

State recommendations to support data access through improved statewide longitudinal data systems

People need access to data to foster successful journeys through education and the workforce. These recommendations are policy and practice steps that states must take to make access to data possible from statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs), which connect data from early childhood through the workforce.

Though these recommendations are essential, by themselves they are insufficient to ensure that individuals, the public, and policymakers have access to the data they need. To change their SLDSs to provide tailored,

individualized access for those navigating their journeys, states must prioritize these enabling conditions.

No one state leader can tackle these recommendations alone. Making this vision a reality will require attention from agency leaders, governors, legislatures, and other state leaders. With leadership, every state can act **now** on these policy and practice changes.

1. Codify cross-agency data governance in state law.

- Mandated leadership-level, cross-agency data governance is the *only* way to ensure transparency and accountability for decisions about SLDS data collection, security, and access.
- Best practices for data governance include establishing a leadership-level body with representation from all agencies that contribute data to the system, plus members of the public who have a stake in data collection and access.
- Legislation is the most effective way to ensure that contributing state agencies come together for shared decisionmaking and that data governance efforts last across changes in state priorities and leadership.

Maryland legislators established the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) Center Governing Board in law and continue to use state legislation to improve the state's data efforts as needs evolve over time.



Start here: [P20W+ Planning for a Modern State Data System: Cementing Data System Requirements in Law](#)

2. Establish an independent entity to administer the state's SLDS.

- When everyone is in charge, no one is in charge. An autonomous data center, governed by the cross-agency body, is necessary to ensure that the state's data sharing, analysis, research, and access priorities aren't beholden to the preferences and constraints of a specific agency, agenda, or actor.
- This entity must be a neutral broker that can be attentive to the privacy, legal, and technical considerations required for data sharing, while also fulfilling the mission of providing access to P-20W data to policymakers, researchers, the public, and individuals.

The **Kentucky** Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) manages the state's SLDS. It explores education and workforce efforts across the state and provides data-based tools and resources for individuals, communities, and policymakers.



Start here: [*The Art of the Possible: Data Governance Lessons Learned from Kentucky, Maryland, and Washington*](#)

3. Map existing assets to identify system strengths and limits.

- Changing an SLDS to enable access must start with an asset map of the state's existing technology, tools, data, funding, staff, legal supports, and other assets and policies that could help or hinder efforts to serve the data needs of individuals, the public, and policymakers.
- States should use this information to be strategic about where to begin and what investments they should make.

The **North Carolina** General Assembly and myFutureNC conducted a study of the state's education data, system, policies, governance, and technology to improve how the state securely shares education data among institutions.



Start here: [*Interoperable and Interconnected Student Data Systems: Findings for North Carolina*](#)

4. Engage the public to prioritize data access needs and seek continual feedback.

- Stakeholders, like community members, school leaders, college administrators, and employers, should have a say in how the state prioritizes the substantial undertaking of providing access to cross-sector data.
- State leaders must deliberately build in multiple opportunities for stakeholders to play a substantive role in shaping SLDS access priorities, including being involved in decisions about what tools should be developed and delivered first and serving as test users of those resources.

As leaders in **California** designed their Cradle-to-Career data system, they built [public engagement](#) into all of their structures and processes. Multiple workgroups and advisory boards were explicitly designed to seek and incorporate public conversation into their work and system priorities.



Start here: [*Investing in California's Data Future: How California's P-20W Cradle-to-Career Data System Could Take the State from Last to First*](#)

5. Fund SLDSs and the source systems that contribute data to them.

- State leaders must provide sustained, dedicated funding to their SLDSs as well as to each contributing agency system.
- SLDSs are only as strong as their weakest contributing data system. State leaders should use their asset map to identify pain points and target investments according to the strengths and weaknesses of their early childhood data, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce systems, as well as relevant systems of other state agencies that serve people on their education and workforce journeys (e.g., public benefits systems, juvenile justice).

Kentucky's KYSTATS has used state funding and grants from numerous federal agencies and programs (including the Department of Labor, the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service, the Employment and Training Administration, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Preschool Development Grant program) to build, improve, and maintain its SLDS.



Start here: [State and Local Governments Can Use Federal Funding for Education Data](#)

6. Develop legal and privacy frameworks to enable and guide state data efforts.

- Too often, confusion about what data sharing is permissible is an unnecessary road block to meaningful data access. Agency leaders and attorneys need to create a shared understanding of how the state interprets and implements state and federal laws (most notably the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) in service of data sharing and access.

When state leaders in **California** were designing their Cradle-to-Career data system, they developed a comprehensive, cross-agency legal framework to govern data exchanges. The state's framework ensured compliance with all federal and state laws and created clarity across all state agencies.



Start here: [P20W+ Planning for a Modern State Data System: Legal Agreements](#)

7. Develop and act on rollout plans when building data access.

- When investing in new ways to access SLDS data, state leaders must be thoughtful and intentional in how they plan and roll out new tools and how they inform and support essential stakeholders, like district superintendents and local workforce boards.
- States must work with agency leaders, local leaders, community advocates, and other trusted intermediaries to help people understand how to use and benefit from these resources.

California's Cradle-to-Career data system team is launching a Teacher Training and Retention Dashboard for the public. But beyond just creating the tool, leaders have developed an entire communications plan detailing how they want to explain the dashboard and its benefits and goals to different types of data users ranging from occasional website visitors to data power users.



Start here: [Communicating about Data](#)

8. Invest in the talent and human capacity needed to modernize SLDSs toward access.

- SLDS centers must have a full-time director and staff; be overseen by a cross-agency governance board; and be supported with analytical, privacy and security, legal, and technical expertise.
- State leaders must invest in roles like data scientist as well as leadership-level data management roles like chief data officers and chief information officers who can align technical and human resources in support of expanded data access.

Maryland ensures that its MLDS Center staff is funded as an explicit part of its [annual budget](#). And in its [annual report](#) to the governor and General Assembly, the MLDS Center Governing Board makes recommendations on additional staffing needs.



Start here: [Quality Framework for Integrated Data Systems: Capacity](#)

9. Center privacy.

Ensuring that people's data is kept private and secure is an obligation, *not* an obstacle to data access. State leaders must:

- Create, implement, and update privacy policies;
- Identify and safeguard against cybersecurity challenges;
- Staff privacy leadership roles such as a chief privacy officer;
- Establish ethical data use practices; and
- Provide transparency into state data policies and practices.

In addition to addressing education data privacy through agency policy and legislation, **Utah** has built comprehensive [data privacy training modules](#) for different audiences across the state. The courses, which include short videos, resources for parents and teachers, and a newsletter, aim to strengthen privacy protection skills, build trust, and provide data management oversight.



Start here: [Data Integration Support Center at WestEd](#) and [US Department of Education's Privacy Technical Assistance Center \(PTAC\)](#)

10. Support local leaders in building their own capacity to use data.

- Schools, community colleges, workforce boards, and other data users often face challenges to data use that, while solvable, nonetheless keep data at arm's length. States must help data users untie their own knots, whether through investing in technology or internet infrastructure at the local level or providing needed professional development on how to use data about pathways from education to work.

Virginia legislators [passed a law](#) in 2015 directing the state to develop a model data security plan for districts and to designate a chief data security officer to assist local school divisions with the development or implementation of data use and security policies.



Start here: [Closing the Data Gap: How Cities Are Delivering Better Results for Residents](#)

What does success look like?

Working from state policy goals and community-identified priorities, state leaders must develop interactive data tools that enable individuals to access information to make personal decisions, provide the public with transparent information about the impact of public investments, and ensure that policymakers at all levels can answer questions to direct future education and workforce policies. If state leaders prioritize these 10 activities, they will take the needed policy and practice steps to lay the foundation for meaningful access.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [P20W+ Planning for a Modern State Data System—WestEd](#)
- [Introduction to Data Sharing & Integration—Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy](#)
- [SLDS State Support Team](#)