

The Transfer Playbook Summary and Overview

See the full Transfer Playbook and Tool for Assessing Progress Toward Adoption of Essential Transfer Practice for Four-Year College [here](#).

Through transfer-oriented programs and courses, community colleges have long offered a gateway to a bachelor's degree and economic mobility for millions of students—including disproportionately large numbers of students of color and those from low-income households. Nationally, the vast majority of students who enroll in community college plan to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree.

Most never make it.

Only [14 percent](#) of degree-seeking students who start at a community college earn a bachelor's degree within six years of community college entry. Transfer students from low-income households and students of color fare much worse.

Institutional leaders, faculty, and staff can improve these transfer outcomes and advance equity.

Research makes clear that institution type, student demographics, and geographic location alone do *not* predict success. Rather, research shows that successful transfer and bachelor's degree completion are correlated with community college and university co- ownership of transfer student success that emphasizes strong institutional practice at both institutions.

In 2016, the [Aspen Institute College Excellence Program](#) and the [Community College Research Center](#) published [The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges](#). This playbook—based on the practices of six sets of community colleges and universities that, together, serve transfer students well—lays out clear, actionable strategies and practices that community colleges and universities can implement at scale to improve transfer and baccalaureate completion outcomes.

This research identifies three strategies of strong transfer partnerships through which community college and university leaders can advance transfer and equity outcomes.

Strategy 1: Make Transfer Student Success a Priority

A hallmark of successful transfer partnerships is the dedication of senior administrators and faculty leaders to establishing and reinforcing the importance of serving transfer students well. This prioritization not only sets the conditions for strong practice that supports transfer student success, but also fosters increased trust and clear communication within and between institutions. Four essential practices support this strategy:

- ❑ Communicate transfer as a key component of the institution’s mission and student success agenda.
- ❑ Share data to increase understanding of the need to improve transfer student outcomes—and the benefits of doing so.
- ❑ Dedicate significant resources to support transfer students, including exercising fairness in financial aid allocation.
- ❑ Collaborate to foster strong institutional partnerships.

Strategy 3: Provide Tailored Transfer Student Advising

To successfully transfer and obtain a bachelor’s degree, students often need more than a clear map. They need guidance—to help decide which pathway to follow, to identify resources and plan how to use them, to navigate the inevitable obstacles they encounter along the way, and, in many cases, to reassure them that they will succeed. Key essential practices from both community colleges and universities that support this strategy include:

Community College Advising Practices:

- ❑ Clearly articulate students’ transfer options and help them determine, as soon as possible, their field of interest, major, and preferred transfer destination.
- ❑ Continuously monitor student progress, provide frequent feedback, and intervene quickly when students are off track.
- ❑ Help students plan for and access the financial resources necessary to achieve their goals.

Strategy 2: Create Clear Programmatic Pathways

Information and advising about transfer programs, course sequences, and credit transferability are often absent or confusing. Community colleges and four-year colleges that achieve high levels of student success work independently and together to develop major-specific pathways (transfer program maps), that clearly set forth the course sequences, prerequisites, and extracurricular activities students need to successfully transfer to the four-year partner and earn a bachelor’s degree. These maps create clarity for students and advisors about the specific courses and other requirements students should complete to attain a bachelor’s degree and make clear to institutional leaders what offerings should be prioritized. Successful partners have adopted three essential practices to support this strategy:

- ❑ Work collaboratively with colleagues from partner institutions to create major-specific program maps.
- ❑ Provide rigorous instruction and other high-quality academic experiences to prepare students for four-year programs.
- ❑ Establish regular, reliable processes for updating and improving program maps, designing unconventional pathways as necessary.

Four-Year Advising Practices:

- ❑ Commit dedicated personnel, structures, and resources to transfer students before, during, and after the transition—and through to graduation.
- ❑ Assign advisors and clearly communicate essential information to prospective transfer students.
- ❑ Strongly encourage transfer students to choose a major prior to transfer.
- ❑ Replicate elements of the first-year experience for transfer students.