



Exemplary Student Pathways

An initiative of The University of Texas System

A PLAYBOOK TO DRIVE STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH DATA-INFORMED CURRICULAR REDESIGN

UTSYSTEM.EDU



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Their deep experience in data-informed interventions, curricular reform, and student-centered redesign shaped every stage of the work. Their willingness to collaborate—and the energy and joy they brought to the process—sustained the time, focus, and commitment required to make ESP a reality. Their fingerprints are all over this Playbook. We hope that their contributions will be clearly visible and will inspire pride, ongoing engagement, and ownership of a transformational change model rooted in academic excellence, institutional effectiveness, and above all, student success.

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ESP Playbook Description and Rationale

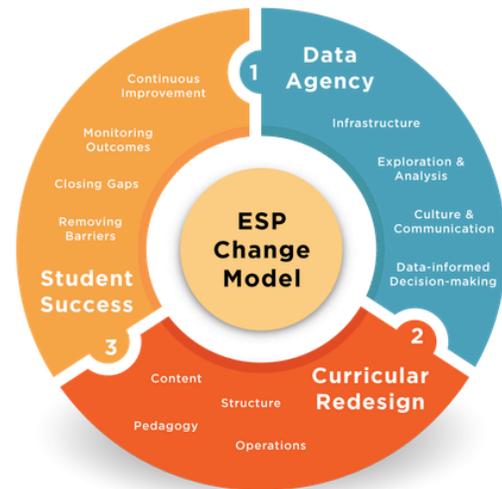
PURPOSE AND GOALS

The ESP Playbook is an online, interactive resource designed to guide institutions in replicating and adapting a change model that focuses on closing gaps in outcomes and removing barriers to student success through data agency and curricular redesign. The model defines both "data agency" and "curricular redesign" in broad, comprehensive terms and positions them as essential levers for advancing student outcomes.

Developed and implemented by the University of Texas System Administration (UT System) and its nine academic institutions, the change model—known as the **Exemplary Student Pathways (ESP) Change Model**—was created with generous support from the Lumina and Trellis Foundations and facilitation by Sova.

The ESP Playbook makes the case that, in a constantly evolving higher education landscape, data-informed curricular redesign plays a critical role in driving student success. It is designed to build institutional capacity to implement the ESP Change Model, allowing UT System institutions and other colleges and universities to adapt the model to their own student populations, strategic goals, institutional priorities, and organizational structures. The Playbook supports practitioners in cultivating and sustaining data agency, with the ultimate aim of reimagining student pathways into and through the curriculum.

In doing so, the Playbook seeks to develop a broad and deep bench of student success leaders and practitioners who are fluent in the practices of data agency and curricular redesign. It also lays the groundwork for institutionalizing the ESP Change Model not only within the UT System, but across diverse higher education institutions and contexts.



ESP Change Model
Data-informed curricular redesign to improve student success

ORGANIZING STRUCTURE AND SCOPE

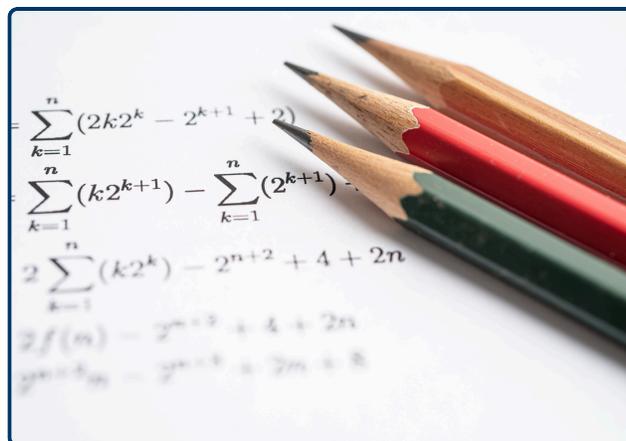
The ESP Playbook is designed for flexible use across a wide range of student success challenges. It provides practical, how-to guidance on implementing the model, and:

- Serves as a professional learning and capacity-building guide to support engagement with, implementation of, and institutionalization of the ESP Change Model.
- Captures learnings, approaches, and strategies from twenty-two ESP projects conducted across the UT System's nine academic institutions between 2022 and 2024.
- Delivers guidance on assessing the impact and efficacy of the ESP Change Model.
- Offers tools, templates, and artifacts of institutional change from across the UT System to support replication and adaptation.

While the ESP Playbook is grounded in the UT System's institutional contexts and student populations, it is designed to be transferable to other colleges, universities, and state systems working to improve student success. The ESP model encourages teams to explore not only data

and curriculum, but also the policies and practices that shape the student experience from entry through completion and beyond.

Beyond guiding institutions through the ESP model itself, the Playbook also offers broader lessons in change leadership and management, with insights that are relevant across diverse institutional settings. Together, the materials reflect a professional development model built around three key priorities: 1) cultivating data agency, 2) advancing holistic curricular redesign, and 3) strengthening institutional capacity to sustain, scale, and institutionalize student-centered change.



This Playbook includes references to a variety of materials designed to support use of the ESP model—all of which are available in the [Playbook Resource Library](#), a curated hub of tools, templates, and examples.

WHO THIS PLAYBOOK IS FOR

This Playbook is designed for a range of higher education audiences—particularly those working within university systems and public institutions—who are leading or supporting curricular redesign, data-informed reform, and student success initiatives. Whether you are a provost, student success leader, department chair, faculty member, institutional researcher, or system-level policy leader, the Playbook offers guidance grounded in practice and aligned with strategic priorities for student success.

Primary audiences include:

- **Provosts and Academic Leaders**

Executive sponsors of institutional transformation efforts will find strategic guidance on how to embed the ESP model within institutional priorities, allocate resources, and drive culture change across divisions.

- **Institutional Project Teams**

Cross-functional teams—comprising faculty, advisors, institutional researchers, and administrators—will benefit from practical tools and frameworks that support each phase of the ESP change process.

- **System Leaders and Facilitators**

System-level offices supporting institutions in change work will find replicable models for facilitation, capacity-building, and cross-campus collaboration.

- **Student Success Practitioners and Faculty Champions**

Those working on the ground to advance student success, redesign curriculum, and use data for improvement will find language, strategies, and examples that resonate with the daily work of supporting students.

While the Playbook is grounded in the University of Texas System's ESP projects, it is intended to be adaptable for any higher education context seeking to improve student outcomes through curricular redesign and enhanced data agency. As such, it may also be of use to funding agencies, higher education coordinating agencies and associations, and higher education researchers.

Making the Case for the ESP Change Model to Improve Student Success

INTRODUCING THE EXEMPLARY STUDENT PATHWAYS PROJECT

The Exemplary Student Pathways (ESP) Change Model emerged from the Exemplary Student Pathways Project—an initiative of the University of Texas System (UT System) designed to improve student success by redesigning curricular pathways across its nine academic institutions.

The model centers students by fostering an educational environment that respects and reflects their diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. It identifies data agency and curricular redesign as core levers of institutional change, enabling teams to remove barriers and close gaps in student outcomes.

With generous support from the Lumina Foundation in the first phase (2022-23), and continued funding from Lumina and the Trellis Foundation in the second phase (2023-25), the UT System—in close collaboration with its institutions—refined the ESP model to better reflect institutional needs and priorities. At its core, the model promotes a deep, data-informed understanding of the students served, both within the UT System and more broadly.

Like the model itself, the ESP Project harnesses the power of data to inform the design of new student pathways that help more learners enter and complete high-quality degree programs, leading to long-term success.

The lessons, strategies, and insights from 22 institutional ESP projects are woven throughout this Playbook. These experiences are complemented by the [ESP Impact Assessment Framework](#), developed by a systemwide working group. The framework identifies key metrics for assessing both the Change Model and individual projects and helps institutions evaluate maturity across the two critical dimensions of the ESP model: **data agency** and **curricular redesign**.



Key Elements of the ESP Change Model

- Positions the curriculum as the locus of change to promote student success.
- Cultivates data agency through an iterative, facilitated process focused on institutional cohort-based participation, research, and reflection through data discovery and action.

THE ESP CHANGE MODEL AND THE UT SYSTEM STUDENT SUCCESS CONTEXT

The ESP model draws from the work of [Laura Fingerson and David Troutman's \(2019\)](#) institutional research framework and [Alice McIntyre's \(2014\)](#) participatory action research. Fingerson and Troutman identify key units of analysis and metrics across the student lifecycle, including matriculation, progression, completion, cost/debt, and post-collegiate outcomes. In its early years, the UT System referred to this work as the Participatory Action Institutional Research (PAIR) model but later adopted the ESP name to better capture the scope and structure of the project. David Troutman served as co-PI on the first Lumina grant before departing the UT System.

The ESP model aims to shift institutional culture around three key domains: data use, curricular redesign (broadly defined), and student success. At the heart of the project is a facilitated process in which ESP teams at each institution cultivate both data agency and curricular redesign capacity—two interdependent practices necessary for closing gaps in outcomes and advancing student success from access to completion and beyond. The word cultivate is used intentionally, recognizing that this work builds upon long-standing student success efforts already underway at UT institutions while acknowledging that continued progress requires sustained and coordinated effort.

WHY DATA AGENCY AND WHY CURRICULAR REDESIGN?



The ESP Change Model defines its core concepts as follows:

- **Data agency** is the ability to create utility from data. It enables institutional leaders and higher education practitioners to develop a clear strategy and capacity for data with a student-centered lens across four domains: **infrastructure, exploration and analysis, culture and communication, and data-informed decision-making.**
- **Curricular redesign** is a comprehensive process of examining and transforming the **structure, operations, content, and pedagogy** of academic programs, courses, and pathways. Its primary goal is to provide students with learning experiences that equip them with the skills, knowledge, abilities, and habits of mind necessary for success in college, careers, and civic life. This is achieved through the development of clear degree pathways with well-defined learning outcomes, resulting in curricula that are coherent and transparent.

The ESP Change Model emerged from years of UT System-institutional collaboration. Across the campuses, faculty, student success leaders, advisors, deans, institutional researchers, and other practitioners were already engaged in efforts such as data analytics projects, curricular innovation grants, and transfer and advising initiatives.

These shared efforts made it clear that institutions needed not only data access but also strategic guidance on how to interpret, analyze, and apply that data to address student success and redesign pathways.

This groundwork also revealed two deeper insights:

1. Academic majors and curricular structures play a significant role in shaping student success.
2. In many areas, the curriculum had become stagnant or resistant to change—whether due to legacy practices, structural complexity, or cultural norms.

These realities underscore why **data agency** and **curricular redesign** are foundational to the ESP model and why professional development is essential to building institutional capacity to do this work well. The ESP process allows time and space to examine meaningful but underutilized data, identify opportunity gaps, and rethink academic pathways. It is designed to complement and reinforce institutional strategic plans, professional development efforts, and infrastructure already in place.

The ESP model also aligns with and supports other UT System initiatives, including:

- The [Developmental Education and Corequisite Capacity Building](#) (DECCB) initiative.
- [Transfer pathways](#) and transition supports.
- The [5 E Advising Excellence Framework](#).
- Pedagogical improvement and classroom innovation through The Student Experience Project and [ACUE training](#).
- [Momentum on Open Educational Resources](#) (MOER)—a vehicle to showcase and motivate greater engagement with Open Educational Resources (OER) across the UT System.
- The [UERU Curricular Analytics Project](#).
- The [Texas Credentials for the Future - Beyond Completion](#) microcredentialing initiative.

After four years of use across the UT System, institutions view the ESP Change Model as transformative. This Playbook responds directly to their requests for tools and guidance to sustain and institutionalize the work.

APPLYING THE ESP CHANGE MODEL IN THE UT SYSTEM

To launch the project, the UT System invited institutions to submit proposals via a request for information (RFI) process. These proposals identified student success challenges, particularly those related to the curriculum, that could be addressed using the ESP model.

Between Winter 2022 and Summer 2024, a total of 22 projects were funded across the UT System's nine academic institutions. Each project followed a six-month, structured, and facilitated change process. Institutions formed teams of 6-8 student success leaders, faculty, department chairs, deans, and other practitioners. These teams worked closely with one or two UT System facilitators and used institution- and project-specific data dashboards to guide their inquiry and planning.

Teams met biweekly and participated in four to five project-wide workshops, progressing through the ESP Model's stages. Together, they refined project statements, explored data, mapped pathways, and developed robust action plans grounded in the principles of data agency and curricular redesign.



UT SYSTEM ESP PROJECTS FROM 2022 - 2024

What follows are nine examples of ESP Projects that took place at UT System institutions between 2022 and 2024. A description of all 22 projects conducted during this time frame [can be found in the ESP Resource Library](#).



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

Enhancing the Student Success Conversation with Faculty of High Enrollment, High DFW Rate Courses (2023)

Examining gateway courses with enrollments totaling more than 2,200 per semester and high drop and failure (DFW) rates to positively impact student retention and graduation rates, ensure that access remains an institutional priority, and provide academic support resources for students sooner.

Select Accomplishments

- The Department of Biology transformed an introductory course as a team, improved pass rates considerably, and shared their process with other departments.
- Launched a project to provide data to all faculty every semester about the enrollment makeup of their course(s).



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Second-Year Experience Project (2024)

Exploring challenges present among the second-year student population, with a focus on identifying ways to increase curricular coherence and transparency, and support increased perceptions of community and belongingness among undergraduate students in their second year.

Select Accomplishments

- Produced over 50 curricular complexity maps that provide starting points for college and department conversations about assessing and addressing bottlenecks and blockages within coursework.
- The Center of Teaching and Learning hosted a *Decoding the Second Year Experience Symposium*, an event with faculty, staff, and students from across the university that provided an opportunity for showcasing second-year experience programming and student-centered research.



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

Improving Students' Success and Experience in the Calculus Sequence (2024)

Addressing different outcomes in first-semester calculus for students who earned math placement scores in the lower range of qualification benchmarks, focusing on enhancing classroom belonging, leveraging supplemental support in the curriculum, offering preparatory activities to enhance success, and addressing course material affordability.

Select Accomplishments

- Created mathematics Open Educational Resources (OER) to deliver free educational material for Differential Calculus and Integral Calculus, which makes these classes more affordable and accessible.
- Promote wider access and usage of math placement tests (ALEKS) component scores at the outset of the course to empower instructors to help students navigate through the course and customize learning to each student.



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Completion of Complex Degrees: Redesigning Kinesiology and Biological Sciences for Increased Flexibility (2022)

Reducing unused semester credit hours (SCH) and improving time to degree for students in Biological Sciences and Kinesiology programs by exploring 1) where excess credit hours are coming from; 2) to what extent excess credit hours differ for transfer students or those who enter the major from another program; and 3) to what extent they are linked to retakes of required courses.

Select Accomplishments

- The Kinesiology program degree plan was completely restructured to allow flexible pathways and better alignment with transfer courses. The Biological Sciences program eliminated some key prerequisites that were causing complexity.
- UTEP is recognizing and rewarding programs that are restructuring degree plans to assure more clarity and shorter time-to-degree.



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PERMIAN BASIN

Closing Retention and Graduation Gaps for Students in High-Demand Fields (2022)

Working to close gaps in retention and graduation with student populations in high-demand fields for the Permian Basin region. There are significant shortages in the number of teachers and engineers in this area, and working on improvements for these areas helps UTPB meet the goals in its strategic plan.

Select Accomplishments

- Developed new degree maps to separate high DFWI classes and spread them more evenly across semesters, resulting in decreased DFWI rates and leading to higher retention rates.
- Developed a process that allows time and space as an institution to understand the data behind perceptions of student success and to break down cross-unit silos.



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Redesigning the Biology Major with a Student Success-Centered Framework (2023)

The biology department worked to improve the number of graduates who get a job in STEM fields that align with their personal professional goals after graduation (including getting a job matched to their degree in the Rio Grande Valley, since many students want to continue living in the region after graduation).

Select Accomplishments

- Biology faculty surveyed their student majors to get a better understanding of their career aspirations and disciplinary interests, and they also looked at where their students are getting jobs and what skills those companies are looking for.
- Identified a set of skills that would be useful in the job market (lab skills, data analysis, writing, etc.) and front-loaded those in new courses early in the major and then scaffolded continued development throughout.



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO

Reduce the Time-to-Degree for Students Within Sustainable Environment Majors (2022)

Reducing the time-to-degree for students in three sustainable environment majors (Civil Engineering, Construction Science and Management, and Environmental Science) and increasing the number and percent of female graduates. This project also aims to unite three programs in an interdisciplinary approach to curricular redesign to holistically evaluate student success.

Select Accomplishments

- Successfully transformed three courses, leading to improved student experiences and course outcomes.
- Strengthened collaboration across divisions of Academic Innovation, Student Success, and Undergraduate Studies, and contributed to the successful launch and completion of multiple initiatives supporting curricular innovation and data agency.
- Developed a Course Profile Report for faculty, including multiple data points to help faculty understand who is in their class and inform their course design, communication strategies, and pedagogical approaches at the onset of the course.



STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

Re-designing Developmental Reading and Writing Corequisite Instruction for First-Year Students (2024)

Addressing how to best educate and remediate the significantly increasing population of incoming freshmen who have state requirements for developmental education in reading and writing (meaning they scored below the levels set for college readiness).

Select Accomplishments

- Major renovation of the Laz Corley Writing Lab using a physical space design based on third-space writing theory.
- Redesigned the writing lab curriculum using a sustainable staffing model based on the pedagogical role of “writing coaches.” Coaches include full-time faculty specialized in first-year writing, graduate teaching assistants, and undergraduate tutors.



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

Moving Through the Mathematics Pipeline: Engineers Pave the Way for STEM Majors (2022)

Working to decrease the percentage of STEM students earning DFWs in their mathematics courses on the first attempt, beginning with engineering programs. The mathematics courses are typically significant blocking and delaying factors for STEM students in completing their respective degrees.

Select Accomplishments

- The College of Engineering conducted a deep dive into their student data to determine what grade point average is needed to progress through the program and graduate. This allows advisors and faculty to work with students when they are approaching this critical GPA tipping point.
- Increased a key entry math course from 2 to 3 SCH to ensure that all engineering students have common student success knowledge and experience. This required a restructure of the program to keep the same number of credits overall.

The Stages of the ESP Model

The **ESP Change Model** includes six iterative and intersecting stages:

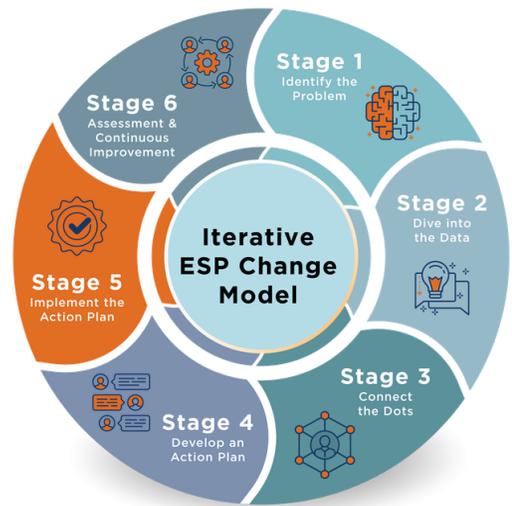
1. Identify the Problem
2. Dive into the Data
3. Connect the Dots
4. Develop an Action Plan
5. Implement the Action Plan
6. Assessment and Continuous Improvement

These stages overlap and build upon one another, resulting in a data-informed process that supports institutional insights, decision-making, and transformation.

Stages 1-3 of the ESP Model culminate in the development of an action plan that serves as a roadmap to project implementation and includes:

- A final, data-informed project statement with specific goals to reduce gaps in student outcomes.
- A proposed redesigned curricular pathway.
- Concrete steps for implementation, including actions needed to remove barriers, mitigate risks, engage stakeholders, and manage change.
- Clearly defined short-term and long-term metrics and assessment processes.

For each of the 22 projects funded across the UT System from 2022-24, facilitation was provided in stages 2-4. However, as the graphic on this page illustrates, the facilitated process from Stages 2 through 4 does not mark the end of the project. The action plan developed in those stages serves as a roadmap for implementation. Institutions commit to carrying out their plans, engaging stakeholders, and examining data, policy, and curriculum to assess impact and make refinements that enhance student learning and success. Other sections of the ESP Playbook provide guidance on assessing project effectiveness, strengthening data agency, advancing curricular redesign, and institutionalizing change for long-term impact.



Exemplary Student Pathways (ESP)
Data agency in service to curricular redesign in service to student success

Stage 1 - Identify the Problem

Engagement with the ESP Change Model begins by defining a focused problem statement tied to student success outcomes and a relevant curricular component. This stage is foundational and is often led by provosts and upper-level student success leaders, even before teams are identified, in response to known gaps, barriers, or inflection points in student progression and the need to understand why those patterns matter. Problem identification is grounded in institutional context, student needs, and strategic goals and priorities, and it frames the inquiry and data exploration that follow. It also points the way to building the right team to move into Stage 2.

Stage 2 - Dive into the Data

Once convened, ESP teams engage in conversations and analyses using dashboards and reports tailored to each institution and project, as well as institutionally housed data. This process helps teams investigate their identified problem through multiple data lenses.

Outcomes of this stage include:

- Identifying a curated set of data resources that generate inquiry and provide context for the project statement.

- Development of initial data findings to guide the work of stages 2 and 3, including examining the questions and assumptions generated by the data, identification of barriers to student success discoverable through the review of the selected curriculum, curricular component, or academic program, and adjacent data, policy, and practice implications.
- A deeper dive into and understanding of patterns and gaps in student outcomes.

Stage 3 - Connect the Dots

Building on their data analysis, ESP teams prioritize actionable information, synthesize findings, and integrate multiple perspectives to refine their understanding of the problem and begin to explore solutions. Through facilitated team discussions and, as relevant, cross-institutional convenings, teams consider what the data suggest about root causes, drivers, and systemic contributors to student outcomes.

This stage helps teams:

- Revise or clarify their project statement in light of new insights.
- Identify opportunities for curricular or pathway redesign, including policy revisions, practice changes, risk mitigation, and required engagement with other offices and units.
- Surface promising strategies or interventions already in use across the institution or in peer settings.

Stage 4 - Develop an Action Plan

In this stage, teams transition from analysis to design. Drawing on prior work, they co-create a concrete action plan that outlines what will be implemented, why, and how, and—if done well—serves as a roadmap to implementation. The plan includes both strategic and operational elements—such as assessment measures, stakeholder engagement, required resources, communications, and change management to ensure feasibility and alignment.

Key components of the action plan include:

- A refined project statement with specific goals and success metrics.
- A proposed redesigned major, set of courses, or pathway.
- Implementation steps, timelines, resource needs, and responsible parties.
- Anticipated risks, barriers, and strategies to address them.

Stage 5 - Implement the Action Plan

In this stage, teams activate their plans by coordinating efforts across academic and administrative units. Implementation involves assigning responsibilities, initiating timelines, and mobilizing communication strategies that build awareness and buy-in for the actions underway. Teams often start with pilots or phased rollouts, using early results to make real-time adjustments. Emphasis is placed on execution, collaboration, accountability, and maintaining momentum. The ultimate goal is the institutionalization of implemented reforms as well as of the ESP Change Model.

Stage 6 - Assessment and Continuous Improvement

The ESP Change Model is designed as a dynamic, ongoing process. In Stage 6, teams evaluate the effectiveness of their implementation strategies and student outcomes using the metrics defined in their action plan. Assessment includes iterative reexamination of data and analysis of results, collecting stakeholder feedback, and using findings to refine policies, practices, and pathway designs.

This cycle of continuous improvement ensures projects remain responsive and aligned with the students being served and institutional goals. It also offers institutional projects and leaders ongoing opportunities to stay focused on further cultivation of data agency and of comprehensive curricular redesign as levers to close gaps in outcomes, remove barriers, and improve student success.

ESP Stage 1: Identify the Problem

There are critical steps that institutions should take prior to launching an ESP project, including assessing readiness and enabling conditions. This section walks users through those preliminary steps. It is important to note that UT System colleagues engaged in ESP projects are experienced academic and student success leaders who bring deep expertise in data-informed interventions and redesign strategies. Likewise, future users of this Playbook will bring their own insights and approaches to applying the ESP model within their unique institutional contexts.



Key Concepts: Identify the Problem

ALIGN INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

- Anchor projects in strategic goals and use institutional data to focus the initiative.

EXECUTIVE SPONSORSHIP

- Engage a senior administrator to advocate, coordinate across silos, secure resources, and ensure accountability.

CURRICULUM NEEDS & PARTNER READINESS

- Identify curricular pathways in need of redesign and assess departments for willingness, capacity, and bandwidth.

STRATEGIC PROJECT SELECTION & SCOPING

- If a program aligns with priorities but lacks readiness, choose a more feasible project and build capacity for future work.

USE OF ESP PLAYBOOK RUBRICS (DATA AGENCY & CURRICULAR REDESIGN)

- Employ these rubrics, included in the ESP Playbook, to evaluate readiness and maturity across multiple domains of data agency and curricular redesign, guide reflection, and calibrate progress across stages.

DATA-INFORMED PROJECT STATEMENT & TEAM FORMATION

- Develop a project statement to articulate the overarching objectives of the project and convene a team that brings a range of perspectives and institutional roles to the collaboration.

DETERMINING READINESS FOR AN ESP PROJECT

To identify the right project, with the right people, at the right time, institutions begin by taking four essential steps that position them to act on institutional priorities for student success and improved curricular pathways:

1. Align institutional priorities.
2. Determine curriculum and pathways most in need of change through the lens of the student experience as well as data.
3. Identify departments and leadership most ready to partner.
4. Assess baseline data agency capacity and curricular redesign adoption.

Two tools developed through the ESP Change Model—the **Data Agency Rubric** and the **Curricular Redesign Rubric**—support institutions in this work. They deepen institutional understanding of what it means to cultivate data agency and conduct holistic curricular redesign, the two core concepts at the heart of the ESP Change Model. They define and assess maturity and adoption levels across both areas, which occur along a continuum. The rubrics are part of an impact assessment framework described elsewhere in the Playbook.

Each rubric contains four domains, or broad categories of assessment. Within each domain are measurable components that help institutions determine whether a domain is present and to what extent. Reflecting on these criteria allows teams to identify opportunities, gaps, and areas of strength.



**DATA AGENCY
SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRIC**

This self-assessment tool is designed to help your institution evaluate its current adoption of data agency as defined by the ESP Change Model. State agencies and other higher education organizations will also find the rubric helpful in thinking through their support for and facilitation of more student-centered pathways and degree completion.

Infrastructure, exploration and analysis, culture and communication, and data-informed decision-making can be understood as the **four domains of data agency**, broad categories of assessment or evaluation, and **criteria**, measurable components within each domain that demonstrate whether the domain is present and to what extent.

CLICK HERE



To access the rubric, you may click this image



**CURRICULAR REDESIGN
SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRIC**

This self-assessment tool is designed to help your institution evaluate its current adoption of curricular redesign as defined by the ESP Change Model. State agencies and other higher education organizations will also find the rubric helpful in thinking through their support for and facilitation of more student-centered pathways and degree completion.

Structure, operations, content, and pedagogy can be understood as the **four domains** of curricular redesign, broad categories of assessment or evaluation. Each domain includes a subset of **criteria**, measurable components within each domain that demonstrate whether the domain is present and to what extent.

CLICK HERE



To access the rubric, you may click this image

The rubrics can be used strategically not only in identifying a project, but also as level-setting tools at key moments throughout the ESP process. For example, they can serve as readiness assessments to establish baseline self-assessments at the outset of an ESP project as teams get underway. They might also be used as teams transition from one stage to another of the ESP process, for example, in the transition from data discovery to connecting the dots, or as the team gets ready to develop their action plans focused on implementation of the curricular redesign, not to mention as a tool to revisit as project implementation and assessment occur.

Additional guidance is available in the [User Guidance](#) for the ESP Data Agency Rubric and the Curricular Redesign Rubric.

CHOOSING AN ESP PROJECT

When scanning across units, departments, or degree programs with a focus on how students are entering and moving through, institutions often find several promising areas for potential ESP projects. Choosing and scoping the right project requires alignment among institutional priorities, curricular and pathway needs, and the readiness of departments and leaders to partner.

These conditions may not always align perfectly at the outset. For example, institutional data might point to a set of courses or programs in critical need of redesign that are also central to the institution's strategic plan. However, if departmental leadership lacks bandwidth or the relationships required to build a strong ESP team have not yet been cultivated, it may be more strategic to begin with another project while continuing to build capacity for future work in the target area.

This section outlines key considerations and strategies for selecting an ESP project, developing a collaborative team, and establishing a structure to facilitate success.

Aligning with Institutional Priorities and Executive Sponsorship

Aligning an ESP project with the institution's strategic plan or student success goals keeps the work grounded in high-priority goals. It also encourages departmental and unit participation, increases visibility with executive leadership, and boosts the likelihood of receiving sustained support—financial and otherwise—through implementation.

Key steps include:

- Reviewing the institution's strategic plan to surface core goals and objectives.
- Identifying outcomes or priorities that are most relevant to the project and focused on the student experience and outcomes (e.g., graduation rates, retention, academic excellence, workforce alignment, first-generation student success) connected to specific courses, pathways, or majors.

Once strategic priorities are clarified, teams should scan institutional data to identify relevant metrics and patterns. Early conversations with faculty, staff, and leaders across programs and departments can help assess interest, gather input, and explore potential project areas.

At this stage, it is critical to identify an executive sponsor. This person, ideally a provost, chief academic officer, or senior administrator, provides support and oversight to help steward the project from start to finish.



Institutional Insights: Aligning with Institutional Priorities and Executive Sponsorship

"Our ESP project is also part of a broader university effort, and work has been happening alongside our project. We are in the early stages of creating a cohesive UTSA-wide strategy for microcredentials. The Exemplary Student Pathways Project Phase 3 is one component of this larger institutional initiative/effort."

Mark Appleford
Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies
The University of Texas at San Antonio

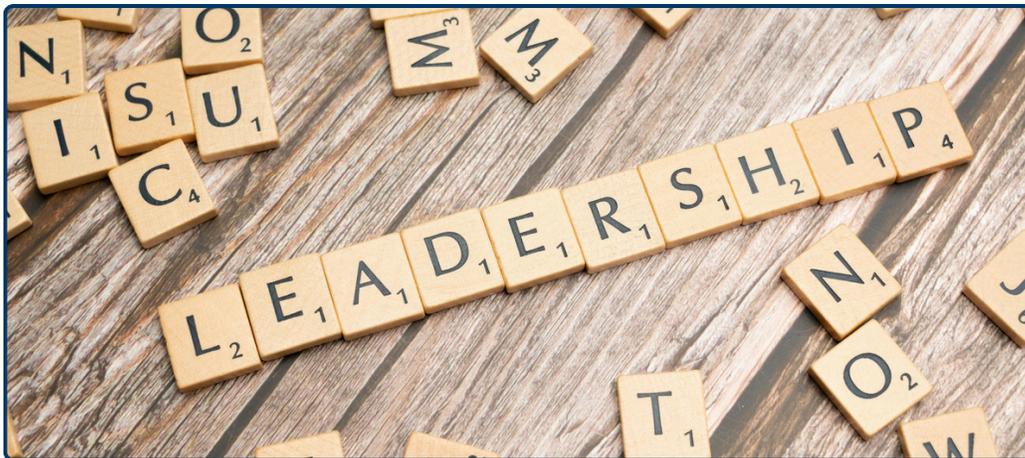
Amy Buechler-Steubing,
Associate Provost for Strategic Initiatives
& Learning Innovation
The University of Texas at San Antonio



Institutional Insights: Building an ESP Team

"While it is to be expected when you build a cross-functional cohort of faculty and staff, faculty cohort members noted how 'monumental' it was to have the ability to engage with others at UTRGV outside of the School of Social Work. Our bi-weekly meetings afforded cohort faculty the opportunity to not just meet people in key offices who are here to support them, but also to see their work in the larger institutional context and hear new questions and insights that sometimes can only come from 'outsiders'."

Jonikka Charlton
Senior Vice Provost for Student Success & Academic Affairs and Dean, University College
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley



Choosing a Department and Partners

After identifying a set of potential project areas aligned with institutional priorities, the next step is to select a department and key partners who are ready to engage in the ESP process. In collaboration with the executive sponsor, consult department leaders to share preliminary data insights and explore the department's readiness and interest.

The project selected should have:

- Clear alignment with institutional goals.
- Commitment from department leadership and those with authority over the curriculum.
- Willingness to allocate time and resources.
- Faculty and staff capacity to support the work.

Shared understanding of the project's goals and strategic importance is essential. Teams should be composed of individuals with diverse roles, including department chairs, tenured faculty, pedagogical innovators, instructors with deep student-facing experience, and staff across advising, data, or student support.



Institutional Insights: Choosing a Department or Partners for an ESP Project

“You do need to have a specific goal in mind, or at least focus on something at a department level. If you go in with something too broad that's pulling in multiple academic areas across the institution, it's going to be incredibly difficult to activate change at that point, because that kind of local context with each department matters.”

Ashley Purgason
Vice Provost for Student Success
The University of Texas at Arlington



Reflection Questions: Choosing a Department & Partners

1. ALIGNMENT AND TIMING

- How tightly aligned are current institutional goals with potential ESP focus areas—and where might alignment fail if department readiness is lacking?

2. RUBRIC UTILITY & IMPACT

- How might the Data Agency and Curricular Redesign rubrics (provided in the ESP Playbook) help us surface hidden gaps or strengths in readiness?

3. TEAM COMPOSITION & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- What mix of backgrounds and roles would best support holistic redesign?

4. DATA-INFORMED PLANNING

- What existing data metrics will meaningfully inform our project statement and goals?

5. EXECUTIVE SPONSORSHIP & SUSTAINABILITY

- Who would be the ideal executive sponsor to reinforce this work institutionally—and how can they sustain support through implementation?
- What structures (e.g., meeting cadence, shared dashboards, charters) encourage accountability and long-term momentum?

Developing a Project Statement

A clear, data-informed project statement is essential to effective curricular redesign. The statement should:

- Articulate the overarching objectives of the project with a clear indication of the curricular component(s) to be examined.
- Incorporate relevant institutional data and metrics.
- Identify specific, measurable goals to reduce gaps in student outcomes.

This statement serves as the foundation for later stages, guiding data analysis, redesign work, and implementation planning.



Tips for ESP Facilitators: Developing a Project Statement

TOOLS LIKE LOGIC MODELS OR SMART GOAL FRAMEWORKS (SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE, ACHIEVABLE, RELEVANT, TIME-BOUND) CAN HELP STRUCTURE THE DISCUSSION AND CLARIFY GOALS.

- Facilitate early sessions where team members work through the logic model, identifying inputs (resources), outputs (activities), outcomes (short- and long-term goals), and measurable indicators.

CONSIDER USING THESE QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE CREATION OF YOUR PROJECT STATEMENT:

- Why does this project matter?
- What problem are you addressing?
- Which strategic goals does this tie to?
- What outcomes do you expect?
- What are the timeline, milestones, and deliverables?
- Are targets both ambitious and achievable?

EXAMPLE PROJECT STATEMENT:

- First-year focus: increase first-generation student engagement in support programs by 25% within one year, leading to a 10% improvement in course completion rates.

Building a Team, Establishing Roles and Structure

Working with department leadership, the executive sponsor, and other stakeholders, convene a team that brings a range of perspectives and institutional roles. Strong teams span traditional silos and include faculty with diverse experiences and those with the time and interest to lead change.

It is helpful to create a team charter that includes:

- The initial project statement (with the understanding it may evolve).
- An overview of the ESP model.
- Roles, responsibilities, and time commitments for team members.

The ESP project should begin with a kickoff meeting to review:

- The project timeline and goals.
- Meeting cadence and logistics.
- Organization of shared materials (e.g., shared drives, data dashboards).



Institutional Insights: Building an ESP Team

“Traditionally siloed entities across campus, including the First Year Writing program, the Department of Language and Culture, the Department of Mathematics, the College of Liberal and Applied Arts’ academic probation program, and the Office of Institutional Research, worked together at key points in the process to design and implement the lab. Of particular note was the ability to compare and contrast approaches across three different academic programs.”

Elizabeth Tasker
Chair/Professor of English, College of Liberal and Applied Arts
Stephen F. Austin State University

Throughout this ESP Playbook, institutional leaders from across the University of Texas System generously shared their experiences leading ESP projects through interviews and on-camera reflections. You can view this video by clicking the icon to the right, and there are similar icons linking to additional videos throughout the Playbook.





Tips for ESP Facilitators: Building ESP Teams

BEGIN WITH A COALITION OF THE WILLING, BUT ENSURE STAKEHOLDER EXPERTISE AND REPRESENTATION.

- While starting with the coalition of the willing is more likely to set a project up for success, it is important to ensure stakeholder representation, including a variety of staff and faculty roles, and students (or mechanisms for student voice).

MEET YOUR ESP TEAM WHERE THEY ARE AND ENGAGE TO CREATE MOMENTUM AND SHARED LEARNING.

- It is important to note that ESP teams may end up with skeptics coming in with, e.g., disbelief about the data being examined or deficit mindsets about students. Engaging those members is necessary and productive—the facilitated ESP process is designed to do this.

REVIEW DATA AS AN ESP TEAM EARLY IN THE PROJECT.

- Starting the process with data discovery serves to mitigate resistance, interrogate assumptions, and dismantle preconceptions about students not supported by the data, winning over even the most incalcitrant skeptics.

Best practice is that ESP teams meet every two to three weeks throughout the project's duration to ensure momentum and progress through the stages of the ESP Change Model.

When beginning team meetings, ensure the team has access to the data and personnel needed to support in-depth analysis and design work. Consider a [Pre-Mortem Exercise](#) as the team comes together for the first time, designed to get team members to define success and failure before diving into the project.

The exercise asks teams to: 1) ground the conversation in the student experience they envision and want to create; 2) engage in “prospective hindsight” to orient themselves to the real work of change leadership; and, 3) set the table for action planning from the beginning of the project, attending to both the technical and human dimension of change embodied in their projects.

The UT System’s ESP teams used a pre-mortem exercise designed by their consultant partners at Sova. This proved an engaging, effective, and student-centered means to develop ownership of projects and the ESP process and to embrace an asset-based and growth mindset for themselves and their students.



Institutional Insights: Setting Roles & Structures

“At the end of every meeting, every person knew what their task was....so [at the next meeting] we weren’t rehashing from the beginning.”

Colleen Swain
Associate Provost for Academic Success & Dean of Undergraduate Studies
The University of Texas at Tyler



Reflection Questions: Setting Roles & Structures

1. WHO WILL SET THE AGENDA FOR EACH ESP MEETING?
2. WILL ONE PERSON TAKE NOTES, OR WILL THIS RESPONSIBILITY ROTATE BETWEEN MEMBERS?
3. ARE THERE CERTAIN PEOPLE WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR RETRIEVING OR REQUESTING THE DATA FOR THE GROUP?
4. WHICH MEMBERS HAVE THE ABILITY TO SUPPORT THE PROJECT OUTSIDE OF MEETING TIMES BY ANALYZING DATA, ORGANIZING NOTES, OR COMPLETING OTHER TASKS FOR THE GROUP?

ESP Stage 2: Dive Into the Data

DATA EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY

Data exploration and discovery are the core activities of the Dive Into the Data stage in the ESP Change Model. This phase is designed to help institutional teams build a shared understanding of the student success challenge they aim to address. Just as explorers chart new territories to uncover what lies beyond the horizon, data exploration allows higher education teams to navigate complex student data landscapes—surfacing truths, patterns, and insights that would otherwise remain hidden.



Key Concepts: Dive Into the Data Stage

COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

- Cross-functional teams (faculty, staff, data analysts) work together to interpret data through multiple lenses.

DISAGGREGATED ANALYSIS

- Data is broken down by student characteristics to reveal differences in outcomes.

CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

- Data is interpreted in light of institutional structures, curricular pathways, and student lived experiences.

ITERATIVE QUESTIONING

- Exploration is not linear—new questions emerge as patterns are uncovered, prompting deeper dives into additional data.

TOOL-DRIVEN INSIGHT

- Dashboards and visualizations help teams make sense of complex data and identify trends over time.

CULTIVATING DATA AGENCY

- The exploration process builds the capacity of the team to access, interpret, and act on data.

PROBLEM REFINEMENT

- Exploration sharpens the focus of the project by aligning the problem statement with evidence and institutional priorities.

The purpose of this stage is twofold:

- To refine and build consensus around the project—both the student success challenge(s) and the curricular component to be reexamined—through collaborative data analysis (*exploration*).
- To generate data-informed insights that will guide the development of a targeted, student-centered action plan (*discovery*).

ESP teams engage in a collaborative, inquiry-driven process to review and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data. This includes examining dashboards and datasets that capture longitudinal trends related to enrollment, course-taking patterns, academic performance, retention, graduation, and post-graduate outcomes.



Institutional Insights: Dive Into the Data Stage

“Data agency is more than just access to data; it is the ability to use data to drive meaningful change that improves the student experience.”

Heather Wright
Assistant Director of Assessment and Experiential Learning, Center for Teaching & Learning
The University of Texas at Austin

MAKING USE OF DASHBOARDS

Data dashboards are institution-specific visual tools that display key metrics and trends in an interactive format. They allow users to explore data quickly and effectively, providing disaggregated views by student demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, Pell eligibility).

These user-friendly tools display information through charts, graphs, tables, and other visuals—enabling administrators, faculty, and staff to monitor outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and inform decisions. Dashboards often integrate multiple data sources (e.g., student information systems, LMS, financial systems, institutional research databases), providing a centralized platform for insight.

Dashboards used in the UT System ESP projects were both institution- and project-specific. They enabled extensive disaggregation of data across multiple student characteristics and other data elements and included filtering features that allowed projects and teams to “slice and dice” in ways that go beyond looking at typical metrics and demographics. They included performance data on students entering, persisting, stopping out and/or completing courses and majors. ESP projects also examined post-graduate outcomes, including resources like [seekUT](#), a free online tool and website that presents data on the earnings and educational outcomes of graduates from UT System institutions, as well as available regional and statewide labor market data from various sources.

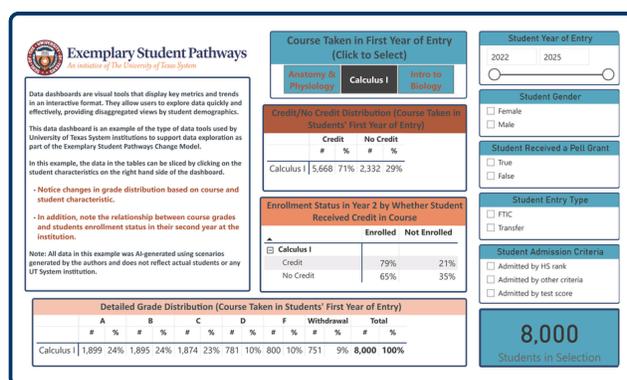
This deeper dive into data was essential and is a key feature of the ESP Change Model, critical to the learning and data agency achieved by teams, and to understanding the demographics of students at UT institutions—as well as their movement through the curriculum.

The ESP Playbook includes a set of [Data Agency Topics to Explore with the ESP Team](#) to support ongoing team development.

The data dashboard to the right is an example of the tools used by University of Texas System institutions during ESP projects to support data exploration. These dashboards were developed by the [UT System Office of Institutional Research and Analysis \(OIRA\)](#), leveraging the depth and breadth of data housed in their UT System-wide data warehouse—one of the most comprehensive and distinctive data resources in higher education.

OIRA supports a data culture at the UT System that fosters integrity, innovation, transparency, collaboration, communication, and best practices. The office supports the academic and health institutions by providing data and analyses to the campuses, engaging in joint research projects, and administering a centralized data request process with the goal of reducing the burden of requests on the campuses.

Note: Not all institutions or postsecondary systems will have this capacity, although resources throughout the Playbook serve as guides for how to strengthen it.



CLICK HERE

Clicking on this dashboard will take you to an interactive site where you can explore the data firsthand. Please note that all data in this example is AI-generated and does not reflect actual students or institutions.

GOING BEYOND THE NUMBERS

While quantitative data reveals gaps and patterns, qualitative insights—such as student, faculty, or staff perspectives—add vital context.

Teams are encouraged to gather these insights through surveys, interviews, or focus groups to better understand the "why" behind the numbers, ensuring that data-informed decisions are grounded in the lived experience of the campus community.

During exploration, teams reflect on questions such as:

- What does the data suggest about the nature of the problem?
- Which assumptions are supported—or challenged—by the data?
- What further information is needed to deepen our understanding?

This iterative and collaborative process often sparks deeper inquiry, surfacing both barriers and opportunities within curricular structures and institutional systems.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA DISCOVERY

Grounding the ESP project in evidence-based analysis ensures institutional change efforts are both targeted and responsive to student experiences. Data discovery builds toward the following goals:

- **Clarifies the Project Statement:** Institutions often begin with a general sense of a challenge—such as low retention in a major or high DFW rates in gateway courses. Data exploration helps refine these challenges into specific, measurable project statements that can be addressed through curricular redesign.
- **Reveals Differences in Outcomes for Students:** Disaggregated data allow institutions to uncover disparities in outcomes across student populations. This is vital for identifying where and for whom the curriculum and/or institutional systems are not working.
- **Builds Shared Understanding:** By engaging cross-functional teams in data review, the process fosters a shared language and understanding of institutional challenges. This collective insight is foundational for building buy-in, spanning silos across distinct units, and sustaining change.
- **Informs Strategic Action:** The insights generated during data exploration directly inform the development of the action plan. They help teams prioritize which barriers to address, which policies to revise, and which practices to scale. They also help identify other stakeholders who need to be brought to the table to implement the action plan.
- **Cultivates Data Agency:** Perhaps most importantly, exploring data together builds the capacity of the team to access, interpret, and act on data. It shifts data use from something viewed passively, or developed for compliance, to a strategic tool for transformation.



Institutional Insights: Dive Into the Data Stage

“What are the key kind of questions we need to get at? And let's focus on that data. You're going to make better progress. Leaning hard into 3 or 4 data sets and really understanding those and trying to like, understand every single piece of information about what we're looking at.”

Ashley Purgason
Vice Provost for Student Success
The University of Texas at Arlington

ORGANIZING THE DATA DISCOVERY PROCESS

A well-documented approach is essential. ESP teams are encouraged to create a [Data Discovery Table](#) (example to the right) that records:

- **Dataset descriptions:** What are the sources, limitations, and relevant definitions?
- **Relevance to the project:** What questions or assumptions does the dataset address?
- **Key insights:** What did the team learn from the data?
- **Implications for action:** What strategies or actions emerged from the findings?

DATA DISCOVERY TABLE: [Insert institutional name and project title]			
As you go through the Data Discovery Process, please document the data sources you review as well as the relevance, questions, and insights generated, and potential actions identified. This document will become a part of your action plan.			
Brief description of the data set	Why is this data relevant to the project?	What questions, insights, and findings do the data generate?	What potential actions might be identified from the data?
Data Source 1			
Data Source 2			
Data Source 3			
Data Source 4			

Teams should also document null findings, including cases where data revealed no disparities or disproved assumptions. These records support future stages (both action planning and implementation), serve as benchmarks in developing metrics and monitoring impact over time, justify resource requests, and strengthen communication with stakeholders. Overall, they guide teams in staying focused on the student populations and experiences in and through the curriculum they are working to understand with the data.



Tips for ESP Facilitators: Dive Into the Data Stage

USE A DATA DISCOVERY TABLE

- Ask teams to document: dataset source, questions addressed, insights, action implications—and note null results when assumptions aren't supported.

PROMOTE TEAM-WIDE DATA COMPREHENSION

- Ensure all members—including non-technical staff—can understand and explain key insights in the shared discovery table.

IDENTIFY CONTEXT, IMPACT & DRIVERS

- Prompt the team to ask: Where is the issue occurring? Who is most affected? What systems or curricular drivers contribute?

PLAN FOR FUTURE INQUIRY

- Document unresolved questions or data limitations to include in stages beyond discovery.

CLOSE THE STAGE WITH SYNTHESIS

- Make sure findings clearly map back to the project statement, and carry forward remaining analysis or follow-up into the next ESP stage.

EXAMINING AND REVISING THE PROJECT STATEMENT

Early in the data discovery process, teams should revisit the initial project statement to ensure shared understanding. This includes reviewing common and less common student success metrics (e.g., GPA, retention, graduation rates, major persistence, prior college credit, students leaving the major, post-graduate outcomes) and curricular metrics (e.g., DFW rates, prerequisite complexity, course sequencing).

If team members express concerns about the validity of the statement, they should be encouraged to investigate those questions directly and share findings. This promotes openness, rigor, and group alignment.

DISTRIBUTING DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

While not all team members will have technical expertise or data access, all should contribute to interpretation. Teams should include members with analytical experience who can guide others in understanding key findings. By the end of this stage, all team members should be able to explain the insights recorded in the [Data Discovery Table](#).

EXPLORING CONTEXT, IMPACT, AND DRIVERS

As understanding deepens, the team should use data to examine:

- **Context:** Where does the challenge occur (e.g., courses, sequences or pathways, departments, student groups)?
- **Impact:** Who is most affected, are there disparate impacts to attend to, and how do they influence broader institutional goals?
- **Drivers:** What factors contribute to the problem? Which are most critical and which are addressable?



Institutional Insights: Re-Examining the Problem Statement

“We learned that our initial assumptions about what the data would tell us were not correct ... [We] discovered that the gaps we assumed would be revealed in the data were not what we thought (or not as extreme) for students in our current degree with respect to gender, Pell status, time-to-graduation, first generation status, and previous credit hours.”

Robert Dearth
Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

This analysis helps identify not just what is happening, but why—and what might be done to change it.

As the data discovery phase nears completion, more of the data analysis may be aimed at addressing questions of what is known about interventions that have occurred in the past or with other projects. Team members may develop a literature review or other documentation of how the drivers of the project statement are addressed by peer departments, institutions, or subject matter experts.

PLANNING FOR FUTURE DATA NEEDS

Some data needs may exceed the project's timeline or capacity. In these cases, teams should document unresolved questions and include them as future action items in the project's final plan. Recognizing data limitations—and planning around them—is part of developing data agency.

WRAPPING UP DATA DISCOVERY

Before moving on, the team should ensure that all key findings, patterns, and questions are well-organized and clearly linked to the project statement. Any incomplete analyses or follow-up needs should be carried forward to the **Connecting the Dots** stage or noted for inclusion in the final action plan.



Institutional Insights: Re-Examining the Problem Statement

“Many of the issues we had thought would be the underlying problem for first-gen students were not actually the basis for the gaps.”

Toni Blum
Vice Provost for Curriculum Effectiveness
and Improvement
The University of Texas at El Paso

SUPPORTING DATA AGENCY

The use of data can enhance decision-making processes across all units at an institution of higher education (e.g., teaching and learning, student support, operations, strategic planning, etc.). However, institutions are often drowning in data without a clear strategy or capacity to organize, access, interpret, use, and act on data with a student-centered lens.

“We often say that colleges and universities are data-rich and information-poor,” says Betsy Reinitz, director of the CIO and Senior Technology Leaders program at EDUCAUSE. “They’ve got this staggering amount of data, and yet it’s hard to make good decisions and do good planning with it unless you take a holistic view of it.”

Developing data agency is a core goal of the ESP process. As team members grow more confident using dashboards, interpreting trends, and applying findings to real-world decisions, they shift from passive data consumers to empowered change agents. It may begin with simple shortcuts that facilitate problem-solving, strategic planning, and storytelling (e.g., visualizations and dashboards). However, as data agency develops, it can progress to more complex analysis and the use of data in day-to-day decision making.

The ESP model seeks to develop and support data agents (e.g., administrative leadership, faculty, chairs, deans, advisors, other staff) and to make student-centered data, research, practice, and policy standard across ESP team members. Both the [Data Agency Rubric](#) and the [Data Agency Topics to Explore with the ESP Team](#) resources help support ESP team member growth in data agency.



Reflection Questions: Dive Into the Data Stage

1. INTERPRETING PATTERNS & CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

- What assumptions about student success are confirmed—or disrupted—by data exploration?
- When disaggregating metrics by demographics, what disparities emerge—and what might they reveal about underlying barriers?

2. INTEGRATING QUALITATIVE VOICE & CONTEXT

- How do faculty, staff, or student perspectives gathered through interviews or surveys contextualize and deepen our understanding of the “why” behind the data?

3. CRAFTING A DATA-INFORMED PROJECT STATEMENT

- How can we refine our initial project statement to reflect specific, measurable insights (for example, improving gateway course transition rates or major persistence)?

4. BUILDING SHARED UNDERSTANDING & ACCOUNTABILITY

- How might documenting null or counterintuitive findings (where something we expected didn’t appear in the data) inform or strengthen our project’s credibility and direction?
- Do all team members understand and feel confident explaining key findings captured in our Data Discovery Table?

5. IDENTIFYING CONTEXT, IMPACT & DRIVERS

- What structural drivers (e.g., prerequisite sequencing, advising practices, curricular design) seem most closely associated with the outcomes we observe?

6. ENVISIONING DATA NEEDS & CAPACITY BUILDING

- Where do gaps in data or analysis remain—what future questions should be logged for the next ESP stage or post-implementation planning?
- In what ways is our team—and our wider institution—building data agency: the ability to interpret and act on data, rather than simply consume it?

ESP Stage 3: Connect the Dots

FROM DISCOVERY TO STRATEGY

The **Connect the Dots** stage serves as a critical bridge between data discovery and action planning in the ESP process. After teams have explored and interpreted both quantitative and qualitative data, this phase invites deeper inquiry into the root causes of the identified challenges. It is a time for reflection, synthesis, and strategic thinking.

Building on the data they have collectively explored, teams revisit initial assumptions, refine their understanding of the problem, and begin to identify how institutional and curricular structures, operations, policies, practices, or even external factors (e.g., students' K-12 preparation or lived experiences) may contribute to the observed patterns. This stage often involves gathering additional input from stakeholders—especially students, faculty, and advisors—and reviewing relevant research and best practices to inform emerging strategies.



Key Concepts: Connect the Dots Stage

BRIDGE FROM DATA DISCOVERY TO STRATEGY

- This stage connects data analysis to planning by interpreting root causes and strategic implications.

REFINE THE PROJECT STATEMENT

- Narrow or adjust focus based on evidence surfaced during data discovery—choosing one or two key student success metrics to target.

ANALYZE DRIVERS & SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

- Identify contributing causes—like policy structures, prerequisites, advising gaps, or pedagogical patterns—that drive outcomes.

INCORPORATE STAKEHOLDER INSIGHTS & RESEARCH

- Engage students, faculty, and advisors; review peer-reviewed research and best practices to shape feasible strategies.

ALIGN STRATEGIES WITH CONTEXT & RESOURCES

- Begin assessing feasibility, risks, and available capacity; ensure proposed changes fit institutional structures and support.

OUTLINE EARLY INDICATORS & EXPLORATORY ACTIONS

- Develop preliminary metrics and a range of potential strategies to test further in the action planning stage.

Connect the Dots is also about ensuring alignment between the data and the refined project statement, between the goals and the institutional context, and between the proposed changes and available resources. Teams begin to assess feasibility, identify potential risks, and outline early indicators of success. This stage sets the foundation for a focused, data-informed action plan that is both ambitious and achievable, all while remaining aligned with the ESP model's holistic approach to curricular redesign.

RE-EXAMINING THE PROJECT STATEMENT AFTER DATA DISCOVERY

ESP teams should begin this stage by revisiting and, if needed, refining the original project statement. While the team may have surfaced multiple issues during the data discovery phase, it is neither feasible nor advisable to tackle them all. Instead, the focus should narrow to actionable components of the curriculum and specific student success metrics that the team hopes to improve.

The [Data Discovery Table](#) and other documentation tools developed in earlier stages are helpful here, allowing teams to identify trends, clarify metrics, and narrow the project scope. Teams may also choose to revisit the [Curricular Redesign Rubric](#) and reflect on their baseline self-assessment to guide forward-looking strategy development.

Though a full rewrite of the project statement may not be necessary, refining it ensures that the action plan is grounded in a deeper, evidence-based understanding of institutional and student contexts. This step strengthens alignment between the refined challenge and the strategies designed to address it.

INTERPRETING FINDINGS AND DOCUMENTING CURRICULAR OR PATHWAY BARRIERS

With a sharpened project statement and clearly defined goals, the ESP team can turn to analyzing the drivers and root causes of the challenge. Having confronted assumptions during data discovery, teams are encouraged to explore qualitative insights and draw from peer research and evidence-based practices. This deepens understanding of the "why" behind the data.

Guided by their data and staying focused on the student experience, teams should also begin to identify and inventory specific **curricular or pathway barriers** contributing to the challenge.

These might include:

- Institutional policies (e.g., hidden prerequisites, complex course sequences, transfer credit inefficiencies, uneven access to high-impact practices).
- Pedagogical practices (e.g., challenges unique to online learning, large lecture formats, or lab structures).
- Administrative processes (e.g., advising gaps, scheduling barriers, registration hurdles).

These barriers may be surfaced through internal inquiry, literature review, or comparison to challenges encountered at peer institutions. Other barriers to assess and document in this step include pedagogical approaches.

Understanding the barriers students may face in different environments, like online courses, large lectures versus seminar-style courses, lab designs, etc., is important before brainstorming solutions. Teams should continue using the [Curricular Redesign Rubric](#) to assess their institution's readiness and areas for change.



Institutional Insights:

Re-Examining the Problem Statement After Data Discovery

"What became very clear to us as we progressed, is that the anecdotal data that we had about Math being a roadblock, especially at the beginning of a students' journey was correct, but the underlying issues that needed to be addressed were very different from what we thought that they were. It was especially important to have the faculty teaching these courses and running the department involved so that they could become important agents of change in this process."

Michael Frawley
Dean of Student Success
The University of Texas Permian Basin



Tips for ESP Facilitators: Connect the Dots Stage

CONDUCT ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

- Bring in students, faculty, and advisors to explore the "why" behind the data and surface system-level perspectives.

INVENTORY SYSTEMS & CURRICULAR BARRIERS

- Prompt the team to identify structural, policy, academic, or administrative barriers—document findings using peer research and qualitative context.

ASSESS STRATEGY FEASIBILITY & RISK

- Guide discussion on which emerging strategies are promising and viable; frame early risk identification and mitigation.

USE GRAPHIC TOOLS FOR VISUALIZATION

- Facilitate synthesis sessions that might include graphic facilitation or causal mapping to clarify connections between findings and strategy.

PLANNING FOR ACTION AND IDENTIFYING PRELIMINARY METRICS

Once the root causes and barriers are understood and documented, teams can begin brainstorming a menu of possible strategies and identifying preliminary metrics to track progress. These ideas are exploratory in nature, bring to bear the multiple perspectives of team members, and will be refined during the action planning stage.

Key steps include:

- Reflecting on which strategies are most promising or feasible.
- Identifying short-term and long-term indicators of success.
- Encouraging each team member to contribute ideas, draw from research as well as their own experience and expertise, and consider the institutional context.

The **Connecting the Dots** Stage is not about finalizing decisions but allows time for each member of the ESP team to reflect, share, and together synthesize before moving to the formal action planning undertaken in the **Develop an Action Plan** stage.



Institutional Insights: Connect the Dots Stage

"As we reviewed and discussed the data from the reports and the ESP dashboard, an action plan began to develop organically as several things that need to be addressed stood out. As we examine and address barriers, we need to keep in mind student population differences, to include transfer students and non-transfer students, and Pell versus non-Pell students, and determine whether the data for each should be examined together or separately."

Toni Blum
Vice Provost for Curriculum Effectiveness and Improvement
The University of Texas at El Paso



Institutional Insights: Connect the Dots Stage

"Early on, it became clear that one of the top concerns of the cohort faculty was how the rest of the faculty in the school would respond to the call for fundamental redesign of the curriculum. We quickly realized that we did not need to jump prematurely to identifying how the curriculum should be redesigned, but rather focus on learning as much as possible about the barriers that students face and where the strengths and opportunities lie in the data and in the curriculum redesign process. The action plan would then lay out the process by which faculty would spend the next year engaged in the specifics of what the redesign would look like."

Jonikka Charlton
Senior Vice Provost for Student Success & Academic Affairs and Dean, University College
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley



Reflection Questions: Connecting the Dots Stage

1. RE-EXAMINING THE PROJECT STATEMENT

- If the data presented many issues we could address, whose input do we need to decide which are the priorities?
- After reviewing and reflecting on the data and other information, will working on this problem make an important difference for student success?

2. INTERPRETING FINDINGS AND INVENTORYING BARRIERS TO BE REMOVED

- What do we know about the factors that contribute to the problem, and how do we know? What do we not yet know?
- What qualitative insights might we gather from stakeholders to learn more about the root cause factors?
- What roadblocks might we face in trying to make changes (refer back to pre-mortem activity)?

3. TEAM COMPOSITION & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- What literature or information from other institutions should we review to better understand how others have successfully addressed these issues?
- What do key stakeholder groups (students, faculty, others with expertise in this area) and the research say about potential changes/solutions?
- How will we build the capacity to implement the potential changes/solutions?

ESP Stage 4: Develop an Action Plan

ACTION PLANNING AS A ROADMAP TO IMPLEMENTATION

After the team has connected data insights with potential interventions, the next step is to document a clear set of actions. Action planning is where teams shift from grappling with challenges surfaced in the data to crafting concrete, actionable solutions—delineating a pathway to curricular redesign.



Key Concepts: Develop an Action Plan

FROM INSIGHT TO IMPLEMENTATION

- Translate data-driven analysis into a concrete roadmap with clear actions to guide curricular redesign and drive change.

REDESIGN ACROSS FOUR DOMAINS

- Structure interventions across the curricular domains of Structure, Operations, Content, and Pedagogy to build coherent, transparent, and outcomes-aligned pathways.

SPECIFICITY IN SCOPE

- Clearly define which programs or courses are targeted and what specific changes are proposed to ensure focused, resourced, and evaluable redesign.

ACTION PLAN STRUCTURE

- Utilize the ESP Action Plan template to organize roles, milestones, resources, timelines, risks, and communication strategies.

PROSPECTION AND RETROSPECTION

- Use retrospective and forward-looking reflection questions to define success, student experience, institutional culture, and sustainability—ensuring long-term embedding of reforms.

PROJECT ARTIFACTS & SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- Append datasets, curricular maps, analytics outputs, qualitative findings, and tools used to document the process, provide context, and support future scaling.

This stage addresses one of the most persistent challenges in higher education reform: translating data insights into action. A well-crafted action plan does more than outline the next steps teams will take as they move forward.

It also serves to bring teams and other stakeholders together with shared commitment, responsibility, and accountability to deepen their project impact. Done well, the action plan becomes the roadmap for project implementation.

FRAMING THE WORK: CURRICULAR REDESIGN AS A MULTI-DOMAIN PROCESS

Curricular redesign is a complex, multifaceted process. The ESP Change Model defines curricular redesign across four interconnected domains:

- **Structure**
- **Operations**
- **Content**
- **Pedagogy**



Institutional Insights: Develop an Action Plan

“The UTSA student experience will be significantly improved to remove hidden curricular elements that impact success. Students may notice that key courses have added support structures, early interventions, and are tied to department-, college-, and university-level infrastructure more holistically and with intentional hand-offs between units. Proactive student outreach based on predictive analytics will improve student performance and further explore obstacles that have not yet been identified by this project.”

Mark Appleford
Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies
The University of Texas at San Antonio

The goal of curricular redesign is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind needed for success in college, careers, and civic life. This is achieved through the development of clear degree pathways with well-defined learning outcomes, resulting in curricula that are coherent and transparent.

Teams are encouraged to revisit the [Curricular Redesign Rubric](#) during this phase. It can be used to:

- Reassess baseline conditions,
- Identify specific action strategies,
- Align planned interventions with institutional goals, and
- Structure stakeholder engagement around redesign priorities.

SPECIFYING THE REDESIGNED PATHWAY OR COURSE SEQUENCE

When redesigning a curricular pathway, course, or cluster of courses, specificity is essential. Teams should clearly define which programs or courses are being targeted and describe the proposed changes that will support student success. Scoping the redesign appropriately ensures that the project can be resourced, evaluated, and sustained over time, and that it is aligned with institutional priorities and strategic goals.

This section of the Playbook introduces the [ESP Action Plan Template](#) and related strategies to help teams build a living document that supports ongoing implementation, stakeholder engagement, and risk mitigation. The template was used by the 22 projects led by UT institutions.

The planning template standardizes processes by clarifying:

- Roles and responsibilities,
- Key milestones,
- Potential barriers and solutions, and
- Communication and engagement strategies.



Institutional Insights: Develop an Action Plan

“Through [action planning], ongoing cross-unit collaborative relationships were strengthened, and new connections were established. A critically important and essential component to enacting relational, human-centered planning processes was the participation and integration of Academic Affairs project management staff.”

Heather Wright
Assistant Director of Assessment and Experiential Learning, Center for Teaching & Learning
The University of Texas at Austin



Institutional Insights: Develop an Action Plan

“This project is all about students and improving their academic outcomes and experience in the calculus sequence at UTD. It will make students’ learning more affordable, accessible, and streamlined. It will allow instructors to help students with individualized diagnostics, using technology and logistics of the math placement test. Through the free of charge co-op class, it will provide one more avenue for a systematic additional help for vulnerable categories of students. The improvement of students’ success in the calculus sequence should reflect positively on students’ self-esteem, self-confidence, and layout important academic preparation for the rest of the academic journey.”

Vladimir Dragovic
Department Head of Mathematical Sciences
The University of Texas at Dallas

USING THE ESP ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

The Action Plan includes two main sections—**In Retrospect** and **Prospection**—and culminates in three implementation tables that guide execution.

In Retrospect

This section invites teams to reflect on the project's starting point, data discovery process, and lessons learned.

Teams are encouraged to:

- Revisit the original project statement.
- Reflect on unexpected findings or course corrections.
- Consider institutional culture, identity, and leadership dynamics.
- Document change management insights, such as silo-bridging and relationship-building.

While formal reflection is not always a part of action planning, this section allows for thinking around some of the key components that will be vital to institutionalizing both individual projects and the overall ESP change model, including institutional identity, leadership, and culture change, among other topics. This reflection serves as a form of qualitative assessment at a pivotal moment in the project lifecycle.

Prospection

This section is forward-looking. It asks teams to:

- Refine the overarching aim of the project.
- Rearticulate the student outcome gap(s) and curricular challenges to be addressed.
- Define what success looks like in measurable, student-centered terms.
- Ensure alignment with ESP goals and institutional strategic priorities.



Institutional Insights: Develop an Action Plan

"Students do not know the answers to the question, 'Why major in Biology?' We realized that simply creating a new degree is not sufficient. It must be complemented with a clear identity and tangible reasons for being a Biology major. So, we have decided to attach experiential, cross-disciplinary outcomes for our courses in addition to discipline-specific learning objectives. These cross-disciplinary outcomes would reflect the valuable work-related skills that are needed for careers available in the region (and beyond) for our Biology graduates."

Robert Dearth
Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley



Tips for ESP Facilitators: Develop an Action Plan

CLARIFY THE SCOPE

- Be precise about which courses or clusters are in focus and what changes are intended—course consolidation, sequencing tweaks, or corequisite supports (e.g., a first-year math redesign targeting Math 101). This clarity ensures alignment with goals and resources.

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS EARLY

- Bring in key faculty, advisors, and administrative stakeholders from the start. Their early input helps uncover bottlenecks, align curricular revisions with related departments, and strengthen buy-in and feasibility.

LINK TO STUDENT SUCCESS GOALS

- Anchor the plan in institutional priorities—such as retention, or graduation—using data to target specific student barriers and frame redesign strategies.

ENSURE REALISTIC TIMELINES & RESOURCE PLANNING

- Set achievable timelines based on capacity, and plan phased implementation—e.g., piloting redesigned courses first—so the team can course correct without losing momentum.

IMPLEMENTATION TABLES: FROM PLANNING TO PRACTICE

The **Prospection** section includes three tables that serve as the map for implementation and allow for customization as projects work to become sustainable and institutionalized. Together, these tools help ensure that action strategies are **S.M.A.R.T.**: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

1. Action Strategies

This table prompts teams to identify:

- The specific action or intervention,
- The rationale and intended student population,
- Responsible parties,
- Timeline, and,
- The resources needed.

Strategies may include curricular reforms, data-informed interventions, ongoing data analysis, policy changes, or stakeholder engagement plans.

2. Assessment

This table focuses on measurement and accountability. It should include sustained attention to metrics, evidence of impact, and sustainability, i.e., how projects will know if they have met their goal(s). Teams are asked to document:

- Each action strategy,
- Baseline performance and target metrics,
- Data collection plans, and,
- Responsibilities for analysis and reporting.

3. Stakeholder Engagement

To implement a student success initiative or change project, attention should be paid to maintaining and deepening relationships to accelerate progress, with clear and shared accountability by stakeholders. Project teams are encouraged to consider the following questions as they complete the Stakeholder Engagement table:

- Have we accounted for all our key groups/individuals? Who is directly impacted and/or indirectly affected? How complex are these relationships?
- Do we understand and agree about the sources of potential resistance?
- How does our core “why” of this work resonate with the motivations & interests of those implicated?
- Who needs to hear what? Who needs to be listened to?
- Do we have structures in place for both effective communication and effective engagement?
- What does our analysis suggest with respect to the sequencing and timing of engagement activities? Who should be engaged when, in what ways, and with what frequency?

The table captures:

- Stakeholder names or groups,
- Key messages or communication strategies,
- Potential resistance, and,
- Engagement channels and timelines.



FINAL REFLECTIONS: MOVING TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Before completing the action plan, teams are invited to reflect on four overarching questions. Responses to these questions further synthesize project learning and can serve as both vision statements and measurable commitments to implementation, sustainability, and institutionalization.

1. Success: What does success look like for your institution?

2. Student Experience: How will students' experience change if you succeed?

3. Institutional Culture: How will departmental, academic, or institutional culture shift? How will your project support broader institutional goals?

4. Sustainability: How will the work be sustained and institutionalized?



Institutional Insights: Develop an Action Plan

"Students will see their cultural backgrounds and lived experience in the curriculum and will feel that their assets and strengths are seen and valued by their faculty. They will have more experiential learning opportunities throughout the degree, not just all at the end. They will make better connections between what they're learning across the curriculum, and they will get the kind of feedback they need from their faculty to continue learning and growing as a professional."

Jonikka Charlton
Senior Vice Provost for Student Success & Academic Affairs and Dean, University College
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

In addressing sustainability, teams are asked to:

- Identify future problems to address or long-term strategies to pursue.
- Describe how the project will institutionalize improvements in data use and curricular redesign.
- Articulate how this work aligns with broader institutional or UT System goals.
- Reflect on how their plan contributes to scaling the ESP Change Model.

CAPTURING THE JOURNEY: PROJECT ARTIFACTS AND APPENDICES

In addition to the core plan, teams may include appendices or supporting materials that document their journey. These might include:

- Data sets and visualizations (e.g., excess SCH, grade distributions, DFW rates).
- Maps of course sequences or major requirements.
- [UERU's Curricular Analytics Project](#) outputs (e.g., complexity maps, bottleneck analyses).
- Qualitative data from student and faculty focus groups.
- Descriptions of interventions (e.g., peer-led learning, faculty PD).
- Institutional resources (e.g., strategic plans, advising materials).
- Tools used during the project (e.g., Miro boards, meeting templates).

These artifacts document the trajectory of the work, help contextualize the plan, demonstrate thoughtfulness and rigor, and support future adoption.

A NOTE ON SCOPE AND ADAPTABILITY

The [ESP Action Plan Template](#) is intentionally robust. Not all projects will require the full depth or scope of the template. However, for grant-funded projects or those seeking to scale change across institutions, this level of detail can be especially valuable and facilitate the accountability required for effective implementation and sustainability.

ESP teams at UT System institutions submitted detailed plans that reflect their deep commitment to improving student outcomes and sustaining the ESP model as part of institutional strategy.



Reflection Questions: Develop an Action Plan

1. RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

- What institutional norms and values do your proposed actions likely conflict with?
- Which individuals or departments may worry that their autonomy could be violated as a result of the proposed actions?
- Does your campus embrace change and innovation, or does it value tradition and consistency?

2. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- What channels and messengers will be most effective at delivering ideas about proposed changes to affected stakeholders?
- How will impacted groups be actively included in decision-making processes?

3. READINESS AND CAPACITY

- What resource or cultural constraints may limit the success of proposed actions?
- Will administrative leaders endorse and support the proposed changes?

4. STAKEHOLDER VOICES

- How might you ensure student voices are present as you develop your action plan?
- How might you ensure perspectives from other front-line stakeholders like faculty, are represented in the action plan?

ESP Stage 5: Implement the Action Plan

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The action plan provides a roadmap for implementation. As teams begin executing their plan, it is essential to maintain focus on factors that can significantly influence the success and sustainability of the effort. These include:

- Removing barriers
- Mitigating risks
- Engaging stakeholders
- Managing change

These steps help ensure that implementation progresses smoothly, challenges are addressed proactively, and the project remains aligned with institutional goals.



Key Concepts: Implement the Action Plan

BARRIER REMOVAL

- Proactively identify and address obstacles—such as policy misalignment, faculty resistance, or logistical hurdles—to smooth the path for implementation.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Maintain consistent collaboration with faculty, students, advisors, and administrators through feedback loops, check-ins, and inclusive communication.

RISK MITIGATION

- Anticipate challenges (e.g., accreditation delays, staffing issues, budget constraints), log them, and build contingency plans in advance.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

- Use structured methods (e.g., 90-day cycles, short-term milestones, adaptive tweaking) to manage institutional change and embed redesigned practices.

REMOVING BARRIERS

Identifying and addressing potential obstacles—such as faculty resistance or misalignment with institutional policies—is key to avoiding delays. A proactive needs assessment can uncover pain points and inform necessary adjustments.

Examples of common barriers and mitigation strategies include:

- Policy misalignment: Revise outdated academic or administrative policies that conflict with the redesign.
- Faculty preparedness: Offer targeted professional development to help faculty implement new curriculum requirements.
- Operational hurdles: Ensure that scheduling, advising, and registration systems support the redesigned pathway.

Removing these obstacles early can accelerate progress and reduce friction during implementation.

MITIGATING RISKS

Anticipating risks before they arise is critical to maintaining momentum. Common risks include:

- Accreditation issues
- Staffing shortages
- Resource constraints
- Delays in rollout or challenges to technology integration

To prepare, teams can revisit their [Pre-Mortem Planning](#) exercise, create a risk log, and develop contingency plans for high-priority tasks.

For example, if a key team member becomes unavailable, having an alternate point of contact in place can prevent disruption. Risk planning allows teams to respond with agility and sustain project progress even under changing conditions.



Tips for ESP Facilitators: Implement the Action Plan

MAINTAIN MOMENTUM THROUGH REGULAR MEETINGS

- Schedule consistent check-ins (e.g., every 2-3 weeks) to revisit milestones, document progress and challenges, and clarify next steps.

ENGAGE STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTORS AS NEEDED

- Invite knowledgeable stakeholders (e.g., faculty from related departments, advisors) at key junctures—without requiring them to attend all sessions—to bring insight and context into specific discussions.

FOSTER INCLUSIVE, ONGOING STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

- Proactively involve faculty and students via focus groups, feedback loops, and cocreation sessions to sustain buy in and make adaptation responsive.

EMBED REFLECTIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

- Include structured reflection in team meetings—prompting participants to evaluate effectiveness, surface challenges, and realign with the original action plan and goals.

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

Meaningful and continuous engagement of faculty, students, administrators, and external partners is central to success. Stakeholder input ensures the redesign is both relevant and responsive.

Teams should:

- Schedule regular check-ins and/or student/faculty focus groups.
- Use feedback loops to refine implementation strategies.
- Foster a culture of shared ownership and transparency.
- Engage transfer partners and other relevant stakeholders external to the institution.

Early and inclusive engagement helps secure buy-in, supports long-term institutionalization of the redesign, and builds capacity not only for the project but also for the change model as a vehicle to student success.

MANAGING CHANGE

Implementing a redesigned curricular pathway requires deliberate change management. A structured approach—such as using [90-day action cycles](#)—can help phase the work, monitor progress, and ensure alignment with institutional priorities.

Key practices include:

- Setting short-term goals with clear milestones
- Adjusting plans based on real-time feedback
- Aligning activities with strategic initiatives across academic and student support units

Change management supports the adaptive capacity of teams and helps transition new practices into standard operating procedures.



Institutional Insights: Implement the Action Plan

“The day you plant the seed is not the day you eat the fruit. Change is very slow and just kind of, you know, making peace with that, but also like thinking, what are the most beneficial seeds we can plant in these moments and how can we make sure that the ground is prepared in the right ways.”

Heather Wright
Assistant Director of Assessment and Experiential Learning, Center for Teaching & Learning
The University of Texas at Austin



Reflection Questions: Implement the Action Plan

1. BARRIER IDENTIFICATION & RESPONSE

- What unexpected obstacles (logistical, policy, cultural) have emerged—and how effectively are we addressing them?
- Have we proactively supported faculty and staff through tailored training or system adjustments?

2. RISK PREPAREDNESS

- Which high-priority risks have contingency plans—who owns them, and how do we monitor their status?

3. STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCE & OWNERSHIP

- Are stakeholders consistently engaged and empowered to shape implementation?
- What feedback mechanisms are in place, and how have they influenced adaptation?

4. CHANGE MANAGEMENT & ADAPTIVITY

- Are we working in action cycles with clear short-term milestones?
- How agile is our team in adapting to new challenges or feedback?

5. SUSTAINABILITY & STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

- What existing data metrics will meaningfully inform our project statement and goals?
- How can we ensure goals are specific, measurable, and tied to reducing outcome gaps (e.g., first-generation student success)?

ESP Stage 6: Assessment and Continuous Improvement

A critical component of the ESP Change Model is the intentional integration of assessment and evaluation strategies to ensure the effectiveness and long-term impact of curricular redesign and data agency initiatives. As made clear throughout the Playbook, goal setting for each ESP project is essential. Assessment plans provide clear benchmarks that guide institutional progress, drive continuous improvement, and strengthen accountability and institutionalization. Effective goal setting involves identifying and setting appropriate student success metrics and ensuring that evaluation efforts are aligned with institutional priorities and student-centered outcomes.



Key Concepts: Assessment & Continuous Improvement

INTEGRATING ASSESSMENT INTO PRACTICE

- Embed systematic evaluation throughout implementation to ensure curricular redesign and data agency efforts have a sustained impact.

ESP IMPACT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (IAF)

- Developed by UT System stakeholders, the IAF enables evaluation of both project-level outcomes and institution-wide adoption of ESP principles.

INSTITUTIONAL & PROJECT-LEVEL REFLECTION

- Analyze both the spread of ESP principles across the institution and the specific results of each project to strengthen accountability and continuous learning.

METRIC STRATEGY: SHORT- & LONG-TERM INDICATORS

- Use process metrics (e.g., training participation, pilot course evaluations) for early feedback, and outcome metrics (e.g., graduation rates, retention, DFW rates) to measure sustained impact.

HOLISTIC EVALUATION APPROACH

- Combine quantitative data (e.g., enrollment, retention, GPA) with qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups, interviews, narratives) across program reviews and strategic planning cycles.

While the ESP process and action plan template ask teams to identify specific metrics and assessment strategies tied to project implementation steps, the UT System recognized the need for a more holistic framework to evaluate the broader impact of the model across multiple projects. This led to the development of the Impact Assessment Framework, which is a shared approach to assessing both institutional adoption and the overall efficacy of the ESP Change Model.

THE ESP IMPACT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (IAF)

To support both individual projects and systemwide evaluation, the [ESP Impact Assessment Framework \(IAF\) Working Group](#) was convened by the UT System. The working group included institutional researchers, assessment experts, and ESP project leads from multiple campuses. Together, they designed tools and processes to evaluate the effectiveness of ESP-driven change efforts, focusing on the model's two core tenets—Data Agency and Curricular Redesign—as levers of change to remove barriers to student success and gaps in outcomes.

The working group produced:

- The [ESP Impact Assessment Framework](#).
- Two companion tools—the [Data Agency Rubric](#) and the [Curricular Redesign Rubric](#).

LEVELS OF ASSESSMENT

The [ESP Impact Assessment Framework](#) is a tool for institutions, systems, or external agencies to assess the impact of the ESP Change Model on data agency and curricular redesign. The framework evaluates **two levels of impact**, the first focused on *the overall change model* and the second on *individual projects*:

1. Level One assesses how engagement with the ESP change model affects institutional orientation to data agency and curricular redesign.

2. Level Two evaluates the effectiveness of projects focused on advancing data agency and curricular redesign in relation to intended student success outcomes.

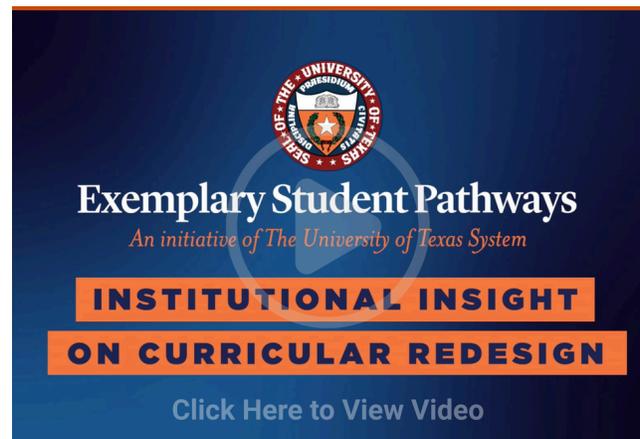
While focused on institutional impact, the IAF also allows for ongoing assessment of the ESP Change Model systemwide and will be of interest to other postsecondary systems and agencies as a broader evaluation tool.

Level One – Assessing the ESP Change Model

Level One of the framework supports institutions in answering two overarching, qualitative evaluation questions:

1. Did the ESP Change Model enable comprehensive, student-centered, data-informed curricular redesign?
2. Did the ESP Change Model improve data agency?

As a means of answering these questions, Level One of the framework introduces the two rubrics produced by the IAF Working Group and referenced throughout the Playbook, the [Data Agency Rubric](#) and the [Curricular Redesign Rubric](#).



Level Two – Assessing the Effectiveness of ESP Projects in the Aggregate and Individually

Level Two of the framework establishes a set of **shared student success** and **project-based** metrics that can be used to evaluate multiple projects in the aggregate as well as individually.

For Level Two, the IAF offers guidance for setting goals and evaluating outcomes aligned with the ESP Change Model. Teams are prompted to:

- Identify institutional factors that support or hinder student success.
- Monitor shared and project-specific student success metrics.
- Use results to inform decision-making and resource allocation.
- Communicate progress transparently to stakeholders.

This process reinforces a culture of continuous learning and collective accountability.

Shared student success metrics are primarily quantitative, based on uniform definitions and sources such as state agency reports, IPEDS, and/or student information systems. (e.g., graduation rates, time-to-degree, etc.). Although the populations of focus vary among projects, shared metrics offer a mechanism for describing the collective gains across projects and help to establish accountability.

The following question is used to evaluate the collective gains across multiple projects, whether institution-wide for those with multiple ESP projects or system-wide: ***What results were achieved by ESP projects in aggregate?***



Tips for ESP Facilitators: Assessment & Continuous Improvement

REVISIT GOALS & ALIGN WITH IAF CORE QUESTIONS

- Review the project's goals and ensure they align with core evaluative questions: did we enable student-centered curricular redesign, and did we enhance data agency?

REVIEW BOTH SHORT-TERM & LONG-TERM METRICS

- Guide the team to examine early process indicators (e.g., training participation, pilot engagement) alongside longer-term outcomes (e.g., retention, DFW rates, graduation).

DOCUMENT INSIGHTS TO INFORM FUTURE CYCLES

- Help the team record lessons learned, emergence of successes or barriers, and suggestions for next steps.

INCORPORATE DIVERSE QUALITATIVE VOICES

- Encourage inclusion of student, faculty, and staff feedback—through focus groups or interviews—to complement quantitative data and deepen understanding of impact beyond numbers.

SITUATE FINDINGS WITHIN INSTITUTIONAL ADOPTION LEVELS

- Facilitate discussion about how the project fits into broader adoption of ESP principles across the institution and opportunities for scaling and embedding effective practices.

Project-based metrics are a set of metrics determined by project type. Although these project-specific metrics will not be comparable across projects to determine “success” or “impact” in aggregate, they do offer a means of assessing the efficacy of individual projects. (e.g., reduction in DFW rates in gateway courses, improvement in subsequent course performance, changes in policy to remove barriers to student progression in degree programs, changes in pedagogy and course content).

The framework offers guidance on approaches to measure the effectiveness of individual projects against stated goals focused on answering the question: ***What results were achieved by each individual ESP project?***

SELECTING APPROPRIATE METRICS ALIGNED WITH PROJECT GOALS

The IAF supports teams in identifying which metrics matter most at different stages and for different audiences. This includes both **process measures** (tracking implementation and including both inputs and outputs) and **outcome measures** (evaluating impact).

Evaluators are encouraged to consider whether metrics are appropriate for the project's level and/or population as well as institutional priorities. The unit of measurement could expand and/or change over time as institutions implement changes within other majors/courses/etc. The framework offers guidance for aligning metric selection with institutional goals. It includes examples of how to define success in both short- and long-term timeframes, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

METRIC TYPES

Short-Term Metrics

Short-term metrics serve as early or leading indicators of progress. They help teams determine whether initial implementation steps are on track and allow for quick course corrections. These may include:

- Number of faculty or advisor training sessions completed.
- Participation in redesigned pilot courses.
- Feedback from early stakeholder engagement (e.g., focus groups or surveys).
- Milestone completion (e.g., team charter finalized, dashboards reviewed).
- Short-term indicators help build momentum and confidence in the work.

Long-Term Metrics

Long-term metrics measure sustained institutional impact and are often referred to as lagging indicators. These indicators assess the broader outcomes of curricular redesign and improved data agency. Examples include:

- Retention and graduation rate improvements.
- Increases in student satisfaction or engagement.
- Changes in DFW rates or completion of gateway courses.
- Evidence of curricular alignment with workforce or transfer goals.

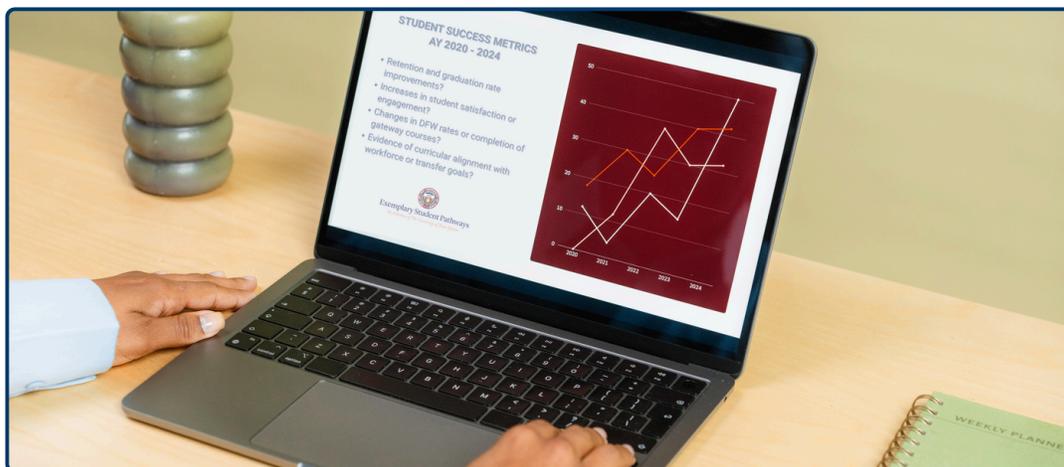
These metrics are especially valuable for demonstrating scale, sustainability, and alignment with institutional strategic plans.

EMBEDDING ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

Effective continuous improvement requires consistent, intentional assessment. The IAF encourages institutions to embed evaluation into the regular rhythm of institutional work, including:

- Annual program reviews,
- Strategic planning cycles,
- Faculty and staff development initiatives, and,
- External evaluations or accreditation reports.

Assessment strategies should include both **quantitative** (e.g., enrollment data, GPA, graduation rates) and **qualitative** methods (e.g., focus groups, interviews, student narratives).



CONCLUSION: SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF EVIDENCE AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Incorporating the IAF into your assessment and evaluation processes can support meaningful reflection, accountability, and sustained institutional growth toward student-centered curricular transformation and enhanced student success. Together, the framework's two levels ensure that implementation is evidence-based, student-centered, and responsive to institutional context. Overall, the framework seeks fidelity to the ESP change model's prioritization of students by fostering an educational environment that respects and reflects their myriad backgrounds and experiences.

By incorporating the IAF and companion rubrics into ongoing evaluation efforts, institutions reinforce a culture that centers student success and values data-informed decision-making. The framework is not just a tool for assessment—it is a strategy for institutional transformation.

It helps answer not only "What did we do?" but also "What changed for students?" and "What should we do next?"



Reflection Questions: Assessment & Continuous Improvement

1. INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL REFLECTION (ADOPTION, SCALING, DATA AGENCY)

- Has the ESP process deepened the institution's long-term capacity for data-informed decision-making and curricular adaptation?
- Beyond your team, have any units (e.g., advising, faculty senates) adopted rubrics or practices championed during the project?
- What evidence demonstrates progress on both core tenets of the ESP model—data agency and curricular redesign—across the institution?
- Are any project elements now embedded in annual reviews, strategic planning, or accreditation processes?

2. STUDENT-CENTERED IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

- If you were to summarize "what changed for students," what are the most compelling stories or data?
- How will these changes be maintained when project funding or leadership shifts—who is responsible next?
- What cultural shifts (e.g., increased transparency, stronger collaboration across silos) emerged? How can you sustain them?

3. NEXT STEPS & ITERATIVE LEARNING

- Looking ahead, what questions remain open, and who will track them in ongoing cycles of review or planning?
- What is your plan for a post-implementation evaluation cycle, and how will insights feed into continuous improvement structures?

Supporting Success and Sustainability through Institutionalization

This section guides institutional leaders and practitioners in embedding the ESP Change Model into long-term institutional practice—and is equally applicable to other student success and change initiatives.

As part of the Exemplary Student Pathways (ESP) Project, the UT System developed an institutionalization framework organized around **eight key categories**, rooted in both decades of higher education leadership, practice, and research as well as institutional experience. These categories reflect essential conditions for sustaining student success initiatives and are designed to be adapted to local contexts and priorities. They will be familiar to Playbook users and those who have been part of ESP projects as they reinforce concepts, process, and activities that are part of the individual stages of the ESP Change Model.

The framework emerged at a pivotal moment: as ESP project funding concluded, both provosts and project teams expressed strong interest in institutionalizing the work. Their commitment was driven not only by the value of individual projects, but also by the ESP model itself—holistic, data-informed curricular redesign—as a mechanism for closing gaps and removing barriers to student success.

WHAT IS INSTITUTIONALIZATION?

Institutionalization is the process of embedding a concept within an organization, social system, or society by establishing rules and norms that shape human interactions. It is not the final stage of the ESP model but a **continuation and deepening** of work that began during data discovery, continued through connecting the dots, action planning and implementation, refined through ongoing assessment.

Institutionalization was highlighted as essential to scaling and sustaining improvement by provosts (executive sponsors), ESP Project Leads, and team members involved in the UT System's ESP initiative across 22 projects at nine public universities between 2022-2024. To be durable, institutionalization requires integrating practices, policies, and mindsets into the core fabric of the institution—so that the work continues beyond any single initiative, funding stream, or leadership transition.



Key Concepts: Supporting Success & Sustainability through Institutionalization

- Institutionalization is the intentional embedding of the ESP Change Model (data agency + curricular redesign) into the institution's core structures, culture, and processes—ensuring it persists beyond pilot projects or funding cycles.
- It's not an endpoint but an enduring stage built during data discovery, action planning, implementation, and evaluation, designed to outlast any single initiative or change of leadership.
- Scaling requires systemwide alignment, not just champions—so institutionalization hinges on embedding shared vision, transparent communication, distributed responsibility, and sustainable investment in infrastructure and people.
- The UT System's Institutionalization Framework outlines eight interconnected categories as pillars of institutionalization.
- Invest in student success champions—through faculty fellows, learning communities, and leadership development—to sustain reforms and cultivate data-driven, student-centered practice.
- Institutionalization is accelerated when ESP tools (e.g., IAF, Curricular Redesign Rubric, dashboards, ESP Playbook) are integrated into existing structures like program reviews, accreditation, and budget planning.

WHY INSTITUTIONALIZATION MATTERS

Meaningful change cannot rely on individual champions alone. For the ESP model to be institutionalized, it must be anchored in a **shared understanding** of why the work matters—particularly the connection between **data agency** and **curricular redesign** as levers to close student success gaps and improve student outcomes.

This shared vision should:

- Be transparent and aligned with institutional strategic goals.
- Reflect commitment across leadership levels.
- Extend across departments and roles.
- Strengthen the case for scaling what works and reforming what doesn't.

Institutionalization is not just about policy or process. It may also involve shifting cultural norms, redesigning systems, or adopting new ways of understanding student success. It requires coalition-building, transparent communication, shared accountability, and sustained investment that shape how students enter, navigate, and succeed within and beyond the institutions they attend.

This Playbook includes materials to support institutionalization of the ESP Change Model—all of which can be found in the [Playbook Resource Library](#), a curated hub of tools, templates, and examples.

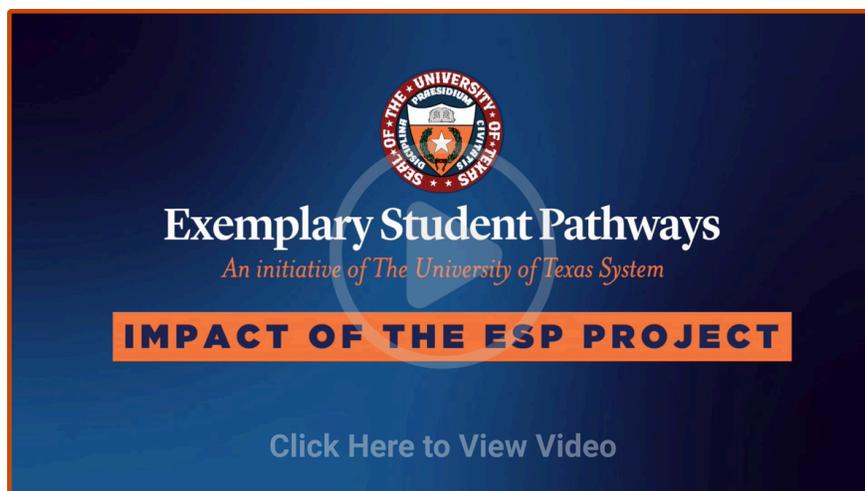
INSTITUTIONALIZATION FRAMEWORK

The UT System's [ESP institutionalization framework](#) consists of **eight interconnected categories**, each with subdomains and illustrative strategies. It draws from lessons learned across the 22 ESP projects, as well as from related tools such as the [NASH Student Success Framework](#).

The ESP Playbook and change model authors also want to acknowledge the [Change Leadership Toolkit 2.0](#) (Elrod, Kezar, González, and Holcombe, 2024). While not directly consulted, Playbook users will see the echoes in the ESP model and institutionalization framework, testament to the extent to which the Toolkit authors and their higher education thought leadership have permeated and influenced change work taking place across institutions and systems.

Eight Institutionalization Categories

1. Institutional Identity
2. Culture Change
3. Leadership and Governance
4. Strategic Alignment
5. Data Infrastructure and Agency
6. Sustainable Resources
7. Assessment and Continuous Improvement
8. Stakeholder Engagement



1. INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

Key Subdomains

- *Mission*: Does your institutional mission emphasize transparent curricular pathways and high-quality credentials?
- *Student Demographics*: Who are your students? Which populations are the focus of your redesign efforts?
- *Institutional Structures*: How do existing departments, roles, and responsibilities support (or constrain) student success?

A strong institutional identity is shaped by the students served and reflects not only what an institution values, but also what it is committed to delivering. For many UT System institutions, this includes a public mission to serve historically underserved students—first-generation, low-income, transfer, and returning adult learners.

These populations are not monolithic, and neither are the institutions that serve them. The ESP model encourages campuses to contextualize data, identify local structural barriers, and co-design solutions responsive to the lived realities of *their* students.

A university's mission reflects not only its values but its commitments. Alignment with transparent curricular pathways and quality credentials is a powerful signal of both. While institutions vary in size, mission, and academic priorities, those that view student success as central to their identity are more likely to engage in meaningful curricular redesign and invest in building a strong and deep bench of student success professionals on their campuses. This alignment is especially visible when curricular transparency is not treated as a compliance exercise but as a strategic imperative tied to institutional identity, workforce relevance, and public trust.

2. CULTURE CHANGE

Key Subdomains

- *Internal/External Factors*: What norms, incentives, or policies support or hinder change?
- *Trust Building*: Are decision-making processes, data sharing, and communication open across departments and leadership?
- *Collaboration Mindsets*: Do teams engage in shared and open inquiry and reflection?
- *Risk Navigation*: How does the institution respond to resistance and manage risk?

Sustaining change requires cultural transformation—not just new tools or policies. Institutions often face barriers such as resistance to change, fear of criticism, discomfort with data, or siloed operations. The ESP model encourages campuses to create environments where faculty and staff feel supported in reflecting on and improving practice.

This includes:

- Investing in ongoing professional development.
- Promoting transparency and shared language around reform.
- Aligning rewards, workload, and recognition systems with student success work.

When values like student success, data use, and collaboration are embedded in daily routines, cultural change becomes a shared institutional responsibility and more likely to be sustained. When diverse voices, including students, are meaningfully engaged, institutions build the trust and momentum needed for lasting transformation.

3. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Key Subdomains

- *Executive Sponsorship*: Are senior leaders visibly prioritizing, recognizing, rewarding, and championing the work?
- *Designated Responsibility*: Is there a point person or office designated with leading and overseeing the initiative, accountable for tracking progress?
- *Distributed Leadership*: How are responsibilities shared across departments or units?

Strong and visible leadership is critical to sustaining the ESP model. Presidents, provosts, deans, and other senior administrators set the tone and secure the resources necessary to move reforms from pilot to policy and then widespread and collectively embraced practice.

As institutions progress from data discovery to implementation, leadership becomes increasingly vital in removing barriers, reinforcing institutional commitment, recognizing and rewarding the change work, and embedding reforms into core operations. Leadership engagement is also a key domain in the ESP Impact Assessment Framework, used to evaluate institutional readiness and sustainability.

At the same time, **distributed leadership**—through cross-functional teams, faculty committees, or shared governance structures—is what builds institutional ownership. When diverse teams are empowered and connected, reforms are more resilient and more likely to scale.

The UT System's ESP experience has also demonstrated the value of external partnership. System-level support (e.g., facilitation, project management, and accountability structures) can help local leaders navigate challenges, share practices, and stay aligned with broader goals. Likewise, other leaders external to the institution can and should be consulted and brought into reform work, including transfer partners, employers, community leaders, and policymakers.

4. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Key Subdomains

- *Connections to Institutional Goals*: How does the project align with strategic objectives related to student success, workforce readiness, or research?
- *Understanding Student Needs*: Through examining the data, how well does the institution understand and respond to student goals and experiences?
- *Integration*: To what extent is the project embedded in existing initiatives, processes, or priorities?

Strategic alignment ensures that student success work is not seen as peripheral—but as central to institutional mission and planning. ESP projects are most sustainable when they are explicitly connected to the university's strategic priorities, whether those include graduation rates, workforce pipelines, regional partnerships, or student success goals.

When alignment is clear:

- Senior leaders are more likely to support the work.
- Departments see themselves as part of a coordinated effort.
- Budget and staffing decisions reflect the value placed on redesign.

Embedding ESP goals into institutional strategic plans, program review cycles, or annual reporting helps ensure visibility, integration, and long-term support. It also provides a shared framework for tracking progress and communicating impact.

5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Key Subdomains

- *Communication Channels*: How are curricular redesign updates, decisions, and opportunities shared across the institution?
- *Breaking Down Silos*: Where are curricular redesign collaboration gaps across departments or roles?

- *Internal and External Stakeholders*: Who is involved in planning and implementation—and who should be? What is the process (or processes) for determining involvement? How is student voice incorporated?

Robust stakeholder engagement is essential to institutionalization. Effective engagement fosters transparency, trust, and shared responsibility—especially in cross-functional initiatives like curricular redesign and data-informed decision-making.

UT System ESP teams reported success when they:

- Regularly convened broad stakeholder groups.
- Created feedback loops across faculty, staff, and students.
- Involved stakeholders early in project design, not just implementation.

Involving students directly—via focus groups, advisory councils, or surveys—not only adds insight, but also signals institutional commitment to student-centered change. Engaging all stakeholders in a way that leverages their unique perspectives and expertise helps ensure that the work reflects the needs of the entire institution and positively contributes to culture change.

Beyond campus, partnerships with transfer partners, employers, community organizations, and policymakers help align reforms with external needs and expectations. These connections can inform curricular relevance, identify barriers beyond the institution, and open up additional funding or collaboration opportunities.

6. DATA INFRASTRUCTURE AND AGENCY

Key Subdomains

- *Data Access and Support*: Do teams have access to and support in analyzing relevant, disaggregated data?
- *Culture of Data Use*: How is data currently used to inform curricular decision-making?

- *Data Exploration and Analysis*: What are the norms and practices for collaborative data analysis?
- *Capacity Building*: What professional development exists to support data literacy and application? And what is needed?

Institutions vary significantly in their capacity, systems, and cultures around data. Regardless of starting point, a strong data infrastructure and culture of inquiry are essential to sustaining curricular redesign. Within the ESP model, data is not a compliance tool—it is a strategic asset for addressing student success gaps and improving outcomes.

The UT System’s ESP projects showed that **data agency**—the ability to access, interpret, and act on data—must be cultivated across teams. This means:

- Ensuring data is disaggregated across multiple characteristics, accessible, timely, and contextualized.
- Supporting cross-functional collaboration to analyze and interpret findings.
- Encouraging faculty, advisors, and staff to engage with data—even if they do not traditionally work with institutional research.

Institutions made progress when they invested in:

- Shared definitions and language around data.
- Institution- and unit-wide access to data through tools like dashboards and collaborative platforms, as well as course-level profiles.
- Iterative team processes that interrogate the project statement, challenge assumptions, surface new questions, and co-create a shared understanding of the problem.

Just as importantly, these institutions created space for skepticism and learning, ensuring that diverse team members could voice concerns, suggest new lines of inquiry, and become active agents of change.

Data agency is also built through **professional learning**.

ESP campuses found success by pairing technical training with structured spaces for inquiry—such as workshops, team reflection sessions, and peer coaching. As described elsewhere in the Playbook, the [ESP Data Agency Rubric](#) provides a tool for self-assessment of an institution's overall data agency maturity, including data culture and infrastructure.

Institutionalizing data agency is not about creating a team of analysts. Ultimately, it is about democratizing data. When data becomes part of routine conversations—whether in curriculum committees or student support teams—campuses are better equipped to scale what works and improve what doesn't. Through the ESP process, institutions come to see data not as a report to be delivered, but as a language for change and a shared tool for advancing student success.

7. SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES

Key Subdomains

- *Human Capacity*: Are there sufficient personnel and professional development structures to support redesign?
- *Financial Capacity*: How are redesign efforts funded, and are they integrated into recurring budgets?
- *Technical Capacity*: What systems and tools support implementation and analysis?

Institutionalizing the ESP model requires sustained investment in human, financial, and technical capacity. Early stages of the model—particularly data discovery and action planning—help institutions identify gaps in capacity and resource allocation. But sustaining momentum demands long-term commitments embedded in institutional planning and budgeting processes.

Human resources are foundational. Faculty, staff, and administrators must have the time, training, and authority to carry redesign efforts forward. Without protected and incentivized workload or structured support, even strong initiatives risk losing momentum.

ESP institutions sustained progress when they:

- Embedded redesign into position descriptions, rewards structures, committee responsibilities, or advising models.
- Supported faculty fellows or cross-functional project leads.
- Created formal professional development opportunities focused on data, pedagogy, and student success.

Financial resources are equally important. Institutions must fund the infrastructure needed for ongoing implementation. Institutions need:

- Budget commitments for data systems, professional development, and assessment.
- Strategic grant-seeking to supplement local funding.
- Integration of ESP priorities into planning and budget cycles.

Technical resources—such as dashboards, planning tools, and analysis software—enable teams to track progress and adjust. Tools like the [Data Agency](#) and [Curricular Redesign Rubrics](#) proved valuable not just for reflection, but also for action planning and communication.

By investing in people, infrastructure, and tools, institutions move beyond pilot efforts to establish systems that can endure and adapt over time.

8. ASSESSMENT & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Key Subdomains

- *Ongoing Evaluation*: How are redesign efforts monitored and assessed over time?
- *Iterative Refinement*: How is feedback used to improve projects in real time?
- *Scaling and Sustainability*: What strategies exist to scale promising practices and ensure long-term impact?

Ongoing evaluation is essential to embedding curricular redesign as a durable practice. Within the ESP model, assessment is not an endpoint

but a continuous process that strengthens alignment between institutional goals and student outcomes.

The [ESP Impact Assessment Framework \(IAF\)](#)—developed collaboratively by UT System leaders and institutional experts—guides institutions in evaluating both project-specific progress and broader engagement with the ESP Change Model. It encourages:

- Use of shared student success metrics (e.g., course completion, retention).
- Monitoring of project-specific indicators aligned with institutional context.
- Reflection processes that inform strategy, resource allocation, and team learning.

More on the IAF can be found in the [Assessment and Continuous Improvement](#) stage of the ESP Change Model.

As implementation of existing and new ESP projects are underway at UT System institutions, many are recognizing opportunities to embed the IAF and its companion rubrics into existing structures such as program review, strategic planning, and accreditation reporting. This integration makes evaluation part of how the institution functions—not as a one-time requirement, but a sustained habit of inquiry and improvement, as well as a critical form of institutionalizing the ESP Change Model.

A hallmark of the ESP model is **iterative refinement**. Institutions used student surveys, faculty reflections, focus groups, and team debriefs to revise project statements, implementation plans, and outcome goals. The Data Agency Rubric and Curricular Redesign Rubric serve not just as evaluative tools, but as developmental guides.

When institutions embrace continuous improvement, they are better positioned to scale what works, sunset what doesn't, and sustain a culture of learning and adaptation.



Reflection Questions: Success & Sustainability Through Institutionalization

1. INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

- How does the institution's mission support transparent curricular pathways and quality credentials?
- How do faculty, staff, and departmental structures support the success of all students, including underserved groups?

2. CULTURE CHANGE

- How do cultural factors like trust and collaboration among stakeholders, communication, and risk tolerance support or hinder curricular redesign?

3. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- How are curricular redesign initiatives prioritized, rewarded, and championed by leaders?
- How are leadership responsibilities for curricular redesign distributed and managed?

4. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

- How connected is the curricular redesign project to strategic goals, to students' needs, and then integrated into institutional priorities?

5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- How are stakeholders from a variety of departments and perspectives, including students, collaborating on curricular redesign?
- How does curricular redesign information get shared with all stakeholders institution-wide?

6. DATA INFRASTRUCTURE AND AGENCY

- What are the cultural, logistical, and/or infrastructure factors related to data access and usage that impact curricular redesign?

7. SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES

- What are the human, financial, and technological resources and capacities necessary to implement and sustain curricular redesign work?

8. ASSESSMENT AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- What is the process of evaluating, refining, and scaling successful curricular redesign practices?

Sustaining Momentum, Scaling Impact

BUILDING STUDENT SUCCESS CHAMPIONS: ESP AS A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Culture change and institutionalization are impossible without deep investment in people. Sustained engagement with professional development is key to cultivating champions of data-informed, student-centered curricular redesign.

ESP institutions that maintained momentum beyond the grant period did so by supporting:

- Faculty learning communities,
- Cross-functional teams,
- Faculty fellow and students as partners models,
- Data literacy workshops, and,
- Leadership development programs.

These practices provide opportunities to deepen skills, build trust, and foster ownership. They also offered safe environments to wrestle with challenging reforms—spaces where faculty and staff could surface concerns, share insights, and experiment with new approaches.

Professional development in the ESP model emphasizes:

- Building capacity to explore and use data.
- Creating environments receptive to change.
- Aligning redesign with existing roles and responsibilities.
- Encouraging peer learning and shared governance.

These efforts yield long-term returns by strengthening institutional capacity, scaling effective practice, resilience to turnover, retaining talent, and improving outcomes. Effective professional learning doesn't just support current projects—it builds the leadership pipeline for future reforms.

Institutionalizing the ESP Change Model requires more than preserving projects—it demands embedding a new way of thinking, collaborating, and acting across the institution. The framework outlined in this section offers a roadmap for sustaining student-centered, data-informed curricular redesign through cultural alignment, strategic leadership, shared accountability, and resource investment. When institutions cultivate student success champions, prioritize and reward continuous improvement, and align their identity and operations with the values of the ESP model, they build the foundation for lasting transformation. Institutionalization, then, is not a final step—it is an ongoing commitment to data agency, learning, and student-centered change and curricular pathways.



Institutional Insights: Sustaining Momentum, Scaling Impact

“The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley has aligned its own sustained and impactful professional development model, Conexión, which includes faculty participating in ESP projects.”

Jonikka Charlton
Senior Vice Provost for Student Success & Academic Affairs and Dean, University College
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Conclusion

The Exemplary Student Pathways (ESP) Change Model represents a transformative approach to advancing student success through data-informed curricular redesign. Grounded in the lived experiences of students, faculty, and staff across the University of Texas System, the model has demonstrated that sustainable, student-centered change is possible when institutions cultivate data agency and reimagine the curriculum as a lever for institutional change.

This Playbook has offered a comprehensive guide to replicating and adapting the ESP model—from identifying the right project and building a cross-functional team, to exploring data, connecting insights, and developing actionable, student-centered plans. It has also provided tools for implementation, assessment, and institutionalization, ensuring that the work continues beyond the life of any single project.

The ESP model is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It is a flexible, iterative framework that can be tailored to institutional priorities, people, student populations, and organizational structures. Its success depends on leadership commitment, faculty engagement, and a culture that values inquiry, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

As more institutions and systems engage with this work, the ESP model has the potential to become a self-sustaining engine for innovation—one that not only improves outcomes for today's students but also reshapes the future of higher education. The authors hope that this Playbook will serve as both a roadmap and a source of inspiration for those committed to building more effective, adaptable, and student-centered institutions.

The lessons from the ESP initiative affirm what many academic leaders already know: lasting change requires more than short-term interventions or one-time initiatives. It requires shared vision, aligned strategy, distributed leadership, and an infrastructure that values data-informed decision-making and student-centered design.

As UT institutions have demonstrated, the ESP model is not just about improving curriculum—it is about transforming the conditions that shape how students enter, navigate, and complete their academic journeys. It is about making institutional structures more transparent and policies more effective, and teaching and learning more responsive to students' lived realities.

At the end of the day, the ESP Change Model is human-centered, and for whatever innovations and changes AI and other vendor-driven technologies continue to bring to higher education, authentic transformation requires careful cultivation of relationships and trust among people.



Exemplary Student Pathways

An initiative of The University of Texas System