

CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING NEW DATA TOOLS

OVERVIEW

The use of data dashboards in education has been surging in recent years. As dashboards proliferate, it is important to critically ask ourselves: What are we hoping to accomplish? How will we know if we've accomplished it? What can we do if we fall short of our goals? This checklist provides a four-step framework for considering these questions when releasing new data tools.

□ STEP 1: DEFINE SUCCESS

In plain language, describe what you would hope to see during a successful rollout of the tool, and why that aspect of success is important.

- Consider how you would like to see data use change or evolve in your community. What shortfalls of the current system are you hoping to address with the new tool?
- Describe 'success' from multiple angles: for example, a rollout may include changes in data access, engagement with new resources, trainings, and services, usage of the new tool, and interactions within the community related to the new tool or data. Aim to identify between two and six aspects of success.
- Identify your target audience(s) for the tool, consider their history and data culture, and imagine what 'successful' use might look like for them. Briefly include context on their data history and culture in your description of success, if relevant.

□ STEP 2: CREATE SPECIFIC GOALS ALIGNED WITH YOUR DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Define specific, measurable goals or targets that can be used to assess your progress towards the aspects of success you defined in the first step over a defined time period.

- Aim to define between two and four measurable goals for each aspect of success you defined in Step 1. Having multiple measurable goals allows you to assess progress towards that aspect of success from several angles, and provides a built-in backup if there are challenges to acquiring the data to assess one of the measurable goals.
- Use benchmark data to determine targets when possible. They may not always be available, so don't be afraid to start with targets that are 'best guesses' and revise them as preliminary data became available.
- Don't limit the goals to data you currently have on hand. Think about what you really want to be able to measure in order to know if you're making progress on the aspect of success you defined in Step 1.

□ STEP 3: ASSESS OPTIONS FOR GETTING THE DATA TO MEASURE GOALS

Brainstorm a list of possible ways to collect the data to assess your goals.

- Consider a wide variety of data sources, including website and dashboard usage analytics and user lists, cognitive interviews, focus groups, targeted or broad surveys, and other less formal data collection mechanisms.
- Identify which goal(s) each data source could potentially help measure. Discard options that aren't well aligned to goals.
- Consider using a cost-benefit analysis to help select a set of strategies that, taken together, can measure the full set of goals, has a good trade-off between the effort to collect the data and the value of the data, and that makes good use of limited resources (such as volunteer early adopters).

□ STEP 4: EXECUTE AND REFLECT

Use the strategies selected in Step 3 to assess the goals set in Step 2, and reflect, revise, and repeat the cycle as needed.

- Consider what revisions are needed for the definitions of success and the measurable targets.
- In cases where goals are appropriate but not met, consider using a root cause analysis to understand and evaluate the reasons the goal was not met, and to plan a strategy to revise the tool or its associated supports to better meet the goal.