

ACHIEVING THE DREAM'S  
INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FRAMEWORK  
AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY  
ASSESSMENT TOOL



Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

Most efforts to improve community college student outcomes involve relatively small innovations or changes at the margins. After more than a decade of experience, Achieving the Dream has learned that improving student success on a substantial scale requires colleges to engage in bold, holistic, sustainable institutional change. Achieving the Dream's Institutional Capacity Framework has evolved to become more comprehensive in scope and to more directly address the emerging needs of the field to improve success results for all students, especially low-income students and students of color.

From the beginning, our focus was designed to help colleges build capacity around five principles required for organizational change: (1) committed leadership; (2) building a culture of evidence; (3) broad engagement; (4) systemic institutional improvement; and (5) equity.

What we have learned from that approach, from the latest applied research, and from the progress of our more than 200 National Reform Network colleges is enabling us to pave the way for the next generation of reform. Among the changes, the new framework is designed for scale, and pays more attention to the teaching and learning environment and non-academic supports while keeping equity at the heart of the action.

## ATD'S NEW CAPACITY FRAMEWORK

These understandings inform the next generation of work at Achieving the Dream and our new approach to organizational change. The framework has at its core seven essential capacities that must be in place for colleges to create the student-focused culture that promotes student success. Colleges must be strong in each capacity area in order to take on any intervention, such as guided pathways, the Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPASS) or the Working Students Success Network (WSSN) at scale.

### The seven capacity areas are:

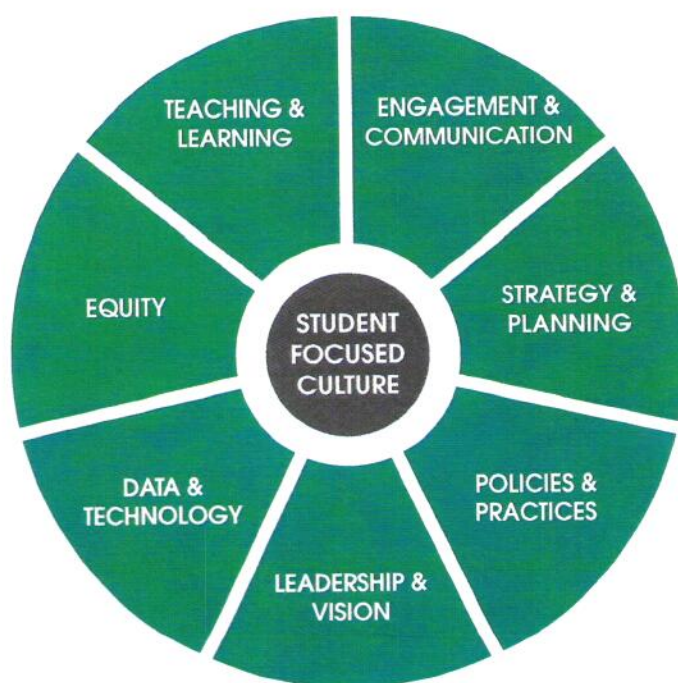
**1. Leadership & Vision** – The commitment and collaboration of the institution's leadership with respect to student success and the clarity of the vision for desired change.

**2. Data & Technology** – The institution's capacity to collect, access, analyze and use data to inform decisions, and to use powerful technology to support student success.

**3. Equity** – The commitment, capabilities, and experiences of an institution to equitably serve low income students, students of color and other at-risk student populations with respect to access, success, and campus climate.

**4. Teaching & Learning** – The commitment to engaging full-time and adjunct faculty in examinations of pedagogy, meaningful professional development, and a central role for them as change agents within the institution. Also, the college's commitment to advising, tutoring, and out-of-classroom supports as well as restructuring developmental education to facilitate student learning and success.

**5. Engagement & Communication** – The creation of strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders,



such as K-12, universities, employers and community-based organizations, and internal stakeholders across the institution to participate in the student success agenda and improvement of student outcomes.

**6. Strategy & Planning** – The alignment of the institution with the umbrella goal of student success and the institution's process for translating the desired future into defined goals and objectives and executing the actions to achieve them.

**7. Policies & Practices** – The institutional policies and practices that impact student success and the processes for examining and aligning policies and practices to remove barriers and foster student completion.

These capacities build on the five founding principles with important distinctions. They reflect a heightened focus on what happens in the classroom and the academic and non-academic supports that are at the heart of student success. Also, the culture of evidence principle is embedded into all seven capacities rather than being a stand-alone capacity, reflecting the need for colleges to place the building of this culture into their value systems.

Data and technology have more prominent placement, as we have learned more about the power of technology to support students in moving into and through college. Finally, the principle of “systemic improvement” is now pulled apart into two capacities. This gives deeper attention to the roles of strategy and planning and policy and practice in guiding and sustaining holistic change.

## APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK WITH ICAT: A NEW TOOL FOR DIAGNOSING STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Each college undertakes the work differently, but our institutional capacity framework and support services provide a practical approach to create an institution that systematically supports the success of all students. We work closely with the college’s leadership, faculty, and staff to build their skills to adopt high impact practices and policies that redesign the way students experience college both inside and outside the classroom

To complement the framework, we have worked with our network colleges to develop a sophisticated diagnostic tool that we are rolling out in 2016. The Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT) is a self-assessment that will help colleges identify their strengths and challenges in each capacity area. It is designed for network colleges and their coaching teams to use in an ongoing way to assess their progress in building each capacity and determine strategies to further build on their achievements. ATD plans to align future coaching and technical assistance to colleges with a customized rather than “one-size-fits all” approach to helping colleges advance whole-college solutions to student success.

To implement the framework, ATD will more closely integrate leadership and data coaching, and our coaches will focus directly on each capacity, introducing new areas over time. Our coaches continuously help colleges set goals and measure progress;

connect institutions to expertise, technical assistance, and resources; foster a culture of accountability, inquiry, evidence, and collaboration; develop priorities and action plans; and leverage and analyze data for use across the institution. This new delivery strategy is important as ATD also works to support colleges in crafting more robust guided pathways strategies.

Our learning events will support deeper understanding of the seven capacities. We will deploy subject matter experts to colleges around the capacities as well as rich resource tools. Our foundation-sponsored learning initiatives, such as WSSN and iPASS, will help us to continue to learn more about capacity building.

The framework coupled with personalized coaching and other supports brings improvement efforts under one cohesive umbrella. It integrates ATD member colleges’ field experiences and the best thinking of the student success reform movement with the successful strategies already underway on your campus. By recognizing and embracing each college’s unique potential for excellence, Achieving the Dream not only builds a customized approach to institutional change, but also an engaged, impassioned group of champions committed to exemplary student achievement and long-lasting success.

## CHANGING CAMPUS CULTURE

Changing campus culture and student outcomes is a daunting task, requiring self-reflection, critical thinking and feedback, and significant, coordinated action across the institution. Based on management principles and experiences in the field, our institutional capacity framework provides the means to get this work done, positioning students to earn credentials and find

family-sustaining jobs and careers. While no two institutions are alike—and neither are their strategies to transform culture and student outcomes—every community college can benefit from this framework and ATD support to transform the student’s journey to success in college and in life.