



Student Success Center
NETWORK



Guided Pathways: Making the Case for Change

Implementing guided pathways requires institution-wide change, which is not possible without significant participation at all levels of a college. How can you inspire others to get involved? Start by involving them in a conversation that is built around two big ideas.

First, consider what the large-scale change process needs from each of the key players:

- **The college president** sets the goals and priorities, establishes the parameters of success, and makes sure participants have the time and budget to implement real change.
- **Other administrators, department chairs, deans, and directors** translate these big-picture ideas into actions that meet the goals—and that make sense to the people who must carry them out.
- **Faculty and staff** participate in the process, contributing their expertise and perspective.
- **Students, particularly those who are not currently succeeding**, provide input.

Second, consider what the key players need from the process:

1. **Recognition** of the work they are doing now and how it may fit into the evolution of reform.
2. **An opportunity to draw their own conclusions** about the big ideas of guided pathways and how these ideas might be applied at your college.
3. **Acknowledgment of concerns** about how change might affect them and their work.

Providing **recognition** does not mean singling out specific programs, and it is not a promise that all will continue as-is. It is an explicit appreciation of existing efforts and, more important, of people's commitment to serving their students well.

Why give participants **an opportunity to draw their own conclusions**? Real change happens when participants (1) believe there is a problem; and (2) believe there is a solution to address that problem. Page 2 of this document focuses on helping your team openly consider key questions so they can develop a unified plan with broad support.

Acknowledging concerns about change is an essential part of the conversation, particularly when you discuss specific solutions. For more information about addressing common concerns related to guided pathways, see [Guided Pathways Demystified](#) by Rob Johnstone, founder and president of the National Center for Inquiry and Improvement, and visit the NC Student Success Center webpage for GPS resources [here](#).

The Student Success Center Network is a national network of statewide Student Success Centers. Jobs for the Future (JFF) manages the Network and provides support to Center staff.

This document was created with input from Rob Johnstone, Founder and President, National Center for Inquiry and Improvement. www.ncii-improve.com

Giving participants an opportunity to draw their own conclusions

This step is essential so participants become an active part of the solution rather than reacting to solutions that are given to them.

If real change happens when participants (1) believe there is a problem; and (2) believe there is a solution to address that problem, then your conversation has one overarching goal:

Helping participants come to the table with an openness to:

- **Understand students' struggles as evidenced by quantitative and qualitative data.**
Present current data on, for example, graduation rates or courses completed. If your graduation rate is 31 percent, it means seven in 10 students did not reach their goals.
- **Discuss whether this reality is acceptable.**
Is your current data—X in 10 students not reaching their goals—acceptable? Are your data for low-income students and students of color acceptable?
- **If the current reality is not acceptable, decide whether it is something to act on.**
If you have 1200 new students per year and increase your graduation rate from 30 percent to 50 percent, that's not just statistics. That increase means 240 more students will graduate each year and 2400 students in a decade whose lives will be improved. It's likely that those 2400 individuals will include a high proportion of students of color and low-income students. If large-scale change can lead to equitable student outcomes and help more people achieve their goals, isn't it worth doing?

When participants decide that change is important to serve students, then the group can consider how to effect change. Key points for discussing this idea:

- The system our college currently has is leading to the outcomes we currently have.
- **It's not students' fault. It's not faculty or staff members' fault. We all work within a system that isn't designed to produce the results we need.**
- We have to reevaluate the entire system and each of our roles in the system.
- This is a long process. It will take time to plan for an implement sustained, long-term change. That is what is required to fundamentally change our system.

At this point, introduce the guided pathways (GPS) framework and how it fits with your college's goals. See references for information to help you explain guided pathways.

- The guided pathways framework can help us organize our work and improve our system ... and a lot of what we are doing already can fit within this framework.
- Explore what will and won't change and note that guided pathways (GPS) reforms are about helping students make more informed decisions. And while this may influence courses offered, and faculty may help reinforce pathways, the changes do not focus on pedagogy.

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