



Data Use & Sustainability

Helping Stakeholders Get the Most from an SLDS

This best practices brief addresses the role data use and sustainability play in creating a statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) that has long-term support. Included in this document are state examples and State Support Team (SST) tips on how to facilitate effective data use to establish and sustain an SLDS program. This brief is part of a series of products that focus on the relationships among stakeholder engagement, data use, and sustainability. The content for this brief originated from an SST workshop held in Phoenix, Arizona in May 2013.

Data Use Framework

For an SLDS to be successful, the data from it must be used regularly to inform decisions and actions in support of the state's, agency's, or stakeholders' overarching goals. The Data Use Framework (see Figure 1) is a generalizable strategy that includes all the critical issues a state must address to ensure widespread, effective data use. It is composed of three main phases: Plan, Create, and Support.

- The Plan phase focuses on establishing a clear mission and goals for the initiative, and, in support of that mission and goals, identifying the top priority users and uses the system will serve.
- The Create phase focuses on engaging stakeholders to identify the products or resources they need from the system to support the uses identified in the Plan phase. It also includes a delivery and dissemination strategy.
- The Support phase focuses on ensuring users know how to use the system, understand the data provided to them, and know how to use the data to inform their work. It also addresses keeping the SLDS relevant to changing needs and resource planning.

For more information regarding data use, please see the resource *Developing a Data Use Strategy*.

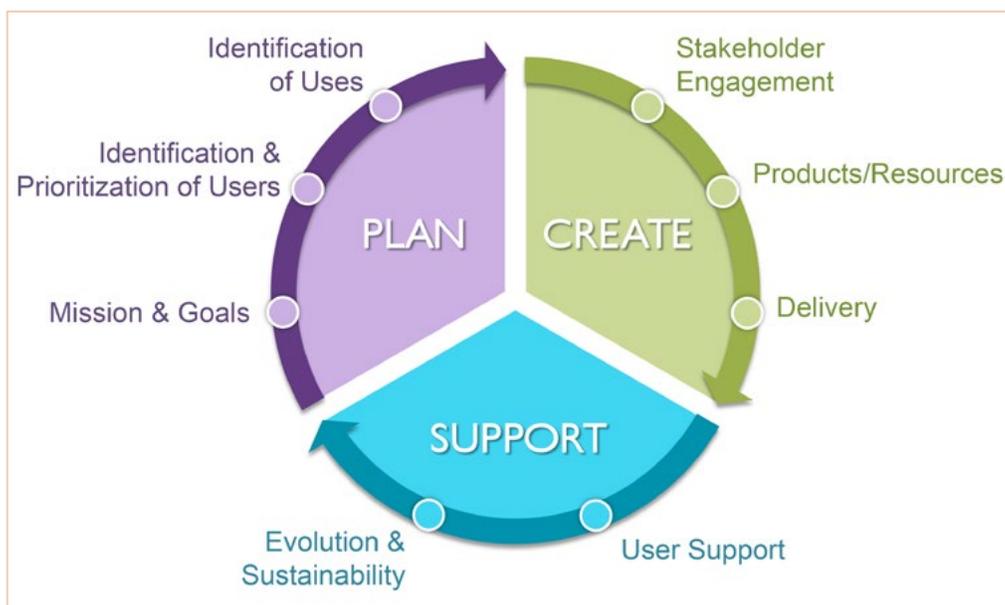


Figure 1. Data Use Framework

This product of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program was derived from an SLDS workshop that took place in May 2013. The information presented does not necessarily represent the opinions of the IES SLDS Grant Program. We thank the following people for their valuable contributions:

Workshop Presenters:

Corey Chatis
SLDS Grant Program, State Support Team

Jeff Sellers
SLDS Grant Program, State Support Team

Patrick Bush and Steve Garner
Delaware

William Henderson and Jeffrey Noel
District of Columbia

For more information on the IES SLDS Grant Program, additional SLDS publications, or for support with system development or use, please visit <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/SLDS>.



Sustainability Framework

For an SLDS to be sustainable, it needs to have the support of those it affects, be used as an integral part of informing education policy and programs, have the financial support of the agency and state legislature, and be able to show the added value it brings. A sustainable SLDS has four major components that facilitate and establish ongoing sustainability:

- Broad and deep *stakeholder support*, which informs and encourages accuracy and relevance of the SLDS. Getting clear direction/vision from stakeholders—before, during, and after building the system—promotes long-term sustainability and helps ensure that the SLDS will meet stakeholder needs.
- *Widespread use*, which is facilitated by the degree of stakeholder engagement. Increased data use confirms need and can increase dependence, which helps support sustainability.
- Long-term *financial support*, in the form of resources and staff, for the ongoing support and maintenance of the SLDS and to accommodate enhancements when changes in state and federal policies and programs require it.
- A demonstrated *return on investment*, both qualitative and quantitative, depicting not only potential savings in time and resources, but also the value of the added capabilities the SLDS enables the state to accomplish.

For more information regarding sustainability, please see the *SLDS Sustainability Toolkit* and *SLDS Sustainability Planning Guide*.



Figure 2. The four aspects that drive sustainability

The Relationship between Data Use and Sustainability

As illustrated in the above sustainability framework, widespread, effective data use is one of the essential aspects of a sustainability strategy. Put simply, even if all the financial and human resources to keep an SLDS operational are in place, if the data it produces are not being used, the SLDS cannot be sustained because it does not have a purpose or demonstrated value. While all three phases of the Data Use Framework play a role in ensuring the SLDS is sustained, the following strategies and state examples are focused on the Support phase.

Support Phase – User Support

The User Support component focuses on the following questions:

- How will users know how to use the system?
- How will users understand the data provided by the system?
- How will users know what to do with the data provided by the system?

Recommended strategies to ensure the SLDS meets the needs of its users include:

- Create a multi-pronged training plan that includes:
 - In-person sessions, webinars, online recordings
 - Documentation vetted by end users
- Ensure system training is coupled with data training so the system immediately demonstrates its relevance to the user
- Partner with program areas within your agency (e.g., professional development, curriculum and instruction) and with other agencies, higher education institutions, nonprofits, etc., that already work with users and share your end goals

User Support: State Examples

Delaware

Delaware created an environment in which local users were married to state systems, such as a statewide information system (SIS), because the system provided them with essential tools and resources and saved them money. The state provides a lot of “hooks” to use the state’s system. For example, users have to access the system to generate statewide unique IDs for students. Training is provided on a regular basis as new releases are rolled out.

District of Columbia

The District of Columbia trains its 59 local education agencies (LEAs) regarding the data elements that need to be collected and how to utilize the SLDS system. After the training, the District surveys the users on the effectiveness of the training.

Support Phase – Evolution and Sustainability

The Evolution and Sustainability component focuses on the following questions:

- How do we continue to support users and their needs as they expand and evolve?
- How do we make the system an essential resource for users?
- How do we ensure we have the resources to continue meeting users’ needs?

Recommended strategies to ensure the SLDS evolves with the needs of its users include:

- Stay on top of relevant and current affairs, specifically bills in legislature. Make the SLDS the go-to information resource
- Establish long-term feedback mechanisms for key user groups
 - Use a larger, initial outreach when trying to answer key questions and define key resources user groups may want
 - Seek feedback from user groups on an ongoing basis for evolving and relevant changes
- Collect, disseminate, and act on usage metrics (both qualitative and quantitative)
 - Who is using the SLDS for what purposes?
- Create a communications overview package for new leadership or key stakeholders
 - Identify key information/uses that users start to consider essential to their work
- Think creatively about how to capture essential use cases
- Brand all SLDS resources
- Early on, determine resources (human, IT, and fiscal; in-house and contractor/vendor) required to stay responsive to current and planned future users’ needs

Evolution and Sustainability: State Examples

Texas

Texas is looking at return on investment (ROI) and creative ways to measure ROI, from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Specifically, Texas is looking at how to improve or lighten the LEAs' burden and how that would affect the ROI.

Georgia

Georgia has captured brief videos of teachers talking about how they use the SLDS to save time and to inform instruction.

Florida

Florida created and disseminated one-page "performance profiles" to each legislator, which were specific to his or her legislative district. The profiles focused on high-interest aspects of the P-20 system, including kindergarten readiness, employment, and high school feedback reports. The reports were used as a communication tool to highlight what the SLDS was producing.

Washington

Washington State has a third-party entity, the Education Research Data Center (ERDC), which leads the P-20W work. The ERDC demonstrates the value of the SLDS by making almost all of its reports or products publicly available via its website (<http://www.erd.c.wa.gov/>). Additionally, the ERDC has served as a resource for the P-20W partner agencies by matching and analyzing linked data prior to the creation of the state's SLDS.

Washington also utilizes the following data use strategies to support sustainability:

- Use system information to inform and improve work, not as a tool for accountability (i.e., as a flashlight, not a hammer)
- Establish trust with data providers early on: treat them like partners
- Take the reporting and data-linking burden off stakeholders' hands so they can focus on utilizing the data
- Use an iterative approach when producing a new product. Start small and get feedback from intended user groups. Incorporate feedback into the final version to demonstrate responsiveness to users' needs
- Stay responsive and alert to stakeholders' needs. Washington has executive sponsor meetings to get a sense of any new direction or topics that need to be addressed in the future

Additional Resources

Data Use

Data Use Self Assessment and Action Plan

Available in the Public Domain Clearinghouse at GRADS360.org

Innovative & Effective Utilization of Early Childhood Data: SLDS Webinar Summary

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/webinar_id-mgmt.pdf

Developing a Data Use Strategy

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/data_use_strategy.pdf

Sustainability

SLDS Sustainability Toolkit

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/sustainability_toolkit.pdf

SLDS Sustainability Planning Guide

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/sustainability_guide.pdf