

Living Out the Theory of Change (ToC): Delivering an Equity-Centered Evaluation for Sustainable & Systemic Impact in a Changing Landscape

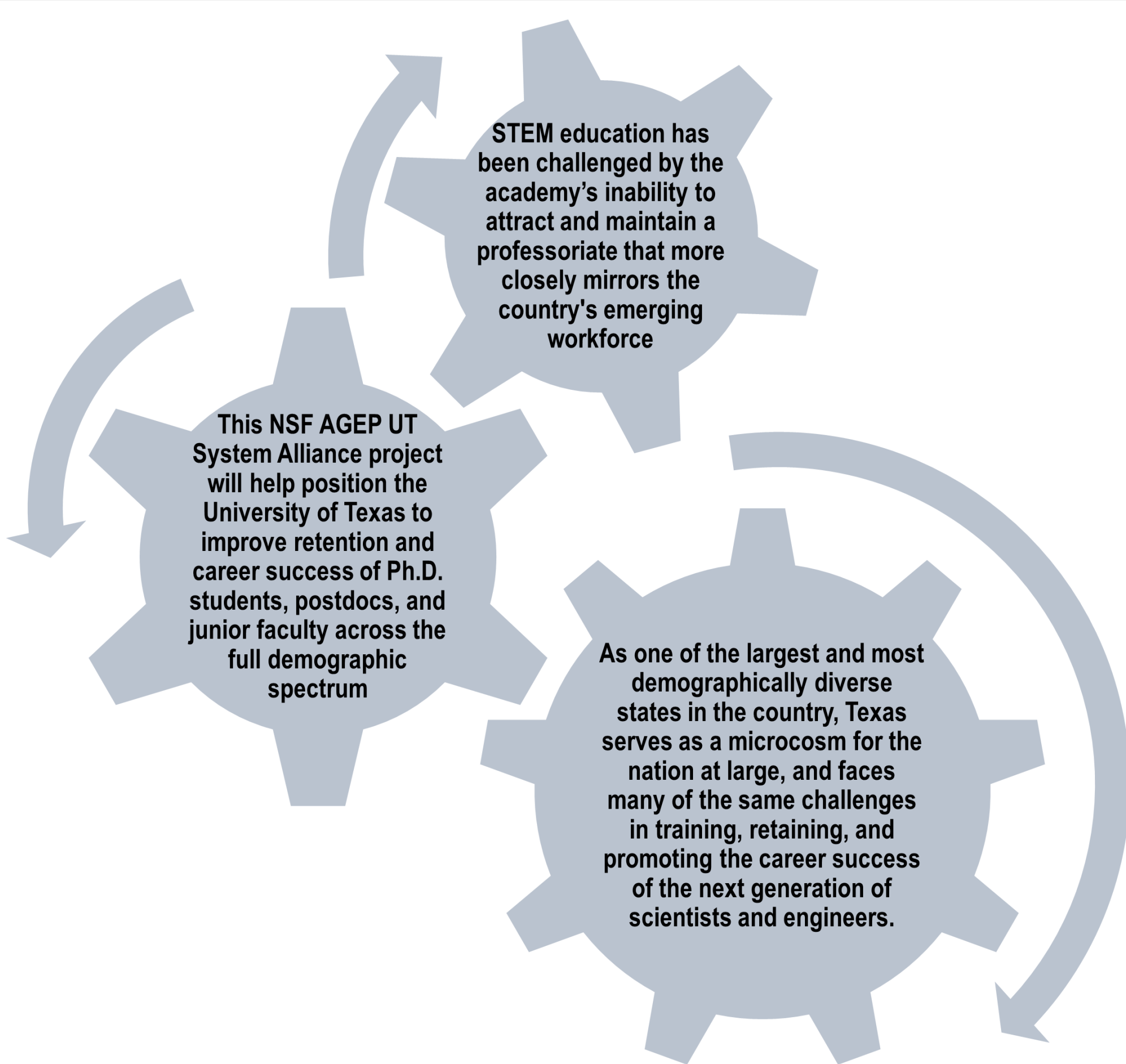


Pamela M. Leggett-Robinson¹, Benjamin Flores², Zachary Tonzetich³, and Kayunta Johnson-Winters⁴
¹PLR Consulting, Inc., ²University of Texas El Paso, ³University of Texas San Antonio, ⁴University of Texas Arlington

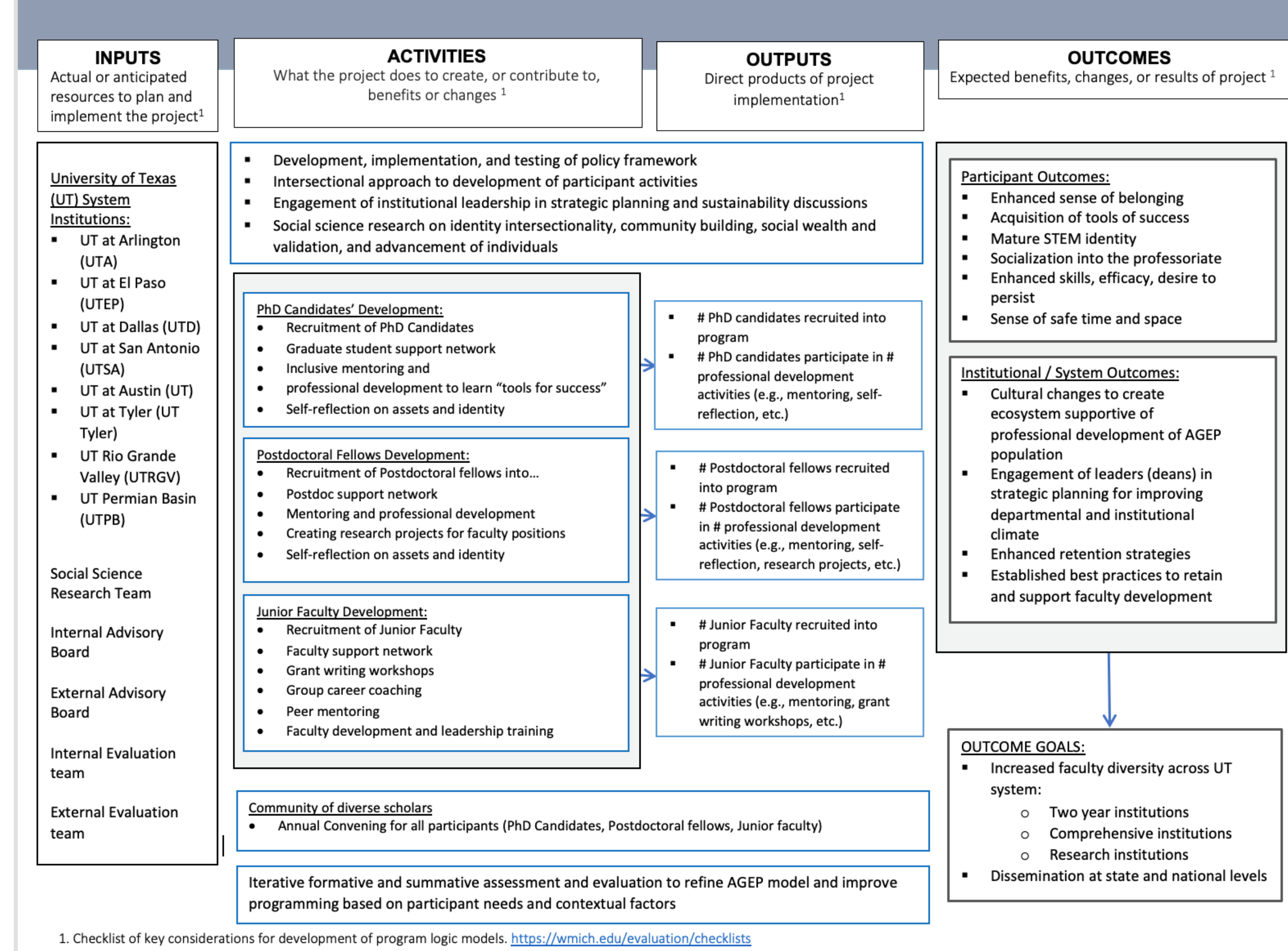
Abstract

Evaluators whose work is equity-centered must seek ways to navigate current complex landscapes while always maintaining a commitment to equity and justice. The NSF AGEP UT System Alliance project, "An Inclusive Model of Mentoring, Sponsorship, and Systemic Change for Diversity in STEM Faculty Career Paths", aims to self-study, develop, implement, and institutionalize a University of Texas System-wide AGEP career pathway model that provides (1) systemic change around policies and procedures for recruitment and hiring of, and (2) collaborative mentoring and sponsorship for the success of AGEP population STEM doctoral candidates, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty members at the University of Texas campuses at Arlington, Austin, Dallas, El Paso, and San Antonio. The Theory of Change (ToC), which undergirds the overall design and implementation of the AGEP UT System Alliance project, is central to promoting shifts in inclusive policies, practices, and programs across selected University of Texas System institutions. Along with the logic model, the ToC works in tandem to provide a complementary framework that clearly outlines the intended change process, makes assumptions explicit, and provides a foundation for measuring progress, assessing effectiveness, and guiding adjustments during implementation. The ToC is a valuable tool for navigating equity-centered evaluations in environments with restrictive policies around DEI. It allows for a values-driven, yet legally compliant approach to equity-centered evaluations by identifying alternative strategies, leveraging points that support equitable outcomes, assessing unintended consequences, and ensuring that the focus remains on equitable impacts regardless of language or framing. We share adaptive and guiding strategies used in the NSF AGEP UT System Alliance project to not only evaluate the fidelity of implementation but, more importantly, evaluate a sustained impact that promotes positive practices and welcoming spaces for AGEP population doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty by focusing on 1) systemic change focus, 2) equity-centered metrics that reflect the experiences of participants, 3) continuous feedback loops, 4) institutional accountability, 5) language reframing, 6) short-term outputs, and 7) long-term outcomes.

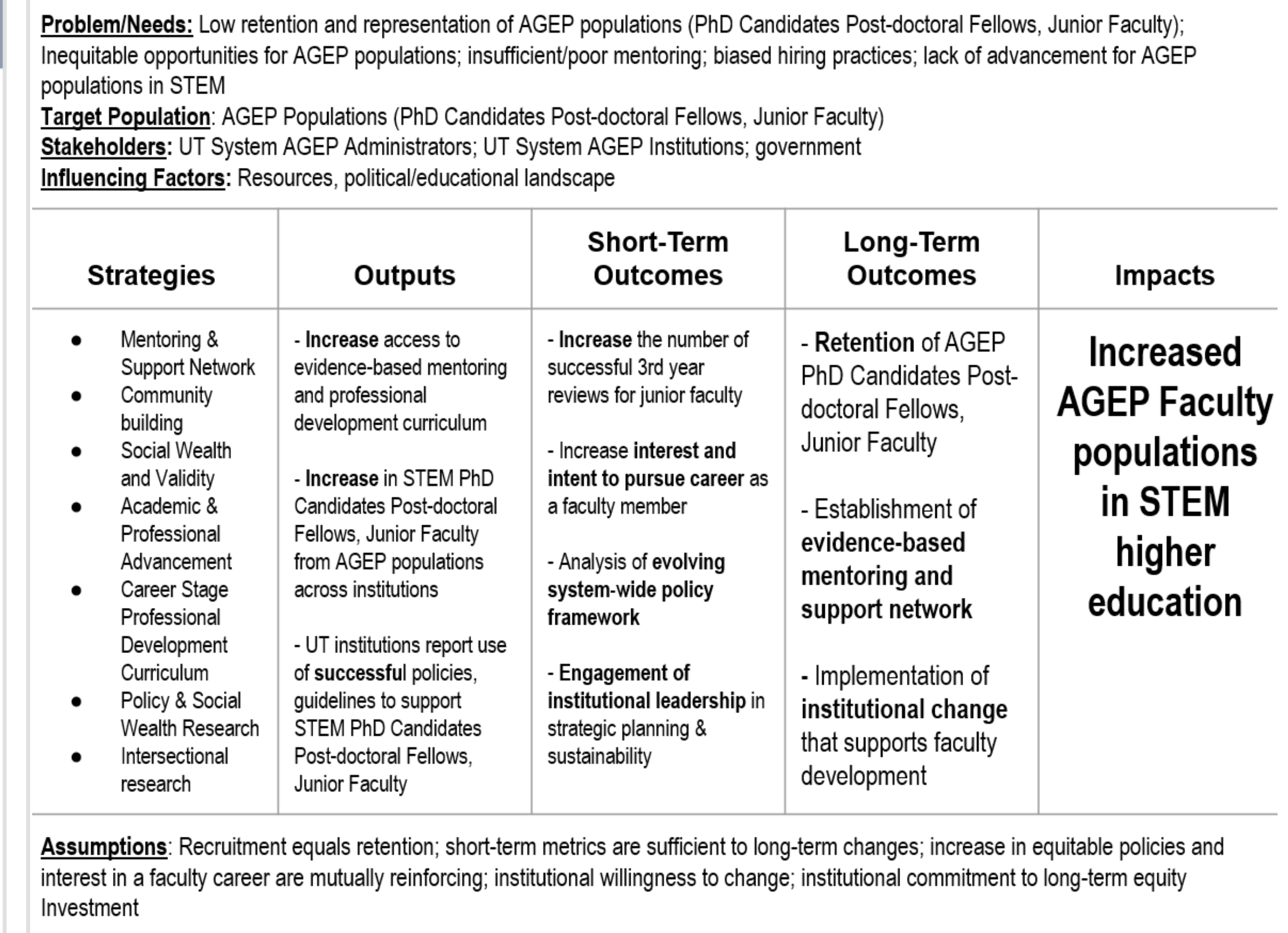
Motivation and the Role of Texas in Shaping the Next Generation of Educators and Researchers



UT AGEP Logic Model



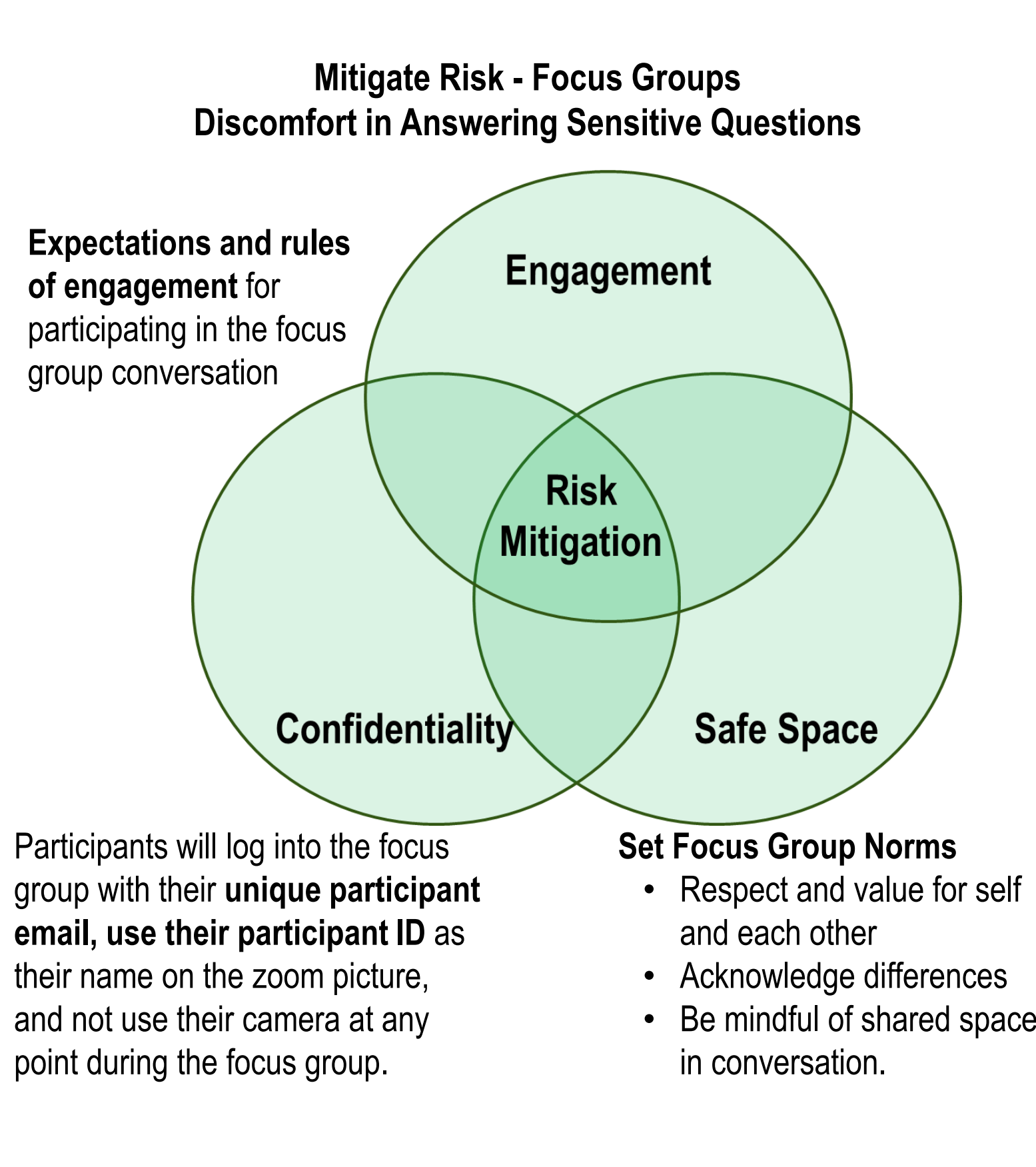
Theory of Change (ToC)



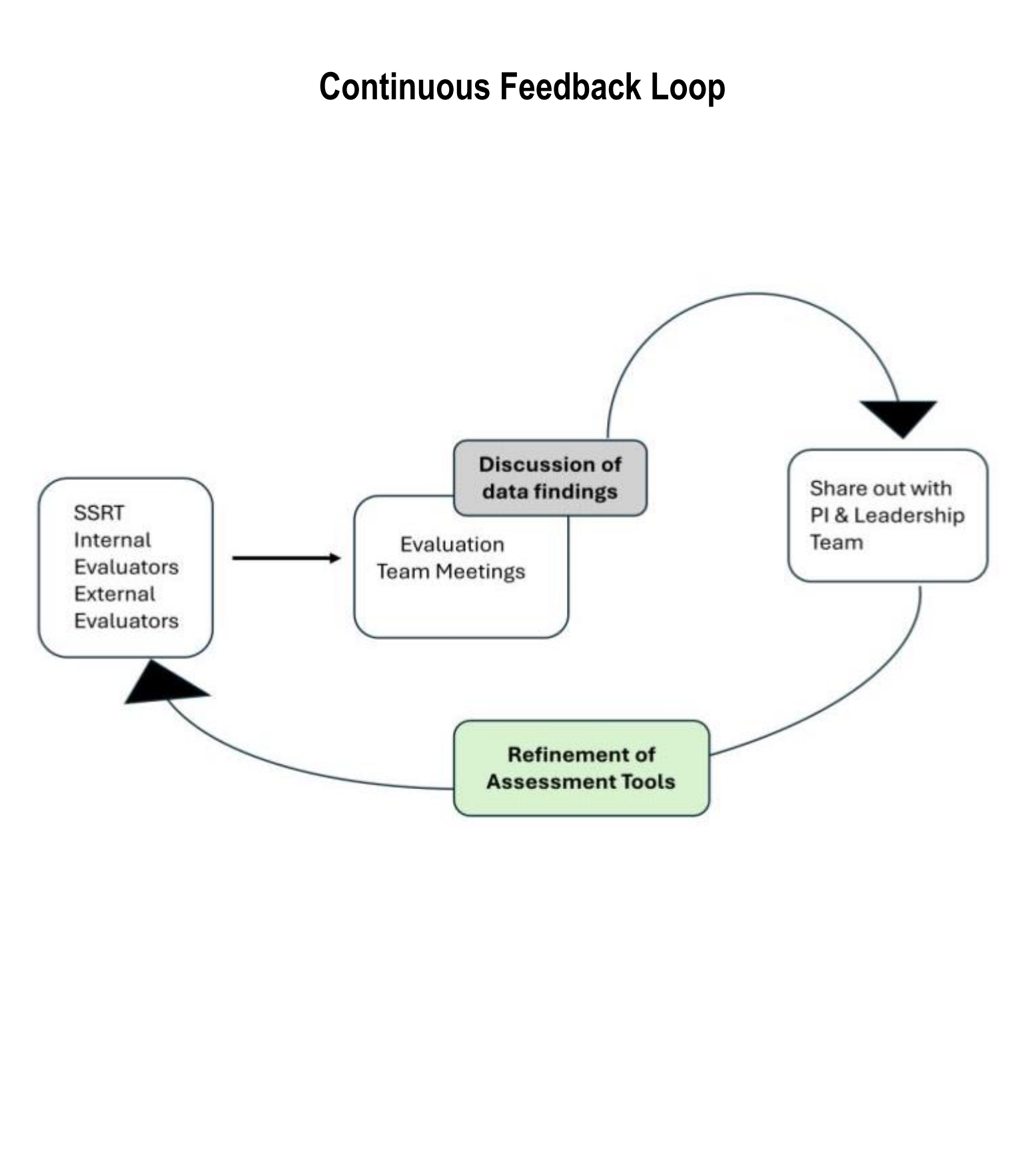
Equity-Centered Evaluation Strategies | Data Types | Data Collection Instrument/Analysis

Systemic Focus	Equity-Focused Qualitative Analysis	Equity-centered metrics	Feedback Loop	Language Reframing
Measures that ensure progress is sustainable and leads to lasting, fundamental changes that promote equity and inclusion	Analyzes qualitative data centered (1) on understanding and addressing issues of equity and (2) seeks to uncover patterns, experiences, and systemic factors that contribute to the promotion of equity and inclusion.	Indicators and measures specifically designed to assess the progress toward achieving equitable outcomes.	Mechanisms for continuously gathering, analyzing, and integrating input from stakeholders, particularly marginalized communities, throughout the evaluation process.	Strategic utilization of terminology to align with the values and priorities of stakeholders or policymakers while still promoting equitable outcomes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify structural barriers and root causesMeasure systemic shifts and the sustainable impact of equitable practices embedded in the organizationInterrogate policies for integration of equity across the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Set ground rules & ensure confidentialityCenter voices and lived experiences and emphasize situated knowledgePractice reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify disparities between different groups and track how interventions affect these disparities over timeUse mixed-methods approaches to capture a holistic view of program impacts.Measure the presence and effectiveness of enablers or supports designed to remove those barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Involve regular, ongoing engagement with stakeholders to make real-time adjustments to evaluation design and interventionsShare interim findingsEnsure the process is iterative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Leverage terms that reflect policy and legal complianceUse the academic leadership frames to adjust languageAnchor discussions in data and evidence-based practices

Program Outputs	Product of Project Implementation	Participant Progress Tracking Tool**
From the AGEP population pool, the number recruited into the program and progressing to the next career stage	Progress toward advancing program values and practices: (1) recruitment, support, and retention; (2) creation of academic & career pathways	Participant Progress Tracking Tool: Descriptive statistics (Socioeconomic Status and Income, Educational Background and Pathways, Accessibility, Support Services needs and use, Language and Cultural Background, Family and Caregiving Responsibilities, and Age), Promotion/tenure status
The extent to which the program is accomplishing proposed activities such as recruitment, mentoring, sponsorship, and professional development	Effectiveness and continued progress of the model defining support and policy for the participants	Activity Tracking Spreadsheet: program activities progress; Gantt chart tracking; narrative of completed tasks/activities; achievements and challenges
		Tracking Spreadsheet: Policy Documentation



Program Impact	Institutional & Systems integration and change	Data Collection
The extent to which shared planning and organized actions have contributed to program effectiveness as well as synergistic institutional initiatives	Indicators for success, challenges, and gaps in data collection from institutions	Semi-Structured Interviews (qualitative): (1) descriptive statistics and analysis of common and divergent themes, descriptions, as well as anonymized quotes for observing change overtime (2) analysis of motivation for continued participation, professional practice, championing, challenges, sustainability, system change, and cultural norms.
The extent to which the program has created institutional engagement to sustain the 3-prong model of support	Monitors institutional progress of 3-prong model of support	Tracking Spreadsheet: Policy Documentation
Defining adoption of the the 3-prong model of support by the UT system	Markers of success - with consideration of new legislation	Institutional Assessment (quantitative): baseline assessment & reassessment to identify and capture assumptions, indicators for success, challenges, and gaps in data collection
How the program added to the body of literature on intersectional populations within STEM higher education?		



Original Language	Language Reframing
Participant Progress Tracking Tool: descriptive statistics - race, ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, sexual orientation	Participant Progress Tracking Tool -descriptive statistics (Socioeconomic Status and Income, Educational Background and Pathways, Accessibility and Support Needs, Use of Support Services, Language and Cultural Background, Family and Caregiving Responsibilities, and Age, Generation, and Life Stage)
Fidelity of Implementation: delineating how the program is accomplishing proposed activities such as recruitment, mentoring, sponsorship, and professional development of historically marginalized stakeholder group	OR descriptive statistics on diverse personal attributes (e.g., demographic backgrounds, professional identities), faculty rank categories, and career advancement status.
	Fidelity of Implementation: To what extent is the program enhancing academic pathways within the University of Texas System and promoting a more representative faculty by providing support structures for PhD candidates, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty from the AGEP population? (structural academic framing)

Acknowledgments

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