NATIONAL LEAGUE of CITIES | MUNICIPAL ACTION GUIDE

Conducting a Scan of Local Efforts to Promote Postsecondary Success

THE CHALLENGE

Nationwide, around 40 percent of working age adults hold a postsecondary credential. In the 21st century, these credentials have increasingly become the keys that open doors to family-supporting jobs. Recognizing the economic necessity of building a highly skilled and educated workforce, more city, education, and business leaders are joining a growing national movement to achieve a 60 percent postsecondary attainment level over the next decade.

In order to achieve this goal, individuals pursuing higher education – including both young people moving from high school to college and adults without a postsecondary degree – will need a variety of services and supports. These services must address a range of needs that span the educational pipeline: college readiness, access and financing; transitions into postsecondary studies; persistence toward credentials; and the push to completion and attainment of multiple types of diplomas and certificates. Yet in most cities, there is little coordination among providers of these services, and fragmentation unfortunately tends to be the rule rather than the exception.

Municipal officials can not only lead the charge for increasing local college completion rates, but also are in an ideal position to embrace one particularly important role in any postsecondary success initiative: conducting an initial scan of the college access and success environment in their cities. The purpose of a scan is to take stock of the local landscape of services, supports, and institutions that promote postsecondary success, and then use that scan to develop a comprehensive strategy for helping more students receive the support they need to earn their degree or credential.

To conduct a thorough scan, city officials should consider taking a cross-sector approach to identify the key players and learn about the programs they offer. As discussed in NLC's municipal action guide on *Municipal Leadership for Postsecondary Success: Getting Started* – the first of this three-part municipal action guide series supported by Lumina Foundation – city leaders can engage a wide range of stakeholders to find out who in their community is focused on postsecondary attainment, what various programs look like, and where these efforts might overlap or leave gaps in needs and services. Once the scan provides a more complete understanding of the various actors and their levels of effectiveness, city leaders can then work with those stakeholders to enhance their services and strengthen their capacity.

POLICY OVERVIEW

Community-based, nonprofit organizations typically dominate the local landscape of services and supports for postsecondary access and success. These providers may operate as independent organizations offering scholarships, mentoring, counseling, college matching, or a combination of services, or as programs within larger social service and educational organizations. They may also focus on a particular age or ethnic group. A few national "name brand" organizations such

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as College Summit operate in multiple locations. In cities where the nonprofit sector is particularly well developed, a network or alliance of organizations may exist. The philanthropic sector often provides the resources to support these organizations' programs. School districts and their partners may also operate programs such as GEAR UP with federal or other sources of funding.

In addition, community colleges and university outreach programs often provide supports and services. They may rely on or coordinate federal resources focused on college access and success, such as:

- The Educational Opportunity Centers discretionary grant program, which provides counseling and information on college admissions to qualified adults who want to enter or continue a program of postsecondary education. This program is one of eight that are known as TRIO programs – a set of programs that includes Upward Bound and Talent Search. These federal outreach and student service programs are designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Federal College Access Challenge Grants, which flow to state agencies to foster partnerships among federal, state, and local governments and philanthropic organizations. Through matching challenge grants, this program aims to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

Several cities and nonprofit partners have established place-based college access and success centers. These centers rely on a mix of philanthropic and city funding and other supports to provide one-stop college counseling, assessment of student interests, referrals, and financial aid resources. Some build upon the longstanding roles of public libraries as go-to information centers on college access and financial aid.

BENEFITS OF A SCAN

To develop a strong local college access and success system, it is essential to understand what assets are in place, what type of college attainment results the current local system yields, and what challenges need to be addressed … For communities in the earliest stages of developing a system, the process of developing a scan can play a catalytic role in galvanizing stakeholders, laying the groundwork for necessary partnership, and developing a map that can trigger momentum, direction, and collaborative will for more coordinated action. In communities where a more emergent or developed system is already in place, an assessment scan can provide essential benchmarking, so progress over time can be calibrated, effective strategy development can unfold, and ongoing coordination and alignment of programs can be facilitated.

– OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, *Conducting a Scan of Your College Access and Success System*

STRATEGIES

City leaders can advocate for, initiate, and support a scan of postsecondary services and then use the knowledge gained from this process to develop collaborative plans for supporting college success. Key strategies for cities to consider include:

- Place the scan within a larger framework of improving postsecondary success to strengthen the city's economy. Conducting a scan is not an end in itself. It serves as an important step toward providing the services and supports that members of the current and future local workforce need to commence studies and attain key credentials demanded by employers. Given the benefits of upgrading residents' skills, many cities are beginning to see postsecondary success as an integral component of their economic development strategies. Higher-wage jobs, entrepreneurship, increased tax receipts, improved public safety, and greater civic participation are associated with higher levels of educational attainment.

- Emphasize the effectiveness and efficiency gains that stem from enhanced local capacity and coordination. A scan lays the groundwork for ongoing strategic efforts to align and build a cohesive system of services and supports in partnership with other education and social service organizations. In some cities,

developing a system entails coordinating numerous existing efforts. In other cities, scan results will signal the additional capacity needed to improve outcomes for students. Another major benefit of a scan is that it can help local partners eliminate redundant programs, fill gaps in services and supports, and reduce barriers to accessing higher education and key wraparound services.

- **Include the full range of service and support providers.** Engaging educational institutions, community-based organizations, workforce development agencies, philanthropies and others in the scan process will help build common knowledge about the postsecondary landscape and reinforce stakeholders' commitment to improving that landscape. Completing a postsecondary success scan can accelerate the process of aligning separate initiatives by establishing a shared agenda, promoting synergy of actions, enhancing communication, and creating the foundation for sustainable, well-defined partnerships.

- **Use the completed scan as a briefing and planning tool.** A completed scan helps city officials better assess which crucial elements of a postsecondary success strategy are in place and which to develop. With scan results in hand, city leaders and their partners can develop informed plans and consider making new investments or reallocating existing resources.

> ## SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASSESS THE LANDSCAPE OF STAKEHOLDERS AND SUPPORTS
>
> - Who are the major players in the college access and success system, including key leaders, community-based providers, educational institutions, and other influential participants?
>
> - What partnerships and/or forums are in place to coordinate and align the college access and success work, and how do they function?
>
> - What programs and supports are in place that have been shown nationally to be important for success?
>
> - What system reform efforts are underway?
>
> - What are the challenges to improving the system's performance?
>
> - What are the opportunities to improve the system?
>
> Source: Adapted from the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, *Conducting a Scan of Your College Access and Success System*

Taken together, these strategies support the mutually reinforcing functions of an effective system: coordination, alignment, and partnership.

ACTION STEPS

Working in concert with local educational institutions, community-based organizations, employers, and workforce development partners, city leaders embarking on a scan of their local landscape should take the following action steps:

1. CATALOG THE POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS ACTORS AND GATHER DATA ON LOCAL COLLEGE ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION RATES.

The staff-level working group charged with this task must be able to identify, catalog, and monitor the existing initiatives and actors in the postsecondary success arena – organizations that can help answer the questions listed in the sidebar above. City officials and staff can also refer to the diagram below for a checklist of some of the core stakeholders to approach. At the center of any postsecondary success initiative are the students, who interact directly with the entities listed in the next ring: higher education, community-based organizations, K-12 schools, and parents, other family members, or adult mentors. The outermost ring includes stakeholders that play a diverse range of valuable supporting roles: funding partners, research organizations, advocacy and communications groups, the business community, policymakers, and intermediaries and technical assistance providers.

One of the most important early steps in the information gathering process is to analyze where students fall out of the educational pipeline. School districts that are members of the National Student Clearinghouse can request college enrollment and completion data on their students. With this information, local leaders can gain a better understanding of how many students in a given ninth grade cohort – both in the overall community and broken out by school, race, gender and other demographic characteristics – graduate from high school on time, attend college, and receive a degree or credential within six years. For more detail on this topic, see NLC's municipal action guide on *Using and Sharing Data to Improve Postsecondary Success* at www.nlc.org/iyef.

STAKEHOLDERS IN A COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS SYSTEM
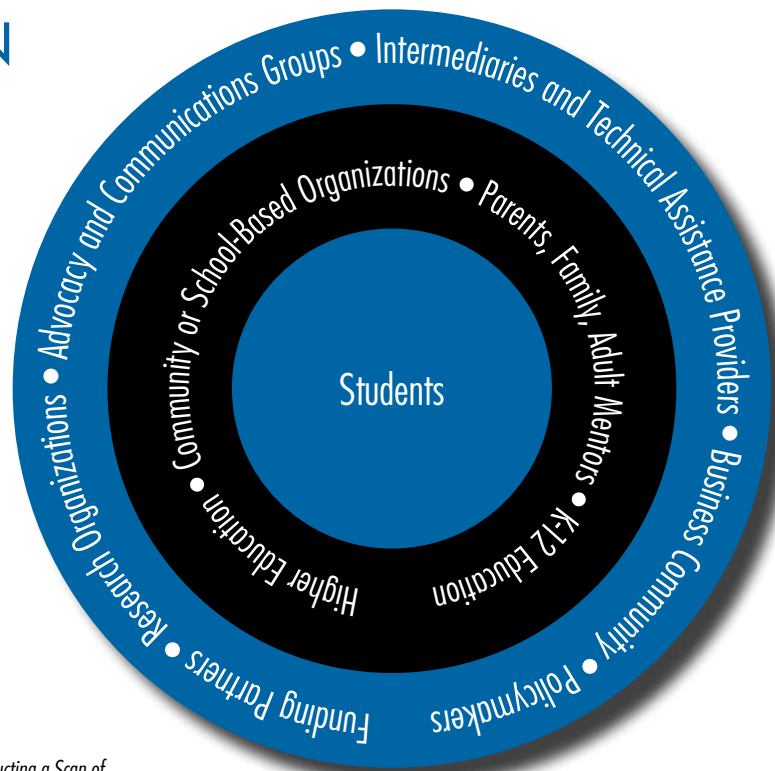
Source: Adapted from OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, *Conducting a Scan of Your College Access and Success System: Why it Matters. How to Do it. How to Use it.*

2. CONDUCT A THOROUGH INVENTORY OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF PROGRAMS, POLICIES, PARTNERSHIPS, AND SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS ACROSS THE EDUCATIONAL PIPELINE.

With a more complete picture of the local entities involved in college access and success, and with current data on postsecondary enrollment and completion rates, city leaders and partners can begin identifying and evaluating the system of partnerships, supports, programs and policies in place to help students achieve their higher education goals. Cities can also map the system's geographic concentration of programs and resources (e.g., by high school or neighborhood) to examine service gaps and inequities. A comprehensive system spans the educational pipeline, aligning the efforts of K-12 schools, postsecondary institutions and other key stakeholders and supporting students as they transition from high school to college. It addresses common barriers to postsecondary attendance and completion, including: inadequate academic preparation for rigorous college coursework; a lack of awareness about college options and the application process; tuition, fees and other costs; and limited supports for students who are enrolled in a postsecondary program.

At the K-12 level, schools and community-based partners may be providing an array of supports that fall into one or more the following categories:

- **Efforts to motivate students and nurture aspirations for college:** Examples include college and career counseling, mentoring, college tours, summer bridge programs, dual enrollment, and cohort models of peer support.

- **Assistance with college and financial aid applications:** Cities and their partners have provided families with information and counseling on how to identify and apply for relevant college programs, offered guidance on applying for financial aid, raised funds for scholarships, and assisted students and parents in completing the FAFSA.

- **Academic support:** Students will be more likely to attend college if they receive encouragement to take and complete rigorous courses in high school aligned with college curricula. Other key academic supports include preparation for college exams and cultivation of good study habits.

Underlying each of these supports is a commitment by all school personnel and the larger community to foster a college-going culture within the school system. At the postsecondary level, the following factors can play a role in helping students attain degrees and credentials:

- **A personalized education experience:** Consistent, structured, and individualized guidance during the first year of college and interaction with faculty can motivate students to continue their education.

- **Proactive academic engagement:** Students can benefit from regular advising on course selections, progress and goals.

- **Social support:** Opportunities to connect with peers, participate in campus life, and work at on-campus jobs can help students build a shared sense of community that encourages persistence.

As with the K-12 system, a postsecondary institutional culture that promotes successful program completion provides the foundation of this support system.

While schools and higher education institutions play a central role in any college access and success initiative, a range of other organizations may be providing various supports. City leaders are in a unique position to coordinate these and other wraparound services such as transportation, health and mental health services, housing, and child care. They can also identify existing partnerships within the community and potential new partners to engage. Stakeholders can use information from this inventory process to strengthen less developed aspects of the system, reevaluate their roles, or identify opportunities for greater collaboration.

Cities may consider turning to national or local intermediaries to assess the postsecondary success landscape. For instance, to help local leaders assess the college access and success landscape in Philadelphia, Pa., and Miami, Fla., the OMG Center conducted more than two dozen interviews as well as a document review, and observed the meetings of key networks. Their efforts underscore the value of deepening a basic "who's who" scan by assessing the activities and capacity of postsecondary success partners.

3. ANALYZE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS SYSTEM.

The inventory of current efforts described above will shed light on the challenges to and opportunities for improving the performance of the postsecondary success system. For instance, the OMG Center's summary analysis of systems in Philadelphia and Miami described Philadelphia as having "a system with a history of developing individual programs and an emergent focus on coordination and alignment" and Miami as having "an emerging, but still fragmented system."

This type of assessment may also produce findings about the presence, absence, or strength of leadership, areas of overlap among service providers and gaps in services available to students, or the "fault lines" along which fragmentation occurs.

The scan process can help cities identify opportunities and challenges at a number of levels. Some common challenges occur on the student and family level, such as a lack of "college knowledge" – that is, students, particularly first-generation college-goers, and their parents are unaware of what it takes to be academically and socially prepared to apply to college, secure financial aid, and enroll in classes. Nonprofit providers of college access services can work together to raise college awareness among all students through public campaigns or by training high school counselors.

In addition, there are often specific institutional practices and policies that create obstacles to student success and present opportunities for improvement. Some colleges, for example, have student support services scattered across the campus. Yet students are more likely to take advantage of the supports they need to persist from one semester to the next if they can address all of their academic and non-academic needs at one central location. Furthermore, many high school principals have recently recognized that teachers can help create a college-going culture by talking to their students about the colleges they attended.

Finally, some challenges and opportunities cross systems, such as the "silos" most institutions find themselves in when they try to link data to track student progress or align secondary and postsecondary curricula and instruction. One way to break down these cross-system barriers is for stakeholders to develop a separate infrastructure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each of the partners. For instance, an intermediary called All Hands Raised (formerly the Portland Schools Foundation) manages the Cradle-to-Career (C2C) Partnership in Portland, Ore. Built on a collective impact model, the C2C partnership brings together local leaders around five common goals for children and youth, including postsecondary enrollment and completion.

4. USE SCAN FINDINGS TO LAUNCH NEW COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS INITIATIVES.

City leaders can utilize a completed scan to galvanize and convene public and partners, build political and public will, and identify specific opportunities for follow up and leadership by the mayor's office and city agencies. Whereas involving stakeholders in creating the scan helps build commitment along the way, leaders can also use the completed scan to attract additional key organizations to the initiative.

With a completed scan as a point of reference, city leaders and their counterparts in educational and philanthropic institutions can identify beneficial policy changes, including:

- Stronger alignment of K-12 school and college curricula;
- Opportunities for dual enrollment in high school and college coursework;
- Mechanisms to increase accountability for college enrollment and completion across the educational pipeline; and
- Measures to build a college-going culture in high schools.

In New York City, the Graduate NYC! partnership used the results of an in-depth scan of postsecondary success programs to create professional development opportunities and begin compiling a provider directory for local students.

RESOURCES

COLLEGE BOARD

The College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy advocates for school counseling that helps every student graduate from high school with the educational preparation and social capital necessary for success in college and life. NOSCA identifies and supports the skills, practices, characteristics and relationships for school counselors necessary to ensure that all students are college- and career-ready.

- National Office for School Counselor Advocacy website: http://nosca.collegeboard.org/

COLLEGE SUMMIT

College Summit is a national nonprofit organization that helps high schools raise their college enrollment rates by building a college-going culture.

- College Summit website: www.collegesummit.org

GRADUATE NYC!

The Office of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, the New York City Department of Education, and City University of New York (CUNY), with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, launched Graduate NYC! with the goal of doubling the number of CUNY graduates by 2020.

- *Graduate NYC! Survey of Postsecondary Readiness and Success Programs and Services:* http://gradnyc.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/GNYC-Program-Survey-Executive-Summary1.pdf

- *Graduate NYC! List of Postsecondary Readiness and Success Programs and Services:* http://gradnyc.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Postsecondary_Readiness_and_Success_Programs_Directory_Final.xls

- *Graduate NYC! Map of Postsecondary Readiness and Success Programs and Services:* http://batchgeo.com/map/c60ad7f712bca94fa3c70ab567a0ef48

NATIONAL COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK

The National College Access Network's mission is to build, strengthen, and empower communities committed to college access and success so that all students, especially those underrepresented in postsecondary education, can achieve their educational dreams.

- National College Access Network website: www.collegeaccess.org

- *Guidebook: Creating Community-Based College Access Centers:* www.collegeaccess.org/NCANBB/AllAccess/ItemPage.aspx?groupid=42&id=2956

OMG CENTER FOR COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

OMG seeks to accelerate and deepen social impact through strategy, evaluation, and capacity-building, and has been a leader in planning and evaluating national postsecondary success initiatives. This report draws heavily on OMG's guide to *Conducting a Scan of Your College Access and Success System: Why it Matters. How to Do it. How to Use it.* (available at http://www.omgcenter.org/sites/default/files/OMG_CollegeAccess.pdf). The following resources provide more in-depth information on OMG's work with Philadelphia, Pa., and Miami, Fla.:

- *College Access and Success in Philadelphia: Moving Towards Systemic Efforts:* www.omgcenter.org/sites/default/files/PhillyLandscapepts1and2.pdf

- *Miami-Dade College Access & Success Landscape Scan: Understanding the College Access and Success System in Miami:* www.omgcenter.org/sites/default/files/miamilandscape.pdf

SUCCESS BOSTON

Announced in November 2008 by Mayor Thomas M. Menino, Success Boston aims to double the college completion rate for the Boston Public Schools (BPS) Class of 2011 and beyond. Key collaborating partners include the City of Boston, the Boston Public Schools, the Boston Foundation, numerous area nonprofits, and nearly 40 Massachusetts colleges and universities.

- Success Boston College Completion Initiative website: www.bostonfoundation.org/Content.aspx?ID=12650

- *Getting Through: Higher Education's Plan to Increase the College Completion Rates of Boston Public Schools Graduates:* www.tbf.org/uploadedFiles/tbforg/Utility_Navigation/Multimedia_Library/Reports/SuccessBoston_ReportOne_F.pdf

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Student Service of the Office of Postsecondary Education's Higher Education Programs division administers programs to facilitate access of low-income, first generation students and individuals with disabilities to higher education; encourages low-income students in elementary, middle, and secondary schools to attend college; and facilitates quality graduate education to address national needs.

- College Access Challenge Grants website: www2.ed.gov/programs/cacg/applicant.html

- Office of Postsecondary Education Higher Education Programs – Student Service/TRIO and GEAR Up Programs website: www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/student-service.html

CITY EXAMPLES

BOSTON, MASS. (POP. 617,594)

www.bostonfoundation.org/Content.aspx?ID=12650

In Boston, Mayor Thomas M. Menino champions Success Boston, a postsecondary success initiative aimed at doubling the college completion rate for graduates of the Boston Public Schools (BPS). Success Boston partners used scans and inventories of the local stakeholders and institutional partners to help create a shared understanding of the education pipeline. The inventory informed the selection of lead agencies to oversee each of the three priority strategies of "getting ready, getting in, and getting through," and helped establish more precise roles for BPS, nonprofits, higher education partners, and the business community. Importantly, the scan of the landscape also laid the foundation for the initiative's subsequent push to target specific "loss points" for intervention: student transitions, alignment of K-12 and college

curricula, financial aid, and employment opportunities that are sensitive to the needs of students and related to their academic and career interests.

MIAMI, FLA. (CITY POP. 399,457, COUNTY POP. 2,496,435)

www.educationfund.org/programs/citipostsecondarysuccessprogramcpsp

With support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the OMG Center conducted a landscape analysis of postsecondary success efforts from 2008 through 2010 in Miami, which has a countywide school district serving approximately 30 cities. The scan identified several national college access organizations operating in Miami, as well as numerous local youth development groups offering college access and success services. In addition, the "scan identified pockets of interest within the business community, local higher education institutions, the school district, the City of Miami and local funders" and identified challenges to coordination and gaps in available data. It also helped inform future directions for the Citi Postsecondary Success Program active in three high schools, and flagged the need for a lead organization and further analysis of college enrollment, persistence, and graduation data.

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y. (POP. 8,175,133)

http://gradnyc.com

Graduate NYC!, a citywide college readiness and success initiative supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, undertook a scan of the local postsecondary success landscape that consisted of a spring 2011 survey of local programs working to increase postsecondary readiness, access, transition and rates of completion. Of the 253 organizations and potential partners that received the survey over a four-week period, 156 responded. The survey sought information regarding each organization's target populations, funding structures, programs offered, program structures, methods of data collection, communication practices, and professional development activities. The survey results now guide the creation of professional development, web-based tools, and resources that Graduate NYC! offers to programs based in New York City. Using the survey results, Graduate NYC! also developed a list of postsecondary readiness and support programs and services available to the city's students and youth (see links to resources above). Graduate NYC! plans to expand this list to include more information, such as program eligibility and start dates. Ultimately, the initial scan and survey will lead to a more comprehensive provider directory for New York City youth and other students.

PHILADELPHIA, PA. (POP. 1,526,006)

www.phillygoes2college.com

With support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the OMG Center conducted a two-year assessment of the college access and success system in Philadelphia beginning in 2008. OMG analyzed efforts by the Mayor's College Ready Committee to increase the city's college attainment rates, the School District of Philadelphia's changes to guidance counseling mandates and curricula, and emerging initiatives to coordinate previously isolated efforts. The scan also identified at least seven community- or school-based organizations, five research organizations, three intermediaries and technical assistance providers, and four funding partners working to enhance postsecondary success in Philadelphia. In addition, the scan identified eight partially overlapping collaborative efforts that bring together multiple stakeholders. These findings have informed efforts of the Mayor's Council for College and Career Success, as well as the city-run PhillyGoes2College Office and Graduation Coaches Campaign.