Coaching For Change

College Readiness for Coaching:
A Case-Making and Planning Guide for
Colleges to Prepare For Coaching

by Katie Kovacich and Lia Wetzstein

Purpose of the Tool:

This tool is intended to be used by Student Success Center (SSC) leadership and the colleges to provide information on definitions, potential benefits, and preparations for coaching. This document is meant to be adaptable to different contexts. The tool has two parts: 1) case-making for colleges to engage a coach, and 2) a self-reflection planning guide to prepare colleges for working with a coach.

Section I:

Why Coaching? The first section on case-making is designed to introduce at a conceptual level what we mean by coaching and the benefits of coaching, including offering a set of self- reflection questions. We envision this section to be shared with college leaders, who will then share with college teams and personnel who will interact with a coach.

Section II:

Planning guide. Once a college has decided it is ready for coaching or has worked with a Student Success Center to determine readiness, this planning guide prepares a college to work with a coach. This section has four areas: 1) description of Peer Mentor Coach, 2) a checklist of potential interactions with coaches, 3) key questions related to college readiness for coaching, and 4) a checklist of what colleges should and should not do in order to maximize their coach's impact.

In using this two-pronged tool, colleges can self-assess to establish a baseline on the college-readiness continuum and can also discern priorities to prepare for coaching.

Key Concepts:

In this tool, we use concepts from change management theory, organizational change/ learning, and coaching for organizational change. Using theory—and often a multi-theory approach—to guide organizational change and learning supports all stages of the change process. Community College Research Initiatives' "theory of evidence-based coaching for change posits that coaches who possess expertise and experience in "why, what, and how" to change can help guide colleges in implementing and sustaining transformative policies and practices that lead to more equitable student outcomes and improved organizational performance."[1] Incorporating coaching as part of a transformative process that requires individual and organizational learning is beneficial for colleges.

The Role of Coaches:

Coaches can be the bridge between the multi-theory approach that is needed to address the unique assets and challenges of colleges by blending their understanding of evidence-based reforms with how colleges change to reach their goals.[2] Coaches are teachers, facilitators, and guides that assist community college practitioners in seeing themselves as change leaders (or change agents), which is important to promoting and sustaining improvements.

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Thinking about using a coach for organizational change? If so, start here…

What Is a Coach?

The word coach has been used in a variety of settings and in many ways. In terms of organizational change, we are defining a coach as someone with change-management knowledge and/or subject matter expertise who works as a thought partner, facilitator, and guide to college teams. The purpose of coaching is to assist colleges with organizational change aimed at improving student success outcomes.

What a coach is not… a compliance agent, "…not an expert on every topic, not a therapist, and not ever to be confused with the college CEO. The coach refrains from attempting to set the college's agenda, specify the college's priorities, or solve the college's problems, opting instead to help the people of the college do those things for themselves."[3]

Why Should You Use a Coach?

Colleges across the nation are engaging in significant student success reform efforts aimed at increasing academic achievement, decreasing equity gaps, and improving graduation rates. This work is incredibly important but, of course, can be challenging. Many colleges are turning to coaches to help them advance their student success reform work and improve student success outcomes.

Coaches can be helpful at all stages of organizational change.

- Early in change processes, coaches can help college leaders determine the best way to make the case for change and lay the foundation for planning and implementation strategy meetings.

COACHING READINESS

- **What**
- **Why**
- **How**

"**Organizational coaching …helps organizations find the resources and solutions to the questions and issues they face within themselves. It's about steering them towards greater coherence and alignment with their goals.**"

President Michael Baston,
Rockland Community College, NY

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- Once student success reform efforts are underway, coaches can ask probing questions, provide feedback and guidance, and, most importantly, serve as a support and resource guide when challenges arise.

- For colleges that have already engaged in significant student success reform efforts, a coach can assist with assessment and can advise college leaders on ways to continue to improve.

Key Benefits of Coaching

Advance the Organizational Change Process

- Coaches meet colleges wherever they are in the stages of organizational change to support future transitions and progress toward goals.

- Coaches support the transformation of organizational culture, help navigate difficult conversations, and provide encouragement when change isn't happening as quickly as desired or when roadblocks emerge.

- Coaches help identify and share successes and remind colleges to celebrate small and big wins!

- Coaches identify and help develop faculty and staff to be transformative leaders who encourage more equitable student outcomes.[4]

Amplify Organizational Effectiveness

- Coaches recognize and help organize the work colleges are already doing, uncovering the what, why, and how to make change (including helping to define goals).[5]

- Coaches help colleges map out plans and link new change initiatives to ongoing organizational and unit strategic plans.

- Coaches empower inclusive and diverse groups of people to operate as a team, "significantly [influencing] team empowerment, and thereby team processes and performance."[6]

- Coaches support building a structure and timeline for change specific to campus context.[7]

COACHING READINESS

What

Why

How
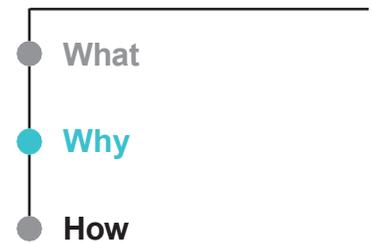
"**Our college embarked on an integrated approach to student development, and our coach supported the process by helping us to surface the critical areas for student retention and success. Drawing on knowledge of best practices and national research, our coach led us through a discovery and assessment of the institution's current student advising and support landscape and allowed us to begin to map an ideal student experience.**"

Administrator,
NJ community college

Foster Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equity

- Coaches facilitate inclusive discussions, encouraging colleges to engage all voices in change processes.

- Coaches help set priorities that address inequities and promote success among diverse student populations.

- Coaches identify gaps in inclusivity, diversity, and equity that may be difficult for internal stakeholders to see.

Serve as a Critical Friend and Accountability Partner

- Coaches assist colleges with monitoring and evaluating progress toward goals.

- Coaches ask insightful, probing questions which challenge assumptions that drive the status quo and help clarify and prioritize areas for improvement.

- Coaches act as critical friend observers on the college change process.

- Coaches help colleges see things from a new perspective, overcome barriers, and stay on track.[8]

College Self-Reflection on Potential for Coaching Benefits

Use this self-reflection to indicate the level of need and explanation of needs your college has for coaching in the four areas mentioned above.

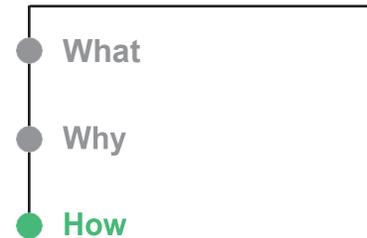| Coaching Benefits	Level of Need for Coaching (Circle one response on a scale of 1—needs little support, to 5—needs a lot of support)	Explain the Need(s) Your College Has for Coaching
Advance the college's organizational change process	1 2 3 4 5	
Amplify organizational effectiveness	1 2 3 4 5	
Foster inclusivity, diversity, and equity	1 2 3 4 5	
Serve as critical friend and accountability partner	1 2 3 4 5	
From the needs described above, select 2-3 priority areas from the response form that a coach can help move forward.		

Planning Guide
How Colleges Can Prepare to Work with a Coach for Organizational Change

Preparing to Engage a Coach

This section helps colleges plan and prepare to engage a coach. The type of coach can impact what gets done or what the college does.

Type of Coach	Subject Matter Expert	Description
Peer Mentor Coach	Expertise in one or more areas: organizational change, a specific subject matter, and/or guided pathways framework	College coaches are often leaders who are actively employed and have experience with organizational change and/or expertise in specific subjects related to the intended change. These coaches tend to provide customized support based on the needs of the institution. Depending on the goal and funding, these coaching relationships can be **short- or long-term** engagements. The coach's interactions with colleges can include in-person and virtual site visit(s), pre/post-visit phone calls, and review and feedback on documents outlining planning and implementation strategies. Examples of how this type of coach can assist colleges include overall success reform efforts, such as the overall guided pathways framework; and more targeted reforms, such as advising the redesign that is a part of the larger success reform.

College Readiness for Coaching—Checklist

Instructions: Review the types of interactions that your college will have with your coach.

Type of Coach	Subject Matter Expert	Preparation for Coaching Logistics	What Interaction with Colleges Looks Like
Peer Mentor Coach	Pre-coaching call(s)	• Discuss the area of need for coaching. • Differentiate the coach's role from college leaders' roles. • Identify the goals for coaching. • Collect materials to provide to the coach in order to prepare colleges for discussing their focus areas. • Co-create an agenda with the coach for the coaching engagement. • Co-create an action plan with the coach to address the focus area(s). • Coach supports college point person in identifying other stakeholders to join the college team. • Invite and confirm that key stakeholders will be at scheduled meetings with the coach.	Phone or video call (or series of phone calls) usually several weeks to a month prior to the visit.

College Readiness for Coaching—Checklist

Type of Coach	Subject Matter Expert	Preparation for Coaching Logistics	What Interaction with Colleges Looks Like
Peer Mentor Coach (continued)	Coaching engagement	• Communicate the purpose and goals of the coaching engagement at the start. • Confirm the co-created agenda is what the college would like to focus on for that engagement. • College openly shares/provides an update on what has happened with the change process since the last coaching engagement. • Engaging all voices, coaches meet with a diverse set of employees, students, and other key stakeholders involved in college changes. • Debrief with the coach, college leaders, and college change teams during the engagement. • Co-create an action and post-engagement plan with the coach. • Administer a coaching engagement evaluation to gather feedback from key stakeholders on the interaction with the coach. • Share results of the evaluation with the coach and college leaders.	Coaching engagements may be campus site visits or virtual meetings. Lengths of virtual meetings are determined by coach and college. Campus site visits typically are several hours or a whole-day visit. The coach meets with necessary stakeholders and groups to move institutional change forward.
	Post-coaching call(s)	• Prepare a post-visit summary report with high-level observations and review with college. • Regularly communicate with the coach after the site visit. • Review with the coach the college's progress on the plan, and milestones for change. • Address challenges that the coach helps the college see on an ongoing basis.	These calls are typically with the team lead or a smaller core group of campus leaders. Post-visit calls usually happen within a few weeks of the visit.

Key Questions for Preparing to Engage a Coach [9, 10]

Directions

Use these questions as reflective questions for the college team prior to meeting with your coach. Many of these questions will be important to the coaching process.

- To what degree is the college ready for change? What is the basis of your readiness assessment? Is rationale for the change initiative clear?

- Is your college's change initiative well defined? Is the scope of change clear? Is the potential impact of the change on all stakeholders well understood?

- What will constitute successful coaching outcomes? What factors will be most critical to success in coaching?

- How well does the coaching purpose align with the college's strategic plan?

- How may previous changes enacted by the college impact the newer change work? What are the biggest risks to continuing the previous change work? What are the biggest risks to not continuing the previous change work?

- What may college employees, students, and other key stakeholders find easiest and most difficult to change?

What Colleges Should and Should Not Do to Maximize the Impact of Coaching[11]

A quick list of do's and don'ts to help your college team optimally utilize the fullest potential of coaching.

DO...

- Be sure there is alignment between the college and coach about what changes are happening, why they are happening and the college context/history in which they are happening.

- Build a partnership between your coach, college leaders and other change leader(s) (faculty, staff, students, etc.).

- Hold everyone accountable for actions and outcomes.

- Use data and evidence to optimize coaching time.

- Get the right people in the room with your coach.

- Ensure your coach has enough time with research staff and all key stakeholders during site visits.

- DO Leverage your coach where you need them the most whether on campus or from afar.

DON'T...

- Expect your coach to do what your college can't or won't do itself (your college must own the change process).

- Spend time during site visits on time-consuming "show and tell" meetings and tours.

- Schedule meetings and other communications so tightly that there is no room to pursue emerging issues.

- Expect your coach to be the 'enforcer.'

- Think too narrowly or too broadly about your coach's skill sets.

- Be defensive of probing questions or offered feedback.

- Underestimate your coach's potential to assist your college's development of a meaningful change process.

- Neglect your coach's advice on critical steps and potential wins.

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Endnotes

1. D. Bragg, D. Dare, K. Kovacich, and L. Wetzstein, *Evidence-Based Coaching for Change in the Student Success Network* (Seattle: Community College Research Initiatives, 2018), 4.

2. A. Kezar, *How Colleges Change: Understanding, Leading, and Enacting Change* (New York: Routledge).

3. "Pathways Coaching Guide," Pathways Collaborative, 2019, https://www.pathwaysresources.org/toolkits/pathways-coaching-guide/.

4. C. Shields, "Transformative Leadership: Working for Equity in Diverse Contexts," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 46: 558-588.

5. D. Bragg, D. Dare, K. Kovacich, and L. Wetzstein, *Evidence-Based Coaching for Change in the Student Success Network* (Seattle: Community College Research Initiatives, 2018).

6. T. Rapp, L. Gilson, J. Mathieu, and T. Ruddy, "Leading Empowered Teams: An Examination of the Role of External Team Leaders and Team Coaches," *The Leadership Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (February 2016): 109-123. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.08.005.

7. For more information on engaging with organizational change through guided pathways, see SOVA's Pathways Engagement 101: Handbook: https://www.pathwaysresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PathwaysEngagement101Handbook.pdf

8. Bragg et al, *Evidence-Based Coaching for Change (Endnote 5)*.

9. Adapted from: H. Law, S. Ireland, and Z. Hussain, *The Psychology of Coaching, Mentoring and Learning* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2013), https://leseprobe.buch.de/images-adb/41/9b/419b4cf7-91e5-4de4-93b1-378ac5996b01.pdf.

10. For more information on engaging with organizational change through guided pathways, see SOVA's Pathways Engagement 101: Handbook (*Endnote 7*).

11. D. Bragg and L. Wetzstein, "Evidence-based Coaching for Change: Webinar for Colleges" (webinar, University of Washington, n.d.), https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/uw-s3-cdn/wp-content/uploads/sites/158/2018/08/23173520/CfC-CollegesWebinar_CCRI.pdf.