EVALUATION CHALLENGE

Getting Data from Project Institutions

Preconference workshop at the 2011 ATE PI conference

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Peter Saflund ***October 2011***

Getting institutions to provided data that is needed for ATE evaluations can be a challenge. Whether a multisite project evaluation needs data from several different colleges or you just need data from one college's instutional research office, getting access to those data requires knowing what to ask for, knowing how to ask, and getting the invovled parties involved early on in the process. It's important to gain clarity on these questions before designing an evaluation that hinges on getting access to institutional data.

7 QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BEFORE YOU ASK FOR INSTITUTIONAL DATA

1. **Do you need institutional data, and why?** Institutional data can help support or prove the goals and claims of your grant. Even though in most cases we are not doing a controlled study, we need to know if something really got better because we did the work we proposed, and if it did, by how much did things improve. We will look at goals and outcomes through the lens of getting supporting data.
2. **Do the participants understand their responsibility to provide data for the evaluation?** If so, this may help the process along. Go back to the original proposal documents and look for commitments. If not, recommend this for the next proposal. In any event, make sure partners and contributors are on board.
3. **What kinds of institutional data are available?** Some options include IPEDs, Perkins, student attainment, faculty evaluations, and placement/transfer/graduation rates. In this session, we will briefly discuss issues of obtaining and working with these types of data.
4. **Who can provide access to this data?** The person's title will vary by college, as will the unit in which they are located. It may be called *institutional research, institutional effectiveness*, or *institutional assessment* (among other labels). In colleges with multiple campuses, there may be a person housed at the district-level office who has responsibility for district-wide data. Find out who the individual in your context is and find out what the protocols are for making data requests.
5. **In what format do you need the data? How do you construct a request?** The more information you can give, the more likely you are to get useful information in return. In many cases we are seeking descriptive statistics, however we may also be able to perform analyses (pre-post, multiple sections, inter-institutional, etc.).
6. **How much time does it take to receive data once request is made?** This is going to vary by institution and by the other responsibilities of the data gate keeper. The point is to find out in advance how much lead-time is needed to respond to a request. No one likes last-minute requests.
7. **Can the office that houses the data perform analysis or just construct data sets?** If they can perform analysis, what types of analysis may be useful to proving effectiveness of your work?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/
http://136.165.122.102/UserFiles/File/Tech_Reports/Postsecondary_Data_Dictionary_Report_WEB.pdf
http://federalstudentaid.ed.gov/about/title4_programs.html

The resources above are good for familiarization with how and why institutions gather and report data. However, each state and educational division have individual and unique reporting requirements and strucures for their student data warehouses. While they collect similar types of data, there are often issues with granularity, so getting an early understanding what data is available in your state, terms under which data can be released, and how to request it is very helpful

Peter Saflund is the Principal/Owner of The Saflund Institute. He may be reached at psaflund@mac.com.