

CUTTING EDGE SERIES

# SCALING COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERVENTIONS

No. 2



Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

 PUBLIC AGENDA

Dear Colleagues:

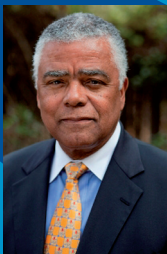
Achieving the Dream is pleased to partner with Public Agenda to offer you this important publication, *Scaling Community College Interventions*. Second in a three-part series, this practical guide addresses specific, common challenges community colleges face.

The origin of this series is the recent interim report by MDRC and the Community College Research Center called "Turning the Tide: Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges." The interim report identified areas of great progress as well as aspects of Achieving the Dream's work that need deeper focus. The report concluded with recommendations for next steps, specifically paying more attention to scaling promising initiatives to reach more students.

Achieving the Dream designed this series with our founding partner, Public Agenda, to address those challenges and ensure that every Achieving the Dream institution has the tools necessary to move the needle on student success and completion. This particular guide provides an overview of the most common barriers to scaling, principles to help position community colleges for successful scaling, and a checklist of critical questions to guide each step of the way. Overall, this new guide should help community college leaders better anticipate and address the roadblocks to successful scaling.

On behalf of the entire team at Achieving the Dream, I'd like to extend my appreciation to Public Agenda for their diligent and thoughtful work on this timely series so far, and my best wishes to each institution in pursuit of greater student success outcomes.

Sincerely,



William E. Trueheart  
President & CEO  
Achieving the Dream

## How to Use This Guide

This is the second guide of the Cutting Edge Series and is designed to help colleges apply strategies that will allow successful institutional change and student achievement initiatives to reach more students.

Section 1 of this guide lays out the most common obstacles to successful scaling and serves as a sobering reminder of the complexity of the scaling challenge.

Section 2 offers a set of principles for colleges to follow in their institutional change and student success innovation processes that, when applied, will increase the chances of reaching scale.

In Section 3 we provide two examples of scaling at Achieving the Dream colleges to illustrate the principles in action.

The Critical Question Checklists we present in Section 4 are intended to serve as tools to prompt discussion of key factors that influence scaling at each stage in the Achieving the Dream 5-Step Process for Increasing Student Success through Institutional Change. By considering these questions, we hope that colleges may better anticipate and address the roadblocks to successful scaling.

Finally, for those who are interested in finding more information on various aspects of the scaling issue, two appendices are included in this guide: a scaling tool created by MDC based on the SCALERS model developed at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, and a list of scaling resources. These resources offer valuable insights from an array of sectors facing the scaling challenge. Members of the work group consulted in the development of this guide as well as other sources of expert input into this tool may be found on page 22.

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<sup>1</sup> MDC was the managing partner of Achieving the Dream from 2004 to 2010 and continues to direct the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), which works with several Round I and Round II Achieving the Dream colleges to build demonstrated results in developmental education innovations.

## Introduction

This guide is based on findings from Public Agenda’s exploration of the most promising practices for scaling student success innovations at community colleges using its combined research and stakeholder engagement model.

The current study was prompted by an interim report by MDRC and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) titled “Turning the Tide: An Examination of Round 1 Achieving the Dream Colleges’ Progress After Five Years in the Initiative.” As part of its comprehensive analysis of the early experience of the first 26 community colleges that have participated in Achieving the Dream since 2004 as Round 1 colleges, the report concludes that the efforts of colleges that succeeded the most in making progress toward improved student achievement shared several key features, including broad-based engagement of college stakeholders; strong institutional research capacity; and, the feature in focus here, scaling student success and institutional change interventions.<sup>2</sup>

According to the metrics used by MDRC evaluators, student improvement strategies were defined as “large-scale” if they reached more than 25 percent of their intended target populations, “medium-scale” if they reached between 10 percent and 25 percent, and “small-scale” if they reached fewer than 10 percent of their target populations. By these measures, the majority of strategies implemented during the early experience of Round 1 colleges were small in scale (52% of strategies), and roughly one-third of the strategies were considered large-scale (31% of strategies).

### What Does “Scaling” Mean?

While benchmarks used in the MDRC interim report offer a valuable quantitative perspective of what it means for a program, service or policy to be “scaled,” colleges may find it useful to consider complementary definitions or indicators of scale. For instance, scale is achieved when...

- The program, service or policy has an impact on the majority of the defined population and there are measureable improvements or expected outcomes that can be documented.
- The practice or policy has become “business as usual” or has been “institutionalized” for the college.
- A college’s processes are modified to support the program or service (e.g., when the college’s recruitment/enrollment, scheduling and resource allocation decisions are impacted for sustainability).
- Institutional resources and policies are aligned in support of the program, service or policy.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this guide we use the term “intervention” as shorthand for strategies, programs, services and policies that are implemented to enhance student success and bring about institutional change.

MDRC's interim findings also showed that the intensity of a successful strategy has an impact on the likelihood of scaling, with high-intensity strategies more likely to result in bigger gains but less likely to reach large numbers of the target student population. MDRC defined "high-intensity" strategies as those that reached students for 10 or more hours per semester, "medium-intensity" as those that reached students for between 5 and 10 hours, and "low-intensity" as those that reached students for 5 or fewer hours. Because higher-intensity strategies "are more likely to meaningfully affect students' experiences, and thus are more likely to improve their outcomes in observable ways," finding ways to scale these interventions is a special challenge for colleges.

To help Achieving the Dream colleges work through the challenge of moving an intervention from small to large scale, Achieving the Dream asked Public Agenda to gather the best thinking about and promising practices for scaling interventions. To this end, Public Agenda conducted a multi-method study, consisting of a broad literature review, an online discussion and an in-person work group convening of diverse stakeholders, practitioners and experts in institutional transformation and higher education reform.

This guide offers recommendations and insights drawn from these sources and has been reviewed by work group participants and Achieving the Dream for content, accuracy and applicability to higher education broadly and Achieving the Dream community colleges specifically.

Throughout this guide we refer to the challenge of scale in the context of interventions that begin as pilots. This approach is consistent with the Achieving the Dream model of institutional transformation, which begins with college leaders committing to institutional change; emphasizes a data-informed intervention design and implementation process; promotes meaningful stakeholder engagement to refine and build commitment to the change process; supports an ongoing evaluation and improvement process for the implemented strategies; and then moves to scale those strategies that prove to be successful while establishing a culture of continuous improvement.

We focus here on situations in which pilots are scaled; however, there are instances where colleges have successfully "gone straight to scale," meaning the intervention was rolled out widely from the get-go. Community colleges may find it useful to forgo the pilot stage if there is already broad-based consensus that the intervention is necessary, well designed and doable for both implementers and support personnel. Going straight to scale may be beneficial if the stakes are small — in other words, the benefits of the intervention far outweigh the risks posed to students, faculty and staff — or if a college faces the risk of losing momentum around an initiative by starting too small.

## Defining "High-Intensity" Interventions

In addition to defining intensity by the number of contact hours per student, the level of intensity of an intervention can be characterized by its:

- Level of ambition
- Degree of "touch"
- Degree of faculty involvement
- Level of necessary coordination across elements or systems at the college (e.g., registrar, student services, system office)

## SECTION 1:

# Common Obstacles to Scaling

Though our main purpose in this guide is to provide principles, practices and tools that can be used to inform scaling efforts, we think it useful to begin by acknowledging the most common and serious obstacles to achieving scale. Consideration and amelioration of these issues at the beginning and throughout the institutional change process can help to support a college's efforts to scale in the long term. We encourage institutional change agents to think carefully and together about the ways these challenges manifest themselves in local contexts.

- ▶ *Lack of leadership and governance support:* If the problem being addressed or the intervention being piloted does not align with the broader institutional goals, mission or culture, it is unlikely that the governing bodies or leadership will agree to scale and ultimately sustain an intervention. Lack of effective leadership may manifest as few communications about the intervention among stakeholders, or a loss of momentum due to personnel turnover.
- ▶ *Lack of financial and human resources:* Securing adequate resources to scale a successful intervention is an ongoing challenge as institutions struggle to do more with less, and as faculty and staff face heavier workloads and more bureaucratic responsibilities.
- ▶ *Lack of underlying Institutional Research/ Information Technology (IR/IT) capacity:* Community colleges' IR and IT departments historically have been involved primarily with institutional effectiveness measures and accountability measures for their states and accrediting bodies; they are not departments designed for evaluative research on initiatives. Without adequate capacity to evaluate and present the results of ongoing assessment, it is impossible to tell whether an intervention should or can be scaled.
- ▶ *Intervention crowding:* The sheer volume of experiments, initiatives and interventions implemented at the college may be crippling for stakeholders and implementers. Faculty and staff may suffer from "initiative fatigue" or share the perception of a "change du jour." These experiences can complicate college reform efforts to either drop unsuccessful programs or scale those that are working.
- ▶ *Lack of faculty and staff support:* As a pilot expands and the institution requires more implementers on board, it becomes necessary to bring additional faculty and staff into the process to contribute in a significant way. Without growing numbers of faculty and staff advocates or champions, the energy and ability to carry a pilot to scale will ultimately suffer.
- ▶ *Intervention fidelity and adaptation:* For complex interventions, scaling a pilot so that it adheres to the pilot design may improve the chances of successful scaling but can be difficult under resource constraints. In settings where an intervention is to be scaled across a multi-campus or multi-college system, variation in local context and culture between colleges and campuses can add an additional level of complexity when deciding whether and how to scale.
- ▶ *High-intensity interventions:* Though high-intensity strategies are the most likely to result in large gains for participants, they are the least likely to reach large numbers of the target student population. For these interventions that require more faculty or staff time and institutional funds, securing adequate resources for scaling is an acute challenge.

## SECTION 2:

# Principles & Practices of Scaling Interventions

Though the challenges to scaling successful interventions may be met at various points along the path toward institutional change and improved student outcomes, there are a number of principles that, if followed, can bolster colleges' scaling efforts and counteract the derailers.

### 1. Design pilots with scale in mind

Too often, colleges start with a pilot without thinking through what it will mean to bring it to scale down the line. Rather than thinking about the pilot as a discrete initiative in and of itself, think about the pilot as a phase in the longer-term change process or as a strategy toward scale. With this perspective, a number of strategies can be implemented early on in the life of an initiative to increase its chances for scalability later on.

- ▶ During the design stage, start with a clear definition of the problem at scale, and frame the problem in terms of student learning. By defining problems as specifically as possible, the college can break down overwhelming problems into ones that are addressable while maintaining an understanding of the scope of the challenge ahead. For example, although a pilot may ultimately aim to tackle low developmental math completion rates, it is important to frame its purpose as accomplishing goals such as integrating more collaborative learning techniques in the classroom or establishing a learning community for students enrolled in both developmental math and developmental English.

- ▶ Use a program logic model to articulate the intervention's theory of change — that is, how the actions of an intervention will bring about the desired goal of institutional change or student achievement. Use this logic model to guide evaluation planning and as a means to regularly gauge progress toward the goal.
- ▶ Develop a formative evaluation plan that includes scalability as an intended outcome and draws a clear “line of sight” from the theory of change embodied in the intervention to the resources and commitments that will be required to sustain and scale the intervention in subsequent phases. Use formative evaluation as a touchstone during implementation to guide necessary revisions or improvements to the program model.

### What is a logic model?

A logic model is a graphical representation of the resources, actions and activities involved in an intervention and of how these elements are expected to achieve the stated objectives and outcomes over time.

*Evaluating Student Success Interventions*, Principles and Practices of Student Success, by Rigoberto J. Rincones-Gomez, provides a practical guide for Achieving the Dream colleges to follow when developing an intervention logic model as a foundation for evaluation.

The guide can be accessed through the Achieving the Dream website: [http://www.achievingthedream.org/docs/guides/ATD-Eval\\_Interventions.pdf](http://www.achievingthedream.org/docs/guides/ATD-Eval_Interventions.pdf)

## 2. Establish systems for gauging readiness

Colleges often find it difficult to articulate how they determine the right timing and conditions for scaling, suggesting that they “know when they know,” or that “it’s a gut feeling.” The right timing and conditions will depend on the intervention and the institutional context; however, identifying indicators of and a process for assessing readiness will help to ground the decision to move to scale. Recommended strategies include:

- ▶ Conduct feasibility/cost studies — Connect evaluation of a pilot to purposeful planning for scale through feasibility studies, and communicate the results broadly in order to build recognition that the college has done its due diligence in anticipating what scaling will involve.
- ▶ Perform systematic “debugging” — Adequate preparation for scaling will involve an audit of the various systems at the college that will be involved directly and peripherally in the intervention. Doing systematic checks during the decision-making process to move to scale will help to identify potential roadblocks along the way.
- ▶ Get the full picture and foster connections — Have the steering committee or team spearheading the initiative present to interdisciplinary groups in order to get multiple perspectives and identify potential derailers for design development at the pilot and, most critically, scaling stages.

- ▶ Cast a wide net — Look beyond higher education for tools and models that are helpful to guide readiness assessment and timing the move to scale. Examples of efforts to apply interdisciplinary models to the community-college context include the following:
  - In “Scaling Social Entrepreneurial Impact,” Paul Bloom and Aaron Chatterji<sup>3</sup> identify seven organizational capabilities that support successful scaling of a social enterprise, represented by the acronym SCALERS: staffing, communicating, alliance-building, earnings generation, replicating and stimulating market forces. As part of its Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), MDC has applied SCALERS at community colleges to help them identify scaling needs (Appendix 1). Clearly articulating scaling needs can help a college determine whether it is capable of supporting those needs, what is needed to build up the resources and when it anticipates that those needs can be filled so scaling can occur.
  - As part of its Postsecondary Success Initiative, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is developing a Framework for Scaling, Sustainability and Systems Change Applied to Higher Education. This framework offers a nine-step approach to selecting scaling strategies and draws on lessons from beyond higher education, including the Technology (Innovation) Adoption Lifecycle,<sup>4</sup> the concepts of the Chasm<sup>5</sup> and Disruptive Innovations,<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Gladwell’s *Tipping Point*,<sup>7</sup> SCALERS and two systems-change frameworks.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bloom and Chatterji 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Rogers 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Moore 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Christensen 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Gladwell 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Coburn; Grief, Proscio, Wilkins 2003.



### 3. Engage stakeholders effectively

Engaging stakeholders early and often gives institutional transformation and improved student achievement efforts a fighting chance at success and is pivotal when planning for, implementing and sustaining the scaling of innovations. What is more, broad-based engagement is needed to anchor institutional commitment and shore up interventions against disruptive staff changes or attrition. Strategies for effective engagement of adjunct and full-time faculty in institutional change efforts are offered in the first volume of the Cutting Edge Series; here we apply the lessons of meaningful and effective engagement to the scaling process.

- ▶ Put faculty and other key implementers front and center — Often, the individuals most involved in implementation will be faculty; however, depending on the intervention, other key players might include advisors, tutors, financial aid officers and even external players like employers. Where faculty are the main implementers, engagement and cultivation of faculty champions is essential to drive scaling. Growing the number of intervention advocates and implementers through hiring and engagement will build the necessary human resources for scale. Though executive leadership is essential, faculty and staff should be at the fore of efforts to scale and reallocate resources to make scaling possible.
- ▶ Engage the naysayers — Those who are resisting change and scale should be welcomed to taskforces and design processes. The critical voice can push efforts to be more data-informed and based in research and can help to identify the knowledge gaps or loopholes to be filled before an intervention is ready for scaling.
- ▶ Engage the “owners” of the problem — The owner (area or department at the college) of the problem should be a part of the solution selection, as the solution will be part of how that “owner” operates going forward. The owner of a problem can be identified by asking, “Where did the problem that we are addressing come from” or “Where does it reside?” Effective engagement can help pinpoint, and also expand, the ownership of a problem in ways that will support scalability down the line and avoid the assignment of blame.
- ▶ Engage students — Capturing the student voice is a critical component of understanding how an intervention is received among those most affected and of anticipating whether or not a small-scale intervention will be accepted if scaled. Student engagement can happen through such means as surveys, online assessments, qualitative assessments, invitations to participate in committees and faculty-student dialogues.
- ▶ Engage beyond “the usual suspects” — Looking beyond the most obvious stakeholders can be critical to forming alliances — on the campus or outside of it — which can provide resources (human or financial) to make scaling more feasible. For example, the Opening Doors Initiative at Chaffey College, led by Ricardo Diaz, uses graduate students from local counseling programs to increase the college’s student advising capacity. Graduate students from local programs provide quality support, receive clinical hours and are affordable. They do not eliminate full-time advisors because they are specifically focused on providing services to students involved in Opening Doors, but they do reduce the workload for full-time advisors.

- ▶ Throughout the pilot process, project leaders should maintain transparency and clear communication. Development of good answers to key questions of problem definition, prioritization and solution design will lead to improved accountability of design decisions and, down the line, will lead to better identification of those solutions that are and are not working.

#### 4. Align resources with the intervention you are scaling

Scaling a successful intervention requires that resources be shifted from the things that are not working to the things you want to see happen. Efforts to align resources for scaling will have the greatest chance of success if:

- ▶ The intervention is integrated with the college's mission — When the intervention is linked to the vision, mission and core values of the institution it has a fighting chance of sustainability. College leadership, faculty and staff are more likely to be on board with a new initiative if it is seen as one that clearly aligns with the college's overall goals and other successful programs already in place.
- ▶ The intervention is linked with other programs or initiatives that are underway and that are part of a larger institutional approach to student success — By aligning programs, institutions can leverage financial, human and intellectual resources that are needed to carry an intervention to scale. Alignment can also serve to buffer the initiative against the perception of a “change du jour,” which can impede the broad-based engagement and support necessary for scaling. Each intervention should be seen as a component of a larger, more complex student success strategy for the institution.

- ▶ You take the time to trim back and let go of unsuccessful practices to make room for the more successful ones that you are emphasizing — Just as alignment with other reforms reinforces the new practices you are scaling, removing those practices that are not successful and not aligned, such as an ineffective use of technology or a failing tutoring program, frees up attention and resources to help the new intervention achieve liftoff.
- ▶ The intervention is supported by functioning underlying systems — Colleges must demonstrate a willingness and ability to address underlying flaws in foundational systems. As interventions at the pilot stage uncover systemic problems in one or more underlying systems — for example, malfunctioning data collection in IR/IT, insufficient financial aid staffing or gaps in student services — institutions must address these issues prior to scaling.

#### 5. Build broad-based institutional research (IR) and data capacity

Developing a culture of evidence at the community college to inform student success and institutional change efforts requires strong institutional research capacity that is not only localized in a department but distributed across the college community. A robust set of promising principles and strategies for building IR and IT capacity in Achieving the Dream colleges will be presented in the third installment of the Cutting Edge Series. Here we offer those strategies that show promise in supporting scaling successful innovations.

- ▶ Devote time early on in the scaling process to developing a strategy, tools and training for evaluation of the scaled intervention. By articulating the criteria for success and how the colleges will measure successful implementation and achievement of intended outcomes from the get-go, colleges can

anticipate data needs, prepare resources and ensure that systems are in place to regularly monitor and track the progress of the scaled intervention. If the evaluation strategy is developed too late or after the intervention has already been implemented, opportunities for assessment might be missed and potential derailers might go undetected. Working with the Achieving the Dream Coach and Data Coach to develop an evaluation plan can help colleges determine how to execute meaningful and informative evaluation.

- ▶ In accordance with Achieving the Dream's core principles of institutional improvement,<sup>9</sup> build up IR's programmatic assessment capability so that it goes beyond data collection and analysis for accreditation or state accountability. Increasing IR capacity to achieve this may involve adding evaluation expertise to IR departments.
- ▶ Increase analytic capacity to disaggregate data. Segmentation of data allows for close analysis of how an intervention has an impact on different groups within the target population. Scaling does not always mean more of the same thing; it can also mean customizing and personalizing. Identifying impacts and achievement gaps among student groups is a central practice of Achieving the Dream colleges.
- ▶ Leverage adjunct and full-time faculty research expertise by involving faculty in data collection, analysis and interpretation.
- ▶ Increase the ability of college leaders to understand and communicate about data to the wider college community.

- ▶ Improve IR personnel's ability to translate and communicate data. Improved IR capacity to translate and communicate about data might occur through setting new or modified hiring criteria or providing professional development opportunities to IR personnel (for example, workshops or refresher courses such as those provided by the Association for Institutional Research).
- ▶ Contextualize the numbers, placing them in the context of the college community and the broader goals.

*Strengthening Institutional Research and Information Technology Capacity through Achieving the Dream*, by Rhonda Glover, provides a practical guide for Achieving the Dream colleges to review and build up their IR and IT functions.

The guide can be accessed through the Achieving the Dream website: [http://www.achievingthedream.org/docs/guides/ATD\\_IR\\_IT.pdf](http://www.achievingthedream.org/docs/guides/ATD_IR_IT.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Achieving the Dream is based on the premise that to improve student success on a substantial scale, colleges need to fundamentally change the way they operate. Achieving the Dream colleges that effectively promote student success adhere to four principles: 1) Committed Leadership, 2) Use of Evidence To Improve Programs & Services, 3) Broad Engagement, and 4) Take Action Aimed At Systemic Institutional Improvement.

## SECTION 3:

# Case Studies

### Scaling Case Management at South Texas College

The use of qualitative data from focus groups and essays paired with historical student outcome data and survey data led to the transformation of the advising process at South Texas College (STC). The college piloted the case management approach to student advisement with First Time in College (FTIC) students in the fall of 2005. The case management approach to advising includes four mandatory contacts during key periods of the semester.

1. Initial contact after mandatory orientation for registration
2. 4th week follow-up (originally at 6 weeks but adjusted based on the need to engage students earlier in the semester)
3. Priority registration
4. Final contact one week before finals

Preliminary results of the case management approach to student advising reflected a positive impact on retention, completion and other key student success indicators. As a result, the Comprehensive Advising Taskforce was charged with developing a plan to scale the case management approach to student advising to maximize the number of STC students impacted by the intervention. As a result, STC developed a Comprehensive Advising Model for Student Advising, which consists of a five-prong approach to student advising that leverages the case management approach to reach different segments of the student population.

1. FTIC (First Time in College) case management
2. Student success specialists (previously retention specialists)
3. Faculty advising
4. Probation/suspension counseling
5. Beacon mentoring

The FTIC case management program was used as a model to scale the number of students benefiting from case management. Faculty and staff underwent a semester long training to become certified Faculty Advisers or Beacon Mentors. The advisers, counselors and student success specialists also participated in the training. The Dean of Student Support Services developed a plan with the support of the academic deans and program chairs to transition students from the academic adviser to a faculty adviser through the student success specialists.

Over 450 faculty participated and were certified as faculty advisers, in addition to over 120 bachelor-level employees to serve as Beacon Mentors, who are assigned to a gatekeeper course. Each of these advising strategies requires that the “case manager” provide the four mandatory contacts outlined above. STC has successfully leveraged the student outcome data from the case management approach to student advising to scale the intervention by securing funding for additional staffing through grants.

- Department of Education, College Cost Reduction & Access Act
- MDC, Developmental Education Initiative

- Lower Rio Grande Valley Workforce Board, Nursing & Allied Health Student Retention & Success Initiative
- Department of Housing & Urban Development, Hispanic Serving Institutions Assisting Communities
- Texas Department of Agriculture, Parallel Pathways to Success

The ability to secure external funding gave the college the opportunity to scale up by supporting students requiring additional support. All new grant-supported staff are required to complete the advising training and to implement at minimum the four mandatory contacts with students.

### **Patrick Henry Community College's Cooperative Learning — SCALE-Up Model**

Early in the Achieving the Dream process, Patrick Henry Community College (PHCC) discovered the impact that the cooperative learning initiative was having on both student retention and overall success measures. However, this success was limited to a core group of full-time faculty who, combined with a handful of adjunct faculty, were utilizing this strategy to its maximum potential. Thanks to the Developmental Education Initiative Grant (DEI), PHCC has been able to scale up this initiative and take greater advantage of its ability to positively impact student success.

Most important, nearly all full-time faculty at PHCC have now completed the Fundamentals in Cooperative Learning workshop, which instructs them in ways of infusing cooperative learning into their courses. Moreover, 75% of adjunct faculty members have also completed the training, which is now offered twice per semester to both new

and veteran instructors. Additionally, PHCC has created an active learning institute called the Southern Center for Active Learning Excellence (SCALE), which trains not only the local instructors but also other community college faculty members. This academic year, 2010-2011, the institute was expanded to include not only a spring session but a midwinter session as well.

PHCC has also scaled its cooperative learning initiative as a methodology by which the student learning outcomes for its critical thinking initiative are met. The topic of critical thinking is not only a Virginia Community College System Core Competency, it also serves as the topic of PHCC's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for SACS reaccreditation. Accordingly, the central topic for the faculty and staff development sessions for the 2010-11 academic year has been the utilization of cooperative learning to enhance the critical thinking skills of the student. The trainings have been extremely successful and have been expanded so that they are now offered as part of the SCALE institute. Accordingly, PHCC has successfully scaled up its cooperative learning model as a primary mechanism by which the learning outcomes of other initiatives are met.

The use of cooperative learning is a major factor in the success of the college's efforts to accelerate developmental education math and English courses. The college is providing fast-track developmental math courses and a second format that allows developmental students to take college level courses along with their developmental coursework. Both methods require the use of cooperative learning. Accordingly, because of the funding efforts of both Achieving the Dream and DEI, PHCC is able to improve student success.

## SECTION 4:

# Critical Question Checklists

The following lists of critical questions are designed to assist colleges in their efforts to follow the Principles of Scale outlined above through Achieving the Dream's 5-Step Process for Increasing Student Success through Institutional Change.<sup>10</sup> These questions can be used as discussion starters at different levels and departments within the college, and they can be used as a means to gauge intervention and institutional readiness for scaling a particular innovation. They can also serve as an informal checklist of practices to follow through the process of institutional change and reform that will increase the college's chances of scaling successfully at a later date.

### Step 1: Commit

*The college's senior leadership, with support from the board of trustees and faculty leaders, commits to making changes in policy and resource allocation necessary to improve student outcomes, communicates the vision widely within the institution, and organizes teams to oversee the process.*

- What is the full scale of the problem we have chosen to tackle in our pilot?**
  - What proportion of the students impacted by the problem will be served by the pilot?
- Is this a systemic problem or is it localized in one department/office?**
- How does the chosen problem align with other problems/issues at the college?**
  - Are there connections or overlaps of problems in different departments or offices?
  - Are there existing initiatives or programs that are already addressing the problem on campus?
  - Are there existing initiatives or programs that are committed to or are currently addressing the problem in the broader community (e.g., K-12, P-20)?
- Who recognizes this problem?**
  - Are there existing initiatives or programs that are committed to or are currently addressing the problem in the broader community (e.g., K-12, P-20)?
- How committed are we to solving the problem at hand? What is demonstrating that we are committed to solving this problem?**
- What are the key components to the pilot design, and how are these components going to lead to our intended outcome?**
  - Have we developed a logic model to guide our program planning and execution?

<sup>10</sup> Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count 2009.

## Step 2. Use Data to Prioritize Actions

*The college uses longitudinal student cohort data and other evidence to identify gaps in student achievement. A key premise of Achieving the Dream is that once faculty and staff see that students overall are not achieving at desired levels and that certain groups of students are not doing as well as others, they will be motivated to try new approaches to improve student success. To ensure that they use their resources to greatest effect, colleges are encouraged to prioritize the student achievement issues they plan to address.*

- Does data inform our knowledge and decisions to move forward with the pilot?**
- How do we allocate resources within institutional research departments?**
  - What percentage of our resources goes to data collection for accreditation?
  - What percentage of our resources goes to initiative evaluation and assessment?
- What are our institutional research staffing strengths and gaps?**
  - Who are the adjunct and full-time faculty with research expertise who can be consulted about and integrated into data collection, analysis and interpretation activities to increase our IR department's capacity?
- Does IR have the analytic capacity to disaggregate data?**
- In addition to being data experts, are the IR and IT personnel effective data translators?**
- Is the IR department involved in the development of an evaluation strategy, tools and training for the pilot?**
- What is the evaluation plan for the pilot, and will we have the capacity to evaluate the program if it is scaled?**
  - How do we define value?
  - How will we track changes and program evolution?
  - How will we collect contextual information that maps onto the data?
- Is the IR department involved in the development of an evaluation strategy, tools and training for the pilot?**
- Are there professional development opportunities for IR and IT personnel to become stronger evaluators and data translators?**
- Are there professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to become stronger data users, analysts, evaluators and translators?**
- Do college leaders understand the data? What are the mechanisms for communication and learning between IR and college leadership?**
- Can college leaders communicate about the data to the wider college community?**
- Is data communicated in a way that places the numbers in the context of the college community and its broader goals?**
- For multi-campus colleges, is IR capacity centralized at one campus, or is it distributed across them?**
  - If the latter, how will we standardize program monitoring and evaluation practices?
  - Are information and data systems integrated in our multi-campus or multi-system college context?

### Step 3. Engage Stakeholders

*The college engages faculty, staff and other internal and external stakeholders in developing a limited set of focused strategies for remedying priority problems with student achievement, based on a diagnosis of the causes and an evaluation of the effectiveness of previous attempts by the institution and others to address similar problems.*

- Have we conducted broad-based engagement with frontline players and secondary players?
- Is broad-based engagement a part of our college culture?
- What are the barriers and challenges to meaningful engagement at our institution?
- Are there existing venues or opportunities in which to build in engagement?
- How do college leaders communicate with other stakeholder groups?
- Who is responsible for identifying and reaching out to various groups of stakeholders?
- When do we engage various groups of stakeholders in the life of institutional interventions?
- Around which types of initiatives or issues are different groups of stakeholders most likely to engage? How do we know this?
- Which stakeholders should be involved in defining and prioritizing the problem to address in our pilot?
- Are there professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to become stronger data users, analysts, evaluators and translators?
- Which stakeholders should be involved in developing solutions and prioritizing actions in our pilot?
- What actions can we take to expand the number of faculty, staff and student champions of our intervention?
- To what extent do stakeholders interact with institutional data?
- Do we have the right relationships between IR/IT, staff and faculty to use data to improve our chances of scaling successfully?
- Internally, do the people involved believe that scaling is possible?



## Step 4. Implement, Evaluate, Improve

*The college implements the strategies for increasing student success, making sure to evaluate the outcomes and using the results to make further improvements.*

- What resources does the intervention require at the pilot level and at the scaled level?**
  - Have we conducted rigorous cost analyses for both the pilot and the scaled intervention?
  - Will we offer any incentives during the pilot stage? Have we considered how incentive structures might change if the pilot scaled?
  - Do we understand which resources are most important at various steps in the process from pilot to scale?
  - Are there resource constraints that we anticipate and that we should keep on our radar as we plan for scale (e.g., temporary funding sources, upcoming elections or other clearly emergent political/fiscal volatility)?
- Should we train additional faculty or staff now in order to plan for future growth of the program or initiative?**
- What policies or practices might interfere with student uptake of the program?**
  - How can we proactively prevent these factors from derailing the program?
- What is the implementation support plan at the pilot level? Can and will this support plan be continued at scale?**
  - How will implementers provide feedback, communicate experiences and express program-related needs or concerns?
  - Will support extend to all of the departments and services that are involved in the initiative?
  - Will support be provided only to the primary implementers?
- Do we have an evaluation plan in place for our pilot, and are we following it?**
  - What is our system for identifying early warning signs that changes need to be made to the intervention?
  - Who is conducting monitoring and evaluation activities?
  - During the pilot, have we identified gaps or problem areas that can point us to where we need debugging of the underlying factors and systems (e.g., financial aid, student services, IR/IT)?
- After multiple rounds of checking and assessment, do we know that the intervention works and that it is making a difference that we value?**
  - How and with whom have we shared the evaluation results?
- To move the program to scale, have we considered or made modifications to the pilot design?**
  - How do these modifications impact fidelity to the pilot model? Are these impacts showstoppers?
  - Are there components of the pilot design that need to be adopted and not modified in order to protect the integrity of the intervention design?
- Can the SCALERS model be used to guide our assessment of readiness and also prepare us for scaling? Based on the application of this model, is scaling feasible?**

## Step 5. Establish a culture of continuous improvement

*The college takes steps to institutionalize processes for improving the impact of programs and services on student outcomes. Attention is given to how resources are allocated in order to bring new initiatives to scale and sustain proven strategies. Processes for program review, planning and budgeting are driven by evidence of what works best for students.*

- Does the intervention remain a top priority for the college? How will we routinely revisit this question?
- Is there alignment among college stakeholders? Are college leaders, trustees, faculty, staff and students on the same page about program effectiveness and feasibility at scale? How will we routinely revisit this question?
- Does the pilot, as it is scaled, still align with other programs at the college?
- Do we have institutionalized systems for obtaining program feedback, sharing lessons and identifying support needs?
- Are the underlying systems upon which an intervention depends regularly evaluated in terms of capacity, resource needs, challenges and successes?
- Do we have the capacity to deal with problems as they come up?
- How do the costs of programs compare to our planning projections?
  - Are there new opportunities for alignment with external sources of funding?
- Do we have a system to monitor and document evidence of program implementation and impacts?

## APPENDIX 1:

# Applying SCALERS at the Community College

In “Scaling Social Entrepreneurial Impact,” Paul Bloom and Aaron Chatterji<sup>11</sup> identify seven organizational capabilities that support successful scaling of a social enterprise, represented by the acronym SCALERS. With some modifications, MDC developed this application for community colleges.

SCALERS as Defined by Bloom & Chatterji	SCALERS at the Community College	Questions to Consider
<b>Staffing</b> “The effectiveness of the organization at filling labor needs...with people who have the requisite skills for the needed positions, whether they be paid staff or volunteers”	<b>Staffing</b> The effectiveness of the college at marshalling resources at their disposal to meet labor needs, including faculty, staff, & student employee positions, leadership & data collection & analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the strategy require labor-intensive &amp; skilled services?</li> <li>• What HR capacity is necessary to recruit, train, retain &amp; sustain the requisite expertise?</li> </ul>
<b>Communicating</b> “The effectiveness with which the organization is able to persuade key stakeholders that its change strategy is worth adopting and/or supporting”	<b>Communicating</b> The effectiveness with which the college is able to articulate clear goals & persuade faculty, staff, & students to adopt & support the strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of communication are required to ensure necessary participation in the strategy?</li> </ul>
<b>Alliance-Building</b> “The effectiveness with which the organization has forged partnerships, coalitions, joint ventures, and other linkages to bring about desired social changes”	<b>Alliance-Building</b> The effectiveness with which the college is able to engage the necessary parties, forming alliances that support the strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What supporting alliances exist within your institution?</li> <li>• What additional alliances could you seek out to increase the likelihood of successful scaling up?</li> </ul>
<b>Lobbying</b> “The effectiveness with which the organization is able to advocate for government actions that may work in its favor”	<b>Demonstrating Impact</b> The effectiveness with which the college is able to demonstrate to institutional, state, and federal decision-makers that strategies have substantial benefits, relative to costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What data do you need to demonstrate the impact of your strategy?</li> <li>• How does the current state policy influence institutional work?</li> </ul>
<b>Earnings Generation</b> “The effectiveness with which the organization generates a stream of revenue that exceeds its expenses”	<b>Resources</b> The effectiveness with which the college manages & secures resources to sustain the strategy’s infrastructure--staffing, space, technology, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beyond personnel costs, what resources are necessary to sustain the strategy?</li> <li>• How do state and Federal funding influence intervention support &amp; delivery?</li> </ul>
<b>Replicating</b> “The effectiveness with which the organization can reproduce the programs and initiatives that it has originated”	<b>Replicating Impact</b> The effectiveness with which the college develops institutional expertise & commitment to support quality implementation of an expanded strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What professional development system is necessary to ensure continuous improvement for faculty &amp; staff implementing the strategy?</li> </ul>
<b>Stimulating Market Forces</b> “The effectiveness with which the organization can create incentives that encourage people or institutions to pursue private interests while also serving the public good”	<b>Sustaining Engagement</b> The effectiveness with which the college can create incentives that encourage college leadership, faculty, staff & students to participate in & value the strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What incentives appeal to college leadership? Faculty? Staff? Students?</li> <li>• What incentives can you create to encourage adoption of, support for &amp; participation in interventions from these groups?</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> Bloom and Chatterji 2009.

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Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

[www.AchievingTheDream.org](http://www.AchievingTheDream.org)

**Achieving the Dream** is a national nonprofit dedicated to helping more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree. Data-informed, student-centered and built on the values of equity and excellence, Achieving the Dream is closing achievement gaps and accelerating student success nationwide by 1) transforming community college practices; 2) leading policy change; 3) generating knowledge and 4) engaging the public. Launched as an initiative in 2004 with funding from Lumina Foundation, Achieving the Dream is today the largest non-governmental reform movement for student success in community college history. With more than 160 community colleges and institutions, more than 100 coaches and advisors, and 16 state policy teams — working throughout 30 states and the District of Columbia — Achieving the Dream helps 3.5 million community college students have a better chance of realizing greater economic opportunity and achieving their dreams.



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