

Leadership Action Plan: A Practical Guide for System Leaders

This action plan is part of the rpk GROUP | MGT System Transformation Toolkit, which provides public higher education systems and institutions with a structured path for undertaking system reform in ways that leverage system-level advantages and strengthen financial sustainability.

System transformation should begin with a clear understanding of the internal and external forces shaping higher education, including institutional pressures arising from demographic change, workforce demand, public expectations, affordability expectations, technological disruption, and fiscal constraints.

Every transformation decision should be evaluated against a fundamental question:

Will this action improve the system's ability to deliver high-quality, affordable education while maintaining the financial capacity to invest in students, workforce needs, and institutional priorities over the long term?

Consider:

- Are current revenue and enrollment trends sufficient to sustain institutional missions?
- Which functions exhibit the greatest cost duplication across the system?
- Are there opportunities to reallocate resources toward student success and workforce responsiveness?
- What investments are required to maintain the current operating model?
- Does the system have the organizational capacity, data systems, and talent needed to support future priorities?

Evidence Sources:

- Student and Labor Market Demand Analysis
- Staffing and Talent Capacity
- Financial Analysis
- Data Assessments
- Technology Assessments

01 Define the Leadership Imperative

Leadership should identify:

- › The primary problem the system is trying to solve.
- › What will happen if the system does not act.
- › Why current practices or structures are insufficient.
- › The outcomes that matter most over the next three to five years.

02 Establish the Desired Outcome

Leaders should agree on three to five outcomes before discussing specific solutions. Examples include:

- › Improve student access, progression, completion, and affordability across the system.
- › Expand institutional access to specialized expertise and services.
- › Align academic offerings with student demand and workforce needs to increase students' return on investment.
- › Reserve geographic access while reducing administrative costs.
- › Reduce unnecessary program or administrative duplication.
- › Create a more coherent and responsive statewide system.
- › Strengthen financially vulnerable institutions.
- › Reduce investment in aging infrastructure .

03 Diagnose the System's Needs

Use the toolkit or other system resources to develop a common fact base.

Diagnostic Question	Relevant Evidence or Toolkit Resources
Are institutions' academic offerings aligned with demand, workforce needs, and student ROI?	APR and MDO Resource Decks; API Model; Academic Portfolio Department Model
Are institutional structures and staffing models efficient?	Spans and Layers Model; Administrative Effectiveness Resources
Are administrative and student success technologies and supports efficiently allocated between institutions and systems?	System-provided Information
Could student access and outcomes improve through greater system integration?	System/Institution Analysis: Transfer, Registration, and Course Enrollment Data
Are some institutions or locations financially or operationally unsustainable in their current form?	Strategic Finance Metrics Dashboard; System/Institution Analysis: Financial Metrics, Enrollment Projections
Could collaboration solve the problem, or is formal structural change required?	System Analysis: Structural Transformation Assessment

04 Evaluate transformation approaches against system priorities

Rating Categories:

- › 1 - Does not address the priority.
- › 2 - Addresses it only indirectly
- › 3 - Partially addresses it
- › 4 - Substantially addresses it
- › 5 - Directly and comprehensively addresses it

System Priority and Supporting Evidence from Sections 2 and 3	Institutional Transformation & Effectiveness	Systemwide Integration & Support	Structural Transformation
Total	---	---	---

05 Select a Transformation Pathway

The decision does not need to produce a single approach. Leadership may identify:

- › A primary approach that addresses the system's central challenge.
- › One or more supporting approaches that enable or strengthen it.
- › A sequence of action if the system is not ready to undertake all needed changes immediately.

06 Create a 90-Day Leadership Agenda

Timing	Leadership Action	Output
Days 1-30	Assemble leadership team to agree on the problem, desired outcomes, decision criteria, and data needs.	Leadership charge and evidence plan.
Days 31-60	Review diagnostic findings and evaluate the three transformation framework approaches.	Case for change and options assessment.
Days 61-75	Test options with institutional leaders, board members, and key stakeholders.	Stakeholder findings and revised options.
Days 76-90	Select the primary and supporting approaches; establish scope and governance.	Approved transformation pathway and implementation charge.

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