Institute of Education Sciences

State Approaches to Engaging and Sustaining Postsecondary and Workforce Partners	SLDS SPOTLIGHT March 2022 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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For more information on the IES SLDS Grant Program or for support with system development, please visit *http://nces.ed.gov/programs/SLDS*.

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Postsecondary education and workforce programs are among the most critical partners for statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) programs seeking to understand the long-term outcomes of education and training programs. Postsecondary institutions can include public community colleges and 4-year universities as well as private colleges and universities. State workforce programs help workers train for and find employment, and they collect valuable information about wages and employment patterns. Developing and maintaining close relationships with postsecondary and workforce programs allows SLDSs to answer pivotal questions about the results and effectiveness of state education and workforce policy.

This spotlight discusses how SLDS programs in Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Connecticut work with postsecondary and workforce agencies to share data, integrate and manage those data, and use their collective information to support state education and workforce initiatives and stakeholder priorities.

Iowa: Finding Common Ground for Data Sharing and Use

Iowa's SLDS partnership was formally established through the state's fiscal year (FY) 2012 SLDS grant project, but it built upon collaborations for previous federal grants and state projects. The partnership originally involved the Iowa Department of Education, which oversees the state's K12 schools and community colleges, the Iowa Board of Regents, and Iowa Workforce Development. The agencies have expanded their collaboration through additional grants from the SLDS Grant Program and Workforce Data Quality Initiative, and the partnership now includes the Iowa College Student Aid Commission and Iowa's area education agencies (AEAs).

Reasons for partnerships

Iowa's SLDS gives its partners access to cleaned, cross-agency longitudinal data that are matched according to mutually agreed-upon business rules. SLDS data cover student characteristics and demographics, high school coursetaking, standardized test scores, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion, and college enrollment and completion.

The SLDS's hybrid data model stores some integrated data long term in its Data Repository while also letting users match its records to additional datasets for ad hoc requests. This structure allows partner agencies to respond more quickly to questions or concerns from board members, legislators, and other stakeholders.

Participating in the SLDS gives contributing agencies a role in determining which data will be shared and

FIGURE 1. Iowa's SLDS partners use integrated K12, postsecondary, and workforce data to create resources like the Iowa Postsecondary Readiness Reports. The reports offer both public information and restricted-access data for authorized users.
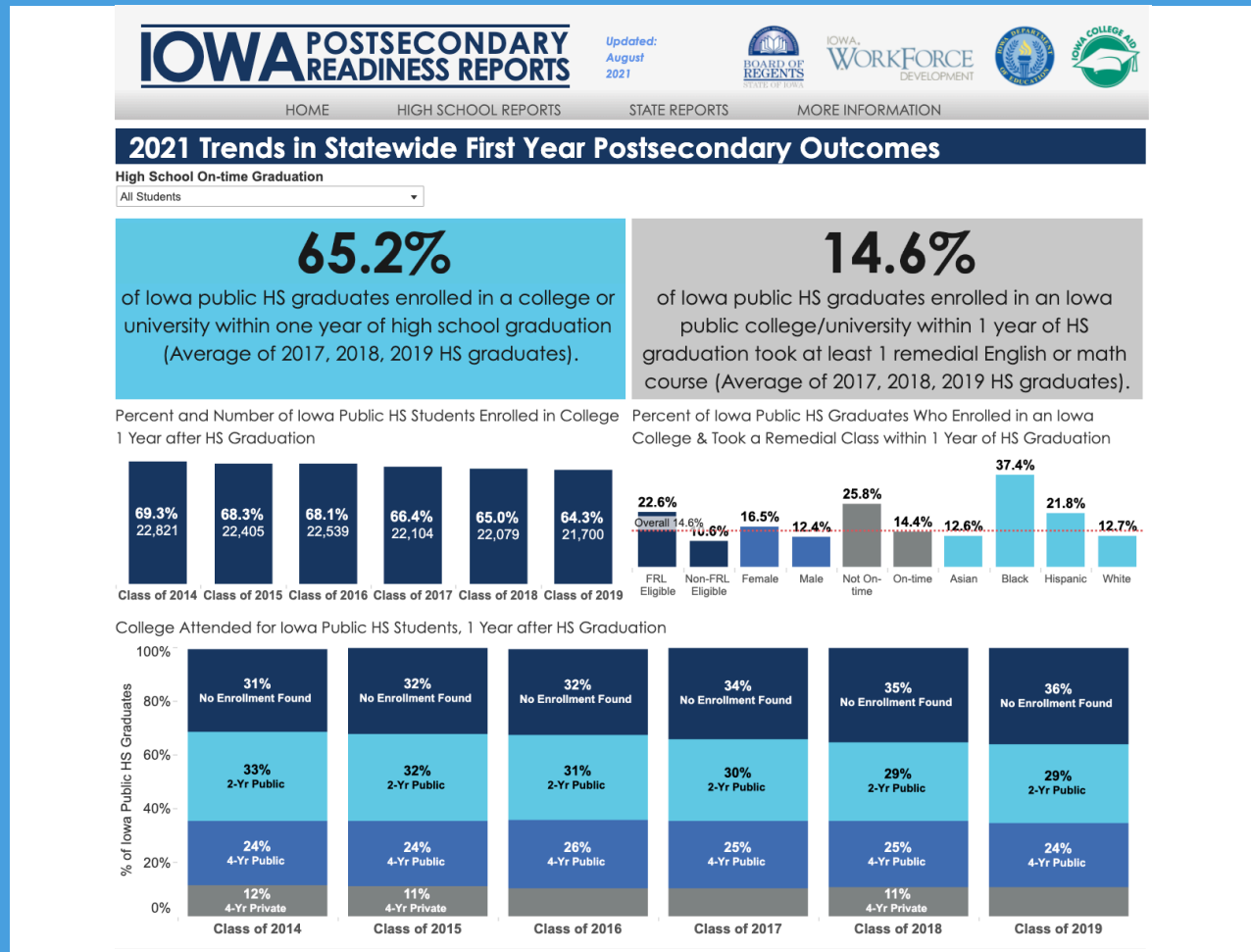
stored, who can access shared data, and the business logic used to match and clean the data. Members of the interagency SLDS Project Team also have the support and cooperation of their peers to solve data problems, answer questions, and improve data use.

Structure and processes for data governance and collaboration

Iowa's core SLDS Project Team includes data stewards from each partner agency and information technology (IT) personnel who support the SLDS at the Iowa Department of Education. Any data projects that fall within the SLDS Project Team's scope are subject to Iowa's Data Governance Policy. The team meets weekly to address issues brought up by its members. The SLDS project manager maintains the agenda and follows up on issues and action items raised during the meeting. Issues may be escalated to the SLDS Steering Committee, which meets quarterly.

Partner agencies form dedicated work teams for specific projects. These teams meet outside of the regular SLDS Project Team meetings and determine the goals, timelines, and division of labor for their projects. Requests to release SLDS data go through a formal application and review process with the SLDS Project Team and, if needed, the SLDS Steering Committee.

Successes and challenges

Iowa's SLDS has produced a number of reports and tools from its partners' shared data and analysis. The SLDS Project Team oversees production of resources including the Iowa Postsecondary Readiness Reports (**FIGURE 1**), Iowa Student Outcomes, and the restricted-access Postsecondary Readiness & Equity Partnership (PREP) Dashboard for the state's school districts and AEAs. Additional projects completed by partner agencies include the Community College Transfer Report, Regents Admissions Index Core

Courses list, FAFSA completion reports, Federal B14 reports, and other education outcomes reports.

The SLDS partner agencies share the general goals of increasing access to data, conducting more evaluation and research, and promoting the SLDS within the state. However, they also have had to figure out how to manage differences, including in the following areas:

- **Risk tolerance**. Sharing and using data with partners often leads to concerns about misuse of those data. All SLDS partner agencies are involved in developing clear, documented practices around data governance and security. These practices establish how the partners make decisions and how they can and cannot use different types of data and data products. Developing these practices collaboratively ensures that they are clear and mutually accepted, and it promotes trust and a shared vision among the partners.
- **Data sharing restrictions**. Agency-specific regulations may make sharing data with the SLDS more difficult. Iowa's SLDS partners involve relevant decisionmakers in initial conversations about potential data sharing opportunities to make sure that projects are legally and logistically feasible before beginning.
- **Turnover and staffing challenges**. The SLDS Project Team puts at least two team members in charge of documenting SLDS practices and procedures and encouraging others to create documentation. Creating records of practices and workflows helps minimize disruption to projects when key people leave. Documentation can include taking and storing meeting notes, noting the location of legal documents, and saving application code with comprehensive, explanatory comments.

Minnesota: Maintaining Engagement in a Growing Partnership

The Minnesota Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS) is governed by the Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership, which includes more than 40 organizations designated in state law. The organizations work together to inform state policy, research, and outcomes related to Minnesota's early care, education, and workforce programs.

Three state agencies–the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, Minnesota Department of Education, and Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development–manage the P-20 Education Partnership jointly. The agency commissioners and their designees make collaborative decisions about

funding, research priorities, stakeholder engagement, and IT system development.

Reasons for partnerships

SLEDS's goal is to help its partners and state leaders gauge the effectiveness of current programs and improve them to better meet the needs of Minnesota residents. The data system integrates information from K12, postsecondary education, and employment programs to identify the most viable pathways for Minnesotans to achieve successful outcomes in education and work. Sharing data with SLEDS also helps partners make better decisions to support education and workforce policies and practices, and it allows them to create a more seamless system of education-to-workforce services.

Structure and processes for data governance and collaboration

Each agency that provides data to SLEDS appoints a SLEDS coordinator to serve as a data steward, subject matter expert, and advocate for their agency or program. The SLEDS coordinators meet biweekly with IT staff and the SLEDS director at the Minnesota Office of Higher Education to plan projects, assess stakeholder engagement, and coordinate the work of SLEDS committees.
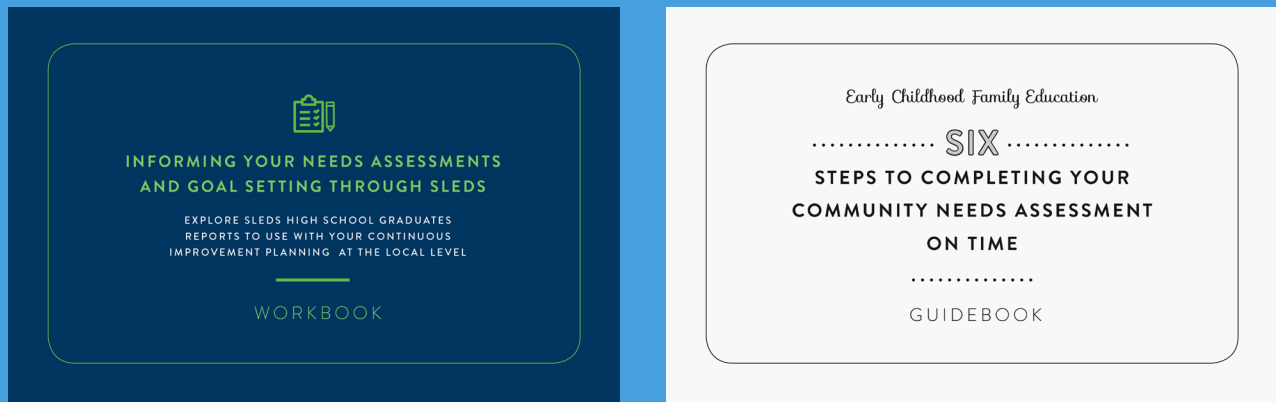
The SLEDS coordinators report to the SLEDS Governance Committee, whose members are appointed by the P-20 Education Partnership. The SLEDS Governance Committee oversees and advises the three principal agency partners on research priorities, data access for researchers outside the partnership, data system setup and functions, data security and privacy, stakeholder engagement, and research dissemination and use. The chair and vice chair of the SLEDS Governance Committee also sit on the SLEDS Executive Committee, which includes the commissioners of the three principal partner agencies or their designees.

The SLEDS Governance Committee appoints members to the SLEDS Research and Data Committee, which develops and reviews research and evaluation proposals, provides technical expertise on data linking and structure, considers system changes, reviews new data and research, and helps set research priorities.

Successes and challenges

As members of the P-20 Education Partnership, education and workforce programs in Minnesota can help set state research priorities, ask for specific studies or reports to be completed, advocate for

FIGURE 2. Minnesota's SLEDS and ECIDS programs offer numerous resources to help partner organizations use data, including workbooks, guidebooks, and regional data coaches.

INFORMING YOUR NEEDS ASSESSMENTS
AND GOAL SETTING THROUGH SLEDS

EXPLORE SLEDS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
REPORTS TO USE WITH YOUR CONTINUOUS
IMPROVEMENT PLANNING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

WORKBOOK

Early Childhood Family Education

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STEPS TO COMPLETING YOUR
COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT
ON TIME

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GUIDEBOOK

integrating new data into SLEDS, and lead outreach and engagement to other partners and stakeholders. Additionally, state and local education agencies in Minnesota have access to interagency data for a set of preapproved research purposes. Researchers from organizations within and outside the partnership can request access to additional data for studies.

Despite active efforts, both the P-20 Education Partnership and the SLEDS Governance Committee struggle to keep all partners engaged. The P-20 Education Partnership launched a series of engagement strategies to promote SLEDS as the state's primary research data source, including developing a set of priorities for SLEDS work, joining the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships, and considering designated funds to promote data literacy and use among partner agencies.

Eleven Minnesota organizations participate in the ECLDS-SLEDS Network, whose goal is to make it easier for local partners like school districts, colleges, and community organizations to use data from SLEDS and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) to inform policy and program decisions (**FIGURE 2**). The network's regional data coaches work with these partners to assess local data needs, provide training, and support research and data use.

Engaging its partner agencies through multiple avenues at the state and local levels also helps the P-20 Education Partnership navigate other challenges, such as

- building relationships and establishing trust among organizations;
- avoiding conflicting priorities;
- managing expectations;
- ensuring transparency in SLEDS work;
- responding to partner needs with data; and
- promoting buy-in, consensus, and name recognition for the data system.

## New Jersey: Establishing Shared Goals for Sustainability and Continuity

The New Jersey Education to Earnings Data System (NJEEDS) was created in 2012 and combines data from K12 education, postsecondary education, and workforce programs. The system is a partnership among the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, Higher Education Student Assistance Authority, and New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Reasons for partnerships

NJEEDS contains data about individuals' K12 and postsecondary education and workforce experiences and performance. The data include demographic information, education enrollment and program participation, assessments, instructional interventions, financial aid, degrees and certificates, wages earned, and industries and locations of employment.

Access to these data let NJEEDS partners learn about long-term outcomes and risk factors for the people whom they serve. For example, the New Jersey Department of Education can examine the experiences of career and technical education students in higher education and the workforce. Similarly, workforce programs can analyze how the educational achievements of workers affect their employment retention and earnings later.

FIGURE 3. New Jersey's SLDS partners use integrated postsecondary and workforce data to create resources like the Higher Education Outcomes Dashboard. Future planned reports will incorporate K12 data.
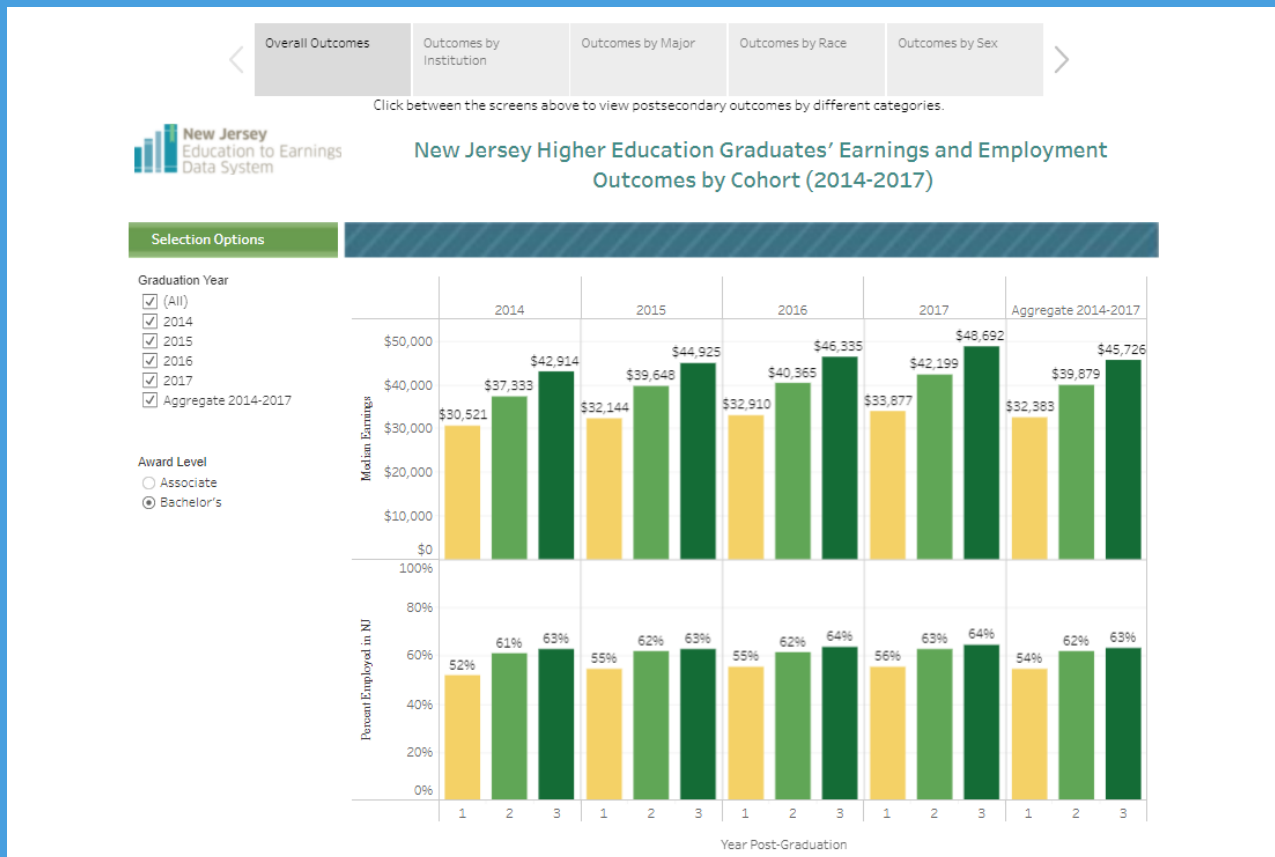
Structure and processes for data governance and collaboration

NJEEDS has two main governing bodies. The Executive Leadership Committee includes representatives from each of the data system's four lead partner agencies and meets monthly to provide strategic policy direction and guidance for NJEEDS's design, development, deployment, and maintenance. Members also use these meetings to notify one another of new initiatives or interests within their agencies. The Executive Leadership Committee has worked with Rutgers University to increase its capacity to oversee data governance, data administration, and report creation.

The second governance group, the Data Advisory Council, includes four data stewards from each partner agency representing different programs and areas of technical expertise. It is chaired by executive-level representatives of each agency and meets quarterly to ensure the quality, timeliness, and availability of NJEEDS data.

Successes and challenges

NJEEDS's partner agencies developed a shared research agenda to address critical questions requiring integrated, longitudinal data. In addition to publishing products using cross-agency data (**FIGURE 3**), the partners work with the Coleridge Initiative's Administrative Data Research Facility, a nonprofit multistate data sharing effort, to share de-identified administrative data securely with both internal and external researchers. A recent NJEEDS pilot project will offer researchers small grants to help answer important education and workforce questions related to

- learning loss, delays in obtaining credentials, and unemployment inequities during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- employment outcomes for people who stop out, transfer, or complete postsecondary credentials;
- current and projected teacher workforce information; and
- new measures of socioeconomic status derived from K12 and postsecondary agencies' administrative data.

After a new governor was elected in 2017, NJEEDS partners faced delays in administering the data system as key political appointees left their agencies and new stakeholders were briefed on the system's work. Although incoming state leaders supported NJEEDS, the system's governance structure relied heavily on partnerships formed with outgoing personnel. NJEEDS staff at Rutgers University helped maintain the system and bring new stakeholders on board during the transition. Since then, NJEEDS has broadened its outreach to a wider range of staff members at each partner agency through briefings and other communications. These efforts help boost awareness of the system and expand staff members' involvement in system development and maintenance.

Connecticut: Building Connections for Statewide Initiatives

Connecticut's SLDS, P20 WIN, draws data from 11 state agencies spanning early childhood care and education, K12 and postsecondary education, employment, and social services. In 2020, the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) became P20 WIN's lead administrative agency. OPM's leadership role allows the data system to take advantage of statewide legal and governance structures and to build relationships with existing P20 WIN partners as well as new organizations across the state. The partnership includes four state higher education agencies and the Department of Labor, which matches cross-agency data for the federated P20 WIN system in its data integration hub.

Reasons for partnerships

Connecticut state leaders and P20 WIN partners recognize the value of sharing data across agencies to evaluate state programs, assist in policymaking, and answer questions that require information from multiple sources. The P20 WIN Executive Board approved the system's Learning Agenda, which poses and prioritizes questions about college and career success; student readiness when entering kindergarten, high school, and postsecondary education; financial aid for postsecondary students; workforce training; and overcoming barriers to success such as homelessness and child welfare needs. The governor and agency leaders support data sharing and expanding P20 WIN to include additional state agencies and programs to support state initiatives. Individual state programs also see the value in working with P20 WIN to address questions from their own stakeholders.

Structure and processes for data governance and collaboration

The P20 WIN Executive Board is composed of executive leaders from data-contributing agencies or their proxies. The board meets quarterly and informs the system's vision and approach to data sharing. The Data Governing Board meets monthly and oversees P20 WIN's performance, system policies, and data management. Representatives from contributing agencies are policy experts who can make decisions about their agency's data. Many Data Governing Board members are involved in multiple cross-agency initiatives that allow them to connect P20 WIN work with other statewide priorities. Meetings for both boards are public, and their schedules, agendas, slides, recordings, and minutes are published online.

As a federated data system, P20 WIN has limited technical infrastructure outside its partner agencies' systems. However, since 2021 OPM has involved Connecticut's Bureau of Information Technology Solutions in P20 WIN's Data Governing Board. The bureau now has a formal role advising on technical upgrades and helping P20 WIN create security plans.

Data stewards from each agency meet as needed to respond to data requests. When data requests are approved and agreements are signed, data stewards compile relevant datasets and transmit the requested data to the Department of Labor for matching. The Department of Labor links the cross-agency data and removes identifying information. The contributing agencies must review and approve the match rate before releasing the data to the requester.

Successes and challenges

The need for cross-agency data to support the Learning Agenda and other statewide initiatives has paved the way for P20 WIN's interagency data sharing agreements and buy-in from state leaders. Recently, Connecticut's Two-Generational (2Gen) Initiative has encouraged broader and more consistent data sharing across agencies. The initiative's goal of addressing education, training, and social service needs of children and their parents has brought programs previously unfamiliar with P20 WIN into the partnership. OPM is developing a more structured and standardized onboarding process to introduce new partners to the system and train staff members on their roles and responsibilities.

P20 WIN leaders keep Executive Board members engaged through one-on-one meetings with agency leaders just before quarterly board meetings. P20 WIN's outreach and engagement coordinator reviews the meeting agenda with each leader and reminds them how data system efforts tie into their agency's priorities. For members of the Data Governing Board, P20 WIN holds learning sessions to share information and build relationships supporting state data efforts. Staff members also engage governing board members

in developing data sharing agreements and making operational decisions about P20 WIN. During the COVID-19 pandemic, holding meetings virtually has helped increase attendance.

Lessons Learned

SLDS programs in Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Connecticut offer the following lessons learned for building and sustaining successful data sharing partnerships with stakeholders.

Build value as well as trust

Gather examples and talking points illustrating how participating in the SLDS can benefit partners and the state as a whole. Demonstrating value can help convince prospective partners to join the SLDS and encourage state leaders to invest resources to sustain it.

Invest time in building relationships with prospective partners and learning about their interests and issues. These needs can form the basis for a research agenda. Additionally, understanding why agencies want to participate in the SLDS and their reservations about doing so will help the project team identify collective "wins" and anticipate challenges or concerns about future work.

Use written agreements to ensure clear understanding among partners

Spend time up front defining common terms–including "SLDS"–that might be interpreted differently across the partner agencies. Establishing clear and specific language from the start makes later conversations and collaboration easier.

Be transparent

Save meeting notes and other critical documents in a place that all partners can access. Establish processes collaboratively to make and document decisions so that everyone understands how the SLDS program works and knows what to expect.

Engage strong advocates

Designate a data governance board chair who will advocate for the system. In Connecticut, the chair of P20 WIN's Executive Board is a former state legislator who views the data system as a lobbying tool and an opportunity to build support from stakeholders, rather than solely as a data effort.

Share results at every opportunity

Take advantage of every chance to give SLDS partners and stakeholders research and data tools to inform their work and demonstrate the data system's outputs. Ensuring that partners use SLDS data to fulfill their organizations' needs helps keep them engaged and active in SLDS work.

Maintain constant communications

People often put complex and slow-moving data work on the back burner, but keeping SLDS work front of mind for partners is critical. It is harder to reengage idle stakeholders than to keep them engaged. Use every opportunity to engage state, regional, and local stakeholders, and create opportunities where none exist.

Additional Resources

Connecticut P20 WIN
https://portal.ct.gov/OPM/P20Win

Iowa Board of Regents
https://www.iowaregents.edu/

Iowa Department of Education
https://educateiowa.gov/

Minnesota Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS)
http://sleds.mn.gov/

New Jersey Education to Earnings Data System (NJEEDS)
https://njeeds.org/

SLDS Best Practices Brief: Elevator Speeches
https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/5907

SLDS Guide: Best Practices for Onboarding Individuals and Organizations to an SLDS Program
https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/20152

SLDS Issue Brief: Addressing Employment Outcome and Workforce Questions
https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/17952

SLDS Issue Brief: Engaging Potential P-20W+ Partners
https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/17615

SLDS Issue Brief: Modeling Occupational Pathways to Inform State Workforce Supply and Demand
https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/18069

SLDS Webinar: Using Partnerships to Build Buy-in and Increase Capacity
https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/19731