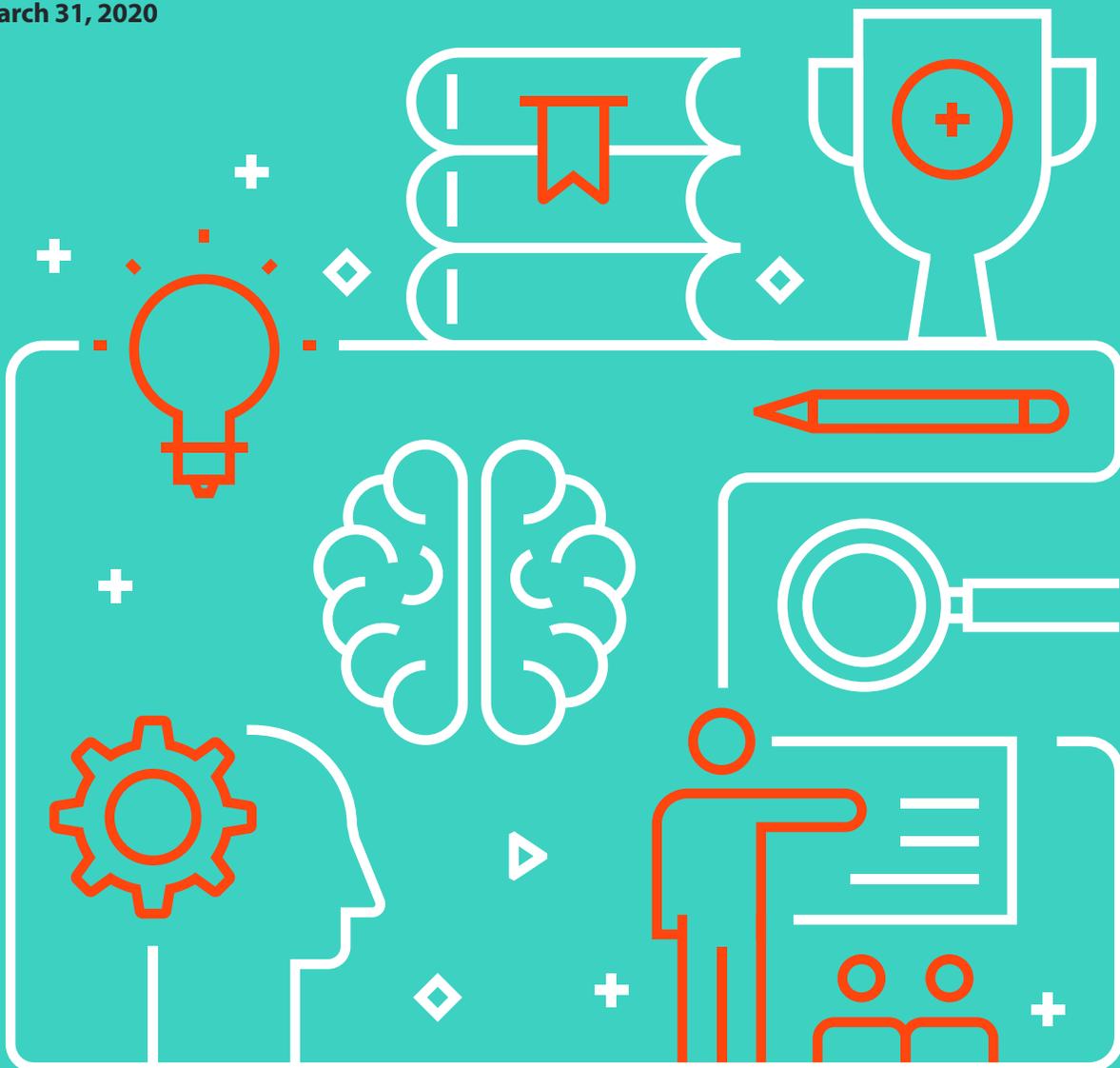# Preparing the next generation of career and technical education leaders

Evaluation findings from the first year of the Postsecondary Leadership Success Program at ACTE sponsored by the ECMC Foundation

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March 31, 2020

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Executive Summary

The Postsecondary Leadership Success Program (PLSP) at the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) sponsored by the ECMC Foundation promotes the development of leadership skills among current and emerging postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) professionals.

Supported by a grant from the ECMC Foundation, 20 Fellows (who are selected through a competitive application process) participate in an intensive, yearlong learning experience that combines virtual seminars with in-person convenings and structured assignments. A dedicated instructional coordinator guides group discussions and activities.

To provide context for their experience, Fellows are asked to identify a critical issue they wish to solve at their home institution and create an improvement plan for addressing it. This work serves as a capstone for their involvement in PLSP. An experienced mentor, self-selected by each Fellow, provides additional guidance throughout the year.

PLSP is designed to strengthen Fellows' skills in five areas:

- **Organizational leadership and management capabilities**
- **Interpersonal and relationship-building skills**
- **Professional network of national and state leaders**
- **Capacity to facilitate institutional change**
- **Understanding the needs of underserved populations**

INITIAL SUCCESSES

In the program's inaugural year, PLSP instructors were tasked with designing and delivering a comprehensive leadership development curriculum tailored to a diverse group of postsecondary professionals with a range of backgrounds and responsibilities. This entailed simultaneously creating and deploying various instructional activities and assignments, with content delivered in online and face-to-face convenings. First-year program successes included:

- **Creating and implementing a program syllabus:** PLSP instructors gathered input from an advisory committee of experienced CTE professionals to finalize and deploy a set of program goals, standards, curricula, and assignments. Feedback from Fellows was also incorporated to strengthen program content for future cohorts.

- **Designing and field testing training activities:** PLSP instructors used multiple pedagogical strategies to deliver program content. Analysis of activity benefits and drawbacks (with input from PLSP leads, Fellows, and the program evaluator) was used to refine instructional approaches.

- **Strengthening Fellows' leadership and organizational management skills:** Fellows attended monthly seminars led by national experts, consulted with program mentors, completed self-reflection writing assignments, worked on professional and institutional improvement plans, and presented at a national CTE conference—all of which contributed to building their professional skills.

- **Expanding Fellows' professional network and career options:** Program activities introduced Fellows to federal policymakers, CTE experts and researchers, and postsecondary administrators running exceptional programs. Fellows leveraged these relationships to gain insights and identify professional opportunities, with some crediting the program in helping them advance their career. In addition to growing their networks through in-person connections, Fellows also published blog posts and program reflections on ACTE's PLSP web page and the ECMC Foundation's website, expanding their professional brand and publication presence.

- **Adopting Google Classroom as an instructional management platform:** The introduction of this web-based file-sharing service helped coordinate program communications, as well as centralize homework assignment and submission. Together, Fellows and PLSP leads identified technology challenges and developed solutions to ensure users could appropriately access and use the platform. Fellows with experience using Google Classroom worked together with PLSP leads to successfully train their peers.

> *Without this program, I would have never gotten to meet and create relationships with so many postsecondary leaders in various roles, at so many different types of institutions, in various stages of their careers.*
>
> *– PLSP participant*

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Now that the program syllabus, learning activities, and communication processes have been developed and tested, PLSP instructors can focus on refining instructional content and formalizing Fellows' roles and responsibilities. The recruitment of a new and experienced instructional facilitator also brings opportunity for program innovation. Recommended Year 2 development priorities include:

- **Engage the advisory committee in ongoing consultation:** At the outset, committee members helped shape program content, market the opportunity, and nominate and select Fellows. Quarterly consultations with PLSP instructors were primarily used to deliver updates. To fully benefit from member insights, PLSP should seek to actively engage the committee throughout the year (for example, by soliciting recommendations to strengthen the curriculum and address unanticipated challenges).

- **Provide mentors with guidance to structure check-ins:** Mentors expressed the need for increased structure and improved communications. PLSP should provide mentors with expectations for their involvement and a structure guide for conducting check-in meetings with their Fellow. Other options include communicating monthly activities and lesson objectives to mentors, sharing Fellows' work submissions, and offering guidance on the use of quarterly reporting forms.

- **Establish guidelines for external presenters:** Site visits and webinar presentations offered a forum for CTE experts to share information. PLSP should consult with experts before events to ensure their presentation content is aligned with learning objectives. Presenters should also be briefed on how to use the webinar platform to more directly engage with Fellows (e.g., polling, chats) and build in time for Fellows to discuss content and ask questions.

- **Create detailed learning objectives and assignment rubrics:** Instructional activities are intended to strengthen Fellows' understanding of complex CTE content. PLSP should develop and circulate learning objectives for each instructional activity and create a library of lesson plans for use with future cohorts. Fellows would also benefit from rubrics that set expectations for assignments and the criteria used to rate them.

- **Provide structured feedback:** Fellows complete various assignments to promote self-reflection and process instructional content. PLSP should establish expectations that Fellows submit work on time and that instructors provide timely feedback on Fellows' work. Where appropriate, Fellows' reflections should be integrated into the curriculum and shared with mentors to help structure their meetings.

- **Design activities to strengthen intra-cohort relationships:** In the first year of PLSP, Fellows valued the opportunity to talk to their peers and share work challenges. PLSP should structure activities and meetings to maximize intra-cohort communications (for example, by offering more social time at convenings and using "flipped classrooms," where monthly webinar content is prerecorded and watched offline to allow additional time for group discussions).

- **Document and publicize program benefits:** Survey results indicate that Fellows valued their participation in PLSP, with nearly 90 percent reporting that they would recommend the program to a friend. PLSP should seek to qualify—and where possible, quantify—Fellows' return on investment if a fee must be charged to sustain the program once grant funding ends.

> *The most fulfilling impact I've received from the PLSP program was the camaraderie and l earning I gained from my Fellows. This program gave me a network of 19 other CTE educators from varying levels, different states, and with many diverse experiences.*
>
> *– PLSP participant*

Background

The Postsecondary Leadership Success Program (PLSP) at the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is a yearlong professional development experience funded by the ECMC Foundation. Its goal is to prepare the next generation of leaders in postsecondary career and technical education (CTE). Program activities seek to strengthen the leadership abilities and organizational management skills of a cohort of 20 Fellows, who are selected through a competitive application process. Activities are delivered by an experienced instructional coordinator, with the support of a dedicated project manager. An advisory board of CTE experts provides guidance and recommendations to improve programming.

As part of the experience, PLSP Fellows:

- Create a professional development plan to hone their leadership skills
- Design an institutional improvement plan to resolve an identified challenge at their site
- Participate in monthly webinars with presentations by national experts
- Meet with a mentor to grow their leadership and organizational management skills
- Write and publish blog posts, journal articles, and self-reflections on ACTE's PLSP web page and the ECMC Foundation website to develop a field presence and publicize the program
- Attend quarterly convenings to network with national experts

Upon completion, Fellows are awarded two semester hours of graduate credit by the Ohio State University and a $4,000 honorarium.

PLSP Fellow recognition at ACTE's CareerTech VISION 2019 conference

This report summarizes the activities and experiences of the first cohort of PLSP Fellows, which convened from March 2019 to February 2020. Researchers from Education Northwest, the external program evaluator, gathered information by attending virtual program convenings, tracking Fellows' event attendance and submission of assignments, collecting PLSP instructor assessments of Fellows' engagement in activities, analyzing mentors' quarterly ratings of Fellows' progress, and attending ACTE's CareerTech VISION 2019 conference.

Program Startup

ACTE announced the launch of PLSP with a comprehensive marketing campaign that included a website feature, membership emails, and outreach to state ACTE affiliates and other national education organizations. Publicity materials were also shared with professional associations serving underrepresented populations to attract a diverse applicant pool.

FELLOW RECRUITMENT

Applications for the first Fellowship cohort were accepted from November 29, 2018, through February 3, 2019. Overall, 326 applications were received via the online platform, 235 of which (72 percent) were incomplete (table 1). Little is known about these individuals because demographic information was not requested until the end of the application.

In total, 52 of 91 applicants advanced to the judging stage. Those deemed unqualified were either not employed as a postsecondary administrator or worked with a noncollegiate population.

The final pool of 20 Fellows was selected by a panel of four judges. Each application was read and scored by a single judge, with responses for six candidates with similar qualifications reviewed by two judges, whose scores were averaged. Finalists were selected based primarily on scoring, although individuals' professional background, area of residence, and demographic characteristics also were considered to make the cohort more representative of the field.

Table 1. Applicant response rates by application status and program admission

	INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS (N = 235)	COMPLETE, RATED BY JUDGING PANEL (N = 52)
Gender	n = 52	n = 52
Female	63%	**69%**
Male	37%	**31%**
Race*	n = 58	n = 52
American Indian/Alaska Native	2%	2%
Asian	2%	0%
Black	14%	6%
Hispanic/Latino	3%	8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%	2%
White	78%	**85%**
Other	3%	2%
Age	n = 58	n = 50
Under 30	3%	4%
30 to 39	16%	**38%**
40 to 49	36%	**30%**
50 to 54	22%	10%
55 and older	22%	**18%**
Location*	n = 56	n = 52
City	46%	58%
Suburb	30%	21%
Rural	32%	37%

*May not total 100 percent because respondents could choose more than one category.
Bold indicates a difference of 10 percentage points or greater between completed applications and the final cohort.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of applications for PLSP Cohort 1

Table 1a. Demographics of Cohort 1 PLSP Fellows

Complete, selected for program (N=20) column (see note above on Table 1)

5% American Indian/
Alaska Native

15% Black

10% Hispanic/Latino

75% White

0% Asian

0% Native Hawaiian/
Pacific Islander

0% Other

20%
Male

80%
Female

Gender

Race*

10%
Under 30

55%
30 – 39

5%
55 & older

15%
50 – 54

15%
40 – 49

40%
Rural

50%
City

15%
Suburb

Age
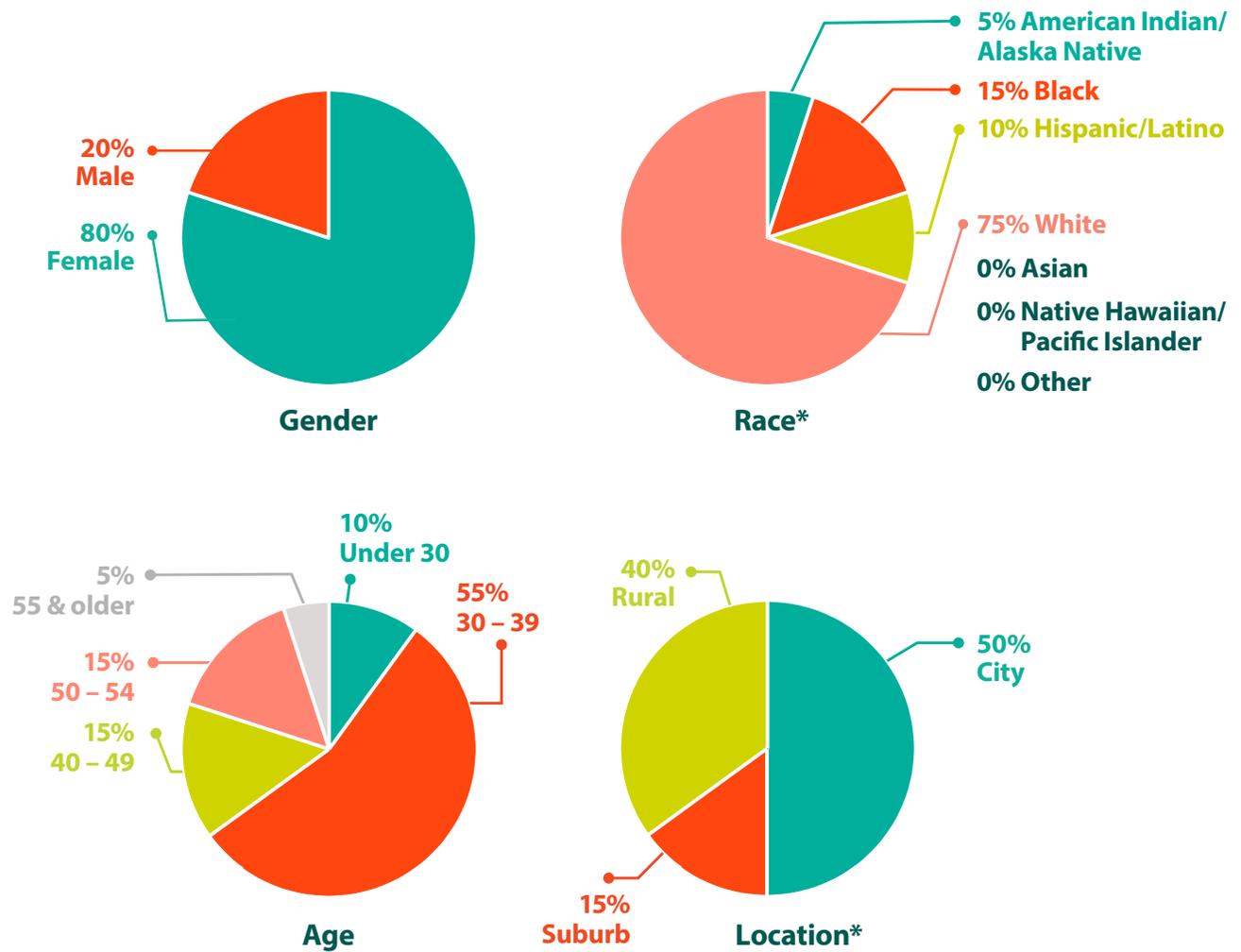
Location*

*May not total 100 percent because respondents could choose more than one category.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of applications for PLSP Cohort 1

Although efforts were made to create a representatively diverse final cohort, Cohort 1 Fellows were predominately female (80 percent) and white (75 percent). In keeping with the goal of promoting career development, nearly two-thirds of the cohort were younger than 40.

Lessons learned

- **Streamline the application:** Applicants were asked to write three essays (of up to 250 words each) detailing their professional goals, their desired program benefits, and an institutional challenge they were seeking to address. This writing requirement may have dissuaded some individuals from submitting their application. To expand the applicant pool, PLSP should consider reducing the essay component and placing higher priority on applicants' position, institutional supports, letter of recommendation, and resume.

- **Provide clear guidance to ensure only qualified candidates apply:** A substantial number of applicants were deemed ineligible to participate in PLSP because they did not meet the minimum eligibility requirements. Redesigning the application to underscore that participation is limited to postsecondary leaders at institutions serving college students could help ensure that only qualified individuals apply.

- **Select a cohort with balanced professional backgrounds:** The 20 selected applicants had varying experiences and job tenure, as well as differing roles and responsibilities. Although a diversity of backgrounds can strengthen the experience, PLSP may wish to select Fellows from a discrete set of job-alike categories (for example, early-career administrators, experienced institutional professionals, and employees of nonprofit research firms or professional associations). This may help build intra-cohort relationships among individuals with similar work responsibilities.

- **Expand outreach to ensure diverse representation:** Given the diverse population participating in postsecondary CTE programming, it is critical that leadership development opportunities be extended to individuals from various demographic backgrounds. Efforts should continue to focus on publicizing the opportunity to underrepresented groups and ensuring the judging process is unbiased.

- **Underscore the program's focus on equity and access:** Few individuals addressed equity or access or proposed institutional improvement plans in their applications. Publicity materials should be redesigned to highlight the importance of equity and access, and Fellows should be encouraged to address these themes in their institutional improvement plans.

SYLLABUS DEVELOPMENT

PLSP activities were designed to grow the leadership and organizational management skills of postsecondary CTE administrators. To ground instruction, before program startup, the PLSP coordinator reviewed the research literature to identify a core set of administrative skills and content knowledge that effective postsecondary CTE leaders should possess.

A course syllabus, incorporating a list of learning objectives and activities, as well as a timeline for teaching them, was developed based on this research. To further structure the program, PLSP recruited an advisory committee of 10 experienced postsecondary CTE administrators who met before the program began to review its goals and suggest discussion topics. Advisory committee members also helped market PLSP and nominate and select Fellows, with some subsequently serving as mentors. Quarterly calls provided members with activity updates.

Lessons learned

- **Engage the advisory committee in program improvement:** Committee members helped shape program content and the Fellow recruitment process. Although quarterly consultations were intended to provide for continued engagement, call participation rates fell over time. To fully benefit from their insights, PLSP should seek to actively engage advisory committee members throughout the experience (for example, by soliciting recommendations to strengthen the curriculum and address unanticipated challenges).

- **Refine the alignment of learning objectives:** The 2019 syllabus provided a broad overview of program activities and the timing of their rollout. PLSP leaders should use Cohort 2 to refine existing lesson plans and learning objectives for each instructional activity and strengthen their alignment with program goals. This may include phasing out activities that Fellows identified as having lower value.

Growth in Leadership and Organizational Management Skills

PLSP was designed to strengthen Fellows' understanding of fundamental issues associated with the delivery of postsecondary CTE programming.

Program participation was grounded in two foundational assignments: Fellows *crafted a professional development plan* that identified the leadership skills they wished to grow and an *institutional improvement plan* to address a worksite challenge. Monthly meetings with a mentor provided a forum for Fellows to seek guidance, as well as discuss worksite issues and what they learned in the program.

In addition to the institutional improvement and professional development plans, Fellows engaged in other activities organized into three areas:

LEADERSHIP

- *Attending two in-person leadership-focused events,* including a site visit to an exemplary community college, and a presentation at ACTE's CareerTech VISION 2019 conference
- *Writing an article for publication* in ACTE's Techniques magazine or another professional journal
- *Designing a promotional/informational tool* based on local and/or national data to improve the image/perception of the value of CTE

POLICY

- *Observing a regents/board meeting* to reflect on policy discussions and the decision-making process
- *Attending two in-person policy-focused events,* including ACTE's National Policy Seminar and the ECMC Foundation Convocation in Washington, D.C.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- *Writing three blog-style reflections* that summarized what they learned about postsecondary CTE leadership based on program activities
- *Participating in a book study* and writing a one-page reflection on an assigned chapter
- *Attending nine monthly webinars* to hear from national experts and completing related assignments
- *Completing a one- to two-page end-of-program reflection* on growth through mentoring and synthesis of their PLSP experience

HOW FELLOWS BENEFITED

When they started and completed PLSP, Fellows were asked to rate their level of confidence in eight domains in which a CTE leader should demonstrate mastery, corresponding to the content focus of the program. Fellows reported substantial increases in their subject area confidence, with the greatest gains in their understanding of federal CTE policy and political advocacy, as well as strategies for building a professional network to support partnership development (figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of Fellows somewhat or very confident in their leadership skills

Pre-program (n=19)
- Somewhat confident
- Very confident

Post-program (n=19)
- Somewhat confident
- Very confident

		TOTAL
Federal CTE funding	Pre: 47% / 0%	47%
	Post: 53% / 26%	79%
Understanding federal CTE policy and political advocacy	Pre: 21% / 0%	21%
	Post: 53% / 26%	79%
Strategies to improve the perception of CTE and strategies to promote student recruitment	Pre: 63% / 11%	74%
	Post: 89%	89%
Challenges in offering equitable access and services to underserved students and strategies for building an inclusive culture	Pre: 47% / 11%	58%
	Post: 42% / 42%	84%
The role of CTE in career pathways and guided pathways and strategies for using technology in program delivery	Pre: 47% / 16%	63%
	Post: 26% / 42%	68%
Challenges in CTE staffing and strategies for recruiting and retaining CTE faculty	Pre: 37% / 16%	21%
	Post: 53% / 26%	68%
Strategies for engaging and building partnerships with business and industry, the community and other education leaders	Pre: 42% / 16%	32%
	Post: 37% / 47%	53%
Strategies for building a professional network to support their development as a postsecondary CTE leader	Pre: 32% / 11%	43%
	Post: 32% / 58%	63%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Source: Education Northwest analysis of results from the PLSP Pre-program Participant Survey and PLSP Post-program Participant Survey results

Fellows also reported substantial increases in their organizational management skills, with more than 80 percent rating themselves as "somewhat confident" or "very confident" in their communication, time management, and team-building skills, and 95 percent at least somewhat confident in peer collaboration.

Although gains were registered across all categories, a third of Fellows reported feeling less than confident in their understanding of strategies for interpreting research findings and using data to support informed decision-making (figure 2).

Figure 2. Percentage of Fellows somewhat or very confident in their institutional leadership skills

Pre-program (n=19)
● Somewhat confident ● Very confident

Post-program (n=19)
● Somewhat confident ● Very confident

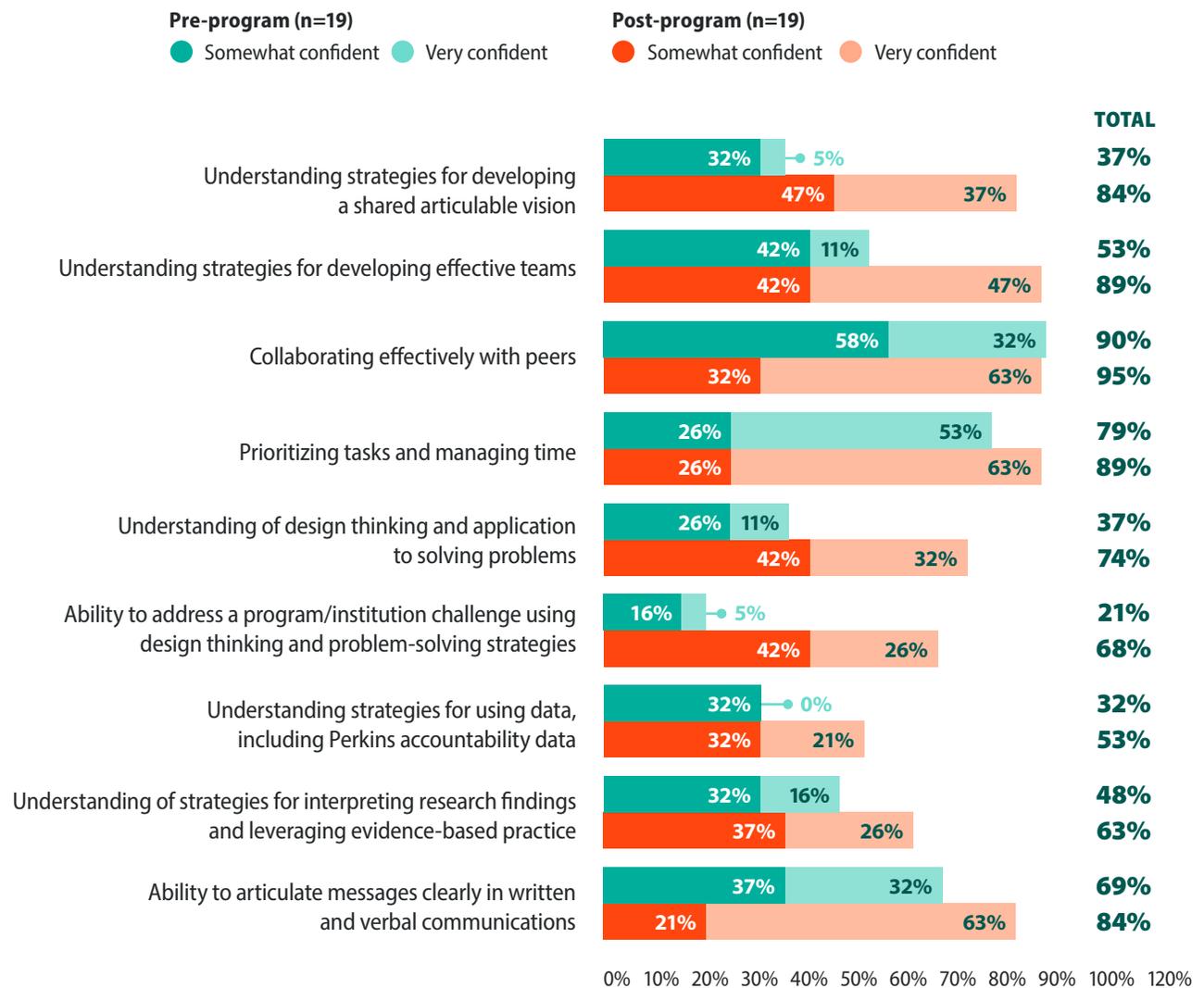| Skill	Pre-program Somewhat	Pre-program Very	Pre TOTAL	Post-program Somewhat	Post-program Very	Post TOTAL
Understanding strategies for developing a shared articulable vision	32%	5%	37%	47%	37%	84%
Understanding strategies for developing effective teams	42%	11%	53%	42%	47%	89%
Collaborating effectively with peers	58%	32%	90%	32%	63%	95%
Prioritizing tasks and managing time	26%	53%	79%	26%	63%	89%
Understanding of design thinking and application to solving problems	26%	11%	37%	42%	32%	74%
Ability to address a program/institution challenge using design thinking and problem-solving strategies	16%	5%	21%	42%	26%	68%
Understanding strategies for using data, including Perkins accountability data	32%	0%	32%	32%	21%	53%
Understanding of strategies for interpreting research findings and leveraging evidence-based practice	32%	16%	48%	37%	26%	63%
Ability to articulate messages clearly in written and verbal communications	37%	32%	69%	21%	63%	84%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100% 120%

Source: Education Northwest analysis of PLSP Pre-program Participant Survey and PLSP Post-program Participant Survey results

Overall, Fellows expressed strong support for the program, with all agreeing that their involvement was a good use of their time and nearly 90 percent indicating they would recommend PLSP to a friend (figure 3). However, only 48 percent of Fellows believed that if foundation funding were not available, ACTE should continue the program by charging individuals (or their institutions) to participate. Given the relatively low support for requiring a participation fee, ACTE should consider options for quantifying the return on investment for Fellows if PLSP is to be sustained.

Figure 3. Fellows' perceptions of PLSP value
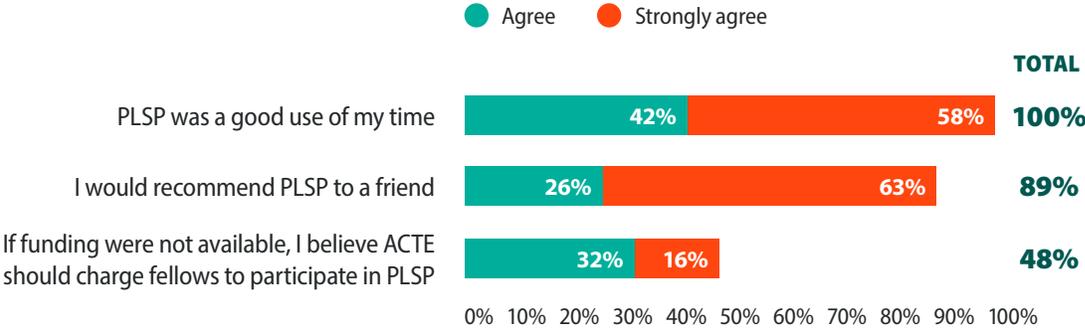
Source: Education Northwest analysis of PLSP Post-program Participant Survey results

Lessons learned

- **Reassess and refine the program curriculum to improve learning outcomes:** Pre- and post-program survey results indicated that Fellows made substantial gains in most core institutional leadership and CTE domains. However, although survey results suggested that Fellows benefited from their involvement in the program, some areas appeared to be lagging. PLSP should use findings from Cohort 1 to identify areas in which Fellows appear to have less confidence in their skills, as indicated by relatively lower ratings in the post-program survey results, and (where appropriate) adjust the curriculum.

- **Link Fellows' individual learning goals to program content:** Cohort 1 Fellows identified various professional and institutional improvement goals in their development plans. PLSP should review the individual goals identified by Fellows and seek to align them with the learning objectives used to structure program activities. Instructional leads also may wish to conduct individual check-ins with mentors and Fellows to ensure individuals are making progress in achieving their personal goals.

- **Integrate institutional plan work into PLSP activities:** Fellows were asked to give two-minute updates on their institutional improvement plan work after monthly webinar presentations. Although these briefings allowed Fellows to hear what progress was being made, they often did not have sufficient time to go into detail or solicit input. PLSP should build time into program activities to allow Fellows to get feedback. This could be accomplished by assigning two to three Fellows to share their work plans on monthly webinars and/or dedicating a webinar to institutional improvement plan reporting.

- **Ensure proposed institutional improvement work has support from the site lead:** Fellows with relatively low organizational authority, typically those earlier in their career, reported obstacles in carrying out their proposed institutional improvement activities. Although immediate supervisors were aware of the proposed work, in some instances, upper-level leaders established roadblocks because the proposed work was not in line with their institutional goals or perceived as a threat. Once Fellows are accepted into the program, PLSP should ensure their proposed work plans are aligned with institutional goals and have the support of senior leaders.

Mentors

When Fellows started the program, they were asked to identify a mentor to coach them in building leadership skills. A list of postsecondary CTE experts, compiled from ACTE's network of contacts, was circulated to help Fellows who requested assistance. Mentors ranged from nationally renowned CTE experts to institutional leaders at Fellows' state education agency or institution (table 2).

Table 2. Types of mentors for Cohort 1

Mentor type	Number
National CTE expert	3
State education agency administrator	1
Institutional and/or local leader	12
Direct supervisor	3

The process of matching Fellows with mentors took longer than expected. Roughly two-thirds of Fellows entered the program with a mentor they had identified from their institutional leadership or professional connections. Others were able to connect using the PLSP mentor list. However, some Fellows were unable to secure a mentor until several months into the program, delaying their initial meetings.

> *[My mentee] and I had very open, honest, and engaging conversations. Rather than being tethered to the plans she set in place, instead I was responsive to the concerns and issues she raised as she set the call agenda.*
>
> *– PLSP mentor*

Fellows and their mentors were asked to meet monthly to discuss Fellows' progress toward their professional development goals, work on their institutional improvement plans, and other work-related issues.

Before meeting with their Fellow, mentors participated in a kickoff call with PLSP leaders to review the program goals and expectations for their involvement. Each quarter, mentors completed a tracking template that asked them to rate their mentee's professional growth using both Likert scale and open-ended responses.[1] PLSP leaders used this feedback to identify overarching themes and tailor supports to meet the needs of individual Fellows.

Although mentors had a relatively good understanding of their role in the program, many said they would have benefited from additional guidance on how to structure their mentoring sessions (figure 4).

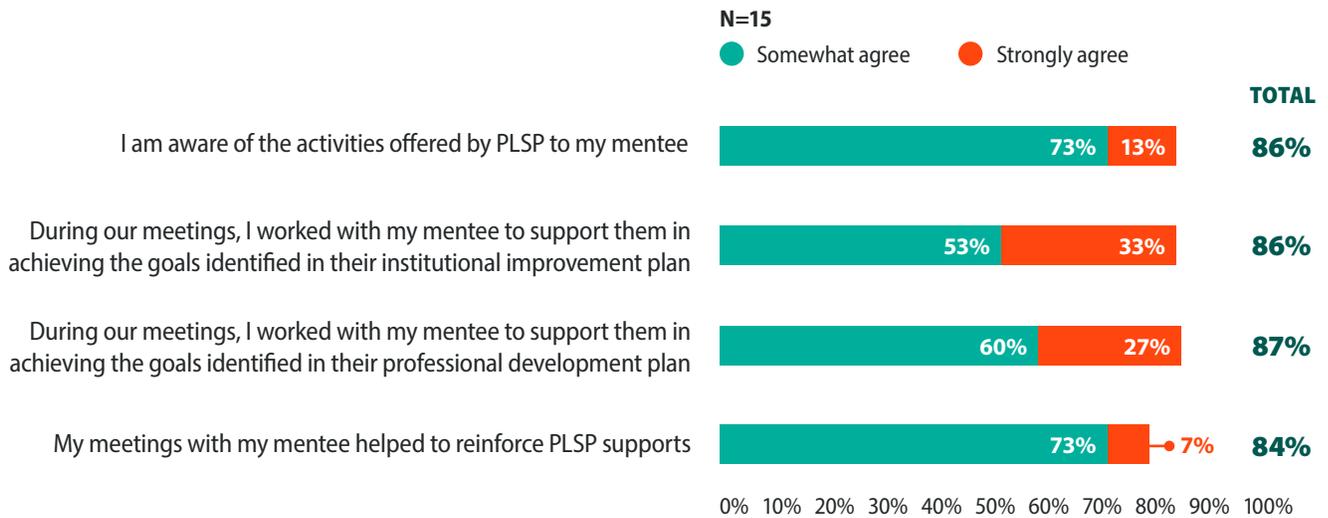### Figure 4. Mentors' experience participating in PLSP
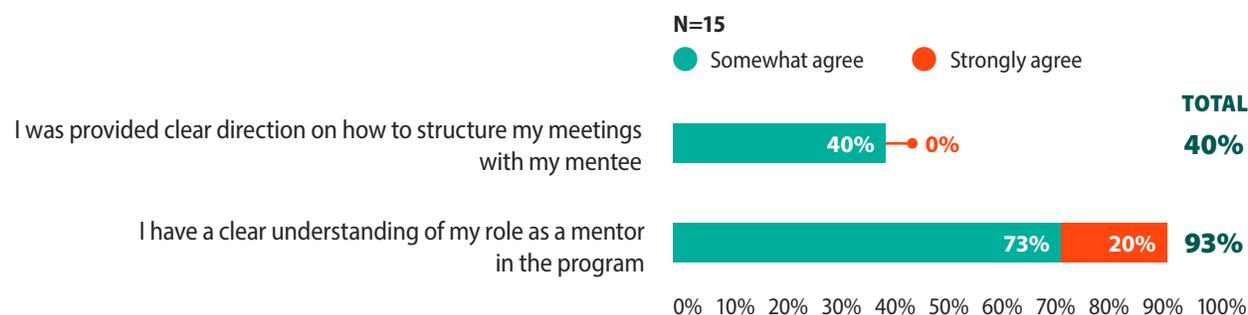
Source: Education Northwest analysis of PLSP Post-program Mentor Survey results

Fellows were responsible for scheduling monthly meetings with their mentors, with most setting the agenda and determining discussion topics. On average, Fellows met with their mentor once a month for 30 to 60 minutes. Fellows whose mentors were based at or near their home institution reported more in-person meetings, as well as more frequent interactions, than their peers whose mentors were located further away.

Mentors reported that their monthly interactions helped Fellows achieve the goals identified in their professional development and institutional improvement plans (figure 5). Mentors were somewhat less confident that their involvement connected to PLSP programming. For example, although 77 percent of mentors somewhat agreed that their meetings with their mentee helped reinforce PLSP supports, just 8 percent strongly agreed.

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[1] Mentors responded to questions using a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree).

Figure 5. Mentors' perceptions of support they provided to PLSP Fellows

N=15

● Somewhat agree   ● Strongly agree

		TOTAL
I am aware of the activities offered by PLSP to my mentee	73% 13%	**86%**
During our meetings, I worked with my mentee to support them in achieving the goals identified in their institutional improvement plan	53% 33%	**86%**
During our meetings, I worked with my mentee to support them in achieving the goals identified in their professional development plan	60% 27%	**87%**
My meetings with my mentee helped to reinforce PLSP supports	73% 7%	**84%**

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Source: Education Northwest analysis of PLSP Post-program Mentor Survey results

HOW FELLOWS BENEFITED

Fellows reported meetings with their mentor as one of the most important components of PLSP. Post-program surveys indicated that 69 percent of Fellows rated the time spent with their mentor as "very useful" in addressing challenges and making progress on their professional development plan.

Mentors with national expertise often shared broad insights and professional advice that shaped how Fellows viewed the profession. For example, speaking to a recognized public figure—such as a university system president or the CEO of a national association—helped Fellows learn about available career paths and challenges they might encounter.

Some Fellows reported that conversations with their mentors helped them build their confidence and gain a better understanding of the field. For example, one Fellow said interactions with their mentor empowered them to pursue and negotiate favorable terms for a new career opportunity for which they otherwise might not have applied. Another said that without the program, they would never have interacted with someone of their mentor's professional caliber.

"

I was the beneficiary of many of his connections, much of his works, and have gained his trust to be part of partnership opportunities as we both lead.

– PLSP participant

Fellows who selected a mentor with a more localized affiliation (in some instances, their direct supervisor) appreciated the advantage an established relationship provided. These Fellows said that because their mentor was attuned to their institutional issues, they were well-positioned to offer targeted guidance to avoid political pitfalls and deal with difficult personalities at their institution. For instance, one Fellow attributed their success in achieving their institutional improvement plan goals to feedback from their mentor, who was knowledgeable of site challenges and personally invested in their success.

Regardless of their mentor's background, Fellows valued the opportunity to interact one-on-one with an experienced professional. These conversations helped break down barriers created by perceived status. Once Fellows established a personal connection with their mentor, they could better appreciate and learn from them. Fellows also reported benefiting from connections they made through their mentors, which helped expand their professional network.

Lessons learned

- **Require Fellows to identify a mentor at the beginning of the program:** Several Fellows had difficulty selecting a mentor, which delayed first-quarter consultations. PLSP should consult with applicants during the admission process to ensure all have a mentor identified at the start of the program—and if they do not, help them recruit a qualified individual to avoid assignment delays (which occurred for some Fellows in Cohort 1). Consideration also should be given to how pairings are made. For example, Fellows prioritizing an institutional challenge might benefit from working with a local expert, and those seeking broader insights might benefit more from a national leader.

- **Provide mentors with expectations for their involvement:** Mentors required guidance to ensure their consultations align with program goals. PLSP should meet with mentors at the outset to provide an overview of the syllabus, program learning objectives, and a description and timing of activities. Expectations for mentoring sessions should also be detailed, including the frequency and content of meetings, as well as instructions for completing and submitting their quarterly reports of Fellow progress in a timely manner.

- **Share information on Fellow activities:** PLSP should establish open lines of communication with mentors early in the program. To provide context for mentoring discussions and insights into Fellows' professional development, electronic copies of program assignments and homework submissions should be shared with mentors (with Fellows' permission).

- **Leverage relationships to address observed challenges:** Mentors were expected to consult with mentees monthly to support their leadership development. PLSP may wish to contact mentors to advise them of challenges Fellows are facing in the program and to solicit feedback to help target services. Likewise, as pertinent and appropriate, mentors should share with PLSP leads any issues raised during their mentoring discussions that might affect Fellows' participation.

Webinars
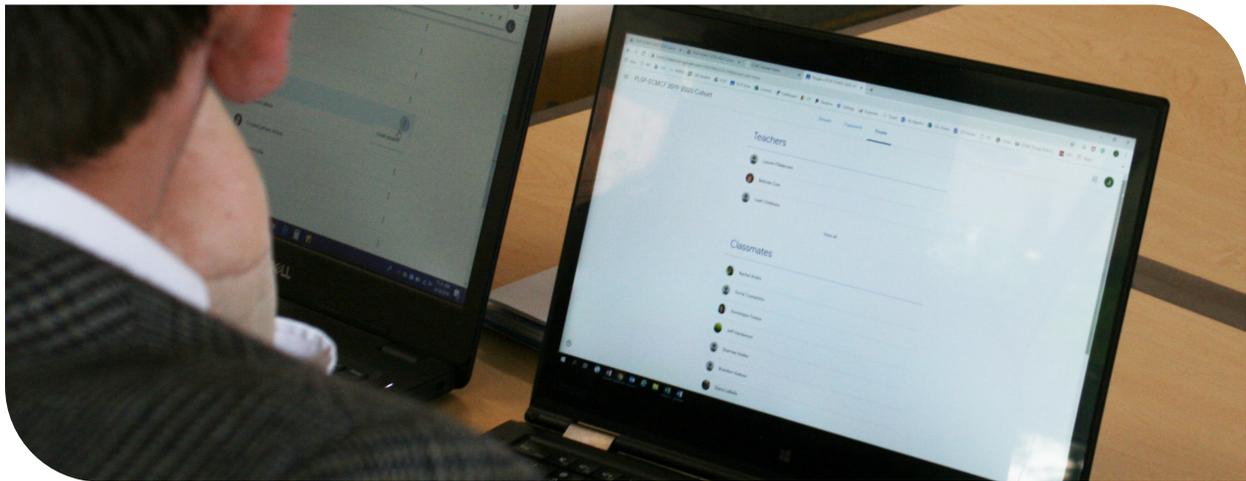
Fellows participated in monthly 90-minute webinars that promoted leadership development and featured presentations from national experts in postsecondary CTE. Each webinar typically began with program updates, followed by a 45-minute presentation. After that, Fellows actively engaged with the presenter in a facilitated Q&A session. Pre-webinar readings or activities, when assigned, added context and helped Fellows formulate questions. Time was allotted at the end of each webinar for Fellows to share progress on their professional development or institutional improvement plans and to ask questions about their activities and assignments.

PLSP personnel monitored Fellows' webinar attendance and rated their level of involvement. To record observations, PLSP staff members used a rating template to assess whether Fellows completed a pre-webinar assignment, attended the webinar, and actively engaged in activities. Fellows were rated using a three-category scale:

- **Engaged:** Contributed to webinar discussions and/or offered evidence of involvement (e.g., participated in chat, asked questions)
- **Unengaged:** Did not speak and/or offered no measurable contribution to the webinar (e.g., did not chat, did not participate in discussions)
- **Unprofessional:** Inappropriate level of engagement (e.g., dominated discussions, lacked self-awareness, behaved in an inappropriate manner)

Records of Fellows' involvement indicated that most Fellows attended each webinar and were actively engaged (table 3). Those unable to attend usually provided the instructor with an excuse, although some neglected to share this information before the webinar.

Table 3. Participant engagement in monthly webinars

WEBINAR DATE	NUMBER ATTENDING	PRE-WEBINAR ASSIGNMENT SUBMITTED	LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT	
			ENGAGED	UNENGAGED
April 5, 2019	19	N/A	18	1
May 3, 2019	19	N/A	13	6
June 5, 2019	18	15	17	1
July 12, 2019	20	18	18	2
August 2, 2019	14	12	13	1
September 6, 2019	19	N/A	16	3
October 4, 2019	14	11	13	1
November 1, 2019	17	N/A	16	1
January 30, 2020	19	19	N/A	N/A

HOW FELLOWS BENEFITED

Monthly webinars were aligned to the PLSP goals/objectives for Fellows and delivered by recognized national experts in postsecondary CTE (table 4). When possible, webinars were adjusted to include topics of interest to Fellows, such as "leading without authority."

Table 4. Webinar topics, presenters, and targeted goals/skills

MONTH	WEBINAR TOPIC	PRESENTER	GOALS/SKILLS
April	Design thinking	Dr. Jaared Scott, Francis Tuttle Technology Center, Oklahoma City, OK	• Understanding design thinking and its application to solving problems • Understanding strategies for developing effective teams
May	CTE image and promotion	Katie Fitzgerald, Advance CTE, and Brittney Davidson and Karthik Ilakkuvan, The Aspen Institute	• Understanding challenges regarding the image and perception of CTE and strategies for promotion and student recruitment • Understanding challenges in access and equity for underserved populations in CTE and strategies for building an inclusive culture
June	Effectively using data and research	Dr. James Bartlett, College of Education, North Carolina State University	• Understanding challenges in access and equity for underserved populations in CTE and strategies for building an inclusive culture • Interpreting research findings and leveraging evidence-based practices

MONTH	WEBINAR TOPIC	PRESENTER	GOALS/SKILLS
July	Access, equity, and special populations in postsecondary CTE	Ricardo Romanillos, National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity	• Identifying challenges in access and equity for underserved populations in CTE and strategies for building an inclusive culture
August	How to talk like TED	Rachael Mann, ACTE	• Understanding design thinking and its application to solving problems • Understanding how to create impactful presentations
September	Perkins V: Local needs assessments	Alisha Hyslop, ACTE	• Understanding federal CTE policy and funding, as well as the purposes of political advocacy • Adopting strategies for engaging and building partnerships with businesses and industries, the community, and other education leaders
October	Leading without authority	Nancy Trivette, ACTE Board of Directors	• Understanding strategies for engaging and building partnerships with business and industry, the community, and other education leaders. • Understanding challenges regarding the image and perception of CTE and strategies for promotion and student recruitment
November	Housekeeping and idea sharing for ACTE VISION presentations	None	• Articulating messages clearly in written and verbal communications • Collaborating effectively with peers • Understanding design thinking and its application to solving problems.
January	Final webinar and PLSP wrap up	None	• Articulating messages clearly in written and verbal communications • Collaborating effectively with peers • Building a professional network to support one's development as a postsecondary CTE leader

Although Fellows reported that webinars focused on postsecondary CTE leadership topics were useful in developing their leadership skills, just over a third found them to be "very useful." Since Fellows were not asked to rate individual topics, little is known about each webinar's relative utility.

Lesson learned

- **Establish expectations for participant involvement:** PLSP instructors required Fellows to use their video camera and find a dedicated space for attending webinars (i.e., a quiet room) to minimize background distractions. For Fellows rated as unengaged, instructors should reach out to better understand why they are not actively participating and to determine whether there are ways to improve content sharing.

- **Link webinar content to Fellows' identified needs:** At the beginning of the program, PLSP should review Fellows' applications to identify requested professional development and organizational management topics. Webinar content should be linked to these topics, as well as the program syllabus. Expectations for pre-webinar assignments should be clearly communicated and feedback provided on Fellows' submissions.

- **Provide time for Fellows to share and solicit input on their institutional improvement plan:** PLSP should consider having at least two webinars dedicated to Fellows reviewing their plan goals, progress made, and challenges encountered. Presenting Fellows should be given guidance to help facilitate discussion and solicit feedback from their peers.

- **Work with experts to strengthen webinar presentations:** Before each webinar, PLSP staff members should work with presenters to ensure they understand the purpose of the program and Fellows' identified professional development goals. Presenters may require training from staff members on the technology features of the webinar platform, as well as strategies for increasing engagement with Fellows and presenting data in meaningful and interesting ways (e.g., using photos, charts, and hyperlinks).

- **Convert monthly webinars to a flipped classroom format to maximize discussion time:** In lieu of a 45-minute live presentation, webinar content could be delivered as a pre-recorded presentation posted on Google Classroom one week before each scheduled webinar. As a pre-webinar assignment, Fellows would be required to review the presentation and submit written questions. The Fellows could then attend a facilitated webinar, along with the presenter, to hear answers to their questions and share insights regarding what they saw.

Site Visits and Conference Attendance

Fellows attended four in-person convenings. These events offered multiple opportunities to network with peers, PLSP staff members, and national postsecondary CTE leaders, as well as learn about CTE research and policy. Events were designed to highlight differing experiences crucial to developing post-secondary CTE leadership skills.

2019 Convenings
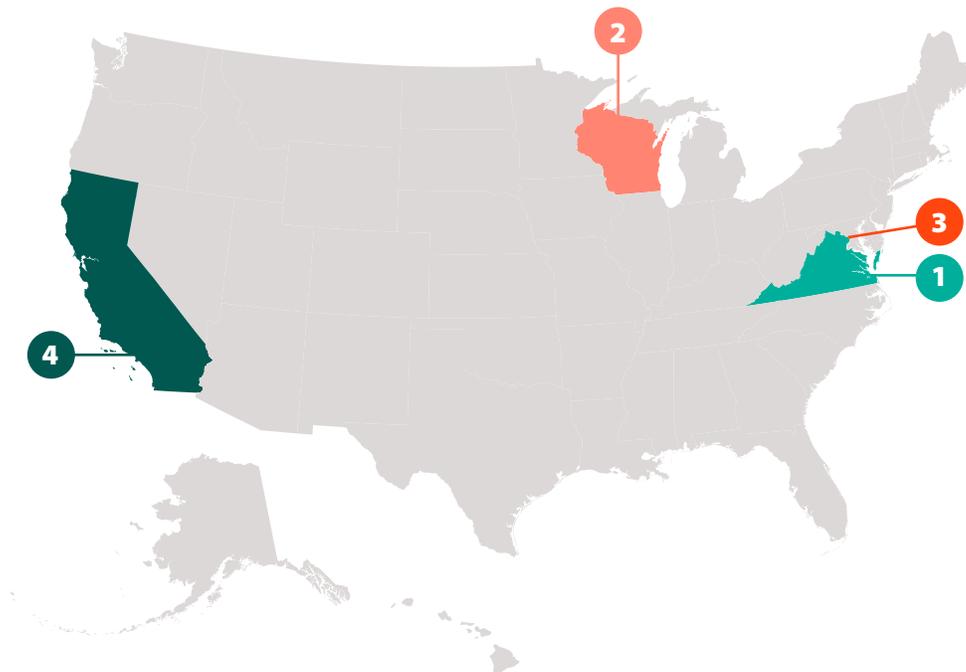
**1 National Policy Seminar:
March 24–27 in Arlington, Virginia**
Meetings on Capitol Hill with federal legislators, updates on national legislation, and sessions on policy and advocacy

**3 ECMC Foundation Convocation:
October 22–25 in Washington, D.C.**
Networking with ECMC Foundation research Fellows and national experts to review pressing issues in CTE policy and practice

**2 Gateway Technical College:
June 12–14 in Kenosha, Wisconsin**
Visit administrators and staff members at standout technical college with outstanding programming and business partnerships

**4 CareerTech VISION 2019:
December 4–7 in Anaheim, California**
Attend annual ACTE conference of CTE educators and present at breakout sessions on institutional improvement plan experience

HOW FELLOWS BENEFITED

Fellows were rated on their engagement at each event using a standardized evaluation rubric. This included whether the person attended, their role (participant or presenter), and a rating of the quality of their involvement using a four-point scale (poor, good, very good, or exceptional).

Conference ratings indicated Fellows were routinely rated as highly engaged, with several reporting that they intended to take the lessons learned from their visits back to their site and/or integrate what they learned into their professional development and institutional improvement plans.

Policymakers and national leaders

The **National Policy Seminar,** held in Washington D.C., introduced Fellows to community college leaders, as well as congressional policymakers and their staffs. Fellows also interacted with high-ranking administrators in the departments of Education and Labor, as well as representatives of professional CTE and workforce development associations.

NPS really helped me understand the big picture and see my place in the overall system.

– PLSP participant

Exemplary program leaders

The visit to **Gateway Technical College** gave Fellows an opportunity to see a high-functioning program and interact with college leaders and faculty members. Breakout sessions targeted critical issues in postsecondary CTE leadership, including organizational management, business workforce solutions and apprenticeships, dual enrollment/pathways, the formation of business partnerships, and digital outreach through social media.

The opportunity to see Gateway Technical College was extremely helpful … [It] was not just the time to interact with their team and facility but also the time to connect with other PLSP peers and reflect on what we were seeing.

– PLSP participant

Learning from the research community

The three-day **ECMC Foundation Convocation** was one of the most highly rated activities. Held in conjunction with the ECMC Postsecondary CTE Research Fellowship Program, this event gave Fellows the opportunity to network through roundtable discussions about critical issues in the field, including work-based learning, credit/non-credit programming, faculty recruitment and training. Plenary sessions offered Fellows opportunities to hear from foundation staff members and university researchers.

Once at the ECMC Convening, though, I felt transformed. Having access to the research fellows was amazing [and] getting the chance to see the overlap between the two programs' missions.

– PLSP participant

Sharing with the field

As a culminating activity, Fellows attended **ACTE's CareerTech VISION 2019 conference.** This weeklong event gave Fellows the opportunity to meet one another, share experiences, and attend breakout sessions put on by leaders in the field. Fellows delivered presentations highlighting their work and experiences, and they were featured at a plenary session, during which they were publicly recognized for their accomplishments.

The ACTE National Conference was probably the highlight of my year! The session we had was amazing, and several of the attendees came up to me and got my information to have follow-up conversations. It took me out of my "beside the scenes worker bee" mentality and pushed me into speaking up about my passion.

– PLSP participant

Lessons learned

- **Build time for participant networking:** In-person convenings provided an opportunity for Fellows to meet informally to strengthen their relationships, discuss professional issues, and build an esprit de corps. Fellows reported that some events felt overscheduled, which limited their opportunities to interact. PLSP should consider building some "downtime" into events so Fellows can network informally and share insights with one another.

- **Group Fellows with similar development interests or professional backgrounds:** Analysis of Fellows' professional development and institutional improvement plans indicated that some individuals were seeking to grow a related set of skills or have job-alike skills. PLSP may wish to connect Fellows with similar interests so they may collaborate, share experiences, and brainstorm solutions. Doing so could help Fellows build skills and strengthen intra-cohort relationships.

- **Continue to schedule visits to highly functional programs:** The site visit to Gateway Technical College was the most highly rated program activity. Fellows said the opportunity to observe facilities and speak with staff members was inspirational and that it gave them ideas they might take back to their own institution. PLSP may wish to provide additional opportunities for Fellows to have similar firsthand experiences.

- **Provide scaffolding supports in early activities:** Participation in high-profile PLSP events can be intimidating, particularly for Fellows who are not used to traveling or meeting with high-ranking politicians and nationally recognized experts. PLSP leads should prep the cohort before events (for example, brainstorming questions and topics so Fellows are prepared to engage). Individualized outreach may also be offered to early-career professionals to help build their self-confidence. Pairing early-career Fellows with ones who have more professional experience may also help lessen anxiety.

Writing Assignments

Fellows were expected to take a leadership role in the field. To that end, program activities were designed to help them develop their professional skills through hands-on work. Writing assignments included developing an article for publication in a professional journal; writing blog posts and essays based on their program experiences, including book studies, interviews, and site visits; and creating and delivering a presentation at ACTE's CareerTech VISION conference. Through publishing select assignments and other program materials on the ACTE and ECMC Foundation websites, PLSP engaged and communicated with interested professionals about the objectives and outcomes of the program.

Fellows engaged in 13 writing assignments over the course of the program (table 5). Work was assigned and submitted using Google Classroom, an online content management platform. Following reports that some Fellows were experiencing technical difficulties, PLSP provided a hands-on tutorial during the June site visit. According to program staff members, after that, Fellows had an easier time using Google Classroom.

Table 5. Fellows' writing assignments and due dates: June 2019 to January 2020

CATEGORIES AND ASSIGNMENTS	DUE DATE
Conference presentations	
Proposal for CareerTech VISION 2019	May 6, 2019
Institutional improvement and professional development plans	
Draft plans	May 1, 2019
Revised problem statement for institutional improvement plan	July 29, 2019
Final institutional improvement plan	January 20, 2020

CATEGORIES AND ASSIGNMENTS	DUE DATE
Publications	
Techniques (submission for October issue)	July 19, 2019
Thoughts and reflections	
No. 1: Interview with mentor	June 6, 2019
No. 2: Gateway Technical College site visit	July 15, 2019
No. 3: The ECMC Foundation October convening, the book study, or the participant's overall PLSP experience	October 31, 2019
Summary of growth in mentorship experience	January 27, 2020
Reflection on PLSP experience	January 31, 2020
Book studies	
Book study chapter	June 24, 2019
"The Innovator's DNA" book study	August 9, 2019
Reports	
Regents/board meeting report	October 1, 2019

Although detailed analyses of assignment submissions are beyond the scope of this evaluation, document review suggested that Fellows dedicated different amounts of time and effort to their work. This was evidenced by the length of Fellows' assignments, the timeliness or absence of submissions, and the presence of typos and grammatical errors.
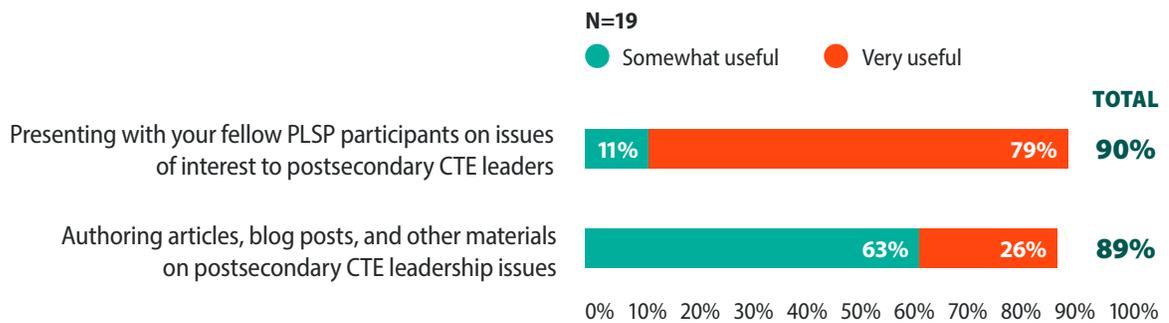
HOW FELLOWS BENEFITED

Overall, Fellows said the workload was reasonable and that they appreciated the opportunity to publish their writing and present at a national conference. Generally, early-career Fellows reported the greatest benefit from the CareerTech VISION 2019 presentation, which served as the program's capstone. Although they also appreciated this opportunity, Fellows who routinely present as part of their job found it less useful.

Seven Fellows turned their interviews with mentors or other program reflections into blog posts that were featured on the ACTE PLSP[2] and ECMC Foundation[3] websites between July and September. Intended to help Fellows build their leadership and writing skills, these blog posts were promoted through ACTE's member communications and social media channels.

The majority of Fellows said completing the writing assignments and presenting with their peers at CareerTech VISION 2019 helped develop their critical leadership skills for postsecondary CTE (figure 6).

Figure 6. Percentage of Fellows finding writing assignments and presentation opportunities to be somewhat or very useful

N=19

● Somewhat useful   ● Very useful

		TOTAL
Presenting with your fellow PLSP participants on issues of interest to postsecondary CTE leaders	11% / 79%	90%
Authoring articles, blog posts, and other materials on postsecondary CTE leadership issues	63% / 26%	89%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Source: Education Northwest analysis of PLSP Post-program Participant Survey results

Lessons learned

- **Review the benefit of existing assignments:** PLSP leaders may wish to review the number, type, and timing of assignments to determine how each contributes to achieving program goals. Ideally, this could be done in consultation with Fellows to determine the relative benefit of different activities and strategies for aligning assignments with institutional deadlines so that Fellows have sufficient time to produce quality work.

- **Establish submission deadlines and provide written feedback:** Once work is assigned, Fellows should be held accountable for submitting assignments in a timely manner—and individualized feedback should be provided. Although work may not need to be graded, Fellows should be offered guidance on its quality.

- **Establish a rubric to describe how assignments will be reviewed:** To ensure Fellows submit high-quality work and meet their deadlines, PLSP should develop and circulate rubrics that set expectations for assignments and the criteria used to rate them. Fellows who do not complete assignments on time or with sufficient quality should be contacted immediately, and plans should be made to remedy the situation.

- **Train Fellows on Google Classroom:** Serving as a centralized communications hub, this platform offers PLSP leads and Fellows an efficient tool for coordinating program activities. PLSP may wish to build a technology training into its kickoff meeting to ensure individuals understand how to use Google Classroom. Leads should also reach out to individuals experiencing difficulty to understand the reason(s) why and to offer training or solutions, if needed.

- **Check before sharing Fellows' images or written assignments:** Fellows are experienced professionals who have worked to cultivate a professional brand. Accordingly, PLSP should consult with Fellows before publicizing information on their program activities. Doing so can ensure that delicate topics, such as those identified in Fellows' institutional improvement plan, are not released if they may draw negative attention. Consultation should also occur before circulating digital media, since people may be sensitive to their appearance. Once products are approved for distribution, PLSP should ensure all materials are professionally edited.

Conclusion

Launching the inaugural cohort of Fellows presented a daunting task. PLSP leads were charged with simultaneously designing and delivering a yearlong leadership development program, online and in person, to a diverse group of professionals with various job tenures and backgrounds. Translating broad professional development goals into a clear and customized set of learning objectives was a challenging process, complicated by the adoption of a sophisticated technology platform to administer assignments.

> *This experience has led me to better appreciate the depth, breadth, and diversity of practitioners, students, programs, and leaders in CTE across the country. It has helped me to better understand how my role with CTE connects with the goals and vision for CTE at a national level. It has empowered me as a CTE professional to be able to better advocate for CTE programs and to better do my job of leading CTE programs within my institution and within my region.*
>
> *– PLSP participant*

Now that the program activities and timeline have been tested, PLSP leaders can turn their attention to institutionalizing the program experience. A detailed syllabus, circulated at the beginning of the program, should include a description of the topics and learning objectives, timing and expectations for the submission of written assignments, and criteria used to evaluate work.

Support may come from the PLSP Advisory Committee, which comprises national postsecondary CTE experts who can help inform standards identification and curricula design. Members' roles and responsibilities should be communicated at the outset, with individuals actively engaged in activity planning. The committee should convene quarterly, with written summaries offered between meetings.

Mentors can also help reinforce program activities. This will require maintaining open, two-way communication so that mentors understand the topics to be covered and how they can address them in their discussions. In addition, mentors must have a way of sharing with PLSP personnel their own insights gleaned from conversations with mentees.

The hiring of Dr. Michael Wright as the 2020 PLSP instructional coordinator offers opportunities for strengthening services for the incoming cohort. Dr. Wright has considerable postsecondary administrative experience, which (in combination with his instructional background) positions him to leverage program resources and activities more systematically.