

ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

to Support
**Special and
Underserved
Populations** in CTE

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Career and technical education (CTE) programs are increasingly engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including parents and community organizations, to improve CTE programs, better serve students and help communities in need. This resource will focus on ways that CTE educators can communicate with, collaborate with and support current and prospective learners' families and communities, particularly for learners and communities who have been historically underserved. This publication describes general strategies for engaging these stakeholders, more specific strategies aimed at breaking down barriers to engagement for particular special and underserved population groups, and examples of CTE and career development programs doing promising work in this area.



Why Engage Families and Communities?

Research has demonstrated that family and community engagement in education has short- and long-term benefits related to program quality and learner success. Parent engagement has long been shown to impact student grades, persistence and completion, while engagement with the community has a documented impact on school quality, including facility upgrades, higher quality curriculum, and increased funding for interventions and supports.¹ These benefits can be particularly impactful when engaging families, community organizations and other stakeholders representing special and underserved populations.

For CTE and career development, family and community involvement also helps program leaders understand local occupational trends; identify local economic, workforce and skill needs; and — most importantly — close equity gaps. By engaging families and communities, CTE educators can learn more about the various challenges, barriers, needs and priorities important to different learner groups, particularly those who encounter the most barriers to access and success in high-quality CTE programs: students with special population status and historically marginalized populations.

In addition, stakeholder engagement is a major theme and required component of the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V). The law required states to develop four-year state plans in consultation with representatives of secondary and postsecondary CTE programs such as teachers, instructors and counselors; state workforce development board representatives; business and industry representatives; and members and representatives of special populations groups as well as parents, students and community organizations.

On the local level, sub-grant recipients were required to engage a similar set of stakeholders in the comprehensive local needs assessment (CLNA) as well as to continually consult with these stakeholders on topics such as aligning programs with workforce needs, identifying opportunities for work-based learning, and ensuring funding is coordinated with other local resources.

This content was originally developed in collaboration with Advance CTE to provide technical assistance for Perkins V state plan implementation. Many resources created by others have informed this publication, particularly [Strategies for Special Population Success: Practical Tips and Tools for Educators](#), which was created by the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE) Education Foundation and authored by NAPE CEO Emerita Mimi Lufkin.

Perkins V Special Populations

Under Perkins V, states and local CTE leaders must report disaggregated data on students from nine special population groups and engage with and enhance their efforts to serve these learners:

- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including low-income youth and adults
- Individuals preparing for non-traditional fields
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Out-of-workforce individuals
- English learners
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Youth who are in, or have aged out of, the foster care system
- Youth with a parent who is a member of the armed forces and is on active duty

In response to these requirements and the evidence of the benefits of stakeholder engagement, local CTE programs and career development initiatives are deepening their connections with representatives of special and underserved populations such as family members and community groups to improve CTE programs, better serve students and help communities in need.

CTE programs are also required to provide disaggregated data by gender, race/ethnicity and — on the secondary level — migrant status. Once data is disaggregated, there are provisions throughout the law requiring an examination of gaps that exist among student groups on measures of access and performance. To address these gaps, many state and local CTE leaders are investing in better serving student groups that have been historically marginalized because of their gender, race or ethnicity as well as Tribal learners, justice-involved individuals, LGBTQ+ learners, and undocumented or migrant students.

Fundamentals of Family and Community Engagement

Regular communication is the foundation of engagement generally and of many of the particular strategies described in this publication. Communicating openly and frequently with family and community stakeholders is foundational to building relationships of trust and lays necessary groundwork for more specific engage-

ment activities. This includes asking for – and using – stakeholder communication preferences such as in-person meetings, text messaging, emails, phone calls, social media and more. To maximize communication opportunities, educators can use multiple avenues for ongoing communication, including anonymous feedback methods, and leverage bilingual/multilingual speakers and tools that support translation, interpretation and accessibility.

Through these various communication channels, CTE leaders can regularly share program information and data on learner out-

comes in multiple languages and accessible formats, including virtual and mobile formats, and learn about family and community needs. As part of this two-way communication, educators must commit to listening to stakeholder input and responding to this feedback honestly by answering questions, addressing concerns and informing stakeholders of potential next steps. To further build regular communication and feedback loops, CTE leaders can designate staff and engage key influencers such as community organization and religious leaders to serve as liaisons to special and underserved populations.

Part of open, transparent communication is measuring and sharing outcomes. To determine the effectiveness of engagement efforts, CTE leaders can measure progress in stakeholder engagement through short-term metrics – such as the number of stakeholders participating in engagement activities, number of resource downloads, and number of social media likes and shares – and long-term metrics – such as changing rates of learners from special and underserved groups participating or concentrating in CTE in high-wage, high-skill program areas. These findings should be shared with stakeholders as part of a collaborative, continuous improvement process.

Tips for In-person and Virtual Events

Many of the strategies described in this document utilize meetings, workshops, focus groups, celebrations and other events. Successful stakeholder engagement relies on making these events welcoming and accessible. Here are a few tips to help you when hosting:

- Make in-person events convenient for stakeholders to attend by looking beyond your campus to host activities wherever the stakeholders you're trying to reach congregate: at community centers, libraries and places of worship.²
- Address barriers to engagement for in-person events such as transportation and childcare by providing or subsidizing transportation, providing childcare or making events family friendly.³
- Address barriers to virtual events through verifying that stakeholders have appropriate technology and, if not, providing them temporary or permanent access to broadband, laptops, or devices like computers, headphones or microphones that can facilitate participation.
- Regardless of format or location, thoughtfully consider event timing, meeting length and accessibility (e.g., translation, interpretation and captioning) to make activities accessible and maximize attendees' time.
- Incorporate a variety of speakers across different stakeholder groups, including family members, community members and other representatives of special and underserved populations.
- Include opportunities for stakeholders to participate and be prepared to meaningfully respond to their input.
- Connect with stakeholders through active listening, validating experiences and affirming emotional reactions.⁴
- Employ asset-based, people-first language rather than deficit-based language when talking about learners and their communities (e.g., “systematically under-resourced communities” rather than “high-need communities” and “students with disabilities” rather than “disabled students”).⁵
- Be sensitive to negative experiences that individuals from special and underserved populations have had with discrimination and stereotyping in education.

General Strategies for Family and Community Engagement

The strategies outlined in this section can help CTE educators better communicate with, collaborate with, and support families, community organizations and other stakeholders. These tips are organized into five categories:

- recruitment and promotion of CTE programs
- academic and career planning
- community-based career exploration and mentorship
- support services
- program and policy development, assessment and improvement

Many of the strategies described can be carried out by an individual CTE program, while others may be more effective as part of a broader school-, district- or college-wide effort. In addition, many of these ideas are appropriate across a variety of learner groups. More specific strategies for engaging stakeholders from particular special and underserved populations can be found in the [next section](#).

Recruitment and Promotion

Inclusive recruitment and promotion approaches can help CTE programs develop positive relationships with prospective students, their families and communities from the ground up. This inclusivity can be communicated through accessible print materials, videos,

social and traditional media, and in-person events that highlight the diversity of students who succeed in your CTE programs as well as through alumni and other advocates who can help deepen connections with particular populations.

Recruit students by meeting them where they already gather. This may include holding recruitment events at community centers, libraries, places of worship and community fairs as well as online

PrepareRI Ambassadors

Rhode Island

Population of focus: Various learner groups

[PrepareRI](#) is a statewide college and career pathways initiative to prepare all Rhode Island youth with the skills they need. It is a strategic partnership between the Rhode Island government, private industry leaders, the public education system, universities and non-profits across the state. PrepareRI was launched with a New Skills for Youth grant from JPMorgan Chase, in collaboration with the Council of Chief State School Officers and Advance CTE.

Part of the initiative's success stems from its ambassador program. [PrepareRI Ambassadors](#) come from different parts of Rhode Island's education landscape, including educators as well as community leaders and parents. Ambassadors use their perspective and skills to advise the PrepareRI team, create resources and trainings, and serve as spokespeople for the initiative. In compensation, ambassadors receive a \$3,000 annual stipend.

The [2019 ambassador cohort](#) included representatives of Spanish-, Arabic- and Portuguese-speaking communities as well as a parent ambassador. Among the [resources](#) developed by the 2019 ambassadors were:

- A welcome website with guidance on navigating the Rhode Island education system for newcomer students and families, particularly multilingual and English learners, as well as guidance for districts to better communicate with and support these families.
- A toolkit for supporting Arabic learners and their families, based on data and interviews with students, parents and educators.
- Ideas for how to address “summer melt” for multilingual high school graduates who planned to enroll in postsecondary education but did not.

and through social media.⁶ For example, representatives of CTE programs at Pensacola State College in Pensacola, Florida, have promoted their programs by attending back-to-school events at community centers, visiting churches with predominantly Filipino or Mexican congregations, and participating in a community Hispanic Day. Relationships with city council members help program representatives understand community needs and learn how best to reach different populations.

Develop recruitment materials in multiple languages and accessible formats with inclusive images. Promotional materials such as brochures, websites and videos are an opportunity to communicate the value of your CTE programs and showcase the range of students you serve. These materials are most effective when they explain CTE offerings and share data on the value and impact of CTE using plain language and clean design that prioritizes readability through large font sizes and easy-to-read color contrast; are translated into key languages in your community; incorporate accessibility (e.g., print materials readable by a screen reader, captions for videos); and use photos and videos that highlight diversity in your programs.⁷ Denver Public Schools recently created a [video](#) in Spanish with English captions, showcasing Spanish-speaking students, families, educators and business partners, to promote the district's [Seal of Biliteracy](#), which recognizes students who have attained high-level skills in both English and another language, and to inform learners and their families about the benefits that being bilingual and multilingual can have for hiring, on the job and in their lives.

Activate students, alumni, families and community members to serve as ambassadors for CTE. Ambassadors can be an informal set of advocates who are equipped to communicate information about your programs, or they can be a more formal group brought together to leverage their expertise. For example, at Northwest Independent School District in Justin, Texas, [CTE student ambassadors](#) give campus tours, host events such as a CTE Showcase and serve on advisory teams. The district's CTE programs benefit from their perspective and enthusiasm, while ambassadors gain volunteer hours and develop skills in networking, public speaking and leadership.

Academic and Career Planning

One of the best ways to build a deeper relationship with families of CTE learners is by deliberately engaging them through the academic and career planning process. This includes not only requiring their participation in individualized education program (IEP) meetings or getting their signatures on individualized graduation plans but also enabling them to be active participants in planning for their children's futures. Academic and career counseling also offers postsecondary and adult students, particularly those from underserved populations, the opportunity to connect with advisers to share their needs, plan their futures and access resources and supports.

Clark County School District #GirlsInSTEM #GirlsInTech Initiative

Las Vegas, Nevada

Populations of focus: Black girls and Latinas in STEM

Launched seven years ago, the [Clark County School District](#) (CCSD) #GirlsInSTEM #GirlsInTech initiative began with a mandate to increase the STEM participation of young Latinas and young Black women. What started as career awareness for eighth-grade girls has expanded to a variety of career exploration activities focused on female and male learners of color and learners in under-resourced schools.

Over the years, a key piece of the puzzle has emerged: engaging families is vital to maintaining learner enthusiasm for STEM. Through surveys and focus groups, initiative leaders learned that they weren't providing activities frequently enough to maintain learner interest and that families were not actively supporting young women in their excitement for STEM. These takeaways shaped two recent pilot projects: movie experiences for the entire family and the BLAST (Building Lifelong Achievement in STEM and Technology) League.

For several years, the initiative has been showing STEM films such as *In Saturn's Rings* and *Whale Superhighway* in real movie theaters to learners, sponsored by movie theaters and media companies. The movies are accompanied by hands-on activities like making an origami lunar module as well as question-and-answer sessions with women in STEM professions. In March 2020, the district was set to pilot #STEMSaturdays for the whole family, with one theater showing films in English and another in Spanish. Almost 200 people had signed up when the event was canceled due to COVID-19. Since then, the initiative has pivoted to livestreaming movies, followed by remote panels with STEM professionals and film producers.

In addition, CCSD piloted the BLAST League in 2019 to create a more consistent, informal learning environment by organizing teams of learners to work together on monthly competitive challenges. The program has received support from companies like Texas Instruments and Lego. The first year was scheduled to culminate in April 2020 with a Saturday family-centric event with awards, giveaways and food. As with the movie experiences, COVID-19 led to this event's cancellation, but the League is gearing back up for the new school year.

#GirlsInSTEM #GirlsInTech has gone from serving about 600 learners in the first year to about 3,500 in 2019-20. Data shows an increase in the proportion of young women participating in STEM, and the initiative will be generating more data as the early cohorts of participants begin graduating high school.

Facilitate family involvement in developing graduation and transition plans. Workshops are one method for more deeply engaging families and other caregivers in their students' academic and career planning. For instance, College 1st hosts [Family Engagement Sessions](#) along with its Career Awareness and Mentorship Programs (CAMPS) for K-12 learners in the Rio Grande Valley. These sessions are conducted on campus or virtually and provide families with knowledge, guidance and tools to support and actively engage in their children's education. During these sessions, learners and families work together to collaboratively explore college and career goals and plans, while learning about options for graduation pathways and career endorsements in Texas. Concurrent sessions in English and Spanish are offered at each implementation site.

Celebrate students' academic and career successes with families and communities. Competitions, graduations, signing days and other family-friendly events offer great opportunities for engaging parents, extended families and communities in CTE programs. The [Girls in Construction Camp](#), a partnership of the Iowa Department of Education, Des Moines Public Schools, Home Builders Association of Iowa, National Association of Women in Construction, Ace Mentor Program of Central Iowa, Turner Construction and local apprenticeship programs, is targeted at young women who are learners of color, economically disadvantaged learners and/or learners with disabilities. The weeklong camp includes daily field trips with hands-on career exploration activities. On the last day, the camp hosts an open house and graduation ceremony where families can celebrate their children while touring CTE programs and learning about CTE opportunities. And during Henrico County Public Schools' annual [CTE Letter of Intent Signing Day](#), families, employers and the school community in Henrico, Virginia, celebrate learners who are heading into the workforce after high school graduation.

Provide structure and supports to adult learners. Structured onboarding, mapped and aligned programs of study, and proactive career and academic advising – hallmarks of the guided pathways model – can help postsecondary and adult learners better navigate their education and career plans. For example, [Savannah Technical College](#), like all institutions in the Technical College System of Georgia, employs a Special Populations Coordinator who supports learners from special populations through career and academic counseling, assistance with accommodations, referrals for services, academic and life skills seminars, and a lending library.

Community-based Career Exploration and Mentorship

Many of the partners who provide career development, work-based learning and mentorship experiences to students are also alumni of CTE programs, parents of students, or community members who may be connected to learners through other organizations or by a shared identity. These stakeholders can be tapped to act as mentors, serve as guest speakers, and provide work-based learning.

Connect students with mentors who share their racial/ethnic/gender/special population identities, including alumni, family and community members.⁸ Research has demonstrated positive outcomes from pairing students with mentors who reflect their identity.⁹ Through [DO-IT](#) (Disabilities, Opportunities, Inter-

networking and Technology), a program out of the University of Washington, scholars with disabilities participate in e-mentoring with peer and adult mentors, who are typically college learners, faculty, engineers, scientists or other professionals with disabilities. Mentors help scholars develop plans and strategies for navigating postsecondary education and careers. In another example, the [Veterans and Military Resource Center](#) at Central Community College in Nebraska connects learners who are veterans and current service members with each other and with a wider community of veterans who understand their experiences and challenges.

FBI Adopt-a-School and Waipahu High School

Waipahu, Hawai'i

Population of focus: High school students in neighborhoods with high crime rates

Since 2009, Waipahu High School has partnered with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) [Adopt-a-School program](#) to improve learner outcomes and community safety. The partnership was driven by crime rates showing that nearly half of juvenile-justice-involved individuals in Hawai'i were coming from the Waipahu neighborhood, and education data demonstrating that nearly half of learners at Waipahu High School were not graduating on time.

Waipahu's Adopt-a-School program was designed and operates with support from FBI agents, Honolulu Police Department officers and community advocates. It begins with a Leader Lab for 9th-graders with modules on ethics, relationships, leadership and strategies for success. Students team up to develop projects for the benefit of the school and the neighborhood, concluding with a "Shark Tank"-like presentation in which student teams present their projects to community leaders who help fund the best ideas.

The relationship continues with the school's Academy of Professional and Public Services, a career academy that was developed based on student and community interest. Juniors and seniors can participate in courses in forensic science, criminology and law as well as a two-day field exercise called PROVE (Practical Observation and Vocational Experience). PROVE features a simulated criminal case during which students excavate a mock grave, interview witnesses, create a timeline of events, conduct a search, draw sketches, take photos and gather evidence.

Waipahu's collaboration efforts are working, based on education and crime data. Rates of violence and drug use on campus, truancy and suspension have decreased by more than 50%, and Waipahu learners are showing increased persistence, improved academic achievement, and higher rates of on-time graduation.

Invite alumni, family and community members to serve as guest speakers, mock interviewers and chaperones for career exploration field trips.¹⁰ Tapping family members, community members and former students for these roles can help deepen your efforts by connecting learners with people who are more likely to understand their needs and priorities. For instance, MENTE, an organization based in Oregon, hosts the [MENTE Summit](#), an annual one-day event designed to connect high school Latino students across Oregon with diverse professionals and develop their knowledge about college and career pathways. The majority of presenters are themselves Latino professionals, demonstrating to attendees different examples of Latino success. The 2020 event included a college and career fair with exhibitors from education, industry and the nonprofit sector as well as workshops on the value of apprenticeships; careers in law enforcement, education and information technology; resume and interview skills; and navigating white-led professional spaces. More than 400 high school students, mostly Latino learners, attended along with educators, community partners and volunteers.

Collaborate with community organizations to provide work-based and service-based learning experiences. For-profit businesses are not the only avenue for work-based learning – nonprofit groups can also provide internships, job shadows and service-based experiences. The nonprofit Community Cycling Center of Portland, Oregon, which combines a bike shop with an array of community support services, has partnered with local schools such as the alternative Helensview School on a STEM Bike Mechanics program with a [curriculum](#) that combines physics and technical skills as well as opportunities for mentoring and work-based learning.

Support Services

To excel in education, students – particularly those from special and underserved groups – often benefit from supportive, wrap-around services. CTE programs and institutions can build on relationships with community organizations to help provide these services directly to learners and their families or to benefit the entire community. In addition, students themselves can support their communities by using knowledge and skills gained in their CTE program areas to provide free or low-cost services.

Collaborate with community organizations to provide advisers and advocates for learners and families. Community groups that understand the challenges and barriers faced by students from special and underserved populations can provide advocates and mentors to supplement your other counseling and advising activities. For instance, the [Latino Center of the Midlands](#) (LCM) in Omaha, Nebraska, partners with Ralston High School to provide a student advocate to help at-risk learners through postsecondary advising, career exploration and job placement, monthly personal and educational development workshops, and referrals to other resources. In addition, LCM's Family Strengthening Coaches work with student advocates to provide holistic services to students

Monument Valley High School Veterinary Science Program

Kayenta, Arizona
Populations of focus: Navajo learners and communities

At Monument Valley High School in Kayenta, Arizona, located in the Navajo Nation, veterinary science students develop skills for career and college success while providing vital, low-cost services to their community. Agricultural education teacher Clyde McBride started the program in response to the local need for veterinary services for the animals and livestock that financially support many on the reservation. At that time, residents had to transport sick animals for hours to reach a veterinarian.

The program boasts a strong advisory board of parents/caregivers, learners, community clients and business partners. These partners helped the program open its \$2.4 million Agri-Science Center in 2011, which provides low-cost veterinary services to the community. Veterinarians gave input into the center's design and perform surgeries in the center's multiple operating rooms, with learners watching from observation rooms above. The center also has examination, preparation and recovery rooms where students, under supervision, carry out vaccinations, ultrasounds and other services.

In a school where the majority of learners qualify for free- and reduced-price lunch, as of 2017, veterinary science students scored higher on state math and English tests than their peers, 100% graduated from high school and about three-quarters went on to postsecondary education. The program has been recognized by [PBS NewsHour](#) and the *Navajo Times* ([1](#) and [2](#)), and McBride has been honored by [ACTE](#) and [Education Week](#).

and their families such as family nights, service referrals and the Cara y Corazón (Face and Heart) program that focuses on building cross-generational relationships.

Enable community groups to conduct outreach and provide services on campus or provide services through the school or college itself. These services could include food pantries, "dress for success" closets, GED classes, medical care, social workers and childcare, among others.¹¹ For example, [West Wardrobe](#) at West Los Angeles College provides professional clothing to learners donated by faculty and staff and civic, business and church groups. [Buckeye Career Center](#) of New Philadelphia, Ohio, supports adult learners in the region with free courses in basic skills, English for speakers of other languages, GED test preparation and more. These courses are made possible through grant funding from the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

Provide free/low-cost services to local communities in need through your CTE programs. For instance, culinary arts learners can prepare free meals, while health care learners can provide low-cost medical services. Pensacola State College in Pensacola, Florida, supports economically disadvantaged members of the community with [dental services](#), performed by student dental hygienists supervised by faculty. Services are low cost for the general public and free for full-time students, faculty, Medicaid and food assistance recipients, and veterans. The clinic also hosts a [Give Kids A Smile Day](#) in which dental learners provide free services to children.

Program and Policy Development, Assessment and Improvement

Engaging stakeholders is critical to developing, assessing and improving CTE programs, including students, alumni, family and community members who can speak to the barriers and challenges experienced by underserved students. CTE programs can bring these stakeholders together with education and workforce leaders through regularly convened advisory boards and working groups as well as more periodic activities such as local needs assessments.

Actively recruit family and community stakeholders to serve on advisory boards. Many programs highlighted in this publication are successful, in part, because learners, parents and community members communicate about their needs, challenges and priorities to educators through advisory boards, steering committees and similar groups, including Project LIFE® (see the profile below), Monument Valley High School's veterinary science program and Waipahu High School's academies.

Actively engage learners, families and communities in local needs assessments and other planning and improvement activities. This engagement should extend beyond a single touchpoint such as a

Butler Technology and Career Development Schools Project LIFE®

Ohio and replication sites nationwide

Population of focus: Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities

[Project LIFE®](#) is a multi-year transition program for learners with intellectual and developmental disabilities that can be deployed with high school juniors and seniors as well as young adults. It is allied with Project SEARCH®, a nationally and internationally replicated work immersion experience, providing learners with a continuum of transition programming that builds skills and independence. This has resulted in individual growth and positive employment outcomes for Project LIFE graduates well above the national employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. National replication teams have grown Project LIFE across the continental United States and Hawai'i.

A significant part of Project LIFE's success is the involvement of parents/caregivers, agencies and organizations supporting individuals with disabilities. The program was developed in 2007 by Ohio's Butler Technology and Career Development Schools with the collaboration of stakeholders from the Butler County Board of Developmental Disabilities, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities and parent mentors, among others. These parent mentors are parents of children with disabilities who serve on the steering committee for each Project LIFE site, along with learners, community groups, vocational rehabilitation representatives, educators and business partners. In Ohio, Project LIFE works with formal [parent mentors](#) who are district employees and support other families through the special education process. At replication sites across the country, informal parent mentors are identified by the replication team.

In addition to parent and learner involvement on the steering committee, families receive regular communications from the program and are highly encouraged to participate in at least two progress meetings and at least one IEP review. Project LIFE also engages families and the community through job fairs, transition fairs and workshops on transition-to-adulthood concepts such as Social Security benefits and guardianship. A commitment to family and community engagement is encapsulated in Project LIFE's [Core Model Fidelity Components](#), a set of standards for implementing the program.

survey to include focus groups, discussion sessions and meetings that enable stakeholders to share more in-depth, nuanced feedback. For instance, the Oregon Department of Education used the opportunity of Perkins V state planning to re-envision its relationship with the state's nine federally recognized sovereign nations. State leaders began outreach immediately after Perkins V became law. The biggest change from prior planning efforts was talking to the Tribes to learn their priorities before the plan was developed, rather than presenting them with a written plan for their feedback. CTE leaders also delivered Indigenous land acknowledgements at the start of meetings with Tribal representatives. Learning Tribal priorities early on led the state to include an option in the CLNA and local application to allow for programs based on local labor market need.

Strategies for Engaging Specific Special and Underserved Populations

In addition to the approaches described above, which can apply to almost any population, the following table provides specific, evidence-based strategies for engaging with learners, families and community members from Perkins V special populations and other traditionally underserved groups. In general, these strategies focus on how to communicate with, collaborate with and support individuals through resources, activities and services that occur outside of the classroom, although there may be some overlap with classroom-based learner engagement strategies.

CTE leaders seeking to leverage these strategies should keep in mind that students, family members and community representatives each have multiple identities and that it will likely take multiple strategies to deepen engagement with various stakeholders. In addition, remember that students and their family members may share identities, or they may have different identities and challenges (e.g., students and their parents/caregivers may or may not share a disability in common).

Strategies for Engaging Individuals Who Are Part of Perkins V Special Populations and Other Underserved Groups

<p>Individuals with disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with special education coordinators, disability services agencies and disability rights organizations to understand the types of disabilities present in your community and the needs of individuals with disabilities. • Ask individuals with disabilities how they prefer to be addressed. When in doubt, start with people-first language (e.g., a learner with autism vs. an autistic learner).¹² • Ensure that spaces used for meetings and engagement activities meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for physical accessibility and that websites hosting program information meet ADA standards for website accessibility.¹³ • Design print and screen-based resources with readable font sizes, color contrast and alternative text to enable resources to be read by screen readers.¹⁴ • Provide American Sign Language interpretation for in-person meetings and closed captioning for virtual meetings, presentations and videos. • Send resources ahead of time so individuals with disabilities can access using their own assistive technology.¹⁵ • Respond promptly to requests for Braille or other specific needs.¹⁶ • Accommodate service animals.¹⁷
<p>Individuals from economically disadvantaged families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with social services coordinators, agencies overseeing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, food banks, and other community groups supporting this population to understand its needs and challenges. • Connect students and families with services such as food banks, medical care, social workers, childcare and GED programs, or consider hosting these services on campus.¹⁸ • As individuals living in poverty often work multiple jobs¹⁹, offer meetings and engagement activities at various locations, including online, and at different times of day to accommodate diverse schedules; make events as short as possible; and announce meetings far in advance so attendees can arrange time off work.²⁰ • Offer transportation and on-site childcare during in-person meetings and other engagement activities.²¹ • Engage CTE programs and career and technical student organizations (CTSOs) in service activities that address the needs of under-resourced communities and expose these communities to available CTE programs.²² • Develop school-based enterprises in which CTE learners provide free or low-cost services to under-resourced communities. • Enlist community organizations as partners in offering earn-and-learn opportunities such as internships and apprenticeships.
<p>Non-traditional students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the benefits of non-traditional careers, including not only skill level, demand and wages but also how these careers benefit the community and support work-life balance.²³ • Activate individuals succeeding in non-traditional careers, including community members and alumni, to act as ambassadors and mentors.²⁴ • Host targeted events such as boot camps that engage non-traditional learners and families in CTE programs and pathways. • Share non-discrimination and sexual harassment policies with students, families and community partners, and enforce these policies.²⁵ • Use inclusive language in forms and other communications.²⁶

<p>Single parents and pregnant learners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with healthcare agencies, health clinics and parenting organizations to understand the needs of pregnant, postpartum and parenting learners. • Provide lactation rooms on campus and highlight their availability during meetings and engagement activities. • Offer meetings and engagement activities at various locations, including online; at different times of day to accommodate diverse schedules; and make events as short as possible. • Offer on-site childcare during in-person meetings and other engagement activities.²⁷ • Host family-friendly engagement events with activities for children (e.g., a craft table for young children to draw pictures of themselves in their ideal careers).²⁸
<p>Out-of-workforce individuals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with workforce development agencies, American Job Centers, business groups and labor unions to understand the causes of unemployment in your community and which population groups are most affected. • Host career fairs that match individuals who are unemployed with local talent needs.²⁹ • Foster mentor relationships between employers and community organization leaders and out-of-workforce individuals. • Promote credit for prior learning and similar initiatives that ease these individuals' pathways into education and retraining.
<p>English learners and migrants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with migrant service agencies, immigrant rights organizations and English learner/bilingual/multilingual colleagues to learn about the background and needs of your English learner and migrant populations.³⁰ • Translate print and virtual resources into languages commonly used by English learner communities in your area. Ensure resources are checked for translation errors by fluent speakers before being disseminated. • Use translation apps such as TalkingPoints to communicate electronically in different languages with families and students.³¹ • Leverage traditional media in other languages, such as radio, TV stations and newspapers, to promote engagement activities.³² • Host events in venues where individuals won't fear being questioned about their immigration status.³³ • Schedule engagement activities to accommodate holidays commonly celebrated by English learner and migrant communities in your area and incorporate these holidays and other cultural traditions into engagement activities.³⁴ • Provide qualified interpreters for in-person and virtual events. • Provide welcome signs or start engagement activities with a few words of welcome delivered in the languages commonly spoken by English learner communities in your area.³⁵ • During engagement activities, employ the same practices you use for English learners in the classroom, such as reading aloud, visual cues and longer wait times when asking for feedback.³⁶
<p>Individuals experiencing homelessness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with staff and agencies serving individuals experiencing homelessness and local McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act liaisons to learn more about different types of homelessness in your learner community and the causes and impacts of homelessness. • Connect learners and families with community services such as shelters, food banks, medical care, social workers, childcare and GED programs, or consider hosting these services on campus.³⁷ • Design communications for mobile devices, as many individuals experiencing homelessness rely on smartphones for internet access.³⁸ • Host events in spaces where individuals won't be required to show identification, as some individuals experiencing homelessness may not have forms of identification.³⁹ • Provide transportation, on-site childcare and food during in-person meetings and other engagement activities.⁴⁰ • Share how learners experiencing homelessness can enroll in CTE programs, schools or colleges without having a home address.⁴¹

<p>Foster youth and adults</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with foster and child welfare agencies, guardian ad litem groups and foster youth clubs to understand the needs of this learner group.⁴² • Communicate proactively with newly enrolled foster youth and their caregivers, especially those enrolling in the middle of the school year. • Be aware that, as a foster youth’s placement changes, new caregivers may face different barriers to engagement than prior caregivers. • As many as half of all foster youth are identified as having a disability – see the section on individuals with disabilities for additional relevant strategies.⁴³
<p>Veteran learners, military learners and youth with parents on active duty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with veterans’ agencies and organizations as well as education and family support services provided by the relevant military branch(es) in your area.⁴⁴ • Communicate proactively with newly enrolled military learners and families, especially those enrolling in the middle of the school year. • Support veteran learners and military learners with credit for prior learning, streamlined enrollment and re-enrollment processes, and assistance in accessing financial aid. • Help build community for veteran learners and military learners by providing on-campus gathering places, supporting organizations like Student Veterans of America, and creating specific learning communities.⁴⁵ • Participate in outreach activities on and with military bases. • Honor veteran learners, military learners and military families for their service. • When units are deployed, military spouses and partners may be acting as single parents; see the section on single parents and pregnant learners for additional tips.
<p>Native American students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect formal consultation or engagement processes with Tribes and Tribal organizations. As sovereign entities, Tribes and Tribal organizations often engage directly with state and local governments.⁴⁶ As such, it is best to coordinate with the state’s office of Indian affairs or the closest regional office of Indian affairs before making outreach.⁴⁷ • Learn and acknowledge the origin of the land you are on.⁴⁸
<p>Justice-involved learners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with corrections and juvenile justice agencies, reentry support organizations and legal aid groups to understand the needs of youth and adult justice-involved students.⁴⁹ • Use neutral language such as “incarcerated person” or “formerly incarcerated person” rather than “prisoner,” “convict” or “felon.”⁵⁰ • Consider removing questions about criminal history from admissions applications and other forms.⁵¹ • Help justice-involved learners navigate financial aid decisions, as certain convictions affect eligibility for federal student aid.⁵² • Coordinate with partners offering work-based and service-based learning experiences to ensure background checks don’t limit student participation in these activities.⁵³
<p>LGBTQ+ students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with LGBTQ+ rights organizations. • Share non-discrimination policies with learners, families and community partners, and enforce these policies.⁵⁴ • Identify your gender pronouns and use stakeholders’ preferred pronouns consistently and correctly.⁵⁵ • Use inclusive language in forms and other communications. • Hold engagement activities at locations with unisex or single-use bathrooms.⁵⁶

Resource List

The following resources can inform and assist CTE leaders seeking to better engage stakeholders generally, better connect with families and community organizations, and better understand the challenges faced by students from special and underserved populations.

Advance CTE. (2017). [*Increasing Student Enrollment in CTE Programs Parent Engagement Tool.*](#)

This guide is based on Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) stakeholder engagement guidance developed for Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) planning, modified for families. It helps users create a strategy for communicating with families through effective messaging, multiple methods of outreach and recruiting CTE ambassadors.

Alliance for Early Success and Child Trends. (2014). [*Culture Counts: Engaging Black and Latino Parents of Young Children in Family Support Programs.*](#)

This document synthesizes a large body of research on barriers to and strategies for engaging families, particularly Black and Latino families, in family support services and programs. It includes recommendations for designing, adapting and evaluating culturally relevant family and caregiver support programs and services.

Anderson-Butcher, D., Lawson, H., Bean, J., Boone, B., Kwiatkowski, A., et al. (2004). [*Community Partnerships in Implementation Guide: Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement, Version 2.*](#)

This state resource describes a model to help schools maximize and leverage community resources through academic learning, youth development, family engagement and support, health and social services, and community partnerships. The Community Partnerships section includes a number of different checklists, tables and similar tools for mobilizing community assets, with an emphasis on developing and implementing more formal partnerships with community organizations to provide coordinated services to students and the community.

Center on Great Teachers & Leaders at American Institutes for Research. (December 2014). [*Moving Toward Equity Stakeholder Engagement Guide: Planning for Engagement With Stakeholders in Designing Educator Equity Plans and companion templates.*](#)

This publication was developed to help state education agencies create and implement a State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators under ESSA through stakeholder collaboration, including educators, families and students, community organizations and business leaders — a similar group of stakeholders as required for Perkins V stakeholder engagement.

The stakeholder engagement process is based on a five-step framework: understanding the problem, setting priorities, raising awareness, taking action, and measuring progress and adjusting strategies. The guide describes this process in detailed steps, with links to templates throughout.

Colorín Colorado. (August 2011). [*A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders.*](#)

This practical resource for educators seeking to better engage English learner families is organized around six themes: connecting with English learner families, communicating important information, parent participation, parents as leaders, community partnerships and creating an action plan. Each strategy includes background information, reflection questions and examples.

CCSSO, Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group. (March 2017). [*Career Readiness Stakeholder Engagement Tool.*](#)

This guide is based on CCSSO's stakeholder engagement guidance developed for ESSA planning, modified for state career readiness systems. It includes nine steps for engaging and communicating with a variety of stakeholders, including families and community organizations as well as policymakers, employers and partner agencies.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (N.d.). [*Public Participation Guide: Tools.*](#)

EPA's Public Participation Guide provides tools for public participation and public outreach in decision-making. The Tools portion is divided into three parts: "Tools to Inform the Public," "Tools to Generate and Obtain Input" and "Tools for Consensus Building and Agreement-Seeking." Each set of tools addresses in-person and remote methods of informing, gathering input and building consensus; the number of participants recommended for each method; and the situations for which each method is best suited. Clicking on the method name leads to additional details on each method, including advantages, challenges, implementation time, resources needed and costs.

equityXdesign. (November 2016). [*Racism and inequity are products of design. They can be redesigned.*](#) Medium.

This article describes equityXdesign, a practice that organizations, teams and individuals can use to mitigate the impact of racism and inequity in design practices. equityXdesign adapts the five modes of traditional design thinking — empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test — by adding two additional modes, notice and reflect. Other adaptations to traditional design thinking include meta-empathy maps, which are tools to help people recognize how implicit bias and identity can impact their understanding of others, and the use of equity pauses throughout the design process.

Lufkin, M. (2021). [Strategies for Special Population Success: Practical Tips and Tools for Educators.](#)

This resource from NAPE was developed to help local Perkins V recipients identify potential strategies to address the root causes of identified gaps in participation and performance found through the CLNA process. It includes general strategies and specific tips for each Perkins V special population, as well as links to relevant organizations for additional resources.

National Disability Institute's LEAD Center in Partnership with the Job Accommodation Network and National Council on Independent Living. (March 2016). [Effective Communication: Disability Awareness & Etiquette Guide: Guide for Centers for Independent Living and American Job Centers.](#)

While designed to help American Job Center staff effectively and respectfully communicate with clients and colleagues with disabilities, the guide is applicable across many settings. It offers general strategies about people-first language, functional access, accessible materials, service animals and communication techniques. This is followed by specific tips for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, blind and low-vision individuals, and individuals with developmental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, hidden disabilities, mental health disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, speech impairments and more.

National PTA. (N.d.). [PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships: An Implementation Guide.](#)

This document is intended to help schools with the practical work of developing and implementing partnerships with families and caregivers based on six standards: welcoming all families, communicating effectively, supporting student success, speaking up for every child, sharing power and collaborating with community. It defines each standard; shares local success stories and action steps for school leaders and parent leaders; and includes a rubric (called the Assessment Guide), survey template and action plan template.

Urban League of Louisiana and YouthForce NOLA. (N.d.). [YouthForce NOLA Family Engagement Toolkit.](#)

This resource was created by the Urban League of Louisiana and YouthForce NOLA to assist schools in their efforts to engage families as partners in career pathways programs of study. It includes background on the value of family engagement, strategies for family engagement and communication, and links to several tools and templates. It also connects to an engagement survey, focus group protocols, a survey to gauge families' perceptions of CTE, an engagement checklist and an engagement planning template.

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