



# Best Practices for Academic & Trade School Partner Development

## *The Future Workforce Playbook*

### What is this for?

This Playbook was created to provide guidance for EDPA companies who want to start or expand and increase positive outcomes of their interactions with faculty and students.



### Why was this developed?

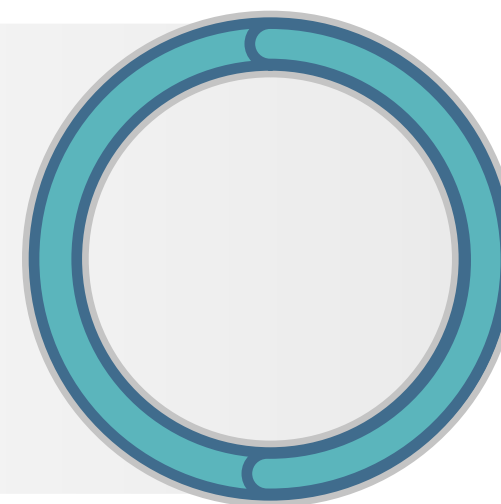


#### **2023 Future Workforce Survey Results**

- 42 EDPA member companies responded.
- 22 of those are currently working at least one Academic or Trade School.
- 20 companies indicated no current involvement; but they would like to know how to get started.
- Of those that are working with at least one school, some were happy with their results, some were not.
- Even those currently achieving positive results want to improve their outcomes.



- 42 EDPA members responded
- 20 show no current involvement
- 22 worked with 1 or more schools
- 100% want to improve outcomes



### Who is this for?

This Playbook is for EDPA members who want to know how to get started and those who want to improve their outcomes with Academic and Trade Schools. In other words, it's for

***everyone.***



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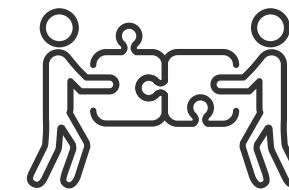
### Do these practices work?

The Best Practices contained in this Playbook are tried and tested. They emerged through surveys and interviews conducted with EDPA members who've been in the trenches, working with a variety of schools for many years. FIT and Bemidji State are well-known in our University Affiliations program and both provide good data.

In addition, many EDPA companies have built long-term, productive relationships with other Colleges, Universities, Trade Schools, High Schools and more. We can learn from these experiences, avoid known pitfalls, and achieve positive results.



### Stratifying our strategies

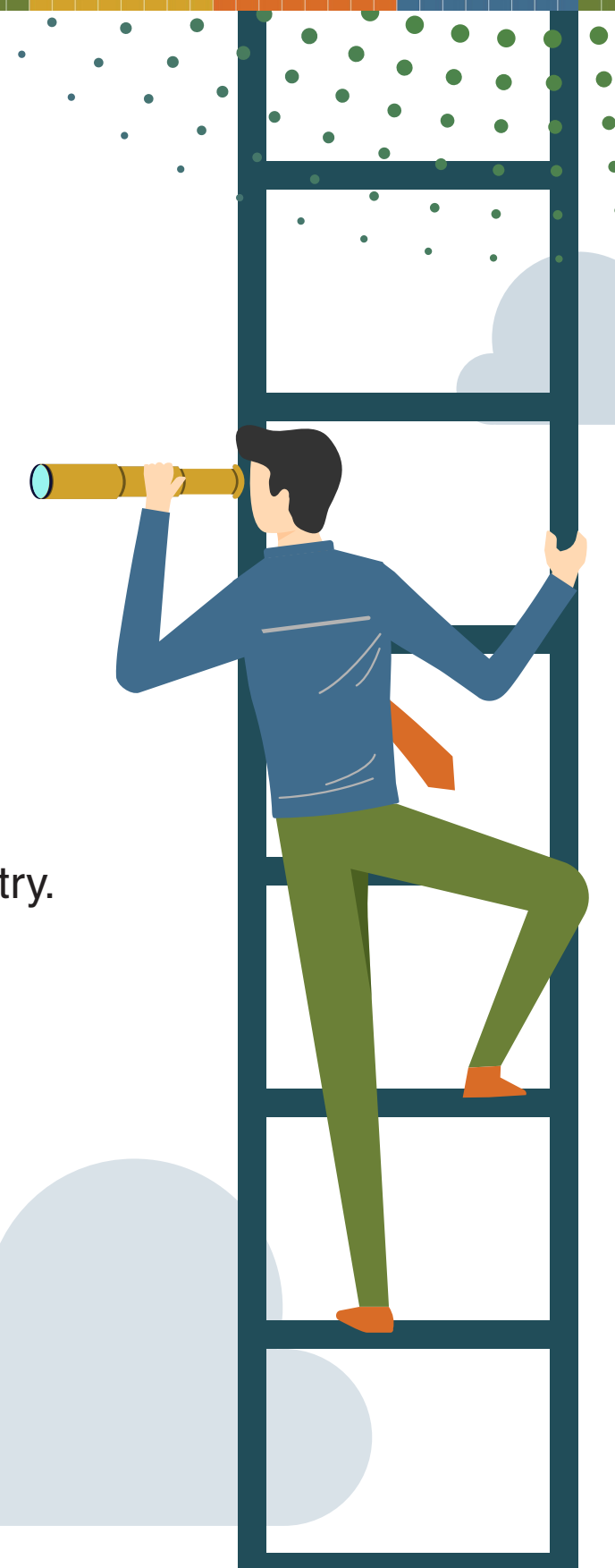


#### *What is our challenge?*

- We are understaffed.
  - Our workforce is aging, slated to retire.
  - We lost employees to other industries during the pandemic.
- Not enough qualified applicants.
  - Low number of candidates seeking jobs compared to jobs available.
  - Low visibility, emerging workforce and experienced workforce are unaware of our industry.

#### *Why partner with academic and trade schools?*

- 2 primary reasons:
  - Advocacy – Spreading the word about our industry.
  - Access – Building a pipeline of emerging talent to fill job openings.





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## I. Getting started

Building a partnership is a lot like dating. It takes time to get to know each other. Without shared goals, the relationship can fizzle out. Set yourself up for a successful long-term partnership.

## First things first



### *Must-haves and requirements*

- Effort and commitment to a long-term relationship are required on BOTH sides.
  - Academic Program Representative
    - i. Willing to invest time.
    - ii. Could be a dean, department head, career counselor, director, professor, or teacher.
    - iii. School faculty are often stretched thin and have meager budgets, not every faculty person will be ready and willing to partner with us in a productive way.
  - EDPA – identify one or more advocate that is committed to developing the partnership.
    - i. Passionate.
    - ii. Someone students can relate to.

## Red flags



### *Schools to avoid:*

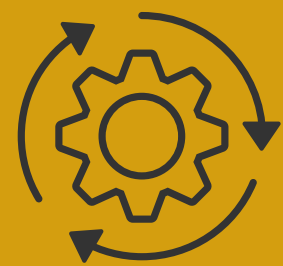
- Institutions that require a large monetary gift to engage with their students. Often the demand for money will not be stated at your first meeting.
- Institutions that have too much “red tape”.
- Faculty engagement is low and will not last.
- Saturated interest from other sources, not enough students to fill current demand.



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## I. Getting started

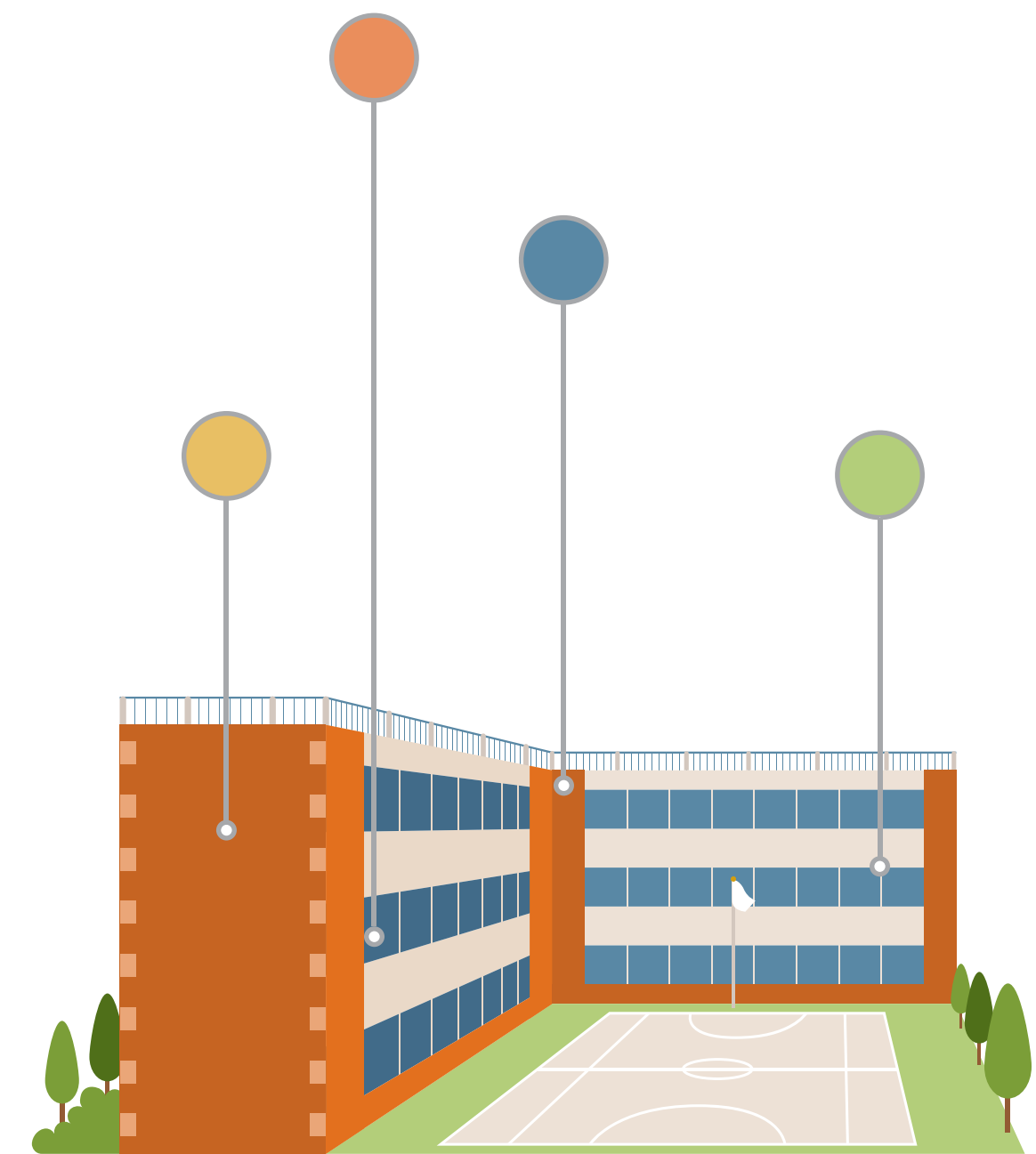
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## A guide when considering schools



### School levels to target

- Colleges/Universities – with industry related degrees.
  - Course/Degree examples: Hospitality, Creative, Business, etc.
  - Pro Tip: Find related programs for the positions that you have the hardest time filling.
- Trade Schools/High Schools – Hire for certain positions out of Community College or High School.
  - Class/Certification examples: Drafting, Engineering, Construction, 3D Modeling, etc.
  - Do on-the-job training.
  - Skills USA – help build the workforce by becoming an industry partner to help bridge the skills gap. ([skillsusa.org](https://www.skillsusa.org))
  - Job Corps – offers free training to job-seeking individuals - potential employers can streamline recruitment by customizing training programs with Job Corps. ([jobcorps.gov](https://www.jobcorps.gov))
- Middle Schools – many kids home in on a profession at this stage, expose them to EDPA careers.
  - Junior Achievement – volunteering to speak in your local chapter's Career Speaker Series or educating youth on our industry at their Career Exploration Fairs ([jausa.org](https://www.jausa.org))
- Elementary Schools – early exposure opens kids' minds to possibilities.
  - National History Day – nationwide Exhibit Design competition – volunteer to coach.
  - 5K Kids Tech Show – Bemidji State University hosted a 30x30 exhibit at this show in 2023.





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## A guide when considering schools



### *Schools to target*

- Alma Mater of an employee at your company – very high success rate.
  - 1st hand testimony of a graduate will show that you hire their students, and it demonstrates how the relationship is mutually beneficial.
- Schools that your own, your employee's, or friends/family's children are attending.
  - Established relationships will open doors.
- Identify the schools in your area.
  - Close proximity makes it easy to engage consistently.
  - Students who have established community/family/connections in one location are motivated to stay in that area.
  - Identify programs that teach skills related to our industry/your specific hiring needs.
  - Start by calling the Career Center; they may direct you to a specific faculty member.
- Smaller, less well-known schools often have less red tape and are eager to facilitate meaningful engagement between students and professionals.

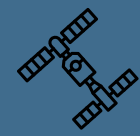




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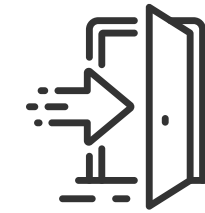
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## II. Establish contact

Just like a first date, it's best to start off with a low-commitment activity that allows you and the school to get to know each other. Both parties can assess the value in committing to future involvement.

## How do we do this?



### *Get your foot in the door.*

- Call the career center, establish contact with a career counselor.
- Participate in Career Fairs.
- Be a Guest Speaker (for a specific class or larger group).
- Attend student presentations to provide professional guidance and critique.
- Review student portfolios.
- Mentor a student.
- Offer a scholarship to students specifying criteria you are looking for.  
This generates a lot of interest and applications from college level students for a relatively low investment.





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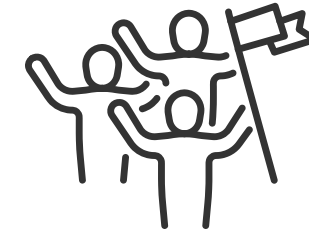
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### III. Increase the connection

If things go well with your initial activities and you see potential in the relationship, consider increasing your involvement with the school. Every EDPA company and every school has its own culture and each representative has their own personality. The right activity to increase your connection with a school will depend on the particular values of each. Don't be afraid to try different things and evaluate which one meets your goals best.

### You're in. Now what?



#### *Take it to the next level.*

- Direct project-based assignments.
- Host tour of your facility for students.
- Invite individual students to job shadow at your company.
- Fund student activities.
- Sponsor a student/faculty to attend an event.
- Host a "Behind the Scenes Tour" of a show or convention center, work with show general contractor, bring a group of students or faculty.
- Tour show hall during the event – set up presentations with exhibiting companies to explain design/material choices, logistics challenges, etc.
- EDPA sanctioned give-away for faculty or students – such as a grant to high achievers.
- Hire Interns, or "Train to Hire" recent graduates.
- Join Advisory Board at the school to help guide curriculum.

### *An invitation*

For schools that are all-in and committed to our industry, there is the opportunity to join the ranks of the **EDPA University Affiliated Schools** like FIT and Bemidji State.





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### IV. Ongoing partner development

No matter the level of involvement with EDPA a school has reached, it is important to evaluate if your current strategies are successful at least 1x per year.

Companies, schools, and people evolve over time, and strategies sometimes need to be adjusted to keep the relationship healthy and productive.



### ***Local government incentives***

Check for local government programs in your area that financially assist companies by partially covering the salary of new employees when you train them.

Programs vary, and not all local governments have them. Multiple EDPA companies have used this type of program to train new hires more economically, and with great retention rates!





# Best Practices for Academic & Trade School Partner Development

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### Appendix I - Generational Challenges

Generations develop shared characteristics based on the social issues and technology available as they grow into adulthood. We cannot paint everyone from a certain generation with the same brush, each person is an individual. However, some characteristics are common, and there are established solutions to bridge the gap between generations.

## Challenges & Solutions

*Known situations when recruiting from Colleges, Universities, Trade or High Schools.*

- **Challenge:** COVID caused many to learn remotely at a pivotal age, some lack key professional and social skills as a result.  
**Solution :** Inform managers, focus heavily on onboarding, offer mentorship, professional development, and lunch & learns. This is critical in the first 6 months.
- **Challenge:** Short attention span. For example, at a career fair, you have 8 seconds to grab their attention.  
**Solution :** Use exciting technology, videos, giveaways they'll want to keep.
- **Challenge:** Have a "what does this industry/company offer me" mindset. For example, Salary & benefits, transferable skill sets, remote work options, office amenities.  
**Solution :** Be clear about what you are offering, create an "Employee Value Proposition" document to share with potential employees. Younger employees can assist with identifying perks you may not automatically identify as such.
- **Challenge:** They trust younger people, closer to them in age, more than older generations.  
**Solution :** Use younger employees as ambassadors, close to their age, Future Leaders, recently graduated students finding success in our industry...who are relatable and understand their concerns.



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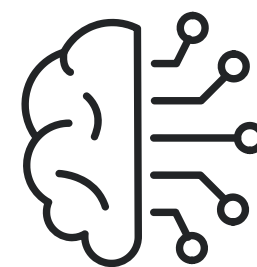
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## Challenges & Solutions

*Known situations when recruiting from Colleges, Universities, Trade or High Schools.*

- **Challenge:** Want to have a clear plan for growth.  
**Solution :** They also need examples of longer-term opportunities from those 20 years down the same career path. Concrete examples of how to succeed and increase financial stability.
- **Challenge :** Looking for work to meet social needs – friendship & counseling.  
**Solution :** Provide evaluations and feedback, especially critical during the first 6 months. Ask questions like: What do you want? What are we doing/not doing well? Allow social interaction that serves team building and productivity between departments.
- **Challenge:** Many prefer a predictable 8-5 job schedule.  
**Solution :** Keep communication open and stay on the same page about expectations when long hours/night & weekend work is required.
- **Challenge:** Ghosting interviews, not answering, or returning phone calls is common.  
**Solution :** Adjust expectations and move on to the next applicant if you do not get a response.





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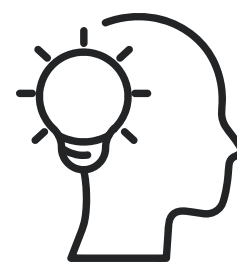
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## Challenges & Solutions

*Known situations when recruiting from Colleges, Universities, Trade or High Schools.*

- **Challenge :** Not all new hires will choose to stay at a job long-term.  
**Solution :** Consider your “best case scenario” for length of employee retention and work to create an environment that keeps new employees engaged. Expect some turn-over with less experienced employees and know the investment is worth it.
- **Challenge :** They do not want to work for free to get their “foot in the door.” Unpaid internships are not going to attract new employees in this job market where they have lots of other options.  
**Solution :** Instead offer “train-to-hire” paid positions for inexperienced new employees.
- **Challenge :** They want to feel their work is significant. Your environmental statement, and company mission statement is important.  
**Solution :** Ask for their input, they see problems with fresh eyes, they know new technologies that can solve problems more quickly than “the way it’s always been done.” Contributing and seeing their work make a difference has a huge payoff, as opposed to being a cog in a machine that doesn’t want to change.





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## Appendix II - Recruiting Experienced Employees

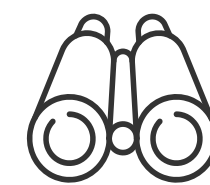
The Future Workforce Committee's focus is on partnering with Academic and Trade Schools. However, many EDPA companies are also looking to hire more experienced employees for higher level positions. Also the great need for skilled labor requires creative recruitment tactics to fill current demand. Here are some tactics EDPA companies have successfully used to recruit for these positions.

### Intentional recruitment



#### *Recruiting experienced employees.*

- Use your employee's connections.
  - They know your company culture and can make good suggestions of friends or family members that will be a good fit.
  - Offer a financial incentive if their recruit stays at least 6 months. This is a very effective motivator that multiple EDPA companies swear by.



- For labor and trade jobs, try these unconventional sources:
  - Disabled Veterans.
  - Rehabilitated Ex-offenders.
  - Firemen – have an unusual schedule to work around but are very reliable.
  - Look into other career sites beyond the standard LinkedIn and Indeed.

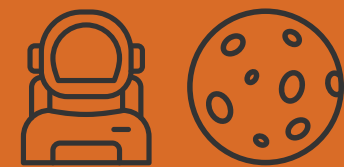




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### Appendix III - What is next for Future Workforce?

This year we focused on discovering best practices currently used by EDPA companies for Academic and Trade School partnership development. Now we don't have to spin our wheels learning what strategies will be successful, and what to avoid. Thank you to our members who generously shared their experiences and insights!

To infinity and beyond!



*Next year, our strategy is to increase our effectiveness.*

- We will learn what resources are most helpful to Career Counselors and students and develop content strategically toward the goal of achieving better relationships/results.
- Over time both EDPA companies and educational institutions needs evolve due to technology, trends, etc. We will update and develop new resources to stay current.



***Don't be shy!***

Please reach out if you have any questions, discover a successful strategy you want to share, or find you need a particular type of presentation we have not yet created.

***We are ready to help.***

We all benefit the more we share ideas.



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### Appendix IV - Credits

Giving credit where credit is due.

*Thank you for contributing to the development of our Future Workforce Playbook.*

- Dave Walens – **Exploring Inc.**
- Mark Crane – **Acer Exhibits & Events**
- Brittany Papciak – **George P Johnson**
- Justin Dworak – **STAR**
- DJ Heckes – **EXHIB-IT!**
- Mark Taylor – **Apogee**
- Rick Pollock – **Total Show Technology**
- Michael McMahon – **Hill & Partners**
- Glenn Diehl – **Genesis Exhibits**
- Steve Deckel – **Deckel & Moneyppenny**
- Caitlyn Correia – **Blue Hive Exhibits**
- Lynn Reves – **Exhibitus Inc.**
- Jeff Hannah – **Global Exhibitor**
- Marissa Hohner – **Good Time Creative**
- Clint Borucki – **ACME Design Inc.**
- Tom Gardner – **Access TCA**
- Kevin Carty – **Classic Exhibits Inc.**
- Jason Weddle – **Hamilton**
- Dana Esposito – **Blue Hive Exhibits**
- Phoebe Mathius – **Exhibitus Inc.**
- Katina Zipay – **Classic Exhibits Inc.**
- Gina Porcaro – **Classic Exhibits Inc.**





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### Future Workforce Committee



#### Meet the team leading the way:

- Michael McMahon – Hill & Partners – mmcMahon@hillpartners.com  
**Chair**
- Katina Zipay – Classic Exhibits – katina@classicexhibits.com  
**Academic Partner Subcommittee Chair**
- Matthew Little – Nuvista – mlittle@nuvistaonline.com  
**Trades Subcommittee Chair**
- Gina Porcaro – Classic Exhibits – gina@classicexhibits.com  
**Content Creation & Management Subcommittee Chair**



### Contact us

Please reach out to us at  
[futureworkforce@edpa.com](mailto:futureworkforce@edpa.com)

if you have any questions, ideas and strategies to share. We are here to support you.



Meanwhile, access our helpful resources to educate and recruit our future workforce, here:

<https://www.edpa.com/future-workforce-events>

- 2023 Salary Guide
- Job Descriptions
- Future Workforce Banner Stands
- Future Workforce Presentation Deck
- Playbook – How to navigate Future Workforce educational partnerships