

Forming and Utilizing a Business Advisory Council

A Business Advisory Council (BAC) can be one of the most important and versatile tools of your HSHT program. A functioning BAC should provide support, champion the program in the community, make connections and open doors, be a potential source of funding, help secure internships for the students, and provide valuable insight into the needs of the business community. For all of this to occur, the right members need to be recruited, strong leadership and direction must exist, and members must be fully engaged.

First: Identify Needs

Consider the type of outside support the program needs. Program needs should be thought of in broad terms (i.e. transportation issues, funding, public relations, etc.) This will make it easier to identify who to recruit for the BAC. Do not fill the BAC with warm bodies, but rather with people that CAN and WILL actually assist in the growth and development of the program.

Fourth: Recruiting

The easiest way to recruit members is to engage individuals that are already familiar with the program such as employers that have hosted interns or acted as guest speakers. Referrals from others can be a good place to look as well. Referrals might come from a parent or another existing business contact. Finally, cold calling can be effective. However, for cold contacts you may want to ask for participation on a smaller scale to start and engage them as a BAC member after having participated as a guest speaker, job shadowing host, or providing a tour. It is best to ask in-person, not over the phone or through email. A more personal touch may turn a possible no into a yes.

Second: Match your needs to people in the community

Using the list of identified needs, begin to consider the types of people who can help fulfill those needs. Think creatively. For example a universal challenge is the lack of available transportation. To combat this issue, persons you may want to consider recruiting could be the school district's transportation coordinator, manager/owner of a rental car company/car service/taxi company, or manager of the city or county's division of public transportation. If internships are need, persons worth recruiting might be a president from a civic organization or someone from the local Chamber of Commerce. Think about the types of jobs and roles in the community that recruits have which could be leveraged for the benefit of the program.

Third: Connecting the dots

After identifying potential recruits, consider how you are going contact or gain an introduction to each of them. Do not discount people you may already know as potential BAC members. It is also advantageous to know the type of work parents of your students do and for whom they work. Whoever you find, you want to have a BAC comprised of individuals that will actively participate in achieving program goals.

Fifth: Utilizing your BAC

Once the BAC has been formed, members will require something to do. It helps to begin with an orientation and goal setting meeting. Some BACs may want more structure than others. Be prepared for this identifying potential roles or individual tasks for assignment. You want the BAC both excited and engaged. The more engaged they are in the process the more excited they will remain. Another point to consider is leadership of the BAC. As the HSHT Coordinator this role will most likely fall to you, but you may inquire if one of the other members is interested in acting as the Chair, while you assume a more advisory role.

Things your BAC Should Have

Members:

A BAC membership of 5-9 individuals is optimal depending on how large an area you serve. Larger councils may become too hard to manage and prevent/hinder group consensus. Smaller councils may not have the human resources to do the required work of the group.

Identify the specific needs of your program and develop your membership around business/community members that can best help to fulfill those needs. Below are some potential members to consider.

Possible Members:

- College/ University/ Community College/ Vocational School Admissions Officer
- President or Program Chair of the Chamber/ Kiwanis/Rotary (any member will do, but aim high)
- HR Manager/Director from a large 100+ person employer
- Owner of a small business 10 employees or fewer
- Parent of a student
- Professional from a STEM profession (i.e. doctor, engineer, accountant, veterinarian, etc.)
- Representative from the local workforce board
- Alumni student (provides hindsight perspective)
- A local elected official or representative from local government

Structure:

The BAC should be provided with a basic structure to keep everyone on track. By giving members roles within the group they are more likely to take ownership of the BAC and be active.

At the very least your BAC should have a Chairman/ woman, Secretary, and committee chairs such as internships, fundraising, guest speakers, etc.

BACs are expected to meet a minimum of 3 times a year. However, you might decide to convene monthly to harvest the full potential from the group. Scheduling all meetings at the beginning of the year is recommended so members can plan accordingly.

Make sure to keep minutes of the meetings, especially when assignments are made or members volunteer for project or task. This helps you with follow-up and support of the members as they are working for your program.

Purpose & Goals:

It will be up to you, at least initially, to orient the group to its purpose and how they might best support your program. However, one of the primary reasons for having a BAC is to receive input from members on current business and community trends. It will be your job to facilitate this exchange of information that culminates in the goals of the BAC.

The goals you set should be concrete instead of abstract. A good goal reads: Recruit 10 businesses to host internships; **not** Recruit businesses for internships.

Recruiting and Cultivating Members

Provided below are some ideas on cultivating the BAC membership particularly for those individuals who are not currently familiar with you or HSHT.

Recruiting business and community members requires that you cultivate a relationship first. As a person becomes more familiar with you and your organization, the better they can see at fit with your program and the more willing they may become to serve. Listed below are some ideas to help you cultivate BAC members.

- Maintain a list of jobs and employers of parents.
- Once a year host an “open house” event to which members of the community are invited to learn about a completed project, program graduation, or other similar program accomplishments.
- Host a fundraiser to get members of the community involved in your organization. Many people who are willing to financially support the program are also willing to lend support with their time.
- If your organization is a member of the local Chamber of Commerce, host an after-hours event or other social-networking event offered by the local chamber. If you are unable cover the full cost, engage another member as a sponsor.
- Publish a newsletter about your HSHT program and send it to members of the community that you want to know about your program. This list can be comprised of elected officials, Presidents/CEOs of local businesses, presidents of civic organizations, parents, etc. Although this is not a direct recruiting method, recipients may be propelled to contact you to become involved. Most likely, however, this method will create an entry to contact them directly and ask for a meeting.
- Utilize any available connections you have such as groups you (or your family members) belong to: PTA, church groups, sports teams, etc. The more people you talk to about your program, the better chance someone will be able to introduce you to someone that can fill a need.

Additional Advice:

- In the beginning, you may have better results by asking your BAC to tackle a small issue and add increasingly larger issues as the group matures. Asking for too much, too soon may make members feel taken advantage of and discourage them from serving.
- A volunteer will rust out before wearing out meaning that your BAC members need goals and tasks even if they are minuscule. Without a job to accomplish, they may become disengaged, or worse, leave the group.
- Make sure to recognize BAC members during the year: your kickoff, year end celebration, or holiday party.
- Ask members to commit for a certain period of time, 1-2 years for example. Approach them at the end of their term to recommit or rotate off. This the member an opportunity to leave on good terms.
- Conduct an orientation session for the members of the BAC. This allows them to get to know each other and learn their responsibilities.
- When a member is leaving or their term has expired, consider asking them to find their own replacement or to make a referral & introduction.
- As you are meeting potential recruits, bring along an existing BAC member. They can be a very convincing recruiter because they 1) are an “outsider” who is committed to the program, 2) know the actual time commitment, and 3) the new recruit will know a member should they decide to join.
- You may want the first “task” of your BAC to be something fun like the HSHT kickoff. Some BACs may want to get right to work on the larger issues, while others may want to take it slower and become familiar with the program before committing to some of the more involved projects/tasks.