



FirstGen
FORWARD

**NETWORK
CHAMPION**

**Network Champion
Convening Workbook**

**2025 NASPA First-generation
Student Success Conference**

June 27 - June 30, 2025
Denver, CO

 **FirstGen
FORWARD**
FirstGenForward.org

Table of Contents

Network Champion Agenda



3	Acknowledgments
4	Schedule
6	FirstGen Forward Staff Presenters
7	Opening Session
9	From Data to Action: Institutional Insights on Leveraging PDP Dashboards for Success Panel
10	Investment into Impact: Calculating and Communication ROI for First-generation Student Initiatives
15	Exploring the Role of Policy in First-generation Student Success
19	Industry Trends and Workforce Needs
24	Funding Sources and Effective Fundraising Strategies for First-generation Student Programs
29	Continuous Improvement Cycles & ImproveEDU Refresher
50	Institution Work Time
52	Network Knowledge: Leveraging Peer Networks to Advance Institutional Success
52	Appendix





Thank you for
sponsoring the inaugural
Network Champion Convening.

Current Funding Partners

Thank you to our funding partners for their commitment to
first-generation student success.



Schedule

THURSDAY, JUNE 26

3:00 - 5:00 PM	Check-in at Registration Desk
5:00 - 6:30 PM	Welcome Social <i>Centennial FG</i>

FRIDAY, JUNE 27

7:30 - 8:50 AM	Breakfast <i>Centennial AB</i>
9:00 - 10:00 AM	Opening Session <i>Centennial AB</i>
10:10 - 11:00 AM	From Data to Action: Institutional Insights on Leveraging PDP Dashboards for Success Panel <i>Centennial AB</i>
11:10 - 12:10 PM	Investment into Impact: Calculating and Communication ROI for First-generation Student Initiatives <i>Centennial H</i>
12:10 - 1:10 PM	Lunch & Networking <i>Centennial FG</i>
1:20 - 2:20 PM	Exploring the Role of Policy in First-generation Student Success <i>Centennial H</i>
2:30 - 3:15 PM	Industry Trends and Workforce Needs <i>Centennial H</i>
3:15 - 3:45 PM	Snack Break & Networking <i>Centennial FG</i>
3:45 - 5:00 PM	Funding Sources and Effective Fundraising Strategies for First-generation Student Programs <i>Centennial H</i>

Schedule

SATURDAY, JUNE 28

7:30 - 8:50 AM	Breakfast <i>Centennial FG</i>
9:00 - 9:40 AM	ImproveEDU and Continuous Improvement Refresher <i>Centennial AB</i>
9:45 - 10:35 AM	Institutional Work Time <i>Centennial AB & C</i>
10:45 - 11:35 AM	Network Knowledge: Leveraging Peer Networks to Advance Institutional Success <i>Centennial AB & C</i>
11:40 - Noon	Closing and Evaluations <i>Centennial AB</i>

FirstGen Forward Staff Presenters



Maurice A. Jones, J.D.
Chief Executive Officer



Stephanie J. Bannister, Ph.D.
Vice President,
FirstGen Forward Network



Martina A. Martin, Ed.D.
Assistant Vice President,
Network Success



Qua'Aisa Williams, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice President,
Curriculum & Learning Design



Mary Fugate, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice President,
Data Analytics



Catherine Johnson, M.Ed.
Data Expert Guide



Wendy Beesley, M.P.A.
Director, Expert Guidance



Ashlee Kocina Young, M.Ed.
Associate Director, Expert Guidance



Jennifer Luken Sutton, Ph.D.
Expert Guide



Blake Nantz
Research & Data Manager



Stephanie Finau, Ph.D.
Director, Workforce
Development & Solutions



Deana Waintraub Stafford, M.Ed.
Vice President, Field Development
& Engagement



Nancy Stalowski, Ed.D.
Director, Diagnostics
& Data Analytics

Opening Session



Kaye Monk-Morgan, Ed.D.

Dr. Kaye Monk-Morgan is the president & CEO of the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), the center of excellence for civic leadership development and engagement. KLC is a non-profit organization “that fosters civic leadership for stronger, healthier, and more prosperous communities in Kansas and beyond.” Kaye leverages 30 years of experience as a higher education administrator in her work helping individuals, systems, and communities see and solve some of their most challenging problems.

An active community servant, Monk-Morgan has served on non-profit and corporate boards at the local, state, regional and national levels, including The Kansas African American Museum, NXTUS, the Ulrich Museum, KC United!, and the Wichita Land Bank. Monk-Morgan is a first-generation college graduate and has earned multiple academic credentials including a Bachelor of Chemistry/Business, a Master of Arts in Public Administration, and Doctorate in Educational Leadership.

Most important to Kaye is that she is a mentor, mentee, daughter, sister, auntie, wife, and mother. She is a life-long learner, a life member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., an aspiring yogi, and a wannabe long-distance runner. She lives in Wichita, KS, with her husband Derek and young adult sons, Payton and Cameron.

From Data to Action:

Institutional Insights on Leveraging PDP Dashboards for Success

Panelists



Mandy Bailey, M.Ed.

Postsecondary Data Partnership
Account Manager,
National Student Clearinghouse



Jenny Watts, M.A.

Executive Director, TRIO
Programs & First-Gen Initiatives
and Director, Student
Support Services,
Tarleton State University



Jennifer Lukon Sutton, Ph.D.

Expert Guide, FirstGen Forward



Phillip Lloyd Hamilton, M.S.Ed.

Assistant Vice President,
Student Belonging & Support
Florida International University

Moderator:



Mary Fugate, Ph.D.

Assistant Vice President,
Data Analytics

Notes

Turning Investment into Impact:

ROI Insights for First-generation Student Success

Return on investment (ROI) refers to the measurable benefits and outcomes derived from programs or initiatives relative to the resources invested. This process assesses whether the financial, social, and institutional gains justify the costs & efforts involved in implementing these programs.

KEY COMPONENTS OF ROI	
Inputs (Costs):	Outcomes (Long-term Benefits):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monetary investments (e.g., staffing, materials, facilities) • Time and effort from faculty, staff, and mentors (human capital) • Opportunity costs of resources allocated to these programs instead of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher retention and graduation rates for first-generation students • Improved academic performance (e.g., GPA) • Increased post-graduation employment rates and salaries
Outputs (Short-term Results):	Impact (Institutional and Societal Gains):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of students served • Participation rates in programs such as mentoring, workshops, or tutoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced reputation for the institution as a leader in equity and inclusion • Alumni engagement and future financial contributions • Broader societal benefits, such as breaking cycles of poverty or improving community outcomes

ROI EQUATION	
$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{Income} - \text{Expenses}}{\text{Total Investment}} \times 100$	<p>EXAMPLE</p> <p>A mentoring program for first-generation students costs \$100,000 annually, plus \$60,000 in salary costs. The program retains 20 additional students per year who each contribute \$15,000 in tuition revenue, providing income of \$300,000.</p> $\frac{\$300,000_{\text{(income = tuition)}} - \$100,000_{\text{(expenses = operating budget)}}}{\$160,000_{\text{(Total investment = operating budget + staff salary)}}} \times 1.25 \times 100\% = 125\% \text{ ROI}$

Example steps to Calculate ROI for an initiative at your institution.

<p>PROGRAM / INITIATIVE:</p>	
<p>Identify the GOAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does SUCCESS look like? • Consider how your investment is scalable beyond a one-time offering. 	
<p>Identify KEY COLLABORATIONS and ALIGNMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus partners impacted by the work • Strategic planning and initiatives 	
<p>Identify the METRICS that MATTER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmarks and targets • “Along the way” metrics • BONUS: self-evaluation 	

Example steps to **Communicate ROI** for an initiative at your institution.

PROGRAM / INITIATIVE:	
Identify the PURPOSE <i>Why are you telling the story?</i>	
Identify AUDIENCE <i>Who are you telling the story to?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior leadership • Student-facing staff • Those unfamiliar with your work 	
Identify the METRICS that MATTER <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmarks and targets • “Along the way” metrics • BONUS: self-evaluation 	
Continuous Improvement: Storytelling with PURPOSE <i>Who, What, When, Why</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflections and accountability 	

EXAMPLE ROI NARRATIVE STATEMENTS

Audience—Institutional Leadership: We prioritize supporting first-generation students at INSTITUTION because first to second year retention of first-gen students has increased by ___ % each year since NAME_OF initiative began in YEAR. We justify the institution’s continued investment in this program because of this positive movement, knowing that our office directly supports and connects with ___ % of the first-gen, first-year students.

Audience—Donors: We want to make progress closing opportunity gaps at INSTITUTION. Currently about ___ % of first-gen students study abroad compared to ___ % of their continuing gen peers. We believe investment in our program could provide an opportunity to close that gap by ___ students this year, with a projected total impact of ___ students by YEAR.

Exploring the Role of Policy in First-generation Student Success

Focus on understanding new policies, advocating for first-generation student needs, and ensuring equity in compliance with legal frameworks



Tess Barker, J.D., Ph.D.

Executive Director, Association for Student Conduct Administration

Dr. Tess Barker is the Executive Director of the Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA). In this role, she serves as a voice and advocate for nearly 2,650 ASCA members and the conduct profession generally.

Tess previously served as Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at Indiana University Kokomo. During her tenure, IUK expanded athletics, increased dual enrollment, and was accepted into the FirstGen Forward Network. She is most proud of having secured funding to establish a Multicultural Center at IUK, the first among Indiana University's regional campuses.

Barker also served as Chief of Staff to the Chancellor at the University of Michigan-Flint, where she managed high-level initiatives, including developing the campus strategic plan and responding to the Flint Water Crisis. She also served as Executive Director for the Iowa Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and at NASPA, coordinating the Center for Women; the Minority Undergraduate Fellows Program; and the James E. Scott Academy for Leadership. She teaches higher education law at the University of Iowa and was honored in 2022 by the NASPA Faculty Council for Outstanding Contributions as a Scholar Practitioner.

Dr. Barker earned her law degree and a Ph.D. in education policy from the University of Iowa and her master's in college student personnel from the University of Maryland-College Park. In her free time, she loves to read, listen to podcasts, and travel. She resides in Kokomo, Indiana, with her spouse Bill, daughter Isabella, and dog, Rooney.

Reflection Questions: Exploring the Role of Policy in First-generation Student Success

Use these questions to guide reflection and dialogue on how institutional, state, and federal policies impact first-generation student success. These prompts are intended for higher education leaders seeking to align policy with equity and advocacy.

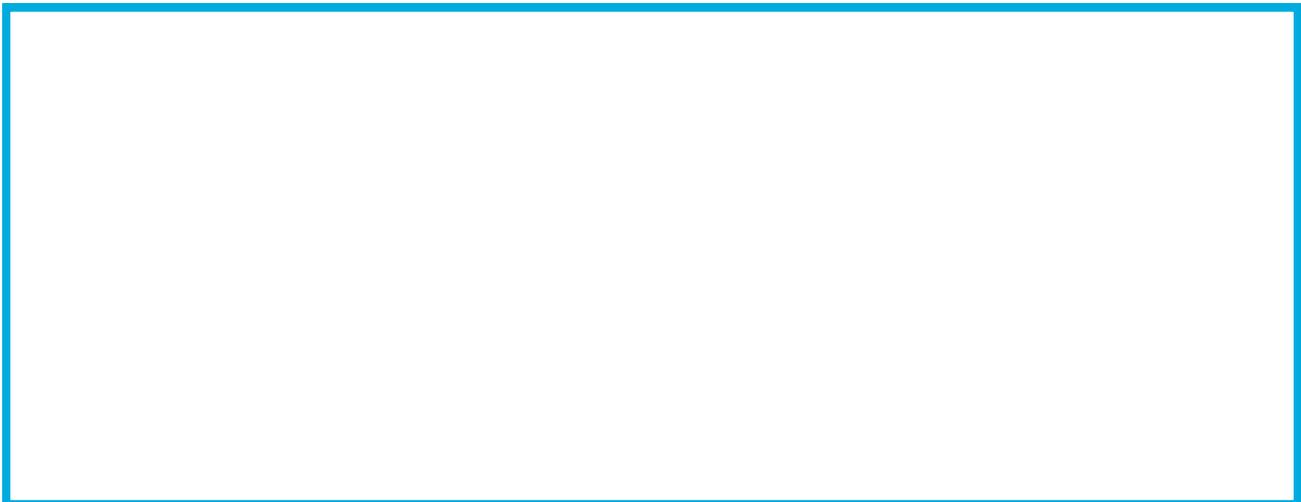
1. Which current institutional or state policies unintentionally create barriers for first-generation students at your institution?

- How might those policies be reformed or reinterpreted through an equity lens?



2. In what ways are first-generation student voices being included (or excluded) in policy development and implementation processes on your campus?

- What mechanisms exist—or need to be created—to center their lived experiences?



3. How can your leadership team advocate for policy changes at the campus, system, or state level that promote equity for first-gen students?

- What allies or coalitions can support this advocacy?



4. What policies or compliance requirements (e.g., Title IV, accreditation standards) intersect with first-gen student success in your context?

- Are there opportunities to align compliance efforts with student-centered equity goals?



5. What is one policy-related action you can take within the next 90 days to advance first-generation student success at your institution?

- Who needs to be involved, and how will you measure progress?



Industry Trends and Workforce Needs

A workshop designed for higher education institution leaders working with first-generation college students. This session will focus on industry and workforce development and will equip leaders with the skills to: develop pathways to career success for their students, foster industry partnerships that benefit first-generation students, and bridge the gap between education and employment.



Stephanie Finau, Ph.D.

Director, Workforce Development & Solutions, FirstGen Forward

Stephanie Finau, Ph.D., is the Director of Workforce Development and Solutions at FirstGen Forward, where she leads initiatives to bridge education and workforce opportunities for first-generation students. She brings a deep commitment to student success and connection to workforce, informed by her previous role as Director of Program Alignment within the Labor Market Intelligence Center at Dallas College.

Beyond her primary role, Stephanie serves as an adjunct faculty member at Dallas College, teaching GED Success Prep courses to support adult learners in achieving their educational goals. She is also the Vice President of the Texas Affiliate of the National College Learning Center Association, part of the International College Learning Center Association, where she advocates for equitable access to academic support services.

Stephanie holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in Postsecondary Student Success in Learning, Literacy, and Mathematics (formerly Developmental Education) from Texas State University and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of South Dakota. Her passion lies in creating pathways that empower students—especially those from underrepresented backgrounds—to navigate and thrive in higher education and beyond.

Ecosystem Mapping Template

Purpose: Use this template to map the internal and external elements that influence career readiness and employment outcomes for first-generation students.

Instructions:

1. List the key players and programs currently involved.
2. Identify gaps or underutilized areas.
3. Circle/highlight potential areas for growth or alignment.

Section 1: Internal Campus Stakeholders

Offices, programs, and departments currently supporting or influencing career readiness for first-gen students.

- Career Services
- Academic Advising
- First-Gen Student Support Office
- Experiential Learning / Internships
- Faculty/Departments (e.g., STEM, Business, Humanities)
- Alumni Relations
- Institutional Research & Assessment
- Student Affairs / DEI Office
- Others: _____

Section 2: External Partners

Organizations and sectors your institution currently engages or could engage for workforce development.

- Local Employers
- National Corporations
- Nonprofits / Workforce Boards
- Chambers of Commerce
- Alumni Employers
- Government Agencies (e.g., Dept. of Labor, NSF)
- Industry Advisory Boards
- Grant Funders / Foundations
- Others: _____

Section 3: Career Readiness Pathways

Which of the following are available and accessible to first-gen students?

- Internships / Co-ops
- Career Coaching or Mentoring
- Industry Site Visits / Job Shadowing
- Skills Credentialing (e.g., microcredentials, digital badges)
- Resume/Interview Prep
- Employer-Led Workshops / Panels
- Alumni Mentorship
- Others: _____

Strategy Sprint—From Insight to Action

A Strategy Sprint Worksheet is a focused, time-bound planning tool that helps participants quickly translate insights from a session into actionable next steps. It's called a "sprint" because it emphasizes speed, clarity, and direction.

Use this worksheet to outline one idea you want to advance at your institution.

1. Challenge or Opportunity

What is one gap, barrier, or opportunity you see in supporting first-gen students in their career readiness or workforce outcomes?

2. Strategy Idea

What is one change, program, or partnership you could champion?

3. Key Stakeholders

Who are the 2–3 people, offices, or external partners you need to engage?

4. First Three Steps

What are your first three actionable steps over the next 30 days?

1.

2.

3.

5. Resources or Support Needed

What tools, people, or information would help you succeed?

6. Success Indicator

How will you know your strategy is working?

Funding Sources and Effective Fundraising Strategies for First-generation Student Programs

A workshop panel on funding, fundraising, and development opportunities targeting higher education institution leadership working with first-generation college students, the learning outcomes focus on strategies for securing financial support, building sustainable development initiatives, and effectively using resources to improve outcomes for first-generation students. This workshop panel, geared toward higher education leaders working with first-generation college students, will explore funding, fundraising, and development opportunities. The session will equip attendees with strategies to secure financial support, develop sustainable resource initiatives, and improve outcomes for first-generation students.



Jillian Peat Hamilton

Sr. Director, Corporate Social Responsibility, TIAA

Jillian Peat Hamilton is a Senior Director for Community Impact at TIAA. In this role, Jillian is responsible for leading the national philanthropic and community strategy focused on first-generation students. She also led the creation of TIAA's

associate-led Sustainability Action Team that advances practices within TIAA and beyond, focused on informing and inspiring others to have an impact on climate.

Jillian has 15 years of professional experience and has been at TIAA since 2017. Prior to this role in Corporate Social Responsibility, Jillian's roles were in specialized areas of Human Resources, including selection, leadership development, workforce planning, change management, and organizational development. With a background in statistics, she delved into Human Resources issues more deeply than most.

Jillian attended Wake Forest University and The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.



Jonathan T. Reid, M.P.H

Program Officer, Ascendium

Jonathan T. Reid oversees a portfolio of grants focused on increasing the number of college students from historically underrepresented backgrounds, including low-income and first-generation populations, who pursue and attain postsecondary credentials. Alongside his teammates, Jonathan ensures

alignment of external activities, programs and grantmaking with the strategic vision and organizational goals of the Foundation.

Jonathan has spent the last decade working on grant-funded nonprofit projects and in higher education, implementing programs focused on health education and community engagement. Prior to joining ECMC Foundation in June 2022, Jonathan was a senior program officer with the LA84 Foundation where he managed a diverse portfolio of grants and launched several funding initiatives. His experience also includes working for Beach Cities Health District, Playworks, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, and the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health.

A native of Bronx, New York, Jonathan completed his bachelor of arts and master of public health at New York University.

Example Donor-facing Data Points: First-generation College Student Programs

This one-pager includes compelling statistics and impact metrics to support fundraising and development cases for first-generation college student initiatives.

These data points can be customized for proposals, pitch decks, or donor engagement materials.

Scope and Need

- 42% of college students in the U.S. identify as first-generation. (NCES)
- First-gen students are 3x more likely to drop out after their first year than continuing-generation peers.
- At our institution, 1 in 3 undergraduate students is the first in their family to attend college.
- Only 27% of first-gen students graduate within four years, compared to 42% of continuing-generation students.

Program Impact Metrics

- First-Gen Scholars had a 20% higher retention rate than non-participants.
- Career readiness programs increased internship placements by 35% for first-gen students.
- 92% of mentorship participants reported increased confidence navigating college and career pathways.
- First-gen program participation reduced time to degree by 0.7 semesters, saving \$4,000 per student.

ROI Framing

- Every \$1 invested in first-gen success returns \$4–\$7 in social and economic value.
- First-gen graduates earn \$12,000 more annually than peers without degrees.
- Employers highlight resilience and adaptability as key traits among first-gen students.

Funding Outcomes

- A \$50,000 grant funded peer leadership cohorts, increasing first-year GPA by 12%.
- A \$25,000 seed gift launched a micro-internship program for 40 first-gen students.
- A \$10,000 named scholarship supports two first-gen students annually with tuition and mentorship.

Human Impact

- "This program gave me the confidence to apply for jobs I never thought I could get." — First-gen student, Class of 2024
- "Thanks to the donor support, I was able to stay in school and finish my degree without taking on more debt." — First-gen graduate

Case for Support Builder Worksheet

Use this worksheet to begin developing a compelling case for funding or donor support for your first-generation student success initiative. Strong cases for support clearly articulate the need, the solution, and the impact.

1. The Why—Define the Need

What challenge are first-generation students facing at your institution? Why is this issue urgent or significant?

2. The What—Describe Your Initiative

Briefly describe your program, initiative, or idea. What are you doing (or proposing) to address the need?

3. The Impact—Outcomes and Transformation

What difference will this make for first-gen students? What outcomes or transformations do you expect?

4. The Ask—What Support Do You Need?

What type of support are you seeking (financial, in-kind, partnership)? Be specific if possible.

5. The Match—Why This Donor?

Why do you believe this donor or partner would align with your mission? How does your initiative connect with their priorities?

Continuous Improvement Cycles & ImproveEDU Refresher



Martina A. Martin, Ed.D.

Assistant Vice President, Network Success, FirstGen Forward

Martina Martin serves as assistant vice president of Network Success with FirstGen Forward. Prior to joining FGF, Martina served as associate director for the University of Kentucky's student community resources and services and as the program director for first-generation student services and off-campus student services. For over a decade, Martina assisted in developing university-wide first-generation initiatives focused on recruitment, retention, and career and professional development.

Martina is a proud first-generation college graduate of Eastern Kentucky University, where she earned a B.S. in physical education, an M.S. in physical education-sports administration, an M.A. in human services-student personnel services in higher education, and an Ed.D. in educational leadership and policy studies. Martina resides in Georgetown, Kentucky with her husband, Ricky Stone, Jr.



Qua'Aisa Williams, Ph.D.

Assistant Vice President, Curriculum & Learning Design, FirstGen Forward

Qua'Aisa Williams (she/her) is the Assistant Vice President of Curriculum and Learning Design at FirstGen Forward, where she has made a meaningful impact since joining in March 2020. As a proud first-generation college graduate and alum of TRIO's Educational Talent Search and Student Support Services,

Qua'Aisa brings both personal and professional dedication to advancing success for first-gen students. Her higher education journey began at Florida State University's Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE), where she supported summer bridge programs for first-generation and economically disadvantaged students.

Qua'Aisa earned both her M.S. in Higher Education Administration and B.S. in Family & Child Sciences from Florida State University, followed by a Ph.D. in College Student Affairs Administration from the University of Georgia. Her work is driven by her own experiences and commitment to creating equitable opportunities for first-gen students across higher education.

Continuous Improvement Cycle Tools

Driver Diagram	Purpose: Maps SMART goal, barriers, and projects to an overall institution focus area	Visual tool used to systematically organize and display the key drivers or factors that contribute to achieving a specific aim or goal. Helps teams understand the relationships between different components and activities that influence desired outcomes.
Action Plan	Purpose: Breaks projects into tasks, timelines, and ownership	Detailed plan outlining the activities or tasks needed to facilitate improvement projects and meet overarching goals.

Driver Diagram Components

Institution Focus Area	Institution-level objective that supports the overarching aim of closing completion gaps between first-gen and continuing-gen students.
SMART Goal	High-level improvement goal/objective you want to achieve set within the broader Institution Focus Area that is Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, and Timed.
Metric	Data relevant to the SMART goal, where measurable progress toward the goal is expected to positively impact the metric.
Primary Barrier	Potential challenges or obstacles that hinder progress towards your SMART goal.
Improvement Project	Small-scale, action-oriented efforts designed to initiate progress toward a larger goal by directly addressing a primary barrier

Getting Started with Continuous Improvement Cycle Planning

Guiding Questions

What are our institution's top 3–5 strategic priorities? (e.g., equity, student success, retention, workforce readiness)

Where do we see explicit or implicit connections to first-generation student success?

What outcomes or indicators are emphasized in the strategic plan? (e.g., graduation rates, belonging, post-grad employment—these can help define metrics)

Which areas from the Insights Tool Report feel most urgent or most aligned with our institution's mission and goals?

Who are the decision-makers, data owners, or champions that need to be at the table for this conversation?

First-year Credit Completion Practice: Creating an Action Plan

Background of the Driver Diagram	
Institutional Focus Area	Our institutional focus area is to close achievement gaps between first-gen college students and continuing gen students. Despite some improvements over the past two fall cohorts, there is a clear need for targeted support to enhance retention rates further.
SMART Goals	<p>By Fall 2028, we aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase first-generation, first-year retention by 2% each year. • Increase first-year credit completion rates. As compared to continuing gen peers who are completing 30 credits per year on average, first-gen, first-year students are completing 22 credits per year on average. • Improve degree completion rates for first-generation students (63%) to more closely align to their continuing generation peers (85%).
Momentum Metrics Identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-year credit completion ratio • First to second year retention • Degree completion

Barrier and Improvement Project	
Barrier	Improvement Project
First-gen students are reporting an unclear career path and this is impacting their desire to graduate.	<p>Need to identify data available at the institution that follows first-gen students post graduation/matriculation/stop out.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What recommendations can be made to incorporate career services into the student journey? • When are students withdrawing from the institution?

Continuous Improvement Cycle Action Plan

Who needs to be in this workgroup?

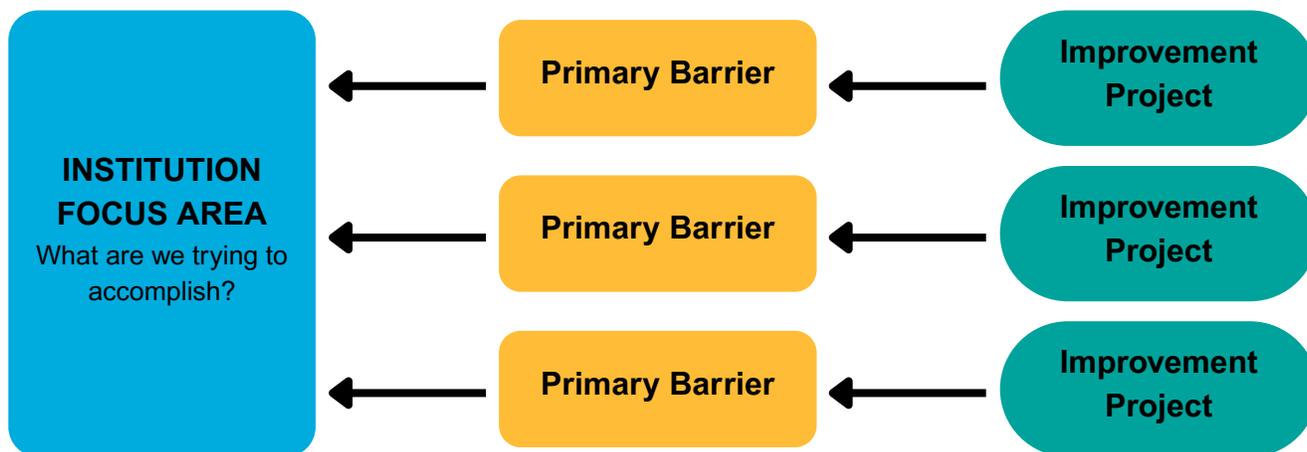
How does this project tie to the SMART Goals?

30 Days

60 Days

90 Days

Driver Diagram-generation Activity



The purpose of this activity is to generate a shared vision to drive a team's improvement efforts and ultimately achieve the overarching goal.

Note: Driver diagrams are not intended to be set in stone. Driver diagrams should evolve as you learn more about the problem/gap you want to address, the change ideas you are trying, and how best to achieve your aim. We encourage teams to revise driver diagrams to reflect your most current thinking/focus and to keep track of versions 1.0, 2.0, etc., so you can reflect on the evolution of your learning.

Definitions:

- **Institution Focus Area:** Institution-level objective that supports the overarching aim of closing completion gaps between first-gen and continuing-gen students. Informed by institutional strategic plans, data, insights, and Insights Tool report.
 - **SMART Goal:** A high-level improvement goal. Specific. Measurable. Achievable. Relevant. Timed. Specific objective set within the broader institution focus area.
 - **Metric:** The specific metric(s) you are seeking to address. What data is relevant to the SMART goal?
- **Primary Barrier:** The biggest issues blocking progress toward your goal.
- **Improvement Projects:** The “work” that drives change. The project should directly address a primary barrier.

ACTIVITY STEPS:

1. Clarifying/Refining the Institution Focus Area Statement (15 minutes)

As a group, craft/refine your goal: What do you want to accomplish, for whom, and by when?

Begin by having each person, individually or with a partner, craft a focus statement. Follow this with a share-around, where each person/partnership shares their goal with the group. Then the group can adopt/adapt from these to create a focus statement that everyone feels good about. Write your group's focus statement on the left side of your poster.

For Consideration:

Is your goal measurable? To help ensure your aim is measurable, it can be helpful to ask yourselves this question: "If X was the best it could be, what would it look like?" It can also help to get baseline data related to the issue/gap your team is working on.

Sample goals:

- By Spring 2027, reduce the retention gap between first-generation students and their continuing-generation student peers.
- By Spring 2028, reduce the graduation gap between first-generation students and their continuing-generation student peers.
- By Spring 2029, close the achievement gap between first-generation students and their continuing-generation student peers.

2. Identifying Primary Barriers (Primary Drivers) (20-30 minutes)

- **Individual (no more than 5 minutes):** Each person identifies the top 4 drivers (i.e., *high-leverage areas*) they think the team needs to focus on to impact the goal, and writes each driver on a separate index card.
 - **Facilitation Move:** It can help to think of drivers as X in the following statements: "If we figured out X, we could achieve our aim," or "If we don't figure out X, it is unlikely we would achieve our aim."
- **Share Around and cluster:** Each person shares their most preferred driver with the group. If others wrote down a similar driver, group these cards together on the table.
 - **Facilitation Move:** As your group shares and clusters, it can be helpful to organize the "stacks" with the most cards to the top of the table and those with the least to the bottom. This gives the group a visual indicator of which drivers might be most important.
- **As a group, select 3-5 drivers** that you think are essential for impacting your focus area. Write those drivers on your driver diagram poster. This is your "theory of action" (i.e., if you could move these drivers, you could achieve your overarching goal).
 - Questions for the team to consider:
 - Is this driver specific enough that we all understand what to focus on?
 - Is this driver impactful enough that it will move the work forward?
 - Is this driver within our locus of control, meaning we can do something about it?
 - Are these drivers necessary and sufficient for achieving our goal?
 - Which driver do we think is our greatest lever for change? (*Star* this one.)

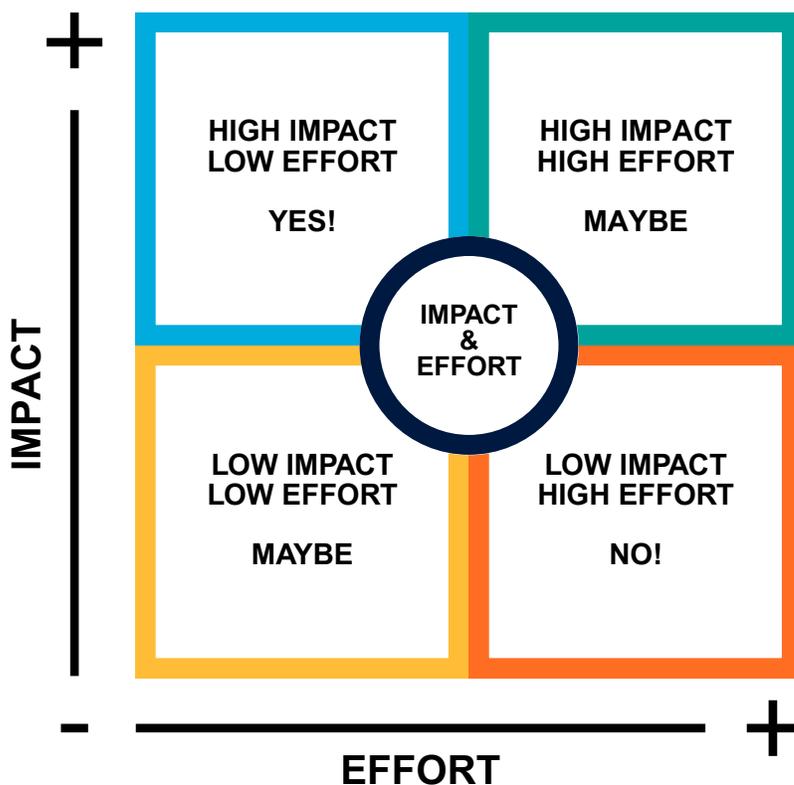
3. Generating Improvement Projects (20-25 minutes; you will need another poster for this part.)

- **Individual Brainstorm (3 minutes):** What could we try that would impact the drivers we identified? What does the research say we should try? Where is this happening well already (bright spots) and what are they doing? Write each idea on its own Post-it.
- **Chart Your Improvement Project–Change Ideas (15-20 minutes):** On another large chart paper, draw an effort vs impact axis (see example below). Using your best collective guess, place each of the change ideas in the quadrant in which it fits best. Start by having each person share their favorite idea and cluster similar ideas as you continue to share.

It can be helpful to ask:

- How much effort (time, energy, resources) would it take for us to test this idea?
- If we are successful, what is the size of the likely impact?
- Will this idea impact issues of equity in our system?

- **Identify high-leverage change ideas (5 minutes):** As a group identify 4-6 change ideas that you think are most impactful, that you could get moving on quickly and that are within your team’s locus of control (i.e., usually those in the upper two quadrants). **Add these change ideas to your driver diagram, drawing arrows to show how they are aligned.**



- Questions for the team to consider:
 - What do we notice about the alignment (or lack of) between our change ideas and drivers?
 - If your change ideas don’t align with your existing drivers, this could suggest a new driver is needed.
 - If you have a driver without any change ideas, this driver may not be helpful to your current “theory of action.”

4. Alignment Check (5-10 minutes)

5. Debriefing the Process (5 minutes)

Institution Goal-setting Recommendations

Institution Focus Area:

An institution-level objective that supports the overarching aim of closing completion gaps between first-gen and continuing-gen students. Informed by institutional strategic plans, data, and Insights Tool report.

- **Option 1:** Increase the graduation rate for first-generation students
- **Option 2:** Decrease the completion rate gap between first-generation students and continuing-generation students
- **Option 3:** Increase the year-to-year retention rates for first-generation students
- **Option 4:** Decrease the year-to-year retention rate gap between first-generation students and continuing-generation students

S.M.A.R.T. Goal

A specific objective set within the broader Institution Focus Area.

- **Goal:** What do you want to achieve?
- **Measurement(s) of completion:** What will you need to measure to know if you've achieved your goal?
- **Timeline to completion:** Identify a target date for achieving your goal.

Metrics:

What data is relevant to the SMART goal? Achieving the SMART goal will impact this metric. Used to track progress toward an overarching goal.

Attainment Metrics:

- **Degree Completion:** The percentage of students who complete their degree within a single institution.
- **Retention Rates (term/year):** The percentage of students who return to an institution for subsequent term/year of academic study.

Examples of Early Momentum Metrics:

- **First-year Enrollment:** The count of students beginning their enrollment at an institution.
- **First-year Retention:** The percentage of students who return to an institution for their second year of academic study.
- **Year-to-Year Retention (Fall to Fall):** The percentage of students who remain enrolled from one Fall term to the next Fall term.
- **Term-to-Term Retention (Fall to Spring; Spring to Fall):** The percentage of students who remain enrolled from one term to the subsequent term.
- **Credit Completion Ratio:** The ratio of the total number of credits earned by the total number of credits attempted in the first year of academic study.

Continuous Improvement: Driver Diagram Development Example 1

Institution Focus Area:

An institution-level objective that supports the overarching aim of closing completion gaps between first-gen and continuing-gen students. Informed by institutional strategic plans, data, and Insights Tool report.

- **Example Focus Area/Institution Goal:** Graduation Rate
 - *“Increase graduation rates for first-generation students.”*

S.M.A.R.T. Goal

Specific objective set within the broader Institution Focus Area.

- **Example S.M.A.R.T. Goal:** “For the entering Fall 2023 cohort: Increase first-generation four-year graduation rate by X% over the baseline of X% for the entering Fall 2019 cohort.”
 - **Alternate phrasing:** *“Reduce the completion gap between first-generation students and continuing-generation students by X% over the same period of time.”*

Metrics:

What data is relevant to the SMART goal? Achieving the SMART goal will impact this metric. Used to track progress toward an overarching goal of increasing graduation rate.

- **Example Metrics:** *“Track Fall-to-Fall retention rate of first-generation students in the Fall 2023 entering cohort for five (5) years, comparing future rates to those for the previous Fall intervals.”*

	Target	Actual
Entering Fall 2023 cohort	-----	68%
Fall-to-Fall retention rate (2024)	70%	
Fall-to-Fall retention rate (2025)	72%	
Fall-to-Fall retention rate (2026)	74%	
Fall-to-Fall retention rate (2027)	76%	
Fall-to-Fall retention rate (2028)	78%	

NOTE: You may also want to measure Fall-to-Spring retention rates as additional interim metrics in addition to the Fall-to-Fall rates.

Considerations:

- Consider using data you are already collecting. Are you already able to capture this? Can you use these as momentum metrics?
- Define the cohorts here: First-year students? First time in college (FTIC)? Transfers? How are you defining first-generation?
- Completion Gap: if using this, define what the current gap is and what your target is (e.g., Reduce the gap by X% using the same timeline).
- Graduation/completion: define graduation/completion (e.g., degree type, certification)

Continuous Improvement: Driver Diagram Development Example 2

Institution Focus Area:

An institution-level objective that supports the overarching aim of closing completion gaps between first-gen and continuing-gen students. Informed by institutional strategic plans, data, and Insights Tool report.

- **Example Focus Area/Institution Goal:** Completion Gap
 - *Decrease the completion gap between first-gen and continuing-gen students.*

A. Fall 2019 Cohort Overall 4-year graduation rate is 65%

Within the overall rate:

- First-gen student graduation rate is 60%
- Continuing-gen student graduation rate is 70%

B. Fall 2019 cohort	Actual
Fall-to-Spring retention rate (2019/20)	81%
Fall-to-Fall retention rate (2020)	78%
Fall-to-Spring retention rate (2020/21)	71%
Fall-to-Fall rate (2021)	63%

(*Continue F-to-F and F-to-S until grad year)

S.M.A.R.T. Goal

Specific objective set within the broader Institution Focus Area.

Example S.M.A.R.T. Goal:

- **Option #1:** For the entering Fall 2023 cohort: Increase the first-gen 4-year graduation rate by 5% by 2027.
- **Option #2:** Reduce the completion gap between first-gen and continuing-gen students by 1% in 2024, 2025, and 2026 and by 2% in 2027 for a total of 5% by 2027.

Metrics:

What data is relevant to the SMART goal? Achieving the SMART goal will impact this metric. Used to track progress toward an overarching goal of increasing graduation rate.

- **Example Metric:** *“Track retention rate of first-generation students in the Fall 2023 entering cohort compared with those for the Fall 2019 cohort at the following intervals:”*

	Fall 2019 cohort	Fall 2023 cohort (target)
Fall-to-Spring retention rate (2019/20)	89%	90%
Fall-to-Fall retention rate (2020)	78%	80%
Fall-to-Spring retention rate (2020/21)	71%	74%
Fall-to-Fall rate (2021)	63%	67%

*Continue tracking term-to-term metrics until the 4-year graduation time frame target.

Considerations:

- Consider using data you are already collecting. Are you already able to capture this? Can you use these as momentum metrics?
- Define the cohorts here: First-year students? First time in college (FTIC)? Transfers? How are you defining first-generation?
- Define retention rate: registered? progressing toward a degree?
- Completion Gap: if using this, define what the current gap is and what your target is (e.g., Reduce the gap by XX% using the same timeline).
- Graduation/completion: define graduation/completion (e.g., degree type, certification)

Driver Diagram Development

STEP ONE: Institution Focus Area

Institution-level objective that supports the overarching aim of closing completion gaps between first-gen and continuing-gen students. Informed by institutional strategic plans, data, and Insights Tool report.

S.M.A.R.T. Goal(s)

Specific objective set within the broader Institution Focus Area. Specific. Measurable. Achievable. Relevant. Timed.

Metrics

What data is relevant to the SMART goal?

Momentum Metric Specific Goal

Goal connected to one of four momentum metrics: first-year enrollment, retention, credit completion ratio, and degree completion rates.

STEP TWO: Primary Barriers

The biggest issues blocking progress toward your goal.

Barrier 1	Brief description of the barrier.
------------------	--

Barrier 2	Brief description of the barrier.
------------------	--

Barrier 3	Brief description of the barrier.
------------------	--

Barrier 4	Brief description of the barrier.
------------------	--

Barrier 5	Brief description of the barrier.
------------------	--

STEP THREE: Improvement Projects

The "work" that drives change. The project should directly address a primary barrier.

Barrier 1	Project(s) to address/minimize barrier.
------------------	--

Barrier 2	Project(s) to address/minimize barrier.
------------------	--

Barrier 3	Project(s) to address/minimize barrier.
------------------	--

Barrier 4	Project(s) to address/minimize barrier.
------------------	--

Barrier 5	Project(s) to address/minimize barrier.
------------------	--

STEP THREE: Improvement Projects

The "work" that drives change. The project should directly address a primary barrier.

Task name:				
Assignee:				
Others Involved:				
Cycle (circle):	30	60	90	
Due Date:				
Comments/Notes:				

Task name:				
Assignee:				
Others Involved:				
Cycle (circle):	30	60	90	
Due Date:				
Comments/Notes:				

Task name:				
Assignee:				
Others Involved:				
Cycle (circle):	30	60	90	
Due Date:				
Comments/Notes:				

STEP THREE: Improvement Projects

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Task name:				
Assignee:				
Others Involved:				
Cycle (circle):	30	60	90	
Due Date:				
Comments/Notes:				

Task name:				
Assignee:				
Others Involved:				
Cycle (circle):	30	60	90	
Due Date:				
Comments/Notes:				

Task name:				
Assignee:				
Others Involved:				
Cycle (circle):	30	60	90	
Due Date:				
Comments/Notes:				

ImproveEDU Outline & Instructions

Introduction to ImproveEDU

ImproveEDU elevates the way that FirstGen Forward and partner institutions operate by offering a streamlined virtual home to drive system change through enhanced campus coordination and visible prioritization of strategic goals.

In collaboration with Expert Guidance, the integration of the ImproveEDU platform allows institutions to collaboratively prioritize goals while also affording users the capability to make visible barriers or obstacles and devise strategies to support goal completion.

The ImproveEDU platform operates along two fundamental principles. First, it serves to coordinate institutional endeavors by providing a structured framework to articulate and document their continuous improvement initiatives. Secondly, it fosters a virtual environment for this work, allowing users to oversee task progression and coordinate work.

The user experience within the system mirrors that of a project management interface. ImproveEDU users gain visibility into all assigned tasks and task owners and can engage in collaborative discourse related to tasks. Additionally, automated reminders encourage timely completion.

Through ImproveEDU, institutions are empowered to drive system change in a sustainable and scalable manner that leads to elevated student success with clarity and effectiveness.

Building a Driver Diagram and Assigning Tasks

In this video, ImproveEDU users will be guided through the process of building a driver diagram and assigning tasks. By the end of this video, you will have a clear understanding of how to effectively use the driver diagram builder and assign tasks to drive your projects forward.

- Introduction
- Creating Presets for Driver Diagrams
- Viewing the User's Perspective
- Creating a New Driver Diagram
- Building the Driver Diagram
- Assigning Tasks to Action Plans

Instructions

This section will focus on building an institution driver diagram and assigning tasks.

To create or make edits to a driver diagram, follow these steps within the CIC section of the platform:

1. Begin by selecting "Driver Diagram" to access the driver diagram builder.
2. Click on "+ NEW DIAGRAM" to start a new driver diagram. You have the choice to either use an existing template or create a new one.
3. Create an "Institution Focus Area" and input the SMART Goal along with associated metrics. If you have a pre-existing driver diagram, you can easily copy and paste this information.
4. Next, input the institution's barriers. Each barrier should have a title and a brief description. To add a barrier, use the plus sign (+).
5. Once a barrier is created, you can add improvement projects related to that barrier. Add a title and description for each improvement project. You can include multiple projects using the plus sign.
6. To add another primary barrier, select "Add another Primary Barrier" and repeat the process to input all barriers and their associated projects.
7. Remember, you can move, edit, or remove any entries as needed.
8. Make sure to click "Save" to save your driver diagram for future reference.
9. To generate and view the completed diagram, click "Generate Diagram." Save the diagram once again and proceed to view it.

This creates a color-coordinated driver diagram with all the elements from the paper version visible. This includes the Institution Focus Area, SMART Goal, metrics, primary barriers, and improvement projects.

From this view, you have several options:

- Return to the builder to make further edits
- Print a copy of the driver diagram
- Begin building out action tasks
- View action plans
- View comments

To create action tasks:

1. Click on the horizontal ellipsis (three dots) in the top-right corner of the improvement project.
2. Select "Add Task."
3. In the task frame, provide the task name and assign the individual(s) responsible for the task.
4. Choose the cycle duration (30, 60, or 90 days) for this task and set the due date.
5. Add any necessary comments to support the task.
6. Click "Add" to complete the task creation.

To view action plans associated with a task:

1. Click on the horizontal ellipsis and choose "View Tasks."
2. Use filters to sort tasks by due date, creation date, or last update.

Additional features:

- You can create new tasks from this view.
- Navigate to the "My Tasks" link on the left side of the page to return to the task view.

By following these steps, you can efficiently create, edit, and manage driver diagrams, along with their associated improvement projects and action tasks.

Communicating within ImproveEDU

This section explains the different ways of communicating within the institution hub and previews the key points institutional users need to know. The video emphasizes the importance of using a centralized platform to avoid losing information and ensure effective collaboration. Additionally, this demonstration will walk users through how to comment on tasks and use @ mentions to trigger email notifications. This video will also show users how to view and comment on action plans, driver diagrams, and task discussions. Finally, it will discuss the importance of updating task statuses.

Instructions

To maintain a consistent workflow and facilitate communication among users within ImproveEDU, we have implemented various features such as tasks, action plans, driver diagrams, and more. These tools enable users to collaborate effectively and stay informed about project-related activities.

Accessing Tasks and Comments:

- To get started, go to the "My Tasks" section. Here, you can access your tasks and engage in discussions.
- Users can comment on tasks and view comments made by others. This feature allows for questions, specific pointers, additional context, and more.

Notifications:

- When a user is mentioned with "@username" or when someone comments on a task (even without including a mention), an email notification is triggered. This email will be sent to your contact's inbox, informing them that they've been mentioned or there's a question.

Viewing Task Discussions:

- To view comments or questions related to a driver diagram, click on the "Driver Diagram" link.
- Select the specific driver diagram you want to view and click on the horizontal ellipsis on the right.
- From the dropdown menu, select "View Comments."

Navigating to Project or Task Level:

- For a more detailed view, navigate to the "More Specific" section in the top right-hand corner of the page.
- Select "Project" to access project-related information.
- From there, choose "Task" to see task-specific details, including comments, user assignments, current health status, and due dates.

Updating Task Health:

- In the individual task view, you have several options:
 - Delete a task using the red "Delete Task" button.
 - Mark a task as complete using the green "Mark Task Complete" button.
 - Update the task's health status by clicking the blue "Update" button.
- You can indicate whether you're "On Track," "Behind Schedule," or if you "Need Help." Save your response.

Task Health Display:

- The refreshed page will display the updated health status in the "Current Health" section.
- Task health, along with the due date, will also be visible in the "My Tasks" area.

Visibility:

- These updates are visible not only to all users involved in the improvement project but also to FirstGen Forward staff and the Expert Guide.

Status Updates by FirstGen Forward Staff:

- FirstGen Forward staff or institutional representatives have the authority to update the status of any task at any time.
- When a task's health is updated, users will receive an automated email prompt every Friday reminding them to check in.

Weekly Check-In:

- Clicking on the provided link in the email will lead you to a URL with links to all your active tasks.
- This process helps communicate the status of the work, prompting assignees to take necessary actions to ensure project success.

By following these steps and utilizing these features, ImproveEDU facilitates effective communication, collaboration, and task management within your institution's improvement projects.

Personalized Hub/Institution Settings

To customize and add additional users:

As a user, you can upload a picture, and edit your first and last name, role, or title.

To have additional users created, please contact your Expert Guide directly.

To Do

WHAT	WHO	DUE DATES	NOTES

Network Knowledge:

Leveraging Peer Networks to Advance Institutional Success

Exercise Instructions

Groups will take turns sharing and discussing a challenge they are experiencing in their first-gen focused work. This can be a future innovation or something you are currently managing that is related to your FirstGen Forward Network milestones.

Presenter:	Institution:
Their role in the work	
Their idea/challenge	
Due Date:	
My notes/advice	

Presenter:	Institution:
Their role in the work	
Their idea/challenge	
Due Date:	
My notes/advice	

Presenter:	Institution:
Their role in the work	
Their idea/challenge	
Due Date:	
My notes/advice	

Presenter:	Institution:
Their role in the work	
Their idea/challenge	
Due Date:	
My notes/advice	

Presenter:	Institution:
Their role in the work	
Their idea/challenge	
Due Date:	
My notes/advice	

Presenter:	Institution:
Their role in the work	
Their idea/challenge	
Due Date:	
My notes/advice	

Presenter:	Institution:
Their role in the work	
Their idea/challenge	
Due Date:	
My notes/advice	

Network Connections

Use this space to capture contact information for connections you make throughout the Champion Convening.

Name

Institution

Email

I want to connect because:

Appendix

**Complete the Network Champion
Convening Survey**



Strategic Priority Milestones—Network Champion Institutions

This section identifies the impactful outcomes of FirstGen Forward’s Institution Actionable Priorities to enhance first-generation student success.

Your institutional leadership team is encouraged to reflect on progress made during the Network Champion experience. Evaluate which of these priorities your institution wants to make movement on. Are these actionable priorities currently present in your driver diagram or action plans?

Actionable Priority	Milestone	Completion Status
Continuous Improvement	Utilization of ImproveEDU to develop and maintain Driver Diagram current improvement projects and action tacks.	
Establishing Intentional Alumni, Donor, & Community Relationships	Develop a plan to partner with alumni affairs to engage first-gen alumni in institutional initiatives to support first-generation students throughout the student lifecycle.	
	Develop a plan to partner with the development/foundation department to identify current and potential programmatic and/or scholarship funding specific to first-generation student support or success.	
Demonstrating Return on Investment (ROI)	Initiatives designed or implemented with first-generation students in mind that span the academic career may result in data demonstrating a return on investment 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.	

Network Leader Foundations

While engaged in the Network Leader phase, your institution advanced based on completion of the actionable priorities outlined below. Although not the focus of the Network Champion phase, your institution is encouraged to maintain ongoing progress in these priorities.

Actionable Priority	Milestone	Completion Status
Aligning Leadership & Institutional Strategy	Attendance at in-person Network Champion Convening.	
	Implement or maintain a cross-divisional decision-making body to lead institutional adoption of first-generation efforts.	
	Audit institutional strategic plan and other key documents to identify opportunities for first-generation alignment and gaps for improvement.	
Mapping & Networking Institutional Efforts & Resources	The institution has a formal first-generation college student definition.	
	First-gen attribute/identifier assigned to first-time incoming first-generation students.	
	First-gen attribute/identifier assigned to continuing first-generation students not initially identified.	
	Complete an institutional mapping exercise that includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. specific first-generation programs and services, 2. intersectional programs and services, and 3. use of first-generation definitions. 	
	Identify emerging themes from institutional mapping that contributes to an initial priority list for steering committee consideration.	
	(Plans for) Web presence specific to first-generation students.	
Continuous Improvement	Utilization of ImproveEDU to develop and maintain Driver Diagram current improvement projects and action tacks.	

Actionable Priority	Milestone	Completion Status
Elevating Actionable Data for Decision-making	Complete data mapping to understand what data is collected, how it is stored, who has access and authorization to view it, and how it is used for continuous improvement and assessment.	
	Create a cross-functional data working group to be accountable for analyzing and communicating first-gen data insights to the institutional community.	
	Identify three key momentum metrics (student outcomes that impact student completion rates) to monitor, improve, and incorporate in continuous improvement cycle planning.	
Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP)	Appropriate Leadership Team members have access to the PDP Dashboard.	
	Utilizing data for decision making.	
Strengthening Institutional Communications	Identify and develop a process to facilitate a comprehensive auditing process (e.g., working group, training the trainer, etc.) Submit a description of the process, and outline the staff involved and their responsibilities.	
	Complete a comprehensive institutional audit of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. external and internal communications, 2. policies and/or procedures, and 3. career and graduate/professional school preparation offerings for opportunities to eliminate jargon and remove barriers to student success. 	
Fostering Knowledge Across the Institution	Complete a process to identify first-generation faculty, staff, and champions and a mechanism for publicly identifying these individuals.	
	Identify existing and potential opportunities to provide comprehensive training and professional development to equip faculty, staff, and advisors with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively support first-generation college students. This includes providing access to first-gen aggregate data and a list of asset-based approaches.	

Network Champion Syllabus

Class of 2024 and Class of 2025

Phase Description

Dedicated to transforming their institutions to better support positive outcomes for first-generation students, Network Champions are national exemplars in advancing first-generation student success. Network Champion institutions have invested the time and commitment to actively adopt the continuous improvement model and align their efforts with institutional priorities to guide first-generation students to completion. Dedicated to serving the field, Network Champions continue contributing to an important knowledge community of evidence-based practices meant to enhance institutional buy-in, engage leadership, and scale student support.

While movement from the Network Leader phase to the Network Champion phase signals an important progression, this phase remains a time for active implementation of the continuous improvement principles while emphasizing institution-focused strategic priorities to improve first-generation students' experience and completion rates.

Duration of Network Champion Experience

Three Years (36 months). Near the end of year three, institutions will undergo a reaffirmation review to assess their eligibility for continued Network Champion status.

Network Champion Benefits

- Assignment of a dedicated expert guide for Network Champion institutions;
- Access to proprietary continuous improvement accountability tools meant to bolster support through intentional alignment with institutional strategy;
- A network of institutions with similar priorities and goals related to first-generation student success, with bi-annual virtual convenings;
- Advanced training opportunities to harness the power of the Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP) dashboards for informed decision-making;
- Ongoing professional development offered through in-person and virtual learning opportunities aligned with specific outcomes, featuring toolkits and e-learning modules;
- Exclusive perks such as discounted or free registration on professional development offerings tailored to first-generation student success include but are not limited to virtual learning and engagement opportunities, live briefings, and short courses.

Learning Platforms

- Basecamp
- Zoom
- ImproveEDU
- Email
- FirstGen Forward Website
- Calendly

Required Experiences

As a Network Champion, an institution commits to continually improving institutional culture and scaling systems. The following requirements ensure continued engagement.

Enroll in the Postsecondary Data Partnership & submit data annually;	Advance priorities through continuous improvement;
Attend fall and spring virtual convenings;	Actively contribute to the Network peer engagement;
Participate in two (2) expert guidance meetings annually and one leadership team meeting;	Sign the participation agreement and submit the annual commitment fee.

Network Champion Calendar 2025-2026

**Please note that program details and offerings are subject to change. We continuously strive to enhance and adapt our programs to meet our participants' evolving needs and feedback.*

June 2025	6/18	Network Champion Celebratory Welcome Event for the Class of 2025
	6/26 - 6/28	Network Champion Convening at SSHE 2025
August 2025	8/1 - 8/31	Class of 2024 Leadership Team Meetings
	8/1	PDP Data Submission Deadline
September 2025	9/1 - 9/31	Class of 2024 Leadership Team Meetings
October 2025	10/1 - 10/31	Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle, 30 Days
	10/8	Network Champion Fall Virtual Convening (for All Network Champion Institutions) 1:00 - 2:00 PM ET
November 2025	11/1 - 11/30	Network Champion Expert Guidance Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle, 60 Days
	11/8	National First-Generation College Celebration
December 2025	12/1 - 12/23	Network Champion Individual Expert Guidance
	12/1 - 12/31	Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 90 Days
January 2026	1/1 - 1/31	Network Champion CIC Reflection Network Champion Individual Expert Guidance
February 2026	2/1 - 2/28	Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 30 Days
March 2026	3/1 - 3/31	Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 60 Days
	3/4	Network Champion Spring Virtual Convening (for All Network Champion Institutions) 1:00 - 2:00 PM ET

April 2026	4/1 - 4/30	Network Champion Individual Expert Guidance Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 90 Days
May 2026	5/1 - 5/31	Network Champion CIC Reflection Network Champion Spring Expert Guidance
June 2026	6/1 - 6/30	Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 30 Days
	TBA	Network Champion In Person Convening at SSHE 2026
July 2026	7/1 - 7/31	Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 60 Days
August 2026	8/1 - 8/31	Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 90 Days
	8/1 - 8/31	Class of 2024 Leadership Team Meetings Class of 2025 Leadership Team Meetings
	8/1	PDP Data Submission Deadline
September 2026	9/1 - 9/31	Network Champion CIC Reflection
	9/1 - 9/31	Class of 2024 Leadership Team Meetings Class of 2025 Leadership Team Meetings
October 2026	10/1 - 10/31	Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 30 Days
	10/7	Network Champion Fall Virtual Convening (for All Network Champion Institutions) 1:00 - 2:00 PM ET
November 2026	11/1 - 11/30	Network Champion Individual Expert Guidance Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 60 Days
December 2026		Network Champion Individual Expert Guidance Network Champion Continuous Improvement Cycle 90 Days

FirstGen Forward Resources

Welcome to the Network Leader-specific resource list! This list includes a range of FirstGen Forward resources designed to meet the unique needs of first-generation college students.

Basecamp

FirstGen Forward Network institutions receive access to an institution-specific learning hub. This hub is only accessible to colleagues from your institution and provides curated resources, messaging, and to-dos. Network institutions also have access to a Cohort-specific Learning Hub that allows them to connect with cohort colleagues, view announcements, seek support, and collaborate.

Community of Practice and Monthly Content-based Workshops

Monthly content and peer networking workshops to advance knowledge and progress across actionable priorities. Contact your Expert Guide to learn how to join these informative sessions.

Continuous Improvement Cycle (CIC)

The CIC is what guides our work. The framework is rooted in an overarching institutional goal and assists in planning and keeping activities focused and on target. This model, designed with strategic stops at 30-, 60- and 90-day intervals, allows for reflection and assessment and ensures the work aligns with the larger institutional goal.

Dedicated Expert Guidance

Expert Guides serve as partners to address your institution's specific concerns, aspirations, and first-generation student population. Your Expert Guide can connect you with this valuable resource.

E-Learning Modules

Accessible modules that integrate multimedia resources and highlight diverse college partners who are champions in the field. Topics include institutional mapping and guidance in engaging work groups and steering committees.

ImproveEDU

ImproveEDU is an online tool that empowers educational institutions to identify and prioritize critical challenges. With ImproveEDU, users can systematically map out barriers and obstacles, enabling them to develop strategic courses of action for continuous improvement.

Insights Tool Report

The Insights Tool is a survey administered to a diverse group of staff, faculty, and administrators at each institution. The resulting data represents a collective insight into the institution's ongoing efforts to support first-generation students.

Toolkits and Guiding Documents

Toolkits are documents that outline the purpose and guiding principles of the topic for FirstGen Forward Network institutions. Topics include stakeholder identification, institutional mapping, financial literacy, a sense of belonging, and paths to graduate and professional schools. Toolkits typically include an executive summary of the topic and examples of mechanisms to complete the outlined activities (meeting agendas, email templates, or data organization sheets).

FirstGen Forward Publications

First-generation College Students' Career Entry: College Perspectives

Many first-generation students attend college to prepare for stable careers and pursue social mobility, while navigating unfamiliar social, economic, and professional landscapes. While much has been written about their educational experiences, less is known about their career development and the challenges they face transitioning into the workforce. This brief addresses that gap, highlighting both the institutional support available and the often-overlooked cultural aspects of boundary-crossing and imposter syndrome.

First-generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs and Services at Four-year Institutions

The report, *First-generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs and Services at Four-year Institutions*, details how institutions serve first-generation students, the challenges institutions encounter in providing support, and how first-generation students perceive their institutional experience.

National Data Fact Sheets on First-generation and Continuing-generation College Students

These fact sheets provide national statistics about the background characteristics, postsecondary experiences, and outcomes of first-generation and continuing-generation college students in the United States from 2019.

National Fact Sheets About First-generation College Graduates' Transition to Graduate School and Employment in the Year After Earning a Bachelor's Degree

These fact sheets provide national statistics about first-generation college graduates' transition to graduate school and employment in the year after earning a bachelor's degree in 2021.

An Annotated Bibliography on First-generation College Students: Research from 2008-2019

This annotated bibliography examines hundreds of entries, placing each into chapters centering on eleven topics: career readiness; classroom teaching and pedagogy; graduate and professional school students; intersections of identity; low-income & working-class students; student refugees; mass media and popular culture; memoirs and fiction; parents and families; social and cultural capital; and student success.

Journal of First-generation Student Success

The Journal of First-generation Student Success joins other publications of NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, adding another robust resource available to NASPA members. The Journal is managed by FirstGen Forward and seeks to publish practice articles grounded in research and literature and, reciprocally, research articles that speak to practice.

National Data Fact Sheets on First-generation College in 2020

These fact sheets provide information about first-generation college students' demographic characteristics, enrollment characteristics, and experiences during the early COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the findings are similar to those in the National Data Fact Sheets from 2019.

News & Blogs

Find the latest from FirstGen Forward, learn new and innovative approaches from colleagues, and engage with current mainstream media conversations on first-generation student success.

FirstGen Forward Network Leader-specific Resources

Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP)

The Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP) empowers institutions with comprehensive data, easier analysis, and better visual representations to help users understand, improve, and communicate student momentum metrics, outcomes, and equity.

FirstGen Forward Programs and Services

CatalystFIRST

CatalystFIRST is central to the FirstGen Forward's strategic priority to advance critical first-generation student success conversations through national convenings, advocacy, and policy influence. We provide talented speakers to elevate your event—big or small—while remaining an affordable option for all institution types, sizes, and geographic locations.

Webinars and Events

Engage with in-person and virtual conferences, professional development, and networking and collaboration platforms. Specific offerings for first-generation student success are infused throughout each offering. These fee-based offerings include developing and implementing programs for first-generation college students, utilizing data to support first-generation student success, and enhancing knowledge and skills for working with first-generation students.

Vocal Video Activity Challenge

Vocal Video is the easiest way to remotely capture, edit, & publish video testimonials. The Vocal Video platform streamlines the process by allowing users to request video responses via a link, without requiring respondents to download an app or schedule a meeting.

The Activity Challenge:

Create a video about your experience at 2025 Leadership Academy & 2025 Champions Convening

VIDEO LENGTH	TOOLS NEEDED	TIPS FOR PARTICIPANTS
90 seconds	Laptop or smartphone to record.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pick a quiet and well-lit place• Relax & be yourself – it doesn't have to be perfect• You can redo your recording if you're not happy with it

The following prompt is provided to guide your response:

What is the most valuable thing you're taking away from your experience at Leadership Academy or Network Champion Convening?

Thanks in advance for your time in providing feedback. We use this information to make sure we're providing the best experience for our institutional partners and colleagues!



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Scan the QR code to capture your video!

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Network@FirstGenForward.org



@FirstGenForward

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