

Best Practices for Postsecondary Outcomes Data Use: Promote a Responsible Data-Sharing Culture

States can help districts and schools use postsecondary outcomes data to develop and improve programs that positively affect students' transitions to higher education and the workforce.

QIP interviewed states that are in different stages of using postsecondary outcomes data, including making this data available to districts. These conversations provided information on five best practices to support the use of postsecondary outcomes data at all levels. To learn more about states' best practices on using postsecondary outcomes data, please see [Best Practices on Using Postsecondary Outcomes Data](#) and an [infographic](#) that expands on best practices for using postsecondary outcomes data.

This resource focuses on the best practice of promoting a responsible data-sharing culture, including real-world examples from states.

What Does a Responsible Data-Sharing Culture Look Like?

States must create and support a strong culture of responsible data sharing to be successful in collecting and using postsecondary outcomes data. This includes having active and consistent data-sharing procedures, policies, and agreements in place.

There are responsibilities that come with sharing data, including ensuring that

- data is high-quality and conforms to established standards;
- data sharing is conducted according to established agreements;
- data users are provided with the information necessary to understand shared data; and
- the privacy and security of protected or sensitive data are upheld according to laws, regulations, and best practices.



How to Create a Responsible Data-Sharing Culture

Build Trusted Relationships

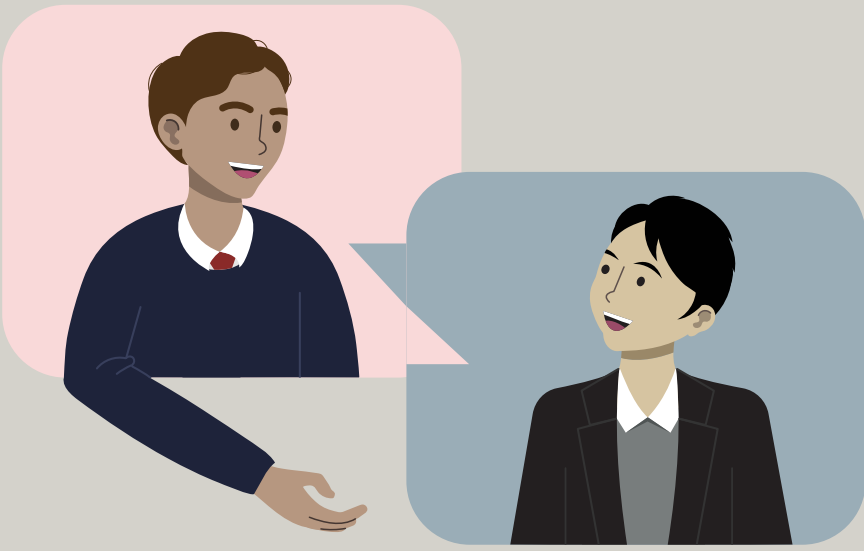


To build trusted relationships that promote data sharing among agencies, states should

- demonstrate the benefits of data sharing, which could include enhancing what is currently being done, reducing data collection burdens, offering new insights, etc.;
- collaborate to understand and meet each agency's data needs;
- establish a data governance structure that defines clear roles and processes;
- maintain ongoing collaboration and communication; and
- dedicate staff to act as a liaison throughout the process to ensure data is clean, that everyone is meeting their agreements, that everyone's needs are being met, etc.

The **Kentucky Longitudinal Data System (KLDS)**, managed by the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS), is a robust statewide longitudinal education data systems (SLDS) managed through a strong leadership and data governance program. KYSTATS, governed by state legislation, receives data from various state agencies, including the Kentucky Department of Workforce Development, the Kentucky Department of Education, and others. These agencies have formal data-sharing agreements with KYSTATS. The KYSTATS board, composed of heads from key education and workforce agencies, ensures rigorous oversight, requiring agency input before releasing reports. This governance model has fostered trust, enabling broader data-sharing opportunities to address critical issues in Kentucky.

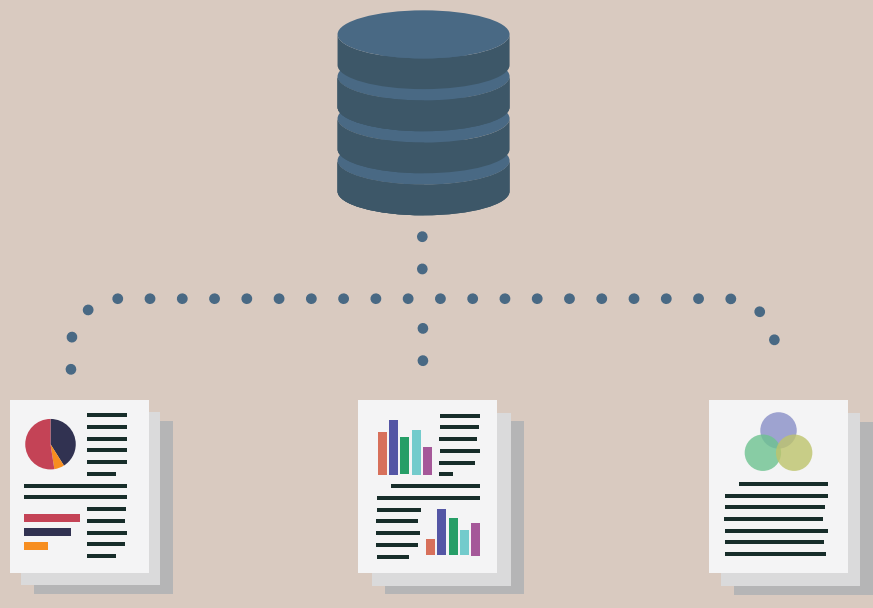
Collaborate to Define and Understand Data



Collaboration is critical to ensure that everyone who uses shared data understands contextual information about the data. When merging multiple data sources, there are risks of inferring meaning without understanding the source context. Data collected for one purpose may not be as reliable when applied to questions with another purpose. Cross-agency communication helps to ensure that all data-sharing partners understand the data and how to appropriately use it.

SLDS partners in **Michigan** know well the benefits of a collaborative approach. Successful data sharing between the Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) and the Michigan Office of Career and Technical Education (OCTE) was critical to to quantify and systematically categorizing the career and technical education (CTE) programs offered to students in the state. CEPI and OCTE worked together to track and gather data on dual-enrollment students in CTE programs and align them with specific career pathways. This collaboration helped both agencies understand dual enrollment patterns and how they connect to students obtaining certification credentials.

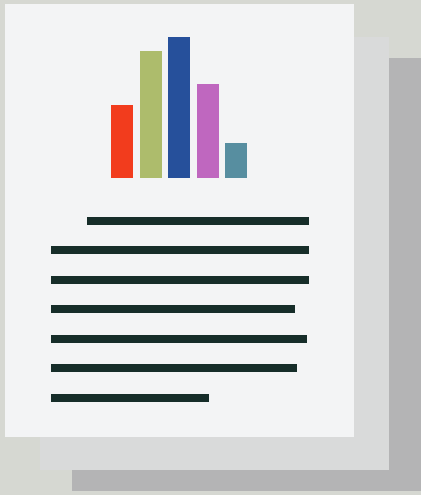
Develop Data-Sharing Agreements



Data-sharing agreements, such as contracts and memoranda of understanding, are critical to ensure that all agencies involved understand how the data can be shared and protected. This includes compliance with federal and state laws and regulations governing the privacy and security of data.

The **North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI)** has data-sharing agreements with state sector partners and local public schools to enhance the analysis and understanding of postsecondary outcomes data. These data sharing agreements facilitate the use of aggregate student data for their school and district data profiles. Some of these agreements also enable the use of student-level data, allowing for data-driven discussions about postsecondary outcomes that can impact program offerings, policy, and funding.

Report Back to Agencies Involved in Data Sharing



The data collection and reporting process is circular: agencies understand that as part of their agreement to share data, they can expect to receive useful reports in return. This process builds trust among agencies by promoting a common understanding of the importance of each data source, how data from different sources can be used to understand student pathways better, and how different data informs decision-making.

New Mexico's approach to sharing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) status reports demonstrates the benefits of ensuring that partner agencies have access to actionable information. The New Mexico Educational Assistance Foundation (NMEAF) leverages data use agreements to help families and students complete the FAFSA. NMEAF sends a FAFSA report showing FAFSA completion progress for students to schools with which it has data sharing agreements. Counselors and designated staff use the report to contact families and students to answer questions and help them complete the FAFSA.