

# EXPLAINER

## Connecting CTSOs to the National Career Clusters<sup>®</sup> Framework



Advance CTE, as the steward of the National Career Clusters Framework (the Framework), recognizes the need for a limitless career preparation ecosystem in which all learners, regardless of race, geography, learner level, or special population status, can access and succeed in programs of their choosing.

As the primary beneficiaries of the Framework, learners of all ages require a career preparation ecosystem that works for them, and industry requires learners equipped with the skills and competencies needed to succeed in ever-changing work environments. To meet these requirements, secondary and postsecondary policies and programs at the state and local levels must be flexible and responsive to the needs of learners, educators, advisors, administrators, and industry. This includes the incorporation of other leadership and skill development activities connected to Career Technical Education (CTE) programs of study, including the connection to **Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs)**.

## Overview

Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) are co-curricular organizations that strengthen CTE programs by providing employability and career development skills through applied learning opportunities, leadership development, and related instruction. Serving over 2 million CTE learners nationally combined, CTSOs are unique from other extracurricular organizations and clubs in that they directly align with CTE programs, allowing learners to participate in a wide variety of aligned activities including conferences and competitions that complement and reinforce content learned in the classroom.

This resource identifies aligned connections between CTSOs and the modernized National Career Clusters Framework, and highlights changes that national CTSOs are making to better align with the Framework.

CTSOs operate as national non-profit organizations, divided into state associations and local school and institution chapters. While each CTSO has guidelines for participation and focuses on slightly different elements, they are united by four common goals: leadership development, academic and career achievement, professional development, and community service.

These organizations are recognized in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) as viable uses of federal funds to strengthen learner engagement and participation, though not individually by name.



Other states use state-level funding or rely on a state CTSO chapter to fundraise through conference registration and dues to support the activities of a given CTSO. Each state develops their own list of state-recognized CTSOs that qualify for funding; some CTSOs represented in a given state may not be represented in this resource.

## CTSOs Participating in the National Coordinating Council for Career and Technical Student Organizations (NCC-CTSO)

[Business Professionals of America \(BPA\)](#)

[DECA](#)

[Family, Career and Community Leaders of America \(FCCLA\)](#)

[Future Business Leaders of America \(FBLA\)](#)

[HOSA-Future Health Professionals \(HOSA\)](#)

[National FFA Organization](#)

[National Professional Agricultural Student \(PAS\) Organization](#)

[SkillsUSA](#)

[Technology Student Association \(TSA\)](#)

## Interdisciplinary Nature

Each CTSO has specific requirements for the types of experiences that can be connected to that particular CTSO. Some CTSOs with a purposeful industry focus have more specific criteria for participation, allowing membership for only learners from certain pathways and programs of study; other CTSOs with a broader lens allow participants from a wider range of programs.



CTSOs bring together learners from a wide range of programs of study, allowing for cross-sectional peer-to-peer learning and fostering exploration of the full breadth of careers that are available in a given sector. CTSOs that bridge across multiple Career Clusters have the potential to provide connection among those Career Clusters, demonstrating the interconnectedness of the world of work and reflecting how many skills from one Career Cluster can be incorporated into the knowledge and skills gained from another.

Because of the focus on leadership, community service, and professional skill development, each CTSO helps build skills aligned with the [Career Ready Practices](#), which represent the skills needed to succeed in a modern workplace. Regardless of content area, aligned industry sector, or connected Career Cluster, CTSOs demonstrate the value of these skills for all career pathways.

## CTSO Connections across Career Clusters

The following chart provides a listing of the CTSOs as recognized by the NCC-CTSO and the Career Cluster(s) they self-identified as being aligned to their events, competitions, and membership in Spring 2025. The Clusters are organized by [Cluster Grouping](#). Local CTE programs interested in incorporating or engaging with a CTSO should connect with their state's CTSO chapter directly about membership and participation.

# CTSO Connections across the National Career Clusters Framework

Organized by Cluster Grouping

	BPA	DECA	FCCLA	FBLA	HOSA	Nat'l FFA	Nat'l PAS	Skills USA	TSA
Advanced Manufacturing					✓	✓		✓	✓
Construction						✓		✓	✓
Supply Chain & Transportation						✓		✓	✓
Education			✓		✓			✓	✓
Healthcare & Human Services	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓
Public Service & Safety			✓		✓			✓	
Digital Technology	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
Management & Entrepreneurship	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Marketing & Sales	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Arts, Entertainment, & Design	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Hospitality, Events, & Tourism	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Agriculture					✓	✓	✓	✓	
Energy & Natural Resources						✓	✓	✓	✓
Financial Services	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	

# CTSO Alignment to the Career Clusters Framework

The following provides additional information about how certain CTSOs are connecting with the National Career Clusters Framework.



**Business Professionals of America (BPA)**'s competitive events are strongly linked to the identified Career Clusters. BPA has aligned over 100 competitions across all membership divisions to the individual areas by cross-walking competition competencies to the modernized Career Cluster Framework and multiple strands of industry recognized standards.

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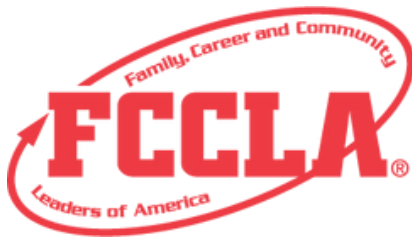
**DECA** prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management. DECA's Comprehensive Learning Program, including competitive events, is strongly linked to the four Career Clusters aligned to DECA's mission.

DECA will explore opportunities to leverage the Cross-Cutting Career Clusters of Management & Entrepreneurship and Marketing & Sales, as well as integration of the new Career Ready Practices.

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**Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)** has proactively aligned its programs, resources, and initiatives to reflect the updated Career Clusters Framework, ensuring strong connections to the six Family and Consumer Sciences-related Career Clusters. The FCCLA website and materials have been strategically updated to clearly communicate these connections, emphasizing how FCCLA prepares students for successful careers.

FCCLA's Competitive Events program has undergone a detailed alignment process, integrating the National Career Clusters Framework into competitive events guides, rubrics, and promotional materials. Comprehensive crosswalk resources highlighting how specific FCCLA competitive events align to each of the six targeted Career Clusters are now accessible online. Users can conveniently explore competitive events filtered by Career Cluster on the FCCLA Competitive Events page. Posters, program guides, and educational resources have been updated to showcase clear visual representations of these connections. Additionally, FCCLA will be implementing further enhancements throughout a structured rollout plan extending through Summer 2026, including ongoing updates to educator guides, student resources, and event materials.

Detailed information, crosswalk guides, and alignment tools are available on FCCLA's dedicated Career Clusters alignment page:

[www.fcclainc.org/career-clusters](http://www.fcclainc.org/career-clusters). Competitive events materials reflecting these alignments are available at: [www.fcclainc.org/competitive-events](http://www.fcclainc.org/competitive-events).

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**Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA)** has aligned its Competitive Events program closely with the Career Cluster Framework. In November 2024, the National FBLA Competitive Events Committee (CEC) used the updated Framework to guide a gap analysis. As part of this process, FBLA distributed a survey to State Leaders to identify the business-related courses and standards being taught across states. The CEC then used both the survey data and the Career Clusters Framework to shape the future direction of the Competitive Events program.

With the launch of FBLA's new website in December, Career Clusters became a filterable option on the competitive events pages. A visual crosswalk was also introduced to illustrate how FBLA events align with each Career Cluster.

The Career Cluster crosswalk is currently accessible on the website, within each division's website: [Middle School](#), [High School](#), [Collegiate](#). Beginning with the 2025–2026 school year, each event's guidelines will highlight its alignment with relevant Career Clusters. These updated guidelines will be published online by late-August 2025, with a communication plan targeting local advisers rolling out in Fall 2025.

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**HOSA - Future Health Professionals (HOSA)** is primarily focused on health professions and hosts 104 competitive events aligned with healthcare programs. All programs align with the Healthcare and Human Services Career Cluster; any changes to language and the incorporation of other Career Cluster-aligned instruction will be finalized in the first quarter of 2026.

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The **National FFA Organization (FFA)**'s Federal Charter clearly states that the FFA's scope is limited to state-approved, school-based agricultural education programs. In addition to the Agriculture Cluster course offerings, historically Conservation & Land Management and Ecological Research & Development course sequences now found in the Energy & Natural Resources Cluster have been delivered by many school-based agricultural education programs and may qualify for participation in National FFA activities. A growing number of agricultural education programs across the nation have also been incorporating Clean & Alternative Energy courses.

National FFA also believes in the interdisciplinary nature of the new Cluster Framework; agricultural education students and FFA members will also be developing skills in Construction and Advanced Manufacturing through Ag Tech course sequences.



The National Council for Agricultural Education and the National FFA Organization are actively working with the Center for Energy Workforce Development to provide resources for teachers and state leaders in expanding the incorporation of energy courses into approved agricultural education sequences.

Resources to assist state leaders and teachers are being released beginning March of 2025. They will include standards and instructional resources developed in conjunction with the Center for Energy Workforce Development. FFA will work to expand competitive events and other relevant CTSO experiences as the membership grows in this space.

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**National Professional Agricultural Student (PAS) Organization** develops two and four-year college level professional agriculture students for the workplace through participation in employment experience programs, skill-set development, network opportunities, and organizational activities. The Cultivating Resources Cluster Grouping in the updated Framework is currently under evaluation by National PAS. The collegiate-level Career Program Area (CPA) contests are being actively reviewed for alignment with Sub-Clusters within the Agriculture and Energy & Natural Resources Career Clusters.

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**SkillsUSA** offers competitions and training programs that span a broad range of Career Clusters and Sub-Clusters. In alignment with the modernized Framework, SkillsUSA is undertaking a series of strategic updates to ensure greater relevance and impact across its programming. These updates include:

- reorganizing all SkillsUSA training programs used for membership development so that they align with the Career Clusters;
- reorganizing all SkillsUSA Championships competitions for clearer alignment with the Career Clusters; and
- developing strategic workforce development initiatives tailored to each Career Cluster.

For Championships events, the organization of competitions in each Career Cluster will be presented to State Directors in August 2025 at the State Directors Association Professional Development and Training Conference and will be placed on the website for chapter advisors to review. This breakdown will also be presented to technical committee chairs (business and industry partners) at the beginning of the academic year so they can gain a better understanding of the alignment between SkillsUSA and the Career Clusters and what that means for students, the competitions, and the workforce.

SkillsUSA is also planning the expansion of their Work-Based Learning Program, launching new resources, training, and standards to provide structured career experiences and strengthening student-employer connections through job placement initiatives and talent pipeline connectivity. They are also planning multiple events, including a new



Industry Insider Event and a week-long virtual event featuring daily deep dives into specific Career Clusters where industry professionals will provide career insights, mentorship, and networking opportunities for SkillsUSA members. Finally, they are prioritizing exposure, exploration, engagement, and experiences within CTE and SkillsUSA, aligned with the modernized Framework.

Many of these changes should be identified and updated before or during the 2025-2026 academic year.

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The **Technology Student Association (TSA)**'s competitive events program of over 70 STEM-based competitions has strong connections with The National Career Clusters Framework. Official rules and regulations for these competitions are updated every two years to accommodate changes in academic standards and to include new competitive events. These guides include a crosswalk illustrating the alignment of the Framework to each competition. Additionally, the guides include leadership content connected to career pathways. Annual themes also provide an avenue for alignment to a wide range of Career Clusters and Sub-Clusters.

The TSA competitive event guides are used by teachers as a foundation for implementing technology and engineering education in CTE programs. The related alignment with the National Career Clusters Framework supports teachers as they make the critical link between secondary education and future careers.

Opportunities for student participation in TSA competitive events occur at the local, state, and national level – giving all student members the chance to benefit from the hands-on application of knowledge, creativity, and innovation in solving real-world problems.

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Visit the **Your Place in the Framework webpage** for more details on how key CTE actors connect to and use the Framework, as well as resources to support implementation.