

The primary purpose of all IDEA Feedback survey instruments is to provide information that may be used to guide professional development efforts. Employing processes that encourage conscientious responses by those surveyed and thoughtful reflection by those receiving results is essential if the survey process is to be of value.

The following considerations and recommendations are intended to assist in the successful implementation of the survey process.

Determining the Survey Purpose

Is the purpose of the feedback to determine continuance, to make other “summative” decisions, and/or to guide improvement efforts?

The IDEA administrator feedback tools were designed to guide formative improvement. Although the surveys can be used as part of the summative judgment process, a tangible benefit of the IDEA tools is to use them for formative purposes. A discussion of how to encourage reflection using IDEA results is addressed later in this document.

When the survey is being used for making administrative decisions, The IDEA Center strongly recommends that other sources of evidence beyond the IDEA feedback tool be used and that survey participants be informed of this.

Typically, expectations and goals for administrators vary from one unit to the next. For example, respondents often are not aware of the charge an administrator received when he or she assumed the position. Identifying and using other sources of information to assess those unique expectations is clearly important.

Adopting a Systematic Rather than Sporadic Survey Administration Schedule

Routine ongoing survey administration is beneficial for all concerned. Predictable, ongoing assessment processes reduce concerns about the intended purpose of an evaluation. Campuses risk creating the impression that the evaluation/feedback process is tied to poor performance when a survey is only administered when there is a “problem.” This would be counterproductive to creating a culture where constructive feedback is valued for its support in professional development.

The IDEA Center makes no recommendation as to how frequently these ongoing, systematic administrator evaluations should occur, with one exception. A desirable time to seek initial *formative* feedback is in one’s third semester of service. By this time respondents will have had enough experience with the administrator to provide valuable feedback, but perceptions will not be so entrenched that they will be difficult to change. Knowing what may need to be changed early in one’s career increases the likelihood of a longer and more successful tenure.

Identifying Appropriate Respondents

Identifying who should be asked to complete a survey is not as simple a task as it might first appear. Often political considerations interfere with gaining the most useful and valid information. Some campuses select respondents by categories of employment and within those categories there may be individuals new to campus or part-time employees who have had no contact with the administrator. Criteria for removal of individuals from the list to be surveyed should be created so only those who can provide valid feedback are included. In general, only individuals who have had enough exposure to the administrator being rated to provide useful feedback about that individual should be asked to complete a survey.

Whatever process is used to select potential survey respondents, it needs to be done in a similar way for everyone who is being rated.

Using Additional Questions

The IDEA feedback systems allow for the addition of 20 user-defined questions. This provides the opportunity to ask questions that may be of unique importance to your campus or to the individual being rated. Given the effort required to administer these surveys, this opportunity should not be lost.

Another use of extra questions is to collect useful information not directly related to the individual being rated. Asking a few questions about the campus, college, or departmental climate (or other issues) is an efficient way to collect information without conducting another survey. Using this method also has a side benefit due to the relatively high response rates typical of such surveys compared to more general campus climate or issue surveys.

Determining Dissemination of Results to Relevant Constituencies

There is no clear right or wrong approach to providing survey results to relevant constituencies, but it must be considered thoughtfully and determined prior to the survey administration. It is recommended that the “official” survey results be distributed in a consistent fashion. This is especially important when a group of individuals is being surveyed at a similar time for a similar purpose (e.g., all senior administrative staff, all of the deans in a university, or all of the chairs in a college).

If the results are to be provided beyond the individual administrator and his or her supervisor, it is important to determine how they will be conveyed and to whom.

- How will the results be communicated? Determine if a written or verbal summary will be provided. If the results will be provided in writing, care should be taken because the results may be distributed beyond the intended audience – especially if they are distributed electronically.
- Who will prepare the summary? It is typical for the summary to be prepared collaboratively with the individual who was rated and his or her supervisor.
- Can the administrator provide additional information about his or her results? For example, chairs have provided more detailed survey results to their faculty at department meetings and described their plans for improvement at that time. On one campus an administrator early in his career with particularly poor results extended a public “mia culpa” to his staff and was very proactive in acknowledging his poor performance as well as his plans to change. Reports of the results of these more comprehensive feedback sessions have generally been received positively.
- What are the legal requirements for dissemination of survey results? Different states have different legal requirements concerning what survey results (if any) are required to be made available to the general public. Be sure to check your state’s requirements so that you collect data in a manner that protects you from disseminating results more broadly than you wish.

Prepare Respondents

Inform respondents by email, mail, or personal communication at least one week before the survey is to be administered that they will receive a survey from The IDEA Center requesting feedback about their administrator’s performance. The communications may come from one or all of the following: the individual being rated, his/her superior, a human resources contact. The purpose of the survey often helps determine who should send the communication. If the primary purpose is to determine the individual’s continuance in his/her position, the administrator’s superior might inform the raters. On the other hand, if the primary purpose is to guide personal reflection, it might be more appropriate for the individual being rated to provide the information.

Some specific points to cover in the communication include:

- *Emphasize the value and importance of the feedback.* No matter how well someone is currently performing, something can always be learned from constructive feedback from valid sources. And, without it, improvement rarely occurs.
- *Inform respondents about the intended audience.* If the results are used only to guide improvement, it may be that the only person who will see the results is the administrator being rated. If used for administrative purposes, the individual's supervisor and perhaps others will view the findings. In other instances, the results may be published or summarized for a broader audience, including the raters.
- *Set the tone that encourages constructive feedback.* Encourage respondents to offer constructive and not mean-spirited or vindictive comments. This is especially important when soliciting responses to open-ended questions.
- *Inform respondents of the survey's purpose.* It is important for them to know if the results will be used to determine continuance, to make other "summative" decisions, and/or to guide improvement efforts.
- *Summarize other sources of evidence used in the evaluation process.* A failure to inform those surveyed that other sources of evidence will be used in the evaluation process may lead them to conclude that their responses have more influence than they actually do for the administrative decision being made.
- *Indicate if, how, what, and to whom results will be disseminated.* Having a clear plan and communicating that plan early will provide clear expectations to those participating in the process.

Additional information about preparing respondents is available in the *Guide to Administering IDEA Feedback Systems for College and University Administrators* (www.theideacenter.org/AdminGuide).

Reflect, Reflect, Reflect

A primary purpose of all IDEA feedback surveys is to encourage reflection intended to elicit higher performance. At the very least, the individual being rated should be asked to respond to a few basic questions such as:

- What results were affirming?
- What results were surprising?
- What may have been of concern?
- How will you use this information to guide your professional development efforts?

The individual's supervisor should reflect on the same questions and schedule a time free from interruptions in a comfortable setting to discuss the results and how they might be used to support future improvement efforts.

A practice that many individuals have found to be useful is for the individual being rated to print a copy of the survey being used from The IDEA Center's website (www.theideacenter.org) and to then complete a self-rating. When the survey results are available, the individual being rated can compare his or her self-rating to the average of the raters. When the average of the raters for an item is more than .5 (on a five-point scale) to .75 (on a seven point scale) different from the self-rating, a difference in perception between raters and the administrator may exist. Perceptions are important, even if they are inaccurate, and it can be beneficial to ask why individuals might view you differently than you view yourself. In addition, some campuses will ask the administrator's supervisor to also participate in this process to discover where additional differences in perceptions might exist.

The opportunity for the administrator who was rated to reflect about the survey results with someone who is not responsible for evaluating him/her is another near essential component of a

useful professional development process. The consultant should be a knowledgeable expert in leadership development as well as understand the administrator's role. A resource to help individuals reflect upon results in a non-threatening way will enhance the value of the process. Such a resource demonstrates the institution's commitment to professional development.

A thoughtfully designed reflection process is essential to truly foster benefits from the survey process. The above recommendations along with the *Guide to Administering IDEA Feedback Systems for College and University Administrators* are intended to support the effective implementation of the administrator feedback surveys.