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## **Transcript - Gathering Information**

You may decide that you need more information before choosing your next goal. There are different ways to do this and the method that's best for your campus may depend on what kind of information you need most, and maybe what you already have. Commonly used options are self-assessment surveys, policy and protocol reviews, formal surveys, conversations with key stakeholders, and focus groups. Let's look at each of these in a bit more detail:

One way to get information is through a campus self-assessment. A self-assessment tool is available on our website – just follow the link in the information section about this video. Typically, a small team collects responses from relevant offices across campus, as well as from off-campus organizations that have contact with students. For example, it can be very helpful to get data from the counseling center on things like the number of students who use counseling services, average number of visits, demographics of students seeking counseling, and the number of students who report suicidal ideation or attempts. You might also find data on the number of students transported to the hospital and for what reasons (e.g., suicidal thoughts, a suicide attempt, potential threat to others, or substance abuse issues). From the local hospital, you might gather information on how many students were seen or hospitalized for suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and substance use concerns. A memorandum of understanding may first need to be in place in order to share this information. See the “Gathering Information” handout for additional ideas of records and information you might consider gathering from offices on campus.

A review of your campus's existing policies and protocols is essential to creating a campus-wide coordinated response to student crises. It is not unusual for various offices to already have guidelines and procedures, but for those to vary and even contradict one another. Also, key people may not always know about existing policy; sometimes documents are written and stored but not used regularly. And sometimes practices are commonly used but not written down. For example, academic affairs may have informal unwritten procedures in place allowing students in crisis to withdraw from most of their classes but take incompletes in one or two courses that they feel they can successfully complete. However, if this is practice is not documented, it is likely to be inconsistently applied across students. Furthermore, the registrar's office and financial aid may not have protocols in place that would support this particular scenario. So, it's important to collect existing documents and formalize unwritten practices. Then consider how written protocols should be stored and shared with key people. This can be especially helpful in clarifying your campus plan for responding to distressed students.



Many campuses participate in one or more formal surveys that gather data on student well-being. For example, your campus may use one of these:

- American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment (NCHA)
- Association for University and College Counseling Center Director's Survey
- Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH) survey
- Healthy Minds Study

If your campus does not participate in any formal national surveys, perhaps it collects data on student well-being in a survey developed by your institution. Think about what offices might be in charge of collecting this type of data. You'll probably want to check in with student affairs and your assessment coordinator, and perhaps other relevant offices on your campus. If your campus does not collect any data on student well-being, this may be something you want to consider doing in the future.

You can also gather very useful information through conversations with key stakeholders, such as staff members in the counseling center, residence life, campus security, and student conduct, as well as the dean of students or even someone from the emergency room at the local hospital. Ask them what they are already doing, if anything, related to student well-being or suicide prevention. What do they see as the strengths of the campus in this area as well as the biggest problem areas or risks that need to be addressed? What went well the last time a student was in crisis, and what challenges did they encounter? What changes would they like to see? Also, what policies or protocols do they already have in place relevant to this topic? Getting different perspectives from those that regularly interact with students will help ensure you are selecting the most beneficial goals and strategies for your campus.

Finally, and depending on what you've learned so far, you may consider holding focus groups. For example, let's say you've learned from the campus counseling center that students' most frequent reason for seeking help is anxiety related to academic work. A focus group with faculty or students could help you better understand common challenges and even brainstorm options for supports. Likewise, if you learn that campus police report transporting an increasing number of students to the hospital for substance related issues, a focus group with students might help you determine what does and does not work related to substance use prevention on campus.

While you could certainly spend a year gathering information, we imagine most campuses will want to move into action sooner rather than later. That's okay, and there are definitely some essential supports that need to be in place on any campus. We'll talk about those next. We just want to emphasize the importance of using some kind of data to guide your planning. Doing so will help to ensure your work is as efficient and as effective as possible.