

Request for Applications

The Advancing Postsecondary CTE Data Quality Initiative

Background

There is tremendous potential for state leaders to improve postsecondary Career Technical Education (CTE) outcomes by strengthening and maximizing their data systems. Already, institutions of higher education across the United States are leveraging data to improve the learner experience by matching learners with career pathways that meet their interests, removing common barriers to access and reducing time to a credential or degree. These strategies have been effective but can and should be brought to scale through intentional actions by postsecondary state CTE leaders.

The unprecedented economic crisis brought on by COVID-19 (the Coronavirus) provides even more urgency for data-driven decision making in postsecondary CTE. Record-high unemployment amid statewide lockdowns – which reached 14.7 percent in April 2020 – has disproportionately affected workers of color, youth and individuals without a postsecondary credential.¹ State and intuitional leaders can and should leverage their data to respond to local economic needs and connect learners with the opportunities to gain the skills, experiences and credentials needed to get back on their feet.

Yet, while 86 percent of State CTE Directors say that improving and enhancing state CTE data systems is a top priority, many state-level leaders lack the information they need to make critical decisions.² Much work is needed to ensure state CTE data infrastructure can operate at the pace of 21st century learners, institutions and employers and respond to the crisis at hand.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) provides an opportunity for states to improve the quality of their CTE data systems. The law calls for new accountability indicators, a renewed focus on equity and access, and better alignment of programs to labor market priorities. Further, the law requires states to publicly report disaggregated data on CTE enrollment and performance, ensuring public accountability to learners, families, employers and other impacted members of the public.

These developments are a step in the right direction, but without a thoughtful, statewide strategy to improve the quality and use of CTE data, they are not enough. These challenges call for a new, transformative approach to collecting and using CTE data, one that builds upon federal policy to better meet learner needs. Such an approach would bring together key actors across learner levels, agencies and sectors to establish a comprehensive data infrastructure that connects and validates learner-level data and provides actionable information to critical decision makers along every step of a learner’s career pathway.

About the Initiative

To address these needs and help state leaders build and enhance their CTE data infrastructure, Advance CTE, with support from the ECMC Foundation, is launching a multi-state, multi-year initiative to advance postsecondary CTE data quality. The goal for the initiative is to accelerate transformational efforts in a

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

² <https://careertech.org/resource/state-cte-improving-data-quality-effectiveness>

small cohort of states and identify strategies and recommendations other states can use to improve the quality and use of their postsecondary CTE data.

Through a competitive application process, a cohort of states will be selected to participate in the initiative. Over two years—from fall 2020 through fall 2022—these states will receive technical assistance, funding and access to a virtual peer network to develop and implement a strategic action plan to improve data quality and use.

Once selected, states will conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of their CTE data infrastructure using the CTE Data Quality and Use Policy Benchmark Tool, which was developed by Advance CTE with input from national, state and local experts. Selected states will use this needs assessment to create a strategic, two-year action plan. Over the course of the initiative, states will work to strengthen their existing CTE data systems, bringing together critical stakeholders across agencies and institutions to improve the quality and use of CTE data.

Objectives

The objectives for the Advancing Postsecondary CTE Data Quality Initiative are to:

- Develop the capacity of state and local leaders to improve their CTE data systems and better meet the needs of postsecondary learners;
- Improve data quality, literacy and use in selected states;
- Foster a peer sharing network among state leaders in selected states; and
- Identify and disseminate promising practices for postsecondary CTE data collection, validation and effective use nationwide.

Supports

Selected states will receive tiered supports throughout the initiative to ensure they can achieve their stated goals and objectives. These supports will include planning and implementation grants totaling \$80,000, ongoing virtual and in-person technical assistance, access to a peer support network, and access to 50-state resources and deliverables.

Planning and implementation grants: Each selected state will receive a \$15,000 planning grant in fall 2020 to support the completion of the needs assessment and strategic plan as well as initial implementation activities. Grant funds will be provided to states as soon as the grant agreement is executed. Implementation grants totaling \$65,000 will be provided to support implementation of the action plan. States will receive \$40,000 in early 2021 and \$25,000 in early 2022.

Technical assistance: Each participating state will be able to access technical assistance from subject matter experts at Advance CTE and other national organizations. In the case of ongoing travel restrictions, technical assistance will be provided virtually. Examples of technical assistance activities include, but are not limited to:

- Facilitating completion of the needs assessment;
- Conducting and sharing background research on critical topics;
- Identifying and sharing promising practices from other states and institutions; and
- Facilitating strategy sessions or workshops with state and local leaders.

Advance CTE will work with the state team lead to identify topics and needs for technical assistance and develop a strategy in response to those needs.

Community of practice: All participants in the initiative – including all members of each state team – will be part of a community of practice where they can share challenges and ideas with other participants in the initiative. Advance CTE will create spaces for participants to engage both virtually and face-to-face. This will include a secure virtual platform hosted through Moodle, regular webinars and cross-state calls, and meet-up opportunities at Advance CTE’s annual meetings. Participants are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities to get input, feedback and ideas from peers in other states.

National convening: The initiative will conclude with a national convening in fall 2022. Participants will be invited to share lessons learned and discuss sustainability strategies. The meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss progress made over the course of the initiative, highlight effective uses of data, and get input and assistance from peer states and national partners as they plan for the future. Travel and registration expenses will be paid for up to five team members from each state.

Tools and resources: Finally, Advance CTE will develop tools and resources to share evidence-based strategies with the field. These supports will include:

- A comprehensive needs assessment tool to help state and system leaders assess and benchmark their progress toward improving data quality, literacy and use;
- A summative white paper describing lessons learned and profiling state achievements through the initiative;
- Other tools, case studies and resources as needed to respond to common challenges shared by participating states; and
- A webinar series highlighting and unpacking promising practices, innovative strategies and relevant research.

Expectations

Selected states will be expected to:

- Designate a single point of contact in the state to be the state’s “project manager” who is empowered to make decisions on behalf of the state;
- Convene a cross-sector team that includes representation from, at a minimum:
 - The state postsecondary education system
 - The state education agency
 - The state workforce agency
 - The State CTE Office, if separate from the secondary or postsecondary education agency or workforce agency
 - At least one local postsecondary institution
- No later than November 2020, complete a comprehensive needs assessment using tools provided by Advance CTE;
- No later than December 2020, develop an action plan and budget that identifies 3-5 annual SMART goals and strategies for achieving them;
- Participate in quarterly check in calls with Advance CTE to monitor progress toward goals;
- Participate in up to two in-person technical assistance activities a year with Advance CTE staff;
- Allow site visits from Advance CTE and/or ECMC Foundation staff;

- Be willing to share insights and lessons learned with the CTE community through webinars, presentations and case studies;
- Report progress on grant activities in a timely manner, including submitting mid-grant and final reports in full and on time;
- Spend funds according to the proposed budget;
- Participate in a virtual community of practice on Moodle;
- Send a minimum of five state participants to the national convening in fall 2022.

Through their work in the Advancing Postsecondary CTE Data Quality Initiative, states will be expected to focus on high-impact strategies, which may include:

- Improving CTE data governance, including establishing protocols for linking, warehousing and accessing data across learner levels and state agencies;
- Improving CTE data quality by strengthening the reliability, validity and completeness of postsecondary CTE data across a number of state-relevant metrics;
- Building routines to ensure state and institutional leaders have the capacity to make data-informed decisions;
- Building the capacity of practitioners to access, understand and make use of CTE data;
- Improving public reporting and ensure internal and external stakeholders have access to the information they need when they need it; and
- Addressing other state-identified needs.

Major Milestones

2020

- **July 17** – Proposals due
- **July 31** – Interviews completed
- **Mid-September** – States selected and notified
- **October** – Grant agreements finalized and initial payments disbursed
- **December** – States complete needs assessment and action plan with annual goals
- **December** – First quarterly check in call
- **On-demand** – Ongoing technical assistance

2021

- **January** – Implementation grant issued
- **March** – Meet up opportunity at Advance CTE's annual Spring Meeting
- **Fall** – Meet up opportunity at Advance CTE's annual Fall Meeting
- **December 1** – Mid-grant report due including progress update on year one benchmarks.
- **Quarterly** – Check in calls
- **On-demand** – Ongoing technical assistance

2022

- **January** – Second round of implementation grants issued
- **Spring** – Meet up opportunity at Advance CTE's annual Spring Meeting

- **Fall** – National convening
- **December 1** – Final grant report due including progress on year two benchmarks
- **Quarterly** – Check in calls
- **On-demand** – Ongoing technical assistance

How to Apply

Interested individuals are encouraged to attend an informational webinar on Monday, June 15 at 3:00pm ET. On the webinar, Advance CTE will unpack the objectives and expectations for the initiative, walk through the application process, and address any questions from interested attendees. To register for the webinar, click [here](#).

There is a two-step process for submitting an application:

- **Submit an application form:** Complete and submit the accompanying application form, detailing your interest in the initiative and what you hope to achieve. The completed form should be submitted by email to aestes@careertech.org **no later than July 17, 2020**. Early submissions are encouraged. *Please note that applications will only be accepted with the signature of the State CTE Director.*
- **Complete an interview:** Upon submission of the application form, Advance CTE will set up a video interview to discuss the details of the application. The purpose of the interview is to get a better understanding of the state context and the applicant's vision for improving the quality and use of postsecondary CTE data.

State proposals – which include the application form and video interview – will be evaluated based on:

- Whether the state has the capacity to enact and is poised for system-wide change;
- The degree to which CTE data is a shared priority across agencies and state leadership;
- The state's need for outside support to improve postsecondary CTE data quality and use;
- The state's vision for improving postsecondary CTE data quality and use.

Application and Selection Timeline

- **June 8** – Application window opens
- **June 8 through July 17** – Advance CTE is available to answer questions throughout the submission period
- **June 15** – Informational webinar for interested applicants ([register here](#))
- **July 13 through July 31** – Video interviews (interviews will be scheduled as soon as the application form is submitted)
- **July 17** – Deadline for submitting applications
- **Mid-September** – States notified of approval
- **October** – Kickoff calls with selected states
- **October** – Grant agreements finalized and planning grants issued