

# Strategic Coaching Design

## Laying the Foundation for a Comprehensive Coaching Strategy

*In the fall of 2017, JFF launched the Assessment, Research, and Coaching Pilot Project aimed at providing modest amounts of funding to Centers in the Student Success Center Network to design and implement coaching strategies. Through the pilot, 10 Centers were funded to implement coaching to address high need areas such as guided pathways implementation informed by the Scale of Adoption Assessment (SOAA), data collection on student enrollment and outcomes to inform implementation, and institutional capacity for transformative change. The Centers tested their coaching designs over a one-year period, offering early lessons on how colleges are using coaching to implement guided pathways and student success strategies.*

The New York State Student Success Center (Center), launched in 2016, is hosted by the State University of New York (SUNY) System and provides leadership and support to improve access, completion, and student success in their community colleges. After several years of case-making, the Center is well underway, with 10 of SUNY's 30 community colleges forming the first cohort to participate in a series of six SUNY Guided Pathways Institutes (Institutes).

### Coaching Model Structure

The Center based the design of its coaching strategies on the AACC Pathways model and embedded the coaching structure in the Institutes. This approach engaged two national coaches as lead coaches with experience from AACC Pathways to train five state coaches in supporting the colleges participating in the institutes. In this model, a coaching team was formed that supports the five state coaches and consists of the Center Executive Director (ED), the lead coaches, and institute planning team members from Monroe Community College (the lead college for the Institutes and a member of AACC Pathways 1.0) and Mohawk Valley Community College (a member of AACC Pathways 2.0). Technical assistance from other national experts was also incorporated into the coaching model.

### Why Coaching?

This Center's pilot began by adopting and adapting the AACC Pathways model, with the emphasis on a coaching model that yields benefits over time. The primary purpose of the pilot was to build in-state capacity by providing coaching support for the college teams participating in the Institutes. Within this goal, the two main focal areas were building the technical assistance capacity of the Center and supporting the administration of the Scale of Adoption Assessment (SOAA). Coaching plays a very important role during and between the institutes. Coaches facilitate team discussions, moderate break-out sessions at the institutes, and support accountability between institutes by checking in with the team leads to support pre-work and action plans. The Center has observed how integral coaching is becoming to the implementation of this comprehensive reform.

### KEY FEATURES OF THE COACHING STRATEGY

- Lead (national) and state coaches coaching model.
- Targeted technical assistance from national experts.
- Two community colleges with AACC Pathways experience are leading the Institutes and helping with coaching support.

### Promising Accomplishments

- The Center built coaching capacity for its state coaches with a planning retreat, embedded supports at the institutes, and numerous calls and webinars with lead coaches and experts.
- The Center designed a coaching model involving two lead (national) coaches and five state coaches. This train the trainer model will be further developed during the next round of Institutes.
- A team emerged among the coaches from relationship development opportunities. In recognition of this as an important strategy, this will be incorporated into future cohorts.
- The Center has begun plans to expand the coaching model to develop a Coaching Academy to train institute coaches while providing further coaching support to current colleges implementing pathways.

## Coaching Design and Strategies

### NATIONAL AND STATE COACH SELECTION

The two lead coaches have previous experience working together that helped to expedite a comprehensive approach to training the five state coaches who were each assigned two college teams. In addition to the AACC Pathways experience, the lead coaches have strong experience facilitating group discussions; understanding data-informed decision-making; and tracking metrics to monitor student progress and success. The state coaches were selected based on their ability to interact with senior leaders and team members, their experience in academic and student affairs, and their initial knowledge and interest in guided pathways. This lead and state coaching model works well because it helps provide high level coaching support and content for college teams while building the depth of guided pathways coaching capacity in the state.

### TRAINING

A one-day coaching retreat was held to create an opportunity for both lead and state coaches to get to know one another and give the state coaches insight into good coaching facilitation strategies. During the retreat and beyond, the lead coaches assist with outreach strategies, advise on team dynamics, serve as resources for answering specific guided pathways content questions, and offer help with other issues. Because strong connections were made and found to be important with the first cohort coaches, future cohorts will also receive team building opportunities.

### INSTITUTE ENGAGEMENT

Beginning the day prior to each institute and continuing throughout multiple touch points are built into the institute's schedule for all involved to make connections, prepare, reflect, and work through issues and debrief. For instance, the day prior to each institute, the state coaching team meets



SUNY Guided Pathways Institute #2 at Rockland Community College with Dr. Michael Baston, Lead Coach.

with the national expert who will be speaking at the Institute, reviews the upcoming agenda, and share updates from their college teams. During the Institute college team time, the state coaches split time between their two college teams while the lead coaches move between all teams providing support or helping with content questions as needed.

### COACH-COLLEGE COMMUNICATION

Outreach templates were developed for coaches to use with college teams to foster connections early in the process. Between Institutes, the state coaches check in regularly with their college team leads. Additionally, the lead and state coaches have monthly coaching calls, facilitated by the Center ED, to review upcoming Institute materials and share updates from their college teams. All coaches are included on webinars with college team leads prior to each Institute, as well as on special topics as needed. At all Institutes, the state coach and college team leads meet for breakfast on the first day and this relationship building activity has proved to be very valuable. However, for some college teams, understanding how to use their coach is a learning process. In the future, the coaching team and Center will share with the college teams the importance of the coaching role to their success prior to the institutes launch.

## CCRI Role

As a national partner for the Student Success Center Network, Community College Research Initiatives (CCRI) supports Student Success Center Executive Directors in the design of evidence-based coaching strategies for their guided pathways implementation. These designs utilize strategic planning, technical assistance, professional development, communities of practice, and applied research and evaluation to achieve more equitable outcomes for community college students. Broadly, CCRI conducts research on equitable college access, progression and transfer, degree completion, and employment in living-wage careers for underserved students and diverse learner populations throughout the United States. Follow us on Twitter @CCRI\_UW.

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