



Windwalker Corporation

OMB Clearance Request for Contract ED-FSA-13-O-0055

Deliverable 2.2 C PEP Enhancement/Implementation

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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 Phase II 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. Windwalker has been contracted to review MSURSD’s operations and processes, provided MSURSD leadership with recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their division’s operations and processes in the form of a Performance Enhancement Pilot (PEP) program. During spring of 2014, Windwalker conducted interviews and focus groups with eleven institutions selected to participate in PEP; follow-up focus groups were later conducted with the same institutions during the summer of 2014. Using the lessons learned from the initial PEP program, Windwalker created a comprehensive expansion and implementation plan with the goal of expanding the reach of the program to include an additional 24 participating schools and of refining the program’s content and implementation approach. Specifically for the current work, MSURSD is interested in gaining insight into the following:

- the impacts of financial aid staff turnover;
- the use of technology to track student financial aid activity;
- student financial aid awareness and engagement; and
- MSURSD services for recently designated MSIs.

INTENDED PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE COLLECTION

As was mentioned in the previous section, MSURSD has contracted Windwalker Corporation to identify areas where the division can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations and processes. Windwalker has already conducted an extensive operational review, completed detailed maps of MSURSD's major processes, and offered related recommendations to MSURSD. A Performance Enhancement Pilot (PEP) program was created by Windwalker, which identified the strategies we recommended MSURSD employ to enhance their operations and processes. Windwalker has developed an expansion of the PEP program to further investigate ways in which MSURSD can broaden the services and resources they offer to MSIs. The selected schools will be representative of the full MSI population in terms of cluster affiliation (e.g. HBCU, HSI, etc.) and risk level (as determined by MSURSD).

This current phase of the research includes conducting root cause interviews with institutional administrators who oversee the financial aid office and focus groups with financial aid staff from 24 MSIs selected by MSURSD to participate in the PEP. The interviews and focus groups will provide MSURSD with insight into ways it may be able to improve its interactions with MSIs by enhancing the services and resources it provides with the dual goals of increasing MSI compliance rates with the Title IV regulations and assisting MSIs in improving student performance outcomes.

The two protocols contain between 25 and 34 items to gather the desired information. The goal of collecting data from two different audience groups is to compare the feedback collected from each group to identify gaps in perception that MSURSD can address through their operational and processes changes. Specifically, the interviews will ask respondents questions on the following themes:

- the impacts of financial aid staff turnover;
- the use of technology to track student financial aid activity;
- student financial aid awareness and engagement; and
- MSRUSD services for recently designated MSIs.

The onsite qualitative data collection is a component of a larger evaluation effort to guide SEG's program development and enhancement of services available for MSIs. All interview protocols are provided as appendices in this document.

COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Each onsite data collection visit will entail a single Windwalker researcher experienced in qualitative data collection spending one business day at the selected institution. One interview with an institutional administrator and one focus group with financial aid staff will be conducted during each site visit. Each session will be entirely qualitative in nature and will be administered by one of six Windwalker researchers experienced in administering the interview/focus group protocols. It is expected that one institutional administrator and up to three financial aid staff will participate in data collection efforts at each institution. Each interview will take approximately 45 minutes and each focus group will take approximately 90 minutes to complete. Both 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 interviewees agree to have the conversations recorded using a tape-recorder provided by the researcher. It will be explained to participants 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 any of the participants decline to have their comments recorded.

The interviews will include open-ended questions to identify gaps in compliance-related knowledge, as well as to identify areas where processes are successfully being implemented or where they need to be improved. The interviews will last approximately 45 minutes and the focus groups will last approximately 90 minutes. Each session will contain between 25 and 34 questions, depending upon which group is participating. 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.

MSURSD will provide the list of MSIs that they want to participate in the PEP pilot to Windwalker. Windwalker will collect the names of the appropriate institutional administrator to participate in the interview, the financial aid director, and their contact information through research on the institution's website. After an initial invitation to participate in the research is sent by MSURSD to each institution, a Windwalker researcher will follow-up, via email, and work with the administrator and director to coordinate the day to conduct the site visit, the schedule of each session, and participants for the focus group.

Upon completing all data collection activities at each institution, the Windwalker researcher will review his or her notes and listen to the recorded session, as available. At this time, the researcher will synthesize all of the themes that emerged from the interviews and focus groups and identify areas where the findings were either corroborated or conflicted across the sessions to note gaps in perception across the respondent groups. These qualitative findings will be added to each school's reported quantitative data, which will look at each individual school's performance across a variety of outcome performance measures. 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 site visits and data collection is approximately March 2-13, 2015 to accommodate the delivery of the draft reports to MSURSD leadership by April 15th. One Windwalker researcher will conduct the interviews for a given site over the course of one business day. No payments, stipends, or incentives are proposed. Windwalker will conduct two separate data collection sessions: an interview with an institutional administrator and a focus group of institutional financial aid staff from the institution. In total, a population of approximately 96 leaders and financial aid staff will participate in the data collection efforts across the 24 schools participating in the PEP. This timeline meets the contractual requirement that the interviews be conducted during the spring 2015 school semester and after OMB clearance is obtained. The interview/focus group instruments have also been shared with MSURSD leadership for approval, and final approval from them has already been granted. The instruments were also shared with the 11 baseline PEP institutions. These institutions offered feedback based on their experience as previous PEP participants and Windwalker incorporated any suggestions deemed valuable into the final protocols.

PLANNED USE OF DATA

As was mentioned in the “Collection Procedures” section, the data collected from these efforts will be used to help MSURSD improve their interactions with MSIs. As was also mentioned earlier, these findings will be presented in an institution-specific report that couples the findings from the onsite data collection efforts with quantitative data. The data will report each institution’s performance across a variety of variables, which will be gathered through the analysis of secondary data collected by the US federal government, such as from IPEDS. The first draft of the report for each PEP-participating institution is due to MSURSD leadership by April 15, 2015. The goal of this report will be to provide a snapshot of each institution’s performance and the gaps in service and resources which MSURSD can fill.

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
Administrators	24	45 minutes	18 hours
Financial Aid Staff	72	90 minutes	108 hours
Totals	96		126 hours

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

We expect a 100% response rate in terms of institutional leaders and financial aid staff participating in interviews and focus groups. Given that all data gathered from these data collection efforts will be qualitative, minimal statistical analysis will be conducted. Frequencies of themes that emerged may be presented, but the vast majority of the findings from these data collection efforts will communicate broad qualitative themes rather than present quantifiable results.

REQUESTED APPROVAL DATE: 10 business days past submission date

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