University of Colorado
Denver

Recommendations for Evolving the Annual Program Check-In

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Annual Program Check-In Operations Team
Report authored by Katie Linder, Hamilton Bean
Amy McGuire, Jeremy Simon, and Jessica Fagioli

Executive Summary

Following a comprehensive listening and learning phase concluded in Spring 2026, we recommend that CU Denver's Annual Program Check-In program undergo evolution to respond to stakeholder feedback and emerging campus needs. The core of this evolution involves 13 recommendations for the second cycle and three future considerations:

Recommendations for the Second Cycle

1. Undertake targeted metric updates based on feedback received
2. Regularly update and verify metric data before annual cycles launch
3. Create a faculty working group 2.0 in AY 2026-27
4. Match check-in effort to prior-cycle program tier
5. Streamline templates and prepopulate from prior cycles
6. Align and deduplicate reporting
7. Be clear about purpose, roles, and decisions
8. Strengthen communication about campus-based supports and resources
9. Institutionalize cross-program learning
10. Improve communication and feedback with, and within, departments
11. Align check-ins with the refreshed strategic plan
12. Set baseline expectations for workload, timeline, and roles
13. Adjust cycle timing around faculty capacity

Future Considerations

1. Broaden what "counts" in metrics
2. Replace internal-distribution tiering with target-based benchmarks
3. Develop program typologies and allow adapted indicators

These recommendations and future considerations reflect 13 feedback themes described below. Three illustrative quotations for each theme aim to represent both the substance and the strength of that feedback. During feedback sessions, stakeholders often urged reconsideration of the annual cadence of the check-in process. However, the impending CU System APS 1046 policy (Academic Degree Program Annual Tracking and Reporting, introduced in draft form Dec. 19, 2025) will mandate that each campus maintain a documented process for carrying out annual reporting requirements. As a result, CU Denver's Program Check-Ins will continue on an annual basis, but the recommendations herein aim to reduce workload, improve clarity, and increase the usefulness of the process.

It may take several cycles to fully assess how the Annual Program Check-In process improves student outcomes, strengthens programs, and advances CU Denver's mission. In the meantime, one clear benefit has been the conversations it has enabled and structured among faculty, staff, and administrators in building shared awareness of program strengths, challenges, and opportunities. These recommendations are intended to carry that learning forward, ensuring a clear connection between the feedback received and how the second cycle and future iterations unfold.

I. Summary of the Process

In Fall 2023, CU Denver's Office of the Provost launched an Academic Transformation initiative to help CU Denver navigate an evolving higher education landscape. A charge of this project's Academic Program Viability and Curricular Innovation working group was to "develop a clear, data-informed, and transparent set of processes and protocols for the early ongoing detection and required realignment of academic programs to current workforce needs and learner demand."

Working group participants—representing a cross-section of faculty, staff, and academic leadership—responded to an identified need to develop an inclusive, systematic process to measure academic program viability and foster curricular innovation. The working group recommended initiating an annual check-in process for each academic program to guide strategic decisions for individual programs as well as the holistic curricular portfolios of each school and college. The check-ins were designed to include qualitative and quantitative measures that would, together, demonstrate program strengths as well as potential areas for improvement.

Beginning in January 2025, an Operations Team consisting of representatives from the Provost Team, University Communications and the Strategic Plan Team was assembled to determine how the process of annual check-ins would be operationalized, building on the operational plan developed by the working group (see Appendix A). The team developed operational, change management, training, and communications plans to support the implementation of the initiative and have met weekly for over a year to plan and orchestrate all components of this initiative.

The Operations Team designed and delivered a series of trainings, which were delivered in Spring 2025:

1. CU Denver Data Fundamentals (4 sessions): Overview of program data available in existing tools, such as University Dashboards and the Decision Support Toolkit
2. Annual Program Check-In Data (4 sessions): Discussion of expected components of Program Check-In dashboard content, including how the data is pulled and interpreted
3. Departmental Self-Study Orientation (3 sessions): Discussion of the self-study rubric and qualitative information to be gathered for the Program Check-In process.
4. Process Preview/Action Steps (2 sessions): Simulation activity in which participants analyze data for a hypothetical department to develop a mock action plan, to prepare programs/units for working with their own data
5. Roles and Decision-Making (1 session): Hosted by Interim Provost Pam Jansma and two faculty co-chairs from the working group, this discussion focused on the roles and responsibilities of academic leaders, faculty, and others in the Annual Program Check-In process

Sixty-nine individuals attended these trainings, with representation from each school and college.

In addition to these trainings, the operational team hosted regular weekly office hours to answer questions and discuss feedback on the process before it was rolled out formally. A follow-up refresher training was offered in September 2025.

The Operations Team provided regular updates to the provost and the deans during the early phases of the project. Guidance suggesting opportunities for how best to engage local communities within schools and colleges was provided at the beginning of each semester to support deans in planning how to facilitate this process with their program chairs and directors as well as with broader faculty and staff groups.

The Operations Team worked closely with the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation (OIRE) to develop a data dashboard specifically designed to support the Annual Check-In process, incorporating the metrics suggested by the working group. Data dashboards related to this process were introduced in August 2025. In addition, a template and submission portal for program self-studies launched in fall 2025.

Leveraging the information assembled about each program through the data dashboards and the self-study documentation, deans convened in December 2025 to review program performance and to norm with one another regarding program tiers and potential next steps.

Based on that discussion, deans assigned one of three tiers to each program in their portfolio:

- **Stable/Universal:** Program is below benchmark in only 1-2 areas of the combined data dashboard and self-study; program focuses on continuous improvement
- **Review Needed/Targeted:** Program is below benchmark in 3-5 areas of the combined data dashboard and self-study; program receives targeted supports
- **Highest-Priority Review/Intensive:** Program is below benchmark in 6 or more areas of the combined data dashboard and self-study; strategic reassessment of program is needed

In early 2026, deans met with the provost to review program tiers for each of the programs in their school or college. They then met with program chairs and directors to share tiering information and to initiate the action steps process. The Operations Team provided support through the creation of a template for action steps and a submission portal. As programs developed action steps, they were encouraged to leverage the Program Support Reference Guide with information about services and support available from campus units such as University Communications, SESS, and OIRE.

After each program submitted their action steps in March 2026, a process was launched to systematically collect feedback from campus stakeholders.

II. How We Obtained Feedback and From Whom

Campus Engagement and Feedback

In November 2024, the working group shared its recommendations with campus at an open forum that included presentations by each of the Academic Transformation working groups. Forum attendees had an opportunity to ask questions and share feedback about the working group’s recommendations. When the Program Check-Ins Operations Team assembled in January 2025, the group incorporated the feedback received.

From spring 2025 through early fall 2025, the Operations Team solicited feedback from the campus community while socializing the process and providing training on process components. The feedback led to several improvements to the process, timeline, and templates utilized. Other feedback, such as suggestions on changes to the metrics, was captured and catalogued to be considered for the second year of Program Check-Ins. In total, feedback was gathered from over 100 individuals.

Listening & Learning Process

How was feedback gathered?

In March and April 2026, feedback was gathered through a variety of methods as part of a Listening and Learning phase. This included two open-invitation campuswide information sessions, an anonymous survey, and individual meetings with stakeholders and groups.

Notably, the following groups made space and time for the Operations Team to join their regular meetings, present the process, and solicit feedback:

- Provost & Deans
- Chairs & Directors
- Associate Deans

Concurrently, Program Viability Implementation Working Group co-facilitators and participants each convened to elicit feedback. Feedback was also solicited from campus support units such as University Communications, OIRE, and SESS through an optional, anonymous survey.

What feedback was gathered?

Most feedback requests were tailored by audience and related to their specific role and experience.

Original Working Group and Co-Facilitator Questions

1. How well did the implemented check-in process reflect the original intent of the working group?
2. What have you heard from colleagues about this process (positive or negative feedback)?
3. How might you design the check-in process differently, based on what you now know?

Campus Feedback Session (Open Forum) Questions

1. From your perspective, what did the Annual Program Check-Ins accomplish?
2. Looking ahead, what updates to the Program Check-In process would you recommend?
3. What questions do you still have related to the Annual Program Check-Ins?

Deans and Associate Deans Meeting Questions

1. What aspects of the process supported constructive academic planning and portfolio management conversations?
2. Where did expectations about roles, authority, or follow-through feel clear, and where did they not?
3. Looking to the future, what actions or communications would strengthen the process?

Chairs/Directors Meeting Questions

1. What parts of the Annual Program Check-Ins were most useful for understanding your program's current position and future opportunities?
2. Now that you have gone through this process, what updates to the process would you recommend?
3. What do you still have questions about related to the Annual Program Check-Ins?

Campus Support Unit Questions

1. How many programs requested support from your unit to support their action steps?
2. How did the level of requested support compare to prior years (e.g. before we launched the Annual Program Check-In process)?
3. What kinds of support were requested from your unit?

The general questions posed in the anonymous survey and during campuswide feedback sessions were broader, and considered the varied experiences of the participants:

1. What parts of the Annual Program Check-In process worked well?
1. What specific recommendations for changes do you have to the Annual Program Check-In process?
2. What other feedback do you have about the Annual Program Check-In process?
3. Demographics:
    a. What best describes your role (Program Chair/Director, Dean, Associate Dean, Faculty, Staff, Other)
    b. Please select your school/college (BUS, CLAS, CAP, CAM, CEDC, SEHD, SPA, Other)
4. Please identify the ways in which you were involved in the Annual Program Check-In process. (Select all that apply)
    a. Reviewing dashboard data
    b. Contributing to self-study
    c. Developing action steps
    d. Attending trainings
    e. Engaging in conversations about Annual Program Check-Ins with school/college/department
    f. I was not asked to participate in the process
    g. Other (please specify – text box)

III. Feedback Themes and Implications

This section distills 13 themes documented in the feedback log. Under each theme, three representative excerpts from survey or discussion data are presented, followed by prospective implications. Survey or discussion responses often included multiple points or extended reflections. To support clarity and thematic analysis, excerpts below highlight portions of responses relevant to a theme. In a few cases, a single response or comment may be represented across multiple themes where portions addressed distinct issues. Excerpts may have been minimally edited for readability without altering their meaning.

1. The Annual Program Check-In process encouraged productive conversations

> *"The important part about this process were the conversations it spurred for programs whose leaders did not know how to have this kind of conversation."*
>
> *— Survey*

> *"[Check-In] … solidified things with data and forced us to talk about it."*
>
> *— April 8 Deans Feedback Session*

> *"Any process that encourages faculty involvement in examining evidence related to our work is a plus. Making metrics and data available is a norm we can benefit from in myriad ways, and it seems that feedback about the types of data and their nuances was encouraged. The process encouraged our dialogue and may well have led to organizational learning from this."*
>
> *— Survey*

Implications for Second Cycle

- Preserve the discussion-promoting facets of the process
- Encourage structured occasions for programs to examine data together for cross-program comparison
- Affirm that the conversations themselves, not only the artifacts produced, are a primary source of value
- Continue inviting faculty and staff participation at all levels of the process
- Maintain Operations Team responsiveness to questions and follow-up requests

2. Metrics/dashboard validity, alignment, clarity, and usability

> *"It would be helpful if, at the start of the process, the administration provided a sheet explaining how each of the metrics we are given were derived. As department chair, I spent a good amount of time asking OIRE how each of the metrics were calculated; I know that other chairs did as well.… It would likely save chairs' and OIRE's time if we were all given a sheet explaining how each of the metrics by which our programs are evaluated were derived."*
>
> *— Survey*

> *"It is problematic to use internal comparisons to set tiers—this is a moving target. While uniform benchmarking is challenging given the diversity of our university, the use of (some) external benchmarks based on market research would make better sense and a combination of shared and unique benchmarks might be possible."*
>
> *— Survey*

> *"When you do announce changes, can you give a clear description of the pre- and post- bases and metrics? This will help ease understanding."*
>
> *— April 21 Associate Deans Feedback Session*

Implications for Second Cycle

- Confirm completeness of data inputs
- Explain how transfer, part-time, dual-degree, secondary majors, service teaching to nonmajors, extended studies (D2), certificates, and microcredentials are considered
- Publish and share metric definitions and calculation methods, and provide a confirmation window to verify baseline figures before data are used
- Allow programs to qualify and contextualize metrics
- To the extent possible, move known structural adjustments upstream into metric design, rather than relying on programs to explain them
- Reconsider the use of internal-distribution-based tiering in favor of benchmarks tied to defined targets
- Add or refine indicators that align with stated student-success priorities
- Distinguish between metrics programs can act on and metrics that primarily reflect institution-level conditions

3. Workload burden, process efficiency, and timing

> *"The workload for chairs was much larger than anticipated… required multiple meetings and revisions… chairs acted as negotiators… this took a lot of time, effort, and skill…"*
>
> *— Survey*

> *"I found the action plan portion to be a real heavy lift in my college, because the dean had to approve the steps but so did the faculty. I was caught in the middle, that took many hours, and now the action steps are just sitting — it's the end of the semester, so we can't really act on them now."*
>
> *— April 14 Chairs and Directors Meeting*

> *"Across multiple initiatives [there is a] feeling of administrative work being pushed down to faculty. Support has not changed. This means chairs are creating committees and being pulled away from teaching and scholarship."*
>
> *— April 21 Associate Deans Feedback Session*

Implications for Second Cycle

- Confirm workload expectations in advance of the second cycle
- Confirm a timeline that accounts for chair, faculty, and staff capacity
- Clarify distinct roles and authorities of faculty, chairs, deans, and central administration in each phase
- Reduce required content to what is essential (eliminate fields that duplicate information captured elsewhere and fields asking about characteristics unlikely to change meaningfully year-over-year)
- Consider that some action steps require multiple years to implement and assess
- Prepopulate information from prior cycles

4. Template design and documentation clarity

> *"The self-study was not meaningful to the department: it was busywork… This was all information we knew… Remove/eliminate the self-study questions… it creates busywork… and pretends this is not about enrollment and student success metrics."*
>
> *— Survey*

> *"The questions (in the self-study) felt like one-time questions, one-and-done thing. But these things will not change within a year. If you want to continue that part, I would revisit what chairs are asked. 'Research strength' will not change in a year."*
>
> *— April 1 Campus Feedback Forum*

> *"The action steps were difficult, but also the writing of everything. If we can make it half as long (even just 200–250 words for each section)."*
>
> *— April 14 Chairs and Directors Meeting*

Implications for Second Cycle

- Shorten required responses and provide explicit length guidance for each section
- Remove sections that duplicate questions asked through other institutional processes or that are unlikely to change within a single cycle
- Align the qualitative prompts with the quantitative dashboard
- Affirm the action-steps component as the most useful element of the process (background or remove the self-study portion)

5. Resource Awareness and Support Infrastructure

Representative Quotations

> *"The Annual Program Check-In was presented to us as a way to provide support for units who need it. When and which form can we expect this support to come?"*
>
> *— Survey*

> *"I didn't see anyone looking for pockets of innovation, pilots to invest in, to see if [they are] transferable... How do we find these and see if they're transferable?"*
>
> *— April 28 Original Working Group Meeting*

> *"Are there commonalities in the resources that are being requested? Are there things that we should be doing universally—ways that we should be supporting programs as a whole?"*
>
> *— April 21 Associate Deans Feedback Session*

Implications for Second Cycle

- Describe what support looks like for programs identified as needing help
- Provide concrete examples of supports that have been effective
- Add a "support needed" field tied to action steps

- Make a particular effort to communicate support options to programs in lower tiers
- Maintain and communicate an inventory of central support units and their services
- Recognize that meaningful faculty participation outside the academic year may have workload implications

6. Governance and Decision-Making Transparency

> *"The uncertainty, and the question of 'What's done with this information?' What exactly is the point of this? Why are we doing this if nothing comes out of it?"*
> *— April 1 Campus Feedback Forum*

> *"As a first-year chair, I struggled with understanding the exact distinction between the approach I would take if it was a determinative process. As a department leader, managing the emotions around the process was challenging. But if it was a sensemaking process, I would take a different approach than I would if it was determinative. So that question of how will action steps be evaluated [needs to be clear], what is the implementation timeline? … so I can be as transparent with my faculty as possible."*
> *— April 14 Chairs and Directors Meeting*

> *"Phrasing of 'VIABILITY' created anxiety."*
> *— April 7 Campus Feedback Forum*

Implications for Second Cycle

- Define how check-in results inform decisions and communicate at what level and on what timeline decisions are made
- Include a clear statement of purpose in all materials
- Document how data and submitted content will be used/retained
- Clarify the relationship between the check-in process and other forms of program scrutiny
- Provide structured opportunities for two-way feedback after submission
- Reconsider terms such as "viability" that respondents identified as creating fear or adverse incentives
- Share aggregate findings and patterns across programs back to participants

7. Connection to program review and institutional processes

> *"The programs that had to do viability plus seven-year review this year really had a hard workload. Please consider streamlining or aligning these two processes."*
> *— Survey*

> *"My program does an annual national accreditation report each year, which overlaps heavily with this. Similar things with numbers, but asked in different ways, which adds to our time. But overall, I think it's great to know what your numbers are, and that you have strategic goals. So, I was able to leverage things but also had to double up between the two reports."*
> *— April 14 Chairs and Directors Meeting*

"We'd like cohesion between Annual Program Check-Ins, end-of-year reports, and seven-year reviews."

— April 21 Associate Deans Feedback Session

Implications for Second Cycle

- Identify and consolidate overlapping requirements across the check-in, seven-year program review, accreditation reporting, and CU System reporting (APS 1046)
- Allow programs undergoing a concurrent intensive review to substantially fulfill the check-in submission through that work
- Map the full landscape of program-level reporting obligations across the year
- Time the check-in cycle to minimize compounding burden

8. Context sensitivity across program types

"Here's the hard question moving forward: What needs to be same across schools and colleges, and what ought to be devolved and within what parameters can schools/colleges or programs vary in doing this work."

— Survey

"The process did not take into account unusual situations very well. We are an interdisciplinary program without rostered faculty. The student/course faculty ratios are all skewed for us. The process does not give allowances for these unique programs. At the college level, the metrics discrepancy was appreciated and understood. But the gathering of data to correct the metrics was not easily executed."

— April 14 Chairs and Directors Meeting

"Smaller programs feel they may not be getting credit—we need to figure out how to credit people in smaller programs that feed [larger ones]."

— April 8 Deans Feedback Session

Implications for Second Cycle

- Consider establishing program typologies to guide metric selection and interpretation
- Incorporate measures that recognize service contributions to institution-wide impact
- Shift responsibility for contextualization from programs to the system, where patterns are predictable
- Allow programs whose structure does not fit standard ratios to use alternative or adapted indicators
- Permit a single submission for closely related programs taught by overlapping faculty
- Avoid presenting comparisons across very different program types as equivalent

9. Cross-program learning and knowledge-sharing

"… annual retreat as infrastructure to support this process—these kind of specific details are great to mention in something like a newsletter for everyone to understand cross-campus practices—share different ways units are going about activating and gathering information from action steps to make helpful to others."

— April 1 Cofacilitator Meeting

“We should have a symposium [to share approaches] to make sure [annual check-in] is impactful.”

— April 8 Deans Feedback Session

“We should share [news of] action steps, the range of action steps, what’s working, what isn’t.”

— April 8 Deans Feedback Session

Implications for Second Cycle

- Identify priority topics for cross-program learning
- Build cross-program sharing into existing recurring meetings
- Create periodic occasions for programs to hear how others are approaching common challenges
- Surface action steps and approaches that produced positive outcomes
- Normalize the sharing of unsuccessful attempts as part of organizational learning
- Encourage and incentivize cross-program and cross-college collaboration

10. Flexibility and differentiation of process

“If a unit dips below a certain threshold, then trigger an online form submission and asking for a brief analysis and action steps.”

— Survey

“CLAS has a lot of programs. It's an especially heavy lift for our college to have [go through] every program. And thinking about 'is that what we need each year?' maybe a more frequent review is needed for programs in the lower third."

— April 1 Campus Feedback Forum

“Let’s have three to five critical metrics, one-page self-study, action steps based on previous cycle, etc.”

—April 8 Deans Feedback Session

Implications for Second Cycle

- Review thresholds or triggers that determine the depth of reporting required from a program in a given cycle
- Reduce requirements for programs that are consistently meeting key indicators
- Calibrate expectations to recognize what programs are already accomplishing
- Acknowledge that even programs in strong standing experienced demoralization when asked to “do more”

11. Strategic plan/APS 1046 alignment

“A larger question is whether we need to connect program viability to the strategic plan metrics and if so, how can we capture the data that [the] refresh[ed] strategic plan is calling for as part of this process?”

— Survey

"The campus as an ecosystem: we're looking at certain metrics on a program-by-program level… retention. Retention doesn't happen at a program level; it happens at a campus level."

— April 1 Campus Feedback Forum

"The fact is, things will get cut: we know that's going to happen [eventually]. This process isn't justifying or facilitating that. For me, it's how to innovate so you're not cut. How do you diversify what you do? This is a way to be ahead of that."

— April 1 Cofacilitator Meeting

Implications for Second Cycle

- Make explicit connections within the process among action steps, strategic plan goals, and APS 1046 indicators
- Recognize that some institutional outcomes are shaped by campuswide conditions, not solely by program-level action

12. Iterative process improvement and feedback responsiveness

"Since this was the first go-around, there needs to be time to make changes based on feedback from departments and colleges/schools. Requiring the Program Check-In annually means that mistakes are likely to be repeated which, ironically, negates the quality of the data gathered to inform policy/practice."

— Survey

"This was building the plane while flying it. I understand the next time, the order of things will be upped. It was being invented as we went along. I say this with care, but really making sure that the deans have as much info as possible before those in schools and college have to do the work. We can pave the way and ease the burden. I could have been given more tools to do that."

— April 7 Campus Feedback Forum

"People don't want to be 'acted upon'—[they] want to have agency and initiative [as check-in iterates]; [it is] hard to take away emotions."

— April 1 Cofacilitator Meeting

Implications for Second Cycle

- Establish a faculty advisory body (i.e., Working Group 2.0) for the check-in process
- At the start of each new cycle, publish refinements made in response to prior-cycle feedback
- Provide a consistent end-of-cycle feedback opportunity and share results back with participants

13. Renew emphasis on curricular innovation

"The original Working Group name was to include 'curricular innovation': So, where was the curricular innovation?"

— April 14 Chairs and Directors Meeting

“We never really got to the curricular innovation part of our work. At the end of the day, metrics and work [are] important and valuable, but if it doesn't lead to innovation, what was the point of it? [I] hope that can be part of it.”
— April 28 Original WG Meeting

“Our faculty, especially those programs that may have not fared well on the metrics, also came to [the] table with innovative ideas (despite any demoralizing feelings).”
— April 1 Campus Feedback Forum

Implications for Second Cycle

- Recenter curricular innovation as an explicit goal in the second cycle
- Encourage and share action steps for pilots, redesigns, new credentials, and curricular experiments
- Share and scale innovations across programs (chairs/directors forums, showcases, briefings)

IV. Recommendations

The following recommendations synthesize implications listed under each theme into a set of integrated changes for the second cycle and beyond. They are intended to address the most consistently expressed concerns from the first cycle while preserving elements participants identified as valuable. Because APS 1046 will require annual program tracking and reporting, the check-in cycle itself must remain annual to align with CU system policy moving forward.

1. Undertake targeted metric updates based on feedback received

Update specific metrics in alignment with feedback received throughout the process, while deferring other changes until additional consultation with deans and faculty takes place. Recommended adjustments (see table below) should make these measures more meaningful to programs and increase alignment across metrics to reduce potential confusion (see also Appendix B for additional metric revision context and rationale).

Metric	Recommended Revisions	Rationale
Application Volume	• Count unique applicants per program, instead of total applications • Include secondary majors	Prevents inflated counts for some programs with duplicate applications and more fully reflects applicant demand
Application Yield	• Count unique applicants per program, instead of total applications • Include secondary majors • Calculate yield based on number of admits	More fully reflects applicant demand and aligns with more commonly used yield metrics
Change in Enrollment	• Include both D1 and D2 enrollment • Include secondary majors	Ensures full representation of program enrollment and better alignment with program review metrics
Change in URM Enrollment	• Include both D1 and D2 enrollment • Include secondary majors	Ensures full representation of program enrollment and better alignment with program review metrics

Overall Retention Undergraduate	Include secondary majors from the cohort term	Ensures full representation in program cohorts
Transfer Student Retention	Include secondary majors from the cohort term	Ensures full representation in program cohorts
URM Retention	Include secondary majors from the cohort term	Ensures full representation in program cohorts
Graduation Rate	Include secondary majors from the cohort term	Ensures full representation in program cohorts
Total Student Credit Hours (Department)	• Shift to full year rather than fall term; update to most recent completed year • Include D1 and D2 instruction	Improves timeliness of data and alignment with other measures; including D2 more fully represents program activity
Change in Credit Hours (Department)	• Shift to full year rather than fall term; update to most recent completed year • Include D1 and D2 instruction	Improves timeliness of data and alignment with other measures; including D2 more fully represents program activity
Faculty Cost per Student Credit Hour (Department)	• Update to most recent completed year • Include D1 and D2 costs and credit hours	Improves timeliness of data and alignment with other measures. Including D2 more fully represents program activity
Student/Faculty Ratio (Department)	• Use faculty FTE rather than headcount • Update to most recent completed year • Include D1 and D2 enrollment and secondary majors	More accurately represent part-time faculty by adjusting for their employment percentage; including D2 more fully represents program activity and aligns to rostered faculty count

2. Regularly update and verify metric data before annual cycles launch
Review and verify updated metrics with a representative group of faculty (see recommendation #3) and OIRE before launch each fall. Publish a single master document defining each metric, its data source, calculation method, inclusions, and exclusions. Give every department chair and/or program director a baseline-verification window prior to dashboard release.

3. Create a faculty working group 2.0 in AY 2026-27
Create an updated faculty Working Group 2.0, to be charged by the provost, that includes former working group members, cofacilitators, and faculty governance representatives to provide both continuity of goals and evolution of process. If appropriate, provide stipends in recognition of the workload.

4. Match check-in effort to prior-year program tier
Programs that meet key indicators might complete a very light annual touch (for example, a brief confirmation, lightly updated self-study, and a short status note on previously committed action steps). Programs whose indicators fall below defined thresholds, or that are otherwise flagged, would complete a deeper submission with a more substantive narrative about action steps taken. This preserves CU Denver's ability to satisfy APS 1046 annually, gives the institution a continuous picture of individual program and portfolio health, and directly addresses feedback on workload by asking for proportionate effort rather than a uniform full lift from every program every year. All programs will continue to participate annually, though the depth of reporting and analysis may vary proportionate to program context and prior-cycle standing.

5. Streamline templates and prepopulate from prior cycles
Shorten required narrative responses with explicit length limits (e.g., from 500 words to 200–250 words per section). Prepopulate templates from prior submissions and existing data sources. Consider affirming the action-steps component as a central element of the process moving forward.

6. Align and deduplicate reporting
Map every program-level reporting obligation across the year (check-in, seven-year review, accreditation, HLC, APS 1046) to identify and remove duplications. Allow programs in concurrent intensive review (such as the seven-year cycle or accreditation) to substantially fulfill the check-in obligation through that work.

7. Be clear about purpose, roles, and decisions
Publish on the check-in website at the start of the cycle, and embed in materials, a clear statement of (a) the purpose of the check-in, (b) how submissions are used and retained, (c) roles and authorities of faculty, chairs, deans, and central administration in each phase, (d) who makes what decisions and when, and (e) how the check-in relates to other forms of program analysis including APS 1046 and Regents-level review. The Operations Team recommends dissuading use of the term “viability” in process-related communications.

8. Strengthen communication about campus-based supports and resources
Add a “support needed” field tied to each action step. Maintain and publicize a current inventory of central support units and their services (building on the current Supports Menu). Share concrete examples of supports that have produced results. Create clearer pathways to support innovative ideas (e.g., seed funding, pilots, and experiments).

9. Institutionalize cross-program learning
Share and scale innovations across programs (via events such as chairs/directors forums, showcases, and briefings). Use existing recurring venues to surface action steps that produced wins, and to normalize sharing of what did not work. Consider a campus symposium for inter-college collaboration and scaled innovation planning.

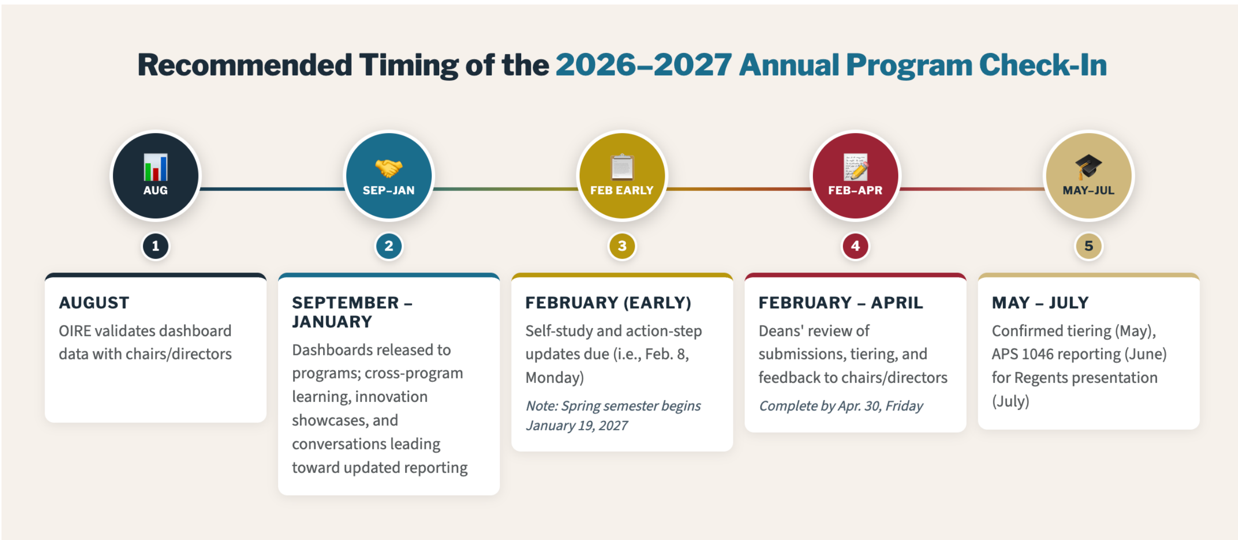
10. Improve communication and feedback with, and within, departments
Ensure full engagement of program faculty and staff in the check-in process. Provide structured responses after submissions, with an interactive discussion or written feedback at minimum. Hold a consistent end-of-cycle feedback opportunity and publish a “what we learned/changed” summary at the start of each new cycle so that participants see how their input shaped the design.

11. Align check-ins to the refreshed strategic plan
Build prompts directly into the action steps template that ask programs to identify connections to strategic plan goals. When reporting out on strategic plan “wins,” acknowledge the work of academic programs toward CU Denver’s goals and mission.

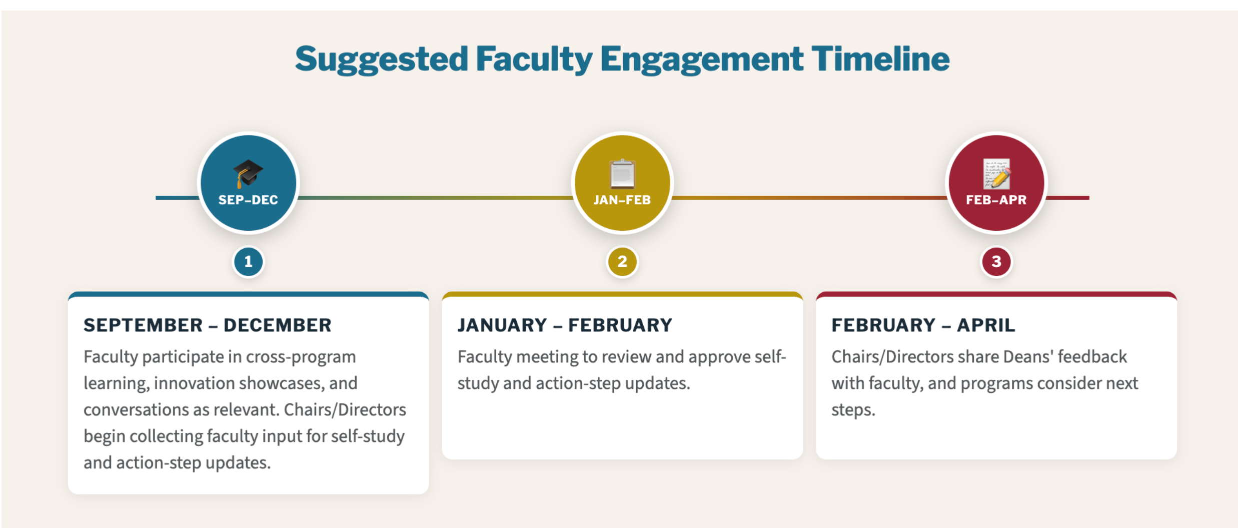
12. Set baseline expectations for workload, timeline, and roles
Confirm workload expectations in advance of each cycle and publish an example timeline that reflects faculty, chair/director, and staff capacities. Clearly define roles and responsibilities across all phases, including who does what and when, and where decision authority resides.

Align workload, timing, and governance so the process is predictable, transparent, and manageable for participants.

13. Time the cycle around faculty capacity
Moving much of the Check-In cycle work to the spring semester was repeatedly suggested. The following graphic outlines the recommended timing of milestones for a prospective spring-semester-focused cycle. Actual due dates and timeframes would be confirmed and communicated later.



In a spring-centric cycle, faculty engagement might resemble the following (for illustration only).



Considerations for Future Cycles

Following are some additional prospective updates the Operations Team recommends considering for future cycles, following the collection of further input and coordination.

1. Broaden what "counts" in metrics
Incorporate student outcomes for part-time students and those changing majors, subplan visibility, service teaching to non-majors, and contributions of certificates and microcredentials, among other variables. Move structural adjustments upstream into metric design so that programs need not explain why default ratios may misrepresent their programs.

2. Replace internal-distribution tiering with target-based benchmarks
Move from comparing programs against one another (which guarantees a bottom tier, regardless of absolute performance) to defined, publicly stated targets keyed to program type and mission, supplemented where possible with external benchmarks. Identify opportunities to align benchmark metrics with strategic plan measures of success, once those are finalized.

3. Develop program typologies and allow adapted indicators
Establish typologies (e.g., interdisciplinary programs without rostered faculty, large service-teaching programs, specialized programs, programs spanning multiple departments, etc.) and pair each typology with a metric set and reporting expectations that fit. Permit a single submission for closely related programs taught by overlapping faculty.

Appendix A

The Academic Program Viability and Curricular Innovation working group report included an operational plan, represented below.

Draft Implementation Plan

Starting in 2025												
Tasks	**J**	**F**	**M**	**A**	**M**	**J**	**J**	**A**	**S**	**O**	**N**	**D**
Receive approval from executive leadership to implement recommendations												
Identify involved teams (Provost Team, Deans, Associate Deans, OIRE, UComm, SESS, Faculty Assembly) and finalize training schedule and data literacy materials												
Finalize metrics and benchmarks: validate value drivers and metrics (e.g., retention, enrollment) and align benchmarks with institutional goals												
Refine dashboards, automate data processes, and test tools internally with OIRE and select faculty/staff												
Collaborate with UComm to create informational emails, announcements, and pilot-overview materials												
Host introductory meetings with department chairs, deans, and program leaders to outline pilot objectives												
Distribute training materials (self-study guides, DSTk instructions, mock scenarios)												
Begin data literacy and DSTk usage workshops for faculty and staff												
Develop tools for feedback collection (e.g., surveys, focus group plans)												

Use a small group of programs to test the check-in process, identifying and refining potential issues												
Resolve logistical or technical challenges discovered during pre-pilot testing												
Prepare key team members (e.g., department chairs, OIRE staff) to train others in their departments or units												
Distribute detailed instructions and host Q&A sessions for program leaders about the annual check-in and tiered support process												
Ensure all automated data for the DSTk is accurate and ready for deployment												
Prepare internal communications detailing key dates, expectations, and next steps												
Conduct a complete walkthrough with selected departments, including mock data reviews, tier placement, and action plan creation												
Provide standardized templates for Targeted and Intensive tier programs to draft strategic action plans												
Collect participant insights from the simulation to refine the process, tools, and templates												
Begin the official check-in process, distributing DSTk data and metrics to programs												
Categorize programs into Universal, Targeted, or Intensive tiers based on check-in results												
Provide standardized templates for Targeted and Intensive tier programs to draft strategic action plans												

Collaborate with Targeted and Intensive tier programs to develop action plans with administrative support												
Schedule follow-ups with participants to gather insights on the launch and make real-time adjustments												
Planning and implementation of action plans												
Transition to 2026												
Tasks	**J**	**F**	**M**	**A**	**M**	**J**	**J**	**A**	**S**	**O**	**N**	**D**
Planning and implementation of action plans												
Review outcomes from initial implementation, including feedback on tools, clarity of tier placement, and action plan feasibility												
Develop a timeline and strategy for mid-pilot feedback collection and continuous process improvement.												
Implementation of plans and evaluation of actions												
Adjust processes, training, and tools based on initial observations and participant feedback												

Appendix B: Metrics Recommendations Overview

Cross-cutting process recommendations

- Revise all metric documentation for clarity and specificity, including detailed notations of all metric changes for the second cycle in AY 2026-27.
- Expand and enhance supplemental data resources that support program narrative development and further understanding of the metrics. Examples may include:
    - More prominent links to existing data resources and/or creation of new supplemental dashboards that show frequently requested detail—e.g., sub-plans within majors, service teaching credit hours taught to non-majors.
    - Refine and simplify the statistical distribution visualizations and other drill-down data resources for increased usability.
- Add more explanatory text and consider modifying the visual presentation to further clarify why the for–credit hour and cost-related metrics are aggregated to a department (rather than individual program) level. Create a supplemental data resource that further details how specific components of the metrics (credit hours, faculty headcount, etc.) are mapped to the department(s) shown.
- To streamline tracking and response for the OIRE team, create a more formalized process (form and/or email contact point) to capture and triage metric-related questions and feedback. This should be in place before preliminary review begins to ensure accurate feedback capture.
- As noted elsewhere, a window for prepublication data review and feedback is recommended. This will require some modification to the data release schedule to build in time for gathering feedback and any needed adjustments by the OIRE team.
- *Topics requiring continued consultation*:
    - External benchmarking and internal target-setting. While these approaches do offer potential advantages, external comparative data are not consistently available at the program level for most of the metrics. In addition, an internal target-setting approach would require considerable consultation and decision-making by leadership to execute effectively.

Recommendations for definitional updates that affect multiple metrics

- For consistency and clarity, include both state-funded (D1) and extended studies (D2) enrollment in all relevant metrics. This increases alignment both within the program check-in metrics and with program review. It also addresses a concern of incompleteness expressed by programs that have a mix of D1 and D2 activity.
- Align timeframe across metrics by moving budget and credit hour measures to the most recent completed fiscal year.
    - For example, Faculty Cost per Credit Hour will now be based on the most recently closed fiscal year (FY 2025-26) and Student Credit Hours (Summer 2025 through Spring 2026). This will now align with admissions (FY 2025-26) and enrollment (Fall 2025).

    - With this adjustment, data for the Faculty Cost per Credit Hour metric will not be available after fiscal year-end financial close is completed (no earlier than August 1, with additional time needed to incorporate those data prior to release).
- For inclusivity, include all declared majors in the program, rather than primary major (unduplicated) counts. In addition, add links to supplemental data resources that show programs the impact of this change and explain the difference between this and more typical unduplicated counts.

<u>Metrics Recommendations Detail</u>

Application Measures: Application Volume, Application Yield

- Update definition from application counts to unique applicants per program. This resolves an issue for some programs in which multiple application records per student were inflating application volume and reducing yield.
- Calculate enrollment yield based on the number of admits, rather than the number of applicants. This compares enrollment more directly to the pool of eligible enrollees (admits) and aligns with more commonly referenced yield metrics.
- Include all majors from the application rather than primary major only. This mostly impacts undergraduate programs.

Enrollment Measures: Change in Enrollment, Change in URM Enrollment

- Include both state-funded (D1) and extended studies (D2) enrollment. This addresses an issue by which exclusively D2 programs show no enrollment information. This also aligns with program review metrics.
- Include all declared majors, rather than primary major only. This mostly impacts undergraduate programs.

Retention/Graduation Measures: Overall Retention Undergraduate, Transfer Student Retention, URM Retention, Graduation Rate

- Include all declared majors from the cohort term, rather than primary major only. This mostly impacts undergraduate programs.
- *Topics requiring continued consultation*:
    - Including part-time students in cohorts: while this would increase the cohort representation, it would also reduce alignment with program review and proposed strategic plan metrics. It would also generally lower the retention and graduation rates currently shown.
        - However, supplemental data resources can be added this cycle to show part-time or overall cohorts for comparative purposes.
    - Additional metrics and/or supporting resources to track success of undergraduate students who declare the program beyond their initial term. This needs additional research and discussion to determine what metric would be most useful and broadly applicable to all programs.

Credit/Cost Measures: Total Student Credit Hours, Change in Credit Hours, Faculty Cost per Student Credit Hour, Student/Faculty Ratio

- OIRE to conduct a targeted review of existing DSTk department mappings, focusing on interdisciplinary and other programs with less clear departmental alignment. Any opportunities for enhancement are reviewed with affected programs for updates prior to metric finalization. In some cases, program-to-department alignment will remain imperfect due to data source and business process limitations.
- Update Total Student Credit Hours and Change in Credit Hours to a fiscal year timepoint rather than Fall. This will reduce confusion by aligning with the fiscal year–based Faculty Cost per Student Credit Hour metric.
- Change the faculty count in the Student/Faculty Ratio to use full-time equivalent (FTE), rather than headcount. Several programs noted that including the full headcount of part time instructors and lecturers overestimates the faculty in their program.
- Include both state-funded (D1) and extended studies (D2) credit hours, enrollment, and faculty cost across all four measures.
  - As with the other measures, this more fully represents the activity of programs with substantial D2 activity.
  - This also addresses a concern that the Student/Faculty Ratio was artificially low for some programs with high D2 enrollment (the faculty headcount used in the metric includes all rostered faculty regardless of funding source).
- Include all declared majors in the Student/Faculty Ratio, rather than primary major only.