

Career & Technical Student Organization Skills Competitions Pilot Discussion Paper

Background

The Carl D. Perkins Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act of 2018 ([Perkins V](#)) defines a career and technical student organization (CTSO) as “an organization for individuals enrolled in a career and technical education program that engages in career and technical education activities as an integral part of the instructional program.” CTSOs may have state units, known as state affiliates, that provide career and technical education (CTE) at a local level. Perkins V recognizes CTSOs as an integral component of CTE infrastructure, providing state and local funding support, especially regarding increasing student participation.

In December 2025, the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) issued a report, [Career and Technical Student Organizations and Skills Competitions: An Opportunity for Work Based Learning in Texas](#), that explored the use of CTSOs and skills competitions to expand work-based learning (WBL) opportunities. The report focused on two nationally-recognized CTSOs operating through state affiliates in Texas.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) currently provides information for the public on 13 [CTSO state affiliates](#). TEA’s [CTSO Oversight Policy](#) states that TEA CTE staff provide oversight of CTSO state affiliates’ use of Perkins V grant funds, but “the responsibility for CTE instructional programs and related activities, including CTSOs, rests with state and local education agencies.”

TEA’s 2025–2026 CTSO Grant [Program Guidelines](#) identify the allowable uses of Perkins V funding for CTSOs, which include:

- Direct costs, such as payroll, contracted services, and employee travel costs;
- Conference hosting or sponsoring;
- Student travel costs for conferences;
- Non-employee conference travel costs; and
- Travel costs for officials, including superintendents, CTSO board members, or executive directors.

Under these grants, CTSOs may host or sponsor conferences, including those that promote WBL or support the integration of CTE skills and CTSO activities. Perkins V funds must be used to supplement, not supplant any activities previously conducted with state or local funds for such purposes.

Issue

Funding for skills competitions and other activities by CTSOs is provided through Perkins V grants administered by TEA. While these grants may include some limited funds for student travel to competitions, many students and their teachers must raise local funds in order to participate in statewide and national events. Additionally, existing grant exclude individual membership fees from allowable funds. CTSOs may require membership fees, uniforms, tools, and other materials for a school’s participation in skills competitions. Some school districts may have available state or local funds to cover the additional costs, while others may rely on parents or community donations. In rural districts, this may be a significant barrier to school

1 participation in these valuable WBL events, putting rural students at a disadvantage to those in
2 more urban areas of the state.

3 A school may be able to establish a local chapter of a CTSO with as little as \$250 in membership
4 fees for the chapter's students. Additionally, competitions may require professional attire or
5 materials required for competitions to be purchased for participation.

6
7 Counties with less than 200,000 and municipalities with a population under 25,000 as may be
8 classified as "rural." 90 percent of Texas cities and 229 counties meet the definition of rural. That
9 means that 23 percent of the population (about 7 million people) live in rural Texas.

10
11 A grant program, funded through Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds or
12 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act statewide funds, could provide an opportunity for
13 students in rural communities to develop and showcase their skills alongside schools from urban
14 areas.

15
16 While rural capacity-building is critical, ISDs across the state often struggle with the direct
17 student fees required to attend CTSO-sponsored events. Because existing Perkins V grants do not
18 cover these individual student attendance fees, a secondary funding mechanism leveraging the
19 centralized networks of the CTSOs themselves could distribute targeted financial relief to ISDs
20 in the form of scholarships, ensuring cost is not a barrier to student participation in skills
21 competitions.

22 **Recommendation**

23 Staff recommends the Commission use \$250,000 in statewide funds to support skills
24 competitions for rural areas in Texas, by implementing one of the following models:

25 Rural Skills Competition Support Grant

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27 A rural skills competition support grant for Texas school districts in counties with less than
28 200,000 residents and within municipalities of less than 25,000 residents. Staff would apportion
29 available funds to the 28 Workforce Development Boards (Boards) based on the number of rural
30 counties they represent. Each rural school district may submit applications to the Board for up to
31 \$5,000 to cover:

- 32 • student membership fees in Texas affiliate CTSOs; and
- 33 • other reasonable fees (including uniforms and materials required for conferences,
34 including skills competitions) not otherwise available through other federal, state, or local
35 funds.

36 CTSO Conference Scholarships

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38 Under an application process developed by agency staff, individual CTSO state affiliates may
39 apply directly to TWC for skills competition scholarship grants in amounts from \$5,000 to
40 \$25,000. Approved CTSOs will use these funds to provide scholarship packages directly to rural
41 ISDs. These scholarships can only be used to fund student fees relating to attendance in CTSO-
42 sponsored skills competitions, which may include national skills competition travel fees for
43 students and teachers, if such funds are not available through TEA CTSO grants.