



Why Key Distinguishers?

HERE to HERE believes that work-based learning (WBL) provides a powerful set of opportunities that should be incorporated into every student’s experience, in both high school and postsecondary education. Research shows a range of benefits to students that participate in WBL internships, apprenticeships, and related activities, from which employers also gain a wider, more diverse set of applicants that are better prepared to enter the workforce. WBL includes a broad range of activities, a core set of which must be in place, with an appropriate level of quality, to ensure that students receive the essential benefits that WBL can offer. We refer to these core elements as “Key Distinguishers”. HERE to HERE has developed initial Key Distinguishers for four key areas in which this work takes place:

- High schools
- Post-secondary programs
- Employers
- Paid work experiences

Effective work-based learning programs put issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion front and center. To better assist stakeholders in meeting their responsibilities and best serving students of all backgrounds, the Key Distinguishers emphasize program implementation that is student-driven and addresses the challenges that are born from the neglect and marginalization that many communities continue to face.

The Key Distinguishers were informed by leveraging the experiences and expertise of a broad set of stakeholders—including students, work-based learning coordinators, teachers, intermediary organizations, and employers—in existing programs as well as a review of relevant literature and practitioner toolkits. An initial version of the Key Distinguishers was used to design an RFP, offer guidance to applicants and funders, and support a learning community in the summer of 2020. [What’s Next: The Promise of Remote Internships in the Future of Work-Based Learning](#), documents this pilot.

How the Key Distinguishers Can Be Used

The Key Distinguishers of Work-Based Learning can play several roles. For those implementing programs, they offer guidance to assist with program design and implementation—a clear set of research-based standards in a field that is still maturing, and that still lacks widespread adoption of best practice. The Key Distinguishers also offer policy makers and funders a straightforward and objective set of guidelines to assess programs, and may be useful in funding decisions, evaluations, and identifying areas for additional support, scaling, and replication. Most importantly, these materials can mobilize a broad set of stakeholders to champion work-based learning in practice and policy.