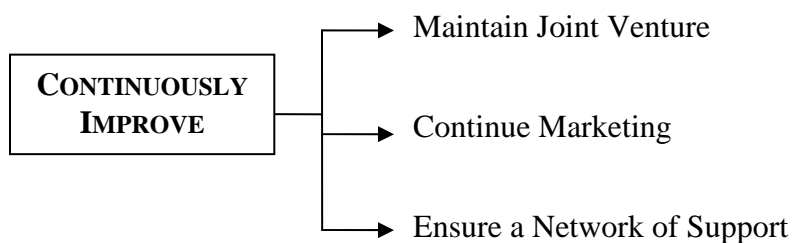
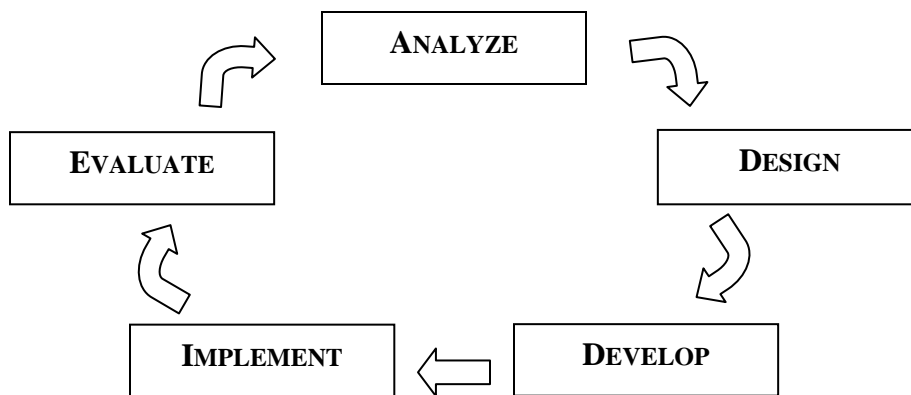


## CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE

Once a new process has been successfully analyzed, designed, developed, implemented and evaluated, attention should be turned to continuous improvement. The ADDIE process is a cycle that must continue to repeat itself. Evaluation raises issues that require analysis. Addressing those issues may require modifications to the design, development, and implementation of the center or its programs. Once changes have been made, they too will need to be evaluated. Continuous improvement is one of the most important steps of any process. If implementation has gone relatively smoothly and initial evaluation has reported positive results, center leaders can be tempted to feel that they have succeeded and rest. However, the energy that started the center must be sustained. Sustaining that initial energy is critical to maintaining the joint venture and the quality of the center's programs. Sustaining that initial energy also allows growth in programs that continue to meet the changing needs of the community. There are many possible pitfalls ahead including personnel turnover among key partners, significant changes in employer needs and labor markets, and lack of funding. Forming or joining a network of other similar centers can be helpful to gain new ideas, compare results, and keep up morale if the effort has been difficult.



## A. MAINTAIN JOINT VENTURE

The joint venture among partners is the glue holding together the center now in place. Each member of the joint venture must stay deeply engaged and carry its share of responsibilities. Strong school district support is vital to keep the facility, funding, charter school status, and faculty. Any loss may not be immediate but can show itself in reduced facility maintenance, reduced funding, increased rules around faculty hiring, and less support from base high school counselors and teachers. The technical college must remain involved to ensure dual enrollment opportunities and appropriate labs and faculty. Relationships with key business and industry leaders must be maintained and fostered to ensure continued opportunities for work-based learning, advisory committee membership, and other kinds of support. Broader relationships with the business community at large and especially with any new employers need to be created and enhanced. Parents and community members must continue to be engaged in the center and feel a part of the process. The partners in the joint venture should be engaged in many of the aspects of continuous improvement, including fundraising, marketing, and networking.

### **Guideline: *REPEAT YOURSELF***

There will always be important stakeholders who do not feel informed about the center and who need to be brought to an understanding of your goals. There will always be newcomers to your community and transitions among center leadership. Whether the newcomer is a superintendent, school board member, employer, teacher, or parent of a child who just transferred to the school district, you will need to be patient and willing to repeat the vision and goals of the center, the types of students that succeed there, its benefits to the community at-large, and so on.

With high-ranking individuals, such as a new superintendent, college president, or member of the board of education, you will want to have a meeting with the newcomer and a few key members of the joint venture to thoroughly explain it and engage their support. To reach new teachers or parents, holding annual orientation-style meetings and tours can cover the information necessary.

- In any forum, be prepared to speak on how it all began as well as what is happening now. You will also want to report on any evaluation results or outcomes. Much support can be gained through sharing statistics on young people with an outstanding work ethic and college credentials. Always provide opportunities or avenues for audience members to get involved.
- In describing the center to newcomers, use students, instructors, and employers. Rich, concrete examples help explain what the center is all about. For instance, this description came from a student at CEC: “In our landscape design class, we had to design Newnan parks and market our ideas to the landscape director for the county. For this you need communications skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to deal with customers.”

**Guideline: LISTEN TO THE EXPERTS**

Leaders at CEC and the sites in Douglas, Walton, and Whitfield Counties provided some specific counsel, based on their experiences, for others seeking to build and maintain such a joint venture.

*“Set a clear focus up front. As you bring in partners, make sure everyone understands.”*

*“Have clear expectations and constant, open communication.”*

*“Make sure everyone is at the table as quickly as you can get them there and make sure they never leave.”*

*“Stay the course; it gets hard sometimes. Stay focused on what the community and students need.”*

*“Build support initially and then focus on maintaining it during rocky times.”*

*“There will be a continual process of bringing new people in and up to speed.”*

*“Use democratic processes. Keep people involved in decision making.”*

*“It takes a while to have an impact. Stay with it long enough to affect change and have something to look at.”*

## **B. CONTINUE MARKETING**

Marketing continues to be an important part of sustaining the center once it is created. Education and outreach are necessary to ensure that student interest in attending the center is maintained. Teachers, counselors, and administrators at the base high school are another group that may need continued education around the center and its goals. Newcomers to your own center staff must also be immediately engaged in this innovative approach. Finally, the community must be consistently updated on the center and its progress.

### **Guideline: *DEVELOP COMMUNICATION MATERIALS***

While much of your local marketing and education efforts will be done through public meetings and word of mouth, developing electronic, video, and print communication materials on the center, designed for particular audiences, is important.

- Make sure that your center has a website. It should provide logistical and contact information for local audiences and advertise what you are doing to the broader world that is looking for educational innovation.
- An attractive printed brochure on your center is useful for ensuring that visitors or those you meet at out-of-county meetings understand what you are doing. Economic development authorities in your county may want to use the brochure as part of recruiting new businesses.
- A video or DVD about the center can serve as an effective recruitment and marketing tool, for students and employer partners. It provides an opportunity for a broader audience to hear from students directly on how the center has impacted their educational lives and their futures.
- Several PowerPoint presentations—that can be adapted as necessary for different audiences—should be at hand. One will be useful for recruiting students. It will have a different tone and message than another to be used with center visitors or for presentations at local business and civic associations and state- or national-level professional conferences.
- Not only are your evaluation results important to have at hand and use in these materials, but it is also worthwhile to keep records of the interest expressed in your center. Maintain a spreadsheet in which you record the number of those expressing interest in the center—the numbers of visitors who tour (and where they came from), inquiry phone calls, invitations to present, and requests for consulting assistance.

### **Guideline: *KEEP LOCAL MEDIA INFORMED***

While local media probably covered the opening of the center in your community, continue to keep local newspaper and television news outlets informed about what happens there. Coverage

of student and center successes, changes, and events in local news is a good way to keep the local community apprised of what is going on.

- Build relationships with local reporters, particularly those who focus on education or economic development.
- Send announcements or press releases on events or accomplishments to local news outlets on a regular basis. Plant stories of successful students, happy employers, and satisfied parents.
- Take time to write an editorial or opinion piece when the center's innovative approaches directly respond to local political or economic changes that are in the news. Send it to local newspapers and others who might publish it—such as educational policy groups or career and technical education associations.

**Guideline: *ATTEND EDUCATION CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS***

You should recognize that both your community's experience in creating such a center and the model of educational reform that the operating center presents are of great value to others. Good venues for sharing your expertise with those interested are at education conferences and meetings at the state-level or even nationally. These could be focused on career and technical education, such as the annual conference of the Association of Career and Technical Education, or more broadly-themed meetings on high school reform and early college access.

- Attending such conferences allows you to learn about others' innovative work and locate sister institutions. As a participant, you will also have the opportunity to tell the story of your center to those that you meet or in the discussion in relevant sessions.
- Apply to be a presenter at such meetings, giving you a larger audience with whom to share your experiences.

**Guideline: *CONTINUE FUNDRAISING***

Fundraising needs to be done on a continuous basis. While some public money may have been available for start-up of the center, continued consistent funding is likely to be a concern. Public funds are often barely sufficient and could be drastically reduced in budget cuts. Lobbying for public education and charter school funds is thus an important role of the center's CEO. In addition, private resources allow for increased flexibility and independence. Such resources come through fundraising.

- The communication and marketing materials and opportunities described above form one piece of a fundraising strategy. Telling your story in a wide variety of venues and to different audiences increases the likelihood of meeting potential new funders.

### C. ENSURE A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

Just as no one entity developed the joint venture on its own, so it will be important that your community and partners never feel they are going it alone. Connecting with others doing similar work and finding avenues of external support will assist in sustaining community efforts.

#### **Guideline: *DO YOUR RESEARCH***

There has been considerable research and development on career and technical education, school-to-career programs, early college admissions, dual enrollment, Tech Prep, and other areas related to the development of reconceptualized education. This information can be accessed through the internet, the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor, professional associations, and a variety of other sources.

- Take the time to inform yourself in these fields through reading and attending events.
- Visiting innovative schools and programs that have implemented similar ideas with success is also a useful way to learn more. In addition, it allows you to meet potential peer institutions.

#### **Guideline: *FORM OR JOIN A NETWORK OF SIMILAR CENTERS***

A network of like-minded communities and similar institutions can be very important for those engaged in replicating the CEC experience. During the process of developing the center, a network of peers can share information, problem-solve, and encourage one another. Once your center is operational, connections with peer institutions are important for support, information exchange, professional development, fundraising, and advocacy.

A valuable addition to your network during both the development and implementation phases are institutions such as CEC and the others mentioned in this manual that have already been down this path. Such institutions provide a model to look at and a rich set of ideas for your design team.

Another benefit is hearing about others' challenges before you encounter similar ones yourselves. External entities are seen as neutral and thus can provide honest answers and evaluations on things that might be sensitive if raised by a fellow community member. Established centers can be strengthened through these advising relationships as well through gaining new ideas for continuous improvement. As one site in the process replicating CEC related, having an experienced community as mentor is important because "you don't know all the questions, let alone all the answers."

Douglas, Walton, and Whitfield counties launched their centers under the guidance and mentoring of CEC leadership and in a network of peers that met regularly. Their efforts also received support from an external technical assistance team, from the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and Florida State University. Now that the centers in these counties are open, they have maintained this network through forming the Georgia College and Career Association.

**Guideline: *CONSIDER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE***

Finally, there are numerous technical assistance providers who can, for a fee, provide a neutral, objective, and experienced outside influence should your reform efforts need assistance. Ask other institutions to recommend technical assistance providers with which they have worked.