

WORKING WITH OUTSIDE EXPERTS



In designing projects, we strive to have students doing the work of the world. Inviting those who actually do that work in the world into your project can be extremely powerful. Outside experts can be leveraged during each phase of the project; and they can come from a variety of places—your school, district, town or city, state, nation, and the world. They might be local business owners, university faculty, leaders of nonprofit organizations, your friends and family, students' families, etc. Don't be afraid to reach out and ask! You'll be surprised at how willing people are to support student learning.

WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Including outside experts immediately increases the authenticity of a project, which in turn increases accountability and enthusiasm. Students tend to produce higher quality work when they know someone other than you—their teacher—will be reviewing it. This is true regardless of age. Imagine how much richer students' questions could be during the launch and build knowledge phases with outside experts to respond to student inquiry? Outside experts can also mean deeper, more meaningful feedback during the various rounds of critique and revision. Including outside experts as part the audience for the final product ups the ante for quality.



WHAT DO I DO?

Ideally, you will be able to set up a relationship that allows for students to work with outside experts throughout the project. If outside experts are only able to offer limited time to engage with your class, be strategic about where including that person brings the most value. It could be at any point in the project, and vary depending on the project.



Keep in mind that since most experts haven't been in a classroom in decades you will likely have to prepare them for what exactly you expect. Be sure to connect either via video, phone, or e-mail to prepare your experts on what students are learning, what questions they've been asking via the need to knows, and what end products you expect them to create. Depending how you are asking the expert to participate in the project, you might share project rubrics as well. The more you prep your outside experts, the more effective they can be in support of the students and their learning.



One thing to be clear about with your expert is extent of the commitment you're asking of them. How much time? When—days and times? Where—in person, at the school, in the community, virtually? And how—video conference, phone, e-mail? Identify and share dates and times in advance knowing that you may have to be flexible to accommodate the expert's schedule.

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
Launch	The expert might be part of your entry event or be someone who comes in during the first few days of the project to answer students' questions. This will serve to deepen inquiry as questions asked to outside experts may also help extend the need to know list. Early engagement with outside experts can also help keep students on the intended path.
Build Knowledge	Bring in experts to help answer need to know questions, correct misconceptions, and support sustained inquiry. Experts can also give students feedback on their proposed topics or lines of inquiry. This will also help deepen the work done during the revision phase that follows, since students will have feedback from outside experts to consider as they begin creating the initial drafts of products.
Develop and Critique	Experts will be able to provide specific insight and feedback into both the learning and the product. An added bonus to including experts here, as mentioned earlier, is that when students know their work is for people other than classmates (or you), they are more likely to produce higher quality work, be more open to feedback and use it in a more meaningful way.
Present	Invite the experts to be part of the public audience to review students' final products, ask probing questions, and provide feedback. This will add weight to the final product and support deep post-project reflection.

GOT TECH?

Sites like Skype and Google Cultural Institute are fantastic options if you can't get someone to come into your classroom or if you can't get your students out of the classroom. Skype has free lesson plans, a community of educators, and unique, hard to find experts ready to support learning. Google Cultural Institute has a wealth of resources—from interactive sites to experts to videos. Peruse and take advantage of Google's in-depth collection and connections to help inspire and enrich your public audience potential.

Google Scholar can not only help you track down academic articles, but it may also serve as inspiration for potential authors or content experts you could track down to use as well.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS



You're having difficulty finding outside experts for the project.

Experts are everywhere! Be open and creative as you think about the learning you want students to engage in and the product they'll create. Chances are good that you know someone in a relevant field or someone who knows someone who could support your students. As mentioned earlier, think locally as well as internationally. Consider community members, family, friends, businesses, universities, and nonprofit organizations, etc.

