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Research • Planning • Professional Development
for California Community Colleges

2016 Survey of Institutional Research Offices in the California Community College System

Full Report

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Executive Summary

In 2016, 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.

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

- Fifty-eight percent of reporting college IRP offices report to a president/superintendent, while 38% report to a vice president.
- Eighty-three percent of reporting IRP offices combine research and planning functions.
- At least 80% of reporting IRP offices have staff serving as members for strategic planning, accreditation, and equity committees, in addition to serving as primary contacts for institutional reporting. Fewer reporting IRP offices have staff involved with grant development and oversight (34%) and budget committees (31%), and fewer still serve as institutional accreditation liaison officers (22%).
- Reporting IRP offices are typically led by a dean or director and are often staffed by 2 or more research and planning analysts. Twelve 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 2015, while 53% have had budget increases since 2011.
- Fifty-two percent of reporting IRP offices have increased their staff since 2015, while 75% have had staff increases since 2011. Fifty-five percent of reporting IRP offices plan to hire new research and planners during the 2016-2017 academic year. Most of these new staff will focus on student equity (69%) and Student Success and Support Programs (54%).
- Reporting IRP offices overwhelmingly rated RP Group resources and professional development as useful.
- Reporting IRP offices conveyed more interest for professional development focused on data visualization or 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-conference workshops.

Reader's Guide

The purpose of this document is to share the findings of the 2016 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, 2014, and 2015. 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 2016, 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

Based on feedback from the field, the questionnaire items of the 2016 Survey of Institutional Research Offices in the California Community College System were revised from those on the 2015 survey instrument. A number of items were refined or removed in order to focus the survey more directly on issues of greatest importance to the RP Group and to reduce the time required for respondents to complete the survey.

The 2016 survey was administered online via SurveyMonkey during August and September 2016. 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 113 colleges and 23 district offices in the system, 54 colleges and 11 district offices responded to the survey, resulting in an overall response rate of 48% (see Table 1). As indicated in Figure 1, slightly over half 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	54	59	48%
District IRP offices	11	12	48%
Total	65	71	48%

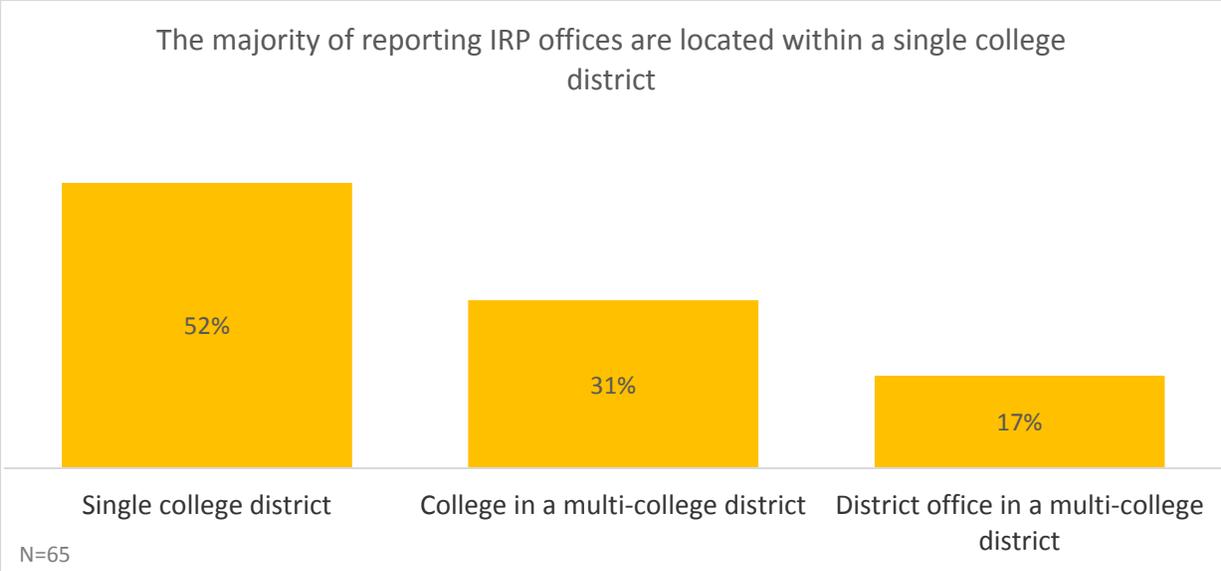


Figure 1. The percent of IRP offices within a single college district, and college in a multi-college district, and a district office in a multi-college district

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).

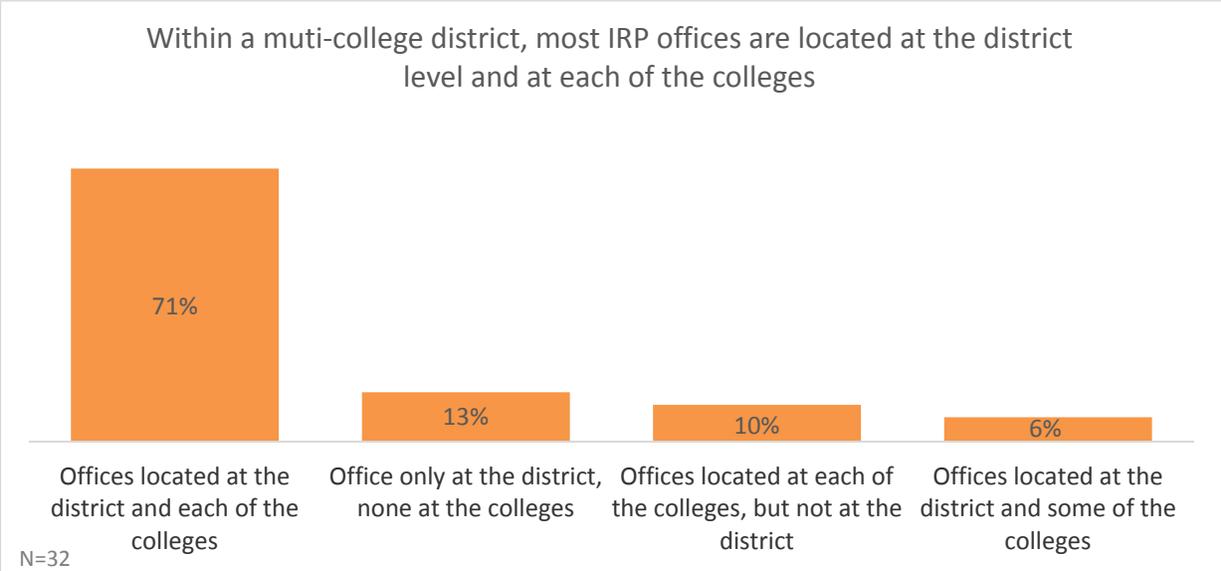


Figure 2. The percenet of IRP offices at various locations within multi-college districts

Findings

Office Names

Although we reference institutional research offices as IRP offices (that is, Institutional Research and Planning offices) in this report, the names of district and college offices are quiet diverse. Of the 65 reporting IRP offices, there are 22 different office names (we do not list them here to preserve the anonymity of responding offices). Perhaps unsurprisingly, most IRP office names include “research,” “planning,” or/and “effectiveness.” The word “research” appears in most office names (80%), with the most common office name being “Institutional Research” (25%). The second most common word in reporting IRP office names is “effectiveness” (48%), as in “Institutional Effectiveness” (15%), the second most common name. The word “planning” is the third most frequent word used in office names, included in 46% of office names.

Organizational Structure of the IRP Office

When asked where within the organizational structure of the district or college does the reporting IRP office fit, 57% of college offices noted that they report to a president/superintendent, while 41% report to a vice president. Among district IRP offices, 64% 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.

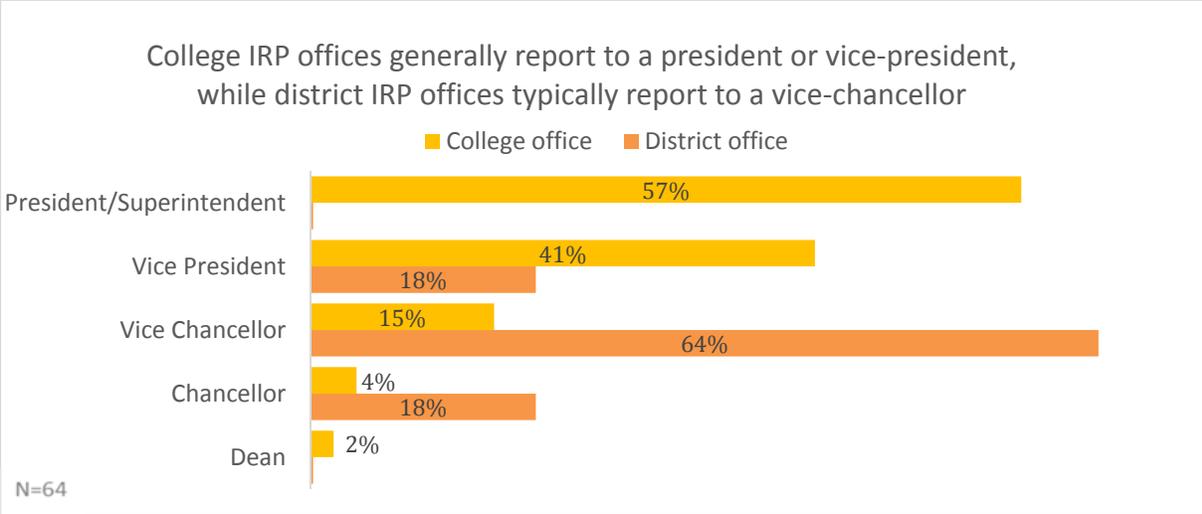


Figure 3. The percent of college and district IRP offices reporting to a president/superintendent, vice president, vice chancellor, chancellor, or dean

The majority (83%) of reporting IRP offices combine research and planning functions (see Figure 4). As for the roles IRP offices play in planning, participants noted 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.

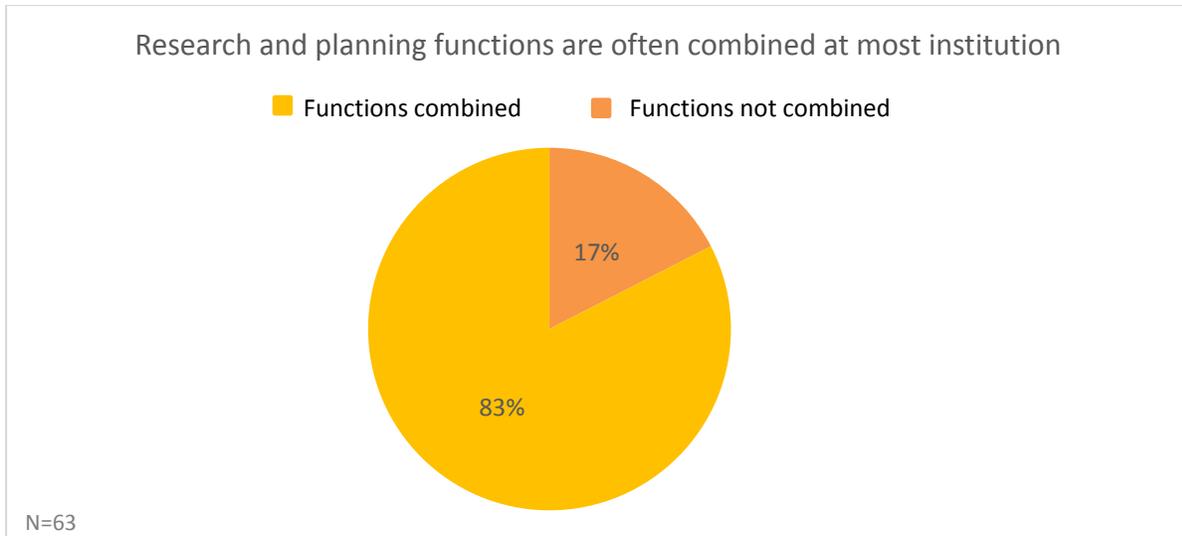


Figure 4. The percent of IRP offices with and without combined research and planning functions

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. Most IRP offices also have staff serving as the primary contact for institutional reporting. A minority of IRP offices have staff serving as accreditation liaison officers, and slightly less than a third are involved in budget committees or grant development and oversight.

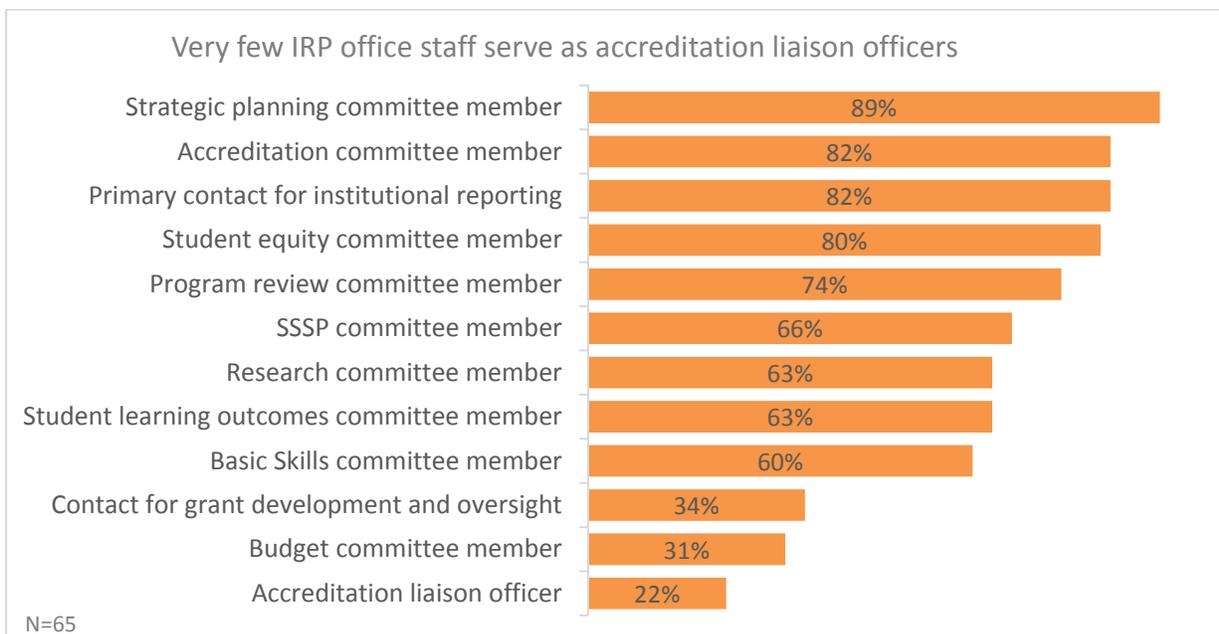


Figure 5. The percent of IRP office staff fulfilling various roles

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 the position categories in the table include all ranks (for example, senior research analysts would have been reported as research analysts and associate deans would have been reported as deans.). Also note that participants selecting other were invited to write-in the position name and that several of these were reclassified during analysis (for example, Confidential Administrative Assistant and Administrative Analyst were recoded as Clerical Support; Research Associate, Research Assistant, and Data analyst were recoded as Research Analyst; IT Specialist, IT Business Analyst, Programmer, Programmer/Analyst, Systems Programmer/MIS Analyst were recoded as Technician). Those positions left in the “Other” category include a

- Faculty research coordinator,
- Short-term worker,
- Faculty SLO coordinator,
- SLO technician
- Professional expert,
- Coordinator (non-management),
- Database and analytics programming consultant,
- Grant writer, and an
- Institutional effectiveness specialist.

For ease of interpretation, each row of Table 2 has been color-coded so that larger values in each row are accompanied with 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	1.5%	3.1%					1.5%
Director	6.2%	40.0%		3.1%			
Coordinator		10.8%	1.5%	1.5%			
Dean	1.5%	43.1%		3.1%			
Research Analyst		16.9%		32.3%	4.6%	4.6%	23.1%
Technician	3.1%	15.4%		3.1%			
Clerical Support	10.8%	26.2%		3.1%			
Student Assistant	13.8%	6.2%				1.5%	
Other	4.6%	4.6%		3.1%			1.5%

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 2 or more than 3 research analysts. Forty percent of IRP offices have some clerical support, 21% of IRP offices have at least one technician, and 11.5% have student assistants. Of the reporting college IRP offices, 12% are led by a director with no full-time staff.

Operating Budget Changes

Figure 6 displays the percent of IRP offices reporting an increase, decrease, or no change in their operating budgets since 2011 and 2015. Just over half of participating IRP offices have had increases in their operation budget since 2011, with 29% experiencing an increase in their operating budget since 2015. Few IRP offices have had any declines in their operating budget.

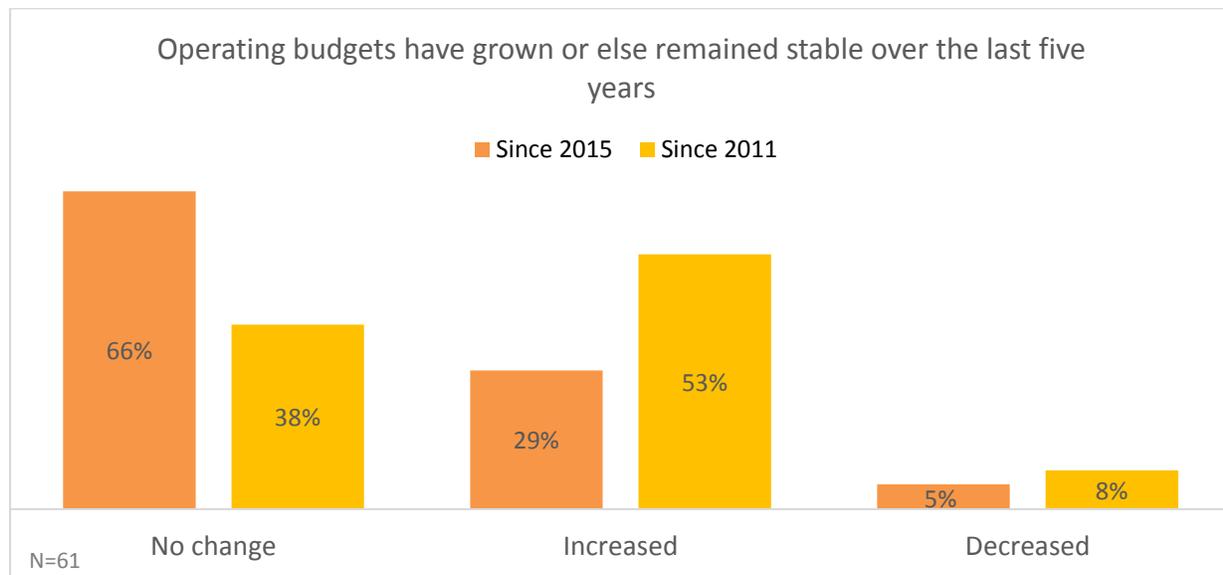


Figure 6. The percent of IRP offices reporting increased, decreased, and unchanged operating budgets since 2011 and 2015

Staffing Changes

Figure 7 displays the percent of IRP offices reporting an increase, decrease, or no change in the number of staff since 2011 and 2015. Three-fourths of participating IRP offices have had increases in staff since 2011, with 52% experiencing an increase in staff since 2015. Few IRP offices have had any decrease in staff.

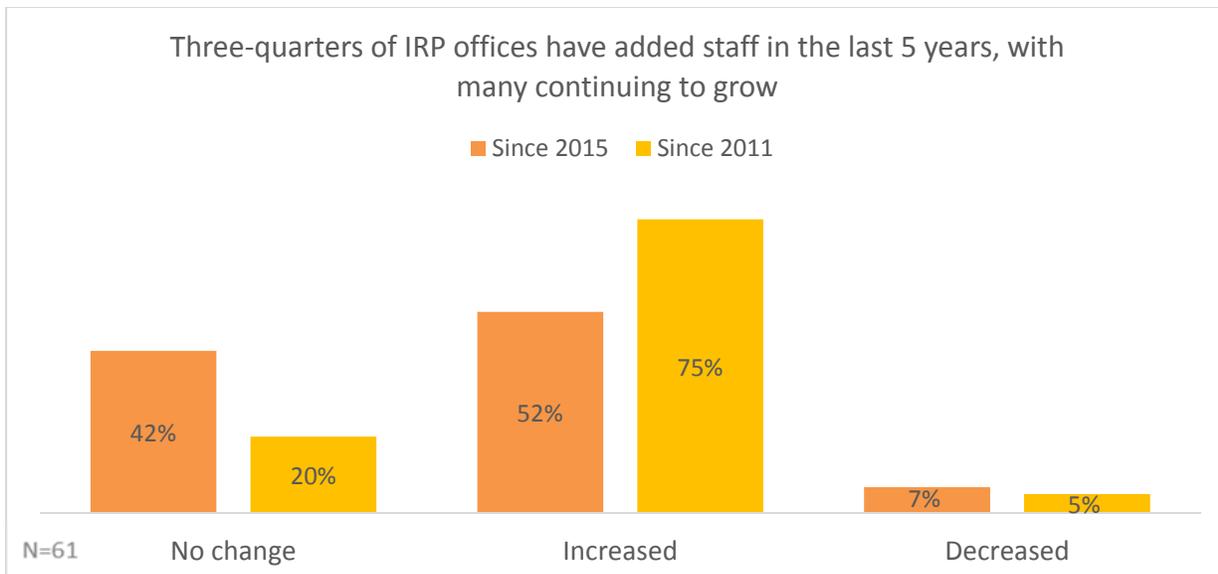


Figure 7. The percent of IRP offices reporting increased, decreased, and unchanged staff size since 2011 and 2015

Just over half of responding IRP offices reported plans to hire new research and planning staff during the 2016-2017 academic year (see Figure 8).

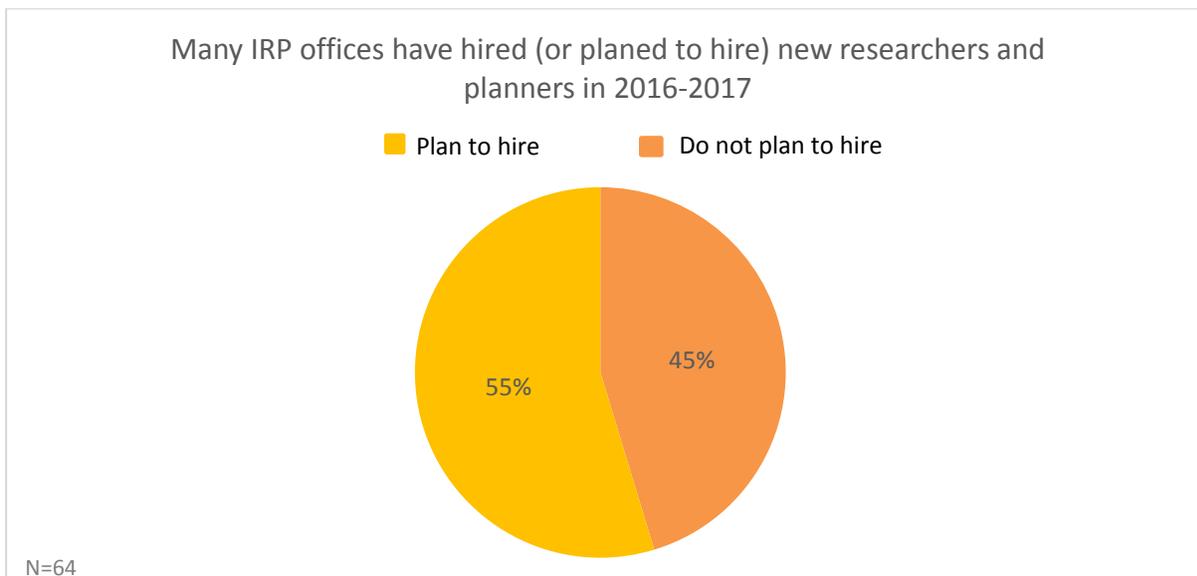


Figure 8. The percent of IRP offices with plans to hire new research and planners in 2016-2017

According to IRP offices intending to make these new hires (see Figure 9), 69% of these new positions will focus on student equity, 54 % will focus on Student Success and Support Programs, 34% will focus on Adult Education, and 51% will focus on other areas, including:

- Various grants (e.g., Title V; Title III; etc.)
- Innovation Award

- Basic Skills Initiative Transformation Grant
- Integrated planning
- Accreditation
- CTE related activities (CTE Data Unlocked Grant)
- Program review
- Hispanic Serving Institutions Grant
- District-funded
- Dual Enrollment; Guided Pathways

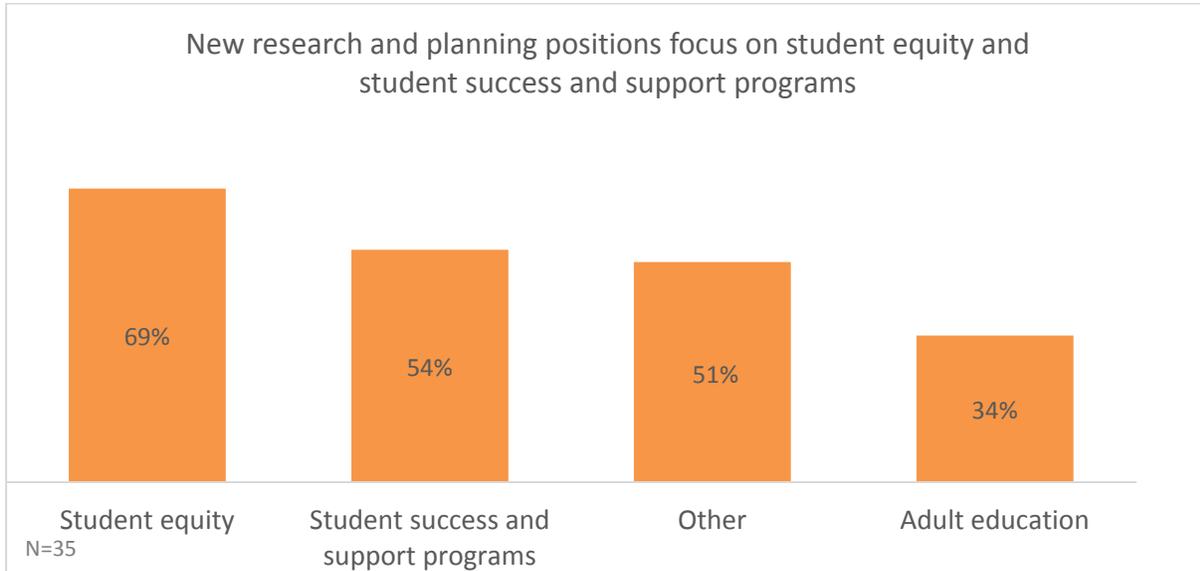


Figure 9. The percent of new research and planning positions emphasizing student equity, student success and support programs, adult education, and other areas

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 10). Note that the RP Group website and RP Perspectives have been redesigned and refreshed since the implementation of this survey.

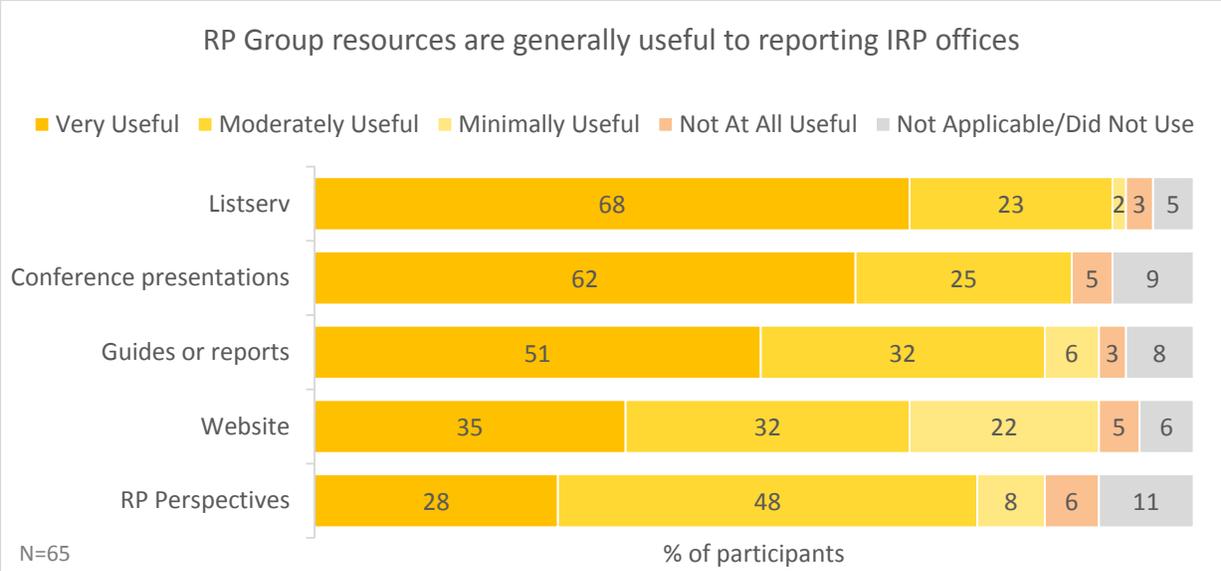


Figure 10. The percent of survey participants reporting levels of usefulness of RP Group resources

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 11). About one-third of IRP offices had personnel attend the RP Group’s Summer Institute, and 14% had personnel complete the RP Group’s Leading from the Middle Academy.

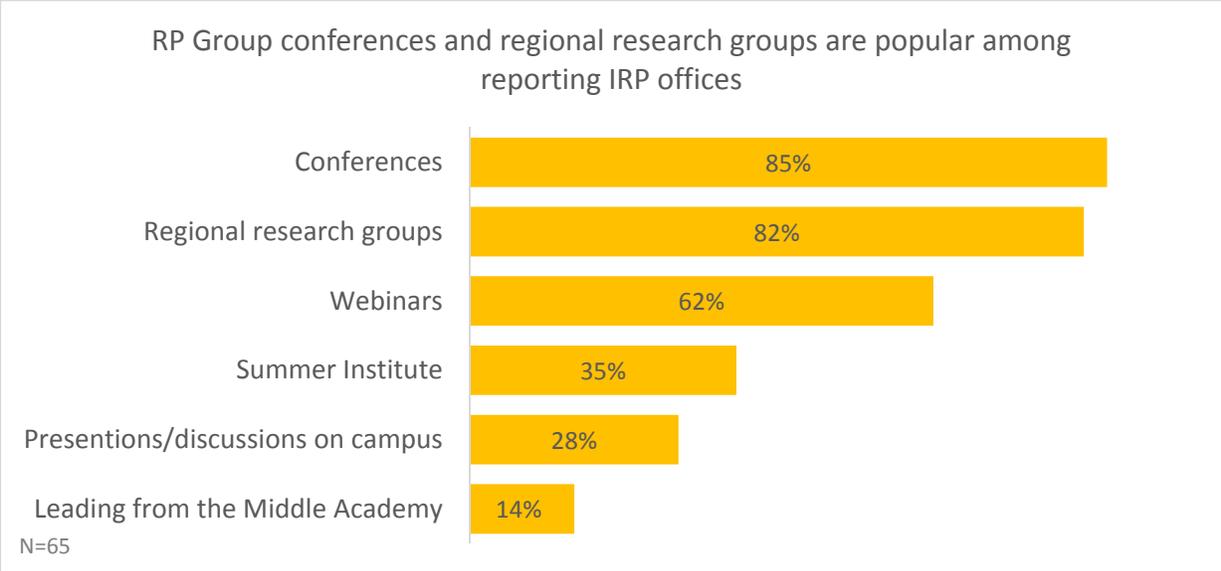


Figure 11. The percent of IRP offices having participated in RP Group professional development in the 12 months prior to of the survey, by type

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 57% indicated they used a SQL querying tool of some variety. Far fewer offices reported using R, Stata, or any qualitative analysis software.

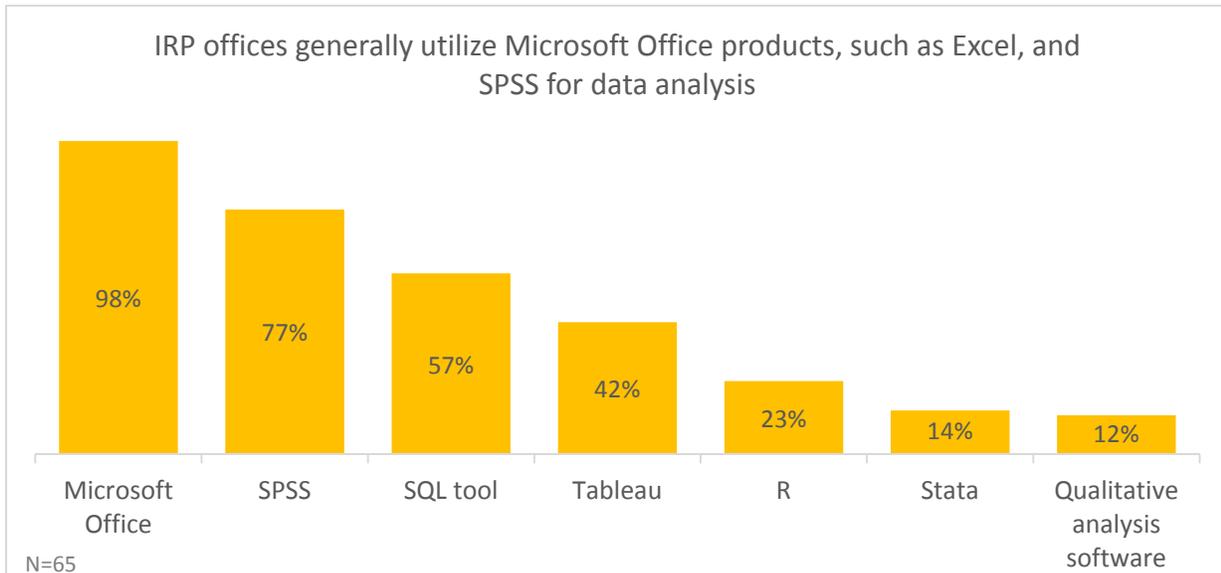


Figure 12. The percent of IRP offices using various software

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, nearly 88% strongly agreed or agreed (see Figure 13).

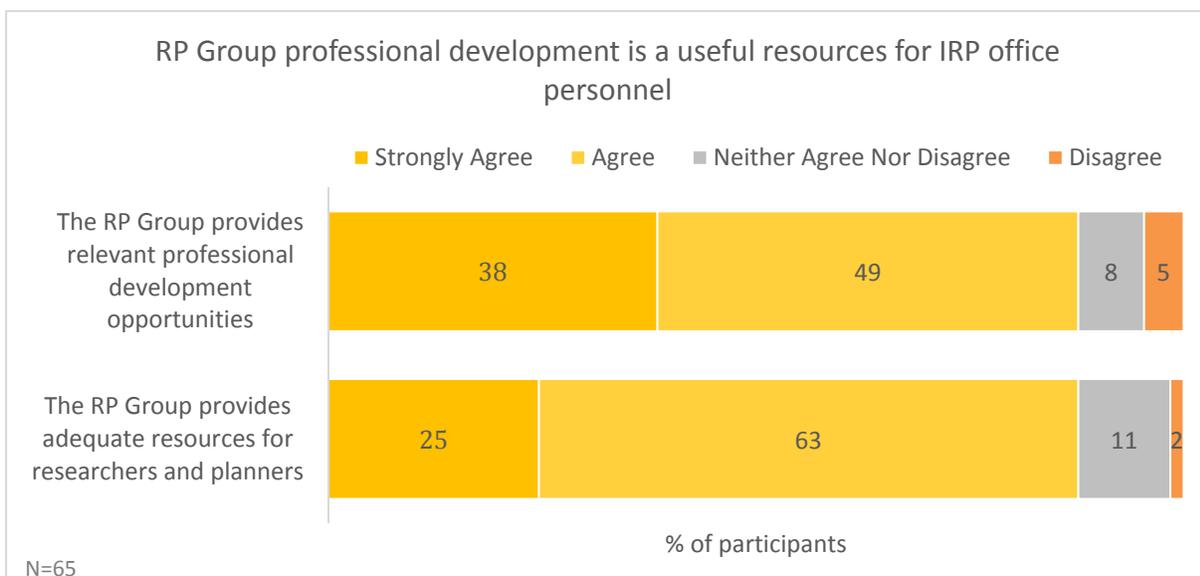


Figure 13. The percent survey participants reporting various levels of agreement with two statements regarding the RP Group’s provision of resources and professional development opportunities

The RP Group offers professional development on a variety of topics related to institutional research and planning. Figure 14. Displays the likelihood that personnel from reporting IRP offices would participate in select topics. Reporting IRP offices indicated more interest for professional development focused on data visualization or planning than for data analysis or learning outcomes assessment. 91% of reporting IRP offices would likely participate in professional development targeting data visualization (91%), while around 82% would likely participate in professional development focusing on planning (integrated planning, equity planning, and strategic/ master planning).

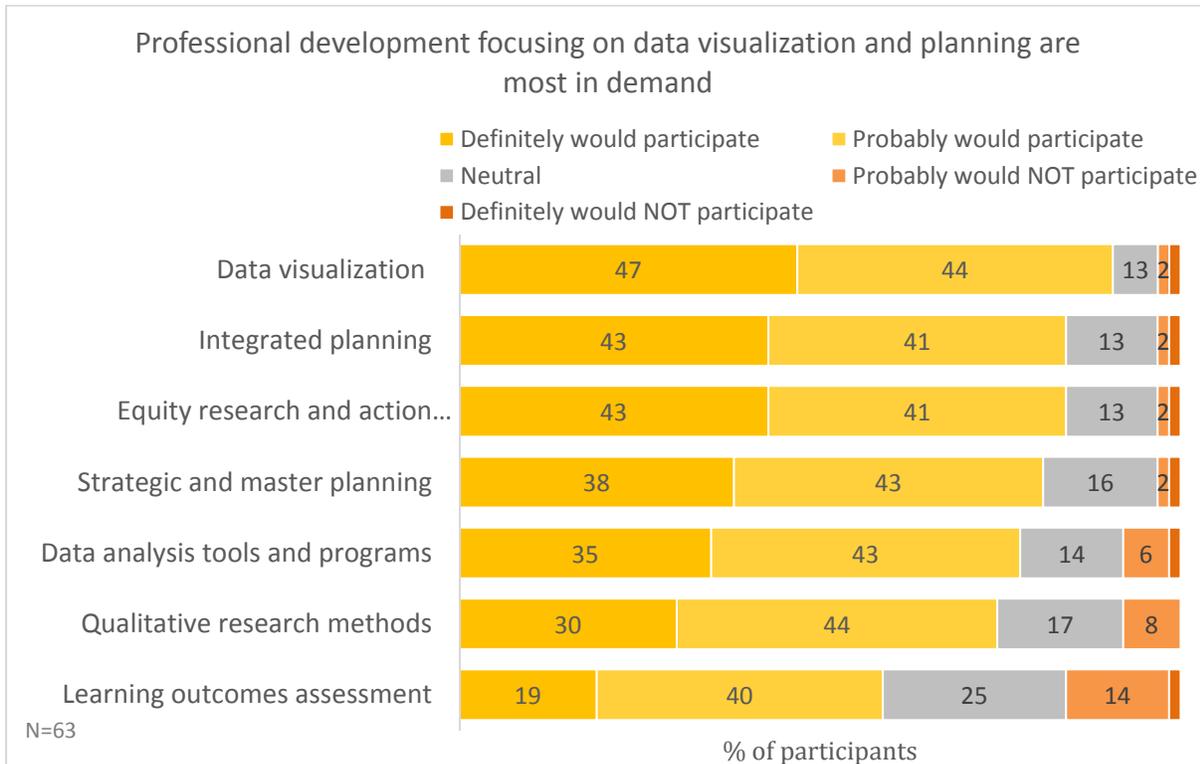


Figure 14. The percent of IRP offices with staff likely to participate in professional development, by delivery format

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 15). As displayed in Figure 15, 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 42% of survey responders noting that they would likely not participant in or else were unsure.

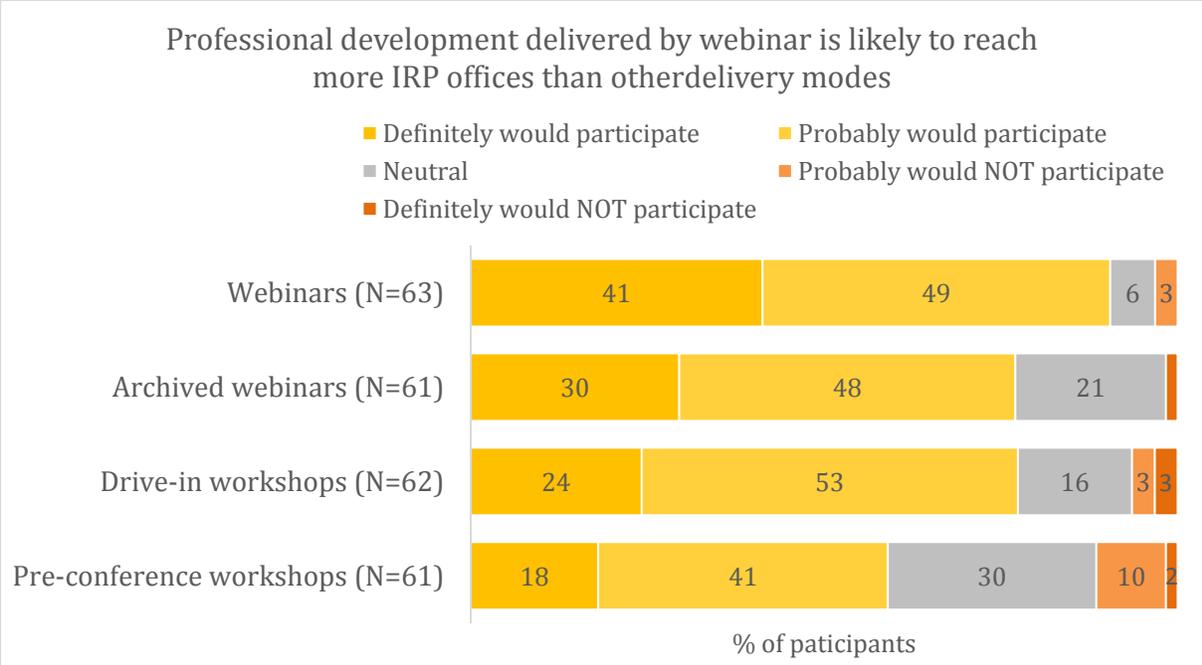


Figure 13. The percent of IRP offices with staff likely to participate in professional development, by delivery format

Survey participants offered several suggestions for how the RP Group could better support research and planners:

- Diversify RP Group professional development offerings to avoid overlap between activities and with other organizations/ initiatives.
- Offer more drive-in workshops, more active learning experiences, and short webinars.
- Provide support for accreditation, particularly for the new standards and how they are being used/interpreted.
- Provide support for strategic planning.
- Offer a mentorship program for new IRP office directors and analysts.
- Create a certificate in Institutional Research.
- Help to share best practices from colleges/offices.
- Align work with the ACCJC and CCC Chancellor's Office work/initiatives.
- Move away from promoting the use of software tools developed for statistical analysis, as opposed to real data analytics and reporting solutions.

- Provide some conversation groups on how to align SSSP, equity, etc. initiatives.
- Prepare practitioners to become advocates for institutional change.

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 48% of IRP offices selected to participate in the 2016 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 2016 survey showed that, among reporting IRP offices, many are growing in terms of staff and a large proportion experienced budget increases in recent years. The titles and functions of reporting IRP offices appear to increasingly be including "effectiveness" and the various responsibilities that term entails (e.g., planning, assessment, and to a much lesser degree, accreditation). That said, there is still much to be learned about the ever-changing scope of IRP office work. Depth interviews and/or case studies could shed additional light on the specific responsibilities of IRP offices throughout the state.

In addition, although reporting IRP offices indicated substantial representation at RP Conferences and in regional research groups, participation in other professional development activities varied. Interest in future professional development offerings was greatest for data visualization and planning-related topics. Reporting IRP offices made a number of suggestions upon which the RP Group may act in the future. These include the development of additional resources and supports for accreditation and statewide accountability requirements. Other recommendations ranged in scope from technical skills to broader leadership and change management skills.

The results of the 2016 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 2016 IRP Survey will be used by the RP Group to tailor professional development offerings in 2017 and develop resources and support for the field.

Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

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.

Project Team

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