

# ACHIEVING THE DREAM

# START RIGHT GUIDE

A Guide for New Achieving the Dream Institutions



Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

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# Achieving the Dream Overview

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**Vision:** A nation in which community colleges are highly valued for preserving access and ensuring that their students, especially low-income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity.

**Mission:** To lead and support a national network of community colleges to achieve sustainable institutional transformation through sharing knowledge, innovative solutions and effective practices and policies leading to improved outcomes for all students.

**Goal:** To help all students—particularly the most underserved—realize substantial value from their postsecondary experience and their earned credentials, thereby strengthening their communities.

For more than a decade, Achieving the Dream has served as a catalyst supporting community colleges to bolster student success. We guide colleges committed to improving student outcomes through an institutional change process designed to enable all students to earn certificates and degrees, improve their economic prospects and support their local communities. Our longstanding emphasis on building data capacity and encouraging leadership and innovation has shaped the national conversation on student success. Our focus on access and completion for low-income students and students of color is now a focus of every community college in the nation.

Today, Achieving the Dream is working toward a new definition of student success that incorporates not just interim objectives— the completion of degrees or certificates— but also longer-term ambitions for higher earnings and prosperous communities. In this next phase of work, we will continue to support colleges in improving student access and completion rates, and better align them with broader economic and social goals. We will be redefining student success as college access and completion that delivers economic benefits to students and the surrounding community. This vision of student success offers exciting possibilities for students, colleges and the education reform field.

## Who We Are:

Achieving the Dream is the leader of a network that includes more than 220 institutions, 100 coaches, and 15 state policy teams in 41 states and the District of Columbia and serves more than 4 million community college students.

Achieving the Dream supports colleges to:

**INNOVATE** to successfully implement, align and scale cutting edge reforms that increase student success, close achievement gaps, and generate economic benefit for their communities.

**COACH** leaders to build institutional capacity, lease whole-college reform, and sustain continuous improvement.

**CONNECT** to a network of leaders to foster innovation and peer learning.

These three pillars have formed the core of Achieving the Dream's work for years and continue to be relevant as colleges strive to achieve integrated reform that improve the lives of their students.

## What We've Learned

Over the past decade, Achieving the Dream has learned critical lessons about community college improvement. These lessons speak to the importance of:

- **Scale.** Disconnected, boutique pilot programs and interventions are not yielding strong returns. Institutions that begin with the end in mind and implement at full scale, or design for scale, yield better impact and outcomes.
- **Integrated, Holistic Strategy.** An institution's student success agenda is sustained by a student-focused culture and requires a holistic approach that builds and aligns institutional capacity to reinforce student success from connection to completion.
- **Pathways.** Colleges are creating curricular pathways to employment and further education (Clarify); helping students choose and enter their pathway (intake); helping students stay on their path (support); and, ensuring that learning is happening with intentional outcomes (learning).
- **Design and Action Informed by Data.** An institution's ability to collect and use data to guide decision making is essential to improving student outcomes and achieving systemic change.
- **Next Generation Developmental Education.** Developmental education reform must incorporate the [Core Design Principles for Transforming Remediation](#) to support student success and scaling of effective practices.
- **Broader Connections.** Community colleges must connect more deeply and dynamically to other education systems, employers, and community-based organizations.
- **Equity.** Community colleges must dismantle the barriers facing underserved students. Colleges must routinely scrutinize structural barriers to equity and invest

in equity-minded policies, practices, and behaviors that lead to success for all students. [View](#) Achieving the Dream's Equity Statement.

## Achieving the Dream's Approach Institutional Capacity Framework

These understandings inform the next generation of work at ATD and our approach to organizational change. The framework has at its core seven essential capacities that must be in place for colleges to create the student-focused culture that promotes student success. With the capacity framework as a guide, our approach integrates and aligns existing college success efforts such as redesigning developmental education, engaging faculty in student success, putting data and information in the hands of faculty and advisors, implementing pathways, preparing for accreditation, integrating planning and advising systems, and going the extra mile to address students' financial challenges to help them continue their studies.



The seven capacity areas are:

1. **Leadership & Vision** – The commitment and collaboration of the institution's leadership with respect to student success and the clarity of the vision for desired change.
2. **Data & Technology** – The institution's capacity to collect, access, analyze and use data to inform decisions, as well as, to use powerful technology to support student success.
3. **Equity** – The commitment, capabilities, and experiences of an institution to equitably serve low income students, students of color and other at-risk student populations with respect to access, success, and campus climate.
4. **Teaching & Learning** – The commitment to engaging full-time and adjunct faculty in examinations of pedagogy, meaningful professional development, and a central role for them as change agents within the institution. Also, the college's commitment to advising, tutoring, and out-of-classroom supports as well as restructuring developmental education to facilitate student learning and success.

5. **Engagement & Communication** – The creation of strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, such as K-12, universities, employers and community-based organizations, and internal stakeholders across the institution to participate in the student success agenda and improvement of student outcomes.
6. **Strategy & Planning** – The alignment of the institution with the umbrella goal of student success and the institution's process for translating the desired future into defined goals and objectives and executing the actions to achieve them.
7. **Policies & Practices** – The institutional policies and practices that impact student success and the processes for examining and aligning policies and practices to remove barriers and foster student completion.

The capacities reflect a heightened focus on what happens in the classroom and the academic and non-academic supports that are essential to student success. A culture of evidence is also embedded into all seven capacities, reflecting the need for colleges to incorporate data-informed decision making across their value systems. Data and technology have more prominent placement, as we have learned more about the power of technology to support students in moving into and through college. Finally, the principle of “systemic improvement” is divided into strategy and planning and policies and practices, giving deeper attention to the roles of these capacities in guiding and sustaining holistic change.

The framework brings improvement efforts under one cohesive umbrella. It weaves in Network colleges' experiences and the best thinking from the student success movement with the successful strategies already underway on campus. ATD learning events, such as DREAM and the annual Data & Analytics Summit, and ATD initiatives continue to deepen our understanding of the capacities. Each college undertakes the work differently, but the Institutional Capacity Framework and other ATD support services provide a practical approach to creating an institution that systemically supports the success of all students. We work closely with the college's leadership, faculty, and staff to strengthen their ability to adopt high impact policies and practices that redesign the way students experience college both inside and outside the classroom.

## The Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool: A Diagnostic for Assessing Strengths and Areas for Improvement

To complement the framework, we worked with our Network colleges to develop a diagnostic tool. Launched in fall 2016, the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT) is a self-assessment that helps colleges identify strengths and areas for improvement in each capacity area. The assessment asks a broad range of college stakeholders to assess their institution's capacity using four levels from minimal to exemplary. Colleges have reported that engaging a cross-section of representatives from the board of

trustees, president's cabinet, administrators, full-time and adjunct faculty, staff and student success teams results in rich conversations that surface critical issues. We recommend that the college collaborate with ATD Leadership and Data Coaches to review the results to identify strengths, discuss areas in need of bolstering and to generate actionable ideas for advancement.

Colleges preparing for accreditation find the ICAT can be an important tool. Some accrediting agencies want colleges to use more than one form of assessment and to use qualitative and quantitative measures in the initial accreditation of reaffirmation. Although the ICAT was not intended to be a psychometric tool, it produces a numeric result with qualitative feedback from faculty and staff who participate in accreditation processes. Read the full publication on aligning the ICAT to accreditation [here](#).

Changing campus culture and improving student outcomes is a challenging task that requires self-reflection, critical thinking and feedback, and coordinated action across the institution. The ICAT is a tool that can get this work done. Colleges that completed the ICAT are leveraging the results to guide strategic planning, prepare for accreditation, launch pathways, implement high impact practices, facilitate discussions across the college and drive action. The ICAT is helping colleges examine the critical elements necessary to support student success and build capacity to transform culture and student outcomes.

## Building Blocks for Successful Change

As colleges seek to advance their student success agenda, build capacity, and engage in large-scale reform efforts to improve the student experience, there are nine building blocks, or success factors, for successfully leading change. Rather than a linear step by step sequence, the order of the blocks may be flexed and used iteratively based on an institution's needs.



## Prepare for desired change

- Set the stage for "unfreezing" habits in favor of cultivating a student-focused culture.
- Examine current student data along the continuum of the student experience: from initial connection through completion and transition to a transfer institution or to the workforce.
- Examine these data not only in aggregate, but disaggregated by age, ethnicity, gender, Pell status, and other student characteristics relevant to your institution.
- Gather and analyze qualitative data to identify the root causes of student success outcomes and achievement gaps.
- Engage a cross-representation of the college community to complete specific sections, or all seven sections, of the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool. Consider including board of trustees, administrators, full- and part-time faculty, and staff.
- Reflect on your results and engage in a facilitated large group dialogue, using a method such as the Capacity Café, to share reflections on strengths, priority areas for improvement, and actions to make the institution stronger.

## Form your student success team(s)

- Identify cross-functional, cross-hierarchical teams, such as a Core Team and a Data Team, to guide the student success agenda.
- Select chairs or co-chairs and other team roles.
- Develop team charters to specify team purpose, goals, and metrics.
- Consider how this team builds alignment across student success efforts, e.g. whether this team should be the "owner" or "approver" of all student success initiatives at your institution.
- Establish a meeting cycle and schedule meetings.

## Develop your student success vision and strategy

- Create a compelling student success vision to steer change.
- Ensure this vision is inclusive of all your student success efforts to build alignment.
- Think big and with high aspirations.
- Set clear goals for student outcomes as well as for your institutional capacity and culture.
  - Where are you now and where do you want the institution to be in one, two, and three years with respect to student access and success?
  - What are the milestones or targets along the way that will signal you are on the right track?

- Identify what actions you will take to build institutional capacity for achieving your goals.

### **Communicate for urgency, understanding, and buy-in**

- Develop a communications plan for impact and relevance that answers: –  
Why—the core need for change.
  - Why now—the unique opportunity for change you have now and the urgent need to address the “why.”
  - Why you will succeed—the assets and strengths the institution will leverage to address the “why.”
- Include messaging that uses data to identify the challenge or need and appeal to the head. Complement this data by capturing student stories to personalize the challenge, appeal to emotions and promote buy-in and energy around the work.
- Identify a “brand” for your Achieving the Dream student success work with clear and simple messaging, e.g. “Student Success Lives Here.”
- Leverage multiple communication channels to share your progress.

### **Engage a cross-representation of the college community**

- Think broadly about the internal and external stakeholders you need for your student success agenda to succeed—board of trustees, faculty, administrators, staff, students, K-16 partners, community organizations, employers, state and local policy-makers.
- Empower leadership at all levels – up, down, and across the institution – to use their skills and abilities to embrace their roles as change agents.

### **Identify and regularly celebrate successes, small and large**

- Identify milestones or short-cycle key performance indicators that can be used to create meaningful feedback on your progress and sustain momentum.
- Celebrate and broadly communicate successes and the individual contributors.

### **Sustain focus on student success**

- Continually communicate your student success vision and goals and reinforce the shared responsibility—student success is everyone’s business.
- Identify barriers to true urgency and the steps you can take to overcome obstacles.
- Create an environment where people can focus on executing the college’s student success priorities, realizing that successful change often involves “going slow to go fast.”
- Focus on leading indicators that are predictive of student success outcomes or results and can be directly influenced by faculty and staff to improve student

outcomes. For example, class engagement and use of a skills lab are often leading indicators for course success.

### **Institutionalize change**

- Identify the changes that you want to become permanent--to “freeze”-- to sustain your student-focused culture.
- Identify how you will institute those changes through policy changes, process redesign, resource allocation/reallocation, and professional development.

### **Evaluate, refine, and continuously improve**

- Continuously use evidence to evaluate and refine your student success work from the planning stages through implementation and to inform decision-making.
- Cultivate a culture of inquiry, “How does this hire/expense/intervention support student success?”
- Retake sections of the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool, or the entire assessment, annually to gauge your current levels of capacity, where you have built strength and where you still need to focus on improvements.

## **ATD Student Outcome Metrics**

Achieving the Dream supports its colleges and the field to develop and maintain a laser focus on collecting, analyzing, using, and sharing data on student outcomes. Achieving the Dream institutions develop a culture of evidence and inquiry on their campus so the whole community is engaged in identifying ways to better serve their students.

To support colleges in answering the call for better data, Achieving the Dream accesses longitudinal data that ATD colleges currently submit to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). With this data, we produce reports for each ATD institution that enables them to:

- Track persistence, completion of credential(s), and transfer to four-year institutions longitudinally.
- Evaluate student success efforts through an equity lens through disaggregated data.
- Benchmark performance against colleges in the ATD Network in their state, region, and the ATD Network.

As an active participant in the Institution of Higher Education Policy (IHEP) Postsecondary Data Collaborative Working Group, Achieving the Dream encourages our Network colleges to adopt a field-driven [Metrics Framework](#). The key metrics in this framework fall into three major categories:

- **Performance** metrics measuring institutional performance related to student access, progress, completion, cost, and post-college outcomes
- **Efficiency** measures considering how resources impact college completion, driven by increased interest in college costs and affordability
- **Equity** metrics seeking to include all students and accurately represent the higher education experience of populations that are underserved and may be “invisible” in other data collections

ATD colleges are coached to the following performance metrics:

### **Early Momentum – Credit Accumulation**

- 6+ college credits in 1<sup>st</sup> term
- 12+ college credits in 1<sup>st</sup> term
- 15+ college credits 1<sup>st</sup> year
- 24+ college credits in 1<sup>st</sup> year
- 30+ college credits in 1<sup>st</sup> year

### **Gateway Math and English Completion**

- Completed college Math in 1<sup>st</sup> year
- Completed college English in 1<sup>st</sup> year
- Completed both college English & college Math in 1<sup>st</sup> year

### **Persistence**

- 1<sup>st</sup> term to 2<sup>nd</sup> term
- 1<sup>st</sup> year to 2<sup>nd</sup> year

### **Credit Completion Ratio**

- College credits earned vs. attempted in 1<sup>st</sup> year

In addition to adopting the IHEP’s metrics framework we encourage Network Colleges to participate in the American Association of Community Colleges, Voluntary Framework of Accountability.

Learn more about using [VFA metrics](#) and ATD’s approach to building data capacity and a culture of evidence in the [Data Discovery Guide](#).

## **Role of the Leadership Coach**

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Leadership Coaches strive to establish trusting relationships with the chief executive, his or her leadership group, the core team, and all other Achieving the Dream work groups in the colleges. The working relationships will grow through site visits and frequent email and telephone contact. Leadership Coaches embed themselves in the culture of the organization and seek to build the organization’s capacity to reach its long-term goals.

Leadership Coaches endeavor to be a critical friend by asking clarifying, tough questions and helping to problem solve. They try to surface unspoken concerns and assist the college to imagine new ways to reach their student success goals and build leadership at all levels of the organization. Leadership Coaches listen with empathy and model collaborative behavior and transformative change. They will support the college build the capacity to identify and build on strengths and address areas for improvement. Leadership Coaches contribute to our active and collaborative coaching community and, in partnership with a Data Coach, ensure that ATD provides the most effective, on-the-ground support to Network colleges.

## Role of the Data Coach

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The Data Coach supports the college to build capacity in the development, analysis, and use of student performance outcomes, efficiency outcomes, and equity outcomes to inform improvement efforts. The Data Coach supports the college in building a culture of inquiry to answer critical questions about who attends college, who succeeds in and after college, and how college is financed. To advance goals of socio-economic mobility and equity, Data Coaches guide colleges in disaggregating data to determine how low-income, first generation college goers, students of color, and other underserved students perform and in identifying achievement gaps to close. Data Coaches contribute to our active and collaborative coaching community and, in partnership with a Leadership Coach, ensure that ATD provides the most effective, on-the-ground support to Network colleges.

## Suggested Team Composition

The information below is intended to guide your institution in developing strong teams to lead your student success efforts. Institutions are encouraged to take the recommendations below and tailor them to their needs and culture. As an example, many ATD institutions refer to their Core Team as their Student Success Team while others feel their efforts are more integrated by merging the Core and Data Teams. We encourage institutions to work with their ATD coaches to identify a structure that works best for them.

### Core Team

No one person can do this work successfully. Achieving the Dream recommends Network colleges create a team specifically dedicated to the college's Achieving the Dream work, commonly referred to as the Core Team. This team should consist of a broadly representative group of college leaders who are highly regarded, influential members of the college community. While this is usually not an official governance

body, its decisions should guide the student success work at your college. The team should generate energy for change as team members reinforce one another's commitment and work together to infuse their shared vision throughout the institution.

### Essential Core Team Members

- President/Chancellor (ad hoc)
- Chief Academic Officer
- Chief Student Services Officer
- Chief Data Officer/Institutional Researcher
- Key Faculty Leader(s) – especially math, English, and developmental education
- Chief Information Officer or equivalent

### Suggested Additions to the Core Team

- Additional faculty, including at least one adjunct faculty member
- Institutional Effectiveness officer
- Trustee(s) or Member(s) of the Board
- Community Representative(s)
- Student Representative(s)

### Core Team Responsibilities

- Use the quantitative and qualitative data provided by the Data Team to form and guide initiative teams to carry out the student success work at the college.
- Following the administration of the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT) and follow-up at a World Cafe, use the results to assure that the seven capacities are strengthened at your college.
- Maintain an inventory of all student success initiatives and assure that they are rigorously evaluated in a manner consistent with continuous quality improvement.
- Coordinate all student success initiatives to effectively and efficiently utilize college resources and avoid duplicative efforts. And assure that all initiatives are appropriately related to the college ATD initiative.
- Facilitate student success work to assist initiative teams to overcome barriers and navigate the college governance system.
- Regularly review the work of the student success initiative teams and offer helpful, constructive advice.
- Assure that a communication plan is developed and executed to achieve broad engagement across all members of the college.
- Ensure that student success work is aligned with the college budget and strategic plan.

- Engage in courageous conversations needed to push forward efforts to achieve equity at your college.
- Develop an inventory of policy and practice barriers that inhibit student success.

### Core Team Leader Description

The Core Team Leader plays a pivotal role in the Achieving the Dream work on your campus. He/she is expected to lead the Core Team in all its duties, including developing a culture of inquiry and action that allows the college to more effectively facilitate success for all students. Additionally, the Core Team Leader is the person primarily responsible for increasing engagement in and communication about the college's student success work. The Core Team Leader ensures the planning, implementation, evaluation, and refinement of interventions run smoothly. To this end, the Core Team Leader is tasked with leading the college in integrating all its student success efforts to ensure they work together towards the same student success goals.

The Core Team Leader acts as the main contact for Achieving the Dream and is, therefore, responsible for maintaining communication with ATD as well as the college's coaching team. It is also his/her responsibility to ensure the college submits annual updates to ATD.

### Attributes of a Strong Core Team Leader

As you decide who at your college is best suited to lead your college's Achieving the Dream work, consider the following attributes common to strong Core Team Leaders.

A strong Core Team Leader:

- Is deeply committed to the equity and success of all students.
- Believes the college's role in students' success is not limited to academics.
- Has a proven track record of collaboration and group facilitation.
- Possesses a deep knowledge of the college's structure, programs, policies, and culture.
- Has the ability to see and effectively communicate the big picture to a wide audience.
- Is highly respected across all college departments and campuses.
- Can effectively garner support for an initiative throughout the college.
- Has a proven ability in leading complex, college-wide projects that have positively impacted the college and its students.
- Understands data and its role in the decision-making process.
- Is an effective team player able and eager to work across departments.
- Is empowered with enough authority to lead others through significant change.
- Treats others with respect and works hard to allay concerns before they arise.
- Has confidence that ATD can support the college make sustainable, systemic change.

## Further Considerations

The Core Team Leader has many responsibilities, so it is common for ATD Network colleges to appoint multiple individuals to work together to complete these duties. We recommend you do not select more than three people to fill this role unless there is a unique reason your college would need multiple representatives—for example, larger colleges with many campuses or colleges that join as a district. Many colleges select two individuals at various levels in the organization who are able to reach and engage different groups, such as one individual from the academic side of the college and one from the student support services side. This can help to integrate the college's efforts and reduce silos. Finally, it is important to consider the amount of time an individual(s) may need to dedicate to this aspect of his/her work and how that will affect his/her existing roles and responsibilities at the college.

While we offer this information as guidance for your consideration, it is important to note that specific expectations of your Core Team Leader will be set by your leadership team based on your college's unique environment, needs, and goals.

## Data Team

Achieving the Dream also recommends that Network colleges create a team solely focused on collecting, analyzing, and sharing data regarding student progression and success. This team is commonly referred to as the Data Team and works closely with the Core Team on the colleges' student success efforts.

### Suggested Data Team Members

- Chief Data Officer/Institutional Researcher
  - *ATD suggests that this individual serve on both the Data Team and the Core Team and act as the liaison between the two teams.*
- Chief Technology Officer
- Institutional Effectiveness officer
- Senior Planning Administrator
- Faculty – especially those with skills in quantitative/qualitative data (computer science, social science, math)
- Inclusion/Diversity/Cultural Awareness staff member(s)
- Student Services staff, especially those involved in student on-boarding
- Individual responsible for reporting Student Tracker data to the National Student Clearinghouse

## Data Team Responsibilities

- Develop a candid analysis of the college's performance with respect to student outcomes, with a special focus on low-income students, students of color, and others who face barriers to success.
- Define key terms and establish relevant time frames and data sources.
- Examine quantitative and qualitative data and present findings in a clear and compelling way that shows where the college is doing well and where it needs to improve.
- Create a common understanding of data throughout the institution.
- Seek involvement of students and faculty to identify strengths and weaknesses of current college policies, structures, and services.
- Aid the Core Team in engaging students, faculty, community members and others in dialogue about the analysis and proposed goals and strategies.
- Engage the wider college community in the use and analysis of data in their daily work. This includes designing and implementing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.

## Data Team Leader Description

The Data Team Leader's primary responsibility is to work with the Core Team Leader and your college's Achieving the Dream Data Coach to create a culture of evidence and inquiry at the college. He/she is expected to lead the Data Team in all its duties and provide support to the Core Team in its efforts to analyze, interpret, and use data. Additionally, the Data Team Leader must lead the data team in engaging the wider college community in incorporating data into its daily work. This responsibility includes identifying, organizing, and delivering professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, administrators, and senior leaders to build skills in data analysis, use data to inform their work, and identify the right questions to ask.

The Data Team Leader acts as the main contact for all data-related communications from Achieving the Dream. Along with the Core Team Leader, the Data Team Leader may be responsible for maintaining communication with the college's Data Coach. It is also his/her responsibility to ensure that any data reports to Achieving the Dream are submitted on time.

## Attributes of a Strong Data Team Leader

As you decide who at your college is best suited to lead your college's Achieving the Dream data analysis work, consider the following attributes common to strong Data Team Leaders.

A strong Data Team Leader:

- Is deeply committed to the equity and success of all students.

- Possesses a strong knowledge of the college's structure, programs, policies, and culture.
- Is an expert in quantitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation.
- Recognizes the value and importance of qualitative data.
- Has a proven ability to lead a team in data analysis and use.
- Can effectively communicate the value and meaning of data to a lay audience.
- Possesses a strong understanding of the technology used to support the college's student supports and teaching and learning environment.
- Has a good understanding of state and national data-related issues.
- Is highly respected across all college departments and campuses.
- Is empowered with enough authority to lead others.
- Treats others with respect and works hard to allay concerns before they arise.
- Has confidence that ATD can support the college make sustainable, systemic change.

### Further Considerations

In addition to the technical expertise necessary for this role, it is important to consider the amount of time an individual may need to dedicate to this aspect of his/her work and how that will affect his/her existing roles and responsibilities at the college.

While we offer this information as guidance for your consideration, it is important to note that specific expectations of your Data Team Leader will be set by your leadership team based on your college's unique environment, needs, and goals.

## ATD Contact

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Questions regarding your college's Achieving the Dream participation should be directed to:

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