

Improving Education Outcomes by Building Data-Driven Relationships

A Checklist for Education Leaders and Researchers

When education leaders and researchers work together, they can create, conduct, and use research to identify education opportunities and best practices and ultimately use data to improve education outcomes for students. Successful data-driven collaboration relies on common goals, clear processes and communication, and a commitment to action. Following are key focus areas that researchers and education leaders should discuss together when embarking on a specific research project or at the start of a longer-term partnership.



Build Relationships and Create a Vision

Having a shared vision for your work—including your goals, roles, and expectations—builds trust and opens the lines of communication so you can remain flexible, troubleshoot challenges, and resolve any potential conflicts.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Who within the state education agency and the research organization will decide the goals and vision for the work? Are there ways to include a diverse array of staff and perspectives in the vision planning?



Use Data Governance

Many states have a data governance body and processes for determining how researchers can access limited data and how state agencies can collaborate with researchers. Understanding the state's data governance structures allows researchers and education leaders to ensure that their work meets the state's research and policy goals and has the necessary support from state leaders.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How might researchers be able to work with the state data governance body to help meet, and even help inform, the state's research goals? How do the planned analyses contribute to the state's research agenda and create useful, timely information for state leaders and educators?



Create Data Sharing Agreements and Processes

Data sharing agreements and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) articulate exactly what data is needed for the planned analyses, who at the research organization will have access to the data and for what purposes, and how the data will be maintained and protected. Establishing these clear data permissions and parameters at the outset of a research collaboration helps ensure that researchers and education leaders are on the same page about data access and use.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Does the state have a standard MOU template or an existing process for articulating the scope and data needs of the planned work, its goals and deliverables, and the timeline?



Ensure Quality Data

Often, researchers can play a role in improving the quality of state education agency data systems by ensuring that the right data elements and characteristics are collected to answer the right policy questions.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Does the state already have the data needed to answer the research question being asked? If not, does the research partner have ideas on how to improve the existing data or map new data needs?



Plan for Data Analysis, Reporting, and Use

To truly affect and improve student learning, researchers and education leaders need a plan for how to translate research findings into new understandings, policy changes, and/or effective practices.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

What decisions or conclusions can (or cannot) be made from the planned research? How will the research findings and the rationale for any suggested policy or practice changes be communicated with educators, policymakers, and the public?



Engage and Communicate with the Public

Communicating with the public about planned research and its findings is an important part of building public trust and buy-in. Engaging the community in understanding research and how it will be used helps ensure that the research answers questions of value to the community.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How will the public be informed about the research and findings or even involved in the development of the research questions? How can events like public school board meetings or resources like school websites be used to communicate? Will you create public-facing, accessible resources on the research findings?



Build Capacity

Beyond completing specific research work, data-driven relationships between state education agencies and researchers can often help build and supplement the agency's capacity to design, conduct, interpret, and use education research.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How can this research partnership be used to help develop the agency staff's data skills and research expertise? Could a continuing research-practice partnership assist the state in carrying out long-term or ongoing research and evaluations? If so, how will you prepare for staffing changes over time?



Safeguard Privacy and Security

Data privacy is a critical component of any data use or research. The public, parents, and educators will not rely on data that they do not trust. In addition to following state and federal privacy laws and their own robust privacy and security policies, researchers can articulate their commitment to respectful and ethical data practices beyond legal compliance.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How will you provide clear information about how you ensure data privacy and security? How will you answer any questions about data privacy or use?



The Data Quality Campaign is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization leading the effort to bring every part of the education community together to empower educators, families, and policymakers with quality information to make decisions that ensure that students excel. For more information, go to www.dataqualitycampaign.org and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) (@EdDataCampaign).