

ATD Institutional Designation Guidance

Achieving the Dream (ATD) has been at the forefront of postsecondary reform work for 20 years. As one of the first national groups to occupy the educational reform space, we have been prioritizing student centeredness and racial equity from the organization's inception, emboldening communities to choose transformation over tradition, curiosity over inaction, and innovation over status quo.

Each year Achieving the Dream honors Network colleges whose commitment to equitable outcomes has driven substantive improvements for students and their communities. Achieving the Dream's national college leadership designations will be announced in February at DREAM 2025 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The three levels of designations are **Leader College, Leader College of Distinction, and the Leah Meyer Austin Award.**

Colleges earning these designations — and that meet requirements — will be prioritized for participation in ATD's innovation initiatives and competitive grant opportunities. They will also be given priority for opportunities to present and facilitate sessions at ATD events and institutes and may be asked to serve as mentor colleges. Additionally, these institutions will receive prioritized attention in ATD's communications, which reach thousands of individuals, funders, and national media outlets. ATD bestows the selected ATD Network institutions with their respective designated badges on the ATD website and other collateral assets.

The resources and requirements for a successful application are outlined below. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact network@achievingthedream.org, check out the [FAQ](#), or join one of the upcoming office hours:

September 12, 2024, 3:00 pm (EST) [[Register](#)]

October 8, 2024, 2:00 pm (EST) [[Register](#)]





Leader College

ATD Network institutions that are in good standing with ATD and their accreditors and have participated in the ATD Network since 2021 or earlier are eligible to apply for Leader College designation. ATD Network Leader Colleges are strong in the capacities fundamental to implementing reforms and are models for how colleges can better serve their students. Leader Colleges develop innovative ways to work with other colleges to share knowledge and facilitate an exchange of ideas about evidence-based reform strategies.

Leader College terms are three years long, after which institutions are eligible to apply for recertification.



Leader College of Distinction

ATD created the Leader College of Distinction award in 2018 to recognize colleges that have pursued and met challenging student success goals, often earning Leader College status several times. ATD Network institutions that have completed at least one year at Leader College status and are in good standing with ATD and their accreditors are encouraged to apply for the higher designation of Leader College of Distinction. ATD Network Leader Colleges of Distinction demonstrate sustained and proactive reform efforts that result in significant improvements in student success and equity.

Leader College of Distinction terms are three years long, after which institutions are eligible to apply for recertification.





Leah Meyer Austin Award

The Leah Meyer Austin Award is the highest distinction a college in the Achieving the Dream (ATD) Network can earn. The award annually recognizes an ATD Network college that has demonstrated outstanding progress in designing a student-focused culture that permeates the whole institution.

Awardees receive \$25,000 to further their institutions' student success efforts.

Leader College: 2025 Eligibility

ATD Network institutions that are in good standing with ATD and their accreditors — and that have participated in the ATD Network since 2021 or earlier — are eligible to apply for Leader College designation. ATD Network Leader Colleges are strong in the capacities fundamental to implementing reforms and are models for how colleges can better serve their students.

Metrics

Leader College certification requires colleges to provide four years of data and demonstrate a three-year upward trend in the Overall metrics category as well as the Equity category. Specifically, closing gaps is best demonstrated by a decline in the size of the gap between two subgroup student groups. While increases across subgroups is also laudatory, the emphasis here is on closing gaps. Please also note that a narrowed gap as a result of lesser gains of one subgroup is not considered a true measure of equity gains.

Colleges seeking this distinction will highlight:

- Two metrics in the Overall category that show a substantial improvement of **three** percentage points or more over three years. Please note that the gateway metric includes three sub-metrics. Colleges may use only one gateway sub-metric in the Overall category.
- One metric in the Equity category that uses disaggregated data to show an improvement of two percentage points or more in closing or narrowing an equity gap over three years. For example, the equity metrics highlights the



equity gap improvement between part-time student and full-time student outcomes (student groups A and B).

When applying for this designation, colleges will complete their data template and then move to the online application, where they will discuss the interventions implemented that are deemed responsible for the metrics gains that demonstrate both the improvements and the distributions outlined above. Colleges applying for Leader College status will also be required to submit a President's Letter of Support.

Leader College of Distinction: 2025 Eligibility

ATD Network institutions that have completed at least one year at Leader College status and are in good standing with ATD and their accreditors may apply to seek a higher designation: Leader College of Distinction. Subject to more rigorous requirements than those applied to Leader Colleges, ATD Network Leader Colleges of Distinction demonstrate sustained and proactive reform efforts that result in substantive improvements in student success and equity.

Metrics

Colleges must report four years of data and show substantive three-year upward trends in the following categories:

- Overall Metrics
 - Three distinct metrics must be presented in the online application. Please note that the gateway metric includes three sub-metrics. Colleges may use only one gateway sub-metric in the Overall category.
 - The metrics presented must include two leading indicators (early momentum metrics) **and** one lagging indicator (milestone metrics like completion or transfer and earned baccalaureate)
 - These metrics should demonstrate a substantial improvement of **three** percentage points or more over three years.



- Equity Metrics
 - Two distinct metrics should be presented in the online application. Unlike the Overall metrics, colleges can present more than one gateway sub-metric in the Equity section. The strongest applications, however, will highlight equity improvements beyond the gateway sub-metrics.
 - The metrics presented must demonstrate equity improvements for two separate student groups. For example, equity gap metric one highlights the equity gap improvement between part-time student and full-time student outcomes (student groups A and B) while the equity gap two highlights the equity gap improvement between Pell-eligible students and non-Pell-eligible students (student groups C and D).
 - These metrics should demonstrate a substantial improvement of two percentage points or more in closing or narrowing equity gaps over three years. Specifically, closing gaps is best demonstrated by a decline in the size of the gap between two groups of students. While increases across student groups is also laudatory, the emphasis here is on closing gaps. Please also note that a narrowed gap as a result of lesser gains of one subgroup is not considered a true measure of equity gains.

When applying for the Leader College of Distinction designation, colleges will complete their data template and then move to the online application where they will discuss the interventions implemented that are deemed responsible for the metrics gains that demonstrate both the improvements and the distributions outlined above. Colleges will also be required to submit a President's Letter of Support.

Leah Meyer Austin Award: 2025 Eligibility

Eligible ATD Network institutions are Leader Colleges or Leader Colleges of Distinction in good standing, have been participants in the ATD Network for at least three years, and have not won the award in the last five years. In addition, eligible colleges have met **one or more** of the following data criteria by showing:



- Four-year improvement in the IPEDS three-year graduation rate of at least three percentage points (first-time full-time students)
- Four-year improvement in the IPEDS Fall to Fall retention rate of at least three percentage points (First-time full-time students)
- Four-year improvement in the IPEDS Fall to Fall retention rate of at least three percentage points (First-time part-time students)
- Selection as one of the top 150 colleges in the competition for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence

Metrics

Colleges must report four years of data and show substantive three-year upward trends in the following categories:

- Overall Metrics
 - Three distinct metrics must be presented in the online application. Please note that the gateway metric includes three sub-metrics. Colleges may use only one gateway sub-metric in the Overall category.
 - The metrics in this category must include two leading indicators (early momentum metrics) and one lagging indicator (completion or transfer).
 - Demonstrate a substantial improvement of three percentage points or more over three years.
- Equity Metrics
 - Two distinct metrics should be presented in the online application. Unlike the Overall metrics, colleges can present more than one gateway sub-metric in the Equity section. The strongest applications, however, will highlight equity improvements beyond the gateway sub-metrics.
 - The metrics presented should demonstrate equity improvements for two separate student groups. For example, equity gap metric one highlights the equity gap improvement between part-time student and full-time student outcomes (student groups A and B) while the equity gap two highlights the equity gap improvement between Pell-eligible students and non-Pell-eligible students (student groups C and D).
 - Demonstrate a substantial improvement of two percentage points or more in closing or narrowing equity gaps over three years. Specifically, closing gaps is best demonstrated by a decline in the size of the gap between two student groups. While increases across



subgroups is also laudatory, the emphasis here is on closing gaps. Please also note that a narrowed gap as a result of lesser gains of one subgroup is not considered a true measure of equity gains.

When applying for the Leah Meyer Austin Award, colleges will complete their data template and then move to the online application where they will discuss the interventions deemed responsible for the metrics that demonstrate gains in both the improvements and the distributions outlined above. Colleges will also be required to submit a President's Letter of Support and an Evidence of Institutional Transformation document.

Resources and Requirements

Applications for ATD's three designations will be submitted through a new platform this year, which will improve the user experience. On your first visit to the application portal, be sure to click the "Register" link in the top right corner and set up your log-in credentials. Upon subsequent visits, click "Login" which will take you to your application portal, where you can find resources and add/edit your application as often as you like until the deadline.

All colleges applying for a designation will download and complete the Data Template, which is available via a link below and in the application portal. Please complete the Data Template before completing the online application. The strongest applications are a result of bringing IR staff and key leaders together to craft clear and compelling narratives that truly highlight the work the college has done to achieve these outcomes. That narrative would ideally include items such as what interventions or reforms were implemented, why those reforms were selected, and the results the college has seen as a result. It should speak directly to the metrics recorded in the data template. In addition to the Data Template and online application form, all colleges must submit a President's Letter of Support. Guidelines for this letter can be found via a link below or in the application portal.

Colleges applying for ATD's highest distinction, the Leah Meyer Austin Award, will also complete the Data Template and the online application form and will submit a President's Letter of Support. However, colleges seeking this designation must also write and submit an Evidence of Institutional Transformation document.



Guidance for preparing this document can be found via a link below and will also be available in the application portal.

ATD has created rubric documents for each designation. Colleges are encouraged to download the appropriate rubric and use it to guide and strengthen the content of their online application.

Before beginning your online application form, please access the resources provided here to assist you in crafting the strongest submission possible.



Resources	Leader College	Leader College of Distinction	Leah Meyer Austin Award
<p>Data Template (Excel file) to be completed and then uploaded to the online form</p> <p>Rubrics serve as a guide to the standards ATD reviewers will use when scoring your application package.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader College (PDF) • Leader College of Distinction (PDF) • Leah Meyer Austin Award (PDF) 	●	●	●
<p>President/CEO Letter of Support (Doc or PDF) to be written and uploaded to the online form</p> <p>Guidance (PDF)</p>	●	●	●
<p>Evidence of Institutional Transformation to be written and uploaded to the online form</p> <p>Guidance (PDF)</p>	N/A	N/A	●