

PATHWAYS TO RESULTS

Implementation Partnerships Strategy Brief

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Office of Community College Research and Leadership

The Value of an Annual Program Review Process

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The statewide program review process for Illinois community colleges required by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) is scheduled on a five-year cycle, however, the value of program review is lost without regular opportunities for engagement and reflection on what has been learned through the process (Eggleston, 2020). Furthermore, one of the stated purposes of program review is to address inequities (ICCB, 2021). If community colleges are going to leverage program review to meet this purpose, ongoing and consistent data collection and analysis are critical to evaluating progress. One way that community colleges can bolster the value of program review is through the implementation of an annual review process.

Members of the inaugural Program Review Advisory Committee (PRAC), comprised of scholar practitioners across the state, have informed the development of an annual program review template as a resource for interested practitioners to implement this practice (ICCB, n.d.). As a complement to the template, current advisory board members have informed this brief that highlights the value of an annual review process and considerations for implementation as resources and readiness can vary across institutional contexts.

Challenges and Opportunities

Primary barriers to the implementation of an annual review process can include getting institutional buy-in as well as a perceived lack of connection between program review and broader improvement efforts. This is particularly the case as the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted higher education, exacerbated existing inequities across health outcomes, education, and employment, and created additional stress for faculty and staff in their pursuit to support students. However, practitioners that have successfully implemented annual review processes have some tips to share towards overcoming these obstacles.



Making purposeful connections between an annual program review process and broader institutional improvement efforts can also lead to more meaningful engagement.

A significant practical benefit of an annual review process is that it ultimately saves time spent on the required review every five years. In fact, the annual process can be intentionally designed to culminate into the five-year review and make it much less cumbersome. This could be accomplished by focusing on various aspects of program review on a rotating basis in the interim years. Another strategy to ensure that review results are driving improvement efforts is to enhance data analysis by creating a new set of questions each year for the annual review. These approaches can shift faculty and staff from seeing program review as a document to be filled out with the dreaded copying and pasting of answers to more meaningful data analysis that drives program improvement. Furthermore, when data is provided annually there are opportunities to evaluate the immediate impact of changes that result from the program review process.

Making purposeful connections between an annual program review process and broader institutional improvement efforts can also lead to more meaningful engagement. This is particularly the case when mechanisms such as the strategic planning, budgeting, and accreditation processes are leveraged alongside program review to seamlessly overlap in a manner that supports continuous improvement across the college. This can also serve to bolster transparency in decision-making and allow for broader sharing across programs of study, departments, and divisions as

well as external stakeholder groups such as advisory committees.

The implementation of an annual review process does require the investment of institutional leaders and systems of support for faculty and staff. The regular release of data to faculty every fall semester with new questions for analysis can facilitate fresh conversations surrounding program improvement. Employing technological tools that allow for transparency and sharing across programs and departments can advance data literacy and collaboration toward larger institutional goals. This consistent data and engagement between reviews supports the identification of trends that ultimately make the five-year process a much lighter lift and highlights progress being made in real time.

** PRAC 2021-2022 member listing acknowledgement (available [here](#))

PRAC goals:

1. Improve the efficiency and efficacy of the program review process by identifying challenges, redundancies, and omissions and providing recommendations for refining the process.
2. Identify, develop, and/or refine professional development, technical support, and supplemental materials that could improve outcomes associated with program review.
3. Improve the application of program review findings in colleges' campus-level programmatic planning and decision-making processes.

References

Eggleston, T. (2020, July). *Program review and assessment for continuous improvement: Asking the right questions*. (Occasional Paper No. 48). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.

Illinois Community College Board. (n.d.). *Annual/Interim Program Review Guidelines*.

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