

Human Capital Strategies for Advancing Guided Pathways

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Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

Rural Guided Pathways Virtual Leadership Session
September 3rd, 2025



Today's Agenda

Time (ET)	Activity
9:00 – 9:10 AM	Welcome and Session Overview
9:10 – 9:45 AM	Advancing a Human Capital Strategy for Rural College Excellence
9:45 – 10:15 AM	A Lesson from the Field with President Greg Williams
10:15 – 11:20 AM	Team Time: Reflections on Human Capital Practices for Guided Pathways Implementation
11:20 – 11:30 AM	Evaluation and Closing

Advancing a Human Capital Strategy for Rural College Excellence



Institutionalize Human Capital Systems and Practices for Sustained Improvements

Advance a human capital strategy that supports college-wide student success priorities

- Ensure strong leadership for human capital within the college (including within senior team)
- Devise strategy for human capital change that contributes to major student success efforts (i.e., guided pathways)

Align components of human capital practice to college-wide student success priorities

Identify how changes can be made in the following systems:

1. Recruitment
2. Hiring
3. Onboarding
4. Professional development
5. Incentives (salary, promotion, and tenure)

Prioritize and sustain progress in words and deeds

- Communicate the importance of human capital improvement to excellence in student outcomes
- Allocate resources to sustain long-term change
- Ensure that all staff (including adjunct faculty) participate

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Human Capital Strategy

What does this look like?

Traditionally...

Human capital is viewed as traditional “human resources”: a compliance and tactical function, needed to hire and retain staff but not used strategically.



At colleges where human capital efforts are aligned to student success priorities...

Human capital is elevated to the level of strategy, staffed at the cabinet level, and treated by the president as essential to mission fulfillment and reflected in all college-wide processes.

Human capital decisions are made at the division and unit levels.



Priorities for improving human capital align with college-wide reform efforts and goals (ie. guided pathways work), and there are centralized strategies to advance those goals college-wide.

The relationship between human capital strategies and the senior team’s actions, communications, and evaluation practices has not been considered.



As part of a human capital strategy, the president and senior leadership team set goals for themselves to model the values of the culture they aim to build.

The president views human capital as purely operational and thus beyond the scope of board policy and review.



The president shares human capital strategies with the board, proposes annual goals for human capital, and incorporates human capital goals in their annual review.

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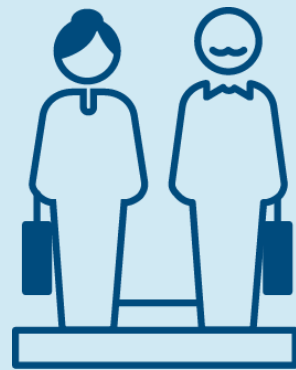
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Align Human Capital Practices to Student Success Priorities

Human Capital Practices

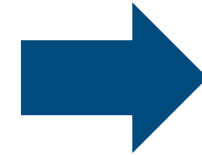


- Recruitment
- Hiring
- Onboarding
- Professional development
- Incentives (salary, promotion, and tenure)

Transformational Human Capital Practices: Recruitment

Traditional

- Recruitment is seen as a task and is done as it's always been done.
- Recruitment is done through traditional (often narrow) methods and sources.
- Job descriptions primarily reflect technical skills and related experiences.



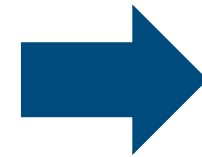
Transformational

- Recruitment is a strategy aligned to mission, with specific goals and plans to monitor progress
- The president and senior team expect strong, diverse candidate pools for every position and provide financial support for aligned recruitment strategies
- Position descriptions reflect the college's mission and major priorities

Transformational Human Capital Practices: Hiring

Traditional

- Focus on compliance with legal and administrative rules
- Divisions develop hiring committees from within, limiting perspective
- Hiring committees assess candidates' qualifications based exclusively on technical skills and experience
- President is not involved in most hiring decisions at the college



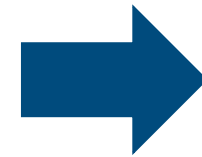
Transformational

- Hiring tools prioritize employee characteristics and experience aligned to human capital strategy
- Hiring and selection committees include representatives from other college divisions and senior leadership
- Review committees assess candidates' commitment to student success and capacity to advance major college-wide priorities
- The president has final approval on all new full-time hires at the director level and above

Transformational Human Capital Practices: Onboarding

Traditional

Focuses on processes, use of IT and other systems, benefits, and compliance with institutional rules.



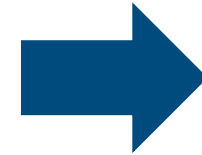
Transformational

- Centers on the most important aspects of professional development related to student success (including specific college-wide reforms, such as guided pathways)
- Includes orientation to the institution's history, mission, values, and student success priorities
- Promotes a sense of belonging for each individual through relationship building within departments and across the college

Transformational Human Capital Practices: Professional Development

Traditional

- Decided at the department level
- Most PD is voluntary
- Required PD is an event that occurs during a few days or weeks each year



Transformational

- College leaders adopt a PD strategy aligned to major college-wide priorities and informed by student outcomes data
- Every employee has a PD and training plan based on role, professional goals, and long-term career aspirations
- College provides professional development and training in multiple formats through a significant, centralized PD budget each year, with division budget submissions reflecting PD goals

West Kentucky Community and Technical College

Professional development strategy informed by student success goals



5X FINALIST
**ASPEN
PRIZE**
FOR COMMUNITY
COLLEGE EXCELLENCE
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Context

Administered ETS Proficiency Profile and found only 40% of students were capable of basic reading skills (compared to 60% at community colleges that administered test nationally).

Reforms

- Used Quality Enhancement Plan process to define biggest challenge in student learning—reading for meaning.
- President committed to scaled system: All faculty across all disciplines participate in professional development focused on how to teach students reading strategies proven to improve reading ability.
- Professional development for faculty—including adjuncts—is robust, and adjunct faculty are also assigned senior professors as mentors and have access to all teaching and learning resources.

Results

Faculty leaders conducted research, designed pilot, tested intervention, and found it effective.



Odessa College

Building student belonging and retention through human capital practices



2019 RISING STAR
**ASPEN
PRIZE**
FOR COMMUNITY
COLLEGE EXCELLENCE
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Odessa's Drop Rate Improvement Program (DRIP)

- Faculty interact with students by name and meet with students one-on-one.
- Faculty agree to four evidenced-based commitments to every student for improving learning outcomes.
- Faculty leaders provide job-embedded supports and incorporate active learning strategies into their teaching.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program

- Faculty professional development designed to close achievement gaps through a set of social and academic skills and behaviors taught to all students.
- New faculty take an initial AVID course; veteran faculty continue with an advanced AVID course.

Results:

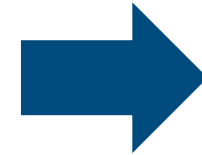
- Successful course completion rates up from 83% to 95%
- Enrollments up eight years in a row



Transformational Human Capital Practices: Incentives (Salary, Promotion, and Tenure)

Traditional

- Job security is based on years of service and the unit's enrollment
- Promotions for faculty and staff are based on time on the job
- Evaluations occur annually and are not linked to professional development plans



Transformational

- Leaders monitor and reward the engagement of faculty and staff in mission-aligned student success work
- The college transparently rewards behavioral development, demonstration of college values and beliefs, and practices that result in student success outcomes
- Salary increases and pay scales align to performance-based measures, and tenure and promotion practices are rooted in efforts to advance student success

Valencia College

Hiring and onboarding senior leadership for student success



2011 WINNER
**ASPEN
PRIZE**
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Context:

- Serving more than 70,000 students in Orlando, FL
- Winner of the inaugural Aspen Prize in 2011
- Valencia leadership focuses on a limited set of priority reforms, enabling scaled changes in multiple areas of student success

Reforms:

- Hiring new senior leadership team members is supported through unique processes, including an EQ assessment and writing exercise
- The development of new senior team hires is included in the portfolio of a VP, who is responsible for meeting monthly with all new team members to onboard them to Valencia culture



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Valencia College

Align faculty life cycle to teaching and learning strategy



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Reforms:

- Faculty collectively designed seven Essential Competencies of a Valencia Educator
- Uses competencies in hiring, onboarding, professional development, evaluations, and post-tenure review
- Redesigned tenure process built on a commitment to high-quality teaching and measuring what students learn
- Provides extensive support for faculty through an innovative, well-resourced Teaching/Learning Academy
- Established meaningful post-tenure review process

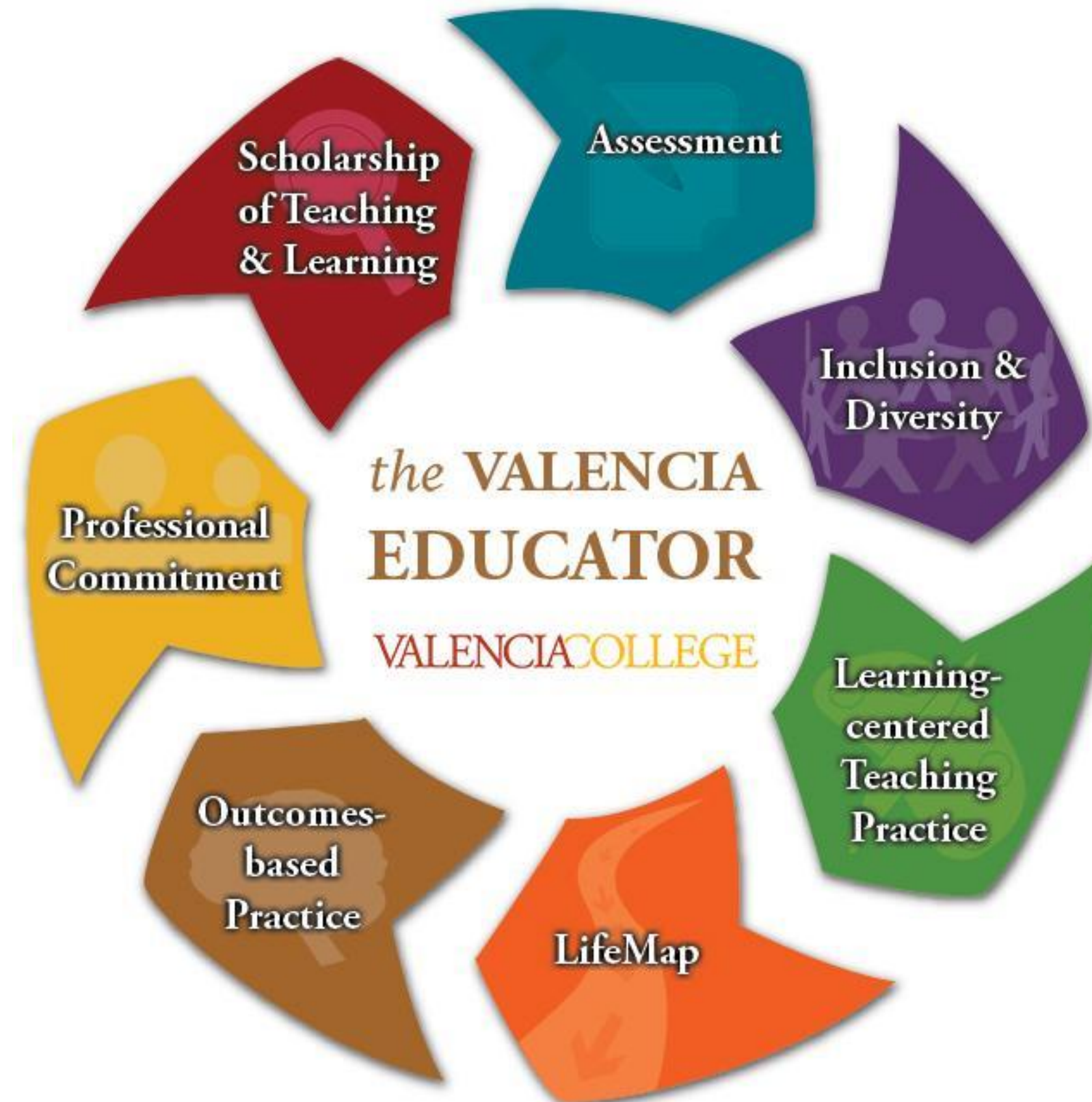
Results:

- Excellent outcomes in all domains
- Enrollment increased 16% over 10 years



Valencia College

The Valencia Educator



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 NATIONAL CENTER FOR INQUIRY & IMPROVEMENT
Design. Implement. Improve.

COLLEGE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM
aspen institute

Zane State College

Combining roles to strengthen student success reforms at a small, rural institution



ZANE STATE COLLEGE
ZSC

Context:

- Located in the small town of Zanesville, Ohio, with a limited college-going culture
- Found it difficult to recruit for & fund specialized positions needed to meet student success goals

Reforms:

- The college combined informational technology and institutional research positions, recognizing that IT systems often hold much of the data that institutional researchers need.
- Also created a “data quality team” of representatives from the registrar, business office, and admissions.

Results: In addition to saving money, this merger advanced student success work by enhancing the college’s data capacity and engaging more leaders in student success data analysis.



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Lesson from the Field

Greg Williams

President, Odessa College

Moderator: Josh Wyner

Aspen Institute College
Excellence Program



Team Time: Reflections on Human Capital Practices for Guided Pathways Implementation



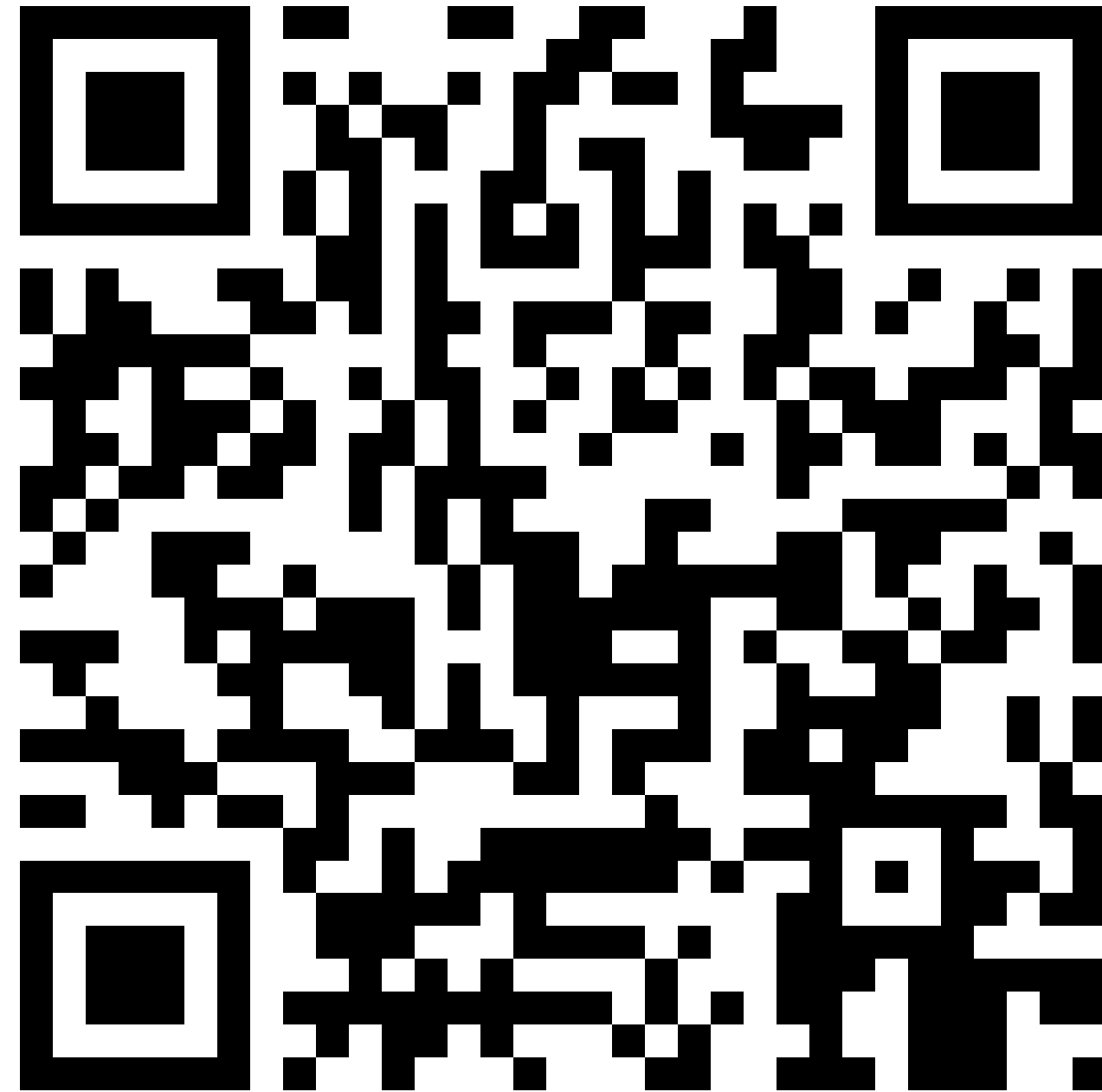
For the next **65 minutes**, you will spend time in breakout rooms with your college team. Coaches will join you for a portion of the breakout session as they move between teams.

Review your Human Capital Assessment Tool results. Then, discuss the questions on page 3-4 of the Participant Toolkit with your team.

Be prepared to return to the main room at **11:20 AM ET.**

Session Evaluation

Thank you for completing our session evaluation! We value your feedback and use it to continuously improve.



Thank You



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