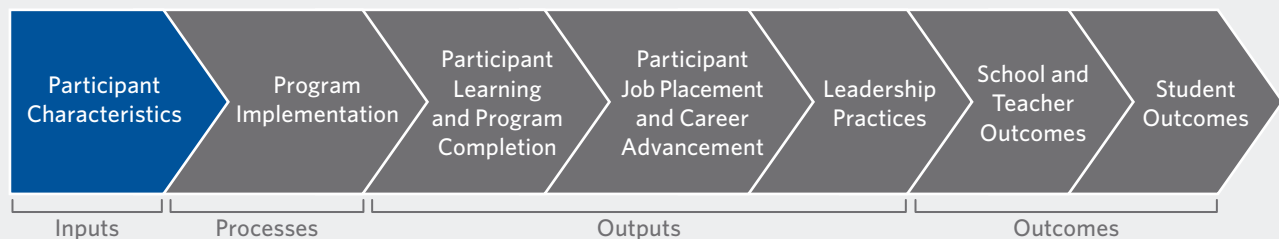


2. TRACKING PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

High quality evaluation of principal preparation programs examines inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes. These components are depicted in the evaluation pathway framework below.

Evaluation Pathway for Leadership Preparation Programs (adapted from [UCEA, 2013](#)):



This paper is part of a [series](#) documenting lessons learned by New Leaders in utilizing this framework to guide internal evaluation of its Aspiring Principals Program (APP). The paper focuses on the first step in the pathway, participant characteristics.

Program participants bring with them a range of demographic characteristics, background experiences, and knowledge, skills, and beliefs—all of which can affect how they perform in training and the principalship (Kottkamp, 2011).

One category of participant characteristics is demographics, such as gender, age, race and ethnicity. Indicators of participant demographics serve multiple purposes in program evaluation. First, demographic variables can be used as controls in predictive analyses. Second, information about demographics can also be used to enable programs to reflect on whether the program design and implementation is meeting the needs of particular demographic groups. For example, programs are likely to be interested in exploring whether women (or older candidates or Hispanic candidates) are more or less likely to complete the program, get placed as a principal, and/or have positive impact on achievement. Based on that information, the program might decide to further target its program towards a particular type of participant, or it might decide that it wants to diversify the program to include a broader diversity of participants. For example, New Leaders serves schools that serve high minority populations—and one of our design assumptions is that minority students benefit when they are led by principals who reflect the student population. As a result we use demographic data to inform recruitment strategies.

A second category of participant characteristics is their background experiences, such as years of teaching experience, years of school leadership experience, type and source of undergraduate degree, and organizational affiliation. Program evaluations should longitudinally track background experience that are used as part of selection criteria because these criteria should reflect design assumptions regarding the prior experiences that are most relevant to success in the program. For example, when a program requires 5 five years of classroom teaching experience, that indicator suggests a program assumption that teaching experience is important. Programs should also consider hypotheses it has about characteristics that *might* matter and track those as well to enable empirical study. For example, New Leaders is examining whether prior experience in the Assistant Principal role predicts success, particularly in secondary schools. If it does, New Leaders may decide to include that indicator in its selection criteria going forward.

A third set of participant characteristics is their prior knowledge, skills, and beliefs. The specific indicators should reflect the program assumptions and selection criteria. Although some programs use standardized tests, such as the GRE, New Leaders conducts its own assessments as part of its admissions process. We have two admissions pathways: 1) National Admissions Process (which includes an application, admissions activities, and a full day of interviews), and 2) the Emerging Leaders Program (which is a program for teacher leaders through which program participants can demonstrate admissions criteria on performance assessments). The National Admissions pathway uses a combination of written application, phone interview, and assessment center activities. In the other pathway, New Leaders uses assignment scores from assignments given to participants in the New Leaders Emerging Leaders Program for teacher leaders. Both pathways are designed to measure participant knowledge, skills, and beliefs related to our selection criteria: personal leadership, instructional leadership, culture leadership, and adult and team leadership. These criteria are based on principal standards as well as internal and external research on effective principal practice.

THE NEW LEADERS APPROACH TO TRACKING PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

The following chart summarizes the indicators and data sources that New Leaders uses to track the three sets of participant characteristics.

Participant Characteristics	Indicators Used by NL	Data Sources Used by NL
Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age Sex Race/Ethnicity 	Eligibility Form (part of initial written application)
Background experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Years of school-based experience (teaching, administrative, other) Kinds/type of school experience (current and prior school levels, school type, subjects taught); Affiliations (professional organizations, training program completed, etc). Certification type Degrees (type, GPA, school) 	Eligibility Form (part of initial written application)

Participant Characteristics	Indicators Used by NL	Data Sources Used by NL
Knowledge and skills	<p>NL Selection standards:</p> <p>Personal Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflective Practice and Continuous Improvement ▪ Communication and Interpersonal Relationships ▪ Vision and Mission <p>Instructional Leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pedagogy/Instructional Strategies ▪ Data Driven Instruction <p>Culture Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Urgency and Efficacy <p>Adult and Team Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diagnostic and Strategic Planning ▪ Performance Management ▪ Leadership Development 	<p>National Admission scores</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Admissions Activity Scores ▪ In Person Interview <p>Emerging Leader Program scores</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assignment scores ▪ Learning Meeting scores ▪ Teacher surveys

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON LESSONS LEARNED

Recommendations based on New Leaders’ experiences regarding tracking participant characteristics are:

- Make **design assumptions** about participant characteristics explicit. For example, is your program designed to meet the needs of a particular type of participant? What background experiences, knowledge, and skills are necessary prerequisites to successful participation in the program?
- **Generate hypotheses** regarding what characteristics are likely to be correlated with success. For example, if participants with particular work experiences (such as serving as an instructional coach) are expected to be relevant to success, it is important to track that information during the admissions process to be able to test that hypothesis later.
- **Maximize variability in scores** (or scoring options) when developing tools to measure participants knowledge and skills, in order to better differentiate between candidates during selection, and to allow for later analysis of whether particular competencies are more important than others. For example, New Leaders expanded its rubric scores to a seven-point scale to increase variability in the scores.
- **Invest in data systems** with the necessary identifiers that will allow participant characteristics to be linked with other data sources and outcomes. Ensure that qualities and characteristics of interest are consistently tracked over time. Create a unique identifier for each program participant so that their participant characteristics can be linked to other program data, such as assessment scores, program completion/ licensure, and placement data. Collect application data using online forms with drop-down menus that allow information to be easily converted into a database with comparable data points across participants.

REFERENCES

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