



SLDS Issue Brief

Implementing a Research Agenda

Research agendas help statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) teams and their states align SLDS work with state strategic goals and policy priorities, plan and prioritize research projects, and respond to data requests from researchers. This brief describes key steps and considerations for communicating and carrying out a research agenda that an SLDS can support, including

- developing a vision for successfully implementing the agenda;
- making the vision a reality by identifying and prioritizing strategies to address implementation challenges;
- creating an action plan for implementation; and
- communicating with research agenda stakeholders.

The brief also discusses how to ensure that the research agenda is sustainable over time.

The guidance in this brief is intended for states that have already developed a research agenda but have not taken steps to implement it. The worksheets referenced in the brief are available in an appendix at the end of the document. For more information about planning and creating a research agenda, see SLDS Issue Brief: Developing a Robust Research Agenda that the SLDS Can Support.

Developing a Vision for Research Agenda Implementation

The first step in implementing a research agenda is to define the goals and desired outcomes of the implementation. This vision statement will reflect the research agenda's purpose within an organization or a group of partner organizations.

The vision statement should reflect the desired future for the research agenda. For example, if the agenda is implemented successfully,

- what is the status of SLDS research?
- how is the SLDS team working with researchers?
- what specific improvements and outcomes have been achieved?
- what problems have been solved?
- what are stakeholders—such as researchers, lawmakers, and the public—saying about the SLDS, and how are they behaving differently?

Examples of Research Agenda Vision Statements

"Data collecting agencies agree on the research agenda and are committed to supporting it."

"Data governance groups and processes support the prioritization and completion of the research agenda, and they ensure that the necessary data are available and shared appropriately among partners."

"The research agenda supports a sustainable cycle of research where current priorities are completed and inspire new and follow-up research questions in the future."

"The SLDS becomes the go-to source for quality research data. Whenever someone talks about multi-agency research, their first thought is to use the SLDS."

This product of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) SLDS Grant Program was developed with the help of knowledgeable staff from state education agencies and partner organizations. The content of this publication was derived from an SLDS regional meeting that took place in May 2016. The information presented does not necessarily represent the opinions of the IES SLDS Grant Program. We thank the following people for their valuable contributions:

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



Action Planning

An action plan details the specific activities needed to carry out the challenge-mitigating strategies prioritized above to ensure that the research agenda is implemented successfully. It helps keep the work on track, establishes common expectations, and exposes conflicts, overlapping efforts, and gaps that need to be addressed.

Establish guiding principles

Guiding principles are the fundamental norms, rules, and ethics that will inform actions related to implementing the research agenda. Guiding principles should connect actions to the overall vision for implementation. When developing the action plan, consider including actions that will need to be taken to ensure that these principles are followed.

Incorporate strategies into the plan

For each high-priority strategy identified during the impact-effort analysis (quadrant 3 and possibly some quadrant 4 strategies on the impact-effort grid), identify specific actions and activities to accomplish the strategy and address the relevant challenge.

Consider breaking actions into tasks

It may be necessary to further break down actions into specific tasks that can be assigned and accomplished. In some cases, developing a project plan with specific tasks, dependencies, completion dates, and resource assignments can help ensure that the actions are accomplished. This

Examples of Guiding Principles for Action Planning

“The research agenda will be transparent and accessible to all stakeholders. It will be free from jargon, publicly available, and communicated to stakeholders.”

“The research agenda establishes priorities for SLDS work in a way that demonstrates the system's value. For example, the agenda prioritizes work involving cross-sector data.”

“The research agenda will be a self-sustaining, living document that incorporates new questions as original priorities are accomplished.”

“The research agenda focuses on measurable outcomes aligned to the state's overall goals and strategic plan.”

“The research agenda guides work in a way that uses resources efficiently and focuses on high-impact strategies.”

“The research agenda strengthens collaboration among key partners within and across agencies.”

STATE SUPPORT TEAM

Challenge-Mitigation and Guiding Principles Strategies and Actions

Use this template to record the challenge-mitigation strategies from the research effort, identify the challenge-mitigation strategies and guiding principles actions that will help address those that could hinder the goal of successfully implementing the research agenda.

Also include strategies and actions that are needed to support your guiding principles. Guiding principles are the fundamental norms, rules, and ethics that will inform actions related to implementing the research agenda.

Goal: Successful Implementation of the Research Agenda

Strategies for Action Planning	Actions and Activities to Carry Out the Strategy

100 Regional Workday | Implementing a Robust Research Agenda that the SLDS Can Support

STATE SUPPORT TEAM

Roles and Responsibilities

Use this template to record the roles and responsibilities that align with challenge-mitigation actions and guiding principles actions. Use one each to map and place actions from the Challenge-Mitigation and Guiding Principles Strategies and Actions template into the Responsibilities column once you have determined the relevant roles.

Goal: Successful Implementation of the Research Agenda

Role	Responsibilities

100 Regional Workday | Implementing a Robust Research Agenda that the SLDS Can Support

The “Challenge-Mitigation and Guiding Principles Strategies and Actions” worksheet, left, documents actions and activities that will help counter forces that could hinder research agenda implementation and fulfill the guiding principles. The “Roles & Responsibilities” worksheet, right, helps align research agenda implementation actions with specific personnel.

approach may be particularly useful for actions that are complex, high risk, and/or highly visible.

Identify roles and responsibilities

Determine the roles and responsibilities that will be needed to carry out these actions and successfully implement the research agenda. Establish which individuals and offices are responsible for each of the strategies and actions. Communicate these responsibilities with everyone involved.

Additional considerations

When describing strategies and actions in the action plan, keep the following considerations in mind:

- *How will critical stakeholders be engaged?* Identify who the critical stakeholders are and plan how they will be involved in the actions. Think specifically about the stakeholders who will provide the data needed for items in the research agenda.
- *Who needs to sign off?* Determine the parts of the plan that will need executive review or approval and decide how that approval will be obtained. Even if approval is not formally required, it can lend weight and authority to work related to the research agenda.
- *What technology will be needed?* A successful research agenda can lead to increased requests for SLDS data for research. Identify the applications and infrastructure that will be needed to respond to an increased volume of requests to provide data on subjects related to the research agenda topics (see the sidebar Supporting the Research Agenda with Technology on page 5). Work with your IT partners to determine how these functions will fit with other information technology priorities.
- *How will progress on the research agenda be monitored?* Assign the responsibility of checking progress on research

agenda work and informing the research sponsors. Establish a method of escalating issues through different levels of responsibility to reach a resolution. Having this escalation process defined before it is needed can help avoid crises and misunderstandings.

Communicating the Research Agenda

Effective communications are essential to keeping work related to the research agenda on track and ensuring that those involved in its implementation are informed and engaged. Determine the stakeholders who will need to

be involved throughout the implementation and why they need to be involved. The content and methods of communicating with each stakeholder will vary based on the stakeholder's role. For example, data stewards at partner agencies that contribute data to the SLDS will need different information and receive different communications from researchers who are working with the data.

Organizing stakeholders according to their interest in the research agenda and the amount of influence or power they will have in its implementation can help the SLDS team decide how to communicate with them (see figure 2, next page).

Examples of Challenge-Mitigation Strategies and Actions

Strategy: *Anticipate potential situations in advance rather than waiting for them to arise.*

Actions:

- Establish a communications plan and continually monitor it to handle potentially controversial research topics.
- Create a research group to involve internal and external researchers, including foundations that might be able to fund research.
- Keep partners informed about research work and provide them with opportunities to give input.
- Evaluate products and procedures periodically to determine their effectiveness.

Strategy: *Hold productive meetings with key leaders and partners.*

Actions:

- Identify essential meeting participants.
- Prepare a list of items that need attention, input, or a decision from leaders, and document the team's recommendations.
- Develop a timeline for work to be done.
- Schedule meetings, possibly taking advantage of existing meetings.
- Identify points of contact for coordinating communications and work related to the meetings.

Strategy: *Plan in advance for leadership turnover.*

Actions:

- Create communications materials about the SLDS and the research agenda, such as an elevator speech and informational handouts.
- Identify allies among stakeholders and users who understand and can communicate the project's value.
- Connect the SLDS to existing efforts among partners, such as fulfilling new federal requirements.

Strategy: *Increase awareness of the SLDS and its research capabilities.*

Actions:

- Solicit input from stakeholders on the clarity of the draft research agenda, possibly through a researcher group or consortium.
- Share the final agenda with key partners and researchers in a variety of stakeholder organizations.
- Consider offering expedited processing of data requests for projects that support the research agenda.

Strategy: *Clarify data ownership.*

Actions:

- Advocate for legal measures that define ownership of SLDS data.
- Set expectations for partner agencies for successful implementation of the research agenda.
- Define the data governance model, its relationship to the research agenda, and the role of executive leadership.

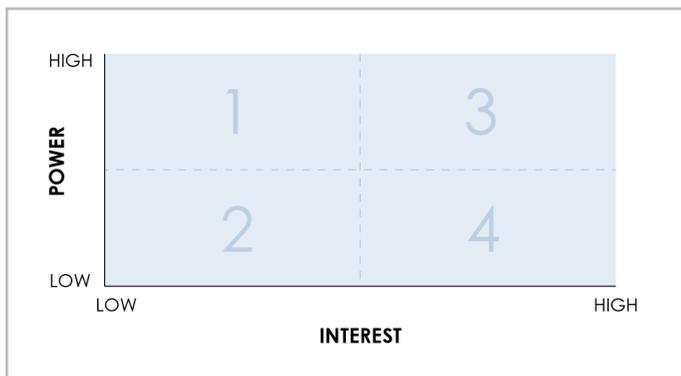


Figure 2. An interest-power grid arranges stakeholders according to their level of interest in the research agenda (low to high) and their level of influence in its implementation (low to high).

Stakeholders who have high levels of interest and power in implementing the research agenda (quadrant 3 in the interest-power grid) are typically those who need to be most closely engaged. High-power, low-interest stakeholders (quadrant 1) need to feel satisfied with the work but may not need frequent outreach. Communications with low-power, high-interest stakeholders (quadrant 4) should focus on keeping them informed. Low-power, low-interest stakeholders (quadrant 2) will not need frequent communications but should be monitored to ensure their needs and issues are considered.

Next, identify the information that each stakeholder will need, when they will need it, and the methods of communicating with the stakeholder. Create an inventory of specific communications items that will be needed while implementing the research agenda. For each item, document its purpose, author, intended audience, schedule and frequency, how it will be delivered, and the


STATE SUPPORT TEAM

Communications Matrix

Use this template to record the different types of communications that will be needed to support research agenda implementation and key information about each.

#	Item	Description	Purpose	Originator/Author	Audience	Frequency	Update and Communication Method
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
12							

SLDS Regional Workshop | Implementing a Robust Research Agenda that the SLDS Can Support

The “Communications Matrix” worksheet catalogs different types of communications, their intended audiences, and methods of delivery.

Supporting the Research Agenda with Technology

Technology can help streamline the process of providing SLDS data for research in a number of ways. Some states are implementing electronic data request processes to manage requests, including those from researchers, more efficiently. Many of these systems allow researchers to request specific data contained in the SLDS electronically and help data stewards track questions, clarifications, and the status of the data request through completion. The electronic data request process can also promote publicly available data and other resources such as data dictionaries and Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) Connections that researchers may find useful. See the Additional Resources at the end of this document for links to webinars spotlighting states that have implemented electronic data request processes.

Data marts containing pre-vetted datasets related to research agenda priorities can be developed in advance and allow data to be pulled for specific data requests. This system can eliminate redundant work for SLDS staff and save time for both SLDS staff and researchers.

person responsible for delivering it. Consider how these communications fit into the roles and responsibilities identified in the action plan for implementing the research agenda.

Sustaining the Research Agenda

Ensuring that the research agenda remains relevant and useful depends on four factors:

- *Stakeholder support.* How broadly and deeply are stakeholders engaged in the research agenda?
- *Ensuring widespread use.* Are a wide range of stakeholders using the research agenda and the SLDS?
- *Return on investment.* How is the success of the research agenda being defined, measured, recorded, and demonstrated?
- *Financial support.* How strong is the financial support for work related to the research agenda?

Determine the steps needed to implement a sustainable research agenda by developing a vision of success for each factor. What will stakeholder support, widespread use, return on investment, and financial support look like when sustainability is achieved?

The research agenda needs to evolve over time to meet new and changing needs. The agenda may need to be revised in a number of situations, including

- aligning with new agency strategic plans or state priorities;
- taking advantage of new SLDS data or capabilities; and
- complying with new state or federal requirements.

Additionally, consider a regular, annual review cycle to revisit the agenda and ensure that it is still relevant. The ongoing success of the research agenda ultimately depends on how well it reflects and supports the information needs of researchers and policymakers now and in the future.



Figure 3. The Sustainability Framework

Possible Characteristics of a Sustainable Research Agenda

Stakeholder support:

- Stakeholders are engaged in the research agenda so that the overall group knows its value and supports it, even if leaders or key personnel leave.
- Information that stakeholders need on an ongoing basis—such as college and career readiness rates for K12 agencies—remain as research agenda priorities over time.

Ensuring widespread use:

- The research agenda is transparent about research priorities so that researchers can plan projects and pursue funding accordingly.
- Research results are readily available and include summaries and descriptions that make them useful to a broad range of audiences.

Return on investment:

- Research results help identify ineffective programs in order to improve or discontinue them.
- Researchers in different organizations are working toward well-defined and cohesive priorities that support state goals.
- Information is produced that would not otherwise be available.

Financial support:

- Requests for additional SLDS funding are justified by documenting operational expenses and additional costs needed for research.
- The value of research done via the research agenda is quantified.
- Funding is provided for research, such as through small competitive grants for researchers.

Additional Resources

Developing a Robust Research Agenda that the SLDS Can Support: SLDS Issue Brief

<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/10124>

Forming Research Partnerships with State and Local Education Agencies: SLDS Data Use Issue Brief

<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/2732>

Increasing Structural Capacity: Developing a Research Request Process: SLDS Webinar

<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/10488>

Increasing Structural Capacity: Streamlining the Research Request Process: SLDS Webinar

<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/8882>

Increasing Organizational Capacity: Successful Partnerships and Collaboration with Researchers: SLDS Webinar

<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/10162>

Researcher Access to the SLDS: SLDS Webinar

<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/5194>

Use of Research Analytics: SLDS Webinar

<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/7729>

Appendix: SLDS State Support Team Worksheets for Implementing a Research Agenda

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Envisioning the Research Agenda Implementation

Use this template as a guide for discussion with your team, and to record your thinking.

Goal: Successful Implementation of the Research Agenda

What purpose will research agenda implementation serve in your state or territory?
What is the best outcome we could hope for?
What is the worst thing that could happen?
Imagine that it's two years from today...
How will we partner with researchers?
What specific improvements have we made?
What are researchers, the public, and legislators saying about us now?
What problems have we solved?
What specific outcomes have we achieved?
How are people behaving differently?



Challenge-Mitigation and Guiding Principles Strategies and Actions

List the challenge-mitigation strategies from the Impact v. Effort Analysis that were identified as needing action plans in the first column below. In the second column, develop and record actions and activities that will help address forces that could hinder the goal of successfully implementing the research agenda.

Also include strategies and actions that are needed to support your guiding principles. Guiding principles are the fundamental norms, rules, and ethics that will inform actions related to implementing the research agenda.

Goal: Successful Implementation of the Research Agenda

Strategies for Action Planning	Actions and Activities to Carry Out the Strategy



Roles and Responsibilities

Use this template to record the roles and responsibilities that align with challenge-mitigation actions and guiding principles actions. Use may wish to copy and paste actions from the Challenge-Mitigation and Guiding Principles Strategies and Actions template into the Responsibilities column once you have determined the relevant roles.

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Roles	Responsibilities



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