

Career and Technical Education Advisory Committees: Strategies and Best Practices

What is a career and technical education (CTE) advisory committee?

A career and technical education (CTE) advisory committee is a group of individuals drawn from education, business and industry, labor organizations, or the community who bring real-world experience and expertise to help ensure CTE programs equip students with the knowledge and skills expected of industry professionals. By applying their knowledge to educational practice, CTE advisory committees bridge the gap between education and the workplace. There are at least four types of committees:

- (1) **County- or District-wide Advisory Committees** provide overarching guidance to administrators and faculty for the entire CTE program(s) for a county, district, or school
- (2) **Sector Advisory Committees** guide industry-specific pathways across the multiple schools or districts
- (3) **School-Based Pathway Advisory Committees** are more narrowly focused on a specific, or in some cases, multiple pathway programs within a school
- (4) **Regional Sector/Occupational Advisory Committees** provide labor market information and sector guidance to multiple districts countywide.

The formation of ongoing and meaningful partnerships, evidenced by advisory committees, is required by both federal (Perkins V) and state (California Department of Education) funding and regulations. Specific programs or initiatives, such as the Career Technical Education Incentive Grant (CTEIG) program, California Partnership Academies, and Linked Learning, among others, also require collaboration between education and local industry representatives. Most advisory committee requirements, purposes, and characteristics are similar across different key funding streams. Footnotes are provided if a requirement is specific to a particular funding stream.

What do advisory committees do?

Legislation allows for a variety of advisory committee convenings that serve many purposes. The most crucial is to provide an opportunity for partnership between education and industry representatives to assess curriculum alignment to industry standards and build the career capacity of students in the area. They provide programmatic guidance, assist school and district administrators in spotting industry trends, and help guide “the development, implementation, and evaluation of CTE programs [20 U.S.C. § 2354 (b)(5)].” The ways in which advisory committees contribute to program success include the following:

- **Review Curriculum, Equipment, and Facilities.** Advisory committees play a critical role in making sure curricula are designed to teach the skills and competencies required by local employers, that technology and equipment used in the classroom are industry-standard, and that facilities are sufficient to provide high-quality training.

SPOTLIGHT: Poway Unified School District

There are several ways business and community partners can contribute to program success. Lynn McConville, Assistant Principal of CTE Programs at **Poway Unified School District**, asks prospective advisory committee members to either contribute “time, talent, or treasure.” Industry professionals without the time to participate on advisory committees are encouraged to share their expertise, for example, in the form of class presentations, mentorship or internship opportunities, or treasure, in the form of equipment or financial donations.

- **Identify Regional Needs and Advise on Program Development.** Advisory committee members are often poised to spot emerging trends in the local economic landscape, suggest new programs, and recommend changes to keep existing programs current. They are also essential for informing CTEIG plans and comprehensive local needs assessments required by Perkins V.
- **Provide and Broker Work-Based Learning Opportunities or Otherwise Engage with Students.** Helping develop and scale high-quality work-based learning opportunities for students is one of the most valuable contributions an advisory committee can make to a program. Committee members can, for example,
 - Serve as classroom guest speakers and host site visits.
 - Provide internships or pre-apprenticeships.
 - Provide mentorship and networking opportunities — advisory committee members can mentor students (and in some cases, faculty) and leverage industry connections to help mentees gain visibility and expand professional networks.
 - Support assessment and instruction — committee members can serve as judges for student contests, technical assessments, or capstone projects; their feedback comes from a workplace-based perspective which is often considered by students to be more authentic than teacher feedback.
 - Participate directly in classroom instruction or demonstrations.

In addition to providing these opportunities themselves, advisory committee members can tap their networks to broaden business and industry participation in work-based learning beyond the committee itself.

- **Support Fundraising and Advocacy.** Committee members sponsor and help raise funds for awards, scholarships, competitions, and field trips; donate or solicit resources, equipment, and supplies; support grant writing efforts and advocate for legislation and increases to funding appropriations.
- **Become Program Champions.** Committee members can become program champions by speaking at industry meetings or forums where they have credibility with other

businesses or advocating for CTE and program elements with elected officials or influential community leaders.

- **Participate in District or County Efforts to Communicate About CTE.** The [2008-2012 California State Plan for CTE](#) signaled the need for business and industry to help bring visibility to CTE programs, including “communicating broadly with students, parents, community members, and policymakers about the opportunities and benefits of CTE” (p. 129). The latest [California Perkins plan \(2020-2023\)](#) reinforces that “better promoting/marketing is needed to show CTE as a viable path” for students (p.96). This promotion, outreach, and communication function often occurs in events called “showcases.” Although the people convened for these showcases considerably overlap with potential advisory committee members (see below), these functions are separate. In general, showcases are **once-a-year** events, have tight agendas, and are generally too broad to allow for meaningful work in support of specific pathways. Advisory committee meetings, on the other hand, ideally take place more often and more closely adhere to the development, implementation, and evaluation functions listed in this section. It is best to keep the two types of events separate, but if they are combined, it is important to leave sufficient time in pathway-specific breakouts to conduct advisory committee business.

SPOTLIGHT: Oceanside Unified School District

Finding good committee members can be a challenge. So when Katieann Henkel joined **Oceanside Unified School District** (OUSD) as a district counselor, she made it a point to meet potential advisory members where they were: out in the community. She joined the Chamber of Commerce and sat on every professional committee she could. Being the only educator on these committees, she found that networking came easily. Curiosity among professionals on those committees opened the door for conversations about her role and the impact that professionals and community members can have on the quality and effectiveness of career preparation programs. To capitalize on those opportunities as they arose, she developed an "elevator" pitch she could use to quickly describe her programs, as well as questions she could ask of prospective advisory committee members to learn more about their career histories and experiences. Getting prospective members to share their experiences with her helped them feel more comfortable sharing their stories in the classroom — a critical first step toward deeper engagement with students.

Additionally, rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach to committee membership, OUSD provides a four-tiered advisory committee structure. New members typically start at level 1, which requires just a one-year commitment, attendance at two sector meetings (of their choosing), and ad hoc consultation with district CTE teachers. Levels of participation and time commitment increase with each tier, with the fourth and final tier consisting of advisory committee officers who commit to a term of three years and have significant responsibility for supporting CTE teachers and guiding pathway development. OUSD’s advisory resources can be found [here](#).

Who are advisory committee members?

Advisory committees are required by state and federal legislation to include a wide array of stakeholders. These include representatives from K12 and postsecondary CTE programs, such as teachers, counselors, staff, or administrators; from industry, including local businesses and labor organizations; and from the wider community, including students, parents, and

representatives of special populations and service organizations.¹ Additionally, they should have deep knowledge of and practical experience in the industry and a pointed interest in CTE programs; they should also be willing to commit to helping school or district programs to be successful.

Some representatives from industry and the community-at-large may be approached by multiple districts or agencies and cannot participate in all advisory committees. In these cases, it may make more sense to form districtwide, regional, or sector advisory committees so as not to dilute engagement efforts or overburden any members.

Diversity among advisory committee members is also critical. A growing body of research suggests student achievement and engagement, particularly among students of color, is improved when staff and faculty reflect the diversity of the student body. Likewise, having diverse representation among advisory committee members can generate interest, create mentorship opportunities, and inspire students to pursue careers they might not have considered otherwise.

How are they organized?

Advisory committees are typically organized similarly to school boards. There is a chairperson elected by members who is responsible for setting the direction for the committee, including approving agendas and minutes, among other responsibilities. The California Department of Education (CDE) recommends that the committee chairperson(s) be members of the business community.² A committee secretary is selected from among committee members to liaise between the committee and the school or district. Secretaries should be representatives from education, for example, a faculty member, program director, or department chair.³ During scheduled meetings, this person will often be the recorder.

How long is the term of service?

Terms of service typically range from 1 to 3 years, depending on program needs. While it is expected that there would be some turnover from year to year, persistence can be a positive indication of the quality and overall effectiveness of an advisory committee.

How frequently do they meet?

California Education Code requires committees to meet at least once per year.⁴ However, it is not uncommon for advisory committees to meet much more frequently — quarterly, even monthly — depending on capacity, level of interest, and the goals and objectives of the committee. In fact, the latest [California Perkins Plan \(2020-2023\)](#) recommends quarterly meetings to increase interaction between industry representatives and CTE programs (p. 97).

¹ Perkins V Section 133 (20 U.S.C. 2354 (d)); Ed Code

² Career and Technical Advisory Committees Structure, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/Ls/fa/sf/vocstructure.asp>

³ Ibid.

⁴ California Education Code, EC § 8070

TIPS ON EFFECTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Below are a few tips to help committee meetings be productive.

- **Schedule meetings when and where committee members can attend.** Meetings should be held at locations that are centrally located and scheduled for when committee members are most likely to be available, such as in the late afternoon or early evening. Additionally, consider holding meetings at school sites, partner offices, or other places in the community. Virtual convenings may also help increase access and participation.
- **Send calendar invitations and reminders.** Proactively send out calendar invitations for committee meetings and follow-up with reminders. A general rule of thumb is to send out reminders one week before and again one day before the meeting.
- **Create a meeting agenda** that outlines topics, presenters, and estimated timing for each agenda item. Using a standardized [agenda template](#) can help organize and streamline meetings and help keep them on track.¹
- **Disseminate meeting materials in advance.** Send out agendas and materials at least one week before the meeting so that participants can arrive prepared and ready to contribute.
- **Provide refreshments.** Do not underestimate the effect that a well-curated selection of food and beverage options can have on participation. (Culinary students are a great resource for this.)
- **Keep meetings focused and outcome driven.** Don't waste committee members' time. Keep meetings focused on business and community partners' contributions, and the outcomes the meeting is supposed to achieve.
- **Keep meetings (relatively) short.** Meetings that extend beyond the 2-hour mark are rarely productive. Try to limit meetings to about 90 minutes.
- **Engage all voices.** Don't allow the loudest voices to dominate the conversation. Create space so that all participants can contribute and be heard.
- **Take minutes.** [Meeting minutes](#) are critical for ensuring the work of the committee moves forward. Minutes can be brief, but they should at a minimum capture:
 - Who did (and did not) attend
 - The location where the meeting was held
 - Meeting date, as well as when the meeting started and ended
 - Topics discussed, including related issues, decisions, and action items
 - Date, time, and location of the next meeting
- **Distribute meeting minutes and follow up.** Meeting minutes should be sent out within about a week after meetings to help prevent action items and decisions from being forgotten between sessions and to keep those who were unable to attend informed of what they missed.

Making the Most of Advisory Committees

Advisory committees are a tremendous asset to CTE programs, yet they are often underutilized. The following tips on making the most of advisory committees are drawn from interviews with regional exemplars and commonly cited examples of best practices.

- **Leverage Dedicated Staff or Third-Party Intermediaries.** Schools and employers rarely have resources on their own to develop the relationships needed to maximize the use of advisory committee members. Employing a third-party organization or dedicated coordinator(s) can streamline communication channels, help monitor levels of involvement, and ensure employers remain engaged and attuned to the opportunities where they are most suited to contribute.
- **Cultivate Personal Relationships.** Developing personal connections with advisory committee members is critical to realizing the benefits they can bring to programs. Meaningful relationships with partners reduce the likelihood of employers feeling as though their involvement on advisory committees is transactional or simply checking a box. Knowing who their partners are as individuals can also help CTE administrators proactively tailor engagements to match members' personalities, availability, and interest.
- **Establish Clear Expectations and Responsibilities.** Advisory committees flounder when there is a lack of clarity around what they are expected to do. Help committee members be effective by establishing up front what will be required of them; document roles and responsibilities either in a handbook or simple role description. Working with committee members to develop bylaws and governance policies can also help to promote a sense of ownership and accountability.
- **Encourage Direct Student Engagement.** Create opportunities for committee members to engage directly with students. Invite them to school or district events, school tours, maker fairs, or student presentations. Exposing advisory members to students can concretize their work, as well as foster relationships that can lead to more pronounced levels of interest and investment in programs and students' long-term success.
- **Recognize and Promote Advisory Members' Contributions.** Show committee members they are valued by acknowledging their contributions, such as providing public recognition at a committee meeting or providing a plaque or certificate at the end of the year or their term of service. Committee contributions can also be recognized via media and social media. Student letters of appreciation are also effective.

SPOTLIGHT: Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program

One of the most pervasive challenges schools and districts face when creating advisory committees is ensuring industry partners aren't overtaxed. This is particularly true within smaller communities where the same business owner might be approached by multiple educational agencies across a district or region. To address this problem, **Imperial Valley ROP (IVROP)** developed a regional approach to employer engagement. Each year, IVROP would hold regional advisory committee meetings bringing together educators and industry partners from all different sectors. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced IVROP to hold its annual advisory committee meeting virtually. This enabled IVROP to broaden its scope to include a more diverse group of speakers and employers, including from outside of the county. It allowed them to hold more focused sessions with greater participation from administrators, teachers, and students.

Helpful Resources

California Department of Education (CDE) Career Technical Education Advisory Committee Manual. Provides guidance for establishing and facilitating advisory committees along with sample agenda (cf. p. 10) and minutes (cf. p. 11).

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/ct/pk/documents/cteacmanual15.doc>

Oceanside Unified School District CTE Advisory Committee Resources. Found on the San Diego and Imperial Community Colleges Regional Consortium [website](#), Oceanside USD's advisory committee resources include its CTE advisory committee by-laws and advisory committee handbook, which is an excellent resource covering member selection, administration, and evaluation, including sample meeting materials and tips for helping to ensure committee effectiveness.

San Diego Community College District Career Education Program Advisory Committee Handbook and Resource Materials. Focused on community college advisory committees, this handbook provides valuable resources and templates to help administer advisory committees.

<https://www.sdccd.edu/about/departments-and-offices/instructional-services-division/workforce-and-economic-development/advisory-committees.aspx>

Career and Technical Education Advisory Committees (website). Outlines California Education Code and Perkins V legislative requirements for administering advisory committees by agency type. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/vocsources.asp>

This brief was developed by WestEd in partnership with the San Diego-Imperial County Strong Workforce Program. For more information, contact careered@gcccd.edu.