



Round One Data Model Update FAQs

Over 600 community colleges have partnered with the Aspen Institute by granting access to their National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data. This information—kept fully confidential—helps Aspen strengthen its free benchmarking tool, which allows colleges to compare outcomes and identify areas for improvement. This FAQ answers common questions about the permission process and data use.

Q: Does my college need to submit data?

A: Your college does not need to submit any new data—just sign a form allowing Aspen to access information your institution already reports to the National Student Clearinghouse.

Q: Will you be collecting individual student data?

A: We are not requesting individual student-level data. We'll only use aggregated outcomes in areas like completion, transfer, and bachelor's attainment, broken down by specific cohorts of students (e.g., full-time vs. part-time).

Q: Is there any cost associated with this?

A: There is no cost to the colleges.

Q: When is the deadline to sign the form?

A: The initial form deadline was August 11, 2025, but we will continue to accept forms past this date for use in future cycles of the Aspen Prize.

Q: What if my institution doesn't regularly report to this National Student Clearinghouse or missed the August 11 deadline? Are we still under consideration for the 2027 Aspen Prize?

A: Assuming that comparable publicly available data are accessible in IPEDS, consideration for the Aspen Prize will remain open regardless of whether colleges report to the National Student Clearinghouse. In partnership with members of our expert Data/Metrics Advisory Panel, we will devise a plan to ensure that alternative, public data sources are accessed for institutions that do not participate with the National Student Clearinghouse or that do not



agree to our accessing NSC data. Limitations in federal data may mean this is not possible for all colleges.

Q: Will you share or sell our NSC data?

A: We have not and will not sell data or share it for any marketing purposes.

Q: Have you had any past data sharing lapses?

A: Aspen has a proven track record of safeguarding institutional data. Over many years and multiple research projects using National Student Clearinghouse data, including datasets with identifiable institutional records, we have maintained strict data security protocols—and have never experienced a breach.

Q: How do you plan to use data for benchmarking?

A: In our benchmarking tools, with your institution's permission, we may share aggregated student outcomes across groups of at least five similar colleges. These averages will never identify any single institution, as we ensure that data are anonymized and presented in a way that protects individual institutions' identities.