

# Building Cross-Sector Partnerships to Support Career and Technical Education Pathways

A PLAYBOOK FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

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## **About ExcelinEd**

Launched by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush in 2008, ExcelinEd supports state leaders in transforming education to unlock opportunity and lifelong success for each and every child.

From policy development to implementation, ExcelinEd brings deep expertise and experience to customize education solutions for each state's unique needs. Focused on educational opportunity, innovation and quality, ExcelinEd's agenda is increasing student learning, advancing equity and readying graduates for college and career in states across the nation.



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## INTRODUCTION

In its first Career and Technical Education (CTE) playbook, *Putting Career and Technical Education to Work for Students*, ExcelinEd examined the need and rationale for strengthening statewide CTE programs and provided a process that state policymakers can undertake to do just that. Underlying much of the work outlined in this process is the assumption that each state can tap into a wide range of stakeholders who can inform the direction and desired outcomes of CTE programs at the state, regional and local levels.

Serious efforts to develop and strengthen career pathways for secondary students share a common challenge: **developing cross-sector partnerships among K-12 education, business and industry organizations and postsecondary institutions.** These partnerships are vital to ensuring that secondary CTE pathways are closely aligned to labor market demand, feature experiential learning opportunities such as internships and provide a seamless transition to a postsecondary credential.

However, cross-sector partnerships are not always easy to cultivate and sustain. Often, the education and business sectors speak different languages or value different priorities. Sometimes partners struggle to find common ground on which all parties achieve mutual return on investment. Regardless of the difficulties inherent in building and supporting these partnerships, they are required if programs are to achieve the shared goals of all sectors:

- **A better-educated and more skilled workforce**
- **Bustling regional and local economies**
- **Greater opportunities for graduates to find success in life and career**

This second CTE playbook examines the role and key elements of robust cross-sector partnerships and explores the ways policymakers can promote and support them to strengthen CTE program outcomes for students. Also featured are examples of state and regional partnerships—including insights from experienced leaders about the opportunities and challenges associated with this important work.



# Elements of Strong Cross-Sector Partnerships

For policymakers, a high-quality state Career and Technical Education program is one that leverages the vertical alignment of robust education-to-occupation pathways to meet the immediate and long-term needs of the state. At the K-12 level, this means promoting CTE pathways that are vertically aligned with:

**High-growth, high-skill state/regional labor market data**

**Current and projected state economic priorities**

**Credentialed postsecondary programs to drive a more learned and skilled workforce for the state**

Successful execution of this three-pronged approach requires the identification and engagement of critical stakeholders in a process for review, input, collaboration and sustained action. As the academic, technical and employability skills required for in-demand occupations in the United States become increasingly complex, stakeholder engagement in the development and delivery of robust, high-quality K-12 and K-16 CTE programming can no longer be deemed as optional.

Though the process of establishing and structuring partnerships will vary from state to state (or even region to region), there are some common elements of effective cross-sector partnerships to strengthen career pathways. These include:

**1 C convening Agency or Intermediary**

**2 Clear Purpose and Established Protocols**

**3 Purposeful Stakeholder Recruitment**

**4 Mutual Benefit and Shared Value**

**5 Open Lines of Communication**

**6 Clear Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities**

**7 Process-Wide Success Metrics**

## I

## Convening Agency or Intermediary



A strong state Career and Technical Education improvement process begins with the identification of which leader(s) and what entity will spearhead the partnership initiatives. At the state level, this convener may be the state education agency or department of education. However, it can also be the state's workforce agency, the governor's office or even a legislative task force. Regardless of where it resides, the convening agency must be staffed with leaders who can bring together stakeholders, make substantive changes to rules and the state's CTE plan, and provide the long-term stability for sustained action.

It is imperative that the convener has credibility with the targeted stakeholders and has their trust. In many cases, credibility and trust take the form of both expertise and commitment—or having some skin in the game.

**"You have to deploy individuals and organizations who already have relationships in the community and are trusted. Going into a community as an unknown, or with no clear message or formal approach, is a recipe for disaster. There will be little to no buy in or willingness to engage, and it will take years to build up any credibility."**

— Local Intermediary

**“Trust and relationships go hand in hand. It’s important that our intermediary works with us to gain an understanding of what we are good at contributing and what other partners’ roles are in the larger process. We don’t want our time to be wasted. We have to trust that our time will be used right and that we are making a difference for the region.” — Employer”**

## Regional and Local Partnerships Benefit from State Support

Cross-sector partnerships typically develop more easily at the local and regional levels. After all, these are the communities where K-12 schools, institutions of higher education and businesses are most engaged. Yet cross-sector partnerships still need state-level engagement to improve their chances for success. While local and regional partnerships may best represent the needs of their stakeholders, they still must collaborate with state agencies and statewide initiatives to secure the flexibility, funding and resources that ensure long-term sustainability.

For their part, state agencies can ensure that existing program rules or bureaucratic processes do not hinder regional and local initiatives.

**“ Our state is very locally controlled. To get folks to the table, so we can execute on regional initiatives, requires us to be very flexible from a programmatic standpoint ... We are the ones to find the middle ground and to remove all of the bureaucratic hurdles that would stall the effort at the local and regional levels. — State Agency Official ”**

Do the convener's actions and words mirror each other? Given the disparate nature of CTE stakeholders, often the only glue that binds them together, particularly at the beginning, is the credibility and trust each feels for the convening agency.

At the regional and local levels, intermediary agencies are playing an ever-increasing role in implementing state-sponsored and state-inspired policies. Just as with state-level programs and initiatives, it is important to have the right agency and person leading the work. The tapping of qualified community-based organizations, particularly when it comes to stakeholder recruitment and engagement, can drive notable increases in statewide outcomes. For instance, an economic development council may serve as an intermediary. As a community-based organization, the council's primary goal is the growth and prosperity of its regional economy, which includes the development of a skilled workforce. Acting as an intermediary allows that economic development council to serve the needs of its primary stakeholders, while engaging them and the local school districts to drive stronger community commitment for CTE-related initiatives aligned with economic and labor priorities.

However, like a state-level convening agency, a regional or local intermediary is not immune to recruitment and engagement challenges, especially with regard to relationship-building.

### WHAT IS AN INTERMEDIARY?

An intermediary is an organization (or dedicated person) whose role is to connect state/regional/local employers, K-12 education leaders and postsecondary institutions to develop and grow the “education to career” pipeline.

**2****Clear Purpose and Established Protocols**

As with any high-quality initiative, the convening agency must be able to articulate the rationale for a cross-sector partnership. The first step prior to contacting any potential partner—the who—is knowing the why, how, what and when for doing so. Though this seems basic, this essential step is often skipped in favor of an immediate ask or win simply to get the overall process moving. Too often, that immediate win turns out not to be as successful as it should be in the end.

In most cases, this work can come in the form of protocols, which formalize how the larger work will be conducted, including stakeholder recruitment and engagement. By having in place at the beginning an articulated intent and operational approach, external stakeholders are more likely to sign on. They immediately understand the purpose and their role in achieving that purpose.

**“When employers are shown—and can see in action—a formal approach or structure to the process, they are more willing to agree. Of course, the structure has to be expansive enough to meet them where they are comfortable in engaging, particularly at the beginning.”**

— Regional Convener

**“In the beginning, we just wanted voices, any voices. We didn’t realize until after we got started on our initiative that half the representatives around the table were the wrong ones for the project. It really made for an underwhelming launch. Finding the right voices matters a whole lot. — Regional Convener”**

## When Partnerships Fail, Learn from the Mistakes

When cross-sector partnerships run into trouble, it's often due to poorly aligned expectations.

**We had a critical business partner ‘divorce’ us a year ago. Why? Because they felt that they were being tapped too much and they just burned out. It was a hard lesson ... Too many people were knocking on their door. Because of this, we changed how we work with our heavy-hitters to avoid other burnouts, and we’ve begun being more direct with the others who aren’t as involved. It’s the classic 20-80 rule. Twenty percent doing the heavy lifting for the other 80 percent. That had to change for us and for our stakeholders. — Regional Convener**

In this case, the “divorce” was a painful setback, but it allowed the convener to reset expectations for all stakeholders and not just those who might be feeling undervalued.

## Purposeful Stakeholder Engagement

Career and Technical Education is a unique component of the American education system. Spanning K-12 and postsecondary, CTE is intentionally the most outward facing curriculum. No other program, if developed well and implemented with fidelity, requires the same elevated level of advisement and engagement of external stakeholders. Consider the range of topics open to stakeholder input:

- **Experiential or work-based learning opportunities (including internships and apprenticeships)**
- **CTE pathway curriculum review for relevance and rigor**
- **Classroom instructional strategies**
- **Postsecondary course offerings and credential programs**
- **Industry-recognized certifications relevant to specific CTE pathways**
- **Industry-utilized equipment**

Regardless of the topic or desired input, the diverse group of individuals who play a part in the development and promotion of high-quality state CTE programs spans far beyond the walls of any state agency. Given this, the reason for and manner by which stakeholders are identified and engaged sets the stage for how well the overall effort meets its goals in a timely fashion and with minimal setbacks.

**3****Purposeful Stakeholder Recruitment**

Whether conducting a full state Career and Technical Education program audit or planning and implementing a specific program initiative, before contacting potential participants, identify and articulate what types of support are necessary to successfully complete the work. What expertise, resources and information gaps have been identified and need to be filled?

**"There's always a willingness on the part of stakeholders to get involved; the hard learning curve is figuring out how to make it actually happen."**

— State Agency Convener

The following tools can help conveners be intentional in their engagement of potential stakeholders.

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### Participant Profiles

Participant Profiles describe what types of knowledge and skills are needed to accomplish the identified work. A profile does not need to be lengthy, but it does need to capture what expertise and skills are desired from an industry sector, organization or government entity and, once filled, what need it will meet. The value of these profiles is three-fold:

- **First, they require thoughtful front-end homework leading to the selection of qualified stakeholders rather than impulsive selection making.**
- **Second, they can serve as process validation artifacts that can be shared with anyone who is curious about how certain stakeholders were invited to participate.**
- **Third, they reduce the mismatching, misidentification or failed identification of qualified stakeholders.**

Concurrently, candidates will also want to make sure that the potential opportunity aligns with their interests and abilities. This profiling on the part of both parties should be an exercise that shows all aligned mutual interests and further cements the commitment to engage.

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## Candidate “Interviews”

Closely paired with knowing what is needed is ensuring that an identified candidate agrees with that need. This can be answered by looking at a candidate’s (a) organization/business (what it does/produces), (b) position and skills (role/responsibilities), (c) level of interest and (d) capacity to serve in the manner needed. Gathering this information may mean requesting it directly from the individual. Though it may feel somewhat awkward to request a resumé or other professional information from a candidate, it is not too dissimilar from filling a job vacancy. A hiring process should be rigorous and sound so that the right candidate is found the first time. Asking for any needed information and arranging one-on-one conversations allows for a more robust vetting process.

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**“Our reason for getting engaged with educators and others is selfish. We are not the Nissans of the world. No one knows who we are outside of our industry. In fact, I would wager that our next-door neighbors have no idea what we do. We have to build our name brand recognition if we are going to remain competitive in this tight market. We were motivated to get involved and basically said that to [our intermediary] when they talked with us.” — Employer**

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## Recruitment Plan

When the overall recruitment process is not strong, the ability to execute on a high-quality Career and Technical Education program or initiative is nearly impossible. Developing a strong action plan for recruitment—and sharing it broadly—is one key lesson learned when setting out to recruit partners.

Given the unique complexities associated with K-12 Career and Technical Education, it is essential that the convening agency makes a point to regularly engage other agencies and organizations, as well as external policy/program experts, to assist with identifying the right stakeholders for the right needs. These asks are best achieved when there exist meaningful cross-sector, cross-agency partnerships that tap into the shared priorities of all parties. Cultivating these relationships develops a deeper understanding of what is needed and why, allowing the identification process to become a more collaborative, responsive process that aligns with the need.

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**“Have your ‘purpose statement’ and action plan built out at the beginning. Know what the needs are and how they will be addressed. Know how and why you want to engage stakeholders in the process before you contact anyone.” — State Intermediary**

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**4****Mutual Benefit and Shared Value**

High-quality partnerships are ones that are mutually beneficial and based on trust and shared purpose. When these are missing from the equation, the convener's ability to leverage his or her leadership rapidly diminishes.

At the end of the day, the depth of stakeholder buy-in will dictate the work's progress and pace. If a stakeholder is not bought in, progress will likely be made but it may not be at the right pace or in the right direction. When that happens, the convening organization must make a decision.

**“The moment I start to insert my own agenda or bias into the mix, rather than what needs to occur, then I’ve lost all credibility and trust with those who are needed at the table. They’ll simply get up and walk away from the table because they won’t feel that I have their interests front and center. So, I leave my ego at the door and take on the role of mediator in order to deliver valued progress.” — Regional Convener**

**“We base our partnerships on shared interests and shared values. Sometimes this approach just doesn’t sit well with an employer. They are not bought into what we are trying to accomplish for their industry sector or the other targeted sectors. Though we value them, we know that we are better off without their engagement. — State Convener”**

**5****Open Lines of Communication**

Stakeholder communications must be coordinated and consistent throughout a process. To be effective, the overall partnership and activities must be clearly communicated and promoted to all stakeholders, as well as to the broader communities (statewide, regional and local) that may be impacted by the work. Though this level of transparency and communication may seem obvious, it is too often the weakest element.

When it comes to stakeholder engagement, even if the stakeholder is actively involved or is part of a larger impacted community, there is no such thing as over-communicating. Stakeholders who are actively engaged in the process should be provided regular progress updates on the action plan, as well as progress toward meeting overall goals and outcomes. These updates should include the sharing of qualitative and quantitative metrics.

**“What resonates with companies is clear and concise language from an intermediary; it’s very appealing to companies. What’s also appealing is seeing strong stakeholder presence. There’s no competition when it comes to this work; we can support one another.” — Employer**

**6****Clear Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities**

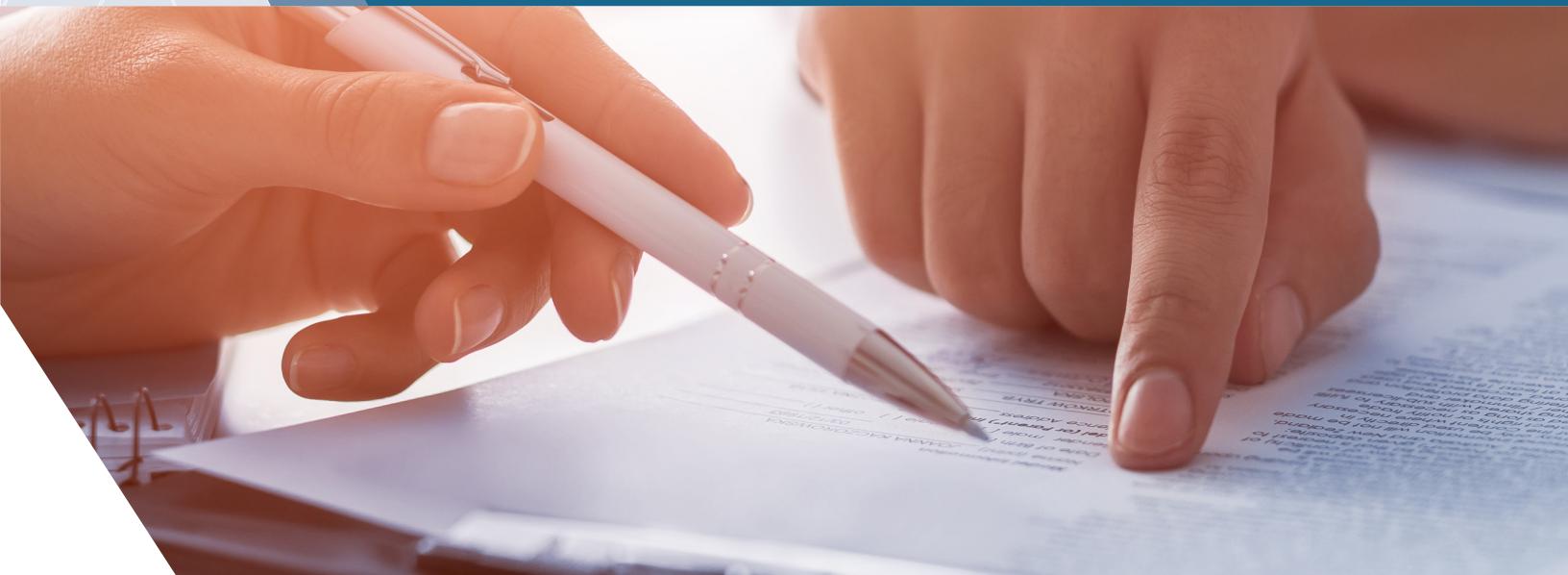
As stakeholders are recruited, it is important for them and the convening agency to establish formal partnership agreements that spell out the various roles and responsibilities. A partnership agreement, like a memorandum of understanding, articulates the expected roles and shared responsibilities of a stakeholder and a convener. It also defines the time period for that engagement. The intent of this agreement is to provide clarity and transparency to the process, while serving as an additional artifact that affirms the goals and expected outcomes.

When agreements are used, stakeholder engagement becomes less about the person making the ask and more about the process goals and outcomes that are trying to be achieved.

**“What sealed our decision to engage was the precision by which we were told what our engagement would be/look like. There was a cohesive plan laid out as to how the goals would be reached and where we were needed as a company.” — Employer**

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## Process-Wide Success Metrics



Evaluating and measuring should be an embedded part of any work that is undertaken. Without formal metrics, it is too easy for one or more parties to perform their own intrinsic evaluations—by simply asking themselves, “Am I getting out of this what I expected?” If the answer is no—or if there is no alternative set of evaluation metrics available—then those parties can easily walk away.

Metrics typically surface once a program or initiative is launched, but a strong process is one that is evaluated during the planning and development phases, as well as throughout implementation. By doing this, the overall process takes on two key evaluative strands that provide a fuller picture. One evaluates and measures progress toward goals and outcomes, while the other evaluates action steps and stakeholder engagement. These strands should form a running thread throughout any work.

A formal stakeholder evaluation should include at least five broad categories (for person and for process):

- 1** The partnership’s effectiveness in reaching identified program goals.
- 2** The use of resources (e.g., expertise, time, artifacts).
- 3** The quality of engagement (all phases).
- 4** The impact on students and other targeted audiences.
- 5** The improvement of partnership dynamics.

## Cross-Sector Partnership Toolbox



What follows is an inventory of tools and materials that convening organizations have used in their efforts to forge and sustain cross-sector partnerships. Collected from both regional and statewide partnerships, these tools demonstrate the variety of ways that convening organizations and individuals can engage potential partners, establish clear expectations for partnership activities and communicate progress over time. To access the examples online, simply click on “View Real Examples” link next to each element of strong cross-sector partnerships.

1 / 2

[VIEW REAL EXAMPLES](#)

**Purpose statements** that summarize the goals of the partnership initiative. This example comes from Rutherford Works, a Tennessee regional partnership led by the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce:

*Rutherford Works, which comprises businesses, K-12 schools, and our postsecondary institutions, empowers and inspires the current and future workforce of Rutherford County to become highly skilled, highly employable citizens. Rutherford Works workforce development focuses on bringing Rutherford County businesses and education partners together to collaborate on (a) closing skills gaps and (b) building the future of the workforce in the County.*

1 / 2

[VIEW REAL EXAMPLES](#)

**Stakeholder engagement materials** that include recruitment materials for potential partners, organizational charts illustrating the structure of featured partnerships, and roles and responsibilities of partnership members.

**3**[VIEW REAL EXAMPLES](#)

**Recruitment protocols** that include partner profile templates, describe the candidate recruitment process and provide candidate interview guidelines.

**4****5**[VIEW REAL EXAMPLES](#)

**Strategic action plan** with a clear schedule of activities, identified responsible parties and embedded communications plan. [Delaware Pathways' strategic plan](#) reflects the initiative's achievements and its changing approaches toward established goals and desired outcomes.

**6**[VIEW REAL EXAMPLES](#)

**Partnership agreements** articulating the responsibilities that both parties (the stakeholder and the convening organization) commit to upholding. Agreements can be crafted in similar fashion to a nonprofit volunteer agreement or a non-binding memorandum of agreement.

**7**[VIEW REAL EXAMPLES](#)

**Data dashboards for monitoring progress** that include metrics aligned to partnership goals and outcomes, such as:

- Stakeholder satisfaction ratings.
- Student enrollment figures for high-demand pathways.
- Number of internships or apprenticeships completed.
- Number of critical jobs filled, or hires made.
- Savings value of student-earned college credit and industry-recognized credentials.



# State Policy Recommendations

State policymakers play an important role in building cross-sector partnerships, whether these be statewide or regional in scope. Below are several recommendations policymakers at all levels can consider to incentivize and promote robust partnerships that can transform Career and Technical Education outcomes for students and address critical workforce needs.

## EXECUTIVE CALL TO ACTION:

**As a matter of economic security and prosperity, governors and/or lieutenant governors can direct K-12, workforce and postsecondary agencies to align and strengthen CTE programs to meet workforce demands of today and tomorrow, with a focus on middle-and higher-wage occupations and credentials. Engagement with statewide, regional and local business industry partners is a critical component of such efforts.**

**“ “ We had a clear charge from the executive level – the governor ... That clear charge became the rallying cry for all stakeholders to come together around K-12.**

— Luke Rhine, Director of CTE STEM Initiatives at the Delaware Department of Education ” ”

In Delaware, the mandate for improving Career and Technical Education and education-to-workforce outcomes came straight from top (an executive order from then-Governor Jack Markell).

## LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIES: **Incentives, Tax Credits and Flexibility**

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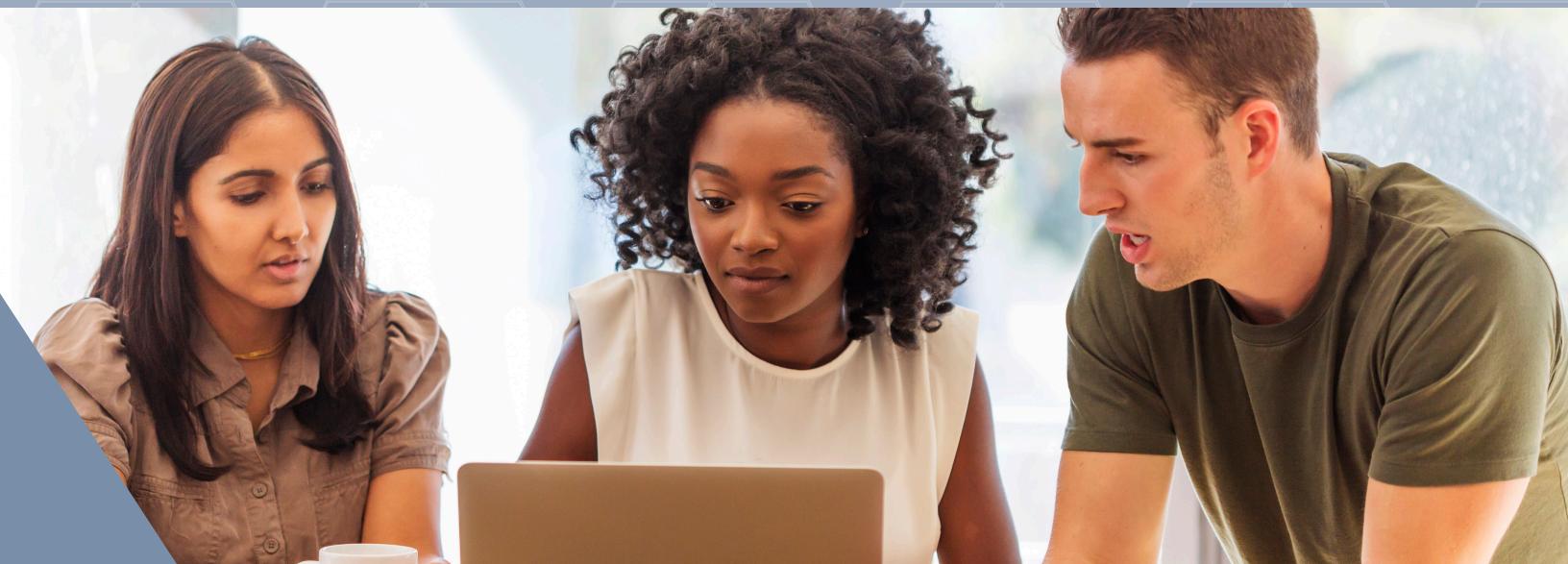
- Provide innovative support to schools and districts to transport students who participate in formal, district-recognized work-based learning programs with business and industry partners. This may include the ability to purchase liability insurance for students who work at an employer's site.
- Provide tax credits to businesses that provide high school student internships and apprenticeships through formalized regional or local K-12/K-16 education-to-occupation pathway initiatives.
- Provide incentive funds to schools for students who successfully earn high-value, industry-recognized credentials and/or complete work-based learning experiences in coordination with formal business and industry partnerships.
- Provide districts and schools the flexibility to recruit and locally certify industry professionals for instructional opportunities in high school CTE pathways.

## STATE AGENCY ACTIONS: **Targeted Program Funding and Rule Revisions**

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- Reallocate or target existing discretionary funds in support of regional and local cross-sector partnerships for robust CTE and career pathways for students. For instance, start-up and support funding for intermediary organizations through federal Perkins Reserve grants can spur significant action at the regional and local levels.
- Revisit and revise existing “teacher-of-record” policies and rules to allow for expanded engagement of industry professionals in classroom and lab instruction. Business and industry stakeholders will be more willing to engage in partnership efforts if states reduce barriers to entry and participation.

# What's Next



This playbook marks the second in a five-part series exploring strategies and a set of processes that states can engage in to improve their Career and Technical Education programs. Looking ahead, *ExcelinEd* will examine the process by which state agencies can perform a comprehensive audit of their existing CTE program offerings and evaluate the results they have produced to date. We will also consider how states currently fund their CTE programs, along with strategies states could adopt to support aligned, robust pathways. Finally, we will look at some of the ways that policymakers can ensure CTE programs are vertically aligned to postsecondary credential and advanced training opportunities.

**ExcelinEd looks forward to working with states as they navigate this vital process to improve their CTE programs and provide students opportunities for lifelong advancement and success.**

# Spotlight on Cross-Sector Partnerships

DELAWARE

## Delaware Department of Education

[www.DelawarePathways.org](http://www.DelawarePathways.org)

Emanating from the Delaware Department of Education, Delaware Pathways is a statewide convening initiative designed to ensure all learners have the opportunity to fulfill their educational goals and career aspirations. Career pathways begin in the public education system (K-12) through the development and implementation of Career and Technical Education programs of study. These pathways continue through adult education and occupational training programs and are administered by partnering school systems, state agencies, institutions of higher education and other service providers.

Delaware Pathways promotes programs and learner pathways that match the state's workforce needs in 14 areas. To learn more about Delaware's statewide work, we spoke with Luke Rhine, Director of CTE and STEM Initiatives at the Delaware Department of Education.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### What is your primary role in the cross-sector partnership?

We serve as the convening force for the state's commitment to increasing the number of Delawareans who are well qualified for the current and projected occupations in our state.

### What lessons have you learned in working with K-12 partners?

For us, K-12 students are our singular motivation. We also recognize that, to drive purposeful career pathways across the state, our districts need to possess the infrastructure to handle the program and curricula shifts, including facilities and qualified educators. We work with our districts to make sure they have the right supports to press forward with the directed changes to their CTE-related pathways.

### What lessons have you learned in working with business and industry partners?

From day one, business and industry partners have been our champions. The majority understood immediately the value-add of our statewide focus on aligning our educational offerings with the economic and labor needs of our state. At the same time, we also understood our limitations as a convener, so we identified Delaware Technical Community College as our intermediary to engage directly with employers for work-based learning placements and other labor-intensive pairings with our school districts.

### What can state policymakers do to support Delaware Pathways and similar pathway efforts?

The Department has a pretty clear legislative agenda for career readiness that we put forward each year:

1. Provide advisory and academic support for students as they transition from middle school to high school and into continuing education and a career.
2. Establish a statewide Workforce Intermediary to connect students and employers.
3. Incentivize youth employment through our state and county chambers of commerce and local Rotary Clubs.
4. Expand workforce data quality and bridge our education and workforce data systems.

### Do you have words of advice for other convening agencies or organizations?

Relationships are what matter most. A stakeholder won't engage or stay engaged if that person feels undervalued. Always check in, and always do "temperature checks" to make sure your partners are doing okay.

*In the 2016-17 school year, **5,000** students were enrolled in Delaware Pathways programs across **36** schools.*

# Spotlight on Cross-Sector Partnerships

## South Central Service Cooperative

[www.mnscsc.org/](http://www.mnscsc.org/)

Teaching-Learning/Perkins

The South Central Service Cooperative (SCSC) was authorized by Minnesota Statute and operates as a governmental unit of the State of Minnesota. SCSC serves as a convening force for Minnesota's south-central region, bringing together educational, business and community stakeholders to address K-12 career pathway needs and opportunities. SCSC acts as both a regional broker and facilitator to drive meaningful student Career and Technical Education learning experiences through cooperative stakeholder engagement. SCSC also works to facilitate CTE-related learning and instruction, which includes work-based learning, by leveraging multiple stakeholder interests, needs and funding. This special focus is driven by the rural landscape that comprises south-central Minnesota.

To learn more about their work and partnerships, we talked with SCSC's Glenn Morris, the Executive Director of the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration, and Gwenn Wolters, the Regional College and Career Readiness Coordinator.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### What is your primary role in the cross-sector partnership?

SCSC's primary focus is increasing the number of local high school graduates who are prepared and ready to contribute to their communities. Given that the region is rural, viable business partners and postsecondary institutions are scattered throughout the area and school districts are small and independent. The landscape dictates that SCSC take a cooperative approach and target the region's economic and labor needs by assembling the collective capacity of small communities to better leverage student CTE learning and experiences.

### What lessons have you learned in working with K-12 partners?

There is a need for a great deal of flexibility. Districts are strongly locally controlled. We know going into any regional work that we need to honor that while also working with each district to find middle ground.

### What lessons have you learned in working with business and industry partners?

Business partners need the red tape removed for them. They don't have the manpower to address any state or federal regulations or requirements, so we handle it for them. They also want their concerns and needs to be heard and to understand how their participation with school districts and students will help respond to those needs.

### What can state policymakers do to support SCSC and similar pathway efforts?

There are several things that come to mind. All of them reflect the need to address student equity and access, particularly for students who live in rural settings.

1. Standardize dual enrollment course offerings and credit value across the state's postsecondary institutions—and make dual enrollment more affordable.
2. Revise occupational licensure requirements. There is an acute need for qualified content experts to teach CTE-related courses in rural communities, but existing state requirements are discouraging for those who come in directly from industry.
3. Explore creative solutions for transporting students to regional work experience sites.
4. Adopt a formal K-12 college and career awareness policy. This should be a braided approach, using counseling, courses, exposure and aptitudes/interest surveys.

### Do you have words of advice for other convening agencies or organizations?

To be successful, be humble, openminded, flexible in your thinking and able to compromise. Be sure to focus on aligning common interests.

*Academies facilitating CTE-related learning and instruction*

*have served over **1,500** student enrollments from*

***23** districts over the past **6+ YEARS**.*

# Spotlight on Cross-Sector Partnerships

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## Highlands of Tennessee Pathways to Prosperity Initiative, Upper Cumberland

[www.HighlandsofTN.com/](http://www.HighlandsofTN.com/)  
Pathways-Prosperity

The Highlands Upper Cumberland Pathways to Prosperity Initiative seeks to improve the education attainment level and job readiness of the region's future workforce by focusing on enhanced training, education and skill development. It also provides students with work-based learning opportunities to match the needs of targeted industries and existing industry.

Targeted industry sectors in the region include advanced manufacturing, engineering, health sciences and Information Technology. Highlands' pathways align the area's economic strengths with the necessary student learning pathways offered in the region's K-12 and postsecondary institutions. The initiative works with both businesses that currently populate the region as well as those that are considering relocation to the area. To learn more about this work, we spoke with Lillian Hartgrove, Vice President of Economic Development and Education for the Highlands.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through the Highlands Pathways to Prosperity Initiative, regional leaders are working to expand Career and Technical Education for students. Key benchmarks of progress in this effort include:

#### **What is your primary role in the cross-sector partnership?**

We are a largely rural region with pockets of mid-sized towns. We view ourselves as the "catalysts for change" when it comes to aligning workforce and education. For our region to thrive, we need to have a coalescing force to drive the regional and local efforts necessary for our continued economic stability and growth. We also provide the needed structure for these groups to gather and work together. Though we facilitate the collective work, we also hold all partners accountable to their specified goals.

#### **What lessons have you learned in working with K-12 partners?**

There are language and cultural barriers that must be overcome. Those of us outside the school districts did not understand the dynamics at first. We had to be patient for the regional goals and intent to gain traction. School leaders didn't understand the critical role they played in all of this until they listened to and interacted with employers.

#### **What lessons have you learned in working with business and industry partners?**

Business partners always come back to their bottom lines. They care about students and their communities, but their involvement is dictated by their economic priorities. Recognizing this, we can explain why they need to be engaged and what their engagement will mean for their company.

#### **What can state policymakers do to support the Highlands and similar pathway efforts?**

State K-12 college and career readiness funding needs to be consistent. One-time funding or limited funding won't drive the percentage increases states want. State education, economic and labor policies all must take a K-16 approach when it comes to ensuring more people are qualified for the current and projected workforces. Shutting out K-12, or limiting its involvement, is shortsighted policy.

#### **Do you have words of advice for other convening agencies or organizations?**

Get stakeholder commitment early on. Make sure you know the "what" and "why" for why you want them engaged—before you ask. Set accountability measures for the overall effort and for all stakeholders, including your organization. Leverage your stronger partners to attract others. Finally, play off strengths. Know who the right people are for the right roles.

- Establishing pre-engineering articulation agreements between the region's community college and an area university.
- Creating course credit transfer agreements between regional technical college and community colleges.
- Developing a seamless nursing pathway for students to progress from high school to and through postsecondary.

# Spotlight on Cross-Sector Partnerships



## San Antonio Works

[www.SanAntonioWorks.org](http://www.SanAntonioWorks.org)

San Antonio Works (SA Works) is an industry-led workforce development organization dedicated to aligning education providers with private sector demand to promote economic mobility. Embedded in the San Antonio Economic Development Foundation, SA Works serves as both an intermediary and “activator” of change with a focus on regional workforce demand in the manufacturing, healthcare and information technology sectors.

In addition to its convening role, SA Works also facilitates work-based learning and employment programs for students as well as teacher externships for instructors. To learn more about their work and partnerships, we spoke with SA Works’ executive director Romanita Matta-Barrera.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### What is your primary role in the cross-sector partnership?

SA Works serves as the voice of committed, solution-driven employers. That provides us a level of credibility with K-12 and postsecondary partners. They want to know what industry needs and come to us for answers and information about how industry demand should inform their program offerings.

### What lessons have you learned in working with K-12 partners?

From the K-12 perspective, ensuring there is buy-in at the superintendent level is key. While our day-to-day contacts are district CTE directors, they need that support from leadership to be effective partners.

### What lessons have you learned in working with business and industry partners?

Our employers are willing partners, but we have to make engagement easier for them. That's our role. For instance, we help set and manage employers' expectations for working with schools. Every school or district is different and we help our industry partners understand their challenges and ways to be flexible in finding solutions.

### What can state policymakers do to support SA Works and similar pathway efforts?

First, rethink opportunities and incentives for teacher professional development. In CTE, teachers need more industry-facing opportunities to remain current on their skills. Teacher externships and stipends for teachers who participate are one effective combination, in our experience. But we can't have quality CTE programs without quality instructors. That means giving them opportunities to learn from industry partners.

Second, many CTE programs are outdated. They should be revised to make sure that they are keeping pace with business and industry. Also, the state needs to focus on those programs that are industry-relevant. For example, right now, schools offer cosmetology and floral design classes during the school day, but robotics programs still mostly take place after school. From what matters to our employers, this approach doesn't make sense and needs to be flipped.

### Do you have words of advice for other convening agencies or organizations?

Building trust with community partners is key. This will ensure that you are seen as providing a value-add to their services and not competing for resources by engaging and informing them frequently. Role clarity among all partner organizations is critical to progress and collaboration.

### San Antonio Works Program Highlights

	Job Shadow	Student Internships	Teacher Externships
2017	3,000+ with 107 employers	700 with 33 employers	194 with 40 employers
2016	1,700+ with 59 employers	573 with 14 employers	151 with 29 employers

## Examples of Cross-Sector Partnerships

For those seeking to start or grow a cross-sector partnership to strengthen Career and Technical Education and career pathways, below are examples of existing partnerships. Some organizations serve as intermediaries while others are dedicated to specific CTE or career pathway opportunities, such as apprenticeship placements. In all cases, these highlighted organizations represent high-quality, cross-sector work that can be replicated across various state, regional, and local platforms.

### Local/Regional

#### **Boston Private Industry Council**

Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) serves as both the city's workforce development board and its school-to-career intermediary organization. As an intermediary, the PIC "connects employers with schools and students on jobs and internships, measures progress on key indicators, and sustains the effort to create career pathways for students and talent pipelines for employers."

#### **Jefferson County Public Schools, Kentucky**

The main office serves as a direct-line intermediary between the school district and business partners in the area. Formalized partnerships focus on a continuum of career-related services and opportunities for students.

#### **San Antonio Works**

San Antonio Works (SA Works) is an industry-led workforce development organization dedicated to aligning education providers with private sector demands to promote economic mobility. Embedded in the San Antonio Economic Development Foundation, SA Works serves as both an intermediary and "activator" of change with a focus on regional workforce demand in the manufacturing, healthcare and information technology sectors.

#### **South Central Service Cooperative**

The South Central Service Cooperative (SCSC) provides programs and services to the south-central region of Minnesota. SCSC serves as a convener of stakeholders from business and industry, K-12 education and community organizations to provide career pathway opportunities to its largely rural area.

#### **Highlands of Tennessee, Pathways to Prosperity Initiative, Upper Cumberland Region**

In Tennessee, Highland's Upper Cumberland Pathways to Prosperity Initiative seeks to improve the education attainment level and job readiness of its future regional workforce through enhanced training, education and skill development. The intermediary and its partners also provide work-based learning opportunities for students matched the needs of targeted industries.

## Statewide

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### **Apprenticeship Carolina**

The organization helps businesses reach high schools, community colleges and the U.S. Department of Labor to offer registered apprenticeships. It facilitates the identification of employers and schools for paired placements. Once an apprenticeship placement has occurred, it handles all required (state and federal) documentation for stakeholders.

### **Delaware Pathways**

Delaware Pathways is a collaboration of government, nonprofit and community organizations to support the mission of preparing the state's students for success in college and career. Its programs feature a set of curricula focused on specific industry-based pathways aligned to Delaware's most critical economic needs.

### **Iowa Sector Partnerships Council**

The Council provides leadership and direction in the development, implementation and achievement of policies and objectives related to sector partnerships and career pathways across the state.

### **Idaho Business for Education**

This is a newly established statewide intermediary and advocacy organization. The organization facilitates business-education partnerships and champions to increase the number of college and career ready graduates as promoted and aligned with the state's priorities.

## Employer-Driven

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### **Northrop Grumman**

The company takes a multi-dimensional approach to its engagement in education. In addition to providing funding, it actively engages itself through work-based learning opportunities and encourages staff to serve as specialized instructors with its education partners.

### **General Electric Foundation**

The foundation launched Developing Skills to directly impact the next generation of learners and employees. The initiative focuses on equipping “individuals with the education, skills and training they need to become employable and meet the demands of a changing global marketplace.”

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