

NPEA DATA COUNTS
FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
SUMMER 2018

Introduction

The National Partnership for Educational Access (NPEA) Data Counts project, funded by The Esther A. & Joseph Klingenstein Fund, brought together member organizations, researchers, and NPEA staff to develop a list of ten key Indicators deemed essential to measure progress and success for educational access and equity programs. The team also developed a Data Collection Tool to gather robust, aggregate, and comparable data across the network. With this approach, it was hoped that NPEA members would be in a better position to collect and use data to understand program effectiveness and deepen impact throughout the field. In order to understand and explore what members gained from NDC and to inform next steps, NPEA embarked on a qualitative study with Brigham Nahas Research Associates. Highlights from this research are presented in the pages to follow, and findings are detailed in the full report.

Highlights From The Study

When asked about what was gained from NDC, “[w]e have stronger data as a result” was a common refrain. More specifically, the Indicators List, the data points, and the detailed definitions were identified consistently as the most valuable parts of NDC. These resources were considered reassuring to those charged with developing a data strategy for their organizations. NDC provided an “*anchor*” to get started for newer programs, while offering more established organizations best-practice standards and definitions with which to align, and against which to compare, current practices. Members also described the process of organizing data to complete the Data Collection Tool as being very valuable to them, despite the fact that it was not always easy. There were three dimensions that describe why the process was valuable to members:

- First, members described NDC as an “*accountability tool*” for programs because participating ensured that someone in the organization would set aside time to assemble and review their data, an activity that is often put off until a grant report is due or a funder requests it.
- Second, gathering data for NDC drew attention to data quality and integrity (i.e., accuracy, completeness, inconsistencies) and raised issues that programs recognized they need to address to ensure the information they are using is accurate.
- Third, NDC called attention to the importance of thinking through and investing in a data management system, often because it was so difficult to assemble their data for the Tool.

Two areas were identified where improvement is needed, both of which can inform NPEA's work going forward.

- 1) The NDC reports and products were generally not as highly valued as the Indicators and process of completing the Tool. Members suggested that shorter products that focus squarely on informing practice with examples from the field would be more likely to catch and hold their attention. There was consensus that a product that compared individual program data to well-defined groups of comparable programs (rather than to the overall, aggregate data) would be especially impactful.
- 2) Members consistently talked about the difficulty of moving their organizations from ones that collect and report data to ones that actually use data effectively, intentionally, and strategically to inform practice and planning. This is an area where many are looking for guidance, coaching, and support and would welcome help from NPEA.

As the NPEA team takes the time to reflect on their work with NDC and the impact it has had on the field, there is reason to be proud. While the process of working with and completing the NDC Tool was not always easy, members said it was worthwhile because it made them think critically about their data practices and talk about them with staff. This is an important step toward using data to improve and make productive decisions. Feedback about how NPEA could continue to support data work can serve as a touchpoint for thinking through next steps and priorities for NDC. In so doing, however, members were clear that they want NPEA to continue doing what they do so well, namely offering excellent conferences, resources, best practices, opportunities to connect, and very personal and hands-on services to members.