

Building a Universal / Common Enrollment System

Successful design and implementation of a Universal Enrollment (UE) system involves six distinct work streams: 1) Stakeholder Engagement; 2) Market Design; 3) Technology; 4) Communications; and 5) Implementation; and 6) Assessment. These are briefly explained below:

1. Stakeholder Engagement

We have learned that the cities that are most successful with UE are those that invest sufficient time in first engaging with local stakeholders, working together to mitigate the complex politics that can derail UE. Successful design and implementation of UE requires the support of a broad base of local education stakeholders who will each require individual attention if they are to “buy-in” to UE as a solution. We recommend that Stakeholder Engagement take the form of a Current State Assessment (CSA) study, creating a report that has stand-alone value while meaningfully engaging with a broad group of stakeholders and developing important relationships that will be vital to success in the coming Market Design process.

2. Market Design

Market Design (MD) is the process of creating the set of policies and operations that governs the annual cycle of enrollment and choice. Your city will need to create a fair, efficient, and transparent way to allocate the seats at its schools, including the scarce seats that are very popular and cannot be given to every family that wants them. You will need to design policy and operations that govern this allocation all throughout the annual cycle, not just for one main lottery. Families need to access schools all through the year, and your MD process should address all of these access points.

3. Technology

A successful UE process requires two distinct technology projects that are both fundamentally necessary for implementation: Assignment Tool software and an Enrollment Management System.

A) Assignment Tool Software

The Assignment Tool (AT) is the piece of software that processes the students’ choices on their applications and merges them with data you provide on capacity at schools and priority for seats at schools, and creates an optimized match of students and schools. Each city has its own set of admissions policies, and each city requires its own unique AT.

B) Enrollment Management System

UE administrators need a technology solution for system-wide enrollment and application management. Because UE administrators are typically uniting district, charter, and potentially other types of schools under one administrative umbrella, UE administrators typically must purchase a new Enrollment Management System (EMS). The EMS is the platform from which administrators will manage operations of the annual cycle of enrollment and choice.

4. Communications

There are two projects that UE administrators should consider within the communications work stream: marketing and guidance.

A) Marketing

The marketing associated with the new UE system will give the community-at-large, and in particular, parents, a first glimpse of the new system. The marketing of the UE system can be thought of in two parts:

- **Something new is coming.** This is general marketing, such as community meetings, the launch of a website, posters, and so on. This sort of marketing will give the community an opportunity to learn about the changes to come.
- **Call to action.** More targeted marketing, such as direct mailers, radio ads, community meetings, and so on. This sort of marketing will direct parents and guardians to take an action (i.e. submit an application).

B) Guidance

Families must have access to meaningful information about their school choices in order for a city to experience the optimal benefits from a UE system. There are many ways to deliver information to families about their choices, and each takes a different amount of time to implement. We recommend considering several methods of implementing guidance programs:

- **Publications.** In print and/or on-line, a “Parents’ Guide to Public Schools” can be an invaluable resource to parents seeking to learn more about their choices.
- **Events.** School fairs are an efficient way to give families an opportunity to meet with school leaders and already-enrolled students in a “one-stop-shop” type setting.
- **Counseling.** Families will benefit greatly from having easy access to guidance regarding their school choices.

5. Implementation

Your city will need support from outside experts in all of the previous work streams, but your city will also need staff dedicated specifically to UE in order to implement successfully. One of the most challenging issues in UE design is that of governance and administration – what entity will house this staff, and to whom will they be accountable for their performance? How will this staff be funded? These issues should be addressed early on in the design process.

6. Assessment

The annual cycle of the UE process should include a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the work. UE administrators typically perform this sort of analysis on an ongoing basis and integrate feedback into their operations. We recommend also conducting an official evaluation of UE by an independent entity whose work is free of any political bias. Some cities turn to a group of university professors for assessment, others partner with research and evaluation firms.