COLLEGE ✳ SPARK
WASHINGTON

College Spark Washington funds programs across Washington state that help low-income students become college-ready and earn their degrees.

ACHIEVING THE DREAM: COMMUNITY COLLEGES COUNT

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a national initiative focused on helping more community colleges students succeed, particularly low-income students and students of color. Built on the values of equity and excellence, Achieving the Dream advances community college student success through work on four fronts: transforming community colleges; influencing policy; developing new knowledge; and engaging the public.

Recognizing that Washington has a strong community college system that is worth investing in, College Spark committed more than $10 million to enable 16 Washington Colleges to participate in Achieving the Dream. Participating colleges received funding and other supports to help them build their research capacity; develop a culture of evidence and inquiry focused on student success; and pilot student success interventions aimed at increasing student success within the Student Achievement Initiative framework, with particular emphasis on increasing first year credit accumulation and improving success in pre-college courses.

PARTICIPATING COLLEGES

Phase I (2006-2010)

Big Bend Community College

Highline College

Renton Technical College

Seattle Central Community College

Tacoma Community College

Yakima Valley Community College

Phase II (2011-2015)

Bellingham Technical College

Clover Park Technical College

Edmonds Community College

Everett Community College

Grays Harbor College

Lower Columbia College

Northwest Indian College

Skagit Valley College

Spokane Falls Community College

Whatcom Community College

Six strategies for effective institutional change

Based on the progress made by 10 Washington community and technical colleges participating in Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count during 2011-2015 in achieving institutional change, below are the lessons learned and critical success factors for colleges:

Institutional change requires visionary, active, engaged, and ongoing leadership.

Leadership from the top needs to be active and unrelenting. For systemic change to occur throughout a college, the president needs to be present and intensely focused on transformation work as a main priority.

Shared or distributed leadership is essential to institutional change, and this requires engaging leaders at all levels of the college.

A crucial component of spreading institutional change is using the organization's structure in a strategic, intentional way from top to bottom and across functions and departments. This includes champions of innovation and people who are in both formal and informal leadership roles.
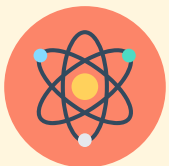
Transformational change requires meaningful engagement.

Engagement that is both broad and deep also helps to minimize loss of momentum from the normally occurring turnover in leaders, faculty, and staff, including the key players that helped start the change. Without an explicit plan for this, good initial efforts may just sink back under the waves of daily work.

Making the case for why change needs to occur is the key driving force for genuine change.

The "why" needs to be compelling and inspiring, and must bring people together to form a collective belief that their contributions to the work will change student lives for the better. It must be a deliberate, active, and ongoing process that engages people throughout the college.

External partners make a difference in moving institutional change forward, providing learning networks, and supporting public, mutual accountability.

Engaging in collaborative partnerships builds a support structure that promotes motivation, knowledge generation, dissemination of improvements in policies and practices, staying on track and moving forward.
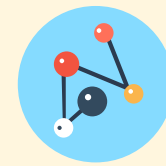
Institutional change is a complex, non-linear process.

Transformational change is continuous and iterative—and it is essential to build in mechanisms that ensure this happens. Critical elements to this approach include evaluation, learning, and continuous improvement and the central role of key people, regardless of title, in making institutional change happen.