

FINDING THE LEVERAGE

CTE Systems Mapping & Prioritization Workbook

Leading Postsecondary CTE in an Era of Workforce Transformation

SEE THE SYSTEM > FIND THE FRICTION > IDENTIFY THE LEVERAGE > CHOOSE THE FOCUS

1 | Choose One Challenge

Do not map your entire CTE enterprise. Select one real initiative, pathway, or outcome that matters enough to improve and is specific enough to examine.

Apprenticeship launch	CTE completion	Work-based learning	Employer engagement
Secondary-postsecondary transition	Credential alignment	Grant sustainability	Student access

The outcome we are trying to improve is:

Describe the result, not the office or activity.

The learners, pathway, or population involved is:

Who experiences this system?

What tells us this is a problem or opportunity?

What evidence, pattern, feedback, or workforce need are you responding to?

TEAM CHECK: Can everyone at the table describe the same outcome in one sentence? If not, clarify before mapping the system.

2 | Map the CTE System

For each area, capture what shapes the challenge. Do not just list structures. Mark each item: **+ working well** ■ **friction/misalignment** ! **significant barrier**.

POLICY

What rules shape this work?
Who has authority to decide?
Where do approvals or requirements create friction?
Are policies aligned across units or systems?

FUNDING

How is the work funded?
What is temporary vs. sustainable?
Do incentives support the desired outcome?
Are resources aligned with student need?

PATHWAYS

Can learners understand and navigate the pathway?
Where are the handoffs?
Where do students get stuck?
Do credits and credentials build toward something?

PARTNERSHIPS

Who must work together?
Are roles and responsibilities clear?
Where are relationships person-dependent?
Are partners pursuing shared outcomes?

LOOK BETWEEN THE BOXES. Systems often break at the intersections, not inside one department.

3 | Find the Friction

Step back from the four boxes. Where are handoffs, incentives, responsibilities, or expectations misaligned?

POLICY ↔ FUNDING	Are we funding something our policies make difficult to implement?
FUNDING ↔ PATHWAYS	Are we funding programs without funding the supports learners need to navigate them?
PATHWAYS ↔ PARTNERSHIPS	Do employers and partners understand where they fit into the learner pathway?
PARTNERSHIPS ↔ POLICY	Are institutional rules making employer or cross-sector partnerships unnecessarily difficult?

Where are the handoffs failing?

Think across the learner journey: **Secondary Education** → **College Entry** → **Advising** → **CTE Program** → **Work-Based Learning** → **Credential** → **Employment**

Handoff notes:

Where do learners, information, responsibility, or resources get lost?

Circle your three biggest friction points.

Friction Point 1

What is happening, and where in the system does it occur?

Friction Point 2

What is happening, and where in the system does it occur?

Friction Point 3

What is happening, and where in the system does it occur?

4 | Move from Symptom to System Condition

Take your **two highest-priority friction points**. Before selecting a solution, test whether you have identified the visible symptom or the system condition that allows it to continue.

EXAMPLE: Low internship participation → fragmented opportunity communication → no shared ownership of employer opportunities

Friction Point 1

1. What are we observing?	Visible symptom or outcome _____ _____
2. What appears to be causing it?	Immediate explanation _____ _____
3. What system condition allows it to continue?	Policy, funding, pathway, partnership, ownership, incentive, or handoff _____ _____

Friction Point 2

1. What are we observing?	Visible symptom or outcome _____ _____
2. What appears to be causing it?	Immediate explanation _____ _____
3. What system condition allows it to continue?	Policy, funding, pathway, partnership, ownership, incentive, or handoff _____ _____

5 | Apply the Leverage Test

A leverage point is not simply an important problem. It is a place where a focused change could influence multiple parts of the system.

IMPACT If we changed this, how much could it improve the outcome?	INFLUENCE How much ability do we actually have to change it?	CONNECTIVITY Would changing this improve more than one part of the system?
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Score each potential leverage point from **1 (low) to 3 (high)**. Use the score to sharpen judgment - not replace it.

Potential Leverage Point	Impact /3	Influence /3	Connectivity /3	Total /9
_____	—	—	—	—
_____	—	—	—	—
_____	—	—	—	—
_____	—	—	—	—

Team / Peer Conversation

- Which option has the greatest potential to change more than one part of the system?
- Which option is actually within your sphere of influence?
- What might be high impact but unrealistic right now?
- Where do team members see the leverage differently?

6 | Choose the Focus

Your goal is not to leave with a list. Make a leadership choice about the 1-2 places where focused action could matter most.

We are trying to improve:

Return to the outcome you named on page 1.

The system condition contributing to the problem is:

Name the underlying condition, not just the symptom.

Our PRIMARY leverage point is:

What is the highest-value place to intervene?

Changing this could affect: ☐ Policy ☐ Funding ☐ Pathways ☐ Partnerships

Why?

Our SECOND leverage point, if necessary, is:

Only select a second if it meaningfully supports the first.

What are we choosing NOT to work on right now?

Prioritization requires deciding what will wait.

BE READY TO SHARE: Our outcome + our primary leverage point + why we chose it.

WHERE SHOULD WE INTERVENE?

Not: What's broken? But: Where could change have the greatest effect?