Coaching for Change
Planning Tool for SSC Led Coaching

by Christopher Baldwin

The overarching purpose of this planning tool is to help Student Success Center (SSC) leaders, staff, and their partners assess their existing or emerging capacity to deliver a robust coaching program for their colleges and to make decisions about areas that need greater focus.

The categories in the tool are intended to address key design features of a coaching program. They should be helpful to SSCs just launching their coaching strategy, as well as those who already have a program in place but are looking to expand or enhance their offerings.

Similar to the larger SSC Self-Assessment Planning Tool, found at https://www.jff.org/documents/3047/SSC_Self-Assessment_Planning_Tool.docx, this tool is designed with flexibility in mind and can be completed in different ways; for example, the questions can be completed by the SSC executive director alone as a snapshot of their own thinking or used as a rubric for larger group discussion.

1. Articulating the link of the coaching program to the SSC's overarching strategic direction

As is the case with any activity the SSCs engage in, it is important to have a clear understanding and plan for how a sustained coaching program connects with other Center initiatives and projects (or how it does not). It isn't necessary that every aspect of the SSC's work be integrated but, to maximize the limited time and resources of SSCs, a thoughtful dialogue about the intersection of the coaching program with other activities is important.

Key questions to consider:

- Is the coaching program central to the core work of the SSC or more on the periphery?

- Is the long-term goal to build coaching capacity in the state or rely on external coaches?

- How will the coaching program align with other technical assistance offered?

- If the SSC has provided coaching to colleges in the past, what are the lessons you have learned and how might your coaching design evolve?

- Does the SSC have a group of practitioners who provide input on coaching program design?

2. Determining the required competencies and content focus of coaches

Coaching can be defined in a variety of ways and focus on a range of content areas. It is important to understand at the start what the focus of the SSC coaching program will be. This will impact who is recruited, how they are oriented, and the way the program is communicated and implemented with the colleges.

Key questions to consider:

- Will coaches serve as subject matter expects on specific topics, generalists focused on the change process, or some combination?

- What is the duration of a coach's engagement with specific colleges and with the coaching program in general?

- What specific content expertise are you looking for in coaches?

- How are you defining the role of the coaches to the colleges?

- How is an equity focus integrated into the coaching program content/focus?

- Is it likely that the coaching focus/approach will change over time? If so, what is the time horizon for a possible shift?

3. Identifying and recruiting individuals to serve as coaches

In most instances, SSCs are focused on building the capacity and expertise of individuals in-state to fill the coaching roles. Others may rely on external coaches to meet their needs. Regardless of the focus, the process for identifying and recruiting coaches should be thought through carefully. SSCs will want to ensure the needs of the program are met, while also providing opportunities for individuals from a variety of colleges to participate.

Key questions to consider:

- Will there be an open call for coaches or more pointed recruitment from "proven" leaders?

- If there is broader recruitment process, what are the criteria that will be used to vet the candidates and who will make the selection?

- How will the program recruit a diverse pool of coaches both in terms of their expertise and their backgrounds?

- What is the benefit for colleges to allow their faculty or staff to serve as coaches?

- Will coaches be compensated for their time? If coaches won't be paid, what is the benefit of serving as a coach for these individuals?

- If the SSC already offers coaching, what role will current coaches play in the future and how can they support your recruitment efforts?

4. Defining the parameters of how coaches will engage with colleges

Considering the extent to which coaches are interacting with a college (or colleges) will help to determine how many coaches are needed, and for what duration. There are obvious budget implications involved in these decisions, particularly if coaches will be paid. The scope of the coaching role will also have important implications

for who the SSC is able to recruit for the program.

Key questions to consider:

- How frequently will coaches interact with their assigned colleges?

- How much time will be involved in training?

- How many colleges will one coach be expected to support?

- Will the interactions be in-person, virtual, or both?

- What will the venues be for in-person interactions: state convenings, college site visits, or both?

- Will virtual interactions be limited to telephone and email, or will video conferencing be used?

- If the SSC already offers coaching, how might the expectations and workloads for your current coaches change?

5. Outlining the process for orienting and training coaches for their role

The success of a coaching program will depend greatly on how prepared the individual coaches are for their role. The coaches need a clear understanding of what their role is (and is not), and this will need to align with the expectations the colleges have of their engagement with a coach (see the next section). There are a variety of approaches to preparing the coaches, but it is very important to systematically think through how coaches will be trained.

Key questions to consider:

- Will the orientation/training for coaches be structured as a singular event or a series of interactions?

- Will the orientation/training take place in-person, virtually, or both?

- Who will deliver the orientation/training?

- Will the orientation include role-playing or other exercises that will give coaches some practice?

- What will the content focus of the training be and how do you balance the need to convey content about specific reforms (e.g., guided pathways) and more general change management principles?

- How will the orientation/training for coaches integrate equity-mindedness both in terms of the coaches' interaction with colleges, and helping to extend this mindset to the colleges' change initiatives?

- Will there be an opportunity to pair more experienced coaches with new coaches during initial college engagements?

- For SSCs with coaches in place, what role can the current coaches play in the orientation and training of new coaches?

6. Ascertaining college readiness for a coaching engagement

Another key component that will determine the success of the coaching program is the extent that individual colleges are prepared to take advantage of the support from colleges. This includes helping them to understand what to expect from the coaches and having a clear vision for what they are trying to accomplish. While there are a few key questions below, Community College Research Initiatives is also developing a deeper tool to help the SSCs determine college readiness for coaching.

Key questions to consider:

- To what degree is the college ready for change? Is the rationale for the change initiative clear?

- Is the change initiative well defined? Is the scope of change clear? Is the

impact of the change on all of your stakeholders well understood?

- What would constitute successful coaching outcomes? What factors are critical to coaching success?

- How well do the coaching objectives align with the organization's strategic goals?

- How will previous institutional change work impact this current work? What are the biggest risks?

- What are the strengths of the college? What do people value?

- Where are you in the change process: preparing, planning, managing, or sustaining?

7. Managing the coaching program once it is established

Once the coaching program is launched, the SSC will need to effectively administer the effort by addressing a variety of issues such as scheduling the coaching engagements, monitoring the effectiveness of the coach, and managing the flow of information for both ongoing support to the colleges and to inform the evaluation of the program. These ongoing matters will all require adequate staff time and focus to diligently monitor and address.

Key questions to consider:

- Who will be the main point of contact with the coaches? Are there staff devoted to the smooth operation of the coaching program?

- What is the mechanism for scheduling coaching interactions with colleges? Are SSC staff involved in this scheduling?

- How are coaches held accountable? Are there regular check-in conversations with the coaches (either collectively or individually)? Is there a regular time when all coaches are convened to have extend discussions about what is

working and what is not?

- Is there an efficient mechanism for the coaches to submit updates on interactions with the colleges?

- How will the SSC address turnover in the coaching ranks?

- How will the SSC address the need for new coaches over time to work with future college cadres or cohorts?

8. Establishing plans for sustaining the coaching program over time

While this item is at the end of the document, SSC leadership should be considering these questions before launching the program.

Key questions to consider:

- What is the approach for evaluating the impact of coaching in supporting college reforms?

- What data is the SSC collecting (qualitative or quantitative) to gauge the impact of the coaching program? What is the process for adjusting aspects of the program?

- What are the SSC's plans to communicate with key college stakeholders (especially presidents) about the value and impact of the coaching program?

- Has the SSC created awareness among key funders about the coaching program and its place in the SSC's overarching strategy to support institutional reform?

Suggestion citation: Baldwin, C. 2019. *SSCN Coaching Program: Coaching for Change Planning Tool.* Seattle: Community College Research Initiatives, University of Washington.