



## **Making a Winning Case for CTE**

### ***How State Leaders Can Put This Research to Work***

This short guide provides ideas for how state leaders can use the messages and research from [\*Communicating Career Technical Education: Learner-centered Messages for Effective Program Recruitment\*](#) to advance the critical mission of getting more learners into Career Technical Education (CTE).

#### **Start with You – and Your Core Team**

The place to start is with yourself, making sure you understand the research and the messaging – and make a personal commitment to put it to good use. You are where advocacy for CTE starts – and you must believe in *and use* the messages consistently if you are going to ask others to do the same. Your example is a necessary first step to bringing others on board.

Believing in the message means adopting it in all you do – from your written materials to your spoken words. The key to success for any advocacy effort is sticking to the plan – with discipline. Before you start putting this new research into action, make sure you are comfortable with it. Start by reading [\*Communicating Career Technical Education\*](#) and exploring the related [resources](#), like the core messages, dos and don'ts, slides and related talking points.

Once you have reviewed the research and messages and feel like you are in a place where you can talk about it to others, it is time to assemble a small core communications team. This group of five to seven people can help you put the ideas below into action. They can be members of your team, partners from other agencies, local leaders or others. Most importantly, they should be people you trust and who are excited about advancing this work and incorporating it into their efforts to engage more learners in CTE.

***Key to Success 1: Understand and commit to winning CTE messages.***

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### **Advance CTE Is Here to Help**

As you work your way through this guide and familiarize yourself with the research and messages, please know that the Advance CTE team is an excellent resource for answering your questions and making sure you have what you need to start putting this great work into action. Call or email us anytime.

<https://careertech.org/contact-us>

And be sure to check out [www.careertech.org/recruitmentstrategies](http://www.careertech.org/recruitmentstrategies) for resources, tools and messaging information.

### **Next, Think About Key Audiences**

#### ***Start with Those Closest to You***

Successful campaigns practice “inside-out” communications, following the principle that you must educate and shore up support from those closest to you *before* you or they can go out and ask others to join the effort.

Make a list of the people on your team, starting with those closest to you, e.g., your direct reports and colleagues within your own department, and work outward in concentric circles. Your audience diagram may also include colleagues in other departments, agencies or organizations with whom you collaborate frequently, such as education or workforce leaders, the governor’s education policy adviser, local administrators and school leaders, educators, business and industry partners and school counselors. Essentially, these are people who have a hand – and a stake – in CTE. You have just created your internal audiences mapping chart.

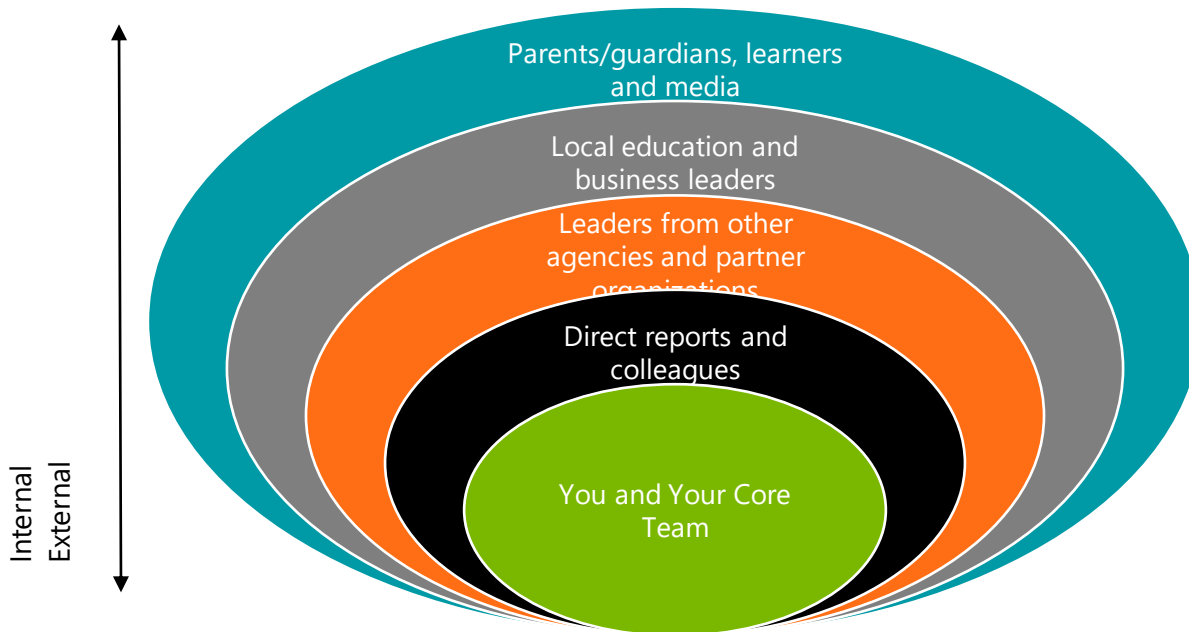
#### ***Key to Success 2: Form a core team that is committed to the message.***

#### ***Adding External Audiences***

Now you can map your external audiences – the people farther from your daily interactions who should hear – and use – these new messages about CTE. Your diagram will probably include such groups as learners, parents/guardians, business leaders and the media. This is your external audiences map. You can add these rings to the outside of the internal audiences map or keep it separate. The important point is that you will not be ready to communicate with these audiences until you have first engaged your internal ones.

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*Audience Mapping Chart*



***Key to Success 3: Brief your core team on the final audience diagram.***

### **Then, Turn the Messages into Materials**

With all your audiences identified, you are ready to build materials to carry your messages. First and foremost, do not ad lib from the messages provided to you. You want to stick to them as closely as possible.

As explained earlier, staying on message in a very consistent and disciplined way is the best way to ensure everyone –internal and external audiences – are on the same page and reinforcing one another. And when you consider that it takes 11 touches for impact – that is, 11 times of putting a message before an audience *before it starts to sink in* – you can understand why it is important that you, your core team and your supporters stay on message.

Before you begin, it is important to evaluate your existing materials and their effectiveness in achieving your recruitment goals, particularly in closing equity gaps. This is also the time for a content “refresh” to ensure your messages are focused and can resonate with your target audiences.

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Here are the kinds of materials you can create to spread the messages to all audiences:

- **A laminated 3x5 card with the core messages** about CTE that you hand out as a brief leave behind.
- **A PowerPoint presentation** that explains the research findings and provides the core messages for use when you are giving presentations.
- **A one-page leave behind** that summarizes the PowerPoint and its most salient points.
- **Stories from learners and parents/guardians** about how CTE impacted their lives. One major takeaway from the research was the power of personal experiences, and you can work with local leaders to collect these stories for everyone's use.
- **A guide for learners** that explains the advantages of CTE using the core messages.
- **A guide for parents/guardians** that similarly explains the advantages of CTE from a parental point of view using the core messages.
- Eventually, you may want **a media kit** that combines the presentation, one pager and stories, along with other materials you might develop, to hand out to reporters to help broadcast the message even more widely.
- A simple **advocacy page on your website** where all these materials and your core message live. No need to get fancy here; keep it simple, clean and coordinated.

This list is not exhaustive, and you and your core team should brainstorm other materials you may need to make your case for CTE.

***Key to Success 4: Keep your materials simple and consistent.***

**Now You Can Turn to Actions**

Once you have your audiences mapped and at least your initial set of case-making materials created, you can start reaching out, remembering to work from the inside-out on your chart. This is where all of your planning comes together.

We believe in a surround-sound approach – meaning that your audiences should start hearing

from you through a number of channels, from in-person meetings to emails to tweets. If it takes 11 touches just to be heard, you should vary how you touch people. Be patient – the message will eventually sink in!

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One final note – don't forget that program quality is essential to effective communications. Keep that in the back of your mind for long-term planning to achieve the most effective messaging campaign possible.

Actions you can take include:

- **One-on-one meetings** with colleagues. This would likely be the best approach for explaining this work to other education and workforce leaders in the state – but you will know best.
- **Small-group meetings** within divisions and/or departments. This is another reason to assemble a core team of messengers at the beginning – you can deploy them to attend these meetings and present.
- **Conduct a statewide tour** either in person or virtually. To get the message out, you'll need to reach far and wide in the state. If you can't physically be everywhere, then leverage technology to conduct a virtual listening tour where you hear from your local leaders and share with them this research and messaging.
- **Use the messages in your scheduled speeches and events.** There is never a bad time for a good message about CTE. Make sure any outreach you are doing includes these new messages and points from the research.
- **Work the messages into your email-signature.** Every time someone receives an email from you, they should know that "CTE learners gain real-world skills, explore careers to find their passion, and have more options for college and career success."
- **Use digital channels** like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, etc. to carry and reinforce your messages. Be careful not to get into long debates on the issue, just use these opportunities to make the case for CTE on a routine basis.
- **Include these messages in your project planning routine.** Be intentional about considering these messages and findings during any project that impacts or requires communication to families.

Finally, remember that the Advance CTE team is always available to help. Contact us anytime.

***Key to Success 5: Communicate with purpose, discipline and patience.***

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