Using Improvement Cycles to Accelerate Partnership Work for Transfer Student Success
Texas Pathways Institute
April 2021
Why Use an “Improvement” Approach to Work on Transfer?

➢ Large, complex problems can (and must) be broken down into ‘bite-sized’ pieces

➢ Modifying key improvement strategies for transfer efforts can make work doable, and can improve the pace & quality of efforts to lower barriers to transfer student success

Key Elements of an Improvement Cycle

➢ Driver Diagrams structure conversation about the most important challenges and opportunities for collaborative work can help cross-institutional teams go deeper faster into real work

➢ 90-Day Plans to turn driver diagrams into action plans provides a structure and light project management ethos to push work forward, keep teams on the same page, provide mutual accountability
A Good Driver Diagram...

... forces delineated articulation of key challenges

... serves as the theory of action to guide the creation of an effective short-term (90-day) work plan

... helps translate a high-level goal into a logical set of underpinning activities or projects

... captures the scope of leading challenges in a snapshot

... helps teams establish shared understanding about the work to be done

Guiding Questions

1. What is the existing condition that needs to be improved?

2. Why does it need improvement/ what’s the evidence?

3. What are the root causes or core drivers of the specific challenge we want to make progress on?

4. What is our role & long-term goal?

5. What is the “SMART” (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely) goal that we could achieve in 3 years?

6. What are the possible concrete actions that we could take that would help us make progress on our SMART goal?
OVERALL AIM
Dramatically improve outcomes for transfer students & close equity gaps

S.M.A.R.T Goal

PRIMARY DRIVERS

POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Driver Diagram Example #1

OVERALL AIM

- Dramatically improve outcomes for transfer students and close equity gaps

S.M.A.R.T. AIM

- Strengthen a multi-level partnership with our main transfer partner in our 3 highest-volume transfer programs to improve the experience & outcomes of the students in those programs.

PRIMARY DRIVERS

- Absence of unifying vision for how shared commitment to transfer improvements ‘fit’ within our respective student success agendas
- Insufficient channels of communication & collaboration to strengthen mutual will for collaboration across institutions
- Insufficient supports for mid-level leaders and front-line faculty & staff tasked with implementation of transfer improvements

POSSIBLE ACTIONS

- Identify impediments to senior leadership prioritizing and communicating effectively about transfer & prioritize strategies for addressing this
- Assess key stakeholders’ starting point attitudes, capacity, and will for cross-institutional collaboration on transfer in these high-volume programs
- Convene deans, chairs and academic advisors to identify/prioritize impediments & opportunities to improving transfer students’ experiences & outcomes in these programs
- Distinguish between unmet PD/training needs, staffing & resource shortfalls, disincentives, and communication breakdowns that need to be addressed: devise action plans & timelines for each

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Driver Diagram Example #2

**OVERALL AIM**
- Dramatically improve outcomes for transfer students and close equity gaps

**S.M.A.R.T. AIM**
- Align or improve math pathways to significantly increase applicability of math completed at the 2-yr for transfer students’ programs of study at the 4-yr

**PRIMARY DRIVERS**
- Lack of curricular alignment and shared clarity about the relationship between course objectives/outcomes
- Insufficient connections between 2yr & 4yr institutions to establish shared understanding of barriers and opportunities around increasing applicability
- Inattention to deeper structural and cultural impediments to creation of seamless math pathways

**POSSIBLE ACTIONS**
- Convene senior academic leadership (presidents & provosts) at 2yr & 4yr on an ongoing basis to look at data on which courses are/are not applying, and to identify the range of issues contributing to lower-than-desired applicability rates
- Convene math chairs and deans in programs serviced by math across the 2yr & 4yr to unpack the range of issues contributing to lower-than-desired applicability rates, and to identify key opportunities for improvements
- Convene advising leadership from the 2yr and 4yr to clarify issues related to applicability with the aim of improving advising to ensure students take the right math for their longer term educational and career goals

**OVERALL AIM**
- Align or improve math pathways to significantly increase applicability of math completed at the 2-yr for transfer students’ programs of study at the 4-yr
A Good 90-Day Plan...

...forces articulation of the relationship between the S.M.A.R.T goal & the near-term goal (requires next steps)

...is clear-eyed but ambitious, grounded in data, focused on the most important work (not just good work)

...includes careful consideration of both technical & adaptive dimensions of improvement

...includes deadlines, responsibilities, and owners of tasks

..helps teams establish shared understanding about the work to be done and hold each other accountable for progress

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<th>Activities</th>
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<th>4-yr Needs / Implications</th>
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What Excellence Looks Like
an example from another state

From an Enrollment Manager at a Regional Public University:

Our College of Business (COB) had recent analysis on CC transfer applicants, which showed that students were meeting and exceeding the minimum GPA required for admission, but they were not completing prerequisites prior to transfer. The completion of prerequisites is critical to progression in upper-level courses and minimizes the risk of students graduating with excess credit hours. The reviewing team also reviewed key resources such as transfer guides, brochures, and websites, and noticed dated information.

5 Collaborative Achievements in 90-Days

1. Redesigned & offered a COB transition workshop for community college advisors;
2. Designed & delivered a COB transition workshop for students at the 2-yr
3. Updated all resources available to advisors and students
4. Designed a 1-page business advising guide with transfer tips and milestones
5. Resolved a key pain point by advocating for a computer competency exam at the 2-yr to satisfy the 4-yr’s COB microcomputer prerequisite course.
**OVERALL AIM**
Dramatically improve outcomes for transfer students & eliminate equity gaps

**S.M.A.R.T aim**
Significantly reduce the # of students accumulating excess credits while not completing prereqs in a high-volume program

**PRIMARY DRIVERS**
- Insufficient information & communication of transfer requirements
- Inattention to viewing student needs through an equity lens
- Misalignment of advising resources to support seamless transfer

**POSSIBLE ACTIONS**
- Redesign a COB transition workshop for community college advisors
- Design & deliver a COB transition workshop for students at the 2-yr
- Update all information to advisors, faculty, and students
- Design a 1-pger COB advising guide with transfer tips and milestones.
Finalizing 90-Day Plans: Key Questions that Need Good Answers

1) Are we clear about what specifically we want to accomplish in the next three months?

2) Are we sure that what we’re seeking to do is the most important thing we can be doing to make progress on our shared SMART goal? (Is it ambitious enough? Can it be done in 3 months?)

3) Whose input & support is essential for our progress? (have we captured that in the ‘needs & implications’ section of the 90-day plan?)

4) Do we have people assigned to action items and a plan for engaging our wider teams and individuals implicated in the 90-day plan?

5) Have we agreed on when/how the teams will come back together? (Are meetings scheduled?)
Thank you!
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