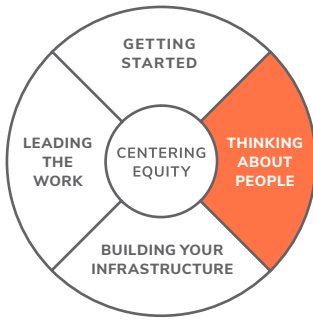# THINKING ABOUT PEOPLE

"People change" is at the core of SST implementation. Once you break down functional silos to provide coordinated, holistic support to students, practitioners will need to engage in new workflows, connect with each other in different ways, and take on revised responsibilities. In short, team members' work looks different — but when correctly designed, should enable them to carry out the functions of their job more efficiently and effectively.

When colleges don't plan for the "people side" of SST design and implementation, they run into trouble in a few different ways. New roles may conflict with human resources constraints or collective bargaining contracts. This might lead to grievance procedures, or to some faculty and staff working quietly outside of their contracted role. Professional staff might feel stretched so thin that folks are burned out and exhausted. Resistance to change might arise from individuals being asked to do new professional functions without commensurate compensation or necessary professional learning to build new skills.

Though sometimes viewed as barriers, **existing "people structures" can be generative when leveraged well.** HR and collective bargaining processes can support new and refined roles, hiring practices, and promotion opportunities that embody holistic student support approaches. Compensation and workload management can be used to ensure that individuals have the time and space to do the work needed during different phases of SST design and launch. Professional learning structures can support individuals' transitions to meeting new expectations.

At the colleges in our study, "thinking about people" meant thinking about three things:

1. Professional roles, and how they evolve to meet the SST approach

2. The time it takes for practitioners to do the work required

3. Learning to provide equity-forward holistic support in a team environment

Strategies to Revise and Create New Professional Roles

Because SSTs require new holistic support practices and span traditional job functions, they often require new roles or revised professional responsibilities within existing roles. Depending on the structure of the team, these might include:

- Modifying advising and counseling to go beyond program planning to providing holistic support

- Adding coaches or navigators to support procedural aspects of advising or connect students with appropriate resources

- Modifying the instructional faculty role to engage with students in advising and support contexts

- Expecting team members to communicate and collaborate regularly, develop new programming, and/or use new technologies to proactively monitor their shared caseload

Many of these shifts are "contract adjacent" — they align with the spirit of existing roles but aren't explicitly outlined in job descriptions. For example, SST meetings are clearly aligned with the instructional goal of supporting student learning and the student services goal of helping students navigate the pathway to graduation. But, they take faculty and staff away from their formal contracted duties of classroom teaching or meeting with students. New and refined roles also create questions around boundaries and compensation across divisions and bargaining units.

Our interviewees told us that key to leveraging people structures to successfully evolve roles is to **bring governance, collective bargaining, and HR leaders into the conversations early on** — during design planning, not implementation. The strategies they shared include:

Be Upfront that SSTs Will Require Evolved Professional Roles. Frame SST development as an opportunity to co-create new work across governance and bargaining units. Commit to a norm of collaboration and figuring things out together, rather than back-and-forth negotiation.

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Start by Defining the Activities SSTs Need to Engage in. Then work backwards to the bargaining or human resources context to determine appropriate compensation, contract grade, and other contract concerns. Engage HR, governance, and collective bargaining leaders as "critical friends" — asking them to identify potential challenges and the things that worry them from a role perspective. These concerns can be addressed in the design.

Create Buy-Out Time for Chairs, Design Leads, and Others Involved in Design and Implementation Planning. Upon launch, turn them into formal positions embedded in institutional structures to build sustainability. Engage with HR throughout the process to identify the best strategy for turning buy-out time into line-item positions.

Teams in Action: Helping Refine Professional Identities in Downstate NY

People place meaning on their work practices and competencies. Asking them to shift those practices means asking them to shift how they think about themselves.

At Downstate NY Medium CC, SST leaders found that professional identity work showed up as fear and resistance, often framed around potential loss. Advisors worried that new coaches would displace them, or take over aspects of their jobs. Some union representatives worried that the redesign would be an excuse to reduce bargaining lines.

To address these fears, implementation leaders set about building trust, clarifying where roles aligned and where they remained distinct, and reassuring professional staff that SSTs would not lead to reduced staffing. They made progress when they said to advisors, "Let's work together with coaches to contact students and direct them to you," thereby clarifying the relationship between the two roles. This also addressed contractual questions by clarifying which activities were related to specific bargaining lines. And fundamentally, it helped individuals start to refine their professional identities—maintaining the core competencies they valued while realigning what it means to "advise" within with a more holistic model.

Making Sure People Have Time to Do This Work

Thinking about people means thinking about how they will find time to do their work during design, implementation, and launch. There are, of course, only so many hours in the day. And while we often think of time constraints as being important during design and planning, our interviewees were clear that **capacity needs persist through implementation.** SSTs require back-end coordinating, such as filtering early alerts to advisors and counselors. One participant noted, "You need people on the back end to do the work so it's seamless for students on the front end."

Building this capacity is a challenge across colleges and exacerbated at small institutions like Southern CA Small CC. Some strategies to expand capacity create new challenges, such as when temporary positions create instability later. Still, colleges in our study found ways to ensure that there were people to design, plan, and launch SSTs by:

- Creating a full-time buy-out position or dedicating a professional staff member's time during design and implementation planning to ensure that a single person is responsible for and has time to shepherd the process

- Building coordinator/practitioner hybrid positions that enable SST members to continue doing their core functions while also having dedicated time for back-end systems building

- Cross-training to ensure that functions are filled even when key staff are out of the office

Ensuring People Can Be Successful SST Members

One college leader told us, "just because you create a position doesn't mean [the person] knows how to do their job." We heard numerous instances of colleges that did not prioritize professional learning across the SST development process. As a result, they saw reduced impact from their SSTs on students and increased stress for professionals. One SST member noted that after a rapid launch with minimal training, it felt like "we're helping students, but we're confused ourselves." Another noted that, without training, SSTs varied in practices and quality and created inequities for students.

Professional learning needs shift over time. During the reflection and design planning phases, professional learning focuses on the "why" of SSTs. This type of learning is well-positioned for external support, such as statewide institutes or professional conferences, and is the type of learning colleges in our study focused on the most.

As colleges move towards implementation planning and launch, **learning needs shift from "why" to "how."** Faculty and staff need to learn how to:

- **Shift mindsets** — from advising-as-registration to advising-as-shepherding-students-to-completion, or from working in silos to working as team members

- **Build skills** — using new technology, asking new questions, or collaboratively planning group advising activities

- **Work cross-functionally** — understanding the functions and professional scopes of other departments and members of the team

Internal structures are well-positioned to nurture and sustain "learning for how." At Central NY Small CC, the first half of each weekly team meeting was dedicated to professional learning, for example, bringing in representatives from other offices so that team members could learn about their work, build relationships, and provide "warm handoffs" to those offices for their students. This approach was low-cost, long-term, and easily tailored to the current learning needs of the team.

Colleges that successfully built internal "how-focused" learning structures used the following tactics:

- Co-creating job descriptions or SST "codes of conduct," to help teams define success and share strategies for enacting new expectations

- Asking team members, "what do you need to do your job?" and building workshops around the answers

- Building a culture that encourages reaching out to colleagues if team members do not know the answer to a student question

- Developing on-line repositories of resources for SST members