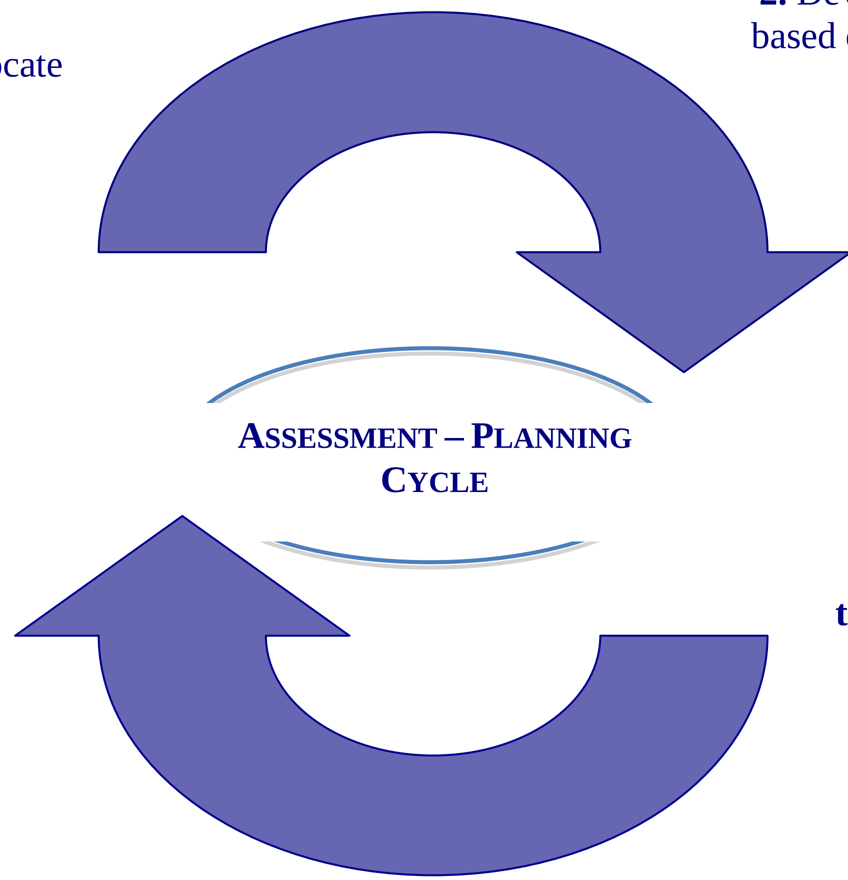

1. **Define** the issue/problem
2. Develop **goal statement** based on problem definition
3. **Align** assessment with mission and goals
4. Identify **stakeholders**
5. Identify/develop **theoretical/conceptual framework**
6. Identify/develop **measurable outcomes**
7. Identify and measure **inputs**
8. Develop **strategies** anchored in theoretical/conceptual framework
9. Develop **action steps** anchored in theoretical/conceptual framework
10. Develop and measure **formative assessment** for strategies and action steps
11. **Measure** outcomes
12. **Make sense** of results
13. **Report/present** findings
14. Review/reallocate/advocate for **resources**
15. **Retool program** based on formative and summative evaluation

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ASSESSMENT-PLANNING CYCLE
Explained

This process and illustration is a simple, but useful tool in developing an assessment plan, step-by-step. While the illustration is cyclical, it is not necessarily linear. You will notice that it is called an assessment-planning cycle. This is because planning is interwoven with assessment. You cannot do good assessment without planning and you can't do good planning, without assessment.

You may need to revisit past steps as you move forward through the model. Thus, it is important that you walk through all steps first before you actually implement your assessment as something that you decide in step eight may cause you to make a change in step four. Expect to revisit.

Note about theory

Theory provides the context for each one of the steps. As such, it is often helpful to review the literature prior to embarking on an assessment.

- **Step 1: Identify the issues/problem**
  - You need to determine what is the real issue or problem. Oftentimes, what we think is the problem is a number of problems rolled into one. For example, vandalism in the residence halls may seem to be the issue, but this may be a by-product of lack of respect for the residence hall, a lack of connection to the hall community, or a result of high-risk alcohol use.
  - Once you have peeled the onion to find the many issues of concern, you will need to decide which problem or issue you really want to focus your planning and assessment on.

- **Step 2: Develop your goal statement based on the issue/problem**
  - Once you have identified the problem or issue you want to focus on, you need to develop a goal statement that is a broad statement of what you want to do. For example, you may want to "increase the feeling of connection to the residence hall community."

- **Step 3: Align assessment with mission and goals**
  - Alignment with the mission of the institution, division, and department is important because it helps you articulate how you are supporting these missions. Funding is often related to work that supports these types of missions.
  - <u>Review the institution, division, and department mission</u>
  - Your goal should support each of these missions so that you do not jeopardize your resources.
  - <u>Finish the statement: This goal supports the mission by….</u>
    - By finishing this statement you will demonstrate the alignment

- **Step 4: Identify stakeholders**
  - Stakeholders have a part in your assessment. They may support your project. They may help you implement the assessment. They may have a vested interest in the results. They may be helpful in implementing recommendations from the

assessment. Assessment and planning cannot be successful without the involvement of stakeholders.

- Identify who may have a question related to your program.
    - Sometimes you may not know all of the stakeholders. It is helpful to begin identifying them by listing everyone that may have a question related to your program. This could be almost anyone including the college president, a vice-president, dean, student, parent, grantor, or accrediting agency.
- Identify your external, internal, and mixternal stakeholders
    - External are external to the institution (e.g., parents, prospective students, trustees)
    - Internal are internal to your division/department (VPSA, director of Career Services)
    - Mixternal are internal to the institution, but external to your division (faculty, vice-provost for undergraduate education)
    - From your list identify, perhaps by using the initials E, I, and M which type of stakeholder each individual or group is. This will be important when you prioritize stakeholder issues.
- Identify which question(s) these stakeholders may have.
    - The questions will likely vary depending on the stakeholder's role.
- Determine which stakeholders and which questions will be included in your assessment.
    - You have limited time and resources. You will not be able to address every question from every stakeholder. Take a moment to prioritize the questions and decide which ones should be included in the assessment and why. Remember that given stakeholders' role/power, the questions of some of these are more important than the questions of others.

- **Step 5: Identify theoretical or conceptual framework for foundation of goals**
    - Theory or a conceptual framework provides a context for both planning and assessment. It provides a guide as you begin to plan, but is also helpful as you are interpreting assessment results. It should be part of the process throughout.
    - Review literature
        - What literature is available to help you understand your determined problem or issue? This literature will help you both determine strategies to achieve your goal, but also ways to assess your goal achievement.
    - Identify the theory/conceptual framework you will use
        - Not all literature regarding your goal will be equally as useful. You will need to decide which theory or conceptual framework you will use.
        - If you discover there doesn't seem to be a theory appropriate for your goal, you may need to develop a conceptual framework yourself. Use your experience or related theory.

- **Step 6: Identify/develop summative outcomes that would exist if goal was reached.**
    - Backwards design
        - You need to begin by thinking about what you want to happen at the end. What is your intended result of the interaction, program, or service? What

do you expect students to be able to do, know, or believe at the end? By thinking with the end first, you design your program, intervention, or service backwards. That way you will you be able to align your goals, outcomes, strategies, and action steps.

  - 3 Types of Outcomes
    - **Operational outcomes** are outcomes that measure progress toward a goal, but are not related to impact. Things such as the number of programs or the number of students served are operational outcomes.
    - **Learning outcomes** are the desired learning effect of a program, activity, or intervention. A students being able to resolve a conflict is an example of a learning outcome.
    - **Program outcomes** are the desired aggregate effect of a program, activity, or intervention. An example of a program outcome is a decrease in the number of students being found responsible for alcohol violations.
  - SWiBAT
    - One formula that is successful in developing learning outcomes is the SWiBAT formula. SWiBAT stands for "**s**tudents **w**ill **b**e **a**ble **t**o." You begin your outcome statement with this and then you add an action verb and then a condition. For example, students will be able to facilitate a hall government meeting as a result of participating in the residence hall council training.
  - SMART
    - Well-written outcomes have some defining characteristics. SMART is a mnemonic device that can serve as a checklist. SMART outcomes are **s**pecific, **m**easureable, **a**ggressive, but attainable, **r**esults-oriented, and **t**ime-bound. If your outcome statements are SMART, you will be more effective as you plan and your assessment will be easier to implement.

- **Step 7: Identify and measure the inputs that can be used to resolve the program.**
  - Inputs are the raw materials available and can include available budget for a program or intervention, staff, facilities, etc.
  - It is helpful to identify the inputs as they will dictate what strategies and action steps you can employ and they also may affect the extent to which you can achieve your goals or outcomes.

- **Step 8: Develop strategies anchored in theoretical/conceptual framework to reach goal.**
  - As I mentioned earlier, assessment is inextricably tied to planning. To assess well, there needs to be good planning.
  - Align strategies with goals
    - Once you have identified your goals and measurable outcomes for those goals, you can begin considering strategies that will foster those goals. For example, if your goal is for students to develop leadership skills and one outcome for that is the ability to facilitate a hall government meeting, what strategies would help students be able to facilitate a meeting? One possibility would be for them to observe other meetings and identify three best practices for meeting facilitation.

        - There will likely be multiple strategies for each goal and there isn't any set number of strategies to have. The issue is really about resources available to implement the strategies. Which strategies are you actually able to employ with the resources you have? Perhaps you brainstorm all of the strategies first and then decide which ones you will employ.
    - <u>Keep in mind the theoretical/conceptual framework</u>
        - Keep in mind that your strategies should be rooted in the theoretical/conceptual framework. This will help bridge theory to practice and ensure that your strategies are successful.

- **Step 9: Develop action steps anchored in your theoretical/conceptual framework to implement the strategies.**
    - <u>Create the "to do" list</u>
        - Once you have listed the strategies, you need to begin to develop the action steps that will lead to the implementation of those strategies. I think about this as the "to do" list.
        - If the strategy is to have students identify and describe three best practices in meeting facilitation, action steps might include identifying meetings to attend, developing an opportunity for reflection, developing a framework for that reflection, evaluating the experience, etc.
    - <u>Document the "to do" list</u>
        - Some folks, ask "Why do you have to write down these little steps? I can do them without even thinking." That's a great question. You want to be able to document what you have done. This serves a couple of purposes. The first purpose is that you know what you *did* so that you know what *to do* in the future. This is especially important if someone else is responsible for the project or outcome in the future. They will know what was done in the past. You also want to document your strategies and action steps to assess them.

- **Step 10: Develop and measure formative assessment for strategies and action steps**
    - Formative assessment is the "assessment along the way." I also think about this as assessment of the process or the assessment of the strategies and action steps.
    - You will want to assess the strategies and action steps so you can learn how effective they are in helping students reach the outcomes you have identified. Let's say you discover that students were not able to facilitate meetings well. You would want to go back and examine the strategies and action steps to find out what you need to change in the future so that you can provide the support. On the flip side, this documentation, and later on the assessment, may help you understand that only two of your ten strategies and subsequent action steps are needed to foster the outcome. The time that you save by only implementing two strategies next time saves time that could be reallocated to other projects or outcomes.
    - Formative assessment can utilize the same methods as summative assessment including tracking, surveys, focus groups, portfolios, rubrics, etc.

- **Step 11: Measure outcomes**
  - Once you have the formative assessment of measuring the strategies and action steps you need to perform summative assessment to determine if the outcomes are reached.
  - Consider summative assessment before you begin
    - It is important that you consider summative assessment before you even begin your assessment project because you will need to determine what types of data you need and what format you need it in so that you can collect the data in this format at the beginning of your project. Perhaps you decide that a pre-test/post-test assessment would be useful. You can't decide on this data collection method three-quarters of the way through your assessment project because the pre-test needs to be completed at the beginning. Perhaps you need to get particular data from an institutional database such as Banner or PeopleSoft. You will need to know this ahead of time because it may take a while to get the data in the format you need. You may even find out that you are unable to get the data in the format you need and will have to find another way to gather the data.
  - Does outcome data already exist?
    - It is amazing how much data the institution collects. Oftentimes we don't even know what is collected in other departments. It is worthwhile to find out if the outcome data you need exists someplace else. This will save you the time of creating a data collection tool yourself.
  - Collect data
    - If you have to collect the data yourself, be creative. Don't fall into the trap of automatically using a survey. Think about what you want to know and what would be the best way to get that information. Perhaps a classroom assessment technique such as a 1-minute paper might be more effective, easier, and quicker than a survey or focus group.

- **Step 12: Make sense of results**
  - Make sense of the outcome data
    - Your outcome data don't have value attached to it yet. Someone needs to analyze and interpret the data and make sense of it answering questions such as, "based on the data, did we reach our outcomes?" Or, "based on the data, to what extent did we reach our outcomes?" Or, "based on the data, what changes do we need to make next time?" These questions are answered at the evaluation step in the cycle.
  - Analysis
    - What type of analysis do you want to perform? Will frequencies and crosstabs answer your questions? Do you need to do more sophisticated analysis such as correlation or regression? If so, do you have the skills to do this or do you know someone who can help. Are your results statistically significant? If so, are they practically significant?
  - Keep in mind the theoretical/conceptual framework
    - It is important to keep in mind the theoretical/conceptual framework because it will help you interpret the data. For example, if you were assessing moral development resulting from conduct meetings and you

find that first-year students appear not to be developing ethically during the interaction, it would be helpful to keep in mind moral development theory and perhaps even some brain physiology. Developmental theory would suggest that first-year students are not going to learn ethics in a brief meeting with an administrator discussing their conduct. Moral development takes time and opportunities for reflection. Brain physiology would support this. Recent studies suggest that the part of the brain that commands ethical behavior and thinking doesn't fully evolve until students are in their late 20s. Together, these conceptual frameworks can help you evaluate the data and realize that the conduct meeting isn't necessarily a failure but perhaps an opportunity to plant the seeds for moral development in the future and there may need to be more opportunities for reflection and the assessment should come at a later point in time.

- Consider alternative hypotheses
  - It is helpful to also consider alternative hypotheses when evaluating the data. Perhaps your outcome is alcohol use and you have just implemented a new program. You review your data and you find out that there is a decrease in usage across campus after the first year of implementation of the program. Can you attribute the decrease to your program? Maybe, maybe not. You may want to check to see if there were any policy or enforcement changes that may have also contributed to lower usage rates.

- **Step 13: Report, present findings**
  - An assessment is only as good as the changes that result. And for changes to occur, the results need to get in the right hands (or eyes, ears, head). Thus, how the results are communicated are of the utmost importance to the success of the assessment.
  - Identify the political aspects of your findings (anticipated or actual)
    - All assessment is political. If the assessment regards a "hot topic" issue, then it becomes more political than a mundane issue would be. If the topic affects resources, it becomes more political than if resources will not be allocated or redistributed. If it becomes public outside of an office or the institution, it becomes more political than if the information was only shared within an office or the institution.
    - An alcohol education class can be very political. High-risk alcohol use is a hot topic on all campuses. Given that higher education is dealing with shrinking resources, it doesn't seem likely that money will come from thin air to increase staffing for an effective alcohol education class. The money will have to come from somewhere. It could come from the health services budget or the vice president may decide that this is so important that the money will come from her discretionary fund. Either way, creation of an alcohol education class will likely result in redistribution of resources.
    - As the political stake rises, the likelihood of error must decrease. Taking money away from the counseling center to staff an extra alcohol counselor to teach this class can have a big impact not just on the counseling center but on the students in need of counseling services. If this type of

redistribution is a possible implication, you may want to make sure the data support your conclusion. The higher the stakes or more rigorous the implications of the assessment, the more rigorous the assessment must be.

    - Because of these issues it is important to consider the political repercussions of possible findings prior to actually implementing the assessment. You don't want to get a phone call at home one night from your vice president or president asking if you shared certain data without keeping her in the loop. In some cases you may decide that a topic is too politically charged to assess and may make the choice to defer the assessment for the time being. This decision to not implement the assessment could save you time and money for an assessment and report that never gets shared because the findings or implications are too controversial.

  - <u>Identify who will receive the report (audience)</u>
    - You will want to tailor the report and who you send the results to depending on your results or findings. A president doesn't need to know everything, but if an assessment is very political, it would be helpful to include her.
    - This is where you need to think about how you will report your findings to your stakeholders, including those whose questions you addressed and those whose questions you didn't.
    - A good rule of thumb is to think about who would be affected by the implications of the data, big picture and small picture and send some version of the report to those individuals and offices.
    - Strongly consider providing the data to your participants in some format either directly to each individual or indirectly through media such as the campus paper. We don't do this often enough.
  - <u>Decide how you will report the information (format)</u>
    - Target your report: Think about how you can most effectively reach your intended audiences
      - A 1-page executive summary may be best for busy administrators.
      - A presentation may be better for health services staff so that they can discuss the implications.
      - A full report on the web may be a cheap and effective way to disseminate to the campus community.
      - A press release may be an easy way to get the information to the public.
      - A podcast or YouTube video may be the best way to reach students.
  - <u>Decide what to include in the report</u>
    - Once you have decide who you will report to and how you will report the findings, you need to decide what you will include. What content will help tell your story to each audience? Should the content be quantitative, qualitative? Should you have pictures? How many graphs? Consider how to best tell your story.
  - <u>Decide when the report will be disseminated (timing)</u>

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        - This is as important as how the information will be distributed. It may be very ineffective to disseminate the information at the beginning or end of a semester or during a break. If there may be an increase in residence hall fees, it would be smart not to disseminate this information while most students are gone over the summer. This makes them angry.
    - Consider what you can do to keep the report from being "shelved"
        - Think about how you can get people to read this report. Maybe your president is a numbers person but your vice president for student affairs likes to read about student stories. You may decide that you need both quantitative and qualitative data to effectively demonstrate the data for both of these administrators. This is one reason it is important to think about the report prior to implementing the assessment.
        - You may also decide to get others involved in the beginning. It might be helpful to talk with student senate prior to the assessment if implications could be increased residence hall fees. You would want them to be supportive of the assessment so that they are more likely to believe the results. Sometimes an assessment will be criticized on its method because one or more constituencies did not expect the results or they were not prepared for the implications. An easy way to end the implications is to cease the study by invalidating the data or results.

- **Step 14: Review, reallocate, advocate for resources**
    - Assessment isn't worthwhile unless changes occur. Reviewing, reallocating, and advocating for resources are the ultimate goals. Some folks will call this step closing the loop or making use of the results. I intentionally use the allocation of resources reference because I think that is ultimately what happens. As a result of the assessment you may decide to discontinue a program and put those resources, be they time, money, or staff towards other things. If you make a change in a program by simply changing strategies or action steps rather than discontinuing a program or creating a new service, you are still reallocating resources. Perhaps, you determine that you are reaching your goal and outcomes and if you had more resources you could be even more effective than you currently are, assessment may be an opportunity to advocate for resources or an essential step for defending the current resources. While assessment is about making improvements, in the political world of higher education, assessment really boils down to use of resources.

- **Step 15: Retool program based on formative and summative evaluation**
    - Now that you have the data you need to do something with it. It is time to improve the program you assessed. You may decided to tweak your outcomes, strategies, or action steps. You may even realize that you need to assess differently. Once you have made your changes, get ready to keep in assessing.

- **Re-Cycle and continue the loop**
    - Identify what to assess next. This was discussed briefly in the implications section. Assessment should never stop. We can always improve even what we have already improved. Think about what is the next cycle of assessment.

- The first option would be to replicate the study. You may realize a way to improve this past assessment or you may just want to re-assess residence hall council training with a different set of students and see if you get the same results.
- Now that you know that students did increase their meeting facilitation skills, another option would be to try to understand how this happened. What was most useful?
- Another option could be to assess different types of leadership skills aside from meeting facilitation.
- Or you could…………………….
- Just don't stop assessing.

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