

Fast-tracking success:

How colleges and universities can reap the benefits of coalitions by redefining these partnerships.

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- No doubt, higher education is no stranger to the formation of consortia and coalitions. During these challenging times, it's no surprise more leaders are evaluating consortia and coalitions with greater interest.
- These partnerships can be an effective way for colleges and universities of all sizes and missions to share knowledge in pursuit of long-term success.
- Coalitions may benefit their members in meaningful ways including cost efficiency, innovation, research, cybersecurity intelligence, and data sharing between compatible schools, among others.
- This white paper offers four key questions that you should answer before joining a coalition.



I'm a firm believer in the power of shared knowledge, resources, and services. In fact, our business is built on success through shared IT and data services – just like a coalition. A private business, like our company, may not traditionally be thought of as a coalition in higher education. However, **the value and benefits of pooling resources and collaboration among many institutions to tackle some of higher education's most pressing challenges makes established partnership models a potential fast-track to institutional success.**

Regardless of the mission and goals of an institution, **a combination of access to clean data, high-level talent, and best practices that lead to strategic and efficient technology services is vital to success.** Because we serve a variety of institutions across the country with customized technical, functional and process solutions, Dynamic Campus partners benefit from the collective knowledge we've gathered from our coalition of higher education institutions as we provide those proven skills, solutions, and best practices, all while maintaining each institution's individual identity and mission.

Tighter budgets, increasing costs, and downward-trending enrollment rates are leading more higher education leaders to consider joining a coalition, partnering in a merger, or making an acquisition in search of affordable solutions. However, campus presidents, their cabinets, and their boards may face unanticipated headwinds given the complexity of pulling off such partnerships successfully. **Without a deep diagnosis of what's below the surface – including issues with data and technology, staffing expertise and scalability – joining a coalition in and of itself won't provide either short-term relief or longevity in the business of higher education.**



Joining a coalition can be a lengthy, complicated process and potentially a drain on what are probably already stressed human resources. **So if you're considering joining a coalition to solve IT and data problems, here are four questions you should ask yourself** based on best practices gleaned from my experience and conversations with dozens of higher education leaders over more than 20 years. The answers will put you on a path to making the right decision.

01 Have you thoroughly assessed your challenges?

Not unlike renovating or remodeling a home, your end result may be highly dependent on unseen factors. You have a great design from a well-reputed architect, but can your house's wiring handle the new lighting requirements? Do you have enough electrical power to run all the new appliances? Is your foundation sturdy enough to support the new walls?

It's easy to see the negative domino effect of building on shaky ground. Applying this thinking to a college or university, these are some data and IT issues to consider: **how clean is your data? Do your data systems talk to each other effectively? Can you build reports that draw data from more than one system? What is the depth of up-to-date IT expertise in your technology division?**

So, you must dig deeply into every aspect of your current operations and budget to fully understand where you are before making decisions about where you want to go and how you're going to get there. This is often difficult as it relates to understanding your technology ecosystem. After all, college and university leaders are focused on their mission and vision, not on evaluating technology solutions.

02 Have you looked at a map of your data systems' structure?

This may seem like an overly technical question, but it's a key point. Institutions of higher education are becoming more and more technology-driven and dependent on accurate data in every aspect of student life from admissions to remote learning systems to campus social networks. **Having trustworthy data is now essential.**

Even a non-technical layman can recognize clarity, complexity, or convolution when looking at a diagram of how all your institution's systems either do or don't talk to each other. You definitely don't want a map that's difficult to understand with illogical connections between systems.

Again, even someone who's not a technologist can ask "Where's this data coming from?" "Why are there two systems providing similar information?" "Why does the registrar use a different database than finance?" Also consider that data is like a river; the flow must be correct and the inputs must be clean and consistent for it to have value. Conversely, it's unavoidable that if your data is inaccurate, or if the flow is diverted by a technical dam, or if data is not consistently entered, decisions will be faulty. That's why **understanding the existing architecture is critical to any further steps you consider.** It's foundational to understanding whether the coalition can actually solve your underlying problems.

03 Is your CIO or IT leader part of your mission-critical decision team?

Historically thought of as a back office function, **you now need to think about information technology and data as the most strategic and potentially hindering tools at your disposal.** IT and data have the power to hold you back or move you forward, coalition or not. Without your IT leader acting as a trusted advisor and sometimes technology translator, it'll be difficult to have full understanding of, or accurate budgeting for, recommended solutions.

And while the mission of higher education remains to prepare students for life after graduation, the ways in which you provide that education, in whole or in part, are powered by technology. Considering that virtually all incoming students will have matured in a post-pandemic, remote-access, technology-driven world, you need to match their expectations of digital experiences -- not only in the classroom, but across every aspect of their life on your campus.

04 Do you have specific needs you're looking to fulfill through the coalition?

You should fully understand the advantages and resources of the coalition and determine if they'll fulfill the needs that initially drove you to consider joining the group.

If you're thinking about **sharing academic programs or back office functions,** consider that to do so effectively and efficiently, it's important to consider whether your technology and data is in a position that will allow you to be an effective member of an academic program or back office consortium. It's very difficult to share information across disparate systems, so your coalition will need to have a strategy for utilizing the existing data of each member across those shared systems and assessing whether the definitions for data terms are consistent across organizations, which can be complex.

Or, maybe you're anticipating that you can **lower your IT budget** through a coalition by sharing technology services. Keep in mind that you'll have to think about integrating applications, perhaps sharing enterprise resource planning systems (ERPs), business processes and rules, admissions systems, and more. You may be trading one expense for another. Oftentimes, adapting your data to work within a new ecosystem is more challenging than updating your own systems and processes or cleaning your data to become more useful.

Dynamic Campus offers a fast track to the advantages of a coalition without the time and expense it takes to vet, join, or create one on your own. Our partner institutions gain all the advantages of our 20+ years 100% focused on higher education because we share the knowledge and experience we've gained with every institution we work with. This is not a new concept for us. Shared and managed IT and data services have always been the cornerstone of our business model.

Our knowledge bases enable us to immediately share best practices and operational processes, saving you time in answering the question "How do we get from here to there?" **And because we've negotiated countless software and service contracts, the ways in which we can reallocate your existing IT spend or reduce costs overall are proven methodologies for us.** In short, we've done some of this research for you.



Importantly, **Dynamic Campus is vendor-independent.** This means that our recommendations are motivated by your success and aligned with your goals. And since we've benchmarked operating costs and contracts from our partners, we can quickly tell you if you have solid solutions in place at the best price.

As your IT managed services partner, Dynamic Campus offers a deep pool of knowledge and expertise that's customized and shaped to help you solve your institutional problems without compromising who you are. Working in a highly collaborative, efficient manner, we'll help you identify key objectives, strategize the best paths forward, and execute on your plans, all within a framework customized for your success. **You'll gain all the advantages of a coalition while keeping your institutional goals, mission and identity.**

For more information on how you can take advantage of the power of Dynamic Campus to accelerate your success in higher education, contact us today.

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