Driving Toward Greater Postsecondary Attainment Using Data

JUNE 2014

In an effort to support community-based collaborations among key sectors—education, business, policy, and nonprofit and community organizations—the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is planning a series of primer fact sheets that will help communities increase their postsecondary attainment. This primer fact sheet explains the data challenge and how different sectors can use data at different points along the attainment pipeline to aid in these efforts. Each primer fact sheet in the series will be followed by a tactical guidebook that provides further detail.

The Data Challenge

QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE, ACTIONABLE DATA are paramount in order for communities to increase postsecondary degree attainment.

Stakeholders must have access to **DATA THAT ANSWER KEY QUESTIONS** about college readiness, enrollment, persistence, completion, and outcomes for students in their cities, particularly for underserved and non-traditional populations.

DATA MUST BE SHARED AND REPORTED REGULARLY, such as through interactive tools, dashboards, and report cards, to track progress at the student and community levels.

DATA MUST DRIVE CHANGE by identifying critical needs and populations, setting goals and benchmarks, informing program and policy design, targeting scarce resources, and evaluating impact to support effective community partnerships for attainment.

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to promoting access to and success in higher education for all students. Based in Washington, D.C., IHEP develops innovative policy- and practice-oriented research to guide policymakers and education leaders, who develop high-impact policies that will address our nation's most pressing education challenges.

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Asking Key Questions and Identifying Indicators Along the Attainment Pipeline

ATTAINMENT

% of residents holding postsecondary certificates and degrees

Are communities meeting their target goals to increase postsecondary attainment?

POST-COLLEGE OUTCOMES

- Employment rates
- Earnings data
- Loan debt and default rates
- Learning outcomes assessment
- Regional industry growth/skills needed

Are students faring well after college, and are they adequately prepared to meet local workforce needs?

COMPLETION

- Transfer rates
- Graduation rates
- Time to degree
- Degrees awarded by level and field
- Licensure/ certification rates

Are students successfully completing college?

PERSISTENCE

- 1st to 2nd year retention rates
- Gateway-course completion rates
- Credit accumulation
- Declaration of major
- Level of unmet financial need

Are students progressing through postsecondary education?

ENROLLMENT

- College application/ acceptance rates
- Direct college enrollment rates
- Out-of-school/ work population enrollment rates
- Enrollment by level and sector
- Full-time enrollment rates

Are students enrolling in quality postsecondary programs and institutions?

READINESS

- College-preparatory course-taking rates
- Student-counselor ratio
- High school/GED completion rates
- FAFSA completion rates
- Placement in developmental courses

Are prospective students being adequately prepared to enter and succeed in college?

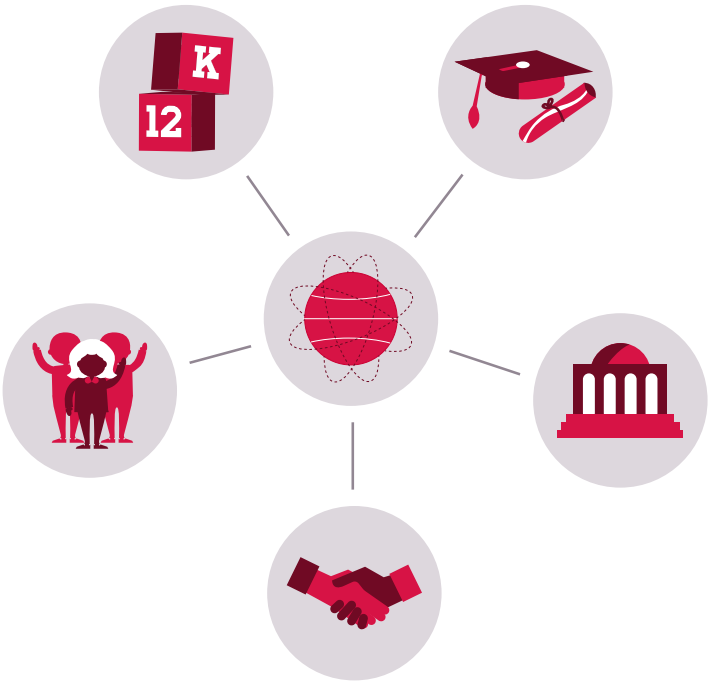
To target resources and support toward closing attainment gaps, data must be disaggregated by key demographics, such as:

- Race/ethnicity
- Socio-economic status
- Gender
- Age
- First-generation status
- Immigrant status
- Military/Veteran status
- Enrollment status (first-time, transfer)
- Attendance status (full-time, part-time)
- Remedial status

To help communities set and pursue goals and invest wisely in attainment strategies, data must be put into context, which may include:

- Benchmarking to peer communities, the state, or the nation
- Tracking progress over time
- Monitoring gaps between populations
- Calculating return on investment (ROI)

Stakeholder Resources



For Any Sector:
Using Data to Advance a Postsecondary Systems Change Agenda (2013: OMG Center for Collaborative Learning)

This brief evaluates data use within the Gates Foundation's Community Partnerships portfolio, in which communities employed a place-based model of advancing postsecondary systems change. It describes the value of using data to set policy- and practice-related priorities, measure progress, and build commitment to attainment goals. The brief also highlights relationship-building to support data use and interpretation in a cross-sector partnership. It includes case studies from New York City and Brownsville, Texas.

For K-12 Institutions:
Using Data and Inquiry to Build Equity-Focused College-Going Cultures (2011: National College Access Network)

This report describes the Student Success Toolkit Demonstration Project at two public high schools in Boston. It shows the practical use of qualitative data from interviews and surveys of students, parents, counselors, and faculty; advocates for an "equity model" over a "deficit model" in interpreting student data; and recommends key questions and practices to support racial equity in college access.

For Postsecondary Institutions:
Learning from High-Performing and Fast-Gaining Institutions: Top 10 Analyses to Provoke Discussion and Action on College Completion (2014: The Education Trust)

This practice guide describes how campus leadership can use data to help underserved students complete college. It demonstrates how data are key to understanding problems, designing interventions, facilitating ongoing inquiry, and monitoring student progress. The guide presents case studies from eight colleges, and focuses on credit accumulation, remediation, gateway courses, and degree completion. For more data on how well colleges and universities are graduating students, search The Education Trust's *College Results Online* database.

For Local Government:
Using and Sharing Data to Improve Postsecondary Success (2012: National League of Cities)

This municipal action guide serves as a roadmap for gathering, using, and sharing data on students' postsecondary outcomes in a community context. It provides an overview of useful data resources and details key steps, such as conducting inventories of local data capacity, sharing data, conducting "loss point" analyses along the education pipeline, determining baseline measures, setting goals, and reporting progress.

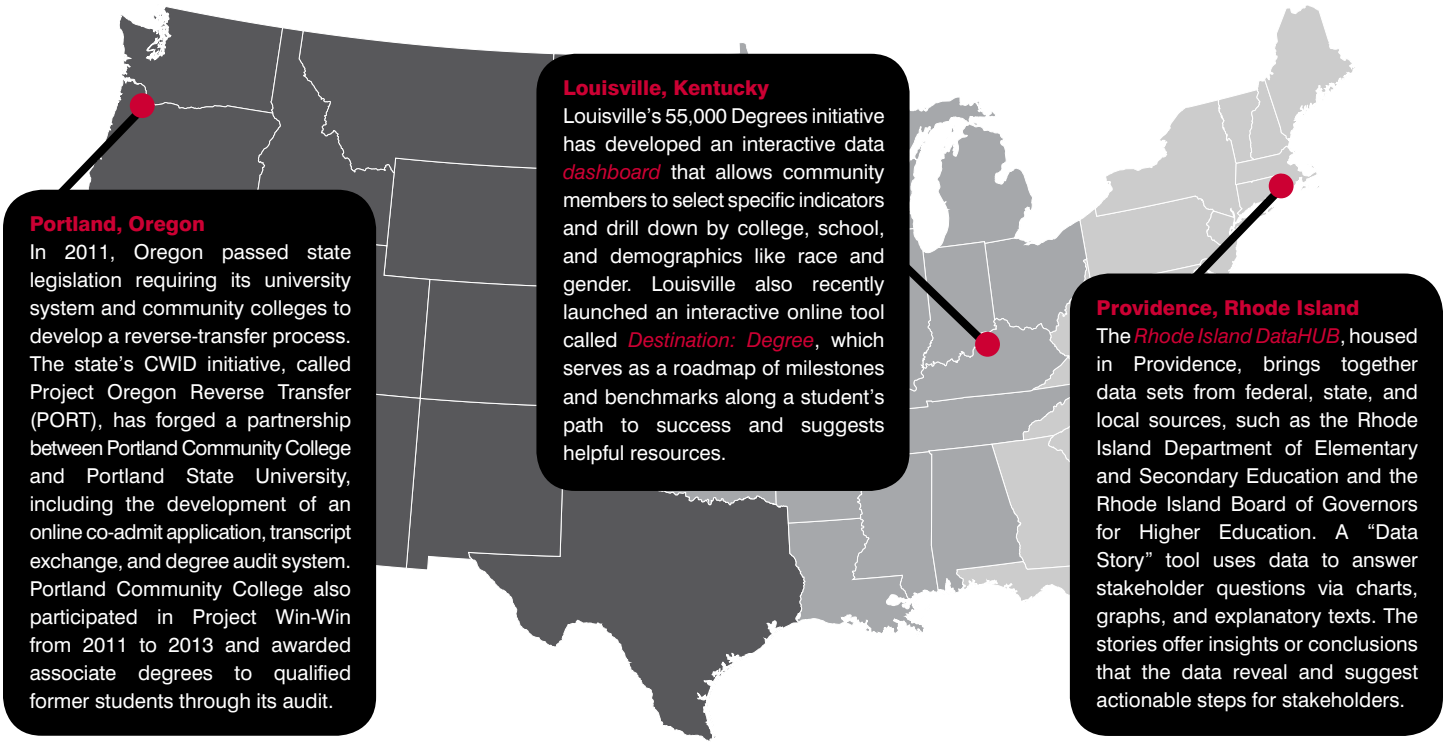
For Business Sector:
Leaders & Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Public Postsecondary Education (2012: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Education and Workforce)

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce grades each state based on multiple outcome indicators, including how well its higher education system meets local labor market demand. These data include wage gaps and unemployment rate gaps between education levels. Florida is highlighted as a successful example, where a data system links student-level postsecondary data and labor market outcomes to reveal robust information on student success and inform programmatic and policy decision-making.

For Community-Based Organizations:
Bring on the Data: Two New Data Tools from Strive (2012: StriveTogether)

This brief demonstrates how communities can report data online through the Community Impact Report Card and Student Success Dashboard (SSD) tools. The Community Impact Report Card presents easily understandable indicators to track population-level outcomes and progress toward community goals. The SSD integrates academic and non-academic data across multiple systems to facilitate the tracking of collaborative efforts, supporting continuous improvement, evaluation, and research.

Leading Data Practices



Portland, Oregon
In 2011, Oregon passed state legislation requiring its university system and community colleges to develop a reverse-transfer process. The state's CWID initiative, called Project Oregon Reverse Transfer (PORT), has forged a partnership between Portland Community College and Portland State University, including the development of an online co-admit application, transcript exchange, and degree audit system. Portland Community College also participated in Project Win-Win from 2011 to 2013 and awarded associate degrees to qualified former students through its audit.

Louisville, Kentucky
Louisville's 55,000 Degrees initiative has developed an interactive data *dashboard* that allows community members to select specific indicators and drill down by college, school, and demographics like race and gender. Louisville also recently launched an interactive online tool called *Destination: Degree*, which serves as a roadmap of milestones and benchmarks along a student's path to success and suggests helpful resources.

Providence, Rhode Island
The *Rhode Island DataHUB*, housed in Providence, brings together data sets from federal, state, and local sources, such as the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education. A "Data Story" tool uses data to answer stakeholder questions via charts, graphs, and explanatory texts. The stories offer insights or conclusions that the data reveal and suggest actionable steps for stakeholders.

Here are several examples of data practices and tools from communities across the country that hold promise. Some tools monitor progress at the student level; others aggregate the data to benchmark the progress of the community toward greater attainment.

Degree Audit Systems

Degree audit systems give students and advisors information about degree requirements and help monitor student progress toward their degrees. Under *Project Win-Win*, a national degree audit initiative, 60 community colleges and four-year institutions authorized to award associate degrees identified former students who were no longer enrolled anywhere and were never awarded an associate degree, but whose records qualified them for one. The schools then retroactively awarded those degrees. They also located "near-completers"—former students who were fewer than 15 credits short of their degrees—to provide them with a roadmap to completion. Similarly, the *Credit When It's Due (CWID)* initiative is supporting 15 states to develop reverse-transfer programs and policies, enabling students to receive associate degrees when they meet the requirements, even after transferring to a four-year institution. Students awarded associate degrees through CWID were found to be more likely to stay in school and finish their bachelor's degrees.

Benchmarking Tools

Several metropolitan areas have developed interactive data systems to make national-, state-, and community-level data sources more readily available to the public. These tools allow users to find and compare data across populations and institutions and enable communities to adopt accountability metrics to measure progress toward attainment goals. Common metrics include student progression and completion, affordability, student learning outcomes, and employment outcomes.

Data-Sharing Agreements

Sharing data across different institutional systems is an important component of collaborative efforts to improve postsecondary attainment. Linking data must be balanced with appropriate security protections for student privacy and confidentiality. Data-sharing agreements and memoranda of understanding between institutional sectors enable communities to document laws, policies, and decisions related to data governance in a way that is transparent and accessible to various stakeholders.