

Overview of the Briefs

This is one in a series of briefs to provide institutions with practical information on building a data-driven approach to career engagement and outcomes. These briefs may be used separately or together. The briefs are (current brief is in bold):

- [Foundations](#) builds common understanding and shared definitions.
- [Building a Data Driven Approach](#) identifies considerations for building the data infrastructure.
- **[Using Career Data](#) covers implementation strategies for different student populations.**
- [Dashboards, Reporting, and Benchmarking](#) discusses approaches to reporting, benchmarking, and continuous improvement.

This document addresses how to put the data infrastructure discussed in previous briefs into practice: how to begin analyzing engagement early enough to act on it, how to identify and close equity gaps between different student populations, and how to responsibly connect engagement data to outcome data for analysis.



USING CAREER DATA

DATA-DRIVEN CAREER ENGAGEMENT

Once effective, consistent systems for collecting engagement and outcome data are in place, the central challenge shifts from gathering information to using it well. This brief focuses on the practical work of analysis: who should be involved, how engagement data can be segmented to reveal equity gaps, and how engagement and outcomes can finally be examined together rather than reported in isolation.

Analysis is only as good as the questions it answers. Rather than producing dashboards or reports for their own sake, institutions get the most value when analysis is organized around a small number of recurring questions:

- Which students are engaging, and which are not?
- Does engagement correlate with better outcomes, and for whom?
- How does our institution compare to peers using the same definitions, and what should change as a result?

The sections below take up the first two questions in turn; the third question, how to compare against peers and act on the results, is addressed in the next brief's discussion of benchmarking and iterating on the model.

Analyzing Career-Related Data

Engagement is rarely distributed evenly across a student population. Disaggregating engagement data by student characteristics often reveals systematic gaps that deserve targeted intervention. National research from the Strada Education Foundation found that only about one in five first-generation seniors reported networking with alumni or industry professionals in their field, compared to nearly a third of continuing-generation peers — illustrating how an engagement gap measured today can be a leading indicator of an outcome gap that would otherwise only become visible after graduation. Common subgroups worth disaggregating engagement data by include:

- Racially minoritized populations
- Gender
- First-generation students
- Transfer students, who may arrive with fewer semesters to engage

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- Students in certain majors (e.g., humanities programs with less direct industry pipeline than business or engineering)
- Commuter and part-time students, who may have less time on campus for in-person events
- Pell-eligible and low-income students

Once gaps are identified, institutions can design targeted outreach — for example, embedding career advisors directly within high-need colleges, or offering evening and virtual appointment hours for commuter students — and then track whether engagement among that subgroup improves over subsequent terms.

Engagement Metrics Tracker

Use this template to track engagement metrics by term and student segment. Replicate for each cohort or college as needed. Note: outcome metrics should live in the separate tracker below.

ENGAGEMENT METRICS TRACKER

Metric	Target	Term 1 Actual	Term 2 Actual	Term 3 Actual	Notes

Outcomes Metrics Tracker

Use this template to track outcome metrics by term and student segment. Replicate for each cohort or college as needed.

OUTCOMES METRICS TRACKER

Metric	Target	Term 1 Actual	Term 2 Actual	Term 3 Actual	Notes

Equity Gap Review

Run this checklist annually. Because engagement is a leading indicator, equity gaps in engagement data should trigger targeted outreach before they become equity gaps in outcome data. Record both the current rate and the prior-year rate to assess whether gaps are closing or widening.

EQUITY GAP REVIEW CHECKLIST

Subgroup	Institution Engagement Rate	Subgroup Engagement Rate	Gap	Subgroup Outcome Rate	Gap vs Overall Outcome Rate	Action Planned
Gender						
Racially-minoritized students (disaggregate by group)						
First-generation students						
Transfer students						
Pell-eligible students						
Commuter / part-time students						
Lowest-engaged major(s)						
Other identified subgroup						

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With each review, please consider the following:

- Have we disaggregated engagement rates by populations listed above?
- Have we disaggregated outcome rates by populations listed above?
- Have we identified majors or colleges with engagement rates significantly below the institutional average?
- Have we set a specific, time-bound target to close the largest identified gap?

Closing the Loop: Connecting Engagement to Outcomes

The Foundations brief established engagement and outcomes as two distinct categories that must be tracked separately. This section addresses the one place they should be deliberately brought together: analysis. One of the most valuable analytical steps, and one that many institutions skip, is connecting engagement data to outcome data at the student level to ask: did students who engaged with career services have better outcomes than those who did not, controlling for major and other relevant factors?

While establishing a causal relationship is useful, even a straightforward comparison of career outcomes rates and starting salaries across students with high, moderate, and no recorded career engagement — broken out by college or major — offers valuable evidence of what is and is not working. Institutions with more analytical capacity can extend this by using regression models that control for GPA, major, and demographics to help isolate the likely effect of engagement itself.

Did students who engaged with career services have better outcomes than those who did not?





A note on causality

Students who proactively seek out career advising may simply be more motivated to begin with, which can inflate the apparent effect of engagement. Where possible, compare similar students – same major, similar GPA band – with different engagement levels, and be transparent about this limitation in reporting rather than overstating causal claims.

Engagement-to-Outcome Comparison Template

Use this worksheet to run the comparison described above – career outcome rates and salaries by engagement level, broken out by major or college.

ENGAGEMENT-TO-OUTCOME COMPARISON TEMPLATE

Student Group / Major	Engagement Level	N (Count)	Career Outcome Rate	Median Starting Salary	Notes on Comparability