Introduction: The Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) of 2018 requires local grantees to conduct a comprehensive local needs assessment (CLNA) and update it at least every two years.

The CLNA is designed to guide Perkins V implementation and spending at the local level. To develop the CLNA, career and technical education (CTE) programs must consult a variety of stakeholders and review student, program, and labor force data. To support states in implementing Perkins V, including CLNA, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) has developed resources available on the Perkins Collaborative Resource Network.
OCTAE has supported customized technical assistance to states addressing a new and often challenging aspect of the CLNA process—the effective use of labor force and other data in programmatic decisions. This module summarizes technical assistance findings related to three questions that guided the technical assistance:

- What support and resources do states provide to local districts on data analysis and data-driven decision-making?
- What strategies are states employing to support local district staff in using labor market data to analyze the labor market alignment of their CTE programs?
- What tools and assistance do states provide to district staff on conducting equity gap analyses?
This module is based on consultations and interviews with state CTE leads and data analysts, information shared by states during the 2020 Data Quality Institute, and reviews of states’ Perkins V state plans and other documentation.

The content reflects information and examples from the following states:

- Alaska (AK)
- Colorado (CO)
- Delaware (DE)
- Florida (FL)
- Georgia (GA)
- Hawai‘i (HI)
- Illinois (IL)
- Kansas (KS)
- Louisiana (LA)
- Maryland (MD)
- Massachusetts (MA)
- Minnesota (MN)
- Nevada (NV)
- North Carolina (NC)
- Ohio (OH)
- Oregon (OR)
- Rhode Island (RI)
- Texas (TX)
- Wisconsin (WI)
- West Virginia (WV)
Overview

State CTE agencies have produced a variety of resources to support local districts in completing their CLNAs, including

• guidebooks,
• CLNA templates,
• webinars,
• synchronous and asynchronous training sessions, and
• reports and tools on CTE student and program data.

These resources enable local CTE providers to make **data-driven decisions**, **use labor force data** to identify and prioritize programs that meet labor market needs, and **perform equity gap analyses** to ensure that CTE programs serve all students equitably.
State agencies have long offered a variety of training opportunities to support local providers in accessing and using CTE data, employing in-person and virtual meetings, asynchronous training, and other opportunities.

With the transition to Perkins V, states have augmented existing training or created new training with CLNA-specific content, including the following:

- **Annual conferences** to introduce new CTE staff to federal and state CTE policies and practices, discuss state CTE initiatives, and provide technical assistance on completing CLNAs, among other topics
- **Annual training** on analyzing and interpreting CTE program and student data
- **Monthly CTE data office hours**, where local CTE providers can ask questions about CTE data reporting requirements and discuss how to review and analyze CTE data
States have developed tools and resources for local CTE providers to use when analyzing data and identifying local needs for CTE programs. Examples include the following:

**TX** Data analysis matrices and templates for identifying data sources to review, consulting stakeholders, and conducting root cause analyses ([Texas’ CLNA analysis matrix and other resources](#))

**OH** Data-related questions corresponding to each CLNA section and instructions on the type of information to include in responses

**CO** Guidebooks on [conducting regional local needs assessments](#) by identifying local needs and developing regional priorities with nearby districts and postsecondary institutions

**MA** Guidance on identifying specific, measurable outcomes and implementation benchmarks for strategies that local providers develop to address needs identified through their data analysis
Some states prepare data reports or dashboards for local providers to use in identifying program challenges, needs, and goals. These reports include the following:

**DE** Excel spreadsheets that provide local CTE staff with data on student performance by subgroup

**OR** “Traffic light” reports for each Perkins indicator that indicate whether districts have met their performance targets

**MD** Interactive data dashboards designed to support the CLNA process (see below)

The **Maryland State Department of Education** has developed data dashboards detailing CTE student enrollment and performance over time by student subgroup that include labor market information. Districts are required to consult the data during the CLNA process, and the state provides technical assistance through monthly meetings between state CTE staff and K–12 CTE directors (state staff also regularly meet with postsecondary CTE directors) and regional specialists.
Perkins V requires that state and local CTE providers use labor market data to ensure that CTE programs are aligned with labor market needs.

To respond to this requirement, states are providing reports and tools that do the following:

- **Present wages, job openings, and education requirements for occupations aligned with CTE programs of study and career pathways (e.g., Kansas and Massachusetts)**

- **Flag or color-code CTE programs aligned with occupations that the state defines as high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand (HSHWID).** States present these data:
  - **at the program level**, with “yes/no” indicators to indicate whether the program meets HSHWID criteria (e.g., Maryland), or
  - **at the occupation level**, with indicators of whether individual jobs aligned with CTE programs meet HSHWID criteria (e.g., Texas).
Consultation with business and industry representatives is another crucial source of information on labor market needs. Therefore, some states have established processes and requirements for local CTE providers to demonstrate that local business and industry representatives are supportive of proposed CTE programs:

- **Louisiana** requires that local CTE providers at the secondary level **secure three letters of support** from local business and industry representatives for industry credentials they plan to offer (which are required for all CTE programs).

- **Florida** allows local providers to use letters of support from local economic development agencies, chambers of commerce, or employers/industry associations as an alternative to the state’s in-demand occupations list when demonstrating the need for a program.
In full-day regional Perkins V Equity Lab sessions, district staff in Ohio identified access, engagement, and opportunity gaps; analyzed the causes of the gaps; and created plans to address the gaps. These plans could then be included in participating districts’ CLNAs and Perkins applications.

**Perkins V** requires local CTE providers to evaluate student and program performance for disparities in student outcomes or access to CTE programs by gender, race/ethnicity, or special population status.

States have provided guidance and resources to local providers to assist them in identifying and addressing equity gaps, including the following:

- **Guidelines and criteria for identifying equity gaps and a “gap analysis indicator” for each Perkins performance metric included on local sites’ data dashboards**
- **Guides with example questions to help districts apply an “equity lens” to analyze student data by considering how policies and trends may shape CTE program access and outcomes for students from different demographic groups**
- **Equity-focused CLNA guides** to guide analysis of student data and critically assess past strategies to improve equitable access to CTE
States have provided guidance on conducting “root cause” analyses to identify immediate and more deeply rooted causes of equity gaps. Common approaches include

- the “fishbone” chart, a cause-and-effect diagram that helps to visualize the relationship between a problem and the factors that contribute to it, and
- the “five whys,” an approach that invites policy makers to start with a problem and ask successive “why” questions to identify the root cause(s).

Underlying both approaches is the need to address the underlying causes of equity gaps. States have supported root causes analyses at the local level through the following:

- CLNA guides that include instructions on how to apply root cause analysis to identify the factors that contribute to equity gaps
- Training and guidance on developing goals to prioritize strategies to address equity gaps that have the most impact and chance of success
Conclusion

State CTE agencies are using the following strategies to promote data-driven decision-making through the CLNA process:

**Data-driven decision-making**
- Providing resources to assist local CTE providers in accessing, understanding, and using data to improve programs
- Creating tools (e.g., Excel or PDF reports, web-based dashboards) that put relevant data in front of local providers
- Offering training on how to use data to inform decisions about CTE program offerings

**Using labor market data**
- Establishing criteria and standards for identifying programs that prepare students for HSHWID occupations
- Partnering with state workforce development agencies to provide labor market data to local CTE providers

**Equity gap analyses**
- Providing guidance to local CTE providers on how to identify and prioritize equity gaps
- Offering resources and trainings on how to conduct root cause analyses to identify the sources of equity gaps, in consultation with a diverse group of stakeholders
The following links point to examples and resources referenced in this module:

- **Data-driven decision-making**
  - Texas’ CLNA analysis matrix and other resources
  - Ohio’s guiding questions
  - Colorado’s guidance on conducting regional CLNAs
  - Oregon’s “traffic light” reports
  - Maryland’s CTE dashboards
  - Resources related to Massachusetts’ “Planning for Success” process

- **Use of labor market data**
  - Florida’s guide to reviewing primary and secondary labor market data sources
  - Kansas’ regional economic analysis reports
  - Massachusetts’ interactive, Excel-based labor market reports
  - Texas’ color-coded, regional occupation reports
  - Maryland’s CTE dashboard: Labor market alignment tool
  - Louisiana’s Star Jobs rating system

- **Equity gap analysis**
  - Illinois Community College Board’s equity-centered CLNA guide
  - National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity resources: Root cause analysis
  - Explanation of fishbone chart for root cause analysis
  - Explanation of the “five whys” approach to root cause analysis
  - Florida’s CLNA guide (incorporates instructions on root cause analysis)