

# USING DATA AND EVIDENCE TO LEAD HOLISTIC ADVISING REDESIGN:

A Guidebook for Campus Leaders for Promoting Consistent, Coherent,  
and Collaborative Data Use in Advising

Wen Zeng, Dallin George Young, Catherine Hartman, and Isaac Portillo

## VOLUME THREE

Improving the Human Resources  
Needed to Use Data More Strategically

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Production Staff for the National Resource Center:

Copyediting: Jennifer Keup and Catherine Hartman

Design and Production: Stephanie McFerrin

Internal Reviewers:

Chelsea Fountain, Program Coordinator,

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

Catherine Hartman, Postdoctoral Research Associate,

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

Jennifer Keup, Executive Director,

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

Jenna Seabold, Research & Grants Coordinator,

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

Lisa Lawless, Senior Coordinator, University College,

Illinois State University

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# ABOUT THE ADVISING SUCCESS NETWORK

Formed in 2018, the Advising Success Network (ASN) is a dynamic network of five organizations partnering to engage institutions in holistic advising redesign to advance success for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander students and students from low-income backgrounds. The network develops services and resources to guide institutions in implementing evidence-based advising practices to advance a more equitable student experience to achieve our vision of a higher education landscape that has eliminated race and income as predictors of student success. The ASN is coordinated by NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and includes Achieving the Dream, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, EDUCAUSE, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, and the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

# ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition was born out of the success of the University of South Carolina's much-honored University 101 course and a series of annual conferences focused on the first-year experience. The momentum created by the educators attending these early conferences paved the way for the development of the National Resource Center, which was established at the University of South Carolina in 1986. As the National Resource Center broadened its focus to include other significant student transitions in higher education, it underwent several name changes, adopting the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition in 1998.

Today, the Center collaborates with its institutional partner, University 101 Programs, in pursuit of its mission to advance and support efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education. We achieve this mission by providing opportunities for the exchange of practical and scholarly information as well as the discussion of trends and issues in our field through convening conferences and other professional development events such as institutes, workshops, and online learning opportunities; publishing scholarly practice books, research reports, a peer-reviewed journal, electronic newsletters, and guides; generating, supporting, and disseminating research and scholarship; hosting visiting scholars; and maintaining several online channels for resource sharing and communication, including a dynamic website, email list, and social media outlets.

The National Resource Center serves as the trusted expert, internationally recognized leader, and clearinghouse for scholarship, policy, and best practice for all postsecondary student transitions.

# INTRODUCTION

The Advising Success Network and its five core partners have focused on creating and distributing thought leadership and assets to promote holistic advising redesign in higher education. This guidebook was created to serve as a resource for data use by campus leaders, including mid- to senior-level administrators responsible for institutional advising initiatives. The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition – working on behalf of the Advising Success Network – aimed to identify strategies and data-use practices for data-driven decision making in advising services and collaboration of data use among campus stakeholders, meaning anyone whose role and/or actions shape and affect the planning for, delivery of, and decision making around advising at any stage.

## About the Guidebook

This guidebook draws upon in-depth interviews with administrators who have oversight of academic advising at 18 institutions to provide strategies and examples of what campus leaders have been doing to promote consistent, coherent, and collaborative data use in advising.

## Objective of the Guidebook

Our goal is to promote data use among campus leaders to improve advising and bolster student success through equity-minded approaches. This guidebook synthesizes and identifies best practices for improving collaboration and communication of data use among campus leaders and stakeholders in advising. Moreover, it presents strategies and practices used by institutions that can inform campus leaders seeking solutions for building a data culture toward developing holistic advising, with the goal of achieving greater and more equitable student learning and success in higher education.

Throughout the guidebook, we also provide recommendations for campus leaders to improve their equity and inclusion mindedness when developing coherent data-use strategies and culture. Most interviewees acknowledged that they prioritized equitable outcomes when examining data and identifying gaps in academic advising. For example, many mentioned they always disaggregated data by demographic information, such as socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and financial aid. The disaggregation of data is one step in the process to achieve equitable student outcomes. To promote equity, institutional data users and decision makers (e.g., mid- to senior-level administrators, advising directors, frontline advisors) must use the disaggregated data to inform their decisions and actions related to student success. Therefore, an equity-minded practice requires institutions to take responsibility and action for student success.

We begin this guidebook by emphasizing that an equity-oriented framework should be used as a guiding lens for advising redesign efforts. We contend that institutions should invest greater effort to address equity gaps

through advising initiatives. We also recognize that many institutions strive to create an empowering culture and implement inclusive and culturally relevant practices in academic advising. For example, positions may emphasize equity and inclusion initiatives, or the diversity of service staff may increase through the hiring of advisors who come from culturally and linguistically diverse groups. However, institutions must move beyond merely focusing on diversity and inclusion efforts toward cultivating an equity-oriented data-use culture. This attention requires institutional staff to identify and develop clear advising objectives designed to reduce inequitable outcomes for racially and socioeconomically minoritized student populations (including Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian and Pacific Islander, first-generation, and low-income students) and to determine the role of advising in supporting retention and graduation among students.

## Organization of the Guidebook

This guidebook begins by exploring some **common challenges affecting strategic data use**, which can be organized in three primary areas:

1. **Systems:** The variety of data and information systems poses a challenge to optimizing data infrastructures.
2. **Culture:** Different attitudes or perspectives in academic advising and data use among institution stakeholders may cause inconsistency and incoherence of data use.
3. **Resources:** Shortages of professional personnel, professional development and training, and data analytic solutions result in limited capacity for data use.

This series of guidebooks addresses the challenges faced by institutions in using data strategically with academic advising and presents real-world approaches and strategies campus leaders can use to cultivate a collaborative and coherent approach to data use in advising:

1. Improving the use of **systems** designed to gather and interpret evidence on academic advising
  - Develop campus-wide assessment for academic advising
  - Develop and enhance data capacity
2. Creating a **culture** of data use around academic advising in your institution
  - Establish clear objectives to understand how data can inform the use of advising
  - Define the role of academic advising in institutional initiatives
3. Improving the human **resources** needed to use data more strategically
  - Identify stakeholders of advising
  - Improve collaboration and communication among advising stakeholders for better data use
  - Provide advising- and data-related professional development regularly to advising stakeholders

This volume of *Using Data and Evidence to Lead Holistic Advising Redesign* focuses on the third challenge, **Resources**, and provides evidence-based strategies focused on *improving the human resources needed to use data more strategically*.

## Using This Guidebook

This guidebook, along with the others in the series, was created with the following questions in mind:

- What should campus leaders and stakeholders in advising consider when using data and evidence to lead advising redesign?
- How can advising redesign promote equity at their respective institutions?

As a core partner of the Advising Success Network, The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has identified strategies for institution leaders regarding better use of data to improve collaboration and consistency in advising practices across colleges, divisions, departments, and other institution units, such as institutional research, information technology, enrollment management, and student affairs.

This guidebook (a) describes the challenges campus leaders face when using data-driven and evidence-based approaches in decision making and (b) provides recommendations for using data and evidence strategically in an effort to create holistic advising redesign that promotes equitable student outcomes.

We drew upon interviews with administrators from 18 different campuses; each administrator had responsibility for advising at their institution.<sup>1</sup> The interviews gathered different opinions and approaches from a wide range of institutions with diverse structures, processes, and initiatives surrounding advising and thus explored major topics relevant to data- and evidence-based approaches in decision making. Emphasis is on how campus leaders use:

- Data in decision making and case making
- Evidence to collaborate across silos within organizations
- Data in their leadership (e.g., to collaborate with other units on campus, to foster a culture of using data)
- Assessment and evaluation strategies

This guidebook provides leaders with recommendations for using data and evidence strategically to improve student success. In addition to administrators and professionals in academic advising, we encourage campus leaders from academic affairs, student affairs, enrollment management, deans and associate deans from academic colleges, data analytics departments, information technology, and institutional research and effectiveness to use this guidebook to support holistic, equitable advising-related work on your campus.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for a more complete description of our research methods.

# IMPROVING THE HUMAN RESOURCES NEEDED TO USE DATA MORE STRATEGICALLY

Institutional leaders are increasingly tasked with facilitating organizational change to improve conditions for student success. In particular, academic advising is a critical component of student success, as it is associated with and holds promise for improving equitable student outcomes, particularly among racially and socioeconomically marginalized students (Fountain, 2021). A holistic approach to advising redesign can help institutions identify, implement, and/or refine equitable, high-quality, and effective institutional practices. By addressing people, processes, and technologies as equal parts of holistic advising redesign, institutions can offer students advising experiences that are sustained, strategic, integrated, proactive, and personalized.

To facilitate successful holistic advising redesign, campus administrators must understand how to use data strategically in evidence-informed leadership. Data and evidence are important components of strategically building and/or redesigning organizations and informing decision making among higher education administrators (Mandinach & Gummer, 2013). Doing so requires the centering of student voices and collaboration across multiple advising partners, including information technology, institutional research, and other student-support offices. It also requires collaboration up and down institutional organization charts to create a culture around data-informed advising decisions.

As such, campus leaders should provide staff with adequate tools, technology, and human and financial resources to access and engage with campus data systems. Moreover, to avoid resistance and unwillingness to use data, initial training and continuous professional development related to using technology and data management and analysis systems should be provided among different levels of stakeholders, meaning anyone whose role and/or actions shape and affect the planning for, delivery of, and decision making around advising at any stage. These individuals may include frontline academic advisors, faculty advisors, and advising directors located in centralized advising units as well as in academic colleges and departments.

# CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH USING HUMAN RESOURCES FOR STRATEGIC DATA USE

Throughout our interviews, many campus leaders expressed concerns about how to obtain data in a timely manner. They also shared their hopes to expedite data-processing time to address advising issues in a timeframe that would not extend beyond the usefulness of the information. Additionally, while many mentioned that their institutional research or institutional effectiveness offices provided data support, a few shared they rely on other units – particularly enrollment management and the registrar – to carry out data-analytics tasks. However, because these efforts require collaboration among offices, campus leaders might not receive necessary advising information immediately.



I don't have specific data people in advising, so I have to pull off resources elsewhere. [We have] Institutional Research, Institutional Effectiveness. We also have another team that supports our registrar's office, getting data. All of them are extremely helpful. The challenge with all of those is I have to wait and put my project in the queue and hope it becomes a priority on their to do list..



– Associate Vice Provost for Student Success, Virginia Tech

Some campus leaders who were trained to use quantitative methods were occasionally able to analyze institution-level data by themselves, but because they had limited time and other responsibilities, they often needed specialized professionals to provide data analytics support to them and their offices. Moreover, some institutions had designated data-analytics specialists in their advising central office or division, and those specialists expanded the institution's ability to use data and supported campus leaders in identifying data, interpreting findings, and implementing change. At institutions that lacked sufficient data-analytics and technology personnel, campus leaders

discussed their need to request funding to create a specialized position on data management and analytics in their central advising office or their departments.

# OBJECTIVES FOR IMPROVING DATA AND EVIDENCE SYSTEMS

In the following section of the guidebook, we present recommendations on how to improve the human resources needed for strategic data use. Based on our interviews with campus leaders coupled with previous research, we pinpointed three objectives for campus leaders to consider when working to improve the human resources needed to use data strategically with academic advising:

1. Identify stakeholders of advising
2. Improve collaboration and communication among advising stakeholders for better data use
3. Provide advising- and data-related professional development regularly to advising stakeholders

## Objective 1: Identify Stakeholders of Advising

Advising is not a unit in higher education institutions that stands alone or disconnected from other student-success efforts. It is often interrelated and integrated with student-support services and housed in different academic departments. A provost of academic affairs at a public four-year HBCU in our sample stressed, “figure out who your partners are in enrollment, find out who your partners in institutional research, because you’re going to always be working closely with them.” Once institutional advising objectives aimed at providing holistic advisory support are established, campus leaders may find it easier to gain support and buy-in from stakeholders.

Campus leaders, through collaborative efforts, can establish cross-departmental and cross-campus teams to design and clarify the institution’s objectives and values associated with advising. Teams can facilitate discussions and opportunities to address issues of equity and support that often arise regarding the purposes and delivery of advising (including divergent values). Collaborations should include various representatives from stakeholder groups who are involved in advising and supporting students, such as

- Senior administrators, including provosts, vice provosts, and vice presidents
- Mid- to senior-level administrators from academic affairs and student affairs
- Frontline academic advisors, such as professional academic advisors and faculty advisors

- College representatives, such as deans, associate deans, department chairs, and directors of advising units
- Administrators or staff members who work at institutional research, evaluation, or assessment
- Representatives from other student-support programs, such as TRIO, the registrar's office, admission office, transfer, and career advising
- Representatives from information technology and data management departments
- Students, especially those with marginalized and/or post-traditional identities (including LGBTQIA+ students, racially/ethnically marginalized students, students over the age of 25, transfer students, first-generation students, veterans, student parents, and more; see Achieving the Dream's [2021] *Knowing Our Students: Understanding & Designing for Success* for additional guidance and information about students' experiences)
- Multicultural and/or diversity, equity, and inclusion offices that are focused on providing programmatic and holistic support for students
- Offices that serve as important referral agents for advising and serve as "triage" agents for students' advising needs, such as orientation, residential life, and campus activities (see also Young & Keup, 2019)

The engagement of stakeholders provides ongoing collaboration focused on how academic advising supports student success and transparent dialogue on data use. Following are some recommendations for engaging stakeholders (Gerzon & Guckenbug, 2015; Hamilton et al., 2009):

- All stakeholders must develop a common understanding about values and visions for academic advising and its learning outcomes.
- Collaboration activities must be aligned with academic advising and institutional objectives.
- Roles for each stakeholder in collaboration must be clearly articulated.
- Campus leaders should provide stakeholders data and information they need to be collaborators around holistic advising and student success.
- Data and information must be shared in a transparent and open way.
- All collaboration must be goal oriented and data driven and must include a plan for assessing and evaluating the collaborative efforts.

## Connecting Advising Initiatives With Stakeholders

Understanding the advising initiatives that exist at your institution and their associated stakeholders is important for cultivating a collaborative and sustainable approach to advising redesign. In the following activity, we ask that you use the advising-related initiatives listed in the audit of advising initiatives activity in Volume 2 of this guidebook. In the column labeled “Stakeholders involved,” list all individuals and/or offices that work to deliver each specific initiative.

Advising-related initiative	Stakeholders involved
<b>Example: Career advising</b>	Example: Career center, academic advising central office, peer mentors, students, students’ families and external communities, employers

## Pause and Reflect

After inventorying advising-related initiatives and their associated stakeholders, review the checklist that follows to explore these relationships further. In the left column, indicate whether or not each feature in the right column exists at your institution by using a checkmark (to indicate yes) or an X (to indicate no).

Checklist	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A cross-campus group of professionals, leaders, and stakeholders in advising exists or is in the process of being formed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clear understandings of goals, initiatives challenges, and approaches to advising are shared by the group.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clear understanding of equity goals for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian and Pacific Islander, first-generation, and low-income students are shared.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roles for each member have been clearly articulated.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stakeholders within the group have the necessary data and information needed to contribute to holistic advising redesign and student success.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Data and information are shared in a transparent and open way.

*table continues on page 12*

table continued from page 11

### Checklist



Collaboration is goal oriented and data driven and includes a plan for assessment and evaluation.

If your institution is missing items from this checklist, what actions can you take and what relationships and/or networks can you leverage to create or strengthen the creation and delivery of these initiatives?

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## Objective 2: Develop and Enhance Data Capacity

We emphasize that effective data and evidence use results from strong relational ties with stakeholders across the institution. Collaboration and effective communication can enhance the information flow between different levels within institutional departments (see EDUCAUSE's [2022] guide *Understanding and Developing a Data-Informed Culture* for additional information). Additionally, expanding channels of communication can prevent stakeholders from working in silos. For example, campus leaders can facilitate group conversations in which they create a space or structured time for stakeholders to share data and results and listen to each other. In our interviews, one campus leader underscored the importance of collaborating and initiating conversations to increase the relevance of data to multiple stakeholder groups: "When we do surveys, there'll be conversations about the items on the survey. But without further conversation, those data cannot be put into action or make any changes."

Moreover, because of the various organizational structures and advising models institutions may have, campus leaders can explore different ways to work collaboratively. One example may include building leadership teams to address emergent issues, share data and interpretation through conversations, and provide data infrastructures and data-analytics support. We identified several examples from our interviews that demonstrate how leaders can engage with stakeholders about conversations around strategic data use.

### Strategies for Engaging in Data Conversations

**Make Results Meaningful and Relevant to Your Audiences.** When campus leaders prepare to present or share data and evidence with their stakeholders, they should first seek to understand which stakeholders are in the audience so that they can make a relevant case among partners. For instance, when campus leaders share data and results with stakeholders occupying upper levels within an organization, they must be prepared with a compelling case that can be delivered quickly with meaningful information. Upper-level leaders might have limited time to attend meetings, and presenters should plan to draw audience members' attention with data and cases. As the Vice President for Student Success & Engagement at Dominican University shared,



You better have the elevator pitch for all of the data that you spent weeks and weeks writing about and looking at; you got two minutes to tell it. After you catch them [e.g., institutional president or provost] with the hook, then you can tell [the data or results] again through a longer narrative, but you got to have the hook.



When leaders present data to stakeholders who deliver services, they should engage these partners in a thoughtful and collaborative approach. Service providers (e.g., frontline advisors and/or student-support staff) interact with students directly and have extensive knowledge about advising practices and students. Data should be used to empower the stakeholders but not intimidate them, as leaders and service providers are equal partners and active team members in the data-driven decision-making process. In our interviews, several campus leaders reported that they regularly shared data related to academic advising appointments, student engagements, and service outreach among stakeholders to credit advisors and acknowledge their work.

**Communicate the “Why.”** After leaders identify successful practices, they need to gain stakeholders’ attention and communicate why data are important and why they should care about it. Instances of mismatch between the priorities of leaders and other stakeholders may exist, though; for example, problems or goals that leaders identify might not be priorities in specific academic departments and colleges. Leaders must seize opportunities to lobby stakeholders about the importance of the data and its results. For example, campus leaders can disaggregate data by colleges and departments, topics (e.g., retention rates, enrollment, financial aid), and student populations (e.g., Black, Latinx, first-generation, low-income) before presenting to stakeholders and interpreting findings. As the Associate Vice Provost for Student Success at Virginia Tech shared,



When I distributed our first university-wide advising students survey, I disaggregated the data by colleges and sent it to every dean and associate dean, and offered, “My services are coming and helping them talk through how they might want to improve advising.” I had zero response. Then, I figured I need to get this data out somewhere. Then, I shared the data campus-wide. Still, no response. The next time I had to distribute the survey, I did the same thing, some of the data to the college individually. I also did a really big presentation. The most powerful slide I used compared overall student satisfaction by colleges in a bar graph. No one likes to be last. Before I could even finish the meeting, every dean went to meet with me, because they were concerned that they were not first or in the first few. They asked me to come in and talk to them about their specific college, and how they can position themselves a little bit differently. The data, the way I originally presented, it is just [that] they didn’t care, but to see themselves in relation to other colleges was a definite motivator to get folks talking about what they were going to do specifically to change and improve advising.



**Make Recommendations Within Various Contexts.** When presenting data and results, leaders must make recommendations that are contextualized within various components of the institution, including divisions, colleges, and advising units; in addition, these suggestions should consider stakeholders’ interests, time, and resources. One way that leaders can facilitate conversations and spark change is by providing simple actions that stakeholders can

take in response to the data. For example, one campus leader who oversaw the advising central office shared that when she met with department chairs, she not only presented data results but also offered “step one, two, three, and four” for department chairs to consider.

The implementation of “targeted advising campaigns” is another example of using data to make specific recommendations. An administrator who leads academic advising programs and initiatives for undergraduate academic affairs at Virginia Tech shared,



Once you drill down in the data and understand exactly who it is and who are the most vulnerable in your particular advising office, then you create a plan on how to engage those students differently and more intentionally, more proactively than you would for the other students.



The administrator examined the data to find out if there were any particular areas that staff should focus on in a given year. Data showed that the probation issues were very different in each college. For instance, one college might have more first-year students who were on probation than another college did. To address probation issues, this administrator asked colleges to establish a college-specific plan for addressing students on probation through a collaborative workshop in which key stakeholders in that college met.

**Build Buy-In.** A high degree of stakeholder buy-in for data use can add credibility to decisions leaders make. Some institutions may face resistance from various stakeholders when they communicate a new campaign or lobby for resources, funding, and changes. To remove and navigate resistance, campus leaders should work to cultivate trust with stakeholders, in part by identifying the evidence and resonant examples they need to provide to their stakeholders to persuade them to buy into decisions. To facilitate buy-in, leaders should base their decisions on data rather than intuition. In our interviews, LaGuardia Community College leaders described how they used data and evidence to obtain buy-in:



You have to know who your audience is because you have to get buy-in in various places. Even if they're not immediate stakeholders, you still have to get buy-in because people who are not directly involved will voice concerns if they feel alienated from a particular process. The rollout of our new model had heavy faculty involvement from the very beginning for the first wave. We asked them to help make the case to their colleagues in the second wave and the third wave to move that forward. We also had data to back up what we're trying to do. We anticipated some pushback in some areas where this would feel like a very different practice. So, we had data from the beginning. We're tracking things that are important to certain constituencies [but] that may not be important to what we're trying to do but are important to the concerns that they had.

We present three steps leaders may use to build buy-in by using data:

- **Present the problems.** Let stakeholders see the gaps by providing information or a snapshot of national or regional picture. Additionally, leaders can offer opportunities for stakeholders to engage in discussions about finding solutions to identified problems.
- **Build trust.** Present evidence to help stakeholders know that their opinions and actions are heard and respected. Including stakeholders as key players in the change management processes, while taking their feedback to improve initiatives, will help create trust and buy-in.
- **Communicate progress.** Keep stakeholders updated about the progress and impacts they make on student success.



## Questions to Consider

1. What strategies do you use to analyze and translate data and evidence associated with advising?

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2. In what ways do you consider Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian and Pacific Islander, first-generation, and low-income students when translating, analyzing, and interpreting data?

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3. What elements do you consider when sharing and communicating data and evidence related to advising with various stakeholders?

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4. What challenges do you face with sharing and communicating data? How do you resolve these?

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### Case Study: How Mesa Community College Builds Buy-In

A campus leader from Mesa Community College described what she had done to build buy-in among different stakeholders in her institution. Mesa Community College uses both decentralized and centralized academic advising models. The decentralized academic advising is delivered by several departments that are under either academic affairs or student affairs. The majority of advising occurs in an advising department located in student affairs, which reports directly to her. One of her responsibilities is to connect all academic advising services together and create consistency.

At the time of our interview, Mesa Community College was starting the process of implementing a Guided Pathways advising model, which included newly created pathway maps that aligned with redesigned curricula and assigned students to an advisor who works with students in similar programs (or meta majors). Following are examples of ways in which this campus leader built buy-in when her office promoted the Guided Pathways framework on their campus:

**Forming a committee:** The leader formed a committee of leaders and stakeholders to examine their own institutional data, comparing outcomes among students who had experienced academic advising initiatives and who had not. They also identified other institutions across the United States that had implemented similar initiatives, seeking to understand how other institutions were able to significantly influence outcomes through the changes and initiatives. The committee presented their findings to district leadership to create buy-in at all 10 colleges in the district:



**It was used to create buy-in. Because it required funding, it required significant change culturally. In order to create that buy-in of leadership, we use the data there to gain new advising positions to support Guided Pathways efforts.**



**Cross-functional alignment:** The campus leader did a self-described “roadshow” in different departments that support advising. The academic departments used different ways to track and examine student performance and used different management systems. The campus leader met with the decentralized advising departments to learn what they were doing in academic advising, what system they were using, and what challenges they had, and the leader gave them an opportunity to learn why the Advisement Department implemented Guided Pathways framework:



The goal is not just to change the departments to do what the Advisement Department is doing. It is more about using a team collaborative approach to determine what is best for students. It helps to create that buy-in and to help all stakeholders understand why it is important for a student to have similar advising experiences from department to department. This also helps us as an institution to track consistent data so we are looking at the same things. This helps us to paint the student story.



**Managing down:** The Advisement Department created monthly reports that examined the overall impacts of academic advising on students. The campus leader used the data to show advisors how much impact they made on students and where there might be gaps in the focus placed on centering student voices and experiences:



Not only do academic advisors understand their impacts, [but] they also understand the good work they're doing. They understand when there is an ask to make a change to what they typically do or a new initiative that they understand the why. Using data helps create that greater understanding.



Additional examples of advising initiatives (including academic, career, and financial advising) across different institutional types can be found in the case study collections from the National Resource Center, including *Career Advising as a Tool for Student Success and Educational Equity* (Fountain & Portillo, 2021) and *Academic Advising as a Tool for Student Success and Educational Equity* (Fountain, 2021).

### Pause and Reflect

Review the following checklist to reflect on the ways in which your institution works collaboratively to provide advising-related resources. In the left column, indicate whether or not each feature in the right column exists at your institution by using a checkmark (to indicate yes) or an X (to indicate no).

#### CHECKLIST FOR WORKING COLLABORATIVELY

- Does your institution regularly schedule meetings to bring faculty and professional advisors together?
- Does your institution organize specialized committees to address emergent issues?
- Does your institution organize specialized committees to discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion? Do these conversations connect with advising initiatives, priorities, and goals?
- Does your institution facilitate collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs?
- Do you regularly message and update stakeholders?

If your institution is missing items from this checklist, what actions can you take and what relationships and/or networks can you leverage to create or strengthen the creation and delivery of these initiatives?

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## Question to Consider

What strategies for working collaboratively would you like to improve or implement at your institution?

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## Objective 3: Provide Regular Professional Development Around Data Use

Campus leaders and stakeholders have different levels of knowledge, skills, and comfort related to technology and data systems. To increase overall efficiency and capacity for data use, campus leaders and all relevant stakeholders should choose to engage in ongoing professional development on data literacy and technology use. With professional development, more consistent data use practices (e.g., common language in data conversations, data-analytics approaches, data interpretation) can occur among stakeholders (Schmit, 2017). Meanwhile, improved data literacy can enhance stakeholders' buy-in and confidence with using data, which may improve collaboration in data use as a tool to promote institution growth and student success. For example, the California State University system offers a certificate program in student success analytics for faculty, staff, and administrators to learn evidence-based strategies for supporting students to graduation and data tools with a focus on closing equity gaps. Topics related to data use range from data management to data analytics to data leadership. Training for data use often is associated with technology training. To achieve shared understandings of data use, data systems, and data culture, we identify some potential topics for professional development based on the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide: *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making* (Hamilton et al., 2009):

- Interpret data correctly and avoid misinterpretation
- Navigate data systems and identify data
- Extract data and display reports
- Use analytics technologies
- Create transparency of data use
- Build and maintain a culture of data use
- Achieve continuous improvement by using data
- Use data to modify leadership and advising practices
- Engage equity and inclusion in data use and conversation
- Develop leadership for data and evidence-based decision making

Campus leaders must understand the diverse learning needs of stakeholders and must be transparent about institutional data-driven decision-making processes. Thus, delivering professional development in multiple ways should

be considered. One example includes posting training modules online so that stakeholders can access modules at their own pace. Along with professional development, campus leaders should provide updated data and technology resource guides and supplemental support services (e.g., access to IT and data personnel) that are used in decision-making processes. The following support resources can be provided:

- A toolbox of data management and analytics resources on the academic advising website
- Tutorial videos of how to use data systems: extracting data, creating data reports, conducting basic data analytics
- A data catalog resulting from a data audit that serves as an inventory for data search

Additionally, while the majority of institutions have onboarding training and continuous professional development of academic advising staff and administrators, faculty advisors often do not often receive professional development related to advising technology and data systems. In our interviews, some campus leaders shared that they encountered resistance from faculty advisors in terms of implementing program assessments, as the primary responsibility for faculty is often teaching and research scholarship. Academic advising was considered part of their service loads but might not help them to achieve tenure and promotion. Without evidence of the effectiveness of faculty advising, institutions might not be able to know what works and what does not work, and that information ultimately affects students' satisfaction and learning outcomes. Therefore, professional development on advising practices, data use, and the value of program assessment and evaluations should be provided to faculty advisors.

## Questions to Consider

We offer the following strategies for you to consider as you work toward increasing the consistency of data use in advising between professional advisors and faculty:

1. How will you work toward communicating implications associated with advising assessment and technologies?

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2. What strategies will you use to build a close liaison between academic department (e.g., deans, associate deans), faculty advisors, and the institutional-level central advising office?

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3. How can your institution create resources and a reward system for participating in professional development and using advising assessments and technologies (e.g., assessment of quality of faculty advising in the tenure process)?

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4. In what ways can your institution provide professional development opportunities associated with incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion in data use?

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### Centering Equity in Advising Resources

To move away from deficit-oriented approaches, educators should use asset-based thinking to achieve equitable outcomes (Dodman et al., 2021; Lasater et al., 2020; Park, 2018). Asset-based thinking focuses on students’ strengths, skills, and values (Park, 2018). Through this approach, campus leaders should identify data that highlight students’ strengths and ways in which assessment methods may or may not capture them. For example, in conversations about student-level data, campus leaders and stakeholders can discuss what they know about students, including the wealth of knowledge that they bring with them into educational spaces, and ways in which institutional services can be restructured or sustained to best fit students’ needs. These conversations also allow for administrators to locate and address barriers to promoting equitable student outcomes (Park, 2018). It is important to constantly and consistently use asset-based approaches to guide decisions and actions because a failure to do so perpetuates inequities and can derail reform efforts and/or lead to superficial implementation (Park, 2018; Rubin, 2008). As such, campus leaders should conduct critical discussions regarding data use to generate alternative views or challenge their preexisting knowledge and experiences with students.

**TABLE 1**  
**REFRAMING DEFICIT THINKING FOR EQUITY MINDEDNESS**

	Deficit-oriented approaches	Equity-minded approaches	Reflection questions
<b>Context</b>	Lack of consideration of academic and nonacademic contexts (e.g., culture)	Data viewed as representative of students' experience, not just numbers on a page	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you know about minoritized students at your institution?</li> <li>2. What inclusive and culturally relevant advising practices exist at your institution?</li> <li>3. How frequently do students use advising services? What are the barriers to student use and access of these initiatives?</li> </ol>

# SUMMING IT UP: PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

Promoting buy-in with institutional holistic advising redesign and garnering support among stakeholders requires data use. This guidebook presents the concepts of collaboration across institutional silos, development of assessment tools, enhancing advising data capacity, and constant engagement through professional development as key structures and bridges that build a culture of strategic data use. One example of these principles in practice from our interviews is the University of South Carolina, where collaboration among stakeholders to create quality advising contained many pieces, including experiential learning opportunities, career exploration, and an understanding of campus resources available to the student. By positioning stakeholders (e.g., faculty and academic advisors) where their strengths lie, technologies, campus resources, and administrators were able to improve academic advising on campus and increase buy-in from the participating parties.

Leveraging a data culture and using it to your advantage is an important part of garnering support and stakeholders when presenting new ideas or potential changes to advising. A clear understanding of data must be in place to allow collaboration across student affairs and academic affairs, drive people to reach beyond their silos, and create clear objectives and attainable initiatives related to academic advising. Such a culture can be created and maintained through the development of assessment tools and data capacity while providing opportunity for professional development and improving strategies, collaboration, communication, and conversations about data use.

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# APPENDIX

# RESEARCH METHODS

## Review of Literature

We reviewed current educational reports, literature, and research on leadership in data use, data-driven and data-informed decision making in educational settings, and cultures of data use. We also reviewed articles posted on the website of NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. We used the information we learned through reviews to develop an interview protocol and to provide justification for the major themes we identified.

## Interviews

We recruited campus leaders to participate in interviews through convenience and purposive sampling. We purposefully sampled to get perspectives from a range of institutions. Three approaches were used to invite campus leaders. First, we sent out calls to the National Advisory Board of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition to ask them to nominate campus leaders they thought would be suitable to discuss our topic. Second, we identified active members in NACADA and sent out recruitment emails to campus leaders. Third, we sent a call to the Advising Success Network HBCU Professional Learning Community.

Between December 2020 and February 2021, we conducted semistructured interviews with 21 campus leaders who had responsibility for academic advising at 18 institutions. We gathered different opinions on using data from individuals at institutions that differed by structure of academic advising, types of institutions, and enrollment size. The summary of characteristics of the institutions is presented in Table A.1. Our interviews explored major topics relevant to data-driven and evidence-based approach in decision making, such as how campus leaders use data in decision making and case making, how campus leaders use evidence to manage up and down in organizational chart, how campus leaders use data in their leadership (e.g., collaborate with other units on campus, foster a culture of using data), and how campus leaders use assessment and evaluation.

All participation in our interviews was voluntary. In this report, we do not identify the campus leaders' names in illustrative cases or direct quotations. Some direct quotations have been edited for grammar and clarity.

## Analysis

We audio recorded and transcribed all the interviews. Then, we conducted content analysis to identify major themes to understand how campus leaders use data and evidence strategically. The themes presented in this guidebook are related to strategies used to build a consistent and coherent culture of academic advising and a culture of data use. We also identified examples to illustrate practices and strategies used in specific institutions.

## Limitations

Our approach had several limitations. First, we interviewed a select number of campus leaders. Their perceptions and experiences do not necessarily reflect those of other institutional leaders and are not designed to be generalizable across multiple institutional types. Second, the leaders we interviewed engaged in different efforts and inputs associated with improving academic advising, which does not mean those institutions are most successful or have best practices in academic advising. The purpose of our interviews was to explore the practices and strategies used by campus leaders and to synthesize suggestions and strategies that other campus leaders can adapt to meet their institutions' needs.

**TABLE A.1**

### SUMMARY OF CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWED INSTITUTIONS

Category	Number of institutions
Four-year institutions	14
Community colleges	4
Historically Black colleges and universities	3
Hispanic serving institutions	9
Private institutions	2
Institutions participating in the Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPASS) project	1
Institutions participating in Guided Pathways initiatives	1

*Note.* Several institutions fall into more than one category.