

FOCUSRITE IN EDUCATION

Expert Guide: How to Fund Your Career Tech Program

Focusrite®

Introduction

If you are reading this Focusrite in Education “Expert Guide,” you are likely one of thousands of Career and Technical Education (CTE) professionals at high schools, career centers, community colleges, and four-year colleges and universities nationwide. We have created this toolkit as a resource to assist you with considering and locating funding sources for your program, so you can provide your students with relevant tools and skills that set them up for success in life and their careers.

This Expert Guide: How to Fund Your Career Tech Program is broken into three sections:

1. How Can I Fund My CTE Program?
2. What Makes a Successful Grant Application?
3. Why Should I Apply for Funding?

How can I fund my CTE program?

The most significant source of United States government funds for Career and Technical Education (CTE) comes from The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, also known as “Perkins V.” This bipartisan measure reauthorized the previous act that was signed into legislation in 2008. In 2019, several sources estimated that Perkins V funding exceeded one billion dollars for US states and territories.

This section of the Toolkit covers Perkins V and other complementary funding sources with specific guidance for arts-based CTE programs.

Funding Sources

Perkins V is far from the only funding source for CTE programs, and we’ll discuss other options below. But it is one of the largest and most well-known funding sources for CTE. Perkins V is also one of the more complex programs, so we’ll start there and spend more time on it.

Perkins V

Perkins V is the largest federal investment in CTE. States apply to the federal Department of Education under this legislation, and the DOE allocates money to those states. Each state distributes the money it receives to school districts and postsecondary institutions.

As a CTE educator or decision-maker, you can and should apply to receive part of your state’s Perkins V distribution!

A Quick Note on Names

You’ve probably already heard of this funding under at least one of its names. “Perkins V” is shorthand for the official legislation titled “The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act.” This legislation reauthorized the “Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006,” which was known as “Perkins IV.” The current reauthorization lasts through June of 2025. Adding to the confusion, a “Federal Perkins Loan” is a loan program for individual college students based on financial need and has very low interest rates.

For more information about Perkins V, see the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education’s website or the Association for Career and Technical Education’s extended overview of the legislation.

For now, just know that “Perkins V” or “Perkins CTE grants” means potential for you to build and grow your CTE program. It’s a grant, meaning you don’t have to pay it back, but the application process is competitive, and you’ll need to satisfy requirements as part of the grant.

Process and Timeline for Applying for Perkins V

Each state has its own unique application form, process, and requirements to receive Perkins V funds. In light of COVID-19, most states have extended their application deadlines.

Consult your [state education department’s CTE office](#) for deadlines, information, and application materials.

Prepare to Apply for Perkins V

Since states have extended their deadline, use this additional time to learn about the grant and the application process. The more you know about these requirements, the better you can craft your application to show your readiness to meet them.

Research the requirements and objectives for CTE in your state

States must send the federal Department of Education a list of goals for the grant, their process for approving local recipients, and strategies for special populations. The federal Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) website has all of these materials for each state.

Read about how the state plans to spend this money and what they expect of recipients. Note any requirements in terms of program assessment, which you may have to fulfill to apply for the grant and if you receive money. There may also be requirements for consulting with educators, administrators, parents, students, or community representatives as part of your application.

Learn who determines funding and how they do it

Each state [determines its allocations differently](#). They may allocate according to the number of CTE students or the actual cost of running these programs.

Requirements for establishing a CTE program also vary. Of course, this information is crucial if you're applying to start a program, but even longstanding programs should consult this information.

Perkins V also uses the [National Career Clusters® Framework](#) to organize CTE programs according to skills, training, and potential career options. States recognize different clusters, so make sure you understand which clusters are recognized in your state.

The Education Commission of the States has published a convenient [summary for each state online](#). You should also consult your [state education department's CTE office](#).

Understand the CTE and funding landscapes in your state

You can research how much money your state has received and how it has been distributed in the past. Barring cuts to the overall Perkins budget, states cannot receive less funding in the future. That means looking at past numbers should give you a fair idea of how much funding is available. You should also research which sectors received more funding in your state and the overall CTE landscape in your state to make your application stand out.

For an overview of your state's CTE landscape and current Perkins funding, the nonprofit group Advanced CTE has created a [state-by-state comparison tool](#).

Review some grants

Speak to colleagues who have received federal funding and find out what may have made their application stand out. Reach out to your professional network to find people with experience writing grants. Attend webinars and read blogs from experts in the field.

Federal programs also accept volunteers to review grant applications (based on their experience with the relevant subject). Studying a grant gives you a look inside the process and insight into which applications made the cut. To volunteer, go to [g5.gov](#), sign up for or log into your account, click "Reviewer" in the Available Type list, and then follow the steps.

Other Funds

Perkins V is the largest and most centralized grant for CTE, but it's not the only one. Be sure to research other grant opportunities that may suit your program or your students.

[Grants.gov](#) can help you find grants and understand the federal grant process. It contains over 1,000 grant opportunities from 26 federal agencies. It can also help you learn more about terminology, reporting, and other places to search so you can align your application as much as possible with the process.

The [Perkins Collaborative Resource Network](#) provides state profiles, additional resources for Perkins V, and other available grants.

The [US Department of Education's Grants Forecast](#) and [youth.gov](#) may have other grants unique to your students, programs, or vision.

The National Endowment for the Arts Foundation's [Student Success Grant](#) supports educational outcomes and student experiences for public school educators who are also NEA members.

[GrantWatch](#) is a search engine of over 1,000 workforce development grants for programs in career education. The website includes grants for youth, immigrants, and their families as well as veterans, adult learners, and displaced workers.

In addition to these federal and national grant programs, there may be state-specific grants, grants for specific industries from businesses such as [Sony](#), or other local and specific opportunities available.

For state-specific grants, contact the CTE office in your state. Solid Professor has collected the link for each state education department's CTE office in [a convenient table](#).

Guidance for Arts-Based CTE Programs

The National Career Clusters Framework includes the “Arts, A/V Technology & Communications” cluster. It includes careers in the design, production, exhibition, performance, writing, and publishing of visual and performing arts and design, journalism, entertainment services, and other multimedia content.

Career pathways include:

- A/V technology and film
- Printing technology
- Visual arts
- Performing arts
- Journalism and broadcasting
- Telecommunications

More information about this cluster is [online](#).

Your grant applications are a chance for you to advocate for the unique opportunities of fields in the arts and their practical benefit to students and the community. With remote and online technology becoming more crucial than ever, students being able to enter the workforce with advanced technical skills will give them an advantage. This educational path also taps into students’ creativity and interests.

Next Steps

In our next installment, we’ll examine how to create a competitive grant application that responds to grant requirements and showcases your program’s strengths.

What makes a successful grant application?

Section one looked at potential grants to support your CTE program. It's usually easy to find the right application portals, forms, and instructions, but what makes a grant application succeed?

As you've already discovered, each grant application is unique. There are often multiple steps in the application process. Some of them may involve updating current language and data about your program. You may also have to write updated narratives, generate new reports, or otherwise create fresh content.

An exhaustive guide for applying to all grants would probably be incredibly long. It would still only scratch the surface. Instead, let's look at some general principles to strengthen your application.

We'll focus on three core actions to improve your grant applications:

- Understand what you want
- Get to know your granter
- Communicate your purpose

Understand What You Want

A grant proposal is not to get you money. It's to explain how your program can benefit your community. The funding is just a means to that end. You need a clear idea of how you want to help.

It may sound intuitive, but before you apply for any grant, and maybe even before you look for one, ask yourself: What is the need, problem, gap, or issue I'm trying to solve?

Assess your community's needs. Define your target audience, their demographics, and barriers to engagement. Experienced school and nonprofit leaders keep these things in mind every day. It's why they do what they do!

Yet a grant application is a critical juncture in this understanding. Don't rely on unspoken motivations. Instead, articulate how and why you serve your community. Then, determine what the grant can do to further that mission.

Come up with your idea first. Make it a specific and maybe even small idea. Don't try to convince granters that you're trying to address every aspect of the issue at hand. It may signal admirable but lofty goals that their grant can't handle. It could also look like you have a lack of focus.

Instead, concentrate on targeted initiatives with realistic expectations, SMART goals, and clear short- and long-term objectives. It's up to you to show that a modest goal can make a huge impact. For example, if a grant lets you buy 20 guitars for your students, what does that mean to these young people, their families, and the community around them?

Show how you'll be a responsible steward of this money. Most grants require some form of evaluation. Granters will ask you to measure progress and assess impact. It may be a final report or periodic reports throughout the year. How often varies depending on the organization and the grant.

Demonstrate that you have the ability and interest in assessing your own work. Provide examples of how you already evaluate your impact. The granter may ask for specific metrics, but you should also be creative in terms of what you measure and evidence. Don't worry about something seeming too small or uninteresting to external audiences. Share the variables that illustrate growth and impact to you. To paraphrase a Harvard Business School professor, **measure what you value, and others will value what you measure.**

S	Specific	Make your goals specific and narrow for more effective planning
M	Measurable	Define what evidence will prove you're making progress and re-evaluate when necessary
A	Attainable	Make sure you can reasonably accomplish your goal within a certain timeframe
R	Relevant	Your goals should align with your values and long-term objectives
T	Time-based	Set a realistic, ambitious end-date for task prioritization and motivation

“On assessment: measure what you value instead of valuing only what you measure.” — Andy Hargreaves

Robust assessment may also mean broader conversations with the rest of your staff. If they're the ones working with your constituents—providing the music lessons, teaching the classes, etc.—they'll need to be involved in building assessment measures and tools. Work with them to determine how you want to gauge progress and collect data at the ground level.

Assessment and evaluation can seem like one more item on your already full plate. Remember that they're more ways to see how you're helping people, prove it to others, and determine what more you can do.

Get to Know Your Granter

Has a telemarketer ever called you about a product that you would never use? You probably felt like they wasted your time. You may have wondered, “Why on Earth did they think I would use this?”

Imagine having that impression after reading several pages of text that requests thousands of dollars.

A granter is not just a company that may give you money. It's a philanthropic organization staffed by individuals. You're building a relationship with those people based on knowledge and trust. If you're going to start the relationship out right, take time to understand the organization and **human beings** behind the grant.

Research the Organization

Understand their mission, how they want to help, and what they've funded in the past. Of the most immediate importance, read what they ask for in their grant application.

Read requirements and directions carefully to see if their grant is even open to your application. Confirm that this granter could support you before you even contact them.

A surprising number of grant applications are rejected because the applicant was not eligible for the funds—even when these requirements were clearly posted. This wastes everyone's time and could leave the wrong impression on the granter if funds ever open up for you.

Build A Relationship

Don't rely on information posted on an organization's website or its printed materials. Don't even just stick to email. Be willing to call their office, ask questions, gain more information, show an interest in them beyond just getting their money, and get to know them as a member of your professional network.

If possible, see if you can request a copy of a successful proposal. If it's a federal or state grant, this information is probably a public record that you can find online. Reviewing successful grant applications shows you what kinds of programs were funded and what makes a winning case.

Communicate Your Purpose

You've thought long and hard about your purpose for this grant. You've done your homework about the granter and learned even more through direct interactions with them. Now, it's time to synthesize all of that into a proposal that shows what your program can do.

Writing an email can sometimes seem like a chore. So, a lengthy grant application can seem incredibly daunting. Organization and time management are key here: instead of seeing a wall of text to be written, break down your grant application into relevant sections with timelines for completing each one.

Track What You Have to Say

The grant's requirements should list exactly what you need to include. These requirements will help you organize specific sections of your application. Consider creating a checklist. Approaching the grant as a series of deliverables not only ensures you include everything, but it can help you see where you'll need to reach out to other members of your team. For example, every granter wants an itemized budget with a financial narrative, but you may not be the one who has that information. Outlining these needs also allows you to give people time to provide these pieces.

You may have a lot of information prepared already as part of donor letters, annual reports, or even other grants. However, don't just copy/paste text. Review your existing materials carefully and refresh them to align with this application. Just like an employer reading a rehashed cover letter, granters can tell when you're just reusing the same language. Again, don't see this as one more thing to check off but an opportunity to articulate what you do with fresh energy.

Tell Your Story

Above all, your application should tell a story. Data should always serve a larger narrative about what you do and who you want to help. You may even connect to a real person you're serving. For example, simply saying that nearly four million K-12 students can't access music education may or may not surprise a granter. Chances are if they're awarding a grant, they're sold on the problem.

Saying that you provided free private lessons to 500 students this year will probably impress him. But to move them, put a human face on the need. Describe a student who took advantage of these private lessons and how they are now succeeding because of an experience you gave them.

In other words, make your story have a heart as well as a brain. You don't need to go out of your way to pull at heartstrings, but numbers about general trends can segue into a specific story about real people.

Having said that, don't forget the data! Granters will ask for specific quantitative information. Beyond just checking off a requirement, the quality of your data illustrates that you can evidence your results on a larger scale.

Depending on the format of the application, consider including images and video. Larger applications are usually submitted online and are entirely text-based. Yet smaller private foundations may ask you to email your application as a document. A few pictures of your work in action or the sound of a successful concert can go a long way. It's cliché but true: a picture is worth a thousand words.

Good writing for a grant application is similar to good writing for any topic:

- Focused, Clear, Concise
- Includes examples
- Details are relevant
- Evidence-based
- Free of typos
- Formatted with plenty of white space, so it's easy on the reader's eyes

Pay attention to page limits or, if you're applying online, character limits. You may have crafted a perfect 1,000-word description of your program, but the granter may want you to say it all in 500 words!

This brings us to our final, most intuitive, but maybe most powerful piece of advice.

Leave Yourself Time

Leave plenty of time for you and anyone involved in writing the application. That means ample time to think before you hit the keyboard, to put thoughts down on paper, to turn those thoughts into a draft, to revise them into a working copy, to ask others for a review, to proofread, and to find examples and data.

Some sources recommend spending an hour per page. Large government grants may take up to two months to complete. On the other hand, a smaller grant may warrant a different investment of time. You'll know how much time you need by carefully assessing everything required, who needs to be part of the team, what you already know, and what you need to find out or write fresh. Above all, don't rush things.

Specific Guidance for Perkins V Applications

As we covered in section one, Perkins V is the largest federal grant opportunity for CTE programs. States are required to use Perkins allocations for CTE programs in public and secondary schools. Each state has its own definitions and requirements for how recipients can use the money according to a unique state plan.

It's crucial to understand your state's plan when filling out your application. It will help you understand and build a relationship with the state. The US Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education has [summarized all state plans in one table](#). Still, visit your state CTE office's website for specific information.

Additional Guidance

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Writing Center has provided [an expansive overview of the grant writing process](#), including steps, descriptions of sections requested in most applications, and sample materials.

For specific guidance about Perkins V applications, check out the Smoky Hill Educational Service Center's presentation, "[Writing Your Best Perkins Grant](#)."

The OCTAE also provides [several documents and videos about CTE and Perkins V](#) to inform your application materials.

Most grant applications will require materials describing your partnerships and letters of support from those partners. These requirements also vary, but the nonprofit development firm Funding for Good, Inc. has collected [some best practices for these materials](#).

Next Steps

Our next installment will explore what you can do with the funding, including diversity issues and supporting CTE in a COVID world.

Why should I apply for funding?

In our previous sections, we discussed how to fund your program and what makes a grant application successful. Now, we'd like to discuss why you might pursue funding.

The answer may seem obvious. You've probably already seen the benefits of CTE programs on students. Yet over the past year, a global pandemic and a long-overdue reckoning with social inequality have shown even great potential for CTE.

In this chapter, we're going to look at the benefits of pursuing support for your CTE programs and ways to use this funding to meet these recent challenges and opportunities. We'll also dive into the established positive outcomes of CTE for students.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In recent years, various social and political movements have brought attention to the most unjust and disturbing actions and policies against different communities. They've also underscored longstanding gaps in income, education, and skills.

The Alliance for Excellent Education has collected some ways states and schools can address these issues in a [series of white papers](#). One [statistic that stood out](#) was that while 80 percent of well-paying jobs require postsecondary education, in 2017, less than 50 percent of Americans between 25 and 64 held a quality credential beyond high school. The number drops even further among historically underserved groups. Only about 30 percent of African Americans and 24 percent of Latinos held an associate's degree or higher in 2017.

A 2018 [study by the Washington Post](#) about women in blue-collar jobs found an alarming trend for women. Looking at jobs that pay at least \$35,000 a year and require only a high school diploma, researchers found that women only hold 25 percent of these positions.

There is no shortage of data to evidence the disparities faced by women, underrepresented minorities, and other disenfranchised communities. We'd like to focus on what CTE does to improve the situation.

How Perkins V Can Address DEI

Perkins V funding — which we examined in depth in Section one — contains specific provisions to address these issues, and it requires states to address them and evaluate their efforts.

The Education Commission of the States has written a [series of blog posts](#) covering these topics. ECS [elaborates](#) on how Perkins V aims to promote gender balance in secondary and postsecondary CTE programs that lead to high-paying jobs:

“The law addresses non-traditional fields, or fields where one gender comprises less than 25 percent of the workforce. It requires states to devote some federal Perkins funds to addressing these gender imbalances. It also requires states to evaluate how well they meet their own targets for improving the gender makeup of CTE programs that lead to non-traditional occupations. Perkins funds can support similar strategies in CTE: expose girls to career awareness events, train high school guidance counselors to help girls consider a broad array of CTE options, connect students to role models, help teachers combat pernicious messages. Strategies such as these can help more girls and women benefit from the renaissance of rewarding middle-skill jobs.”

Perkins V also requires states and districts to **“continually make meaningful progress toward improving the performance of all career and technical education students.”** This includes students from low-income households, students with disabilities, English learners, and students of color. Many of these categories are taken from the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#), which can help familiarize you with the groups identified and terminology for historically underserved students.

The Alliance for Excellent Education also [describes Perkins V's specific supports](#) for what the law refers to as “special populations.” These groups include youth with disabilities, from low-income households, who are homeless, or whose parent is an active military member. The provisions are aimed at recruiting and retaining these groups in CTE programs and improving their overall academic performance. Districts may allocate Perkins V funds to reduce or eliminate out-of-pocket expenses for these special populations.

While no solution is perfect, Perkins V contains some specific provisions aimed at populations most in need. Students from these populations are undoubtedly part of your own program, and it behooves you to consider these students when deciding to apply and how you describe the needs of your program.

Keeping Students Connected During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented challenge to education and the community. In a matter of moments, school doors were shuttered, and students were cut off from classmates and resources to do their work. Maintaining CTE programs wasn't just a matter of ensuring continuity of education; these programs are often a source of community and expression and even a lifeline for some kids.

In the face of this unprecedented challenge, educators worked to ensure continuity. There's no shortage of insightful and often inspiring coverage of these solutions. Here's just a sample:

- The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) published an [exhaustive list of resources](#). Here is just [one specific example](#) of collaborative remote learning.
- The Massachusetts Music Educators Association also provides a [concise chart](#) of these ideas.
- The Hunt Institute published a [concise summary](#) of how educators met the challenge in creative ways.
- MusicTech magazine also [reviewed](#) some of the technology solutions.

Many of these solutions—online learning, video tutorials, and at-home resource drop-off—will likely be familiar to you. For educators used to entirely in-person models, the move to online or [hybrid models](#) may never feel like a complete substitute. Yet they can be crucial alternatives during this difficult time.

Support from grants can help you implement or enhance solutions like these. While there are many free applications available, having the funds to upgrade to premium services or purchase even basic equipment can make a huge difference.

During the pandemic there are many examples of schools and campuses that have invested in and augmented their technology systems to enhance in-person and blended home-to-campus audio and music instruction. Both the [San Francisco Conservatory of Music](#) and [Florida's Full Sail University](#) expanded Focusrite's RedNet audio-over-IP hardware with Dante. Thanks to RedNet the campuses were able to enable high-quality, low-latency teaching, production and performance environments that not only maintained but also enhanced high-quality learning.

These solutions are not just a requirement to sustain your programs during the pandemic. They can be a chance to strengthen programs well into the future. Even if you never see school doors shuttered again, a solid framework for remote learning offers your students additional outlets for their creativity. This brings us to our next point and the most powerful one at the student level.

Student Passion

CTE programs connect students with a specific skill or creative area typically not part of traditional academic programs. Whether it's coding their own video game or understanding how to run a successful business, these programs offer something unique and, in many cases, tap into a student's personal interests—even as they still provide a valuable education experience!

In music and the arts, students do gain plenty of technical knowledge, and we'll cover that next. Yet while learning how to create, record, mix and produce music and audio, their personal drive is what keeps them engaged.

The desire to see their projects to completion is the “hook” that lets a teacher add technical skills to the student's toolbox. In some cases, a student might struggle in their traditional academic subjects but shine in CTE. It can be their outlet or the one place they want to be during the school day. In fact, [research shows](#) that school districts with music programs have higher attendance rates.

This doesn't just mean instrumental or vocal programs! Not everyone is playing an instrument, but students engaged with music technology enjoy the same benefits and have a better academic experience.

Music and the arts allow a unique form of self-expression and other socio-emotional benefits alongside the skills training. Creative work can be a unique extension of the student. That makes the arts unique among all other [CTE career clusters](#). So the chance to fund your programs goes beyond the educational or practical benefits. You're guiding a young person's artistic and personal growth.

An example is Southern California, Lawndale High School's "[Commercial Music Pathway](#)," where students learn entrepreneurship, management, music, audio, technology, marketing skills and more. During the pandemic this CTE program created 25 audio recording and product kits including Focusrite Scarlett 2i2 Studio bundles for students to check out and use at home so that learning didn't have to stop. Lawndale's students have had a truly successful school year, creating and producing music and audio, performing, and with virtual industry mentorship opportunities.

Practical Benefits

We looked at some recent world events highlighting the need for CTE. We also discussed the profound personal benefits of CTE for students. Those factors only enhance the very real practical advantages of CTE programs for students and their communities.

Work-Based Learning

Perkins V discusses work-based learning at length. Unlike the last version of the bill, Perkins V explicitly authorizes states to use these grants to create or expand work-based education. States must also have a plan for sharing opportunities for work-based learning with students.

Take a look at how the legislation defines "work-based learning." Chances are, the definition already fits what you're doing or could become a goal:

Sustained interactions with industry or community professionals in real workplace settings to the extent practicable, or simulated environments at an educational institution that fosters in-depth first hand engagement with the tasks required in a given career field and that are aligned to curriculum and instruction.

States can also now include work-based learning as a performance indicator in their CTE outcomes data. That means you're not only supporting your students but can contribute to the larger success story for your state, which can have positive benefits for the entire state.

Job Prep and Life Skills

Any CTE program that involves learning technology—whether it's a designated [information technology program](#) or an audiovisual production course—offers technical skills and knowledge that are transferable to a variety of fields. Even students in vocal or instrumental music programs can benefit from learning production to either produce their own music or as job preparation outside of music.

There is more demand than ever for people who can create content. This means that the earlier students can learn these skills, the more advantage they'll have when they join the workforce. Many jobs are also changing to self-marketed independent opportunities. A CTE program can set a student up to thrive in the "gig economy" by bringing various skills to potential employers.

At the same time, students learn much more than how to make videos! Regardless of the industry, employers seek a foundational skill set of knowing how to interact, manage, and plan. The collaborative nature of many CTE projects as well as opportunities for internships helps students learn how to communicate, solve problems, follow-through, and other "[soft skills](#)."

These are just some of the reasons why funding to implement, sustain, or grow your existing CTE programs is crucial. The next section of our toolkit examines how specific school programs utilize these funding sources in their programs.