



Designing Student-Centered Retention & Graduation Strategies

2019 Institute on High Impact Practices & Student Success

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Today's Objectives



- **Reflect** on what it means to devise truly student-centered retention and graduation initiatives
- **Explore** the roles data, strategies, and people play in effective retention and graduation efforts
- **Discuss** the notion of a strategic reform strategy and how it differs from a basic activity
- **Review** different retention and graduation models that have been employed by colleges and universities across the country



- How many of you would consider the **retention and graduation rates of your students to be major issue** for your campus?
- How many of you feel as though you have **the right strategies in place** to foster greater student retention and graduation?
- How many of you feel as though your retention and graduation strategies **need more work**?

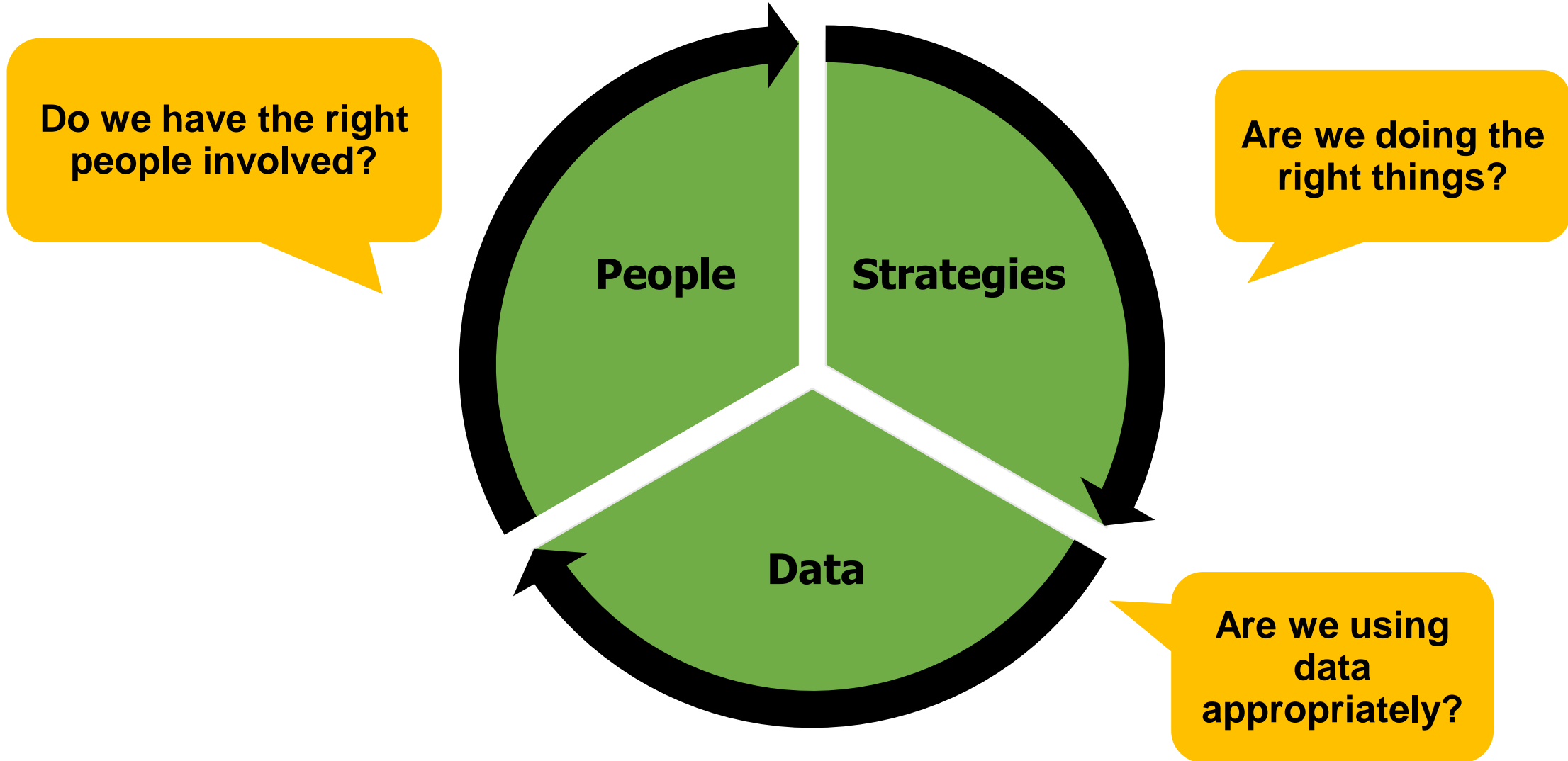
What does it mean to devise student-centered retention and graduation strategies?

The term **student-centered** often refers to a wide variety of academic support strategies that are intended to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations or cultural backgrounds of individual students as well as groups of students.

In practice, truly student-centered retention and graduation strategies:

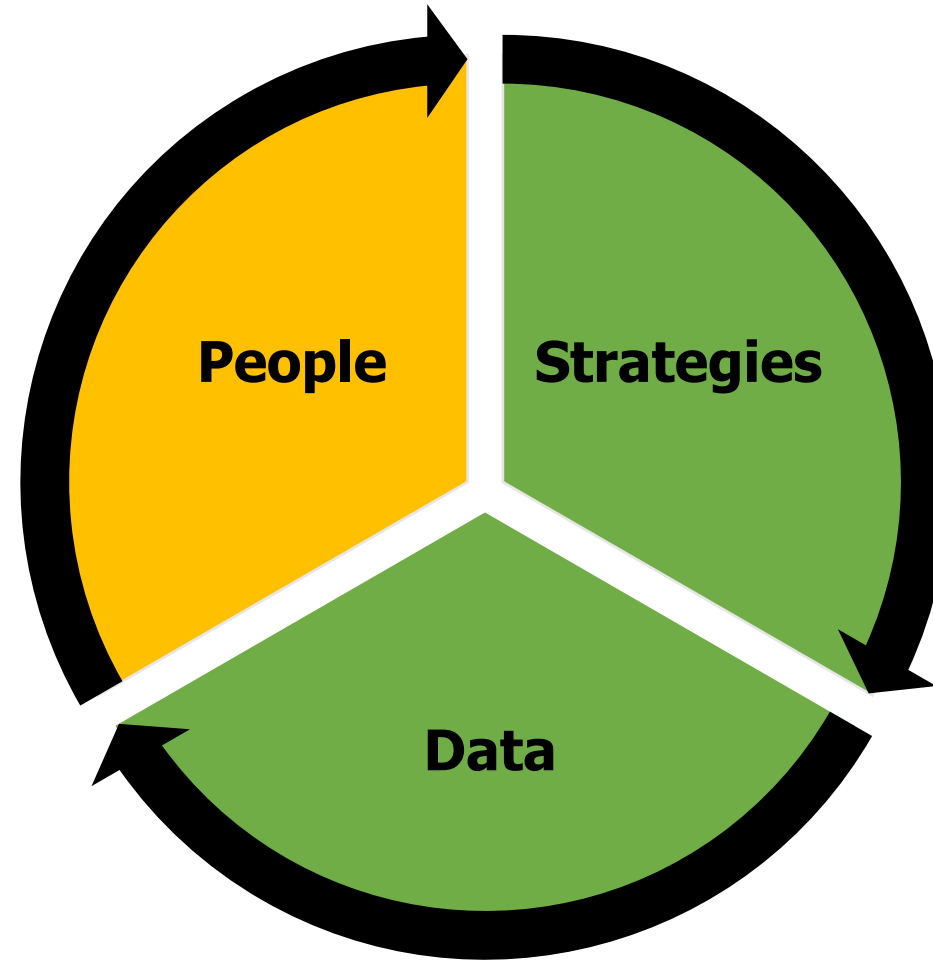
- ✓ Take into consideration the whole student—who they are intellectually as well as individually
- ✓ Operate from an asset-based mindset rather than a deficit-based mindset
- ✓ Are informed by the all-important notion of equity

Efforts to improve student success through improved retention or graduation require attention to three essential components: people, data, and strategies.



Though often overlooked, people are the driving force behind most retention and graduation efforts.

Do we have the right people involved?



Key competencies for student success practitioners

Competency

Definition

Problem-solving

Ability to facilitate discussions and break down complex and ambiguous problems into manageable pieces and to constantly seek solutions

Relationship management

Sensitivity, empathy, fairness, cultural humility

Data analysis

Basic “numeracy,” the ability to understand, interpret, and draw implications from large quantities of data. For some student success practitioners, deeper proficiency may be required (e.g. use of data analysis software and tools)

Feedback and coaching

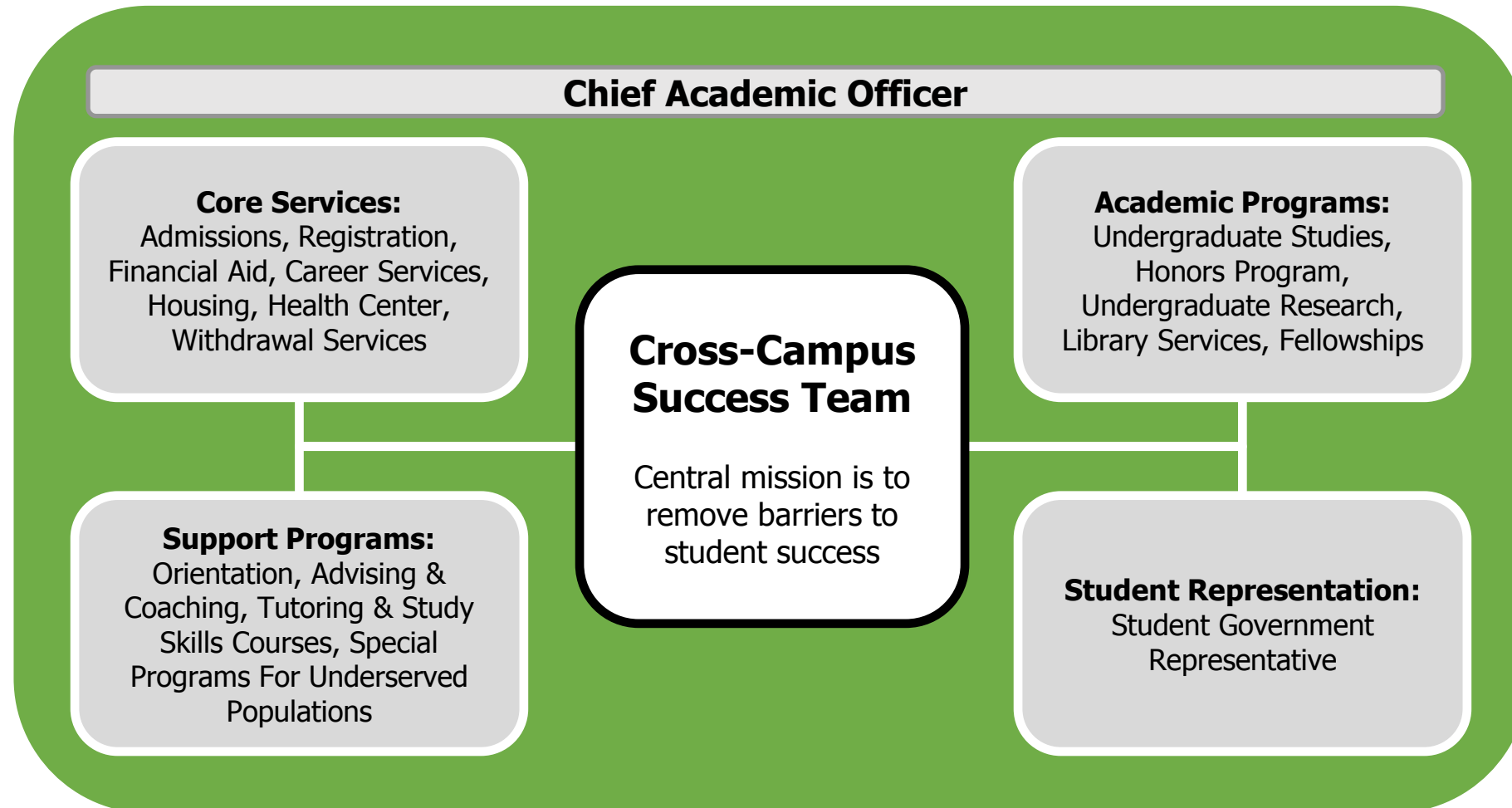
A mindset of continuous reflection on, and learning from, one’s own experiences and those of others, and the ability to communicate these lessons in a thoughtful and specific way

A “delivery” mindset

A key competency in adding value to every student success effort. The individual must have a very strong positive, can-do attitude to push through the many instances when the work can be frustrating and challenging. He or she must also possess an assets-based mindset.

Florida State established a cross-campus team whose mission was to remove barriers that hindered student success.

Florida State Cross-Campus Team



The team operated differently from typical committees by focusing on analysis, action, and accountability.

Typical Committee

Cross-Campus Team

Formal Charge

- Provide analysis and/or identify recommendations for an institutional priority or issue

- Remove institutional barriers hindering student success

Composition

- Senior-level administrators, usually several levels removed from students

- Rich mix of people who work day-to-day serving students, includes front-line practitioners

Function

- Advisory in nature; outlines the work others on campus are to undertake

- Operates as a true workgroup, defining tasks to be done and completing them

Accountability

- Vaguely defined, if at all

- Defined by measurable and specific changes in student outcomes and performance

Routines

- Convene on an intermittent basis, usually for a finite period of time

- Weekly, on-going meetings where progress is assessed continuously
- Data-driven

Overall Perspective

- Not well-defined

- Driven by the mindset that all students can succeed; student-centered in their thinking

The team met weekly to address key questions, make decisions, and sustain momentum.

Diagnose Problems

- Which students are progressing as planned? Which students are not? Why?
- What seems to be impeding student progress or performance?

Problem-Solve

- Where should we intervene?
- What can we do that might make a difference?

Plan

- What additional supports can we put in place?
- What changes to our policies, programs or practices might we make that would be helpful?

Evaluate

- Are our efforts having the impact we intended?
- Do we have the right strategies and supports in place?

Report

- What have we accomplished since our last meeting?
- What achievements or accomplishments can we celebrate?

Followed by an **ACTION-**
oriented line of questioning

WHO will take responsibility for intervening?

WHEN will that happen?

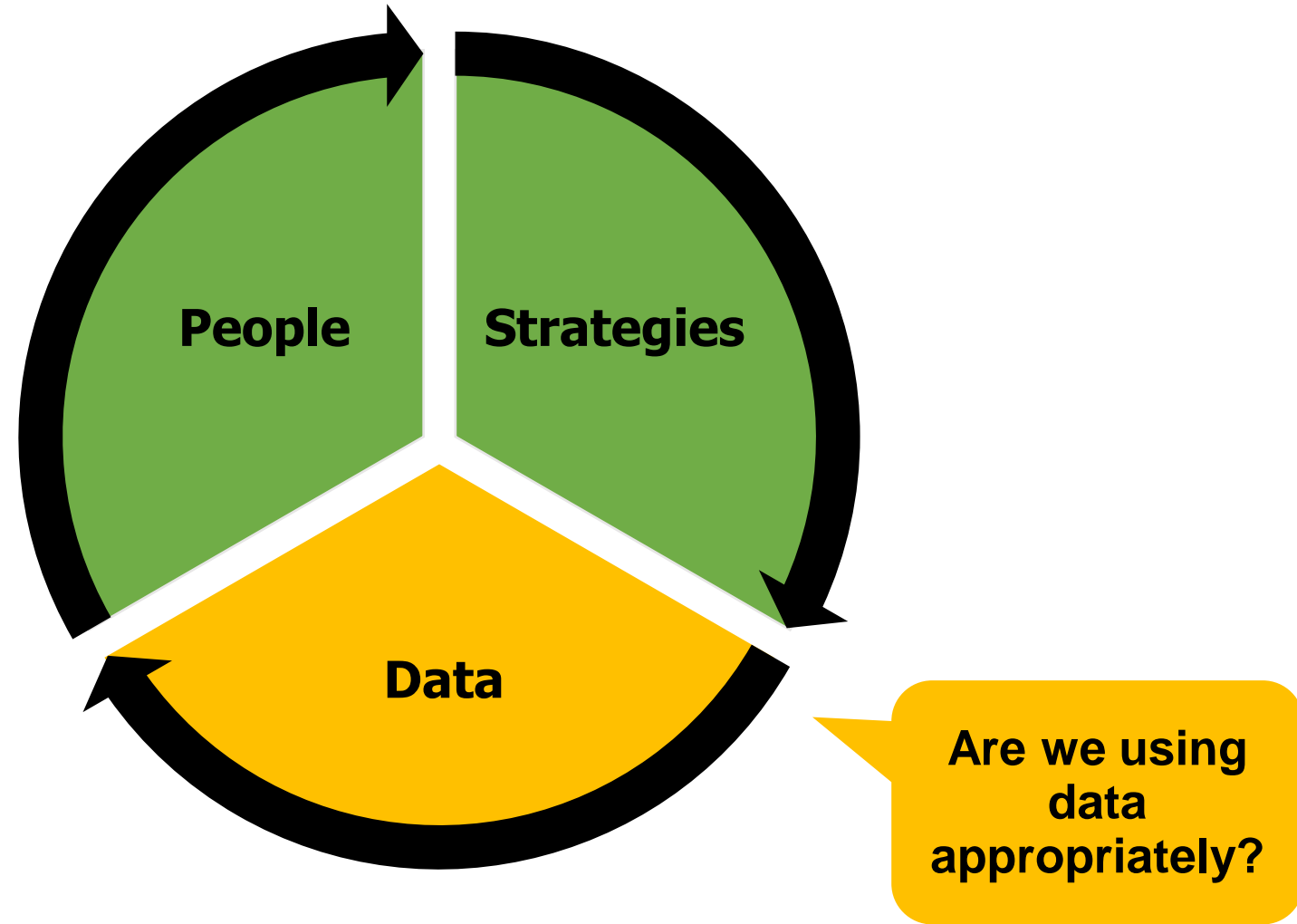
HOW will our progress be assessed?

WHERE we will see results?

Things to keep in mind when it comes to people:

- **Best practices** are often the result of **best practitioners**.
- Bring **varied perspectives and expertise to the work** which can translate into more well-informed and effective strategies.
- **Empower your people.** Let them not only identify the issues for you but give them the authority and resources to implement solutions.
- **Make champions** of your people whenever you can. Celebrate their successes. Whenever possible, reward their effort.

Another essential element is the use of data to determine when, where, and how to intervene on behalf of students.



Data helps foster a clearer understanding of what is going on with your students as well as how you can help them.

- **Reveals the myriad of pathways** that students follow as they move through the institution and determine where their progress gets stalled or they are taken off-track
- **Helps define what your institution has the power to change** or do differently for your students
- **Shapes the strategies and actions** you might take to help students; and
- Provides a basis for the continual **monitoring and refining** of your efforts.

Turning data into real insight for action is dependent on certain institutional conditions.

Access & efficiency

The ease and speed with which data can be accessed or retrieved from campus systems

Monitoring

Actions taken to understand progress on campus goals and metrics

Problem solving

The processes we use to turn what we learn from campus data into action around campus strategies

Culture

The attitudes and reactions of campus faculty and staff toward making decisions using campus data

Key questions to consider

Access & efficiency

Do leaders and staff have access to relevant student success data? Do data requests proceed smoothly? Do leaders and staff use the data faithfully?

Monitoring

Has campus leadership clearly established responsibility for monitoring progress on student success? Are they regularly kept up-to-date of progress according to the data?

Problem solving

Do we have a standard process that guides how we use data to inform our understanding of the problems our students are facing?

Culture

Does the rest of the campus readily accept the data that is presented? Are they confident in the data systems on campus?

A Wisconsin story

Problem

The Honors Program has too few students of color participating in it. No one knew why.

* Testable Hypotheses

Guiding Questions

How many students of color do we have on campus?

How many of them are performing at the same level or above the current cohort of students in the Honors Program?

Data Analysis

We have more than 30 students of color who could—and should—be in the Honors Program.

Why are they not in the program?

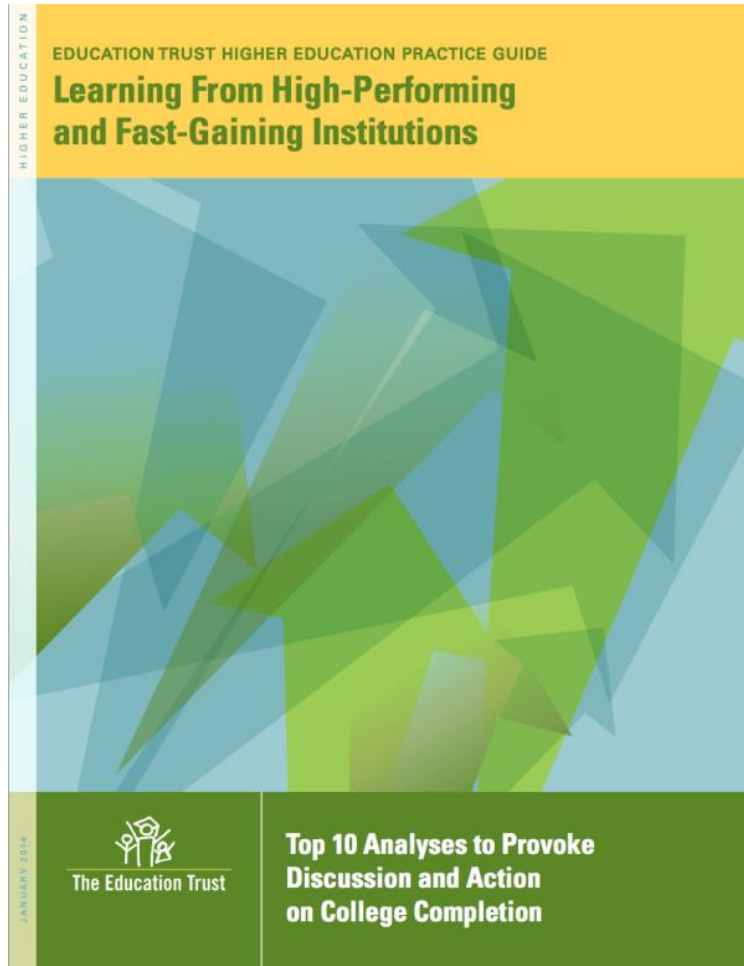
Identification of Barriers & Solutions

There is only one “on-ramp” to the Honors Program.

It is dependent on high school counselor nominations.

We need to build other on-ramps and access pathways.

There are numerous analyses you can undertake to determine how your students are succeeding at your institution.



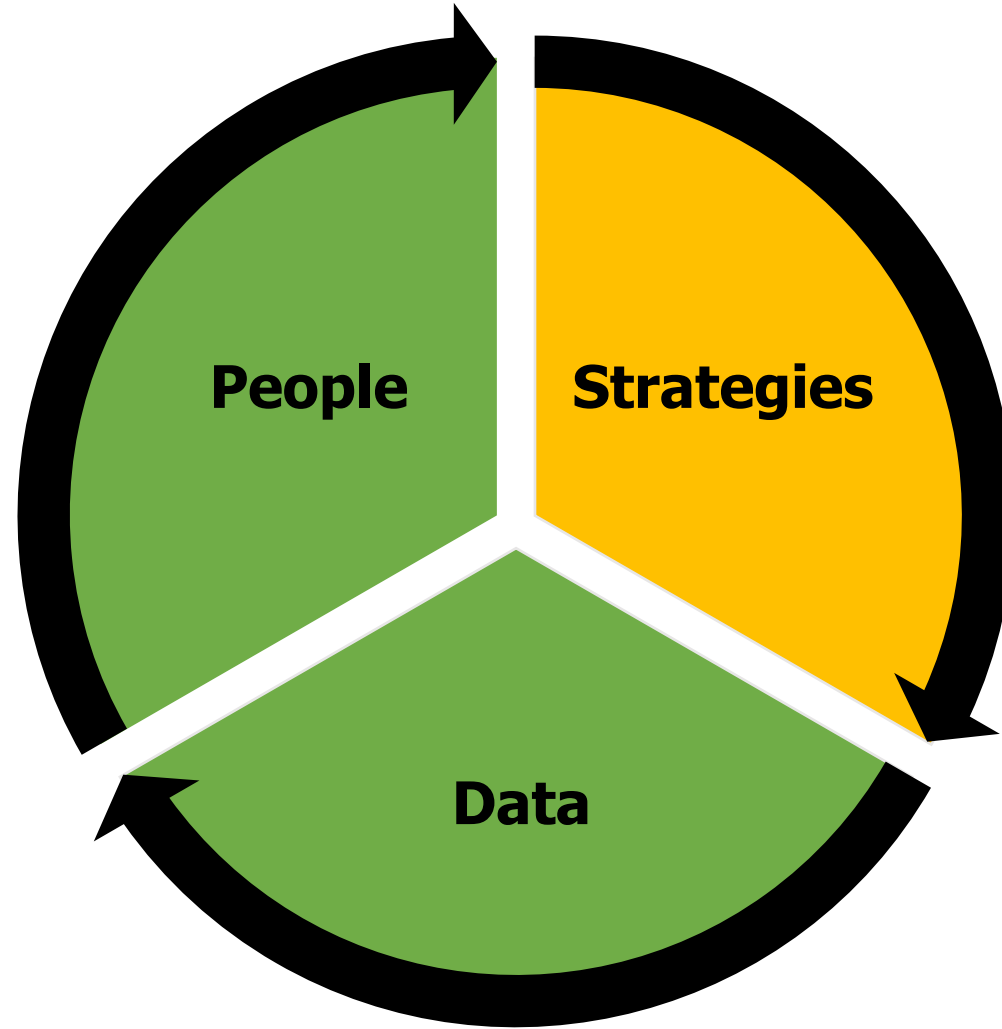
Examples of TOP 10 Analyses

- **TRACKING THE RATE OF SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS WHO ACHIEVE SOPHOMORE STANDING**
- **ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF COURSE WITHDRAWALS**
- **ANALYZING SUCCESS RATES IN THE 25-35 COURSES WITH THE LARGEST ANNUAL ENROLLMENT**
- **ANALYZING SUCCESS RATES IN THE FIRST CREDIT-BEARING MATH COURSE**
- **AN ANALYSIS OF TRANSCRIPTS**

Things to keep in mind when it comes to data:

- **Use data at every step in your student success work:** to identify barriers and problems; determine where best to intervene on students' behalf; and to evaluate the degree to which you have been able to successfully remove barriers and improve student outcomes.
- **Dig deeply into the data,** disaggregating it to see which student groups are being successful, which are not, and where you can make a difference.
- **Use data regularly** to test assumptions or notions about what is really happening with students on your campus.

There are lots of strategies you might implement to help your students succeed.



Are we doing the right things?

There a lot of strategies you might consider as part of your student success work

Precollege

- Summer Bridge Programs
- High School Initiatives
- Early College Awareness

Momentum

- Purpose First
- 15 to Finish Campaigns
- First Year Experience

Pathways

- Guided Pathways
- Academic Maps

Holistic

- Emergency Grant Aid
- Food Pantry
- Behavioral Health Services

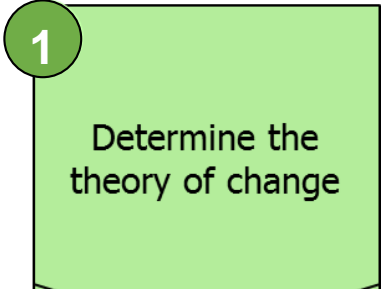
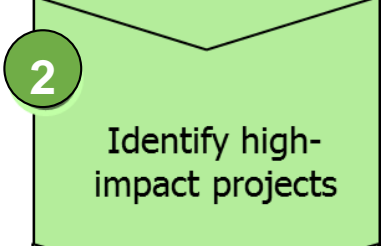
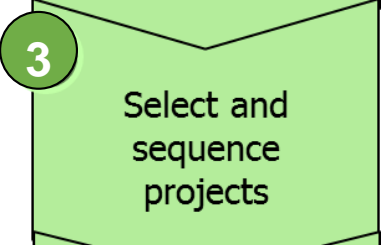
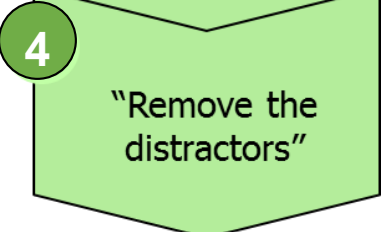
Strategies define what you will do differently in order to achieve your goals.

Strategies are:

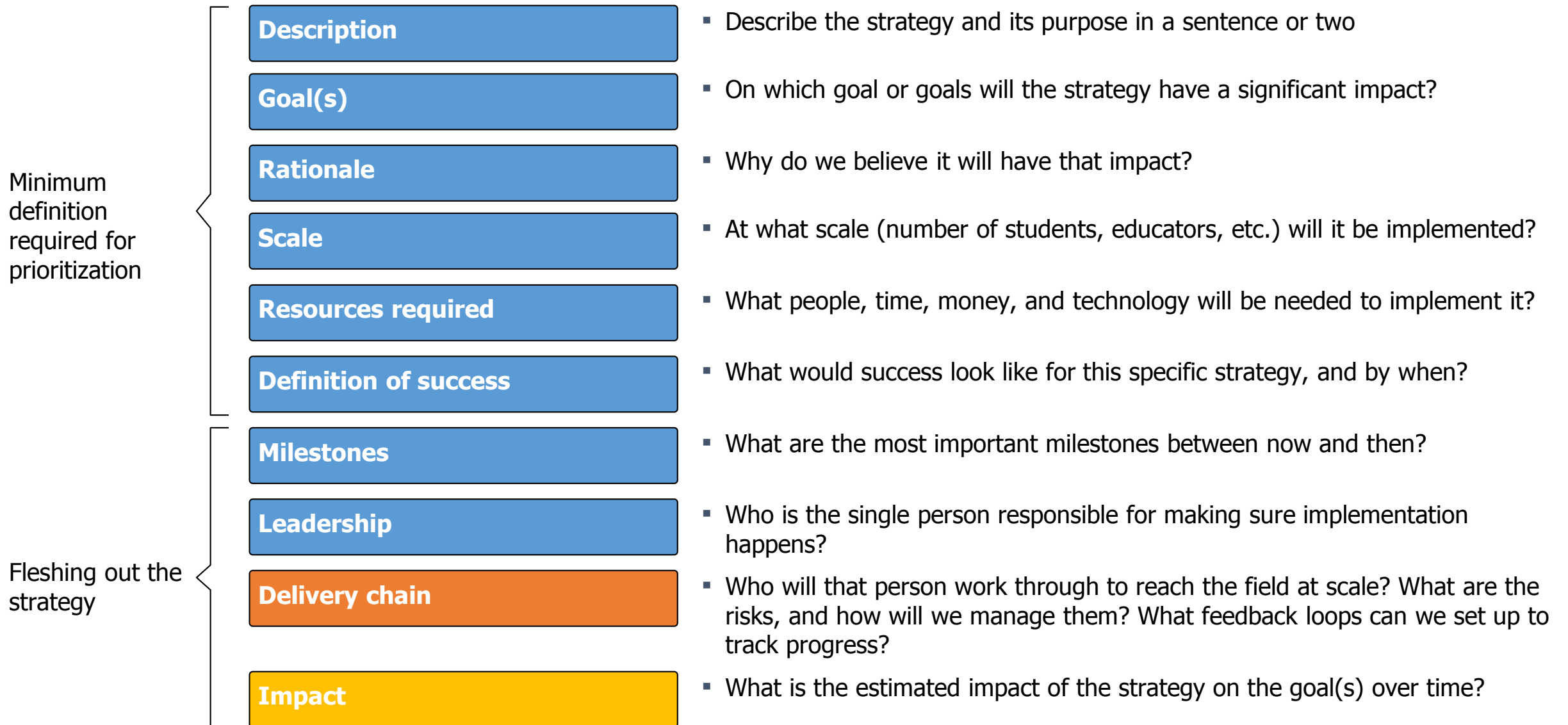
- Deliberate and coordinated activities
- Manageable in number
- Designed to help you achieve your goal
- Defined by changing the way your system does business by **adding**, **improving**, or **removing** an existing activity



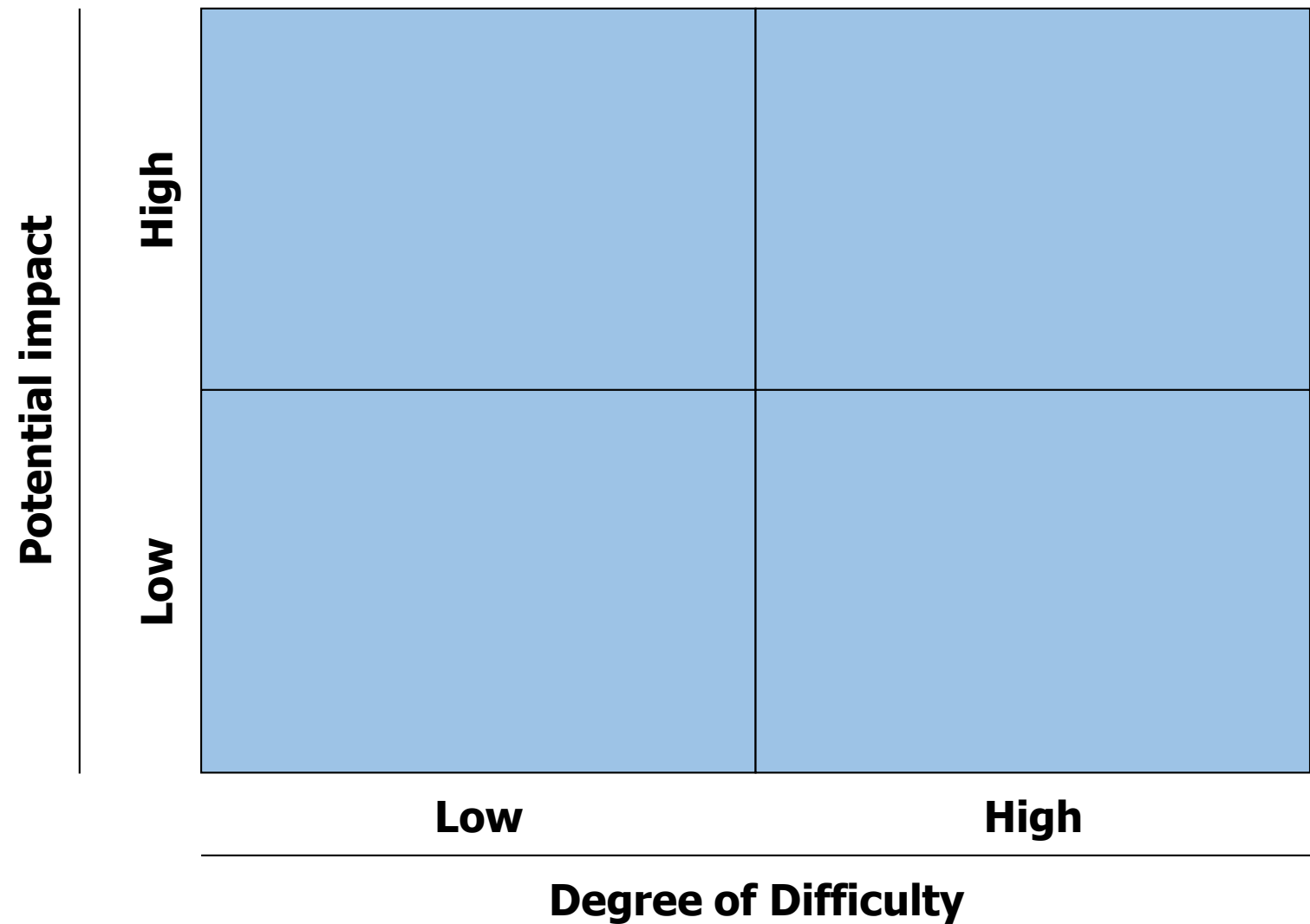
When thinking about strategies, it is helpful to think through four key steps.

Process step	Description
 <p>1 Determine the theory of change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Identify the set of interrelated themes (content areas or implementation models) that focus your efforts on those things most likely to affect the target metric
 <p>2 Identify high-impact projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Examine impact of existing system and campus activities on aspiration and identify potential projects. Consider adding additional activities based on the theory of change, impact, and alignment with institutional strengths
 <p>3 Select and sequence projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Evaluate and select from the identified projects based on three principles: 1) Independently effective; 2) Integrated; 3) Sequenced
 <p>4 "Remove the distractors"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Leader gives permission to stop doing previously planned projects▪ Staff identifies high cost/low impact projects and recommend ways to "remove the distractors"

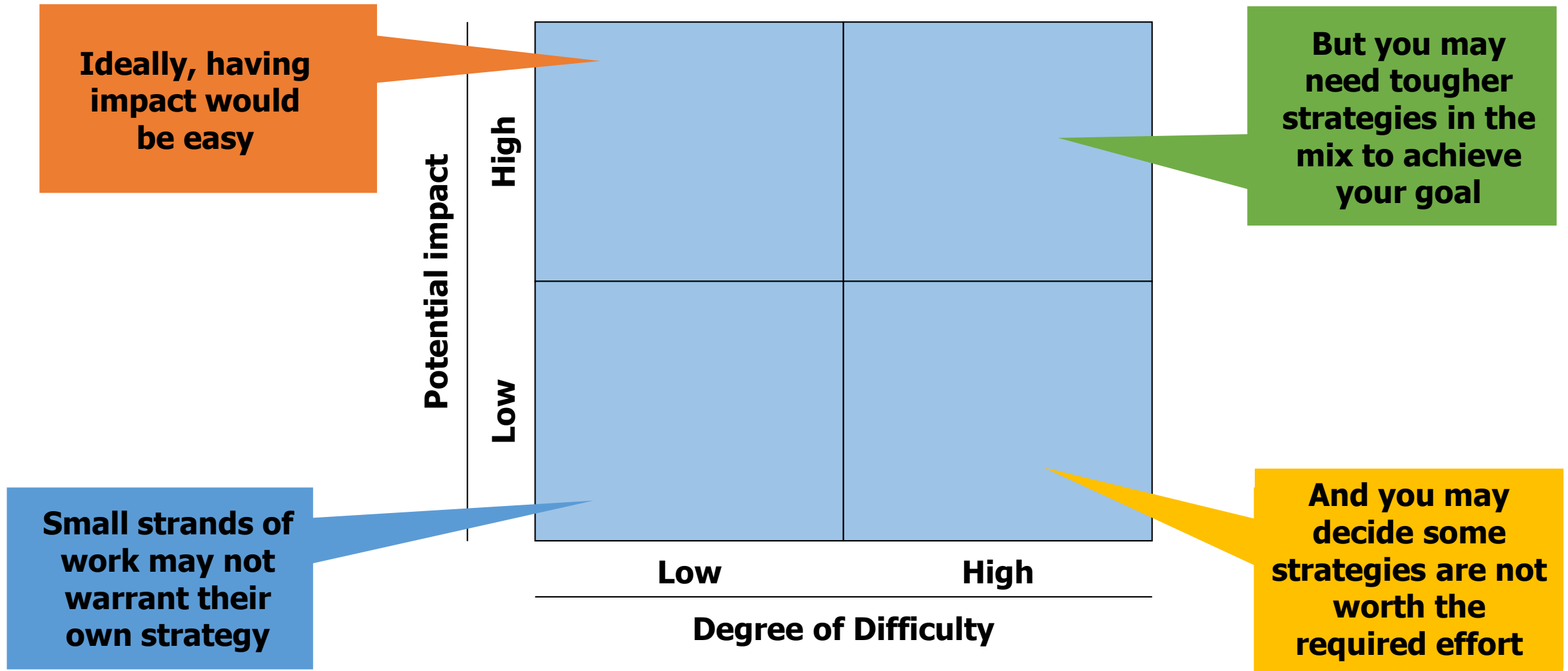
Strategy profiles help you answer key questions when crafting your retention or graduation plan.



A 2x2 will help you prioritize strategies by evaluating potential impact and difficulty of implementation 1/2



A 2x2 will help you prioritize strategies by evaluating potential impact and difficulty of implementation 2/2



Exercise: Mapping Your Strategies

What

- Make a list of all of the student success initiatives on your campus
- Map these initiatives according to the quadrants on the 2x2 template
 - Where do you see your retention or graduation effort falling on the template currently?
 - Are their efforts going on that you might not continue moving forward?
 - Are their efforts that need more work to move into the high impact quadrant?

Materials

- 2x2 Reform Strategy Template

Time

- 20

Things to keep in mind when it comes to strategies:

- **Ensure that the strategies implemented have an intensive focus** on changing the bottom-line in terms of student retention, persistence, and graduation.
- **Pay attention to how strategies align overall** with the kinds of support students need over the course of their time in college.
- **Evaluate strategies on a regular basis** to ensure they are being implemented properly and producing the expected outcomes.
- **Recognize that a “silver bullet” strategy does not exist.** The key is persistence; you have to commit to a strategy over a long period of time.

Closing Thoughts

