

Collecting and Using Data to Inform Student Support Services

NOTE: This document is designed to accompany the resources and tools presented in [MDRC's Tools for Postsecondary Schools Toolkit](#). It builds on information and concepts presented in the Data Management for Student Success videos. **Before reviewing this document, please use the link above to visit the web-based toolkit and watch those videos.**

BUILDING YOUR DATA TOOLKIT

- Establish measurable outcomes of interest and implement a plan to make that information readily accessible to relevant staff members. Consider:
 - Communication and outreach to students (including the method of reaching them and their response rate to that outreach), attendance and engagement, enrollment, and milestone completion, etc.
 - Desired outcomes for students
 - Information needed to track progress toward those desired outcomes
 - The people involved in tracking outcomes, and the people who require access to that information
- Conduct an inventory of current data collection practices to identify knowledge gaps (that is, what you are not measuring) and potential efficiencies (that is, what data are not necessary).

- Complete an assessment of your current management information system(s). Is it:
 - Customizable?
 - Updated in real time?
 - Accessible and easy to use across departments?
 - Able to access the right measures to evaluate your program?
 - Flexible in what data can be exported and in the export format options?
- When possible, integrate data used to track student outcomes and support services into an existing management information system.
- Be mindful of who has access to sensitive student data.
- Balance quantity and quality—more data ≠ better data!

USING YOUR DATA TOOLKIT

- Review real-time data on a daily/weekly basis to monitor aggregate and individual student outcomes and engagement. Use this information to inform and set priorities for your outreach to students and the support services you provide.
- Conduct monthly reports of student outcomes and engagement and compare them with previous months' data and long-term goals. Identify inequities in outcomes and engagement and develop short-term strategies for immediate intervention.
- Reflect on student support services and outcomes for each semester. Revisit conversations on any inequities in outcomes and engagement. Refine your long-term goals and plan for targeted interventions.
- Rely on qualitative data (that is, student comments, staff anecdotes, quotes, and stories) to generate ideas for improving support services based on students' needs.
- Make conversations about data a part of your regular routine. Set up regular meetings to discuss daily, monthly, and semesterly reports, and your progress toward long-term goals. Bring in relevant staff members based on the information being discussed.
- Ensure relevant data are accessible to appropriate staff members. Provide training in the processes for requesting and accessing data, allowing for direct access when possible.