



# At a Glance

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Pathways to Results (PTR) is an outcomes-focused, equity-guided process to improve programs and policies that support student transition to and through postsecondary education and employment. PTR focuses on addressing equity gaps between diverse learner groups and continuously improving processes critical to student success, including retention, completion of postsecondary credentials, and transition to employment.

The PTR process is most effective when it begins with a strong collaboration of team members and partners focusing on the critical problems that get in the way of student success in particular programs of study. These problems are identified when the teams use student-level data to identify outcome and equity gaps in results between racial, gender, low-income and other underserved groups and special populations. Major processes are assessed to understand how contributing factors create the identified problems and impede student success. Implementation and evaluation plans are designed to create solutions that improve the quality of programs of study immediately and over time. PTR gives teams the opportunity to continuously improve programs of study and produce ever-more equitable student outcomes.

The Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) was established in 1989 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Our primary mission is to use research and evaluation methods to improve policies and programs to enhance community college education and transition to college for diverse learners in Illinois and the United States. Projects of this office are supported by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), along with other state, federal, and private and not-for-profit organizations. The contents of our publications do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of our sponsors or the University of Illinois. Comments or inquiries about our publications are welcome and should be directed to [occrl@illinois.edu](mailto:occrl@illinois.edu).

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# THE PTR PROCESS

Pathways to Results (PTR) is an outcomes-focused, equity-guided process to improve student transition to postsecondary education and employment. Applied to programs of study, PTR focuses on addressing equity gaps between diverse learner groups and continuously improving processes critical to programs of study that extend from the secondary to the postsecondary level. PTR is led by education, employer, and community partners whose shared goal is success for all students.

## PATHWAYS TO RESULTS

**Engagement and Commitment** – Team members and partners collaborate to focus on critical problems that need to be addressed to improve student outcomes and enhance program quality. The team members represent all stakeholders who have vested interest in improving the chosen program of study.

**Outcomes and Equity Assessment** – Teams use student-level data to examine outcomes and identify gaps in results between racial, ethnic, low-income, and other groups and special populations. Using these data, teams identify areas where outcomes are especially successful and areas where short- and long-term improvements are needed.

**Process Assessment** – Teams seek to understand how major processes impact student outcomes and contribute to the identified problem. The focus is on thoroughly understanding each step of the processes and the contributing factors that impact the identified problem to first determine root causes.

**Process Improvement** – Teams develop solutions to the identified problem. Potential solutions are generated and evaluated to determine whether they support the desired outcomes. Teams draft an evaluation plan to track progress of implementation of the process improvements.

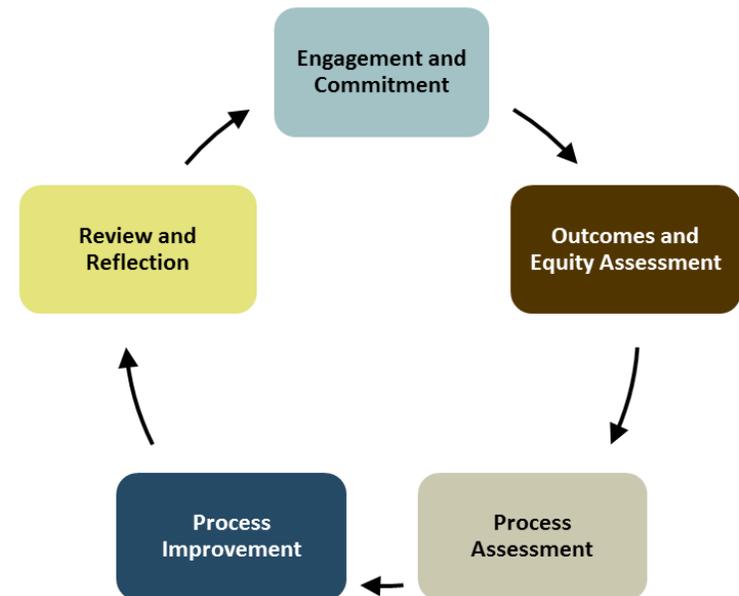
**Review and Reflection** – Team members participate in activities that encourage review, reflection and shared learning at the individual and group levels. The team discusses ways in which the solution can be sustained and the PTR process can be applied to other programs of study.

## RESOURCES

PTR teams are supported by trained professionals and print and electronic resources. Professional development is provided at cross-site meetings and through webinars, e-Learning modules and other technology applications. Each summer, OCCRL hosts a PTR Institute for applicants interested in an in-depth training on how to apply PTR to programs of study.

## PTR IS GROWING

PTR emerged as a method to improve programs of study, but it can be applied to many different programs and processes that are dedicated to improving student transition and success in college and careers. PTR was piloted in 2009-10 and continues to expand. The state's goal is to integrate PTR into the P-20 education system.



# Engagement and Commitment

During Engagement and Commitment, leaders across all levels of education as well as business, industry, and the community focus on critical problems that need to be addressed to improve student outcomes and enhance the quality of programs of study. PTR teams are formed that make initial decisions about the PTR project by identifying problems that need to be resolved to create equitable student outcomes.

## PREPARING FOR ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT

- Team members view the e-learning module on Engagement and Commitment.
- Leaders identify programs of study that could benefit from the PTR process.
- Leaders provide background information on selected programs of study, including the *Career Cluster Framework*, *POS Curriculum Template*, and *POS Expectations Tool*.
- Leaders identify background information on labor market data and past student performance measures.
- Leaders generate support for programs of study and PTR from broad-based P-20 education, business and industry, and community groups.
- Team leaders develop and distribute PTR team meeting agendas and materials to team members.

## CONDUCTING ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT

- **Step 1.** Identify and engage P-20 leaders who must support the improvement of programs of study, including secondary, postsecondary, business and industry, adult education, workforce development, community-based organizations and other who guide P-20 education systems change.
- **Step 2.** Gather and share information about past grant activity and other funding sources; local and regional education and labor market data; and other relevant data. Conduct SWOT analysis and begin to draft the first section of the *PTR Charter*.
- **Step 3.** Identify and convene the PTR team including selecting the team leader who has primary responsibility for leading team meetings and providing direction and support throughout the PTR process. Continue to refine the first section of the *PTR Charter*, including drafting the problem statement and identifying student outcomes related to the problem.

## ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT IN CONTEXT

To achieve systems change, federal, state, and local leaders must support individuals and organizations that show an interest in and commitment to programs of study. Leaders must support collaborative partnerships at all levels to enhance student transitions to college and careers.

## RESOURCES

- *POS Expectations Tool*
- *Instructions for Analyzing the POS Expectations Tool*
- *POS Curriculum Template*
- *SWOT Analysis Tool*
- *PTR Charter*
- *Outcomes Menu*

# Outcomes and Equity Assessment

During Outcomes and Equity Assessment, teams use student-level data to identify gaps in outcomes between racial, ethnic, low income, and special populations. Using these data, teams identify areas where outcomes are especially successful and areas where short- and long-term improvements are needed to address inequities among student groups. This information is used to refine the problem that the PTR team focuses on for the rest of its project.

## PREPARING FOR OUTCOMES AND EQUITY ASSESSMENT

- Team members view the e-learning module on Outcomes and Equity Assessment.
- Team members review *Why Equity*.
- Team leaders and institutional research (IR) staff (including other team members, as appropriate) complete the *Team Readiness Tool*.
- Team leaders and institutional research staff prepare the *Outcomes and Equity Templates*.
- Team leaders distribute templates to PTR team members for individual review.
- Team members complete the *Data Review Worksheet*.
- Team leaders compile a summary of team members' *Data Review Worksheets*.

## CONDUCTING OUTCOMES AND EQUITY ASSESSMENT

**STEP 1.** All team members participate in two facilitated activities to a) identify and select outcomes data to collect; and b) develop an understanding of equity. The *Team Readiness Tool* helps the team understand the needs throughout the duration of this phase. Technical, conceptual, and advisory assistance is identified using this form.

**Step 2.** Secondary and postsecondary institutional research staff collect and share data with team members using PTR reader friendly outcomes template formats.

**Step 3.** Team members participate in a facilitated activity to review and interpret disaggregated student outcomes data from an equity perspective. The team reaches consensus on the focus of the PTR project.

## OUTCOMES AND EQUITY ASSESSMENT IN CONTEXT

PTR is concerned with outcomes and equity for all students for many reasons. Despite the best intentions to create positive change, disparities in outcomes continue to persist for underserved and special population students. At nearly all points in the educational pipeline, racial and ethnic minorities, low income students, students with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups underperform compared to their non-minority and higher income counterparts. For underrepresented students, the educational system is not delivering on its promise to educate them for successful futures.

## RESOURCES

- *Outcomes and Equity Templates*
- Team Worksheets
- Updates and Revisions to the *PTR Charter*

# Process Assessment

During Process Assessment, teams analyze “core processes” (e.g., recruiting, advising, teaching, learning) that contribute to the problem. Teams probe and critique existing processes to understand why desired results are not being produced. This produces a detailed, step-by-step understanding of core processes and a list of potential factors that teams need to understand to develop effective solutions.

## PREPARING FOR PROCESS ASSESSMENT

- Team members view the e-learning module for Process Assessment.
- Team members review the Team Worksheets and the *PTR Charter* from Outcomes and Equity Assessment.
- Team members review existing maps or graphics displaying major processes that support student progress in program areas relevant to the problem statement.
- Team leaders develop and distribute meeting agendas, along with the *PTR Process Inventory* and the *Detailed Process Description Worksheet*.

## CONDUCTING PROCESS ASSESSMENT

- **Step 1.** This step requires that the team identify major processes (e.g., marketing, recruitment, testing and assessment, instruction, academic support, student support, career development, and job placement) that support the movement of students along a career pathway and improve the program of study.
- **Step 2:** This step provides a thorough explanation of the processes the team has selected for review and creates a list of potential factors that contribute to the problems.
- **Step 3:** This step engages team members in determining underlying reasons for the identified problems. Understanding underlying contributing factors (or reasons) is essential if the team is to develop effective solutions.

## PROCESS ASSESSMENT IN CONTEXT

Understanding how processes contribute to student success is crucial to improving programs of study. Process analysis is a means by which the deficit thinking that sometimes characterizes discussions of outcomes inequities is overcome. In other words, teams can move from the idea that “if we had better students, we would have better outcomes,” to the idea that “if we create better processes, our students will demonstrate better outcomes.”

## RESOURCES

- *PTR Process Inventory*
- *Detailed Process Description Worksheet*
- *Improvement Team Report on Process Assessment*

# Process Improvement

During Process Improvement, teams reach consensus on solutions to the identified problem, and implementation plans are developed to improve student outcomes. Teams create evaluation plans to measure the success of the identified solutions and track progress of the process improvements over time.

## PREPARING FOR PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

- Team members view the e-learning module for Process Improvement.
- Team leaders distribute process assessment maps to PTR team members identifying how the processes were examined and how they may potentially impact student outcomes and contribute to problems previously identified.
- Team leaders communicate with and get input from PTR team members, Institutional research staff, and other staff who support the processes identified for improvement.
- Team leaders develop and distribute the agenda and materials for each meeting to the PTR team members and other P-20 leaders who are engaged in Process Improvement.

## CONDUCTING PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

- **Step 1.** Identify solutions, also called process changes and reach consensus on their implementation.
- **Step 2.** Develop an implementation plan that includes a statement of goals, intended outcomes, roles, and responsibilities; description of steps needed to create solutions; an estimated timeline, cost and resource requirements; and potential mechanisms for integrating this work into institutional and partner organizational planning.
- **Step 3.** Develop an evaluation plan that includes goals, methods and performance measures to evaluate the success of the identified solutions.
- **Step 4.** Implement solutions and begin to analyze results. Persons and organizations responsible for implementing the solutions begin to make improvements. Depending on the timing of implementation, the PTR team begins to evaluate the scope and extent of implementation. The team returns to this step to evaluate the extent to which solutions were implemented to resolve the problems identified in Engagement and Commitment and Outcomes and Equity Assessment.

## PROCESS IMPROVEMENT IN CONTEXT

Process Improvement helps members of the PTR team build the foundation on which they can gather data, develop performance measures to monitor progress on specific outcomes, and evaluate student progress as it relates to addressing the problem and improving the program of study. By developing implementation and evaluation plans, the teams prepare to implement sustainable solutions.

## RESOURCES

- *Suggested Solutions Worksheet*
- *Solutions Evaluation Worksheet*
- *Implementation Plan*
- *Evaluation Plan*
- *Evaluating Progress on the Improvement Objective Worksheet*

# Review and Reflection

During Review and Reflection, team members, individually and collectively, consider retrospectively the lessons learned from engaging in the PTR process. The team develops a plan to ensure that solutions are sustained and determines the feasibility of scaling up the PTR process to other programs of study.

## PREPARING FOR REVIEW AND REFLECTION

- Team members view the e-learning module for Review and Reflection.
- Team leaders work with OCCRL to develop a plan to conduct the Review and Reflection questionnaire, including establishing a timeline that gives sufficient time to tabulate and summarize results.
- Team leaders distribute the *Individual Reflection Tool* to participants in advance of the meeting(s) to give them time to reflect and prepare a reflection statement.
- Team leaders distribute all necessary agenda materials once a meeting date has been established.

## CONDUCTING REVIEW AND REFLECTION

- **Step 1.** Individuals reflect on the PTR process by writing a brief reflection about a significant idea, experience or other aspect of the process and by completing a questionnaire about sustaining solutions.
- **Step 2.** Individuals meet to reflect as a group on what they have learned as part of the PTR process. Each individual shares his or her personal reflection. The group then considers all of the individual reflections, creates a group reflection, and discusses the use of questionnaire results to sustain solutions and extend the PTR process to other programs of study.
- **Step 3.** The group develops a shared understanding of what the PTR process has accomplished and reflects on the work that team members have accomplished together to improve programs of study and student equity and outcomes. Teams come together to celebrate their achievements and make plans to sustain long-term improvements.

## REVIEW AND REFLECTION IN CONTEXT

The Review and Reflection phase provides PTR teams an opportunity to reflect on the work they have done and examine outcomes of the process itself. The team utilizes the collective input of all partners to implement solutions and ensure that changes are sustained. This phase becomes a time to celebrate achievements, discuss future challenges, and establish timelines to sustain long-term improvements.

## RESOURCES

- *Individual Reflection Tool*
- *Reflection Sharing Tool*
- Questionnaire results
- Plans to sustain the solutions and extend them to other programs of study

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

### Facilitation & Coaching

- OCCRL researchers, and practitioner leaders work closely with each PTR team to facilitate the process

### PTR Networking and Cross-site meetings

- Local PTR teams come together to learn from each other and from experts.

### E-learning modules

- E-learning modules are available for each phase of the PTR process. Visit <http://occril.illinois.edu/projects/pathways/resources/teams>.

### Technology Enhancements

- OCCRL hosts regular webinars and interactive conference calls to support an online learning community.

### PTR Institute

- OCCRL hosts a two-day training that provides intensive instruction on the PTR process

### Regional Network Workshops

- Key concepts of PTR are offered via regional workshops. See: [www.ilprogramsofstudy.org](http://www.ilprogramsofstudy.org).

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