

Common Myths about a Modernized National Career Clusters[®] Framework

Advance CTE's Advancing the National Career Clusters Framework (Framework) initiative is designed to create a modernized Framework that is industry-informed, learner-centered, and responsive to the changing nature of work. All sectors of the CTE community are providing ongoing feedback through a national advisory committee, industry advisory groups, partner focus groups, a national user survey, and an upcoming national validation survey.

Throughout the process, several myths or misunderstandings about the Framework and the modernization process have emerged. Below are responses to eight of the common myths we have heard.

Myth 1: The Framework only reflects what the economy and careers look like now.

The decision to update the Framework was based on growing recognition and observations from the CTE community that the current Framework no longer reflects the many changes that continue to reshape industry, work, and learning. Educators and industry leaders have told us they want the Framework to be more inclusive of emerging sectors and aligned to the new workplace. The process we are engaged in is not only looking at the current labor market but also the future needs of learners, industry, and state and local economies.

While no one has a crystal ball, the research behind the Framework relies on the best labor market projections across industries. The research and data provided a useful basis for thinking about:

- what the workforce and its needs will look like in the future;
- which industry sectors are changing and are emerging and what skills and knowledge workers and learners will need to fill evolving jobs;
- how technological advances are projected to affect all facets of work in the future; and
- the ever-more interconnected nature of jobs and the world of work

Myth 2: The Framework will continue to silo careers and skills.

Compared to two decades ago when the career clusters were established, the labor market and the nature of work and the workplace have changed. As new types of work emerge and industry sectors have become more interconnected, learners need new skills and knowledge to work across industry sectors. In response to this changing landscape, we are establishing an updated Framework that:

- reflects current and emerging industry sectors.
- includes living-wage careers available across the full world of work.
- serves as a bridge for education to reflect the structure of industry and work in their CTE systems and programs; and
- challenges the field to reach next-level quality and interdisciplinary nature of programs of study, including providing courses that can be used across multiple clusters to fully prepare learners for life and careers.

Myth 3: The Framework isn't flexible for state and local economic realities.

A modernized Framework will more accurately reflect industry's organization and breadth of the entire and evolving world of work while providing flexibility for the future, and will serve as a bridge for education to reflect this structure in their CTE systems and programs.

While the vast majority of states and U.S. territories currently use the Framework in some way, the Framework has neither been mandated nor is it meant to be a one-size fits all model. Rather it is the foundation upon which state CTE systems and CTE programs are built to best meet the needs of their local and state economies. The size and orientation of specific clusters in different regions and states will vary. States will be able to proceed at the pace of their choice to evaluate and align the Framework to their economic and workforce needs.

Myth 4: The Framework is limited because it was created relying only on national labor market data.

The modernized Framework was developed based on a combination of national labor market data and the deep, ongoing engagement of thousands of CTE-connected professionals, national partner organizations, and industry representatives. It is being developed and organized based on an analysis of the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) and Standard Occupation Codes (SOC), combined with sector-specific labor market research. The resulting Career Clusters and underlying information will be validated by industry professionals in each sector and shared through industry sector profiles that will be published with the finalized Framework.

Research and analysis of national labor market data is an important foundation for the new Framework, particularly in ensuring the modernized Framework is responsive to the full breadth of industry needs. That said, the Framework is not simply a national synthesis of data but the foundation of statewide programs that are designed to meet the needs of their state, local, and regional economies.

Our national structures, surveys, and sector-specific feedback sessions have given us information that is guiding the development of the Framework. We have brought representatives from thousands of CTE professionals from the local, state, and national levels, and we will continue to collect feedback from these structures throughout the development of the Framework, including a public national validation survey.

Myth 5: The Framework will be implemented right away.

The modernized Framework is an important step in creating a more learner-centered and industry-responsive CTE system, but only the first step. Implementation will not happen immediately, as states need time to determine whether or not they will adopt the Framework, as is or with modifications, and on what timeline that makes sense for them and their learner and industry needs.

Advance CTE is considering and preparing for the impact of a modernized Framework on program of study structure, educator credentialing, state staff structure, Career Technical Student Organization (CTSO) alignment, data collection, legislative initiatives, and more.

Once a state does choose to adopt the Framework, they will have ample time to implement the Framework with related supports and materials. Advance CTE will work closely with states and partners during the implementation phase providing both general resources and materials and working on state-specific needs that align with the pace at which the state chooses to adopt the Framework.

Myth 6: The Framework needs to include all jobs of all wage levels.

A core principle that guides Advance CTE's work around the National Career Cluster Framework is that CTE programs should focus on high-quality career pathways and programs that lead to life-sustaining jobs and careers. The Framework was designed to cover all industry sectors. However, it was *not* designed to cover all jobs and wage levels but rather to put learners on pathways to good jobs with opportunities for advancement. The vast majority of these opportunities require some education or training beyond high school or what O*NET [describes](#) as “medium preparation.”

Myth 7: The Framework is only administrative and doesn't have a direct benefit for educators, industry and learners.

A modernized National Career Clusters Framework is foundational to effective and accessible CTE programming across the nation. Advance CTE will be working with our members to help with adoption and implementation to ensure that all CTE stakeholders will realize a broad range of benefits from the new Framework. It gives learners a clearer path to in-demand jobs, educators, and state CTE leaders a means to align and design programs that better prepare learners for these careers, and ensures that industry has learners with interests, skills, and work-based experiences that match their hiring needs.

Ultimately, a modernized Framework will reflect the truly interdisciplinary nature of work and push the CTE community to remove silos within and across clusters to ensure all learners are fully prepared for the workplace no matter what career they pursue.

Myth 8: The updated Framework suggests some industries are less important to the economy.

At this point, we anticipate that occupations will be added rather than removed from Framework to reflect the full world of work. Changes to the Framework—whether addition of a new cluster, the consolidation of certain areas of work, or moving a field to a different cluster or clusters—were based on what the labor-market research, industry advisory groups and partners told us to best meet the needs of learners, employers and our economy. The groupings are aligned by industry sector and are relevant in today's evolving economy.

The design is also intended to lead to the development of more dynamic and interdisciplinary programs of study that more accurately reflect the interconnected nature of careers and skills in today's workplace. The goal is to create clusters and subgroupings that accurately reflect high-skill, high-wage, in-demand jobs and that support CTE programs that lead learners to good paying jobs and sustainable career pathways.

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