

### Introduction

As states begin the extensive and inclusive process of developing their state plan for the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), it is all too easy to have communications be an afterthought. However, communications must be front and center in a state's overall efforts to develop – and eventually implement – its Perkins V state plan. Given the many partners and stakeholders that are either required or recommended to be consulted or engaged throughout the state plan development process and the incredible interest in and spotlight on Career Technical Education (CTE) from so many policymakers, industry leaders and families, having a proactive communications strategy that has a clear and compelling message – delivered effectively to your target audiences – will be critical to your overall success in Perkins V planning. Communicating early and often is also imperative to helping facilitate the many changes that will be coming as a result of Perkins V.

This tool aims to help state leaders think through their overall communications strategy throughout the process of developing and implementing your Perkins V state plan. Importantly, this is not the same as your stakeholder engagement strategy; rather, your communications strategy will support and enhance the ways in which you engage stakeholders and key audiences. If done right, it will foster and build upon the excitement, interest and consensus around CTE and Perkins V and allow stakeholders, partners and other impacted audiences to better understand CTE, Perkins V and your statewide vision.

### How to Use This Resource

*Section 1: Lock in Your Core Messages: At the heart of your communications strategy are thoughtful, impactful and easy to understand messages that support your overall branding, in-person and virtual engagements, and communications materials and assets.*

*Section 2: Map Your Communications Channels and Activities: Before developing any new communications channels and assets, it is important to take stock of the activities already occurring and the various ways in which you are communicating with key audiences and stakeholders. This is critical to help you identify those activities and materials that can be leveraged going forward and where the gaps may be.*

*Section 3: Identify Your Short- and Long-Term Action Steps: While communications planning is an iterative process, a great place to start is looking at your overall timeline for Perkins V state plan development and what needs to happen around key anchor dates. As you map out your overall timeline, consider who needs to know about major activities, and when. Additionally, begin to explore your immediate next steps, as well as your communication activities in the short, medium and long term.*

For more communications resources, check out [www.careertech.org/recruitmentstrategies](http://www.careertech.org/recruitmentstrategies)

## Section 1: Identify Your Core Messages

Central to any communications strategy is having a set of core messages in place that are used consistently and collectively by you, your colleagues, peers and partners. These should identify the fundamental value of CTE and the importance and opportunity of Perkins V to strengthen CTE in the future. They should be used to develop your overall brand for Perkins V planning (and CTE more broadly); be embedded in all in-person and virtual presentations and communications; and be reinforced in all communications materials, including print, social media, media engagement, etc.

A few quick tips to developing and putting your core messages into action:

- Keep the messages simple and straightforward and limit yourself to three key messages – audiences cannot handle more beyond that.
- Avoid jargon whenever possible – these messages need to work with multiple audiences including those newer to CTE.
- Test your messages with trusted partners – including those outside of the CTE “family” – to make sure they resonate and translate.
- Have data and stories to back up your messages to help bring them to life.
- Work with your peers and partners to get them on board and comfortable using these messages.
- Consider any existing brands or campaigns that you can leverage or to which you can tie your communications strategy.

*Message 1: Why is CTE so important in your state?*

*Message 2: Where do you need or want CTE to go in the future?*

*Message 3: How will Perkins V support the advancement of high-quality CTE in your state/your statewide vision for CTE?*

## Section 2: Map Your Communications Channels and Activities

Whether or not your state currently has a formal CTE communications strategy in place, you are inevitably communicating – possibly frequently – with the field through both formal and informal means. A good place to start is identifying what channels and activities you are currently using, whom you are reaching with those channels (directly or indirectly); the purpose of those channels and activities (e.g., to inform or influence); the intensity of those communications (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly); and how effective they are at both reaching your audience and achieving their purposes.

### Potential Channels & Activities to Consider

- Newsletters/listservs
- Events (e.g., professional development conferences, state advisory meetings, CTE showcases, CTSO competitions, etc.)
- Social media and blogs
- Earned media (i.e., press coverage)
- Webinars
- Website(s)
- Direct mailings
- E-blasts

Channels & Activities	Audience	Purpose	How Often/When	Effectiveness
<i>State CTE office newsletter</i>	<i>CTE teachers and administrators</i>	<i>Keep them informed of state resources and activities</i>	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>Somewhat effective – open rate of newsletter is over 30% and regularly have new people sign up</i>
<i>State CTE office Twitter account</i>	<i>General public, policymakers, families, learners</i>	<i>Keep them informed and engaged around value of CTE</i>	<i>At least every other day</i>	<i>Ineffective – limited interaction, follows, retweets, likes</i>

Channels & Activities	Audience	Purpose	How Often/When	Effectiveness

**Review the list above and consider what channels or activities are missing.**

*Take into consideration the target audiences you need to reach. To determine what audiences you will likely need to communicate with throughout Perkins V planning and implementation, refer to Planning for Engagement: Identifying Key Stakeholders for Perkins V, found in the [Perkins V Virtual Resource Table](#).*

**Which channels and activities need some attention or revision to ensure they are more effective at meeting their purpose and reaching your target audiences?**

**What materials or assets need to be created that do not already exist (e.g., fact sheets, brochures, PowerPoint slides, infographics, messaging cards, etc.)?**

**Section 3: Identify Your Short- and Long-Term Action Steps:**

Communications must be part of your Perkins V planning strategy from the get-go. Once that you have identified your messages and communications activities (existing and to be developed), it is time to determine next steps. Use the template below to determine your short-term and longer-term goals, identify what staff will be responsible, how you will measure success, and what you need to create or develop along the way.

<b>What actions will your state take over the next <u>90 days</u></b>			
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Individual Owner</b>	<b>Evidence of Impact/ Success</b>	<b>Resources to create</b>
<i>Develop a brand for Perkins V planning</i>	<i>Scott</i>	<i>Support and uptake for new brand from partners and the field</i>	<i>Brand name, logo, PowerPoint and Word templates</i>

<b>What actions will your state take over the next <u>six months</u></b>			
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Individual Owner</b>	<b>Evidence of Impact/ Success</b>	<b>Resources to create</b>

What actions will your state take over the <u>next year</u>			
Action Steps	Individual Owner	Evidence of Impact/ Success	Resources to create