

Application Instructions

2025-2026 Awards Applying for an institutional designation is a meaningful opportunity to showcase the impact your college is making — and we’ve designed this process to guide you every step of the way. The application process is intentionally structured to bring together a representative group from across your college to review your student success work and data, fostering shared ownership and insight.

By breaking it down, into clear manageable actions, you’ll find that each step builds naturally toward a complete, compelling application. Use this checklist as your roadmap, and know that ATD’s team and resources are here to support you throughout.

A. Get Started with Resources and Support

1. Visit the institutional designations application submission landing page in [SurveyMonkey Apply](#). On the landing page, you will find the following materials and resources:
 - a. Highlights of changes to the institutional designations processes for the 2025–2026 cycle
 - b. The 2025-2026 Awards and Designations Data File
 - c. Links through which you may register for our informational webinar and our office hours to support you in the application process. (Links to recordings of these sessions will become available here as they occur.)
 - d. A link to our FAQ about the application and submission process
 - e. An email address (network@achievingthedream.org) where you may send questions not answered in the FAQ
2. Register for the informational webinar and/or office hour(s) via the links on the landing page.

B. Access Your Data

1. Download the data file from the landing page
2. Using the directions on the cover page of the data file, examine your college’s data in each of the metrics categories (access, early momentum, milestone momentum, and economic mobility). This will help you respond to the narrative questions. Note: The file lists only IPEDS Unit IDs — not college names.

C. Access Narrative Questions and Invite Collaborators To Respond

1. Access the narrative application questions via the link provided on the landing page
2. As the first person to initiate the application, you can add collaborators, who may also view and edit the application. Follow the directions after selecting the "add collaborator" button on the left-hand side of the application. (ATD encourages the collaborative development of narrative responses, including data stories that connect your college's efforts and strategies with your college's data.)
3. Collaboratively answer the narrative questions. The questions will focus on a number of institutional capacities and community vibrancy categories. All colleges will be assessed for progress based on all metrics, but the emphasis will vary based on the designation for which your college is applying.
 - a. Leader College applicants will be asked to emphasize progress in the areas of access and early momentum.
 - b. Leader College of Distinction applicants will be asked to demonstrate sustained efforts in access with a more emphasis on early momentum and milestone momentum.
 - c. Leah Meyer Austin Award applicants will be required to demonstrate sustained efforts in access and early momentum with more emphasis on milestone momentum and economic mobility.

D. Upload Section of Application

1. Colleges must provide a president/CEO letter of support. A letter guidance document can be found on [SurveyMonkey Apply](#).
2. Your institution's logo (300 dpi, vector, or high res .png on a transparent background) is requested to support ATD's communication efforts.

E. Submit your application on SurveyMonkey Apply by October 17, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. ET.