

# Space Productivity Metrics Toolkit

Three Tools for Improving the Productivity of  
Offices, Research Labs, and Classrooms

Strategic Advisory Services

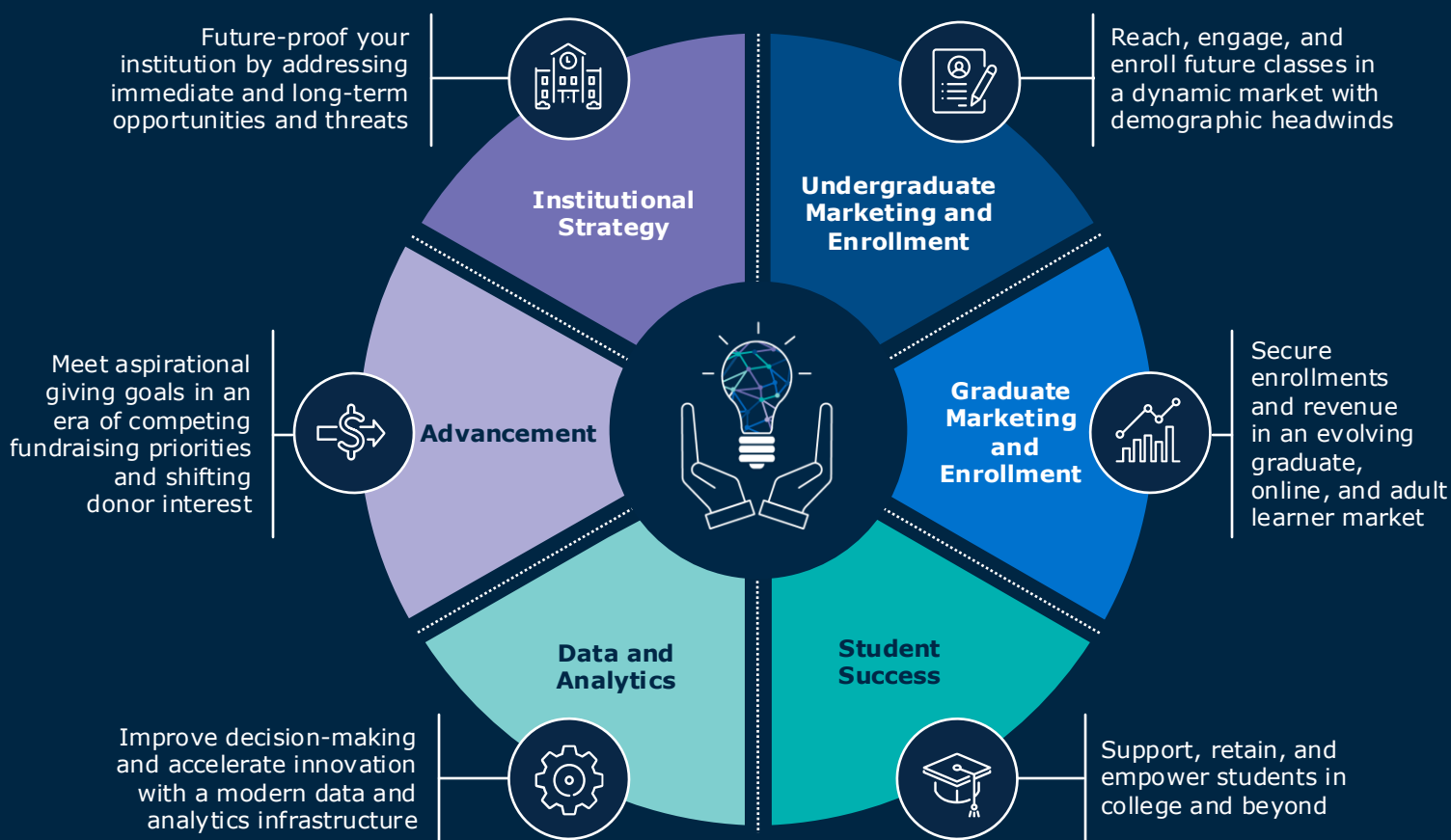
## Three Ways to Use This Resource

- Establish a metric selection process for Facilities or other administrative functions
- Identify metrics that will help assess space productivity across campus
- Learn about space data collection options



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# Executive Summary

## Growing Urgency to Address Costs—Especially Space (An Outsized Expense)

Colleges and universities always seek to optimize their resource allocation. The current fiscal environment is particularly challenging, and many leaders are scrutinizing their budgets even more closely. With space being among the largest assets, it is critical that institutions include the built environment in their assessments.

19%

Increase in building  
supplies and construction  
services costs (2019-2024)

+3%

Average yearly  
increase in  
utilities costs

45%

Increase in price per GSF<sup>1</sup>  
of total asset backlog  
(2013-2023)

## Underutilization of Campus Space Creates Inefficiencies

Beyond space being a costly asset, it is also an underutilized one. Average classroom utilization is less than 60% on average, while leaders report that offices may be utilized less than 20% of the time. Alarming, one institution discovered that its most expensive research lab was being used to store furniture, highlighting the potential for better space management.

## Inefficient Use of Space Impacts Strategic Priorities

Improving space productivity is not only crucial for financial health but also closely tied to strategic priorities, like research growth. For example, productive research labs generate more citations and patents enabling researchers to receive additional grants for future research. Optimizing existing spaces also reduces the need for new buildings, which can save millions. For instance, by finding an alternative to new construction for 140K square feet of office space, one university avoided \$45 million in new construction costs. This prudent space management means that funds can be reinvested in strategic areas such as student success, research development, and sustainability.

## Evaluate Space Productivity Across Campus

This toolkit helps leaders select metrics to assess the productivity of current campus space. This is an essential first step to determining where a campus has opportunities for improvement and how to resolve them.

The following sections each provide best-practice guidance, examples, and case studies designed to provide comprehensive support.

▶ Section 1: Select and Display Space Productivity Metrics

▶ Section 2: Compendium of Metrics

### Interested in Facilities metrics beyond space utilization and productivity?

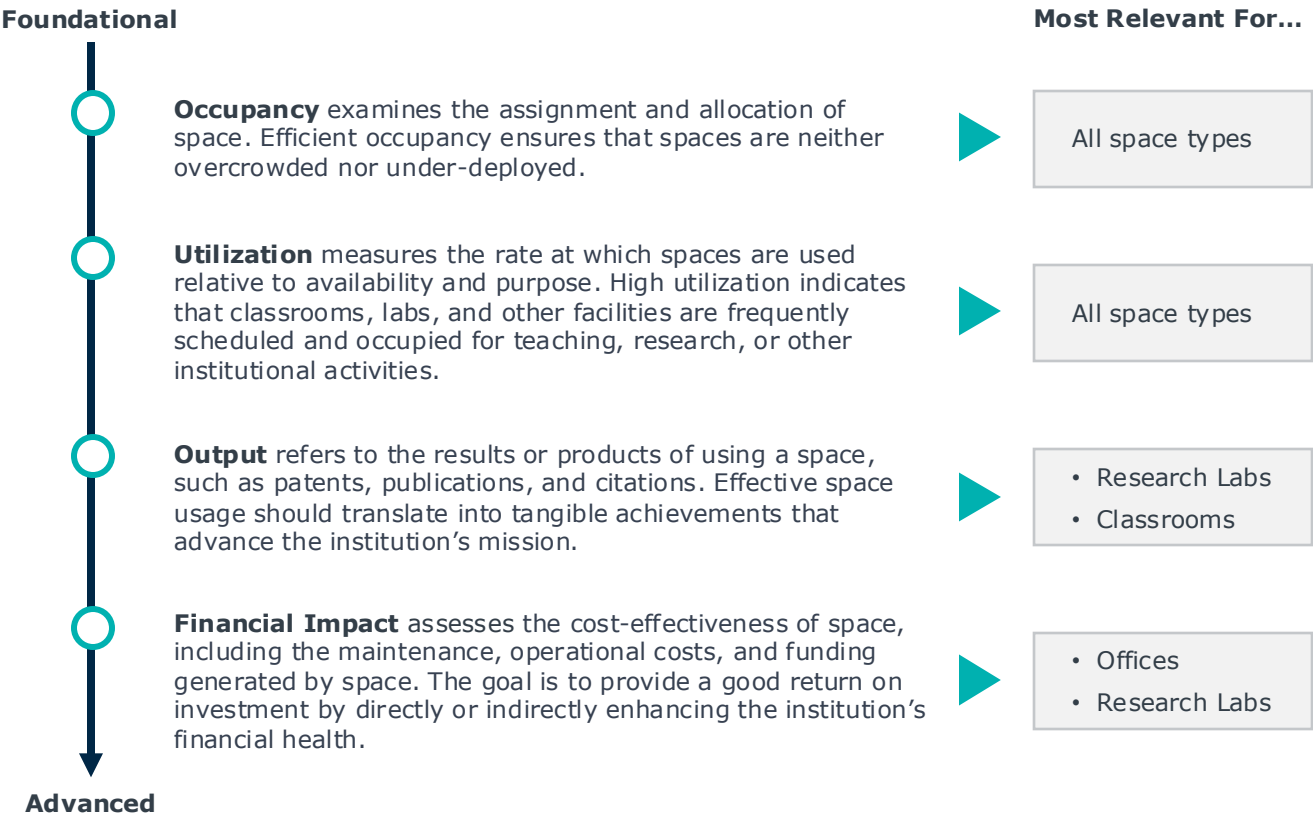
EAB's [Guide to Building an Impactful Facilities Dashboard](#) includes over 700 facilities performance metrics with guidance on filtering, selecting, and tracking the most essential ones. It also demonstrates the best ways to display and share these metrics internally and with campus stakeholders.

Source : "Higher Education Price Index," Commonfund Institute, June 22, 2023; "The State of Facilities in Higher Education 2023", Gordian, 2023; "The State of Facilities in Higher Education 2024", Gordian, 2024; EAB interviews and analysis.

1) Gross Square Foot.

# Defining Space Productivity

This toolkit focuses on **space productivity**, which captures four discrete categories of metrics: occupancy, utilization, output, and financial impact. The definitions below provide more context on each category. Each category is a critical component of gauging space productivity, but some are more relevant based on space type. Ultimately, EAB recommends picking a balance of metrics. See Filter 3: Create a Balance of Metric Types on page 15 for more.



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.



# Guide to Selecting and Displaying Space Productivity Metrics

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## SECTION

# 1

- Step 1: Assemble the Right People
- Step 2: Filter and Select the Metrics
- Step 3: Display the Data

# Step 1: Assemble the Right People

To manage space productivity effectively, it is essential to understand the distinct roles stakeholders play in shaping and supporting space decisions. Each leader—Facilities, IT, Finance, Academic, and Executive—brings a unique lens to how space is measured, allocated, and aligned with institutional goals. The following table outlines how these roles intersect to drive more strategic, data-informed use of campus space.

Stakeholder	Role in Space Productivity
<b>Senior Facilities Officer</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Coordinates the collection of space data across units</li><li>&gt; Conducts space audits and utilization studies</li><li>&gt; Maintains and updates Facilities dashboard</li><li>&gt; Communicates space productivity trends to senior leadership</li></ul>
<b>Chief Information Officer</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Develops and supports IT systems that track space usage</li><li>&gt; Connects space tracking platforms to other systems (HR, registrar, finance)</li><li>&gt; Supports the development of a digital facilities dashboard</li></ul>
<b>Chief Business Officer</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Makes strategic decisions about space usage based on productivity data</li><li>&gt; Champions space productivity tracking at the executive level</li><li>&gt; Approves and initiates investments in space productivity tracking (i.e., sensors)</li></ul>
<b>Provost</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Makes strategic decisions about space allocations for academic units</li><li>&gt; Mediates discussions between the CBO and faculty about space productivity</li><li>&gt; Encourages deans and faculty to share space productivity data with Facilities</li></ul>
<b>President</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Sets institutional vision that includes space productivity as a strategic goal</li><li>&gt; Uses space productivity data to support major decisions</li><li>&gt; Gives executive authority to initiatives aimed at improving space productivity</li></ul>

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.



## Step 2: Filter and Select Metrics

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This section helps senior leaders whittle down a long list of potential metrics to only those that are most relevant to their institutions. These three filters ensure that chosen metrics meet pragmatic limitations, support strategic priorities, and are well distributed across metric categories. For a complete list of productivity metrics, see pages 19-21.

### Three Metric Selection Filters

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1

#### **Apply a Reality Check**

Set aside metrics not readily accessible, regularly tracked, supported by reliable data, or easily communicated to others

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2

#### **Map to Strategic Objectives**

Identify metrics that most directly measure progress on the institution's strategic objectives

---

3

#### **Ensure Balance of Metric Categories**

Force trade-offs in overrepresented areas by sorting metrics by function or strategic perspective

# Filter 1: Apply a Reality Check

## Overview





This filter checks the feasibility of tracking different productivity metrics. It involves a one-by-one consideration of each metric and elimination of any that fail a majority of reality checks.

## Stakeholders Involved

- Owner: Senior Facilities Officer (SFO)
- Reporting partner(s), as needed:
  - IT
  - Institutional Research

## Four Pragmatic Screens to Determine Metric Viability

Four pragmatic screens quickly eliminate metrics that are infrequently updated, based on untrustworthy data sources, or potentially confusing to leaders and staff. The first two screens—accessibility of data and frequency of tracking—serve as a litmus test to confirm the availability of data at regular intervals. The second two screens—reliability of data and communicability of concept—test quality and metric relevance.

Metric Screen	Description	Rationale
 <b>Accessibility of Data</b>	Information system must possess the capability to generate data on metrics.	Unrealistic to expect manual data collection and analysis in timely manner for each metric.
 <b>Frequency of Tracking</b>	Metrics elevated to unit dashboard should be monitored at regular intervals (e.g., monthly or quarterly).	Infrequent (e.g., annual) data updates hamper ability to impact performance in real time.
 <b>Reliability of Data</b>	Data available from information system should be accurate, consistently defined, and measured across the organization.	Absence of trustworthy data results in manager suspicion toward performance, often resulting in inaction.
 <b>Communicability of Concept</b>	Definition and rationale for metrics should be easy to understand and replicate.	Lack of understanding about metric drivers and relevance hinders manager’s ability to inflect performance.

# Understand Your Options for Data Collection

This section outlines your options for data collection and potential data sources. Review the options below and assess which collection methods and data sources you currently have access to and which you may want to invest in for future use.

## Key Sources of Productivity Data



### All Spaces

- Occupancy sensors
- Wi-fi sensors
- Faculty, staff, and student self-reports or surveys
- Departmental reports
- Facilities-led space study



### Offices

- HR Department data on staffing levels, work location, and employee satisfaction
- Badge swipe data
- Office hours schedules
- Room booking data



### Classrooms

- Registrar Office data on course scheduling, enrollment, maximum capacity rate, attendance, and withdrawal/drop rates
- Course evaluation surveys
- Desk sensors



### Research Labs

- Research Administration Office data on funding, proposal submissions, and expense reports
- Provost's office data
- Research repository
- Grant tracking database

## Three Ways Institutions Collect Space Data

### Manual



- Uses "boots on the ground" approach where Facilities staff conduct inspections to observe utilization in-person
- While more time- and labor-intensive, approach avoids inconsistency of self-reported data

### Self-Reported



- Hosts space type, allocation, and usage data in [UO Spaces](#), a custom-built, live map of campus
- Units asked to update system as changes made to space (e.g., office reassignments)

### Automated



- Collects comprehensive data about campus space using people counters, occupancy sensors, and building management systems
- Data integrated into digital twin; informs service levels and space reconfiguration decisions

## Reality-Check Red Flag Questions

The following questions will help Facilities leaders test each metric against the four pragmatic screens. A majority of “no” answers for any one screen or at least one “no” for each of the four screens suggests that a metric should be eliminated from consideration as a core performance metric.

Screen 1: Accessibility of Data	Yes	No
1. Is the data for this metric collected via an automated system?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. If not, can someone collect and report the data within a few hours?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Is the system capable of calculating and reporting the results for this metric?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Screen 2: Frequency of Tracking	Yes	No
4. Can this metric be tracked more than once a year?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Can this metric be tracked frequently enough to inform action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Screen 3: Reliability of Data	Yes	No
6. Do all departments (e.g., Finance, HR) use the same definition for this metric?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Is the metric calculated by an automated system?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. If not, are you certain the reported data is accurate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Do managers trust the data for decision-making?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Screen 4: Communicability of Concept	Yes	No
10. Is this metric easily explained to and understood by leaders across units?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Do stakeholders typically agree on the definition of this metric?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Are stakeholders aware of the importance of tracking the metric?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Do stakeholders understand how performance on this metric impacts institutional goals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Filter 2: Map to Strategic Objectives

## Overview

This filter provides a framework to evaluate which potential metrics truly measure progress against institutional goals. It equips leaders to differentiate between and prioritize metrics that focus on the desired outcome rather than the means.

## Stakeholders Involved

- Owner: Project Lead
- Senior Facilities Officer (SFO)
- Chief Business Officer (CBO)
- Provost

## Align Space Productivity Metrics With Key Strategic Priorities

Without ensuring that chosen metrics directly link to strategic objectives, the chosen metrics may not reflect institutional priorities and could promote counterproductive initiatives. The graphic below outlines common strategic priorities that relate to space productivity.

## The Impact of Improving Space Productivity on Institutional Priorities



### Financial Sustainability

- Prevents or decreases the size of new builds, reducing construction and O&M<sup>1</sup> costs
- Shifts existing resources to high ROI<sup>2</sup> areas



### Student Success

- Efficient use of space expands course availability, increasing student flexibility
- Incentivizes more sessions of high-demand courses



### Research Innovation

- More lab space available for highly productive, early-career researchers
- Incentivizes researcher productivity



### Environmental Stewardship

- Reduces energy wasted in empty spaces
- Minimizes new construction, avoiding unnecessary resource consumption

1) Operations and maintenance.  
2) Return on investment.

# Mapping Institutional Priorities to Productivity KPIs

After listing out your institution’s strategic priorities, write your corresponding objectives. Identify the metric most closely related to each individual objective. (Note: It might not be possible to have a metric for every objective.) The framework below depicts how to effectively cascade broad strategic priorities into space productivity-specific objectives, metrics, and initiatives.

## Framework to Map Metrics to Institutional Strategic Priorities

	Strategic Priorities	Strategic Objectives	Metrics	Targets	Strategic Initiatives
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Backbone for strategy; roughly four to eight</li><li>• Usually derived from mission statement</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stem from strategic priorities; typically 40 to 60</li><li>• Adapted annually to every few years</li></ul>	Indicators that track progress toward objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indicator goals that motivate performance</li><li>• Frequently reset to ensure continuous improvement</li></ul>	Set of actions to raise metrics above target levels
Example	Research Innovation	Ensure lab space is available for highly productive PIs by identifying and reallocating underused lab space	Average utilization rate per primary investigator	60%+	Redistribute labs that are used less than 60% of the time

Metrics should flow directly from strategic objectives

Many institutions mistakenly track metrics that assess strategic initiative progress

Note that you do not have to fill out the **Targets** and **Strategic Initiatives** columns yet; however, thinking through the strategic initiatives is helpful because it can help you differentiate between metrics that advance the objective versus those that track progress against the initiative. In this example, tracking the lab utilization rate per primary investigator is the key metric.

A Priority Exercise Mapping worksheet can be found on the next two pages

# Priorities Mapping Exercise

Strategic Priorities	Strategic Objectives	Metrics	Targets	Strategic Initiatives

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

# Priorities Mapping Exercise

Strategic Priorities	Strategic Objectives	Metrics	Targets	Strategic Initiatives

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.



# Filter 3: Create a Balance of Metric Types

## Overview

This step is the final check on the list of metrics. It outlines how to assess the balance of metrics across different categories. The final list includes metrics that represent all metric types.

## Stakeholders Involved

- Owner: Project Lead
- Senior Facilities Officer (SFO)
- Chief Business Officer (CBO)
- Provost or Chief Research Officer (CRO)

## Balance the Four Types of Productivity Metrics

Productivity can be assessed using four main types of metrics: occupancy, utilization, output, and financial impact. Since each metric offers distinct insights and has unique pros and cons, aiming for a balance among them creates a more comprehensive view of space productivity and enhances strategic decision-making.

### Option One: Occupancy

**Measures:** assignment of space and the extent to which spaces are filled based on capacity

**Pros:**

- > Easiest to measure with existing data
- > Identifies low hanging fruit for better using space

**Cons:**

- > Dependent on a single snapshot in time, potentially obscuring larger patterns

### Option Two: Utilization

**Measures:** extent to which spaces are used relative to availability and capacity

**Pros:**

- > Easiest to measure with automation
- > Facilitates comparison across space types

**Cons:**

- > No way to differentiate low-impact from high-impact use behavior

### Option Three: Output

**Measures:** results or products facilitated by using the space

**Pros:**

- > Most customizable for different spaces
- > Supports non-financial strategic decision-making

**Cons:**

- > Difficult to compare with other data
- > Open to subjective interpretation

### Option Four: Financial Impact

**Measures:** cost-effectiveness of space; includes funding generated and operating costs

**Pros:**

- > Simplest to standardize
- > Accurate data for strategic decision-making

**Cons:**

- > May obscure progress on non-financial priorities
- > May not be applicable to all space types

# Metric Balancing Exercise

**Complete the Following for Each Space Type:**

**Step 1:** Assign each of your tentative metrics to the appropriate category based on their classification in the metric lists on pages 19-21

**Step 2:** In the categories with the most entries, identify any metric(s) that are redundant or significantly less valuable than others, and remove them

**Step 3:** In the categories with the fewest entries (excluding those designated for fewer metrics in that space), consult the metric lists on pages 19-21 for additional metrics in that category

Occupancy	Utilization	Output	Financial Impact
Offices			
Research Labs			
Classrooms			

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

## Step 3: Effectively Display Data With a Dashboard

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A facilities dashboard is one of the most effective ways to present space productivity metrics. Dashboards consolidate key data into a visual format that helps leaders spot trends, compare performance, and support informed decisions. As outlined in EAB's [Guide to Building an Impactful Facilities Dashboard](#), effective dashboards promote alignment and accountability across institutions. The chart below summarizes seven key characteristics of high-impact dashboard design.

### Characteristics of Effective Dashboard Layouts

Characteristic	Description
<b>Concise</b>	Static dashboards limited to three pages or less; interactive dashboards include drop-down menus or variable inputs to allow audience to display desired amount of information
<b>Accessible Data Visualizations</b>	Uses visualizations to simplify complex metrics and trends; most effective elements are bar charts, pie graphs, and trend line graphs
<b>Metrics in Context</b>	Includes trends over time, performance targets, action triggers, clearly labeled graphic titles, and brief metric definitions when necessary
<b>Directionality</b>	Uses arrows or icons to convey metric trend and/or goal directionality
<b>Color-Coded</b>	Deploys color-coding to indicate progress and enhance visualizations; binary color scheme (e.g., red and green) the simplest way to track progress, but multi-chromatic scheme can enable more complex data visualizations
<b>Consistent Time Frame</b>	Clearly indicates time interval for metric collection and assessment; time frames may differ based on metric type and goal (e.g., monthly work order completion rates, annual customer satisfaction scores)
<b>Mapped to Strategic Goals</b>	Where possible, maps metrics to broader Facilities themes or goals; some dashboards signal metric owner (i.e., Facilities staff member accountable for metric)

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.



# Compendium of Metrics

Metrics for Assessing Space Productivity and EAB's Recommendations

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SECTION

- Office Space
- Research Labs
- Classrooms

2

# Office Space

The list below includes metrics for assessing the productivity of office space. The **bolded** metrics are EAB's recommendations for performance indicators that institutions should track.

Metric Category	Measures
Occupancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Percent of offices assigned</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private</li> <li>• Shared</li> <li>• Workstations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Average offices per faculty/staff member</li> <li>• <b>Density rate per NASF<sup>1</sup></b></li> </ul>
Utilization <i>Average utilization should compare the time the space is in use to the total time available for the space to be used.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Average utilization rate by workspace type</b> (i.e., private, shared, workstation)</li> <li>• <b>Average utilization rate of conference and meeting rooms</b></li> <li>• Average utilization rate for student interactions</li> </ul>
Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research publications per NASF<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Citations per NASF<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Professional publications per NASF<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Public engagements (e.g., workshops, seminars) per NASF</li> <li>• Number of students advised per semester</li> <li>• Student interactions per office hours session</li> </ul>
Financial Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Operations and maintenance cost per NASF</b></li> <li>• Operating budget per NASF</li> <li>• Deferred maintenance backlog per NASF</li> <li>• Furniture costs per NASF</li> <li>• Research funding per NASF<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>

1) Net Assignable Square Feet.

2) For faculty for whom their office is their primary research space.

# Research Labs

The list below includes metrics for assessing the productivity of research labs. The **bolded** metrics are EAB’s recommendations for performance indicators that institutions should track.

Metric Category	Measures
Occupancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Researchers per lab</b></li> <li>• NASF<sup>1</sup> per workstation</li> <li>• NASF per researcher</li> <li>• <b>NASF per primary investigator</b></li> <li>• NASF per student researcher</li> </ul>
Utilization <i>Average utilization should compare the time the space is in use to the total time available for the space to be used.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Average utilization rate per lab</b></li> <li>• Average utilization rate per bench</li> <li>• <b>Average utilization rate per researcher</b></li> <li>• Average utilization rate per student researcher</li> </ul>
Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average time between funded projects per lab</li> <li>• <b>Publications per NASF</b></li> <li>• Citations per NASF</li> <li>• Patents per NASF</li> <li>• Students trained per lab</li> </ul>
Financial Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Annual operations and maintenance cost per NASF</b></li> <li>• Internal funding per NASF</li> <li>• External funding per NASF</li> <li>• <b>F&amp;A<sup>2</sup> funding per NASF</b></li> <li>• Funding per primary investigator</li> <li>• Indirect cost recovery per NASF</li> <li>• <b>Research expenditure per NASF</b></li> </ul>

1) Net Assignable Square Feet.

2) Facilities and Administration.

# Classrooms

The list below includes metrics for assessing the productivity of classrooms. The **bolded** metrics are EAB's recommendations for performance indicators that institutions should track.

Metric Category	Measures
Occupancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Average section fill rate per classroom</b></li> <li>• Percent of classrooms scheduled by size/classification</li> <li>• <b>Percent of classrooms below room capacity</b></li> </ul>
Utilization <i>Average utilization should compare the time the space is in use to the total time available for the space to be used.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Average utilization rate for centrally managed classrooms</b></li> <li>• <b>Average utilization rate for departmentally managed classrooms</b></li> <li>• <b>Average utilization rate by peak times</b></li> <li>• <b>Average utilization rate by non-peak times</b></li> <li>• Average seat utilization per classroom</li> </ul>
Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Student credit hours per NASF<sup>1</sup></b></li> <li>• Student credit hours per classroom</li> <li>• Students taught per NASF</li> <li>• Average student satisfaction score per classroom</li> <li>• Number of non-instructional events hosted in space each week (e.g., conferences, student activities, speakers)</li> </ul>
Financial Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total NASF of classrooms offline</li> <li>• Technology cost per NASF</li> <li>• Revenue generated from non-instructional events (if applicable)</li> <li>• Deferred maintenance backlog per NASF</li> <li>• Operating budget per NASF</li> <li>• <b>Annual operations and maintenance cost per student credit hour</b></li> <li>• <b>Annual operations and maintenance cost per NASF</b></li> </ul>

1) Net Assignable Square Feet.



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