

HEDS Student Success Champions Program

2027 Cohort Call for Applications – Deadline September 18, 2026

The Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS) is a community of colleges and universities that share data, knowledge, and expertise to advance undergraduate liberal arts education, inclusive excellence, and student success. In 2022, HEDS kicked off a new professional development program to support people who champion student success at their institutions. We designed the two-year program to: (1) strengthen student success efforts at colleges and universities, and (2) help people who are engaged in that work develop their leadership, planning, implementation, and change management skills. Since 2022, 76 Champions from 53 different institutions have participated in the program. We invite anyone who is, or will be, working on a student success initiative at their college or university to apply. We will accept applications for the 2027 cohort of Student Success Champions until September 18, 2026.

Core elements of the HEDS Student Success Champions Program

During their two-year term, Student Success Champions become part of a community of practice that's focused on student success.

The HEDS Student Success Champions Program employs a “learning by doing” approach. Champions develop leadership and change management skills as they help design, adapt, and/or implement a student success initiative at their institution. Through this work, Champions gain confidence in their leadership abilities and build resilience to work through challenges that often thwart institutional change efforts.

This program will give you the encouragement you need to dream, design, and implement a student success program on your campus. You'll be part of a warm and supportive group of colleagues from a variety of institutions, who will help you strategize and hone your ideas into an attainable plan. Just as important, you'll be able to normalize the challenges and struggles of getting a project off the ground and maintaining project momentum in a supportive think tank collective. Jump in and apply. You'll be taking part in an incredible professional development experience.

Trish Moser, Rollins College (2023 Cohort)

Student Success Champions work on a student success project for their institution during their time in the program. Champions can develop a new project when they join the program or continue their work on an existing project at their institution. A broad range of projects fit under our student success umbrella, including initiatives aimed at increasing retention and persistence, improving graduation rates, promoting equity and inclusion, helping students explore vocation and purpose in life, promoting students' well-being, helping students develop academic and life skills, and helping students figure out meaningful next steps after graduation. Of course, a Champion's project may change during their time in the program as their position or the needs of their institution change. That's not unusual, and it's fine. Regardless of the direction a Champion's project takes, our program will continue to support them and their work for students.

The range of projects that Student Success Champions have worked on includes:

- Redesigning academic probation to support the success of students who are struggling academically.
- Developing an advising program to better support students who've lost financial aid eligibility because they weren't making satisfactory academic progress.
- Improving accessibility throughout students' academic experiences.
- Improving the consistency of first-year experience course sections.
- Helping students who've left the institution return to continue their academic career.
- Helping underrepresented students secure internships or study abroad to promote postgraduate success.

- Developing a holistic program of support for first-year students to improve retention and performance geared toward at-risk groups of students.
- Creating an academic warning system and intervention for students who are on the verge of academic probation.
- Incentivizing high-impact programs for sophomores to increase persistence.
- Better equipping faculty, staff, and students to support mental health and well-being.
- Building an integrated data infrastructure to support student success initiatives across the institution.
- Improving the persistence and success of second-year students by developing a well-rounded Second-Year Experience program.
- Creating a workshop series for students to improve engagement and skills on topics like understanding academic standing and progress, registration, overcoming test anxiety, etc.
- Integrating career guidance—including the exploration of transferable skills—into foundational courses.
- Expanding courses to help 1) first-year and sophomore students transition to college and explore majors, and 2) juniors and seniors prepare for a successful post-graduation launch with leadership and career/graduate school preparation.
- Connecting student involvement data with the college’s student information system to better understand the student experience and support students.

I was worried that I had no clear project in mind at the outset of the program, rather a general idea of what I was hoping to get out of it and some possible ideas (all of which I abandoned within the first 6 months!). That's really not the point. If you're hesitating to apply because you don't have something concrete in mind, know that the meetings will move you toward more clarity, and also provide you with incredible resources for moving your work forward.

Carrie Tamayo, Harvey Mudd College (2026 Cohort)

The Student Success Champions Program includes the following activities:

1. Two face-to-face meetings each year at Wabash College, one in January and one in July/August, that focus on helping Student Success Champions develop practical leadership skills, including approaches to engaging the support of academic leaders, using evidence to advance projects, building coalitions, working with challenging faculty and staff, and keeping projects moving forward in dynamic institutional environments. Each meeting lasts for 4 days and 3 nights.
2. Two one-hour, small group, virtual check-in meetings each year—in spring and fall—with HEDS leaders for updates on their projects, troubleshooting obstacles, and honing plans for next steps.
3. Ongoing consultation with HEDS Directors and other Student Success Champions about their projects. The consultations will focus on real-time troubleshooting to help the Champions sharpen their projects and overcome barriers.

Who can apply to be a HEDS Student Success Champion?

The program is open to any employee at a 2-year or 4-year, public or private, non-profit higher education institution—including, but not limited to, faculty, student affairs professionals, administrators, assessment professionals, and institutional researchers—who is, or will soon be, engaged in a student success project and can secure the support from their institution that we describe below. Former Champions are eligible to apply. Two individuals from the same institution may apply as a team.

I confess to some hesitation when applying for the HEDS Student Success Champions program so soon after beginning a new job at a new institution, but I soon learned that I should have lunged at the opportunity instead! What better move than to be connected with remarkable colleagues from across the nation who are wrestling with similar questions to my own. Learning that many of them were in newly created student success roles made it even better! If you are hesitant, I get it, but don't let the opportunity pass you by.

Albert Sturgeon, Ripon College (2025 Cohort)

Institutional and individual commitments for the program

Applications for the sixth cohort of the program open June 1, 2026. Successful applicants will begin the program in January 2027. As we noted earlier, we expect Champions to attend four meetings each year (two face-to-face and two virtual).

As a section of our website is dedicated to the Student Success Champions Program, we will also ask each Champion to submit a headshot that we can post publicly on our website.

This program has offered me the opportunity to challenge myself to find ways to leave my institution better than I found it by creating a project that adds meaning to the work I do to serve students. My cohort has offered me a safe and supportive space to develop a project with objective feedback. I have found that while projects may alter over the course of time, the dedication to student success is unwavering.

Janelle Gibson, Camden County College (2024 Cohort)

Cost

We strive to keep costs as low as possible for this program. If your institution is a member of HEDS, we do not charge a program fee to participate; your institution will only be responsible for the cost of your travel, food, and lodging for the two face-to-face meetings each year. If your institution does not belong to HEDS, we charge a one-time \$1,500 program fee per person, *in addition* to the cost of your travel, food, and lodging for the meetings. If you think your institution might be interested in joining HEDS, you can learn more about membership [here](#).

The first meeting of successful applicants will be January 6-9, 2027, at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, IN. The second meeting will be July 20-23, 2027, also at Wabash College. Both meetings will begin at mid-afternoon on the first day and end at 1:00 p.m. on the fourth day (all times Eastern). The cost of each meeting in 2027, which covers three nights of lodging, food (all meals and snacks), and transportation between the Indianapolis International Airport and Wabash College, will be around \$950-\$1,150. We calculate the final fee before each meeting based on the most up-to-date costs. If food and lodging costs increase while you are in the program, we will need to increase the price we charge for meetings. We can provide additional nights of lodging to accommodate flight schedules at the hotel’s rate, typically \$125-\$150 per night.

Estimating the total cost of the two-year program for your institution

Costs	Your Institution’s HEDS Membership Status	
	Member	Non-Member
Program fee (paid per person in January 2027)	\$0	\$1,500
Lodging, food, and local transportation for each 4-day/3-night meeting at Wabash College (paid around the time of each meeting)	~\$950 x 4	~\$950 x 4
Travel to each meeting at Wabash College: Airfare to Indianapolis International Airport plus transportation to your local airport and airport parking -or- Mileage/driving expenses to Crawfordsville, IN	Varies x 4	Varies x 4

* Please note, the above table shows the cost per person. If you apply as a team, double the cost.

We outline estimated program costs in the table to the right.

Application requirements

We seek people with a passion for improving student success who want to join a nationwide, interdisciplinary community focused on helping students achieve their goals for college and life. Champions must be willing to share their experiences working on student success initiatives at their institutions, both the good and the bad, with others in the program. We are also looking for people who are willing to spend time outside of formal meetings to offer advice and provide feedback to their colleagues in the program. We are especially interested in applications from people who would be willing to pay it forward and use their skills and knowledge to support future Champions.

Applicants should prepare a document that addresses the following questions. Please address each question separately rather than writing one essay to answer all the questions. If you are applying as a team, please answer questions 1-7 individually and write a joint response to question 8. Hopefully, we've conveyed that this is not your typical higher education professional development program. It's also not your typical higher education professional application. Your credentials are your voice, passion, and commitment. Think of this application as our chance to get to know you.

1. Why would you like to be part of the HEDS Student Success Champions Program?
2. What student success goals would you like to pursue during the program?
3. What are the biggest challenges that students at your institution face?
4. What strengths do your students bring to bear on these challenges?
5. What strengths and weaknesses do you see at your institution that may impact your work on a student success project?
6. What skills and experiences do you bring to student success work?
7. What skills would you like the program to help you develop?
8. Champions will work on a student success project for their institution during their time in the program. Will you be starting a new project or continuing work on an existing project during the HEDS Student Success Champions Program? (Please see follow-up questions below.)
 - If you'll be starting a new project, please describe the goals for the project and any preliminary thoughts you have on the shape of the project. It's okay if your ideas about a potential project change during your work as a Student Success Champion. We'd just like to get a sense of what you're thinking about now.
 - If you'll be continuing to work on an existing project, please briefly describe the goals of the project, where you are in the project, what's going well, and what's not been as successful.

Please include a letter of support from an administrative leader at your institution. This letter should briefly explain the importance of your work on student success to your institution, and their commitment to cover the costs of travel and expenses for the face-to-face meetings and the \$1,500 program fee, if applicable, for the two years of the program. If you and a colleague are applying as a team, your administrative leader's letter should address how working as a team will benefit your institution.

Applications are due on September 18, 2026. Please submit your responses to the application questions and your letter of support to Charlie Blaich and Kathy Wise at StudentSuccessChampions@hedsconsortium.org.

We will announce the sixth cohort of HEDS Student Success Champions on November 4, 2026.

Important Year 1 dates for the 2027 Cohort

June 1, 2026 – Call for applications opens

September 18, 2026 – Application deadline

November 4, 2026 – HEDS announces 2027 cohort of Student Success Champions

January 6-9, 2027 – Student Success Champions meeting at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, IN

April and/or May 2027 – Virtual update meetings – hour-long, individually-scheduled small groups

July 20-23, 2027 – Student Success Champions meeting at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, IN

October 2027 – Virtual update meetings – hour-long, individually-scheduled small groups

Questions?

If you have questions about the HEDS Student Success Champions Program, the student success project you're considering for the program, the application, or anything else, please contact Charlie Blaich and Kathy Wise at StudentSuccessChampions@hedsconsortium.org. We're happy to talk!