

Strategic Partnerships for Holistic Student Supports Toolkit

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



THE NEW STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS FOR HOLISTIC STUDENT SUPPORTS TOOLKIT from Achieving the Dream (ATD) is designed to provide a guided process for community and technical colleges to create partnerships with community partners that provide meaningful and impactful holistic supports for students to achieve their personal, academic, and career goals.

This toolkit was informed by ATD's ongoing work with ATD Network colleges as well as insights from interviews with leaders from eight diverse community and technical colleges of various sizes from across the country. These eight colleges have accomplished measurable results in providing holistic student supports through community partnerships, including during the unprecedented interruption to education, work, and life caused by the coronavirus pandemic from early 2020 to the time of publication.

The toolkit is accompanied by a **workbook**, which is provided for individuals and teams to capture their work in following the step-by-step process outlined in this toolkit. This workbook is in a fillable and saveable document, to allow college teams to iterate on their plans. Below is an outline of the most common steps:

Step One: Conduct Student Needs Assessment

- Collect a combination of data points
- Quantitative data on student outcomes, student identities, experiences, and on the student experience of a given problem
- Student understanding of needs and experiences through a combination of surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and or journals
- Third-party perspective of student needs and experiences
- Student-led process mapping



Step Two: Identify What It Will Entail to Meet Students' Needs

- Determine student needs and the missing structures to support those needs
- The goal should be independence, economic stability, economic mobility, and successful credential completion
- Identify where needs can be met by the college's current resources

Step Three: Assess Partnership Landscape (Current and Future)

- Inventory current partnerships: What are existing partnerships and relationships that can help to address the remaining needs?
- Review external partner landscape for future opportunities: Are other organizations within the community serving this need or trying to solve this problem?

Step Four: Conduct a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) for These Partnerships

- Strengths and weaknesses are internal to the organization. What are the strengths and weaknesses in moving forward with this partnership?
- Opportunities and threats are external to the organization. What are the opportunities and potential threats of moving forward with this partnership?

Step Five: Design and Build Partnerships for Holistic Supports

- Decide on your partner(s)
- Begin partnership discussion and develop a strong written agreement
- Build personal mutually beneficial relationships
- Identify shared vision, purpose, goals, and principles
- Identify a partnership team and ensure everyone is on board
- Create partnership parameters including roles and responsibilities
- Identify goals, success metrics, and timelines to achieve milestones in meeting student holistic needs



Step Six: Measure Success and Plan for Continuous Improvement

- Measure broader outcomes as well as specific outputs
- Identify, collect, and analyze data to measure the effectiveness of the partnership
- Disaggregate data to look at intersections of identity and circumstances
- Work toward continuous improvement

Step Seven: Pilot, Validate Proof of Concept, Operationalize, and Scale

- Pilot to explore effectiveness of programming or strategy, and adjust based on data collected
- Validate proof of concept through implementation of the evaluation plan and continuous improvement towards student success
- Operationalize programming, thus leading to sustainability
- Scale when proof of concept is fully developed, and additional resources are available to expand activities



www.achievingthedream.org

Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a partner and champion of more than 300 community colleges across the country. Drawing on our expert coaches, groundbreaking programs, and national peer network, we provide institutions with integrated, tailored support for every aspect of their work — from foundational capacities such as leadership, data, and equity to intentional strategies for supporting students holistically, building K–12 partnerships, and more. We call this Whole College Transformation. Our vision is for every college to be a catalyst for equitable, antiracist, and economically vibrant communities. We know that with the right partner and the right approach, colleges can drive access, completion rates, and employment outcomes — so that all students can access life-changing learning that propels them into community-changing careers. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).