

CTE Program of Study Approval

In 2016, Advance CTE released [Putting Learner Success First: A Shared Vision for the Future of CTE](#). Rather than isolating Career Technical Education (CTE) as a separate educational strategy, *Putting Learner Success First* explains how an integrated approach to education and training can ensure that all learners have opportunities to achieve career success. The first principle of *Putting Learner Success First* focuses specifically on the quality of CTE programs and calls on states to adopt rigorous review and approval processes.

In this tool, Advance CTE has defined and described the non-negotiable elements of an effective policy for approving and evaluating programs of study, which encompass both secondary and postsecondary CTE. State leaders can use the **CTE Program Approval Policy Assessment Rubric** to identify gaps in their current state policies and practices and prioritize policies that validate programs of study in a way that shows they are high quality and are aligned with the state’s vision and definition of success. Once state leaders have completed an assessment of their state’s CTE program approval policies, they can begin planning for implementation using the templates and prompts. After they have completed these sections, state leaders can then examine the potential **CTE Program Evaluation Policy Criteria** to inform CTE program reapproval and evaluation as well as the possible phasing out of CTE programs that are not deemed high quality.

Each tool can be used independently of the others, and following the order listed above is not necessary. CTE program of study approval and reapproval is an ongoing cycle for states, and state leaders may not need to examine the entire system at once.

A program of study, a requirement under the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, is a nonduplicative sequence of academic and technical courses that include secondary- and postsecondary-level content and opportunities for high school students to earn postsecondary credit and that culminate in industry-based credentials and/or postsecondary degrees. Advance CTE believes that all CTE programs should ultimately be structured in this way. **This tool is designed to help states design policies that will bring all CTE programs to the level of a high-quality CTE program of study. For the purposes of this tool, any mention of a “CTE program” is referencing a program of study.**

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How to Use This Tool

This tool is divided into four sections. Each section is designed to guide you and your team, ideally including both secondary and postsecondary leaders as well as representatives from other relevant state agencies and stakeholder groups, through a self-assessment of current policies and practices, both formal and informal, and the creation of a plan to modify those policies as appropriate. This tool can and should be used in conjunction with state-specific tools you may already use, such as career pathways guidance and labor market data tools. Additionally, this tool is not meant to override any federal or state legal, regulatory or statutory requirements. We suggest working through this tool in the following order to achieve optimal results:

Section 1. Examine the Core Elements of a CTE Program Approval Policy

This section describes both the six non-negotiable core elements of an effective CTE program of study approval policy and effective CTE program evaluation policies.¹

Section 2. Complete the CTE Program Approval Policy Assessment Rubric

This rubric breaks down each core element into multiple sections so that you can fully analyze existing policies. To use this rubric, examine each core element and its components one at a time by reading the descriptions provided under “1 (Emerging)” and “4 (Strong).” Then assign a rating of 1, 2, 3 or 4 for each element row (e.g., 1A, 2B, etc.) based on how your current policy compares to the examples in the rubric and provide a written rationale for that rating. Once you have completed ratings for each row within an element, decide what rating the element merits overall. Enter this rating in the summary table on page 14. These ratings will help you prioritize the policy elements most in need of further review, analysis and potential revision.

Ratings definitions:

- **1 (Emerging):** This policy component is not yet defined or is just beginning to emerge; current state policy meets most of the criteria listed.
- **2 (Building):** This policy component has some bright spots, but there are still many improvements to be made; it meets some of the criteria under 1, but there are key considerations that allow for more optimism.
- **3 (Promising):** This policy component is fairly well developed, though there are still some improvements to be made; it meets some but not most of the criteria under 4, and is considered to be more developed than a 2.
- **4 (Strong):** This policy component is extremely well developed and effective, even if there are still minor adjustments to be made; it meets most of the criteria listed under 4.

You are strongly encouraged to choose only one of these four rating categories and not to allow half-point ratings, which can weaken the prioritization of the six core elements. Keep in mind that this is not a mathematical formula but rather a subjective rating based on objective evidence found in your existing state policy and current practice.

While achieving a 4 rating in all categories is the ideal scenario, it is difficult to attain. Do not let this discourage you. There are always ways to improve a state CTE program approval process, and this tool illustrates the many areas a state could focus on to improve the quality of its programs of study approval policies.

Section 3. Plan Your Next Steps by Getting Started with Implementation

Once you have completed the rubric, this section will help your state decide on next steps. You can use some or all of the templates provided in this section to guide planning, including setting goals, planning for stakeholder involvement and mitigating potential risks.

¹ These assertions have been validated by national content experts and State CTE Directors, and the descriptions can assist you as you communicate with stakeholders about these policies.

Section 4. Consider the CTE Program Evaluation Policy Criteria

This section dives into some of the criteria a state may use during a CTE program evaluation or reapproval process. Once you have examined your state’s CTE program approval policies and thought through the implementation of any changes, you should begin to think about CTE program evaluation and reapproval. The criteria listed may be used in an evaluation policy to ensure that approved CTE programs continue to provide high-quality instruction and opportunities for learners.

Section 1. Examine the Core Elements of a CTE Program Approval Policy

Any policy — be it regulatory, legislative or programmatic — related to ensuring that high-quality CTE programs are developed and implemented should include and/or address the following core elements. While a CTE program approval policy may include other elements, if a state does not address the list below, its CTE program approval policy will not be able to ensure that all CTE programs are high quality.

CTE Program Approval: To ensure that CTE programs in your state are high quality, states must have rigorous front-end validation and approval processes and requirements for new or current CTE programs. The elements listed below are essential to an effective CTE program approval policy, though each state must decide how to measure and implement them in a way that fits state context.

1. Rigorous course standards and progressive, sequenced courses

All CTE programs must be comprehensive and aligned with rigorous standards, and they must prepare learners for opportunities in high-skill and in-demand fields. Therefore,

- All CTE programs of study should be developed using rigorous state-approved and industry-aligned standards and be organized into deliberate course sequences;
- All CTE program and/or course standards should be thoroughly aligned with state-approved academic standards;
- Multiple courses should be available within each CTE program, and the CTE programs must start with an introductory course that teaches broad foundational knowledge and skills and then progress to more occupationally specific courses; and
- All CTE programs of study should culminate in a credential of value, ideally one that is state approved and industry validated.

2. Secondary and postsecondary alignment and early postsecondary offerings

All CTE programs must vertically align across the secondary and postsecondary education levels to ensure seamless transitions for learners and allow learners to earn credentials of value, including postsecondary certificates and degrees. Therefore,

- Secondary and postsecondary representatives at the state, regional and local levels should collaborate regularly to review CTE programs of study;
- All CTE programs should have both a secondary and postsecondary component, whether it be at a two-year or four-year institution or beyond, with a seamless transition between the two; and
- Transitions should be facilitated through credit transfer and statewide articulation agreements, and secondary learners should have access to dual enrollment or early college opportunities while progressing through their CTE program.

3. Industry involvement

Industry partners at the state and local levels must play an active role to identify, develop and regularly review CTE programs of study. Therefore,

- Industry partners should be involved in validating standards and credentials, informing course development, and helping provide work-based learning experiences for learners; and
- Sustainable, consistent processes for engaging industry partners must be in place to ensure the relevance and rigor of CTE programs of study and related learner experiences at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

4. Labor market demand

CTE programs must prepare learners for careers in high-skill and in-demand fields. Therefore,

- All CTE programs should be able to justify their existence by demonstrating that labor market information shows a consistent and sustainable demand in high-skill and in-demand occupations for employees in related fields in the state and/or local region; and
- Labor and economic data should include accurate information on the current and projected number of openings in specific career fields, as well as data on salary and any technological or policy advancements that may affect this career field.

5. High-quality instruction

Any CTE program must have appropriately certified instructors in place before being approved by the state. Ensuring that instructors have the necessary academic content expertise, knowledge of pedagogy and industry expertise must also be a top priority. Therefore,

- All CTE programs must have in place instructors who are appropriately certified both in teaching and industry knowledge.

6. Experiential learning

High-quality CTE programs must provide opportunities for learners to engage in authentic, experiential learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore,

- States, districts, institutions of higher education and employers should work collaboratively to provide all learners with access to relevant work-based learning opportunities, including virtual or simulated opportunities for those who may not have access to in-person experiences in their desired career field; and
- All learners should also have access to experiential learning, which may be offered through participation in Career Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs).

CTE Program Evaluation: Once your state has approved a high-quality CTE program, a process must be in place to monitor that CTE program and provide support to help CTE programs close gaps or to transition out CTE programs that are not meeting requirements. This process will ensure that CTE programs are accomplishing their goals, serving learners equitably, and using the latest information and labor market data to maintain relevance. The process requirements and timeline must be made clear and must be administered transparently and consistently. See page 19 for additional details.

Section 2. Complete the CTE Program Approval Policy Assessment Rubric

This rubric breaks down each core element into multiple sections so that you can fully analyze existing policies. To use this rubric, examine each core element and its components one at a time by reading the descriptions provided under “1 (Emerging)” and “4 (Strong).” Then assign a rating of 1, 2, 3 or 4 for each element row (e.g., 1A, 2B, etc.) based on how your current policy compares to the examples in the rubric and provide a written rationale for that rating. Once you have completed ratings for each row within an element, decide what rating the element merits overall. Enter this rating in the summary table on page 14. These ratings will help you prioritize and focus on the policy elements most in need of further review, analysis and potential revision.

Ratings definitions:

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You are strongly encouraged to choose only one of these four rating categories and not to allow half-point ratings, which can weaken the prioritization of the six core elements. Keep in mind that this is not a mathematical formula but rather a subjective rating based on objective evidence found in your existing state policy and current practice.

While achieving a 4 rating in all categories is the ideal scenario, it is difficult to attain. Do not let this discourage you. There are always ways to improve a state CTE program approval process, and this tool illustrates the many areas a state could focus on to improve the quality of its programs of study approval policies.

Questions to Consider	1 (Emerging)	4 (Strong)	Rating and Rationale
1. Rigorous Course Standards and Progressive, Sequenced Courses		Overall Rating: 1 2 3 4	
<p>1A) How effectively does your current policy ensure alignment between CTE program standards and relevant industry standards?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program and/or course standards, whether developed at the state or local level, have not recently been evaluated for alignment to relevant industry standards. • There are numerous gaps in alignment to industry standards within and/or across CTE programs. • Local CTE programs align and revise CTE program and/or course standards and industry standards at their own discretion, with little to no guidance from the state, so there is no way of knowing the degree of alignment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state has a defined and ongoing process in place for aligning CTE program and/or course standards with industry standards, which is validated by industry partners. • CTE program and/or course standards are aligned with state-approved industry requirements for skills and competencies based on state and regional needs. • Local CTE programs examine program and/or course standards at specific state-approved intervals and are aware of the degree of alignment that exists and how to increase it. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>
<p>1B) How effectively does your policy ensure that CTE programs are thoroughly integrated with relevant academic college and career readiness standards?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTE program and/or course standards are considered entirely separate from or do not align with academic standards and instruction or employability standards. • The state completed a crosswalk of CTE program and/or course standards to academic standards, but it is seen only as a guidance document or resource rather than a requirement. • Program and/or course standards are typically narrowly focused on occupation-specific skills and do not address cross-cutting employability/career-ready skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic standards and CTE standards are considered equally significant for all CTE programs and courses in the state. • Individual schools and institutions use state-level guidance to ensure that program and/or course standards are integrated with academic standards consistently. • Program and/or course standards show a clear integration of academic and technical content, as well as state-approved employability standards. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>

Questions to Consider	1 (Emerging)	4 (Strong)	Rating and Rationale
<p>1C) How clearly does your state policy define and structure CTE course sequences?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State policy does not include a state-approved, structured course sequence or a mechanism to monitor the quality of locally developed course sequences. Course curriculum is not submitted in CTE program approval applications, and/or there are no checks on the rigor of that curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clearly defined and intentional sequence of courses that builds on both academic and technical competencies gained in previous courses is required for CTE programs. CTE programs are able to show that courses have structured curricula, whether built at the institution, region or state level, that cover intentional progression of knowledge and skills. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>
<p>1D) How effectively does current state policy ensure that all CTE programs culminate in a credential of value?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CTE programs are not required to anchor program and/or course standards with state-approved and industry-aligned knowledge and skills associated with a credential of value. Credentials of value are not embedded within programs and are treated only as add-ons, rather than the culmination of a CTE program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program and/or course standards are anchored in and aligned to a state-approved credential of value, where appropriate, and alignment is verified and updated regularly. CTE programs have state-approved credentials of value embedded within program and/or course standards, perhaps as a capstone requirement, where appropriate. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>

Questions to Consider	1 (Emerging)	4 (Strong)	Rating and Rationale
2. Secondary and Postsecondary Alignment and Early Postsecondary Offerings			Overall Rating: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>2A) How effectively does your state policy require and ensure strategic and collaborative alignment between secondary and postsecondary institutions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary and postsecondary institutions have ad hoc relationships focused only on specific CTE programs or initiatives. There is little to no structured coordination between secondary and postsecondary institutions when designing and developing a CTE program, and the institutions often work separately from each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary and postsecondary institutions have a formalized relationship that facilitates regular interactions and mutual planning. Secondary and postsecondary institutions work as partners in the design, development and implementation of CTE programs, and state policy allows them to share resources, potentially including funding and materials. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>
<p>2B) How effectively does your state policy ensure seamless transitions from secondary into postsecondary and beyond?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary CTE programs are not required to have a postsecondary component. Learners are not provided simple transitions between institutions and CTE programs, including from secondary to postsecondary and from two-year to four-year CTE programs, and into job placement. Secondary and postsecondary systems are not required to coordinate completion and entry requirements, resulting in learners who may successfully complete a secondary or two-year postsecondary CTE program but still not qualify for entry into a two- or four-year postsecondary CTE program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All CTE programs have both an approved secondary and an approved postsecondary component, with aligned nonduplicative sequences. A well-defined system is in place that allows learners to transition from secondary into a postsecondary institution of their choice and from two-year institutions to four-year institutions. Secondary and postsecondary institutions agree on and/or have established metrics for determining college readiness to enter and complete credit-bearing courses. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>

Questions to Consider	1 (Emerging)	4 (Strong)	Rating and Rationale
<p>2C) How clearly does your policy define and encourage dual and concurrent enrollment opportunities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual and concurrent enrollment options and articulated courses are not required CTE program offerings. • State policy allows articulated courses to count only as postsecondary elective credit, rather than as credit toward a meaningful postsecondary credential, so learners do not receive credit of value to them. • Dual and concurrent enrollment options and articulated courses are not offered consistently to all secondary learners but rather on ad hoc basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All CTE programs have structured dual credit opportunities, through either state validation of locally developed articulation agreements or a statewide articulation policy. • State-approved articulated courses are validated as courses leading to nonelective program credit in postsecondary. • All learners in the state are made aware of opportunities to earn postsecondary credit in high school, and the process for enrollment is simple and accessible. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>

Questions to Consider	1 (Emerging)	4 (Strong)	Rating and Rationale
3. Industry Involvement			Overall Rating: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>3A) How clearly does your policy define and encourage an active and collaborative role for industry partners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirements for state- and local-level advisory committee membership and length of term are not defined, and members may not adequately represent the employers and associations in specific regions. Input from industry partners is not required for many aspects of CTE program design or the validation process. Other than the initial CTE program review, the state does not require a set number of meetings or suggest any meeting objectives for advisory committees, resulting in some committees tapering off. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State- and local-level advisory committees must be established using a clear and transparent process and memorandum of understanding (or an equivalent), with participants who represent local or regional industry and requirements for regular structured interactions and consistent attendance. Input from industry partners is required at key points of the CTE program design and validation process, including standards revisions and design of experiential learning opportunities at the state and local levels. State policy requires a clear expectation and timeline for ongoing engagement with industry partners, including reviews of course standards and CTE program outcomes. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>

Questions to Consider	1 (Emerging)	4 (Strong)	Rating and Rationale
<p>3B) How well does your policy ensure sustained relationships between CTE programs and industry partners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory committee members perform a cursory review of CTE program standards but are not required or empowered to dive deeply into the content or provide meaningful suggestions for improvement. There are no clear state-defined expectations for the ongoing role that industry should play, including whether or not industry partners review or design CTE program standards and curriculum, or if they offer experiential learning. There is no clear role for industry partners outside of advisory committee participation or ad hoc engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry partners on advisory committees actively and regularly participate in validating the standards and curriculum for CTE programs by comparing them with the skills and competencies needed to gain employment in their industry. Advisory committees must set out clear expectations of what membership entails, such as providing experiential learning opportunities and designing and validating CTE program courses and/or standards. CTE programs are structured to offer ample opportunities for industry involvement, including spending time in the classroom, offering mentorships, offering experiential learning opportunities and more. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>

Questions to Consider	1 (Emerging)	4 (Strong)	Rating and Rationale
4. Labor Market Demand			Overall Rating: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>
4A) To what extent does state policy require the use of current labor market information to inform CTE program design and approval?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTE programs may be approved without any labor market information that supports their alignment to in-demand and/or high-skill career opportunities for learners. • Institutions and schools do not use labor market information when designing and updating CTE programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved CTE programs must show that labor market information confirms that they will prepare learners for employment in a state-defined high-skill, in-demand industry, though flexibility is provided for data related to self-employment options. • CTE programs must use labor market projections to inform program design. 	Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Rationale
4B) How effectively does the state support local use of labor market information when designing and updating CTE programs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local districts and institutions use labor market information inconsistently to justify their CTE programs. • The state does not provide local districts and institutions access to quality and timely labor market data and/or consistent data definitions. • The labor market data made available applies to the entire state and does not allow regional or local analysis in areas where this differentiation is needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All districts and institutions are required to use labor market information provided by the state or state-approved sources that is quality, timely and uses consistent data definitions. • Labor market information is customized by the state for specific regions to allow for differentiation of CTE programs. • Labor market data is accurate and based on recent information about the state and regional economies. 	Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Rationale

Questions to Consider	1 (Emerging)	4 (Strong)	Rating and Rationale
5. High-Quality Instruction			Overall Rating: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>5A) How well does the state CTE program approval policy ensure that CTE programs are staffed with qualified instructors?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTE programs may receive full approval before an instructor has been hired, and the state has no mechanism to follow up to ensure quality instruction once a person has been hired. CTE programs may hire only instructors with certifications in education and industry, with no flexibility in times of instructor shortage. • CTE programs have so much flexibility in hiring that the state is not able to ensure that all CTE programs are led by fully qualified and certified instructors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While CTE programs may receive conditional approval before an instructor has been hired, potential instructors must be identified if not already hired by the time a CTE program is fully approved. • CTE programs must be taught by instructors with appropriate credentials in both teaching and industry. • In situations where there is a shortage of available instructors, the state provides clearly defined options for alternative ways to provide instruction, including co-teaching, adjunct teaching and mentorships, among others. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>

Questions to Consider	1 (Emerging)	4 (Strong)	Rating and Rationale
6. Experiential Learning			Overall Rating: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>6A) How well does the state CTE program approval policy encourage and promote participation in work-based learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTE programs have no specified work-based learning requirements. • CTE programs may offer work-based learning but with no consistent definition of the appropriate depth of experience or skills that should be gained. • Learners have no opportunities to earn credit for extended work-based learning through or toward their CTE programs. • CTE programs do not have consistent mechanisms for providing information on and access to work-based learning opportunities for learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-based learning that provides real-work, real-world experience is a CTE program requirement. • The state clearly defines or provides guidance around the types of appropriate work-based learning, regardless of whether it occurs in the workplace or is simulated in the classroom. • State-developed or approved work-based learning courses can be accepted components of a program of study. • Districts and institutions develop and execute plans for providing information on and access to work-based learning opportunities for all learners as part of CTE program development. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>
<p>6B) How well does state CTE program approval policy encourage and promote participation in CTSOs where appropriate?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTE programs are not required to align content or coordinate with CTSO activities. • CTSOs are considered an extracurricular activity, separate from CTE program content, and are required to be aligned with their related CTE programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTE programs are encouraged to coordinate activities with CTSOs, where appropriate, to align experiences with classroom training. • CTSOs are a co-curricular component of a CTE program that contributes to learner experience and instruction and are fully aligned with the CTE program standards and expectations. 	<p>Rating 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Rationale</p>

Section 3. Plan Your Next Steps by Getting Started with Implementation

Once you have completed the [CTE Program Approval Policy Assessment Rubric](#), this section will help your state decide on next steps. You can use some or all of the templates provided in this section to guide planning, including setting goals, planning for stakeholder involvement and mitigating potential risks.

While the core elements described in the rubric on the previous pages build the foundation of a strong CTE program approval policy, each state must still decide how to measure and implement these elements in a way that makes sense for their context. Additionally, CTE program approval policies must work in concert with other federal, state and district policies to ensure that all learners have access to high-quality CTE programs of study. And states must specifically consider how to leverage funding and other incentives, including competitive and categorical grants and performance-based funding policies, to accomplish their goals.

First, use the summary table below to record your ratings from the [CTE Program Approval Policy Assessment Rubric](#). For example, if you gave element “6A: How well does the state CTE program approval policy encourage and promote participation in work-based learning?” a 2, enter a 2 under “6) Experiential Learning” in row A. Once you have done this for all ratings, you will get a sense of the full picture of your state policy. Use this to determine your state’s areas of strength and opportunities for the most growth. Keep these areas in mind as you continue to develop your action plan and priorities.

	1) Rigorous Course Standards and Progressive, Sequenced Courses	2) Secondary and Postsecondary Alignment and Early Postsecondary Offerings	3) Industry Involvement	4) Labor Market Demand	5) High-Quality Instruction	6) Experiential Learning
A						
B						
C						
D						
Overall						

What is your state’s vision for CTE?

What do you want to accomplish long term for learners in your state?

How will your CTE program approval policy help you achieve that vision?

The answer to this question will help you design your theory of action. If you are clear on why you are modifying your CTE program approval policy, you will be better equipped to decide what changes to make and how.

CTE Program Approval Policy Goals
Once you have described your overall state vision for CTE and how CTE program approval can help you achieve that vision, identify your goals for modifying your state’s CTE program approval policies. These goals should be higher level — your work on how to accomplish those goals will follow. For example, a goal could be to redefine state guidance and requirements around industry advisory committees or to pursue a statewide articulation agreement between secondary and postsecondary institutions.

Goal	Primary Goal Owner	Completion Date

CTE Program Approval Policy Goal Requirements

Once you have decided on your overall goals for your CTE program approval policy, fill out the template below to begin to get a sense of the steps needed to achieve each one.

Goal	Will This Policy Change Require New Legislation?	Will This Policy Change Require State Board, System or Coordinating Board Action?	Will This Policy Require Any Changes to Your State Perkins Plan?	Will This Policy Change Require Regulatory Changes?
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
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	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
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	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Affected Policies and Programs
 What state and local policies and practices will be affected by any changes to your CTE program approval and evaluation policies? A potential list has been prepopulated below, but you can change and add to these policies as it makes sense for your state.

Policies	How Will They Be Affected?	Action Needed?

Necessary Stakeholder Involvement

Whether you are creating new policies or modifying existing ones, you need to think about which stakeholders should be involved and to what extent. Use the three categories below to list stakeholders and think about what role each should have. Stakeholders may appear in multiple lists below, based on the different objectives you might have for them.

To Engage

With whom do you need to actively work? These stakeholders should be included in planning meetings and progress monitoring sessions and potentially even own some of the implementation processes.

-
-
-
-

To Consult

Who can provide you necessary information? These stakeholders should be consulted for relevant information early in the process but do not need to be directly involved in planning or implementation.

-
-
-
-

To Inform

Who needs to know about this policy and can serve as an advocate? These stakeholders should be kept in the loop on policy issues, particularly when it comes to how that policy will affect their lives.

-
-
-
-

Barriers and Risks to Policy Change

What barriers do you face to changing your CTE program approval and evaluation policies? Once you design a policy, what risks or inadvertent negative consequences might occur? We have prefilled in a few common barriers for CTE program approval policies, but you should also add your own and think about how to address those challenges.

Barrier	How Will Your State Address This Barrier?

After you have considered the steps above, it is time to begin planning for implementation. While it is important to have a long-term strategic plan, you must first consider your immediate next steps. Use the table below to think about which action steps must happen right away and who will be the owner of ensuring that those actions take place. These action steps will likely include initial outreach to specific stakeholders, drafting the longer term plan, and beginning to draft new legislation and/or regulations.

What Actions Will Your State Take Over the Next 30 Days to Accomplish These Goals?		
Action Steps	Individual Owner	Completion Date
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.

What Actions Will Your State Take Over the Next 60 Days to Accomplish These Goals?		
Action Steps	Individual Owner	Completion Date
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.

What Actions Will Your State Take Over the Next 90 Days to Accomplish These Goals?		
Action Steps	Individual Owner	Completion Date
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.

What Actions Will Your State Take Over the Next Year to Accomplish These Goals?		
Action Steps	Individual Owner	Completion Date
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.

Section 4. Consider the CTE Program Evaluation Policy Criteria

Once you have examined your state’s CTE program approval policies and thought through the implementation of any changes, you should begin to think about CTE program evaluation and reapproval. The criteria listed below may be used in an evaluation policy to ensure that approved CTE programs continue to provide high-quality instruction and opportunities for learners. Read through the items below, categorized by core element, and compare them to current reapproval requirements in your state. Then answer the questions in the table provided to think about how to update your reapproval and evaluation policies. For a more in-depth list of potential evaluation criteria, check out [ACTE’s Quality CTE Program of Study Framework](#).

Evaluation Core Elements	Potential Evaluation Criteria
1) Rigorous Course Standards and Progressive, Sequenced Courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners experience positive outcomes, as seen in evidence of program completion and credential attainment Program standards and/or curricula have been updated since the last review to reflect the latest knowledge from the field, as validated by industry partners and representatives from both secondary and postsecondary Learners’ course-taking patterns indicate an appropriate and deliberate sequence of instruction CTE participation at the school and institution levels reflects the school’s overall population
2) Secondary and Postsecondary Alignment and Early Postsecondary Offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statewide credit transfer agreements are embedded within CTE programs, and CTE programs have evidence that learners are able to smoothly complete transitions between secondary and postsecondary and between postsecondary institutions, as well as earn nonelective postsecondary credit Learners obtain at least one relevant credential of value upon completion of the CTE program Learners have access to high-quality advising systems to help guide them through their chosen pathway and transition from secondary to postsecondary to workforce
3) Industry Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The industry advisory committee meets on a consistent timeline, and each meeting is structured to allow for meaningful engagement and input from members Industry advisory committee members represent a diverse group of stakeholders and remain engaged over time The industry advisory committee regularly reviews CTE program standards and curriculum and provides insights on how to better align them to industry needs CTE program administrators and the industry advisory committee regularly examine labor market information and make CTE program changes as needed to ensure alignment with industry needs Multiple industry partners provide meaningful opportunities for learners and instructors to benefit from their expertise both on site at a workplace and in the classroom

Evaluation Core Elements	Potential Evaluation Criteria
4) Labor Market Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors and counselors have access to labor market information and use it to help advise learners on career and education plans • Statewide or regional labor market information still shows that the industry in question is in demand — or the CTE program can adequately demonstrate local need • Learners are able to access and participate in CTE programs, and enrollment and recruitment have not declined • Learners complete the CTE programs in high numbers and successfully move into related careers or further education and training
5) High-Quality Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All instructors are appropriately certified for the content they are teaching • Instructors have participated in ongoing professional learning related to pedagogy and classroom instruction, as well as course content • Instructors regularly participate in professional learning related to recent developments in their industry and use it to inform instruction • Learners feel adequately informed, supported and prepared by their instructors
6) Experiential Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A majority of learners participate in meaningful work-based learning experiences • Participants in work-based learning gain meaningful skills and competencies from their experiences • A significant percentage of learners in the CTE program participate in high-quality, approved CTSO activities, as available • Advisers and/or work-based learning coordinators make all learners aware of available experiential learning opportunities and guide their participation

CTE Program Evaluation Logistics

In addition to setting up rigorous front-end validation of CTE programs, states must also institute effective processes for CTE program evaluation and reapproval. Use the questions below to begin thinking through what this means for your state.

Logistics Prompts	Logistics Responses
How often will each program undergo evaluation?	
Will all evaluations involve in-person site visits? If not, how will you gather meaningful information and data on program quality?	
If a program does not meet all requirements in its evaluation, what are the steps the state will take to help the program either improve or be phased out?	
What data is currently available to you related to labor market demand, learner outcomes, and learner participation in programs and/or experiential learning?	
If data is currently unavailable to help you evaluate programs, are you able to design a process to collect it?	
What data could you collect as a proxy for unavailable information? (For example, if you cannot get data on placement after completion or credential attainment, how else can you approximate learner success?)	

Appendix

Methodology

The Program Approval Policy Benchmark Tool was created after a year-long process of research, interviews, and detailed feedback from state leaders and organizational partners. Advance CTE began by researching current program approval policies across the country and interviewing more than a dozen state CTE leaders about program approval policies in their states. Using that information, Advance CTE drafted the six **Core Elements of a CTE Program Approval Policy** and created a structure for the **CTE Program Approval Policy Assessment Rubric**. The **Core Elements** and **Rubric** structure were then tested by members and partners through a workshop at Advance CTE's 2017 Spring Meeting. During summer 2017, Advance CTE worked with state CTE leaders and organizational partners on multiple rounds of revisions, gathering feedback and validation at each step. Advance CTE then recruited volunteers to test the functionality of the benchmark tool. Luke Rhine and Lisa Stoner from the Delaware Department of Education and Donna Lewelling from the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission used the benchmark tool with their teams and provided feedback on the instructions and use of the tool.

The information within the tool has been reviewed and validated by representatives from nine state CTE offices, which include representatives from secondary and postsecondary agencies. The tool was also reviewed by representatives from seven nonprofit partner organizations.

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Related Resource

[ACTE's Quality CTE Program of Study Framework](#): To help synthesize the myriad voices that are a part of the dialogue on high-quality CTE, ACTE embarked on a multistep project to identify a comprehensive, research-based quality CTE program of study framework, test the framework, and integrate it into their efforts to recognize and disseminate information on best practices within CTE. The ACTE quality framework elements and criteria are designed to apply to single, local CTE programs of study spanning secondary and postsecondary education and can be used for self-evaluation and program improvement and to encourage secondary-postsecondary collaboration. ACTE will be developing tools for these purposes as the framework is finalized.