RTCC

Program Advisory Information

Introduction

Everyone who manages a career and technical education (CTE) program in Vermont knows that advisory committees are required. At the secondary level they are written into state statute, and at the post secondary level they are mandated by policy. As in other states, there are some program leaders who fulfill those mandates but do nothing beyond: They see it as an obligation, as a box to be checked off, and nothing more.

However, if you ask the heads of the strongest and most successful programs about advisory committees, you'll almost certainly hear a different perspective. Successful program leaders know that if you invest some time and effort into building a strong advisory committee, you'll reap outsized returns; build strong business partnerships, increase community support, find new resources, build the strength and relevance of instruction, and provide a greater number of opportunities for both students and staff to succeed.

In fact, of all the different types of partnership models available, advisory committees provide the greatest return on investment: If you're willing to invest in doing more than the minimum, while taking a truly collaborative approach to working with your partners, your advisory committee can be the single most powerful support tool you have for improving student experiences and outcomes. And if you ask for support from our Work Based Learning Coordinator, Director, and Guidance Coordinator we can work as a team.

As you go forward, there is one guiding principle to keep in mind: There's no one right way to set up and manage your advisory committee. Some effective committees meet twice per year, while others meet monthly. Some establish multiple ad hoc or permanent subcommittees, while others operate strictly as a single committee. While it's important to learn what's worked for others it's more important to talk with your education, industry, and community partners and figure out what will work best for your partners, staff, and students. Advisory committee management is more of an art than a science, so take advantage of this flexibility and build a model that works for you.

What Are the Benefits of Having an Advisory Committee?

If you run a CTE program in Vermont, you're required to have an advisory committee and convene two meetings per year. But by going beyond the minimum requirements, you have the potential to create significant benefits for all those involved in your program.

Benefits to students and educators

Students and staff benefit greatly from the guidance and support of industry partners in the following ways:

Ensuring program relevance-CTE programs are valuable because they are relevant: They identify and address the needs of the industry they serve. Since industry needs change on a regular basis, your advisory committee is an indispensable voice in keeping your program aligned with your students' future employers.

Ensuring program quality-Industry partners can provide important information on both workplace expectations, so teachers and students understand what is required of them, and on effective instruction and training strategies, which they can share with your instructors.

Keeping teachers current -While many teachers come from industry, their skills and knowledge of the industry can become stale if they don't work to stay current within their field. Advisory committees recognize this and work to support educators as they maintain their skills and knowledge.

Identifying and engaging partners -It is extremely difficult for a teacher to operate as a person show, responsible for establishing and maintaining all relationships with business partners. Industry engagement is one of the core functions of an advisory committee, and members are not only expected to partner with the program directly, but also to solicit other partners on your behalf.

Developing advocates – Business partners can say things you sometimes cannot say, and they can get the ear of people you may not be able to reach on your own. By allowing partners to "buy in" to your program through their involvement in your committee, you give them the opportunity to become advocates and speak on your behalf.

Tapping into expertise – Beyond their industry knowledge, advisory committees have specific skill sets, such as management, marketing, social media, change leadership, and finance that you can access to improve program operations and outreach.

A chance to ask: 'What if?' – The world of education is often filled with traditions and rules, some of which may no longer be relevant or appropriate. Advisory committee members are in a position to question the way that things have been done in the past in favor of new approaches, which represents an exciting opportunity to innovate and break free of past restrictions.

Benefits to business partners

Business and industry partners benefit from their work with the program in the following ways:

Creating the future workforce – Many industries are facing a workforce crisis of epic proportions as their Baby Boomer employees retire and they begin to realize that there are not enough qualified people prepared to replace them. Participation on your advisory committee is an important investment in rebuilding their pipelines.

Building a stronger community - In many towns and neighborhoods, people recognize the local school or college as a centerpiece or hub of the community, and appreciate the fact that a strong educational institution is essential to civic life. Remember also that industry partners are often parents, and those parents want to strengthen their schools and build a direct relationship with the school that serves their children.

Creating immediate workforce benefits – While most conversations about employer benefits focus on the long-term workforce issues, it's also true that current workers benefit from working with students: They have higher morale, work harder, and stay with their companies longer. Advisory committee service opens up opportunities for committee members' co-workers.

Networking - Businesspeople understand the importance of building connections with others in their field. An advisory committee, built on shared interests and goals, provides the perfect venue for peers to connect and build relationships.

Giving back – Some businesspeople have a natural affinity for education and want an opportunity to give back; others are grateful for the opportunities their profession has provided and want to be sure the next generation has those same opportunities. In either case, many industry professionals find committee service to be highly rewarding.

What the Perkins Act Says

Because federal funding for career and technical education is critically important for local CTE programs, states generally look to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (also known as Perkins, or the Perkins Act) as they set standards and expectations for programs within their jurisdictions.

There are elements of the Perkins Act that speak to industry engagement in ways that are ideally suited to the advisory committee structure. Section 135(b)(l), for example, lays out the requirements for developing a local plan for the use of Perkins funds, and says recipients must:

(A) Offer introductory courses or activities focused on career exploration and career awareness including those in non-traditional fields.

(B) Provide readily available labor market information, e.g. supply & demand, educational requirements, employment sectors, etc.

(C) Provide career guidance

(D) Provide students with strong experience in and comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the industry

In addition, the Act specifically allows Perkins funds to be used for the purpose of engaging business and industry partners (Section 135(b)(l)). This is the what, why, and how of Program Advisory Boards.

What Vermont Says

The state of Vermont specifically requires advisory committees. According to Vermont State Statute 2384:

l. Each technical education program shall have a program advisory committee of at least 5 persons representing employers, employees, graduates, and other individuals knowledgeable about occupations for which students are prepared in the program.

2. The program advisory committees shall meet at least twice a year to review and report to the director on the relevance of program content, levels of student performance, work-based learning opportunities, and strategies for program improvement.

These definitions also set considerable latitude as to how these committees are set up in terms of structure, leadership, and management. In short, the state provides program leaders and their industry partners with the flexibility they need to customize their committee structure in a way that lines up with their needs and circumstances.

Advisory Committee Basics

Functions of an Advisory Committee

There are a number of ways in which advisory committees can support the ongoing management of effective pathways and CTE programs. These include:

Ensuring Program Relevance – making sure that a program of study is aligned with industry expectations and needs is one of the core functions of an advisory committee. CTE programs exist in order to introduce students to certain careers and industries, and to prepare them to successfully enter those careers; guidance from industry partners is a necessary and indispensable source of information to make sure programs are sharing current and accurate information, and effectively relaying industry's priorities and needs.

Assessing Program Quality - As employers- the people who will ultimately be hiring graduates from the program —advisory committee members are perfectly positioned to assess the rigor and relevance of a program of study. Your committee members can share firsthand information on their hiring expectations and work with you to determine which of your curriculum and instructional efforts will help students meet those standards upon graduation.

Problem-Solving - Your advisory committee is like your own personal Knights of the Round Table – a group of experienced professionals who are committed to your program and are ready to put their skills to work to ensure your success. Program leaders who try to put a positive face on their program, never letting their industry partners see their struggles and challenges, are doing themselves and their partners a disservice: Your committee members want to be true partners and help you work through your problems so that you can all succeed together.

Providing Opportunities for Students and Staff - While most advisory committees don't require members to participate in experiential education efforts as a condition for joining, it is a clear expectation, and a smart thing for committee members to do. Like other employers, your committee members want to develop relationships now with potential future employees, and in a larger sense want to make sure the pipeline of future workers to their industry is full. Participating in work-based learning activities is one of the best ways to accomplish that.

In addition to working with students, advisory committees also recognize the importance of keeping faculty and staff up to date on current practices in their fields, and make sure that educators have opportunities to experience the workplace firsthand through summer internships, site visits, professional development, pairing with industry mentors, and sharing current trade publications and other resources.

Advocacy - Your advisory committee members are able to say things that you may not be able to say, either due to modesty or regulations (such as advocating for bond issuances); as influential members of the community, they may also be able to speak to people you may not be able to reach directly. As such they can be very effective advocates for your work, making people aware of your successes and highlighting the importance of ongoing support. In some schools or colleges, the advisory committee is expected to provide an annual report to a governing body; in others, school leadership, such as a dean or superintendent, sits on the committee to get direct feedback from community members.

Other Support Mechanisms

Employer Needs - Someone, or some group, should be tasked with continually gathering information on employer needs. This includes regional economic development trends, such as which industries are growing and which are being considered as recruiting priorities for the regional Economic Development Agency; which professions are in greatest demand in the program's field; and what knowledge and skills employers desire.

Experiential Education – Advisory committee members should maintain a strong focus on identifying partners who can provide work-based learning opportunities as well as ensuring that standards are set for quality experiences.

Dual Credit/Articulation – If the school has secondary or postsecondary partners, the committee should have a role in developing formal agreements to ensure alignment and, where possible, dual credit opportunities. If no such relationships exist, the committee can play a role in developing them.

Accreditation - if a program is accredited by a professional body, the advisory committee will have a role in accreditation and should be involved in reviewing annual reports.

Curriculum and Instruction – Since industry members of the advisory committees have a clear understanding of their workforce needs, and also have experience in training current employees, they should be asked to play an ongoing role in the review of curriculum and instructional practices and offer advice on both. Many programs keep an ongoing "light touch" approach coupled with a periodic (perhaps every three to four years) intensive review to ensure alignment.

Professional Development - While many CTE educators come with direct work experience in their industry of choice, the relevance of that experience fades over time as industry practices gradually change. One or more advisory committee members should maintain a focus on keeping teachers in touch with industry through direct professional development and/or through exposure to the workplace.

Fundraising – If there are fundraising needs, such as building a new facility or acquiring new resources or equipment, one or more committee members should play a supporting role in that effort. This person may also be involved in capital campaigns that require bond referenda.

Marketing/Recruitment/Retention – Because most CTE programs are programs of choice (not required as part of a core sequence), marketing and recruitment are particularly important issues in attracting students; it is similarly important to build awareness of the program among prospective partners and community members to ensure support for experiential education and other efforts.

Remember that many of your advisory committee members have professional skill sets that can benefit your program: You may have a marketing expert on your board who can apply his or her experience to building a plan for promoting your program to various audiences. If you recruit new members with specific skills in mind, you could very well end up with a multi-talented committee ready to apply their professional skills to any number of challenges.

Essential Paperwork

Vermont gives program leaders flexibility in terms of documenting their activity. Some committees are formal, with a full set of written records on all committee activities; others do little more than keep meeting minutes. RTCC requires written agendas, and minutes to be kept on file.

Agendas and Minutes - Experienced teachers know that a published agenda can make the difference between a well-run meeting and something short of a three-ring circus in which issues come up almost randomly and nothing actually gets accomplished. The program teacher should lead the work in advance to develop a meeting agenda well in advance of the next gathering and distribute that agenda, along with any necessary support materials, at least a week or two prior to the meeting.

Minutes are a concise written summary of the discussions and actions that took place at a meeting; these are important to help members remember what took place and provide the necessary context for upcoming meetings. They can also provide new members with a written history as part of their orientation process. They are distinct from meeting notes, which can be more expansive and free-form, though they are often distilled from notes into a definitive record of discussions and actions. Minutes should be either written or approved by the secretary and distributed as quickly as possible after a meeting has taken place. They must also be archived someplace accessible to all members, ideally in both print and electronic formats.

Recruiting Members

When talking with CTE educators and administrators, one of the most commonly asked questions relates to finding business partners: All too often they feel as if they don't have enough contacts in industry and aren't sure how to approach them. So if you feel that you don't know who to reach out to, how to contact them, or how to bring them into the fold, rest assured that you're not alone. This section will answer all of these questions, giving you a game plan as you solicit advisory committee members and other business partners.

The right mix of members

Advisory committees exist to allow industry to provide feedback and guidance to the CTE programs that serve their field. As a result, it makes sense that the majority of your committee members should represent those professions and industries. Some, like the National Academy Foundation, believe that 75% or more of an advisory committee's members should represent industry; others think a simple majority would suffice. Vermont does not require a specific percentage, but confirms that the advisory committee structure should represent the voice of industry.

Many program leaders want to see an inclusive committee, and ask representatives of multiple stakeholder groups to participate, including students, alumni, parents, faculty, administration, counseling, and representatives of other education agencies. There is certainly value in hearing from a wide range of people, but if those other stakeholders drown out the voice of the business community, you may be defeating the purpose of the committee.

All of the voices mentioned above should have some input into your program; however, you should think carefully about whether that input necessitates a seat on your advisory committee. Consider reserving committee membership to a specific group of people, with multiple opportunities for other stakeholders to provide input into their discussions through stakeholder forums, presentations to committees, the sharing of survey results, and the like. You can also consider setting up advisory structures for other stakeholders, such as periodic surveys or meetings. Just remember the primary purpose of the advisory committee – industry input into program goals and operations -and work from there.

What to look for in a member

When looking for advisory committee members, you'11 want to keep an eye out for the professional characteristics that will provide you with a wide-lens view of the field and the personal qualities that can lead to an effective and collaborative body.

Professional breakdown - As mentioned previously, there is certainly a place for educators, both from within your program and from other institutions (secondary or post secondary partners, depending on your perspective), on your advisory committee, along with other select stakeholder representatives. But your primary focus should be on representatives from business and industry. Consider seeking representation from the following segments of the corporate market:

- Large, more established employers in key industries
- Small, fast-moving "gazelle" companies in key industries Union representatives (trade unions, not teacher unions)
- Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Agency, and/or Workforce Development Board
- Professional association or sector representatives
- Senior executive with board management experience
- Individuals with specifically needed skill sets, like social media expertise

Personal qualities - Beyond their professional affiliation, you want to attract a group of professionals who are positive, collaborative people who are able to work together to make things happen for your program. Consider the following list of personal qualities to look for in members, recognizing that not every member has to exhibit every quality (for example, you would be happy to find a member with a large network of contacts even if he or she couldn't provide a significant amount of resources).

Knowledge – An understanding of their industry and the local economic environment

Experience – At least five years of experience in their field (for those in a leadership role, even longer.

Network – Personal and professional contacts who could be approached to support your program in some way.

Resources – The ability to provide funds, equipment, transportation, facilities, or volunteers (or all of the above!)

Interpersonal skills- You'll want every member to have some level of interpersonal skills, both for internal collaboration and for public outreach.

Time- You generally want to find busy people, since this indicates they're in demand and able to manage their time. But be wary of people who are too busy or perpetually overwhelmed.

Passion - Someone who believes in your work and is energized by it

Responsibility - Someone who will honor their commitments

Finding prospective members

While many CTE program leaders feel that they don't have the contacts needed to build a strong and diverse advisory committee, they likely have more than enough personal and professional connections to do the job, even if they're new to the school or the community. Consider the many connecting points listed below as a starting point for your outreach:

Teachers and administrators - As a professional educator, you have regular access to your fellow teachers and administrators within your school walls, as well as a network of your peers throughout your service area. Whether they're CTE educators or not, they each have their own networks of family members, friends, neighbors, and professional contacts, and can leverage these networks to help you. If you put out a call for partners, you might find a math professor whose husband works in the field, or a peer at another school who's willing to share partners or discuss a joint committee model.

Vendors - Most CTE programs have local vendors they talk with on a regular basis. Did you ever consider that these vendors also serve businesses throughout your industry? They would be doing you and your prospective partners a favor by introducing you, and vendors love to be in a position to help their customers.

Current partners - There's a truism in sales that your current customer is your best customer, and that's certainly true in education. If you have existing business partners who are involved in other areas, ask if they would be interested in serving on the advisory committee, or if they know of individuals either within or outside their firms who would be good prospects.

Advisory committee members - **It** goes without saying that you should ask your current advisory committee members for referrals; in fact, some even put the responsibility for committee membership on the board itself.

Parents - Even if you're in your first year with a new program, you have a built-in network of contacts thanks to the dozens of students sitting in your room. Since CTE programs are often programs of choice, those students elected to be there, either with their parents' permission or with their direct encouragement. You should be regularly asking those parents for assistance; some might already be working in your industry, and others might have contacts there that would be helpful.

Post/secondary partners - Most CTE programs and advisory committees already understand the importance of connecting with their secondary or postsecondary partners to ensure a seamless connection between the two.

Former students - If your program has been in place for a few years or more, you likely have some students who have graduated and entered the field. If you've kept in touch with these graduates, then perhaps they can introduce you to other contacts within their new firms. As a graduate of your program they serve as the perfect example of the value you provide, making committee service an attractive prospect.

Established networks - If your personal networks don't generate the contacts you need, consider the professional networks in your community, such as the Chamber of Commerce or the appropriate sector group. One of the primary roles of these networks is to connect members; let them know what you're looking for and ask them for introductions. If you're able, try to take an active role in some of their standing committees (most have education or workforce development groups), and ask whether you can host a meeting at your location.

Making the ask

Once you've got one or more connections in mind, it's time to reach out to them to introduce yourself and ask for their support. This isn't a cold call by any means: Remember that you have shared interests, and that you can provide them just as much value as they can provide to you. Just follow the three steps below to go from introduction to committee member.

Introduction

If you followed the steps above, you're approaching a contact based on the recommendation of a friend or associate. If possible, ask that person to handle the introduction: The shared connection ensures that your prospective committee member will be willing to have at least an introductory conversation.

If you don't have someone who can introduce you, it's time to make contact directly. Make the initial contact by email or phone (not letter), and keep your contact brief and to the point: Let them know that you've been told that they employ people in this field, and you'd like to talk with them briefly because you prepare people to enter this same field, and that you'd like to get some guidance from them.

Getting to Know Them

Once you've successfully made contact and agreed that you have enough shared interests to talk further, it would be smart to arrange a time to visit with them at their place of work. There are several reasons for this: Your prospective partner will realize that you're serious about developing a relationship. Whether you're able to pursue a professional relationship or not, going to their place of work will provide valuable real-world feedback on what's happening in the field.

What’s more, you'll have an opportunity to meet others within the prospect's company, building awareness of your program there and increasing your own network of future contacts.

During this meeting, you should certainly share some information on your program, but you should listen much more than you talk: This is an opportunity to learn about your prospective partner, his or her firm, what's happening in their industry, and what they're looking for in future employees. Make it clear that you're there to learn, and that you're sincere in your desire to build a program that prepares students for exactly the kinds of opportunities offered by this company. This expressed interest should help your prospect understand the value that you can provide to them, and make the next step attractive to them.

Note that some program leaders resist getting out of the office for site visits, on the notion that they don't have the time available given their other obligations. If you share that perspective, remember just what you're asking of your prospective partners: That they take time away from their own busy schedules to support your program. If you're not willing to invest that time, why should they?

Getting to Know You

The next step is to invite your future partner to visit your program. Since you've already laid the groundwork by discussing your shared interests, most business prospects will welcome the chance to see your center firsthand.

During the first meeting, you kept the focus largely on your business counterpart; during the second meeting you have an opportunity to share information on your efforts in much more detail, including offering a tour of your facilities. You should host such meetings during the school day so they can meet instructors and students, and see your classrooms in action; there's little value to them in touring empty classrooms.

Once you've had a chance to learn about their operations, and they've bad the opportunity to experience yours, you should have established a rapport and enough common ground to discuss the ways in which you might work together, including through participation in your advisory committee.

Clear expectations

While it's wonderful to get a commitment from a new advisory committee member, your job isn't complete just because they've agreed to join you. Many advisory committees have lost new members because there were misunderstandings about the role or the scope of commitment, with newcomers quickly resigning upon learning more about the situation and what's expected of them.

To avoid this, make sure you give your new member a thorough and realistic assessment of the state of the program and its advisory committee. If there are challenges facing the program, such as funding issues, low performance, or high staff or management turnover, tell them that. Some will relish the challenge of righting a ship; the rest will at least be grateful that you allowed them to go in with open eyes. Furthermore, do your best to set clear expectations for their role. Give them a job description of the advisory committee membership role. Let them know how long a term lasts, how many meetings they'll be expected to attend, other time commitments outside of meetings (such as subcommittee involvement), and whether members are expected to contribute to the program, either financially or in terms of volunteer hours or work-based learning opportunities. Many consider it a best practice to state these expectations in writing, have you and your new committee sign the document, and send them a copy for their records. This won't guarantee their long-term involvement, but it will ensure that mismatched expectations will not be the reason for their leaving.

Orientation for New Members

The committee's success will depend in part on how well new members understand their roles and how quickly they can get up to speed. New and continuing advisory committee members should be regularly provided with information relative to the committee's purpose, function, structure, and goals as expressed in the committee's work plan.

To help new members become productive as quickly as possible, the committee should consider setting up a formal orientation process. New member orientation could include a review of the member guide and summaries of past accomplishments. Meetings often involve tours of employer facilities and presentations about the program. Discussion of current issues that affect the program should be included.

Items in your orientation guide could include the following:

- Background on the school or college involved Admission policies
- Mission statement and other value statements
- Organizational chart
- Programs offered
- Career pathway overview Curriculum scope and sequence
- Facilities and equipment

- Staff biographies
- Roles and responsibilities
- Membership and governance issues
- Committee program of work and accomplishments

A master copy of the orientation guide should be kept on file and available electronically for easy distribution.

Typically, in addition to the orientation guide, new members may receive various resource materials including course catalogs, class schedules, program brochures, student performance statistics (retention, placement, certifications earned, competitive performance), and local economic development news.

Managing Your Committee

Once you have your advisory committee in place, with a clear sense of its purpose and goals (both of which are covered elsewhere in this handbook), your priority becomes execution: Making sure the committee meets regularly and works effectively towards the objectives it has set. This chapter outlines effective practices in setting and running committee meetings and looks at the use of technology in board operations.

Meeting logistics

Frequency - We will meet at a minimum twice a year; usually once in October and once in April. Dinner will be provided.

Planning - advance planning (Our meetings will be October 17,2019 & April16, 2020@ RTCC 6:00PM-7:30PM

Give your members as much advance notice of meetings as possible: They'll need plenty of lead time to block off your meetings on their calendars to prevent conflicts such as travel or other meetings. Some programs set their meeting calendar for the entire year up front, meaning that members can schedule other things around your meeting, rather than try to fit your last-minute meeting into their already packed days.

In addition to providing advance notice of meeting dates, work to provide relevant meeting materials to members well in advance of the meeting date, ideally two to three weeks ahead of time. This gives them the flexibility to review materials when it's convenient for them and come to your meeting fully prepared.

Agenda (To be submitted to RTCC Director prior to meeting date)

Organized meetings are one of the keys to a successful advisory committee, and having a published agenda is the most important element of an efficient and effective meeting. Your agenda should be set collaboratively by your board chair and program head. Depending on your priorities, items could include:

- Roll call
- Approval of previous minutes
- Introduction of guests
- Summarization of unfinished business
- Sub-committee reports
- New business and special reports
- Review of next meeting time, date, and location
- Adjournment

Agenda topics will be dictated by the committee's priorities and goals, but sample agenda topics could include:

- Academic preparation of students
- Labor market trends
- Impacts of federal and state legislation
- Emerging fields and potential new courses and programs
- Curriculum development Instructional or staff development Facilities or equipment requirements
- Technical skill assessments Recruitment of students Marketing of programs
- Work performance of graduates
- Accreditation reports
- Program review processes and outcomes

Running the meeting

Meetings are usually run by the committee's chair, though in some cases there may be a staff person managing the meeting function. Committee chairs vary in their level of formality: Some say require formal processes such as using Robert's Rules of Order, while others may have a more relaxed demeanor. (The most appropriate approach may be dependent on the size of the committee. In either case you'll want to ensure that there is time for discussion, but also that the meeting moves ahead efficiently so that it can end on time. Note that on-time completion is important to your business partners, who will have other obligations during the day and want to get back to their offices when they expected to.

Minutes (to be submitted after the meeting to RTCC Director)

All advisory committees and subcommittees must have written minutes. Minutes are the official record of the committee's activities. They help members understand the group's progress, concerns, decisions, and actions.

The advisory committee's support staff records minutes. It is not necessary to record all discussions. Minutes generally include a listing of those who attended the meeting (name, occupation, and organization); a summary of each issue discussed; and any decisions, assignments, or recommendations made.

Written minutes should be submitted to the committee chair for review and signature. The minutes should be sent out as soon after the meeting as possible; you may also want to include them a second time when you send out the agenda for the next meeting.

A record of all past meeting minutes and a membership roster should be kept at the school and possibly on the school's website. We keep these is a binder in the Director's office for inspection by the Vermont Agency of Education yearly. Note that consistent documentation of committee meetings can be used to support grant applications.

You should have a common online resource to store all committee documents, including bylaws, agendas and meeting minutes, new member orientation materials, contact lists, and resource materials (information about the program, brochures, press releases, etc.). Google Drive is commonly used, and free, resources.

Google also offers online word processors and spreadsheets allowing collaborative work on documents for virtual teams. When using online collaboration tools to work on sensitive documents, give some thought to data security and sharing privileges.

Consider creating a website or a blog specifically dedicated to the advisory committee, which would allow you to make the committee and its actions more accessible to the public and provide them with a way of contacting you. Blogging sites are generally free (ex: Blogger.com) and a website presence could simply be incorporated as a page on the school or program website.

Obviously, email is an essential tool for member communications and meeting announcements; if you want to keep an accessible record of communications for group access, you can also consider starting a listserv or creating a bulletin board.

Given that some board members may be traveling and unavailable for on-site meetings, establish a conference call line and share it so that those people are able to dial in for your meetings.

If your members are spread out, there are concerns about inclement weather, or you're simply trying to reduce the number of on-site meetings you hold (a particular issue with subcommittees), look into virtual conference resources like GoToMeeting and Webex. These provide conference call capabilities as well as the ability to view users' screens for presentations or document sharing.

Robert's Rules of Order

Each advisory committee will decide how formally they wish to conduct its business; however, many adhere to the standards and practices set by Robert's Rules of Order. When followed, these rules establish accepted protocols for all aspects of discussion and decision-making, removing concerns about preferential treatment and unfair processes. See www.robertsrules.org for an overview of these rules and how they can be implemented.

Thinking about the big picture

It's easy for people to get lost in day-to-day activities, and that's especially true for educators: In addition to the time actually spent in class with students, there's planning, reviewing student work, meeting with parents, setting up employer partnerships, going to meetings, and much more. With all this, it can be hard to break away and think about the big picture.

The key question is: Why does your program exist? The answer seems obvious: To help students learn about a profession or industry and prepare to successfully enter that field. But to be actionable, you actually need to go down one or two levels. Consider the following questions:

To help students – but which students?

Has your student population changed, and does the new composition have a different starting point? Suppose our student body is fifty percent poverty rate, what can a program advisory committee do to help? Or suppose your program has been traditionally almost entirely male, and industry is very interested in attracting more female students to the field.

The profession or industry - is your information current?

Do you know whether there's still demand for the kinds of positions you've been targeting, and whether the set of knowledge and skills you've been focusing on are still current? Are there new opportunities in your industry of which you're not aware?

Preparing students - are you doing it effectively?

Are there new instructional strategies or work-based learning models that would be more effective in reaching students? Are you working with the right equipment? Is your curriculum aligned with current and projected industry needs? Are your teachers up to date with their knowledge and skill sets?

Hosting the Planning Session

In order to get the most out of your session, consider establishing a formal agenda that takes you from a review of the purpose of the meeting through to decisions and plans. The following sequence may be helpful:

Frame the discussion – start the day by restating the key question(s) that brought you together. Make sure everyone understands the focus of the day and what you expect to accomplish. Make sure participants understand the voting model: You may decide to approve plans by a simple majority vote, or you may couch the end result as recommendations that will be taken back to the executive committee for fleshing out.

Review of market information - There's no need to rehash all of the information that was disseminated prior to the meeting; instead, you'll want to lead a discussion on that information, asking people what they felt were the critical data points and building a consensus on the facts that will influence the decisions you'll need to make.

Discussion - much of your day will center on answering the day's key question(s) in light of the available information. Depending on the size of your group you can do this as a single body or in small groups that later report out for a second round of conversation.

Setting short and long term goals – The solutions identified by participants may lack specificity; you'll need to turn those into a specific set of action steps in the form of short-term and long- term goals. Given the time constraints of a part-day or full-day meeting, this may be limited to deciding on a scope of action intended to build a full plan.

Planning a measurement model – If a specific plan is developed, make sure you and your partners decide on how success will be measured. This may be quantitative or qualitative in nature, depending on what you set out to achieve, but it's important to be able to determine if and when you've reached your objective.

Once you've held this meeting, it is important to share the results and act on the recommendations put· forth in some way. People will want to know that their time and effort mattered, and by implementing an agenda based on their feedback you'll increase their level of support and engagement going forward.

Self-Evaluation of the Committee's Work

Goal-setting and planning require you to look forward; you and your committee members may also find it helpful to look backwards as well, reflecting on the previous year and gathering lessons that may help future efforts.

Advisory committees conduct regular self-evaluations of their efforts. Reflect on the past year as a group during a retreat or committee meeting, or on an individual basis through member surveys. Some of the questions you might ask include:

- What new things did we do this year that should become a standard practice? How could we have avoided mistakes or missed opportunities?
- What practices would have made us more effective or productive?

Asking questions like these can produce insights that will help you perform better in the future.

Sample: Minutes

[DATE, TIME] [LOCATION]

Members Present: (List members present) Members Absent: (List members absent)
Others Present: (List others present)

Call to Order: Chairperson [NAME] called the meeting to order. He offered his thanks and appreciation for the ongoing strong levels of attendance and participation at advisory committees. He stressed the importance of the committee's continuing support and assistance. New members were introduced to the committee.

Minutes: Minutes of the last meeting were approved as submitted.

Old Business: The committee discussed the need for more up-to-date equipment in the health lab. The committee felt that students should be taught on the kind of equipment they will be using in the work place. [NAME OF COMMITTEE MEMBER] volunteered to do some research and convene a meeting between industry and school representatives to discuss the best approach; she will report her findings at the next meeting.

New Business: Chairperson asked that the committee look at and make a suggestion regarding adding more rooms for the lab. After a lengthy discussion, this issue was tabled for the next meeting.

The next meeting will be [DATE] at the [LOCATION] at [TIME]. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9 pm.

Sample: Agenda

[DATE, TIME] [LOCATION]

Call to Order
Approval of Minutes
Old Business
Final accounting for capital campaign
Program of Work Update
Other

Appendix: Advisory Committee Forms

New Business: Committee reports; Establishment of subcommittee on middle school outreach; Review of annual accreditation report; Other

Next meeting date, time, and location

Adjournment

Sample: Letters

Note that all letters should be on school stationary and, ideally, signed by both the program lead and the chairperson of the advisory committee.

Membership invitation letter

[DATE]
[NAME/ADDRESS]

Dear [NAME]:

[SCHOOL NAME]'s [CTE PROGRAM NAME] is committed to introducing students to [INDUSTRY], providing them with opportunities to explore the industry and preparing them for careers in this field. To help us achieve this goal, we reach out to business and industry partners, along with other community stakeholders, and ask them to work with us in an advisory capacity to make sure our program continues to be relevant and of high quality.

You have been recommended to us as a person who is interested in [CTE PROGRAM NAME] and as one who would make a valuable contribution to the program. We invite you to join our CTE advisory committee for a term of [LENGTH OF TIME]. By participating on this committee, you will have an opportunity to guide [SCHOOL NAME] in preparing students for success in your field.

The [NAME OF PROGRAM] advisory committee meets[#] times each school year. The first meeting will be on [DATE] at the [LOCATION]. The meeting will begin at [TIME] and end at [TIME]. Meetings are usually held on [DATE AND LOCATION]. In addition, calls to committee members are occasionally made as the need arises.

Please indicate your willingness to serve on this committee by confirming your interest in writing, either by email or in response to this letter at the address shown below. If you have any questions, or would like to discuss the committee's work further before confirming your decision, please email me at [EMAil-] or call me at [TELEPHONE NUMBER].

Sincerely,

Thank you letter

[DATE]
[NAME/ADDRESS]

Dear [NAME]:

Thank you for your commitment to serving on the [CTE COMMITTEE]. Your cooperation and support are tremendously important in making sure our students have the opportunity to explore, and become prepared for, a career in [FIELD].

With your help and recommendations, we will continue to improve our efforts to serve these students and future employees. Our students and staff have already benefited from your guidance, and we plan to make other improvements resulting from your suggestions.

Please accept my sincere appreciation.

Adapted from the State of Minnesota, CTE Career Program Advisory Planning Guide 2016