

# EVERY STATE, EVERY STUDENT:

## Key Learnings for Statewide Efforts to Support Student Basic Needs

### PART IV

#### 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.

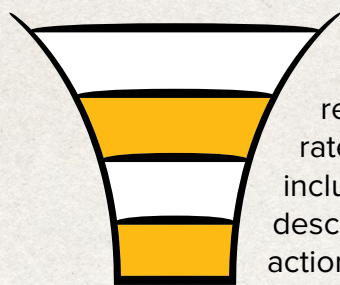
Along with identifying who will be involved in the evaluation process, you will need to determine how they will provide input and how this information will be aggregated into a final decision. This may include, for example:

- 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.

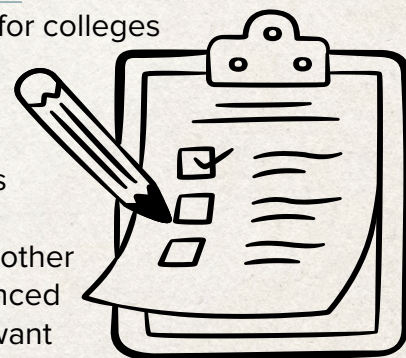


Michigan employed a similar process. During their second of four meetings, task force members met in small groups to rate a list of draft recommendations from high to low priority, share additional feedback, and ask questions. Following some additional research and revisions based on their ratings, feedback, 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.