



Community Colleges Must Be *Resilient by Design*

SYSTEM AND STATE DISCUSSION TOOLKIT

Business as Usual No Longer Works. Plan for a Future of Change.



SYSTEM AND STATE DISCUSSION GUIDE

No college or system of colleges, no matter how healthy it currently may be, likely can continue to operate with business as usual; all institutions will be pressured to adapt or risk becoming irrelevant or insolvent, creating gaps in opportunities for students and communities and causing system-wide disruption. Moreover, these changes will take place at a pace that is faster than colleges are used to, requiring rapid and ongoing adaptation.

This reality may seem daunting, but all of these factors also present an opportunity for community colleges to recommit themselves to rapid responsiveness in alignment with the public's ever-changing needs. In doing so, with proper support from their system and state agencies, they can respond in a way that doubles down on the traditional mission of community colleges to propel economic mobility and growth for individuals and communities and to help lay the foundation for civic society.



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Why Community Colleges Are Planning for a Future of Change

The next decade will present pivotal moments for community colleges. While individual colleges and the field as a whole have made critical improvements, the accelerating pace of change — in the labor market, the economy, student demographics, and other forces — means that colleges will continually face both familiar and new challenges. Those challenges will be widespread and disruptive enough that strong support and aligned incentives from systems and state agencies, as well as a coordinated approach, will be invaluable.

The report *Resilient by Design* identifies the forces that will shape higher education as the pace of change accelerates and the magnitude of change increases. It was prepared by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) on behalf of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

As *Resilient by Design* explains, colleges, systems, and states must begin planning for a future that will be quite different from the present. More important, conditions will continue to evolve and present fresh challenges — even as expectations for accountability to both students and taxpayers rise.

This new future demands that colleges, systems, and states develop processes for evaluating, discussing, and rethinking their own policies, practices, priorities, and performance. It compels colleges to plan for change while ensuring a quality learning experience for all students. It compels systems and state agencies to move beyond a compliance orientation and consider how to effectively leverage all the assets represented by their community colleges in a collective and collaborative manner. Most of all, it requires everyone in the college ecosystem to think strategically about how to best use their resources — time, money, and talent — to meet the community college mission in a rapidly shifting future.

[Download](#) and read the *Resilient by Design* report.



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How Systems and State Agencies Can Support Their Colleges in Rapidly Changing Conditions

In supporting community colleges and ensuring that state priorities are met, systems and state agencies with coordinating or governing responsibilities will need to navigate the challenging conditions ahead with care. These organizations will continue to play an important role in ensuring accountability and compliance with state and federal policy. Yet systems and state agencies also hold unique promise for developing and implementing solutions to the challenges ahead if they operate with a value-added orientation and a commitment to scale.

Systems and state agencies can make vital contributions to meeting the needs of students and the public in the challenging years to come. To do so, they must ramp up their attention to these critical activities:

- ▶ Creating new opportunities for shared services and collaborative programming among institutions;
- ▶ Disseminating promising practices;
- ▶ Providing support for institutional change management;
- ▶ Engaging employers and other external stakeholders to jointly address their needs;
- ▶ Ensuring straightforward access to relevant data; and
- ▶ Tuning incentives to support constructive institutional dialogue and change.



Key Points From the *Resilient by Design* Report

The coming years will see unprecedented change on several dimensions that are critical to community colleges' success in continuing to power American economic prosperity and societal health.



FORCES AFFECTING COMMUNITY COLLEGES

- Enrollment declines and changing student audiences
- Financial pressures
- Workforce needs
- Student needs and expectations
- Intensifying competition
- Supporting communities
- Advancing technologies

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

- Measuring success and demonstrating value
- Community-scale impacts
- Meeting employer needs and expectations
- Meeting student needs and expectations
- Teaching and learning
- The business model

Resilient by Design identifies seven forces that will affect the way colleges operate, fund their work, and serve their students and communities. It then discusses six categories of implications for colleges as these forces shape the future.

The report is clear that to thrive in this emerging future, systems and states will need to support colleges to do the following:

- ▶ Unabashedly demonstrate their value with quantitative data. Show that they generate a positive return on investment (ROI) for individual students and taxpayers and that they improve their communities. Demonstrating these impacts will require new ways of measuring student success, including post-graduation outcomes.
- ▶ Adapt their curricula to meet workforce needs with speed and through more systematic involvement from employers.
- ▶ Develop more symbiotic relationships with employers that lead to hands-on workplace learning embedded in programs.
- ▶ Prioritize the needs of the emerging student populations and adjust their approaches accordingly.
- ▶ Adopt new ways of teaching and learning.
- ▶ Add short-term credentials that are tailored for an economy that requires regular reskilling or upskilling while simultaneously eliminating barriers between noncredit and credit programs.
- ▶ Ensure that graduates are prepared for employment at living-wage jobs or for seamless transfer to baccalaureate and graduate programs that lead to living-wage jobs.
- ▶ Evolve their business models to maintain financial sustainability amid changing revenues and expenses.
- ▶ Collaborate with one another to ensure the availability and affordability of relevant programs.
- ▶ Make the use of key data a standard part of day-to-day work and embed a data-informed approach in regular operations and institutional culture.

Throughout the report and this guide, the need for implementing these ideas is explained more fully, and the discussion questions provide opportunities to explore how states and systems can support colleges in planning strategically for the future.

Key Points From the *Resilient by Design* Report

Whichever themes you discuss, keep the core goals of community colleges — completion, transfer, and living-wage jobs — in mind. Also remember that community colleges most often succeed through collaboration, connection, and an abiding focus on students.

Completion and Transfer Remain Key Goals

Resilient by Design calls on community colleges to more openly embrace their responsibility for ensuring living-wage employment opportunities, and it notes that this work should include creating more shorter-term credentials. Yet data indicate that the baccalaureate degree remains a significant milestone for upward mobility. Thus colleges should not lose sight of degree completion and seamless transfer as goals.

As the future unfolds, colleges, systems, and states should keep these observations in mind:

- ▶ **The traditional approach to education and careers is outdated.** A student's educational journey no longer proceeds directly from high school to a community college, then perhaps a university, culminating with a job. Instead, students compile learning from many online and in-person sources — including multiple providers, a mix of credit and noncredit programming, and internships and co-ops — simultaneously. Moreover, the rapidly changing nature of work will require everyone to be lifelong learners; even those who possess bachelor's and graduate degrees will need additional education and upskilling from time to time throughout their careers.
- ▶ **Guided pathways continue to be essential.** Colleges using the guided pathways model plan with students' end goals in mind and create structures that keep students on track to reach those goals. The strategy has been shown to improve student retention, graduation, and transfer outcomes, yet work remains to be done. Despite evidence that guided pathways are effective, many colleges and systems have not implemented them at scale. This transformational reform requires colleges to change the ways they operate, so it should be part of any changes discussed in connection with *Resilient by Design*.
- ▶ **Jobs that provide living wages must be a clear priority.** Colleges will need to ensure that every student has a clear roadmap to well-paying jobs and a career related to their chosen program of study. The pathway should lead to whatever credential is required to meet the student's goals.
- ▶ **Simplifying transfer is critical.** Transfer must be straightforward, penalty free, and guaranteed. Colleges must pursue articulation arrangements that guarantee the transferability of entire certificates, degrees, and blocks of coursework among multiple institutions rather than course-specific articulations negotiated on a bilateral basis. Because this work requires cooperation and compromise from both community colleges and universities, it may require state- or system-level leaders to mandate change and insist on accountability from all institutions.



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Key Points From the *Resilient by Design* Report

More Collaboration Will Open New Doors

Community colleges' many strengths include their local ties and their ability to respond to local needs. See pages 25–26 and 34–35 of *Resilient by Design*.

In the coming decade, collaboration will be even more important to save costs, expand services, and meet changing or emerging needs. More collaboration can also help community colleges overcome challenges of scale and better withstand intensifying competition from providers outside of traditional institutions of higher education. These nontraditional providers include for-profit entities, corporations that are standing up training programs for their own employees, and online sources that provide (often free) educational content.

In addition to expanded partnerships with employers and community organizations, which are discussed throughout this guide, colleges, systems, and states can consider other solutions such as:

- ▶ Multiple institutions delivering programs and services in collaboration. This structure can yield enhanced levels of service at lower costs.
- ▶ Partnering with other institutions to offer programs that a college discontinues or that would otherwise be unavailable. These collaborations can expand the educational offerings available to students at all of the colleges involved while keeping costs reasonable for individual institutions and for students.
- ▶ Building shared capacity to unlock tools and capabilities that institutions will struggle to create on their own. States and systems can leverage their scale to advance important changes. For example:
 - » Introducing Learning and Employment Records (LERs), which are auditable records that summarize or provide a portfolio of a student's learning and work experience. LERs remain under the control of the student rather than the institution. These records reflect the reality that students gain knowledge and skills in multiple settings, and students can use them to fully document what they know and can do.
 - » Developing instructional resources and administrative tools for the effective use of AI.



Making the Most of This Discussion Guide

Community colleges face an uncertain and rapidly changing future that will require resilience from their faculty and staff, their students, and the system- or state-level structures that support them. *Resilient by Design* details future changes and suggests how community colleges might best position themselves for that changing future.

This discussion guide draws from the report so your system or state can use the report's findings to foster important conversations, plan strategically, and support colleges in doing the same. To maximize the impact of your system- or state-level discussions, invite college leaders to participate so you can understand their priorities and incorporate their perspectives.

Each section addresses a central theme of the report. All of the themes are interconnected. They are:

- ▶ Meeting Workforce Needs ... Even as They Regularly Change;
- ▶ Managing Enrollment ... Amidst Shifting Student Demographics;
- ▶ Meeting Student Needs ... Even as Needs Grow and Evolve;
- ▶ Using Advancing Technologies ... for Colleges and Students;
- ▶ Reimagining Teaching ... and Ensuring That Students Learn Relevant Skills;
- ▶ Using Data in New Ways ... to Improve Colleges' Work and Prove Colleges' Worth; and
- ▶ Rethinking the College Business Model.

The questions are designed to inspire strategic thinking, and your answers likely will require large-scale change. While your agency or system office probably will not address all aspects of this report and discussion guide at the same time, you should be thinking about how changes in one area will affect — or ultimately lead to additional changes in — other areas.

Thus, while examining themes separately is practical, you also should bear in mind how the changes you identify will be part of the greater whole. Toward that end, consider how your system's or state's oversight of its community colleges might more effectively steer the colleges to better support the changes you identify.

In other words, to make your new ideas possible, how should your agency, and the colleges in your system or state, think about:

- ▶ Adapting approaches to teaching?
- ▶ Changing or expanding support services?
- ▶ Expanding the capacity to collect, assess, and use data?



Making the Most of This Discussion Guide

- ▶ Collaborating with employers?
- ▶ Collaborating with your community?
- ▶ Collaborating across institutions?
- ▶ Changing budgeting?
- ▶ Adjusting business models?
- ▶ Maintaining quality as practices and processes evolve?

NOTE: Your conversation facilitator will tell you which section(s) of this guide your discussion will cover. Your discussion may not include all of the questions in this guide, but it should always include questions that have this arrow ▶ symbol.



Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

MEETING WORKFORCE NEEDS ... Even as They Regularly Change

Relevant pages of *Resilient by Design*:

- 20–22
- 35–38

Workforce development through education is at the core of what community colleges are expected to do, and they must do it well. To build the nation's workforce for an uncertain future, community colleges must equip students with skills that enable them to meet immediate workforce needs and ensure their long-term resilience as skills and jobs evolve.

Students will need to learn both short-term and long-term work-relevant skills. Colleges must prepare students to step into a living-wage job immediately upon graduation and equip them with foundational skills such as teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial thinking that will serve them well even as technology shifts and as they change careers.



Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

While data indicate that the baccalaureate degree remains a significant milestone for upward mobility, both employer and student needs are changing.

- ▶ More employers are moving toward skills-based hiring at the same time that the pace at which technology is altering those skills accelerates. Colleges will be expected to keep up with the speed of industry.
- ▶ Driven especially by adult learners, student demand is increasingly moving toward credentials that are highly connected to the workplace and can be completed more quickly and at a lower cost than traditional degrees.
- ▶ Colleges need to provide all students with up-to-date, marketable skills as well as instill the ability to continuously learn and adapt.
- ▶ Technology, including but not limited to artificial intelligence (AI), is rapidly evolving, which means employers constantly need new skills from their workforce. Some occupations are changing, while others are disappearing or emerging.
- ▶ Even beyond AI-specific skills, the fast-moving and sweeping changes mean that colleges will need to prepare students for future workplaces that are different from the ones of today in unknown ways. Students will need to enter the workplace with durable skills that allow them to adapt as their tasks change within a particular job, as entire occupations disappear, and as new opportunities are created.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

- ▶ **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect our system's ability to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for system-level conversations?

What role should the system play in engaging employers in conversations about workforce needs, especially needs that span multiple institutions' service areas?

What changes in system policy and practice will promote the sharing of academic programs between system campuses — sharing designed to ensure that regional workforce needs are addressed in a timely fashion and the system is using its resources effectively?

How can our system encourage more widespread adoption of work-based learning? How can the system be most helpful in arranging work-based learning opportunities?

How might we encourage an effort at the system level to support changing general education so that it integrates the workplace skills employers most value in clear and practical ways?

» How can we ensure that colleges better connect content in general education coursework to students' areas of study?

What priorities should our system set for advocating for state-level policy change? What changes in state policy are the most important to align community college education with workforce needs?

What programming or services do we need to stop doing, or scale back, to make resources available for practices that will allow our colleges to better serve future students and better meet emerging needs?

What aspects of our current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

» Which system policies and practices make it more difficult for colleges to rapidly adapt their programs to changing workforce needs?

» How can we balance the needs of colleges to innovate rapidly in their local contexts with the goals of system-level efficiency, coordination, and consistency?

What data do we need to better understand this topic within our system? How would we measure our system's success in bridging the gaps between college curricula and the needs of the workplace?

-
- ▶ **What additional data should the system provide to colleges to improve institutional responsiveness to workforce needs?**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL LEADERS

- ▶ **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect the ability of community colleges in our state to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**
-

What aspects of this topic are most important for statewide conversations? How should this topic be featured in statewide community college convenings or communications?

What changes in state policy and practice will promote the sharing of academic programs between colleges — sharing designed to ensure that regional workforce needs are addressed in a timely fashion?

How can the state's approach to resource allocation provide incentives for institutional practices that would be more responsive to workforce needs?

What is the role of the state-level entity in identifying regional workforce needs?

What aspects of our state's current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

» Which state policies and practices make it more difficult for colleges to rapidly adapt their programs to changing workforce needs?

What data do we need to better understand this topic within our state? How would we measure our system's success in bridging the gaps between college curriculum and the needs of the workplace?

- ▶ **What additional data should the state provide to colleges to improve institutional responsiveness to workforce needs? Does the state have access to relevant data, especially wage and employment data, that colleges should have?**

MANAGING ENROLLMENT ...

Amidst Shifting Student Demographics

Relevant pages of *Resilient by Design*:

- 14–17
- 41–42

The decline in the number of traditional-age students has long been predicted and is starting to affect all of higher education.

High schools nationally have begun (or are about to begin) producing fewer graduates. The nation's high school class of 2041 will be nearly half a million students smaller than the 2025 graduating class. The specific timing varies by state and region, but this national trend ultimately will affect every state.

Compounding the decrease in high school graduates is a decline in college-going rates.

Between 2015 and 2022, the percentage of high school graduates who enrolled directly in college across all sectors fell — even though the number of high school graduates mostly grew during this period.

Because the direct-from-high-school population serves as the most predictable source of enrollment for most colleges, including community colleges, these changes will significantly affect how community colleges recruit and serve students. Colleges will have to either shrink or find new student audiences, most notably by increasing the number of adult and dual enrollment students. In fact, the number of U.S. adults — people aged 25 to 44 — who hold a high school diploma but no college credit has increased.

Colleges would benefit by enrolling more students aged 25 to 44. While this age group is not the only one projected to grow substantially, helping these individuals acquire certificates, degrees, or new skills will ensure that they are better equipped to productively address communities' workforce needs.

The needs of students aged 25 to 44, however, are dissimilar to those of traditional-age students in many important respects. For example, adult learners often seek credentials that are highly connected to the workplace and can be completed more quickly and at a lower cost than traditional degrees.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

- ▶ **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect our system's ability to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**
-

What aspects of this topic are most important for system-level conversations?

Who are the students our system currently serves? In what ways are they the same as or different from potential students in our state or region? In what ways has our student population stayed the same or changed over time?

How will the demographics for our state or region change in the coming years, and how will those changes affect the types of students we are likely to enroll?

- » What students should our community colleges be serving?
 - » How can we expand enrollment of older students?
 - » How can we support the retention of older students through a degree or credential of value?
 - » How can we increase the number of dual enrollment students?
 - » How can we increase the portion of dual enrollment students who identify a pathway while still in high school and pursue that path through our system?
 - » How can we ensure that students can successfully transfer credits from our colleges to other institutions in ways that advance their academic program progress and prevent the loss of degree credit?
 - » How can we prove the value of our offerings to students in the new demographics we are seeking to serve?
-

If we expect the demographics of our students to change, what do we need to change in our structures and services to attract and meet the needs of these new students?

- » What services are the students we will enroll in the future more likely to need? Is there a role for the system to play in offering those services? For example, if our colleges will be enrolling older students, should we offer system-provided services outside of traditional business hours or system-supported child care? What among our current services will become less important?
 - » At the system level, how can we ensure that dual enrollment students get on — and stay on — a pathway that leads to certificates, degrees, and living-wage jobs? What policies do we need to change or put in place to achieve this objective?
 - » What is the role of system-level marketing and recruitment efforts?
 - » What professional development will faculty and staff need to serve our changing student population? What is the system's role in supporting this professional development?
-

What should the system do to help campuses improve retention and student success?

What should the system do to promote recognition of learning acquired in noncredit courses and through life and work experience?

MANAGING ENROLLMENT ... Amidst Shifting Student Demographics

What changes in system policy and practice will help institutions attract and retain new categories of students, such as adults and dual enrollment students?

- » How can we discourage unproductive competition for students among the institutions in our system?
- » How can we balance the needs of colleges to innovate rapidly in their local contexts with the goals of system-level efficiency, coordination, and consistency?

What priorities should our system set for advocating for state-level policy change? What changes in state policy are the most important for community colleges to effectively serve changing student audiences?

What programming or services do we need to stop doing, or scale back, to make resources available for practices that will allow our colleges to better serve future students and better meet emerging needs?

What aspects of our current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

- » **What additional data should the system provide to colleges to help them identify new audiences?**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL LEADERS

- » **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect the ability of community colleges in our state to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What statewide conversations would be most useful in helping colleges adapt to changing demographic realities? How should this topic be featured in statewide community college convenings or communications?

What changes in state policy and practice would encourage colleges to serve new student audiences? What aspects of our state's current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

- » Does the state's funding model recognize noncredit and short-term training programs?
- » Does our state appropriately compensate colleges for their enrollment of dual enrollment students?
- » Does our funding model create incentives for institutions to recognize learning acquired through work and life experiences?
- » Do state financial aid and scholarship programs serve adults as well as they serve recent high school graduates?

- » **What additional data can our state provide to colleges to help them better adapt to changing demographic realities by enrolling and retaining more or different students?**

MEETING STUDENT NEEDS ... Even as Needs Grow and Evolve

Relevant pages of *Resilient by Design*:

- 22–24
- 38–44

More than ever, students arriving at the nation's community colleges bring academic and nonacademic needs that must be met as a prerequisite for learning and success. Many students did not receive the preparation they needed before they arrived at community college, and now students also must make up for academic losses sustained during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, increasing numbers of students arrive at college with food or housing insecurity and needs for child care, mental health care, transportation, and internet access.

As the student population changes, students' needs change. For example, serving more adults will mean more students needing child care, and serving more new Americans will mean more students needing English language instruction and translation services.



Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

- ▶ **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect our system's ability to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for system-level conversations?

Which state or system policies and practices make enrolling and succeeding in our colleges more difficult for students — especially those from populations we will need to serve in greater numbers?

Are our placement and developmental education models working? How do we know?

- » What models do our institutions use for placing students in classes and providing additional support to students who need it?
 - » What models do our institutions use for assessing students' prior learning? What percentage of students are assessed for prior learning and get credit for such learning?
 - » How might we adjust system-level developmental placement policies to promote student success and reduce the time and money needed to graduate?
 - » How can the system implement prior learning assessment at scale?
-

What other barriers are keeping current students from graduating across our system?

- » Do colleges know which students need support? How can we help colleges identify which services each student needs?
 - » What services do our colleges currently offer to meet students' basic needs (e.g., food, housing, mental health care, child care, transportation, and technology)?
 - » Do our colleges offer enough services to meet the current demand among our students? If not, how can the system support them in expanding those services and adapting them to changing needs?
 - » What type of professional development might college employees need, and how can the system help provide it?
-

How can the system help colleges, perhaps in partnership with others, address the barriers that keep prospective students from enrolling and current students from graduating?

- » How can we encourage collaborations across institutions and with community partners to orchestrate a tightly knit system of student support?
 - » How can our system prompt the adoption of effective supports? How can we help solve for capacity challenges that are more acute at some of our member institutions?
-

Which student support functions/services should be centralized at the system level to improve services and create efficiencies in the delivery of those services?

How might we change our system's resource allocation model to ensure that adequate funds flow to the campuses with the greatest student needs?

What priorities should our system set for advocating for state-level policy change? What changes in state policy are the most important for community colleges to effectively address student needs?

MEETING STUDENT NEEDS ... Even as Needs Grow and Evolve

What programming or services do we need to stop doing, or scale back, to make resources available for practices that will allow our colleges to better serve future students and better meet emerging needs?

What aspects of our current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

- » What system-level policies and practices should be changed to promote better delivery of needed student support services or to minimize barriers to student success?
- » How can we balance the needs of colleges to innovate rapidly in their local contexts with the goals of system-level efficiency, coordination, and consistency?

» **What additional data should the system provide to colleges to help them identify and prioritize student needs?**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL LEADERS

» **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect the ability of community colleges in our state to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for statewide conversations? How should this topic be featured in statewide community college convenings or communications to best prepare institutions to deal with increasingly complex student needs?

What barriers are keeping prospective students from enrolling?

- » How can state-level policies and resource allocation practices make enrolling in, attending, and earning a credential from a community college easier for state residents?
- » Which state policies and practices make enrolling in and attending our colleges more difficult for students?

How should state resource allocation policies and practices change to ensure that adequate funds flow to campuses with the greatest student needs?

What aspects of our state's current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

- » What state-level policies and practices should be put in place (or removed) to allow campuses to provide better support services to students?

» **What data do we and colleges need to better understand student needs within our state?**



USING ADVANCING TECHNOLOGIES ... for Colleges and Students

Relevant pages of
Resilient by Design:
• 26–30

New technologies not only will change the content of education, but they will also affect how teaching and learning occur, require costly maintenance and upgrades to keep programs relevant, and change the nature of instructional and administrative work. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the workplace as well as the classroom, and it is expected to have an impact at least as great as the introduction of the internet. But AI is only one example. Pressures to constantly adapt are also growing for more mundane technology needs such as lab equipment, software platforms and licenses, and classroom supports.

Every advance in technology introduces new skills for students to master, creates new professional development requirements for the college's faculty and staff, imposes costs for that professional development or for equipment or software licenses, and reshapes college operations.

Clearly, community colleges will need to prepare students with work-relevant AI skills and the understanding that their skills will have to evolve throughout their careers.

AI also has implications for pedagogy and learning. Institutional cultures will need to evolve from viewing AI primarily as an issue of academic integrity to one in which AI is a tool to be used beneficially in all academic programs. For example, colleges will have to expand their focus from policing academic integrity in student work to effectively engineering AI prompts and improving AI-written documents. Coursework also will change. For example, instead of teaching students computer coding, colleges will start teaching them how to prompt AI to produce code.

Overall, instruction will need to put less emphasis on knowing specific content and more on teaching students how to find and validate content; the emphasis will move from the product to the process. AI will infiltrate all corners of the collegiate curriculum, from operating machinery in advanced manufacturing to considering the ethical dimensions of AI's use in the humanities and social sciences to assisting with diagnoses in clinical settings.

AI will also reshape college and system operations as new tools emerge that hold promise for improving efficiency or services. Some new tools also may power new ways to drive student success. These changes may create new challenges for human resources and for institutional culture. They also raise questions about scale: Can individual institutions — or even systems — adopt AI technologies that contribute to improvements in student outcomes or make college more affordable? And can they do so at a scale that keeps pace with competing, often national, providers?

Systems and state agencies cannot afford to passively watch these changes unfold; they will have to guide their institutions to make effective, efficient, and (ideally) collaborative plans for addressing technology needs. Systems and state agencies will need to do this work in ways that increase colleges' capacity and avoid excessive bureaucracy that slows innovation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

- » **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect our system's ability to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for system-level conversations?

How can our system take an appropriate leadership role in developing a coherent strategy for technology acquisition and application? How do we do so without adding inappropriate constraints that limit institutions' ability to innovate?

How can we support institutions in making necessary changes to curriculum, pedagogy, and business practices in light of new technology?

» What is the system role in training faculty and staff in the effective use of AI and other technologies?

» In what ways does technology change the impact of distance in providing learning experiences to students? How does technology make teaching and learning harder, and what opportunities does it present? What is the system's role in ensuring that students are able to benefit from new technology? What is the system's role in resolving issues of distance that create barriers for students' progress?

Are there functions or services related to AI that should be centralized at the system level?

What is the system's role in making sure students have access to the technology they must become comfortable using? How can the system ensure that institutions are able to budget for or otherwise gain access to expensive technology?

How do we need to change our system office's internal operations in light of new technology?

» How can we use new technology to improve our processes in ways that save time or money and improve service to colleges and their students?

» How can we develop a standardized technology prioritization, adoption, and implementation process that includes training and maintenance so we maximize the benefit of new investments?

» What professional development will system staff need as we build AI and other technologies into system operations?

How do we build our technology infrastructure wisely and sustainably?

» Investments in technology are one-time costs with long-term implications. Knowing that technology budgets are finite and trade-offs are necessary, how can we ensure that we are making strategic purchasing decisions that will meet our system's — and our students' — long-term needs?

» How might we collaborate with partners — such as K–12 districts, universities, state agencies, and vendors — and encourage collaboration among our institutions to responsibly acquire and make the best use of new technologies, including AI?

What additional expertise do we need at the system level to address AI and other changing technologies — both to serve colleges and students and improve our own infrastructure? Do we have the staffing expertise needed to coordinate and support our efforts?



USING ADVANCING TECHNOLOGIES ... for Colleges and Students

What priorities should our system set for advocating for state-level policy change? What changes in state policy are most important to help community colleges adapt to technological change?

What programming or services do we need to stop doing, or scale back, to make resources available for practices that will allow our colleges to better serve future students and better meet emerging needs?

What aspects of our current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

» What system-level policies and practices should be initiated or eliminated to foster effective use of AI at the campus level?

 **What additional information can the system provide to colleges to help them navigate technological change?**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL LEADERS

 **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect the ability of community colleges in our state to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for statewide conversations? How should this topic be featured in statewide community college convenings or communications to best prepare institutions for widespread technological change?

How can we support institutions in making necessary changes to curriculum, pedagogy, and business practices in light of new technology?

How do we ensure that institutions throughout our state are able to provide programs that are relevant for their students and their communities? How do we ensure that they are equipped with sufficiently up-to-date technology?

What aspects of our state's current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

» What state-level policies and practices should be put in place (or removed) to allow campuses to foster effective use of AI at the campus level?

REIMAGINING TEACHING ... and Ensuring That Students Learn Relevant Skills

Relevant pages of
Resilient by Design:

- 44–52

As community colleges evolve to meet future needs, types of instruction and modes for delivery are both likely to change. In fact, most issues raised in this discussion guide — in particular changing workforce needs, shifting student demographics, and advancing technologies — dovetail with teaching and curriculum changes.

As systems assist colleges in reimagining teaching, they should consider the issues raised in other sections of this guide as well as the bullets that follow.

But before any of these changes can realistically happen, colleges must consider one overarching issue: They must invest time in rethinking the faculty role.

Much of the burden of responding to future changes will fall on faculty. But many faculty members are unable to add more to their plates. The responsibilities of faculty members have already expanded dramatically. In addition to the traditional work of teaching and institutional commitments, faculty members often must design online tools to support fully online, hybrid, and in-person courses; devise learning outcomes assessments; advise students and connect them to support services; mentor students; facilitate placements with employers; adapt course content to ever-shifting needs; collaborate with colleagues and employers; and more.

Expecting faculty members to complete all of the duties in this ever-expanding role — and to complete them all well and at the same time — is unreasonable. Colleges should consider making faculty roles more specialized so each faculty member is responsible for fewer tasks and can focus on what they do best.

Additional issues for colleges and systems to consider:

- ▶ Ensuring that the quality of instruction, whatever form it takes, remains high.
- ▶ Speeding up the time students take to earn a credential of value. Strategies include replacing prerequisite remediation with corequisite support, providing more frequent program/course start dates, making terms shorter, and creating year-round offerings.
- ▶ Redesigning general education so the skills it teaches are clearly articulated and embedded in program-specific and career-technical coursework. This approach helps students get to their career-focused coursework more quickly and can shorten time to degree, while ensuring that students learn the general education skills — critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication — that employers prize.



Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library



REIMAGINING TEACHING ... and Ensuring That Students Learn Relevant Skills

- ▶ Bringing more practice faculty — faculty who work full-time in industry — to the college to help meet demand for real-world learning experiences.
- ▶ Offering more short-term certificates, stackable certificates, and noncredit training programs. These programs require students to make a smaller investment of time and money. Students also may perceive these programs as more directly connected to their career goals.
- ▶ Spurring institutions to rethink course schedules and modalities to meet student preferences, in particular by considering how the combined assets of the institutions in the state or system can be leveraged to meet the needs of all residents. For instance, access to relevant programs should not be wholly determined by distance, yet not all institutions can or should provide all programs. Moreover, students' needs may differ depending in part on the setting and modality in which they are expected to learn.
- ▶ Broadly adopting prior learning assessment policies and scaling awards of credit for prior learning. Colleges must recognize that students will come to their institutions with knowledge and skills acquired in other settings, including the military, the workplace, and other postsecondary education institutions. These students will strongly resist requirements to take (and pay for) classes that cover material they already know.
- ▶ Introducing — or expanding — competency-based education (CBE) so students can move through coursework more quickly if their own pace allows it. CBE methods typically require faculty to be more transparent about learning objectives because credit is tied to demonstrating stated competencies. With this approach, students better understand the knowledge and skills they are acquiring and how those skills connect to what they are learning in other courses and to their career goals.

An emerging imperative of these converging realities is that noncredit instruction must be more fully integrated into the academic programming of the colleges, and students who enroll only in noncredit programs should be treated more like their degree-seeking counterparts. These students could be continuing learners at the institution and should be supported by student services that help them maximize the value of their experience with the institution.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

- **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect our system's ability to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for system-level conversations?

How can we support institutions that are rethinking the notion of the traditional classroom and questioning whether the current structure, curriculum, and scheduling meet the needs of students as technology and work-based experience become important drivers of their success?

- » How can system-level program review help ensure that career-relevant skills are embedded throughout college courses and programs?
- » How can the system encourage professional development so college faculty and staff can continually refresh their own knowledge and competencies and adjust their work to incorporate new technologies, learning science, and delivery methods?

What changes in system policy and practice are needed to allow campuses to deliver programs at times and in modalities that best meet student needs?

How can systems effectively establish the expectation that students will learn relevant skills? How should student learning of these skills be monitored and measured?

- » How can we encourage colleges to adopt practices that quantify learning in ways other than the credit hour — and specifically in ways that are more attuned to the student and how learning will occur in the future — such as prior learning assessment and CBE?
- » What role should the system play in adopting Learning and Employment Records (LERs)?

How can systems disseminate information on changing effective practices in teaching and learning to both institutional leaders and faculty?

What role should the system play in conducting research that identifies these effective practices?

What priorities should our system set for advocating for state-level policy change? What changes in state policy are the most important for community colleges to innovate their teaching and learning practices?

What programming or services do we need to stop doing, or scale back, to make resources available for practices that will better serve our future students and better meet emerging needs?

REIMAGINING TEACHING ... and Ensuring That Students Learn Relevant Skills

What aspects of our current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make or create incentives for maintaining the status quo?

- » How can we make sure that policies adopted to advance student success (e.g., common course numbering) do not also potentially impede the adoption of more short courses that impart specific skills and that complement — or can build toward — traditional courses that lead to a degree?
- » How do current transfer policies limit colleges' ability to offer CBE and measure learning in other innovative ways?
- » How can we balance the needs of colleges to innovate rapidly in their local contexts with the goals of system-level efficiency, coordination, and consistency?
- » How can systems work with their human resources departments and, where relevant, alongside their collective bargaining units to reimagine the faculty role in ways that ensure that faculty members' talents are best leveraged to promote student success?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL LEADERS

- ▶ **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect the ability of community colleges in our state to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for statewide conversations? How should this topic be featured in statewide community college convenings or communications?

What is the role of the state-level entity in creating a shared understanding of what it means for students to have “relevant” skills? Should these understandings be codified in accountability reporting?

How can the state-level entity best use its convening capabilities to promote adoption of new teaching practices?

What aspects of our state's current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

- » Should the state-level entity advocate for specific state policy or practice changes that would improve teaching practices and help more students acquire relevant skills?



USING DATA IN NEW WAYS ... to Improve Colleges' Work and Prove Colleges' Worth

Relevant pages of
Resilient by Design:
• 31–35

Some of the forces creating chaos for higher education have their roots, at least in part, in growing concerns about the value of a college degree relative to its cost. Colleges and systems must take action to demonstrate the relevance of college credentials.

Colleges and college systems must use data to demonstrate their relevance and show accountability. Currently, the quantitative measures of community college success are similar to those of four-year university success: retention and graduation rates, plus transfer rates for some colleges, as traditionally measured by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

While these metrics track meaningful outcomes, they are incomplete. They exclude many students that community colleges serve in abundance, such as part-time students and students who do not begin in a fall term. In addition, these metrics do not entirely align with what students and policymakers currently want to know.

Community colleges and college systems need different data to show their value. In addition, colleges need to use data more consistently — and have a greater range of people at the college using data — to allow for better planning and to pave the way toward better outcomes.

Colleges and systems should:

- ▶ Work with policymakers and accreditors to determine how they should measure their success. The metrics for success should address meaningful outcomes related to certificate and associate degree completion, post-college employment, wages, and successful transfer and baccalaureate completion.
- ▶ Embrace the idea of knowing, sharing, and improving the post-community college outcomes of their students, both for students who graduate and those who do not.
- ▶ Show students what jobs will be available to them after their program of study, along with the likely wages for those jobs.
- ▶ Ensure that colleges have good data and appropriate interpretations for labor market and ROI outcomes. Support institutions in using these data to inform dialogue among faculty and staff.
- ▶ Work to make all faculty and staff comfortable with using data and applying data in ways that help them do their jobs more effectively and efficiently.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

- ▶ **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect our system's ability to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for system-level conversations?

Are we using data consistently and constantly to improve the quality of the education our colleges provide and to demonstrate the impact we are having on students at all levels across our system? Where are we falling short?

- » What data do we regularly present to internal and external audiences? Are we sharing the right data with the right people?
- » What role should the system play in ensuring that staff and faculty have the professional development they need to effectively use data to drive improvements in their work?
- » Do we have and effectively use data that show outcomes related to post-graduation employment, wages, successful transfer, and baccalaureate completion? Do we have these data at the system level, for each institution, and for each program?
- » What data about outcomes and ROI should we regularly make public?
- » What should the system do to better communicate the importance of ROI information?
- » Should the system assume responsibility for publishing ROI information annually?

What degree and certificate programs will be most relevant to our state or region in the future?

- » Are the colleges in our system using the right data to know if programming is workforce aligned? If not, what needs to happen differently so the system and our colleges have access to the best data and are using the information appropriately in decision-making?

Do we know what happens to all of the students who leave our system?

- » How do we know if credit and noncredit students are meeting their goals?
- » What happens to our students who do not graduate?
- » Do colleges have data on which credits successfully transfer and apply toward students' majors at transfer institutions? How should failures of credit transfer to majors be addressed?
- » Do colleges and students have program-by-program data about the jobs and wages their students will qualify for when they complete their programs? If not, what needs to happen differently so the system and our colleges have these data?
- » How can we present data in ways that encourage improvement and constructive change rather than punitive use? How do we balance the use of data for accountability purposes (internally and externally) with the value of data in formative evaluation and improvement?
- » What levers do we have and want to employ to ensure that institutions are responsive to data on post-college outcomes?

What priorities should our system set for advocating for state-level policy change? What changes in state policy will best encourage community colleges to effectively use data to inform their work?



USING DATA IN NEW WAYS ... to Improve Colleges' Work and Prove Colleges' Worth

What programming or services do we need to stop doing, or scale back, to make resources available for practices that will allow our colleges to better serve future students and better meet emerging needs?

What aspects of our current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

- » At the system and institutional levels, do we have appropriate resources (staffing, expertise, technology) dedicated to collecting data and deploying the information effectively for decision-making?

 **What data should the system collect and distribute? What other data do we need to understand student outcomes at community colleges and colleges' impact on their communities?**

- » Should we change the types of data the system requests from colleges?
- » Are there ways we can improve the method by which colleges transmit data to the system?
- » What data should the system provide to campuses to improve decision-making?
- » What data should the system provide to the public and policymakers to demonstrate the ROI of the system and of individual colleges?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL LEADERS

 **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect the ability of community colleges in our state to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for statewide conversations? How should this topic be featured in statewide community college convenings or communications?

How can the state-level organization add value to the conversation about ROI? Possibilities might include taking direct action to tell the community college ROI story or providing guidance to colleges as they seek to make their own ROI cases.

How can we use data to focus attention on key topics? What information should the statewide organization provide to college leaders? What data should be presented by experts in the field?

How should the statewide organization change the way it uses data to advocate for community colleges to state policymakers and other stakeholders?



USING DATA IN NEW WAYS ... to Improve Colleges' Work and Prove Colleges' Worth

What aspects of our state's current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

- » Are there barriers in data sharing among state agencies that impede college access to data that are relevant to their decision-making and planning?
- » Should we change state-required compliance reporting to make it more relevant and allow us to better track metrics that matter?
- » Does the state have relevant data that colleges should have?

 **Do we have the data to understand student outcomes from community colleges and colleges' impact on their communities? What other data might we collect to better understand these topics?**



RETHINKING THE COLLEGE BUSINESS MODEL

Relevant pages of *Resilient by Design*:

- 17–20
- 25
- 52–53

Earlier sections of this guide have addressed new approaches to methods for measuring institutional performance, new ways of meeting changing student needs, new forms of educational delivery, alterations to academic schedules, new partnerships, and the need to rethink the faculty role.

In addition to those factors, the funding pressures currently facing community colleges and college systems will not abate. If anything, these pressures are likely to grow, especially now that the federal stimulus support that followed the COVID-19 pandemic has run its course. Simultaneously, new student populations will have changing and often greater needs while expectations from employers and the public will continue to grow. At a minimum, colleges, systems, and states will have to reconsider their priorities for resource allocation.

But reallocation may not be enough. Meeting all of these challenges may require new business models. Traditional approaches have focused on producing student credit hours that lead to degrees. With a greater emphasis on noncredit and competency-based programs, the credit hour may no longer be the best unit to attach to tuition prices. Alternatives might include subscription pricing, a fixed price for short-term credentials, and financial agreements among colleges for collaborative delivery of course content.

Colleges and systems also will need to exercise more strategic budgeting. They certainly should follow the principle of setting aside some funding each year for strategic investment — even if doing so requires some selective pruning of historical budget allocations — to ensure that sufficient resources are available to quickly adapt to shifting expectations.

All of these changes suggest the need to be deliberate about the deployment of human and other resources to achieve the system's goals. This process also raises questions about how best to engage shared governance in productive ways; in some states, these dialogues must also involve collective bargaining units.

As the current business model that is predominant in community colleges is largely determined by the cost of employing faculty and staff, these conversations are simply unavoidable. The focus should not be primarily on the very contentious topic of reductions in employment levels. Rather, it should be on questions about what is the most effective — and most cost-effective — mix of programs and services that will meet students' and communities' needs in the years ahead, as well as how to begin a process of transitioning to the new, future-ready model that these emerging needs require. Colleges will need to build comfort with the reality that some programs and services, as well as time-honored but obsolete practices, might need to be retired or replaced.

How these conversations play out for individual institutions and systems will depend on their specific context and circumstances. Differences in governance — whether the college is locally controlled or locally funded or exists as part of a larger system — will also matter. Whatever the specifics for any particular college, the resources that college will require and the ways those resources are deployed will need to be continually reviewed and reassessed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

- **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect our system's ability to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for system-level conversations?

What can we expect as the higher education changes outlined in *Resilient by Design* unfold?

- » What is a realistic level of enrollment our system can expect in the future, and how will it be distributed between dual enrollment and post-high school students, full-time and part-time students, traditional-age and adult students, and credit and noncredit students at each institution?
- » How can we adopt, across the system, the staffing and financial models necessary to support the future mix of students?

Will our colleges' current business models serve them well as these changes unfold?

- » How do we expect our colleges' revenue to change in terms of both sources and amounts?
- » How do we expect our colleges' expenses to change? What new types of costs do we anticipate, and what old costs might disappear? What sort of growth in expenses can we expect?
- » How are these changes in revenue and expenses linked to programs, services, and audiences? For example, if our enrollment changes in terms of numbers of students or the types of students we serve (e.g., adults, dual enrollment students), what will the impact on college finances be, and what will the impact on the system be?

If our colleges' current business models will not be effective, how can the system encourage campuses to rethink them? For example, should we encourage colleges to:

- » Gain efficiencies through collaboration, such as partnering with community organizations to meet student basic needs or partnering with employers to share equipment and facilities costs?
- » Identify new revenue streams, such as employer sponsorship of programs, facilities rental, new auxiliaries, additional philanthropic opportunities, or others?
- » Develop new pricing strategies, such as subscription pricing (a single price for all of the courses a student can complete in a fixed period of time) or outcomes pricing (a fixed price for the coursework required for acquisition of a particular certification)? Should our colleges have different pricing strategies for different subpopulations of students, such as traditional-age students, adult students, and dual enrollment students?

How can our institutions offer new programs with a minimal up-front investment through partnerships or contracts with K–12, other colleges and universities, employers, or other local entities?

- » How can the colleges within our system offer programs collaboratively in ways that preserve or expand student access, maintain quality, and consume fewer resources than standalone programs?

What investments will we make to better meet changing student, employer, and community needs?

RETHINKING THE COLLEGE BUSINESS MODEL

How should we change the system's approach to resource allocation to better support each college's sustainability?

What steps should our system take to create expectations for different approaches to fiscal management at the campus level?

What priorities should our system set for advocating for state-level policy change? What changes in state policy are most important for the long-term viability of system institutions?

What programming or services do we need to stop doing, or scale back, to make resources available for practices that will allow our colleges to better serve future students and better meet emerging needs?

What aspects of our current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

» What system policies and practices serve as barriers to adopting new business models at the campus level?

» Does our system's methodology for resource allocation support or hinder innovative business model design?

► **What data do we need to better understand the dynamics affecting college-level and system-level financial viability?**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL LEADERS

► **What most stood out to you from the relevant sections of the report? How do these findings affect the ability of community colleges in our state to provide a quality learning experience that leads directly to a living-wage job or successful transfer to a baccalaureate program?**

What aspects of this topic are most important for statewide conversations? How should this topic be featured in statewide community college convenings or communications?

What changes in state policy are required to ensure the financial viability of community colleges in our state? Examples might include providing funding for noncredit instruction that results in workplace certifications or creating incentives for sharing academic programs.

What policies should we put in place to ensure the continued viability of rural institutions? What expectations should be placed on these colleges in exchange for this support?

For locally governed colleges, how should minimum levels of local support be calculated as a prerequisite for state support?

What aspects of our state's current policies, practices, or priorities will create barriers to making the kinds of changes we need to make?

► **What data do we need to better understand the dynamics affecting college financial viability within our state?**

