Local College Access Network
Facilitator's Guide to Data Discussions

It's important for the leaders of a local college access network (LCAN) to define the overall attainment goal the community is striving to achieve and using data to measure progress along the way. This guide can help you facilitate constructive conversations within your leadership team to better understand what you want to measure, where to access the data, and the limits of the data source.

Pre-discussion preparation

Before you begin any conversation around data, it's helpful to set the context for the type of conversation the community is agreeing to have. For example:

> "The conversation we are having today is not about winners and losers. It's to cultivate shared learning. The data, for instance, may reveal barriers we didn't know existed."

That way, if the conversation steers into an unproductive direction, you can remind participants about the conversation the team has agreed to have in the current setting, to help get the conversation back on track.

Type of data conversation:	Guiding questions:

When reviewing Goal 2025 & other data scan reports to inform planning and shared learning:	• What stood out to you?
	    ○ Why was that noteworthy?
	• What community strengths were revealed from which we can learn?
	• How is our local context different from that of the state?
	    ○ How might that influence our results?
	• What areas are new to your understanding of potential barriers to student success? (e.g. student debt / default rates)
	• What new thinking is it inspiring?

Baseline / benchmarking discussions:	• What are we trying to measure? • What are we hoping to learn? • What are we expecting the data will tell us? ○ How might that be limiting our thinking? • What case are we trying to make? • Who is our target population? • When can we expect updates to the data? • What activities can we undertake (lead measures – e.g. student college campus visits) that we expect will drive out attainment goal (lag measure)?

Building new data tools / reports / measurements:	• What are we trying to measure?
	    ○ How is that different from what is actually available?
	• What is the best source for that data?
	    ○ Who owns it?
	    ○ Do we have a relationship with that source?
	    ○ What is that source's limitations?
	    ○ How can we keep the limitations of the data from stopping us in making progress?
	• How much work will we need to invest to manipulate the data to get at what we need?
	    ○ Is it worth the investment?
	    ○ Is there another way to get at a proxy measurement?
	• Who might be impacted by our inquiry into this area?
	    ○ How might we anticipate their concerns / needs?
	    ○ What can we do to reduce any negative impact?
	• What's the final product we hope to create? (e.g. report, dashboard, one-pager)
	    ○ Is that something we have the capacity to do in-house or will we need an outside resource?

Additional facilitator considerations:

How well are we ensuring context is considered when reviewing data?	**Examples:**
	• We don't compare schools without discussing the difference in each school's environment
	• We remember to ask:
	    o What might be influencing what we're seeing?
	    o What conclusions are we jumping to?
	    o How might we confirm / discredit those assumptions?

How well have we ensured the language we are using is clear to all participants?	**Examples:** • We avoid acronyms or we provide a glossary for all acronyms. • We have agreed to the definition of commonly used terms like "college" and have a frequently updated reference document that we share with partners.
How well are we involving partners from different organizations in data discussions?	**Examples:** • We involve partners in a data working group. • Partners are encouraged to share their data so that the most accurate local data is used.
How well do we ensure all partners understand the constraints of each data source?	**Examples:** • In printed reports, we footnote sources for reference. • We note the year, student subset, or other parameters so users can ensure they are comparing items that can be compared.
How well are we ensuring we're using data as a light not a hammer?	**Examples:** • We avoid language that indicates there are winners and losers. • We anticipate the concerns of the organization on whom the data reports. • We ensure we are using data to inform learning, looking for areas to mobilize our LCAN.
How are we ensuring we're not crossing over into analysis paralysis?	**Examples:** • We evaluate whether the outcome of a new data source is worth the investment (time and money). • We leverage data sources that are the most credible in education circles to capture agreed upon measures of student progress.

Florida College Access Network is here to help!

We can share resources, data and examples from other Florida LCANs to help you lay a strong foundation for a multi-sector approach. For more information go to: FloridaCollegeAccess.org.

Need help?

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