

Informing Improvement and Powering Progress



Recommendations to the Illinois P-20 Council
by the Education & Workforce Data Task Force on

Building a P-20W Data System

APRIL 2019



Contents

Introduction.....	2
<i>Where We Are Today</i>	3
<i>Where We Want to Go</i>	5
Recommendations.....	6
<i>Establish Leadership, Vision, and Goals to Drive Statewide P-20W Data Use</i>	8
<i>Create Data Governance and Oversight Bodies to Implement the Vision</i>	9
<i>Build Capacity to Support Data Use and Management Within and Across Agencies</i>	11
<i>Focus on Providing Data That Is Useful to End Users and Builds Local Capacity</i>	12
Making This Plan a Reality.....	14
Members of the Education & Workforce Data Task Force.....	15
Acknowledgments.....	16

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a white patterned shirt, leaning over a young girl with dark hair in a braid, wearing a pink shirt. They are both looking at a laptop screen. The word "Introduction" is overlaid in a large, white, serif font on the left side of the image.

Introduction

Our state's economy, health, and well-being depend on a well-educated population. We want better, equitable outcomes for Illinois learners and communities, especially those that have long been underserved.

But we will not achieve this goal unless we fundamentally reshape the way we use information to support students, families, educators, policymakers, employers, and the public. This report identifies the work needed to make Illinois a national leader in education and workforce information, with recommendations to build on our current strengths and radically improve the ways we help the people of Illinois succeed.

Illinois has been a national leader in building the technical infrastructure to inform decisions and actions across education and the workforce. We are pioneering state-of-the-art data infrastructure within the state and regionally through partnerships with neighboring states. This strong foundation is necessary but insufficient to meet the increasing information needs of our citizens.

Families, learners, educators, program and institution directors, and policymakers can make smarter, more refined decisions—if they have quality information provided in timely, actionable, and tailored ways. We should build a culture that values evidence for inquiry, and we should strengthen the state's capacity to make information more accessible and user friendly. This work will allow us to make better decisions and continuously improve. Our state needs and deserves to have a state-of-the-art information system

to guide education and workforce policy and practice; having this system will help prepare every person in Illinois for an increasingly knowledge-based economy.

The P-20 Council created the Education & Workforce Data Task Force and charged it to study Illinois' current data landscape, identify challenges and gaps in infrastructure and capacity, highlight best practices from other states and industries, and present a set of recommendations to improve Illinois' use of data. At a high level, the Task Force recommends the state:

- ➔ Establish leadership, vision, and goals to drive statewide P-20W data use;
- ➔ Create data governance and oversight bodies to implement the vision;
- ➔ Build capacity to support data use and management within and across agencies; and
- ➔ Focus on providing data that is useful to end users and builds local capacity.

Detailed background on the current capacity of the system, lessons from other states and sectors, and detailed context around the recommendations can be found in the [appendices](#).

Where We Are Today

Task Force discussions began with a jointly created vision and mission statement on what we desire for the future state of data use in our education and workforce sectors (see sidebar, below). Our discussions around the desired future state highlighted the theme of equity. Longitudinal data makes focusing on individual learners' strengths, needs, and pathways possible.

Instead of focusing on using data only to evaluate schools, programs, and people, we can use quality longitudinal data to have a richer understanding of what each person needs to achieve success and then better tailor services to meet those individual needs. Meeting these needs is the heart of equity. We also must ensure that people across the state have access to the data, tools, and training necessary to leverage data to serve learners at every point in their life. There is wide disparity in capacity and access today across Illinois, and the state should play an active role in addressing those gaps.

The Task Force spent the majority of our conversations identifying the actions necessary to have this vision become a reality throughout Illinois. We want to underscore and celebrate the progress and strong foundation created over the past decade. We acknowledge that our work builds on the groundbreaking Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS), which was established specifically to answer questions from multiple agencies about transitions across the early learning to workforce pathways.

The Task Force started by articulating a vision, mission statement, and guiding principles:

VISION STATEMENT

Illinois educational and workforce practice and policy decisions are driven by a culture of data use that supports strong, equitable outcomes and engages stakeholders.

MISSION STATEMENT

Good decisions start with good information. In Illinois, we will ensure that high-quality, appropriate, and secure data about learners and best practices from birth to career will be readily available and easy to use. This will enable a wide range of stakeholders to create, advocate, and benefit from research, policies, and practices that lead to improved learning and academic and career success. Empowering people with actionable information will support strong, equitable outcomes and engaged communities.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ➔ To be of value, data must be high quality, accessible, timely, and secure and meet the needs of an array of stakeholders with diverse data needs while ensuring appropriate student privacy.
- ➔ Data should be used to improve academic and life outcomes for all learners from birth through career and to help identify and close gaps and prepare all residents for a productive life.
- ➔ Data collection, quality, and use benefit from public investment in a coherent and coordinated state system with a clear vision, purpose, and structure.
- ➔ When we invest in quality, understandable, accessible, and timely information, we broaden and deepen community engagement in supporting learners from birth through career.
- ➔ The state has a central role in creating the culture, capacity, and conditions that encourage stakeholder engagement with its data collection system(s) and the public information generated as a result of that engagement. This role may include providing relevant analyses for families and other stakeholders.

Some of the accomplishments of the ILDS to date include:¹

- ➔ Identification of two- and four-year college completion patterns among individuals holding a Gateways credential—a key indicator of the knowledge, skills, and experience held by members of the early childhood workforce;
- ➔ Descriptive statistics based on distinct counts of children from birth to age 5 who receive publicly funded early childhood services in Illinois;
- ➔ Linkages to measure the number of high school graduates who attend an Illinois community college and enroll in developmental education coursework, which is then included in the state report card;
- ➔ The development of the Illinois College2Career tool, which offers prospective college students, their parents, and other stakeholders information on workforce outcomes by academic area for two- and four-year postsecondary institutions in Illinois; and

- ➔ Broadening of the perspective on training and workforce outcomes to include the formerly incarcerated and welfare populations.

Each of these projects is built on the data sharing agreement and data sharing infrastructure (including the Master Client Index) developed through the ILDS.

The ILDS and all of its agencies have prioritized creating new portals and tools to provide actionable information while ensuring the privacy and security of data. (See [Appendix IV](#) for a detailed description of work underway at the ILDS and individual agencies.) Illinois has received national attention for many of these efforts to provide greater transparency, to ensure that educators have student information at their fingertips, and to use innovative metrics in public reporting and accountability systems. This work is to be celebrated, and these efforts must be continued and strengthened.

1 http://edsystemsniu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ILDS-Annual-Report-Plan_2018_digital.pdf



Where We Want to Go

Moving forward, Illinois' data needs continue to expand. Our data infrastructure and capacity must keep evolving to meet those increasing information demands. Ongoing areas of research, analysis, and data use include:

- ➡ The impact of funding choices made at the federal, state, and local levels on childhood program quality and stability, student readiness for kindergarten, and long-term outcomes;
- ➡ Increasing the usage of critical tools on high school to college success, such as the Illinois Report Card, Illinois Postsecondary Profiles, Illinois College2Career, and the soon-to-be-released Illinois HighSchool2Career;
- ➡ Analysis of the types of credentials and degrees that most effectively meet state and regional workforce needs; and
- ➡ Analysis of the different effects of various credentials and programs, including both industry-based certifications and degrees, on postsecondary and workforce outcomes.

These examples are but a small sampling of the research questions and projects that agencies and the ILDS support. Thanks to investments by federal, state, and philanthropic leadership, a revolution around data has started over the past decade. Illinois has better quality data than ever before, and people are beginning to have access to more actionable information about how programs, schools, and institutions are serving learners at all levels. Instructors and program directors are beginning to have the data to personalize learning from birth through workforce to help keep individuals on track for success.

This progress represents a pivotal change around the use of data from a tool of compliance reporting to one used to empower, inform, and improve. As the scope and complexity of questions around education and workforce programs and policies increases and the demand surges for more tailored, timely, and accessible information to make decisions, the need for the ILDS and all agencies to strengthen their infrastructure and capacity becomes ever more urgent.

The Task Force identified several opportunities to enhance capacity throughout Illinois agencies and the ILDS to improve the quality of information and insight provided to the people of Illinois:

- ➡ **ACCESS:** Agencies have built data resources, tools, and portals, but more coordinated and intuitive approaches to find information are needed.

Presenting data in timely, actionable ways that are tailored to specific users is a critical part of the access issue. For analysts and researchers, securing appropriate and legal access to data they need to transform into information that can provide insights is also too burdensome.

- ➡ **ANALYTIC CAPACITY:** Stakeholders agree that inside state agencies and within schools, institutions, and advocacy organizations we need more people who have the training, skills, and time to be able to transform data into actionable information and who know how to use that information to improve decisionmaking and outcomes. Within government, there is a shortage of information technology (IT) experts, data scientists, and data analysts, as people with expertise in those areas are in high demand and can earn higher wages in other sectors. Critical end users do not have access to training on how to use data effectively to fuel continuous improvement. And even the research community in Illinois has lost some of its capacity due to the closure of the Illinois Education Research Council; there is a sense that in other states researchers have environments that are more conducive to working in partnership with government.

- ➡ **COLLABORATION:** Agencies have worked collaboratively with the resources they currently have on cross-functional projects that inform decisions about pathways from birth through workforce. Illinois has come to understand better the interrelationships among those programs and across agencies—bringing us closer to breaking down the technical, legal, and bureaucratic walls that make answering our central questions difficult. While the ILDS structure provides a forum for common discussion across the agencies, it alone cannot provide the strong leadership needed to ensure that all agencies are collaborating and coordinating on supporting effective data use in the education field.

The ability to act on these opportunities for improvement has been hampered by the recent budget crisis and a lack of strong centralized leadership at the highest levels of government to create and implement a shared vision for data use across the P-20W system.



Recommendations

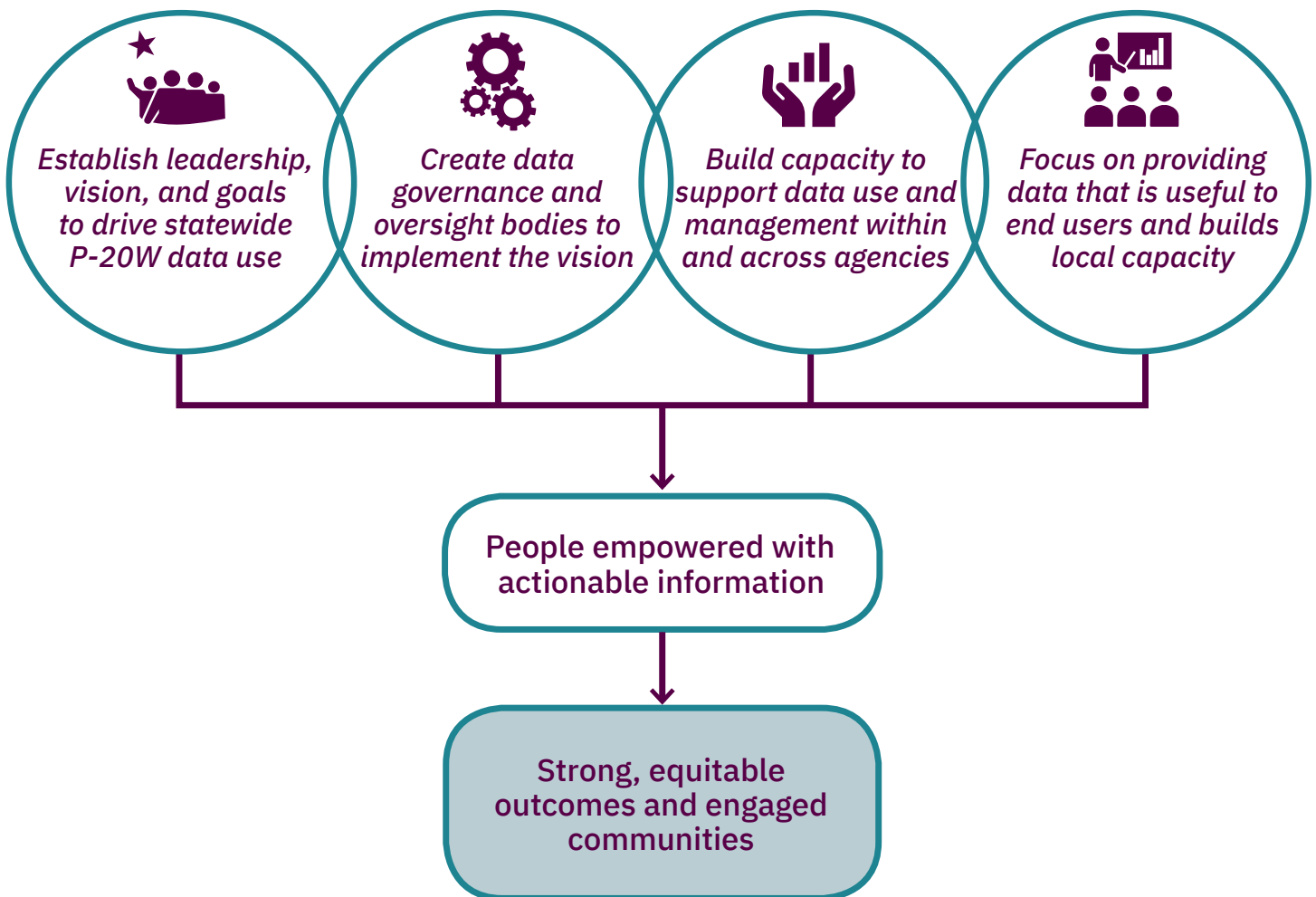
The recommendations in this section provide an outline of specific areas of action; [Appendix III](#) contains much greater detail and lessons from other states and sectors. Throughout our research and discussion, the Task Force underscored three ***critical conditions*** necessary to improve data use: ***leadership, partnership, and trust.***

We learned from other states that gubernatorial and legislative leadership is critical to strengthening the data culture; these leaders must ensure that this work is a priority and hold people accountable for coordinating and collaborating to reach common statewide goals.

Relatedly, this statewide priority cannot be accomplished by government alone; stakeholder input is critical, and agencies need to partner with each other, colleges,

universities, and advocacy organizations to conduct research, make data more actionable, and promote data use. This work cannot be done without increasing the investment of time and money; money cannot be repurposed from current agency data budgets to focus on growing capacity somewhere else. Last—but most important—at every step of this work we must be transparent about what data is collected, how it will help people, and how it is safeguarded.

We believe that the following recommendations will position Illinois to better answer the key questions across the P-20W pathway:





Establish Leadership, Vision, and Goals to Drive Statewide P-20W Data Use

The work begins with strong gubernatorial, legislative, and stakeholder leadership and a shared vision of how data should be used to inform the alignment and improvement of learners' paths from early childhood through workforce systems and life success.

This vision helps the state develop goals to improve decisionmaking; prioritize programs and interventions; and ensure that efforts are coordinated, effective, and impactful. The governor and agency leads should work with stakeholders to develop appropriate goals—and then use their authority to ensure that those goals drive action across the system.

The Task Force recommends the following actions:

THE GOVERNOR:

- ➔ Develops a vision for evidence-based decisionmaking and providing actionable data in the state—either the Task Force's vision, articulated on page 3, or a vision based on similar goals and adapted to suit the administration's priorities.
- ➔ Establishes or identifies a senior leader in the administration with the authority and capacity to implement the vision.
- ➔ Uses the cabinet or subgroups of the cabinet (such as a Children's Cabinet) to ensure that agencies are closely coordinating to implement the vision.

THE CABINET:

- ➔ Works with the P-20 Council, Early Learning Council, Illinois Workforce Innovation Board, and other relevant multistakeholder groups to develop the metrics and goals for which agency leads, the governor, and other stakeholders will be accountable.
- ➔ Aligns agency board goals with this vision.

THE LEGISLATURE:

- ➔ Builds a culture of evidence by using and promoting the data coming out of this system.
- ➔ Provides oversight to ensure that data is being provided and used in the service of supporting constituents.
- ➔ Supports increased capacity and improved infrastructure.

STAKEHOLDERS:

- ➔ Philanthropy: Supports the strengthening of data use capacity.
- ➔ Colleges and universities: Collaborate with government to provide research and analytic capacity.
- ➔ Employers, advocates, and constituency organizations: Prioritize the effective use of data through strategic and clear communication about the information needs of stakeholders.
- ➔ Educators and program administrators: Provide feedback and input through the governance structure to ensure that the state is providing timely information and the conditions and capacity to use it to improve outcomes.
- ➔ Families and students: Have a seat at the table in the data governance structure to ensure the provision of useful, accurate information, while protecting their personally identifiable information.



Create Data Governance and Oversight Bodies to Implement the Vision

While leadership is critical to create a vision and culture for data-informed decisionmaking, a clear, aligned, sustainable governance structure charged with establishing the processes and overseeing the development of infrastructure to execute the vision is also required.² Just as this Task Force has benefited from providing a forum for gathering diverse stakeholder voices together to shape these recommendations, an effective data governance structure must provide a permanent venue for data stakeholders to work together to ensure that data is supporting, assisting, and serving the people of Illinois. This governance structure also needs to ensure that protocols, policies, and practices are in place to support the effective and safe collection, linking, sharing, analysis, and protection of the data.

To support these two governance roles, the Task Force envisions two boards (see Appendix I for more details):

A P-20 DATA USE ADVISORY BOARD focused on ensuring that the state's education and workforce data systems are serving the information needs of end users. This Advisory Board, made up of representatives of data stakeholders, will ensure that actionable data is available to inform and monitor strategies to accomplish statewide policy goals—and ultimately help people make better decisions around education and workforce issues. This Advisory Board could be under the auspices of the P-20 Council, with representation from the Early Learning Council and the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board. Its responsibilities could include:

- ➔ Launching a trusted and well-known centralized brand around data and evidence-based policymaking;
- ➔ Ensuring that the information infrastructure is transparent, coordinated, action oriented, and customer focused;
- ➔ Developing a research agenda;
- ➔ Identifying key metrics for strategies to accomplish statewide goals;
- ➔ Prioritizing and identifying data use requirements from stakeholders;

- ➔ Tracking the implementation of data use projects and the efficacy of implementation; and
- ➔ Monitoring decisions made by and offering input to the Education and Workforce Data Interagency Board.

AN EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DATA INTERAGENCY BOARD (*Illinois Longitudinal Data System Governing Board 2.0*) to facilitate the alignment and coordination of interagency data priorities, projects, and resource requests. The Board, made up of agency leadership, will discuss and reach interagency consensus on these issues and oversee the management of data. This work includes developing and managing processes for collecting, sharing, linking, and protecting data and the technical infrastructure for data sharing, analysis, and management.

The current Illinois Longitudinal Data System Governing Board and interagency data sharing agreement can serve as the basis for this body with increased coordination with the state Department of Innovation & Technology (DoIT). Its responsibilities could include:

- ➔ Providing a forum for the introduction, alignment, and interagency coordination of projects that address the metrics defined by the governor, the cabinet, and

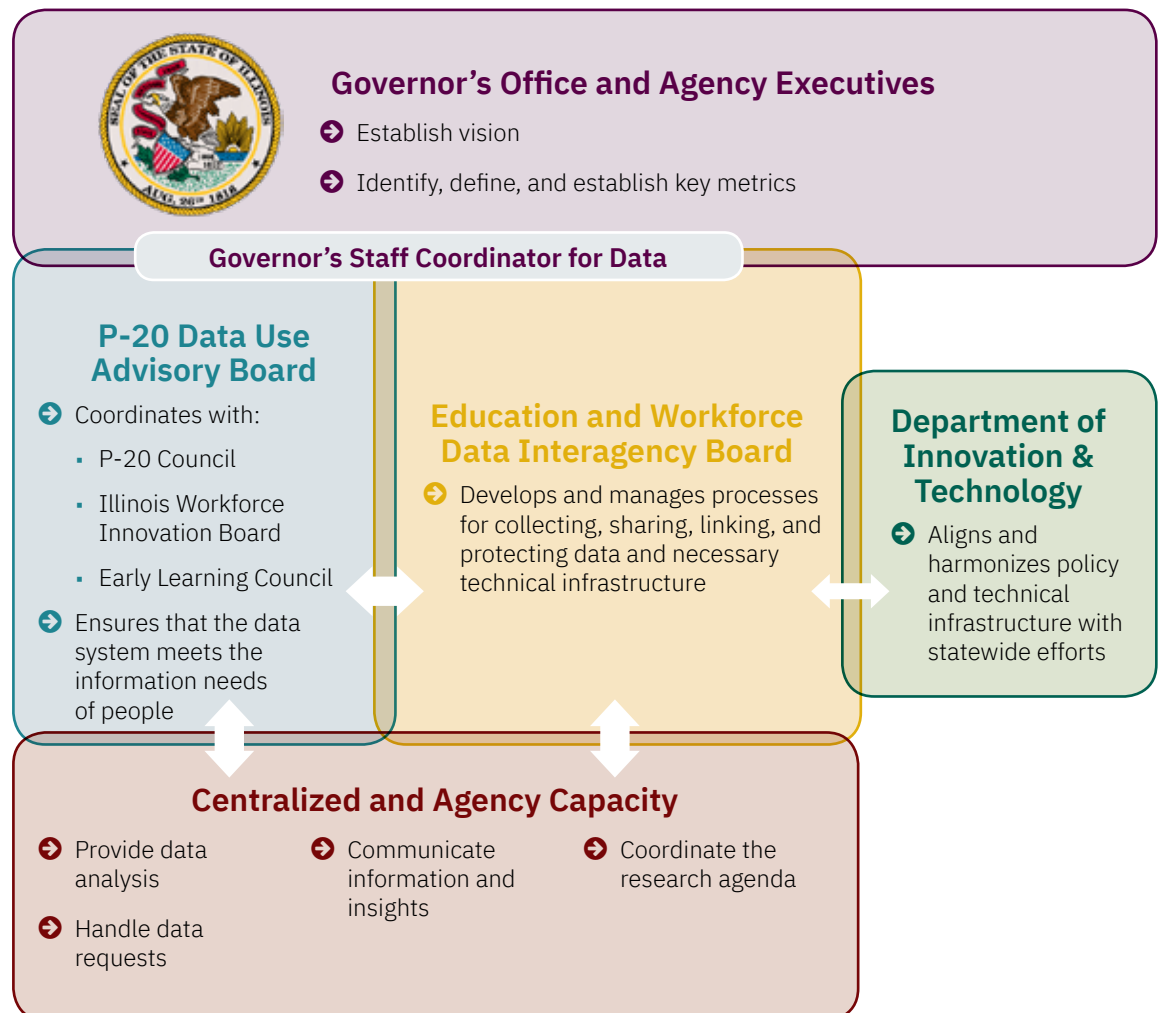
2 The Illinois Federation of Teachers does not join this recommendation. For its comments, please see the [Appendix I](#).

the recommendations of the P-20 Council, Early Learning Council, and Illinois Workforce Innovation Board committee for policy priorities and state goals;

- ➔ Developing strategies to strengthen the IT infrastructure to share, link, access, and protect data (including the statewide development and implementation of the Master Client Index, technical infrastructure design, data operations, data sharing and extraction, data linking, data quality, data analytics, and data security and privacy);
- ➔ Supporting implementation of DoIT's enterprise model and statewide data governance framework, data standards, policies, and procedures;
- ➔ Establishing and ensuring the use of a standardized data sharing agreement, an enterprise integration platform, and processes to remove the bottlenecks in the current system;
- ➔ Supporting the use of secure research and analytic environments;
- ➔ Aligning the branding and features of public-facing information resources to enact the brand;
- ➔ Consulting with agencies regarding decisions about their data security and data usage, for which they remain responsible; and
- ➔ Developing a set of capacity priorities with a focus on agency capacity while developing initial plans for centralized capacity.

ILLINOIS P-20W DATA GOVERNANCE

Illinois educational practice and policy decisions are driven by a culture of data use that supports strong, equitable outcomes and engages stakeholders.





Build Capacity to Support Data Use and Management Within and Across Agencies

To implement the state's vision, we need to build the capacity—both staff and technical infrastructure—to support a system of responsive data analysis and data sharing. Because the agencies' capacity needs are significant, we must prioritize additional agency funding to build staff and capacities to meet existing demands, complement investment in centralized capacity to manage cross-agency data, support interagency research, and develop communications that leverage this data and research. Illinois needs to build capacity within as well as across agencies to support the effective use of data to serve people. Lessons from other states highlight that when the state prioritizes building centralized capacity around data, this work increases capacity within individual agencies as well. The development of this capacity begins with a clear governance structure charged with leading this work.

The Task Force recommends the following actions:

SURVEY EXISTING AND FUTURE DATA

CAPACITY NEEDS (including technical infrastructure and analytic staff) of agencies and develop a strategic plan and budget for staff capacity to support ongoing data work.

DESIGN, DEVELOP, AND FUND CENTRALIZED CAPACITY FOR SUPPORTING THE EFFECTIVE USE OF DATA

that involves linkages from multiple agencies' data sets, including managing data requests, analysis, and research support. This centralized staff and infrastructure capacity will focus on the following tasks:

- ➔ Translating policy priorities about cross-sector education/workforce issues into data projects;
- ➔ Managing specific data projects that focus on those transition issues;
- ➔ Partnering with agencies to maximize efficiency and support individual agency capacity;

- ➔ Coordinating and managing the research agenda established by the P-20 Council, Early Learning Council, and other agencies;
- ➔ Establishing partnerships with internal and external researchers;
- ➔ Establishing processes for the publication of research, peer review, and ensuring the quality of data and analytics around these cross-agency efforts; and
- ➔ Communicating insights from these data analyses in compelling and actionable ways (public-facing dashboards and a P-20W information center).

BUILD A 21ST CENTURY CENTRALIZED INFRASTRUCTURE through the new governance structure that provides increased data security and enhanced analytic capability, including access gateways with data governance and control, such as the University of Chicago Gen 3 Data Commons and the Administrative Data Research Facility (see [Appendix III](#) for more details).



Focus on Providing Data That Is Useful to End Users and Builds Local Capacity

Strong data cultures focus on the needs of those who will use the data. These needs include those of state agency personnel but also extend to those of local practitioners, independent researchers, and the public at large. While the Task Force does not provide concrete action steps for this final recommendation, the following conditions are necessary to improve data use in Illinois:

BUILD TRUST: People will not use data if they do not know it exists, do not find it valuable, or fear it will be used to hurt them. In recent years, public data has been used more often as a hammer than as a flashlight. This situation diminishes trust in data and data systems among point-of-service personnel, who are often best positioned to use data to improve individual and organizational effectiveness.

LISTEN MORE ACTIVELY TO WHAT END USERS ARE TELLING US ABOUT THEIR INFORMATION NEEDS: Illinois needs to engage practitioners and the public more intentionally in the development of information systems that meet their needs. This effort includes focusing on critical questions and use cases that result in data collection, analysis, and information systems that users find valuable.

MAKE IMPROVED DATA LITERACY A STATEWIDE PRIORITY: Improved data literacy is a critical condition for more effective data use. More often than not, data does not provide clear answers so much as it increases opportunities for thoughtful analysis and interpretation. End users such as teachers, school leaders, and other service providers need specific training on how to interpret different kinds of data for specific purposes.

VALUE PARTNERSHIP: Transforming data into information happens across many levels and involves many people. Public agencies, colleges and universities, philanthropic

organizations, advocates, and employers all have role in creating a culture of evidence that provides needed training and builds capacity over time.

BUILD LOCAL ANALYTIC CAPACITY: Greater analytic capacity within agencies and outside partners is a critical component of transforming data into valuable information. But without making local analytic capacity a higher statewide priority, this work will have only a marginal impact on quality and effectiveness at actual points of service across the state.

PROVIDE APPROPRIATE AND TIMELY ACCESS TO INFORMATION: The state must ensure public transparency around aggregate data through continued work on creating dashboards and portals and make sure that those limited stakeholders who require personally identifiable information have the data they need in the format they require.

SAFEGUARD DATA: A major part of building trust is to continue to prioritize ongoing improvements to keep data secure, private, and confidential. Agency staff feel a strong sense of responsibility as stewards of the data in their control, and agencies must continue to implement best practices in protecting data. DoIT can and should play an important role to ensure that data security methods are consistent across agencies and following best practices.

INVEST FOR IMPACT: If meeting people’s information needs is a priority in Illinois, then the state budget needs to reflect that focus. Leading states have increased their investment in building their state information systems (see [Appendix III](#) for state budget numbers). Funding needs to support not just the technical aspects of the data system but also efforts to increase the staff available to conduct analysis, create communication tools and services, and manage data requests and queries.

USE THE BULLY PULPIT OF STATE AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP TO INCREASE URGENCY: State leadership should embrace the vision by talking about the role of information in internal and public discussions, allocating resources to this work, and creating the conditions for people to work together toward shared goals. The second recommendation in this plan provides suggested actions to make this vision a reality.





Making This Plan a Reality

Some of the infrastructure and capacity recommended in this report are already in place. We have a strong foundation on which to build, and we also benefit from the experiences of other states and sectors (see the [appendices](#) for details). To succeed, this work needs more than just financial resources; it needs political support and commitment from leaders across government—and the education and workforce communities—to work together toward the vision of having a culture that values information to improve decisionmaking and outcomes.

Establishing new governance bodies and putting in place new state government capacity are necessary steps to instigate the cultural change needed, but they alone are not enough. Key stakeholders outside of state government must also embrace this agenda and engage in this work for there to be any chance of achieving the vision. While this plan calls for major changes and investments in the governance structure and technical infrastructure of Illinois data systems, it also underscores the importance

of investing in people—the people charged with being stewards of the data, transforming the data into actionable information, protecting the data, and communicating effectively about the data and what it tells us. Some of those roles must live within state government, but others will require collaboration with a wider range of partners.

There is energy behind this work; the members of this Task Force are excited about the promise of this vision and the possibility of this strategic plan to create a statewide plan around putting data into action. This work is cutting edge, and Illinois can be at the forefront of the nation in having information serve its citizens to make better decisions to improve outcomes. The time has never been better to dive into the work. The technology has improved, the quality of our data has increased, and it is the beginning of a new gubernatorial administration. We believe the will is there, and it will require the leadership and attention of the state's policy leaders to make this work a priority.

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