

CAREER & TECHNICAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS



Career and technical student organizations (CTSOs) are an integral part of CTE instruction and a key element of high-quality CTE programs. These [intracurricular organizations](#) include more than 2 million students combined and have demonstrated impacts on learner educational aspirations, academic motivation and engagement, career self-efficacy, employability skills and more. Continuing to engage learners in CTSOs will be critical for their future career readiness, and the overall success of CTE programs.

Key Issues to Address
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging students in CTSO decision-making • Hosting meetings and elections with social distancing or through virtual platforms • Redesigning competitions, leadership development, fundraisers and community projects for social distancing or virtual platforms • Engaging business and community partners • Scheduling CTSO activities to maximize participation of learners on campus and at home

Many traditional CTSO activities, such as conferences, community service projects, competitive events and fundraisers, present added challenges in a COVID-19-impacted school year. The national CTSO organizations are working to address these challenges, with the majority planning to offer meetings and leadership training through multiple modes of engagement to support state organizations and local chapters and make it as easy as possible on advisers, whether those states and local chapters are operating in in-person, remote or blended learning environments. Local leaders can look to their national and state organizations for additional direction and supports as the year unfolds.

Regardless of the instructional model, it will be important to give students a voice in decisions made about how to move CTSOs forward. Student officers should be consulted regularly and given opportunities to make decisions, where appropriate, about the activities and priorities of their organizations, and may also be strong candidates to serve as leaders within the entire student body as institutions implement a diverse array of changes and seek student input and buy-in.

Across all educational scenarios, careful thought on the local and state levels should also be given to providing leadership training and competitive events to students as the year progresses. In many places, large conferences are likely to be prohibited for some time to come. The majority of national CTSO organizations are planning to offer remote meetings this summer and fall, and many states will likely follow suit. National CTSOs are also pushing up their launch of fall activities by several weeks to match the early-start calendars that many states and districts are implementing.

Recruiting members and leaders in the current environment may be challenging, especially without appealing draws like the opportunity to travel or interact with student leaders from across the country. It will be important to continue to make member recruitment and chapter affiliation a priority to ensure students still have access to the important skill-building opportunities that CTSOs provide, including adapting fun and social activities to socially distanced or remote environments.

Another important aspect of quality CTSOs is the opportunity for students to interact with business and community professionals. Given the current economic climate, it may be difficult for employers to dedicate as much time to CTSO activities as they might normally, regardless of policies on in-person or virtual learning, but advisers can use strategies described in the [Business and Community Partnerships](#) section to help create these opportunities.



In-person Considerations

Even if students have returned to campus, social distancing and safety requirements could complicate some CTSO activities, especially those that have typically taken place outside of class time. For example, students may not be allowed to gather before or after school for meetings in large groups. In this case, activities could be conducted during already scheduled class times, although that could reduce opportunities for students who are not currently enrolled in a CTE course to participate. Other ideas include utilizing larger spaces where students can spread out, such as gyms or cafeterias; hosting virtual meetings; or hosting smaller committee meetings rather than entire chapter meetings. Elections for leadership positions may also need to be held virtually or over a longer period of time to reduce contact between students.

Competitive events may be possible with minor modifications if learners return to campus, as most involve students working individually or in small teams. Projects should be evaluated for safety in light of the current local guidelines if they involve external activities, such as work in the community. Industry partners may still be able to mentor projects and serve as event judges in person, with appropriate social distancing; if public visitors are restricted on campus, business partners could connect remotely to meetings and competitive events hosted on campus.

Access and Equity Implications

When you are considering how to facilitate CTSO participation, remember that some learners may have scheduling challenges owing to other courses they need to take or family obligations, as well as connectivity issues that could impact their participation in virtual activities. In addition, remember that medically vulnerable and quarantined learners may be feeling isolated and lonely away from their CTSO peers; frequent check-ins from peers and the CTSO adviser may help alleviate these feelings and keep them engaged.

While most national CTSOs will not be hosting any in-person events this fall, as the school year progresses, national, state and local CTSO organizations will have to make decisions about the safety of travel and large gatherings in spring 2021, in accordance with local and state travel restrictions. Be prepared for modifications to traditional competition formats as the year unfolds. Institutions may also close periodically or for an

extended time if there is another surge of cases, so making sure students have access to materials at home to safely complete their projects will be important.

Similarly, many local CTSO chapters pride themselves on extensive community involvement. Care should be taken to follow local and state guidelines for continuation of such events to ensure student safety. Student leaders should be encouraged to rethink activities in light of emerging community needs and design projects where social distancing and other safety measures can be prioritized. For example, instead of picking up items for a food drive, students might place drop-off containers in easy-to-access locations, such as parking lots, where donations could be collected without direct contact among individuals. These same guidelines would apply to fundraisers as well.

Remote Considerations

Not being together on campus will make the activities that are central to CTSOs even more challenging in many ways, but even more important as educators seek to build and maintain a sense of community among students. Meetings can be held through approved synchronous platforms, and the same practices described in the [Engaging Instruction](#) and [Business and Community Partnerships](#) sections can be used to make chapter or committee meetings productive and engaging. It will also be important to provide learners asynchronous ways to engage, such as discussion boards or messaging platforms, due to the variety of challenges many students still face with online access.

Some competitive events may not be possible in a fully virtual environment, but with some creativity, many others will be. Over the course of the spring, CTSOs in a number of states began to experiment with online competitions, and this is likely to be an option again this school year in places where in-person gatherings are not possible. The national CTSOs are exploring virtual competitions and leadership development, in addition to in-person and hybrid activities, although some event criteria or processes may need to be modified for the virtual setting. Employer mentors and event judges can continue to engage with learners through these virtual conferences; communication about the virtual conference format should be clear and consistent to help these partners, learners and guardians make the switch from in-person to remote events. Learn more about virtual CTSO events in the [Resources, Tools and Examples](#) section.



Student engagement with the community can continue with virtual or low-contact activities, depending on local guidelines. For example, students could record read-alouds to be posted on social media for preschool children, virtually tutor elementary students, produce public service announcements, participate in appropriately socially distanced outdoor cleanups, conduct online or drop-off supply drives or fundraisers for important community needs, or donate their emerging skills to those in need, virtually or with minimal personal contact. There will likely be many opportunities for creative new projects.



Blended Considerations

In blended scenarios, advisers will need to keep in mind all of the in-person and remote considerations mentioned above. In addition, there may be added issues to think through since students may not be all

together at once, depending on the model being used, or could be on campus for only part of the fall. Options include using virtual platforms to host meetings and activities, or hosting separate chapter meetings for different groups of students. Advisers will need to think carefully about how to maintain activities like fundraisers and service projects if not all students are on campus each day. Dividing responsibilities and careful planning will be critical to the success of projects in this model.

Resources, Tools and Examples

- [Iowa HOSA](#) hosted a virtual conference in March with only a few days' notice. The advisers discuss how they hosted it and lessons learned on this webinar recording.
- [SC HOSA](#) hosted a virtual conference this spring. The conference website includes recordings and more information that other CTE advisers can use as inspiration.
- [FCCLA](#) will host a virtual national conference this summer. The conference website includes a student workbook, justification letter and other tools that can serve as examples.
- DECA has been hosting a [virtual business challenge](#) for several years, and this spring held an [online executive mentor roundtable](#).
- ACTE's [Virtual Conference Planning Guide](#) includes detailed tips and procedures for hosting virtual conferences.
- This spring CTSOs moved planned fundraisers online, like the [Monticello High School FFA Plant Sale](#), which enabled customers to order plants online and sign up for pick-up time slots.

This is an excerpt from [High-quality CTE: Planning for a COVID-19-impacted School Year](#). Access the complete guide for additional content about providing high-quality CTE programs in a COVID-19-impacted school year. **Last Update:** June 22, 2020

This document is not legal advice, nor is it an exhaustive list of every consideration or action that CTE educators may need to take for the 2020–21 school year. Readers should defer to federal, state, local and/or institution requirements and guidance. The instructional models, ideas, resources, tools and examples shared do not constitute endorsements of any products, services or strategies, as different products, services and strategies will work in different contexts. As knowledge is gained, this guide may be updated to incorporate new ideas and resources and emerging issues.



Career & Technical Student Organizations: Key Questions to Consider

Cross-cutting Questions

- How can student leaders have a voice in decision-making about CTSOs in a COVID-19-impacted school year?
- How can you prepare students to move forward with projects given uncertainties like possible closures and pending decisions about competitive event formats?
- How will you communicate any changes in activities to students, families and partners, as appropriate?
- How can you continue to engage business and community partners?

In-person Questions

- How will you schedule chapter meetings for social distancing and to maximize participation? Even if students return to campus, can you meet virtually?
- How can you modify processes for electing officers or appointing committees for social distancing? Even if students return to campus, can you use remote tools for elections?
- How can you help learners modify projects to comply with social distancing?
- Are there travel restrictions in place that affect student participation in events?
- How can students participate in leadership training with social distancing, or virtually if in-person events are cancelled?
- How can you adapt fundraisers and service projects for social distancing? Are there new needs in your community your students could help meet?
- If you have members who remain at home because of illness, possible exposure or underlying medical conditions, how will you keep them involved?

Remote Questions

- Is there an approved synchronous platform that you can use for meetings? How will you schedule virtual meetings to maximize participation?
- If your state will host competitive events virtually, which events will be available to students and how can you help them prepare?
- Which virtual leadership trainings can students can participate in?
- How can your current service projects or fundraisers be adapted to the virtual space? What new opportunities might be available?

Blended Questions

- How will you offer chapter meetings if some students are on campus while others are working remotely?
- If you have longer-term projects or fundraisers, how will you manage those without students on campus every day? Are there project roles that need to be reassigned or redistributed?