

ATD Institutional Designations Application

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), 2027

This FAQ answers common questions about the 2026–2027 ATD Institutional Designations application. For step-by-step guidance on preparing and submitting your application, begin with the Application Instructions.

Applicants and ATD coaches with additional questions may contact network@achievingthedream.org or join an Awards and Designations webinar or office hours session.

Eligibility and Choosing a Designation

Q: How do I know which designation(s) my college is eligible for?

A: Your eligibility email from ATD identifies the designation(s) your college is eligible to pursue.

Q: Who received the eligibility email for the 2026–2027 Institutional Designations?

A: The eligibility email was sent to each institution's Core team leaders, Core team members, data leads, president, and the president's cc. If you have any additional questions regarding contact information, you can email us at network@achievingthedream.org.

Q: Our college is eligible for more than one designation. Which should we pursue?

A: Apply for the highest designation that best reflects the evidence your college is prepared to demonstrate.

If you apply for a higher designation and the evidence does not support that level, ATD will consider your application for the highest appropriate designation.

See the Application Instructions for designation expectations and guidance.

Preparing Your Application

Q: Do all applicants complete the same application?

A: Yes. All applicants respond to the same narrative questions. Your eligibility determines which designation(s) your college may pursue. The expectations become progressively stronger from Leader College to Leader College of Distinction to the Leah Meyer Austin Award.

Q: How much should we write for each narrative response?

A: Each narrative question includes a recommended word count to help you plan your response. The word counts are not strict limits. Focus on providing a clear, concise response that addresses the question and presents the most relevant evidence of your college's work and results.

Q: Can we include supporting materials?

A: Yes. You may upload one optional Supporting Evidence file of up to five pages. This file may include charts, graphs, dashboards, tables, process maps, hyperlinks, or other visuals that strengthen your narrative responses.

Supporting evidence should complement, not replace, the information in your narrative responses. Clearly label any supporting evidence and reference it in the relevant response.

Q: What is the President, Chancellor, CEO Letter of Support?

A: The President/Chancellor's Letter of Support is a signed letter from your institution's president or chancellor that describes their commitment to your college's transformation work, distributed leadership, and contributions to the ATD Network. The letter may be up to two pages and is part of the narrative application.

Upload the letter as a PDF through your application in SurveyMonkey Apply.

Using the ATD Data Report

Q: What data should we use in our application?

A: Use the ATD Data Report as a starting point for understanding your college's results across Access, Early Momentum, Milestone Momentum, and Economic Mobility. Use these data in your narrative responses to support your college's transformation story. You may also include institutional data and other evidence

to provide context, demonstrate more recent progress, or strengthen your responses.

Q: What if our institutional data differ from the ATD Data Report?

A: We recognize that your institutional data may differ from the publicly available data in the ATD Data Report or may include more recent results. You may include institutional data in your narrative responses to provide additional context and evidence.

Use the narrative response to the Connecting Your Evidence question to explain important differences between your institutional data and the ATD Data Report, provide context for your results, or highlight more recent evidence that helps ATD understand your college's progress.

Q: What should we do if data are missing from our ATD Data Report?

A: If data are missing from your college's ATD Data Report, contact us at network@achievingthedream.org. We'll help you understand what information, if any, you need to provide. If your **Early Momentum fall-to-fall retention data** are missing because they are not available in IPEDS, provide those data as part of your application using the **Early Momentum Data Template** in SurveyMonkey Apply. These data must be provided by the application deadline.

Q: How do you want us to account for COVID impacts to data?

A: The impacts of COVID should be addressed in the narrative. While the metrics portion of the evaluation is based on publicly available data gathered and provided by ATD, colleges may cite additional data from other sources in their narrative responses to complement and strengthen their data story. We understand that growth is not a straight line, and the narrative is the place to explain how COVID disrupted trends, highlight recent improvements not yet reflected in the ATD Awards and Designations Data Report, and provide context about your institution.

How Your Application Will Be Evaluated

Q: How will our application be evaluated?

A: Your application will be evaluated using two equally weighted components:



- **Metrics Assessment (50%)** considers your college's results across Access, Early Momentum, Milestone Momentum, and Economic Mobility using the **ATD Data Report**.
- **Narrative Assessment (50%)** considers how your **narrative responses and Leadership Commitment** letter demonstrate your college's transformation strategy, use of evidence, results, institutional capacity, and leadership commitment.

Q: After applications are reviewed, is it possible to receive ATD's rubric scoring of our application for our records?

A: Achieving the Dream welcomes you to debrief about the selection committee's review of your application. To schedule a call, please reach out to network@achievingthedream.org.

Q: Can our college contest a decision regarding an award or designation after it has been made?

A: Achieving the Dream does not reevaluate awards and recognition decisions. The college leadership designations cycle occurs annually, so your institution will have more opportunities in subsequent years to pursue higher awards or designations.