



TRANSCRIPT

## Four Pillars for Sustaining Rural Cross-Sector Data-Driven Decisionmaking

MARA LOCKOWANDT

Welcome everyone. We are really happy to have you all as part of our conversation today and thank you for taking time to join us. So today's webinar is really around this idea of four pillars for sustaining rural cross-sector data-driven decisionmaking.

Our objectives for today are really to look at some frameworks and tools that research has indicated are effective in using data to build capacity and drive data-driven decisionmaking. We're going to be talking about and thinking about some of the strategies and tools that sustain cross-sector data infrastructure, technical expertise, data-driven processes, and culture.

We're going to spend a little bit of time now framing the conversation with a look at two pieces of literature that have helped provide some framework for this work.

So I'm going to go ahead and start us off by talking about this first piece of literature that we have grounded a lot of our work in, and have found really useful. As mentioned, we've been really interested within our REL West project in learning about data-driven decisionmaking for rural and rural-serving cross-sector collaboratives. And we've looked at a number of pieces of literature out there, as well as the ongoing work with our sites to learn about what it really takes to sustain this work.

And one reason why I'm sure many of you have joined today is that the relationship between levels of data use and the ways in which they're used within cross-sector work can really increase student achievement and economic outcomes. So we're really interested in what are those effective practices for increasing capacity around this.

This piece of literature resonated with us as part of our ongoing effort. It was developed by Mathematica through support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. And it outlines three complementary components to building a cross-sector data-driven decisionmaking organizational supports within cross-sector work. And those three components you see illustrated on the graphic here around data infrastructure, analytic capacity, and a culture of data-driven decisionmaking as really components that build a data-rich environment for education decisionmakers. Their focus here was on education decisionmakers; we think it's applicable to cross-sector decisionmakers, which we'll get into more later in really accessing the wealth of information that can help drive decisions to improve student outcomes.

---

You can see here as illustrated. I know it's a little bit small, but data infrastructure here is referring to the types of activities and the data steps that would go into assembling high-quality raw data. Analytic capacity, which we also talk about as a technical capacity, is really around the ability to conduct an analysis that ensures resulting data are relevant and diagnostic. And then the culture of data-driven decisionmaking, which we have found to be really essential in this work. It's really using relevant data to inform... Here it's about instructional and operational decisions, but as we know from our panelists, it's much broader than that when we are starting to talk about cross-sector work in terms of regional decisions and improvements.

ALICE RICE

So next up we have another Bill and Melinda Gates-supported grant. This time it's a report from the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning and it outlines common data steps and processes that can encourage a systems change agenda, and programming targeted at improving student success and outcomes.

So as Mara was kind of talking about, in our interest of identifying pillars of sustainable cross-sector partnership, this research is important because it really highlights the role of processes. Specifically, the report kind of talks about, while different types of data that partners considered were sometimes different, the process of using the data was actually often the same. And that process kind of goes like this: one, establishing ways to work together; two, setting goals and data strategies; three, collecting, aggregating, and analyzing data; four, engaging in data inquiry and interpretation; and five, communicating messages and results to a broader group of stakeholders. While these steps were not necessarily linear, a common set of data activities did emerge.

The report also states that targeting the right data to the right consumers is extremely important. That while data transparency is critical to strong partnerships, actually too much data can overload and overwhelm. People need kind of like the right level of data detail so that they can make decisions to do their work.

So in summary, a quote that really stood out for me from this report is that using data can help drive systems change, but it can also become an outcome of system change efforts. Sharing and using data across institutional systems to achieve common goals like postsecondary success and living wage employment is a significant departure from the way our current systems operate. When communities develop systems to obtain and share data, particularly systems that partners have not had access to before, partners pay attention.

So we're going to transition now to the kind of four pillars that we were talking about, which is a synthesis and kind of expanding upon of this research that we've found in the field.

MARA LOCKOWANDT

Yeah. Thank you, Alice, so much. So this kind of summarizes what we were just describing within these two pieces of literature—as well, as I mentioned, through conversations with the rural sites that we've been working with across California—these four pillars around infrastructure, technical capacity, processes, and culture are what our panelists are going to be diving even deeper into now in terms of how this develops, builds, and scales within rural

and rural-serving communities. Also, this piece around how to kind of use this to secure financial and technical sustainability for this work is also really critical.

Here the pillars are just built out in more detail to kind of talk about some of the examples of the activities or steps that might be a part of these different pillars, based on the literature and based on what sites have been doing.

So infrastructure really is around pieces like establishing the data storage responsibilities, the data sharing agreements. Technical capacity—a huge piece of this is really having the personnel, having the data capacities to really start to disaggregate data, to understand the common definitions. It might look like providing training to folks or working with external partners. Process steps like engaging in data inquiry and interpretation, continuous improvement processes, alignment of data collection and reporting timelines. And then the culture—how you're really encouraging folks within your collaborative, within your institution to use data in ways that are really going to be integrated into strategic decisionmaking. How you're allocating time and resources might be part of this and really buy regional buy-in for the work. A lot of that is around the trust building and the culture of data use in your region.