

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Northeast Iowa Community College

Project Details			
Title	Creating a systematic approach to the planning process.	Status	COMPLETED
Category	8-Planning Continuous Improvement	Updated	09-05-2007
Timeline		Reviewed	09-18-2007
	Planned Project Kickoff 06-23-2003	Created	11-24-2009
	Actual Completion	Version	4

1: Project Goal

A: The goal is to develop a strategic and operational planning process that is a result of a collaborative effort by all levels of college employees through the use of quality improvement concepts. The result of this process will be a strategic planning process that is participative and focused on meeting identified stakeholder needs. The identified strategic plan will serve as the foundation for allocation of the college's resources to meet the goals and objectives established by the representative departments and divisions of NICC.

2: Reasons For Project

A: Providing employees with the tools to guide effective identification of the needs of the college and working toward problem solving and solution generation will lead to greater participation in the planning process. Employees will be committed to the future of NICC if they are able to take an active role and become part of the vision. Ultimately, employees will be more comfortable with change if they are key players in determining the focus, direction, and purpose of the college.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Administration, departments, divisions, committees, and teams.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Strategic planning, operational planning, budgeting, and resource allocation.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: A number of activities are currently in place in support of this goal. The college vision team has been formed and is a cross representation of staff, faculty, administration, and support services. A forum on identification of the college's vision has been completed with the vision team. Training sessions in continuous improvement techniques will begin this fall.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Program reviews, college-wide strategic planning, budgeting, and resource allocation for identified priorities, and division and department planning.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: NICC employees' involvement in the planning process; completion of a formal strategic plan and establishment of a cohesive strategic planning process; and college employees informed of the strategic plan through various media. Progress on the strategic plan included in the President's bi-annual state-of-the-college address and progress published annually.

8: Other Information

A: Seventy-five percent of the college vision team will participate in development/review of college vision, mission, and strategic plan through utilization of continuous quality improvement techniques. Identified facilitators will receive training in QI concepts, SWOT analysis, and performance measures. Ten percent of NICC departments/divisions will engage in the implementation of continuous planning processes with the aid of trained facilitators. Seventy-five percent of the college vision team is trained in continuous quality improvement techniques. Fifty percent of NICC departments/divisions will engage in the implementation of continuous planning processes with the aid of trained facilitators. Seventy-five percent of the college vision team is trained in continuous quality improvement techniques.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: This action project is, perhaps, the most challenging and ambitious one we have undertaken. Over the past two years, the College has taken some important steps in setting up a new planning process and involving all employees in annual planning. The process involved departments meeting annually and setting goals and submitting proposals to three district-wide committees (Vision, Strategic Planning, and Budget). The committees reviewed the proposals for adherence to the College mission and vision, alignment with the strategic plan, and budget priority. This was the second year of the annual planning process. It became clear that the process had a lot of strengths, but also some inherent flaws. The most important was that many of the proposals submitted dealt with basic operational needs. Rather than being a vehicle for new initiatives, the process became a way for departments to ask for money to pay for daily operations. An AQIP Team went to Lisle, Illinois, in May 2007 to review our action projects and set a direction for the next set of action projects. It quickly became clear that the annual planning process needed some adjustment. The team determined that the annual planning cycle needed to be more closely aligned with the College strategic plan and with AQIP. It also needed to include clear benchmarks and outcomes and a process for tracking those. The team proposed setting up a Quality Council to establish and review benchmarks and outcomes. Council members would include the chairs of seven subcommittees, one for each area of the strategic plan. Each of the seven committees would establish benchmarks and outcomes and create an assessment plan to track initiatives. The College shared information about the new committee structure with all employees in August 2007. The next few months will be dedicated to establishing the Quality Council and seven subcommittees and training committee chairs in continuous improvement and meeting facilitation.

2: Institution Involvement

A: A number of individuals have been involved in creating and testing our annual planning cycle:

- All employees had the opportunity to participate in the annual planning process last year. They met with their colleagues at the department level and submitted proposals for funding to three college-wide committees.
- The three committees (Vision, Strategic Planning, and Budget) reviewed the proposals for adherence to the College vision and mission, alignment with the College strategic plan, and funding priority. The committees had members from all levels of the College.
- The AQIP Team reviewed the annual planning process and came up with a new system to ensure coordination. Members of this team included the President, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Peosta Provost, several other administrators and faculty, and a board member.
- The AQIP Team shared their findings with the College Senate and the Strategic Planning Committee. They also presented the new proposal to the President's Cabinet and Board of Trustees.

3: Next Steps

A: The next steps in creating a systematic annual planning cycle will be:

- Establishing a Quality Council with college-wide representation.
- Establishing seven subcommittees, each representing an area of the strategic plan.
- Establishing benchmarks and outcomes for each area of the strategic plan and creating appropriate assessment plans.
- Training committee chairs in continuous improvement principles and effective meeting facilitation.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: We have found the following practices to be effective in creating a systematic approach to the planning process:

- Developing a strategic plan aligned with the College vision and mission.
- Tying annual planning and resource allocation to the strategic plan.
- Involving all employees in annual planning.
- Aligning all planning efforts with strategic planning and accreditation.
- Establishing a committee structure that reflects a commitment to continuous improvement and aligns with the strategic plan, accreditation efforts, and

evaluation requirements.

5: Project Challenges

A: We still have much to accomplish on this action project. We need to promote a culture of continuous improvement through information, education, and other strategies. We need to continue to refine the planning process and tie it to strategic planning and accreditation requirements. We need to integrate planning and assessment. One of the biggest challenges will be to determine the most appropriate benchmarks and outcomes. Another challenge will be to set up the process for collecting and reporting data. Because this action project is so important, we will integrate it into our next cycle of action projects.

6: AQIP Involvement

A:

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The College is commended for redirecting the action plan and appears to be making reasonable progress toward completion of the project. The College's acknowledgment that the planning process had some strengths, but was hindered by a focus on basic operational/budget issues versus new initiatives will result in a change in direction, to be met by aligning the planning process with the college strategic plan and AQIP. The old adage "what gets measured gets done" applies to the College's plans for the future. The proposal to establish a Quality Council to establish and review benchmarks and outcomes along with an assessment plan to track initiatives is essential to success. AQIP Category 8, Planning Continuous Improvement, includes two important components to assess this process: measures and analysis of performance projects and results.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The College recognizes the importance of employee engagement in the annual planning process and sought employee input at the department level. The College's challenge on retaining employee engagement will be to ensure that they remain involved in the process. And most importantly, employees will need to see a link between their participation and their impact on the annual planning cycle and ultimately intended results. Senior leadership, faculty and staff are involved in the process and have considered the AQIP Team's findings. The College should consider developing a plan and select measures to ensure the success of the coordination system suggested by the AQIP team.

3: Next Steps

A: The broad description of steps to create a systematic annual planning cycle address the engagement of staff, and the establishment of a governance framework (establishing seven subcommittees linked to each area of the strategic plan). And most importantly benchmarks and outcomes are described. The improvement section of AQIP Category 8, Planning Continuous Improvement" asks "how you set targets for improvement". The benchmarks and outcomes and related assessment plans demonstrate the College's commitment to the process.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The College should continue to sustain the effective practices described in this section. They represent best practice and critical to the AQIP Criterion "Mission and Integrity". Key to the process is the recognition that planning efforts and resource allocation are linked to the strategic plan.

5: Project Challenges

A: The College correctly recognizes the challenges facing this action project. Information and education are two strategies cited as

necessary to overcome challenges and promote a culture of continuous improvement. The recognition that the planning process needs to be refined and tied to strategic planning and accreditation requirements answers the “why should we do this?”. An action plan and specific targets should be established for this objective. The challenge of determining appropriate benchmarks and outcomes will fall under the responsibility of the Quality Council. The seven subcommittees that track to each of the College’s strategic plan areas will be charged with setting benchmarks and outcomes and creating an assessment plan to track initiatives. The College has an opportunity for enhanced success in this project to support its strategies if it clearly defines “how progress reports will be tracked as well as communicated to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and key stakeholder groups”. (Category 8, 8P3) In turn, this will demonstrate the College’s commitment to the College community (faculty, staff and administrators) recognizing their integral role in the organization’s success (AQIP Category 4, Valuing People).

6: AQIP Involvement

A: Assistance was not requested. Reviewer 9819.