

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

Video Series

Section 5: Maximizing Effective Communications



CAREERTECH.ORG

ADVANCE CTE
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

Welcome to Section 5 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 this section, we will utilize what you have learned from and about your audience to maximize the efficacy of communications to drive opinion and behavior change. This video will provide knowledge and strategies that will be helpful as you complete Section 5 of the accompanying workbook.

Getting to Know Your Audience



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



Current Perceptions of CTE programs and communications



Barriers that limit reception and connection



How to Communicate their preferences and trusted sources

In Section 4: Getting to Know Your Audience, we discussed the importance of directly engaging with the focus audience to discover what matters to them, their current perceptions of CTE, any barriers that limit reception of or connection to recruitment communications and their communication preferences. We may think we know a particular group or population, however, direct engagement with them allows us to hear from the audience firsthand how we can better communicate with and serve their needs. In this tool, learners and families are the primary audience.

Once we have learned about the audience *from* the audience, we can use that information to craft effective program and recruitment communications. Effective communications connect or resonate with the audience helping to drive opinion and behavior change.

What makes communications effective?

Messages that speak to the target audience and answer **“What’s in it for me?”**

Messages that **meet them where they are** by utilizing messengers and channels that the target audience trusts and prefers.

Evaluate the impact, reach, and performance of communications and **adjust your approach.**

“What’s in it for me?”

Meet Them Where They Are

Adjust Your Approach

CAREERTECH.ORG

ADVANCE CTE
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

What makes communications effective? Effective communications have three core components.

- First, effective communications have messages that speak directly to the focus audience, helping them to clearly identify how the CTE program or offering aligns with their interests, values, and needs. We will refer to this as the “What’s in it for me?” factor of messages.
- Second, effective communications meet the audience where they are by ensuring that the communications are accessible, and by using messengers and channels of communication that the audience trusts and prefers to engage with.
- Third, effective communications are consistently evaluated and adjusted to increase the impact, reach and performance using data to refine strategy and approach and to increase communications efficacy.

Let’s dig into these three core components of effective communications a little more.

What's in it For Me?

In order to drive opinion and behavior change, communications must connect with the focus audience's values, interests, and needs.

Clear and concise **core messages** that reflect the needs, interests, and values of the broader audience

Through CTE learners gain real-world skills and experience that provide more options for college and career success and lead to financial security and independence.

Tailor messages to reflect the needs, interests, and values of the focus audience

Through CTE, gain real-world skills and experience for family-sustaining wage career success within your community.

Incorporate **learner voice** and collaborator feedback

In order to drive opinion and behavior change, communications must connect with the focus audience's values, interests, and needs. This is how we will clearly show the focus audience how CTE can align with their interests while meeting their needs, or in other words, what's in it for them. To accomplish this we must first craft clear and concise core messages that reflect the values and needs of the broader audience. For example, most learners and families across demographics want the learner to be successful in the workforce gaining economic independence. This core message may look something like "Through CTE learners gain real-world skills and experience that provide more options for college and career success and lead to financial security and independence."

If the focus audience, in this example Native American learners, have shared that they are looking to contribute to the family and community immediately after graduation without leaving their community, we may tailor the message to clearly and concisely connect with that value and need. The previous message may be transformed to "Through CTE, gain real-world skills and experience for family-sustaining wage career success within your community."

We want to incorporate learner feedback or voice into the tailoring of the messages to ensure that we are using the terminology and the aspects of CTE that most resonate with them. In Section 6, we will discuss how to develop, test, and tailor messages while

incorporating learners into the process.

Meet Them Where They Are

To meet the focus audience where they are, we must ensure that communications are accessible and use the messengers and channels that the audience trusts and prefers to engage with.

Tailor messages to consider language, terminology, cultural norms or bias

Engage with trusted messengers to bring communications to the focus audience

Use the communication channels your audience prefers

Revisit: Section 4 Getting to Know Your Audience Assessment

To meet the focus audience where they are, we must ensure that communications are accessible and use the messengers and channels that the audience trusts and prefers to engage with.

- We will do this by further tailoring the messages to accommodate the need for translation, use of terminology more familiar to the audience, or for any cultural norms or biases that may exist.
- Next, we will engage with the trusted messengers, or the people, places, and things that the focus audience trusts to provide information and to help inform their decisionmaking around education and career choices. We will also communicate using the formats and channels the audience prefers.

In Section 4 of this tool, Getting to Know Your Audience through the Audience Assessment, you identified trusted messengers and the preferred communication formats and channels of your focus audience.

Chances are, you are already sending out recruitment and program communications and it will be helpful to audit your current communications efforts to determine how well they align with the preferences of your focus audience.

Communications Audit

To meet the focus audience where they are, we must ensure that communications are accessible and use the messengers and channels that the audience trusts and prefers to engage with.

Communications Audit:

- Evaluate your current communications formats and channels
- Evaluate who is engaging with your current communications
- Compare your current communications efforts to what is preferred by the focus audience

Communications Audit Tool

- Involve communications team members
- Engage with organizational and local level partners

Performing a communications audit will help you to:

- Evaluate your current communications formats and channels
- Evaluate who is engaging with your current communications
- Compare your current communications efforts to what is preferred by the focus audience

Section 5 of the workbook has an easy-to-use communications audit tool that in partnership with communications team members, organizational partners, and local-level partners will help you evaluate the formats and channels you are currently using to communicate about CTE. The audit will also help you understand who is currently engaging with those communications, as well as opportunities for future engagement with the focus audience. Let's explore the communications audit tool.

Communications Audit Tool

SECTION 5 COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT TOOL

Communication Channel	Channel Status	Audience for Engagement/ Targeting (educators, administrators, intermediaries, learners, families, workforce/ industry, etc.)	Where Your Focus Population Engages/ Gets Their Information	Notes
Social Media Platforms	Are you currently using these channels to communicate about CTE?	Which audiences are engaging on these channels?	Does your focus audience (learners/families) engage/ get their information from these channels?	Use this space to provide any additional detail or comments about the channel or the need for additional information.
Facebook	-		-	
Instagram	-		-	
X (formerly Twitter)	-		-	
LinkedIn	-		-	
YouTube	-		-	
TikTok	-		-	
Pinterest	-		-	
Other social media (specify here)	-		-	
Other Digital Communications				
Videos	-		-	
Digital Publications and Media				
Weekly, monthly, or quarterly newsletter/biweekly	-		-	
Other email media	-		-	
Digital publications—state based	-		-	
Contributions to digital publications—school based (newsletter, program brochure/one-pager, blog, etc.)	-		-	
Contributions to digital publications—community, faith, or other organization based (newsletter, blog, etc.)	-		-	
Contributions to digital publications—other	-		-	
Website	-		-	
Other digital media (specify here)	-		-	

The Communications Audit Tool is broken down into sections for social media and other digital communications, print communications, in-person and virtual events, and other for any channels that may not fit into the provided categories. Included within the categories are channels that may be controlled by the state, institution, or district you work for as well as channels outside of your direct control (like community based) where you may be a contributor of content. Utilize the notes section to add additional detail, items for follow up, or next steps in evaluating current and potential communications channels. In addition, you will be able to easily compare your current efforts with the preferences of your audience using the information you have learned by directly engaging with your focus audience.

Adjust Your Approach

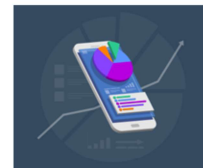
Consistent evaluation of the impact, reach, and performance of communications using data and learner feedback will allow adjustments for maximum efficacy.

Use **learner voice** and collaborator feedback to adjust messages, messengers, and channels

- Surveys, focus groups, learner council
- Continued direct engagement with the focus audience

Use **data** to inform adjustments in strategy and approach

- Digital analytics or metrics
- Participation in events
- Interest and enrollment
- Consolidated Annual Report (CAR) data



Now let's discuss the third and final core component for effective communications.

Consistently evaluating the impact, reach, and performance of your recruitment communications using data and learner feedback will allow you to adjust your messages and approach for maximum efficacy. There are two major vehicles for evaluating the efficacy of your recruitment communications.

First, ask learners and other collaborators to offer feedback on your messages, communication formats, and channels via surveys, focus groups, or a learner council, and through continued direct engagement with the focus audience. Continued engagement and incorporating learner feedback will allow you to best meet the changing needs of the focus audience.

Second, collecting and evaluating data to inform adjustments in your strategy and approach can greatly increase the efficacy of your recruitment communications. Before launching a communications campaign, determine which data you will collect and from which sources. These sources may include digital analytics or metrics, participation in events, interest and enrollment, or changes in consolidated annual report data. Some of these data sources will be available more quickly than others so it is important to use a combination of short and long-term data sources.

Next Steps

Work with your team and/or colleagues to:

- Complete the Communications Audit Tool.
- Strategize the next steps in aligning recruitment communication efforts with the preferences of the focus audience.

Section 6: Developing and Testing Messages

- Messaging research
- Developing and testing messages with learners, families, and other collaborators.

SECTION
5
MAXIMIZING
EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATIONS

Conduct the communications audit and continue direct engagement with learners

1 month

To take the next steps in making communications effective, complete the Communications Audit Tool in Section 5 to identify current communication efforts and compare them to the preferences of the focus audience. From there, you can begin to strategize the next steps for aligning your recruitment communications with the needs and preferences of learners and families, or other audiences in subsequent uses of this tool. The anticipated minimum time required to complete Section 5 is approximately 1 month though it may take you more or less time.

In the next section of this tool, we dig into some of the messaging research that Advance CTE, through the generous support of Siemens Foundation, has conducted with learners and families. We will also discuss how to develop and test messages that will connect with your focus audience by utilizing the information you have learned through getting to know them.

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 5 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.