

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 communicate the resulting data to different audiences, how to benchmark against peer institutions, and how to use the evidence each year to improve programming and resource allocation.



DASHBOARDS, REPORTING, AND BENCHMARKING

DATA-DRIVEN CAREER ENGAGEMENT

Dashboards and Reporting

Just as engagement and outcome metrics should never be blended into a single score, they should also be visually separated on every dashboard — typically as two clearly labeled panels or tabs — so a viewer can see at a glance whether a low number reflects weak student participation or a weak result, since the two call for entirely different responses. Different audiences need different views of the same underlying data:

TABLE 1. DASHBOARD AUDIENCES AND REPORTING CADENCE

AUDIENCE	WHAT THEY NEED	SUGGESTED CADENCE
Career services staff	Operational detail: appointment volume, no-show rates, case-loads by advisor	Weekly
Deans / department chairs	Engagement and outcome rates by major, comparison to prior years	Per term
Provost / senior leadership	Institution-wide career outcome and salary trends, equity gaps by subgroup	Annual, with mid-year update
Board of trustees / state system office	High-level outcome summary tied to strategic plan and funding metrics	Annual
Accreditors	Documented methodology, response rates, and trend data over multiple years	Per accreditation cycle

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Dashboards should always disclose survey response rates and any known limitations in coverage; a career outcome rate based on a 35% survey response rate should never be presented without that context, since non-respondents are often disproportionately unemployed or underemployed.

DASHBOARD AND REPORTING CALENDAR

Audience	Report Content	Owner	Due Date	Distribution Method



Benchmarking

Public institutions benefit from comparing their data against external benchmarks rather than evaluating performance in isolation:

- [The National Association of Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#) First-Destination Survey standards, which many public universities use to standardize survey methodology, outcome categories, and definitions; NACE's current guidance favors the term "career outcome rate" over "placement rate," since not every graduate outcome reflects an institution actively placing someone in a job.
- [State system-level benchmarking](#), where multiple public universities within the same state system (such as the University System of Georgia, the State University of New York system, or the University of Wisconsin System) compare outcome metrics using shared definitions.
- [Peer-group comparisons](#) among institutions of similar size, mission, and student demographics, often coordinated through state higher education coordinating boards.

Benchmarking is most useful when institutions adopt the same definitions as their peers; a career outcome rate calculated differently than a peer institution's is not a fair comparison, even if both numbers look similar.

Iterating on the model for review

A data-driven career engagement program is never finished. Each year should include a structured review cycle:

1. Review the prior year's engagement and outcome data together.
2. Identify which programs or interventions showed the strongest association with improved outcomes.
3. Identify persistent equity gaps by subgroup.
4. Reallocate staff time, advising capacity, or programming budget toward what is working.
5. Sunset or redesign activities that show high participation but no measurable outcome association.
6. Update the data collection plan itself if new gaps are discovered.

ANNUAL REVIEW CYCLE WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to document each step of the annual review cycle described above, with a clear owner and target date for follow-through.

Review Step	Key Findings	Actions Taken	Owner	Target Completion
1. Review prior year's engagement and outcome data together.				
2. Identify strongest associations with improved outcomes.				
3. Identify persistent equity gaps by subgroup.				
4. Reallocate staff time, advising capacity, or budget.				
5. Sunset or redesign low-impact activities.				
6. Update the data collection plan.				

Closing Note

Building a data-driven career engagement program is an iterative, multi-year effort rather than a single project with a defined end date. To start, establish a shared definition of career engagement and invest in connecting siloed systems, while being transparent about the limitations of your data. Then, use the resulting evidence to inform resource allocation.

The templates in this guidebook are meant to be a starting point — adapt them to reflect your institution's own systems, student population, and strategic priorities.