

# BRIC Technical Assistance Program

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## Inquiry Guide

Maximizing the Program  
Review Process

**bric**

Bridging Research  
Information & Culture

An initiative of the Research & Planning Group  
for California Community Colleges

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## Preface

### Overview of the Bridging Research, Information and Culture (BRIC) Project

BRIC is a Hewlett Foundation funded project with a general goal to help community college faculty, staff, and administrators discover or recapture passionate, thoughtful inquiry and then use it to help students. The project hopes to encourage more people to ask a wider collection of questions, and then to use their evidence and conclusions to enhance the broader student experience at their college. One tool to promote this goal is the RP Group's collection of inquiry guides such as the one you are currently reading.

### The BRIC Inquiry Guides

Collectively, the guides developed for BRIC provide a set of tools to address different areas of the college and the activities outlined in the BRIC Framework below. Where BRIC is able to serve schools directly through its Technical Assistance Program (TAP), these guides will be bolstered by facilitated conversations on the college campus during technical assistance site visits. For colleges that we are not able to serve directly through TAP, these guides can be used by the colleges to start their own campus conversations about these critical issues.

The guides have been designed to respond to the needs of college constituency groups—faculty, staff, institutional researchers, and administrators—in all areas of inquiry-based practice, including data collection and interpretation, data usage, research, planning, and evidence-based decision-making. The guides recommend best practices and strategies to promote increased and authentic use of inquiry and evidence, with suggestions for potential directions for processes, procedures, standards, and protocols. One important observation is that colleges will need to find their own fit between their campus culture and the set of possible approaches outlined in these guides. The suggestions made here are done in a spirit of collaboration and with an understanding that there are a range of tools and approaches that can result in the successful evolution of a culture of inquiry.

## BRIC Framework

### Institutional Domains –

#### What areas of the college and activities does BRIC hope to impact?

The BRIC Framework provides an organizational structure for responding to the various areas of data and information usage within a college in the following five broad domains:

- **Evaluation and Assessment:** The bundle of activities, skills, and practices a college uses to assess student learning and practices leading to student success.
- **Planning and Decision-making:** The practices a college uses to make decisions, evaluate effectiveness, and create short and long-term plans.
- **Communication:** The mechanisms and approach a college implements to communicate information at all levels and to all constituents.
- **Organizational Structures:** The processes, procedures, and policies that provide a frame or structure for college practices.
- **Culture and Climate:** The spoken/unspoken, accepted/unaccepted guidelines for behaving in a college and creating an environment that is conducive to collaboration and to effective teaching and learning.

### Expected Outcomes –

#### What does BRIC hope to achieve?

The following five overarching outcomes are the goals of BRIC. The college will:

- **Develop Actionable Data** by applying evaluation and assessment techniques, practices, and models that are grounded in good assessment principles and result in evidence that is used to help students succeed.
- **Interpret Data through Discussion** by using research evidence and assessment data in meaningful and thoughtful discussions that leads to a wider variety of improved program interventions and classroom teaching and learning strategies.
- **Facilitate Dialogue** by employing facilitation skills in discussions of institutional research and assessment with an increased number of participants from all college constituency groups.
- **Integrate Data into Institutional Processes** by creating integrated planning strategies that are equity focused and have well-defined links to budget and other core decision-making processes.
- **Build an Inquiry-Based Practice** by developing an infrastructure for a culture of evidence that promotes thoughtful, evidence-based collaborative inquiry as a normal, ongoing activity.

## Background

This guide provides a description of effective practices for program and services review. Program review is part of a sound, comprehensive education planning practice and, as the Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges points out in *Program Review: Setting a Standard*, “faculty-driven program review is essential to the integrity of the college community and its educational programs.” Clearly, it is critical that faculty lead the instructional program review process and they must be involved in every step of the process. Their involvement ensures that the information, discussions, and conclusions are accurate, relevant, and useful for faculty and staff and lead to improvement in student learning and achievement. Similarly, it is critical that counselors and other student services professionals be involved in each step of the student services program reviews and key operations personnel be involved in each step of the operations program reviews.

Program review is driven by several considerations, including the requirements of the California Educational Code, the requirements of the Vocational and Technical Education Act, and the accreditation standards of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). In fact, program review has become a major focus of accreditation and failure to institutionalize an exemplary program review process has been a principal reason that many colleges have been sanctioned by the accrediting commission. ACCJC expects that

The [program review] process is driven by the search for ‘educational quality’ or ‘educational truth.’ It is done with the intent of increasing the awareness of faculty and administrators about their educational practice so they can improve the quality of teaching and learning, and thereby enhance the student educational experience. Thus the product of program review is a better understanding of the effects of academic programs on student learning. (Beno, 2003)<sup>1</sup>

ACCJC also suggests that

In order to ensure effective and efficient delivery of instruction ... a system of continuous review and refinement of academic programs is in place that is an integral part of the college’s overall planning and resource allocation process. The foundation of the program review process is the assessment and refinement of instructional services that have value to students. (Beno, 2003)

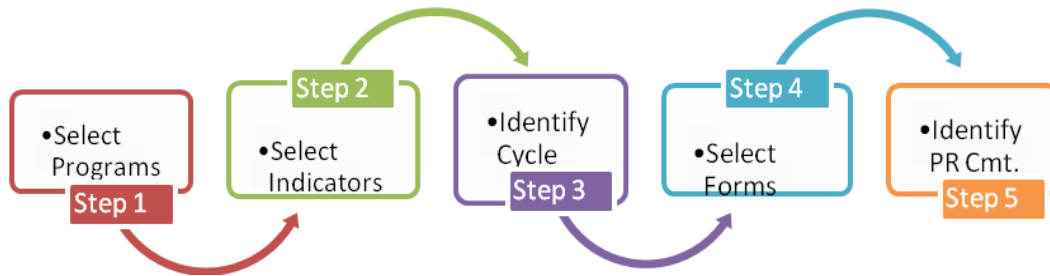
In summary, for a variety of important reasons, program review is an essential assessment of a college’s institutional health.

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<sup>1</sup> Beno, B. (2003, April). What accreditors expect from program review. *Accreditation Notes*. Novato, CA: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges.

## Description

Program review has evolved into a fairly standard process at most California community colleges. The first several steps in conducting a program review involve the identification of programs and services and the selection of key performance indicators.



In the illustration above you will note the typical sequence of activities in the program review process.

### Step 1: What is a program?

While the identification of programs and services might seem straightforward (and in many cases instructional programs will be identical to instructional departments), it is worthwhile to have a discussion about what exactly constitutes a program. Title 5 §55000(g) defines an educational program as "an organized sequence of courses leading to a defined objective, a degree, a certificate, a diploma, a license, or transfer to another institution of higher education." However, depending in part upon the size of a college, and in part upon local preferences, some instructional departments may be separated for the purposes of program review while others may be combined. For example, a college may wish to treat the large departments of English and mathematics as programs or may wish to separate those two departments into developmental and transfer levels. In other cases, several occupational departments may be combined into a single program. For example, departments of architecture, construction technology, and woodworking might be combined into the construction program. Similarly, foreign language departments might be treated individually or combined into one foreign language program. Special projects, such as an Honors Program, MESA, or Puente, if they are included in the program review process, will combine information from several departments or discipline areas.

The choice of programs should be decided by a broad discussion that includes faculty, directors, deans, vice presidents, and the college researcher(s). A similar conversation should take place for other services to be included in program review. All services on campus, such as student services as well as operations, should be included in program review. Student services might identify counseling, matriculation, career counseling, financial aid, transfer center, EOPS, DSPP, and others as separate programs. Operations might identify maintenance and operations, budgeting, institutional research, public

information, marketing, and others for inclusion in program review.

Several questions can guide the identification of programs, including:

1. Is there a certificate or degree associated with the curriculum?
2. Are there cross-listed or team-taught courses associated with the curriculum?
3. Are there course requirements or electives for a degree or certificate that span several departments?
4. Does the faculty or staff in the program provide similar services?
5. Is the size of the service(s) offered sufficient to provide robust data on effectiveness?

### **Step 2: What are key performance indicators for these programs?**

Once a set of programs has been identified, a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) should be agreed upon. While instructional programs have a fairly standard set of KPIs, student services and operations may not. The actual KPIs adopted should be ones that help determine how important or how in demand, efficient, and effective the program, service, or operation is in meeting the mission of the college and promoting institutional effectiveness. Whatever set of KPIs are adopted, standard data definitions and sources of data should also be agreed upon among program faculty and staff. The KPIs should include evidence of student learning, or in some service areas, evidence of increased student success in instructional areas.

While traditional outcome or effectiveness measures, such as retention and success rates, degrees, certificates, and transfers are indirect evidence of student learning, most colleges are accelerating the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes (SLOs) as more direct evidence of learning. The incorporation of the SLO assessment information into program review can take several forms. Faculty discussion on the issues of forms of assessment, sampling of students, and identification of standards is critical.

Appendix A provides a list of KPIs typically included in an instructional program review. Appendix B provides a list of KPIs that might be included in a student services program review. Appendix C provides a list of KPIs that might be included in an operations program review.

### **Step 3: What is a useful cycle of program review completion?**

There should also be discussion about the frequency of program review. Some colleges have chosen to align program review with curriculum review or their accreditation cycle. On the other hand, many colleges have moved to annual program review, which offers some advantages including currency of information, robust longitudinal examination of information for trends, and familiarity with the program review process so that it is not re-invented every five or six years.

#### **Step 4: What format will be used in program review?**

It is important to come to some agreement on the form that program review will take. Many colleges have streamlined program review so that there is less focus on process and more focus on effectiveness. A typical program review will include some analysis of the KPIs. It is critical to note that within any program, the faculty and dean involved in that program will have additional knowledge—about local industry, transfer partners, new directions in a discipline, emerging trends—that may be unique to a program but must be considered. The internal program review data should be supplemented with a local environmental scan that includes information about the community, such as population, demographics, local feeder high school trends, social and educational indicators, occupational indicators, transfer partner trends, and local economic, political, and social forces. The analysis of KPIs and other information should provide not only some areas of focus, but also some short-term and long-term goals for improvement. Program review also provides the opportunity to identify human, fiscal, and physical resources that are necessary to achieve the goals identified. It is critical that these resource needs are tied to the KPIs and goals that emerge from the analysis. ACCJC notes that “Program review requires an institution to ask important questions about itself and to do some good thinking about its own performance. The quality of questions asked, and the care with which answers are sought and then analyzed, determine whether a program review will lead to meaningful information that can be used to improve institutional effectiveness and student learning.” (Beno, 2003)

One question that often emerges in program review discussions concerns the meaning of a particular value for a KPI. For example, if the psychology program includes retention and success rates in its courses as part of its program review, the faculty may ask whether the values for those KPIs are “good.” There are two major ways to evaluate normative data—by examining changes over time and by comparison to similar programs. Clearly, providing the data on an annual basis facilitates examination over time, so that the psychology department could study its annual retention and success rates over the past five years and identify trends. The KPI could also be compared to other similar social science departments within the college or to other psychology departments at similar colleges by referring to the Chancellor’s Office Data Mart that makes those KPIs available. For example, the Data Mart provides enrollment, retention, and success rate information by TOP code for each college and for the entire system. The Instructional Program Improvement Resource Guide provides a process and examples for the analysis of KPIs in program review

([http://www.cccco.edu/Portals/4/EWD/CTE/Resources/faq/pirg-full\\_doc.pdf](http://www.cccco.edu/Portals/4/EWD/CTE/Resources/faq/pirg-full_doc.pdf)).

#### **Step 5: How will the program review be used and by whom?**

Finally, it is important to decide what to do with all of the program reviews once they are completed. For program review to be meaningful, the results must be incorporated into planning and budgeting. It is often useful to create a committee to review all of the program reviews and to identify common themes, resource requests, and priorities among all the requests. This committee may also be charged with evaluating the program review process itself so that it continues to evolve and improve.

## Guided Inquiry

- 1 Institutional Snapshot:** Consider how your institution currently answers the following questions. What is a program? What are key performance indicators? What is a useful cycle of program review completion? What format will be used in program review? How will the program review be used and by whom?
- 2 Moving Forward:** Given the unique characteristics of your institution and your answers to the questions above, how might your college most effectively structure its program review process?

## Impact

A sound and effective program review process is the foundation for college planning. Program review is the principal internal scan that measures the extent to which a program is contributing to the accomplishment of the college mission, institutional effectiveness, and ultimately student learning and achievement. Program review can identify strengths and weaknesses of programs and identify exemplary practices at the college. Program review effectively demonstrates the need for additional resources for a program or service and can lead to more efficient use of those resources.

On the other hand, program review may become an empty exercise if it is not incorporated into the planning and budgeting cycle of the college. Faculty and other reviewers will withdraw from the process if it appears that program review is simply an exercise in compliance. In addition, program review should NOT be defined as just a required step in the budget process. It is imperative that the results of program review be part of the wider college educational conversation, particularly in the main planning body of the college. Further, discussion among faculty and staff plays a critical role in ensuring the meaningfulness of program review.

In summary, it is important that faculty and other reviewers see that the goals identified and the resources requested in program review are acknowledged and, as the college resources permit, supported. It is also critical that processes for identifying themes and particularly for prioritizing resource requests be seen as fair and evidence-based—or the process will become a political exercise.

## Components & Strategies

As noted above, the major components of program review include: 1) the identification of programs, services, and operations, 2) the identification of key performance indicators, their definition, and sources, 3) agreement about program review frequency, 4) agreement on the form of program review, and 5) agreement about the outcomes of program review, including the development of a committee to review and evaluate all program, services, and operations reviews.

There are several strategies that can be employed to make program review less onerous or routine and more thoughtful and useful.

- First, **programs identified should be large enough that KPIs are meaningful.** It is not useful to identify a specific foreign language such as Portuguese as a program if there are only two or three sections taught annually. Faculty may have the best insight into the constitution of a program and its definition depends greatly on local conditions. At some colleges, anatomy and physiology might be separate programs and at other colleges those departments might be part of the biology program.
- Second, **the KPIs selected should be readily available to all constituencies** without the need for specialized knowledge or access privileges. Reliance on extensive new data collection procedures, especially surveys, will usually delay the process. Most indicators for instructional programs can be easily extracted from MIS referential files or the college's information system. The exception is information about SLOs, which are not yet typically captured by those systems. But many colleges have developed or installed commercial tracking systems for SLOs and these can be utilized.
- Third, **program review should be conducted frequently** enough so that it does not seem like a new and onerous process each time it is conducted. The streamlining of data provision and reporting formats makes annual or biannual review attractive. This level of frequency allows the reviewers to concentrate on the analysis of information and the development of goals for improvement rather than on data collection.
- Fourth, **the program reviews, once completed, should be reviewed** by a college-wide committee. If this committee is not the major planning committee of the college, it should be a broadly constituted committee that links into the college's planning process.
- Finally, **the president, vice presidents, deans, and directors of the college should be supportive of the process** for program review to take hold and be respected by reviewers.

## Practical Application

There are several good examples of program review processes and products. The forthcoming update of the Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges publication on program review, *Program Review: Setting a Standard*, identifies several colleges with links to their program review process. In addition to the program review websites cited in that document, you can access college websites directly. In addition, a number of California community colleges have exemplary program review processes. In particular, Chaffey College has developed a Program and Services Review model that incorporates all of the components identified in this guide.

## Evaluation

Evaluation of the program review process can take two forms and both are important. First, the evaluation should focus on how well the process works at the college. This must be determined based on the criteria and purpose established by the college. Selection of programs, choice of KPIs, provision of data and other information, selection of the reporting format, resources required to complete the program review, collegiality and inclusiveness of the process, constitution of the review committee, fairness of prioritization, support of college administration of the process—all of these should be examined annually.

Next, the evaluation should focus on how well program review advances the mission of the college and improves program effectiveness. ACCJC has provided a rubric for evaluating the development of program review and requires that all colleges be at the “sustainable continuous quality improvement level.” This level is described as follows:

Program review processes are ongoing, systematic, and used to assess and improve student learning and achievement, and the institution reviews and refines its program review processes to improve institutional effectiveness, and the results of program review are used to continually refine and improve program practices resulting in appropriate improvements in student achievement and learning. The program review process, forms, and analyses should be regularly reviewed to insure that it is serving its intended function. (ACCJC, 2007).

The ACCJC rubric provides another evaluation tool to ensure that program review provides useful information and that it serves to improve, through the incorporation of results in planning and budgeting, student learning and achievement. In both cases it should become evident whether the program review process is resulting in improved student outcomes.

## Appendix A

### Examples of Key Performance Indicators for Instructional Program Review

#### Program Access/Demand

- Course Information
  - Sections Offered (Day, Evening/Weekend, Online/Hybrid, Short Term)
  - Courses Offered (Day, Evening/Weekend, Online/Hybrid, Short Term)
- Student Information
  - Majors
  - New Majors
  - Enrollments (Disaggregated by Student Characteristics)
  - FTES
  - WSCH
- Occupational Information
  - Job Openings

#### Program Resources

- FTE Faculty
- Personnel (Dollars)
- Supplies (Dollars)

#### Program Efficiency/Productivity (Average Section Size)

- Fill Rate (at Census)
- WSCH per FTEF
- Cost per FTES
- Cost per Major

#### Program Outcomes

- Course Retention and Success Rates
- Course Sequence Persistence
- Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Results
- New Major Persistence
- Degrees and Certificates Awarded
- Transfers
- Student and Alumni Satisfaction
- Job Placement
- Employer Satisfaction

## Appendix B

### Examples of Key Performance Indicators for Student Services Program Review

#### Student Services Program Access/Demand

- Evening/Weekend Services Offered
- Number of Student Contacts
- Number of Counseling Appointments
- Number of Students Served in Orientation
- Number of Placement Assessments
- Number of Class Presentations

#### Student Services Program Resources

- FTE Student Services Faculty and Staff
- Personnel (Dollars)
- Supplies (Dollars)

#### Student Services Program Efficiency/Productivity

- Average Counselor Load
- FTES per Student Services FTEF
- Student Services Cost per FTES

#### Student Services Program Outcomes

- Student Satisfaction
- Student Term Persistence
- Student Course Retention
- Student Course Persistence
- Student Transfers
- Degree and Certificate Completion
- Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Results
- Number of Students Completing Educational Plans
- Number of Students Receiving Financial Aid
- Total Financial Aid Dollars Awarded

## Appendix C

### Examples of Key Performance Indicators for Operations Program Review

#### Operations Program Access/Demand

- Number of Service Requests Received
- Number of Student Hours Logged In
- Number of Packets to/from Internet
- Number of RQs Created (Dollar Volume)
- Number of Help Desk Calls
- Number of Data/Information Requests
- Number of Program Evaluations Completed
- Number of Enrollment Management Reports Completed
- Number of Advertisements Requested
- Number of Marketing Materials Requested
- Number of Work Requests
- Square Footage Maintained
- Scheduled Maintenance Activities
- Number of Internal Information Requests
- Number of External Information Requests
- Number of Press Releases
- Number of Student Parking Permits
- Number of Parking Citations Issues
- Number of Service Calls on Campus
- Number of Accounting Transactions
- Number of Customers Served in Bookstore/Online
- Number of In-Stock Course Materials and Merchandise

#### Operations Program Resources

- FTE Operations Staff
- Personnel (Dollars)
- Supplies (Dollars)

#### Operations Program Efficiency/Productivity

- Square Footage per Maintenance FTEF

- FTES per Operations FTEF
- Operations Cost per FTES

### **Operations Program Outcomes**

- Client Satisfaction
- Number of Service Requests Completed
- Number of Non-Credit Hours Generated
- Number of Project Milestones Met
- Number of New Systems Installed
- Number of Systems Upgraded
- Number of Data/Information Requests Completed within Timeframe
- Number of Bulletins/Information Briefs Completed
- Number of Advertisements Produced
- Number of Advertisements Placed
- Number of New Students
- Number of Maintenance Requests Completed on Schedule
- Faculty/Staff Satisfaction with Internal Information
- Faculty/Staff Satisfaction with External Information
- Number of Articles Placed
- Number of Parking Complaints/Appeals
- Parking Revenue
- Campus Crime
- Accuracy of Accounting Transactions
- Number of Audit Findings

## Appendix D

### **Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness – Characteristics of Institutional Effectiveness in Program Review**

Please note that ACCJC guidelines require that institutions operate at the *Sustainable Continuous Quality Level*.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Awareness**

- There is preliminary investigative dialogue at the institution or within some departments about what data or process should be used for program review.
- There is recognition of existing practices and models in program review that make use of institutional research.
- There is exploration of program review models by various departments or individuals.
- The college is implementing pilot program review models in a few programs or operational units.

#### **Development**

- Program review is embedded in practice across the institution using qualitative and quantitative data to improve program effectiveness.
- Dialogue about the results of program review is evident within the program as part of discussion of program effectiveness.
- Leadership groups throughout the institution accept responsibility for program review framework development (Senate, Admin. Etc.)
- Appropriate resources are allocated to conducting program review of meaningful quality.
- Development of a framework for linking results of program review to planning for improvement.
- Development of a framework to align results of program review to resource allocation.

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<sup>2</sup> Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. (2008). Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness – Part I: Program Review; Characteristics of Institutional Effectiveness in Program Review.

**Proficiency**

- Program review processes are in place and implemented regularly.
- Results of all program review are integrated into institution-wide planning for improvement and informed decision-making.
- The program review framework is established and implemented.
- Dialogue about the results of all program reviews is evident throughout the institution as part of discussion of institutional effectiveness.
- Results of program review are clearly and consistently linked to institutional planning processes and resource allocation processes; college can demonstrate or provide specific examples.
- The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its program review processes in supporting and improving student achievement and student learning outcomes.

**Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement**

- Program review processes are ongoing, systematic, and used to assess and improve student learning and achievement.
- The institution reviews and refines its program review processes to improve institutional effectiveness.
- The results of program review are used to continually refine and improve program practices resulting in appropriate improvements in student achievement and learning.

## BRIC TAP Inquiry Guide Series

1. Assessing Student Learning Outcomes  
Primary Audience: *Instructional Faculty*
2. Using an Equity Lens to Assess Student Learning  
Primary Audience: *Instructional Faculty, Student Services Staff*
3. Assessing Strategic Intervention Points in Student Services  
Primary Audience: *Student Services Staff*
4. Assessing Institutional Effectiveness  
Primary Audience: *Institutional Researchers and Administrators*
5. Assessing Basic Skills Outcomes  
Primary Audience: *Instructional Faculty*
6. Maximizing the Program Review Process  
Primary Audience: *Instructional Faculty, Institutional Researchers*
7. Turning Data into Meaningful Action  
Primary Audience: *Institutional Researchers*
8. A Model for Building Information Capacity and Promoting a Culture of Inquiry  
Primary Audience: *Administrators, Institutional Researchers*