EVERY STATE, EVERY STUDENT:
Key Learnings for Statewide Efforts to Support Student Basic Needs

Approximately **60% of college students experience basic needs insecurity**, including lacking the food and housing needed to learn and thrive. Research shows that basic needs insecurity negatively impacts students' academic performance, sense of belonging, and persistence.

As states seek to identify and address the systematic barriers to student success, reach their state educational attainment goals, and strengthen their economies and workforce, they are recognizing the need to proactively and comprehensively address student basic needs.

Several states have launched statewide efforts to better understand students' needs and pursue changes to policy and practice to create a more affordable and supportive higher education environment.

At The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, we have had the opportunity to assist several states in such work.

Coordinated basic needs efforts can create lasting systemic changes by:

- Cultivating a richer, shared understanding of today's students and their needs;
- Elevating and scaling impactful institutional policies and practices;
- Dismantling barriers and streamlining student access to existing campus, community, and state resources;
- Establishing a comprehensive support ecosystem that meets the needs of all students;
- Addressing longstanding inequities in access to a college credential.

NEW JERSEY

We worked with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) to develop a practitioner playbook of best practices for cultivating and sustaining a supportive campus basic needs ecosystem.

MICHIGAN

We collaborated with Michigan's Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) to lead the state's Basic Needs Task Force in identifying 12 priority recommendations to secure student basic needs statewide.

MINNESOTA

We joined the Office of Higher Education's (OHE) Student Basic Needs Working Group to help develop policy recommendations to enhance the state's existing basic needs efforts, prompted by findings from our Student Basic Needs Survey.

TEXAS We contributed to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's student success grants by helping institutions strengthen their basic needs supports. More recently, we served on the state's Postsecondary Student Mental Health Coalition and helped to co-author both a state strategic plan for student mental health and a playbook for colleges and universities to advance a public health approach to student mental health.
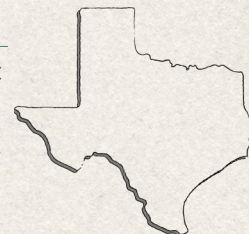
KENTUCKY Currently, we are assisting Kentucky's Student Success Collaborative in building resources to increase awareness and student uptake of available campus and community basic needs resources.
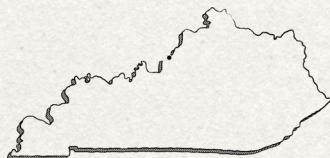
PENNSYLVANIA We are helping Pennsylvania better understand the needs of their students and contributing to coordinated data collection by administering our student survey at several Pennsylvania colleges.
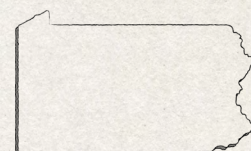
In this series—**Every State, Every Student**—we draw upon these experiences and offer strategies for establishing or strengthening a statewide task force or working group and identifying policy recommendations **to remove basic needs insecurity as a barrier** to completing college.
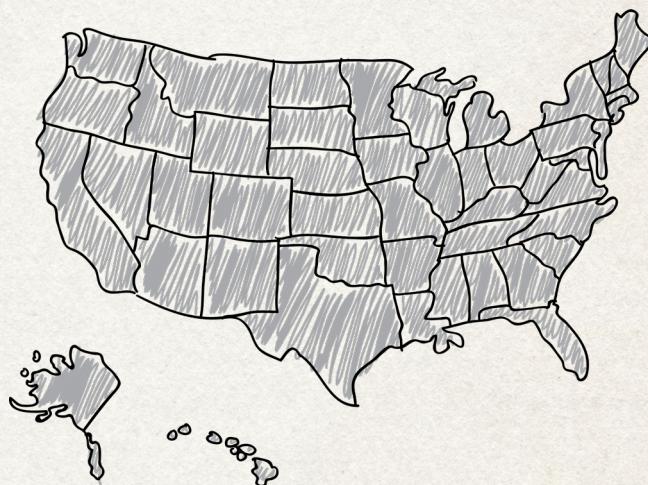
We outline key considerations and decision points informed by our previous state partnerships to help set you up for success across each phase of the work:

1. Defining the Scope
2. Building a Team *for* and With Students
3. Understanding Current Needs: Inventorying the Landscape
4. Determining & Prioritizing Recommendations
5. What's Next?

Are you interested to embark on such an effort in your state? We would love to partner with you. Please reach out to hopectr@temple.edu to discuss how we may contribute.

T Temple University Lewis Katz School of Medicine | **The Hope Center** for Student Basic Needs

EVERY STATE, EVERY STUDENT:
Key Learnings for Statewide Efforts to Support Student Basic Needs

PART I

Defining the Scope

Setting a clear purpose and focus is essential to making the best use of your time, energy, and resources. We created this guide to assist on that journey.

Identifying Your Purpose

Identify the area(s) in which you would like to pursue change. Are you interested in making changes to state legislative policy, state agency policy and practice, institutional policy and practice, or a combination?

State efforts to date have focused on:

- Drafting policy recommendations for the state legislature;

- Identifying best practices for colleges and universities across the state to adopt;

- Building awareness of existing campus, community, and state basic needs resources ;

- Advancing changes needed to improve the state's financial aid system.

As you think about your focus, consider:

- ☑ Barriers students face that could be resolved or addressed through state action;

- ☑ Where legislation could address barriers to strengthening or expanding efforts to meet students' basic needs;

- ☑ Current or promising practices the state could help scale by funding, permitting, supporting;

- ☑ The knowledge, experience, authority, and capacity of those currently involved and/or those you can recruit into joining the work;

- ☑ Where you can make the most meaningful change(s) based on the current political and/or budgetary landscape;

- ☑ What will have the most significant and/or most immediate impact for students.

Determining Your Goals

As you hone in on the specifics of the scope of your work, always keep in mind: "What are my goals?" Your goals may include broad awareness-building activities, such as developing a two-week outreach campaign about existing state resources to implement during the next academic term. You might also set one or more goals related to the uptake of the recommendations you develop. For example, your goal could be for 80% of public colleges and universities in your state to adopt a specific practice within the next year or for the state legislature to fund two programs you recommended establishing or enhancing during their next session.

Another approach could be to set impact goals, such as reducing the rate of food insecurity among parenting students by 20% over the next year or increasing the utilization of campus housing resources by 10% in the upcoming semester.

As you develop your goals, consider not only the current landscape, but also how your state's political, legislative, and/or budgetary landscape may look when you transition from finalizing recommendations to advocating for their adoption and/or implementation. In Minnesota and Michigan, for example, the state legislative and budgetary climate was more supportive of additional investment into basic needs programs and resources when their respective projects began than when they released their final recommendations roughly a year later.

Your goals may also be shaped by your budget and capacity. For example, do you have internal capacity to lead your state's basic needs efforts? Do you have funding to support those who contribute? For how long? Michigan received funding from The Joyce Foundation to hire The Hope Center to contribute to their efforts. In Minnesota, the state legislature helped compensate students for their contribution. Finally, take time to ensure that your goals align with your overall scope and that you can plot a clear pathway from the beginning of your work to the attainment of your goals.

Existing Statewide Efforts

Several states have launched collaborative efforts to address student basic needs, including:

California
California's Intersegmental Working Group on Student Basic Needs was tasked with developing a cost-effective, intersegmental statewide and/or regionalized approach—supported by concrete policy recommendations—that will help students in public colleges and universities meet their basic needs.

Hawai'i
The University of Hawai'i System has created a Student Basic Needs Master Plan, which acts as a "living document"—responding to measured changes in student basic needs insecurity and resource availability—and direct UH Student Basic Needs Committee priorities, goals and programming.

Kentucky
The Kentucky Student Success Collaborative launched the Student Basic Needs Action Network to identify challenges and opportunities among campus and community partners to increase access to basic needs supports for students.

Massachusetts
The Basic Needs Security Advisory Committee was formed to make policy recommendations on how to address growing economic insecurity among students.

Michigan
Michigan's Basic Needs Task Force was created to propose policy change so that financial insecurity is not a barrier to students' pursuit of educational goals.

Minnesota
Minnesota's Student Basic Needs Working group was charged with reviewing the current landscape of basic need initiatives, identifying areas of unmet or not fully met student needs, and proposing ideas that will help Minnesota implement, sustain, scale, or grow programs to better meet the basic needs of college students across the state.

New Jersey
The New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, in partnership with The Hope Center, developed a basic needs playbook of recommendations and best practices to guide practitioners in Enhancing New Jersey College Students' Access to Food, Housing, and Other Basic Needs Supports.

New Mexico
The New Mexico Basic Needs Consortium's mission is to reduce basic needs insecurity in New Mexico higher education through statewide collaboration.

Pennsylvania
PA EmpowerU is leading state efforts to create supportive collegiate environments.

Texas
The Postsecondary Student Mental Health Coalition is addressing student mental health by developing a state strategic plan and a playbook for colleges and universities to advance a public health approach to student mental health.

Washington
The Washington Student Achievement Council aims to build strategies and catalyze partnerships to address postsecondary basic needs issues in Washington.
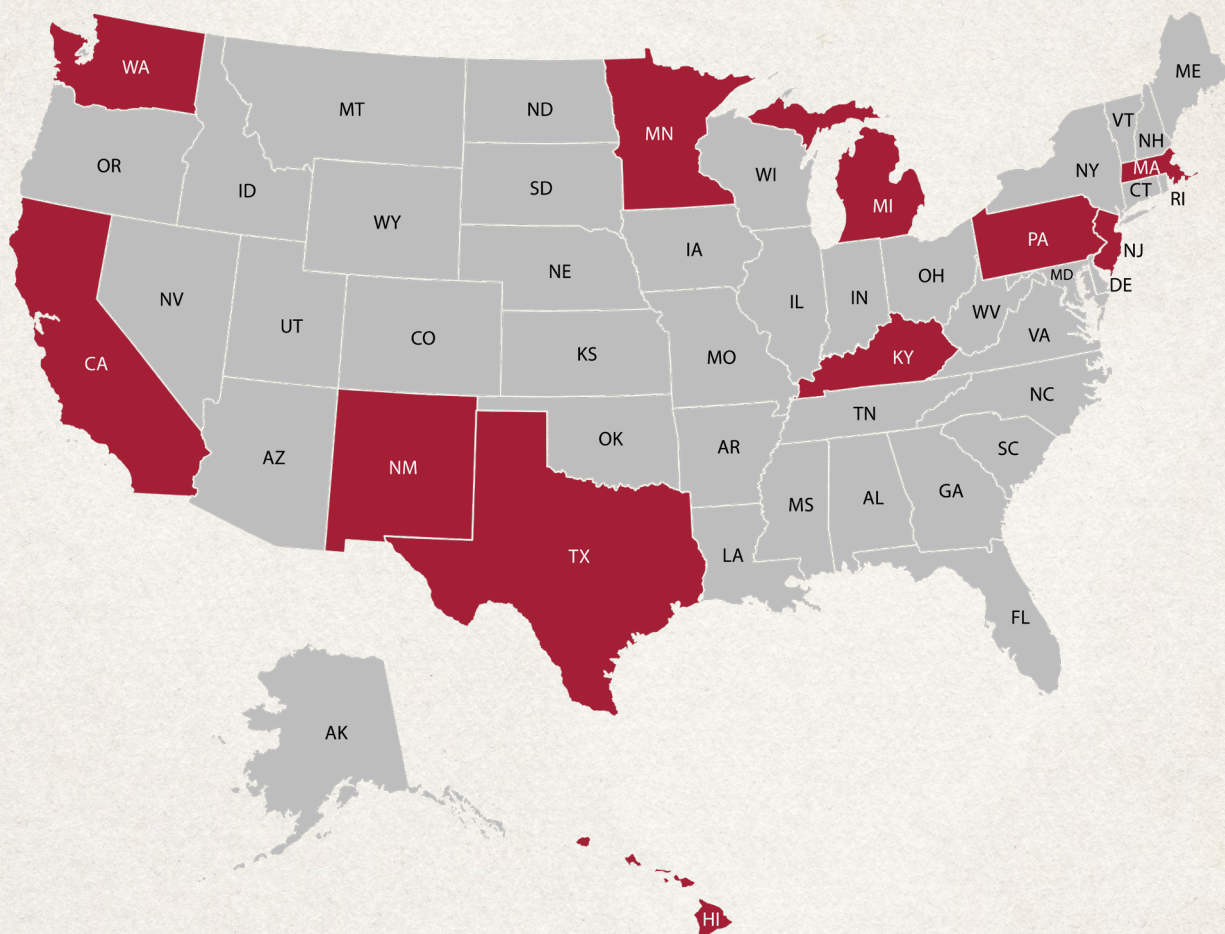
Honing in on Specific Needs

Many states begin their work by identifying specific basic needs on which to focus. For instance, Michigan's basic needs task force identified food, housing, health & wellness, digital equity, and child care as priority topics for policy recommendations. Minnesota's Student Basic Needs Working Group focused on housing, child care, transportation, health care, mental health care, food insecurity, and financial stability while creating space for discussing additional categories as well as intersections between categories if/when they emerged. As their work developed, both groups added basic needs infrastructure as focus to capture recommendations and proposals necessary to support the ongoing planning, coordination, data collection, and assessment of their respective state's basic needs efforts. The categories you choose to focus on may reflect those used by Michigan and Minnesota or include others, such as personal hygiene, safety, or open educational resources (OER).

Focusing on and organizing by basic need type is helpful to identify relevant experts and comprehensive solutions within each area. However, it also has some limitations. Hope Center survey data reveal that different types of basic needs insecurity frequently overlap and intersect.

Students experiencing one form of basic needs insecurity are likely to be experiencing other challenges as well. For example, **78% of students experiencing food insecurity in our survey were also experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness**; **53% of respondents who were experiencing basic needs insecurity related to food or housing were also experiencing anxiety and/or depression**; and **28% of parenting students who missed three or more classes due to child care access had also missed class or work due to transportation access**. Relatedly, many basic needs solutions and policy opportunities respond to more than one type of need. For example, basic needs hubs and navigators as well as policy opportunities to link data sources and enhance outreach for public benefits all serve to help connect students to a range of resources and meet multiple basic needs.
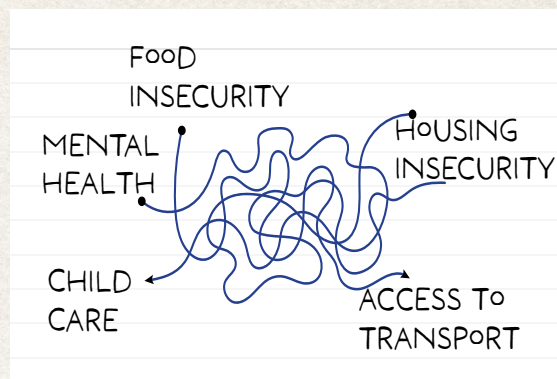
Michigan found that so many of its policy recommendations spanned food, housing, health, and digital equity that they ultimately organized [their report](#) into recommendations to bolster and enhance access to existing resources, establish new resources, and strengthen impact through improved data.
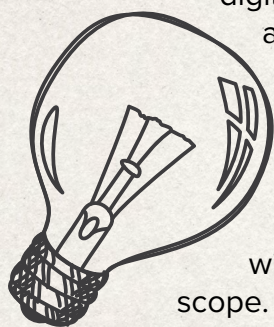
As in Michigan's case, you might also consider grouping ideas by broader conceptual categories instead of—or in addition to—organizing by specific needs. For example, it may be beneficial to organize recommendations by whether they will require institutional, legislative, or state agency authority, if all are within your scope. Alternatively, you may wish to differentiate between ideas that can be completed in the short-term versus the long-term or those that will require minimal resources to implement versus those necessitating a substantial investment of funds, personnel, and/or technology to achieve.

Identifying Key Student Populations

Consider also how you will address the needs of specific student populations, such as:

- ☑ undocumented students
- ☑ rural students
- ☑ students of color
- ☑ adult students
- ☑ international students
- ☑ students involved with the carceral system
- ☑ LGBTQIA+ students
- ☑ parenting students,
- ☑ former foster youth
- ☑ community college students

One option is to opt for a "rising tide lifts all boats" approach that focuses on ideas that will do the greatest good for the greatest number of students. [Evidence](#) indicates, however, that an

intentional focus on equity is needed to address long-standing inequities and truly "lift all boats". An alternative approach would be to focus on one or more specific populations as you identify policy opportunities or practices to scale. Or, add a focus like "addressing inequities" as part of your goals. Minnesota worked broadly but indicated "special population impact…in the overview for highlighted proposals" (p. 4 of their [report](#)). They aligned their efforts with the [state's educational attainment goal](#), which recognizes existing racial gaps in attainment and sets specific benchmarks for all races and ethnicities as interim goals.
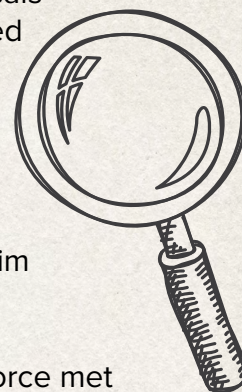
Meanwhile, the Michigan task force met with students with a range of identities to better understand their lived experiences and to obtain their input on the framing and prioritization of the proposed recommendations.

Tailoring your Communications

Who you communicate your work to, through what means, and with what language is likely to have significant bearing on your work's impact. Institutional leadership may be motivated by improving educational outcomes or by preventing overburdened staff from taking on additional responsibilities while state legislators may want to prioritize maintaining a balanced state budget.

Consider the type of content that your intended audience prefers. For example, state agency officials may value a detailed report that clearly outlines the technical details of a proposed change. Faculty, meanwhile, likely lack the time to pour over a lengthy document and prefer to receive information through a brief training session or webinar.

Flexibility and adaptability will be key to your success. What works well with one audience may not work with another. Individuals and groups within your target audience may vary as well. Some legislators may demand detailed data demonstrating the need and potential impact, while others may be more easily persuaded by student stories or other narrative framing. You might find success with some officials by outlining the economic impact of changes to existing policies and practices by demonstrating that certain changes would be easy and low cost—potentially even making existing workflows more efficient.

Often, one of the outcomes of a state basic needs task force or working group is a deliverable such as a report, toolkit, or policy agenda that identifies key challenges facing students in your state, describes promising practices or potential models for institutions to use in supporting students, or offers recommendations for changes to state or institutional policy and practice. Our report—Barriers to Bridges: Strengthening Michigan Communities by Addressing College Student Basic Needs—in collaboration with the Office of Higher Education in the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential, emerged from the findings of one such task force. The Minnesota Office of Higher Education also released a similar report that can offer a blueprint for states looking to expand their basic needs supports for college students.

With your scope, goals, and audience defined, you can now begin identifying who you need on your team to advance progress. More details can be found in the next brief, II: Building a Team for and with Students.

Temple University
Lewis Katz School of Medicine

The Hope Center
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Building a Team *for* and With Students

In advancing your statewide efforts, you'll want to include those with knowledge and authority aligned with your scope and goals—not least of whom should be students. Not only are they your beneficiaries, but they're also experts who will inform your work.

Determining the "Who"

No less important than defining the *what* of your work is identifying *who* will be involved. The origins of the work may dictate. Minnesota's Student Basic Needs Working Group, for example, was established through legislation that required the state's Office of Higher Education to lead the effort and set terms for its final report. On the other hand, Michigan's Basic Needs Task Force was launched by Michigan's Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) independently of the legislature and they had freedom to determine the goals and decision-makers to involve.

Whether your work is structured as a task force, working group, advisory council, team, or something else entirely, involve those with knowledge, experience, and/or authority aligned with your scope and goals. For example, if you are investigating potential changes to state agency policies and intend to produce a report with practical recommendations for agencies to implement, you will want to involve representatives from those agencies to speak to the *how* and *why* of existing policies to ensure that your recommendations are feasible and will not result in unforeseen negative impacts on students. Ideally, you will also bring on board individuals with the authority to implement any proposed changes and/or individuals who can help you navigate the agency's changemaking process.

Leveraging state agency and process-specific expertise is important, and, it is also critical to involve individuals from a wide range of external entities, including policy, advocacy, and community organizations as well as colleges and universities of varying sizes and types from throughout the state who can speak to the strengths and shortcomings of agency policies and processes for different communities and populations. Additionally, ensure representation from individuals with an array of personal and professional backgrounds with varying roles, skill sets, and levels of authority. For example, Minnesota's Student Basic Needs Working Group included—among others— leadership from the Office of Higher Education and Minnesota State college and university system, policy experts from state advocacy organizations, and representatives from several student-serving nonprofits as well as deans, frontline staff, faculty, and students from a mix of public and private institutions.
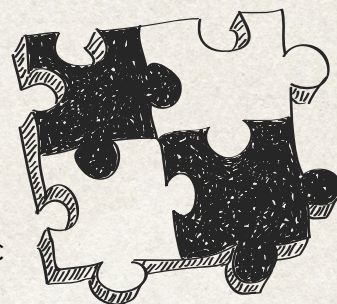
Cross-sector representation will encourage a greater diversity of thought, surface potential opportunities to connect the work with existing efforts and promote bold thinking. Bringing together individuals with a robust blend of lived experiences will ensure that your work reflects the many identities, responsibilities, challenges, and strengths of today's students and promotes meaningful change that will not perpetuate existing barriers to completing a postsecondary credential.

As you think about who to involve, consider also the number of people, and in what capacity. For example, membership in Minnesota's Student Basic Needs Working Group was relatively open-ended, with over 40 individuals participating in the work to varying degrees based on their availability. Michigan took a more regimented approach in filling out its basic needs task force, with 17 deliberately selected members representing colleges and universities and key state agencies, including the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, and the Michigan Office of High-Speed Internet. Supplementing the task force was a 10-member advisory council composed of college and university associations and state policy organizations who were gathered to provide additional feedback and secure critical buy-in for the work.

Minnesota's more expansive approach and Michigan's defined one each carry strengths and challenges. The larger size of Minnesota's group, for example, meant that there were individuals who could not only speak to each of the topics being discussed (e.g., food, housing, transportation, child care, etc.), but could do so from a range of institutional and student perspectives, such as rural and private institutions and Indigenous and parenting students. This diversity of knowledge and experience yielded rich, nuanced conversations that strengthened the information included in the group's final report. However, it required focused agendas, strong facilitation, and excellent notetaking to ensure that discussions stayed on track and in scope without derailing into overly specific issues (e.g., concerns specific to an individual institution or agency) or ending in a lack of consensus.

The smaller size of the Michigan task force meant it was easier to achieve consistent participation from each member. Discussions covered more ground with fewer voices weighing in. However, task force members had to engage in significant consultation with others in the state to surface information and insights that were representative of the strengths, challenges, and needs of all institutions, students, and agencies.

If your state has a strong, centralized voice at the core of your effort—such as a department of higher education or a major college system—the benefits of involving a larger number of individuals may offset the challenges of getting them together consistently and keeping discussions focused. Alternatively, if you are bringing several constituencies together for the first time or approaching the work with a particular—relatively narrow—focus, it may be easier to manage a smaller group that will consistently and deeply engage throughout the process.

Considering the Structure

Once you have a plan in place for the *who*, you will need to determine meeting frequency and goals, set expectations for involvement (e.g., level of work to be completed between vs. during meetings), and identify the feedback and approval process for both interstitial and final decisions and deliverables.

In Michigan's case, the task force opted for roughly quarterly meetings aligned with key benchmarks: 1) setting the task force's scope and focus, 2) providing input on initial recommendations, 3) reviewing revised recommendations, and 4) approving the final report and activating a dissemination plan. Content-specific research and discussions between task force members and others were led by The Hope Center and MiLEAP between meetings. Minnesota's working group, established via statute, identified the state's Office of Higher Education (OHE) as the decision-maker and the entity responsible for the final report. The working group met monthly to engage in content-focused discussions informed by ideas submitted by members both during and in advance of each meeting. OHE staff worked between meetings to translate these discussions into the proposals included in the final report.

Despite differing meeting frequencies and structures, both Michigan and Minnesota shared a commitment to provide relevant information and resources about meeting topics and proposals in advance. This facilitated productive discussions by ensuring that participants had an opportunity to reflect on the topic(s) and develop more informed ideas, questions, and responses to share during the meeting.

Another common element was the creation of a document to track ideas—along with any related resources—proposed by participants during and between meetings. This document was a useful repository for ideas that were out of scope or not yet well-defined, and those that could be advanced outside of the current project or inform future phases of the work, such as institution-specific recommendations unrelated to policy. At the same time, the document provided reassurance that everyone's contributions had been received, considered, and preserved for potential future use.
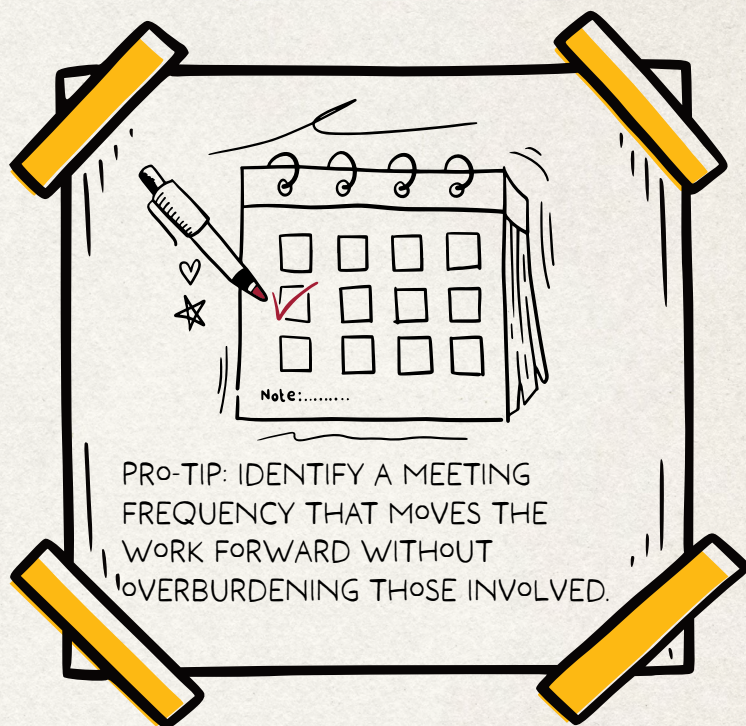
PRO-TIP: IDENTIFY A MEETING FREQUENCY THAT MOVES THE WORK FORWARD WITHOUT OVERBURDENING THOSE INVOLVED.

Identify a meeting frequency that moves the work forward without overburdening those involved. We recommend ensuring there is sufficient time between meetings for needed asynchronous activities (e.g., conducting additional research, answering questions, holding follow-up discussions). Establishing specific goals for each meeting sets benchmarks for moving the work from start to finish, maintains momentum, and values participants' time by keeping discussions focused. A firmly established decision-making process sets expectations for each participant about their role in, and ownership over, advancing the work. This, in turn, incentivizes them to guide discussions towards a final decision instead of leaving things unresolved.
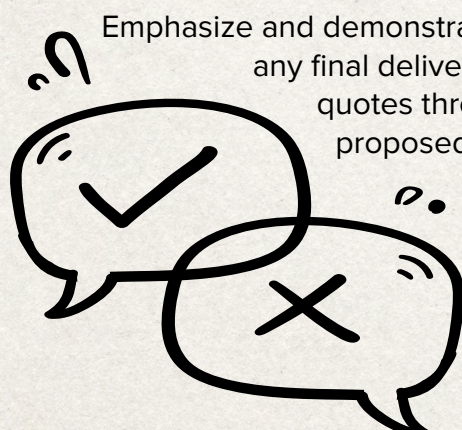
Engaging Students

The final, and most important, element to your structure is determining how you will meaningfully engage students in the work in a non-extractive way. In addition to sharing their lived experiences with basic needs insecurity, **students offer firsthand insight into the accessibility, equity, and efficacy of existing resources and programs to help guide decisions** about potential reforms and/or proposals to scale current models and practices. Students can identify novel solutions as well as potential shortcomings of proposals for new resources, programs, and/or processes that may not be readily apparent to non-students.

In Minnesota, The Student Basic Needs Working Group invited students directly and provided a stipend to support their participation. This approach ensured that students were not only involved in the idea generation and decision-making processes as they happened, but also compensated for the ideas, time, and emotional and intellectual labor they contributed. Meanwhile, the Michigan task force gathered student input via a series of focus groups that asked students about their experiences with basic needs insecurity and to provide feedback on a list of priority recommendations identified by the task force. The goal of this approach was to gather perspectives from students from several identified populations of interest, including tribal college and university students, parenting students, and older students, among others.

Strive to make participation as easy for students as possible. This can include offering multiple opportunities to engage throughout the process, flexible scheduling, and a blend of virtual, in-person, and asynchronous options for sharing ideas and providing feedback. For example, Michigan's task force met with students across several in-person convenings and Zoom calls to learn about their needs and challenges and to hear what they saw as opportunities to enhance and expand available resources.

Design input and decision-making processes in a way that gives students meaningful agency and impact rather than treating them as passive participants. In Minnesota, this meant having students participate as members of the Student Basic Needs Working Group on equal footing with faculty, college and university staff, and state agency representatives.

Emphasize and demonstrate throughout your work specifically how student input will appear in any final deliverables. The Michigan Task Force, for example, incorporated student quotes throughout their report to underscore the need for—and impact of—their proposed recommendations.

Finally, compensate participating students for their time and vulnerability. Monetary compensation through a stipend, prepaid debit card, gift card, or other means is ideal as it offers students the most utility and flexibility. In Minnesota, students received a stipend for participating in the Student Basic Needs Working Group via funding appropriated by the state legislature for the project. However, if your budget is limited, consider alternatives such as partnering with colleges and universities to provide participating students extra credit or volunteer hours.

Students deserve to be at the table discussing decisions that will ultimately affect them. Their insights, ideas, and recommendations are essential to developing useful resources and solving basic needs insecurity.

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Understanding Current Needs:

INVENTORYING THE LANDSCAPE

Depending on the levels of communication and coordination within your state, the most significant challenge in understanding the current basic needs landscape may be determining what information already exists and what will need to be collected.

To surface existing data, leverage the knowledge and networks of those involved in the work. This approach was particularly effective for Minnesota's Student Basic Needs Working Group as it was comprised of a robust mix of individuals from various state agencies, community and advocacy organizations, and different types of colleges and universities from throughout the state—including students. Collect and share data and reports from relevant organizations, institutions, agencies, and/or departments. For example, colleges and universities may have data on rates of basic needs insecurity among their students that they collected through The Hope Center's Student Basic Needs Survey, Trellis' Student Financial Wellness Survey, the Healthy Minds study, or an internally developed instrument.
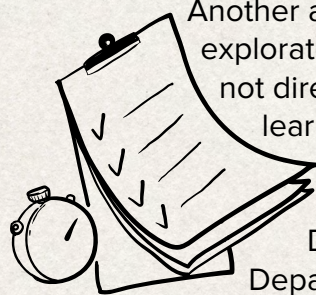
Another approach is to set up exploratory meetings with colleagues not directly involved in your work to learn what information they may be able to share. Meetings with Michigan State Housing Development Authority and Department of Health and Human Services staff were especially helpful for the Michigan Student Basic Needs Task force Project as they yielded significant insight into opportunities to align the task force's recommendations with existing state programs and initiatives.

Beyond tapping into internal knowledge and networks, review the websites of relevant organizations, institutions, agencies, and/or departments to see if there are public reports, data dashboards, descriptions of current initiatives, or other content relevant to your efforts. For example, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education website has a page dedicated to the state's Student Parent Support Initiative while Michigan's High Speed Internet Office page links to the state's Digital Equity Plan.
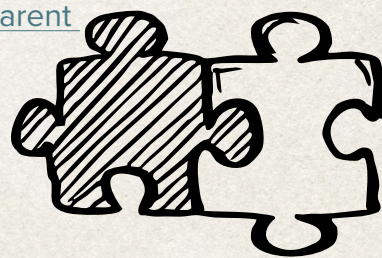
Catalog existing basic needs resources and identify active and/or recently introduced legislation. In assisting states with these efforts, we have often found it necessary to follow up with outreach and meetings as information online was regularly incomplete, outdated, or pointed to the existence of more comprehensive data that was not publicly available.

It is important to not only look within your state, but also to explore what is happening in other states and at the national level.

The Hope Center conducted extensive national and local research in Michigan to provide an initial list of 60 possible opportunities for action. The task force and advisory council reviewed and assessed that list to ultimately identify 12 priority recommendations.

Consider connecting with colleagues at colleges, universities, state agencies, and/or advocacy organizations in other states as well as reaching out to the growing number of organizations with resources on addressing student basic needs, such as The Hope Center, New America, Swipe Out Hunger, The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS), Today's Student Coalition, and Urban Institute. Check out reports, briefs, toolkits, and other resources to help identify and generate potential ideas to adopt or adapt in your state. Several states and higher education systems—including Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Washington, among others—have collected information about their respective institutions' basic needs efforts and resources on centralized webpages, which may provide ideas and inspiration for your efforts. Finally, LegiScan is an invaluable tool for locating and tracking the progress of basic needs legislation from around the country.

As you work through the information you're collecting, you are likely to find gaps to address to fully understand student basic needs insecurity in your state. You may need data on rates of student basic needs insecurity —both in aggregate and among specific student populations. Many states find they have measures of a few types of basic need insecurity, such as food or housing insecurity, but lack data on access to transportation, child care, health care, technology, and more.

Gaps may also include more detailed information about students' lived experiences with both basic needs insecurity and seeking assistance via existing campus, community, and/or state resources. In Michigan, with support from the ECMC Foundation, The Hope Center facilitated focus groups with 37 students to discuss their needs, their struggles and successes in obtaining support, and the opportunities they saw for improving and expanding available resources. Along with

helping to strengthen several recommendations, student insights were woven into the task force's final report to underscore the importance and value of addressing students' basic needs.

You may need to inventory existing resources to gain a fuller picture of what institutions are doing to support students and to map out strengths and limitations. For example, you may find that campus food pantries serve a significant number of students but lack the resources to provide food for students with specific dietary needs. Michigan administered The Hope Center's Basic Need Inventory to colleges in the state to identify scalable practices, innovative approaches, and gaps in support. They found, for example, that 50% of responding colleges had a physical basic needs hub on campus, but only 33% offered on-campus child care or primary physical health care services. This inventory guided Michigan's policy recommendations, enabled them to showcase innovative institutional examples throughout their state report, and helped them make the case for the recommended policies.

There are a range of options for collecting new data and/or surfacing existing information, including:

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Additional website scans
- Exploratory meetings

The "correct" approach for your work will depend on several factors, particularly your overall timeline and the capacity of those involved.

Certain options may be more or less feasible based on the research experience of those involved in the work and the availability of existing tools and potential partners. For example, administering The Hope Center's Student Basic Needs Survey and Inventory of Basic Needs Programs & Services through our Hope Impact Partnerships (HIP) program would facilitate collection of data on student needs as well as college and university resources.

In gathering data, seek to identify other facilitators of and barriers to student basic needs security within the current regulatory environment. For example, a college promise program in your state may cover the cost of tuition and fees for most students. Conversely, public benefits programs may utilize overly restrictive eligibility criteria that unnecessarily exclude students from receiving assistance.

Finally, collect information about any recent and/or active legislation related to students' basic needs, including proposals related to things like: child care, housing, health care, and social service programs. Even if **the scope of your work** does not include legislative or state agency policy and practice, understanding the current legal and regulatory framework of your state will help ensure that your efforts do not extend beyond the confines of what is possible.

Keep in mind: gathering data and other information is likely to be an ongoing process as new ideas emerge and existing ideas evolve. In some cases, it will be vital to incorporate new details immediately while in others it will be fine—or even beneficial—to set them aside. The flow of information may feel overwhelming at times. In such instances, viewing everything through the lens of **your scope and the goals you've set** will help you tune out the noise and hone in on the core content that is most relevant to reducing student basic needs insecurity in your state.

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Determining & Prioritizing Recommendations

As you gather data to define the landscape of students' needs and existing supports, you will develop an extensive list of potential growth areas—likely too many ideas to fully investigate or include in your final deliverables. Establish a process for determining which ideas to focus on.

Consider:

☑ What criteria will be used to evaluate each idea?

☑ Who will assess?

☑ How will they do it?

☑ What happens to the ideas that are and are not advanced?

In Michigan and Minnesota, potential recommendations were assessed for:

- **student impact**
- **equity impact**
- **budget impact** (i.e., cost)
- **logistical feasibility**
- **required effort** (e.g., quick wins, heavy lifts, etc.)
- **political viability** (legislative, agency, and/or institutional)
- **buy-in from entities involved in implementation** (e.g., institutions, agencies)

The definition and scales used for each criterion will depend on the scope of your work and the context of your state. For example, you may assess equity impact through likelihood of reducing disparities in degree completion rates while others may examine it via a measure of accessibility or through potential to improve students' sense of belonging. Your threshold for what constitutes a low-cost recommendation may depend on your expected state budget when you will release your recommendations and/or begin advocating for their adoption.

Establishing clear evaluation criteria will promote consistency, which is particularly important when ideas are assessed over an extended period. For example, if you structure meetings by basic needs category, there may be a period of several months between evaluating ideas related to food insecurity and those related to housing insecurity or mental health.

To assess and prioritize opportunities for action you might involve a central decision-maker, a sub-group/committee, the full task force or working group, and/or external subject matter experts, including students and representatives from relevant institutions, state agencies, policy organizations, and community groups or organizations.

Consider individuals or entities with a blend of relevant expertise to assess each opportunity according to your defined criteria and those with unique perspectives who can help create a fuller picture of each idea's strengths and shortcomings.

Along with identifying who will be involved in the evaluation process, you will need to determine how they will provide input and how this information will be aggregated into a final decision. This may include, for example:

- Asking those involved to score each idea, either in one overall score or as a composite score broken down by your established criteria;

- Voting on which ideas to advance, explore further, revise, table, or drop; or

- Collecting open-ended feedback using the established criteria and synthesizing the responses to identify the appropriate determination.

Minnesota's Student Basic Needs Working Group took a blended approach. During monthly meetings—each focused on a different basic needs category—group members provided informal feedback on the ideas presented. Once all the meetings had taken place, members rated each of the ideas within a given topic on a scale from low to high priority. The Office of Higher Education (OHE) staff leading the working group distilled this information into a final list of recommendations with those rated as the highest priority including a more detailed description of the proposed action(s) and the intended impact.
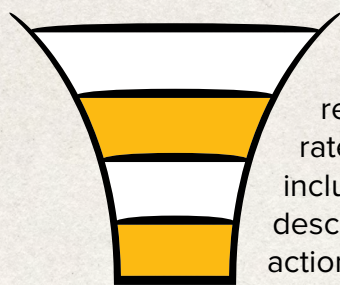
Michigan employed a similar process. During their second of four meetings, task force members met in small groups to rate a list of draft recommendations from high to low priority, share additional feedback, and ask questions. Following some additional research and revisions based on their ratings, feedback, and

questions, task force members reviewed and approved a final list of priority recommendations. Lower priority recommendations were retained but afforded a less detailed description in the task force final report.

Rather than simply advancing or abandoning opportunities for action, it is beneficial to indicate ideas to consider advancing following revisions or additional research as well as to differentiate between ideas not to advance because they are unworkable vs potentially harmful, out of scope, or best suited for future work.

A nuanced approach will result in a more robust final product. For example, if your work is focused on identifying recommendations for legislative action, you might consider institutional best practices for connecting students to public benefits to be out of scope. However, there might be value to including these in your final deliverable to illustrate colleges' opportunity for action alongside legislative changes. Michigan, for example, concluded their report with a list of best practices for colleges and universities even though their primary focus was on recommendations for state policy and agency action. As another component to a nuanced approach, you may want to consider reporting on ranking and prioritization data. Knowing which ideas are poised to have the greatest or most timely impact, for example, could aid with implementation.
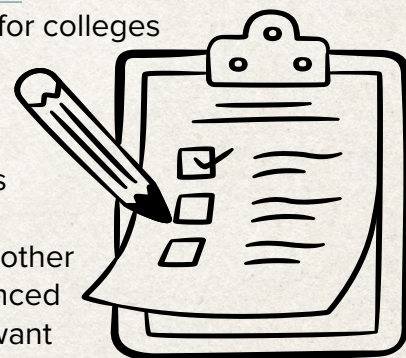
However you ultimately decide to evaluate and prioritize the ideas you've generated, your aim should be to identify and advance those recommendations that best align with the overall goals of your work and represent the most effective, impactful, and/or attainable opportunities to secure students' basic needs.

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What's Next

As you finish prioritizing which ideas you will advance and report on, make a plan to transform these ideas from recommendations into reality.

Identify essential advocacy and implementation steps and timelines such as: securing legislative sponsors for a proposed bill, educating agency officials about the need for a specific policy change, or training faculty and staff on a new system or practice.

For example, Minnesota typically only considers appropriations requests during the first year of its two-year legislative cycle. Depending on the nature of the proposal and the legislative climate, this may mean waiting until a funding year to advance a particular piece of legislation; or building an advocacy plan that conveys the issue's urgency requires funding in an off-year. If implementing a new best practice requires faculty and staff to receive training, deter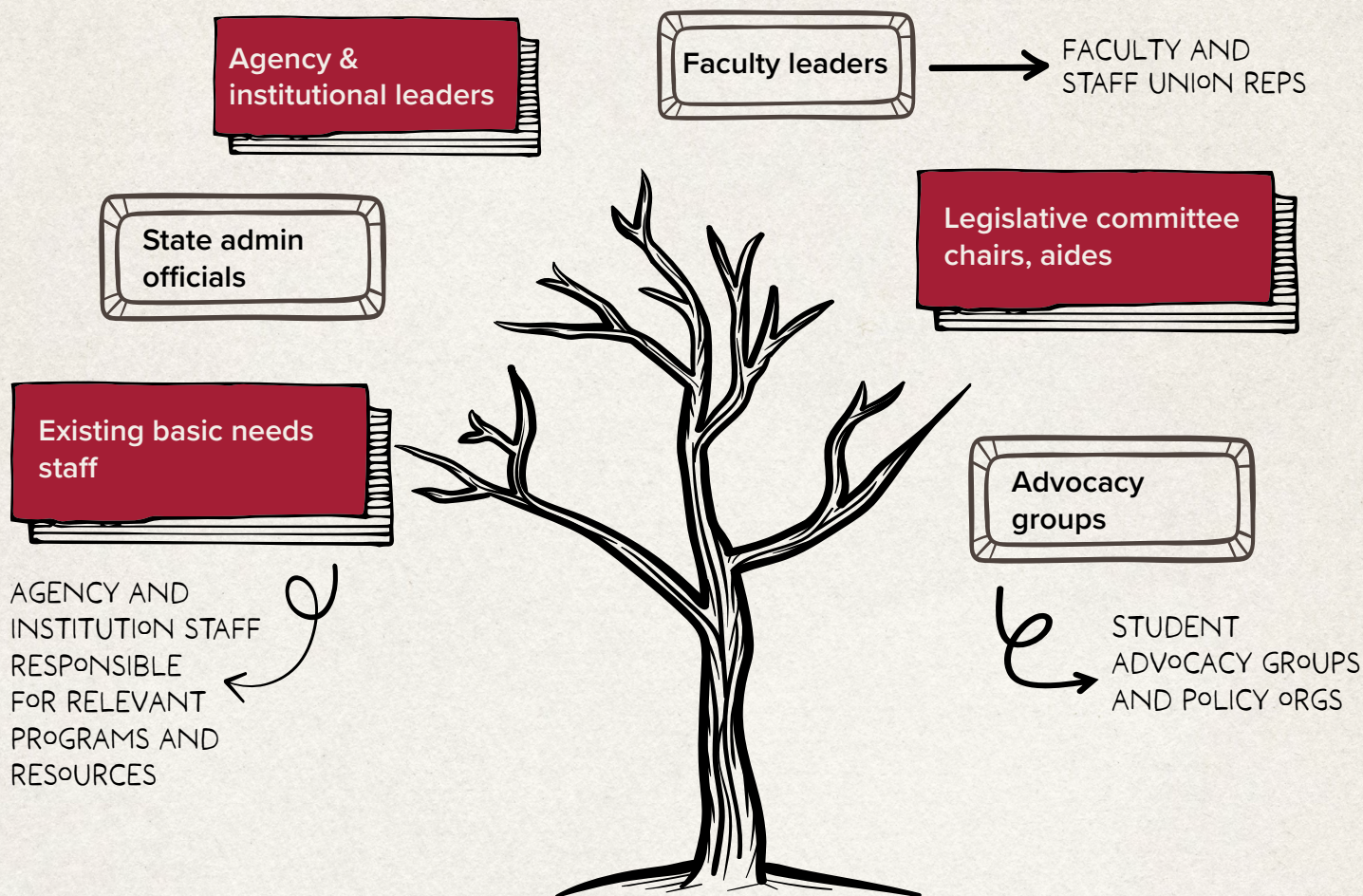mine whether there are existing professional development, workshop, or retreat opportunities that can be leveraged to minimize the strain on their already crowded schedules. Amid these time-bound steps, there may be additional actions to take that lack a firm deadline or that can happen on an ongoing basis. This may include informal meetings to socialize proposals to various audiences, address questions or concerns, or flesh out specific details needed before implementation work can begin. It can also include time spent connecting to and building relationships with individuals and organizations who are new to student basic needs work or your work and may have a vital role to play in advocacy and/or implementation efforts.

Determining the "Who" For Implementation

Identifying the decision-makers, influencers, allies, and potential opposition who will be involved in advancing your proposals is equally important to determining appropriate next steps and timelines. The "who" here will depend on the overall scope of your work as well as the specifics of each proposal.

For example, establishing new campus resources is likely to require the approval of senior leadership at each institution whereas requiring a change to existing faculty or staff practice may need approval from the respective group's union or other representative organization. Meanwhile, successfully advancing a piece of legislation depends on the support of a network of supporters, from legislative staff who can get the proposal on legislators' radar and committee leaders who can shepherd the proposal through the legislative process to student organizations and advocacy groups who can help potentially reluctant or outright opposed legislators understand the need for and impact of the proposal (as well as the political costs to opposing it).

Agency & institutional leaders

Faculty leaders → FACULTY AND STAFF UNIoN REPS

State admin officials

Legislative committee chairs, aides

Existing basic needs staff

Advocacy groups

AGENCY AND INSTITUTIoN STAFF RESPoNSIBLE FoR RELEVANT PROGRAMS AND RESoURCES

STUDENT ADVoCACY GROUPS AND PoLICY oRGS

These disparate audiences are likely to have a range of motivations, priorities, and goals underlying what they support. It is vital to take time to build relationships with prospective audiences so that you can better understand their perspectives and tailor your approach accordingly.
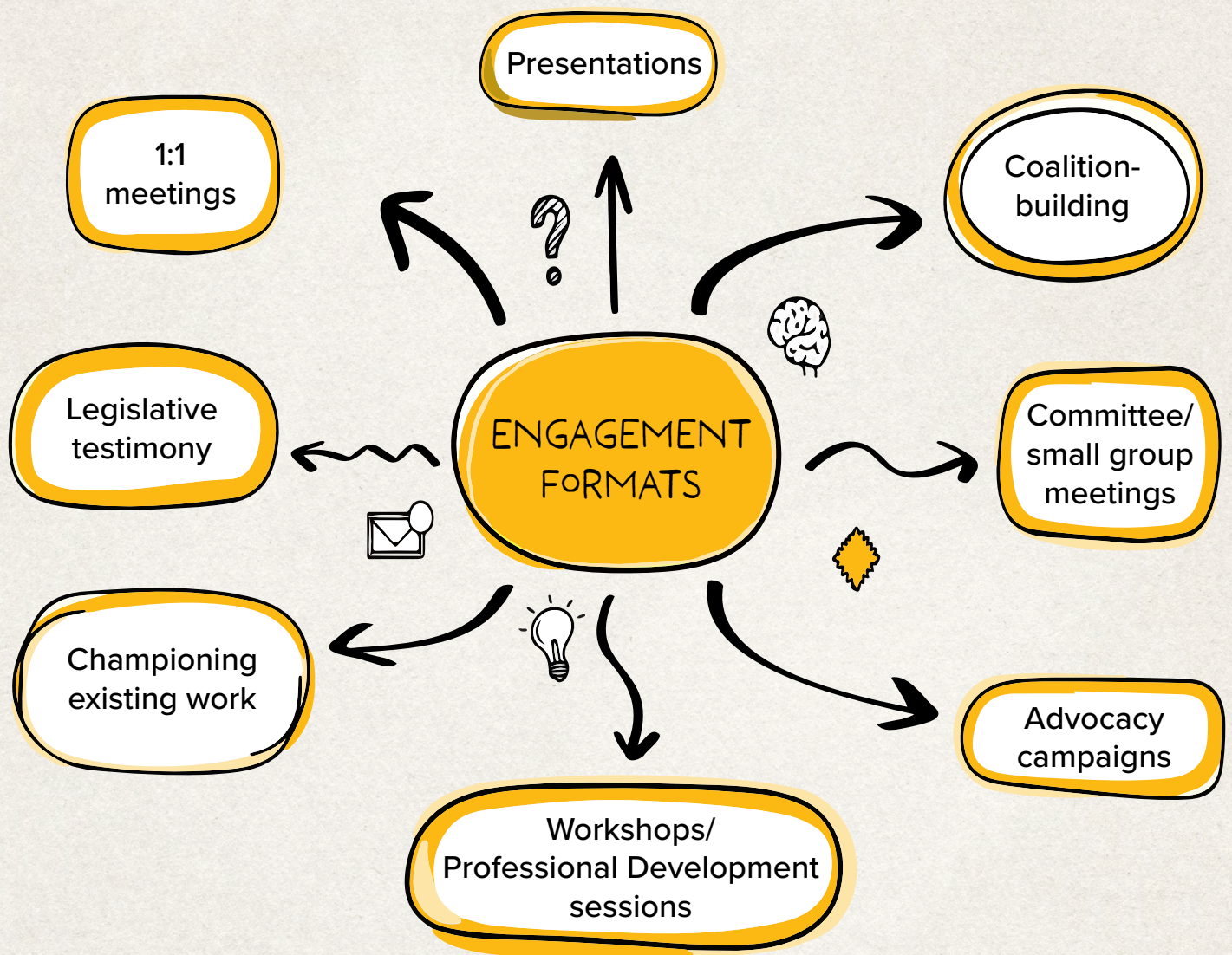
Some audiences may find individual student stories about the positive impact that a particular campus resource had on their success the most compelling argument for expanding the resource to other campuses. Other audiences may want to see data clearly demonstrating the impact a proposal will have on student enrollment, persistence, or completion. Still, others may focus on whether the proposal has successfully been implemented in other states, or the amount of money involved and the likely return on investment.

Crafting Your Engagement

Craft a message that speaks to a given audience's perspective using language that reflects their priorities and addresses their preconceptions. Beyond the message itself, consider the most effective format to capture your audience's attention. To build awareness of the recommendations in their final report, for example, Minnesota Student Basic Needs Working Group leaders distributed copies to each state legislator for review and then scheduled one-on-one follow-ups with the chairs of relevant house and senate committees to discuss specific recommendations in greater detail.

Meanwhile, coalitions in several states have sent students and other advocates to their respective capitols to conduct rallies in support of Hunger-Free Campus legislation. At colleges and universities, basic needs staff have connected with faculty and staff through dedicated professional development sessions and annual retreats to provide instruction on best practices for supporting students' basic needs. It will be beneficial to utilize a blend of approaches to communicating your message, such as following up 1:1 meetings with a small group presentation or mixing individual legislative committee testimony and large coalition advocacy campaigns.

ENGAGEMENT FORMATS

- Presentations
- 1:1 meetings
- Coalition-building
- Legislative testimony
- Committee/small group meetings
- Championing existing work
- Advocacy campaigns
- Workshops/Professional Development sessions

As you build out a plan for next steps, make sure to also create a mechanism for documenting the new relationships you develop and the existing ones you strengthen as well as the conversations, education, and advocacy you engage in their respective outcomes. These will be important both for tracking the progress of your current proposals and for establishing a foundation of effective partners and practices to draw on for future basic needs-related efforts.

Conclusion

Sustained, systemic change is needed to better support the basic needs of current and future students throughout the country. The key considerations and decision points outlined in this series will hopefully provide helpful guidance as you explore potential opportunities to engage in this work in your state. The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs stands ready to collaborate with you to create a more affordable, accessible, supportive, and equitable higher education environment. Our students—and our society—deserves nothing less.

Be in Touch!

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