

# Communicating the Value of Career and Technology Centers to the Community

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# INTRODUCTION

Career and technical education (CTE), offered at over 80 career and technology centers (CTCs) in Pennsylvania, has undergone substantial and impressive improvements in recent years. Once considered an option for students less interested in college preparation, today's rigorous CTE prepares students for multiple postsecondary opportunities: two- or four-year college, training programs, apprenticeships, and immediate employment.

Approved CTC programs in Pennsylvania align with the National Career Clusters Framework<sup>1</sup>. An Occupational Advisory Committee (OAC), comprised of volunteer business and community members, is in place for each program to ensure that curriculum and equipment is aligned with up-to-date industry standards. Programs are designed around curriculum and career development experiences that are engaging and make school learning relevant. Students who complete CTC programs graduate with industry-recognized certifications, employability skills, job-specific technical skills, work-based experiences, and often with college credits.

Now more than ever, students completing CTE programs are both college and career ready.

Yet, despite these exciting opportunities, many CTCs struggle to overcome an outdated reputation that does not accurately reflect their current standing. Starting in the 2015-2016 school year, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Bureau of Career and Technical Education (BCTE) invited CTC directors to participate in a leadership council and charged the group with identifying current or emerging challenges affecting CTE. The council's list of five issues includes "communicating the value of CTE to multiple stakeholders." While pockets of progress and innovative practices are taking place across the Commonwealth, council members contend that collaborative and concentrated effort is needed to find affordable and effective ways for all CTCs to improve the perception of those served by the CTC community.<sup>2</sup> It is, after all, this community that supports and benefits from career and technical education.

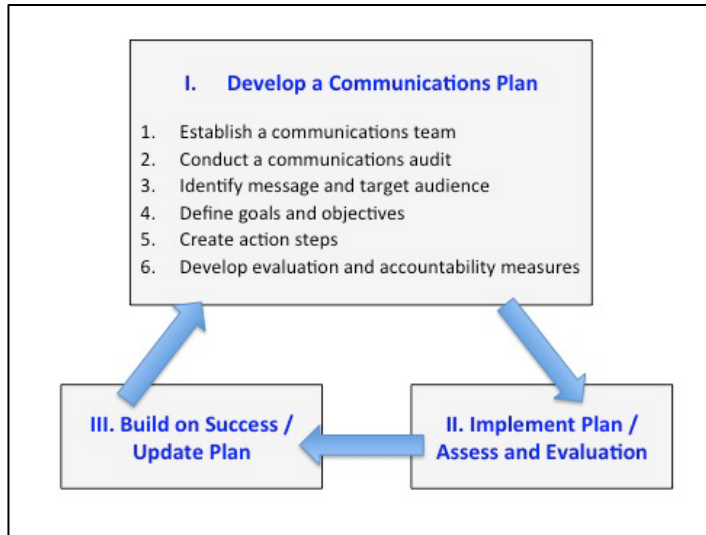
The BCTE supported the development of a communications document to assist CTCs in communicating their value to the communities they serve. The intent of this document is twofold. First, provide CTC staff and leaders with guidance in the examination of their current communications efforts and develop a plan to expand or improve these efforts; and secondly, to share replicable promising practices taking place across the state.

Each CTC's communications efforts reflect their unique strengths and needs and, therefore, these efforts are different in each school. To that end, this document, while specific in offering possible steps to take, is meant to serve as a springboard for discussion and action and should be modified as necessary to best meet the needs of the individual CTC and its community.

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<sup>1</sup> Information about the National Career Clusters Framework is available at [National Career Clusters Framework](#).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this document, the term CTC community refers to the many stakeholders who are served by career and technical education. This includes students, parents, CTC and sending school staff and leaders, community organizations and members, postsecondary education institutions, workforce development agencies, and members of business, industry, and nonprofit organizations.



## DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

CTCs, no matter their size, benefit from having a communications plan in place. A well-developed and “living” communications plan presents a clear and concise framework for those involved in this important work. Generally, the development and implementation of a communications plan requires a substantial time commitment, approximately 12 to 18 months. In this toolkit, the development of a communications plan proceeds in the following steps:

1. Establish a communications team;
2. Conduct a communications audit;
3. Identify message and target audience;
4. Define goals and objectives;
5. Create action steps; and,
6. Develop evaluation and accountability measures.

### Step 1: Establish a Communications Team

The process of communicating the value of a CTC to the greater community is long-term, thorough, and reflective. It requires a strong commitment from school staff, particularly those who are at the front line of positively influencing the community such as office staff and teachers. While some CTCs employ a dedicated communications director and staff, others will establish a communications team and team leader comprised of staff members who also have other responsibilities. In either case, it is critical that a team is formed and the leadership is established as the first step in the process. A variety of perspectives and voices are necessary

to develop and implement a communications plan that will address the needs of various community members. Therefore, members of the team represent those various stakeholders served by the CTC:

- CTC and sending school administrators;
- CTC and sending school teachers;
- CTC support staff;
- Students;
- Parents;
- Members of the business community and OACs, especially those with communications expertise; and
- Members of the Joint Operating Committee (JOC).

**TIP:**

The communications team revisits two driving questions prior to all noteworthy activities and events at the CTC:

1. How does this benefit our students?
2. How do we communicate it to our stakeholders?

The number of team members depends on what is manageable and essential; additional stakeholders may be consulted to provide targeted guidance as needed while not officially being part of the team. The designated team leader, typically a building administrator, has decision-making authority so that action steps are approved to move forward quickly and efficiently. Equally important is that teachers actively participate on the team as they have valuable insight about what students perceive to be its strengths, benefits, and challenges.

Initially, the communications team meets frequently (at least once a month) for a minimum of one year and up to 18 months or longer. During this time, the team focuses on the development and implementation of a plan. Once a plan is in place, team meetings, while still important, become less frequent and perhaps more brief.

The first meeting sets the tone for the group and achieves common understanding of several factors:

1. What is our purpose?
2. What will success look like?
3. What will our process look like?
4. What are our group and individual responsibilities?
5. What resources do we have (e.g., money, talent, materials)?
6. What constraints and/or challenges might we face?
7. To whom and how must we report our progress and plan?
8. What is our meeting schedule for the next six months (or longer)?

9. How will we reach consensus?

10. What needs to happen between now and our next meeting?

For each meeting, the team follows an agenda that is shared with members in advance. In setting the agendas, the communications team may also wish to research branding, another important aspect of communications. After meetings, notes and next steps are distributed and/or posted.

A template for recording team member information is provided in Appendix A.

## Step 2: Conduct a Communications Audit

Following the initial meeting and the development of a long-term meeting schedule, the team conducts a communications audit to identify the gap between what currently is in place and what is needed. A communications audit may include several actions:

### **a. Review and Assess Current Communications**

**TIP:**

Invite team members to bring current communications resources (i.e., brochures, sending school course catalogs, flyers, newsletters) to a meeting. Display these around the room with sticky notes available at each item. Encourage members to walk around and jot down their feedback/comments on the sticky notes. If possible, set up a few laptops, each one displaying relevant website pages.

The team gathers and reviews all communications efforts and materials presently distributed to parents, potential students, and other community members. In looking at these materials, discussion questions might include the following:

- Which key audiences are we targeting?
- What message are we sending?
- Are we successfully telling our story? How do we know?
- How are we reaching our various community members? What worked? What didn't?
- Are we presenting a consistent message and using consistent branding and graphics?
- Are we projecting the right message to the correct stakeholder group?
- What external communications have we received (e.g., media, sending schools)? Was it positive and effective? What external communications opportunities were missed?

**TIP:**

Connect with local media and contribute to a segment about the local economy and workforce. [Berks Career and Technology Center and Reading Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center were featured on NPR's Marketplace.](#)

The team identifies outlets for relaying its messages, listing those already utilized and those that are untapped. The list may include the following:

- CTC website and mobile platforms;
- Sending districts' websites and mobile platforms;
- CTC newsletter;
- Sending districts' newsletters;
- Social media for various stakeholders (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram);
- Newspaper and local magazines (advertisements and letters to the editor);
- Press releases;
- Regional television and radio;
- Open house (CTC and sending school districts);
- Building tours;
- Posters, flyers, and other print resources;
- Student ambassadors;
- Word of mouth testimonials from students, staff, OAC members, and employers;
- Billboards;
- Sending school districts' course catalogs;
- Promotional materials (e.g., pens, caps, mugs); and
- Presentations or presence at local events, conferences, fairs, and student exhibits.

#### **b. Identify Current Perceptions**

**TIP:**

If you don't shape the perception of your CTC, your community will do it for you. Take control of your message.

An important part of the communications audit is ascertaining community members' current perceptions and misperceptions of the CTC and CTE as a whole. Surveys and focus groups are useful strategies to gather this information. The questions asked of participants are specific to each CTC and their intended target audience(s). General examples include the following:

- Have you heard about the CTC? If so, from where? What information did you hear?
- What pops into your head when you hear [name of your CTC]?
- What do you believe is the role and purpose of the CTC in the community?
- What value do you believe the CTC brings to the community?
- What do you believe the CTC could improve upon?
- Who do you think the CTC serves most effectively?
- After graduating from the CTC, what do you believe students are prepared to do?
- Why do you think students attend the CTC?
- If you are a parent, have you encouraged your child to attend the CTC? Why or why not?



- If you are a high school student who does not attend the CTC, what might have changed your mind?
- What is the best way to communicate with you?

**TIP:**

Consider using an online survey tool and/or conducting a focus group via an online conference call. Respect participants' time by keeping the survey and questions brief and to-the-point. Survey questions can more quickly be analyzed and shared when they do not ask for open-ended responses. Instead, consider using yes/no questions, a list of possible responses ("check all that apply"), or a scale (e.g., strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree).

### **c. Organize and Analyze Findings**

Using the information gathered from these discussions and activities, the team conducts a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, the final step in the communications audit. The team answers questions such as:

1. What communications efforts are working well? (Strengths)
2. What communication efforts are not effective? (Weaknesses)
3. Which communication resources are available but not utilized? (Opportunities)
4. What specific barriers do we face? (Threats)

**TIP:**

Discussion and questions relating to how communications efforts are or will be funded typically emerge during the audit and are indicated on the SWOT analysis. Team members need a clear understanding of the budget in order to develop realistic action steps down the road. This may be a good time to "pick the brains" of employer, workforce development, and community partners to gauge their interest in sharing resources and/or providing funding.

Results of the SWOT analysis are reviewed carefully. As the team moves forward, they use the results to focus on expanding strengths and leveraging opportunities while also working to minimize weaknesses and eliminate threats.

A basic SWOT analysis template is provided in Appendix B.

With the final step of the communications audit completed, the team has a strong and focused baseline to begin planning goals, action steps, and evaluations measures.

### Step 3: Identify Purpose, Target Audience, and Internal Message

**TIP:**

As part of the communications audit, develop a list of media contacts in your region. The media list includes contacts at television stations, radio stations, newspapers, and magazines noting who covers education stories and ways in which the CTC may pitch a story or submit news releases and public service announcements.

Communication efforts are most powerful and effective when the purpose is clearly established, target audience is understood, and a guiding message (for internal use only) is developed.

#### **a. Identify Purpose(s) of Communications**

While communicating the value of the CTC is an obvious purpose of the plan, it is useful for the team to drill deeper and identify more specific purpose(s). Defining precisely what you are trying to accomplish guides future communications strategies and helps to identify target audiences. One or a combination of the following may be your purpose:

- Becoming known, or better known, in the community;
- Changing current perception among a specific stakeholder group;
- Recruiting students (perhaps from targeted school districts or for specific programs);
- Announcing events and highlighting successes;
- Recruiting business partner volunteers;
- Educating sending school district staff; and/or
- Educating members of business, industry, workforce agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

#### **b. Identify Target Audience(s) and Their Perception(s)**

Knowing the precise audience(s) and the desired change in perception(s) are essential to develop and execute an effective, on-point message. By this stage, the team likely has a good sense of the audience(s) it wants the communications efforts to reach as it strongly correlates to the purpose(s) already identified. The team now uses the data gathered in the communications audit and perhaps the following questions to prioritize the various target audiences.

- Who are our key customers and stakeholders?
- What do we know about each stakeholder's perception of our CTC?
- What do we want them to know that they don't already know?
- Which perceptions do we want to change?
- What are some efficient ways to get our message to them?
- What are potential roadblocks in communicating with them?

- In light of our identified purpose(s) and resources, which stakeholder(s) should we focus on immediately and which can be secondary?

Examples of target audiences include the following:

#### Internal

- Students;
- Staff;
- Joint Operating Committee (JOC): and
- School boards of sending schools.

#### External

- Parents;
- Parent organizations;
- Parents and families of prospective students;
- Sending school staff;
- Prospective students (specify grade levels);
- Business community;
- Workforce development agencies;
- Elected officials (local, state, and federal);
- Civic groups;
- Community groups; and
- Postsecondary institutions.

A template to guide and capture this process is available in Appendix C.

### **c. Craft an Internal Message**

**TIP:**

Consider using these questions to guide the discussion:

- What words describe what we do well?
- How do we presently serve the community/specific target audience, and how do we want to serve the community/specific target audience?
- What makes our CTC unique in this community? What do we offer that the community will only get from us?
- What do we want the community/specific target audience to know that they presently do not know?

With a keen sense of the purpose and target audience, the team develops a compelling message that captures the value of the CTC and guides development of goals and action steps. This message is not a slogan to be used in external communications. Rather, it is an

internal tool that guides and focuses the team on the critical information and message it wants the audience to know.

The internal message is engaging, concise, and authentic. Ideally, it is one powerful statement that answers the question, “What unique value does our CTC bring to the community, specifically to our target audience?”

How does the communications team create and agree upon a message that will accomplish all of this? A simple but effective approach is to brainstorm key words that describe the value of the CTC in the community, both generally and to specific target audiences. From this list of words, the team selects the most accurate and illustrative phrases to craft a succinct and powerful message.

Each team member knows and understands this message. As the team moves through the planning and implementation stages, it circles back to this internal message, ensuring that all actions are in alignment to it.

#### Step 4: Define Communication Goals and Objectives

**TIP:**

To keep the process manageable and the goals and objectives attainable, consider limiting the number of goals to no more than three. Likewise, consider limiting the objectives to three to five per goal. More than this may prove overwhelming.

Guided by the communications audit, the internal message, purpose, and target audience(s), the team establishes broad and long-term communication goals that address its most immediate needs and build upon existing strengths. Realistic and achievable goals are those that are specific and easy to measure.

To drill deeper, the team also defines narrowly focused objectives that indicate the way in which each goal will be achieved. Objectives may include target audience, relevant SWOT analysis item, timeline for completion, anticipated costs, and the person(s) responsible for its completion.

Defining communication goals and objectives takes time. In fact, several meetings may be dedicated to this work so that ample discussion, revision, analysis, and consensus building take place. Depending on the size of the team, it may be more productive to break into smaller groups, assign each group with one goal, and provide time to develop objectives. At the conclusion, the small groups present their work to the team and welcome feedback before finalizing the objectives.

**TIP:**

Don't underestimate the impact of "inside-out" communication – instill a culture of "spreading the word" with all staff:

- Keep all staff aware of the communications plan and ongoing actions. Create a staff newsletter or fact sheets to better inform employees of building data, activities, and communications efforts.
- Train staff members to recognize and fulfill their responsibilities as building ambassadors and in customer service efforts.
- Add a communication component to the new teacher induction program. Provide all new employees with an orientation packet ensuring that they know the value of the CTC.
- Face-to-face communication is powerful, especially in more difficult situations. Encourage staff to use personal interaction when appropriate.

A template for recording goals and objectives is provided in Appendix D.

### Step 5: Create Action Steps

For those teams that have the capacity to do so, it is worthwhile to take the planning process a step further and define specific strategies or action steps to accomplish each objective. Although this may seem duplicative of the previous steps, it guides the team to focus on objective-specific strategies that are used to meet the broader goals. It is a finely detailed approach to laying out a communication message.

To develop action steps, the team follows much of the same process it used to define the goals and objectives. If several objectives have been established, they are divided among group members so that the intense work of aligning action steps and objectives is completed in small groups or by individuals and then presented to the team for input. When finalizing action steps, the team also determines who is responsible for implementation, resources that may be required, and a timeframe for completion.

That being said, it may not be feasible for a team to take the extra step of creating action steps due to time or other resource constraints. In such cases, the team integrates action steps into the development of each objective, creating objectives that are precise, detailed, and measurable.

A goal with aligned objectives and action steps is provided as an example:

**Goal: Establish an effective media relations program that enhances the CTC image in the community.**

**TIP:**

Put yourself in the shoes of your target audience. What do you need to know? What do you want to hear? How do you prefer to receive information? What might stop you from listening?

Objective 1: Develop tools and resources to help all staff become more effective in their roles as communicators for the CTC.

- Action Step 1a: Include communications training in the new teacher induction program.
- Action Step 1b: Provide staff with a monthly update relating to successes taking place in the CTC.
- Action Step 1c: Provide “customer service” training to frontline staff.

Objective 2: Strengthen and expand the content and design of key communication tools for sending districts to share with potential students.

- Action Step 2a: Encourage sending districts to maintain a CTC page on their website and upload content provided by the CTC.
- Action Step 2b: Deliver a bi-monthly e-newsletter to sending school staff to announce upcoming events and student successes at the CTC.
- Action Step 2c: Produce and distribute short video clips showing CTC students engaged in learning and with testimonials.

**TIP:**

Utilize well-trained student ambassadors whenever appropriate:

- Greet visitors and facilitate tours.
- Greet guest speakers and guide them to their room.
- Volunteer at elementary and middle schools during special events.

At many schools, this position is competitive, requiring an application and training process. Ambassadors wear designated blazers or shirts.

A template for recording action steps is provided in Appendix D.

## Step 6: Develop Evaluation and Accountability Measures

Educators know the importance of evaluating progress to determine which goals and objectives have been accomplished and whether or not the strategy was effective. To this end, the communications team aligns specific evaluation measures to each objective. Ideally, there is frequent and ongoing assessment of progress rather than a long-term or summative assessment. Such an approach allows the team to revise and redirect communication efforts as needed, saving effort and financial resources.

Assessment and accountability measures may include the following tracking systems:

- Benchmarks;
- Focus groups;
- Surveys;
- Post-event evaluations;
- Website analytics and feedback;
- Social media analytics and feedback; and
- Media hits (proactive).

Teams may find it efficient to combine the goals, objectives, action steps, and accountability measures into one comprehensive document. For those who wish to maintain a separate evaluation and measures document, a template is provided in Appendix E.

## **IMPLEMENT PLAN AND ASSESS EFFECTIVENESS**

### **TIP:**

Keep communications brief and to the point.

- Use bullet points, simple graphics, and photographs. Avoid dense text.
- Highlight the message in the title.
- Incorporate student testimonials and success stories.
- Limit teacher jargon.
- Translate communications into other languages as needed.
- Proofread all documents before distribution.

After several months of ongoing planning, a communications plan is in place. Joint Operating Committee (JOC) approval of the plan may be necessary and is certainly recommended if only to build buy-in. The communications plan is also shared with all staff and posted on the CTC's website. It is distributed to sending school administrators, staff, and their school board members when deemed appropriate and beneficial.

At this point, the team begins to implement the actions aligned to the plan's goals and objections and the evaluation measures. It is important to realize that full implementation of the plan may take up to one year. During this time, the team continues to meet on a regular basis. This provides an opportunity for members to report on evaluation measures outcomes, discuss what is working well, and make revisions as needed. Detailed meeting notes should be recorded and easily accessible.

## **BUILD ON SUCCESS AND UPDATE THE PLAN**

Throughout the plan's implementation, the communications team leader keeps momentum going and the team engaged in this important work. Developing a continuous improvement model is highly recommended to ensure that questions such as the following are discussed cyclically:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go and why?
- How do we plan to get there?
- How will we know when we get there?
- What needs to be revisited?

Building on the success of the plan may involve an annual meeting in August, a mid-school year status check-in, and an end-of-school-year data debrief (with planning and implementation meetings continuing monthly). Each year, the team utilizes data it previously captured as a springboard to plan its next area of focus. In this way, an ongoing cycle of revisiting the plan and setting new goals is embedded in the process. Continued updates to and analysis of the communications audit make it a living document.

Section IV of this document offers a variety of examples from the field that include brief summaries of effective communications activities taking place in Pennsylvania's career and technical centers.

## **EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD**

Across Pennsylvania, many CTC leaders and staff are successfully and innovatively employing a variety of strategies to communicate their value. This section offers a sampling of noteworthy practices.

### **A Multifaceted Approach to Marketing: [Chester County Intermediate Unit \(CCIU\)](#)**

At Chester County Intermediate Unit (CCIU), the Communication Team employs a variety of marketing strategies to communicate the value of the CTE programs offered at Chester County Technical College High School's three campuses. The team identified parents and families of prospective students as their most important target audience; research indicated that this audience was often misinformed about the ways in which the CTC could benefit their children. Therefore, for about the last 10 years, the team has focused on communicating directly and efficiently with parents and families. Its goal is to get their message into parents' and families'



hands without going through several channels of communication. In this way, parents learn about the CTC directly from the CTC itself rather than only through sending schools literature and presentations.

CCIU is fortunate to support a communications division that includes a communication director, marketing manager, and admissions specialist. With a staff devoted to public relations and with relatively strong resources, CCIU implements many marketing practices, some of which are listed here.

- **Host Fifth Graders:** Students attend information sessions for three programs.
- **Create Course Catalogs:** CCIU developed two versions of the course catalog: a full version and a lite version. Typically, the full version is distributed to school counselors and the lite version is distributed at events for parents and prospective students.
- **Social Media:** Email, Twitter, and Facebook are used to communicate directly with parents, families and students. CCIU works with a company to send email blasts to approximately 30,000 recipients and to analyze the number of views.
- **Advertisements:** Digital billboards are used to advertise and marketing videos run in theaters prior to the feature movie. CCIU also employs traditional print advertising.
- **Ongoing Outreach:** Throughout the school year, CCIU holds town hall meetings at the local schools and information nights to reach out to prospective students and their parents.
- **Use of Traditional Media:** Local print and online news outlets are provided with three to five press releases a month regarding program opportunities as well as staff and student achievements.
- **School District Communication Office:** Sending school districts' communication staff are provided with press releases regarding the accomplishments and achievements of their mutual CTC students.
- **Direct Mail:** CCIU receives the names and addresses of ninth grade students from its sending school districts for direct mail campaigns that inform students and their parents of upcoming events such as open houses, community days, and college nights.

### **Setting Realistic Goals: [Chester County Intermediate Unit](#)**

The communications team meets three times a year with the entire CTE administration to set, review, and revise recruitment goals. First, the group sets a realistic recruitment goal based on the previous year's full-time enrollment (FTE) and the CTE programs' capacity. For example, the group takes into account that if the school is at 70 percent capacity, it is not realistically going to increase to 100 percent capacity by the following school year, but an increase to 75 percent is realistic. From the recruitment goal, the group determines an application goal based on the conversion rate from application through enrollment. For example, if the recruitment goal is 900 FTEs and the conversion rate is 68 percent, then the application goal is 1,324.

### **Connections Magazine: [Lenape Technical School](#)**

*Connections* magazine is published three times a year and mailed to 40,000 customers in its four sending districts. The 16- to 24-page magazine communicates what's new and exciting at Lenape Tech, ways in which the school serves its students and community, how students positively contribute to the community, and the various business partnerships in which the school participates. The spring issue of the magazine highlights a Lenape Tech student from each technical program, focusing on the student's accomplishments in school and community service work. *Connections* also provide examples of the ways in which academics and technical skills are integrated to create a strong education program.

The magazine is divided into three sections covering:

- Student and program success stories at the secondary level;
- Adult education and nursing programs; and
- Adult and continuing education classes offered at the school and through Butler Community College.

A local advertising company is contracted by Lenape Tech to write and print the magazine; topics and themes are provided by the CTC. Director Karen Brock states that publishing *Connections* is well worth the financial cost given its circulation and ability to communicate key messages to a wide audience. Both the Adult Education and Butler County Community College programs contribute to the publication costs.

### **Rewriting Information in Sending Schools' Course of Study Booklets: [Berks County Career and Technology Center \(BCTC\)](#)**

Administrators realize that CTC information provided in their 16 sending school district's annual course of study booklets is often incomplete and is inconsistent among districts. For example, some booklets fail to include all of BCTC's programs, and the Technical Academy is currently not listed in any of the booklets. From a marketing and recruitment perspective, administrators saw the incomplete information in the booklets as a disservice to BCTC.

To address this issue, the administrator plans to annually provide BCTC's sending districts with text to be used in future course of study booklets and on the districts' websites to ensure that an accurate and unified description of each program and course offered at the CTC is provided to students, parents, and other stakeholders. This goal is one of BCTC's 2016-2017 School Improvement Plan initiatives. In the short term, Dr. James Kraft, Director, plans to provide superintendents with a one-page listing of BCTC program information to serve as a stopgap measure.

## **Using Social Media as A Marketing Tool: Chester County Technical College High School—Pennock’s Bridge Campus<sup>3</sup>**

To re-energize recruitment efforts, administrators at Chester County Technical College High School piloted the use of a “Social Media Blitz Day,” encouraging students to use social media responsibly while promoting CTE and the school. On this day, students shared news about their programs and accomplishments with other students, parents, and the larger community.

To plan for the social media blitz, a committee of administrators, faculty members, administrative assistants, communication/marketing staff members, IT staff, and students was formed. The committee determined to hold a single, one-day event (rather than several days or longer) in order to capitalize on the “blitz” aspect of the event.

For the project to be successful, the committee enacted several preliminary steps. Faculty and staff received training related to the use of Facebook, Tweeting, and texting. During an assembly, administrators explained the event to student representatives from each program; student representatives then announced the event to classmates in their respective programs. Administrators also visited each class to provide students with detailed expectations of the event.

Parents/guardians were asked to sign a permission form that explained the event, guidelines, and expectations, as well as consequences if students did not follow the guidelines. A sample posting was developed and displayed in each of the CTE program classrooms prior to and during the event. On Social Media Blitz Day, non-instructional staff was assigned to a CTE program to assist with the oversight of the postings during the day of the event.

Based on data obtained from Facebook statistics, approximately 150,000 family and friends were reached on Social Media Blitz Day. Nine new student applications came in directly tagged on Facebook. The Social Media Blitz has become a yearly event and the name has been changed to TCHS Pride Day.

## **Monthly Communications Meetings: Cumberland Perry Area Vocational Technical School**

To keep communication efforts moving forward, the administrator holds monthly, 15-minute public relations meetings with several staff members. When needed, the team schedules a more extensive follow-up meeting. The agenda for the monthly meeting is as follows:

1. Review the communications timeline. Discuss upcoming events. Decide if a new action should be implemented.
2. Plan the content for the website, weekly newsletter, and monthly news release. Discuss new social media platforms to use.

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<sup>3</sup> This practice is also highlighted on the Pennsylvania CTE Resources website: [Pennsylvania CTE Resources](#)

### **Recording Action Steps: [Cumberland Perry Area Vocational Technical School](#)**

The public relations team creates an annual communications timeline spreadsheet to document the strategies used to reach various customers and the date by which these strategies will be implemented. Director Justin Bruhn also documents which team members are responsible for various communication strategies; this list may be found in Appendix F.

### **Focus on Student Recruitment: [Parkway West Career and Technology Center](#)**

Each year two non-teaching days are dedicated to hosting eighth and ninth grade students from twelve sending districts for a Career Exploration Day. Participants select two programs they would like to explore, and instructors use hands-on activities to engage and inform them about the program. At the end of the day, attendees complete a survey to provide feedback on their experience.

Parkway West administrators schedule two days in the instructors' contract so that the Career Exploration Days can be held when Parkway West students are not in the building. This approach allows the instructors to focus solely on recruitment of prospective students.

### **Videos to Market Programs: Multiple CTCs in Pennsylvania**

Several CTCs have created engaging videos to market individual programs and/or the school in general. Videos typically highlight the academic and technical skills within a program and the careers aligned with them. Links to the videos are shared in a variety of ways, including posting them on the CTC's website, inviting sending schools to post on their website, suggesting that sending school counselors share with potential students, and distributing to parent groups. Examples of marketing videos include the following:

- A.W. Beattie Career Center—[Advanced Computer Programming](#)
- [Delaware County Technical School](#)
- Franklin County Career & Technology Center—[Engineering Technology](#)
- Lehigh Career & Technical Institute—[Supply Chain Management](#)
- [TechLink Consortium](#)

### **Summer Camps: Multiple CTCs in Pennsylvania**

During the summer, many CTCs run camps to provide younger students with an opportunity for hands-on learning and for them and their parents to better understand career and technical education programs. The focus of these camps varies but typically highlights Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. Camps are usually weeklong and open to students in grades 5 through 9, although some CTCs offer camps to high school students. While some CTCs charge a camp fee, others secure funding in other ways. Often, the camp session concludes with an event to which parents are invited and told about the CTC.

To learn more about such camps, click on the following links.

- [Summer Career Academies - Chester County Intermediate Unit](#)
- [Camp LCTI – Lehigh Career & Technical Institute](#)
- [Summer of STEM – Lancaster County Career & Technology Center](#)

### **Focus on Recruitment: Forbes Road Career and Technology Center<sup>4</sup>**

Several practices designed to increase student enrollment and community outreach have been implemented:

1. **Community Outreach:** A staff member who assumes responsibility for community outreach was hired to increase the CTC's presence on social media and to create a quarterly newsletter that is mailed to rising tenth grade students. Many of the outreach efforts are focused on ways to more effectively and directly reach parents of prospective students.
2. **Community Service Projects:** Two high-level community service projects have been completed, both of which were featured in the local news. The Recycle Rides project involved collision repair students recycling two cars that were then given to people in need. For the *Invisible Girl* project, several programs collaborated to build an addition on a home for a disabled girl.
3. **Middle School Career Fair:** A team of three adults supervise two students from each CTE program at the Career Fair. The group sets up a table display with work samples, tools, equipment, and a tri-fold tabletop advertisement for the program.
4. **Dissemination of Enrollment Information:** Sending districts are provided with a recruitment packet that includes an updated program of study booklet, application, student tour invitation, open house flyer, and a one-page program description sheet. Districts use this information for their course catalogs.

### **Looking Beyond Pennsylvania**

Following are communications-related resources from outside the commonwealth:

1. [Alabama State Department of Education CTE Month Communications Plan](#)
2. [ACTE Advocacy Toolkit](#)
3. [Learning that Works for Minnesota: CTE Works! Telling Your Story](#)
4. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: [Wisconsin CTE Month](#)
5. [Learning that Works for Utah: Advocacy for CTE, CTE Month 2017](#)

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<sup>4</sup> This practice is also highlighted on the Pennsylvania CTE Resources website: [Pennsylvania CTE Resources Recruitment](#)



**SWOT Analysis: Identifying Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats**

Populate the table with data collected from surveys and other sources.

Include team members' brainstormed ideas and thoughts.

1. Build consensus for each statement; eliminate those that do not reach consensus.
2. Prioritize items in each section to help focus later discussions pertaining to goals and action steps.

<b>Communications Audit</b> SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats [DATE]	
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
What communications efforts are working well? Where or with whom are we successfully communicating the value of our CTC? Who has a positive perception about the value of our CTC? What are we doing that is beneficial to the community but not widely known or recognized?	What communications efforts are being used and are ineffective? Who aren't we reaching? Who has misperceptions about the value of our CTC? What internal changes may be needed to improve our reputation?
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
What resources and opportunities are available but under-utilized in our communications efforts?	What challenges or barriers might we face that will impede our efforts to increase all stakeholders' awareness of our value within the community?

Appendix C

Communications Audit Identifying Our Audiences [DATE]					
Our Stakeholders/ Customers	Why do we want to reach them?	Their Present Perceptions and Misperceptions	What do we want them to know?	Potential Communications Tools	Potential Roadblocks/Solutions



**Internal Message:**

**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

**Goal #1:**

Objectives for Goal #1: (specific and quantifiable)	Customer Addressed	SWOT Item Addressed	Timeline
1a.			
1b.			
1c.			

**Goal #2:**

Objectives for Goal #2: (specific and quantifiable)	Customer Addressed	SWOT Item Addressed	Timeline
2a.			
2b.			
2c.			

**Goal #3:**

Objectives for Goal #3: (specific and quantifiable)	Customer Addressed	SWOT Item Addressed	Timeline
3a.			
3b.			

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN: ACTION STEPS			
<b>Goal 1:</b>			
<b>Objective 1a:</b>			
Action Steps for Objective 1a	Who is Responsible?	Resources	Timeline
1.			
2.			
3.			
<b>Objective 1b:</b>			
Action Steps for Objective 1b	Who is Responsible?	Resources	Timeline
1.			
2.			
3.			
<b>Objective 1c:</b>			
Action Steps for Objective 1c	Who is Responsible?	Resources	Timeline
1.			
2.			
3.			

Appendix E

Communicating the Value of Our CTC: Evaluation Measures for Objectives			
Objective	Evaluation Measure	Evaluation Results & Date	Notes <i>Is result considered successful? Will changes be made?</i>
1a.			
1b.			
1c.			
2a.			
2b.			
2c.			
3a.			
3b.			
3c.			

## Appendix F

### List of Public Relations Responsibilities

1. Receptionist:
  - Report Visitors/Events to JOC Secretary/Director
  - Student of the Month postings on website
  - Daily Facebook, Twitter, Instagram Updates
  - E-newsletter Content (Monthly)
    - Alumni Feature
    - Program Spotlight
  - E-Newsletter Construction
  - E-Newsletter email sent
2. JOC Secretary
  - Multiple School/Program Pieces for website weekly including video
  - Recognition letters to districts/JOC
  - Instagram, Pinterest and other trendy app management and use
  - Update information for Fact Sheet, Brochures, etc.
  - Manage website information
  - Prepare/distribute news releases monthly
  - Future-student reporters
3. Co-op Coordinator
  - 1 student feature per month including picture and/or video
  - Alert Receptionist of all new co-op employers in order to thank business
4. Graphic Communications
  - Fall and Spring Mailings
  - Program/Cluster brochures printed in fall
5. Counselor
  - Manage Fall and Spring mailings
  - Tours

Sample provided by *Cumberland Perry Area Vocational Technical School*