

# Nursing Advisory Council (NAC)

Meeting #2

January 20, 2026

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## Welcome, Housekeeping, and Project Overview

- Hope Morrison, lead consultant at Sophos Strategies, opened the Nursing Advisory Committee (NAC) meeting. Hope reviewed the NAC meeting recording procedures and informed the NAC that thematic notes will be posted on the NAC SharePoint. She also reviewed the meeting guidelines.
- Hope reviewed the purpose of today’s NAC meeting, which was to review the NAC focus, review progress since the last NAC meeting, review and discuss December Stakeholder Roundtable themes, and review and discuss preliminary feasibility evaluation criteria and options to address the [House Bill 2851](#) directive.
- Hope reviewed the project’s purpose and the role of the NAC. [House Bill 2851](#) directed the Texas Health Education Service (TXHES) to centralize nursing school applications with the goal of ensuring the state has the data necessary to support nursing workforce development planning and to ensure a more efficient, equitable nursing admission system. The original report and recommendation that informed [House Bill 2851](#) can be found starting on page 31 of [Building Texas' Future Healthcare Workforce](#).
- The legislation directed TXHES to establish an advisory committee to provide recommendations and inform the implementation plan, which is this NAC. Sophos is assisting TXHES to carry out that directive by engaging the NAC while conducting a feasibility study and by developing an implementation plan for a centralized system.

## Project Progress

- In November 2025, Sophos Strategies initiated research to flesh out technical, operational, financial, stakeholder, and oversight feasibility elements relevant to a CAS, as required by HB 2851. Sophos also facilitated the first NAC meeting, at which time the NAC provided input on stakeholders who should be engaged, measures of success, and what we need to learn through the feasibility study.
- In December, Sophos Strategies continued research and hosted Roundtable Sessions to seek input from stakeholder groups identified by the NAC. After the December Roundtable Sessions, additional analysis and research was conducted, leading to the identification of feasibility criteria within each of the five domains and options to possibly meet the goals of the House Bill 2851 legislation.

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- In January, the Roundtable Session report was completed and the Sophos team hosted additional conversations with CAS operation and technical experts to understand key elements and options for implementing those elements. Also in January, Sophos Strategies disseminated a nursing program applicant survey to understand applicants' experiences and needs associated with Texas nursing application services.

### **NAC Process Survey Findings**

- Erin McGaffigan, Sophos Strategies, provided an overview of the NAC Process Survey findings from the November 2025 NAC meeting. Eight individuals completed the NAC Process Survey. Overall, respondents expressed appreciation for the most recent NAC meeting, found the process productive, and shared strong support for collaborative engagement moving forward.
- 100% of survey respondents reported they were active participants in discussions and there was adequate time for discussion and input. The majority of survey respondents (85%) agreed the purpose of the meeting was clear, facilitation was effective, and meeting technology worked well overall. Also, 85% of the participants indicated the NAC meeting was a good use of their time.
- The majority of survey respondents (75%) felt they had all necessary meeting materials in advance, that the meeting date and time worked, and that discussions were productive.
- Moving forward, respondents emphasized the importance of continued transparency and clear articulation of NAC goals, objectives, and role in decision making. There was also a request from a survey respondent to receive materials as early as possible to allow for meaningful input.
- Survey respondents also shared their priorities for this project through open response survey questions, which were keep application costs affordable for students; engage a broad set of stakeholders (e.g., registrars, admissions, student affairs, nursing deans and directors, CAS partners); ensure a CAS is responsive to diverse program requirements and institutional capacity; and ensure CAS data collection is purposeful, actionable, and decision-relevant.

### **December Stakeholder Roundtable Sessions Methods and Findings**

- Erin McGaffigan, Sophos Strategies, provided an overview of the Roundtable Sessions and results. Roundtables were conducted in December 2025 to ensure the feasibility study was grounded in real-world experience of Texas nursing programs. Five virtual roundtable sessions were originally planned, but six were held (December 11-15<sup>th</sup>) given the high demand for participation.
- Roundtable sessions were recorded, qualitatively analyzed for themes, and paired with a post-roundtable survey providing participants with an additional chance to provide responses to the Roundtable questions. While there were only 8 responses to the post-session survey, the themes identified through the survey aligned directly with the live sessions. The full Roundtable Sessions report is available on the NAC SharePoint for NAC review.

### **Session Participation**

- Outreach for Roundtable Sessions occurred within a two-week outreach window (during a busy end-of-semester/holiday period), and the high interest in attendance signaled investment in this topic.
- A total of 54 individuals were confirmed for a Roundtable session of which 40 joined a session. Participants were representing one of four roles 1) deans and senior academic leadership (largest share); 2) nursing program/department directors; 3) enrollment, admissions, and student services leadership; and 4) associate/assistant deans and program chairs.
- Participants were from 23 institutions statewide, with diversity across institution types, including public universities, health science centers, independent private universities, and community/technical colleges.

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### Perceived Benefits and Opportunities

Participants described several ways a CAS could add value, particularly if designed and implemented well. For instance, participants reported a CAS could:

- Improve access to accurate, actionable data by providing better visibility into the applicant pipeline, including the number of qualified applicants and those who were ultimately turned away.
- Increase transparency for applicants by offering clearer insight into application status and where individuals are in the process and application timeline.
- Improve applicant awareness of available programs and open seats, helping applicants identify opportunities, make more informed choices, and potentially reduce unfilled seats.
- Reduce administrative burden for institutions, which is often tied to transcript-related work, but also by extending to centralized tracking and having key materials “in one place.”
- Help export data to support applicant ranking, review, and admissions decision processes.
- Include support services that could help applicants navigate the application process more effectively.

### Perceived Challenges and Concerns

Participants described several ways a CAS could pose challenges or concerns. For instance a CAS could:

- Reduce institutions’ flexibility if the system is too rigid to accommodate variation across programs.
- Actually lead to institutions having multiple or parallel application systems for a single program, creating increased complexity and duplicative requirements and workflows.
- Require applicants to navigate multiple platforms while offering less tailored, hands-on support than what many institutions already provide, possibly frustrating applicants and lower completion rates.
- Impact institutions’ return on investment of their work to build their own systems, which required substantial time and resources to build.
- Unintentionally increase competition among institutions, leading to “poaching” of students.
- Offer options to students that seem strong at first glance, but are less feasible when factors such as overall costs for relocation are considered.
- Slow admissions processes rather than streamline them given transcript standardization or other standardized requirements.
- Not meaningfully reduce workload since institutions may still need to verify applicant information and determine if the applicant is qualified.

### Data Needs and Governance

- Participants emphasized that the value of CAS depends heavily on what data is collected, who is permitted to access the data, and how the data is used.
- Participants identified a need for reporting capabilities that distinguish applications from unique applicants and applicants from qualified applicants
- Participants identified a need to provide visibility into application status and progression.
- Participants identified the need for data on unfilled seats and other data to support program- and system-level metrics, such as graduation rates, NCLEX pass rates, and cost and outcome measures related to applications and enrollment.

### Timeline, Phasing, and Implementation

- Participants expressed that implementation must be deliberate, phased, and grounded in realistic expectations rather than rushed. There was broad consensus that any rollout should occur over multiple years, most commonly described as a three-year approach with the first year focused on

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planning and design, the second year dedicated to piloting and refinement, and the third year supporting broader deployment.

- Participants expressed mixed comfort levels with pilot participation, with some institutions eager to participate early to influence system design and others preferring to wait and learn from early implementation before engaging.
- Participants also emphasized several institutional implementation needs, cautioning against underestimating the time required for IT and security review and internal stakeholder buy-in.
- Participants shared that pilot selection should be based on institutional readiness and interest, that successful implementation would require robust training and change management, and that clear marketing and education efforts would be essential to prevent potential declines in applicant volume due to lack of awareness or confusion during transition.

### Governance and Oversight

- Participants raised data governance concerns, stressing the importance of clear rules around who can access applicant data and for what purposes to mitigate the risk of “poaching,” which was described as institutions using data to recruit applicants away from other programs.
- Participants generally preferred an advisory governance model that includes representation from a diverse range of institution types and geographic regions. They stressed the importance of incorporating system users into governance processes. They emphasized that oversight bodies should include individuals with practical knowledge of existing institutional systems, rather than relying solely on technical or security experts.
- Participants noted that governance should extend beyond the design phase to include continued involvement during piloting, troubleshooting, and ongoing operations.

### Key Questions Raised

Roundtable sessions surfaced a range of questions that participants want answered. These were:

- Do programs have a choice, or is adoption expected regardless?
- Will it cost institutions money? Will it cost students money?
- Is this an immediate requirement or a longer-term possibility?
- Can we achieve goals another way?
- Will a CAS require uniformity across programs?
- How will different program types be included/impacted?
- How will filled vs. unfilled seats be defined (metrics)?
- What is the value proposition for programs without unfilled seats?
- Who will have access to data, and what will they do with it?
- Will students lose the individualized/local support they rely on today?

### NAC Discussion

Erin requested that NAC participants share their overall reflections and questions pertaining to the Roundtable Session findings. Below is a review of points made during this discussion.

- NAC participants confirmed that the questions raised by Roundtable Sessions were the right questions and were important. Participants asked when these questions would be answered and how those questions would be reflected in the findings.

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- Erin explained that the questions presented were synthesized through qualitative analysis to reflect the most frequently raised concerns, and that a written summary would be shared to close the loop, including clarification on which questions could be addressed now versus those requiring further analysis.
- Hope added the content of these questions were embedded within the feasibility criteria and would be addressed through the analysis and implementation planning, including financial impacts on institutions and students. She noted that the final report is intended to ensure decision makers are informed of stakeholder concerns, tradeoffs, and desired system characteristics.
- A participant suggested that early rollout should prioritize programs struggling to fill seats while another participant expressed that focusing a pilot on this group could overly influence system design away from institutions that do not face enrollment challenges. Erin confirmed that both viewpoints were voiced during the Roundtable Sessions.
- There was additional discussion about applicants navigating multiple application systems simultaneously, potentially increasing complexity rather than reducing it. Erin confirmed that this point was made during the Roundtables by some participants.
- A participant shared that we need data to decide if a CAS is even needed, for instance, if we are even appropriately defining and measuring “filled” and “unfilled seats” to inform this decision. Maja Djukic noted that there are definitions and data found at [Texas Health Data - Professional Nursing Education](#).
- A participant asked if we knew how many Roundtable participants were NursingCAS users and non-users. Erin reported that limited participant detail was collected during registration and that it is difficult to quantify representation precisely from discussions. However, Erin reported that she observed a strong mix of participants with NursingCAS experience (including those who used it, stopped using it, or were interested in adopting it and were researching it). Erin also offered to add language to the report introduction to better reflect this diversity in NursingCAS experience.

### Initial Feasibility Framework Overview and Discussion

#### Feasibility Framework Overview

Hope reviewed how feasibility is being evaluated using a structured framework consisting of five feasibility domains, each with specific criteria used to assess and compare options. Hope reviewed this draft framework with the NAC, noting the following:

- These domains are taken from the Healthcare Workforce Task Force’s Recommendation 8, which informed [House Bill 2851](#), and therefore reflect legislatively defined expectations.
- The five domains include technical, operational, stakeholder, governance, and financial feasibility. The criteria across all domains are considered draft and will be refined based on stakeholder feedback and further review with legislative representatives and the Governor’s Office to ensure alignment with legislative and policy intent.
- Each option will be assessed across domains using a high–medium–low rating rubric.
- Technical feasibility criteria focus on areas such as system compatibility, data architecture, scalability, change management, flexibility across institutional requirements, secure and compliant data handling, and Texas’s level of control over system design and future enhancements.
- Operational feasibility criteria reflect issues such as alignment with varied admissions models and timelines, support for program-specific workflows, minimization of manual workload and workarounds, phased implementation based on readiness, training and onboarding support, and the ability to reconcile centralized application data with institutional requirements.

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- Stakeholder feasibility is assessed differently than other domains, as it centers solely on stakeholder perceptions, concerns, and buy-in rather than practical achievability. Criteria in this domain reflect themes raised during NAC meetings, roundtables, and other engagement activities and include delivering value across institution types, preserving institutional autonomy, improving transparency for applicants, avoiding increased applicant burden, particularly for first-generation and high-need students, and maintaining access to advising, navigation, and ongoing stakeholder engagement throughout implementation and operations.
- Governance feasibility criteria reflect areas such as statutory authority to implement and govern the system without additional legislative changes, institutions' legal and accreditation constraints to participation, clear and enforceable frameworks for data ownership, access, privacy, and confidentiality, viability of shared or advisory governance models, and the integration of operational expertise into decision-making.
- Financial feasibility criteria incorporate issues such as affordability, predictability, and sustainability of costs over time. Criteria include minimizing initial development and integration costs, limiting cost escalation as the system scales, reducing financial burden on applicants, ensuring equitable cost distribution aligned with ability to pay and anticipated benefits, minimizing net changes to institutional administrative costs, avoiding long-term vendor lock-in, and aligning cost structures with House Bill 2851 goals.
- Participants were encouraged to review the framework after the meeting and provide written feedback by the end of the week.

### Feasibility Framework Discussion

Below is a review of the discussion themes that resulted from NAC discussion following presentation of the feasibility framework.

### Feedback on Domains and Criteria within Domains

- A participant shared the need to explicitly emphasize stakeholder involvement in planning, not only implementation, so institutions are included early and mistakes are avoided.
- A participant shared the need to address the primary data gap, which is that stakeholders need information on how many applicants who apply through NursingCAS ultimately enroll, allowing for deeper analysis and action within specific programs.
- A participant asked about the origin of the feasibility framework and whether it had been used successfully in similar efforts. Hope explained that the five feasibility domains were taken directly from the Healthcare Workforce Task Force report that underpins House Bill 2851, and that the project team then developed the criteria within each domain using stakeholder feedback gathered during the project and research on statutory requirements, technology features, and current operational workflows.
- A participant questioned whether it is realistic for an option to “deliver clear value” to every institution if the primary goal of this work is to address the statewide nursing shortage. Hope noted that, in addition to stakeholder feedback, the team will also seek input from legislative sponsors and the Governor’s Office to ensure criteria align with legislative directive and state policy intent.
- A participant sought clarification on the goal of this effort and asked whether the goal is primarily to share resources across Texas schools or to attract applicants more broadly, warning that adding additional requirements through a CAS could discourage applicants who have options outside Texas. Hope clarified that the original purpose came from the governor-appointed task force’s recommendation to centralize nursing applications to improve statewide data on the nursing

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workforce pipeline. The feasibility study is intended to identify the most feasible way to accomplish that while considering operational, technical, governance, financial, and stakeholder constraints.

- Participants requested that cost as a potential barrier include costs to students. Participants would like clarity on how the system would be paid for, since funding options had been mentioned but not fully explained.

### Learning From and Building on Existing Models

- Participants discussed the importance of building on existing NursingCAS rather than ‘reinventing the wheel,’ while also noting the importance of IT engagement in planning and implementation.
- Participants recommended the team look at other state models, including California, to understand what has worked and what has not. They recommended the team look at how systems are financed, rolled out, customized, and governed in other states.
- A participant recommended that we ensure Texas’ leverage as a large state be used to negotiate for the data needed, if we use a paid vendor system like NursingCAS.

### Ensuring Accurate Data Assumptions

- Participants discussed data assumptions behind this project. Reportedly, Texas has “thousands of unfilled nursing seats” and the need for a CAS to help applicants see where vacancies exist so seats can be filled. Some questions were posed as to whether thousands of qualified applicants are really being turned away since existing data counts applications rather than unique people. Participants agreed that our core goal is to better match qualified applicants to vacant seats.
- There was some concern that the existing workforce data may not support strong conclusions about open seats since schools may issue many offers that are later declined and that applicants often apply to multiple programs and accept only one offer. Participants want to ensure that this project is operating from the right assumptions and any system chosen must more accurately identify how many actual people are not admitted, in part to avoid “qualified applicants not admitted” figures being used against programs.

### Four Options Overview and Discussion

Henry Perretta, Sophos Strategies consultant, explained four options for meeting the HB 2851 directive identified through Sophos research and stakeholder feedback. These are:

#### Option 1- Using Liaison’s NursingCAS Statewide

- This option involves implementing Liaison’s NursingCAS statewide as a Texas-configured version (“TexNCAS”), with Texas-specific setup based on stakeholder guidance.
- Programs would integrate core admissions workflows into the system, applicants would apply through NursingCAS, and NursingCAS would collect and share statewide data for decision making while providing NursingCAS’s national data for benchmarking.
- NursingCAS would collect common applicant information alongside program-specific sections customized by each nursing program to include questions, document requests, and prerequisites.
- NursingCAS would allow for bi-directional data exchange with nursing programs’ systems (e.g., Slate, Banner, PeopleSoft) to help programs maintain direct outreach and visibility into applicant status.

#### Option 2-Texas-owned Centralized Application System

- This option would involve building a Texas-owned centralized application system with similar functionality to NursingCAS, but informed by TMDSAS models.

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- A pilot-based build would allow the state to develop requirements, manage an enterprise-scale development effort, and deploy in a controlled way, with a goal of having a real system operating by 2027.
- The system would require applicant and reviewer portals, Texas administrative functions, identity and role-based access controls, Application Programming Interface (API) for integration with institutional systems, workflow tools for verification and processing, and an initially limited reporting capability since statewide data would not be available at launch and national benchmarking data would likely not be available.

### Option 3-Hybrid Approach

- This option would be a hybrid approach that would still involve building the Texas system described in Option 2. However, Option 3 would allow institutions to remain on their current application platforms if they chose and report applicant level data and open seats capacity in a data feed to TxHES. This data feed would allow TXHES to receive information on unique applicants and open seats.
- This option adds additional operational complexity, including frequent data submissions, error handling, and the challenge of matching applicants across systems without a universal identifier. There is uncertainty about whether this option meets the requirements in House Bill 2851.

### Option 4- Data Warehouse

- This option is a data-warehouse-only approach with no centralized application service platform. Instead, institutions would submit applicant and seat data to TXHES for reporting.
- This option avoids changes to institutional admissions workflows but does not address applicant experience. This option also provides uncertainty on how actionable the aggregated data would be to allow for improved outcomes.
- Any changes within individual institutional systems could impact timely and accurate data submissions. Also, the option would likely require multiple submission methods (e.g., batch files or other standardized feeds) and the development of statewide dashboards to meet reporting needs. There is uncertainty about whether this option meets the requirements set forth in House Bill 2851.

### Feasibility Options Discussion

Below is a review of the discussion themes that resulted from NAC discussion of these options.

#### Option Timelines

A participant asked about any difference in timelines across the options. Henry reported that the team did draft initial workplans for each. According to this initial work:

- Option 2 was scoped as roughly a year of requirements, design, development, testing, and training to deliver a limited pilot by June of the following year.
- Option 1 was expected to be require a shorter timeframe to implementation than Option 2 because it is more configuration than development .
- Option 3 would take longer than Option 2 because adding data-feed capability for programs that stay on their existing systems introduces additional complexity, requiring the system to launch first and then another several months to build and stabilize the external data interfaces.
- Option 4 was estimated for June of 2027 based on draft planning assumptions.

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- Matthew Meeks noted that TXHES has an established relationship with Liaison International and has discussed with them both Options 1 and 2, including models similar to California's partnership approach with NursingCAS.

### Seeking Accurate Data

- A participant asked how Options 3 and 4 would differ from existing statewide reporting already submitted by programs (such as the annual NEPIS reporting to the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies), and whether the intent of those options was to enable deduplication through additional identifiers and data-sharing. Henry clarified that all four options are intended to produce unique-applicant reporting, similar to how NursingCAS can report both applications and unique individuals, and he acknowledged that Options 3 and 4 are essentially attempts to achieve that deduplication through more robust identifiers and data integration than what currently exists.
- A participant asked whether there is a way to assign or use a consistent identifier for each applicant so the state can track where individuals apply, where they are admitted, and ultimately where they enroll (similar to previous gainful-employment tracking), noting that current counts feel inflated because they track applications rather than people. The schools reportedly already use unique student IDs and the participant wondered if a comparable approach could be applied earlier in the pipeline for applicants, potentially through a centralized application process, so that enrollment outcomes (such as status by the 12th class day) can be reconciled with application activity. Henry said he needed to think further about the identifier question, but he recognized it as central to solving the "supply and demand" visibility problem that the options are trying to address.

### Responsiveness to House Bill 2851

- A participant was concerned that we may be limiting options too early since there may be other options used by other states, including California.
- The conversation surfaced uncertainty that Options 3 and 4 may not satisfy the intent of the legislation, which includes improving applicant experience not just data collection. Applicant affordability is a central consideration and there is participant concern that Options 3 and 4 are more institution-facing and do not sufficiently address the applicant experience.
- A participant noted that House Bill 2851 was also designed to improve the applicant experience by simplifying and standardizing the application process, which currently varies significantly across schools and can be difficult for applicants to navigate.
- The legislation contemplates offering a centralized nursing application system by fall 2027, but intentionally sets implementation after the next legislative session to allow time for review, potential amendments, or additional state input based on the findings of this feasibility study.

### Review of Next Steps

- Hope invited NAC members to submit written feedback on the feasibility criteria and the options by the end of the week, noting that additional time to reflect is encouraged.
- Hope explained that the team will finalize the feasibility framework using NAC input and feedback from a small group that will include the offices of the legislative sponsors of HB 2851 and the governor to ensure alignment with legislative direction and state policy priorities. Once the criteria are finalized, the team will apply them to each eligible option, identify the highest-feasibility option, and then develop an implementation plan for that option.
- Hope shared that the next NAC meeting is scheduled for February 10th, and the goal is to present the results of the feasibility analysis at that meeting.

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- Hope noted that meeting slides, the Roundtable Sessions report, and the student survey flyer are already available on the NAC SharePoint site. She requested that NAC participants who do not yet have access to the SharePoint site to email her to be added.
- Hope noted that the team will prepare thematic notes from today's meeting and post the notes to the SharePoint site.