

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the VFA?

The **Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA)** is the first-ever national accountability system to measure how 2-year colleges perform in serving their more than 13 million students. The VFA was developed *for community colleges, by community colleges* with measures that encompass the full breadth of the community college mission and the diversity of students' goals and educational experiences.

More than 60 community college leaders guided the 18-month development of the VFA framework resulting in the release of more appropriate measures. The VFA gauges student progress and outcomes including pre-collegiate preparation (such as developmental education and Adult Basic Education), academic progress and momentum points, completion and transfer measures, and workforce outcomes for career and technical education.

Why do we need the VFA?

Existing accountability measures in higher education do not adequately measure the unique mission of community colleges. For example, existing measures may exclude part-time students or non-credit career and technical students who are a key part of community colleges' mission. In light of the inadequacy of existing measures, the VFA provides community colleges with a significantly improved ability to assess its performance, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate its commitment to successfully meeting its academic mission.

Why Join VFA?

The VFA is the foundational accountability framework for our colleges for now and into the future and it gives community colleges what has long been lacking in reporting outcomes to the public and policymakers: specific metrics that assess how they do in areas such as student progress and achievement and career and technical education programs (credit and noncredit).

The data collected and shared will be specific to community colleges and focused on telling internal and external audiences what they need to know to shape improvement strategies and provide resources. With better, more appropriate measures, our colleges can use the VFA for reporting to boards and local, state, and regional stakeholders; responding to calls for performance funding; shaping policy and advocacy; improving practices; identifying institutional effectiveness; and benchmarking to peer colleges.

Also, the VFA Data Tool has the potential to streamline accountability reporting and improve transparency. It enables the colleges to do more, systematically, with data than ever before. The tool gives colleges and IR staff methodologies and processes for data collection, in addition

to an easy way to display and benchmark the data. The intention is to ease the burden on IR staff and, as community colleges and state systems adopt the VFA, leverage the data for multiple purposes (internal improvement, as well as external accountability) to further mitigate the burden on overly-taxed IR offices. There is enormous potential for the VFA to be the framework that satisfies a variety of reporting requirements and simplifies the work of institutional researchers, accountability and effectiveness professionals, and presidents.

The more colleges that join, the greater our voice will be.

How do I Join?

Joining the VFA is easy. Please visit the Membership section of the VFA web site and follow the steps for joining [<http://vfa.aacc.nche.edu>]. There are four distinct membership types (Associate, Consortia, Multi-College and College) and membership is for an annual data collection cycle.

Which community colleges can participate in the VFA?

All community colleges are eligible to participate in the VFA if they are an AACC member and/or a regionally accredited, predominantly associates degree-granting institution. For community colleges offering baccalaureate degrees, the VFA reports the earning of a baccalaureate as a student outcome.

What is required to participate in the VFA?

VFA members will assign a VFA Key Contact to their member account. The Key Contact is responsible for maintaining the VFA College profile and for assigning user roles to people at their college. The VFA College Profile page is auto-generated from the AACC database using the college's IPEDs ID and data. A profile includes basic information about the college (name, president, member date, total enrollment) and student demographics (Age, Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Part-time/Full-time).

How does VFA membership work?

Joining the VFA is for a one year data collection cycle (November 1, 2013 to October 31, 2014) and annual dues are based upon the size (enrollment) of a college. There are also four membership types: College Member, Associate Member, Consortia Member, and Multi-College Member. For detailed information on membership types, the year one schedule, and VFA annual dues, visit VFA Membership [<http://vfa.aacc.nche.edu/membership/Pages/default.aspx>].

Can my district or system office be a VFA member?

Yes. Districts, systems, and any central office for community colleges can join the VFA as a **Multi-College Member**. Multi-College Members agree, and are required, to submit VFA data for each of the colleges within the district/system. If all colleges in the district/system do not wish to participate in VFA, then the colleges should join VFA as a single, **College Member**.

The Multi-College Member may also (but is not required to) submit a data report that aggregates all their VFA data across the colleges.

When can colleges sign up to join the VFA?

In October 2013, AACC opens VFA sign-ups for year one membership and data collection (November 1, 2013 to October 31, 2014). Sign-ups will continue on a rolling basis until the primary sign-up period closes on February 28, 2014. The VFA will continue to accept new members after this date but participants are expected to meet data submission deadlines. Colleges may sign-up through the VFA web site. Visit the Membership pages for the VFA Year One Schedule and to Join Now. [<http://vfa.aacc.nche.edu/membership/Pages/default.aspx>]

When can colleges begin to enter their VFA data?

Data entry for the inaugural VFA launch will open in mid-November 2013. Colleges can continue to enter their data up until the first data submission deadline – March 14, 2014. AACC encourages all colleges to get their data submitted as early as possible so that participants can utilize the data outcomes dashboards and benchmarking features. Data submission and the data entry system for year one will close permanently on July 1, 2014. Visit the Membership pages for the VFA Year One Schedule. [<http://vfa.aacc.nche.edu/membership/Pages/default.aspx>]

How were the measures in the VFA developed?

The VFA measures were developed through 18 months of intensive research and testing by community college presidents, institutional researchers, and trustees/governing boards that know data and understand our institutions and students. Managed by AACC and under the guidance of a steering committee, four working groups defined the VFA measures, which were then pilot tested by nearly 60 community colleges.

The VFA measures are described in detail in the *VFA Brochure* and the *VFA Metrics Manual*, which are both available on the VFA web site. [<http://vfa.aacc.nche.edu>]

What are the measures in the VFA?

The VFA measures gauge student progress and outcomes including pre-collegiate preparation (such as developmental education and Adult Basic Education), academic progress and momentum points, completion and transfer measures, and workforce outcomes for career and technical education.

Student Progress and Outcomes

- **Developmental Progress Education Measures:** percent of students who progress through developmental education and into college-level work
- **Two-Year Progress and Outcomes Measures:** percent of students who reach two-year progress points and outcomes including retention, credit thresholds, earning a credential, transferring, and still enrolled

- **Six-Year Outcomes Measures:** percent of students that achieve one of the 9 outcomes including earning a certificate, associates or bachelor's degree; transfer; still enrolled; left institution with less/more than 30 credits

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

- Percent of students that obtain CTE and achieve outcomes such as a earning a certificate or credential, passing a licensure exam, gaining employment and realizing a wage gain.

Adult Basic Education (ABE)

- Percent of students that obtain their GED and progress into employment or college education

The VFA measures are listed in the **VFA Snapshot** and described in detail in the **VFA Metrics Manual**, which are both available on the VFA web site. [<http://vfa.aacc.nche.edu>]

What are the cohorts and timeframes in the VFA?

VFA will report outcomes for two cohort years:

- 1) Six-Year Cohort: students who entered the institution six years ago
- 2) Two-Year Cohort: students who entered the institution two years ago

Each of these cohort years are broken into three cohort types:

- a) Main VFA Cohort: fall entering students that are first-time at the reporting college
- b) Credential-Seeking Cohort: fall entering students that are – by their behavior – intending to earn a credential
- c) First Time In College Cohort: fall entering students that are first time in college

The VFA cohorts are described in detail in the **VFA Brochure** and the **VFA Metrics Manual**, which are both available on the VFA web site. [<http://vfa.aacc.nche.edu>]

How will VFA data and outcomes be displayed?

After a college submits and approves for publishing its VFA data, the public can access the public outcomes dashboard from the college's profile page on the VFA web site. Only the VFA member, though, has access, to the benchmarking dashboards, which enables a college to compare its outcomes data to that of peer colleges.

How will VFA data be collected and reported?

VFA data will be collected through a web-based data collection site. Each participating institution will have its own online account that can be used to log into the site to either enter data into online forms or upload a data file with the required information. The institutions will

then review and publish the college's data. From the data entered, the VFA Data Tool will create data dashboards showing the outcomes visually – as bar charts, tables, pie charts, etc. The public can view a college's *VFA Outcomes Data Dashboard* once the college approves its data for publishing on the VFA web site. Colleges will have the ability to preview the data entered before publishing the chart for public view on the web site.

In October of 2013 – and then on a rolling basis until February 28, 2014 – each college will sign-up for VFA membership. In November 2013, data entry opens and continues until the specified due date. Using the specifications detailed in the VFA Metrics Manual, colleges will determine and input/upload their VFA data to the VFA online data collection and display tool.

When will VFA data be available?

Data entry for the first year of data collection closes on July 1, 2014, by which date all VFA members are required to have submitted the college's VFA data. We anticipate that many colleges will have data submitted and published before this time. Data entry opens on November 18, 2013. Benchmarking dashboards are not available to the public but will be useable by participating colleges as data are submitted by fellow VFA members.

Will VFA members be required to enter all the data requested in the VFA?

No. Colleges may not be able to report all the data requested in the VFA. The measures in the VFA were developed and defined to answer the question: "What are the most appropriate ways to measure the community college mission and gauge college performance?" With that objective, the measures encompass the full breadth of the community college mission and student experiences. Many colleges do not have the data to report all the measures in the VFA. It is the sector's and AACC's hope that the VFA can drive local, state, and federal policy and accountability decisions to help colleges get the data that they need to measure performance. We ask colleges to report all the data that they are able to provide and give AACC feedback on which data would be useful to collect or to which they could benefit from access.

How is the VFA funded?

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is fully funding the building of the VFA Data Tool and implementation to our colleges (Phase III). The Lumina Foundation for Education and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded development of the metrics and conceptual model for the data tool (Phase II). VFA will now be supported by annual dues from its member colleges.

How do I submit questions or give feedback on the VFA?

Feedback on the VFA is critically important. AACC encourages all colleges and practitioners to ask questions and give suggestions. Please send an e-mail to VFA@acc.nche.edu.