

Frequently Asked Questions

This resource provides an accessible format to answer the most common questions about the Advancing the Framework initiative to modernize the National Career Clusters® Framework, the validation process, and steps after an updated Framework is released.

The National Career Clusters Framework: The Basics

Q: What is the National Career Cluster® Framework?

A: The Career Clusters Framework has been a crucial catalyst that helped transform what was once known as vocational education to Career Technical Education (CTE). The National Career Cluster® Framework organizes occupations for CTE learners into industry clusters and embedded sub-groupings that learners can experience and explore. It has been a central building block to achieving consistently designed and high-quality CTE programs that provide meaningful, career-relevant education experiences to learners and talent pipelines to industry.

Q: Is the Framework part of a federal government program?

A: The Framework was established in 2002 through a collaborative effort between the federal government and states. Since that time, Advance CTE, on behalf of the states, has been its steward. While Career Technical Education (CTE) is supported by federal dollars through the Perkins Act and other grant programs, the Framework itself is neither federally mandated nor funded.

Q: Are states required to use the National Career Clusters Framework?

A: While states are not mandated to use the Framework, the majority of states do use the Framework in some fashion to organize CTE programs at the state and local levels. All states are required to use the 16 Career Clusters when reporting their Perkins-related data to the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education also uses the Framework to organize data reporting for federal grants that support CTE, and as such, all states use the Framework to at least organize these annual data submissions.

Advancing the Framework Modernization Initiative: The Basics

Q: Why is the National Career Clusters Framework being updated?

A: It has been over two decades since we established the National Career Cluster Framework, and the labor market, the nature of work and the workplace, and technology have changed dramatically over that time period. From the rise of artificial intelligence and the greening economy to the need for more flexibly prepared and nimble workers, it is imperative that our CTE system remains responsive and forward looking. The Framework in its current form is not reflective of today's labor market and is not dynamic enough to ensure all learners are prepared for the ever-changing economy and workplace and can attain living wage, in-demand jobs.

Q: Is there a guiding principle for this project?

A: The [Advancing the Framework](#) modernization initiative is working to build an industry-informed, learner-centered, and responsive Framework that can support changes in work that have taken place and continue to evolve. Our north star through this process is a renewed purpose statement, unanimously approved by Advance CTE's Boards of Directors in September 2020: The National Career Clusters Framework provides structural alignment and a common language to bridge education and work, empowering each learner to explore, decide on and prepare for dynamic and evolving careers.

Q. How will a modernized Framework help learners and CTE partners?

A: A modernized Framework will more accurately reflect industry's organization, encompass the breadth of the entire and evolving world of work, and provide flexibility for the future. It will serve as a bridge for education to reflect this structure in their CTE systems and programs. It will give learners more personalized paths to living wage jobs and gain skills for a variety of careers; CTE leaders and educators a means to align and design programs that better prepare learners for these careers; and ensure that industry has learners of all ages with interests, skills, and experiences that match their hiring needs. A modernized Framework will reflect the truly interdisciplinary nature of work and push the CTE community to remove silos within and across clusters. This will be a major next step to improving the quality of CTE programs and ensure all learners are fully prepared for the workplace no matter what career they pursue.

Q. How has the initiative been collecting and incorporating feedback from state CTE leaders, educators, industry experts, and partners of the Framework so far?

A: Advance CTE is committed to an inclusive and meaningful process to solicit and respond to feedback from all partners of the Framework. 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 across the CTE field together to solicit ongoing feedback through:

- Advance CTE's Board of Directors and a National Advisory Committee that comprises 23 members representing national, state, and local CTE leaders.
- Thirteen distinct Industry Advisory Groups (IAGs) totaling over 200 members each selected through an open nomination process.

- Input from nearly 2,100 CTE stakeholders who responded late last year to the National Implementation Survey.
- Focus groups and listening sessions conducted in late 2023 that gathered further input from educators, counseling professionals, and representatives of the educational technology community across over 50 organizations.

We will continue to collect feedback from these structures throughout the development of the Framework, as well as offer a public validation survey for all members of the CTE community to provide evidence-based input on the draft Framework.

Q. How does this process differ from previous efforts to update the Framework?

A: Advance CTE has structured this process to be a more transparent and stakeholder-driven process. Most notably, the process is industry driven through 13 Industry Advisory Groups representing over 200 industry representatives. There has been ongoing feedback from professionals and national partner organizations both in and connected to CTE via a National Advisory Committee and focus groups, which were not part of the previous Framework update efforts. Their regular engagement will continue throughout the validation process in addition to opportunities for individual input from the full CTE community.

Advancing the Framework Modernization Initiative: Development, Validation, and Beyond

Q. Does Advance CTE anticipate changes to the Framework?

A: Yes. The Framework is being modernized to make it more responsive to the needs of industry and learners seeking good-paying jobs and sustainable career pathways. At this point, we anticipate that sectors, sub-sectors, and their embedded occupations will be added rather than removed from the Framework. However, there will be some consolidation of existing Career Clusters and new Career Clusters added based on labor market research and feedback from industry representatives and stakeholders. In the final analysis, it is likely that this will be an update rather than a complete overhaul, as many aspects of the current Framework are likely to be carried forward.

Q. What is Advance CTE doing to ensure that the modernized Framework reflects the current and future labor markets as well as the changing world of work?

A: The modernized Framework 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. At the same time, we are working to ensure the design will be flexible enough to accommodate emerging and future occupations and allows states to accommodate their unique economic and workforce needs.

Q. How are decisions being made to change the Framework?

A: Changes to the Framework are being made through a data-driven process, integrating the most recent knowledge about the occupational marketplace into the design of the Framework. Each stage of development is informed by labor market research and comprehensive feedback from the field with guidance from the National Advisory Committee and the approval of the Advance CTE Board.

Q. What is your timeline for this project?

A: Our goal is to release the final updated Framework along with a set of initial supporting materials by the end of 2024. Prior to this release, Advance CTE will take time to consider all input gathered throughout the validation phase, including a public validation survey open to all CTE professionals and connected partners. Throughout 2025, Advance CTE will build out additional resources and supports to help states and communities adopt and implement the modernized Framework in the years to come.

Q. How can I or my organization get involved?

A: Advance CTE is committed to a transparent, inclusive process to ensure the modernized Framework meets the needs of all users, but we need your help! We will be providing regular updates on the process through the Advance CTE website and encourage you to look for the launch of the national validation survey in early June. We also hope that you will help spread the word about this process and the survey with your CTE colleagues. You can also get regular updates and information about providing feedback by [signing up for Our Career Clusters Updates](#).

Q. What happens after the Framework is validated and approved?

A: Once the Framework is approved by Advance CTE's Boards of Directors, states will design and execute an implementation strategy that adopts the entire Framework, or incorporates elements of the Framework into existing systems, to organize their CTE programs. This is a state-by-state decision.

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 adopt the Framework they will have ample time to implement the Framework and related supports and materials. Advance CTE will work closely with states 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.

For questions or additional information, email careerclusters@careertech.org.

Last Updated: April 2024