

101 DATA GOVERNANCE TOOLKIT

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Cross-Agency Data Governance Accelerates State Education and Workforce Data Capacity

Cross-agency data governance is not optional—it is the foundation for making data work for people, communities, and leaders, who are all making decisions that shape people’s journeys from education to the workforce.

The states with the best statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs)—those that are delivering insights to state leaders, communities, and students—have invested in enabling policies and practices to ensure that everyone has tailored access to information to drive student success, economic opportunity, and systemic change. **The first and most critical of those policies is to codify cross-agency data governance in state law.**

This brief gives state leaders the information they need to understand the value of cross-agency data governance; evaluate their state’s current policies; and identify concrete next steps to make improvements, regardless of their starting point.

What Is Cross-Agency Data Governance?

Cross-agency data governance encompasses the policies, processes, and leadership structures that guide how data shared between state agencies is connected, secured, accessed, and used. Cross-agency data governance helps ensure that education and workforce data brought together in an SLDS can be responsibly linked and used to inform decisions that support student achievement and successful transitions into careers.¹

Effective cross-agency data governance includes both **clear processes** and **designated leadership for making those decisions**. But not all governance bodies are created alike. Many states have established a cross-agency governing body that brings together policy and/or technical experts from the state’s education and workforce agencies to create guardrails and guidance for how data is shared, secured, and used. But too often, these bodies are structured as committees or task forces that lack any real

WHAT IS AN SLDS?

For decades, states have been investing in SLDSs that connect individual-level data from participating state agencies—at a minimum, early childhood, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce—over time. These systems have the potential to provide valuable insights that could help people seamlessly navigate their journeys through education and the workforce. But this potential is rarely fulfilled because governance of these systems is too often ad hoc, temporary, or disrupted during leadership transitions.



¹ An SLDS can also link data from other state agencies such as the Department of Health and Department of Corrections, with the goal of providing more holistic information about individuals’ education and workforce journeys. This brief focuses primarily on linking P–20W (early childhood, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce) data.

decisionmaking authority about data transparency, data access, and how data should inform policy.

Every state has governance processes that define the legal and technical requirements for sharing data within their SLDS. However, far fewer states (12 as of May 2026) have established a sustainable, statutorily required

cross-agency data governance structure that defines a clear purpose, roles, and responsibilities for participating agencies and ensures accountability for transparency and data quality, privacy, and security. The difference is a data system that exists largely in the background versus one that state leaders and communities can actively use to understand outcomes and guide investments.

Why Data Governance?

While states have governance processes (e.g., data-sharing agreements, security policies) established for their SLDSs, those processes do not provide the SLDS with clear leadership, a purpose, or accountability for how decisions are made. Without that clear authority, decisions about how data is connected, secured, and accessed can happen behind the scenes and as one-off or one-time determinations—leading to limited transparency and accountability, inconsistent progress toward state goals, or goals that shift as leadership changes.

Governance matters because states collect data about their constituents and leaders should be accountable for what happens to it. Without a clear cross-sector structure, decisions about how data is connected, secured, and accessed may default to the one agency that houses the system, with little input—and little trust—from leaders in other agencies and sectors. Further, the most important decisions about how data is used are often made without clear ownership or continuity of vision as state administrations change.

As a result, states face common challenges:

- **Access.** Policymakers and the public often cannot access the information they need to understand outcomes or guide decisions.
- **Decisionmaking.** Without clear authority for cross-agency data decisions, responsibility for data privacy, access, and use is diffuse.
- **Transparency.** Decisions about data sharing and use occur behind closed doors, reducing public trust.
- **Vision.** Without stable leadership and codified governance, priorities for state data assets can shift or stall as administrations change.

Codified cross-agency data governance addresses these challenges by establishing clear leadership and authority for how data is used.

- **Accountability.** Ensures that leaders are accountable (by law and by the public) for data decisions and that those decisions are made transparently and in the open.

- **Policy Alignment.** Brings the agencies that contribute data to the SLDS together with a shared vision and purpose, ensuring that decisions are made through a coordinated, multiagency policy lens and are focused on priorities that require collaboration.
- **Privacy and Security.** Designates a single, responsible authority for protecting individuals' data, setting clear expectations for privacy, security, and appropriate data use.
- **Transparency and Trust.** Brings decisionmaking into the sunshine by conducting business openly and by including all data contributors at the table, building trust in both the SLDS and the governing body itself.

WHY GOVERNANCE NOW?

States are navigating a rapidly shifting education and workforce landscape. Policymakers are making decisions about how to implement new and evolving priorities—such as Workforce Pell Grants, career and technical education, apprenticeships, dual enrollment, and skills-based hiring—while responding to broader policy and economic changes, including the growing impact of artificial intelligence.

These decisions require timely, reliable information about how students move through education and into careers and which pathways lead to strong outcomes. But in many states, the data people need to answer these questions remains difficult to access and fragmented across agencies, so the systems are slow to produce meaningful insights.

Codified cross-agency data governance ensures that states can quickly generate the insights they need to guide policy decisions and implementation—for both today's priorities and those that will emerge in the future.

STATE LEADERSHIP IN DATA GOVERNANCE

Building on pioneering governance efforts in Kentucky, Maryland, and Washington, several states have enacted legislation establishing cross-agency data governance structures, including:

- Alabama;
- California;
- Colorado;
- Connecticut;
- Georgia;
- Mississippi;
- Montana;
- New Jersey; and
- Rhode Island.

- **Sustainability.** Codifies decisions, roles, and priorities in law, ensuring that the SLDS and its mission remain stable and effective across leadership changes and political cycles.
- **Access.** Charges state leaders with the responsibility to determine how the SLDS is used to provide the public, agencies, and policymakers with timely and appropriate access to data and analyses.

Best Practice Cross-Agency Data Governance

For states seeking to ensure that their SLDS delivers on its purpose to inform research, transparency, and/or individual decisionmaking, cross-agency data governance must be clearly structured, stable, and durable over time.

The foundation for achieving strong SLDSs with best practice governance is codifying cross-agency data governance in state law. Policy and practice in leading states show that effective governance laws share common components. At a minimum, statute should

establish a clear purpose for the system, define the governing body responsible for cross-agency data decisions, designate the entity responsible for managing the SLDS, and ensure that the system operates in alignment with its intended purpose and state policy goals.

The following four components draw on lessons from state-led policy innovation and highlight the features that are common to the strongest cross-agency data governance practices.

Component #1: The governing board includes leaders from all data-contributing agencies and external groups.

Answering questions about students' pathways from early learning into the workforce requires leadership from each education and workforce agency that contributes data to the system. At a minimum, the governing board should include the heads of those agencies to ensure that the leaders responsible for generating and stewarding the data are directly engaged in decisions about how it is connected, secured, and accessed.

The strongest governance structures also include representatives from outside of those agencies. Incorporating other voices—legislators, researchers, workforce and employer representatives, district and higher education leaders, and relevant members of the public—helps ensure that the system reflects interests that are broader than those of the contributing agencies alone. It also builds trust by ensuring that oversight incorporates multiple perspectives representing different state actors. While governing board composition will vary by state, designing a governing body that reflects the state's priorities and earns public trust is critical.

When structured this way, governing boards:

- Create formal and sustainable venues for cross-agency communication, joint decisionmaking, and problem solving among the leaders responsible for the state's education and workforce systems.
- Ensure that agency data practices align with shared expectations for privacy, security, and access.
- Incorporate outside expertise and public perspectives that strengthen the system's transparency, credibility, and usefulness.
- Promote a culture of shared responsibility for using data to improve outcomes across the education-to-workforce continuum, rather than working in silos.

If this structure is not codified in law, governance efforts lack the cross-sector authority and continuity needed to sustain collaboration—slowing progress in system development and transparency and weakening the credibility of the system.

Component #2: The governing board has authority over the SLDS's managing entity.

For leaders and the public to use the data in an SLDS to inform policy and practice, they must have confidence that the data and analyses the system produces are not shaped by the priorities of any single agency or political agenda. This independence is critical to building trust among policymakers, agencies, researchers, and the public that the system produces objective information that can be used confidently to inform decisions.

States with the strongest SLDS governance structures address this challenge by ensuring that the system's managing entity operates under the oversight of the cross-agency governing board rather than the direct control of any one data-contributing agency. This

structure helps ensure that decisions about how data is linked, analyzed, and shared reflect the board's collective direction rather than the priorities of a single agency.

In practice, states achieve this independence in different ways. Some house the managing entity in a neutral state office, like the state's information technology department. Others establish a standalone entity that is administratively attached to an existing state agency or locate the managing entity within a university or research institution. While the administrative structure varies, the defining feature is that the SLDS operates under the authority of the governing board.

Component #3: The governing board oversees the SLDS's executive director.

In best practice SLDSs, the executive director of the managing entity staffs and is accountable to the governing board and is charged with delivering on the SLDS's mission. By charging the governing body with selection and oversight of the SLDS executive director, states can ensure that the director is not beholden to any single contributing agency, avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest.

While the executive director should have strong facility with technology and data, their primary role is to staff

the policy-focused governing board and ensure that the board's decisions are implemented by a variety of staff representing different functions (e.g., technology, research, legal). In practice, this position serves as a key translator between the board, which provides vision and direction, and the implementation staff. The executive director works across agencies to build buy-in and deliver on the mission and vision established in statute and directed by the board.

Component #4: The purpose of the system is clear, and the governing board has a clearly defined charge and authority.

The strongest SLDSs have a purpose, defined use cases, and a governing board with clear responsibilities and authority. A clear purpose for the system goes hand in hand with a clearly defined charge for the governing board and ensures that governance decisions are aligned with state priorities.

For example, some states have codified SLDSs with language that defines that the purpose of their system is to help leaders better understand transitions between higher education and the workforce as well as the outcomes of different pathways. Statute should go on to specify the governing board's role in overseeing the SLDS and ensuring that the system operates in alignment with stated education and workforce priorities.

In practice, the governing board's responsibilities should include:

- **Oversight of the SLDS managing entity and executive director**, ensuring that the system operates in alignment with the board's policy direction as well as the purpose and use cases for the system.
- **Data privacy, security, and quality policies**, establishing clear expectations for how to protect and ensure that sensitive information is used responsibly.
- **Decisions about how linked data is accessed and used**, including establishing policies for researcher access; public reporting; and the development of tools that help students, families, and policymakers use data effectively.

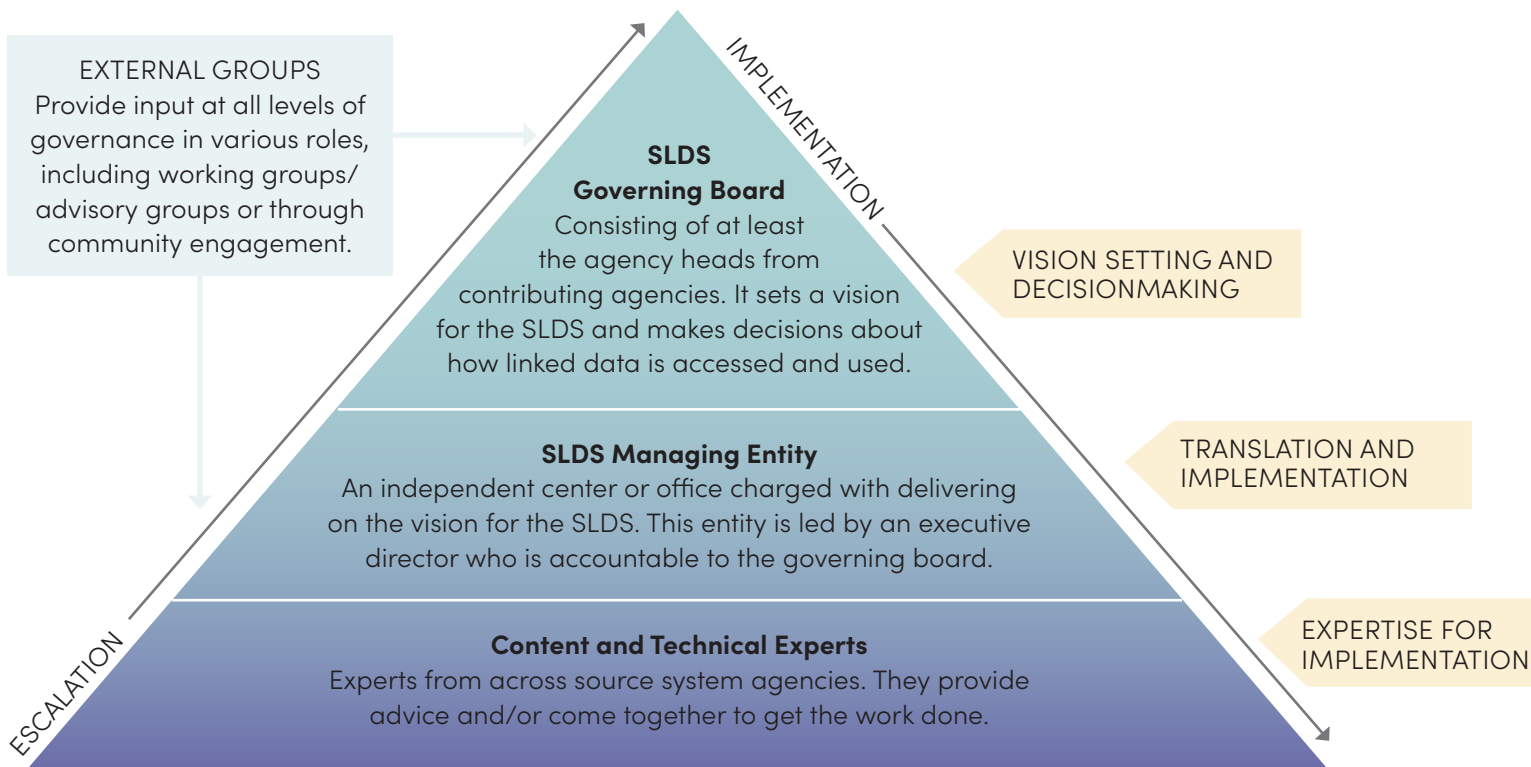
- **Transparency in decisionmaking**, including requiring open meetings and ensuring clear public communication about how the system operates.
- **Accountability to policymakers and the public**, such as reporting regularly to the legislature on system progress toward the purpose and use cases, outcomes, and opportunities for improvement.

When these responsibilities are clearly defined in law, the governing board has both the authority and the accountability necessary to ensure that the SLDS operates as a trusted public asset.

Governance Pyramid

Effective governance requires a clear organizational structure that defines roles and responsibilities across policy leadership, cross-agency implementation, and technical expertise. Together, these components create the foundation for cross-agency data governance that is sustainable, transparent, and capable of delivering meaningful value from a state’s data system.

The following governance pyramid illustrates this structure—showing how states organize leadership, management, and technical capacity to support the responsible use of linked data across agencies.



START HERE: Learn more about your state’s SLDS and its governance structure

Understanding how your state’s SLDS is governed is essential to determining how it can meet the data needs of students, families, and policymakers. Review the following list and ask: Does the law in my state meet all of these standards? If not, there is room to improve your state’s SLDS governance to better support people’s education and workforce pathways.

Is my state’s SLDS governing body:

- Codified in law?
- Made up of leadership-level agency members?
- Authorized to make decisions about the linked data?
- Charged with data security and privacy?
- Charged with overseeing the SLDS’s executive director?
- Managed independently from the agencies that contribute data?

What State Leaders Must Do Now

1. Take Action

If your state lacks codified governance, take legislative action.

Legislators can enact legislation that improves their state's data ecosystem and fosters access to data through establishing cross-agency data governance. Best practice governance legislation establishes the governing board's structure, membership, processes, and charge.

- **See *Data Governance 101: Best Practices for Legislation to Ensure Sustained Education and Workforce Data Capacity* on page 9.** Champion legislation to codify cross-agency data governance.
- **Spread the word.** Communicate with colleagues about the value of P-20W data access in connection with current state policy priorities.
- **Tell a story.** Identify a use case that aligns with current state policy priorities that could demonstrate the importance of broadening access to linked data.

If elements of governance exist, make it stronger.

Your state may have elements of best practice cross-agency data governance but be missing some pieces that are key to its success.

- **See *Data Governance 101: Best Practices for Legislation to Ensure Sustained Education and Workforce Data Capacity* on page 9.** Most states do not have the needed policies in place to ensure robust SLDSs with strong governance. Identify gaps between your current state laws and best practice cross-agency data governance; if needed, champion legislation to address the gaps.
- **Take stock.** Collaborate with the governing body members or SLDS staff to assess the SLDS's assets and challenges to better prioritize improvements.
- **Ask questions.** Request reports or analyses that answer your education and workforce program questions to build demand for what the system can do.

If your state has best practice cross-agency data governance, hold leaders accountable.

- **Use the data!** Request reports or analyses that answer your education and workforce program questions.
- **Hold leaders accountable.** Ask your constituents if they have access to the data they need to make informed decisions and communicate their answers to the governing board.
- **Work in partnership.** Collaborate with the governing board to assess the SLDS's assets and challenges including staff capacity, technical infrastructure, or legal obstacles.

2. Learn More

- **Education Commission of the States** produced *Lessons in Data Governance for State Education Leaders*, which notes that "data governance is a core obligation for leaders and staff across any agency that collects, stores, or uses individuals' data" and outlines six principles that state leaders can use in establishing effective data system governance.
- **George W. Bush Institute** evaluates SLDSs in four areas, and two are focused on cross-agency data governance: governance for coordination vision and governance for capacity and resources.
- **Watershed Advisors** released *One System, One Vision: Enhancing Education and Workforce Outcomes Through Unified Data Governance*, which outlines how governance can overcome structural barriers that often hinder the effectiveness of SLDSs.

ABOUT THE DATA QUALITY CAMPAIGN

The Data Quality Campaign is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization leading the effort to ensure that data works for everyone navigating their education and workforce journeys. For more information, go to dataqualitycampaign.org.

DEEP DIVE

BEST PRACTICES FOR LEGISLATION to Ensure Sustained Education and Workforce Data Capacity

Legislators looking to create lasting data access, use, and transparency that meet their state’s priorities must codify cross-agency data governance. Use this guide to understand the components of best practice cross-agency governance legislation, see how different states are using legislation to fit their state context, and measure state legislative efforts against best practices.

Why Legislation?

Legislation is the most effective way to ensure that contributing state agencies come together for shared decisionmaking and that a state’s vision of its data system lasts across changes in political leadership. Codifying governance in law means that the right people must consistently be at the table and maintain a clear vision and purpose for the statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) to guide their decisionmaking. Legislation can also clearly and transparently outline—to policymakers, state leaders, and the public—what data governance is, what it is for, and who is in charge by including components such as:

- A clear purpose for the SLDS aligned to policy goals;
- Leadership-level membership of the board including at least the head of each contributing agency (e.g., Department of Education, Department of Higher Education, and Department of Labor);
- Authority for the board to make decisions about data to meet policy goals;
- Requirements for transparent meetings;
- Requirements for outputs, like reports, research agendas, and dashboards, that advance access to data;
- Mechanisms for ongoing public engagement;
- A neutral managing entity outside the agencies contributing data to the SLDS (i.e., an office or center) that oversees the SLDS with an executive director who reports to the governing board;
- Clear policies for safeguarding individual data; and
- An outline of the board’s responsibilities (e.g., data privacy, research agenda development, setting a mission and vision).

GOVERNANCE 101

Cross-agency data governance is a leadership-level board responsible and accountable for making decisions about how data linked between state agencies through an SLDS is connected, secured, and accessed to meet state education and workforce goals. Best practice cross-agency data governance lays the foundation for secure, effective data use across the P–20W (early childhood through workforce) spectrum.

Data governance is the most important step toward making SLDSs more accessible and useful for people. It ensures that leaders work together to decide how data is collected, linked, and shared and make transparent decisions that prioritize the education and workforce questions that policymakers, students, families, and researchers need to answer.

Centers or offices that act as managing entities for SLDSs can look different across states. Most commonly, these centers are housed in an agency that does not contribute data to the SLDS, in a newly created standalone office, or at a university.

Best Practices in Data Governance Legislation

Data works as an effective tool only when supported by an ecosystem of policy conditions that address important sustainability and decisionmaking questions, demonstrating the importance of cross-agency data governance legislation. Legislators have the opportunity to enact legislation that positions their SLDS to support decisionmakers at all levels to take action to support student success.

The following tables offer state leaders a place to start by detailing the components that should be present in any best practice data legislation, including provisions that ensure that the cross-agency data governing board has the authority and responsibility to make the state’s SLDS work for its people. The second section of tables includes essential provisions for the data system and managing entity that are necessary to promote sustainability and a transparent data ecosystem. While each state’s approach may look different, together, these foundational components represent best practices for building effective data governance through legislation. At a minimum, a piece of legislation should establish or codify the SLDS, provide for a best practice governance structure, and establish the managing entity for the system.

GOVERNING BOARD STRUCTURE

The mandated who, what, and how of the governing board

BEST PRACTICE	WHY IT MATTERS
Mandates a governing board to oversee the data system	Strong, sustainable data governance is the foundation for secure, effective, and meaningful use of cross-sector data. A cross-agency governing board provides structure for how states connect, secure, and access data—and helps states create a culture of data use focused on continuous improvement.
Provides decisionmaking authority over the SLDS and managing entity	To drive meaningful progress, the governing body must have clear authority to make decisions about the SLDS—not just serve in an advisory capacity. Mandated authority ensures clear roles and responsibilities and accountability for data quality and access.
Mandates leadership-level representation from (at a minimum) agencies contributing data to the system	The governing board must include decisionmakers from each agency contributing data to the system. This structure ensures that the data system meets the needs and policy priorities of the state. It also promotes shared ownership of decisions about data.
Mandates representation from groups beyond contributing agencies	Including representatives from agencies and communities beyond those that contribute data—such as economic development, health and human services, and criminal justice—ensures that the system can serve a broader set of priorities.
Requires the inclusion of members of the public	Formally engaging members of the public (e.g., those representing K–12 schools, community colleges, and cities and those who bring unique expertise) brings vital perspectives into data governance conversations. This engagement helps ground the work in user needs, increases transparency, and builds public trust in how data is used.

GOVERNING BOARD CHARGE

The mandated responsibilities of the governing board

BEST PRACTICE	WHY IT MATTERS
Charges the governing board with ensuring that the system delivers value to users and/or advances state goals	Giving the governing board a clear charge to align its work with the state's education and workforce priorities ensures that the system is focused on delivering value. The charge frames the board's decisions and holds it accountable for making sure the system drives impact for individuals, communities, and the state.
Specifies that the board appoints and oversees the executive director of the managing entity	The executive director should report to the cross-agency governing board—not the leadership of a single agency. This structure reinforces the system's objectivity and ensures that data use is not driven by one agency's agenda or needs.
Requires the governing board to establish a research agenda	A clearly defined research agenda ensures that the system is proactively answering the questions that matter most. When the governing board sets and owns the agenda, the board is accountable for it and can drive intentional work across sectors.
Makes the governing board responsible for data privacy	Assigning responsibility for data privacy to the governing board creates clear lines of accountability. The public knows who is responsible for safeguarding their data, and the board is empowered to create policies that protect privacy while enabling meaningful use.
Requires that meetings be open to the public	Public meetings promote transparency, foster trust, and ensure that decisions about the use of data are made in the sunshine.

THE DATA SYSTEM

The requirements for the state's data system

BEST PRACTICE	WHY IT MATTERS
Establishes an SLDS or modifies and/or codifies an existing SLDS	Legislation codifying an SLDS should outline a clear purpose for the system, provide sustainability through funding and structure, and create the legal framework for sharing data across systems and sectors.
Outlines a purpose for the system	A well-defined purpose helps ensure that the SLDS is more than just an information technology project. Connecting the system's purpose to state goals—such as improving education attainment or workforce readiness—reinforces its value and encourages long-term investment and use. Legislation can task the cross-agency governing board with developing the mission and/or vision aligned to the system purpose.
Requires specified agencies to contribute data to the SLDS	Mandating the participation of specific agencies in the SLDS creates the legal framework for sharing data across agencies and helps foster trust.
Cites data access for nonpolicymaker audiences as an explicit purpose for the system	While early SLDS efforts focused primarily on policymakers and researchers, more recent legislation mandates providing access to students, families, educators, and communities.
Provides guardrails for data requests	Data governance should ensure that all agencies have a voice through the governing body, while maintaining clear, consistent processes for accessing and using data. No single agency should have the authority to veto a data request unless the request presents clear privacy and/or personally identifiable information issues; to deny a request, agencies must provide appropriate rationale for the governing body to consider. This structure strengthens collaboration and protects the integrity of the system's purpose.

MANAGING ENTITY STRUCTURE

The mandated who, what, and how of the SLDS managing entity

BEST PRACTICE	WHY IT MATTERS
Establishes a dedicated office or center to manage the system	Creating a dedicated office or center ensures that an executive director and team are responsible for the day-to-day management of the SLDS. This coordination is key to maintaining system quality, supporting users, and keeping the work aligned with the state's broader goals.
Specifies that the managing entity is governed by and responds to the authority of the independent governing board	Making the managing entity accountable to the cross-agency governing board helps ensure objectivity and balance. This structure reduces the risk that one agency will dominate the system's priorities and keeps the data in the SLDS "neutral" from any given agenda.
Requires that the managing entity be housed outside agencies contributing data to the SLDS	Locating the SLDS outside of the agencies contributing data to the system reinforces that the system is objective and is a source of neutral data, separate from the goals of any one agency.
Designates the managing entity as the authorized representative of contributing agencies for purposes of research and reporting	Authorizing the managing entity to act on behalf of contributing agencies allows the SLDS to generate insights and meet reporting requirements more efficiently, reducing the burden on individual agencies and ensuring that the system provides value to contributing agencies.

MANAGING ENTITY CHARGE

The mandated responsibilities of the SLDS's managing entity

BEST PRACTICE	WHY IT MATTERS
Tasks the managing entity with performing research and analysis	The managing entity should be explicitly tasked with using the SLDS to carry out research and analysis aligned with the research agenda established by the governing board. This alignment fosters timely, relevant insights that support state goals and meet the needs of data users.
Makes the managing entity responsible for staffing the system	Designating the managing entity as the home for SLDS staff ensures that the system is consistently supported by dedicated personnel. This structure provides stability and ensures that staff are in place to conduct research, support the governing board, and respond to data user needs. Some states also have liaison staff who work part time for the SLDS managing entity and part time for one of the contributing agencies. These shared staff focus on answering the specific questions of individual agencies and using the SLDS to meet agency-specific reporting requirements.
Specifies that the managing entity will provide technical assistance to data users	Charging the managing entity with supporting data users ensures that the system is accessible to a wide range of populations. Offering technical assistance helps make the system more visible and usable, especially for those without advanced data skills.
Includes a mechanism for community feedback	A feedback mechanism gives the public a voice through tailored avenues for input on decisions about data and elevates user needs. One way to collect this feedback is through formal advisory boards.

FUNDING

Mandated provisions for funding the system

BEST PRACTICE	WHY IT MATTERS
Ensures ongoing funding for technology needs and required staff	SLDSs need ongoing funding to sustain and upgrade the system as needed. While federal and philanthropic dollars can provide needed start-up or innovation funds, ongoing state funds are also needed to sustain the system. Additionally, dedicated funding for full-time staff positions is essential for building and sustaining capacity within the managing entity. Clear <u>investment in staffing</u> helps ensure that the system is equipped to conduct research, support users, and continuously deliver value over time.

TOOLS AND OUTPUTS

Required outputs from the SLDS, including dashboards, reports, tools, and more

BEST PRACTICE	WHY IT MATTERS
Requires the system to support access points (tools or reports)	Legislation should clearly charge the managing entity with creating and maintaining public-facing tools or reports. This requirement ensures that the SLDS produces insights that are accessible and useful to the public, researchers, and policymakers. Requiring the release of user-friendly tools or dashboards increases transparency and builds public trust. Such tools demonstrate that data is being used not only to guide policy but also to empower students, families, educators, and communities with information they can use.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: CALIFORNIA

Codified statute is vital to sustain effective governing bodies that can safeguard student and worker data, elevate community voices, and adapt to emerging state goals and needs. California state leaders and legislators recognized that strong leadership, shared decisionmaking, and transparency were required to advance their state's data needs and answer the questions of a diverse student and worker population.

After years of trailing most states in their efforts to make data work for students, policymakers in California passed a much-needed [data system law](#) in 2021 mandating and governing the [California Cradle-to-Career \(C2C\) Data System](#). The law requires the state to create a robust and user-focused statewide data system that connects data longitudinally across early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce. Critically, the legislation establishes best practice cross-agency data governance with a mandated, leadership-level governing board. California went further than other states by including multiple provisions that help ensure not only that individuals, communities, and decisionmakers have

the information they need but also that their voices are heard in the development of the state's system:

- California requires advisory boards for the governing body that consist of researchers, policy experts, local education leaders, advocates, and the general public. Having public advisors for a state's governing board ensures shared decisionmaking and creates built-in feedback from data users. As of April 2026, 32 members of the public serve across C2C's two advisory boards.
- California's law also requires specific outputs from the system that focus on supporting individuals. Within four years of codification, C2C is supporting the scaling of the [California College Guidance Initiative](#) and has published [dashboards](#) about how California students navigate to and through college, providing students and families with information about postsecondary pathways, return on investment, and more. Access to this information enables individuals to make more informed decisions and reinforces the user-centered focus of California's data system.

Other States With Cross-Agency Data Governance Legislation

Following in the footsteps of three early leaders on data governance (Kentucky, Maryland, and Washington), nine additional states have adopted cross-agency data governance: Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. Leaders looking to codify cross-agency data governance can draw inspiration from the following bills.

STATE	BILL/CODE	YEAR
Washington*	RCW 43.41.400	2007
Maryland	Chapter 190 (S.B. 275)	2010
Mississippi ^A	Miss. Code Ann. § 37-154-3	2011
Kentucky	KRS 151B.132	2013
Connecticut	Sec. 10a-57g S.B. 1250	2017 (updated 2025)
California	A.B. 132	2021
Alabama	H.B. 109	2023
Montana	H.B. 949	2023
Rhode Island	H.B. 5200 H.B. 5076	2023 (updated 2025)
Colorado	H.B. 24-1364	2024
Georgia	H.B. 1302	2026
New Jersey ^A	A. 5802	2026

*Washington's 2007 legislation was the first of its kind and has provided a blueprint for other states to look to for almost 20 years. However, Washington's Education Research & Data Center (ERDC) does not have a governing board, making answers about accountability and sustainability for state data decisions less clear. While Washington's model has evolved over time and ERDC continues to provide value for the public and policymakers, best practice would include codifying a governing board in legislation.

^ANeither Mississippi's nor New Jersey's governance legislation mandates leadership-level representation on the governing board. While the states require representation from contributing agencies, leadership-level representation is important to ensure that the appropriate people come together to make decisions about a state's data collection, security, access, and use.

Conclusion

Codifying the SLDS and its governing board ensures that they last across changes in state priorities and political leadership. States that have sustained their SLDSs by codifying cross-agency data governance into law have created decisionmaking authority, defined responsibilities for data, and promoted access. While states can pursue other ways to build and sustain their data systems, best practice cross-agency data governance is the most critical element.

For additional information on best practices and examples of state legislation on cross-agency data governance, see these resources:

- [Principles for Education Data Legislation](#)
- [State Data Legislation](#)

ABOUT THE DATA QUALITY CAMPAIGN

The Data Quality Campaign is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization leading the effort to ensure that data works for everyone navigating their education and workforce journeys. For more information, go to dataqualitycampaign.org.

DEEP DIVE

A Case Study of ADVOCACY FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN COLORADO

Advocacy, policy, and implementation work go hand in hand—and all three elements are essential for making data work for people. In 2024, with focused partnership between state leaders and advocates, Colorado legislators enacted a comprehensive workforce development law that established a statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) and best practice cross-agency data governance. Colorado hasn't stopped at codification—the state's efforts have been supported by both the steadfast commitment of state leaders and a strong coalition of advocates.

Learning from Colorado's successful efforts, state leaders and advocates can use this resource to understand how advocates can support state efforts and how both groups can work together to advance policy implementation.

COLORADO'S DATA POLICY HISTORY

Colorado has a long history with education and workforce data, extending back to 2013's inBloom education technology initiative. That effort failed to engage key constituencies and stalled actionable data progress for almost 10 years in the state.

In 2022, with a supportive governor and engaged policy and business communities motivated to better understand the outcomes of students and workers in the state, legislators passed [House Bill \(H.B.\) 22-1215](#). This law required the state to produce a report on recommendations to support the expansion and alignment of high school, postsecondary, and workforce programs. One of the key [recommendations](#) focused on establishing an SLDS to connect cross-agency data, setting the stage for Colorado's cross-agency governance law.

In 2024, Colorado joined a group of leading states by codifying best practice cross-agency data governance. [H.B. 24-1364](#):

- Mandated the establishment of the Colorado Statewide Longitudinal Data System within the Office of Informational Technology (OIT);

- Created a cross-agency data governance structure with a governing board that includes leaders from various state agencies and members of the public;
- Provided \$5 million in state funding to build and staff the data system;
- Outlined requirements and purposes for the system, including that the data system must have the ability to supply information to education and workforce practitioners alongside policymakers and researchers; and
- Required the Colorado SLDS governing board to submit an annual report on postsecondary and workforce outcomes to the governor and general assembly.

While Colorado's journey to cross-agency data governance has not been linear, it has demonstrated that state leaders can take a range of pathways to secure data governance. Considering the unique history, context, and needs of the state is important, which is why implementation strategies focused on public voice, transparency, and data for decisionmaking continue to be priorities for leaders in Colorado.

Colorado's Advocacy Strategies for Implementation Success

Since 2024, advocates have helped to support successful implementation of Colorado's data system, acting as critical friends to state leaders who are motivated to ensure the success of the system and see results for everyday Coloradans. To do this work, Colorado advocates took the following steps:

Established a coalition of relevant partners. Led by a statewide policy organization, Colorado Succeeds, education and workforce advocates in Colorado united to support an accurate, timely, and user-centered SLDS in the state, forming the [Better Data for Better Decisions Coalition](#). The coalition was vital to ensuring that legislators codified legislation, and their work has not stopped with the passage of H.B. 24-1364. The coalition has used its business, technical, and advocacy expertise to help state leaders stay focused on meeting the elements of the law and the needs of Coloradans. The coalition's 2025 [report](#) calls on policymakers to prioritize certain opportunities during implementation, including leveraging existing data assets across the state to meet the pressing data needs of Coloradans, gain early wins that demonstrate the value of the SLDS, and create momentum for future work that can benefit even more Coloradans.

Developed relationships with system leaders. Advocates in Colorado have established a relationship with OIT, the managing entity of the SLDS. Advocates have served as critical friends during this work, helping state and system leaders reach different constituencies and build trust while also holding them accountable to these same communities. The coalition has invited the executive director of the SLDS to partner on multiple webinars and events, amplifying the reach and transparency of the system and allowing system leaders to hear from the public about their needs and intended uses of the system. OIT now views advocates, especially the coalition, as a partner in the work, reinforcing the importance of continued advocacy through all stages of the data governance implementation.

Built trust with the public about the importance and possibilities of an SLDS. [People don't use data they don't trust.](#) That's why Colorado advocates have been deliberate about crafting and sharing with communities information about the state's efforts to build its SLDS. Coalition partners have hosted events and webinars aimed at keeping the public up to date and hearing their feedback, along with providing resources to help the public understand [how data can work for them](#). Leaders are engaging in robust community engagement to sustain interest, trust, and use of Colorado's new system.

Invested in the resources required for meaningful policy implementation. Policy alone doesn't result in quality implementation. Advocates in the state have capitalized on efforts to ensure that financial resources are available for implementation by engaging with the philanthropic community inside and outside of the state. Local funders especially have mobilized around the state's data vision, understanding the need for investment to continue advocacy, education, and coalition efforts. Advocates' success in garnering philanthropic buy-in and support has been integral to ensuring that the development of the state's data system is timely and that the system ultimately delivers value back to its users.

Colorado's legislation set the stage for best practice cross-agency data governance, and the state's implementation process thus far has demonstrated how successful data initiatives must be partnerships of state leaders, advocates, and the public. With continued public engagement, partnerships with advocates, and transparency about their work, Colorado leaders are well positioned to build a data system that works for Coloradans.

STATE LEADERS IN IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to support from advocates, OIT, the Governor's Office, and the governing board are focused on establishing a system that can deliver value to Coloradans and positioning Colorado as one of the nation's leaders in education and workforce data. Prioritizing best practice cross-agency data governance and intentionally bringing the public along in the following ways has proved to be effective thus far in Colorado:

- **Prioritizing representation and transparency.** Colorado's legislation mandated representation on the governing board beyond contributing agencies, including appointing members of the public to the board. Meetings must be available to the public, and the board is responsible for creating mechanisms for community feedback. Colorado has

two advisory groups—the Build & Implementation Advisory Group and the Sustainability Advisory Group—that aim to incorporate additional voices (including advocates) into governing board decisionmaking, demonstrating a commitment to engaging communities in data decisions.

- **Supporting advocacy efforts to educate and create buy-in with the public.** Just as advocates have created materials for the public to learn more about the SLDS, so have leaders in government. OIT has crafted intentional communications efforts, including a [communications toolkit](#), that outline its efforts to provide information to a variety of users at different starting points, allowing the public to understand how an SLDS would work for them and fulfill their data needs.

For additional information on best practices and examples of other states that have employed a range of these strategies for successful governance and implementation, see these resources:

- [Investing in California's Data Future: How California's P-20W Cradle-to-Career Data System Could Take the State from Last to First](#)
- [The Art of the Possible: Data Governance Lessons Learned from Kentucky, Maryland, and Washington](#)

ABOUT THE DATA QUALITY CAMPAIGN

The Data Quality Campaign is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization leading the effort to ensure that data works for everyone navigating their education and workforce journeys. For more information, go to dataqualitycampaign.org.