

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

## Video Series

### Section 4: Getting to Know Your Audience



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA

CAREERTECH.ORG

**ADVANCE** CTE  
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

Welcome to Section 4 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 3, we introduced asset-based framing that could help improve perception and communication about your population. In this section, we will focus on getting to know what your audience values, how they get their information, and how they prefer to communicate.

This video will provide knowledge and strategies that will be helpful as you complete Section 4 of the accompanying workbook.

## Why is it important to get to know your audience?



CAREERTECH.ORG

**ADVANCE** CTE  
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

As discussed in Section 2, while we often think that our recruitment and program communications are not reaching our focus audience, often the problem is that our communications are not resonating with our focus audience and are therefore ineffective in driving opinion and behavior change.

Getting to know the audience allows us to design recruitment and program communications that truly connect with the focus audience and that encourage them to attend informational sessions, enroll in programs and continue through to program completion.

## How do you get to know your audience?



**What Matters** their values, vision for the future, cultural norms



**Current Perceptions** of CTE programs and communications



**Barriers and Considerations** that limit reception and connection



**How to Communicate** their preferences and trusted sources

How do you get to know our audience? We must seek to discover:

- What matters to the focus audience, what they value, their vision for the future and their cultural norms. Understanding what matters to your audience can aid in crafting recruitment and retention communications that resonate with them and drive opinion and behavior change.
- In addition to discovering what matters to the focus audience, it is also important to find out what their current perceptions of career technical education (CTE) are and their opinions on any current recruitment communications.
- We must also discover, with their help, any barriers to communication that limit their reception of and connection with recruitment and program communications.
- Lastly, we must discover where the focus audience prefers to communicate, where they get their information, and who they trust to help inform their education and career decision making.

Before we dig into each of these, let's clearly define the audience we are getting to know.

## Recognizing the Multitiered Audience

Learners

Families

Educators & Administrators

Career-Advising Professionals

Industry/employers

Community leaders

May need to

- Engage in direct information-gathering (survey, poll, focus group)
- Educate/train (professional development, presentations)
- Involve in recruitment efforts (events, presentations, one-on-one outreach, trusted messengers)

As discussed in Section 2 and defined in the glossary, within any specific population there exists multiple audiences, each with defining characteristics. Some of these individuals may be members of the population, while others may be trusted sources who support the population. In the case of CTE recruitment, there are several audiences: learners, families, educators and administrators, career-advising professionals, industry representatives and employers as well as community leaders and potentially others.

In order for recruitment communications to drive opinion and behavior change we may need to

- Engage different tiers of this multitiered audience in direct information-gathering to get to know what matters to them, their communication preferences and their current perceptions of CTE. We can do this via surveys, polls, focus groups and other means.
- Educate and train tiers of the multi-tiered audience through professional development, community presentations, career fairs, open houses, etc. in order to
- Involve them in recruitment efforts to help share our recruitment and program communications.
- In some cultures where family and/or community leadership have a significant impact on what experiences and opportunities learners have access to, such as tribal leadership within a reservation, you may need to first engage with and educate them before being able to start recruitment efforts with learners or other tiers of the tiered audience.

This tool prioritizes learners as the primary focus audience and families as a secondary focus

audience to ensure that there are systemic improvements to engage and respond to those directly participating in CTE programs. Engagement with career-advising professionals, educators, employers, etc. is important and required by Perkins; therefore their engagement can be assessed and improved in subsequent uses of this tool.

Now that we have clearly defined the focus audience, let's dig into the core components of getting to know your audience.

## Getting to Know *What Matters* to Your Audience

### What do they value?

Family, community, traditions, friends, economic mobility, social capital

### What needs do they have?

Flexibility, opportunity, options, information, earning while learning

### What is their vision for the future?

First-generation, family-sustaining wages, short-term, long-term, positive or negative

### What are the cultural norms and/or bias?

Expectations, traditions, opinions on postsecondary education, CTE or specific career fields

### What are their experiences with CTE?

Historically across generations, with peers, within school, within the community

CAREERTECH.ORG

**ADVANCE** CTE  
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

While we may have research that shows us what a specific group or population cares about, it is important to engage directly with your specific focus population as their values, needs and experiences will be nuanced based on the uniqueness of each community.

In order to create recruitment communications that truly connect with the audience driving opinion and behavior change, we must get to know what they value and need. If recruitment communications align with what they value and also serves to fill a need that they have, CTE becomes a viable solution to address those needs.

We must also become familiar with what vision this group has for their future. In some communities that experience high levels of violence or young-adult death, discussing long-term plans for the future may seem futile to the youth within that community. Similarly, for learners whose families have decided that they will be the first member of their family to attend college, the conversation around CTE will look different than with the learners looking to start earning family-sustaining wages as soon as possible.

To fully know what matters to your audience, it is also important to discover any cultural bias and norms that will impact how they view and engage with CTE. For example, if it is expected that learners will stay within their community and remain local, like within native populations living on a reservation, then exploring career paths and training that aren't available within

the reservation will not be viable options for those native learners.

Understanding that bias is sometimes a result of direct experience, it will also be important to discover what experiences the audience has had with CTE. These experiences could be positive or could be negative, the result of historical and systemic exclusion and tracking across generations. These experiences could be positive or negative interactions with school personnel, friends or within the community itself.

Uncovering the experiences an audience has had with CTE will also help us discover their current perceptions of CTE, something we will talk about a little later in this video.

## Getting to Know *Current Perceptions* by Your Audience

### What we say and mean

Filtered through experiences, values, bias, cultural norms, and interests

#### Career Technical Education

- Hands-on learning, career focused education

#### You belong in CTE!

- CTE offers something for everyone

#### High-wage in-demand careers

- Learn skills to take advantage of open positions with family-sustaining wages

#### Create options for your future

- Align your passions and interests with your career path

### How messages might be received

#### Isn't that Voc-Ed or the Trades?

- Not my kid, my kid is going to college

#### Not me

- A trusted adult told me so, I don't see myself in CTE

#### Need college for that

- Need to earn while I learn, don't know how to afford/apply/access college

#### I don't want to leave my family, community, or the area

- I don't know how CTE will allow me to do this

Experience, values, bias, norms, etc.

CAREERTECH.ORG

**ADVANCE** CTE  
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

It is important to learn from the focus audience what their current perceptions of CTE are so that we can understand how our current messaging is being received. What we say and mean is not always received as we intend it to be because our messages, regardless of format, are received through a filter that is shaped by the experiences, values, bias, cultural norms, and interests of the focus audience.

Let's go through some examples of how the messaging we use to promote CTE may be received differently by our focus audience.

- When we say "Career Technical Education" we may mean the hands-on, career focused learning designed to help prepare learners for the workforce. However, due to the filters of experience, values, bias, etc. families within our audience might not have the same perception of career technical education.
- When we say "You belong in CTE!" we may mean that CTE offers something for everyone, regardless of age, race, socio-economic status and desire to pursue postsecondary education. That message may be received differently based on the experiences a learner has had.
- When we say "High-wage in-demand careers" we may mean that CTE provides learners with skills that will help them take advantage of open positions in careers with family sustaining wages. That message may be received differently based on bias, community expectations, or access to these careers in their community.
- When we say "Create options for your future" we may mean that CTE allows learners to align their passion and interests with their career path. However, this message may be received



differently based on the filters we have discussed previously.

In order to ensure that we truly understand what our audience within the focus population believes to be true about CTE programs and to hopefully improve their understanding and perceptions of CTE while reducing bias, we must engage with them, learn from them, and get their real time feedback on recruitment messages and communications.

## Getting to Know *Considerations for Communicating* with Your Audience

**Language:** English language learners (ELLs), use terminology

**Access and Availability:** to CTE programs, transportation, broadband, and/or experiential and work-based learning opportunities

**Cultural norms:** communication, education, language, gender roles, decision-making process

**Culture-based bias:** around CTE, career fields, gender roles, postsecondary education

**Representation:** in communications assets (images, videos), in programs, in career fields

While we are engaging with the focus audience, we also want to learn about the challenges they experience that hinder or impact their receiving and understanding recruitment and program communications.

We may already be aware of some barriers like language or limited access to specific CTE programs, but engaging with representatives from the population can help us understand what cultural norms or bias we might also have to consider when creating recruitment communications.

Additionally, we want to assess how well the audience is being authentically represented across communication assets as well as across programs and career fields. Engaging with the focus audience can help us understand where more representation is needed, and which forms of representation are seen as authentic versus performative.

## Getting to Know the **Communication Preferences** of Your Audience

### Where do they seek out information

- based on preference, accessibility, ease of use and/or necessity

### How do they prefer to receive information

- via which channels (video, infographic, word of mouth, events)

### Who do they trust – who are the “trusted messengers”

- people, places, and things that are trusted sources of information

Once we have a clear understanding of what matters to our audience, their current perceptions of CTE and the barriers to communicating with them, we want to discover how our audience prefers to receive their information, who they trust to inform their education and career decisions, and what channels they often use to seek out this information.

Where the focus audience seeks out information when they need it may be based on their preference, accessibility to broadband or other technology, how easy they are to use or understand and/or based on a need for specific information.

How they prefer to receive information that they may or may not be looking for will vary across individuals. However, identifying the most popular channels and formats will allow you to be more effective in creating recruitment communications that can drive opinion and behavior change.

As we discussed in Section 2, trust is a major component of building and maintaining relationships for effective recruitment communications. While we can build trust, we must also recognize that it will not be the same level of trust that the audience has with their current trusted sources of information or the “trusted messengers”. Trusted messengers are people, places and things that are trusted sources of information and who or what these messengers are may change based on the type of information someone is seeking.

## Top Ranked **Trusted Messengers** to Help Inform Education & Career Decisions

### PROSPECTIVE

#### Parents/Guardians

1. School counselor
2. School website
3. Teachers
4. Google search

#### Learners

1. Teachers
2. College representative
3. School website
4. Tie: Google search and school counselor

### CURRENT

#### Parents/Guardians

1. School counselor
2. Teachers
3. CTE students or alumni
4. College representative

#### Learners

1. Teachers
2. Google search
3. College representative
4. Tie: School counselor and CTE alumni

CAREERTECH.ORG

**ADVANCE** CTE  
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

During the 2020 Siemens messaging research, learners and families were asked who they trusted most to help inform their education and career decisionmaking. As you can see from the chart, families and learners trust differently. Learners rank teachers as their most trusted source, while families rank school counselors as their top source on who they trust most to help inform their education and career decisionmaking. You can also see how the trusted sources rounding out the top four for both prospective and current learners and families are a combination of people and digital sources like websites and Google searches.

By engaging with the focus audience and identifying how they prefer to receive information and who they trust to help inform education and career decisionmaking, you can then leverage those messengers for your recruitment communication efforts.

# Getting to Know Your Audience Engagement Strategy and Audience Assessment

4

## Part 1: Getting to Know Your Audience Engagement Strategy Assessment

### Instructions

Use the Engagement Strategy Mapping Tool to assess current engagement with key audiences that are part of or connected to your [focus population](#) (identified in Section 2) and to plan for additional or improved engagement.

Select a cell to place a check in the cell.

Multitiered Audience of the Focus Population	Survey/Poll	Focus Group	Committee/Kitchen Cabinet	Training (Professional Development, Presentation)	In-Person Event	Virtual Event	Other
Learners (primary focus audience)	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Families (secondary focus audience)	✓				✓	✓	
Educators				✓			
Administrators				✓			
Career-advancing professionals				✓			
Industry employers							
Community leaders							
Other:							
Other:							

4

## Part 2: Audience Assessment

### Instructions

This assessment narrows the focus from all audiences to learners and families from your focus population. First, complete the Audience Assessment "Preengagement" column to develop a picture of what you understand to be true about these audiences. After completing the "Preengagement" assessment, engage in direct information gathering (survey, focus group, advisory group, etc.) with learners and, if possible, families from the [focus population](#) and complete the "Postengagement" column. Then, compare the two columns to determine areas of confirmation and discrepancy.

Aspect	What Matters	
	Preengagement	Postengagement
What does the audience value? (e.g., family, community, traditions, friends, economic mobility, social capital, in education)		
What does the audience need to participate in CTE? (e.g., flexibility, access to opportunities, ability to explore options, ability to earn while learning)		
What is the audience's vision for the future for themselves or their youth? (e.g., first-generation college goes, first-generation white-collar workers, a job with family-sustaining wages, short- or long-term view, positive or negative)		
What cultural norms exist for the audience connected to participation in and/or promotion of CTE? (e.g., staying within the community, gender roles or identity, four-year college, locations for specific careers or fields)		

Additional resources for conducting surveys and focus groups can be found in [Advance CTE's With Learners, Not for Learners: A Toolkit for Elevating Learner Voice](#) and the accompanying supplemental materials. Additional resources can also be found via state examples from the [Building Sustainable State Recruitment and Communications Systems to Reach Diverse Learners cohort](#).

Effectively Communicating Career Technical Education to Engage Every Learner

CAREERTECH.ORG

Effectively Communicating Career Technical Education to Engage Every Learner

CAREERTECH.ORG

CAREERTECH.ORG

**ADVANCE** CTE  
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

In section four of the workbook, the Getting to Know Your Audience Engagement Strategy Assessment provides you with an opportunity to identify the ways that you are already engaging with the multitiered audience of your focus population and uses some reflection questions to help you plan for future engagement.

After completing the Engagement Strategy Assessment, you will complete the Preengagement Audience Assessment to develop a picture of what you understand to be true about the focus audience. The assessment aligns with the four areas of getting to know your audience that we have discussed in this video. After completing the Preengagement section, you will engage in direct information gathering (survey, focus group, advisory group, etc.) with learners and, if possible, families from the focus population. Using what you learned through direct engagement, you will complete the Postengagement column and then compare the two columns to determine areas of confirmation and discrepancy. This may take several weeks or even months, and that's ok!

## Next Steps

### Work with your team and/or colleagues to:

- Complete the Engagement Strategy Assessment and the Preengagement column of the Audience Assessment
- Conduct direct engagement with learners (survey, focus group, advisory group)
- Complete the Postengagement column of the Audience Assessment

### Section 5: Maximizing Effective Communications

- Meeting the interests and needs of the audience while adjusting for bias.
- Using data to adjust and maximize the efficacy of communications.

CAREERTECH.ORG |

**ADVANCE** CTE  
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

#### SECTION

#### 4

#### GETTING TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Assess audience  
knowledge and  
conduct direct  
engagement  
with learners

**2 months**

To take the next steps in getting to know your audience, complete the Engagement Strategy Assessment and the Preengagement Audience Assessment in Section 4 of the workbook. Then, conduct direct engagement with learners and complete the Postengagement column of the Audience Assessment. Be sure to record any lessons learned in the Project Lead Planning and Tracking Tool. The structures you are creating or reinforcing with direct learner engagement will be a valuable asset for future stakeholder engagement as required by the CLNA and Perkins V. The anticipated minimum time required to complete Section 4 is approximately 2 months though it may take you more or less time.

In the next section of this tool, we will discuss what makes communications effective, how we can use learner voice to improve the efficacy of communications, and how to use data to increase the performance of communications.

# ADVANCE CTE

State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

The Effectively Communicating Career Technical Education to Engage Every Learner: A Recruitment and Engagement Tool has been made possible thanks to the generous support of the Siemens Foundation.

To view CTE messaging research conducted by Advance CTE and sponsored by Siemens Foundation, please visit <https://careertech.org/what-we-do/case-making-communications/engage-families-learners/> or scan the code.



CAREERTECH.ORG

ADVANCE  CTE  
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

This concludes the Section 4 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](https://careertech.org/what-we-do/case-making-communications/engage-families-learners/) or scan the code.