Why this matters

The cornerstone of a great Demo Day is **actively engaged local employers**. This guide exists to make employer recruitment feel manageable even if you've never done anything like it before and to help you **build relationships that outlast a single event**.

Understanding what you're asking for

Before you reach out to anyone, get clear in your own mind about what the ask really is, because how you understand it will shape how you present it. You are asking for a half-day commitment, typically two to four hours, since employers stay on-site through several short student rotations rather than a single session. There's no formal presentation to build. They're simply giving students exposure to the work they do every day, through conversation and hands-on activities that show what a day in the life actually looks like. **At the heart of it, you're asking for something bigger than their time: an investment in the next generation of their own industry.** Being able to state that clearly and confidently, without hedging, is the single most useful thing you can do in every conversation.

How many employers you need

While the model states a minimum of four employer sessions, the **right number for your event depends on how many students are participating.** Work backward from your student count and the 15 to 20 student group size. Smaller is better since it keeps the hands-on pieces manageable and makes sure every student actually gets exposure rather than watching from the back. *A larger student body means more employers, not larger groups.*

Beyond the math, more employers also gives you a buffer. If one cancels a week out and you're already at the minimum, you're scrambling to adjust your whole schedule. Aim for one or two more than your count requires if you can, both for that buffer and because more career variety means more students find a session that speaks to them directly.

Thinking about career variety

It's easy to default to construction, welding and other trades when thinking about employer recruitment, but Demo Day works best when it reflects what's actually available and in demand in your own community, not just the careers that come to mind first. Rather than choosing at random, use real local data to guide your employer list. When deciding what to include, consider:

- **What students are actually interested in.** Ask students themselves what career areas they're curious about.
- **What's in demand locally.** Ask your chamber of commerce or local employers who's hiring and where they're struggling to fill roles.
- **What pays well.** Look for high-wage, high-demand pathways, not just any open role, but ones that lead to real financial stability.
- **What employers are willing and able to participate.** A great career match means nothing without a willing employer nearby to lead it.
- **What variety you're missing.** Round out a list that's leaning too heavily toward one type of work.

Where to find employers

Cold outreach to a business that has no connection to your school or community will always be the hardest path and the lowest-yield one. Start with relationships that already exist. A warm introduction from someone the employer trusts converts to a yes far more often than a stranger's email. Only after these avenues are exhausted should you move to true cold outreach, and even then, look for some point of connection, mention the school by name or reference a mutual contact, if applicable.

Places to start:

- **Existing school or advisor relationships.** Ask your CTE coordinator, career advisor or counseling staff which local employers have already hosted job shadows, internships or career days. These are your fastest yeses.
- **Local chambers of commerce and economic development offices.** They know which businesses are civic-minded and can often make a direct introduction on your behalf.
- **Parents, alumni and community members.** A personal connection to a student or staff member is one of the strongest warm paths available.

Making initial contact

Keep your first touch short. A long, detailed email upfront rarely gets read carefully and can feel like a bigger ask than it is. Email works, but keep in mind that local employers are often smaller operations oftentimes without dedicated staff checking inboxes regularly, so a message can sit unread for days. A phone call is often the better first move. It gets you a real answer faster and opens a conversation instead of asking for a decision immediately. **Your goal in this first message is not to close the deal. It's to get a conversation started, a reply, a phone call, a meeting.**

Making the case, before you make the ask

Some employers will hesitate over the schedule or what they'd demonstrate. Others haven't gotten that far, they don't yet see why career exposure matters at all, and no amount of logistics reassurance will move someone who hasn't bought into the premise. If a conversation feels stuck before you've even described what a session looks like, you're likely talking to someone in this second group, and it's worth shifting the conversation before pushing forward.

This groundwork matters most with employers who've never been approached for anything like this before. Employers who've hosted job shadows, internships or classroom visits already understand the value and can move straight to the conversation below.

A few ways to make the case itself, not just the ask:

- **Name the gap directly.** Most students choose a career path with almost no real exposure to what that career actually involves day to day.
- **Reframe it as workforce development.** This isn't just a favor to a school. It's a way to influence who enters their industry and how prepared those future employees are.
- **Point to what's already true for them.** Most employers already know hiring can be hard or that new hires often lack a real understanding of the job before starting. Career exposure is a direct, early intervention for exactly that problem.
- **Keep the ask small relative to the case.** Once someone understands why this matters, the actual commitment, a half-day, feels proportionate rather than burdensome.

Handling common hesitations

You will hear some version of these concerns repeatedly. Having an answer ready in advance makes you sound confident and prepared, which itself builds trust.

"I don't know what I'd show them." Reassure them that a walkthrough of an ordinary day, a tool demonstration and letting students watch or try something simple is more than enough. The Session Demonstration Ideas by Career Area resource has specific examples for many industries and can be shared once they've confirmed.

"I can't spare a half-day." Clarify that it's typically one team member, not the whole staff, and it's a single block on their calendar, a morning or afternoon, not an ongoing commitment. Many businesses can cover for one person for a few hours, especially for something this worthwhile.

"I'm not a public speaker." Reassure them this isn't a presentation. Conversational, small-group, question-and-answer format is the model, not a stage or a script.

"What if students aren't interested in what we do?" Remind them that the goal isn't to recruit every student in the room, it's to give every student exposure to a real career option. Even students who don't pursue that path leave with a clearer picture of what's out there."

Following up on outreach

Silence after an initial outreach doesn't usually mean no, it usually means busy. Follow up once, about a week after your first message, with a short, friendly nudge rather than a repeat of your full pitch. A phone call is often more effective than a second email at this stage, but a brief follow-up email works, too, if a call isn't practical. Either way, keep it to a one-line check-in rather than resending the same information.

If you still don't hear back after a second attempt, it's reasonable to move on and focus your energy on employers who are responsive. You can always circle back for a future event.

Once confirmed

Two weeks out, send the confirmed employer the **Employer Preparation Guide** that includes session flow, timing and common student questions, so they arrive ready. This is also the point to confirm any equipment, space or setup needs on your end to ensure nothing is a surprise on event day.

Building a relationship after the event

Recruitment doesn't end when an employer says yes to one event. A short, genuine thank-you after the event, ideally referencing something specific from their session, goes a long way toward making them a returning partner rather than a one-time favor. Employers who felt appreciated and saw real student engagement are your easiest yeses the next time you run a Demo Day or are looking for partners in career exposure, and they may be more willing to help you recruit other employers from their own network.