

Engagement Best Practices

This section includes a range of best practice strategies that will keep your stakeholders engaged throughout the development of your Perkins V plan and build relationships that will enable you to continue to gather input from them through implementation and beyond. As you think about the **purpose** behind your engagement efforts: Is your goal simply to inform? Is it to create opportunities for stakeholders to have their questions answered? Are you creating opportunities for your stakeholders to get involved? Is your goal to earn their support and ultimately inspire them to act?

- 1. Speak to your audience.** Remember that engagement strategies that may be successful in one community may not work in another. Not all stakeholders will come to the table with the same level of education, background on the Perkins Act or interest in the details of policy development. That does not mean that their voices should not be heard. Recognize up front that many of your stakeholders will not be education experts and may need context before they can fully contribute to, and engage in, a valuable discussion.
 - *Don't pigeonhole your stakeholders.* Some community groups and stakeholders have expertise in more than one policy area. Ask each stakeholder group what areas are of greatest interest to them, and consider what they can contribute to the local plan.
 - *Anticipate your stakeholders' concerns.* Each group will likely have specific areas that are of interest to them. Be prepared to speak to those topics and answer questions.
 - *Identify a clear point of contact.* Make sure your stakeholders know who at the LEA can answer their questions and can keep them informed about progress along the way.
 - *Don't speak over—or under—your stakeholders.* Not all stakeholders will have a background in education. Don't assume they have read the details of the law in advance, but also don't assume they have no information. Speak and provide concise materials that are clearly written, about topics that are relevant to them.
 - *Avoid edu-speak.* As much as you can, try to avoid using education jargon or acronyms that non-educators won't understand. If some jargon can't be avoided, include a glossary of terms with your materials.
 - *Leave enough time for them to respond.* Don't expect stakeholders to review content and provide input within 24 hours. Acknowledge that you know they're busy and allow them a reasonable amount of time (i.e., 2-3 weeks) to provide feedback in writing.

If you're engaging...

Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Parents will be more likely to engage in this process if they see the importance of getting involved and feel like their voices will be heard and valued. Frame the issues around how the changes could impact their children and community.▪ Provide parents with background materials in advance and keep all presentation materials clear and concise.▪ Anticipate language barriers. Have materials available in person and online in multiple languages and arrange for interpreters at public events.▪ Ask what has and has not been working well in their child's schools.▪ Try not to use acronyms and educational jargon; define complex words and phrases when they cannot be avoided.
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(excerpts pulled from the Stakeholder and Perkins V: Meaningful Engagement for Student Success guide, provided by the Council of Chief State School Officers)

Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain how this level of flexibility and state control is different from the way the state operated under Perkins IV (the previous version of the Perkins Act) and what that will mean for them.
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2. Use multiple vehicles. Traditional outreach methods like town hall meetings and press releases are no longer the only—or even the best—ways to reach every audience. Blogs, websites, social media, webinars, focus groups and surveys are among a myriad of other strategies that districts can also employ to connect with specific stakeholders. This means that districts will need to adopt a strategy that incorporates more than one vehicle to effectively make the connections they need. Not all people get their information in the same way anymore, so to be most effective—and to ensure that no one is inadvertently left out—districts need to intentionally seek out and use the vehicles that work best for the people they are trying to reach.

- *Meet people where they already are.* Ask to be added to the agenda of community meetings or forums that were previously scheduled instead of creating new ones. Ask partner organizations already meeting with their members to host focus groups.
- *Leverage communication vehicles people are already using.* Many stakeholders already contribute to, and read, monthly newsletters, e-mail distribution lists, and social media accounts. Seek these out and ask the stakeholders who lead these vehicles to help you spread the word.

Possible vehicles to use

- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.)
- Websites
- Webinars
- In person forums
- Focus groups
- Roundtable discussions
- Newsletters
- Surveys
- Email listservs
- Personalized emails
- Text messages
- Online chat
- Conferences
- Video conferences

3. Identify your best ambassadors.

- *Make sure your ambassadors know what is expected.* Ambassadors have to be a two-way conduit—their role is to convey the district’s message to the stakeholders, and then to bring the stakeholder perspective back to the district. Clarify expectations before they get started and provide them with the training and tools they need to ensure they are able to be effective.
- *Invite active stakeholders to play the ambassador role.* At convenings and presentations, ask stakeholders if they would be willing to be part of an ongoing engagement effort or act as ambassadors.

4. Ask for input before decisions are made and use it. The intent of Perkins V consultation requirements are to make sure the people affected by the law are at the table from the start of the process. Asking for input on issues or policy changes after decisions have already been made leaves stakeholders feeling devalued, and like their time has been wasted. Approach stakeholders with rough ideas to get their reaction and be clear from the start on which issues have been resolved and are no longer up for discussion.

- *Clarify what is on—and off—the table.* Let stakeholders know what they will have the authority to help decide, and what is already decided or simply not up for discussion. This level of clarity will help stakeholders understand the role they are being asked to play and help to avoid confusion or conflict.
- *Come with questions you need answered.* Approach stakeholders with draft policies or rough ideas and present them with specific questions that can be used to inform the district's thinking. Provide them with the opportunity to have a direct impact on the plan and make sure their input is reflected on the next draft.
- *Ask for better ideas.* If stakeholders do not agree with the initial thinking, ask them to explain why and to provide alternative ideas or solutions. This will ensure the engagement process is results-oriented and productive, particularly when discussing difficult topics where there are varying opinions.
- *Close the feedback loop.* Create a reporting mechanism that goes back to the community after the engagement process and explains what you're using, what you're not using and why. Explain the district's thinking and decision-making process so it is clear why some ideas were incorporated and others were not.

5. Keep your materials simple and brief. All written, online or presentation materials should be concise and easy-to-understand, written to illustrate how the content relates to **student achievement** and to your districts strategic vision for Perkins V. Differentiate your materials by audience, asking yourself what they really need to know, and what questions and concerns they are likely to bring to the discussion. Keep the in-the-weeds detail about process for discussions with practitioners and those with specific expertise or experience in the topic; frame other content on how individual stakeholder groups will be impacted and how things will change.

- *Create materials your stakeholders can share.* Written content should be developed to guide your stakeholder discussions but should also be created with a broader audience in mind. Think about how your stakeholders can use the materials in a conversation with their colleagues and include talking points to help guide that discussion.
- *Avoid edu-speak.* Watch out for acronyms and education jargon. Define them when they can't be avoided but aim to keep your materials clear and easy to understand for all audiences.
- *Use visuals.* Some audiences will have an easier time understanding complex topics if they are explained using a graphic, animation or visual rather than through a lengthy white paper or set of bulleted items. Consider ways to incorporate visuals to represent data or complex issues.

6. Turn these new connections into long-term relationships. The stakeholder engagement process required under Perkins V provides states with an opportunity to create new relationships with stakeholders who have not traditionally been at the table and model how things will be done in the future. Engage with a wider array of stakeholder groups, actively listen to their input, answer their questions and show how their feedback is used to strengthen your plan. Remember that long-term relationships and engagement is not about agreeing 100 percent of the time, but about working through your issues together. Seek to deepen your relationships with civil rights organizations, businesses, workforce boards, unions, administrator associations, postsecondary institutions, other agencies and advocacy groups through this process and commit to working together in the future to expand the district’s reach and support system.

- *Play the long game.* Remember that Perkins V’s changes are going to take time to implement and will have a lasting impact on the district. Districts should use the engagement and planning process to establish strong relationships with stakeholder groups so they can all have a sense of ownership in the final plan and work together on course corrections as they arise.
- *Set up regular check points.* Schedule at least two or three check-ins during the first year of implementation to get stakeholder reaction and suggestions for improvement. These can be in- person or virtual, but they will demonstrate to stakeholders that their input is valued and how you intend to follow up.
- *Report on your results.* After the first year of Perkins V, publish a report on the lessons learned and how implementation of the Act can improve. Give credit to stakeholders who suggested improvement strategies you intend to adopt.
- *Create an advisory group but don’t just rely on them to represent your stakeholders.* Districts should develop an advisory group that includes representatives of key stakeholder groups, but engagement with those communities should not end there. Continue to engage and communicate with larger groups of stakeholders to identify areas where improvements are needed and potential solutions.

If you’re engaging...

Traditionally under-represented groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some groups that have not been effectively engaged in the past may have low expectations for this process. Use the Perkins V plan development as an opportunity to create two-way dialogue and build a reciprocal relationship that can lead to ongoing, meaningful collaboration.
Special populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perkins V holds CTE programs accountable for the performance of (and calls for engagement with) groups of students that go beyond the subgroups listed in ESSA. Examples include students pursuing careers that are non-traditional for their gender, single parents, and out-of-work individuals. In the past, these students have not always been equitably served by CTE programs. Use the Perkins V consultation process to forge new relationships with those groups and to ensure that their needs are addressed.