
Data Collection Protocols

Financial Aid Focus Group Protocol

OMB Approval No.: 1845-0045
Expires: 08/31/2016

FSA MSURSD MSI Support

TASK 2.3A:

Comprehensive Plan for Expansion/Implementation of Performance Enhancement Pilot (PEP)
Essential Recommendations Throughout SEG Community
Financial Aid Staff Focus Group

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING TO RESPONDENTS

Good morning/afternoon everyone,

First, thank you for taking time to meet with me and for being willing to participate in this study for the Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA). I am (name of researcher) and a member of the Windwalker research study team. Now allow me to share information about the study and the purpose of this interview.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

I am here today representing Windwalker Corporation. We are a consulting firm that conducts education research. I am here today to facilitate a focus group on behalf of FSA's Minority Serving and Under Resourced Schools Division (MSURSD). As independent, federally contracted evaluators of MSURSD, Windwalker is looking to support MSURSD as they enhance their services. This is not an evaluation or review of your institution; it is an opportunity for us to hear from you about the resources and services that you utilize and explore the techniques and strategies you employ on your campus. We would also like to gather lessons learned and best practices based on your experiences here at (name of institution).

Today we will discuss these topics:

1. Campus wide strategies for communicating clearer, more explicit and less technical communications regarding federal aid compliance;
2. Techniques to expand campus-wide leadership buy-in for federal aid compliance; and
3. Strategies for engaging students in the financial aid process. The ultimate goal of our research efforts is to increase Title IV compliance rates.

The ultimate goal of our research efforts is to increase Title IV compliance rates. During this focus group Windwalker will explore lessons learned and best practices that are transferable across colleges and universities. At the conclusion of the focus groups, Windwalker will provide MSURSD with a summary document that includes recommendations on ways to enhance school experiences with Title IV and enhance MSURSD services.

Your institution has been selected to participate in this interview because of its geographic location, resources, enrollment demographics, and institutional level.

DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW PROCEDURE AND CONFIDENTIALITY

I'd like to share a few words about our process and then we will begin. During today's focus group, I will ask some questions and I'll take notes on our discussion. If you don't mind, I would also like to record our conversation simply for note-taking purposes. I will not record your name. No one outside of our research team will hear the recording; it would be used for reference and clarification of notes when needed. I will stop recording at your request. Do I have your permission to record?

I want to assure you that all of the information you provide today will be kept confidential and will only be used in summary form for the purposes of this study. The recorded interview will be transcribed by me and portions of this discussion may be incorporated into the final report to the Department of Education but your identity will remain confidential. I will not use your name or attribute any quotes to you. Therefore, anyone who reads the results of the study will not know that the statements came from you. The results of this study will be used by FSA only to further improve upon its interactions with institutions. Whatever you express in this room stays in this room. We are asking you to make the same commitment - to keep what is said in this room confidential and not repeat it to others in your school.

Agreed?

This interview is a dialogue and you should express your opinions. Stop me at any time and ask questions or clarify any statements that are not clear. Your ideas and opinions are important.

Remember I can stop the recording at any time. You are not required to answer a question and I will repeat or clarify any question if needed.

Any questions? Do you agree to the terms mentioned? Do I have everyone's verbal consent to start the recording?

Background Information:

1. Who in the financial aid office is responsible for monitoring federal financial aid compliance? What tools are used in your office to monitor compliance? How often does compliance monitoring occur?
2. What is the process for sharing financial aid policies and regulations with admissions, student billing, academic/student affairs, and the registrar office?
3. Are tools developed to clarify financial aid terminology and information into user friendly language? If yes, by whom? Please describe the process and techniques used for developing those tools? Which terminology is used?

4. Have changes in federal regulations impacted your office's ability to monitor compliance?
5. Please describe your process for engaging other campus departments in federal aid awareness and compliance.

Probing Inquiries:

- How is it done?
- Who is involved?
- Which offices are engaged?
- What offices are expected to participate?

Campus-wide strategies for communicating clearer, more explicit and less technical communications regarding federal aid compliance:

6. What campus-wide strategies are used to inform students of changes to financial aid policies?

Probing Inquiries:

- Who is responsible for conducting these updates?
- How are these strategies monitored?
- What tools are used?
- How often does monitoring occur?

7. What campus-wide communication networks are used to disseminate information on financial aid to students? Do you experience any challenges with your networks? If so, what are the challenges?
8. What would you say are some of the most effective ways of communicating financial aid information to students across campus? Any non-effective ways?
9. What recommendations would you offer to streamline the process of communicating financial aid compliance information to students?

Techniques to expand campus-wide leadership buy-in for federal aid compliance:

10. What techniques are used to include campus leaders in the financial aid compliance process?
11. What techniques are used to inform leaders of their role in financial aid compliance?
12. Any other strategies, techniques or campus resources (technology, organizations, infrastructure) are used in gaining leadership buy-in? How are they used?

Strategies for engaging students in the financial aid process:

13. What strategies are used to engage students in the financial aid process? What on campus resources are available to students?
14. What technical materials/resources are available to students? Where are they located? How are students made aware of the resources? Do you track their usage? If yes, how?
15. What is the process for monitoring student academic progress and financial aid compliance? How are students informed and updated about their academic progress and financial debt?
16. What support services, financial aid planning tools, or other financial aid resources are available to students? How do you monitor their usage?

Those are all the questions I have. Thank you for your time and for participating in this study.