DESIGNING YOUR STUDENT SUCCESS TEAM
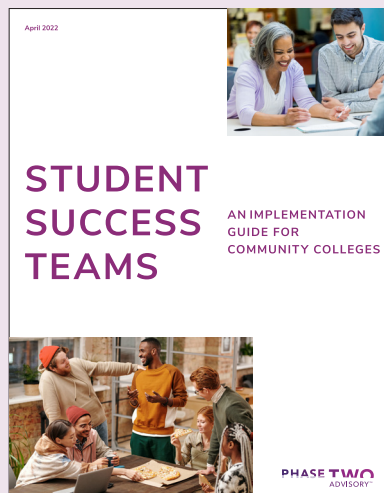
#1 IN THE *BREAKING IT ALL DOWN* SERIES

This is a companion to *Student Success Teams: An Implementation Guide for Community Colleges*, which is based on over 80 interviews at nine colleges in three states.
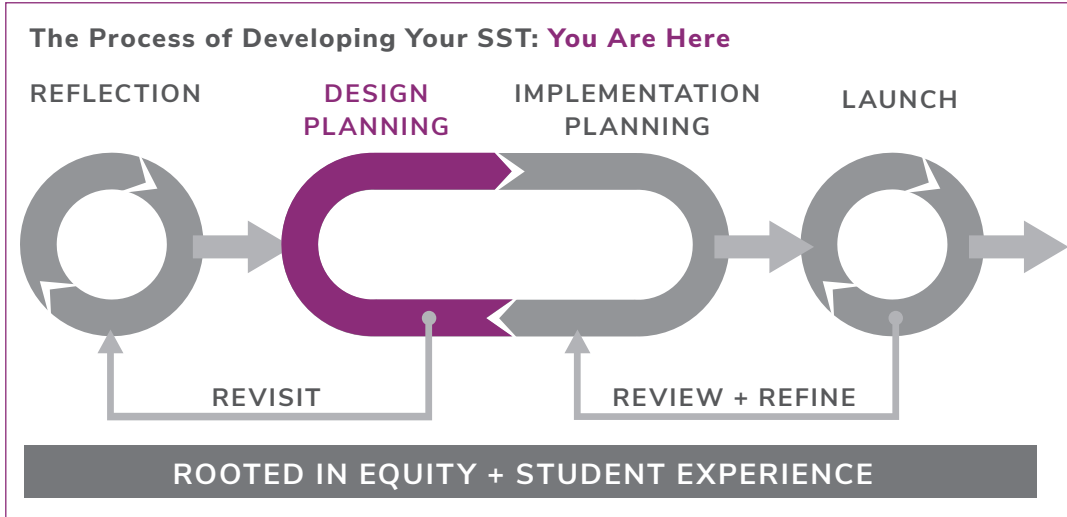
This document draws on examples and composites from our original dataset to illustrate important considerations related to SST design.

Phase Two Advisory believes that reform is adaptive, not adoptive. Institutions should take what is shared here and refine it for their own culture and context.

Please cite this piece as:
Karp, Melinda M., & Lyons, Suzanne M. (2022). *Designing Your Student Success Team*. Denver, CO: Phase Two Advisory.

April 2022

STUDENT SUCCESS TEAMS

AN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

PHASE TWO ADVISORY™

PHASE TWO ADVISORY™

DESIGNING THE FUTURE STATE

The Process of Developing Your SST: You Are Here

REFLECTION   DESIGN PLANNING   IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING   LAUNCH

REVISIT   REVIEW + REFINE

ROOTED IN EQUITY + STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Your college has wrapped up the reflection phase and is committed to using Student Success Teams to build a strategic, personalized, and proactive support ecosystem for every student. Now, you find yourself trying to figure out what the future state will look like.

The Design Planning Phase is the time when a cross-functional group of colleagues clarify:

- what students will experience once the SST is launched;

- how the student experience will be different from what they experience right now;

- why SSTs will address the root challenges undergirding your holistic student support reform; and

- how SSTs will create these changes.

When design planning, you will need to make **two big decisions:**

1. How your teams will be structured, including who will be on them and how you will define the cohorts they serve.

2. What types of work your team members will do.

We find that **colleges need to explore four broad categories of questions** on their way to developing an SST design.
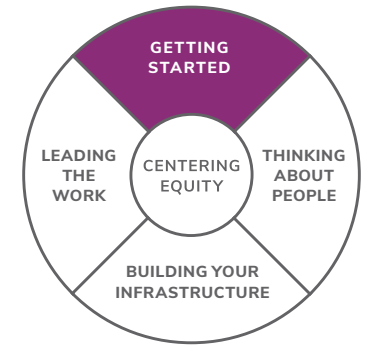
- Why are you implementing SSTs?

- What specific problem will SSTs solve?

- What parameters must your design take into account?

- What resources do you have at your disposal?

Different types of answers will lead you to different types of teams. Asking yourselves a fifth and final question will help you connect your emergent structure to team member expectations upon launch.

- What will SSTs do to change students' experiences?

The remainder of this document provides questions within each category to ask yourself, as well as descriptions of how colleges in our study used their answers to determine an SST design that worked for them.

GETTING STARTED

LEADING THE WORK   CENTERING EQUITY   THINKING ABOUT PEOPLE

BUILDING YOUR INFRASTRUCTURE

REVISIT YOUR WHY

Design Teams may not be made up of the same individuals who engaged in the Reflection Phase or the decision to launch SSTs. Make sure your Design Team understands why your college is implementing SSTs, and that everyone has the same understanding of the reason for SSTs.

As you revisit your why, be sure to contextualize your answers to the questions in the sidebar within your broader campus culture. For example, are your answers aligned with your Equity Task Force's or Cabinet's understandings of equity and holistic student support?

If you find that the Design Team is still unsure of how to define equity, equitable outcomes, and/or holistic support — or if you're having trouble articulating how a Student Success Team supports these definitions — it's worth continued conversations with leadership and those who identified the SST strategy. It's important to understand the "why" before diving into a design process.
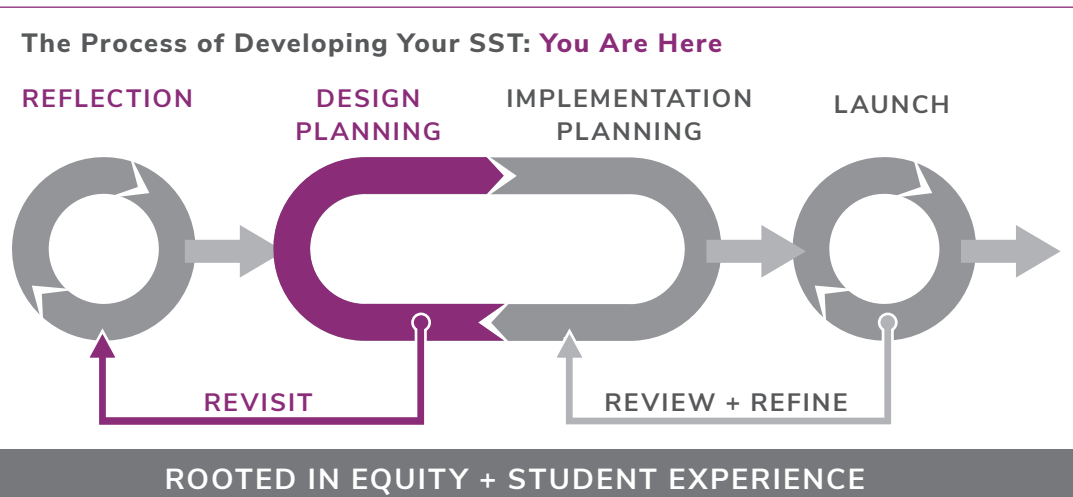
To clarify your why, ask yourselves:

1. How does your college define equity and equitable outcomes?

2. What is the shared vision of what equity looks like on your campus?

3. How does your college define holistic student support?

4. Why do you think Student Success Teams are the structure that will best support the creation of equity-forward holistic student support?

5. Which committees or offices do you need to partner with in order to align your understanding of "why SSTs"?

The Process of Developing Your SST: You Are Here

REFLECTION   DESIGN PLANNING   IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING   LAUNCH

REVISIT   REVIEW + REFINE

ROOTED IN EQUITY + STUDENT EXPERIENCE

CLARIFY THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM

Low persistence or completion rates are, in many ways, the symptoms of larger root challenges. To effect meaningful change in the student experience and long-term outcomes, you need to get at underlying causes. At some colleges, this root-cause identification is done during the Reflection Phase.

If you have not yet identified the underlying causes of low rates of retention, persistence, belonging, or equity gaps, **spend some time asking yourselves what your SST is supposed to solve.** You can think of this as identifying your theory of change — what specifically needs to change, for who, and how in order to maximize the impact of your SST.

Institutional root challenges SSTs might need to address include:

• Disjointed student experience (sometimes referred to as "ping ponging")

• Siloed offices or student support staff

• Reactive rather than proactive student outreach

• Low levels of student connection or sense of belonging

• Inequitable access to student supports across student groups

• Lack of a student-centered or culturally-responsive institutional culture

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To clarify your root challenge, ask yourselves:

1. **What issue(s) are you trying to solve and for which groups of students?**

2. **What student needs are you trying to meet with your SSTs?**

3. **If you address your identified root challenge, what will be different for students?**

4. **How will an SST model address the problem you are trying to solve?**

5. **How will addressing these issues create a more equitable college?**

6. **What will your measures of success and equitable outcomes be?**

Identifying the root challenges you need your SSTs to address can provide some guideposts regarding the type of team you need to design. The chart below — while not exhaustive — demonstrates **the relationship between root challenge and team structure.** Asking yourself what kind of team will address your root cause will give you the first broad outlines of your intended future state.[1]

Type of Challenge	Backend Coordinating	Networked Support	Networked Single Point of Contact
Siloed offices or staff	X	X	X
Inequitable access to, or outcomes from, services	X	X	X
Disjointed student experience		X	X
Lack of student sense of belonging		X	X
Lack of student-centered culture		X	X
Student confusion around how to access support			X

[1] See our *Implementation Guide* (p. 10) or our companion resource, *Understanding Different Types of Student Success Teams*, for a refresher on the three types of SSTs identified in our study.

IDENTIFY YOUR GUARDRAILS

Most campuses are constrained in how radically they can transform. One college in our study noted that while the Design Team wanted a "Cadillac model" SST, budget and culture meant that they needed to think about a "Fiat." **Knowing the limitations faced by your team at the outset can prevent wasting time designing a model that just isn't feasible.** And to be clear—any iteration is likely to be better than the status quo, so don't think that because you are constrained, holistic student services reform isn't worth it. Just make sure that your Design Team understands the constraints upfront, so you can plan accordingly.

Figure out the limits you face in SST design. These may be obvious, such as technology or campus culture. Or you may need to ask senior leadership to candidly share any guardrails you should know about, or things they think just aren't feasible. Find out if these guardrails are moveable — that is, they can get wider with enough planning — or immoveable.[2]

To identify your guardrails, ask yourselves:

1. What guidance has senior management provided — do they want you to think big and then scale back if needed? Or do they want you to build within the existing resources?

2. What level of disruption can your institution handle?

3. Do you have student-level data to assign students to teams, track them easily across key academic milestones, and/or conduct outreach?

4. How much control do you have over data definitions and coding?

5. What technology infrastructure does your college have? Do you have a budget and personnel bandwidth to adopt new tools?

6. How much professional learning will be required to break functional silos, build a team culture, and/or shift practices towards holistic cohort case management?

7. How much budget (new or existing) is your college willing to invest in the launch and maintenance of SSTs, and who controls how funds are going to be allocated or reallocated?

[2] Many of these guardrails and constraints align with key areas of the *Implementation Guide*, so refer to relevant sections for more clarity on why these topics matter and what to look for.

IDENTIFY YOUR RESOURCES

Ideally, SSTs leverage existing resources, structures, and campus cultures. **Think about what you have at your disposal, and how you can use those resources in new ways to support your future SSTs.**[3]

Also think about the resources you wish you had. What will you need to address your root challenges via an SST? If you sense that your available resources are not aligned with what you need, you have two design choices:

- reframe your design to work within what's available, or
- embed resource development into your implementation planning so that you can access what you need for your preferred approach.

To understand your available and necessary resources, ask yourselves:[3]

1. **What skill sets are held by individuals in the various student-facing roles at your college, and how do they connect to the core goals of your future SSTs?**

2. **What existing equity or cohort programming can you learn from and/or connect to?**

3. **What data are available, from whom, and in what form?**

4. **What grants or funding sources could be used to support SST implementation and launch?**

5. **Who at your college is skilled at strategic finance?**

6. **What professional learning, governance, collective bargaining, and/or leadership structures do you have in place to support generative thinking and change management?**

7. **What communication structures do you have in place?**

8. **What are other college activities or external influences that need to be considered, connected to, or leveraged in developing your model?**

[3] Don't forget to think outside the box! For example, not all data live in IR systems and some colleges leverage LMS systems as communication tools.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

You can use the answers to the preceding categories of questions to establish your SST structure. By "structure," we mean the parameters of your SST, including: [4]

- the type of teams you are building,
- what types of cohorts they will serve, and
- what organizational resources will support them.

You probably identified the general team type after your root cause analysis, but the guardrails and resources will help you further clarify it. You'll want to **build a high-level understanding of what folks on the team will do** to change students' experiences and create a more equitable culture of holistic student support. You need to identify the kinds of activities your teams will do in order to achieve the goals you've set out for them.

Ultimately, you want to be able to fill in these blanks:

Our SSTs will do (your purpose) **for** (your cohorts)**. Teams will include** (people/roles) **who use** (tools, data, and technology) **to do** (responsibilities/tasks)**.**

To get to this level of clarity, ask yourselves the following questions:

1. **Given the resources we have, which existing or new faculty/staff roles can meet the needs we are trying to address?**

2. **Given our data and technology infrastructure, how will team members access information about students and communicate with one another?**

3. **Given other structural aspects of our college (e.g., metamajors, enrollment patterns, cohort programs), how will we group students to assign them to SST cohorts?**

4. **What are the must-have elements of the design, and what are negotiable?**

5. **What will SST members need to do or focus on to achieve the teams' goals?**

6. **How will team members holistically support students?**

7. **How will SSTs embed equity and culturally-responsive practices into their work flows?**

[4] See our *Implementation Guide* (p. 10) or our companion resource, *Understanding Different Types of Student Success Teams*, for examples of the different types of teams and how they do their work.

In the end, every college will ultimately design teams that fit its goals and context. **What works for one college might not work for another**—even if they have the same underlying root challenge. Below are three examples of how colleges in our study[5] answered the questions above and landed on an SST vision that worked for them.

[5] See our *Implementation Guide* (p. 4) for more information on each of these colleges.

Backend Coordinating

At **Eastern PA Medium-Large CC,** involvement with Achieving the Dream, Guided Pathways, and a Foundation-funded advising project led to deep data analysis and reflection. College leadership realized that they needed a way to use data to identify barriers to holistic advising within their guided pathways metamajors, streamline communication, and remove barriers for students. The college had substantial grant resources and an investment in DEI work at its disposal, as well as a new institutional structure that combined academic and student services under a single senior leader. At the time of their SST development, they also had a new advising department that was still trying to flesh out what "holistic support" meant to stakeholders.

As a result, the college decided to implement a **Backend Coordinating Student Success Team** for each metamajor. These SSTs include faculty, advisors and counselors, and support personnel from admissions and financial aid. They meet regularly to identify trends and themes they are seeing in metamajor-based data, and then address systemic barriers that might be contributing to those trends.

The college approached their SST and broader design work with a continuous improvement lens, so always expected to refine their work over time. Today, they are inching towards a networked support SST, as the advisors and counselors on the SSTs are working with students in their metamajor to build long-term plans and visit first-year experience courses to extend their student-facing reach.

Networked Support

Northern CA Large CC was engaged in Guided Pathways reform, and identified three key causes of low student outcomes. They found that students and college personnel alike were unaware of available resources, and that those resources were fragmented. Students also lacked a strong sense of community or connectedness. They wanted SSTs to build a centralized location for information and resources, reduce the need for students to "run department to department," and build a sense of community within their metamajors.

The college was in the process of refining its data and communications structure, and had enough infrastructure in place to manually assign students to cohorts but lacked robust tools and technologies. They benefitted from a collaborative culture, shared leadership with strong senior-level support, and a willingness to rethink budget allocations. They were constrained, however, by overall budget availability which led to relatively low staffing levels.

The college implemented a **Networked Support Student Success Team,** consisting of a student success coach, counselor, faculty member, and peer mentor. These teams meet regularly to streamline communications and share information, communicate with students and — in the case of the coach and counselor — meet with students in their metamajor. In addition, SSTs created a Canvas course shell to house key information for students in their cohort and to host community-building activities. Although the college aspires to create a single point of contact model, staffing considerations preclude it at this time.

Networked Single Point of Contact

Downstate NY Medium CC launched holistic student services redesign as part of its Title V initiative. The college had also moved to a Guided Pathways metamajor structure. After an inclusive and cross-functional design and visioning process, the college realized their root challenges were fragmented services and a lack of connectedness among students. Students did not know where to go to access what they needed, and from an institutional perspective, students were not being served strategically, which led to overburdened offices and staff.

The college had substantial resources — Title V funds, a metamajor structure, additional grant funds to hire Navigators, and supportive senior leadership. They also had a robust technology and data infrastructure, including an early alert system, a degree planning tool, standardized metrics, and processes for accessing and using data. At the same time, the college had a strong collective bargaining culture, counselors with contractually-limited working hours, and a reliance on grant funding that made some individuals reluctant to commit to new approaches.

The college opted to implement a **Networked Single Point of Contact Student Success Team.** Students connect with their Navigator, who refers them to counselors or other support personnel as necessary. In addition, the full SST — consisting of the Navigator, counselor, instructional dean, and, in some cases, career and financial aid counselors — meet regularly to communicate with one another, explore data for their metamajor, identify communication and intervention strategies for students, and reach out to students in need of assistance. Each metamajor organizes their network slightly differently to account for different needs and student populations, but all provide a key contact in the form of a Navigator and assigned counselor.

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This project was generously funded by The College Futures Foundation.

Want to learn more? Visit **www.phasetwoadvisory.com/sst-guide**

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