



Windwalker Corporation

OMB Clearance Request for Contract ED-FSA-12-O-0032

Deliverable 2.3D Industry Benchmarking Study Best Practices

Prepared by:

Windwalker Corporation
1945 Old Gallows Road
Tysons Corner, VA 22182

Submitted to:

Christopher T. Lemmie, Senior Advisor and Project Manager
FSA – Customer Experience Group
christopher.lemmie@ed.gov
(202) 377-3225

July 23, 2014



1945 Old Gallows Road Suite 600- Tysons Corner, VA 22182
703-970-3500 - info@windwalker.com



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Clearance Documentation

Documentation for the Generic Clearance of Customer Service Satisfaction Collections

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: Data Collection for PEP Participant Baseline Report

SURVEY FOCUS GROUP SOFTWARE USABILITY TESTING

DESCRIPTION OF THIS SPECIFIC COLLECTION

BACKGROUND

Under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which covers the administration of U.S. federal student financial aid programs, Federal Student Aid (FSA) administers the following programs: Pell grants, Stafford loans, PLUS loans, and the “campus-based” programs including Federal Work Study, Perkins Loans, and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants. Federal regulation requires schools to have written policies and procedures for the administration of the Title IV student assistance programs. To ensure institutional regulatory compliance, FSA provides training and technical assistance for financial aid administrators, institutional leaders, and other institutional support staff nationwide via its Information for Financial Aid Professionals (IFAP) website and the School Experience Group (SEG). The SEG’s mission is to identify the unique service needs of all post-secondary education institutions and provide them with tailored resources to meet those needs. Within SEG, the Minority Serving and Under Resourced Schools Division (MSURSD) is responsible for providing support, assessment, and training specifically targeted for Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

MSURSD is currently working to enhance the services and resources they provide to the MSIs, with the dual goals of increasing MSI compliance rates and of assisting MSIs in improving student performance outcomes, such as increased student retention and graduation rates. From January to May 2014, Windwalker conducted onsite interviews and focus groups at 11 institutions selected by MSURSD to provide them with information to identify where gaps in compliance-related knowledge and process implementation exist in the schools they serve. The next step of our research is to identify MSIs that demonstrate high compliance rates and/or have achieved high student performance outcomes so we can uncover the best practices employed by these exemplary MSIs. Once uncovered, the best practices from these institutions will be disseminated to schools that participated in the previous round of research to act as tools to assist them in closing performance gaps.

INTENDED PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE COLLECTION

MSURSD has contracted Windwalker Corporation to identify areas where the division can increase its efficiency of their operations and processes, as well as to enhance the effectiveness of the resources they provide to MSIs. Windwalker has already conducted an extensive operational review and has completed detailed maps of MSURSD’s major processes. Based upon

this research, a Performance Enhancement Pilot (PEP) program was created by Windwalker, identifying the strategies we recommend MSURSD employ to enhance their operations and processes. During this past spring, Windwalker visited 11 MSIs and conducted root cause interviews with institutional leaders and financial aid staff to identify where gaps in compliance-related knowledge and process implementation exist to assess the extent to which the recommendations in the PEP program decreases gaps.

This current phase of the research incorporates two components: 1) the completion of an industry benchmarking study; and 2) the identification of best practices employed at top-performing institutions. The industry benchmarking study will involve Windwalker analyzing secondary data that have been provided by MSURSD. Specifically, the benchmarking data analysis will include the reporting of multiple data metrics assessing institutional performance across three MSI segments – HBCUs, HSIs and TCUs – and reporting measures of central tendency (i.e., means and medians) for each in order to provide a snapshot of performance on each by cluster. Windwalker is not seeking OMB approval for this facet of the research since it does not include interacting with subjects.

Once the benchmark metrics have been calculated, Windwalker will identify the three top-performing institutions in each segment and request that they participate in a study to better understand the practices they employ that they feel contribute to their high levels of performance. Specifically, the director of the Office of Financial Aid or the director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness will be contacted to participate in a phone-based survey of approximately 20 questions to uncover the best practices implemented by their offices that they feel contribute to their top performance (see appendix for full instrument). These interviews will ask respondents questions on the following themes:

- identification of which practices enable top performance;
- identification of each practice's stakeholders;
- explanation of how each practice was developed; and
- explanation of how each practice is implemented.

Interview participants will also be asked by the Windwalker researcher if they have any artifacts, such as program descriptions, process maps, etc., that they would be willing to share with other institutions looking to improve their performance.

COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Financial aid or institutional effectiveness directors from the three top performing institutions from each of the three MSI segments, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), will be contacted to participate in a phone-based interview to discuss the practices their office employs that contribute to their exceptional performance. Nine, one-hour phone-based, qualitative interviews will be conducted by a single Windwalker researcher experienced in qualitative data collection. Each interview will begin with the researcher explaining the purpose of the research and how the results will be used. The researcher will also ask if the interviewee agrees to have the conversations recorded using a tape-recorder provided by the researcher. It will be explained to each participant that the recording is for data analysis purposes only and will

only be accessible to the research team. However, the researcher will not record the session should the participant decline to have his or her comments recorded.

The interviews will include open-ended questions to identify ways in which each institution's departmental processes or procedures contribute to their high performance levels so that other institutions can replicate them. The interview will last approximately 1 hour and will contain about 20 questions. A precise number of questions cannot be provided since the exact number of questions answered by a specific respondent will depend upon the number of initiatives they feel contribute to their institution's high performance. Protocols will include both the interview questions and a series of prompts to act as guides for researchers to gather data from respondents who are having difficulty answering the question as intended.

Windwalker will identify three top performers for each of three segments (HBCUs, HSIs and TCUs) from quantitative data received from MSURSD. Once identified, the Windwalker task lead will contact MSURSD leadership and/or the cluster leads to determine the best person (either the financial aid director, the institutional effectiveness director, or either director's assistant) to contact at each institution to coordinate the director's participation in the phone-based interview. In order to gain the director's participation, the researcher will email either the institutional contact to coordinate a time to conduct the study.

Upon completing each interview, the Windwalker researcher will review his or her notes and listen to the recorded session, as available. At this time, the researcher will identify the underlying dimensions, or root causes, of the best-in-class initiatives that the top-performers implement. Once identified, the researcher will document the practice, including any artifacts that are provided, for later distribution to institutions looking to enhance their performance. Greater detail on how these results will be used is provided in the "Planned Use of Data" section below.

DATES, LOCATIONS, AND PARTICIPANTS

The proposed timeframe for conducting phone-based focus groups is approximately site visits and data collection is approximately August 1-15, 2014 to ensure that the draft Industry Benchmark Report is delivered to MSURSD leadership by September 1, 2014. One Windwalker researcher will conduct the interview for one hour. No payments, stipends, or incentives are proposed. In total, a population of 9 financial aid/institutional effectiveness directors will participate in the data collection efforts across the 9 exemplary schools. This timeline meets the contractual requirement that the interviews be conducted during the summer of 2014 and after OMB clearance is obtained. The interview instruments have also been shared with MSURSD leadership for approval, and final approval from them has already been granted.

PLANNED USE OF DATA

As was mentioned in the "Collection Procedures" section, the data collected as part of this task will be used to identify and socialize best practices employed by financial aid departments that may improve compliance and student performance outcomes. These findings will be coupled with an industry benchmark report which will aggregate best practices across the different

institutions to serve as a guide to be implemented by poorer performing institutions to increase their effectiveness.

AMOUNT OF ANY PROPOSED STIPEND OR INCENTIVE

Not applicable.

BURDEN HOUR COMPUTATION (Number of responses (X) estimated response or participation time in minutes (/60) = annual burden hours):

Category of Respondent	No. of Respondents	Participation Time	Burden
Financial aid/Institutional effectiveness directors	9	60 minutes	9 hours
Totals	9	60 minutes	9 hours

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

We expect a 75 percent response rate in terms of directors participating in interviews. Windwalker will work with MSURSD staff to ensure that the directors from the selected institutions participate. Given that all data gathered from these data collection efforts will be qualitative in nature and will be describing each institution’s individual processes and procedures, minimal statistical analysis will be conducted.

REQUESTED APPROVAL DATE: 10 business days past submission date

NAME OF CONTACT PERSON: Chris Lemmie

TELEPHONE NUMBER: (202) 377-3225

MAILING LOCATION: 830 First St. N.E., Washington, DC 20202

ED DEPARTMENT, OFFICE, DIVISION, BRANCH: Chief Customer Experience Office, Office of Federal Student Aid, U.S. Department of Education