# DURING

# PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

The official start of a participant's career development experience (CDE) is an exciting moment filled with expectation and curiosity about the experience from both participants and hosts. As participants and hosts become more familiar with one another and the related tasks, they may be in need of support and resources to ensure a successful experience. It is crucial that the managing organization is checking in on both participants and hosts throughout the CDE to ensure active engagement and addressing any concerns or questions as they arise.

## INITIAL CHECK-IN

Taking into account the timeline of a participant's CDE, the points of contact from your managing organization should check in with both participants and hosts shortly after the first day to learn how everything is going so far. It is important to do this initial check-in early in the CDE to demonstrate your availability to support and interest in feedback from participants and hosts.

The initial check-in should be open-ended and brief. Later on in the CDE, you will conduct more formal assessments in which you will have the opportunity to ask more targeted questions. This is simply your time to reaffirm your organization's commitment of support and openness to feedback from both participants and hosts. They might not have much to say, but listen for cues and determine whether you need to probe to get more honest feedback. If there were any specific items mentioned by either party prior to the CDE, now is a good time to follow up on those particular issues. It is also helpful to provide any friendly reminders for participants and hosts to be aware of such as recording attendance and hours, assessment needs and a general timeline of the CDE.

## RECORD KEEPING

As participants are completing their CDE, ensure that they are meeting your managing organization's requirements for tracking their attendance and hours. If participants are supposed to log in and out daily on an online portal, monitor it closely to troubleshoot and ensure that they are meeting this requirement. If participants are submitting paper records, ensure that these are submitted with appropriate dates and times. Both online and paper records should be verified by the host.

If participants are receiving academic credit for the CDE, require an hourly log as a course assignment submitted via paper records and/or a learning management system. A participant's letter grade will verify their completion of hours.

If participants are receiving financial compensation for the CDE, payroll can serve as verification of hours completed, but a time sheet verified by the host should still be completed to validate hours.

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### TOOLKIT TERMINOLOGY

Definitions for the terms "participant," "managing organization," and "host" are given in the Introduction.

### INITIAL CHECK-IN WITH HOSTS

Make the initial check-in by phone rather than over email so you can hear from the host firsthand. If you cannot reach them quickly by phone, send an email reaching out and letting them know you are available to talk at any time. Direct outreach such as this is important for establishing and maintaining a trusting relationship with hosts.

### ENSURING ACCURATE TIME REPORTING

Timesheet fraud occurs when an individual is paid for hours that they did not work or time spent on activities not related to work. If participants are earning hourly compensation for the CDE, review timesheets with them for accuracy, ensuring they are being paid for their exact hours worked. Remind hosts of their responsibility to review timesheets closely and verify they are only approving actual participant hours worked.

PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

## MAINTAINING A PRODUCTIVE & MEANINGFUL CDE

There are a variety of tools and options for ways in which you can keep hosts and participants engaged throughout a CDE that are authentic and lead to the development of essential employability and technical competencies. The following are common resources and supports for participants and hosts to reaffirm expectations of the CDE and provide assistance to promote positive engagement:

**Essential Employability Competency: Planning and Organizing**
Participants may need extra support to organize their tasks and meet deadlines. Provide resources that are helpful for participants and can be reinforced by hosts.

**Managing Multiple Hosts**
If you have a large number of participants completing a CDE at the same time across multiple hosts, consider distributing a weekly email that conveys the same announcements and reminders to participants and hosts.

**Host and Participant Communication**
As participants are adjusting to their host site, it is important to make sure they are adhering to the communication needs and preferences of their host. Additionally, it is important to make sure that hosts are providing the necessary information and spaces for communication to occur.
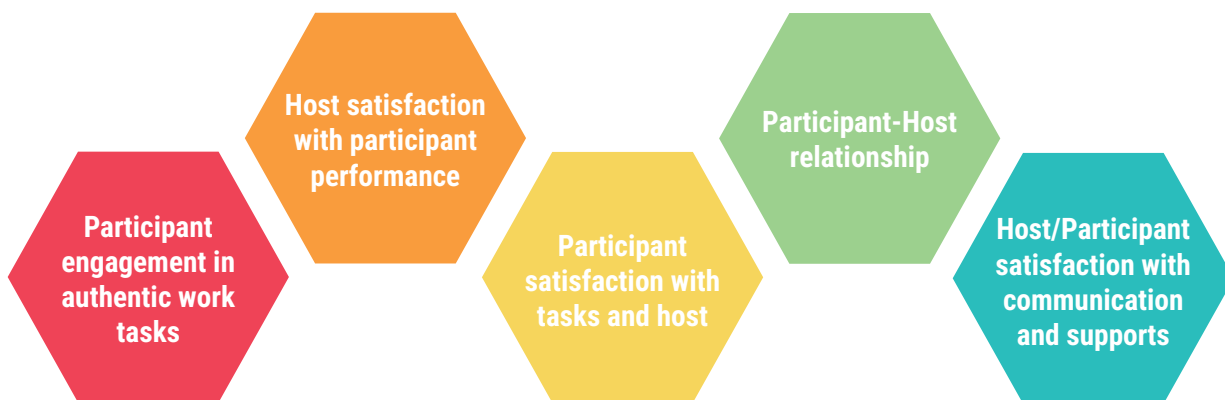
**Informational Interviews**
CDEs are a perfect time for participants to network and learn from professionals in their career area of interest. Encourage participants to advocate for, and the host to make time for, informational interviews. Interview questions should be reviewed by the host; provide some initial prompts for reference.

## MONITORING IMPORTANT ISSUES

Participant engagement in authentic work tasks

Host satisfaction with participant performance

Participant satisfaction with tasks and host

Participant-Host relationship

Host/Participant satisfaction with communication and supports

Ensure that potential issues are being monitored by the points of contact within your managing organization (as referred to in the "Organizational Structure" section), particularly if there are personnel changes. Depending on the nature of your program, you may be in frequent contact with your participants. Take advantage of these moments and find out as much as possible about what they are doing at their CDE site and how they feel about the experience. Allowing participants to be as open and honest as possible will help you proactively address any issues or needs that arise.

# PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT

## TIME FOR REFLECTION

As you are preparing for participants to be formally assessed by the host, provide time for participants to reflect on their CDE and their areas of strength and growth. It is most meaningful if a participant is able to take ownership of their own assessment rather than simply being told what they are good or bad at. This will allow for an assessment that feels more like a collaborative discussion rather than a potentially punitive process. To facilitate the reflection process, participants will need tools and resources to learn how to reflect.

Participant reflection can take on many formats, including:

| Entrance/Exit Slips | Survey Forms in Email | One-on-One Meetings |
|---|---|---|
| If participants are regularly gathered together throughout the CDE, have them jot down responses to 1–2 questions about the day/experience as they are entering or wrapping up the session. | If you send any regular communication to participants, include a survey link with 1–2 questions that participants can respond to and will be automatically uploaded for your review. | If you meet regularly with participants or if this is an individual support that they need, find time to intentionally ask 1–2 reflective questions for the participant to respond to. |

**REFLECTING FOR DEEPER LEARNING**

Typically, we think of reflection as a more limited process of simply sharing thoughts and feelings that have occurred as a result of an experience. To encourage deeper learning through reflection, participants should start with an understanding of the competency development and performance expectations of the CDE. Using these, participants can evaluate and recognize where they have exhibited the expected behavior, assess areas of needed improvement, and learn to take constructive feedback.

Specifically, participants should reflect on the following before their formal professional skills assessment:

| Making Connections | Evaluate | Goals |
|---|---|---|
| How does what they are doing at the CDE host site relate to the expected CDE learning outcomes? How does this experience prepare and inform them in their career pathway? | Does the quality of their work match the Host's standards and expectations? How have they improved their knowledge and skills over time (specifically what did they do to be successful)? | Can they identify their strengths and how they have contributed to the work of their Host? In what areas do they need more support and what steps will they take to advance current knowledge/skills? |

If the reflection is not in-person, make sure you review the participant's response as soon as possible and following up on any areas that are unclear or concerning.

PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT

## PROFESSIONAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT

As defined in the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act, a professional skills assessment is:

> *A tool-based observational assessment of a participant's performance in a career development experience given by an adult supervisor and shared with the participant that addresses foundational professional skills including, at a minimum, those outlined in the Essential Employability Skills framework. The professional skills assessment tool is to be used primarily as a feedback tool and development strategy and not as the sole basis for a grade or credit determination.*

Depending on the length of the CDE, it may only be appropriate to do one professional skills assessment. If the length of the CDE allows (for example, a full semester), it is beneficial to have a baseline, middle, and final assessment with the same questions to evaluate participant's growth over time. Regardless of how many professional skills assessments are completed, it is important they speak to the participant's competency development and capture feedback on performance from the host. One of the most valuable aspects of a CDE is the ability for a participant to receive feedback on their performance through an assessment completed primarily by their host.

Managing organizations should provide hosts with guidelines on what is being assessed and parameters for their ratings of participant performance and development of competencies. It is important to put practices in place to ensure consistency among various hosts and avoid participants being assessed more harshly or forgivingly based on their CDE host rather than their actual performance. This assessment should be utilized as a performance review for participants and encourage discussion among participants, hosts, and your organization.

## FOLLOW-UP

Once a professional skills assessment is submitted, it is important that your managing organization follows up with both the participant and host to discuss responses. This can be through a formal in-person meeting (see "Site Visits" below) or through a phone call/email exchange. Both participants and host should be made to feel that the time they spent completing the assessment is recognized and valued. (See "Running into Trouble" at the end of this section for handling issues and concerns that may arise from these conversations.)

If timing allows, schedule the opportunity to sit down in-person with the participant and host to discuss the professional skills assessment. Be prepared to manage the conversation so it remains collaborative and everyone is talking with, rather than at, one another. For youth to truly develop essential employability and technical competencies, they must be treated with respect and provided room for their voice to be heard during these conversations.

### ASSET-BASED APPROACH

An asset-based approach is crucial for participants to see themselves as capable of being successful in a professional space as they progress through their CDE experiences. In summary, this approach focuses on strengths and views diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets. Participants should be valued for what they bring to a host instead of being characterized by what they lack. While areas of growth exist for everyone, too often for youth there is a focus on inadequacies and what they need to gain or change about themselves to be successful.

# GUIDE FOR SITE VISIT AT HOST

Site visits help managing organizations establish and maintain trusting relationships with hosts and participants since they are able to directly see a CDE in action. Depending on the capacity of your organization, this might not be possible for every participant, so consider those hosts and/or participants who are most in need of an in-person visit.

Site visits provide an opportunity for managing organizations to gain a first-hand look at what it is like for a participant to complete their CDE at a particular host. As you consider whether a host is a good fit to continue placing participants, this is a great way to gather more information. Site visits are especially important if a participant has expressed concerns about a host site (staff, working conditions, etc.) so you can assess and address the situation effectively.

Through site visits, you can establish a more human connection between your managing organization and the host to further build a trusting relationship, even if it is only a brief conversation with your host point of contact.

Components of a site visit may include:

- Meeting other host staff and departments who work with the participant beyond your normal host contact

- Tour of the space and observing a participant interact with equipment and materials to perform tasks

- Discussion of accomplishments/challenges and any additional supports your Organization can provide

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**SITE VISIT BEST PRACTICES**

A combination of one-on-one time with hosts and group time with hosts and participants is an effective format to learn about participants' professional skills assessment and overall performance.

First, meet with the host one-on-one to discuss their feedback and evaluation of the participant and the CDE.

Second, have the participant join the discussion and share their reflection on their own feedback and evaluation of their performance and the CDE.

After they both share, use the remaining time to find a common understanding and discuss any goals or next steps to focus on for the remainder of the CDE.

# NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

CDEs typically get off to a great start, but challenges may emerge as participants and hosts move beyond the initial excitement and anticipation. Through continuous coaching and support, it is possible to navigate challenges and improve the experience through a better understanding of needs and expectations. This is a typical process for anything new and one that should be considered as participants begin their CDE and are encouraged throughout to get to a "steady results" point. If a participant or host reaches a moment of frustration and discontent with the CDE, it is not a sign that the experience is unsuccessful but rather an opportunity to learn and improve.
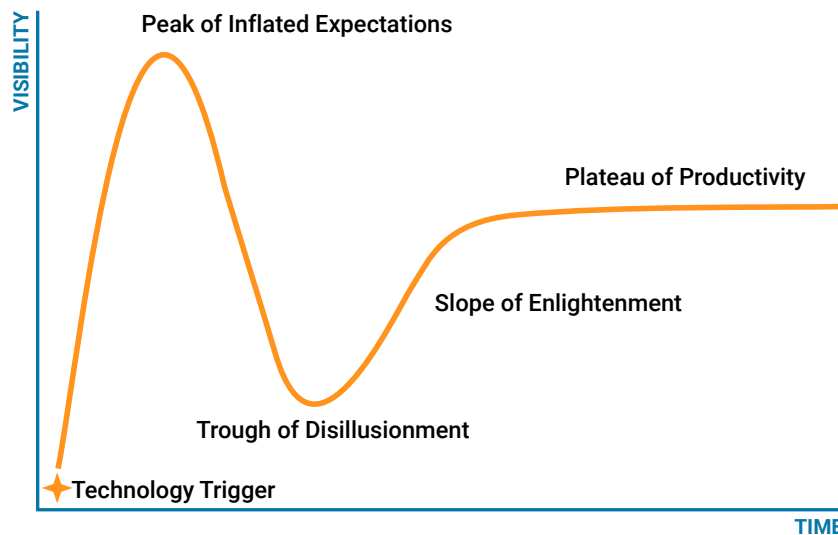


Consider the above image of the Gartner Hype Cycle that is used to show the graphic representation of the maturity and adoption of new technologies as it relates to a participant's CDE and may affect their performance:

| Gartner Hype Cycle Stage | CDE Related Events |
|---|---|
| Innovation Trigger | The participant learns that they are eligible for a CDE. |
| Peak of Inflated Expectations | The participant researches the host they will be placed at for the CDE and tasks they will perform. |
| Trough of Disillusionment | The participant has started to get used to the CDE tasks and they no longer hold the same appeal. |
| Slope of Enlightenment | Through reflection, the participant becomes aware of their personal growth and development. |
| Plateau of Productivity | The participant realizes how they can contribute in a meaningful way to the host and the CDE's impact on their career pathway. |

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**FIGURE 3**

Gartner Hype Cycle

## NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

In general, most issues and concerns that arise during a CDE can be worked through quickly and are typically due to some form of miscommunication or assumptions. Other times, a deep divide has been formed between a participant and their host and you will need to step in and mediate the situation.

First, hear perspectives from both the host and the participant separately so they both feel that they can speak openly and candidly with you about the situation. During this time, feel free to provide insights and suggestions as appropriate, but focus on active listening and taking notes so you can identify where you can start to build a common understanding between participant and host.

When an issue or conflict occurs during the CDE, consider the following:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What is the problem and what do the participant and host hope to accomplish?** | **Where might your managing organization play a role in the cause and/or resolution?** | **Could it be a result of something happening outside of the CDE?** |
| **Has any miscommunication occurred or information not been provided?** | **How has the host and participant contributed to the issue?** | |

If the situation cannot be easily corrected and a formal meeting needs to occur to determine whether a participant can complete their CDE with the host, best practice is to meet in-person but a conference call can work if that is the only workable option. (See "Termination of a CDE" below.)

## PARTICIPANTS DEALING WITH TRAUMA

Participants may experience trauma or difficulties such as a death in their family or friends, loss of income, or housing instability over the course of the CDE. Managing organizations should be equipped to identify and refer participants to resources and services based on their unique needs. Some managing organizations may be able to directly provide some or all of these resources and services, but at minimum, CDE program staff should be trained on and aware of the options for participant referrals. Establishing trusting relationships with participants early will ensure that they feel comfortable expressing needs for support to their managing organization.
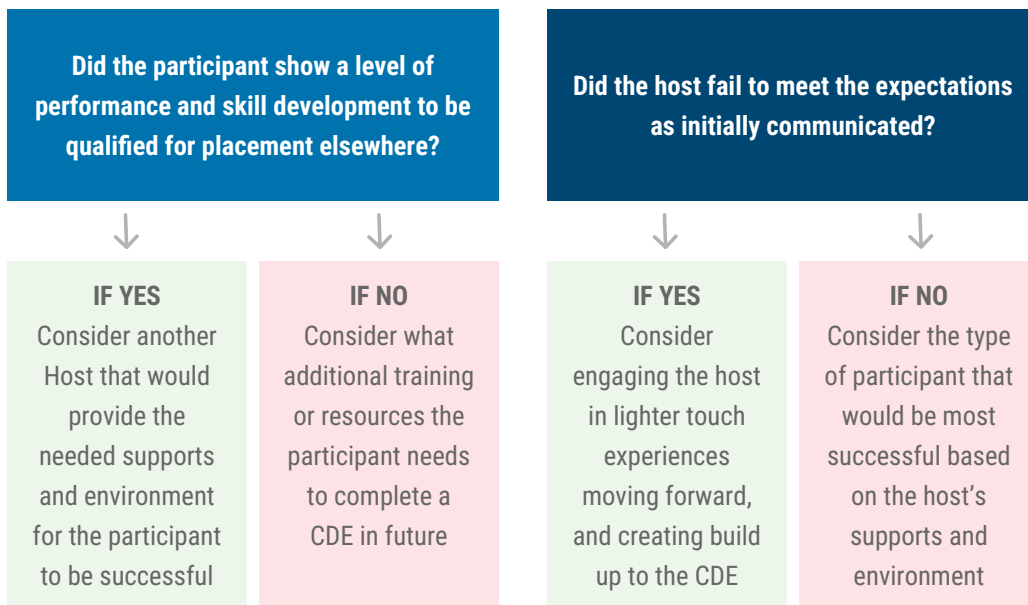
### SETTING AND REVISITING GOALS

A great way to regroup when challenges have occurred and facilitate a collaborative and asset-based conversation with hosts and participants is to focus on setting goals and positive forward thinking. It is easy to get wrapped up in the current frustrations and associated emotions when something has gone wrong. Your role as a managing organization is to be a liaison between hosts and participants to work through a difficult situation. Have the host and participant discuss what goals they have and what success in those goals would look like. Then spend some time defining the roles and responsibilities of all of you to ensure that those goals are met.

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

## TERMINATION OF A CDE

There may come a time when a participant and a host are no longer able to work together to complete the CDE. This decision should not be made lightly, but it should also not be prolonged to create further feelings of frustration by the participant and/ or host. If you created an improvement plan for a participant, consider whether expectations were met by the participant and if the host provided the needed support.

While this is an unfortunate circumstance, it may not necessarily have to lead to dissolution of a host relationship or a participant's ability to complete another CDE. Relationships are a key asset to any CDE program, and your organization needs to take the proper steps to follow-up with both participant and host after a termination As you are debriefing the situation once the CDE has been terminated, consider the following:

| Did the participant show a level of performance and skill development to be qualified for placement elsewhere? | | Did the host fail to meet the expectations as initially communicated? | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| **IF YES** Consider another Host that would provide the needed supports and environment for the participant to be successful | **IF NO** Consider what additional training or resources the participant needs to complete a CDE in future | **IF YES** Consider engaging the host in lighter touch experiences moving forward, and creating build up to the CDE | **IF NO** Consider the type of participant that would be most successful based on the host's supports and environment |

### IMPROVEMENT PLANS

An improvement plan is an agreement among a participant, host, and managing organization to improve performance related issues. This improvement plan might be a formal document or a verbal agreement among parties. It should outline in detail the expectations for improvement and a timeline for assessment check points to monitor growth. Improvement plans should be a collaborative document that both hosts and participants determine is agreeable and achievable given the timeline and expectations as outlined.

# CDE ONLINE
# TOOLKIT RESOURCES ⬀

### PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

**TEMPLATE** | Recording CDE Hours: PDF // Word

**RESOURCE** | Host & Participant Check-In Meetings

**RESOURCE** | Participant Task Examples by Pathway Endorsement Area


### PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT

**RESOURCE** | Participant Reflection Questions

**RESOURCE** | Observational Assessment and Worksite Evaluation from Illinois workNet

**RESOURCE** | Example Professional Skills Assessment for Education Pathway from Making Opportunities Real for Everyone (MORE) in the Mississippi and Rock River Region


### GUIDE FOR SITE VISIT AT HOST

**RESOURCE** | A Guide to Providing Feedback to Participants

**RESOURCE** | Helping Your Customers Stay Motivated and Engaged from Illinois workNet

**RESOURCE** | Worksite Evaluation from Illinois workNet

**EXEMPLAR** | Supervised Agricultural Experience: Visit Scheduling Form

**EXEMPLAR** | Supervised Agricultural Experience: Visit Checklist

**TEMPLATE** | A Guide for Site Visits at Hosts


### NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

**RESOURCE** | Hype Cycle from Gartner

**RESOURCE** | A Guide to Providing Feedback to Participants

**RESOURCE** | A Guide to Difficult Conversations

**TEMPLATE** | Navigating Challenges Worksheet: PDF // Word

**TEMPLATE** | Participant Improvement Plan: PDF // Word