

FOUNDING RESEARCH PROSPECTUS

The Virginia Institutional Decision Intelligence Benchmark Study

A founding research prospectus for the first statewide benchmark of institutional decision behavior in U.S. higher education.

PREPARED BY

SevenFourteen Advisory

PREPARED FOR

Statewide community college systems, institutional leaders, foundations, and sector research partners.

FRAMEWORK

Institutional Decision Intelligence™

STATUS

Confidential · Founding Cohort Draft

CONTENTS

How to Read This Prospectus

The Prospectus is organized in four parts. The Premise establishes why institutional decision behavior warrants systematic investigation. The Framework introduces Institutional Decision Intelligence™ and the Theory of Change. The Study sets out the research design. The Founding Initiative describes Virginia's opportunity to lead and the field that may follow.

PART I · THE PREMISE

- Executive Summary
- The Strategic Context
- The Interpretation Gap
- Decision Behavior as a Research Domain

PART II · THE FRAMEWORK

- Institutional Decision Intelligence™
- Theory of Change

PART III · THE STUDY

- Measurement Architecture
- Research Questions
- Methodology
- The Institutional Participation Model
- Governance, Ethics, and Confidentiality
- The Intelligence Assets Produced

PART IV · THE FOUNDING INITIATIVE

- Why Virginia Can Lead
- National Contributions
- Building a Longitudinal Decision Intelligence Dataset
- Closing Reflection

PART ONE



The Premise

Why institutional decision behavior has become the decisive variable in higher education's next decade.

I • EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Capability That Defines the Next Decade

Higher education has entered a period in which the velocity of change exceeds the interpretive capacity of most institutions.

The next decade of institutional performance will be defined less by what systems know and more by how they decide. The Virginia Institutional Decision Intelligence Benchmark Study proposes that this capacity can be observed, measured, strengthened, and ultimately understood.

The Core Problem. Institutions rarely fail because they lack information. They struggle because stakeholders interpret information differently and make decisions through different lenses. Leaders, faculty, administrators, governance bodies, and students each filter the same conditions through distinct experiences, responsibilities, and assumptions. The resulting divergence — quiet, persistent, and rarely measured — shapes institutional behavior more than any single strategy.

The Core Hypothesis. Institutional decision behavior is measurable. The patterns through which institutions interpret ambiguity, set thresholds, reconcile competing viewpoints, calibrate judgment, and coordinate action can be observed systematically, compared across institutions, and tracked over time.

The Opportunity. Virginia is uniquely positioned to become the first statewide Institutional Decision Intelligence benchmark cohort. The Virginia Community College System combines statewide coordination, institutional diversity, and a tradition of shared inquiry that few systems in the country can match.

The Outcome. The Study will produce a statewide decision intelligence asset for Virginia and establish the foundation for a future national benchmark of institutional decision behavior in U.S. higher education.

FOUNDING PREMISE

The Study seeks to establish Institutional Decision Intelligence™ as a measurable organizational capability worthy of systematic investigation.

II · THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Why This Work Matters Now

Six compounding pressures have made interpretation — not information — the decisive constraint on institutional performance.

Accelerating Technological Change

Artificial intelligence, automation, and data infrastructure are reshaping teaching, learning, and work faster than institutional policy structures were designed to absorb.

Workforce Transformation

Employer expectations, credential pathways, and the half-life of skills are shifting in ways that require institutions to make consequential decisions under genuine uncertainty about future demand.

Demographic Pressures

Enrollment patterns, learner demographics, and regional labor markets vary widely across the Commonwealth and require differentiated institutional interpretation rather than uniform response.

Governance Complexity

Coordinated systems must reconcile institutional autonomy with statewide coherence — a balance that depends on shared interpretation, not uniform mandate.

Public Accountability

Boards, legislators, and the public increasingly expect institutions to demonstrate not only outcomes but the reasoning behind the decisions that produced them.

Learner Expectations

Students arrive with expectations shaped by digital, workforce, and social environments that evolve faster than curriculum, advising, and support systems can adapt.

CENTRAL PREMISE

The bottleneck is no longer information.

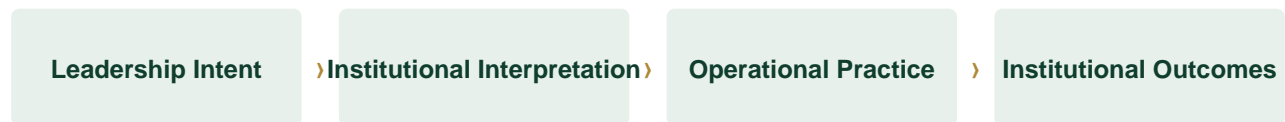
The bottleneck is interpretation.

III · THE PROBLEM

The Interpretation Gap

Most institutional difficulty does not begin with missing data. It begins in the space between intent and practice — where interpretation occurs.

The Interpretation Gap is the cumulative distance between what leaders intend, how the institution understands that intent, how operational practice expresses it, and what outcomes ultimately follow. It is not visible in any single decision. It is visible only in the pattern across many.



Leaders may articulate a clear strategic direction. Faculty may interpret that direction through the lens of disciplinary practice and academic freedom. Administrators may translate it through operational and resource constraints. Governance bodies may read it against fiduciary and policy obligations. Students may experience only the downstream result. Each interpretation is legitimate. None is complete on its own.

These differences are normal institutional realities, not failures. Healthy institutions contain multiple interpretive frames by design. The question is not whether divergence exists, but whether it is visible, whether it is reconciled deliberately, and whether the institution can act coherently in spite of it.

CORE INSIGHT

Outcomes Are Shaped by Reconciliation, Not Origin

The quality of institutional outcomes is a function of how interpretive differences are reconciled — not whether they exist.

IV · INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATION

Decision Behavior as a Research Domain

Higher education has studied the structures around decisions. It has rarely studied the behavior inside them.

Higher education has invested heavily in the study of leadership, governance, strategic planning, organizational change, and technology adoption. Far less attention has been devoted to institutional decision behavior itself — the observable patterns through which institutions move from uncertainty to action.

Existing research traditions illuminate the structures around decisions: who participates, what authority they hold, what processes they follow, and what outcomes they pursue. They are less developed in describing what happens inside those structures when stakeholders encounter genuine ambiguity. Institutional decision behavior is the part of organizational life that is felt by everyone and measured by almost no one.

DEFINITION**Decision Behavior**

The observable patterns through which institutions interpret ambiguity, establish thresholds, reconcile competing viewpoints, calibrate judgment, and coordinate action.

Why It Warrants Independent Investigation. Decision behavior sits beneath strategy and above process. Strategy describes what an institution intends. Process describes how it administers. Decision behavior describes how it actually moves — how interpretive friction is resolved, how thresholds are set when no precedent applies, and how shared judgment forms in the absence of a single authoritative answer. These patterns shape institutional adaptability more than any individual policy.

RESEARCH PROPOSITION

Institutional decision behavior constitutes a distinct organizational capability worthy of independent investigation.

PART TWO



The Framework

Institutional Decision Intelligence™ and the Theory of Change that connects measurement to institutional capability.

V · THE FRAMEWORK

Institutional Decision Intelligence™

A capability — not a technology, process, or planning methodology — that develops at observable stages of maturity.

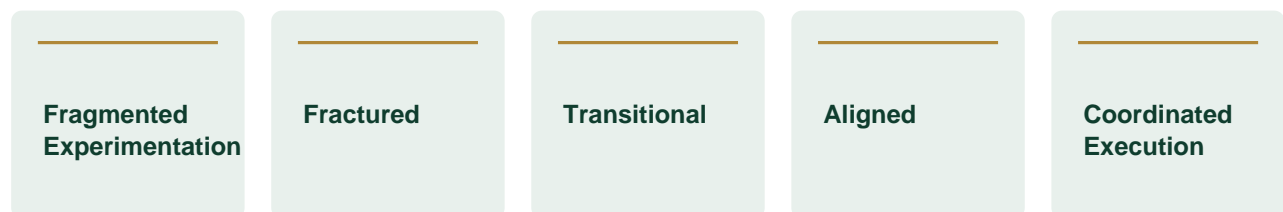
DEFINITION

Institutional Decision Intelligence™

The capability through which institutions transform uncertainty into coordinated action.

Institutional Decision Intelligence is the underlying capability that determines whether an institution can interpret change, align judgment, and coordinate response under conditions that no playbook fully describes. It develops over time, and it can be observed at characteristic stages of maturity.

MATURITY CONTINUUM



Fragmented Experimentation. Activity is widespread but disconnected. Individual leaders and units respond to change locally, with limited visibility across the institution.

Fractured. Stakeholders recognize the need for coordinated response but interpret priorities, thresholds, and pace differently, often without realizing it.

Transitional. The institution begins to surface interpretive differences deliberately and to build shared language around decision criteria and risk tolerance.

Aligned. Leadership, governance, faculty, and operational units share common reference points and reconcile differences through established practice.

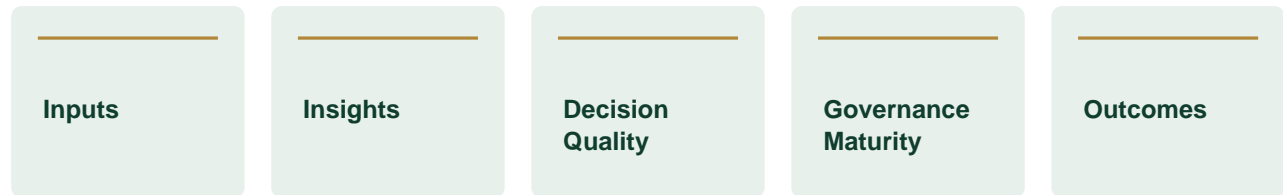
Coordinated Execution. Institutional decisions move coherently from interpretation to action. Adaptation becomes a repeatable capability, not a heroic event.

The Benchmark Study supports movement along this continuum by giving institutions a shared vocabulary, a comparable measurement frame, and reliable evidence about where their own decision behavior currently sits.

VI • THEORY OF CHANGE

How Measurement Produces Capability

Sustained measurement, reflection, and shared interpretation compound into durable institutional capability.



The Theory of Change does not depend on any specific reform agenda. It depends only on the institution's willingness to see its own decision behavior more clearly. The mechanism is cumulative: each cycle of measurement and reconciliation strengthens the institution's capacity to manage the next decision with greater coherence than the last.

Inputs. Participation by leadership, governance, faculty, and operational stakeholders across the institution generates the raw signal the Study requires.

Diagnostic Data. Structured signal about how the institution currently interprets, calibrates, and coordinates.

Institutional Insights. Patterns that were previously invisible become visible to leadership and governance.

Improved Decision Quality. Decisions are made with greater awareness of interpretive variance and shared thresholds.

Governance Maturity. Boards and senior leadership operate with stronger visibility into the institution's decision behavior.

More Effective Coordination. Cross-functional and cross-institutional action becomes more coherent.

Institutional Adaptability. The institution becomes more capable of absorbing and responding to change without losing direction.

Improved Student and Institutional Outcomes. Stronger interpretive and coordinative capability translates into more reliable outcomes for learners and the institutions that serve them.

MECHANISM OF CHANGE

Improved governance and coordination are not endpoints. They are compounding capabilities.

PART THREE



The Study

The measurement architecture, research design, participation model, ethical commitments, and intelligence assets the Study produces.

VII · METHODOLOGICAL BACKBONE

Measurement Architecture

How individual responses become institutional diagnostics, and how institutional diagnostics become statewide intelligence.

Inputs

Individual Responses · Scenario Reflection

Measurement Layer

Institutional Diagnostics · Calibration Intelligence

Intelligence Layer

Consensus Mapping · Benchmarking Intelligence

Institutional Outputs

Confidential Institutional Reporting

Sector Outputs

Statewide Learning Infrastructure · Institutional Adaptability

Individual Responses. Structured input from leaders, faculty, administrators, and governance participants captures the full range of interpretive perspectives within each institution.

Institutional Diagnostics. Aggregated patterns of interpretation, calibration, and coordination give each participating institution a confidential view of its own decision behavior.

Scenario Reflection. Realistic institutional scenarios surface how stakeholders reason under uncertainty — not only what they believe in principle.

Calibration Intelligence. Comparison of thresholds, risk tolerances, and judgment patterns across roles reveals where the institution shares calibration and where it diverges.

Consensus Mapping. Convergence and divergence across institutions and stakeholder roles distinguish shared statewide ground from areas requiring local interpretation.

Benchmarking Intelligence. Comparative cohort analysis lets each institution understand its decision behavior relative to peers, confidentially and without ranking.

Statewide Learning Infrastructure. Cohort-level findings become a durable asset for system-level governance, planning, and coordination.

Institutional Adaptability. The compounding result of repeated measurement and reflection — the capability the Study ultimately exists to strengthen.

VIII · THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Research Questions

Six categories that together constitute a legitimate research agenda for the emerging study of institutional decision behavior.

Interpretation

How do institutions interpret accelerating change, and where do interpretive frames converge or diverge within and across institutions?

Governance

How do governance structures, practices, and norms influence institutional decision behavior under conditions of uncertainty?

Calibration

How do stakeholder groups establish shared thresholds for risk, evidence, and readiness — and where does calibration break down?

Consensus

Where do institutions converge in their decision behavior, where do they diverge, and what patterns characterize statewide alignment?

Adaptability

What institutional conditions contribute to adaptability, and which decision behaviors most reliably predict it?

Longitudinal Change

How does institutional decision behavior evolve over time, and how do deliberate interventions shift the maturity continuum?

GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE

Research Posture

The Study treats these questions as open inquiries, not hypotheses to confirm. Its credibility depends on the willingness to be surprised by what the data reveals.

IX · METHODOLOGY

How the Study Is Conducted

Participants, instruments, and analytic frames designed for replicability and future cross-state expansion.

Participants. Each participating institution contributes a structured cross-section of leadership and operational perspective. The Study is designed to capture interpretive variance, which requires breadth across role and function.

- Presidents
- Academic Affairs
- Operations and Finance
- Provosts and Chief Academic Officers
- Workforce and Continuing Education
- Governance Representatives
- Chief Information Officers
- Student Services
- Institutional Research leadership

Instruments.

IDI Diagnostic. A structured instrument capturing how stakeholders interpret institutional conditions and decision criteria.

Scenario Reflection. Realistic institutional scenarios designed to elicit reasoning under uncertainty.

Calibration Exercises. Comparative judgments that reveal threshold and risk-tolerance patterns across roles.

Consensus Mapping. Structured identification of convergence and divergence across stakeholders and institutions.

Analysis.

Institutional Analysis. Confidential synthesis of each institution's decision behavior.

System-Level Analysis. Statewide patterns of interpretation, calibration, and coordination.

Benchmark Analysis. Comparative cohort analysis without institutional ranking or public attribution.

Longitudinal Analysis. Year-over-year evolution of institutional and system-level decision behavior.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATION

Methodological Commitments

The methodology is designed for replicability across future cohorts, ethical rigor in instrument design and participant engagement, and future cross-state expansion so the Virginia cohort becomes the first node in a broader national research infrastructure.

X · PARTICIPATION

The Institutional Participation Model

A defined participant journey designed to produce immediate institutional value and durable statewide insight.

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE****Participation Expectations**

Participation involves a defined, time-bounded set of activities supported by the research team. Institutional time commitments are designed to be proportionate to senior leadership capacity, not additive to it.

XI · TRUST INFRASTRUCTURE

Governance, Ethics, and Confidentiality

Protections that are not administrative formalities but the foundation on which the research stands.

Institutional Confidentiality

No institution is named, ranked, or publicly attributed in any external reporting.

Data Stewardship

Data is collected, stored, and analyzed under defined stewardship responsibilities consistent with established research practice.

De-identification

Statewide and cross-institutional reporting is de-identified by design, not by exception.

Governance Oversight

Study governance includes structured oversight by participating institutions and the System Office.

Reporting Standards

Reports follow consistent standards designed to inform without exposing.

Ethical Review Principles

Instrument design, participant engagement, and data handling follow the ethical principles expected of foundation-supported higher education research.

GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE

Non-Negotiable Commitments

No institution ranking. No public attribution. Strong confidentiality protections. Voluntary participation throughout.

XII · DELIVERABLES

The Intelligence Assets Produced

Two tiers of deliverables — confidential institutional assets and durable statewide intelligence.

Institutional Intelligence Assets. Each participating institution receives a confidential package designed to be immediately useful to its President, cabinet, and governance.

Executive Scorecard. A leadership-ready summary of the institution's decision behavior across the maturity continuum.

Deep Diagnostic. A detailed view of interpretation, calibration, and coordination patterns across stakeholder groups.

Consensus Map. Visual mapping of where the institution converges and where it diverges in its decision behavior.

Calibration Profile. A profile of how thresholds and judgment are calibrated across roles.

Reflection Report. Synthesis of scenario-based reasoning and its implications for institutional practice.

Visibility Gap Analysis. Identification of areas where leadership intent and institutional interpretation diverge most significantly.

Statewide Intelligence Assets. Statewide deliverables are designed for the Chancellor, the System Office, and the cohort as a whole. They establish a durable statewide asset.

Governance Maturity Benchmark. A statewide view of governance maturity across the cohort.

Calibration Benchmark. A statewide view of calibration patterns across roles and institutions.

Statewide Consensus Map. Identification of areas of statewide convergence and divergence.

Coordination Intelligence Report. Analysis of statewide coordination patterns and the conditions that strengthen or weaken them.

Public Summary Report. A de-identified public document suitable for foundation, board, and policy audiences.

PART FOUR

IV.

The Founding Initiative

Why Virginia is positioned to lead, what the work contributes to the broader field, and what becomes possible over time.

XIII · FOUNDING COHORT

Why Virginia Can Lead

The conditions that make this Study possible are not common, and they are not easily replicated.

Virginia is uniquely positioned to serve as the founding statewide cohort for Institutional Decision Intelligence research.

Existing Statewide Structure

The Virginia Community College System offers coordinated statewide infrastructure capable of supporting common instruments and cohort-level analysis.

Twenty-Three Colleges

System scale provides statistical and interpretive depth without sacrificing the institutional specificity that makes findings useful.

Existing Leadership Engagement

The Chancellor's office provides convening authority and strategic clarity required to anchor a statewide research effort.

Workforce Mission Alignment

Virginia's community colleges sit at the intersection of education and workforce — precisely where interpretive demands are most acute.

Institutional Diversity

Urban, suburban, rural, and regionally distinct institutions provide a natural range of conditions across which decision behavior can be observed.

First Statewide IDI Dataset

Virginia has the opportunity to generate the nation's first statewide Institutional Decision Intelligence dataset — a durable strategic asset.

SIGNATURE ARGUMENT

Virginia has the opportunity not merely to participate in the future of Institutional Decision Intelligence™, but to help define it.

XIV · FIELD-BUILDING

National Contributions

What becomes possible when institutional decision behavior becomes measurable across a coordinated cohort of systems.

The Virginia Benchmark Study is designed from the outset to be extensible. Its instruments, methodology, and governance model are built so that future state systems can join without diluting comparability.

VIRGINIA FOUNDING COHORT

Statewide benchmark cohort — proof of concept and reference implementation.

DOMAINS THE STUDY HELPS OPEN

Governance Research · AI Policy Research · Organizational Adaptability

EXPANSION PATHWAYS

Cross-State Replication · Comparative Benchmarking · Cross-Sector Benchmarking

FIELD-LEVEL OUTCOMES

National IDI Dataset · Longitudinal Decision Intelligence · Emerging Research Domain

Each layer strengthens the next. A successful Virginia cohort establishes proof of concept. Cross-state replication establishes external validity. Comparative benchmarking creates a national reference frame. A national dataset enables longitudinal research on institutional decision behavior. The cumulative body of work establishes Institutional Decision Intelligence as a recognized research domain within higher education.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATION

A New Research Domain Becomes Possible

The Study contributes not only to Virginia and not only to its participating institutions. It contributes to the formation of a research domain that the field of higher education does not yet have.

XV · LONG-TERM RESEARCH AGENDA

Building a Longitudinal Decision Intelligence Dataset

Sustained measurement opens lines of inquiry no point-in-time study can support.

A longitudinal dataset transforms the Benchmark Study from a snapshot of statewide decision behavior into an evolving research instrument — one capable of tracking how institutions actually change.

Multi-Year Benchmarking

Annual measurement of institutional decision behavior across the Virginia cohort.

Governance Maturity Evolution

Tracking how boards and senior leadership develop visibility into institutional decision behavior over time.

Decision Behavior Change

The conditions under which institutions advance along the maturity continuum, and the interventions that accelerate movement.

Workforce Alignment Research

How decision behavior shapes institutional responsiveness to workforce change.

Student Outcome Correlations

The relationship between institutional decision behavior and learner outcomes.

Institutional Adaptability

The decision behaviors most strongly associated with sustained adaptability across changing conditions.

LONG-TERM POSTURE

The Benchmark Study is the beginning of a long-term research agenda, not a single engagement.

XVI · CLOSING REFLECTION

The Capability That Will Define the Next Decade

The defining challenge of the next decade may not be technological capability. It may be institutional capability.

Specifically, the capacity of institutions to interpret change, coordinate judgment, and act coherently under conditions of uncertainty.

The Virginia Institutional Decision Intelligence Benchmark Study proposes that this capability can be observed, measured, strengthened, and ultimately understood.

Virginia has an opportunity to become the first statewide system to demonstrate how.

Prepared by SevenFourteen Advisory. Institutional Decision Intelligence™ is a framework of SevenFourteen Advisory. This document is confidential and intended for review by the Chancellor, System Office Leadership, Community College Presidents, and prospective research and foundation partners.