

Equity & the Perkins V Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment

INTRODUCTION

Through the Perkins V legislation (Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act), states and local education agencies (LEAs) have been given a critical framework to center equity within Career and Technical Education (CTE). The Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA or needs assessment), which is required every 2 years of secondary and postsecondary institutions receiving Perkins funds, is an important advancement that can yield significant outcomes for communities, and particularly marginalized communities.

This document addresses the CLNA and extends the detailed guidance previously provided by [NAPE](#) and our partners at [Advance CTE](#) and [ACTE](#). The needs assessment process is the primary lever within Perkins V by which educators can highlight the factors limiting the success of marginalized communities and underrepresented student groups (e.g., by gender, race/ethnicity, and special population) in CTE. The law requires that the results of the CLNA be included in the four-year Perkins V local application submitted to the state. Here we offer that the needs assessment enacted as a step-by-step process will be insufficient to yield meaningful and transformative change. It will be critical to bring an equity lens that is guided by three principles in order to realize greater gains in addressing and closing equity gaps in programs of study leading to high-skill, high-wage, in-demand careers with family-sustaining wages.

In this document we provide three guiding principles to frame the needs assessment. To some readers these principles may be intuitive and highly validating; to others they may be new. Each of us is in a different stage in our journey to apply an equity lens to our work, but the desire to do right by our students and the communities we serve is a key starting point. Application of an equity lens can be challenging and messy, but it is also extremely rewarding as the results can be transformative for both educators and families.

COMPREHENSIVE LOCAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Within the provisions of Perkins V, LEAs are now required to conduct a Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment. The objective of the needs assessment is to provide institutions with a methodology that will ultimately yield interventions aimed at continually making meaningful progress towards improving the performance of all CTE students, especially identifying and

addressing equity gaps by gender, race and ethnicity, migrant status, and each of the expanded definition of special populations. The actions determined through the CLNA are then included in an institution's Local Application.

For the CLNA, stakeholders should be consulted that include: CTE programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels; state board or local workforce development board and a range of local business and industries; special populations; local agencies serving out-of-school youth, homeless children and youth, and at-risk youth; and Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations.

States provide guidance to LEAs on implementation factors that will frame the needs assessment process. If the CLNA is treated only as an exercise or a required step-by-step process that does not recognize the individual-, institutional-, and systems-level barriers to access and success for underrepresented and marginalized students in CTE, then it will miss the mark in yielding meaningful change. Local leaders must understand and then apply an equity lens throughout the process to best yield meaningful actions that will address the long-standing disparities within CTE.

EQUITY PRINCIPLES TO FRAME THE CLNA

The following three principles will significantly change the way the institution, and the educators within, view its underserved groups, as well as interventions to remedy opportunity and achievement gaps.

1. Asset Orientation

Developing an equity lens begins with an asset orientation wherein we embrace, cultivate, and leverage the diversity of each individual within an institution. An asset orientation elevates the humanity of the communities being served by your institution by valuing and leveraging the wealth of knowledge and ability inherent in those groups.

With an asset perspective, students' cultural differences are perceived as beneficial to the learning environment, as opposed to a deficit perspective, when cultural differences are perceived as detrimental to the learning environment.

To ensure success of the CLNA, leaders must develop and espouse an asset perspective. Leaders who recognize the capacity within marginalized student groups and communities, and call upon educators to value the diversity within their classrooms are transformative in their work.

First, in using an asset perspective, educators will realize fundamental changes in the assumptions made during the needs assessment process. For example:

Are the institutional outcomes driving the CLNA needs assessment a reflection of students' fundamental capacity, or a marker of the effects of systems within and around the institution acting upon students?

By understanding the historical role that schools and institutions play in marginalization, we can ensure that educators do not falsely ascribe differential outcomes to the traits of an individual or a community. This substantial shift in how educators understand differential outcomes will lead CLNA teams then to consider different questions.

Deficit-Based Thinking	Asset-Based Thinking
Problem Solving	Co-construction
Reliance on Expert Knowledge	Reliance on Personal Strengths
Externally Driven	Internally Driven

An asset orientation also changes the questions that teams will ask during the needs assessment process, and to whom they will be posed. Subsequently, the discoveries that result via the CLNA when informed by an equity lens will change the interventions that are selected.

Reflection Questions:

- *What vision for equity is your organization communicating to stakeholders?*
- *Is an asset or deficit orientation driving educators' work? Is the goal to fix the students or structural barriers?*
- *What does it mean for a program to be high quality? Are equitable outcomes a key criterion being used to determine quality? If not, programs defined as high quality may be perpetuating systemic barriers to access and success for students from marginalized groups?*

2. Grounded Action

An equity lens recognizes the depth of knowledge within a community and its individual members. No one is better situated to speak to the problems within CTE and education in general than the very students and families experiencing depressed outcomes. The stories of people who are negatively impacted by current policies and procedures are the best source of data and of solutions to improve outcomes.

Education in general, and program improvement models more specifically, have a strong tradition of employing deductive methodologies exclusively. In this tradition, educators rely on

conjectures and research-based hypotheses to explain gaps in participation or completion. This reliance on only using reasoned assertions derived from external research and external contexts may lead educators to exclude other factors that potentially have a greater effect on the student. This risk is greatly increased when those individuals making the assumptions do not represent the communities with which they are working.

A grounded approach to research can complement the deductive methods described above by allowing questions and theories to emerge from the environment where the social or organizational problem exists. Such action research takes a grounded approach and draws from the complexity of the school and from those individuals engaged in that context to develop a truer picture of the issues at hand. This results in actions and interventions that can be more effective in addressing the root causes for disparities in student outcomes system.

Grounding data used in the needs assessment within the lived experiences of the students served has important implications for the interventions and activities that are identified in the local application. For example, the methodologies employed and the quality of data collected during the CLNA process will change substantially. Moreover, the imperative to engage marginalized groups will enhance outreach efforts.

Reflection Questions:

- *How is your organization elevating the voices of students and families?*
- *What community groups are faithfully represented on advisory committees within your organization? Which groups are not currently represented and how might you engage them through the Stakeholder process?*
- *Where do you engage stakeholders? Do you go to them rather than expect them to go to you?*
- *Are communities engaged from a place of partnership, or as only a source of data?*

3. Systems are Not Neutral

The accountability movement within the U.S. and systems-based improvement models often treat educational systems as neutral processors that handle all inputs equally. Both reflect a black-box approach, assuming that the internal workings of an institution are not responsible for the differential outcomes of various student groups. An equity lens understands that institutions are not neutral and that inequitable outcomes strongly predicted by group membership (e.g., ability, race, language) are signs of biased mechanisms. Moreover, the hierarchies inherent within systems create a complex web that results in varying experiences of marginalization dependent upon the overlapping identities of students.

Are all girls realizing the same outcomes within a program, or does race/ethnicity or ability further influence their experience?

Data analyses that purposefully identify the effects of group identification on various measures are an effective means of creating an accurate picture of a complex system. To fully realize this goal, data disaggregation must go beyond single student demographic measures to include the intersections of identity. Perkins V requires that LEAs disaggregate their data to the program level (or the cluster level if those data are not available) by gender, race and ethnicity, each of the nine categories of special populations, and migrant status¹.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As you explore the equity gaps within your institution, remain aware of how systems create the historical differences that have been the most challenging to address. Do not assume that the problems you've uncovered lay with individuals or programmatic reasons. An effective anchor is to always ask "What else might be going on?" Set your assumptions aside and enter the discovery process assuming that your knowledge is incomplete or possibly even wrong. This stance will reveal possibilities through the needs assessment process that you may not have otherwise considered or seen.

With many years of guiding both states and LEAs on completing an Equity Gap Analysis through our Program Improvement Process for Equity™ (PIPE), NAPE has observed the hallmarks of effective, equity-focused plans that positively influence student access and opportunity. It is our hope that the principles provided here may stand as guideposts as you implement the CLNA within your local context.

As you embark on this process, be sure to create spaces for dialogue, discovery, and a focus on continuous improvement. Please share with us your discoveries, insights, and progress. We are here to be partners and advocates for equity alongside you (www.napequity.org; nape@napequity.org).

¹ Migrant status is a disaggregation criterion identified in Section 1111(b)(2) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is referenced in the Perkins V law. This applies with the caveat, "except that such disaggregation shall not be required in the case of a State, local educational agency, or a school in which the number of students in a subgroup is insufficient to yield statistically reliable information or the results would reveal personally identifiable information about an individual student" (Hyslop, A. (2018). *Perkins V: The Official Guide to the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act*. ACTE.).