

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Northeast Iowa Community College

Project Details			
Title	Improving a college-wide assessment plan	Status	COMPLETED
Category	7-Measuring Effectiveness	Updated	09-30-2014
Timeline		Reviewed	10-08-2014
	Planned Project Kickoff 10-01-2011	Created	09-30-2011
	Actual Completion 09-01-2014	Version	3

1: Project Goal

A: The goal of this Action Project has broadened to measure, report, communicate and set goals from the implementation of the College's strategic plan through an identified and consistent process.

2: Reasons For Project

A: In 2011-2012, NICC worked diligently with feedback from the AQIP Strategy Forum to communicate the importance of measuring the College's strategic plan and communicating that plan via the "3 Big Rocks," which distills the nine strategic priorities into 3 focused themes: Student Learning, Fiscal Stewardship, and Stakeholder Relationships. The College's original intent was to move beyond simply collecting and understanding data in pockets, toward improving college-wide alignment (goals, data collection, decision-making) with a college-wide assessment plan.

This past Fiscal Year 2013 saw significant steps forward including a) hiring of the College's first Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness to create the first "home" for the College's accreditation and strategic planning functions. This office also oversees marketing, legislative, grants, and institutional research, creating a one-stop shop for data, communication, and planning functions; b) engaging in the College's second year of collecting departmental goals college-wide, which are tied to the college's strategic plan and assessment of that plan; c) communicating internally and externally, for the first time specific and measurable fiscal year strategic priorities, drawn from the 5-year strategic plan; and d) developing new metrics for academic programs to monitor their impact on the strategic priorities of student retention and enrollment.

This action project is still very high among college priorities as the new Institutional Effectiveness office moves to development of a college scorecard, streamlined reports on strategic plan implementation, grassroots alignment through goal-setting and assessment, and a quality council that is skilled in assessing results and data to make recommendations on strategic plan priorities.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: All areas of the college will be affected by the implementation of a college-wide assessment plan, led by the Institutional Effectiveness staff. The assessment plan itself, resulting in a college scorecard and measurement of strategic priorities and strategic plan implementation, will be especially valuable to NICC personnel leading initiatives directly related to strategic priorities. This data will be important as they establish a baseline, set goals, and analyze results and impacts of initiatives or activities. The NICC cabinet will also be directly impacted as each member has responsibility over one or more areas of the strategic plan and will be reporting progress to Board of Trustees and other stakeholders.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: The Action Project will have a positive impact on the College's data collection and analysis (to establish benchmarks and feasible goals), strategic planning process (where meaningful data and outcomes will inform the next strategic plan), communication with internal and external stakeholders (where NICC demonstrates its accountability to its mission), program assessment (where data trends can be used for program analysis and goal-setting), and fundraising efforts (where meaningful data can illustrate needs).

Actions for this fiscal year 2014 include a) developing a scorecard of fiscal year priorities, b) developing reports for each of the nine FY11-15 strategic priorities and establishing a priority "lead" to ensure implementation, and c) following up with college departments submitting goals on Sept. 30 to measure goals at a midway and final reporting time and aligning with strategic priority reports.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: While this project will be continuously evolving to encompass new strategic priorities and goals, and it will take several years to complete thorough trend analyses. NICC believes the process of this action project can be instituted in two years. This fiscal year will focus on piloting a scorecard, strategic priority reports, and a second year of grassroots goal setting and assessment. The second year will hopefully result in an institutionalized and well-communicated process that is recognized as part of the NICC culture.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Quality Council will monitor the on-going implementation and evaluation of goals at the program and divisional levels; the Institutional Effectiveness office will ensure progress toward development and integration of College scorecard with the intent to inform College decision-making. The Marketing and Communications department, part of Institutional Effectiveness, will be integral to the ongoing communication plan regarding outcomes of goal-setting, assessment, and college priority measurement.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: This project will be assessed both through delivery of outcomes, i.e. creation scorecard, development of program metrics, data collection at all levels of College, as well as broad engagement in the *process*, i.e. staff and faculty at various levels know the college's priorities and can communicate how they are contributing to those priorities or aligning their own departments with those priorities. A broad indicator will be the improvement of College priorities over baseline measures as a result of targeted and specific initiatives.

Project Update

1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

A: General Project Status: Completed In-progress Suspended Reopened
Original Project Start Date: 10 / 01 / 11
Originally Projected End Date: 9 / 1 / 14
Anticipated Completion Date If Not Completed: complete

This action project has met its goal to measure, report, communicate and set goals from the implementation of the College's strategic plan through an identified and consistent process.

This process and results will be detailed as a strategic initiative in the soon-to-be submitted systems portfolio

2: ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

A: The project outcomes, as detailed in Question 7 of the original project, included the following:

- 1) creation of college scorecards to measure strategic priorities--this framework has been completed and 6 out of 9 scorecards have been developed and shared with the board of trustees and college community
- 2) development of program metrics--this framework has been completed and the academic affairs office maintains and updated the program metrics, which include retention and enrollment data for each term.
- 3) data collection at all levels of College--this framework has been established through an annual college goal-setting process, although it's being deployed at varying levels of effectiveness.

3: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

A: Key accomplishments include the following:

- development of 6 college scorecards aligned with a strategic priority (the other three will be developed in October, November, and December of 2014).
- development of program metrics to bring enrollment and retention data to the program level for deans and faculty to better engage in goal-setting and strategic priorities.
- development of FY 14 priorities and FY 15 priorities from the strategic plan and corresponding scorecards for each
- Strong engagement in college-wide, grassroots goal-setting. District-wide, 42 departments submitted 102 goals in the fall of 2013. As of September 1, 91% of the goals had been updated with progress and/or outcomes information. Of those updated, 24 goals were successful, 55 are ongoing, 29 are waiting to review data from the 10th day official enrollment and retention reports, 2 were unsuccessful or abandoned, and 2 were not reported on. This year we tweaked the process to allow for online submission of projects, which includes required approval from cabinet-level supervisor.
- Developed College's first online dashboard showing fall enrollment goals and progress toward goal.

The goals are still aligned with last year's project update.

4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

A: All areas of the college were affected by college-wide assessment plan, led by the Institutional Effectiveness staff. All departments were invited to submit goals and with supervisor buy-in, all but a handful complied. This brought the strategic priorities down to a grassroots level. The program metrics in particular engaged academic deans in discussions of enrollment, retention, and student success at new levels. The NICC cabinet was also directly impacted as each member has sole or shared responsibility over one or more areas of the strategic plan that was reported as progress to the board Board of Trustees and other stakeholders each month.

5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

A: I think the overall effect has been an increasing habit of and expectation of data-informed decision-making, particularly at higher levels of the institution. This project has also elevated our conversations about student success, enrollment, and retention by bringing a greater level of detail (program metrics, student location, high school yield, non-credit enrollment, etc.) to the conversation that was traditionally about fall enrollment numbers.

6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

A: One challenge continue to be keeping such a large organization in touch with strategic priorities and how they influence them. We have tried to do this through internal staff newsletters, institutional effectiveness staff attending goal-setting meetings, convocation presentations, etc. and we are making headway.

7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIMELINE

A: This project is fairly well institutionalized at the College. The FY 15 goal-setting collection is underway, the program metrics were updated with fall 2014 enrollment numbers, deans are meeting in October to set enrollment and retention goals from metrics, and we have the last three strategic priority report cards set to roll out at board meetings the last three months of the year.

8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

A: One key to the successful completion of this action project was in identifying a home for these types of functions at the college. At Northeast low a Community College that is the office of institutional effectiveness. It is difficult for these types of expansive changes to happen when not part of a core responsibility of a leader at the college. We believe this transition to developing the IE office was instrumental in this project.

Update Review

1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

A: This very ambitious action project has been completed. Northeast low a Community College saw the need to use data to make key decisions related to its strategic plan and direction. Hiring an institutional researcher and setting up an office to collect, analyze, plan, and report data has been key to the success of this action project. That NICC will carry this action plan to the next phase by connecting the results with its strategic initiative is exciting and commendable.

2: ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

A: NICC clearly understands what sort of data is important to collect. In the current higher education environment, NICC is savvy in collecting data pertaining to retention and enrollment -- and then figuring out a smart way of communicating this information to stakeholders. That not every office on campus understands how to use the data for goal-setting is not unusual. What is important is that all parts of campus are being given the chance to use data to set goals. Over time -- and as people become more data literate -- the process for setting goals will become more and more effective.

3: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

A: NICC has much to be proud of with this action project. Its key accomplishments are impressive and move the college in a positive direction. NICC clearly understands the importance of not only collecting data, but of communicating it with stakeholders and then using it to set goals and make decisions. It is also commendable that while accomplishing the action project, NICC was willing to make adjustments to the process so that it would run more smoothly. As mentioned above, NICC shouldn't be too concerned that not all goals were met. This project was ambitious and so it is not surprising that there were some hiccups. These challenges will get worked out if NICC continues to be self-reflective, as demonstrated in this action project update.

Global Judgment: Outstanding

4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

A: It appears that most stakeholders were involved in some way in this action project. The Institutional Effectiveness Office played a key role, as described in the original plan. NICC was smart in making sure that buy-in was top-down and bottom-up. This makes for a much more sustainable process. Engagement of middle-managers, like the academic deans who are invested in student success, is especially important. This is an example of **promoting collaboration** and **broad-based involvement**, two hallmarks of high performing institutions.

NICC might consider how to include students and the community in this project. For example, it could be useful to ensure that these two groups also have access to some of the relevant scorecards that are created and have a chance to respond to data.

5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

A: NICC clearly understand how important it is that processes become institutionalized -- and in particular the process of using data to inform strategic decisions that affect students, finances, allocation of resources, etc. What NICC has found is that there is often a positive ripple-effect when a process works. In this case, it is commendable that this project has led the college to have more conversations about ways of helping students succeed in their programs of study. NICC is reflective on its practices and processes. This is an example of AQIP Category 4 Planning and Leading and HLC Criterion 5 Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness.

6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

A: NICC has identified an important challenge, that of communication in a large organization. Another challenge that they might watch for is sustainability of the process. The ongoing process of collecting data, analyzing it, and then preparing it for communication to large groups of stakeholders is not easy to maintain. NICC might consider reviewing the AQIP Action Project Directory to see if other institutions have had similar projects and if they have defined processes for maintaining and sustaining processes related to data collection and data communication. http://www.hlcommission.org/component/com_apdsearch/?Itemid.126/

7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIME LINE

A: Once these next steps have been accomplished, NICC might consider how to codify the whole process. For example, it could be useful to develop a kind of handbook that describes what data will be collected each semester and by whom, and how it will be distributed and by whom. This process worked great the first time, but unless it is sustainable, it won't have teeth to enact change long term.

8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

A: It's nice to see when an AQIP action project has multiple benefits. Not only has NICC figured out how to collect and communicate data in ways that inform the college's strategic direction and goals, but it has moved the college forward in developing an office that will be able to help with multiple projects like this one.

Project Outcome

1: REASON FOR COMPLETION

A: This action project has met its goal to measure, report, communicate and set goals from the implementation of the College's strategic plan through an identified and consistent process.

2: SUCCESS FACTORS

A: The project goals and outcomes of the original project, which we believe are successful, include the following:

- 1) creation of college scorecards to measure strategic priorities--this framework has been completed and scorecards have been developed and shared with the board of trustees and college community
- 2) development of program metrics--this framework has been completed and the academic affairs office maintains and updates the program metrics, which include retention and enrollment data for each term.

3: UNSUCCESSFUL FACTORS

A: Another project goal was to streamline data collection at all levels of College--this framework has been established through an annual college goal-setting process, however, it's being deployed at varying levels of effectiveness.