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## Opening Doors to the Tech Industry: The LA HI-TECH/Snap Inc. Case Study

**Snap Inc.**



**BIXELEXCHANGE**  
CENTER FOR INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY AT THE L.A. AREA CHAMBER

**CLP**

Career  
Ladders  
Project

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## THE WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

California’s public high schools and community colleges are playing a growing role in preparing the future tech workforce. Young students are taking sequences of courses in computer programming, information support, communications technology, digital design, and media arts that are accompanied by counseling and services to help them set goals and take steps toward higher education and careers. Initiatives like the Los Angeles High Impact Information Technology, Entertainment & Entrepreneurship, and Communications Hubs (LA HI-TECH) are working regionally to identify high-growth occupations and prepare students for them.

However, great classroom learning is not enough. Students also need hands-on work experience that builds the very practical skills and competencies employers look for in new hires. Students need to step inside work-places, interact with tech employees, see for themselves what the day-to-day work entails, and try their hand at tackling real-world challenges.

**Los Angeles High Impact Information Technology, Entertainment & Entrepreneurship, Communications Hubs (LA HI-TECH)** is a consortium of eight community colleges, including Los Angeles City College, Los Angeles Mission College, Los Angeles Pierce College, Los Angeles Southwest College, Los Angeles Valley College, West Los Angeles College, Santa Monica College, and Pasadena City College, and 16 high schools that enroll more than 3,600 students in tech-related, industry-supported career pathway programs. Funded initially by the California Career Pathway Trust\* (CCPT), LA HI-TECH is now able to leverage public, private industry, and philanthropic funding to meet the common goal of increasing the number of students pursuing degrees and careers in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). At the heart of LA HI-TECH’s work are high-impact educational strategies, such as early college credit, contextualized instruction, and work-based learning (WBL). LA HI-TECH’s more than 25 industry partners make WBL a reality for ICT pathway students.

*\*Administered by the California Department of Education, the California Career Pathways Trust provided \$500 million for the development of sustained K–14 career pathways that connect industry, K–12 schools, and community colleges in order to better prepare students for the 21st century workplace.*

**Work-based learning (WBL) opens doors**, especially for student groups underrepresented in the tech industry, who are often without role models or networks to show them the way in. Unfortunately, it can be hard for educators and employers to find each other and make WBL happen. This case study tells the story of a partnership that is really doing it: LA HI-TECH and Snap Inc. are opening doors to the tech industry for a diversity of promising young people who are gearing up to become the tech workforce of the future. The lessons learned by this partnership could help bring the benefits of WBL to greater numbers of students, schools, and businesses throughout California.

**SNAP INC.** is a camera company headquartered in Los Angeles, CA. The company’s mission is to contribute to human progress by empowering people to express themselves, live in the moment, learn about the world and have fun together.

## BIG QUESTIONS ABOUT WORK-BASED LEARNING

LA HI-TECH identified WBL as a top-priority strategy to increase student success on the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) pathways. This raised the following questions among the high school and community college instructors:

- How can we identify dedicated employer partners and cultivate lasting relationships?
- What sorts of great WBL activities will inspire students and prepare them for careers?
- How can we connect students’ WBL to career pathways and employment?

Two intermediary organizations—the Career Ladders Project (CLP), strategic assistance and support provider, and Bixel Exchange, workforce intermediary—stepped in to help LA HI-TECH’s member schools and colleges explore these questions, learn about promising WBL models, and find good employer matches.

Snap Inc. has turned out to be just that match. Snap Inc.’s team of designers, engineers, marketers, and recruiters, who were interested in cultivating connections with the local community, wondered the following:

- How can we connect to local schools, teachers, and students?
- What sorts of activities will engage and inspire creativity among young people in the schools?
- How can we forge community partnerships that can help us recruit diverse, local talent?



**BIXEL EXCHANGE**, hosted at the LA Area Chamber of Commerce, has a mission to build a prosperous and inclusive tech sector in LA by giving traditionally underrepresented students access to opportunities in LA’s fast-growing tech sector. Bixel Exchange serves as workforce intermediary for the LA HI-TECH consortium, drawing upon its relationships with 60+ regional tech employers to connect high school and community college instructors with potential WBL partnerships.

**CAREER LADDERS PROJECT** works to improve college and career outcomes for Californians. In supporting initiatives like LA HI-TECH, Career Ladders Project (CLP) facilitates partnerships among high schools, community colleges, industry, and others to realize a vision of high-quality, industry-engaged pathways. In the field of pathway development, CLP supports reflection, documentation, and publication of practitioner tools and policy briefs to support the field and lift up effective and systemic reforms.



## THE LA HI-TECH/SNAP INC. STORY AND HOW IT EVOLVED

### Getting to Know Each Other: One-Day, Collaborative Design Project at the Snap Inc. Headquarters

Snap Inc.'s connection with LA HI-TECH began when CLP and Bixel Exchange introduced them to the Digital Design course at John F. Kennedy High School in Los Angeles. The teacher of the course met with Snap Inc. employees to design a worksite visit that would build students' skills and add a work product to their portfolios. They shaped a project around the design of Geofilters, location-based art overlays that communicate the "where and when" of a Snap in a fun way. In preparation for the one-day collaborative design event, 16 participating students learned about Geofilters and the software used to develop them. On the big day at Snap Inc. headquarters, they sat side by side with designers, trying out their design ideas, asking questions, and learning about how things work at the company and what recruiters look for in new employees.

#### Teacher Perspective

**"This experience changed the energy of the classroom for the entire year. One student even told me it was one of the best days of her life."**

#### RESULTS:

- All 16 students added a Geofilter of their own design to their portfolio.
- One student was asked to design more Geofilters for Snap Inc., and another asked for and received a letter of recommendation from a Snap Inc. employee.
- Los Angeles Mission College saw an increase in the number of Kennedy High School students who were interested in their Design & Video Media Arts program.
- Snap Inc. heard positive feedback from participating employees—and decided to continue working with Bixel Exchange and LA HI-TECH on WBL activities.
- LA HI-TECH and its partners provided a strong example of how partnerships between education and industry can yield mutual benefits.

#### Student Perspective

**"I could ask many questions about my career interest and have another designer's opinion on my artwork."**

**"I felt very comfortable in this work environment and I enjoyed how everyone was very amicable and friendly."**



## WEAVING HACKING INTO THE CURRICULUM

### Eight-week Design Competition Hosted by Snap, Inc.

To develop an even more engaging career preparation experience, Snap Inc. welcomed an introduction by Bixel Exchange to the faculty who were teaching a computer science course at Los Angeles Pierce College, a nearby community college. Snap Inc. employees learned about the course syllabus and student skill levels to tailor the parameters of their first Bitmoji Hackathon, a competitive product-development activity with a defined theme. At the start of the semester, Snap Inc. engineers taught a 4-hour class to introduce Bitmojis (personalized emojis, or avatars) and the ways C++ programming language, JavaScript, and HTML are used to design them. They also utilized an online platform where students could engage in discussion and ask questions of the Snap Inc. employees. Over the next five weeks, students worked in teams of three to develop their final class project, a website on the theme of storytelling using their Bitmojis, which they then presented at Snap Inc. headquarters to a panel of employee judges. Each team received specific feedback on its work, followed by a workshop led by recruiters on how to land an internship or a permanent job at Snap Inc. or other leading tech companies.

#### RESULTS:

- All 16 students added their Bitmoji product to their portfolio.
- Half of the students applied to Los Angeles Pierce College’s coding bootcamp.
- Snap Inc. set a goal of reaching greater numbers of local students—either within one college or across multiple colleges—through challenging and impactful WBL experiences.

### Student Perspective

**“This validated the classes I’ve taken in the past 3 years and now I KNOW that I want to do this!”**



## OPENING THE DOORS WIDE TO STUDENTS' CREATIVITY

### Los Angeles Region-wide Snap Inc. Design Challenge

Snap Inc. and the LA HI-TECH partners now shared a common goal: to offer fun, creative, and high-quality WBL experiences to more students and to open the doors wide to student creativity. With Bixel Exchange coordinating the effort, Snap Inc. invited students from all LA high schools to submit creative designs for virtual “stickers,” the colorful images that can be “stuck” onto Snaps and Chats to add expression. From a pool of over 100 student designs, Bixel prescreened and forwarded 50 to the Snap Inc. judges, who selected 20 winners. These winners were invited to Snap Inc. headquarters, where they met with designers to learn how to develop a portfolio, network with professionals in the field, and secure an internship that would prepare them for a creative tech career.

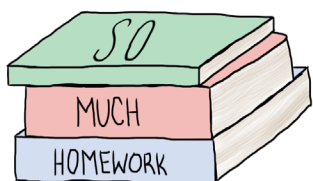
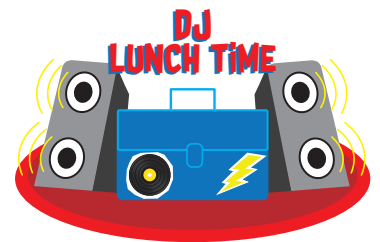
#### RESULTS:

- More than 100 students from LA public high schools created and submitted sticker designs that could be added to their portfolios.
- Twenty winning students developed their soft skills, professional networks, and understanding of hiring practices on their visit to Snap Inc. headquarters.

### Teacher Perspective

**“For some of our students, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to present their work to a panel of Snap Inc. engineers. I could see that the engineers took it very seriously and were helping the students throughout the entire thing.”**

**“Sometimes our students do not think they are good enough to apply for better 4-year colleges or apply to better companies. The very thoughtful feedback of the judges taught them otherwise.”**





## BRIDGING FROM WORK-BASED LEARNING TO WORK

### Recruiting Community College Students For Internships and Jobs

When Snap Inc.'s diversity recruiter met students from the LA HI-TECH schools on worksite visits, he recognized an opportunity to reach members of the local community who also had skills and a high interest in working in tech. So, in partnership with Bixel Exchange, the recruiter initiated a new community college student internship program in Snap Inc.'s Information Technology department. In the program's first summer, Bixel Exchange interviewed 100 students and referred 16 top candidates to Snap Inc. recruiters. Five students were selected and successfully completed what grew from a 2-month to a 5-month internship with the company.

#### RESULTS:

- Nine community college interns became full-time Snap Inc. contractors.
- One community college student leveraged her Snap Inc. internship to secure an internship at another tech company.
- One student referred a classmate from his community college network to Snap Inc. The company has since hired him as an incoming intern.
- Snap Inc. and Bixel Exchange plan to sustain and grow the new community college internship program.
- LA HI-TECH and its partners demonstrated that WBL is a continuum of activities, from 1-day events, to competitions, to in-depth internships.

**"[These] community college interns converted to full-time employees at the same rate as all our other interns coming from 4-year colleges."**

**– Snap Inc.**







## LESSONS LEARNED

Snap Inc., Bixel Exchange, CLP, and the high schools and community colleges that make up LA HI-TECH discovered through their evolving partnership some answers to their big questions about using WBL as a strategy to increase student success in ICT Pathways.

**Teachers and faculty** at the LA HI-TECH high schools and colleges learned the following about their questions.

### How to identify dedicated employer partners and cultivate lasting relationships:

- Partner with a workforce intermediary like Bixel Exchange.
- Share information about what the students are learning and what they're interested in, and then let your intermediary find the right fit within its industry network.
- Approach the intermediary relationship as an evolving process of getting to know each other's and the students' needs.

### What sorts of WBL activities will inspire students and prepare them for careers:

- Let the intermediary facilitate communications between teachers/faculty and employers so that activities are co-designed.
- After a WBL activity has taken place, invite feedback from all involved, and work together to improve the next activity.

### How to connect students' WBL to career pathways and employment:

- Work with a technical assistance provider like CLP to integrate WBL into well-structured career pathways and course curricula.
- Build employer relationships over time to include longer-term, deeper-commitment WBL activities, such as internships.
- Get to know recruiters with interest in diversity hiring and help them to meet students whose talent and potential will speak for itself.
- Exercise patience regarding internships; employers need time to get to know your student population. First focus on WBL activities like classroom visits and field trips to engage company employees with your students. Those employees become internal advocates, and that leads to deeper engagement overall with the tech company.

**Employers** like Snap Inc. are learning the following through these WBL experiences:

### How to connect to local schools, teachers, and students:

- Partner with a workforce intermediary like Bixel Exchange to identify schools with interest and with career pathway programs in the industry.
- Then have the intermediary help open conversations with the schools about what students need and desire, and about what your company has to offer.

### How to create WBL activities that engage and inspire creativity among young people in the schools:

- Co-design with teachers/faculty WBL activities that address real-life challenges, involve interaction with employees in their regular work environments, and result in tangible products that can make their way into student portfolios and inspire their confidence in a future tech career.
- Structure activities so that employees and students get to know each other, sharing ideas about a specific design challenge and about what it's like to work in the company.
- Relate the WBL to actual products so that employees make the connection between the WBL and their own work.

### How to forge community partnerships that can help recruit diverse, local talent:

- Start with small pilot activities to get to know the schools, but don't hold back from offering more intensive WBL activities that let you get to know individual students' skills and work styles.
- Be open to considering new employee recruitment channels that can open up as these relationships develop.

*"We wanted to scale the [WBL] model ... and Bixel Exchange made it very easy for us .... We have this model that's proven, that's worked, and we can keep expanding upon that."*

– Snap Inc.



## CONCLUSIONS

LA HI-TECH high schools and community colleges, Bixel Exchange, CLP, and Snap Inc. embarked upon a partnership to offer WBL with little certainty about where it would lead. Together, they created synergies that are benefiting a diversity of students at a critical early point in their careers. This dynamic partnership illustrates keys to developing WBL that truly open doors.





Design | Lindsay Anglin | Roy Robles

Photography | Jason Chau



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**Snap Inc.**

The Career Ladders Project works with community colleges and their K12, university, community, workforce and employer partners to improve educational and career outcomes. We foster these improvements through research, policy change and strategic assistance to colleges and their partners.

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