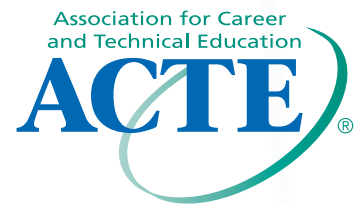




# Addressing the Workforce Shortage Through Strong Partnerships

– November 2019 –



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## Executive Summary

Career and technical education (CTE) professionals and administrators want to work with businesses and industries in their community, but building and maintaining partnerships has proved a challenge for many.

This paper summarizes existing research and presents new data about the challenges to successful CTE partnerships. This latest research, conducted in the fall of 2019, surveyed CTE administrators to discover the value of these business/industry partnerships and what tools are needed for successful partnerships.

This new research validates the understanding that the CTE community is seeking partnerships with businesses and industries to prepare learners for fulfilling careers. To accomplish this, CTE administrators need stronger relationships and better engagement.

## Introduction

As the nation's system of more than 200,000 CTE professionals strive to educate and inform learners to be adequately prepared for 21st-century careers, the leaders of this community overwhelmingly place a high value on their partnerships with business and industry. While this is generally acknowledged within the CTE community, research that captures the value that CTE administrators place on business engagement is sparse.

In a recent survey of more than 900 CTE leaders, these CTE administrators report industry relationships as a top priority. At the same time, they share the need for meaningful engagement with, and support from, the businesses and industry groups with whom they are striving to build a prepared workforce.

This survey was conducted by the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) in the fall of 2019 to determine the importance placed on business/industry partnerships and to identify specific needs to be able to enhance the effectiveness of these partnerships.

Chief among the findings of the survey was that a combined 98 percent of CTE administrators say that business/industry partnerships are important or extremely important. While not surprising, given CTE's mission to prepare learners for further education and fulfilling careers, it serves as an important validation of the need to work closely with and expresses a commitment to the business community that CTE programs are willing and eager for their collaboration.

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## Existing Research

As mentioned, few studies specifically explore the perspective of career and technical educators on their partnership with business and industry. Four recent reports and datasets address these issues and provide a baseline validation of the findings of the survey:

- According to Advance CTE's [\*The State of Career Technical Education: Employer Engagement in CTE\*](#), 43 of 47 State CTE Directors surveyed reported that they were collaborating with state economic or workforce development agencies. Although business engagement occurs in 95 percent of respondents' districts, only 11 percent of state leaders would describe the engagement as deep. However, 80 percent of state directors report that employer engagement has increased in intensity, and most states believe that this increase will continue.
- In a 2018-19 dataset obtained through questionnaires fielded by myOptions™, in partnership with ACTE, secondary CTE educators were asked how they work with business and industry leaders in their CTE programs. The top three answers were: visiting classrooms in person or virtually to speak with students (59.5%), providing job-shadowing experiences for students (50.6%) and providing internships or apprenticeships to students (45.5%).
- According to ACTE and Advance CTE's [\*State Policies Impacting CTE: 2018 Year in Review\*](#), 26 out of 50 states passed legislation or enacted policies in 2018 that addressed industry engagement to drive student learning through work-based learning or other means. Industry partnerships were the second most common CTE state policy topic in 2018.

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- According to Gallup polling, as reported in [\*What America Needs to Know About Higher Education Redesign\*](#), only 1 in 10 (or approximately 11 percent) of business leaders strongly agree that college graduates have the skills and competencies that meet their workplace needs.

Though none of these publications or datasets directly address program and school administrators' priorities, they do show that leaders and educators recognize the importance of industry partnerships and their role at the forefront of many states' and business leaders' priorities.

## Survey Participant Pool

ACTE's membership includes a significant representation of the nation's CTE administrator community, with 3,800 professionals in ACTE's Administration Division. These members generally represent positions that are responsible for the leadership and oversight of local CTE programs. The Division includes superintendents, principals, directors and others in leadership positions from 44 states and the District of Columbia.

The survey was developed in SurveyMonkey. A link was emailed to all the members of the Administration Division requesting they complete the survey. Of the total surveyed, 918 responded, for a completion rate of just over 24 percent. This online survey was open from September 24-October 4, 2019.

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## Survey Questions

The survey consisted of five multiple-choice questions. The questions were intended to elicit feedback from CTE administrators on how best to partner with outside businesses and industries. Three questions focused on ‘how’ the relationship between the CTE community and business/industry partnership could and should be mutually beneficial, and two additional questions focused on ‘what’ resources are needed to advance forward.

### HOW IMPORTANT?

The first question asked about the importance of having partnerships between the CTE community and business/industry.

Question 1: As a CTE administrator, how would you rank the importance of business/industry partnerships in the programs you lead?

### HOW CONFIDENT?

The second question asked about how confident CTE administrators felt in their ability to develop and maintain business/industry partnerships. While not specifically asking how long the CTE administrator has been working with business/industry partners, this question gives us a glimpse into the level of experience of each CTE administrator.

Question 2: How would you categorize your ability to develop and maintain effective business/industry partnerships?

### HOW USEFUL?

The third question asked about how useful additional resources would be to develop and maintain business/industry partnerships.

Question 3: How would you rate having additional resources and/or tools to help build strong, effective business/industry partnerships?



## WHAT ROADBLOCKS?

The fourth question aimed to identify the specific barriers that keep CTE administrators from being able to develop and maintain business/industry partnerships.

Question 4: What barriers do you face in developing more, and more effective, business/industry partnerships (choose all that apply)?

## WHAT RESOURCES?

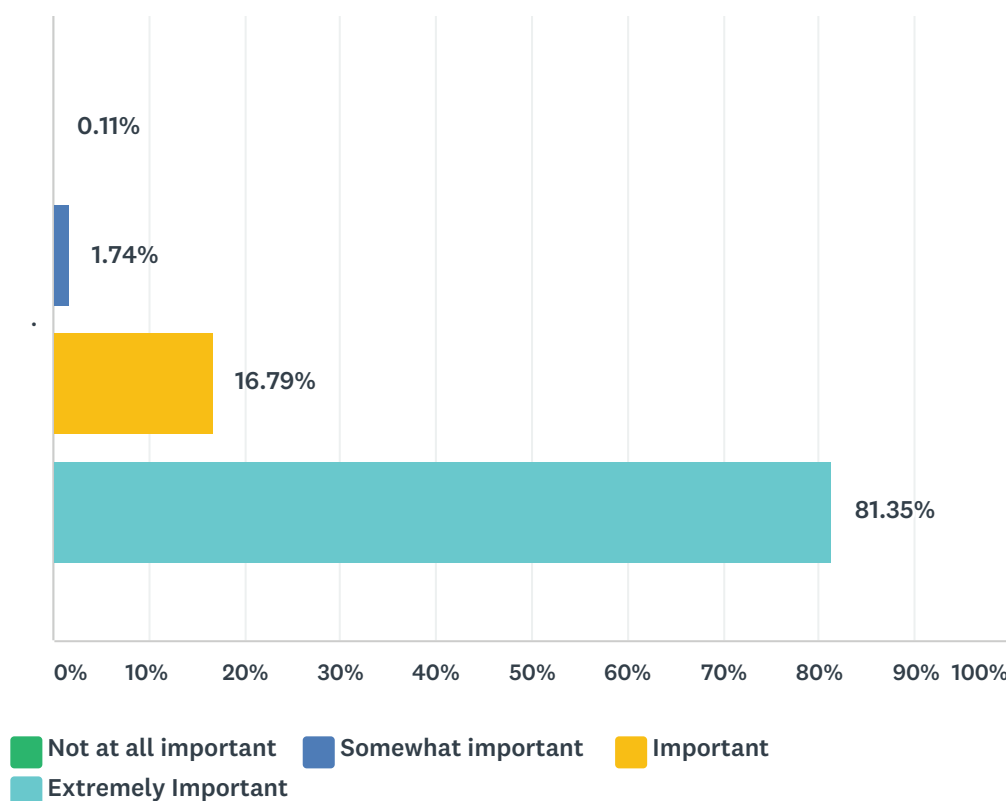
The fifth and final question asked for suggestions of other resources which would be helpful to CTE administrators to develop and maintain successful business/industry partnerships.

Question 5: What resources or tools would be helpful in developing more, and more effective, business/industry partnerships (choose all that apply)?



## Survey Findings

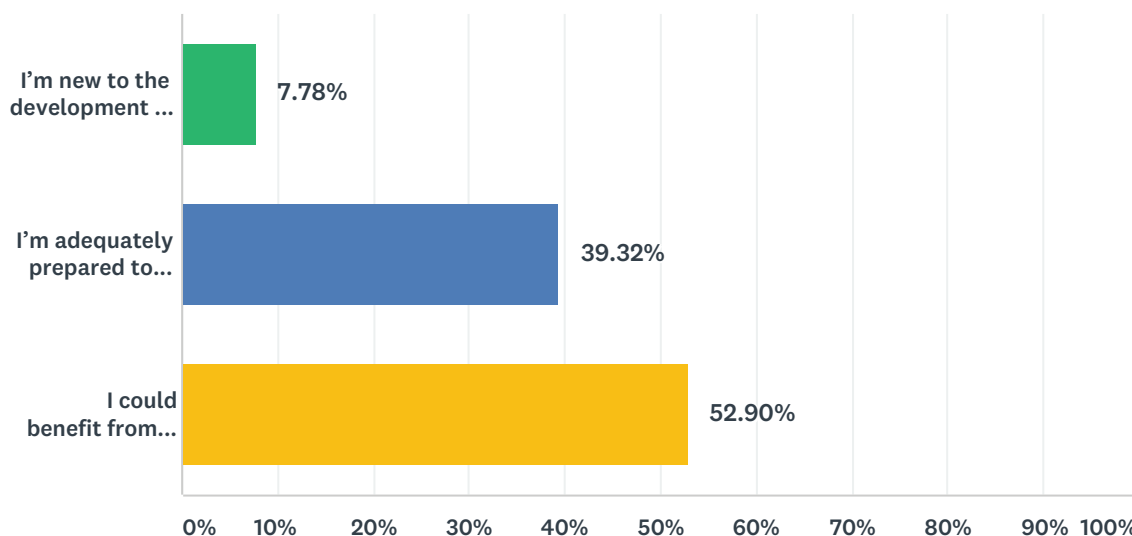
Question 1: As a CTE administrator, how would you rank the importance of business/industry partnerships in the programs you lead?



Of the 917 respondents, over 98 percent reported the relationship as ‘important’ or ‘extremely important.’ Just under 2 percent responded ‘not at all important’ or ‘somewhat important.’ This extreme dichotomy suggests that CTE administrators put a significant emphasis on positive relationships with business and industry partners in order to successfully prepare learners for careers.

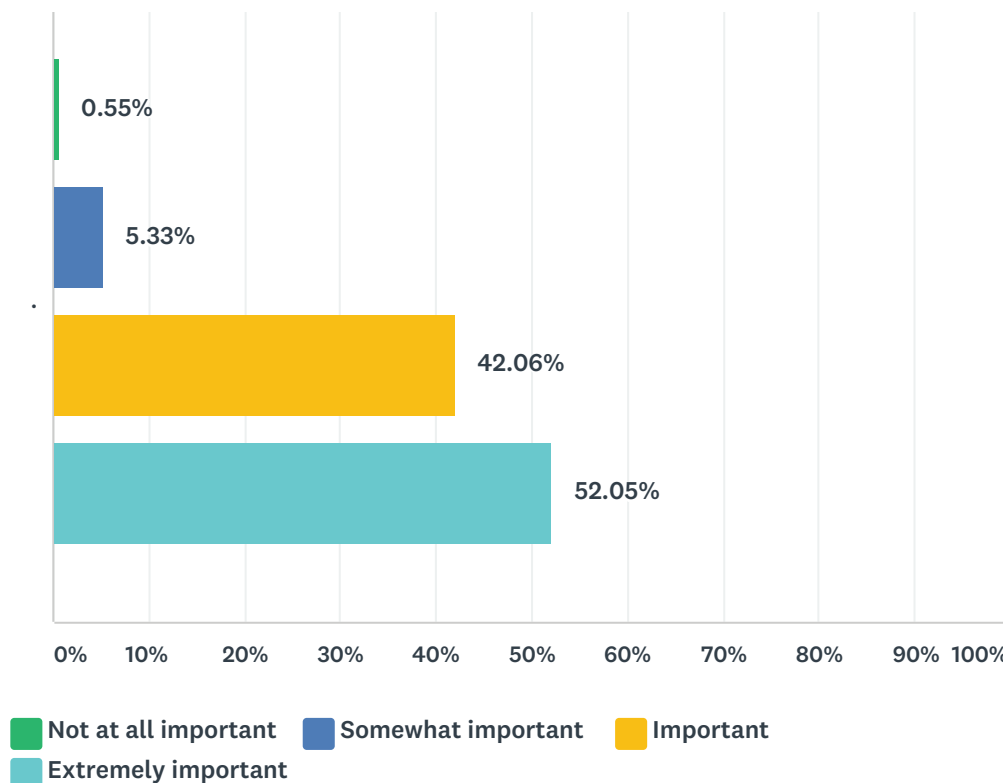


## Question 2: How would you categorize your ability to develop and maintain effective business/industry partnerships?



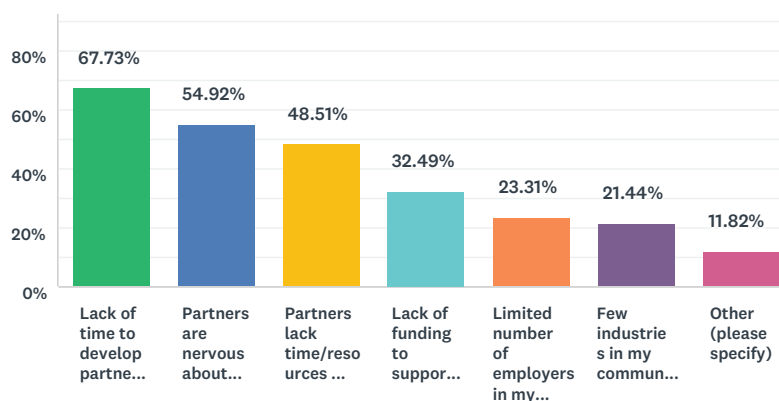
Of 913 respondents, results showed that the largest number of respondents (52.90%) could benefit from assistance to better understand how to structure, develop and grow effective partnerships. An additional 8 percent of respondents said that they are new to the development of business/industry and education partnerships, and thus could also benefit from assistance. This is a combined 61 percent that could benefit from resources to build partnerships, such as those offered by ACTE. The remaining 39 percent responded that they are adequately prepared to manage business/industry partnerships.

Question 3: How would you rate having additional resources and/or tools to help build strong, effective business/industry partnerships?



Of 901 respondents, again, we see a large proportion rating additional resources as ‘extremely important’ (52.05%) and ‘important’ (42.06%), with few rating the additional resources as only ‘somewhat important’ (5.33%) or ‘not important at all’ (0.55%). One of the most significant findings of this study is that a resounding 94 percent of CTE administrators value having access to additional partnership-building resources.

## Question 4: What barriers do you face in developing more, and more effective, business/industry partnerships (choose all that apply)?



| ANSWER CHOICES   | RESPONSES |     |
|--|-----------|-----|
| Lack of time to develop partnerships                                   | 67.73%    | 613 |
| Partners are nervous about safety/liability for work-based learning    | 54.92%    | 497 |
| Partners lack time/resources to engage                                 | 48.51%    | 439 |
| Lack of funding to support partnerships                                | 32.49%    | 294 |
| Limited number of employers in my community                            | 23.31%    | 211 |
| Few industries in my community/lack of breadth across industry sectors | 21.44%    | 194 |
| Other (please specify)   | 11.82%    | 107 |

Of the 905 respondents, the issue identified by the highest number of CTE administrators is a lack of time. About 68 percent of CTE administrators listed ‘lack of time to develop partnerships’ as a main concern. An additional 49 percent noted that a lack of time or resources on their business/industry partners’ behalf was a challenge to partnerships.

The second issue is that of safety and liability in engaging students in work-based learning. This was the second highest concern, with 55 percent of CTE administrators noting this challenge. Some of the write-in responses elaborated on this particular point. Many CTE administrators have found the age restrictions to be cumbersome. Examples include comments such as these:

- “Under-18 employment of students in industry is a challenge.”
- “Partners seem to only want older students (18+).”

- “Industry partners are losing potential employees because they refuse to employ secondary-education students under 18.”
- “Legal issues and concerns with minors (insurance, coverage, liability, etc.)”

A third issue is a lack of available partners in their geographic region. Nearly a quarter, or 23 percent of CTE administrators, cited a limited number of employers in their community who were willing to partner. Another 21 percent noted that there are few industries in their community and/or there is a lack of breadth across the industry sectors. The write-in responses elaborated on this point further:

- “Competition with other school systems.”
- “In the rural communities I serve, there are not enough employer partners.”
- “Multiple schools in the area competing for resources/time/partnerships from the same industries.”

Lack of funding to support partnerships was the fourth-highest concern, with 32.5 percent of CTE administrators citing this as an issue. Some of the write-in comments also described funding concerns:

- “My institutional leadership wants us to ask for funding from our partners. This does not lead to trusting and fully engaged partnerships.”
- “Funding is geared towards full-time CTE programs rather than short-term, directed, or customized training.”
- “Business/industry is afraid that we want money when all we want is their input.”

This multiple-choice question allowed for write-in responses, many of which are cited above. One additional theme that surfaced in the write-in responses related to staffing, either funding to hire a school/district/institution staff person or staffing turnover at the partner businesses. We saw comments such as these:

- “Lack of school district staff.”
- “Staff to cultivate relationships”
- “Consistency of staff at the business (if someone leaves you often have to start all over).”
- “Change in people at business makes partnerships difficult to maintain.”
- “Many are low on employees, so therefore do not have manpower to give up for engagement.”

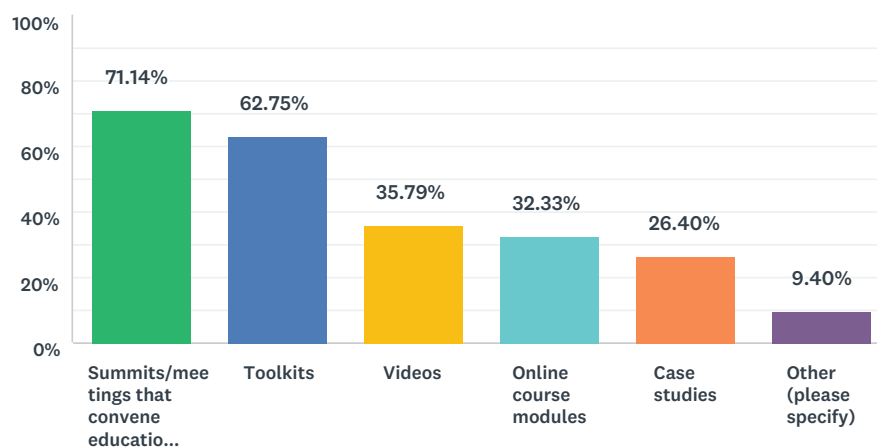
Another theme addressed the need for outreach and education of potential business and industry partners about the benefits of CTE:

- “Lack of understanding by industry about how they can help and make a difference. Lack of understanding about what we are already doing.”
- “We have many smaller businesses and industries that don’t see the need to work with us; they have been getting by without a partnership for several years and don’t see the need.”
- “Business partners lack knowledge of what CTE has become and how it can benefit them. Which leads to a lack of willingness to participate.”
- “I find that businesses want to outsource their on-the-job training. They aren’t actually interested in a partnership.”

On a positive note, many of the write-in responses also reported that they have overcome barriers to create successful partnerships. Comments included:

- “I oversee a very strong Work-Based Learning program with over 140 industry partners.”
- “We have hired a business partnership coordinator who makes a lot of these connections that we, as administrators, were not able to make. It has made a world of difference.”
- “We have over 200 industry partners currently due to the relationship building by my instructors.”
- “We currently have over 130 business partners who are very active in our school.”

### Question 5: What resources or tools would be helpful in developing more, and more effective, business/industry partnerships (choose all that apply)?



| ANSWER CHOICES  | RESPONSES |     |
|---|-----------|-----|
| Summits/meetings that convene education and business/industry leaders | 71.14%    | 636 |
| Toolkits  | 62.75%    | 561 |
| Videos  | 35.79%    | 320 |
| Online course modules   | 32.33%    | 289 |
| Case studies  | 26.40%    | 236 |
| Other (please specify)  | 9.40%     | 84  |

As we saw in the previous question, the challenges to successful partnerships between the CTE community and business/industry partnerships are varied, and so the tools to address the problems are also diverse.

Of 894 respondents, the resource selected by most CTE administrators (71.14%) was summits/meetings that convene education and business/industry leaders. Live events prove to be highly valued.

The other four options in this multiple-choice question were all asynchronous formats of communication and learning: toolkits (selected by 62.75% of respondents), videos (35.79%), online course modules (32.33%) and case studies (26.40%).

The majority of the write-in responses elaborated on the multiple-choice options:

- Toolkits
  - “Learning kits for all the different ways to introduce Work-Based Learning to students starting at 6th grade.”
- Case studies
  - “Examples of successful partnerships and discussion of how they were developed.”
- Video/audio
  - “Videos that could be customized to your geographic area.”
  - “Podcasts (not just videos).”

Additional requests for tools and resources fell roughly into the following four buckets:

- Networking
  - “Contact information on business industry leaders.”
  - “Industry and partners coming into the classroom with teachers.”
  - “Affordable and user-friendly B2B CRM to track and follow-up with industry partners.”
- Outreach and education for potential businesses and industry partners
  - “Information that could be provided to businesses about the value of CTE and Work-Based Learning.”
  - “More education for business sector on the limitations and barriers that exist in the government regulations in public education and youth labor. This is a HUGE challenge to translate to the public sector.”
  - “What could help is a resource that would help us show businesses the return on their investment of working with CTE and our students.”
- Work-based learning
  - “Perhaps a toolkit for businesses dispelling Work-Based Learning myths of hiring students under 18.”
  - “State-specific information about safety and liability.”
  - “Indemnity examples to use to provide industry partners.”
  - “Incorporating Work-Based Learning into University Gen Ed programs so teachers learn about the relevance.”
- Funding and staffing
  - “Funds to purchase equipment used in the industry.”
  - “Money to hire someone to help in the development of these resources.”
  - “It’s another job and it takes an incredible amount of time.”



## Next Steps

Survey results strongly demonstrate CTE administrators' interest in business-education partnerships and their need for related supports and resources. ACTE's efforts to respond to this need are evidenced in the creation of the Coalition for Workforce Development Through CTE. Founded with the participation of more than 30 diverse trade associations in the fall of 2018, the Coalition has identified three projects to strengthen the impact of these relationships. These projects—to focus on providing technical assistance to CTE professionals to build/enhance their business partnerships; to produce resources for the Coalition to share with their member companies in forging education partnerships; and to craft and deliver messaging that expands participation in high-quality CTE programs—are already in development and will align with tools identified as needed by CTE administrators.

The Coalition is scheduled to convene a summit of its participants to continue this work and expand its potential to address the skills gap these industries face. This summit will be one resource available to CTE administrators who value the synchronous gathering of the CTE community and business/industry partners. Through the Coalition's work, additional impactful tools and resources will be identified and promoted to the CTE community.

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is the nation's largest not-for-profit association committed to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers. ACTE represents the community of CTE professionals, including educators, administrators, researchers, guidance and career development professionals, and others at all levels of education. ACTE is committed to excellence in providing advocacy, public awareness and access to resources, professional development and leadership opportunities. Learn more by visiting <http://www.acteonline.org>