



California
Community
Colleges

California Virtual Campus –
Online Education Initiative

Publicity Primer

Improving Online CTE Pathways Grant Program

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CVC-OEI Pathways Publicity Overview

Now that your *Improving Online CTE Pathways* grant project has officially begun, it's time to put together a publicity plan to promote your work!

We want to assist you and your institution in sharing your project with the other Pathways grant projects and CCC academic communities, as well as the general public, so we ask that you keep us informed as your grant project moves forward. If there is something about your project that is particularly noteworthy (a major event, release, or milestone, for instance), please let the CVC-OEI team know. We are eager to help you get the word out and share the results of your grant award. We will be posting feature stories and upcoming events on our website regularly and would like to work with you to identify accomplishments or news items that we could post.¹

Please note that publicity is different from a) reports and b) marketing in the following ways:

- If you're asking yourself "Won't our quarterly reports handle this?"
 - **Reports are not highly visible:** While reports are or can be made public, they usually require people to go find them. Publicity is broadcast--often via multiple channels--to maximize the visibility of your efforts.
 - **Reports have a specific purpose:** Reports cover what the grant funders want to know about your project, but not always what other stakeholders want to know. Publicity contains what you want people to know about your project, and is most effective when aligned with different stakeholders' interests.
- If you're asking yourself "Won't our marketing efforts handle this?"
 - **Marketing is bigger than publicity alone:** Basically, marketing involves a number of activities, including publicity, but also advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and more.
 - **Marketing has a different focus:** Marketing focuses on "selling" the end product (e.g., new and/or revised certificates and programs), while publicity addresses the process (e.g., your grant project's progress and accomplishments).

If your Pathways application included a marketing budget, determine whether or not publicity should be included in that marketing work, or treated as a separate set of activities.

NOTE: It is important to include your campus and/or district unit(s) related to Marketing and Public Information. Not only does that unit have experience with publicity campaigns to help you get up and running quickly, but also allows you to amplify your message each time you send out an announcement.

Considerations

This CVC-OEI Pathways “Publicity Primer” contains information to guide you in answering some basic questions:

- Why: Identifying Your Rationale
- Who: Building and Informing Your Audience
- What: Crafting PR Messages
- When / How Often: Determining Timing and Frequency
- How: Choosing Publicity Channels and Strategies

We are presenting many ideas here--more than you probably need--so we are also providing guidance to help you choose the best publicity pathways for your project.

Why: Identifying Your Rationale

The first step is to align your publicity plan with specific goals, such as the following:

- **Inform key stakeholders:** Campus and district leaders will want to stay apprised of your progress, but so will others at your institution. For example, academic counselors will want to know about online certificates and programs they can promote when working with students.
- **Attract students** to the updated or new online CTE certificates, credentials or programs: Regular announcements in the right places can start generating student interest in the certificates and programs you will improve or develop over the next year. If you listed “Increase visibility” as one of your project goals, then publicity is one way to do that!
- **Line up additional funding sources:** If your college or district wants to attract additional funding to develop more certificates or programs (e.g., other CTE areas, non-CTE disciplines), a publicity campaign would make your current efforts and successes more visible. Potential funding agencies and organizations like to support entities with a proven track record, so start making that track record public!
- **Inspire participation in future projects:** Just as publicity can attract attention externally, it can attract attention internally. As you seek funding, you will also need project participants.
- **Foster school-industry partnerships:** Your current project may or may not involve industry partnerships. Publicity highlighting a focus of creating employment opportunities in your county or region could be the first step in creating new partnerships.
- **Promote your institution:** In general, the Pathways projects are reflections of your institution’s values and commitment to student success in CTE and beyond. All 70 projects combined represent a major contribution to that student success across California.

Who: Building and Informing Your Audience

Identifying Your Stakeholder Groups

Depending on the goals you want to achieve through your publicity efforts, you may want to communicate with and/or stay connected to some or all of the following stakeholder groups:

- **Campus/District leaders** will want to know how the project is moving forward, how many students are impacted, and how your results help the campus or district meet CCCCCO goals (e.g., Pathways, Vision for Success).
- **Students** will want to know what online CTE pathways are available and when. They will also want to know about new pathways planning tools and online student services that do not require visiting campus.
- **Faculty** will want to know how they can participate in your project or improve their own online courses.
- **Academic Counselors** will want to know when CTE certificates and programs can be completed online, so they can advise students to enroll in those programs.
- **Student Support Service staff** will want to know how many more students will be taking online CTE courses, so they can increase capacity in supporting online students (without requiring them to visit campus).
- **Curriculum Committee members** will want to know when you plan to submit courses, certificates, or programs for approval, so they can schedule time to do the review work.
- **Local employers** will want to know how students will be prepared to enter the workforce, so they can advertise job opportunities to students who earn certificates or credentials.
- **Local community members** will want to know how your institution is supporting them.

Considering Targeted Messages

REMEMBER: Each stakeholder group views the world in a different way. For example, while it will be a major accomplishment to get 30, 40, or even 50 faculty to participate in and complete professional development, campus leaders will want to know more, like what effect did those 50 faculty being trained have on student retention or success? Consider who is reading your messages when you start crafting the content of each message (see “What” below).

Depending on the publicity channel or strategy (see the “How” section below), consider calling out a specific group as part of a targeted announcement or message. For example, Tweet something directly to students: “Hey @SchoolName #students! We are kicking off a year-long

project to increase your options via Online #CTE Pathways. Follow us to get regular progress updates!”

What: Crafting PR Messages

Including a CVC-OEI Acknowledgment Statement

Unless advised to the contrary, an acknowledgment of CVC-OEI support must appear on all materials publicizing or resulting from award activities. Reporting the outcomes of CVC-OEI-funded projects and communicating the role of CVC-OEI support increases public understanding of how we work with award subrecipients and other stakeholders to achieve our mission “to support existing California Community Colleges in accelerating innovative online learning opportunities leading to increased employability and upward mobility for working Californians” (cvc.edu).

Sample acknowledgment statement:

- *This website [or blog or newsletter] is supported by the Improving Online CTE Pathways project, funded by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office’s California Virtual Campus-Online Education Initiative (CVC-OEI) as part of a one-year grant award totaling [\$XXX,XXX]. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, CVC-OEI or the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. For more information, please visit <http://cvc.edu/pathwaysgrant>.*

Using Media to Increase Impact

Media plays an important role in publicity campaigns—for example, images (including photos, screenshots, charts, graphs, and infographics) and video increase the impact of publicity efforts. In other words, more people open emails and/or click links when they know there is an image or video to view. Consider a) taking photos of faculty participating in workshops, b) capturing mock screenshots of students participating in virtual counseling sessions, or c) recording video testimonials from faculty and/or students about the impact of your grant’s efforts.

See more about what to include in your publicity messages in the next section, “When/How Often.”

When / How Often: Determining Timing and Frequency

In general, the publicity channel(s) you choose will help determine the frequency of your publicity efforts. For example, social media or blog posts might be published weekly, newsletters and website updates might be published monthly, and press releases or news articles will probably be reserved for big announcements (i.e., beginning, middle, and end of the project).

The suggestions below include ideas for both what information to share in your publicity messages and when to share it:

Launching the Project

The projects all launched officially on July 01, 2019, but your project may not be known widely (yet). There is still time to announce the launch! Here are some suggestions:

- Create a press release to let your community know about your project (see more on Press Releases in the “How” section below).
- Launch a project website, a blog, a dedicated social media account (e.g., Twitter account, Instagram account), and/or a social media page (e.g., Facebook page).

Approaching Milestones

While it is important to let people know after you reach each milestone, sometimes that can be too late to take appropriate actions. Publicize upcoming milestones in advance, such as the following examples:

- If your goal is to make current online courses more visible and available, share course information well in advance about which sections will be offered online for the upcoming semester. Ideally, share the information 1) when enrollment for the upcoming semester begins and 2) again when the semester begins and students are looking for classes.
- If your goal is to help students track their academic progress, announce when you are seeking students for any pilots, and again well before you launch so students know this is a service your campus will begin providing.

Reaching Milestones

Publicizing when you reach milestones helps maintain your own momentum, and also keeps your supporters up to date. The Pathways projects have a very short timeline, so it can be easy for your campus or district community to fall behind when following your progress. Counter this by letting the world know each time you reach a milestone.

Examples of milestones to record and publicize:

- **Faculty earning Certificates in Online Teaching** (e.g., from @ONE): Post a photo of the cohort on Instagram or write a short blog post to share the news and let people know what comes next (e.g., redesigning courses, seeking curriculum approval, launching new online sections). You might also include this news in a monthly email newsletter.
- **Faculty and instructional designers completing the course redesign process**, or meeting the CVC-OEI Course Design Rubric requirements.
- **Online CTE courses being approved by your campus Curriculum Committee.**

- **The launch of new, fully online CTE certificates or programs:** Publish a press release!

Getting Results

The CVC-OEI team will know about your results from your Quarterly Reports and Final Report, but your campus community (and the rest of the world) wants to know about your successes, too!

Examples of results to record and publicize:

- The **number of new online CTE sections offered** and the **number of students enrolled in them**.
- The **increase in the percentage of students who successfully complete online CTE courses or certificates:** Here is an opportunity to include a chart or infographic as well.

Continuing Post-Grant Work

Once your project builds a following, keep them informed about what you will be doing after the grant period ends. Each grant subrecipient has committed to continuing the work in some way. That is worth publicizing!

How: Choosing Publicity Channels and Strategies

Press Releases

- *Estimated time commitment per publication: 01-02 hours*
- *Suggested frequency - press releases: ad hoc (announce launch, report milestone achievement, report project results)*

The National Endowment for the Humanities describes press releases clearly and concisely: “The basic method of communicating with all media is through a press release. It provides the who, what, when, and where of your news. Often it is picked up by a newspaper and run in its entirety. In other cases it introduces a reporter to your news and provides a contact for getting more information.”² As stated above in the “When/How Often” section, press releases make the most sense for big announcements--e.g., launching the project, reaching major milestones, and sharing end results.

How to get started with a press release:

- **Step 1 - Write your press release**
 - See Appendix A for a press release template.

- **Step 2 - Increase the visibility of your press release** through free or paid news outlets
 - National Public Radio (free) - On the [Contact NPR page](#), select “Send a news tip” and complete the form.
 - [PR Newswire](#) (free) - Click the [Send a Release](#) button - the site will ask you to sign up first, then you can send your press release.
 - [PR Log](#) (free) - If you are a new user, [create a press release account](#) first. Then log in and send your press release.
 - Education Writers Association (paid) - Go to [the EWA Promote Your Press Release page](#), and click the Post Your Listing button. As a non-member, you just fill out the form and pay a small fee (\$100).
- **Step 3 - Point people to the press release** through other channels
 - Link to the press release from your social media account.
 - Promote the press release with your campus Marketing and Public Information unit.
 - Send the link to the CVC-OEI team!

For more tips about creating and launching press releases:

- [Review the NEH Media Tips and Suggestions](#) (NEH)
- [Check out 5 Ways to Get Your NonProfit Press Release to Stand Out](#) (Bloomerang)
- [Read How to Write a Press Release in 10 Steps](#) (Fit Small Business)

Local News Articles

- *Estimated time commitment per publication: 30-60 minutes*
- *Suggested frequency - local news articles: ad hoc*

Work with your campus’ Marketing and Public Information unit to connect with a local or regional journalist.

How to get started with a local news article:

- **Step 1 - Identify appropriate local news platforms** (web, TV, radio, print)
- **Step 2 - Search for journalists who cover education topics**
- **Step 3 - Write an email pitching a story about your grant project**
 - Use data from your application as well as local employment forecasts to support your email pitch--i.e., share the needs that drive your online CTE project and how the project will help meet those needs
- **Step 4 - Announce when the article will be published**

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- Inform CVC-OEI that your project will be featured in an article
- Use social media to point people to the article

For more tips about connecting with local journalists

- [Persuasive email pitching to journalists](#) (Cutting Edge PR)

Example local news articles:

- Local news article about College of the Desert's Pathways project (NBC Palm Springs) <https://nbcpalmsprings.com/2019/06/25/college-of-the-desert-receives-funding-to-expand-online-programs/>

Social Media

- *Estimated time commitment per publication (post): 02-05 minutes*
- *Suggested frequency - social media: at least once or twice weekly*

Social media campaigns can seem daunting, but they don't have to be. It only takes a minute to type up 280 characters on Twitter or to post a picture on Instagram or Facebook. While posting regularly increases the number of people who follow you, you can keep it simple by posting updates once or twice a week.

How to get started with social media:

- **Step 1 - Choose the appropriate social media platforms** for your project, starting with those that your stakeholder groups use most. Facebook has the largest number of active users, Twitter has the highest activity volume, and Instagram has the highest levels of user engagement.³
- **Step 2 - Create a centralized project account and/or page** on each platform you selected
 - Facebook: Create a page for your grant project and post there regularly. This might be easier than creating a campus or district website for your project.
- **Step 3 - Advertise your account and attract followers**
 - Provide the CVC-OEI team with the account name or handle for each social media platform you use. The CVC-OEI team will create a master list for all 70 projects to help each project build a following.
 - If you publish any press releases, mention the social media platforms you use in the "boilerplate copy" about your project at the end of the release.
 - If you have a project webpage or website, a) add links for people to follow your project on each social media platform, and b) see if you can add a webpage widget that displays the latest social media updates and mentions of your project
- **Step 4 - Create a rough plan and start posting**

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- Twitter: For any Tweet related to your Pathways grant project, please include the CVC-OEI Twitter handle (@CVCOEI) and the Pathways hashtag (#onlinectepathways).
- If you plan to use more than one social media platform, consider using a social media management tool like HootSuite to coordinate all of your social media activity. These tools also help if more than one person will use the account to post messages about your project. Social media management tools allow you to schedule announcements in advance--they will be posted on the day/time you choose.

More tips about using social media for publicity:

- [The Best Time to Post on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn & Pinterest](#) (HubSpot)

Grant Websites

- *Estimated time commitment per publication: 01-02 hours to set up, 05-10 minutes for updates*
- *Suggested frequency - website updates: ad hoc, as necessary*

Are you getting a lot of common questions? Then create a simple website with pages for a) About the Project, b) Frequently Asked Questions, and c) Contact Us.

How to get started with a grant website:

- **Step 1 - Determine the scope of your website**
 - If you really do not want to maintain a large stand alone project website, you can create a few static web pages as a part of your lead unit's website (e.g., web.xyzcollege.edu/cte/pathwaysgrant)
 - If a website is part of your marketing plan, then create an entirely new website dedicated to the project (e.g., pathways.xyzcollege.edu)
- **Step 2 - Create your website** (or work with a web developer)
- **Step 3 - Provide the CVC-OEI team with the URL** of your project webpage or website

Blogs

- *Estimated time commitment per publication: 30 minutes to set up; 15-45 minutes per article*
- *Suggested frequency - blog updates: weekly or bi-weekly*

Do you want to share details regularly about your project's progress? Then consider starting a blog and posting short articles once every week or two. NOTE: Successful blogs require posting new content on a regular basis. If you don't plan to write a brief article (400-500 words) every week or two, then consider a monthly email newsletter. You can share the load by splitting up the blog posts among the members of your grant project team.

How to get started with a blog:

- **Step 1 - Create a blog account or site**
 - Check to see if your campus or district hosts blogs. If not, check with your campus communication guidelines to see if there are any restrictions about using tools like WordPress.
 - Be sure to work with your campus Marketing and Public Information unit.
- **Step 2 - Create a rough plan**
 - Set a goal for how frequently your team will author blog articles, and create a list of potential topics based on the activities you identified in your application.
- **Step 3 - Advertise your project blog**
 - Let CVC-OEI know about your blog.
 - Use social media to announce when you publish each new blog article.

More tips about writing blog articles:

- [How to Write Blog Posts That People Actually Read](#) (Blogging.com)
- [Tips for Writing That Great Blog Post Every Time](#) (Huffington Post)
- [7 Tips to Write a Blog Post that Converts](#) (Opt In Monster)

Email Newsletters

- *Estimated time commitment per publication: 01-02 hours to set up, 05-10 minutes for updates*
- *Suggested frequency - email newsletter updates: weekly, bi-weekly or monthly*

Email newsletters allow you to synthesize your project's activities on a regular basis--usually weekly, bi-weekly or monthly.

How to get started with an email newsletter:

- **Step 1 - Create a newsletter template** with consistent types of information you want to share every week to four weeks. For example, each month you might have a) at least one article written by a faculty member who are redesigning their course as part of your

project, b) a project progress report or update, and/or c) information for students about how this project supports their goals (e.g., certificate achievement, employment).

- Be sure to work with your campus Marketing and Public Information unit.
- **Step 2 - Advertise your newsletter and attract followers**
 - If you have a project webpage or website, add a link for people to subscribe to receive your project's email newsletter.
 - Send an email inviting all relevant stakeholders to receive the email (e.g., campus leaders supporting the project, faculty participating in course redesign, student services staff who are supporting your project).
 - Let the CVC-OEI team know you have a blog and how to find it!

For more tips about creating and launching newsletters:

- [How to Create an Email Newsletter People Actually Read](#) (HubSpot)
- [Are Newsletters Effective? Assessing Their Role as a Communication Tool](#) (Purdue University Extension)

Endnotes

- 1, 2: Language adapted or directly quoted from a webpage originally created by the National Endowment for Humanities: <https://www.neh.gov/grants/manage/publicizing-your-project>
- 3: “Instagram engagement is the highest of any social media platform at around 3%, while Facebook and Twitter sit between 0.5% and 1%.”
<https://www.socialbakers.com/blog/best-times-to-post-on-social-media>

Appendix A: Press Release Template

[MONTH DAY], 2019

CONTACT INFORMATION

[COLLEGE NAME] Awarded [DOLLAR AMOUNT] Aimed at Building Online Career Education Offerings

[CITY], Calif. – [COLLEGE NAME] was recently awarded a [DOLLAR AMOUNT] grant to develop and strengthen career education programs that can be completed online. Awards were made through the *Improving Online CTE Pathways* grant program developed by the California Community Colleges' California Virtual Campus – Online Education Initiative (CVC-OEI). One-time funding for the grants, \$35 million in all, came via the 2018-2019 state budget.

[PARAGRAPH DETAILING GRANT FOCUS AND PURPOSE]

[QUOTE FROM COLLEGE OFFICIAL]

A total of \$27.5 million in [grants](#) to 70 community colleges were awarded earlier this month. Grants are administered by the Foothill-De Anza Community College District, which serves as the fiscal agent for the CVC-OEI.

The CVC-OEI'S primary focus is to increase the number of transfer degrees awarded by the state's community colleges and its mission is to provide access to and success in high-quality, online programs and student support services.

Improving Online CTE Pathways grants are aimed at helping community colleges develop online programs that either lead to short-term, industry-valued credentials, or enable a student in a career pathway developed by the new California online community college – formally known as Calbright College – to continue his or her education in a career pathway offered by a traditional community college.

One-third of students in the California Community Colleges system now take at least one class online.

[COLLEGE BOILERPLATE]

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