

# Student Engagement Guidebook

Best Practices to Connect With Students  
and Create Awareness of the Accounting Profession



# Thank You

**If you're reading this guide, you are a vital stakeholder to the AICPA and state CPA societies. Our continued growth in the accounting profession is because of dedicated people like yourself. So thank you.**

We understand that presenting can be a daunting task, especially when it's to a group of students. To simplify your life, we have done extensive research with multiple groups of students, both high school and college, to garner insights into how to connect with them. This guidebook was compiled with that research.

Please use this to help you give engaging presentations that make an impact and encourage more students to consider an accounting career.

# The AICPA Story

The following information is probably familiar to you.  
Please use it as a reference when presenting to or meeting with students.

The AICPA is the world's largest member association representing the accounting profession, with more than 418,000 members in 144 countries and a history of serving the public interest since 1887. Members advise clients on federal, state and international tax matters and prepare income and other tax returns for millions of Americans. We are also an integral part of the success of global business, as CPAs, CGMAs and other specialty credentials provide knowledge, resources and advocacy to protect the ever-evolving public interest.

State CPA societies are important partners in achieving the AICPA's mission. There are 55 CPA society jurisdictions, comprised of the 50 US states, plus the District of Columbia, Guam, Commonwealth of North Mariana Islands, Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

When you're presenting, remind students that they can become members of the CPA society in the state where they reside, or where they attend school and can join the AICPA with free student membership. The benefits attained through these memberships are wide and include the ability to apply for student accounting major scholarships offered through various state CPA societies and the AICPA.

The AICPA has two student brands – Start Here, Go Places. (high school) and ThisWayToCPA (college). Each brand is supported by a team at the AICPA and has an abundance of resources for students to learn about and pursue CPA licensure and careers in accounting. Visit the brand websites for access to the resources that you can share with students.

The AICPA partners with other student, academic and diversity organizations to offer a holistic service to members. Consider utilizing our partnerships as appropriate in your presentations and work.

## Teacher/Advisor Organizations

- NAF
- DECA
- FBLA
- BPA
- NBEA
- ACTE
- ASCA
- AACC
- NACE
- TACTYC
- AAA

## Peer/Student Organizations

- NAF
- JA
- FBLA
- DECA
- BPA
- NABA
- ALPFA
- Ascend
- BAP

# Before the Presentation

In our discussion groups, we found that students want to be just as prepared for a meeting as you do.

With that in mind, **send an agenda** or a few-sentence overview on what you plan to talk about. Make sure you **provide any pertinent background information** that may help them prepare.

The day of the presentation, **arrive early** so you can greet students as they come into the room. Casual conversation will help them get comfortable with you and eager to participate. It's also a good idea to be aware of any **current events or stories that can help illustrate your points** during the presentation. We learned that it's easier for students to connect your experience and profession to things happening in the world.

Be conversational. Consider your PowerPoint as **notecards not a script**. And make sure you stop occasionally to ask and receive questions.

Be personable. Sharing things beyond your educational and career background will help students make a better connection with you. Consider your hobbies, family background or something that will surprise them about you or help them find commonalities with you.

Keep in mind that **students are interested in learning about the accounting profession and the career options within it**, not necessarily insight into your specific firm or organization. While it's welcomed to share specific details about your job, don't make it the focus of the presentation (unless that's the reason you're there).

It will be important for you to present to each **particular group based on their level of knowledge** and where they may be in deciding on a career rather than their age or grade. We found in our research that some high school students were much more focused and knowledgeable of an accounting career, while some college students were just beginning to consider career options. So make sure you **talk to the presentation coordinator prior to the event** to gauge the students' level of knowledge and interest.

**And finally, remember, you got this.**

# CONNECTING WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



When talking with high school students keep in mind **they may not have a clear vision** of their career path. Many times they are only exposed to their parents', relatives' or neighbors' experiences or what a career aptitude test has told them. Encourage high school students to research options as they think about school subjects they enjoy.



Additionally, some students may have taken an accounting class or two, while others may not. Some may not know what a CPA is or does. Discuss these things with the meeting coordinator prior to the presentation. Then you can **cater your presentation accordingly**.



High school students are often overwhelmed with the thought of college, let alone selecting a career path. **Share resources** like scholarships and college/ career information from the AICPA and your state CPA society.



In our research, we found an overwhelming majority of **students prefer hands-on activities**. So we highly encourage you to work in a game or some other activity that gets them truly involved. Check out **StartHereGoPlaces.com** for resources.



START HERE, GO PLACES. >>>  
Fueled by AICPA

# CONNECTING WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS



College students like people to get to know them. If this is your first time meeting with a group, talk with the meeting coordinator to try to get to know the students. Obviously this will depend on the size group you're meeting with, but **make an effort to get to know each student.**

Consider meeting college students where they're comfortable, which is **not always a traditional classroom** setting. You may want to set up a table in the union or at a popular on-campus coffee shop. Cater your presentation according to the setting and the amount of time students have.

**The millennial generation is focused on finding meaning in their careers.** During our discussion groups, students talked about the purpose of their job being just as important as the salary, title, etc. So whenever possible, talk about **what it means to be an accountant and how rewarding it is as a career.**

College students are fully aware that they live in a bubble and they like to know what it's like in the real world. **Tell them about the challenges of your job, or a time you failed.** They know that jobs are not perfect so give them the whole picture to arm them to make an informed decision.

Just like high school students, college students are stressed about choosing a specific career path. Do your best to **alleviate their stress** by answering questions honestly and sharing your own experience and recommendations for choosing a specific field or job.

Because college students are closer to a full-time career, determine what information would serve them best. Perhaps CPA examination content, guidance on how to apply for licensure, specializations within accounting or advanced expertise insight would be appropriate for college students.

Lastly, remember you're speaking with college students who are serious about their education and future career path. You have a lot of important information and experience to share, talk with them on a **peer-to-peer** level to establish mutual respect. You might even want to **consider sitting down** so the presentation takes on more of a conversational tone.

★ **Important Tip:** Students will never turn down a snack, just double check for allergies or dietary restrictions with the meeting coordinator.



# Connecting with Non-Traditional Students

**Before your presentation, find out if the group you're meeting with includes non-traditional students.**

Are any of them working full-time or taking care of a family while they're in school? While this doesn't necessarily change your presentation, it's important to be sensitive to students' various backgrounds and responsibilities.

A student who is returning for continuing education and has real-world experience may be able to contribute an interesting/different perspective to your presentation.

Also, find out if the group includes any international students. Be prepared to speak to differences those students may encounter in certifications or testing, or be able to point them to resources to learn more.

## Diversity & Inclusion

**While all students are unique, we found an important distinction in differentiating minority students.**

Their differentiation from a non-minority student is correlated to their belief in achieving their career goals. A minority student may be so focused on paying for college and earning the right grades that they become discouraged by certain career paths. It's our collective job to provide them the logistical and emotional support they need to achieve their career goals. Share resources for scholarships or study aids through the AICPA or your state CPA society, and speak to your own experiences as appropriate.

## After the Presentation

**It's important for you to keep in mind that students have different learning styles.**

Consider following up with relevant resources from our websites that may be appropriate for particular students to address any questions they may have had.

We recommend reaching out to the meeting coordinator to get feedback on your presentation. It will only make you better.

And if you feel comfortable, share your contact information with the group for follow up questions, networking events or mentorship opportunities.



220 Leigh Farm Road  
Durham, North Carolina 27707

AICPA.org  
academics@AICPA.org