PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE FUTURE



2025 BROCHURE

US COMMUNITY COLLEGES MEET GERMAN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS



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BEST PRACTICES FOR TRANSATLANTIC APPRENTICE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

CORE PRINCIPLES

AUTHENTIC IMMERSION. Frame exchanges as "temporary adoptions" rather than visits. Students/Apprentices live with host families, attend regular classes, and participate in daily routines as insiders, not observers.

SELECT COMPATIBLE PARTNERS. Look for schools with similar program offerings, comparable educational philosophy, institutional commitment, and reasonable geographic accessibility. Core similarities create foundation; differences become learning opportunities.

BUILDING YOUR PROGRAM

START SMALL, SCALE GRADUALLY. Begin with 5-10 students per side. Test logistics, refine processes, demonstrate success, then expand incrementally.

CLEAR SELECTION CRITERIA. Require minimum GPA/attendance, positive teacher recommendations, demonstrated maturity/adaptability, and family support. Rigorous selection ensures participant readiness.

INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS. Engage local businesses for facility tours, mentorship, financial support, and advisory roles. This transforms exchanges into career exploration and demonstrates workforce value.

RECIPROCAL STRUCTURE. Implement two-phase exchanges (hosting 2-3 weeks, traveling 2-3 weeks). Reciprocity distributes costs, creates authentic pairings, and ensures mutual investment.

FINANCIAL ACCESSIBILITY. Offer payment plans, scholarships, clear cost breakdowns, and fundraising options. Host families provide room/board, significantly reducing expenses.

ABOUT PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE FUTURE

This project facilitates the first connections between German vocational schools and community colleges in the US. Its goal is to establish sustainable exchange programs for apprentices through networking events, workshops, and targeted support. The AHK USA-Chicago actively assists with initial contact and project development.

THE THREE PILLARS

The successful "exchange before the exchange" is the primary objective of the **"Partnerships for the future – Vocational Schools Meet Community Colleges: Dialogue on Apprenticeship Exchange"** project. Representatives from German vocational schools and US community colleges are given the opportunity to discuss topics relevant to apprentice exchange programs and to get to know each other. In doing so, they can develop a solid transatlantic apprentice exchange program concept together. The structure of an apprentice exchange program is customizable and receives support from the AHK USA-Chicago, especially during the initial development and partner-finding phases. The concrete implementation of a transatlantic apprentice exchange then lies with the vocational schools and community colleges.

Finding a Program Partner – Virtual Networking Meetings

Twice a year, the project hosts virtual networking meetings for German vocational schools and US community colleges. These sessions offer instructors a low-barrier way to connect, share ideas, and explore potential apprentice exchange programs. Interactive workshops, breakout rooms, and a web-based map facilitate finding partners and developing concepts. Schools can present exchange ideas or simply explore possibilities, making it easy to take the first steps toward sustainable transatlantic partnerships.

Bilateral Connections – Support for Transatlantic School Partnerships

The project supports German vocational schools and US community colleges in finding partners and building sustainable collaborations. AHK USA-Chicago facilitates connections, advises on project plans and funding applications, and continues to assist partnerships after the initial contact. The goal is to overcome communication barriers, bridge educational systems, and implement concrete exchange projects—from initial matchmaking to moderating virtual meetings.

Program Ideas and Best Practices – Virtual Workshops

Participants from German vocational schools and U.S. community colleges collaborate in virtual workshops to develop concrete ideas for transatlantic exchange programs. Experts also share best practices, their experiences with different education systems, and funding opportunities for exchange initiatives.

Workshop 1: Successfully Planning an Apprentice Exchange – Determine and Develop the Basics
Workshop 2: Implementing an Exchange with Best Practices Examples from German and US Perspectives
Workshop 3: School Partners of Apprenticeships – Differences and Similarities DE – USA
Workshop 4: Intercultural Competencies and Communication during Exchange



MANAGING CHALLENGES

COMMUNICATION. Establish multiple channels—formal email, real-time messaging, cloud document sharing, and 24/7 emergency protocols.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS. Focus on technical content rather than language instruction. Use visual learning, hands-on activities, translation technology, and peer support. Technical vocabulary provides common ground.

STUDENT MATCHING. Consider program alignment, gender/family preferences, personality compatibility, household dynamics, and geographic distribution. Thoughtful pairing impacts experience quality.

ORIENTATION. Prepare traveling students on cultural norms, logistics, safety, and behavioral expectations. Prepare host families on student backgrounds, dietary needs, household expectations, and problem-solving.

GETTING STARTED

- Assess institutional readiness (support, capacity, interest)
- Research potential partners (alignment, compatibility)
- Make initial contact with clear proposal
- Visit potential partners for relationship building
- Start with small pilot to test feasibility
- Document lessons learned for improvement
- Scale gradually based on demonstrated success
- Share learning to contribute to the field

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP EXCHANGES

GATE PROGRAM (GERMAN APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING EXCHANGE) WITH JOACHIM HERZ FOUNDATION (HAMBURG, GERMANY)

PROGRAM FOCUS. Supporting transatlantic apprenticeship exchanges between U.S. colleges and German vocational schools since 2017.

FUNDING PATHWAYS

A: New School Partnerships (Structured Initial Funding)

- Delegation Visit: Up to €5,000 (rolling applications)
- Exchange Year I: Up to €20,000 (deadlines: April 30, November 30)
- Exchange Year II: Up to €20,000 (deadlines: April 30, November 30)
- Follow-up: Up to €10,000 (maximum 50% of total costs)

B: Existing School Partnerships (Add-on Funding)

Exchange Support: Up to €5,000 (rolling applications)
Eligible Expenses: Return flights, accommodation, meals, transportation, cultural activities, visa fees.
Key Requirements: German vocational school must apply and receive funds; grants can cover both partner institutions; combinable with other U.S./German funding; faculty may accompany (1:5 ratio).

Website: www.joachim-herz-stiftung.de/gate/en

VETWORLDWIDE PROGRAM (AUSBILDUNG WELTWEIT) WITH FEDERAL INSTITUTE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Funded by German Federal Ministry of Education and Research

ELIGIBLE DESTINATIONS:

- All non-European countries (excludes Erasmus+ countries)

FUNDING CATEGORIES:
Internships for Apprentices (3 weeks to 3 months, all sectors)

- USA subsidy example per apprentice: €1,581/month accommodation + €1,175 travel

Job Shadowing for Trainers (5-12 days)

- Purpose: Observe training methods and workplace practices

Preparatory Visits for VET Professionals (2-5 days)

- Purpose: Establish partnerships and assess host sites

HOST ORGANIZATIONS:
Companies offering qualifying internships; technical schools/colleges with practical learning plus company training.

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STRATEGIC APPLICATION TIPS

TIMING. Begin planning 12-18 months before travel. GATE operates semi-annually; VETWorldwide accepts rolling applications.

MAXIMIZE FUNDING. Combine both programs with local chamber support, industry contributions, and institutional budgets. Host families providing accommodation eliminates major expenses.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING SOURCES

Explore U.S. Department of Labor apprenticeship grants, state workforce development boards, industry associations, community foundations and corporate sponsors with German operations.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Move beyond grant dependence by building institutional budget line items, developing industry partnerships, creating endowments, implementing modest participant contributions, leveraging reciprocity through hosting, and generating efficiency as programs mature. Initial grants enable development; sustainable programs diversify funding while continuing to leverage available grants, making transformative international experiences accessible to all apprentices regardless of personal resources.



CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION GUIDE FOR U.S.-GERMANY APPRENTICE EXCHANGES

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION STYLES

THE PEACH VS. COCONUT MODEL:

- Americans (Peach): Friendly and warm initially, but take time to develop deeper relationships. Quick to use first names and engage in small talk.
- Germans (Coconut): More reserved initially with formal interactions, but once trust is established, relationships run deep and long-term.

KEY COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES

AREA	UNITED STATES	GERMANY
Feedback	Indirect, "sandwich method" (praise-criticism-praise); frequent positive reinforcement	Direct and straightforward; criticism given matter-of-factly without softening
Formality	Informal from start; immediate first-name basis	Formal initially; titles and last names until invited to switch
Communication	Relationship-focused; emphasis on enthusiasm and optimism	Task-focused; emphasis on precision and accuracy
Meetings	Application-first; focus on practical next steps and "how"	Principle-first; detailed discussion of concepts and "why"

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL EXCHANGES

FOR AMERICAN STUDENTS/FACULTY WORKING WITH GERMANS:

- Be more direct: Say exactly what you mean without excessive politeness or hedging
- Expect critical feedback: Germans view constructive criticism as helpful, not personal
- Prepare thoroughly: Have detailed plans and be ready to explain underlying concepts
- Avoid overstatement: Phrases like "awesome" or "amazing" may seem insincere
- Respect formality: Wait to be invited before using first names with instructors/supervisors

FOR GERMAN STUDENTS/FACULTY WORKING WITH AMERICANS:

- Add positive framing: Balance directness with encouraging language
- Engage in small talk: Brief personal conversations build workplace relationships
- Show enthusiasm: Express appreciation and optimism more frequently
- Clarify indirect feedback: If something sounds positive but feels unclear, ask for specifics
- Be informal (appropriately): First names and casual conversation are workplace norms

COMMON WORD MISUNDERSTANDINGS

- "Interesting" (US) = May mean "I disagree" OR "genuinely interesting" (context-dependent)
- "Gut" (German "good") = Average/acceptable, NOT excellent
- "Challenge" (US) = Exciting opportunity; (German) = Serious problem
- "Let's talk" (US) = Casual check-in; (German) = Serious discussion needed

EXPECTATIONS:

- DEADLINES. Germans expect precise adherence; Americans may view as somewhat flexible
- QUESTIONS. Germans ask to understand thoroughly; Americans may perceive as challenging authority
- SILENCE. Germans use it to think; Americans may fill it to avoid awkwardness
- PRAISE. Germans give it sparingly for truly exceptional work; Americans give it frequently for motivation

TABOO TOPICS (PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS)

GERMANY: Personal finances, salary details, personal health issues, overly personal questions
UNITED STATES: Politics, religion, race, age, immigration status
SAFE TOPICS: Weather, sports, food, travel experiences, regional culture, technical training content

QUICK SUCCESS STRATEGIES

- OVER-COMMUNICATE. When in doubt, provide more context and follow-up than seems necessary
- OBSERVE AND ADAPT. Pay attention to how colleagues from the other culture interact
- SHOW RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCES. Acknowledge that both approaches have value
- BUILD PERSONAL CONNECTIONS. Shared meals, cultural activities, and informal time strengthen exchanges
- SEEK FEEDBACK REGULARLY. Ask how communication is working and what could improve

REMEMBER:

These are cultural tendencies, not absolute rules. Individual personalities, generational differences, and regional variations matter too. Approach each person with curiosity and openness rather than rigid cultural assumptions.

RESOURCES:

German American Chambers of Commerce offer intercultural training; many online resources provide deeper cultural insights for ongoing learning.

ABOUT ICATT APPRENTICESHIPS

The **Industry Consortium for Advanced Technical Training (ICATT)** and its affiliate programs, the Michigan Advanced Technician Training (MAT2), and the Georgia Consortium for Advanced Technical Training (GACATT) are specialized apprenticeship programs focusing on advanced manufacturing, mechatronics, electronics, and business administration. They are designed to address the skills gap in the US workforce by providing a structured training pathway for individuals interested in pursuing a career in this field. The programs focus on high-demand occupations, ensuring that apprentices are well-prepared for successful careers in the ever-evolving manufacturing industry.

INDUSTRY-DRIVEN: The programs are developed and driv- en by leading manufacturing companies in collaboration with educational institutions.

DUAL EDUCATION SYSTEM: The ICATT apprenticeship pro- grams combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction.

COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM: The program follows a competency-based curriculum, focusing on specific skills and knowledge required for various job roles in the manu- facturing industry.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT: The Apprenticeship Programs typically span three years, providing a comprehensive and in-depth training experience.

SUPPORTIVE NETWORK: The programs provide a support- ive network for apprentices and companies, including mentorship, best practice exchange, and resources to help them succeed.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES: Upon successful completion of the ICATT apprentices can secure full-time employment with the host company



ICATT
APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM
& AFFILIATE PROGRAMS



ABOUT GACC MIDWEST

The **German American Chamber of Commerce® of the Midwest (GACC Midwest)**, headquartered in Chicago with a branch office in Detroit, was founded in 1963. GACC Midwest is an integral part of the German Chamber Network (AHKs) with 150 offices in 93 countries around the globe. Our continuing mission is to promote German-American business relations and to support trade and investment between Germany and the United States, especially the Midwest. Our organization combines elements of a trade commission, a membership association, and professional consulting services for market entry, apprenticeships in the US, and more. With this unique concept in international trade promotion, GACC Midwest's territory covers 14 US states: the 12 of the Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin), including Colorado and Kentucky, comprising together approximately one quarter of the nation's geographical area, its population, and its GDP. GACC Midwest's headquarters, which we share with Germany Trade and Invest (GTAI), is located in the heart of downtown Chicago. Our Michigan office is located just outside of Detroit to better serve the German-American business community in Michigan and the neighboring states.

AHK German American Chambers of Commerce Deutsch-Amerikanische Handelskammern

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