

## What is the CTE: Learning that works for America® brand?

The CTE: Learning that works for America® brand represents a commitment to a CTE system that ensures all learners are successful in their education and careers. No matter the audience, your dedication to learners and their success should drive what you do, the decisions you make, how you talk about CTE and how CTE connects with others. It's why CTE matters.

This campaign provides you with a variety of logos, resources and tools to help you better communicate about CTE with key audiences. Not only that, when you use the brand, you are joining state leaders and hundreds of local schools and organizations in this unified goal.

Advance CTE has created this guide to assist you and your team in thinking through how to best use the brand to reinforce your communications efforts and advance your strategic priorities. This tool can be used at both the state and local levels.

### Step 1: Clarify Your Overall Communications Goals

As a first step, you must be clear about your overall short- and long-term goals for using the campaign. The questions below will help clarify your strategy and ensure the brand is assisting you in meeting your goals.

- What are your short-term goals for communications?
- What are your long-term goals for communications?
- How does the campaign fit into your current communications strategy?
- How does or can the campaign help you to achieve these goals?
- Do other people within your organization understand and agree with these goals?
- How can you measure these goals to understand their impact?

### Step 2: Identify Key Audiences

CTE programs and systems touch many stakeholders and audiences. Having a communications plan that intentionally engages each of them will help you to achieve your priorities, whether you're at the local, state or national level.

Start by making a short list of all the types of groups you are hoping to communicate with throughout your short- and long-term goals (e.g. students, parents, employers, partner organizations, policymakers, members of the media).

The more specific you can be when identifying your audiences, the more effective your communication will be. Broad descriptions such as the "general public" are less likely to lead to a successful communications campaign than a defined audience or even targeted individuals. The more thoroughly you understand your target audiences, the more likely you are to have a successful communications campaign.

If one of your target audiences is parents, consider using Advance CTE's [parent engagement tool](#).

*For example: Parents of middle school students; industry leaders in manufacturing; the local media.*

### Step 3: Create & Tailor Your Message

Next, you'll want to identify the messages to communicate to your target audiences. Start by determining what you want your audience to do and the reasons they should do it. A simple way to organize your messaging is to place your core message in the center of a triangle, and the three supporting messages arranged around the three points. These should remain your central messages and drive the rest of your communications to all of your audiences.

While you should focus on your core messages, you may want to tailor your communications according to audience.

To do this, consider the issue from their perspective. You can do this by asking a few basic questions about an audience:

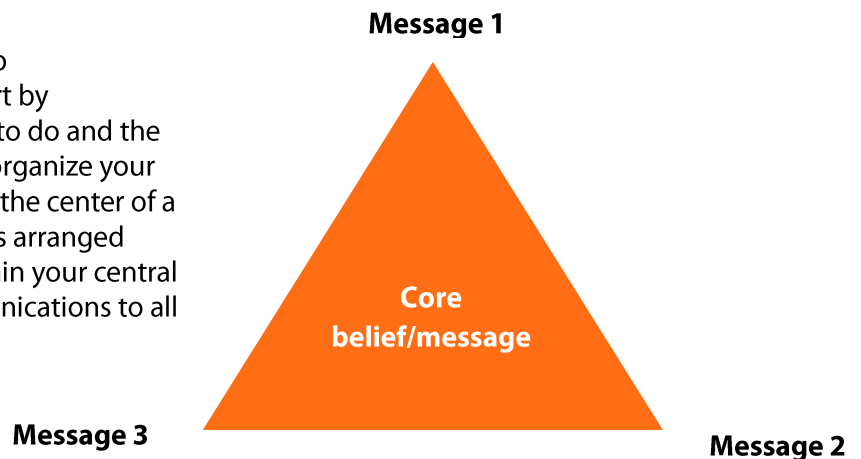
- What do they know about CTE?
- How do they currently engage in CTE?
- What benefit will they gain from engaging in CTE?
- What motivations and/or barriers are there to them hearing, believing and accepting the information?
- What historical or cultural factors may influence them?
- What do you know about the best ways to reach them?

Tailoring the message means figuring out what action you want each key audience to take, and which of your messages will resonate best. For example, you might find that parents are more interested in hearing about expanded career options for their children. Meanwhile, students want to know more about the real high school experience CTE delivers, and employers care most CTE's role in the talent pipeline.

Consider tone and vocabulary changes as well. For instance, the term "Career Technical Education" may not be applicable in every state or audience, so use the term that best describes your program or system, and with which your audience is already familiar.

### Step 3: Choose the Right Messenger

Your spokesperson matters. For example, you may find that the best way to address parents is through local employers or other parents, while students are more likely to be reached by their school counselor and teachers. A policymaker might likely respond well to a business leader or district superintendent. And don't forget, just about any audience would like to hear directly from the students benefiting from CTE.



For example, in **Nebraska**, the [Nebraska Loves Public Schools campaign](#) features successful CTE students who explain what CTE is, the benefits of participation and how to get involved. Featuring learners helps all audiences understand how CTE works and why students find it valuable to their education. Additionally, featuring students who represent a [diverse array of backgrounds](#) helps audiences understand that CTE is truly for everyone.

Similarly, featuring a wide range of programs in a variety of settings and [Career Clusters®](#) helps all audiences understand the true breadth of CTE. For example, state leaders in **Utah** [featured](#) a series of student testimonies during CTE Month to demonstrate the vast array of programs in potential career areas students are completing across the state. The testimonies were compiled into a PowerPoint and posted on the state department website and shared in their monthly newsletter.

The **Idaho** Division of Career & Technical Education highlights student stories through [videos](#) in careers ranging from aquaculture to robotics. The videos are not only featured on their website but also aired during a television special produced by [Idaho Public Television](#).

**Oklahoma** has an entire roster of [CTE Champions](#) who have benefited from and contribute to CTE. It is comprised of CTE alumni, all of whom are leaders in industry, schools, institutions, and communities across Oklahoma. They help to tell Oklahoma's CTE story, and put a face to the thousands of students that benefit from CTE each year in the state.

"Because of what I learned in the Digital Media Pathway, I've started my own photography business and hope to expand as I learn more about digital media in college."



### **Renee Carver**

CTE Pathway Completer: Digital Media



1. Slide featuring CTE student during Utah's CTE Month campaign

*"A high school athlete with no real plans for his future. [Jimmy Reece](#) played football and baseball and ran track. His educational path wasn't without struggle, though. His mother and father were sent to prison his freshmen year, and he went to live with his grandmother. When someone from Metro Technology Centers came to his high school to talk about its programs, an interest survey suggested he might like law enforcement. He enrolled, and he excelled." - Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education*

**Oklahoma CTE Champion:** *"A little boy who wanted to know how things work. Josh Brown's parents said he was always building or inventing something – or taking things apart. He enrolled in Francis Tuttle Technology Center's Pre-Engineering Academy in high school and said he knew from the start that he wanted to be an engineer. Josh credits his Introduction to Engineering Design class, which exposed him to 3-D modeling. He still loves – and uses – 3-D modeling today. Josh had several career-defining (and life-changing) experiences, including these:*

- *Receiving practical, hands-on engineering lessons – programming CNCs, building sophisticated balsa bridges, designing FIRST Robotics robots, etc.*
- *Learning to create and deliver precise presentations.*
- *Gaining the skills to confidently speak in public.*

*Now, Brown is a mechanical engineer designing for Allied High Tech Products Inc., a manufacturer and supplier serving the aerospace, government, semiconductor, medical and metallurgical industries."*

## Best Practice Spotlight: CTE Programs Use Employers and Industry Experts as Champion Messengers

[Jones County Junior College's Emergency Medical Technology Education](#) program of study is one of the premier rural EMT programs in the nation. Located in rural **Mississippi**, the program has unique challenges in recruiting students, which can greatly affect the region's talent pipeline into health care careers, an increasingly in-demand field.

To combat this, the college uses its industry partners and instructors (who often have a background in the industry) as their champions to increase student interest in the program. Elementary school students may not yet have careers or college on their radar, so program staff of partner with local schools for events and field trips to plant educational seeds early in their education.

The [Mechatronics program of study at Oakland High School](#) in **Tennessee** has similarly used business and industry leaders to reach parents and students to demonstrate that their views of manufacturing careers may be outdated. A critical component to this program's success is convincing parents and students that this program of study equips students with real-world skills and unique hands-on opportunities. These leaders went directly into the classroom to meet with prospective students and their parents, and provided them with insight into what careers in mechatronics can look like as well as the tangible benefits this program offers.

Using employers and industry leaders to reach into the community is a fantastic way to get your message to other audiences. However, it is critical that employers are using the right messages, so be sure to arm them with the information they need to carry out your message effectively. For more information, check out Advance CTE's [employer guide](#) for making the case for CTE.

### Tips for Staff:

#### Step 5: Apply the Brand & Select Appropriate Channels

It is important to engage all staff in using these CTE branding materials. Staff should get in the habit of using the logo at every opportunity and integrate the brand color scheme and messaging into their broader marketing plan. As a CTE advocate, you can help your peers and colleagues understand that using the brand logo, color scheme and messaging is a way to demonstrate that they are proud representatives of CTE. Remember, if staff are not consistently using the branding, then key audiences may experience mixed messaging, and the brand will have much less impact.

Each time the CTE: Learning that works for America logo is used in conjunction with other logos, it is evidence that CTE works with other organizations and has strong, mutually beneficial partnerships. When you use the CTE brand image in conjunction with other logos, please refrain from placing

- Use the Learning that works for America state logo in your email signature. It signals your commitment to the campaign, and creates a unified brand for your entire department;
- Use the logo and campaign colors in all materials. For example, this [one-pager](#) on CTE in **Wyoming** features the logo, colors, and brand theme to create a consistent look and message.
- Use the logo across all social media platforms, including Twitter, YouTube and Facebook

those logos in close proximity to the CTE brand image. See the [User's Guide](#) for additional guidance and recommendations.

Next, choose your communications channels wisely. Think about allocating your resources most efficiently. Resources include time and money, as well as outreach tactics, using varied channels of communication:

- Direct contact (e.g., speaking at a Back-to-School night)
- Earned media (e.g., talking to a reporter from a local newspaper)
- Digital media (e.g., tweeting a positive message)
- Paid media (e.g., posting online ads on sites most widely viewed by your target audience)

### **Best Practice Spotlight: Reaching Policymakers through Direct Contact**

Policymakers are an important target audience. They must know and understand CTE to make informed decisions about the policies and investments that impact CTE.

The importance of this audience cannot be overstated as they have a direct impact on federal and state policies affecting CTE. It can be difficult, though, to get the attention of policymakers and provide them with messages that have impact. **Michigan's** Office of Career and Technical Education took an innovative approach in their communications with policymakers.

Michigan's state CTE leaders put together a CTE Legislative Showcase that involved exhibits and scheduled visits with legislators. Students set up career-based exhibits at the capitol building. Each exhibit aimed to provide policymakers with a better idea of the work students do to prepare for their careers (e.g., culinary arts students provided food samplings at their exhibit).

Additionally, CTE administrators timed visits with local legislators to coincide with this event. The Office of Career and Technical Education provided every legislator with a packet of information, prominently featuring the CTE: Learning that works for Michigan brand.

In one day, policymakers in Michigan were able to see the CTE branding materials in their packets, hear about CTE from school administrators, experience CTE in action and engage directly with students at the CTE showcase. This was a terrific way to make a lasting impression on policymakers and help them to understand the ways in which they can support CTE.

You can create a similar experience in your community. You might plan an event like this for CTE month, or time it to coincide with another important event in your state. Consider assembling resources into packets that can be handed out during scheduled visits or showcases. Think of ways to go beyond simply meeting with policymakers, and help them actually experience the power of CTE.

You should then consider what materials you might need to communicate effectively with your target audience through the channels you have identified. You may need:

- A one-page leave behind
- A PowerPoint presentation with talking points
- A guide for your audience about CTE
- An advocacy page on your website
- Sample tweets and Facebook posts
- Success stories about CTE
- A media kit, which may include your latest press releases, student stories, fact sheets about your state or local CTE program and more. This should be a compilation of materials that demonstrate why and how you serve learners in your community.
- Endorsements by business leaders.



2. South Dakota Brochure

For each audience, you may have to create customized versions of each communications materials, which are differentiated by what you want the specific audience to understand about CTE. For example, the **South Dakota** Department of Education created two brochures to provide an overview of CTE in the state, one for [educators](#) and one for [students](#). Additionally, they developed a [video](#) using the campaign brand to explain the basics of CTE that can be used at the state and local level. This multi-channel approach -- featuring a unified message, look and feel -- ensures that the department is reaching multiple audiences and sharing a consistent message.

### Step 6: Communicate Often and at Key Times

You must be proactive in your communication with your key audiences. Consider the following when determining how and when you will communicate with audiences:

- How often will you engage with key audiences to ensure it happens regularly and not ad hoc?
- Are there key dates, deadlines or events that should be considered for your communication (e.g. back-to-school night with parents and students or [CTE Month](#))?
- What channels can audiences use to reach you directly for more information?

Consider creating a short- and long-term communications calendar and developing aligned resources that you and your colleagues can use throughout the year.

For example, **Maryland** created a year-long, state-wide calendar for districts and local leaders to use when focusing on increasing enrollment into CTE programs of study. Important dates include back-to-school nights, Manufacturing Day, the CTE course enrollment period, parent-teacher conferences, and more. This resource helps local leaders understand the best times to push out targeted messages to parents and students.

A short-term example is the state-wide [social media calendar](#) for CTE Month in **Wisconsin**. Not only did they include appropriate social media handles and hashtags across a multitude of platforms, they also developed themes that local leaders should emphasize on a week-by-week basis. This allows the state, district and local schools to communicate about CTE consistently.

## Step 7: Measure Your Success

A critical component of any communications strategy is measuring your success. It is imperative that you have ongoing outreach and communications strategies in place to maintain the level of support necessary to sustain your effort. To stay on track, you should review your intended goals at key points and assess what has been achieved, and what still needs to be done. Use those review periods to adjust your strategy if it is not achieving your intended goals. Fine-tune your messages and outreach tactics based on what you learn. Consider the following when developing your evaluation plan:

- What are key times to evaluate the campaign effectiveness?
- What are key milestones you will need to have accomplished throughout the use of the campaign?
- How will you measure your progress? (e.g., web hits, media calls, increase in enrollment, newsletter open rates, increase in partners, etc.)
- Have the target audiences taken the intended action?
- What lessons have you learned?
- How will you share those lessons?
- Did you remain within the budget?