Effectively Communicating Career Technical Education to Engage Every Learner: A Recruitment & Engagement Tool

Video Series
Section 3:
Changing the Narrative with Asset-Based Framing

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Welcome to Section 3 of the Effectively Communicating Career Technical Education to Engage Every Learner: A Recruitment and Engagement Tool where we provide information on using the power of relationships, messaging, and effective communication practices to enhance recruitment systems and structures to ensure all learners have access to and can succeed in high- quality CTE programs.

In Section 2 we discussed data to evaluate relationship building with key underrepresented populations, and through the assessments in the workbook chose a focus population for the recruitment and communications work. Later sections are going to allow you to learn more deeply about that population.

In this section, we will discuss asset-based framing, which can help ensure we are not unintentionally reinforcing or creating stigma or bias around a group or population and primes collaborators for addressing systemic obstacles as opposed to thinking that the group or focus population is what needs intervention.

This video will provide knowledge and strategies that will be helpful as you complete Section 3 of the accompanying workbook.

What is Asset-Based Framing

Deficit-Based Framing: defining people by their challenges and ignoring their contributions and aspirations.

- Assumes the population had no aspirations or contributions before receiving help
- Positions the population as the problem

Asset-Based Framing: defining people by their aspirations and contributions before noting their challenges.

- Assumes the population made contributions and had aspirations before receiving help
- Repositions systemic obstacles as the problem

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When we are communicating with and developing messages with and for the focus population, it is important for us to consider the potential impact of how we say something. Often, we tend to lead with problems in a deficit-based frame that can unintentionally position the focus population as the problem taking the focus off of the systemic obstacles a population may face. A deficit-based frame triggers our subconscious mind and automatic association process, creating a desire to intervene in order to make the perceived problem (the focus population) less of a burden on us or society as a whole.

If we flip the narrative, leading first with a population's aspirations and contributions before noting their challenges, we now position the systemic obstacles the population faces as the problem that needs intervention and solving. Asset-based framing helps to create automatic associations of worth within the brain and the need to invest in a group by addressing the systemic obstacles they face.

Let's take a look at a few examples to further illustrate why how we frame or how we say something is so important.

Why How We Say Something Matters

"We'd offer more programs aligned to high-skill, high-wage careers, but our learners aren't interested in them."

Problem as presented: Learners are not interested.

Reality: Learners may not be aware of what is possible or available outside of current offerings or may not see themselves in these careers.

"Our learners aspire to earn skills that are aligned to in-demand, high-wage careers; however, inconsistent career advising and career exploration may limit their awareness of available careers. To help provide more options to learners, we will survey them to determine their level of interest in additional program offerings aligned to high-skill, high-wage careers.."

Contributions/aspirations: Have high-wage careers.

Problem: Don't always know what options are available.

Solution: Survey learners to determine where their interest lies for additional programs.

Let's start with what may be a common phrase among CTE leaders and educators concerning the challenge of getting information about CTE out to families. "We'd offer more programs aligned to high-skill, high-wage careers, but our learners aren't interested in them." As presented, what or who is the problem in this statement? The learners. In reality, it may be that learners are not aware of what offerings are possible or they may not see themselves in these careers. Through direct engagement with learners, we could learn the various ways we could communicate with them in order to increase access to the information.

In this second presentation, we have led with the aspirations and contributions of learners "earn skills that are aligned to in-demand, high wage careers", then state the problem "however, inconsistent career advising and career exploration may limit their awareness of available careers." When possible, we can also offer a potential solution to mitigate the systemic obstacle, in this case, surveying learners to determine their level of interest in additional program offerings. It is important to note, that direct engagement with learners is vital to helping us identify any potential systemic obstacles and solutions. Direct engagement with those we serve can also help to reduce any stigma and bias that may be present with collaborators throughout the CTE ecosystem.

When we are willing to ask questions and engage with learners to uncover root causes, we can be responsive in our communications and better meet the needs of the learners we are working with.

Why How We Say Something Matters

"English learners struggle in CTE courses, they just can't keep up."

Problem as presented: English learners can't keep up

Reality: English learners may need additional supports, like a translator, or materials translated into their primary language.

"English learners want to be successful and have options for college and career success, however, they sometimes do not receive the supports they need. To better support English learners, we use Perkins funds to make program and communication materials available in their primary language.

Contributions/aspirations: English learners want to be successful

Problem: not receiving additional supports

Solution: using Perkins funds to hire a translator to make materials available in their primary language

Another concept that may be familiar is one that centers around English learners. A common perception may be that "English learners struggle in CTE courses, they just can't keep up." Here the problem is presented as the English learners themselves. In reality, English learners may not be receiving the additional supports they need, such as a translator or materials translated into their primary language, to be successful.

In the second application, we have led with the aspirations of English learners – they too want college and career success, and then the problem – not receiving the supports they need. The solution includes using federal funds available through the Carl D Perkins Career and Technical Education Act to provide supports such as a translator and making materials available in the primary language of the learner. These supports may also help the families of English language learners be more involved as well, ultimately setting the learners up for the highest levels of success.

Asset-based framing can help you see solutions and a path forward to improve performance among all populations in your CTE programs.

Why How We Say Something Matters

"This program is too rigorous for some learners. They just don't have the motivation or the academic knowledge to be successful."

Problem as presented: student motivation and academic knowledge

Reality: prerequisites may not have been clearly communicated, additional supports may be needed

"While CTE learners aspire to be successful in CTE programs for high-wage, in-demand careers, incomplete information about course prerequisites can lead to decreased motivation and reduced academic success. To address this issue, we are adding a call out to all program listings that clearly list the necessary prerequisites per program. "

Contributions/aspirations: aspire to be successful in high-wage, in-demand careers

Problem: incomplete information on course prerequisites lowers motivation

Solution: adding a callout section to program listings that clearly state prerequisites

In this third example, the problem is presented as a lack of learner motivation and academic knowledge when in reality, the course prerequisites may not have been clearly communicated and the learners may need some additional supports to be successful.

If we first acknowledge the aspirations of learners to be successful in their CTE programs for future career success, we shift the blame for the lack of motivation away from the learners and onto the real problem of learners not receiving clear information about course prerequisites. Through directly engaging with learners, we could help reduce any stigma or bias about motivation and academic achievement while gaining insight into potential solutions for mitigating this challenge and ways to better support them in their journey.

Steps to Reframe as Asset-Based

Contributions & **A**spirations   **P**roblem   **S**olution

CAPS

Name the **contributions & aspirations** of the specific population or group.

Name the **problem or challenge** for what it is.

Name the potential **solution** for the actual the problem.

DIRECT ENGAGEMENT

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In Section 3 of the workbook, the Reframing Deficit-Based Thinking to Asset-Based Thinking Activity provides an opportunity for you to practice reframing deficit-based statements into asset-based statements. The three general steps are to

1. Name the contributions and aspirations of the specific population or group. Ideally, this information will be gathered from the learners or specific populations through direct engagement.
2. Second, name the problem or challenge for what it is – a systemic obstacle – and not due to a flaw of the people. Again, directly engaging with learners will help to identify the challenges they face.
3. Third, when possible, name the approach to potentially solve the problem. Often, we name the approach we think will work without first engaging with those directly experiencing the challenge. It is ideal to engage with learners and the specific population to inform potential solutions to systemic barriers. In the workbook, this process is referred to as CAPS.

Reframing Deficit-Based Thinking to Asset-Based Thinking Activity

During the Reframing Deficit-Based Thinking to Asset-Based Thinking Activity you will name the contributions and aspirations of the provided group, state the real problem that inhibits participation or success, and propose a potential solution in order to reframe some deficit-based statements. Since these are simulated examples, it is ok to use your best guess or informed opinion to complete the exercise. During the next phase of this work, you will get to know your focus audience and confirm or correct any current assumptions you may have around their contributions and aspirations, barriers to enrollment or completion, and potential solutions to overcoming those barriers.

Next Steps

Work with your team and/or colleagues to:

- Complete the Reframing Deficit-Based Thinking to Asset-Based Thinking Activity.

Section 4: Getting to Know Your Audience:

- Getting to know the audience's values, current perceptions of CTE, and communication preferences

- Establishing or reinforcing structures for stakeholder engagement

SECTION
3
ASSET-BASED FRAMING

Change the narrative with asset-based framing to reduce stigma and bias

2 weeks

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To take the next steps, complete the Reframing Deficit-Based Thinking to Asset-Based Thinking Activity. The anticipated minimum time required to complete Section 3 is approximately 2 weeks though it may take you more or less time.

In the next video in this series, Getting to Know Your Audience, we will discuss the importance of direct engagement to identify what the audience values, their current perceptions of CTE, and their communication preferences. The structures that we will establish or reinforce in Section 4 will be a direct asset to future stakeholder engagement as required by the CLNA and Perkins V.

This concludes the Section 3 video of the Effectively Communicating Career Technical Education to Engage Every Learner: A Recruitment and Engagement Tool. For more information on the CTE messaging research conducted by Advance CTE with learners and families and supported by the Siemens Foundation, please visit careertech.org/what-we-do/case-making-communications/engage-families-learners or scan the code.