

Innovation Through Collaboration Project Guide

Understanding ITC Projects

The Innovation Through Collaboration (ITC) program connects Penn State Behrend business students with organizations seeking fresh perspectives on business challenges. This guide explains how ITC projects work and what you can expect from the partnership.

How ITC Projects Work

Project Structure

- **Duration:** 4 to 16 weeks based on your needs and complexity
- **Team Size:** 1 to 3 students selected for relevant skills
- **Time Commitment:** Students dedicate 8–10 hours weekly to your project
- **Faculty Oversight:** Experienced professors guide and quality-check all work
- **Cost:** Contact us for current program pricing

Who Does the Work

Your project team consists of upper-level business students from Penn State Behrend's Black School of Business. These students bring knowledge in:

- Accounting and financial analysis
- Marketing and digital strategy
- Supply chain management
- Project management
- Information systems
- Finance and investment analysis

Students are selected based on your project needs and their academic background, ensuring the right fit for your specific challenges.

What Makes a Good ITC Project

Clear Business Challenge

The best projects start with a specific problem or opportunity. Examples include:

- “We need to understand why customer retention dropped 15% last quarter”
- “Our inventory costs are too high compared to industry standards”
- “We want to launch on TikTok but don't know where to start”
- “Our financial reporting takes too long and lacks actionable insights”

Realistic Scope

Projects should be substantial enough to provide value but focused enough to be completed within the timeframe. Consider breaking large initiatives into phases.

Available Information

Students need access to relevant data and personnel to succeed. This might include:

- Historical performance data
- Customer feedback or survey results
- Financial reports (sanitized as needed)
- Marketing analytics
- Process documentation
- Key staff members for interviews

Openness to Fresh Perspectives

Students bring current academic knowledge and an outsider's view. The most successful partnerships embrace new ideas while providing context about what's been tried before.

Project Deliverables

Every project is unique, but most include several of these components:

Research & Analysis

- Market research reports with competitor analysis
- Customer segmentation studies
- Process efficiency assessments
- Financial performance analysis
- Industry benchmarking

Strategic Recommendations

- Prioritized action plans with implementation timelines
- Business case development for new initiatives
- Risk assessments and mitigation strategies
- Performance measurement frameworks

Practical Tools

- Custom AI assistants for ongoing support
- Excel models and dashboards
- Process documentation and standard operating procedures
- Marketing templates and content calendars
- Training materials for your team

Knowledge Resources

- Organized research databases
- Best practice guides
- Implementation checklists
- Vendor evaluation frameworks

The Project Process

Discovery Phase

- Team introductions and goal alignment
- Access setup and initial data gathering
- Preliminary research planning
- Communication schedule establishment

Research & Analysis Phase

- Data collection and analysis
- Stakeholder interviews
- Market and competitor research
- Problem definition refinement

Strategy Development Phase

- Deep dive into findings
- Solution development
- Tool creation begins
- Regular check-ins for feedback

Delivery & Implementation Phase

- Final recommendations preparation
- Tool testing and refinement
- Documentation completion
- Knowledge transfer sessions

Post-Project Support

- 30-day support period for questions
- Implementation assistance as needed

Preparing for Your Project

Before the Kickoff

1. **Define Success:** What specific outcomes would make this project valuable?
2. **Gather Materials:** Collect relevant documents, reports, and data
3. **Identify Stakeholders:** Who should students talk to for different perspectives?
4. **Set Expectations:** Communicate the project to your team

During the Project

1. **Designate a Point Person:** Someone who can answer questions and provide guidance
2. **Schedule Regular Check-ins:** Weekly or biweekly meetings keep projects on track
3. **Provide Timely Feedback:** Quick responses help students stay productive
4. **Be Available:** Plan for interviews and working sessions

Information Sharing

Students sign non-disclosure agreements and Penn State maintains professional liability insurance. You control what information is shared and can sanitize sensitive data as needed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How are students selected for projects?

A: We match students based on their academic focus, skills, and career interests with your project needs. You receive brief profiles of selected team members.

Q: What if our needs change during the project?

A: Minor adjustments are normal and expected. Major scope changes may require timeline or team adjustments. We'll work with you to find solutions.

Q: Can we hire students after the project?

A: Yes. Many ITC alumni have joined client organizations after graduation. We can discuss internship or employment opportunities.

Q: How much time will this require from our team?

A: Plan for 1–2 hours per week for meetings and questions, plus time for initial knowledge transfer and final deliverable review.

Q: What if we need help after the project ends?

A: Projects include 30 days of follow-up support. We can also discuss extended engagements or future projects.

Q: Do we own the deliverables?

A: Yes. All work products become your property. Students may use sanitized examples for their portfolios with your permission.

Q: What technology do students use?

A: Students have access to standard business software, AI tools, and analytical platforms. They can work with your existing systems or recommend new solutions.

Investment & Value

ITC projects require both financial investment and time commitment from your organization. In return, you receive:

- Fresh perspectives on persistent challenges
- Academic rigor applied to real-world problems
- Cost-effective consulting compared to traditional firms
- Connection to university resources and talent pipeline
- Support for community workforce development

Contact us for current pricing and to discuss how we can structure a project to meet your budget.

Next Steps

1. Submit Your Interest

Share your company name and challenge area through our website. No detailed preparation needed at this stage.

2. **Receive Custom Proposals**

We'll send tailored project proposals based on your needs, typically within a few business days.

3. **Select Your Path**

Choose the project approach that best fits your goals, timeline, and budget.

4. **Begin Collaboration**

Once agreements are signed, we'll match students to your project and schedule the kickoff.

We look forward to exploring how Penn State Behrend students can help your organization tackle challenges and seize opportunities.

The ITC program is supported by Penn State Behrend's Black School of Business, an AACSB-accredited institution committed to experiential learning and regional economic development.