NEW SKILLS FOR YOUTH
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Career Readiness Stakeholder Engagement Tool

Sustainable and successful transformation of state career readiness systems, including but not limited to Career Technical Education (CTE), requires engagement with a variety of stakeholders who are deliberately working to share ownership. Lead agencies must engage those from industry, who may be new to policymaking, not only to generate buy-in but also to reach state goals for transformation.

This tool is based on two connected guides released by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in June[i] and November[ii] 2016. These guides list steps for effective stakeholder engagement in relation to state plans for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and were developed in consultation with 15 national advocacy and civil rights groups. Through the New Skills for Youth initiative, we have taken those guides and adapted them for a career readiness context. This worksheet will help states that are designing interactions for specific stakeholders, whether they are individuals, communities or organizations. This worksheet will help states initiate, deepen and maintain your engagement with stakeholders throughout the design and transformation of your career readiness systems.

How to Use the Tool

This worksheet is designed inform your communications efforts but is not designed to serve as your entire strategic communications plan. To use this tool, designate one person on your career readiness cross-sector team to coordinate stakeholder engagement efforts. This person will not necessarily be conducting all stakeholder outreach, but he or she will be in charge of the overall strategy and plan for stakeholders. Then use the list below and/or the stakeholder map to choose an initial stakeholder to engage. The lead can complete this worksheet on his or her own and then share with the broader team or facilitate a conversation with a few team members to complete the worksheet together.

Steps for Effective Stakeholder Engagement:

- Step 1: Clarify your goals
- Step 2: Work with partner organizations and ambassadors to identify and engage your stakeholders
- Step 3: Speak to your audience
- Step 4: Use multiple vehicles
- Step 5: Ask for input before decisions are made, and use it
- Step 6: Keep your materials simple and brief
- Step 7: Communicate early and often
- Step 8: Keep your team informed
- Step 9: Turn these new connections into long-term relationships

Choosing a Stakeholder

You will likely complete this exercise for multiple stakeholders, but you should focus on each one separately to be strategic with all of them. Additionally, you should think about which stakeholders take priority based on how much they might support your efforts as well as how much they might be able to influence outcomes.

Below is a list of potential stakeholders and a stakeholder map. This list is by no means exhaustive so do not feel limited by it. The map should be used to decide where certain stakeholders fit in terms of *support* and *influence*. While all stakeholders are important, you should think about how best to use your limited time and resources to transform your career readiness system.

Potential Career Readiness/CTE Stakeholders

State Policymakers and Agencies

- Governor
- State Legislature
- State Board, If Applicable
- State Education Chief
- Higher Education Institutions
- Youth Development and Adult Learning Agencies
- Other Before- and After-School Service Agencies

Workforce

- State Workforce Board
- Regional/Local Workforce Boards
- State CTE Advisory Committees
- Employer Groups, Such as State or Local Chambers of Commerce
- Industry Associations
- Specific Employers

Districts and School Staff

- Local Education Agencies (LEAs)
- Teachers
- Principals and Administrators
- Counselors
- CTE Administrators
- Charter School Leaders, If Applicable

Families and Communities

- Parents/Families
- Students
- Community Partners/Organizations
- Civil Rights Organizations
- Tribal Leaders, If Applicable
- Educator Preparation Programs

Stakeholder Map

Power to **influence** outcome

	Low	High
High	**Opponents** Watch them	**Messengers/ Champions** Activate them
Low	**Not a Priority** Minimize engagement with them	**Fan Club** Inform them

Level of **support** for your effort

Choose your stakeholder (group, organization or individual):

Step 1: Clarify your goals

Remember to consider stakeholders' prior knowledge of the content — avoid edu-speak!

Before communicating with a stakeholder, you must be clear about your overall long-term vision or goal for career readiness, CTE and career pathways and your objective for engaging that specific stakeholder. Knowing what your state is working toward informs which stakeholders you reach out to when and which messages you use with each. The vision must be widely shared across the state for alignment across agencies. The questions below will help clarify your state's overall vision.

Once the state vision for career readiness is clear, you must then consider your objectives for interactions with this stakeholder. What do you expect from this stakeholder in the short term? Stakeholder engagement should not be done just for the sake of compliance or for appeasing certain groups; it should be designed to seek input, support and feedback from those most closely tied to and affected by the state's career readiness system.

Overall Vision

1) In one sentence, describe your state's vision for career readiness. (If completing this exercise in a group setting, have each participant independently write what he or she believes the state vision is and then compare answers. Does everyone largely agree?)

2) Do other people within your agency understand and agree with this vision? Try asking a sample group of colleagues what they believe the vision is and see how it matches with what you have written above.

3) Do people in other agencies understand and agree with this vision? How do you know?

NOTE: If you complete this part of the exercise and realize that your state vision is not widely shared, consider a separate effort to develop an internal communications strategy and raise awareness of or clarify your state vision.

Objective for Stakeholders

1) Why are you reaching out to this particular stakeholder? Do you just want to inform this person/organization, or do you need input and/or support?

2) What are your short-term goals for this stakeholder? What action do you want or need the stakeholder to take?

3) In what way would this stakeholder prefer to engage with you? In person or virtually?

Step 2: Work with partner organizations and ambassadors to identify and engage your stakeholders

Transforming your career readiness system will affect numerous individuals and sectors. You must engage stakeholders across multiple state agencies; employer groups that may not be used to contributing to education or CTE issues; and those on the ground, including administrators, educators, counselors, parents and students. Leveraging existing contacts and partnerships can be helpful for identifying and inviting these stakeholders into the conversation.

Some stakeholders will respond more openly to a colleague, peer or other trusted source than to a member of your team, particularly if the information they are discussing could affect them directly. Therefore, asking an existing partner to serve as an ambassador might be helpful for interacting with your identified stakeholder. This can also be a great opportunity to re-engage stakeholders that were involved in other projects in your state, such as the planning processes for ESSA, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or other state efforts.

If the stakeholder you are currently working with to design an interaction is one that you have not engaged previously, use the questions below to think about how other contacts can help to initiate outreach.

1) Do you have current partners (individuals or organizations) who have relationships with your identified stakeholder? If so, list them:

2) If you use an ambassador, how would his or her perspective differ from your own? What would that mean for the content of the message the ambassador delivers?

3) What messages might be most effective for your ambassador to deliver to this particular stakeholder to achieve your objectives?

4) Your ambassador must be prepared with a pitch that conveys your state's vision and also how the stakeholder can contribute (the objective for the stakeholder). To develop this pitch, include your responses to Step 1 with the answers to the following question:
    a) What experiences can your ambassador describe that demonstrate the benefits of engaging with you?

Step 3: Speak to your audience

Not all stakeholders will come to the table with the same level of education, background in career readiness policy or programs, or interest in the details of policy development. That does not mean those stakeholders should not be involved, rather that the burden is on you to provide the necessary context and background information. Documents should be shared ahead of scheduled meetings so that stakeholders have time to review them and formulate questions, and sufficient time should be left for stakeholders to respond to requests.

Students can be your best ambassadors!

Additionally, considering where this stakeholder falls in terms of support for the state's objectives and power to influence the outcome — and then tailoring your message accordingly — is important. Many groups have influence in some arenas but not others. For example, the PTA can be incredibly effective at reaching out to legislators but may have less ability to influence state employer associations. You can use the stakeholder map to help you think through this issue.

1) Assign one point of contact within your agency for this stakeholder to interact with. This contact will not be the only person who speaks with this stakeholder, but he or she will be consistently available for questions and requests.

2) What background does your identified stakeholder have in career readiness or CTE policy?

3) Have you or someone else in your cross-sector team engaged this stakeholder previously? If so, was the engagement successful?

4) What information related to career readiness does the stakeholder need to know to achieve the objective you have in mind for engagement?

5) How will your career readiness reforms benefit this stakeholder specifically? Is the stakeholder aware of those potential benefits?

Step 4: Use multiple vehicles

Have strong examples of programs and career pathways at your disposal and ready to share (especially ones that represent different approaches, clusters and/or communities).

To effectively work with a wide variety of individuals and groups, you must use multiple methods of communication. These methods can include town hall or other in-person meetings, social media, blogs, webinars and emails. Varying your approach is important as well; if you use the same channels each time, you will continue to engage the same people. New stakeholders might be more motivated to participate if you meet them where they are — leverage communication methods they already use and speak at meetings they are already scheduled to attend.

You should not simply put all of the information your stakeholders need on your website and consider the task completed. In particular, new stakeholders who are not used to looking to your website for information are not likely to find your communications on their own.

1) What method of communication will you use for your first interaction? Consider whether any meetings are already scheduled that you could be a part of, such as a monthly board meeting or an organization's staff meeting, or consider any popular blogs or social media channels that are regularly used. (For your initial conversation with your identified stakeholder, an in-person meeting or presentation is preferable.)

2) What method of communication will you use for ongoing communications with your identified stakeholder? Consider any existing channels that you could use, including newsletters and social media channels the stakeholder reads regularly.

3) How will you track engagement with this stakeholder? This tracking could include a log of conversations kept in a database or evidence of more passive interactions on your website or social media channels.

4) If you publish information for this stakeholder online, how will you know if he or she has accessed and understood it?

Step 5: Ask for input before decisions are made, and use it

Remember to ask stakeholders to review materials before you share them with other audiences.

Asking for input on issues or policy changes after decisions have already been made leaves stakeholders feeling devalued and like their time has been wasted. Whenever possible, involve stakeholders in the conversation early in your efforts to first build awareness of the issues and then solicit input. Ask them what types of policies and initiatives make sense given their experiences. Approach stakeholders with draft versions of documents to get their input and reaction early, and be clear from the start about which issues have been resolved and are no longer up for discussion. Once you have received input and feedback from a stakeholder, make sure that you have a system in place for following back up and letting the stakeholder know the current status of the discussions in which he or she was involved.

1) What career readiness issues are you hoping to discuss with this stakeholder?

2) Will any specific deadlines related to those issues affect your conversation? These deadlines could include federal accountability plan deadlines, legislative sessions or the beginning of the school year.

3) When will you or your ambassador reach out to this stakeholder?

4) When you or your ambassador interact with this stakeholder, which career readiness policies and strategies have already been finalized, and which are open for additional feedback and input?

5) How will you follow up with this stakeholder to let him or her know the results of the feedback?

Step 6: Keep your materials simple and brief

All written, online or presentation materials should be concise, easy to understand, and developed with specific audiences in mind. Frame content around how different stakeholders will be affected by your career readiness reforms as well as their level of comfort and background with the content. You can also extend the use of your materials by deliberately creating resources that your supporters can share with others.

Use the questions below to ensure that your materials are appropriate for your identified stakeholder.

1) What information does your identified stakeholder need to know to be an effective partner, advocate or supporter? Try to limit your materials to just that information.

2) What types of messaging might be most effective to convince your stakeholder? These types of messaging could range from testimony from students to labor market data.

3) Would your stakeholder also be compelled to share these types of messages?

4) What form will your materials take? Consider various formats, including fact sheets, PowerPoint slides and talking points.

5) Are concepts explained using visuals where possible?

6) Do your materials contain any career readiness or workforce development jargon that needs to be more thoroughly explained?

7) Have these materials been reviewed previously by either your stakeholder or a stakeholder with a similar background?

8) How should your stakeholder use these materials? Should the stakeholder share them or craft his or her own messages based on them?

Step 7: Communicate early and often

Your efforts to transform your state's career readiness system will likely involve significant policy changes, so you must be proactive in letting your stakeholders know about those changes before they find out from other sources with different objectives from your own. Stakeholders should have a way of easily reaching out to you as well to convey information and provide feedback. Use your ambassadors, particularly state-level associations and organizations, to help disseminate information broadly.

For a communications timeline template, check out the full stakeholder engagement guide[iii] from CCSSO.

1) Where does interaction with this stakeholder fit in your overall timeline for your career readiness plan?

2) Communications with your stakeholder should not happen only on an ad hoc basis. How often will you engage or check-in with this stakeholder, even when you are not actively working with the stakeholder on a particular policy or initiative?

3) What channels can this stakeholder use to reach out to you for more information? Is the stakeholder aware of these channels?

Step 8: Keep your team informed

Members of your internal team, as well as your broader cross-sector career readiness team, are both critical stakeholders and potential ambassadors. Make sure they are included in any outreach you do with other stakeholder groups, and provide them with access to information about key themes, dates and decision points. Also provide them with talking points so that any communications with your stakeholder by any member of your team are coordinated and messages are aligned.

It is important that the members of your broader career readiness team are as informed as your staff members, so everyone remains on the same page — and uses the same messages. This task is generally not simple, especially when communicating with staff from multiple state agencies and organizations about draft documents and policies.

1) Who else on your team needs to know about interactions with your identified stakeholder? People on your team may need to know because they have to sign off on communications, the input from this stakeholder affects their work and/or they have an existing relationship.

2) How and when will you inform your team more broadly about interactions with this stakeholder?

3) If staff from your agency or partner agencies communicate with this stakeholder, what are the key messages they should keep in mind?

4) If other staff from your agency or partner agencies communicate with this stakeholder, how will you know about it?

5) How will you regularly keep in touch with your cross-sector career readiness team?

6) How will cross-sector team members give input on documents and ideas, and how will they suggest new ideas to you? If providing this input in person is not always possible, consider a document sharing platform or other virtual routines.

Step 9: Turn these new connections into long-term relationships

Not all communications should come from the state education agency — leverage other agencies and groups to deliver messages.

While your purpose for engaging your identified stakeholder may be related to only a short-term goal within your larger career readiness efforts, you should not forget about the stakeholder once that short-term goal has been achieved. With a bit of effort, this stakeholder can become a valuable partner in your state's long-term career readiness goals. This work starts with making sure that your immediate interactions are well planned and responsive.

Additionally, you must ensure that all of your cross-sector partners are committed to nurturing this relationship consistently.

1) How will you communicate the results of this stakeholder's involvement to him or her? What changes did this stakeholder influence?

2) Did you meet your short-term goals with this stakeholder?

3) What long-term goals do you have for this stakeholder?

4) What other initiatives and projects would benefit from involvement by this stakeholder?

5) If you and this stakeholder are not actively working on something together, how often will you check in?

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[i] For the full CCSSO tool, visit http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/ESSA/CCSSOStakeholderEngagementGuideFINAL.pdf

[ii] For the full CCSSO tool, visit http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/ESSA/LetsKeeptheConversationGoingGuide11022016.pdf

[iii] For the full CCSSO tool, visit http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/ESSA/CCSSOStakeholderEngagementGuideFINAL.pdf

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