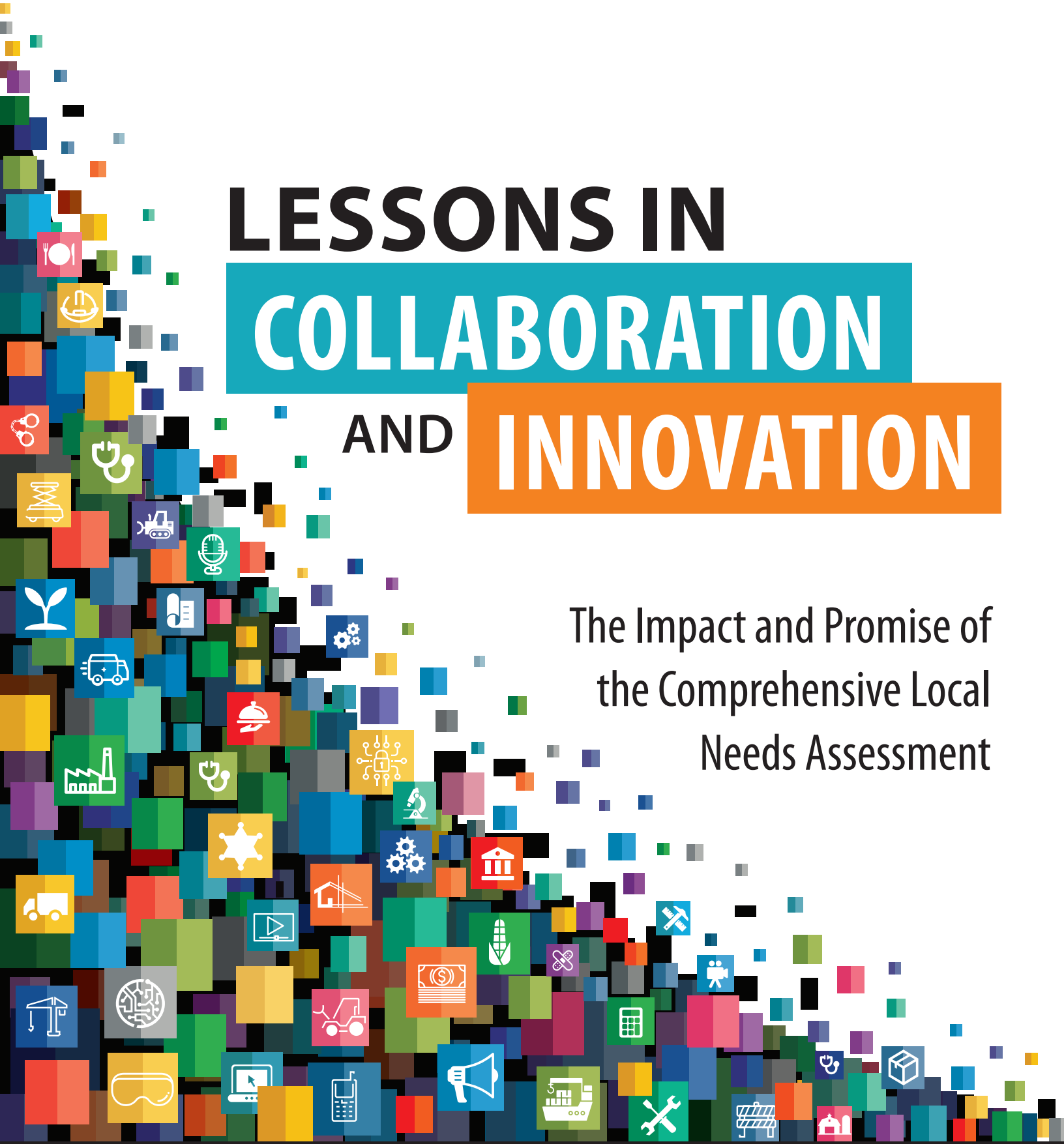
LESSONS IN COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION

The Impact and Promise of the Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment



Association for Career and Technical Education
ACTE

ADVANCE CTE
State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

CONTENTS

Introduction

The Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) was one of the most significant changes introduced in the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V). As states have worked to implement Perkins V over the past three years, they have paid significant time and attention to the requirement that each eligible recipient conduct a local needs assessment prior to submitting their local application and update that needs assessment at least every two years.

As the field approached the two-year mark since the initial CLNAs were conducted, Advance CTE and the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) partnered to interview an array of state and local Career Technical Education (CTE) leaders. The goal was to elevate lessons learned from the first round of CLNAs and offer recommendations for enhancements going forward to ensure that the CLNA fully meets its promise of improving the quality of and equitable access to CTE programs of study for each learner.

About the CLNA

The purpose of the CLNA is to better connect the planning, spending and accountability elements of Perkins V; strengthen data-driven decisionmaking within CTE programs; and ultimately ensure that more students have equitable access to high-quality CTE programs and supports. Each local recipient of Perkins funds had to include, at minimum, each of the following elements when conducting their initial CLNAs:

1. Performance on federal accountability indicators;
2. Alignment to labor market needs;
3. Size, scope and quality of programs offered;
4. Progress toward implementing programs and programs of study;
5. Recruitment, retention and training of faculty and staff; and
6. Progress toward improving access and equity.

States also were able to add or emphasize topics within these sections as the law provided significant flexibility for states to shape how local recipients structured their CLNA processes to make the process their own. Each state was required to prepare a template for local sub-grantees to use, but even within those templates there was some discretion in how the CLNA was carried out to meet state and local goals.

One key feature of the CLNA is that it requires significant stakeholder involvement, in addition to a review of quantitative Perkins data and labor market data. Required stakeholders for the initial CLNA included:

- CTE program representatives at the secondary and postsecondary levels, including teachers, faculty, administrators, career guidance and advisement professionals and other staff;

- State or local workforce development board representatives;
- Representatives from a range of local businesses and industries;
- Parents and students;
- Representatives of special populations;
- Representatives from agencies serving at-risk, homeless and out-of-school youth; and
- Representatives from Indian Tribes or Tribal organizations, where applicable.

The CLNA and the Coronavirus Pandemic

Many local recipients were in the thick of their CLNA process when the coronavirus pandemic resulted in campus closures in March 2020. While some states had earlier deadlines and, therefore, their local recipients had already completed all or most of their work, others had to quickly shift gears and complete the CLNA virtually — all while managing the broader impacts of the transition to online instruction and other challenges of the pandemic. In these cases, stakeholder engagement was often limited, as consultation methods using face-to-face contact were no longer possible and many stakeholders were occupied with other urgent needs. The pandemic also affected the data that was available and the validity and reliability of that data as the educational and economic environments shifted dramatically.

The importance of the CLNA for improving CTE program quality, access and equity and the CLNA's status as a new requirement — as well as the need to examine the impact of the coronavirus pandemic not only on this process but also on CTE learners and systems more generally — make it critical that state and local CTE leaders reflect on the successes and challenges of the first CLNA and continue to refine this process.

State Approaches to the CLNA

Because the needs assessments must be updated at least every two years, the process is not static, and many states and local recipients are working to update their process. To support them in their efforts, Advance CTE and ACTE gathered materials and feedback from state and local CTE leaders about the first CLNAs and plans for the second round. Sources included:

- A review of states' Perkins V plans — including CLNA and local application templates — conducted in 2020 and documented in Advance CTE's The State of Career Technical Education: An Analysis of States' Perkins V Priorities;
- Interviews with State CTE Directors and other state CTE leaders from 11 states around the nation, representing both secondary and postsecondary agencies with oversight of Perkins;
- Interviews with local CTE leaders from districts, CTE high schools, area technical centers and community colleges nationwide; and
- Information shared by State Directors and state CTE leaders as part of the Data Quality Institute held by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education in October 2021.

As such, the following findings are informed by input from a number of states but may not be wholly representative of the breadth of state experiences with this process. In particular, the interviews were conducted primarily with exemplar states that prioritized CLNA resources and supports for local recipients above and beyond the letter of the law.

Promoting Regional Collaboration

According to The State of Career Technical Education: An Analysis of States' Perkins V Priorities, 16 states explicitly required or encouraged in the development of the first CLNAs some degree of collaboration beyond the minimum stakeholder engagement requirements outlined in Perkins V. These collaborative approaches included developing a fully regional CLNA and merging local completion of the CLNA with regional collaboration and strategy setting.

For instance, **Colorado, New Mexico** and **South Carolina** developed regional structures for completing the CLNA. South Carolina organized around 12 regions, each including at least three school districts, one technical college and one local workforce board. Participants included regional career specialists and regional representatives from the Department of Commerce. Interviewees from the state described it as "a small microcosm" of the state's education and workforce system within each region.

In contrast, states such as **Tennessee** and **Iowa** merged individual CLNAs with regional collaboration. Tennessee directed recipients to conduct a local CLNA but provided many opportunities for regional collaboration, including quarterly statewide meetings and monthly regional study council meetings. These monthly council meetings facilitated peer sharing about the CLNA and informed local CTE directors about regional labor market needs through data analysis and discussions with economic and community development partners.

Iowa took a different approach, with locally developed CLNAs and regional strategy setting taking place on a staggered schedule. Each sub-grantee completed its own CLNA on the biennial cycle. In the interim year, local recipients and stakeholders — including secondary CTE, postsecondary CTE, regional work-based learning intermediaries, and representatives from workforce boards and industry — came together within Regional Planning Partnerships to develop region-wide strategies and coordinate approaches across regions.

Offering Robust CLNA Supports

States provided multiple resources and supports to help local recipients conduct the first CLNAs. Common resources included templates, data reports and presentations or trainings to help sub-grantees better understand and complete the CLNA. In addition, a number of states reported providing one-on-one in-person or virtual assistance to local recipients.

CLNA templates and associated guidance were a primary tool for states to encourage collaboration and communicate statewide priorities. For instance, 36 states required that eligible recipients use the same CLNA template across secondary and postsecondary CTE. The **District of Columbia** developed a shared secondary and postsecondary CLNA template that also embedded a root cause analysis process to help recipients collaboratively develop strategies to address program-level equity challenges and create feasible solutions.

A number of states also emphasized particular priorities in their CLNA template or local application, such as work-based learning (49 percent of states), supporting teachers (47 percent), career advisement (43 percent), dual enrollment and articulation (41 percent), and credentials of value (25 percent). For instance, **Illinois** and **Ohio** developed equity-focused CLNA templates as part of an overall commitment to improving CTE equity, as further described in the next section of this report, and **Colorado** included questions about career advisement in its template to better align the CLNA process with state CTE goals. **South Dakota** prioritized work-based learning in its CLNA and local application in addition to selecting work-based learning as the state's secondary program quality indicator; including it in the size, scope and quality definition; and requiring it for CTE program approval.

Beyond template resources, many states hosted presentations and trainings with local leaders to help educate them on the process and even work through sections of the CLNA. **Alaska, North Carolina** and other states have incorporated CLNA technical assistance into their annual state CTE conferences, while **Wisconsin** holds monthly CTE data office hours, during which local CTE providers can ask questions and discuss how to review and analyze data for the CLNA and other needs.

As part of these state presentations and trainings, several states facilitated stakeholder engagement to help local leaders make connections with various groups and to provide a model for the local stakeholder engagement process. **Oklahoma** hosted regional meetings that included panels with representatives from each stakeholder group, who shared their own concerns, needs and ideas. This information, supplemented with local-level engagement, could be used in each local recipient's CLNA. In addition, the state made a contact list of stakeholders available on its website for follow-up. **Illinois** also engaged on the state level with parent groups, student groups, and state and local workforce boards and shared those findings with local recipients.

The coronavirus had a variable impact on states' ability to host events and connect with local recipients around the CLNA, depending on where states and local recipients were in the process when campus closures began, as described earlier in this report. Some states, such as **New Jersey,** even reported that virtual platforms helped them expand their outreach to local recipients.

Applying an Equity Lens

Perkins V infused equity within nearly every aspect of the legislation — from planning, uses of funds and stakeholder engagement to accountability and reporting — to address persistent gaps in learner access to high-quality CTE programs. The CLNA requires eligible recipients to conduct an equity gap analysis of learner performance data and assess their progress in providing equal access to programs. Across the nation, 33 states went above and beyond these minimum federal requirements to emphasize equity in their first CLNA and/or local application in additional ways.

Some states, such as **Tennessee,** leveraged the CLNA to begin difficult conversations around equity in CTE, encouraging local recipients to look beyond legal compliance to more deeply investigate issues of access and equity. **Oregon** created guides to help districts apply an equity lens when analyzing data and to think through how trends, policies and practices affect different learner groups.

Other states were even more proactive in their approach. **Illinois** made equity central to Perkins V planning. The state agencies with CTE oversight responsibilities — the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) — collaborated to develop for local recipients step-by-step guidance and related technical assistance focused on equity, and the CLNA template developed by the ICCB required sub-grantees to reflect on and describe how each component of the CLNA is meeting the equity needs of each learner group.

Ohio also developed an equity-focused template and embedded root cause analyses within the CLNA process. The Ohio Department of Education piloted its CTE Equity Labs in 2019 to guide key stakeholders such as administrators, instructors and counselors through a process of identifying gaps in access to or success in CTE programs, discussing root causes of those gaps and creating action plans. In addition, the state's Equity Ambassador program prepares one representative from each career-technical planning district with equity-focused professional development and a community of practice. This person can then serve as a local equity expert and advocate.

Transformative Change Through the CLNA: **Improving Learner Access and Supports**

The need for improved access to CTE programs and more inclusivity within programs were two themes that emerged from the CLNA conducted by the **Delaware Area Career Center (DACC)** in **Ohio.** What educators learned from their data analysis and stakeholder feedback led the center to change its admissions process. Rather than being ranked by grade point average, learners who meet certain qualifications related to county residency and credit accumulation now are placed into a lottery. DACC also started a learner-led, nontraditional equity group; created a social media campaign focused on nontraditional learners; and revised promotional materials to be more inclusive. Recently, the center has begun a curriculum review looking at diversity in textbook authorship and is evaluating the quality of capstone experiences across different CTE program areas.

In another example, the **College of DuPage** in **Illinois** leveraged the ICCB's equity-focused CLNA template and its own stakeholder engagement process to learn more about barriers and challenges faced by learners. The findings led the college to implement additional financial supports such as covering the costs of textbooks for CTE learners as well as providing a CTE needs-based laptop and Wi-Fi hotspot loan program. The college also took a workforce specialist position that had been part time and made it full time, with additional responsibilities for helping students navigate available resources and supports.

Expanding State and Local Data Capacity

A successful CLNA depends on the availability of accurate, disaggregated data and the skills to read and analyze that data. Across the nation, 27 states provided dashboards or other accessible reports with disaggregated student performance data or labor market information (LMI) to support local recipients for the first CLNAs. State approaches to the formatting of that data varied and included spreadsheets, dashboards, in-demand lists, and access to third-party data systems such as Emsi Burning Glass.

Several states developed resources and supports to help local recipients conduct data analysis through an equity lens, as described in the previous section. **Maryland** developed dashboards with disaggregated Perkins data that helped CTE practitioners and stakeholders easily see over- and under-representation through colorful visualizations. The state also maintains LMI dashboards that list approved CTE programs and identify each program's alignment with high-skill, high-wage and in-demand definitions. Each dashboard provides three years of data to enable users to see trends over time. To protect learner anonymity, the state provides more granular data directly to local recipients.

In addition, **West Virginia** created CTE data profiles for each county and school district to provide policymakers and the public a better picture of who is being served by CTE and what their outcomes are. **Michigan** invested in technical assistance for CTE practitioners to ensure that they can maximize the use of student and program performance and outcomes data, along with LMI, to drive program improvement.

Aligning the CLNA With Other Priorities

In addition to the regional collaboration described previously, states are pursuing several avenues for enhanced alignment with other CTE and workforce development goals and activities through the CLNA. These efforts are designed to improve CTE programming and supports while avoiding duplication.

For instance, in **Illinois,** the ICCB has aligned the CLNA across multiple dimensions: with broader institutional processes, with other Perkins activities and with workforce development. The ICCB has integrated the CLNA process into the community college system's broader program review process, which includes working with student services staff, academic staff and deans. As one interviewee described it, needs assessment "isn't just happening in the CTE division." In addition, the ICCB awarded Perkins Reserve Funds for the first time to rural colleges and recipients with performance gaps. The colleges' plans for how to use the funding had to be informed by CLNA findings. Finally, both the secondary and postsecondary CTE systems aligned with local workforce boards in numerous ways for the first CLNA.

Like Illinois, several other states aligned the CLNA with other state CTE or Perkins activities. For instance, **Kansas** has incorporated the CLNA into its application process for secondary pathway improvements and new postsecondary CTE programs, and **Colorado** aligned Perkins V planning with the state's CTE strategic planning. This alignment means that even school districts that offer state-approved CTE programs but do not receive Perkins funding in Colorado are required to take part in the regional CLNA.

Maryland's Division of Career and College Readiness developed the Consolidated Perkins and Methods of Administration Monitoring Program, a holistic approach to monitoring civil rights compliance and Perkins V requirements and measuring the effectiveness and equity of CTE statewide. Monitoring is performed on site or virtually by diverse teams from industry, higher education and secondary education that have expertise in equity issues and have undertaken training to serve as effective monitors. Outcomes from monitoring are used to inform technical assistance and can easily be pulled into the CLNA.

New Mexico took a different approach, aligning the CLNA with other required needs assessments to reduce the burden on local recipients. State leaders compared common questions and priorities across multiple grant programs and developed a form with overarching questions. CTE coaches in the New Mexico Public Education Department evaluated submissions from local recipients and pulled out information that responded to requirements for each specific grant.

STATE PERSPECTIVES

CLNA Successes

Stronger Alignment Between Local Needs and Funding Decisions

The CLNA aims to improve alignment between the needs of learners, employers and the community and decisions about CTE programming and funding. State CTE leaders by and large reported success in this regard, with greater alignment between needs and budgets and fewer local recipients using Perkins as a "wish list." In addition, several state leaders shared their perception that local leaders have developed a stronger sense of ownership through the first CLNA process and improved capacity to reflect on and improve CTE programs.

These benefits were apparent in **North Carolina,** where state leaders surveyed local recipients about the successes and challenges of the first CLNA to inform and improve the process. The state learned that 98 percent of districts found the CLNA beneficial or somewhat beneficial, and 100 percent reported that strategies outlined in their local applications have been successful or somewhat successful in addressing the needs identified in their CLNAs.

Percentage of respondents stating that the CLNA process has been beneficial to the overall improvement of the CTE program

Percentage of respondents stating that the strategies outlined in the CTE local application have been successful in addressing the identified needs in the CLNA

Yes Somewhat No

South Carolina CTE leaders reported that many of the state's regions are using the CLNA to drive transformation. Such innovations include developing a new logistics program in Greenville County School District, which is near a booming rail-served inland port; expanding computer science and cybersecurity offerings and phasing out mechatronics courses in the Midlands Region based on data and stakeholder feedback; and improving coordination between CTE and special education in Florence 3 School District, where co-teaching, foundational skills programming, and a summer camp for culinary arts learners have grown out of the CLNA.

Several states facilitated this improved alignment on the local level through their strategies for reviewing and responding to the first CLNAs. **Texas** developed a rubric with options for unacceptable, acceptable and exemplary responses to each question in the CLNA template. Texas Education Agency CTE staff reviewed more than 900 CLNAs, and each CLNA submission received a response from the state.

Transformative Change Through the CLNA: **Developing New and Needed Programs**

The implementation of new CTE programs in response to learner and labor market needs — and the closure of other programs that do not prepare students for high-skill, high-wage or in-demand careers — is one of the biggest ways in which the CLNA effects change. In **Rhode Island** at the **William M. Davies, Jr. Career and Technical High School,** input from stakeholders and data analysis, including an examination of educator data showing that the teaching staff's demographics differed from the demographics of their learners, led the school to develop its own education program to encourage its largely minority learner population to enter the field of teaching. The program began in January 2022 and takes place in a converted building on campus, part of which hosts a satellite YMCA preschool and part of which has classrooms for the high school education and training program.

The goal is for learners to experience teaching across the PK-12 spectrum, so they not only observe and do clinicals with the preschool staff but also shadow Davies high school instructors to learn about different subjects they could teach. For instance, if a learner is interested in the education career pathway but also in health care, that learner could observe in the health careers classroom.

More Collaboration Among Recipients

Many states directed or encouraged regional collaboration for completing the first CLNA. In addition, most of the state leaders interviewed shared their perception that local recipients collaborated with each other more, sharing more best practices and being more collegial and less adversarial as a result of the CLNA.

South Carolina was one state that emphasized the benefits of greater collaboration among local recipients. Through the CLNAs, rural districts with smaller learner populations that had already been in the process of consolidating began to work together more closely with each other and with their local technical colleges. Secondary and postsecondary collaboration has also improved, with CLNAs helping to pinpoint mismatches in program of study alignment and opportunities for improvement. The state is facilitating a more collegial environment by sharing best practices statewide.

New Mexico leaders shared that, through the state's regional consortia, districts that previously saw themselves as competitive are now working on shared initiatives. Sub-grantees within regions have worked together to pool funding and direct it where it is most needed. For instance, in one region, school districts shared their funding with one small district that was participating in Perkins for the first time to help that district buy equipment that it could not have afforded with its base allocation.

In addition, secondary and postsecondary collaboration and alignment in the state have improved. In some regions, high schools have disbanded less effective industry advisory committees on the secondary level and are now sharing advisory committees with local colleges. State leaders credit the development of regional priorities through Perkins V planning and streamlined paperwork requirements for a tremendous increase in local education agencies participating in Perkins, with participation rising from about 30 percent to 85 percent.

Improved Data Capacity and Literacy

Data-driven decisionmaking is the foundation for conducting a successful CLNA and, more broadly, for offering high-quality CTE programs and supports. State leaders reported that a major success of the first CLNA was the greater use and enhanced understanding of data by local CTE leaders and practitioners, leading to more data-informed decisions.

Maryland CTE leaders reported that improved data transparency among educators and other stakeholders was a primary benefit of the CLNA. State interviewees described how eye-opening the data visualizations were for educators and families. **Oklahoma** CTE leaders similarly shared how useful it was for instructors to see the data they had previously submitted and learn more about how it can be analyzed and used. They also described the benefits of triangulating information from multiple sources by integrating labor market data with information received from stakeholders. This integration enabled local recipients to see where the data and feedback reinforced each other.

In addition, **Tennessee** CTE leaders described how the CLNA spurred local leaders to shift from relying primarily on state-level data to using local data, building their confidence and capacity for using non-state-generated resources to justify growth or continuance of a program of study.

Better Informed State-Level Programs and Processes

In addition to these successes among local recipients, several states have developed new initiatives on the state level that resulted from the knowledge they gained during the first CLNAs and overall Perkins V planning. They also have developed new state-level processes that will better support local CLNAs during the second round. For instance, **South Carolina** leaders have harnessed connections they made and information they gleaned during the CLNA and state planning to develop a number of new activities and resources, including:

- The SC CTE Brand Video, which is being disseminated online, shared with instructors and counselors, and even aired on broadcast television. The state is also creating additional videos exploring major industry sectors.
- A suite of activities to improve business and industry relationships, including hiring a business and industry liaison for the state Office of Career and Technical Education and developing a new business and industry website and toolkit to help employers engage with CTE.
- Technical training modules developed by the Office of Career and Technical Education and the Office of Special Education Services to facilitate communication and understanding among special education case managers, Individualized Education Program teams, teachers who support English learners, CTE teachers, general education teachers, school counselors, outside agency representatives and work-based learning facilitators about how to set each student up for post-school success.
- The restructuring of the Office of Career and Technical Education and the Office of Student Transition Services into one office to better align state and federal CTE legislation and increase access and equity for student success.

Another state that has created or updated tools and guidance as a result of the first CLNA is **Colorado,** which developed a new toolkit for work-based learning as well as new requirements for contact hours with employer mentors as part of industry-sponsored projects, along with related rubrics and tools to help instructors and partners develop and assess these projects. In addition, after learning more through needs assessment about teacher pipeline and credentialing challenges, the state is working to pass legislation that would create a bachelor of applied science degree for teaching in technical content areas.

In another example, **Iowa** streamlined existing processes, such as secondary self-studies and postsecondary accreditation, to complement the CLNA. In **Rhode Island,** the CLNA is leading to a full CTE program audit, including examinations of return on investment.

STATE PERSPECTIVES

Areas for Improvement in the CLNA

Enhancing Capacity and Supports

The CLNA is the biggest change in Perkins V legislation from prior iterations of the law. The requirements call for detailed analysis across multiple components of CTE programs, with the involvement of numerous stakeholders. Not surprisingly, state leaders that were interviewed reported that the first CLNA was a "heavy lift" and "overwhelming" for local recipients, with several state leaders interviewed noting that state, district and college leaders underestimated the time and effort needed to conduct a high-quality and equity-driven CLNA.

In **North Carolina,** which surveyed local recipients about their CLNAs, district leaders are recognizing the need for more time to conduct a high-quality CLNA: Almost two-thirds of local respondents reported that they will begin the process earlier for the 2021-22 CLNA.

To help local recipients get off to a quicker start in the second round, a number of states began rolling out presentations and training for local leaders on an earlier timeline. For instance, **Nevada** is providing additional technical assistance and sharing CLNA best practices with local education agencies to support the second CLNA, and **Montana** is using examples of well-conducted CLNAs to demonstrate their effectiveness to schools that were reluctant to participate during the first round.

In addition, states are further helping local recipients expand their capacity to conduct a quality CLNA in 2021-22 by building on the supports they offered for the first CLNA — providing improved data resources, developing digital platforms for submission and, in some cases, updating CLNA templates, as further described later in this report.

Shifting Mindsets

While improved alignment between identified needs and uses of Perkins funds was a success of the first CLNA, state leaders shared that this alignment is still a work in progress in many communities. States have reported that it was difficult for some local recipients to switch gears to prioritizing investments based on areas of greatest need.

For instance, **Oklahoma** described how some school districts had rotated Perkins funding among programs in the past, rather than investigating and responding to local needs. For the first CLNA, regional coordinators worked with districts to help them better connect their CLNA findings with their local application funding requests.

Maryland described a similar process, with state staff reviewing local applications and engaging local recipients to help them bring their budgets more in line with their findings. Often, the needs assessments were well done, but the connections between CLNA findings and budget decisions were weak. State leaders believe that a needs assessment in isolation of a root cause analysis is not as effective as it could be and will be piloting an accompanying root cause analysis for the 2021-22 CLNA.

Anticipating that this shift to a needs-informed approach would be challenging, the Technical College System of **Georgia,** which directed postsecondary recipients to revisit the CLNAs in 2020-21 in the wake of the coronavirus, has

sought to help colleges conceptualize the CLNA as an ongoing process by adding a final section to its template. In this section, sub-grantees describe how they will seek continued consultation with stakeholders. During monitoring visits, state staff review implementation of the local application and progress toward building ongoing stakeholder engagement.

The state leaders interviewed expect the second CLNAs to be more impactful and lead to more change than the first round, as local recipients are more experienced in this process.

One way **South Carolina** is supporting such a shift is by adding questions that will require regional teams to analyze disaggregated data for special population groups across additional sections of the CLNA. They also have gone beyond the equity-specific requirements in the law, such as requiring analysis of students with disabilities by disability type. South Carolina also added questions about middle grades CTE and career exploration to focus on critical areas identified by the state.

Authentically Engaging the Full Range of Stakeholders

A multitude of stakeholder groups must be engaged in the local needs assessment process so that local recipients hear from the full range of individuals inside and outside the education system who are affected by CTE program decisionmaking.

However, several of the states interviewed could not speak with certainty about whether all stakeholders were substantively engaged in local or regional CLNAs. In particular, several state leaders expressed concerns about the quality and depth of stakeholder engagement with learners and families. These local engagement challenges mirror concerns at the state level about the ability to engage with these populations: Advance CTE's review of Perkins V state plans found that only 20 states have systems that support ongoing feedback loops with families/caregivers, learners and community members.

States are acting to help local leaders improve stakeholder engagement for their second CLNAs. **North Carolina**'s district survey identified stakeholder groups for which engagement was less robust during the first CLNAs. To address this need, 50 percent of local leaders intend to improve their consultation methods, and 40 percent plan to do more to ensure that all stakeholders are part of the input process for the 2021-22 CLNA. North Carolina state leaders are facilitating this improved engagement by encouraging districts to start consulting with stakeholder groups earlier in the second round and helping them use a wider variety of consultation methods, such as focus groups.

Transformative Change Through the CLNA: **New Opportunities Resulting From Robust Engagement**

Intensive stakeholder engagement can point local CTE programs in new directions. In **Mitchell County, NC,** a small rural district, CTE leaders began preparing for the CLNA in summer 2019, engaging instructors in an intensive summer training about the process. That fall, they hosted 14 focus groups, each with cross-stakeholder participation that included learners, and followed each focus group with leadership team meetings, during which they reviewed and discussed the feedback received. This robust engagement led the district to develop several new courses, including a career management course to help learners with disabilities identify CTE program areas and career fields of interest and honors and Advanced Placement courses in CTE pathways. It also led the district to provide new professional development opportunities focused on improving instruction and supports for English learners.

Further Improving Data Capacity and Use

Data is another pillar of a successful CLNA, and recognizing this, many states provided data supports and resources to their local recipients for the first CLNAs. However, several state leaders described challenges with data quality, access and use. This finding aligns with prior research on state data systems, which found that fewer than half of State Directors say their CTE data systems provide enough information for them to make decisions about CTE program quality and related initiatives at both the secondary and postsecondary learner levels.

One particular challenge was analyzing data and making projections based on the new definitions and indicators under Perkins V. In **Tennessee,** state leaders encouraged local recipients to look at multiple sources of data, particularly local data, to help set targets. The state also encouraged them to lean into areas in which the data was cleaner, such as educator development data, to make inferences for the future. As more data is collected and reported under Perkins V, this challenge will be easier to navigate, and data trends will be more evident.

The quality of data resources provided to local recipients, and literacy to understand and use data, was another challenge cited by a number of states. **Iowa** CTE leaders shared that local recipients found the LMI overwhelming, so for 2021-22, they are developing labor market one-pagers for each Career Cluster® within each region. The state will be providing Perkins data in a more streamlined format as well.

In fact, most changes that states have reported making for the 2021-22 CLNAs revolve around data resources and analysis as well as electronic platforms for data and CLNA submission. **Ohio** employed spreadsheets for the first CLNA to ensure that its process was effective before making investments in a digital platform for the 2021-22 CLNA. In addition, the state is sharing almost all of its data with secondary recipients through new Microsoft Power BI dashboards that can be filtered by learner population and career pathway to facilitate equity gap analysis. Another state considering an online submission platform is **Maryland,** which also updated its data dashboards to make the data easier to visualize and is working with the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity to pilot a root cause analysis process as part of the CLNA. **Oregon** partnered with its state Employment Department to build a new dashboard showing trends and growth in high-wage, high-skill and in-demand occupations, and in **New Mexico,** state staff have been taking online courses in data manipulation and visualization to help them develop the state's first Perkins data dashboard.

Recommendations for State CTE Leaders

Based on this input from state and local CTE leaders about the CLNA process, its benefits and areas for improvements, state leaders should build on early CLNA successes by continuing to support local recipients with the following strategies and resources.

Fully Commit to Putting Equity at the Center of the CLNA

One of the most powerful benefits of the CLNA is the ability to identify access and performance gaps across learner populations, enabling CTE programs to better serve special populations and historically marginalized learners and break down inequities. State leaders can further embed equity into the CLNA, beyond the requirements in the law, with the following actions.

- **Incorporate equity questions across the CLNA template.** Beyond the requirements for local recipients to consider their performance data disaggregated by sub-groups and special populations and to review how they are providing equitable access for learners, states should include equity-focused questions in other sections of the CLNA, including around program of study implementation, teacher recruitment and retention and labor market alignment.
- **Facilitate equity conversations in state-led meetings and build local capacity for these conversations.** Presentations, meetings and conferences that bring together CTE educators from around the state or region are an ideal venue for developing local educators' understanding of equity, helping them look beyond federal compliance to more active ways of addressing these issues in the CLNA and more broadly. These state meetings can also serve as "train-the-trainer" venues where state leaders help local educators develop skills in activities such as opportunity gap analyses.
- **Facilitate root cause analyses.** The data analysis inherent in the CLNA is only the first step in investigating and closing equity gaps. Subsequent root cause analysis to explore why gaps exist and how they can be closed can be a powerful addition to the CLNA process, as described by several states in this report.

Continue to Invest in Data Capacity

High-quality data — and the ability to read and understand data — is the backbone of a robust CLNA process. State leaders should prioritize investment in strong data systems and front-facing data tools that help stakeholders understand and use data for program improvement.

- **Provide data in easy-to-use formats.** States and local recipients agree on the benefits of data tools that help educators and other stakeholders quickly see gaps and trends. These tools include dashboards of disaggregated data that can be filtered and sorted to illustrate gaps as well as fact sheets that provide a snapshot of CTE or labor market data in a particular community or region. The tools have multiple uses beyond the CLNA, including sharing data with legislators and the public about the benefits of CTE.
- **Learn — and teach — how to analyze data.** Being literate in reading and communicating data is critical for CTE leaders, but some state leaders have gone a step further, engaging in professional development that builds their skills in data analysis and visualization. These skills can be particularly important in states with few data staff dedicated to CTE. In addition, the state should support developing data analysis and visualization skills in local recipients through a "train-the-trainer" model or other professional development opportunities.
- **Go beyond required metrics.** While Perkins indicators are key to any CTE data system, states can build their capacity to investigate through longitudinal systems additional relevant metrics such as secondary-postsecondary transition within a region or alumni employment and earnings.

How to Build a High-Quality Career Readiness Data Ecosystem

A quality CLNA relies on the availability of high-quality data about learners, CTE programs and the labor market. Many states focused on providing data resources and supporting data analysis in the first round of CLNAs, with improved data tools and an even greater emphasis on equity gap and root cause analysis being implemented for the 2021-22 CLNA cycle.

State CTE leaders can further support analysis of Perkins and LMI data and better integrate the more traditional sources of CTE data with other important metrics by developing a high-quality career readiness data ecosystem. A data ecosystem with accurate, timely and disaggregated data delivered through an interconnected infrastructure can demystify a complex education and workforce system for learners and allow for a deeper investigation of barriers and potential solutions to improve quality, access and equity for all learners.

Advance CTE's Career Readiness Data Quality and Use Policy Benchmark Tool describes six core elements of a high-quality career readiness data ecosystem and highlights recommended actions state leaders can take to improve the quality and effective use of career readiness data across education levels.

The benchmark tool includes case studies, an assessment to help state leaders identify strengths and areas for improvement, and worksheets for creating a plan of action to improve the quality and effective use of career readiness data.

This tool is the result of nearly a year of thought partnership and collaboration from a Shared Solutions Workgroup of national and state data experts. It was developed with support from JPMorgan Chase & Co., through the *New Skills ready network*, and from the ECMC Foundation, through the Advancing Postsecondary CTE Data Quality Initiative. A state implementation guide to accompany the policy benchmark tool is available for Advance CTE members at this link.

SIX CORE ELEMENTS OF A HIGH-QUALITY CAREER READINESS DATA ECOSYSTEM

1. Data is collected consistently and accurately.
2. Processes and protocols are in place to ensure effective data governance.
3. Data systems, policies and practices are fully aligned across agencies and learner levels.
4. Information is relevant, timely and disaggregated.
5. Practitioners and the public are equipped to understand and leverage data.
6. Information is used effectively to promote quality and equity in career pathways.

Support Local Stakeholder Engagement

One area for improvement identified by state and local leaders is the depth and breadth of stakeholders engaged. States were not always aware of the quality of stakeholder engagement on the local level, and owing in part to coronavirus complications, some local recipients were unable to complete planned stakeholder engagement activities. To help sub-grantees better engage with key constituencies, state leaders should consider the following actions.

- **Add more questions about stakeholder engagement to the CLNA template.** While many CLNA templates in the first round included lists of stakeholders engaged from each required group and/or signatures from each stakeholder group, the mere presence of all stakeholders does not ensure depth and quality of engagement. State CLNA templates could incorporate additional questions to gather more details, such as which consultation methods were used with each stakeholder group, what the key takeaways were from each stakeholder group, and how the local recipient will continue to engage representatives of each stakeholder group.

- **Leverage state-level partnerships to activate local stakeholders.** Developing relationships on the state level with stakeholder groups can help smooth the way for local CTE leaders to do the same. Connecting with statewide industry associations, chambers of commerce and community-based organizations can result in new state-level resources and activities that can inform local efforts. In addition, sharing information about the process and benefits of the CLNA with stakeholders on the state level can lead to more informed stakeholders on the local and regional levels. And while state-level consultation cannot replace engagement with community members directly affected by CTE programs in a particular area, panel discussions, focus groups, and other activities with stakeholders at state conferences or trainings can provide additional context and model for local recipients how they can engage stakeholders on the ground.

- **Help local recipients use a variety of consultation methods.** Advisory board meetings and surveys are important tools to gather information for the CLNA. However, there are other ways to get more nuanced feedback from stakeholder groups, including qualitative research methods such as focus groups, discussion sessions and interviews. Focus groups and similar discussions are particularly powerful when facilitators come prepared with gaps identified in the data and engage stakeholders to understand more about root causes and potential solutions.

How to Engage Learners and Families in CLNAs

Engaging stakeholders — not only educators but also employers and industry, workforce development, community organizations, learners and families/caregivers — is vital to ensuring that CTE programs are responsive to workforce, learner and community needs, particularly for special populations and historically marginalized groups. Deep and continuing engagement and consultation with a range of stakeholders can help CTE programs uncover gaps, determine root causes and implement and assess solutions, all while building a base of support for CTE programs in the community.

In the first CLNAs, stakeholder engagement emerged as a benefit but also an area for improvement. In particular, CTE leaders expressed concerns about the level of engagement with learners and families — two populations that can be challenging to reach and engage authentically.

The following action steps can help state and local CTE leaders better engage these important stakeholder groups in CLNAs and in program evaluation and continuous improvement activities more generally.

1. Facilitate learner and family/caregiver engagement through state levers

States have a role to play in requiring, incentivizing and supporting more robust engagement of learners and families/caregivers. These levers include requiring that local recipients identify multiple learners and families that were engaged in the needs assessment process and adding questions to CLNA templates about how learner and family voice is and will continue to be elevated. In addition, states can offer grants to local recipients that incentivize them to engage these stakeholder groups as part of the CLNA and program improvement more broadly and use technical assistance and professional development to develop local capacity to elevate the voices of parents and learners.

States can also model engagement of families and learners by deliberately engaging these constituencies on the state level through program review and monitoring processes, state advisory boards and statewide professional development events.

2. Use multiple methods to engage learners and families/caregivers around root causes and solutions

Surveys can be useful for getting broad feedback from a large number of stakeholders, including learners and families, to show trends. However, learners, families and other caregivers may struggle to respond accurately to surveys if they do not fully understand what the CLNA is and why it is important or if the questions and response options do not express their perspectives. CTE leaders may learn more from families and learners by pairing broad-based approaches such as surveys with more targeted activities such as focus groups, which allow for more in-depth discussion. Focus groups can be facilitated or co-facilitated by current learners, alumni, family or community members who understand the learner and family perspective and reflect participants' identities.

3. Sustain engagement with learners and families/caregivers as part of a continuous improvement process

As CTE leaders implement action plans to address needs identified through the CLNAs, they should also create avenues to sustain learner and family engagement more broadly. These avenues can include recruiting families and learners to serve on advisory boards or launching learner-led advisory boards; including learners and caregivers in program approval, review and monitoring opportunities; and frequently checking in with learners and families to report on the implementation of new activities resulting from CLNAs and solicit ongoing feedback from these stakeholders.

In addition, leaders can track the success and impact of learner and family engagement strategies through measures such as how many — and which — learners and families were engaged; the satisfaction level of those engaged; and policy and practice changes resulting from learner and family engagement, among other metrics.

For more tips on engaging learners, families and the community in CTE programs, please explore the following resources:

- With Learners, Not for Learners: A Toolkit for Elevating Learner Voice in CTE (Advance CTE and ACTE);
- Engaging Families and Communities to Support Special and Underserved Populations in CTE (ACTE); and
- Engaging Representatives of Learners with Special Population Status Through Perkins V (Advance CTE).

Plan Ahead to Ease Capacity and Timing Burdens

The CLNA is an effective but time-consuming process. State leaders can help local recipients with this lift by aligning the CLNA, as much as possible, across the secondary and postsecondary levels and with other required activities, while also building in opportunities to update the CLNA when needed.

- **Align secondary and postsecondary timelines, if the CLNA is not regional.** For states that do not use a regional approach, state leaders can still facilitate coordinated planning by ensuring that secondary and postsecondary CTE systems are conducting the CLNA on the same timeline.
- **Connect the CLNA with other state and federal grant programs and state Perkins activities.** In addition to secondary and postsecondary coordination, states can align the CLNA with other federal and state grant programs — particularly with workforce development activities such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act planning, as many did in the first round — and with internal Perkins processes such as program review and civil rights monitoring.
- **Develop flexible provisions to update CLNAs in the event of unanticipated circumstances.** To maximize responsiveness to labor market and learner needs, states can make updating the CLNA easy for local recipients when community needs change in between the biennial cycle. For example, updating the CLNA could be necessary to reflect new programs or work-based experiences required to support a new employer partner or to respond to an emergency event such as the coronavirus pandemic.

Balance a Focus on *Process* With a Focus on *Progress*

Process is undoubtedly important for the CLNA. As the process becomes more established in states and local areas over time, state leaders and local recipients should also be attentive to progress toward the goal of improved alignment to needs and improved programs and services for learners.

- **Develop state-level processes for reviewing and using CLNA results.** State CTE leaders can better understand the quality and depth of each local recipient's CLNA by reviewing full CLNAs rather than just the top-line findings required for the local application. This further exploration can help states understand the quality of the process used to reach those findings and further inform state-level decisions about funding and resources that will best help local recipients deliver high-quality and equitable programs.
- **Track alignment among local needs, budgets and spending.** State CTE leaders should track the relationships among identified needs, budget decisions and actual spending by local recipients to observe the level of alignment over time.
- **Survey local recipients about CLNA successes and challenges.** To better understand local recipients' process and progress with the CLNA, state leaders can survey local CTE leaders anonymously to identify strengths and areas for improvement where the state can direct resources and training.

Frame the CLNA as an Opportunity

The time and effort required for local recipients to complete a quality CLNA process are significant. To encourage local recipients, state leaders should frame the CLNA as an opportunity, rather than merely a compliance exercise.

- **Ensure that framing language, trainings and technical assistance are focused on the positive aspects of the CLNA.** As with any complex exercise, there is a risk of a "check-the-box" mentality if sub-grantees are overwhelmed or do not fully understand the value of a robust CLNA. There is also a risk of local recipients not using the results of the CLNA as thoughtfully as possible if they have not seen value in the process. State leaders should ensure that the value of the CLNA is front and center in any trainings or documents and that technical assistance opportunities help local leaders apply the results in positive ways.
- **Disseminate examples of the CLNA's positive impact.** State leaders can lift up examples of how both the process and the outcomes of the CLNA have helped to improve programs, better serve students, and more fully meet employer and community needs. Whenever possible, states should allow local districts and colleges that have embraced the CLNA to improve programs and learner supports to share their stories with their peers directly.
- **Share results with policymakers.** State leaders can capitalize on the opportunity of the CLNA by ensuring that results are shared with policymakers so that action can be taken on systemic issues. For example, policymakers could help local programs meet needs that surface during the CLNA through additional funding or policy changes to address program implementation barriers.
- **Market the opportunity to external stakeholders.** To help ensure that stakeholders are willing to dedicate the time to engage authentically in the CLNA process, state leaders can distribute key messages at the state level — messages that local recipients can also share with key constituency groups on the local level. Messages to stakeholders should emphasize the opportunities and service improvements that could result for specific communities and industries based on the outcomes of the CLNA.

Acknowledgments

This resource was developed with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Advance CTE and ACTE offer many thanks to the following federal, state and local CTE leaders for sharing their time, expertise and perspectives on CLNA:

- Leah Amstutz, Ohio Department of Education
- Lisa Batchelder, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education
- Letha Bauter, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education
- Tiara Booker-Dwyer, Maryland State Department of Education
- Curtis Clough, Hagerman Municipal Schools, New Mexico
- Randy Dean, Technical College System of Georgia
- Barbara Eichhorst, (formerly) New Mexico Public Education Department
- Jonita Ellis, College of DuPage, Illinois
- Matthew Feuerborn, Ridgewater College, Minnesota
- Adam Flynn-Tabloff, U.S. Department of Education
- Tammy Hall, Delaware Area Career Center, Ohio
- Dennis Harden, Iowa Department of Education
- Sarah Heath, Colorado Community College System
- Kim Hodshon, Mitchell County Schools, North Carolina
- Kathryn Hornsby, Technical College System of Georgia
- Jennell Ives, Oregon Department of Education
- Paul McConnell, Rhode Island Department of Education
- Joni McDaniel, South Carolina Department of Commerce
- Trey Michael, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- Darlene O'Rourke, Queensborough Community College, New York
- Kathleen Paquette, New Jersey Department of Education
- Elaine Perea, New Mexico Public Education Department
- Jeanne Prete, College of Lake County, Illinois
- Suzi Raiford, South Carolina Department of Education
- Scott Smathers, Kansas Board of Regents
- Craig Statucki, Nevada Department of Education
- Lisa Stock, College of DuPage, Illinois
- Maria Swygert, South Carolina Department of Education
- Whitney Thompson, Illinois Community College Board
- Marty Tobey, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- Jacque Treaster, Montana University System
- Susan Votto, William M. Davies, Jr. Career and Technical High School, Rhode Island
- Janelle Washington, Illinois Community College Board
- Kristi Weaver, Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Colorado
- Sarah Williams, Tennessee Department of Education