

# Bridging the Gaps through Cross-System Education Partnerships: Reflection Questions

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The reflection questions below are intended to help educators as they seek to develop or strengthen their own regional cross-system partnerships. The questions are informed by research conducted with Bridging the Gap partners and are organized by the five principles outlined in the report. Bridging the Gap partnerships focus on first-generation college students, students of color, and low-income students who face substantial barriers in meeting their educational goals. The questions are meant to serve as a starting point for self-assessment of partnership goals, strategies, and challenges. Individual partnerships will likely have additional questions arise from this exercise. Questions are adapted from [\*Bridging the Gaps through Cross-System Education Partnerships: Principles of Practice from Long Beach and the Salinas Valley\*](#).

## **(1) Keep Students, their Educational Goals, and Related Equity Implications at the Center**

- Do we have a common vision across institutions for our partnership and for the specific tasks we are undertaking? What are our partnership goals? How do they relate to our own institutional goals? Do the partnership goals focus on students? Can we make the goals more student-centered? More equity-centered (and do we have agreement about how we define and operationalize equity)? Who is developing our goals (are diverse groups at the table)?
- Which groups of students do the current or proposed activities of our partnership support? Are there additional groups of students that we should be trying to reach through our efforts? Will large numbers of students be able to access the proposed activities? Who will be left out?
- Are there equity implications in terms of the students we are serving and are proposing to serve? For example, to what extent does this work help us become “student-ready” in supporting the closing of opportunity and outcomes gaps for students?

- How are we engaging students in this work? Does our partnership have processes in place (such as surveys and focus groups) to listen to student feedback? For example, do we ask students about their perspectives on supports and programs that help them meet their educational goals (including current and potential offerings)?
- What expectations do different partnership stakeholders have for addressing the needs of students? Do we need to change the mindsets or expectations of any of the stakeholder groups regarding student capabilities and addressing student needs? If so, what strategies are we using to try to change mindsets?
- What processes does our partnership have in place to engage K-12 parents and K-16 faculty to help students meet their educational goals? What processes do we have to engage students in these efforts? Who else do we need to engage in our efforts to support students?

## **(2) Share and Use Data to Identify Successes and Barriers and to Build Engagement**

- What long-term goals do we share for student success across our systems? What data do we need to collect or understand regarding whether we are meeting these goals?
- Do we disaggregate data by student group? Do we have processes in place, and are we using data to identify, understand, and change opportunity gaps? Outcomes gaps? Who leads those discussions?
- What kinds of data does each partner collect to help us understand student progress across our partnering institutions? What do these data tell us? Are the data timely?
- Are we using these data to inform changes in processes, procedures, and policies that can better support student success?
- Are faculty and staff using the data to inform program, curricular, and pedagogical changes that support equitable student outcomes?
- What are the key [loss and momentum points](#) within and across the continuum of students' educational experiences? Which groups of students are we losing at those points?
- What steps do we need to take to ensure access to data across our partnering institutions?
- What questions do we need to ask to ensure that our efforts and dollars spent on data do not outweigh the benefit?
- How accessible are our data? Are we sharing evidence-based information with students, parents, and community members? What are we hearing from them? How are we responding to them? Who is responding to them?

### **(3) Engage and Support Leaders at the Top and in the Middle**

- Who is at the table in our partnership efforts right now? Do our discussions include voices representative of our community and our students? Are our faculty and staff representative of our students? Who needs to be at the table who is not currently here?
- Which individuals or organizations does our partnership need to engage? What strategies and which allies can help us reach out for that support?
- Does our partnership engage and support individuals at multiple levels (for example, campus/school/district leaders, mid-level administrators, teachers/faculty, and counselors) in the partnering institutions?
- Does our partnership engage and support individuals in different roles (for example, academic and student affairs) in the partnering institutions?
- Is our partnership structured in ways that can sustain the work if institutional leaders depart? Do team members on the ground have the authority to make decisions that will allow the work to continue to be a priority?
- What strategies or incentives can we put in place to help create the time and space for people to go beyond their regular work duties to participate in this work—individually and collectively?

### **(4) Work across Institutions to Improve Connections and Create Coherence for Students**

- What strategies do we have to ensure an awareness of and a commitment to a common vision across the partnership? Is our commitment to that vision aligned with support for the goals of each group of partners working on discrete tasks?
- How would we describe the culture of our partnership? In what ways is it based on a culture of trust? A culture of equity? A culture of evidence-based decisionmaking? A culture of assets-based supports? A culture of systemic reform? In what areas could each of these issues be developed or enhanced among partners?
- What processes are currently in place to encourage or engage in cross-system collaboration? What additional strategies could be established to facilitate this work?
- What are the motivations for each institution to engage in this partnership? What are the financial incentives and policy levers that can help drive participation in this work? How can we build on those incentives, policies, and other opportunities at our home institutions?
- What are the fiscal, policy, and other barriers to partnership at the different institutions? Are there different processes and procedures at the different institutions (different academic

schedules, registration systems, terminology, etc.) that need to be addressed in order to allow the activities of the partnership to work more efficiently?

- What processes can our partnership put in place to build awareness of incentive structures and barriers within and across systems and institutions? How do our own institutional histories and contexts affect our abilities to partner effectively?

## **(5) Work *within* Each Institution to Institutionalize and Sustain the Work**

- How does the work of my partnership align with current tasks and priorities at my own institution? Are there potential conflicts between the work of the partnership and the goals and priorities of my institution? How can we address these conflicts?
- How can we build on existing structures and processes within each institution to incorporate the work of the partnership?
- Is initiative fatigue affecting the work at my institution? What steps do we need to take to ensure that partnership initiatives are treated as long-term priorities and not just as another short-term project?
- In facilitating and institutionalizing change, in what ways are we attending to routine, yet impactful, practices within each institution, such as enrollment management, curriculum and program streamlining, budgetary commitments, tenure track hiring, and data capabilities? How are we considering opportunity and outcomes gaps around these issues? How are we using evidence to inform these key decisions?
- How do our institutional incentives, barriers, histories, and contexts affect the sustainability of our partnership and collaborative programs? How can we leverage our partnership to sustain our work?