MLDS Center
Maryland Longitudinal Data System

Better Data • Informed Choices • Improved Results

July 1, 2025

Process for Reviewing and Revising the MLDS Center Research Agenda

Process for Revising MLDS Center Research Agenda

I.   Overview

The Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) Center receives data from multiple sources to establish a data system that contains detailed information about Maryland students, their educational experiences and outcomes, their interaction with child welfare and juvenile services, the degrees and credentials they obtain, and their workforce experiences and outcomes. State law directs the Center to use the MLDS to conduct research to improve the State's education system and guide decision making by state and local governments, educational agencies, institutions, teachers, and other education professionals.

As required by state law, the MLDS Governing Board is required to establish a Research Agenda that:

   I.   Delineates the Governing Board's priorities for research topics and areas of analysis;
   II.   Establishes the parameters for acceptable use of the system;
   III. Ensures that the work of the Center is in compliance with statutory requirements;
   IV.   Provides guidance to the Center on annual output priorities, and
   V.   Informs the decision on approval of research and reporting project proposals.

On June 9, 2023, the MLDS Governing Board approved the current version of the Research Agenda, which became effective July 1, 2024. The approved research agenda includes a review and revision schedule. A consistent review and revision schedule ensures that the mission of the MLDS Center remains focused on generating timely and accurate information about student performance that can be used to improve the State's education system and guide decision makers at all levels. The review and revision scheduled is to be completed by the MLDS Center, in consultation with the Research and Policy Advisory Board, to make sure the agenda reflects the needs and priorities of the State of Maryland.

This document outlines the process for reviewing and revising the Research Agenda, including engaging stakeholders in the review and revision process, and submitting the revised agenda to the Governing Board. Once approved, the Research Agenda is posted to the MLDS Center website.

II.   Timeline for Reviewing the Research Agenda

Effective July 1, 2025, the Research Agenda will be reviewed every five years unless otherwise directed by the Governing Board. The review schedule is as follows:

Review Initiated	Stakeholder Review Initiated	Presented to Governing Board
January 2022	*January 2023*	*June 2024**
March 2029	August 2029	June 2030
March 2034	August 2034	June 2035
March 2039	August 2039	June 2040

*Current research agenda adopted during the June 2024 Governing Board meeting.

In a review year, the timeline and key components are outlined in the table below. Two forums are involved in the review and revision of the Research Agenda[1]:

  I.   Output Meeting: An internal staff meeting held on the second Tuesday of each month.
  II.   Research and Policy Advisory Board (RPB) meeting: An external stakeholder meeting held on the first Thursday of each month.

Month	Meeting	Activity
March, April & May	Output Meeting	Internal staff discuss the review process and gather any materials needed for the review. Internal staff complete the process outlined in Section III below. Internal staff identify if any categories or themes in the current Research Agenda were NOT used in the current fiscal year.
June & July	Output Meeting	Internal staff continue the review process and prepare materials for the August Research and Policy Advisory Board meeting. See Section III item 2 (data collections).
August	RPB Meeting	Preliminary revisions are presented to RPB for discussion. Additional suggestions for revisions are collected from RPB.
September, October & November	Output Meeting	Based upon RPB feedback, internal staff make revisions to the Research Agenda and prepare materials for the revised Research Agenda for the January RPB meeting.
January	RPB Meeting	The revised Research Agenda is presented to RPB for feedback.
February & March	Output Meeting RPB Meeting Governing Board Meeting	If necessary, internal staff make additional changes to the Research Agenda. A draft of the agenda is presented at the March RPB meeting and a summary of planned changes are presented at the March Governing Board meeting.
May & June	RPB Meeting	The revised Research Agenda is presented to RPB for final review.
June	Governing Board Meeting	The revised agenda is presented to the Governing Board for adoption for the next fiscal year. If the Board does not approve the revisions the current agenda remains in effect until the Board approves revisions. Note: the Board may request additional revisions to the agenda during the June meeting.
July	n/a	Post the revised Research Agenda to the MLDS Center website.

Once the Research Agenda is finalized all other policy and process documents must be reviewed to determine if revisions are required.

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[1]The Research Agenda, as of FY2024, includes both categories of research and themes for research. All work conducted under this agenda requires the selection of at least one category and one theme.

III.   Process for Reviewing and Revising the Research Agenda

The following considerations are used during internal staff Output meetings to review the existing Research Agenda and determine if revisions are required. The resulting analysis may 1) require small descriptive changes in narratives for each Research Agenda category and/or theme, 2) the addition or removal of example questions for each Research Agenda category and/or theme, 3) require the addition or removal of categories and/or themes, or 4) require major revisions to the entirety of the research agenda.

1. MLDS Center Organizational Considerations

Changes to the mission and structure of the MLDS Center may have direct impacts on the type of research agenda the Center has capacity to pursue. The following questions help assess the potential impact that changes in the MLDS Center mission and structure could have on the scope of the research agenda:

a. MLDS Center Mission
   i. Has the mission of the MLDS Center changed? Does the Research Agenda still align and support the MLDS Center mission?
   ii. Have the by-laws been changed? Does the change to the by-laws impact the scope and focus of the research agenda?
   iii. Does the MLDS Center have a strategic plan, key performance indicators or other metrics that impact the scope and focus of the research agenda?
b. Legislation
   i. Have there been any changes to the enabling MLDS legislation (Ed. Art. § 24-701 et seq., Annotated Code of Maryland) that changes the operating parameters of the Center? Does that change impact the scope and focus of the Research Agenda?
   ii. Have there been changes to partner agency/data sharing partner legislation that may have an impact on the Research Agenda. Does that change impact the scope and focus of the research agenda?
c. MLDS Center Governing Board
   i. Have the agencies represented on the Governing Board changed? Does that change impact the scope and focus of the research agenda?
   ii. Has the Governing Board identified any priorities or areas of focus since the last review? Can they be addressed under the existing research agenda?
d. MLDS Center Staffing and Advisory Boards
   i. Have any of the following changed, and do those changes impact the scope and focus of the Research Agenda or impact the research and reporting that can be completed?
      a) Has the staffing of the MLDS Center changed? Have liaisons been added or removed? Have the branch directors been added or removed?
      b) Has the advisory board structure of the MLDS Center changed?
e. MLDS Center Budget
   i. Has the budget of the MLDS Center changed?

    a) Does the change expand capacity? Reduce capacity? Support securing external data (for example, National Student Clearinghouse)?

    b) Did the Center receive a grant or other funding that is focused on a specific research topic?

2. Data Collections

All work conducted by the MLDS Center is driven by the data contained within the System. The list of current data collections is maintained here: https://mldscenter.maryland.gov/Collect.html). Changes in data availability, additions of new data, or removal of existing data, have a direct impact on the types of research and reporting that can be completed by the Center. The following questions help assess the potential impact that changes in data availability may have on the scope of the research agenda:

    a. Have any data collections been added? If so, do they align to the existing research agenda?

    b. Have any data collections been removed? If so, should any components of the Research Agenda be retired?

    c. Have any data collections been revised (data elements added/removed)? If so, do those elements align to the existing research agenda? Does their removal require any component of the Research Agenda to be retired?

    d. Have any data gaps been closed?

    e. Have any data gaps been added?

    f. Are there any new data sharing agreements with third parties? Including other states or entities such as the Census or Coleridge Initiative?

3. Annual Research and Reporting Priorities

The work of the MLDS Center is guided by annual research and reporting priorities. This section of questions considers the work completed under the research and reporting priorities to determine if the priorities align to the scope and focus of the research agenda. The following questions help assess the potential impact that prior and current priorities may have on the scope of the research agenda:

    a. List the research and reports that have been completed in the last two fiscal years (See: https://mldscenter.maryland.gov/AnnualPriorities.html).

        i. Are there examples of completed work under each component of the research agenda? Are there any components of the agenda that did not have at least one approved research or report? Do any components have such a large volume of projects that the component should/could be split into subcategories or sub-themes?

        ii. What sectors do the research and reports fall under?

        iii. Do all approved items align to the existing Research Agenda?

        iv. Were any projects denied because they did not fit within the Research Agenda?

    b. Legislative Mandates

i. Are there any legislative mandates to produce reports or dashboards that do not align with the current research agenda?
ii. Were there any legislative mandates to produce reports that were removed?

4. State of Maryland Priorities & Emerging Issues

The MLDS Center's mission is to conduct research to improve the State's education system and guide decision making by state and local governments, educational agencies, institutions, teachers, and other education professionals. This section of questions considers the impact of the work of other state agencies on the Center's Research Agenda. The following questions help assess the potential impact that changes in state priorities may have on the scope of the research agenda:

a. Review the priorities of the Governor and each state agency sharing data with MLDS Center (include the State Plan for Higher Education, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, etc.).
    i. Do the priorities and state agency plans align to the existing research agenda?
b. Are there any emerging issues identified that fall within the mission of the MLDS Center that are not addressed by the scope and focus of the research agenda?
c. Review meeting minutes from Governing Board meetings and RPB meetings -- are research and reporting topics discussed that do not fall within the scope and focus of the research agenda? Would research or reporting on suggested topics require revision or expansion of the Research Agenda?

IV. Process for Submitting Research Agenda Revisions to the Governing Board

a. Governing Board meeting: Quarterly meetings are held on the second Friday of March, June, September, and December. The Research Agenda will be presented at the June meeting.
b. Notice of revisions are provided to the Board via memorandum in advance of the meeting. The memorandum provides a brief description of the proposed changes.
c. Board members should also be informed of Research Agenda discussions and revisions from their representatives on the RPB.
d. During the Board meeting, Board members review the proposed changes and suggest additional changes and adjustments/refinements to the proposed changes.