# 2017 Survey of Institutional Research Offices in the California Community College System

Full Report

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# Executive Summary

In 2017, the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (the RP Group) conducted a survey of institutional research and planning (IRP) offices in the California community college system to

- Identify key research and planning priorities and activities of the IRP offices;
- Document staffing profiles and identify budget changes;
- Identify RP Group resources that have been useful and how they have been used; and
- Identify other resources or professional development that can address the field's needs.

Eighty-nine college and district IRP offices responded to the survey. Highlights from the analysis of collected survey responses include the following:

- Sixty percent of reporting college IRP offices report to a president/superintendent, while 36% report to a vice president.
- Eighty-four percent of reporting IRP offices combine research and planning functions.
- Around 90% of reporting IRP offices have staff serving as members for strategic planning and accreditation committees, while 72% of reporting IRP offices have staff that serve as a primary contact for institutional reporting. Fewer reporting IRP offices have staff involved in budget committees (35%) or in positions as institutional accreditation liaison officers (27%).
- Reporting IRP offices are typically led by a dean or director and are often staffed by 2 or more research and planning analysts. Six percent of reporting college IRP offices are led by a director with no full-time staff.
- Twenty-nine percent of reporting IRP offices have had an increase in their budget since 2016-2017, while 69% have had budget increases since 2012-2013.
- Forty-seven percent of reporting IRP offices have increased their staff since 2016-2017, while 79% have had staff increases since 2012-2013. Eighty-eight percent of new staff were hired through categorical funding sources.
- Forty-five percent of reporting IRP offices plan to hire new research and planners during the 2017-2018 academic year. Most of these new staff will focus on student equity (63%) and Student Success and Support Programs (61%).
- Reporting IRP offices overwhelmingly rated RP Group resources and professional development as useful.
- IRP offices are engaging with the RP Group largely though RP Group conferences, regional research groups, and webinars.

- Reporting IRP offices conveyed more interest for professional development focused on data visualization, equity research and action, and planning than for data analysis or learning outcomes assessment.
- Reporting IRP offices prefer professional development delivered by webinar, archived webinars/ training modules, and drive-in workshops, than through pre-/post-conference workshops.

# Reader's Guide

The purpose of this document is to share the findings of the 2017 Survey of Institutional Research Offices in the California Community College System. With the information gathered from this survey, the RP Group will be able to identify key research and planning priorities and activities of the IRP offices, document staffing profiles and identify budget changes, identify which RP Group resources have been useful and how they have been used, and identify other resources or professional development that can address the field's needs. When examining the findings presented from this survey, it is important to keep in mind a limitation of this research: not all college and district IRP offices completed the survey, and those that did were not selected at random; there may be differences in the characteristics of those offices that did respond and those that did not. As a result, caution should be used when interpreting results from the survey.

# Introduction

One of the RP Group's ongoing projects is to better understand the research capacity of the California community colleges. In order to best capture such information, the RP Group has surveyed institutional research and planning contacts in both college and district offices in 2006, 2009, 2011, and 2014-2016. The results from these studies were shared with researchers and planners around the state through reports and/or presentations at RP Group meetings and events.

In 2017, the RP Group again surveyed institutional research and planning (IRP) offices, using a survey that collected information about IRP staffing and budget, office priorities, and the scope of planning in IRP offices. Additionally, the survey gathered feedback on the usefulness of current RP Group resources and suggestions for new RP Group resources.

With the information gathered from this survey, the RP Group will be able to:

- Identify key research and planning priorities and activities of the IRP offices;
- Document staffing profiles and identify budget changes;
- Identify which RP Group resources have been useful and how they have been used; and
- Identify other resources or professional development that can address the field's needs.

# Methodology

The 2017 survey was administered online via *SurveyMonkey* during September and October 2017. An email invitation, which included a direct link to participate in the survey, was sent to key research and planning contacts at each IRP office in the California Community College system. Of the 114 colleges and 23 district offices in the California Community College system, 72 colleges and 10 district offices responded to the survey, resulting in an overall response rate of 64% (see Table 1). As indicated in Figure 1, two-thirds of respondents are located within a single college district.

*Table 1.* Survey Response Rates among District and College IRP Offices

|  | No. of Responses | No. of Non-responses | Response rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| **College IRP offices** | 72 | 42 | 63% |
| **District IRP offices** | 10 | 13 | 43% |
| **Total** | **82** | **55** | **64%** |

**IRP offices located within a multi-college district and those at single college districts share a similar proportion of survey responses**

College in a multi-college district: 45%
Single college district: 43%
District office in a multi-college district: 12%

N=82
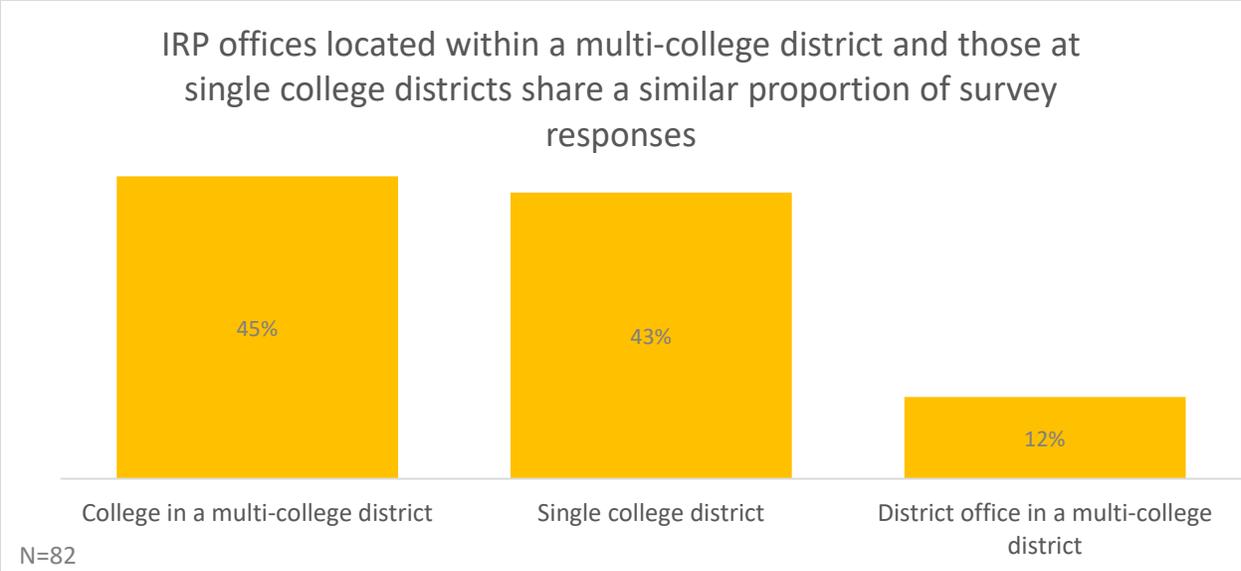
*Figure 1.* **The percent of IRP offices within a single college district, and college in a multi-college district, and a district office in a multi-college district**

Survey participants represent 76% (35 out of 46) IRP offices at single college districts, while participants from IRP offices at districts and colleges within multi-college districts represent about 85% (22 out of 26) of such districts.

Of the reporting IRP offices in a multi-college districts, the overwhelming majority note that IRP offices are located at the district-level and at each of the district's colleges (see Figure 2).



**Within a muti-college district, most IRP offices are located at the district level and at each of the colleges**

Offices located at the district and each of the colleges: 81%
Offices located at each of the colleges, but not at the district: 11%
Office only at the district, none at the colleges: 4%
Offices located at some of the colleges, but not at the district: 4%

N=47
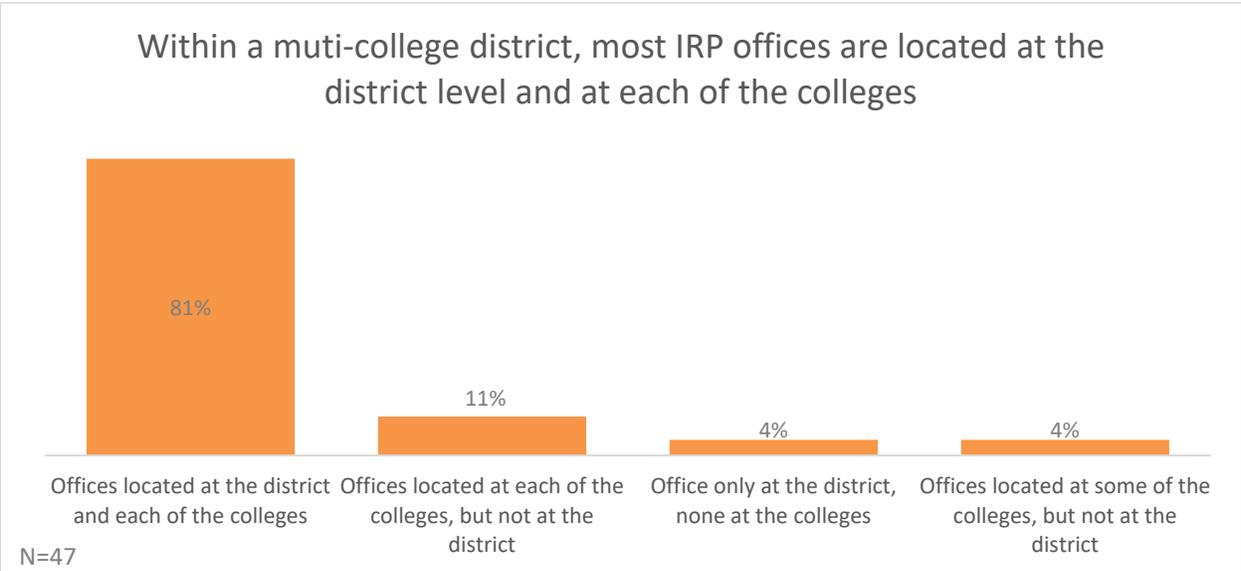
*Figure 2.* **The percecnt of IRP offices at various locations within multi-college districts**

# Findings

## Organizational Structure of the IRP Office

When asked where within the organizational structure of the district or college does the reporting IRP office fit, 60% of college offices noted that they report to a president/superintendent, while 36% report to a vice president. Among district IRP offices, 80% noted that they report to a vice-chancellor. Figure 3 displays the percent of responding college and district IRP offices reporting to a president/superintendent, vice president, vice chancellor, chancellor, or dean.
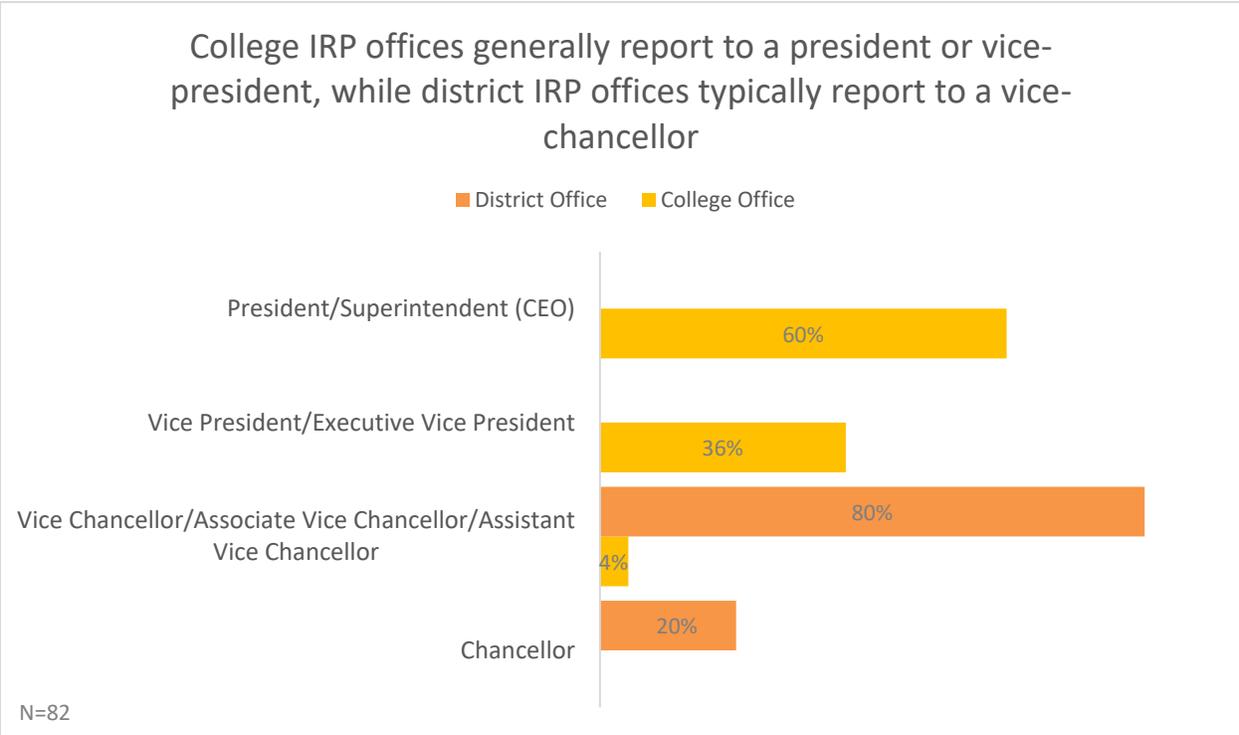


**Figure 3.** The percent of college and district IRP offices reporting to a president/ superintendent, vice president, vice chancellor, chancellor, or dean

The majority (84%) of reporting IRP offices combine research and planning functions (see Figure 4). Just as observed in the 2016 Survey of Institutional Research Offices in the California Community College System, the roles IRP offices play in planning include coordinating and overseeing planning activities (e.g., integrated planning, program review, strategic action plans, and educational master plans) as committee chairs or committee members, while others contribute to planning by providing data essential for decision-making.

**Research and planning functions are often combined at most institution**

■ Functions combined   ■ Functions not combined

16%

84%

N=82
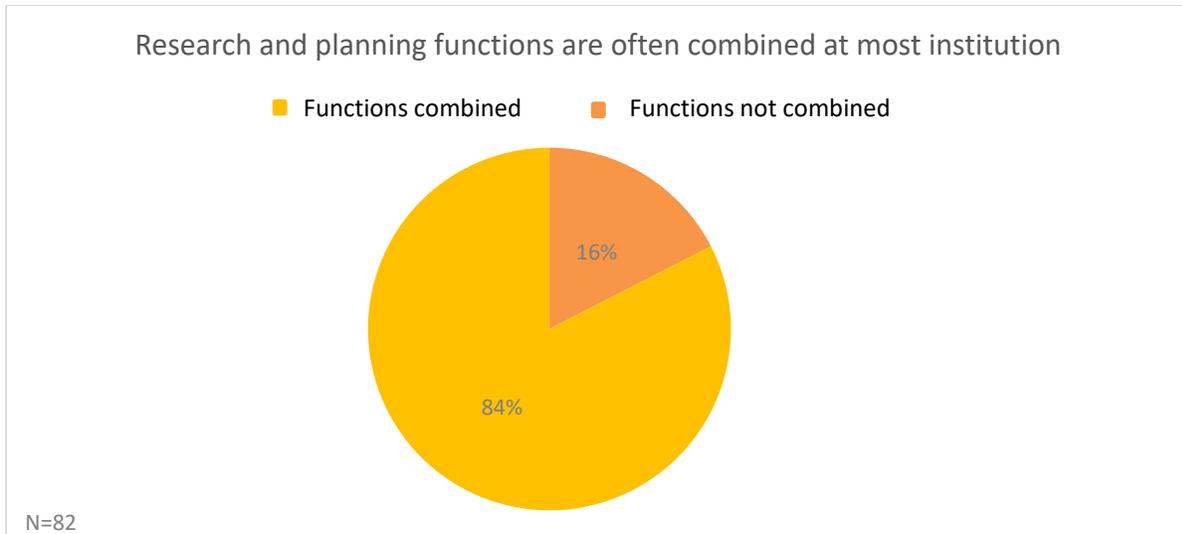
*Figure 4.* **The percent of IRP offices with and without combined research and planning functions**

## Roles Held by IRP Office Personnel

IRP office staff hold many roles at their district office or college. Figure 5 includes a list of 12 roles and the percent of reporting IRP offices with staff serving in those roles. As indicated in Figure 5, an overwhelming majority of IRP offices have staff serving on strategic planning, accreditation, and student equity committees. A minority of IRP offices have staff serving on budget committees, serving as accreditation liaison officers, or involved with grant development and oversight. Other roles held by IRP office staff not included in Figure 5 include membership on Assessment committees, institutional effectiveness, enrollment management, guided pathways, Institutional Review Board, and integrating planning.

**Very few IRP office staff serve as accreditation liaison officers**

| Role | Percent |
|------|---------|
| Institutional/strategic planning committee member | 91% |
| Accreditation committee member | 90% |
| Student equity committee member | 84% |
| Program review committee member | 79% |
| SSSP committee member | 76% |
| Primary contact for institutional reporting | 72% |
| Student learning outcomes committee member | 70% |
| Basic Skills committee member | 68% |
| Research committee member | 65% |
| Budget committee member | 35% |
| Accreditation Liaison Officer | 27% |
| Primary contact for grants development and oversight | 21% |

N=82

*Figure 5.* **The percent of IRP office staff fulfilling various roles**

## Current FTE by Position Type

Table 2 displays the current Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staffing per position type at participating IRP offices, and includes positions that were unfilled at the time of the survey. Note that participants were invited to write-in the position name and that several of these were reclassified during analysis (for example, Research Associate, Research Assistant, and Research & Policy Specialist were recoded as Research Analyst; IT Facilitator, Business Analyst Programmer, Programmer, MIS Analyst were recoded as Technician). Those positions left in the "Other" category included:

- Equity Dean
- Fiscal Specialist
- Grant Analyst / Grants Specialist
- Faculty Researcher (part-time)
- Faculty SLO coordinator (part-time)
- Faculty program review coordinator (part-time)
- Temporary Employee
- Interns and hourly staff, as needed

For ease of interpretation, each value within Table 2 has been color-coded so that larger values are represented by darker shades of yellow and smaller values by lighter shades of yellow.

**Table 2. The percent of IRP offices with various positions, by FTE**

| | < 1 FTE | 1 FTE | 1 to 2 FTE | 2 FTE | 2 to 3 FTE | 3 FTE | > 3 FTE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Vice President** | 1% | 1% | | | | | |
| **Director** | | 49% | | 4% | | | |
| **Coordinator** | | 8% | | | | | |
| **Dean** | 1% | 47% | | 3% | | | |
| **Research Analyst** | 1% | 27% | 5% | 18% | 4% | 22% | 14% |
| **Technician** | 1% | 13% | | 1% | 1% | | 1% |
| **Clerical Support** | 10% | 40% | | 1% | | | |
| **Student Assistant** | 8% | 4% | | 1% | | | |

N=78

As indicated by Table 2, reporting IRP offices typically have a director and/or a dean—although most offices usually have one or the other—and two or more research analysts. Half of responding IRP offices have some clerical support, while 17% have at least one technician, and 12% have student assistants. Of the reporting college IRP offices, 6% are led by a director with no full-time staff, while one IRP office is staffed with only one research analyst.

## Operating Budget Changes

Figure 6 displays the percent of IRP offices reporting an increase, decrease, or no change in their operating budgets since 2012-2013 and 2016-2017. Sixty-nine percent of participating IRP offices have had increases in their operation budget since 2012-2013, with 29% experiencing an increase in their operating budget since 2016-2017. Few IRP offices have had any declines in their operating budget.

**Operating budgets have grown or else remained stable over the last five years**

■ 2012-2013 (N=71)  ■ 2016-2017 (N=78)

| Increased | Unchanged | Decreased |
|---|---|---|
| 69% / 29% | 23% / 62% | 8% / 9% |
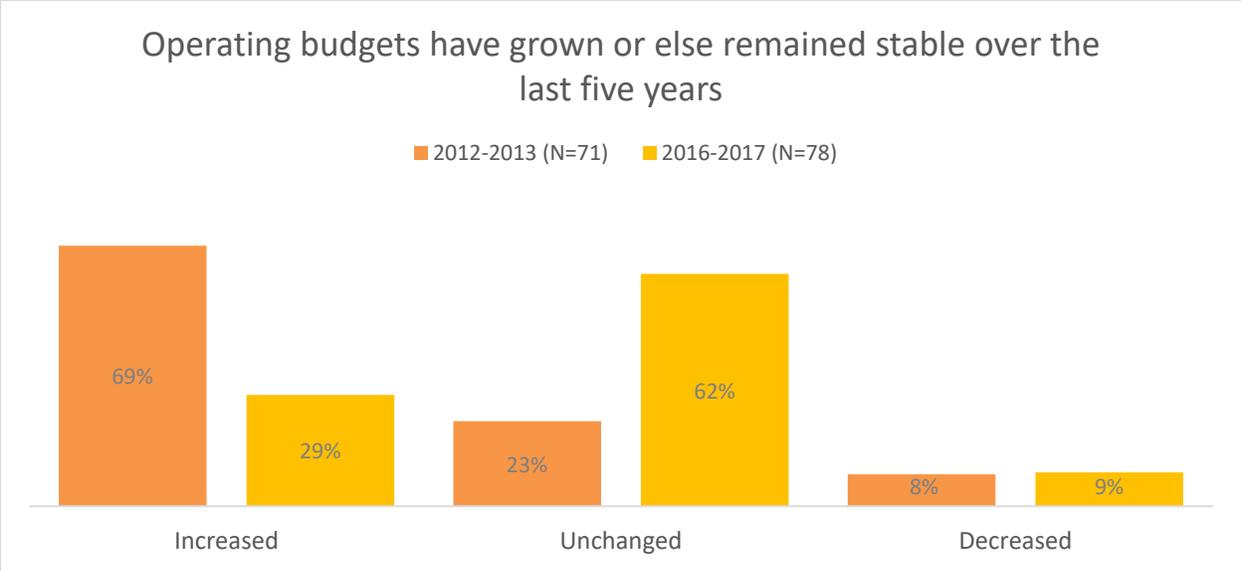
*Figure 6.* **The percent of IRP offices reporting increased, decreased, and unchanged operating budgets since 2012-2013 and 2016-2017**

## Staffing Changes

Figure 7 displays the percent of IRP offices reporting an increase, decrease, or no change in the number of staff since 2012-2013 and 2016-2017. Seventy-nine percent of participating IRP offices have had increases in staff since 2012-2013, with 47% experiencing an increase in staff since 2016-2017.  Few IRP offices have had any decrease in staff.



**Nearly half of IRP offices have added staff in the last 5 years, with many continuing to grow**

■ 2012-2013 (N=77)  ■ 2016-2017 (N=79)

| Increased | Unchanged | Decreased |
|---|---|---|
| 79% / 47% | 12% / 44% | 9% / 9% |
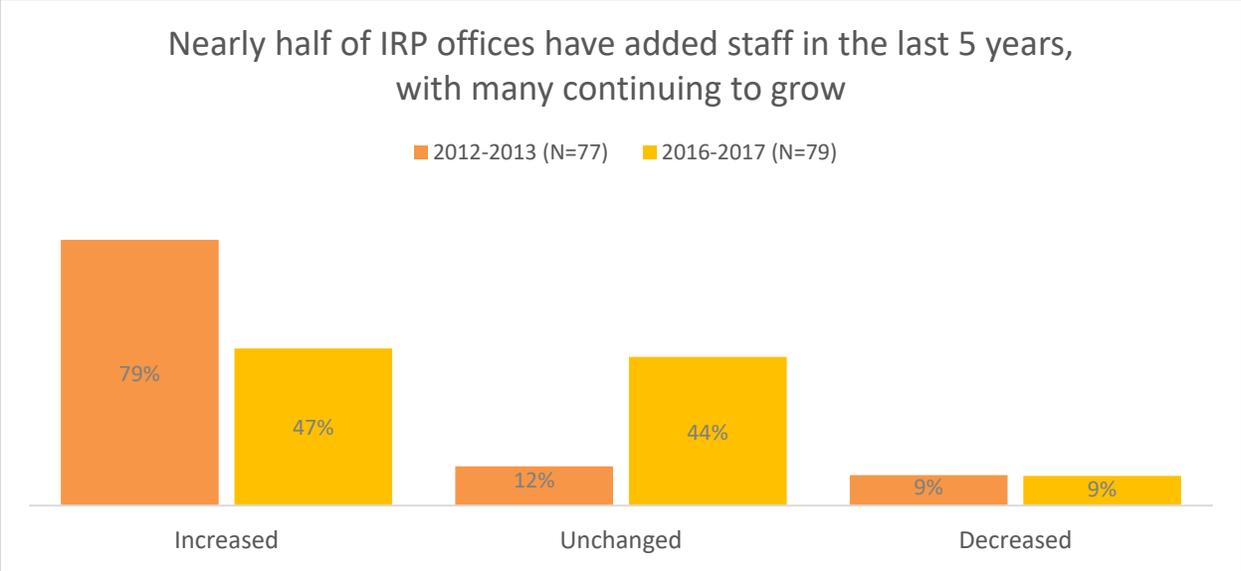
*Figure 7.* **The percent of IRP offices reporting increased, decreased, and unchanged staff size since 2012-2013 and 2016-2017**

Among survey respondents who indicated that their office's staffing has increased in the past five years, 88% reported that the staffing increases were funded by categorical programs such as SSSP, Student Equity, Basic Skills, Strong Workforce, and AEBG. Just over half of these categorically funded positions were for one full-time staff member (see Figure 8).
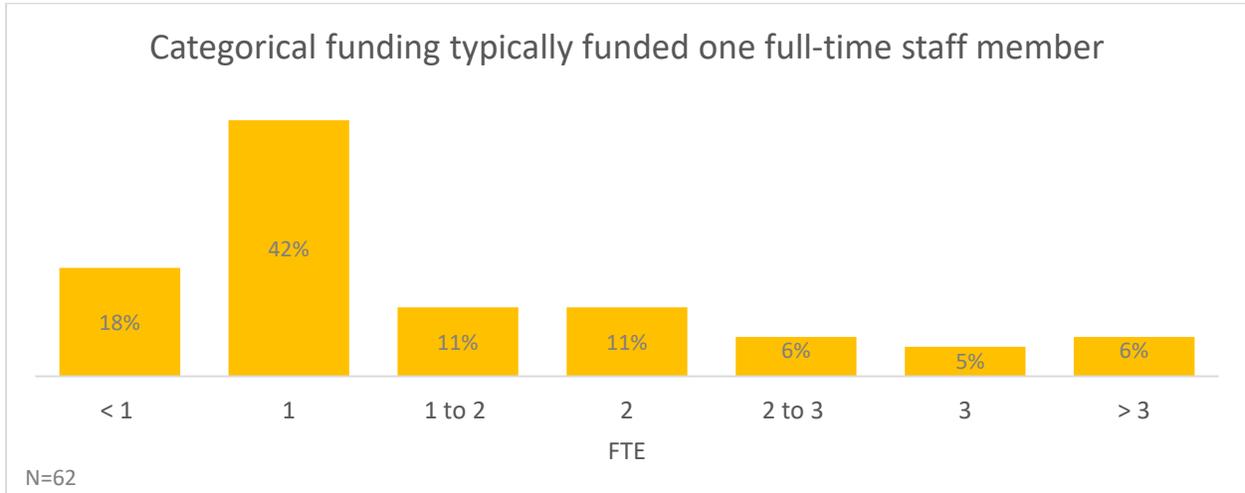


**Figure 8.** The percent of IRP offices with new hires funded by categorical sources, by FTE

Just over half of responding IRP offices reported no plans to hire new research and planning staff during the 2017-2018 academic year (see Figure 9).
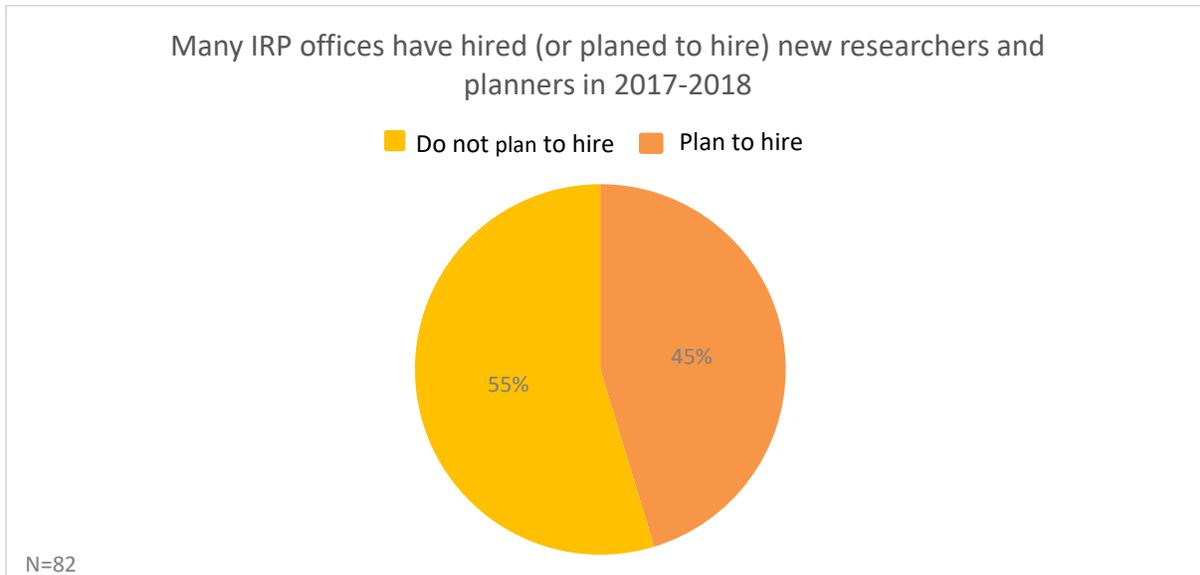


**Figure 9.** The percent of IRP offices with plans to hire new research and planners in 2017-2018

According to IRP offices intending to make these new hires (see Figure 10), nearly two-thirds of these positions will focus on student equity or Student Success and Support Programs, and 55% will focus on other areas, including:

- Various grants (e.g., Title III, Basic Skills Initiative Transformation Grant)
- Enrollment Management
- Student Learning Outcomes
- Institutional effectiveness
- Guided Pathways

Sixty-seven percent of these new hires will fill newly created positions, while the remaining 31% will fill vacant positions.
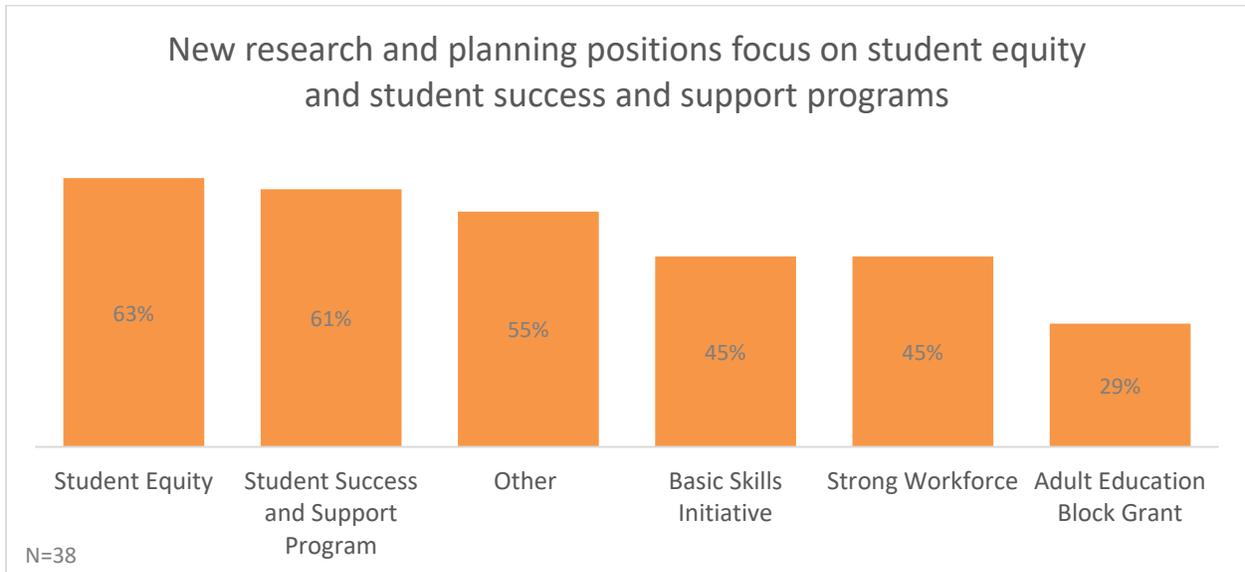


*Figure 10.* **The percent of new research and planning positions emphasizing student equity, student success and support programs, adult education, and other areas**

# RP Group Resources

The RP Group provides a number of resources to stakeholders within the California Community College system. All survey participants and/or someone in their offices have made use of RP Group resources within the 12 months leading up to the survey. The usefulness of these resources, however, vary among reporting IRP offices (see Figure 11).

**RP Group resources are generally useful to reporting IRP offices**

Legend: ■ Very Useful ■ Moderately Useful ■ Minimally Useful ■ Not At All Useful ■ Not Applicable/Did Not Use

| Resource | Very Useful | Moderately Useful | Minimally Useful | Not At All Useful | Not Applicable/Did Not Use |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Conference presentations | 67 | 19 | 9 | | 6 |
| Website | 59 | 31 | 7 | | 2 |
| RP Perspectives | 56 | 28 | 4 | 1 | 11 |
| RP listserv | 36 | 42 | 19 | 1 | 2 |
| Guides and reports | 26 | 48 | 16 | 1 | 9 |

% of participants

N=61

*Figure 11.* **The percent of survey particpiants reporting levels of usefulness of RP Group resources**

As for RP Group professional development activities, all but one reporting IRP office had personnel participating in at least one event within the 12 months leading up to the survey. Most IRP offices reporting in this survey had personnel attend an RP Group conference and/or a regional research group (see Figure 12). Close to a quarter of IRP offices had personnel attend RP Group facilitated presentations or discussions on campus, while 18% had personnel complete the RP Group's Leading from the Middle Academy and 17% had personnel attend the RP Summer Institute.

**RP Group conferences and regional research groups are popular among reporting IRP offices**

| Activity | Percent |
|---|---|
| RP Conferences | 87% |
| Regional Research Groups | 80% |
| Webinars | 62% |
| Presentions/Discussions on Campus | 22% |
| Leading From the Middle | 18% |
| RP Summer Institute | 17% |

*Figure 12.* **The percent of IRP offices having particpated in RP Group professional development in the 12 months prior to of the survey, by type**

In order for the RP Group to provide relevant professional development opportunities to the field, an item was included in the survey questionnaire to take stock of the various data analysis and visualization software used by IRP office personnel. From a provided list, almost all reporting IRP offices indicated they used Microsoft Office products, such as Microsoft Excel. Roughly three quarters of reporting offices indicated they used SPSS for data analysis, and the 60% indicated they used a SQL querying tool of some variety. Far fewer offices reported using R, Stata, or any qualitative analysis software. Survey participants were given space to write-in the names of other data analysis and visualization software that are being used in their IRP office. Some of the more frequent software mentioned by participants included Argos, Microsoft Power BI, Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, TracDat, Hyperion, and Cognos.



**IRP offices generally utilize Microsoft Office products, such as Excel, and SPSS for data analysis**

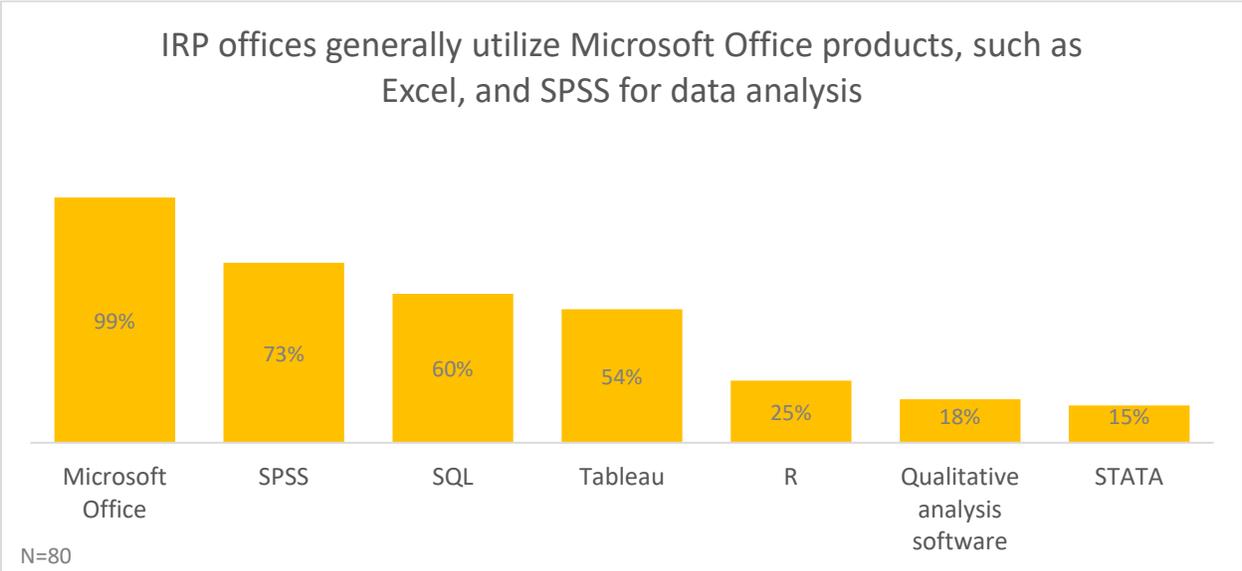| Microsoft Office | SPSS | SQL | Tableau | R | Qualitative analysis software | STATA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 99% | 73% | 60% | 54% | 25% | 18% | 15% |

N=80

*Figure 13.* **The percent of IRP offices using various software**

When asked to rate their agreement with statements asserting that the RP Group provides relevant professional development, as well as adequate resources, for researchers and planners, around 81% strongly agreed or agreed (see Figure 14).
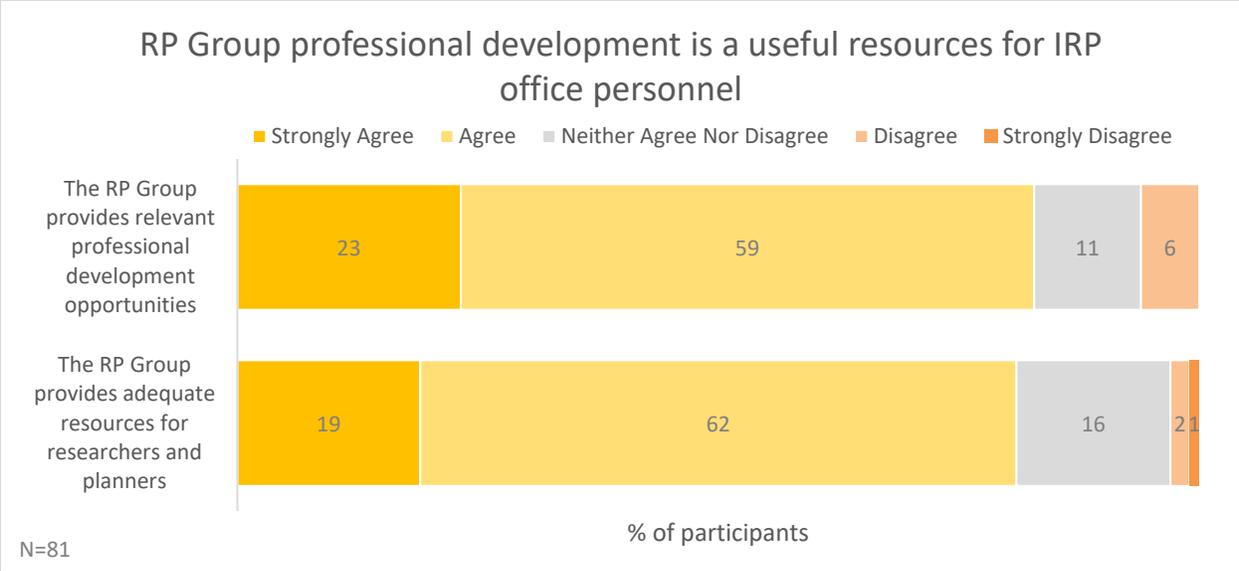
*Figure 14.* **The percent survey particpiants reporting various levels of agreement with two statements regarding the RP Group's provision of resources and professional development opportunities**

The RP Group offers professional development on a variety of topics related to institutional research and planning. Figure 15. Displays survey participants' perceptions of their IRP office's level of interest in select topics. Reporting IRP offices indicated more interest for professional development focused on data visualization, equity research and action, and planning than for data analysis or learning outcomes assessment. Ninety-nine percent of reporting IRP offices would likely participate in professional development targeting data visualization, while at least 94% would likely participate in professional development focusing on equity research and planning (integrated planning, equity planning, and strategic/master planning).

## Professional development focusing on data visualization and planning are most in demand

■ Very interested  ■ Moderately interested  ■ Mildly interested  ■ Not at all interested

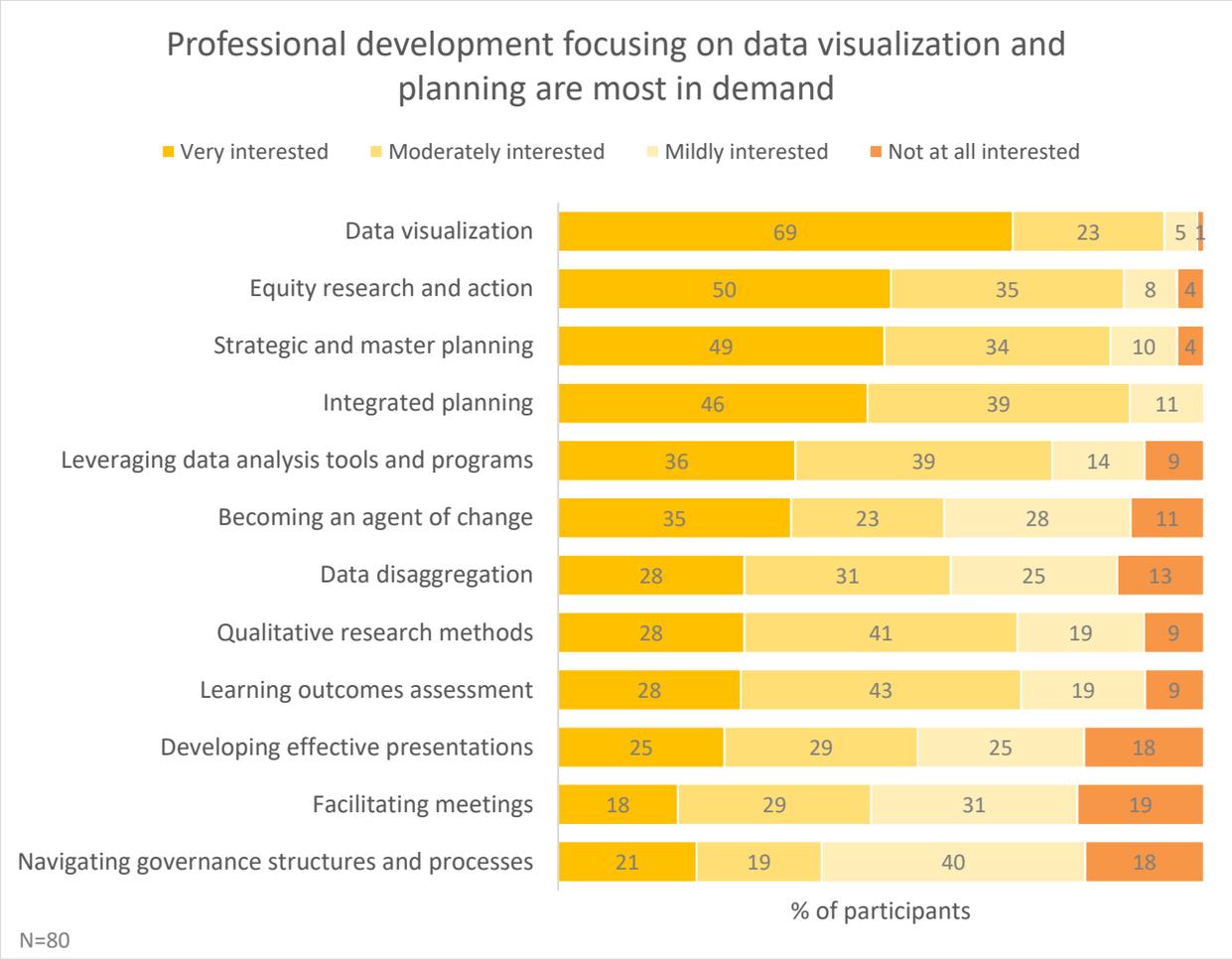| | Very interested | Moderately interested | Mildly interested | Not at all interested |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data visualization | 69 | 23 | 5 | 1 |
| Equity research and action | 50 | 35 | 8 | 4 |
| Strategic and master planning | 49 | 34 | 10 | 4 |
| Integrated planning | 46 | 39 | 11 | |
| Leveraging data analysis tools and programs | 36 | 39 | 14 | 9 |
| Becoming an agent of change | 35 | 23 | 28 | 11 |
| Data disaggregation | 28 | 31 | 25 | 13 |
| Qualitative research methods | 28 | 41 | 19 | 9 |
| Learning outcomes assessment | 28 | 43 | 19 | 9 |
| Developing effective presentations | 25 | 29 | 25 | 18 |
| Facilitating meetings | 18 | 29 | 31 | 19 |
| Navigating governance structures and processes | 21 | 19 | 40 | 18 |

% of participants

N=80

*Figure 15.* **The percent of IRP offices with staff likely to participate in professional development, by delivery format**

Survey participants were also asked to rate the likelihood that they (and/or other members of their office) would participate in professional development activities if it was delivered through webinar, archived webinar/ training module, drive-in workshop, or pre-conference workshop (see Figure 16). As displayed in Figure 16, most survey respondents noted that they are most likely to participate in professional development delivered by webinar, followed by archived webinars/training modules and drive-in workshops. Of the professional development delivery modes, pre-conference workshop garnered the least potential commitment for participation, with 46% of survey responders noting that they would likely not participant in or else were unsure.
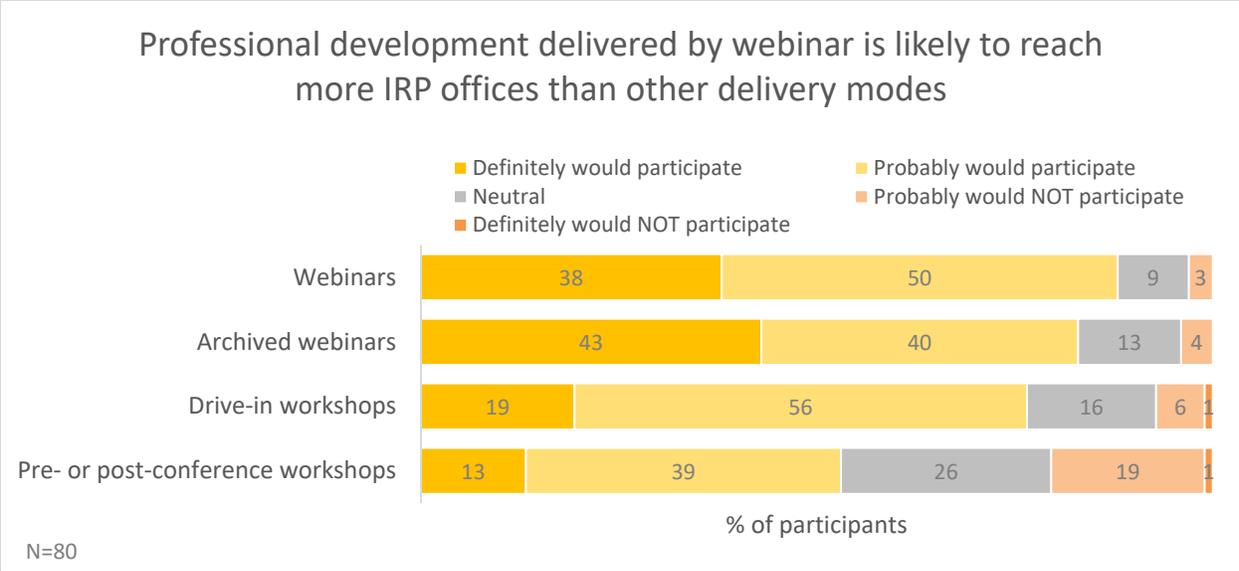
**Professional development delivered by webinar is likely to reach more IRP offices than other delivery modes**

Legend:
- Definitely would participate
- Probably would participate
- Neutral
- Probably would NOT participate
- Definitely would NOT participate

| Delivery format | Definitely would participate | Probably would participate | Neutral | Probably would NOT participate | Definitely would NOT participate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Webinars | 38 | 50 | 9 | 3 | |
| Archived webinars | 43 | 40 | 13 | 4 | |
| Drive-in workshops | 19 | 56 | 16 | 6 | 1 |
| Pre- or post-conference workshops | 13 | 39 | 26 | 19 | 1 |

% of participants

N=80

*Figure 16.* **The percent of IRP offices with staff likely to participate in professional development, by delivery format**

Survey participants offered several suggestions for how the RP Group could better support research and planners. The most frequently offered suggests are summarized below:

- Provide more direct support to regional research groups to ensure that they are sustained and hosted in all regions of the state.

- Offer more professional development for strategic planning.

- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for all levels of researchers, from novices to well-seasoned professionals.

- Deliver professional development around institutional effectiveness (i.e., leadership, participatory governance, working with faculty, learning outcome assessment, equity).

- Share promising practices, improvements, and lessons learned from RP Group projects and college efforts.

- Produce and disseminate more recorded presentations and webinars, online training modules, and briefs.

# Conclusions and Implications

The IRP Survey is intended to serve as a census of IRP offices across California's community colleges. The survey is also intended to gauge interest in professional development topics and inform future RP Group professional development offerings. Although 64% of IRP offices selected to participate in the 2017 survey, the survey's results provide a number of informational items for RP Group professional development offerings, resources, and support for IRP practitioners across the state. The results of the 2017 survey showed that, among reporting IRP offices, many are growing in terms of staff and a large proportion experienced budget increases in recent years. Most of the growth in budgets and staff hiring have are the results of an increase in categorical funding.

IRP offices engage with the RP Group largely though RP Group conferences, regional research groups, and webinars. Survey participants noted being generally satisfied with the RP Group's professional development opportunities and resources, and would like more offerings dealing with data visualization, equity research and action, and strategic planning. Moreover, feedback from survey participants point to sustained demand for ongoing professional development opportunities (for novices to well-seasoned professionals alike), and prefer that such offerings be hosted online, during a regional research meeting, or at a college campus.

The results of the 2017 IRP Survey will be shared with the RP Group Board, RP Group Professional Development Advisory Committee, and RP Group staff in order to facilitate action planning. The results will also be shared with the field for informational purposes. Moreover, the results of the 2017 IRP Survey will be used by the RP Group to tailor professional development offerings in 2018 and develop resources and support for the field.

# The RP Group

Through professional and leadership development, technical assistance, research, and evaluation services, the RP Group strengthens the ability of California Community Colleges to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

**www.rpgroup.org**