2026 – 2027
Partnership Funding Opportunity

Career Technical Education Foundation
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CTESonomaCounty.org/Grants

Introduction

CTE Foundation's Partnership Funding Opportunity (PFO) is a grant program that allows schools and districts to use awarded funds to experiment with new and innovative education strategies that provide authentic learning opportunities and help students explore and prepare for meaningful careers in Sonoma County.

The following information is designed to provide applicants with a clear understanding of the Partnership Funding Opportunity priorities, structure, and timeline, to ensure a simple and transparent process.

Our "Trust-Based Philanthropy" Approach

CTE Foundation has adopted a trust-based philanthropy model for funding local schools. This simplified approach focuses on building and strengthening relationships with our school partners that is rooted in open, honest, and transparent communication, trust, and mutual accountability. Our aim is to make the application for funds and, if awarded, the reporting process simpler and more accessible to all schools and districts across Sonoma County.

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Belonging and Antiracism

CTE Foundation is grounded in our vision that all students have rewarding careers that strengthen their lives, our community, and the economy. We believe this is only realized by ensuring equitable access to education and career pathways regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or ability.

We acknowledge the difficult truth underlying the systemic racism that contributes to inequities impacting a young person's ability to realize their full potential.

We invite and embrace the many identities of the communities we serve regardless of race or ethnicity, language spoken, family makeup, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status, economic status, educational attainment, neighborhood in which one lives, or any other defining characteristic. Therefore, we pledge to work to dismantle racism in our own organization through our hiring, promotion, and retention practices; our board governance, representation, and policies; and in our community through our grant-making, program development, student and teacher engagement, and community partnerships.

Eligibility to Receive Funding

CTE Foundation provides funding only to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) serving Sonoma County students in grades 6–12, including public schools, districts, and private or charter schools serving student populations considered high-risk, underserved, or under-resourced.

Youth-serving nonprofits interested in requesting funds must partner with a local school or district. In these cases, the LEA must serve as the official applicant and – if awarded – all grant funds will be issued to the school or district. The school or district may then distribute funds to the partnering nonprofit according to the structure outlined in the proposal.

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Funding Priorities for 2026–2027

CTE Foundation supports education programs and initiatives that are designed to innovate and enhance the education–to–career experience for Sonoma County students so that they have equitable opportunities to succeed. Our goal is not to replicate existing funding opportunities but to enhance successful programs, support fledgling programs, or provide bridge funding that supports innovation or helps meet a school's strategic vision around future readiness.

Just like the personalities and interests of our local students, their needs and challenges can be varied and wide-ranging. This means there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing student need. CTE Foundation's trust-based philanthropy approach acknowledges that those serving students at the site or district level are most knowledgeable of their needs and how funds could meet their needs. Our approach is also about ensuring a simplified and flexible application and funding process, and we are willing to explore supporting a wide range of ideas and proposals.

Because our funds are limited, proposals that align with the priorities below will increase the likelihood that a proposal is selected to receive funding.

- **Internships**
  Efforts that expand access to high-quality internships for high school students – particularly through the Path to Purpose Youth Internship Program. This may include staff time and coordination, systems-building, student readiness supports, or the creation of courses or programs such as Work Experience Education (WEE) that prepare students for career-connected learning and allow them to participate in off-campus work experience or internships.

- **Pathways / Integrated Pathways**
  Projects that build, strengthen, or integrate CTE pathways, including course sequencing, collaborative structures across schools, and alignment between middle school, high school, and postsecondary education. This includes the development of integrated pathways, which intentionally blend CTE courses with A–G academic coursework and structured work-based learning to create a cohesive, college- and career-preparatory program. These efforts may also include improving connections between academic courses and CTE pathways.

- **Equipment & Consumables**
  Requests for equipment or consumable materials that are necessary for high-quality, hands-on learning experiences aligned with pathway instruction. Examples include lab supplies, industry-aligned tools, technology, culinary consumables, or materials for engineering, health, agriculture, or other CTE programs.

- **Industry-Recognized Certificate Opportunities in High School**
  Programs that offer students opportunities to earn industry-valued credentials while still in high school. Examples include OSHA-10, Adobe or Autodesk certifications, ServSafe, CPR/First Aid, Google or IT certifications, or sector-specific credentials aligned with Sonoma County industries.

- **Teacher Supports and CTE Credentialing**
  Professional development, CTE credentialing support, externships, or training that increase teacher capacity to deliver high-quality, career-connected learning. This may include support for new CTE teachers, collaborative learning communities, or educator-industry externships.

- **On-Campus Mentorship for Students**
  Structured mentorship programs – provided by teachers, counselors, staff, industry volunteers, or postsecondary partners – that help students explore careers, set goals, and navigate pathways to graduation and beyond. Mentorship

may include career advising, support with applications, project-based guidance, or small group coaching.

Alignment with Workforce Needs and Student Interests

All proposals should clearly demonstrate how the project aligns with both local economic and workforce needs, and student needs and interests. Applicants are encouraged to reference data sources such as Sonoma County Economic Development Collaborative (EDC) workforce reports, regional labor market information, YouthTruth student perception data, or other collected data. Proposals that synthesize student voice with real workforce demand will be stronger and more competitive.

How We Evaluate & Partner

CTE Foundation uses a Program Committee made up of community members representing industry, nonprofits, educators, students, and parents. This diverse group has helped build our Partnership Funding Opportunity process and structure and plays an integral role in the funding selection process.

Applications submitted to CTE Foundation within the open application period will be evaluated in Phase 1 using the rubric included in this packet. Those selected for the Phase 2 of the application process will be invited to meet for a 30-45-minute virtual conversation to discuss the proposal. This is an opportunity for brainstorming, questions, and relationship-building. The content of this discussion is also evaluated using the same rubric.

To ensure full transparency, CTE Foundation is sharing the application questions and the rubric that will be used to evaluate all proposals.

Application Questions

Applicants will be asked to respond to the following prompts in the online application:

Student Need: Describe the needs or challenges your students are facing that will be addressed through this project or program. Please center student needs in your statement and reference data where possible (for example, YouthTruth survey results, school or district data, or local labor market information).

Target Population: Describe the target population of this proposal. If applicable, break down the population by gender, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, language, ability, and/or other identities, and explain how this project will equitably support the target population.

Proposed Solution: What are you proposing that addresses the need identified above? Clearly describe your program or project, including key activities, partners, and timeline.

Estimated Number of Students Impacted: Provide an estimate of the number of students that will be directly impacted by this proposal and, if applicable, indirectly impacted.

Aligned with Larger Strategy: Is this solution in alignment with a larger or longer-term school or district strategy? Will this solution help to expand or enhance a CTE pathway within a school or district? Can this funding be leveraged to obtain additional funding from other funders?

Additional Information: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about your proposed project? You may want to address how you will measure success, how you will engage industry and community partners, and what other funding you anticipate for this project.

Upload or Link Additional Documents: Upload or link to any additional information relevant to this proposal, including budgets, expense breakdowns, videos, or materials that help make your case.

Requested Grant Amount: Provide the total amount of funding you are requesting from CTE Foundation through this Partnership Funding Opportunity.

Evaluation Rubric

Student Need & Impact	Description	Total Points Possible
Stated need	Proposal identifies a significant need or challenge and substantiates it using data or stakeholder feedback, such as YouthTruth surveys, focus groups, or regional labor market data.	5
Proposed solution	The proposed solution clearly addresses the stated need and is likely to positively impact the target population as intended.	5

Student impact	The proposal has the potential to serve a large student population and/or provide high-quality, in-depth support to a particular target student group.	5
Career-connected learning & relevancy	The proposal provides high-quality career-connected learning (such as internships, integrated academic-CTE experiences, industry-recognized credentials, or on-campus mentorship) and outlines plans to engage industry and community partners to ensure alignment with real local workforce opportunities.	5
Strategic Approach	**Description**	**Total Points Possible**
CTE pathway enhancement	The proposal strategically invests in building, enhancing, or integrating CTE pathways – potentially including equipment, consumables, mentorship structures, certifications, or alignment across middle, secondary, and postsecondary systems. The proposal considers scalability, sustainability, or long-term pathway impact.	5
Connected to larger strategy	The proposal is part of a larger or longer-term school or district strategy designed to improve the student experience (for example, strengthening CTE pathways, developing integrated coursework, improving work-based learning systems, offering early college credit, or leveraging CTE Foundation funding to obtain additional resources). This funding is critical to the success of that broader strategy.	5
Equity	**Description**	**Total Points Possible**
Diversity & inclusion	The requester demonstrates experience and provides a plan to serve a diverse student/educator population among gender, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, language, disability and/or other identities in a thoughtful and equitable manner.	5
Equity	The proposal is aimed at lifting and supporting students who are high-risk, underserved, under-resourced or furthest from opportunity and offers tailored support to students with the highest needs.	5
Engagement and feedback of those served	The requestor has, or demonstrates a plan to, actively engage and obtain feedback from a diverse student or educator population and use that feedback for continuous improvement.	5

Past CTE Foundation Funding	Description	Total Points Possible
Past CTE Foundation funding	To promote equitable access to resources, CTE Foundation begins with a 5-point scale based on how much funding a school has previously received from CTE Foundation, giving higher initial scores to those that are new to our grantmaking or have received minimal support. The CTE Foundation Program Committee then provides input, considering how past funds were used, whether the school followed through and demonstrated impact, and any other funding the school or district is receiving and how it aligns with the current request. This holistic approach balances historical investment with demonstrated outcomes and future potential.	5

Application and Funding Timeline

Phase	Dates and Description
Application Phase 1	**January 12, 2026 – February 24, 2026** Accepting applications from schools and districts. **March 2026** The CTE Foundation Program Committee reviews all applications and selects which proposals advance to Phase 2.
Application Phase 2	**March – April 2026** The CTE Foundation Program Committee holds virtual meetings with each Phase 2 applicant to further assess and refine their proposal.
Final Funding Decisions	**June 2026** CTE Foundation Board reviews Program Committee funding recommendations and makes final funding decisions. Notices to LEAs are sent soon after.
Funding Distribution	**July 2026** Checks issued to schools and districts for implementation during the 2026–2027 school year.

Available Funding

Total Available Funding: To Be Determined

Recommended Funding Request Amount: $1,500–$25,000*

Average Grant Amount from Previous Two Grant Cycles: $11,184

*Recommended funding request amount is based on past funding provided by CTE Foundation but is not constrained to this range. Requests below $1,500 or exceeding $25,000 will still be considered.

Apply for Funding

To Apply, visit www.CTESonomaCounty.org/grants

Teachers are encouraged to apply, but all submissions must have site and district leadership approval.

All funding should support programs and initiatives implemented during the 2026–2027 school year.

Contact

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