

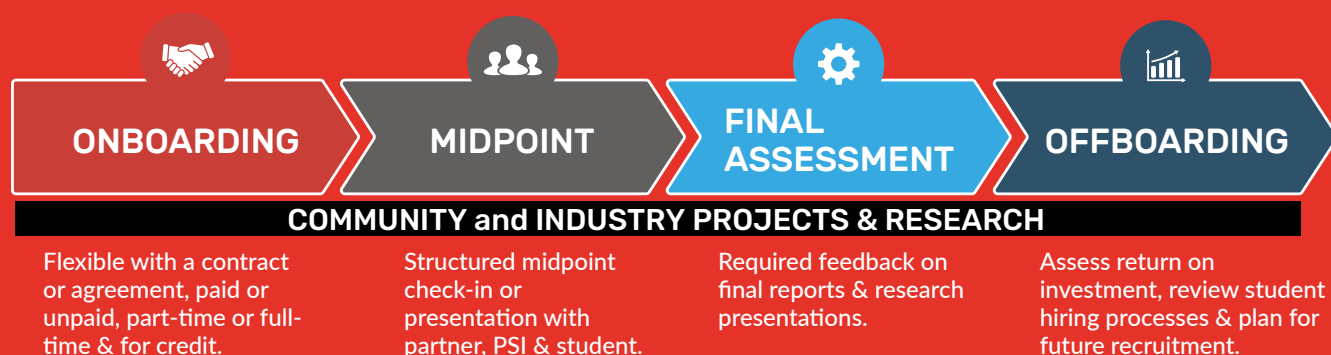
COMMUNITY and INDUSTRY RESEARCH & PROJECTS

For WIL partners

Community and Industry Research & Projects (CIRPs) allow students to engage in research that occurs primarily in workplaces or directly with a community partner as part of their academic requirements. These can include Consulting Projects, Design Projects, and Community Based Research Projects. CIRPs very often include a collaboration between an academic course and a community partner. The goal is to provide students with a real-world approach to their course material, bringing to life the course concepts through industry collaboration.

CIRPs can be used by your organization as a supplement or alternative to paid co-op opportunities, as in most cases they are free for the community to access. These types of projects are “win-win” because they enrich the student learning experience while contributing to their course credit, and the community partners receive tangible work and recommendations to implement within their organization.

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SUPPORTING BUSINESS OBJECTIVES WITH PROJECTS and RESEARCH

Top 4 ways CIRPS can support your business objectives

1. Can target larger, long terms problems that are important but not urgent
2. Get detailed, well-thought out solutions to a problem
3. Low cost and low time required for supervision
4. Typically conducted remotely

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ONBOARDING & PRE-ENGAGEMENT

Unlike other forms of Work Integrated Learning (WIL), it is important to remember that depending on the institution, Community and Industry Research and Projects can have slight variations and each College and University may structure their experiences differently. When exploring WIL and CIRPs at various institutions, there can be multiple experiential definitions that can fit within CIRP.

It is also worth noting that CIRPs may be suited to opportunities outside of the classroom (i.e. larger research projects), depending on funding availability and scope. Staff who work within WIL and CIRPs will be able to refer appropriately and as necessary.

Review your organizational goal and needs

Before partnering with an institution for a project or research, it is important to have a clear understanding of what your organizational needs and goals for the project are. For community partners, CIRPs are utilized when they are facing a challenge within their business or organization. The goal of the project is for students to apply course concepts to the challenges facing the community partner and deliver recommendations back to the community partner based on what the students have learned in their course.

Engaging and promoting CIRP with the community

Institutions may engage with community partners in different ways, depending on what collaboration

with the community looks like. Western University recruits all community partners for their CIRPs in the Spring/Summer, which allows the courses and community partners to fully prepare before their project approaches in the Fall or Winter.

Brock University's Goodman School of Business uses a "Request for Partnership" (RFP) model for CIRPs, in which all courses that utilize this type of WIL are made available to community partners, providing them with a variety of options of courses to engage with. The RFPs are sent out to community partners 1-2 months before the term begins, which provides ample time for consultation about the details of the courses, the deliverables of the projects, and timelines. The goal of this consultation is to align the project with the community partner's needs.

4 ONBOARDING STEPS

1. Determine your organizational needs and goals.
2. Determine your capacity for engagement with the institution and project teams.
3. Identify who the main points of contact will be within your organization.
4. Collect any relevant information (data, resources, etc.) that will assist students as they work on their projects.

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Partnerships with the community may also be developed and fostered in a variety of ways. For instance both Niagara College and Mohawk College utilize community partnerships that have been created through their Innovation Centres to identify where projects may fit into their curriculum. In other institutions, partnerships may be fostered by a business development lead or through organic referrals.

Finding a fit and project logistics

The partnering school, possibly in collaboration with the faculty member teaching the course or Dean/Department Chair, will discuss what the students will accomplish through the project and clearly outline what you as the community partner and your organization should walk away with at the conclusion of the project. It is important to note that not all conversations result in moving forward with a partnership. If the community partner or faculty member feels that goals do not align, a new opportunity may be explored.

Projects can differ depending on the course topic, year of study or class size. Details of the partnership will be made explicitly clear to you as the community partner, to ensure a clear understanding of the level of collaboration required.

When a project is ready for on-boarding, after confirmation has been made by both the institution and the community partner, a plan will be set in place to determine key dates, communication policies, confidentiality, and project goals.

A highly intensive MBA course, where students were creating social media strategies and search engine marketing campaigns for their community partners, required the community partners to be in constant communication with the group(s) they were working with. It also required them to share information and data on an ongoing basis. This type of intensive WIL would differ from a 1st year course, where the exposure of the students to the community partner is minimal and the touchpoints are infrequent.

Project management

How projects are managed within the institution is dependent on many factors, including: resources and staffing dedicated to this type of WIL at the institution, the level of complexity or collaboration required for the partnership, and if the partnering institution chooses to use an educational project management software.

MacEwan University manages most CIRPs through an online experiential platform, which allows for recruitment of community partners, centralized communication, and data tracking. If projects are to be managed through a platform, there may be additional training and facilitation needed to get a community partner up to speed.

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**MIDPOINT CONSIDERATIONS**

As a student progresses through their CIRP, what should I expect?

Once a project is underway, your organization and the student groups will keep in contact on a schedule that is agreed upon at the beginning of the project. This process may be formalized through a contract or “expectations agreement” which is developed in collaboration between the students and their community partner. A key component of the partnership is a half-way or midpoint check-in to ensure that project goals are being met and groups are on the right track.

Students will be encouraged to work with you in the way that works best for all parties. The methods of communication for collaboration can differ, depending on the accessibility and availability of you and your organization to the students. Typically, a hybrid approach of virtual and in-person meetings, along with email communication, can be used to keep in touch as the project moves forward.

The midpoint presentation or meeting is intended to keep the project in line with partner needs and avoid major surprises at the conclusion of a project. CIRPs are intended to be highly collaborative and as the community partner you should be able to provide feedback about the progress of the experience to increase the likelihood of favourable deliverables. Projects with minimal communication and collaboration can lead to disengagement from students, losing

sight of the project goals, and a lack of information and guidance from the partner, resulting in lower quality projects.

Midpoint meetings or “interim presentations” are used to showcase the progress of student work. If this model is used, you can provide feedback to ensure students are on the right track or change the direction of what the students have proposed. The midpoint interaction is also a great way for students to have additional in-person exposure to their community partner as it can be used as a Q&A for every team working on the project. The timing of the midpoint meeting is dependent on the complexity or length of the partnership. As most CIRPs span a full term (4 months), this touchpoint is suited for the halfway point in the term, between the initial project introduction and final presentations.

At most institutions consulted, the mid-point is an opportunity for the community partner to see the progress the students have made, and to make sure the solutions being developed by the students are in line with both the community partner and instructor’s expectations, in either a Q&A or presentation format. The midpoint may be an opportunity to provide feedback on:

- Feasibility of the proposed solutions and restrictions that may need to be considered.
- Alignment of student ideas and understanding of your organization and the needs of your organization.
- Additional organizational information that was not shared in the introduction.

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FINAL ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

CIRPs typically conclude with the community partner receiving student's final reports and recommendations.

As the community partner, you may be invited to watch final presentations, be provided with recorded presentations, or receive final reports and slide decks. The format of final presentations and any dates that you are required to be live in person or virtually would be set earlier in the term.

Faculty members will be responsible for grading the projects and providing feedback to the students as it relates to learning outcomes in the course. Community partners will have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and provide feedback at the conclusion of the project. In some courses, this feedback will be incorporated in the student's final grade.

Research compilation

At the end of the WIL experience, students will have compiled their research and recommendations based on the initial needs of your organization, feedback throughout the project, and course theories they have acquired along the way. Students are typically required to present this research in a live or recorded session, and compile a report outlining the steps

the community partner should take next. Students and community partners may also have a period to reflect on their projects, how their groups worked together, and the overall experience working with the community partner(s).

After working with multiple courses at Brock University, Downtown Niagara Falls has been able to hire students in both full time and contract capacities. In some cases, these students were able to continue working on projects they completed as part of their class, and in other cases, the community partner presented job opportunities to the class and brought on students who had an interest in the organization, and made a strong impression during the project.

CIRP HIGHLIGHTS

- Paid or unpaid
- Full-time or part-time
- For credit
- Can be mandatory or not mandatory
- May have a competitive recruitment process and may not

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**OFFBOARDING CONSIDERATIONS****After the CIRP ends, what should I consider?**

Once the WIL experience has concluded, you should review the information provided by the students, as well as any notes from the faculty member, and work within your organization to identify which recommendations are able to be implemented, and how your organization might go about doing this. Will additional resources be required, or will additional projects be needed to address follow up concerns?

Community partners may receive recommendations from the students that specifically identify next steps that can be supported by another CIRP or through more in depth research opportunities in other departments.

Project coordinators and faculty may also seek feedback from you to learn more about your experience with the CIRP. This feedback allows any adjustments to be made to the project, and identify areas of success, as well as areas of concern. This may also be an opportunity to discuss with the faculty member or project coordinators what you believe the appropriate next steps for your organization will be now that you have all the recommendations from students (ie: another project, hiring, utilizing external resources, etc.).

It may become clear that additional WIL projects will be required by the community partner, and these can be conversations you may wish to have with the project coordinator, faculty member, or any initial contact you had to get this project up and running.

Community partners are encouraged to share their organizational needs with their WIL contacts in the institution when discussing potential projects. Providing a full picture to the institution may spark additional project options or allow you to be connected to other units on campus.

Building a talent pipeline

In some cases, community partners have identified students who they wish to bring onto their team, whether that be for full time, part time, or contract opportunities. By working closely with students, your organization may be able to develop insight into the work that students could do if they had the dedicated time, as well as build professional relationships to build a talent pool. You may also wish to explore other WIL opportunities that will build on the work done in the project, including Internships, Co-op, or Work Placements. Institutions can work with community partners to identify opportunities and pathways to continue to work together if the organization sees the need.

For more information about Projects & Research for WIL partners visit the [CEWIL Resource Hub](#).