



RENEWING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN COLORADO

A summary of the Colorado State Plan
for Implementation of the Carl D. Perkins
Career and Technical Education Act of 2006



Prepared by the Colorado Community College System

JANUARY 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colorado is placing increased emphasis on the development and continuous improvement of a seamless system of education that ensures ease in student transition from one educational system to another and from one level of instruction to another. In particular, the Governor has set a goal to decrease the high school dropout rate by fifty percent and double the number of degrees and certificates earned in the next ten years.

Career and Technical Education (CTE), offered at the secondary and postsecondary levels, is an important strategy to helping Colorado accomplish these objectives.

This paper summarizes the key activities underway in Colorado to implement the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, a source of over \$17 million in federal funds for CTE in Colorado.

The State Plan for implementation of the Perkins Act focused on the following issues:

- *Implementing Career and Technical Education Plans of Study;*
- *Strengthening Accountability for Results;*
- *Moving To a Project-Based Focus for Local Planning and Implementation;*
- *Assessing Career and Technical Skills;*
- *Integrating Academic and CTE Skills and Knowledge;*
- *Expanding Colorado's Corps of Effective CTE Teachers*
- *Ensuring Effective Instruction and Strategies for Special Populations; and*
- *Connecting CTE to Employers and Workforce Priorities.*

The implementation of the Perkins Act by Colorado's CTE teachers, faculty members and administrators is a key element to building a skilled and competitive workforce in Colorado. CCCS is committed to providing the leadership, support and professional development to help CTE educators succeed in this endeavor.

INTRODUCTION

Colorado is emphasizing the development and continuous improvement of a seamless system of education to help students make successful transitions from one educational system to another and from one level of instruction to another. In particular, Colorado's Governor Bill Ritter set a goal to decrease the high school dropout rate by fifty percent and double the number of degrees and certificates earned in the next ten years.

Career and Technical Education (CTE), offered at the secondary and postsecondary levels, is an important strategy to helping Colorado accomplish these objectives.

As explained in "Bridges to Opportunity through Career Pathways,"¹ an overview document released in fall of 2007 that explains the vision for CTE in Colorado, "***CTE has begun to create the seamless transitions from high school to college to career for students who complete a concentration of CTE courses, in addition to their required academic credits.***" The "Bridges" document is meant to lay out the broad strategy for connecting CTE with key education and workforce development goals for the State of Colorado. The "Bridges" document is aimed at a broad audience of educational, community and political leadership.

This paper summarizes and organizes into a more digestible format the detailed goals and strategies that are found in Colorado's State Plan for the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which it submits to the U.S. Department of Education to receive and distribute the State's allocation of federal dollars for CTE. The full state plan can be found at the Colorado State Plan website. The primary audiences for this document are the educational administrators and CTE teachers and faculty who are directly responsible for implementing and improving CTE on an ongoing basis.

BACKGROUND: THE PERKINS ACT OF 2006

The newest version of federal funding and requirements for career and technical education is called the "Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006," Public Law 109-270. Some of the new provisions of this law began taking effect in fall of 2007, and other reforms take effect beginning in summer and fall of 2008. In particular, the Perkins Act requires states to:

- *Increase opportunities for individuals to keep America competitive;*
- *Develop challenging academic and technical standards and related, challenging integrated (academic and CTE) instruction;*
- *Prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, or high-demand occupations in current or emerging professions;*
- *Promote partnerships (education, workforce boards, business and industry, etc.);*

¹ This document and other resources are available through the Colorado State CTE Plan website (www.ColoradoStatePlan.com).

- *Provide technical assistance and professional development to teachers/instructors and administrators; and*
- *Increase state and local accountability.*

BACKGROUND: CTE FUNDING AND OVERSIGHT IN COLORADO

National funding for the Perkins Act is a little over \$1.1 billion. As a comparatively small state, Colorado’s allocation of the Perkins Act (formula) funds in fiscal 2007 was about \$15.86 million; this amount is allocated between high school programs and postsecondary programs. The state receives another \$1.39 million in federal Tech Prep funding, which is now folded into the general CTE funding. Approximately \$21 million of state funding is allocated by the Colorado State Legislature through the Colorado Vocational Act (CVA) to support CTE programs offered by Colorado school districts.

The Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education (SBCCOE) oversees all Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs for the State of Colorado. Since its creation in 1967, the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) has provided leadership in the overall governance of program quality and teacher effectiveness for Colorado’s community colleges. The Board approves programs and disburses funding to CTE programs at the secondary and postsecondary level.

BACKGROUND: CAREER CLUSTERS AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Colorado has adopted the Career Clusters/Career Pathways model as a new organizational tool that can reflect all jobs in the U.S. economy, organized into 16 Career Clusters. This model is far more inclusive and flexible than the traditional “vocational” education offerings that were predominant during the second half of the 20th century.

The Career Clusters/Career Pathways model was developed by the U.S. Department of Education and validated by a collaborative approach among state departments of education in 2002. Development teams identified knowledge and skill statements for each of the 16 Career Clusters, as well as 81 Career Pathways that lead, through education and training, into employment sectors. This system is fully cross-walked with occupational descriptions and tools developed by the U.S. Department of Labor.

The Career Clusters/Pathways model offers a career exploration framework that is workable for middle school and high school students as well as for adult career-changers. It does not require a student to make a career choice, but gives the opportunity for exploration and thought about the links between secondary education, postsecondary education and career options.

In Colorado, the 17 Career Clusters are organized within six CTE industry sectors:

- Agricultural and Natural Resources;
- STEM, Arts, Design and Information Technology;
- Skilled Trades and Technical Sciences;
- Health Sciences and Public Safety;
- Hospitality, Human Services and Education; and

- Business and Public Administration.

IMPLEMENTING THE STATE CTE PLAN FOR 2008-2012

In April 2007, Colorado submitted a one-year Transition Plan for the first year of the Perkins Act. The Transition Plan covered Program Year 2007-08 or July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008. In 2008, the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education will submit its Multi-year Colorado State Plan for Career and Technical Education covering the period of Program Years 2008-09 through 2012-13.

To ensure broad input to the State Plan, the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) convened working groups focused around a number of key issues. Their work is reflected in the State Plan and in the organization of this summary document. The key issues presented are as follows:

- *Implementing Career and Technical Education Plans of Study;*
- *Strengthening Accountability for Results;*
- *Adopting a Project-Based Focus;*
- *Assessing Career and Technical Skills;*
- *Integrating Academic and CTE Skills and Knowledge;*
- *Building a Corps of Effective CTE Teachers;*
- *Ensuring Effective Instruction and Strategies for Special Populations; and*
- *Connecting CTE to Employers and Workforce Priorities.*

For each strategy in this document, we cite the federal law and its intent followed by the Colorado State Plan implementation. Please consult the Colorado State Plan website for local and national examples of promising practices as these strategies are implemented.

STRATEGY 1: IMPLEMENTING CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION PLANS OF STUDY

The Perkins Act:

Under Perkins 2006, states have the responsibility to create and/or recognize a series of CTE offerings called “CTE Programs of Study.” These Programs of Study will be adopted by local recipients at high schools, regional CTE schools, and community and technical colleges. Each Program of Study is meant to be a cohesive set of academic courses paired with CTE courses, with mechanisms that connect the high school program to postsecondary programs. Ideally, Programs of Study should have closely aligned content that doesn’t duplicate and allows qualified students to earn college credits while still enrolled in high school. The CTE Program of Study is also designed to culminate with a recognized credential or degree at the community or technical college level, and can also be designed to lead to a baccalaureate degree.

The Colorado Plan:

In carrying out this section of the Perkins Act, Colorado uses the term “Plans of Study” rather than Programs of Study in order to avoid confusion with the term “program” which is already in use. During the transition period, Colorado developed a framework and process for secondary and postsecondary CTE providers to identify and implement Plans of Study. The Colorado CTE Plans of Study incorporate secondary education and postsecondary education elements, include coherent and rigorous content (both academic and technical), and offer a non-duplicative progression of courses that align secondary education with postsecondary education. The Plans of Study will provide options for students (and their parents as appropriate) when planning for postsecondary education and related career options.

Beginning with the program year 2007-2008, each school district, technical college and community college is beginning a planning process for implementation of a minimum of one approved Plan of Study. CCCS will provide model Plans of Study templates based on the Career Clusters and Career Pathways framework. These model Plans of Study will be designed with state-level input from business and industry and education content experts, but will also allow for appropriate local adaptation and customization. The locally developed Plans of Study, based on the new model templates, will be an integral part of the state-level CTE program approval and renewal process which takes place every five years. As an established program applies for renewal, part of the review process will include a documented Plan of Study within the program.

To ensure that students, their parents and families, and school personnel understand the Career Clusters and Career Pathways, CCCS is also implementing an awareness building campaign.

CCCS staff will focus on building relationships with Colorado counseling associations and professional organizations such as the Colorado School Counselors Association (CSCA), the Colorado Council on High School/College Relations (CCHS/CR), and other appropriate groups including students, parents, community and business leaders. CCCS will also work in partnership with College In Colorado (www.collegeincolorado.org), a student services website representing the colleges and universities of Colorado.

STRATEGY 2: STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

The Perkins Act:

Under Perkins 2006, there is an accountability system in which States and Local Recipients (school districts, technical colleges, community colleges and consortia) are held accountable for the achievement of students in a series of performance indicators. The performance indicators fall into three categories: skill attainment, retention and completion, and transitions. High school programs must measure academic achievement and high school graduation; technical (career-related) skill attainment; and transitions to college, employment or the military. Postsecondary indicators include technical skill attainment; program retention and completion; and transitions to further postsecondary education, the military and employment. Programs at both levels are also accountable for “non-traditional” participation, meaning the percentage of students that participate in a CTE program for which their gender is significantly underrepresented.

Performance targets are established for each of the indicators at the state level, and then also by each Local Recipient, based on the state performance target. If the State or Local Recipient does not meet its performance target for any one of the indicators, it must create a plan of action to improve performance (Local Improvement Plan) on that indicator. In concert with the state or local improvement plan, the federal or state government must provide technical assistance to help improve performance. Under certain circumstances, if a State or Local Recipient fails to make necessary improvement against the indicators, the federal government and state government is authorized (but not required) to implement various levels of sanctions.

The Colorado Plan:

CCCS will build upon its current single statewide CTE accountability system (VE-135) in order to meet the data reporting requirements of both Perkins 2006 and the Colorado Vocational Act (CVA). The CTE Colorado State Plan lists the valid and reliable measurement definitions and approaches CCCS will use to evaluate performance on the core indicators of performance for the Multi-year Plan. The measure for academic achievement utilizes the Colorado Student Achievement Program (CSAP) assessment (managed by the Colorado Department of Education) and is used in compliance with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act).

Based on benchmark data and the state performance levels established for each indicator, CCCS will establish local performance targets on the indicators for each school district and college. In accordance with the Perkins Act, CCCS will also provide each eligible recipient the opportunity to reach an agreement on the local performance target if it does not accept the State performance target. Colorado will continue to prepare and disseminate on an annual basis the Colorado Performance Metrics disaggregated by the same special populations as is required on the U.S. Department of Education in the Consolidated Annual Report (CAR). Perkins recipients are required to create improvement strategies in their local plans if they miss their annual performance targets. Since Colorado has chosen to roll Tech Prep funds into the Title I, community college and school districts will no longer be required to track Tech Prep students in the CTE data collection system.

STRATEGY 3: ADOPTING A PROJECT-BASED FOCUS

The Perkins Act:

Requirements for local activities under the Perkins Act place an emphasis on:

- **Meeting performance targets** (“how the career and technical education activities will be carried out with respect to meeting State and local adjusted levels of performance established under section 113;”) and
- **Improving Programs** (“Each eligible recipient that receives funds under this part shall use such funds to improve career and technical education programs.”)

The 12 local plan elements (Section 134 of the Perkins Act) and the nine required uses of funds (Section 135) should all be focused on the goal of helping improve programs and meet the performance targets established for the programs.

The Colorado Plan:

Under the new State plan, CCCS requires each Perkins Local Recipient (community college, technical college, school district or consortium) to complete an annual Local Plan for use of Perkins funds. During the Transition Year, CCCS staff is redesigning the Local Plan utilizing input from a field council, interviews with Local Recipients and a field survey. The new Local Plan form includes a focus on “projects” for the use of local funds. In each year’s application for funds, the Local Recipient proposes one or more projects – time-limited activities lasting one to three years – that are aligned with the sub-recipient’s strategic plan, the Colorado CTE Strategic plan, and the requirements of Perkins 2006, particularly continuous improvement of all the Perkins Accountability Indicators.

The local applications must fully address the required contents of the Local Plan as specified in Section 134 (b) of the Act; CCCS will require each Local Recipient to specifically address how it will continuously improve upon each Perkins performance metric (Colorado’s term for the Perkins accountability indicators). If a Local Recipient is unable to meet or exceed its performance metrics, the sub-recipient will complete a local improvement plan for those performance metrics.

The Local Plan will be web-based to ease submission of the plan. CCCS plans to provide ongoing training in subsequent years to fully develop the quality of Local Plan applications. CCCS will coordinate “project planning for strategic results” training within the CCCS technical assistance model.

The planning, development, implementation and evaluation of a CTE program are handled at the local level. CCCS encourages the active involvement of parents, academic and CTE teachers, administrators, faculty, career guidance and academic counselors, local business (including small business), and labor organizations in the planning, development, and implementation of CTE programs. The Local Advisory Committee is typically the forum through which the constituencies named above are included in local CTE program planning, development, implementation and evaluation.

STRATEGY 4: ASSESSING CAREER AND TECHNICAL SKILLS

The Perkins Act:

The law (section 113(b)(A)(ii)) says each state must develop an indicator relating to “student attainment of career and technical skill proficiencies, including student achievement on technical assessments that are aligned with industry-recognized standards, if available and appropriate.” This will require a more consistent approach to measuring technical skill attainment, using assessment instruments that are valid and reliable, and that are based upon industry-recognized standards, where they are available. States are not required to use industry-based credentials for every program, nor are they required to use exactly the same measurement approach for all their programs. But, whatever assessments approaches are used should be based on standards (when such standards are available) and must meet criteria for validity and reliability. This means that the assessment approaches must accurately and consistently measure the attainment of technical skills across programs in the state.

The Colorado Plan:

CCCS believes that, when fully developed, an upgraded technical skills assessment system will allow greater comparability and accountability for program improvement. However, Colorado is hesitant about the capacity of existing data on technical skill attainment to accurately reflect CTE program quality. There are significant limitations regarding the availability of affordable and appropriate assessments and whether data derived from many industry-based assessments can be accessed and inputted in the CTE accountability system.

CCCS believes that a prudent, efficient, and thoughtful approach to secondary CTE student assessment will involve several phases.

- Staff research, training and development about content, instruction and assessment industry alignment;
- Capacity building with CTE teachers about content, instruction and assessment industry alignment;
- Piloting state- or teacher-developed assessments;
- Analysis of piloted assessments;
- Readjustments of assessment strategies based on pilot results; and
- Implementation of content, instruction and assessments that are aligned with industry standards.

For postsecondary assessments, CCCS staff and postsecondary field partners will continue to investigate how and when test results might be provided to the State directly from industry-assessment providers or how and when test results might be provided by postsecondary faculty. Postsecondary CTE programs are already required to meet valid and reliable assessment standards through regional accreditation systems. Given the relatively strong position of postsecondary CTE assessments, the bulk of CCCS resources will focus on development of secondary CTE student attainment measurement systems.

STRATEGY 5: INTEGRATING ACADEMIC AND CTE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

The Perkins Act:

The Perkins Act of 2006 places a high importance on integration of academic and Career Technical Education content. One of the key purposes of the Perkins Act is to promote the development of services and activities that “integrate rigorous and challenging academic and career and technical instruction.” There is a requirement on local schools, as they create plans for their Perkins funds, to demonstrate how they will “improve the academic and technical skills of students...through the integration of coherent and rigorous content aligned with challenging academic standards and relevant career and technical education programs...”

The Colorado Plan:

At the secondary level, CCCS supports and advocates for the improvement and development of new CTE courses that are aligned with rigorous challenging academic content standards and student academic achievement standards adopted by CDE in compliance with NCLB. One method to achieve this is to find academic content that is inherently present within a CTE course and teach those skills through applied lessons. An excellent example of this is the well-known Math-in-CTE research project conducted by the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education. Another approach is full integration of academic course content and CTE content in a way that both academic credit and CTE elective credits can be awarded.

A first step toward academic integration is creating a cross-walk of academic standards that are resident in a CTE curriculum. CCCS is supporting the creation of a cross-walk of academic standards that are resident in a CTE curriculum through the continued expansion of a Colorado interactive CTE standards website (www.coloradocte.com). This on-line tool allows CTE teachers to build courses based on industry defined standards. CCCS is working to complete the CTE standards website that includes information on pathways, standards, and courses in each of six current CTE concentrations: Agricultural and Natural Resources; Business and Public Administration; Hospitality, Human Services and Education & Training; Health Sciences and Public Safety; STEM, Arts, Design and Information Technology; and Skilled Trades and Technical Sciences.

Once this is complete for all programs, the next steps include:

- prioritize which academic standards should be taught;
- create clear processes for how to integrate academic content in CTE courses;
- provide professional development opportunities on these processes; and
- share model lesson plans for academic integration.

Inherent in this approach is a strong relationship between CCCS and the Colorado Department of Education, as the foundation of statewide development of rigorous and challenging courses aligned with academic content standards. CCCS is also researching and investigating promising practices that currently exist in academic integration and showcase these promising practices on the CCCS website and through professional development opportunities.

STRATEGY 6: EXPANDING COLORADO'S CORPS OF EFFECTIVE CTE TEACHERS

The Perkins Act:

The Perkins Act calls on states to offer “comprehensive professional development for career and technical teachers, faculty, administrators, and career guidance and academic counselors.” The new law says that State Leadership Funds must be used for professional development programs that are “high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher’s performance in the classroom, and are not 1-day or short-term workshops or conferences.” This limitation **does not limit the use of local funds for professional development**, but is a significant change in the use of state leadership funds. Another element of the state plan (Sec. 122 (c)(3)) indicates the state must have a plan for improving “the recruitment and retention of career and technical education teachers, faculty, and career guidance and academic counselors,” as well as for improving “the transition to teaching from business and industry.”

The Colorado Plan:

Colorado understands the new emphasis on professional development that is “high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused” and will develop, through a consultative process, new approaches for how professional development is offered within Career and Technical Education. In early Fiscal Year 2008-09, a statewide working group of secondary and postsecondary master-teachers and administrators will be convened to develop a model for professional growth, built around the knowledge and skills every CTE teacher and faculty should possess. The goal of the group would be to create a five-year plan for ongoing professional development articulating the theme for each of the five years thus ensuring an integrated, thoughtful approach to professional development. While short-duration training events may still have an appropriate place in a teacher’s professional growth, the development of a Personal Professional Growth Plan for each teacher and faculty member would demonstrate how short-duration training fits into a plan of ongoing professional growth.

CCCS will also encourage the development of “Communities of Practice” made up of interested teachers/faculty, administrators and counselors, to focus activity and learning around a particular challenge or promising practice.

Building the future CTE teaching force may be one of the biggest challenges facing Colorado and its school districts and colleges. CCCS will investigate potential options that could include restructuring of teacher preparation programs, and enhancing the role of community colleges in preparing CTE teachers and providing professional development for professionals coming into teaching from business and industry.

CCCS will facilitate an ongoing dialogue among the Governor, state and local leaders and business and industry to help develop and sustain a corps of effective CTE teachers and faculty for Colorado.

STRATEGY 7: ENSURING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

The Perkins Act:

Perkins 2006 identifies the following students as “special populations”:

- individuals with disabilities;
- individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including foster children;
- individuals preparing for non-traditional fields, (*for their gender*);
- single parents, including single pregnant women;
- displaced homemaker; and
- individuals with limited English proficiency.

In its plan, each state must describe the program strategies for special populations, including a description of how it will ensure that students receive access to CTE activities, will not be discriminated against, and will be provided with programs that are designed to help meet or exceed the State and local performance targets on the performance indicators.

The Colorado Plan:

CCCS will build on a growing statewide commitment to special populations. In the professional activities provided by CCCS, teachers will be actively engaged in Communities of Practice which focus on a variety of educational strategies including support strategies for special populations. Once implemented and evaluated, these curriculum and professional development strategies will be available for all CTE teachers statewide.

Students who meet the criteria for special populations will receive more focused planning based upon the students’ needs. For students with disabilities who participate in CTE programs, federal requirements (the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [aka the *No Child Left Behind Act*], the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act) already require that students receive the full range of supplemental services to assist them educationally and to support their successful transition to employment after completing their public education. In Colorado, at the local level, each student with a disability has an Individual Education Program (IEP) developed by the IEP team. The IEP addresses the students' individual CTE needs and outlines a plan for transitioning the student to work or further training after completion of high school.

CCCS will continue to work with local recipients to ensure that services are equally maintained for special populations. All Colorado secondary and postsecondary institutions have nondiscrimination policies in place and have published procedures for filing complaints. As part of the Local Plan process, CCCS requires local recipients to indicate the specific strategies they will provide to insure equal access to special populations. And for the purpose of program approval and renewal, CTE programs in Colorado are required to provide a number of assurances regarding accessibility of the students in the special populations to the school’s programs.

STRATEGY 8: CONNECTING CTE TO EMPLOYERS AND WORKFORCE PRIORITIES

The Perkins Act:

A newly stated purpose of the Perkins Act is *“providing individuals with opportunities throughout their lifetimes to develop, in conjunction with other education and training programs, the knowledge and skills needed to keep the United States competitive.”*

In this purpose, Congress drew a careful balance helping individuals grow and advance in their areas of interest and aptitudes, but also making sure that available programs are focused on those that help keep the United States competitive.

Also, throughout the Act, there are multiple references to preparing students for jobs that are “high skill, high-wage, or high-demand” in “current or emerging occupational areas.”

The Colorado Plan:

A number of strategies are being implemented to continuously strengthen the connection between CTE and employers, with a focus on occupations that are high-skill , high-wage , or high-demand.

CCCS has organized “Discipline Teams” to review curriculum and program content in each of the industry sectors and Career Clusters. These discipline teams will interact with other state-level Career Sector advisory councils such as Colorado Nursing Associations, and the American Welding Society to ensure that curriculum is valid and applies to the specific field.

CCCS is exploring viable workforce data system options. The use of accurate data will strengthen the existing program approval standard of implementing programs that meet workforce demands. CCCS is developing and strengthening state-level business and industry focus groups and Plans of Study Advisory Councils to provide advice about emerging career areas. For local program approval, CCCS mandates local business and industry advisory committee review of programs to help assure modernization of technology and curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The Colorado Community College System believes that CTE efforts will help meet the Governor's goals to cut the dropout rate in half and double the number of degrees and certificates awarded to Coloradans. The flexibility of Career Clusters/Pathway model allows Colorado's schools and colleges to work with all students to provide them with the opportunity to find career success.

The implementation of the Perkins Act by Colorado's CTE teachers, faculty members and administrators is a key element to building a skilled and competitive workforce in Colorado. CCCS is committed to providing the leadership, support and professional development to help CTE educators succeed in this endeavor.

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This Colorado State Plan summary document and the complete Colorado State Plan are available at:

www.coloradostateplan.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This summary, as well as the Transition and Multi-Year State Plan, was prepared with the assistance of the Meeder Consulting Group, LLC, a firm that helps empower education leaders with creative and research-based solutions, aligning policy and practice with high expectations. More information can be found at <http://www.MeederConsulting.com>.