



LEARNING & RESEARCH AGENDA 2020-2024

Greater Texas Foundation supports efforts to ensure Texas students are prepared for, have access to, persist in, and complete a postsecondary credential, with particular focus on underserved and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations.

We believe that to do our work well, we must learn all we can about serving students effectively and share what we learn with others. To that end, we developed a learning and research agenda to inform our grantmaking, research, convening, and communications through the end of our current strategic plan in 2024.

The agenda is informed by published research and data on Texas students as well as national research on trends and best practices in student access, success, and completion. In addition, the GTF Postsecondary Research Virtual Summit held in July 2020 brought together higher education researchers and practitioners from across Texas and around the country to identify the most important research questions for GTF to explore.

We commit to deepening our work as a knowledge-builder with the following principles as our foundation:

- **Equity always matters.** Attending to the needs of every student – particularly Black and Latinx students, students experiencing poverty, and students in rural areas who don't have the same proximity to postsecondary institutions as others – is critical. We will:
 - Invest in understanding how these students experience postsecondary education and what strategies can dramatically improve their success rates.
 - Recognize the intersectionality of student identities.
 - See the rich variation that exists not only between populations and communities, but within them.

This will require, on nearly every project, disaggregating data by race, ethnicity, gender, urbanicity, and more, as well as engaging directly and deeply with students, families, and programs to discover not just what is working but why it is working for different sets of students in different contexts.

- **We learn by doing.** Because so much is changing in higher education and there is urgency to help systems change quickly to better serve students, there is not time for full-scale longitudinal research on every pilot program before we can make recommendations for practice at scale. We will:
 - Continue to value and support longitudinal research studies, but also invest in approaches that allow organizations to “fail fast,” practicing formative assessment and making improvements as they go.
 - Make room for innovative research methods that collect and analyze data in real time and elevate student voice.
 - Create opportunities to reflect on and share lessons learned from all our grants, not just those that involve formal research.

- **We need each other.** Texas has no shortage of strong researchers and practitioners dedicated to advancing student success, but they may have limited opportunities to connect with and learn from each other. We will:
 - Look for ways to “connect the dots” between agencies, institutions, and systems.
 - Convene researchers and practitioners together around issues of postsecondary access, persistence, and success so they can build relationships, learn from each other, and collaborate.

With these principles in mind, we will seek a better understanding of the following questions in support of our [strategy](#). Though not exhaustive, the following list provides examples of priority questions under each goal area:

Student Supports

- How can institutions transform to better support traditionally marginalized students?
 - How do specific student populations, including low-income students, students of color, returning adults, and student veterans, experience higher education, and what systems need to be in place to help them gain access, persist, and succeed?
 - What specific transition issues are prominent for different student populations?
 - Are there progressive solutions in place at specific 2-year and 4-year colleges that can serve as models for other institutions?
- How can we re-engage students who have exited postsecondary education prior to completing a credential?

Transfer, Transition, & Advising

- How do we know whether advising practices are equitable and available across student groups?
 - What guidance is provided to advisors to implement equitable practices for different student populations?
 - What are the challenges and benefits of remote advising, particularly for traditionally marginalized student populations?
 - How do institutions offer robust advising at scale? What models are gaining traction and bearing results?
- What state-level transfer policies improve student success?
 - What types of transfer partnerships produce significantly improved student outcomes? What critical characteristics do they have in common?
 - Do regional collective impact efforts to drive transfer policy produce better outcomes than state-level policies?

Rural Collaborations

- What factors impact rural families' and students' attitudes toward and plans for postsecondary education? Are these the same from region to region? For Black, Latinx, or students experiencing poverty? Across the intersections of identities?
- How have different rural communities come together to build pathways for education and workforce development? What models have proven effective and why?
- What factors increase the number of rural students taking dual credit? How does this differ by student population and region?
 - What are successful models for dual credit delivery in rural regions?
 - What is a successful early college high school model that can be adapted and sustained in different regions?

Math for Success

- How can secondary and postsecondary math educators be prepared to pursue equity in their classrooms, adopt a growth mindset, teach problem-solving, and create opportunities for productive struggle—particularly in a virtual environment? How can schools and systems create conditions for all students, especially those who traditionally have been marginalized, to flourish in their math courses and beyond?
- How can we create flexible math pathways that provide students with the math instruction they need for the career they want?
 - What successes and challenges are districts facing as they implement HB5? What successes and challenges are institutions facing as they implement multiple math pathways?
 - How do we create opportunities for students to accelerate on their pathway or change direction without losing time to degree?
 - How are students experiencing math pathways? Do they have equitable access to the pathways they need? What are the long-term outcomes of each pathway?

Additionally, we hope to grow in the art of grantmaking, learning how to become **more innovative and adaptive** to meet challenges that reach across all goal areas:

- What are the hallmarks of innovative projects and programs that GTF should seek to support?
- How might failed attempts at innovation advance GTF's thinking or help us make progress toward our goals?
 - What structures for "failing fast" and "failing forward" in innovative practice might lead us to accelerate outcomes, particularly for Black, Latinx, and rural students?
 - What can we learn from our peer funders in this regard?
- What disruptive innovations have occurred as a result of COVID-19 that have the potential to significantly improve postsecondary success for Texas students at scale, particularly for Black, Latinx, and rural students, and those experiencing poverty? How are institutions continuing to learn from and innovate these programs and approaches?

We will use a range of methods to further our learning, including reflecting on our active grants, conducting literature reviews, initiating conversations with and inviting presentations by experts, participating in conferences, hosting convenings, and proactively funding research on topics where new study is warranted.

We invite you to join us in our learning journey. You can follow along with us by signing up for our newsletter at www.greatertexasfoundation.org and following us on Twitter [@Gr8rTXFdn](https://twitter.com/Gr8rTXFdn). If you have knowledge to share about any of the questions we've listed above, we welcome your insights. You can get in touch by contacting Allison Pennington, Programs & Strategy Associate, at apennington@greatertexasfoundation.org.