





A.S.P.I.I.R.E.S

Policy Review Framework

Every state wants its residents to be able to compete in the 21st-century economy. That’s why several state leaders have set [big goals](#) for boosting the share of the population with college degrees and other credentials — making higher education and training more accessible, flexible, and affordable. But how well, and for whom, are those policies working?

A.S.P.I.I.R.E.S is a tool state leaders can use to evaluate progress toward their public policy goals and chart the best course forward. See how it works and [sign up to learn more](#).

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|  | <p>ASK</p> <p>This first step is simple but important. Here’s a model to start with: How well is policy (x) working for population (y) with respect to policy goal (z)? Even if the focus population is “all residents” or “all students,” ensure a commitment to identify any disparities that may exist by race/ethnicity, income, or other relevant attributes.</p> |
|  | <p>SET UP</p> <p>Assign personnel, create teams to conduct the project, and provide any needed training. Ensure all are on the same page about the goals and approach. Set a budget and secure funding. Define the project scope, including the project timeline, the look-back period, and the regions or colleges to include. Identify key performance indicators (KPIs) used to judge desired outcomes. Decide which data sources to use and which stakeholders to engage. Establish systems for managing the project and keeping everyone informed.</p> |
|  | <p>PERFORM RESEARCH</p> <p>This is the digging process. See what the numbers say, and disaggregate data by race/ethnicity, income, and other attributes. Hear what the stakeholders say, and involve students whenever possible. Compare policies and programs against what’s permitted and what’s proven. Keep everything organized. Prepare summary slides for non-technical stakeholders to understand results.</p> |
|  | <p>INTERPRET</p> <p>Now that you’ve gathered all relevant information, go back to the key question(s) and the KPIs you set. What’s working well, what’s falling short, and why? How might policies and programs be improved to expand opportunity and improve outcomes? Answers to these questions are your project findings. If you end up with more questions than answers, consider going back to the SET UP phase and revise the approach, but be mindful of timelines, as students need support now.</p> |

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|  | <p>IDENTIFY OBJECTIVES</p> <p>Once you’ve interpreted the information and assembled findings, it’s time to identify objectives. If you found that policies and programs are falling short, what would improvement look like in one year, three years, five years? Have a destination in mind before figuring out how to get there. If the research identifies any disparities among students or state residents by race/ethnicity, income, or other attributes, ensure there are objectives to address these disparities.</p> |
|  | <p>RECOMMEND</p> <p>Now that you have set objectives, develop the roadmap for reaching them. Design recommendations and secure commitments to change policies, adjust policy implementation, and improve programs. While legislative change may be on the list, focus on opportunities within the purview of state agencies, postsecondary training providers, and statewide partners who can hit the ground running.</p> |
|  | <p>EXECUTE</p> <p>Simply put, it’s now time to put the plan in motion. Identify roles, implementation plans, and timelines for advancing each recommendation or commitment. Communicate and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to increase support, reduce opposition, and accelerate progress.</p> |
|  | <p>SCOUT</p> <p>Track and tweak to make sure your policy is at its peak. If you’re hitting roadblocks, what adjustments are needed and who can help? Monitor outcomes for different groups of students to ensure your changes are reducing inequality, not exacerbating it. Go back to an earlier part of the A.S.P.I.I.R.E.S framework if you need to.</p> |

At Ed Trust, we will keep learning with supporting public officials who are working to improve opportunity and outcomes in higher education, especially for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. The A.S.P.I.I.R.E.S framework is one tool for doing that.

The Ed Trust A.S.P.I.I.R.E.S framework uses examples from the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative. We are deeply grateful to officials in Colorado, Hawaii, [Kentucky](#), Louisiana, and Massachusetts for their collaboration on this project. As we continue to learn from officials in these and other states, we will publish accompanying stories, tools, and resources inspired by their work.

SIGN UP

[Sign up](#) to be the first to receive additional insights from this project, and to receive an invitation to discuss implementing the ASPIRES framework in your state.