



Readiness and Progress Audit Network Member Application Content Guide

Thank you for your interest in joining the FirstGen Forward Network!

Getting Started

To join the FirstGen Forward Network, you will apply using the Readiness and Progress Audit.

The Readiness and Progress Audit is a diagnostic tool designed to gather valuable data on how your institution serves first-generation students. This tool is integral to the FirstGen Forward Network experience, as it collects longitudinal progress data to assess and support your institution's efforts in strengthening and scaling infrastructure and resources for first-generation students. Additionally, the data collected through this audit informs the development of new products and services tailored to meet the evolving needs of Network members.

The Readiness and Progress Audit will be utilized at multiple points during the First Scholar Network experience.

IMPORTANT: One of your two primary contacts will complete the Readiness and Progress Audit, but that individual may need the support of the leadership team and Institutional Research (IR) to prepare the questions we will provide in advance.

We recommend that you take the survey in one sitting. Please review this guide before you apply for the FirstGen Forward Network. If you cannot complete the Readiness and Progress Audit in one sitting, please continue using the same browser and internet connection.

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Sample Questions

The Readiness and Progress Audit has approximately fifty questions. Some are multiple-choice, with a simple yes, no, or “I’m not sure” answer. The “I’m not sure” answer is important because it shows what areas the institution needs to focus on in communicating with the campus community. Additional question types include select-all-that-apply, Likert scale, and open-ended.

Multiple Choice (most common question type)

Does your institution have a formal definition(s) of who is considered a first-generation college student?

- Yes
- No
- I’m not sure

Select All that Apply

Please select the response most closely aligned with your institutional definition(s) of a first-generation college student. (*select all that apply*)

- Neither biological parent earned a four-year college degree
- Neither parent or guardian earned a four-year college degree
- Neither parent or guardian earned a four-year college degree from an institution in the United States
- Neither parent nor guardian with primary influence on the student at age 16 earned a four-year college degree
- Neither parent completed education beyond the associate/two-year degree
- Neither parent entered any form of higher education
- Other, (please specify): _____

Likert Scale

The definition(s) of a first-generation college student is used consistently across:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I'm not sure
The admissions process						

Open-ended

Please elaborate on ways in which institutional leaders support first-generation student success:

All open-ended questions are provided below.

Content Overview

Please complete the Readiness and Progress Audit to the best of your ability. However, please understand that **your institution does not need to actively pursue each area** to be considered for selection. We look forward to learning more about the great efforts you and your colleagues are leading!

The list provided here is not comprehensive but is meant to support you as you apply to the FirstGen Forward Network.

Institutional Characteristics

- Type (e.g., Public, 4-year, Private, 2-year)
- Characteristics that describe your institution (e.g., Minority-serving institution, Hispanic-serving institution, etc.)

Leadership Team

We ask for the contact information of those serving on your Leadership team.

- **Primary contacts:** Two currently employed faculty and/or staff who will serve on your institution's leadership team for this initiative. They guide the day-to-day work and participate in all aspects of the FirstGen Forward Network experience. At least one must have an individual NASPA membership profile;
- **Cabinet-level leader:** This representative typically has oversight and management of first-generation student initiatives on campus, including financial responsibility and decision-making authority, and is a conduit to and responsible for maintaining communication with institutional leadership;
- **Institution's President or Chancellor:** the most senior institutional leader with final decision-making authority. The president or chancellor will champion the institutional support of first-generation student success and will be involved in the FirstGen Forward Network experience.

Institutional Research and Data Points

The following questions will ask about first-generation momentum metrics: enrollment, percent first-gen, completion rate, first-year retention, and credit completion ratio. **Please consult with your institutional research office (or equivalent) to provide the most recent available data.** We have provided these questions to make it easier for you.

- How many undergraduate students are enrolled at your institution? (Please use the unduplicated headcount over a 12-month period (July 1 – June 30) as reported to IPEDS) _____
- What percentage of your total undergraduate student enrollment are first-generation students?
 - %: _____
 - We do not collect this information
 - We do not have access to this data
- What is the most recent first-year enrollment for undergraduate first-generation students at your institution?
 - %: _____
 - We do not collect this information
 - We do not have access to this data

- How many graduate students are enrolled at your institution? (Please use the unduplicated headcount over a 12-month period (July 1 – June 30) as reported to IPEDS) _____
- What percentage of your total graduate student enrollment are first-generation students?
 - %: _____
 - We do not collect this information
 - We do not have access to this data
- What is the most recent first-year retention rate for undergraduate first-generation students at your institution?
 - %: _____
 - We do not collect this information
 - We do not have access to this data
- What is the most recent credit completion ratio* for undergraduate first-generation students at your institution?
 - %: _____
 - We do not collect this information
 - We do not have access to this data

*For credit completion ratio, you can calculate it the following way:

Divide “Successfully Completed Credit Hours” by “Attempted Credit Hours” (successful credit hours ÷ attempted credit hours = Completion Ratio) then multiply the result by 100 to obtain percentage (Completion Ratio x 100 = ____%). Not all institutions track this information so if you do not, it is not a problem.

Please answer the following question if you are a 2-year institution:

- What is the most recent 2-year degree completion rate for undergraduate first-generation students at your institution? (*Your institution may define this as the graduation rate*)
 - %: _____
 - We do not collect this information
 - We do not have access to this data

Please answer the following questions if you are a 4-year institution:

- What is the most recent 4-year degree completion rate for undergraduate first-generation students at your institution? (*Your institution may define this as the graduation rate*)
 - %: _____
 - We do not collect this information
 - We do not have access to this data
- What is the most recent 6-year degree completion rate for undergraduate first-generation students at your institution? (*Your institution may define this as the graduation rate*)
 - %: _____
 - We do not collect this information
 - We do not have access to this data

Inventory Question Topics

The questions in this inventory tool cover many topical areas identified by empirical research and evidence-based practices as imperative to first-generation student matriculation, persistence and completion, and post-graduation career and continued education trajectories. The majority of these questions are select-all-that-apply and Likert scale questions. Any questions that require a written response will be provided in the open-ended questions below. These questions are grouped into the following topics:

Aligning Leadership & Institutional Strategy: For first-generation efforts to become embedded into the institutional culture, be sustained through transition, and be scaled, it is critical for senior, cabinet-level leadership—those with decision-making capabilities, strategic direction, financial resources, and an ability to galvanize audiences—to lead the charge. Institutions focused on improving first-generation student success outcomes must develop a definition of success for that particular campus. Once the end goal is clear, the institution can create a holistic, student-centered strategy across all dimensions of the student experience, from the classroom to support services to campus operations to relationships with the broader community—all designed to foster measurable improvements in persistence rates, time to graduation, and completion rates.

- Support from the President or Chancellor
- Support from other cabinet leaders
- Steering committee perception and roles

Elevating Actionable Data for Decision-Making: Data-driven decision-making is vital to institutional success in resource allocation, student success metrics, program review, and regional and programmatic accreditation requirements. Ensure student data are disaggregated to ensure the first-generation population is specifically and appropriately addressed in institutional resources and support services.

- First-generation definition
- Analyzing intersectional identities
- First-generation self-identification
- Data collection and use
- Needs assessment of first-generation students

Mapping & Auditing Institutional Efforts & Resources: The most influential institutional transformation occurs due to cross-campus partnerships and collaborations. Institutional mapping and auditing of programs and services, communications, policies, and procedures will help develop a networked approach that aligns with your institution's culture to provide the greatest opportunity for successful transformation.

- Overall first-generation perception, awareness, and programming engagement
- Dedicated office, physical space, organization
- Federal TRIO programs

Strengthening Institutional Communications: Recalibrate internal and external communication toward an asset-based, first-generation inclusive approach, including

communication from pre-matriculation through post-completion for students, broader internal and external stakeholders, and the multitude of ways in which communication occurs.

- Communication for first-generation students
- Institutional websites that exist devoted to providing information to first-generation students and their family systems

Fostering Knowledge Across the Institution: Faculty and staff that learn more and build their knowledge about the first-generation student experience and their intersectional identities increase the institution's ability to relate, understand, support, and serve all students. In addition, an institution can break down barriers to first-generation student success in many ways, including equity-minded curriculum design, course audits through the academic review process, identity visibility, professional development, academic support, and reflection on current classroom and course practices.

- Campus stakeholders
- Engagement of stakeholders

Demonstrating Return on Investment: Initiatives designed or implemented with first-generation students in mind that span the academic career may result in data demonstrating a return on investment (ROI) and may be considered for scaling across the institution. Institutions must balance new initiatives, current budgets, and the external factors influencing institutional finances. In particular, ROI is a way to gauge proposed program growth and resource allocation. Institutional representatives with budgetary oversight (finance, budgeting, accounting, etc.) will be key partners while working toward this priority.

- Calculate ROI for undergraduate first-generation students
- Calculate ROI for graduate first-generation students

Open-ended Questions

The following is an inclusive list of the open-ended questions throughout the inventory. We encourage you to type these separately in a Word document so that you can copy and paste them when completing the Readiness and Progress Audit. Please ensure that these responses are between 250 and 500 words long.

- **Please provide a summary of your current first-generation student success efforts at your institutions.** *(This will serve as a general summary of your current efforts, while many of the following questions will be with a growth mindset.)*
- **What is your institution hoping to achieve by joining the FirstGen Forward Network?**
- **Is there a student outcomes metric your institution hopes to improve through advancing first-generation efforts?**

(For example, closing a 10% completion gap between first-generation and continuing-generation students or improving first-to-second-year persistence for first-generation students by 3%.)

- **What challenges or barriers may prevent this success? How do you anticipate overcoming these challenges or barriers?**

(Please know that sharing the challenges or barriers will not influence the selection process.)

- **What are the THREE (3) most important factors driving institutional decisions for first-generation student success?**

- Academic performance
 - Career outcomes
 - Completion/degree attainment
 - Co-curricular engagement
 - Emergency aid/basic needs support
 - Financial aid
 - Fundraising/scholarship development
 - Increasing enrollment
 - Cost of providing services
 - Persistence and retention
 - Sense of belonging
 - Student satisfaction
 - Student wellbeing
 - Other, please specify:
-

- **Is there any additional information you would like to share with us?**

Goals Submission

The following section will ask you to address 2-3 identified priority areas and to submit a SMART goal you aim to accomplish throughout the 2025-2026 academic year. This process includes time for reflection and consideration of how your team will remain accountable. We encourage you to type these separately in a Word document so that you can copy and paste them when completing the Readiness and Progress Audit.

PRIORITY AREA

These are specific projects or issues to address that are often overarching, community-wide needs. Ask yourselves: What are we trying to accomplish? What problem are we trying to solve? Ideally, your priority areas are aligned with your institution's strategic goals; improvement within a priority area will result in a demonstrated, scaled impact.

SMART GOAL (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound)

Based upon your identified priority area, begin thinking about goals that will address and improve the priority area. These goals should be focused on advancing first-generation student initiatives for the 2025-2026 academic year.

PRIMARY BARRIERS

These are challenges or issues that your institution will need to work on to achieve your SMART goal. Ask yourselves: What are the biggest issues blocking progress?

ACTION STEPS/TIME-BOUND ACTIVITIES

These are small-scale ideas and projects for implementation to initiate action towards the goal. These action steps bring you closer to addressing barriers. Think carefully about leadership support, collaborations, and resource needs. Who are your campus or community partners that will support this work? What are your indicators of success?

- **Priority Area I**
- **SMART Goal I**
- **Describe the primary barriers to achieving SMART Goal I. For each primary barrier, what Action Steps/Time-Bound Activities will address the barrier?**

- **Priority Area II**
- **SMART Goal II**
- **Describe the primary barriers to achieving SMART Goal II. For each primary barrier, what Action Steps/Time-Bound Activities will address the barrier?**

- **Priority Area III (Optional)**
- **SMART Goal III (Optional)**
- **Describe the primary barriers to achieving SMART Goal III. For each primary barrier, what Action Steps/Time-Bound Activities will address the barrier? (Optional)**