



# LEVERAGING LEARNER VOICE IN CTE: EMPOWERING LEARNERS, ENHANCING CTE

## LEARNER VOICE AT THE CENTER

*[Without Limits: A Shared Vision for the Future of Career Technical Education](#)* recognizes that centering learner feedback, needs, and input is essential for fostering a welcoming and supportive career preparation system. To empower states in actualizing this principle, in 2023, Advance CTE, in partnership with the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), launched a cohort of technical assistance for five states. The states received targeted coaching, support, and thought partnership to leverage learner engagement in the design and delivery of Career Technical Education (CTE) programs and policies. The following states were selected to participate in the [Leveraging Learner Voice to Strengthen CTE](#) technical assistance (LVTA) cohort: **Colorado, Delaware, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Wisconsin.**

This publication spotlights the journey of the five states in the cohort, which leveraged promising strategies for meaningful learner engagement to enhance CTE programs and policies. By sharing the cohort states' experiences and lessons learned, leaders across all levels and contexts can explore practical guidance on meaningfully engaging learners in program improvement efforts, promoting equity within CTE programs, and enhancing learner experiences across the spectrum of CTE opportunities.

## EMPOWERING STATES, ELEVATING LEARNERS: ADVANCE CTE'S TAILORED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Advance CTE offers comprehensive [technical assistance](#) to support regions, state agencies, institutions, and more in achieving their goals within and across CTE programs, policies, and systems. While Advance CTE offers various methods and modes of technical assistance and support, a beneficial model includes offering workshops to a cohort of states focused on a targeted goal or initiative. The LVTA cohort included the following components:

- six comprehensive workshop sessions led by Advance CTE and ACTE working through the priorities of the [With Learners, Not for Learners: Learner Voice Toolkit](#)
- three community of practice sessions to elevate the shared experiences, successes, and opportunities of the states in the cohort as they strengthened learner engagement efforts
- monthly one-on-one coaching sessions for each state team with leaders from Advance CTE and ACTE to offer support directly aligned with the contextual needs of the state
- state-specific stipends, generously supported by the Joyce Foundation, awarded to each state team to compensate learners for their involvement in the design and development of the state's learner engagement action plan



## LEARNER INSIGHTS, STRENGTHENED PROGRAMS: HOW LEARNER ENGAGEMENT IMPROVES CTE

To build high-quality CTE programs that meet the evolving needs of learners and the workforce, leaders should center the feedback, input, and leadership of learners. By actively partnering *with* learners, CTE programs can leverage invaluable insights to identify gaps, pinpoint areas for improvement, and create more relevant and responsive learning experiences.

Learner engagement offers multiple benefits:

- **Data-Driven Improvement:** Direct learner feedback provides critical data to inform program adjustments, ensuring alignment with learner needs and industry demands
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Centering diverse learner perspectives helps identify and address barriers, creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment
- **Compliance and Accountability:** Engaging learners supports meeting federal, state, and local requirements in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins V) and demonstrates a commitment to program quality and continuous improvement

Ultimately, a collaborative approach that empowers learners to shape their education is essential for building successful CTE programs that prepare learners for their future careers.

## STATE SPOTLIGHTS: LEARNERS AS PARTNERS IN CTE

States participating in the LVTA cohort represented a diverse range of starting points regarding learner engagement efforts. Some had established foundations; others were beginning the journey. Regardless of their initial position, each of the states in the cohort benefited from opportunities to assess existing strengths, develop strategic plans, and implement comprehensive approaches to amplify learner voice in CTE policy and program development, design, and delivery. This section chronicles each state's progress throughout the technical assistance cohort and subsequent months, highlighting key initiatives and promising strategies to meaningfully engage learners in CTE.



## Setting the Context

Colorado's CTE system leverages workforce and education systems to ensure that each learner can access high-quality CTE opportunities leading to lifelong career success. The state's 2019-24 [strategic plan](#) guided its efforts to highlight opportunities to engage partners, establish clear goals for education and workforce systems, and communicate the state's CTE vision. In alignment with its strategic plan, Colorado has made substantial progress and investments in CTE, such as aligning secondary, postsecondary, and the workforce through a [work-based learning integration task force](#) and scaling and expanding equitable college and career pathways in [Launch: Equitable & Accelerated Pathways for All](#) and the [New Skills ready network](#).

Colorado's participation in the LVTA cohort included the State CTE Director and the CTE program director for special populations, counseling and equity. The team focused on the following objectives:

- **Aligning State Priorities With Learner Needs:** State priorities should be aligned with learner perspectives across all CTE initiatives. Programs and policies should be designed to meet learners' needs effectively.
- **Enhancing Program Design and Evaluation:** Robust feedback mechanisms should be implemented to inform program development and measure outcomes in alignment with the *CTE Without Limits* shared vision.
- **Amplifying Learner Representation:** Career Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) should be partnered with to elevate learner voice within CTE and the broader educational landscape.
- **Integrating Learner Voice Into Strategic Planning:** Learners' feedback should be aligned with existing state-level CTE strategic plans and legislative mandates to create a cohesive, learner-centered approach.

To inform the development of Colorado's action plan, the state team prioritized the integration of learner perspectives. Through engagement with nearly 300 learners statewide, the team realized that learners felt their voices were often overlooked in educational experiences. To address this issue, Colorado implemented several strategies:

- **Required Learner Participation:** The state-mandated learner representation on local advisory committees to ensure that their input influenced program approval.
- **Leveraged Alumni Expertise:** Recent CTE graduates were engaged to facilitate learner engagement and provide insights for program improvement.
- **Fostered Systemic Change:** The state disseminated a *Learner Voice Toolkit* to support local leaders in sustaining meaningful learner engagement.



# COLORADO



## Key Achievements

These efforts have led to significant advancements in learner voice integration within Colorado's education and workforce systems. Key achievements include the following:

- **Integrating Learner Voice Systemically:** Learner voice is now embedded in core CTE processes, including program design, evaluation, and policy development.
- **Conducting Innovative Engagement:** Colorado has implemented diverse strategies, such as contracting with alumni and creating learner-centered marketing materials.
- **Fostering Data-Driven Decisionmaking:** Learner feedback gathered through surveys and focus groups is part of data-driven decisions.
- **Developing a Culture of Listening:** The state has fostered a culture in which educators, administrators, and policymakers actively seek learner input.



## Promising Practices for Replication

Colorado's progress in elevating learner voice can serve as a model for other states. Key strategies for replication include the following:

- ✓ **Establish a Strong Foundation:** Building a shared understanding of the importance of learner voice among partners is essential. The Colorado team has a shared definition and understanding of learner engagement across multiple efforts. Colorado's commitment to systemic change has laid solid groundwork for sustainability in meaningful learner engagement.
- ✓ **Leverage Learner Leadership:** Empowering learners to take on leadership roles, such as by participating in advisory committees, can amplify their impact. Colorado's collaboration began with CTSO state officers and built off that engagement to recruit a diverse group of learners to provide feedback and input; leveraging existing state assets and building on them is a powerful example of this approach.
- ✓ **Create a Supportive Environment:** Providing resources, training, and support to educators and administrators is crucial for successfully implementing learner voice initiatives. Colorado's professional development opportunities for leaders across the state support adults in the system by teaching them how to engage learners for program improvement efforts.



## Looking Ahead

Colorado recognizes the imperative of sustaining and scaling learner engagement efforts to ensure long-term impact. By providing targeted resources, building capacity, and fostering a supportive environment, the state aims to empower local leaders to prioritize learner voice at all levels of the CTE system. Key strategies for advancing this work include the following:

- **Fostering Innovation Through Grants:** Through the strategic use of mini-grants, the state is empowering the expansion of successful learner-centered practices. By engaging in Advance CTE's Building Sustainable State Recruitment and Communications Systems to Reach Diverse Learners cohort, Colorado has gained valuable insights into effective strategies for attracting and supporting underrepresented learners. These strategies, which include targeted outreach, inclusive environments, and personalized support, are being implemented in CTE programs across the state. Moreover, Colorado's commitment to centering learner voice is evident in its support for mini-grants that prioritize learner input and engagement. This approach ensures that CTE programs are responsive to their learners' needs and aspirations, leading to more meaningful and equitable educational experiences.
- **Promoting Knowledge Sharing:** Colorado is committed to fostering a culture of learner engagement that permeates the entire CTE system. To facilitate knowledge sharing and promote the widespread adoption of effective practices, the state will highlight promising strategies and lessons learned at the CTE Administrators Conference in February 2025. This dedicated presentation will build upon previous sessions that have contributed to a growing recognition of the importance of learner voice. By sharing successful approaches and valuable insights, Colorado aims to empower CTE leaders and administrators to implement more meaningful and impactful learner engagement initiatives.
- **Elevating Learner Voice Systemically:** Integrating learner perspectives into CTE policy, program development, and delivery requires thoughtful engagement strategies that value learner input and audience impact. Colorado's learner leader shared that learners often prefer high-visibility platforms, such as speaking engagements and panel discussions, to share their experiences with peers, educators, administrators, and policymakers. By providing diverse opportunities for learner voice, CTE programs can foster a culture of continuous improvement and create more relevant, equitable learning experiences.



## Setting the Context

Delaware has established a robust CTE system that expands learner pathways to postsecondary opportunities. The state's strategic approach prioritizes equitable access to high-quality CTE programs. By fostering strong collaborations among education, industry, and workforce partners, Delaware is committed to ensuring that all learners possess the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the 21st-century economy. Through initiatives such as [Delaware Pathways](#), [credit for prior learning](#), [articulated transfer](#), and more, the state actively supports continuous improvement and transparency in CTE program delivery.

Delaware's participation in the LVTA cohort was led by the State CTE Director and a dedicated staff member focused on strategic voice. The team entered the cohort with a strong foundation centered on equity and learner voice, established through creating a culturally competent workforce lead position. The team focused on the following objectives:

- **Integrating Learner Voice Systemically:** Learner voice, diversity, equity, and inclusion principles should be embedded into the core fabric of CTE programs and policies.
- **Comprehensively Redesigning Programs:** CTE programs should undergo a holistic overhaul to ensure equitable access, opportunities, and outcomes for all learners.
- **Building Capacity and Engaging Partners:** Educators and administrators should strengthen their capacity to implement learner-centered practices through targeted training and collaborative partnerships.

To inform the development of Delaware's action plan, the state team prioritized the integration of learner perspectives. Through engagement with a cohort of 40 learners representing diverse CTE programs and backgrounds, the team identified the following strategic actions:

- **Establish a Student Leadership Advisory Committee:** Recruit and convene a diverse group of 16 learners to provide ongoing input and guidance on CTE program improvement.
- **Enhance Learner-Centered Program Development:** Revise the program review and Teacher Academy processes to prioritize learner feedback and ownership and scale learner-led program revisions to other CTE programs.
- **Cultivate Learner Leadership:** Create and implement leadership development opportunities to empower learners as leaders and advocates for equity and cultural competency.



# DELAWARE



## Key Achievements

Delaware is a leader in elevating learner voice within CTE. The state has significantly integrated learner perspectives into policy, programs, and practices, driving innovation and improving equity and accessibility across the system. Key achievements include the following:

- **Integrating Learner Voice Systemically:** Delaware has embedded learner voice into core CTE processes, including program development, revision, and evaluation. Learners have been tactfully included in efforts such as revising funding formulas for special populations and presenting their recommendations to policymakers and the state legislature.
- **Fostering Learner Leadership Development:** Delaware has cultivated a robust infrastructure for learner leadership by establishing learner advisory committees and providing development opportunities. This approach empowers learners to be active partners in program improvement. For example, a group of learners in the education program successfully co-redesigned the program's curriculum and co-developed instructor training focused on equity, inclusivity, and workforce readiness skills identified by learners as critical gaps.
- **Developing Innovative Partnerships for Learner Leadership:** Delaware has cultivated strategic partnerships across the CTE system to empower current learners as leaders and advocates for learner engagement. By collaborating with institutions across the mid-Atlantic region, such as Towson University in Maryland, Delaware learners share their knowledge and experiences with peers in other states. These learners actively participate in program improvement efforts and serve as mentors and trainers, fostering learner-centered practices beyond state lines and driving regional collaboration on meaningful learner engagement.
- **Demonstrating Learners' Impact:** Delaware has centered learner voice by integrating feedback into its social-emotional learning framework, creating a more relevant approach to supporting learner well-being. The state also expanded work-based learning opportunities by requiring vendors on CTE projects to provide immersive experiences for learners, giving them real-world career exposure. Additionally, Delaware involves learners in contracted employment, such as learner-led catering for CTE/CTSO events, enhancing learner agency and supporting local businesses that hire learner workers.
- **Scaling Learner Engagement for Sustainability:** Delaware is committed to embedding learner engagement as a core component of its CTE system. To achieve this goal, the state has implemented policies requiring learner involvement in program revisions. Building upon the Teacher Academy as a pilot, Delaware has made learner input mandatory for all program revisions. This effort includes the recruitment of new cohorts of learners to participate in the redesign process, with four to five programs currently undergoing this process. Additionally, innovative partnerships, such as the collaboration with Wilmington University to create opportunities for learners to co-design programs and receive academic credit for their contributions, recognize and reward learner leadership in CTE.



# DELAWARE



## Promising Practices for Replication

Delaware offers exemplary practices that can be replicated by other states seeking to elevate learner voice in CTE:



### **Build a Shared Vision for Learner Engagement:**

The state team established a common understanding of learner engagement by aligning existing frameworks with the *Learner Voice Toolkit*. The team challenged traditional engagement approaches by comparing [Hart's Ladder of Family Engagement](#) to the toolkit's [continuum](#) and developed a shared vision. To further deepen this understanding, learners were actively involved in reviewing the toolkit, providing critical insights, and identifying opportunities for improvement. This collaborative process fostered alignment and momentum across the team.



### **Shift the Focus to Learner Voice:**

Delaware's project lead for the technical assistance cohort experienced a significant shift in their role in this work; after establishing the shared vision for learner engagement, it became evident that their primary objectives were to **build the stage, turn on the light, and pass the mic**. To this end, building the stage includes providing the space for learners to feel comfortable, safe, and supported to engage in discussions about their lived experiences. Turning on the light calls on the adult or leader in the system to bring learners' feedback and input to the center of attention *and* empower learners to share their ideas and thoughts without fear of retaliation and retribution. Finally, passing the mic invites leaders to step back and listen intently to learners' feedback, input, experiences, and suggestions.



## Looking Ahead

Delaware is committed to building upon its momentum in elevating learner voice to create a sustainable, systemwide impact. The state recognizes the importance of scaling successful initiatives and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Key priorities as the team looks ahead include the following:

- **Deepening Learner Engagement:** Expanding opportunities for learner leadership and co-creation to ensure that learner perspectives inform every aspect of CTE programming.
- **Building Capacity:** Providing ongoing professional development and support to educators and administrators to strengthen their capacity to implement learner-centered practices.
- **Advocating and Advancing Policy:** Championing policies that prioritize learner voice and equity at the state and federal levels to create lasting, systemic change.



## Setting the Context

The New Hampshire Bureau of Career Development oversees the state's CTE programs. Its role includes guiding and supporting CTE initiatives at both the high school and college levels. The bureau works to create educational pathways that prepare learners for further education or employment.

Building on the success of its CTE Ambassador Program, which began with technical assistance from Advance CTE under another cohort opportunity, New Hampshire entered the LVTA cohort with a solid foundation in learner recruitment. Aligned with the state's commitment to supporting CTE centers, the cohort provided an opportunity to deepen engagement strategies. The team focused on the following objectives:

- **Expanding Its Learner Engagement Knowledge Base:** The team aimed to deepen its understanding of learner engagement tactics and identify innovative approaches for statewide implementation.
- **Elevating Promising Practices and Strategies:** The team sought to elevate proven learner engagement strategies while incorporating promising practices from peer states participating in the cohort.
- **Fostering Inclusivity in New Hampshire CTE:** The team aimed to create a CTE system that is welcoming and accessible to all learners, regardless of background.

Approximately 50 CTE learners provided input to inform New Hampshire's action plan for meaningful learner engagement in CTE. Key challenges identified included inconsistent engagement across centers, scheduling difficulties, and a general lack of understanding about learner engagement among adults in the system. To address these challenges, the team implemented the following strategies:

- **Incorporate Learner Voice in the CTE Advisory Board Meetings:** By including learners in statewide CTE Advisory Board meetings, their perspectives directly influence state-level CTE policies and decisions.
- **Build Capacity for Learner Engagement:** Creating a comprehensive manual to equip CTE centers with practical guidance on incorporating learner voice into local programs and activities ensures meaningful learner engagement can be adapted for various contexts and sustained.
- **Integrate Learner Voice Systemically:** Incorporating learner voice into the Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) templates and forms ensures that learner feedback is consistently collected and analyzed for program evaluation and improvement efforts.



# NEW HAMPSHIRE



## Key Achievements

Throughout the LVTA cohort, New Hampshire engaged learners in ways previously unexplored for the state's CTE system. During the cohort and the subsequent months, the team actualized supports for meaningful learner engagement. Key achievements include the following:

- **Cultivating Statewide Relationships to Support Learner Engagement:** New Hampshire leveraged strong partnerships with CTE center directors to foster statewide learner engagement. These relationships have helped to lay the groundwork for increased learner participation across the state.
- **Demonstrating the Value and Importance of Learner Voice:** New Hampshire has prioritized learner voice by including learners in high-level policy discussions. By supporting learner voice in state CTE Advisory Board meetings, the state has effectively demonstrated the value of learner perspectives and created a sustainable foundation for ongoing learner engagement.
- **Developing State-Specific Resources and Supports:** To help CTE centers incorporate learner voice, New Hampshire developed contextualized guidance based on the *Learner Voice Toolkit*. This resource and ongoing support from the state team will empower directors to engage learners in program improvement meaningfully.



## Promising Practices for Replication

New Hampshire's experience offers valuable practices that other states can adopt to enhance learner engagement in CTE:

- ✓ **Establish a Strong Foundation:** New Hampshire worked closely with CTE center directors to foster existing relationships that support learner engagement. These partnerships are essential for ensuring that learner voice is consistently incorporated at the local level.
- ✓ **Leverage Learner Leadership:** By involving learners in high-level policy discussions at the state CTE Advisory Board meetings, New Hampshire elevated the impact of learner voice in decisionmaking processes, showing how learners can be partners in shaping CTE.
- ✓ **Create a Supportive Environment:** New Hampshire developed guidance for CTE centers on leveraging learner voice into local programs. This ensures that educators have the tools they need to engage learners meaningfully and adapt these practices across various contexts.



## Looking Ahead

New Hampshire will continue prioritizing learner engagement by advocating for learner voice at state CTE Advisory Board meetings and providing ongoing support to CTE centers for implementing meaningful learner engagement strategies.

- **Sustaining Learner Representation:** Ensuring learners have a consistent and impactful role in CTE decisionmaking by strengthening their presence on advisory boards.
- **Supporting Implementation:** Offering targeted resources and tools to CTE centers to scale and sustain effective learner engagement initiatives statewide.

# OREGON



## Setting the Context

Oregon's CTE system has made significant strides driven by a solid commitment to equitable access, learner success, and regional workforce alignment. The state has focused on expanding access to high-quality CTE programs by leveraging state and federal investments for key areas of progress, including developing industry-aligned career pathways, increasing collaboration with local employers, and enhancing career exploration opportunities for learners. Oregon's focus on equity has been a guiding principle, with deliberate efforts to close participation gaps for historically underrepresented learners. Oregon has created a more inclusive and responsive CTE ecosystem through partnerships with secondary schools, community colleges, and industry partners, preparing learners for postsecondary education and high-demand careers in the state's diverse economy.

Oregon has made headway in incorporating learner voice into CTE governance. Before engaging in the LVTA cohort, the state created a Statewide CTE Advisory Council, including secondary and postsecondary learner representatives, to underscore its commitment to learner-centered decisionmaking. Eager to build upon this work, the Oregon team recognized the following as opportunities for improvement:

- **Establishing a Sustainable CTE Student Advisory Council:** Developing a robust model for recruiting, compensating, and supporting a diverse group of learner advisors to inform CTE policy and practice.
- **Amplifying Learner Voice:** Integrating learner perspectives into the Statewide CTE Advisory Council, Perkins V Comprehensive Local Needs Assessments, and other decisionmaking processes.
- **Building Capacity:** Creating resources and training opportunities for educators and administrators to engage learners effectively.
- **Measuring Impact:** Developing metrics and feedback loops to assess the effectiveness of learner engagement strategies.

When developing the state's learner engagement action plan, the Oregon team engaged nearly 150 learners across the state in virtual and in-person focus groups and rounds of surveys. This engagement led the team to understand what learners enjoy about CTE, their challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Based on these findings, the team developed the following actions:

- **Build on Existing Learner Engagement Activities and Strategies:** Identify and leverage successful learner engagement practices within Oregon's CTE system to scale and sustain meaningful learner engagement.
- **Leverage Sustainable Funding Sources to Compensate Learners:** To ensure equitable participation and recognize learners' valuable contributions, the state explored diverse funding avenues to compensate learners for their involvement in advisory councils, focus groups, and other engagement activities.
- **Codify the CTE Student Advisory Council:** Establish a formal structure for the CTE Student Advisory Council to solidify its role in CTE decisionmaking and provide a clear framework for learner participation and leadership development.

# OREGON



## Key Achievements

The Oregon team has successfully fostered a culture of learner engagement within the CTE system. By creating a supportive environment and empowering learners to share their perspectives, the team has achieved the following:

- **Successfully Forming a CTE Student Advisory Council:** The team has grown from seven to 18 members, demonstrating strong interest and engagement. Due to high demand, the team had to turn away potential participants, highlighting the need for expanded capacity. To accommodate as many learners as possible, the team invested significant time and effort in building a supportive and inclusive environment that fosters active participation and engagement.
- **Developing Learner-Centered Programs:** The team's involvement in the CTE state plan revision process has ensured that learner perspectives are at the forefront. Through regular meetings held twice a month in the evening, the learners actively participate in discussions and provide input. Seven learners attended the statewide convening on the Perkins V state plan, demonstrating their commitment to advocating for CTE. Learners' contributions have been instrumental in shaping the state plan, as evidenced by the positive reception of their video presentation to the state's education board and leaders across the state who are eager to hear learners' feedback and input.
- **Conducting Effective Outreach and Recruitment:** The team's social media campaign, "This is CTE," successfully raised awareness of CTE programs and attracted new youth members. Launched in February 2024, the campaign has been a valuable tool for promoting CTE and engaging learners. Building on the success of the 2024 campaign, the team plans to expand its efforts in 2025 by introducing a monthly *CTE Update* newsletter and revitalizing the "Brightspots" section, which encourages submissions from CTE programs and teachers. By combining these initiatives, the team aims to create a more comprehensive and impactful campaign highlighting the value of CTE across the state. Additionally, the team has collected anecdotal evidence of success and secured earned media coverage, demonstrating the campaign's effectiveness in reaching and engaging learners.




# OREGON



## Promising Practices for Replication

Oregon's experience in leveraging learner voice within its CTE programs and policies offers valuable insights for other states and districts. The following promising practices can be replicated to foster meaningful learner engagement:

 **Conduct Strategic Recruitment:** The state employed a multifaceted approach to attract a diverse group of learners, leveraging existing networks, social media campaigns, and partnerships with Career Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs). Initially, the Statewide CTE Advisory Council had only two learner representatives, but Oregon quickly recognized the need to broaden its recruitment efforts. By understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by learners from various backgrounds, the team was able to refine its strategies to appeal to a wider range of participants. This targeted recruitment effort significantly increased the number of applicants for the CTE Student Advisory Council, demonstrating the effectiveness of its inclusive approach.

 **Foster Strong Leadership and Support:** The state ensured that dedicated staff and resources were available to guide the CTE Student Advisory Council's activities, which was essential for the council's success. The team provided ample time, resources, and guidance, enabling them to effectively manage the council's operations, including planning meeting agendas, organizing professional development sessions, and offering ongoing support to members. Building a solid and supportive team culture requires continuous effort, establishing clear expectations, facilitating effective communication, and creating opportunities for team building. These efforts helped sustain an environment where learners felt empowered and supported, fostering long-term engagement and leadership development.



## Looking Ahead

As Oregon continues prioritizing meaningful learner engagement, the state is committed to expanding and enhancing the CTE Student Advisory Council's impact. Future goals include the following:

- **Expanding Team Capacity:** Exploring options for increasing the size of the CTE Student Advisory Council to accommodate more learners and represent a more comprehensive range of perspectives.
- **Strengthening Advocacy Efforts:** Supporting the team in developing advocacy skills and strategies to influence CTE policy and decisionmaking at the state level.
- **Exploring Compensation and Incentives:** Developing a sustainable funding mechanism to provide compensation or incentives for team members, particularly those who incur travel expenses.
- **Measuring and Evaluating Impact:** Implementing a system to track and measure the impact of the CTE Student Advisory Council's activities on CTE programs and learner outcomes, ensuring continuous improvement.



## Setting the Context

Wisconsin's CTE system operates through regulatory guidance and advocacy measures, allowing local control of institutional operations and strategic response to district and regional needs. There is a solid commitment to a shared mission and vision across the system. While state statutes and federal regulations provide overarching guidelines, the implementation of CTE programs largely rests at the institutional level. Historically, learners have been involved in various capacities, such as through event planning committees and feedback mechanisms, though their input has often been limited to specific isolated initiatives. A turning point came through participation in the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity State Equity Leadership Academy, highlighting the importance of centering learner experiences in decisionmaking processes. This realization prompted Wisconsin to explore new ways to amplify learner voice and create pathways for learner leadership. The state laid the groundwork for substantive learner engagement initiatives by focusing on recruitment and building relationships with learners.

One such initiative is the [WTCS Ambassador Program](#), which aims to recognize and reward outstanding learners in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). Each year, one learner from each of the 16 colleges in the system is selected to participate in a leadership development and recognition program. By providing these learners with opportunities to share their experiences and advocate for technical education, the WTCS Ambassador Program contributes to greater public awareness and appreciation for the high-quality system of technical education in Wisconsin. This program serves as a valuable model for other states and institutions seeking to amplify learner voice and foster a culture of learner leadership within CTE.

Wisconsin's participation in the LVTA cohort was marked by a collaborative approach, bringing together secondary and postsecondary leaders to foster alignment across the CTE system. The team focused on the following objectives:

- **Building a Strong Foundation:** Leveraging the expertise of both state agencies (the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and WTCS), Wisconsin aimed to establish a robust partnership focused on amplifying learner voice at all stages of CTE.
- **Centering Learner Perspectives:** Aligned with the state's priorities, Wisconsin sought to incorporate what it learned from the technical assistance to create a learner-centered K–12 career readiness system that prioritizes equity.
- **Empowering Learners:** By harnessing the power of shared knowledge and resources, Wisconsin sought to equip learners and adults with the tools to co-create a CTE system that meets their needs.

To inform the development of Wisconsin's action plan, learners from diverse educational backgrounds were consulted statewide. Key findings from this engagement included a preference for email communication, a desired hourly compensation range or reimbursement for travel and accommodations, and a desire for recognition through a letter of certification or acknowledgment in published materials. Based on these insights, Wisconsin developed the following strategies:

- **Institutionalize Learner Engagement:** Develop standardized state office policies and procedures for engaging learners, including survey protocols, to ensure consistent and equitable practices.
- **Build Learner Capacity:** Create resources to prepare learners for effective engagement with state-level processes, empowering them to contribute meaningfully and authentically.
- **Foster Interagency Collaboration:** Establish regular meetings among state agencies to strengthen partnerships and sustain momentum for learner engagement initiatives across educational levels.



## Key Achievements

Wisconsin's participation in the LVTA cohort yielded several key achievements:

- **Developing a Learner-Informed Action Plan:** By soliciting learner input through surveys, WTCS developed a learner engagement action plan grounded in learners' preferences. This plan prioritizes email communication, appropriate compensation for learner participation (\$15-\$20/hour or travel reimbursement), and recognition through certification or publication.
- **Strengthening System Collaboration:** An Ambassador Banquet fostered collaboration among learners, educators, and administrators across WTCS. This event served as a platform for learner leadership development and provided opportunities for learner-faculty mentorship. The state aims to leverage this model for future events.
- **Engaging Diverse Learners:** Collaborative efforts with the Department of Children and Families and a statewide literacy organization resulted in an Immigrant and Refugee Summit. This event featured learner voice on the conference agenda, demonstrating the state's commitment to inclusivity.
- **Highlighting Presidential Leadership:** The System President's commitment to learner engagement was evident in their campus visits, where they directly engaged with learners from various programs and highlighted underrepresented learner groups such as members of Tribal Nations. These interactions were [documented and shared](#) to promote further learner engagement.



## Promising Practices for Replication

Several of Wisconsin's initiatives hold promise for replication in other states:

- ✓ **Compensate Learners:** Wisconsin secured a dedicated budget line item within the technical college system office for learner compensation, marking a significant achievement in recognizing the value of learners' time and expertise. This funding sets a strong precedent for future efforts to compensate learners across the state's education and workforce systems.
- ✓ **Support Learner-Driven Summits:** Supporting learner-led conferences, such as [WisCORE](#), empowers learners to lead and shape their educational experiences. Engaging learners as speakers and attendees at conferences such as the Immigrant and Refugee Summit demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and empowers learners to share their unique perspectives.
- ✓ **Leverage College Events:** Wisconsin colleges actively incorporate learner engagement into existing events, such as system meetings, to amplify learner voice within established structures. This strategic approach increases visibility and influence for learners across the system.





## Looking Ahead

Wisconsin acknowledges ongoing opportunities related to capacity and budgetary constraints. Despite these opportunities, the state remains committed to advancing learner engagement through several key actions:

- **Developing Resources:** Creating training materials to equip learners with the necessary skills to effectively engage in state-level processes, ensuring they can meaningfully contribute to policy discussions and program development.
- **Fostering Interagency Collaboration:** Continuing collaboration among state agencies to ensure sustained support for learner engagement initiatives, building a cohesive and supportive ecosystem for learner participation.
- **Building a Culture of Inclusion:** Highlighting promising practices, such as the Ambassador Banquet and WisCORE, to inspire further learner leadership development and foster a culture of inclusivity across the system.
- **Scaling Up Compensation:** Expanding the budget line for learner compensation, with the long-term goal of ensuring all learners have the opportunity to participate meaningfully, regardless of financial barriers.



# TAKING THE NEXT STEP TOWARD A LEARNER-CENTERED CTE SYSTEM

Meaningful learner engagement is essential to creating equitable, and responsive CTE programs that are relevant to the needs of learners and industry. By centering learner voice, states can build stronger, more effective CTE systems.

Advance CTE is committed to supporting states to elevate learner voice. Our [resource center](#) provides a wealth of tools and guidance. To further accelerate your progress, we encourage you to [connect with our team for tailored technical assistance](#).

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