

## **FIVE SIMPLE KEYS TO ASSESSMENT**

Adapted from *SACS Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness*

### **KEY 1 – Setting Goals? Keep It SIMPLE!**

To formulate effective goals for expected results - focus on **BALANCE** and **OBJECTIVE** at all levels of the organization (*department, college, VP, etc.*).

- **BALANCE** - In setting goals, balance the need for SIMPLICITY with the need for APPROPRIATE COMPREHENSIVENESS.
- **OBJECTIVE** – The objective for setting goals is to IDENTIFY the significant SET OF RESULTS that most adequately reflects the extent to which the institution is achieving its purpose.

## **KEY 2 – Identify Expected Results**

A variety of expected outcomes may be employed in the assessment of a program or service.

*EXAMPLE:* Student outcomes expected in an educational program:

- Retention and completion rates
- Student achievement in general education
- Student achievement in major field
- Student perceptions of their development toward educational objectives
- Opinions of program quality by
  - Alumni
  - Employers
  - Dropouts
  - Students
  - Job placement rates
  - Rates of placement and indicators of performance in graduate/professional education
  - Performance after transfer from 2-year to 4-year institutions
  - External recognition of achievements of students and graduates

### **KEY 3 – Establish Effective Evaluation Procedures**

In describing evaluation procedures, institutions should strive not only to use clearly stated language but also to:

1. Specify appropriate time frames for periodic achievement of particular goals.
2. Address both minimum standards required and targets for excellence.
3. Indicate at what level the assessment will be conducted (e.g., program, department, division, institution, etc.).
4. Designate responsibility for implementing evaluation and ensuring appropriate use of results.
5. Determine assessment strategies or instruments to be used.
6. Employ multiple measures to assess complex functions.

*EXAMPLE:*

Adequacy of an instructional program should be judged through:

- Test scores
- Employer evaluations of graduates
- Student ratings
- Judgments of faculty peers
- Consideration of the following limitations and variables:
  - Limitations of assessment technology
  - Sources of errors
  - Time
  - Impact of events and experiences over time

#### **KEY 4 – Promote the Use of Assessment Results.**

Successful efforts to promote the use of assessment results will incorporate **Five Important Principles.**

1. **Principle One** is ESSENTIAL – Involve in planning and evaluation the people who will be affected and/or responsible for implementing plans! Cost Center Heads, Faculty, and Staff should:
  - Contribute to the development of plans
  - Understand the information produced
  - Believe it is relevant
  - Know its limitations
2. **Principle Two** – Determine appropriate levels of analysis.
  - Set goals and assess results at all levels of the organization (VP, College, Department, etc.)
  - Assessment information must relate to the level or unit with primary responsibility for decisions and actions
3. **Principle Three** – Comparative information is critical to evaluation.  
*EXAMPLE:*
  - Knowing that the attrition rate is 55% provides no guidance for action.
  - Knowing that the rate has dropped from 60% to 40% in two years is more useful.
4. **Principle Four** – Maintain simplicity and perspective.
  - Avoid “data deluge” by the collection and analysis of **conservative quantities** of USEFUL information—NOT volumes of data.
  - **Balance** the need for **simplicity** and **appropriate comprehensiveness** in planning and evaluation.
5. **Principle Five** – Institutions **MUST provide incentives** to departments to take seriously and to use assessment information to improve programs and services.

When resources are allocated based on plans and budgets justified by good assessment information, faculty and staff become committed to the process.

## **KEY 5 – Test Your Planning and Evaluation Process**

The Primary Test of a **planning process** is the *extent to which it produces a real and positive impact* on the institution.

The Primary Test of an **evaluation process** is *how the results are used*.

### **Successful Assessment Results are Achieved by:**

- Maintaining simplicity, focus, and appropriate measurements in setting and assessing goals.
- Setting and assessing goals at all levels of the organization
- Involving the people who will be affected
- Using comparative information for effective evaluation
- Allocating resources on the basis of good assessment information