PEER EVALUATORS: SELECTED POINTERS ON DEVELOPING A QEP
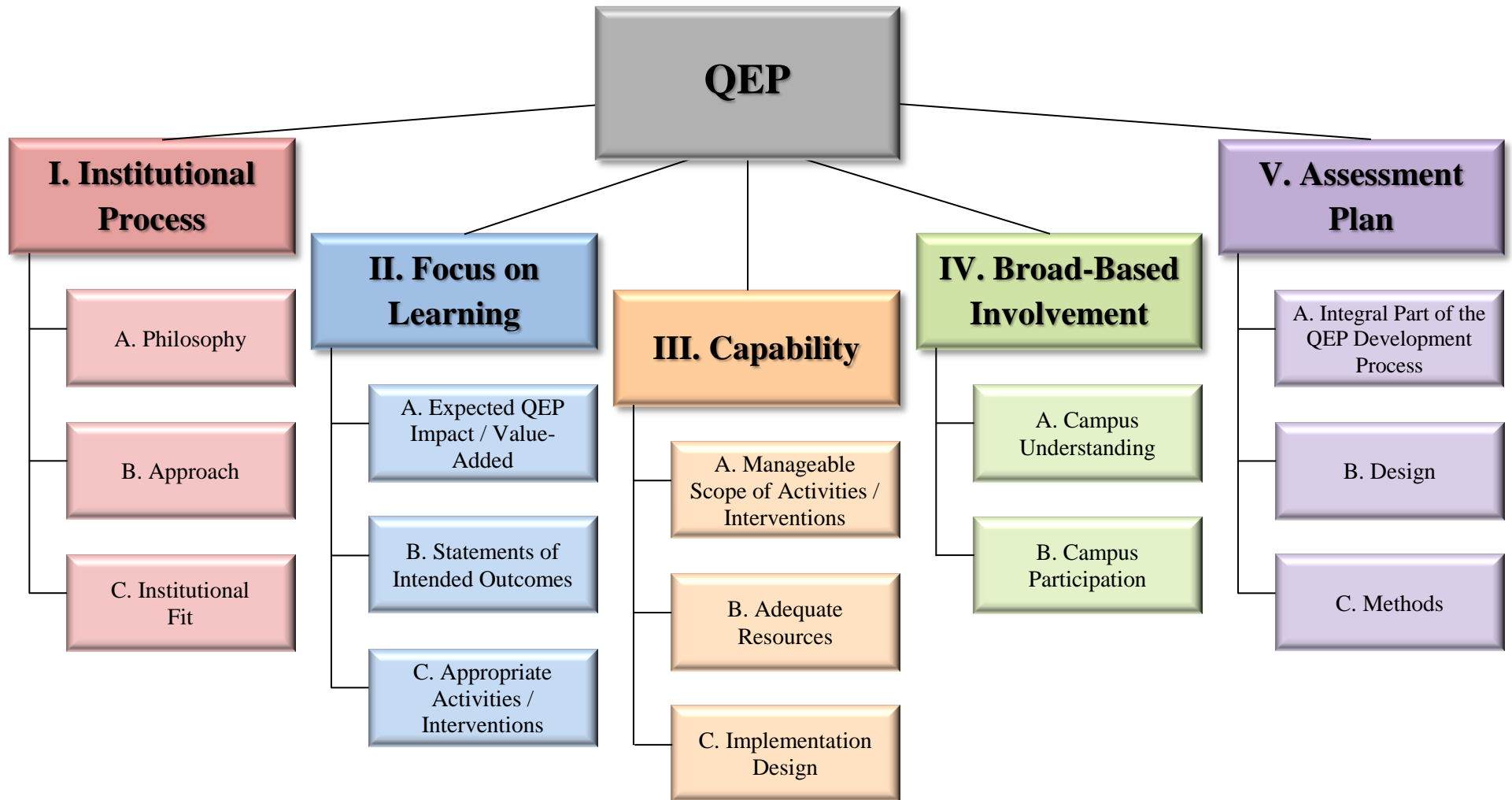
Members of the 2012 and 2013 SACSCOC On-Site Reaffirmation Committees were asked to offer practical pointers for institutions that are about to start developing their QEPs. A set of factors listed below emerged from the content analysis of the feedback provided by the peer evaluators. These factors (and illustrative direct quotes) are intended to highlight peer evaluators' perspectives and to assist institutions in designing effective and sustainable QEPs. The purpose of the framework presented below is to serve as a GUIDE not as a checklist. The inter-related component parts of this framework are not exhaustive or summative nor are they necessarily of equal weight. Institutions will need to evaluate and weigh all relevant and appropriate issues when designing a QEP that appropriately addresses CR 2.12 and CS 3.3.2.

QEP

I. Institutional Process
- A. Philosophy
- B. Approach
- C. Institutional Fit

II. Focus on Learning
- A. Expected QEP Impact / Value-Added
- B. Statements of Intended Outcomes
- C. Appropriate Activities / Interventions

III. Capability
- A. Manageable Scope of Activities / Interventions
- B. Adequate Resources
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V. Assessment Plan
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- B. Design
- C. Methods

I. INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS

A. PHILOSOPHY

i. Innovation *(Moving Institutions Forward)*

- "Think about your vision for the university and develop a QEP that will move that forward."
- "Consider your institution's history and evolution -- and then ask: what is the next likely point of institutional emphasis?"
- "Calibrate the Quality Enhancement Plan to the realities of the contemporary world (in other words, strive to avoid creating a plan that would be a better fit to the 1970's or 1980's, which is the time period during which mid-career and senior faculty were socialized into the Academy)."
- "Something you would like to accomplish anyway, not just for SACS[COC]."
- "Identify something you would want to implement even if there were no QEP requirement."

ii. Improvement *(Making Institutions More Effective)*

- "Understand what the goal is: NOT to meet a SACS[COC] requirement but to make an institutional commitment to improve student learning."
- "Own the QEP as an institutional process and project rather than as an accreditation requirement."
- "Honestly examine your own institution and look for areas in which you could make improvements that will make a significant difference in the lives/success/completion for your students."
- "The institution should not be afraid to try something challenging out of fear that they cannot demonstrate improvement. Not all plans may have remarkable results. What matters ultimately is what the institution does with the results."
- "Bear in mind that, like a well-designed scientific experiment, no QEP, if properly implemented, is a failure. While it may not result in the outcomes you were expecting or hoping for, a QEP carried out with due diligence will provide useful information about what to do or not to do."
- "I continue to believe that too many QEPs have a deficit orientation, i.e., they tend to focus on what needs to be fixed. I suspect that an appreciative orientation might well better serve many institutions."

B. GENERAL APPROACH

i. Senior Leadership Commitment

- "Clear buy in from President, CFO and board."
- "I look for clear evidence that executive leaders (CEO, CFO, etc.) are engaged and supportive of the project."
- "A clear indication that top level management is committed to outcome of the QEP."
- "Enthusiasm of those in leadership positions for implementation."
- "Clear description of leadership in implementing the QEP."
- "Ensure that the president has given absolute support, including financial and personnel, to the entire process and from the outset."

ii. Advance Preparation

- "It takes longer than you think to develop a good QEP."
- "Must start early. Zeroing in on a topic can be 'herding cats,' so start soon."
- "Invest in the time it takes for [broad-based involvement] to happen…which isn't overnight."
- "Start NLT [no later than] three years out."
- "Determine the process well in advance of beginning the investigation of possible topics, and be willing to amend that process if better alternative paths surface."
- "Be willing to let the process for developing the plan take place – don't rush to make a final decision."

iii. Process Documentation

- "Incorporate several different methods of input from stakeholders and design effective documentation of all."
- "Show a step-by-step process as to how the topic was developed and to what extent all factions of the college had input into the final topic that was selected."
- "Carefully document each step along the way, both in identifying a topic and in developing the QEP."
- "Clearly outline the process (from start to finish) that was used to hone in on the final QEP…There was so much rambling in the last school's report it ward hard to keep up with who and what happened and when!
- "Provide minutes of all meetings related to the development and implementation of the QEP."
- "Document who participated and how many at the various input stages. How many faculty? Staff? Students?"

- "Please show evidence that faculty and staff were asked to participate, given the opportunity to participate and the extent to which participants represent a cross-section of the institution."

C. INSTITUTIONAL FIT

i. Alignment with Institutional Mission

Reflection of the Nature of the Institution

- "The QEP should emerge from college culture and history."
- "Pick a topic that will be useful to your institution and fits with the mission."
- "In these lean economic times, we have to do a better job of ensuring that we place any new initiatives squarely against our mission statement."
- "Make sure that your QEP topic fits your institution. Do not adopt someone else's topic because it seems that many other institutions chose a particular one. Make sure it fits your students."

Reflection of Institutional Plans / Priorities

- "Make sure your topic fulfills your mission, and be specific in describing how it does."
- "Clearly connect the dots between the plan and the Mission of the college."
- "Make sure mission of the institution and the goals and outcomes for the QEP are aligned and make that alignment crystal clear."
- "The QEP should address core goals, not develop a new "cottage industry" that is off to the side of the campus' main preoccupations."
- "Incorporate QEP development processes in on-going institutional processes like strategic planning and faculty/staff conferences."
- "Tie the QEP plan into long range and strategic goals that already exist to show that the QEP supports already identified needs."
- "[Discuss] relation of QEP to overall college- and program-level SLOs."
- "Clear connection/flowchart between mission—needs/assessment—topic."

ii. Solid Evidentiary Base / Needs Analysis

Data Collection / Compilation

- "Work closely with your IR/IE department and find trends and areas that need to be addressed. Don't assume just because 2 or 3 faculty think something is a problem that it is a problem."
- "Ensure that you can demonstrate a 'real' need, rather than simply opinions of key individuals/ administrators/ faculty – it is one thing to 'hypothesize' that something is needed, another to have some data supporting the notion it is needed."
- "Ask: what do our students need that they are not getting from us to the degree that they should?"
- "Study alumni and employer satisfaction surveys for weaknesses in curriculum and instruction; study national student- and faculty-survey assessment data for RELATIVE weaknesses in comparison with benchmark institutions."
- "Hold faculty, staff, and student interest group meetings. Have students describe their most meaningful learning experiences. This often enlightens institutions about true student perspectives and fuels thinking about designing a meaningful project."

Analysis and Interpretation of Assessment Results

- "Don't throw the "kitchen sink" of data at the reviewers."
- "Before any work is done on the QEP, including topic selection, make sure your institution identifies strengths and weaknesses with student learning."
- "Look at your data. What does the data tell you? Where are the problems?"
- "Where does it hurt? How do we know? Those questions get to the needs and assessments quickly."
- "Thoroughly analyze pertinent assessment data in your institution so that you can correctly identify a clear focus area for improving student learning. Figure out what it is that your students are not getting from their educational processes at your institution."
- "Identify an area/topic where relevant data suggest student performance is sub-par compared to the institution's own standards, or where relevant data suggest that student performance lags that of peer institutions."

Topic Selection Based on Assessment Findings

- "Don't create a problem just to solve it; base the topic on institutional data."
- "Assessment data must lead you to the topic, not the other way around."
- "Be sure that the chosen topic is based on data/needs. Do not choose a topic and then look for a problem/issue that needs solving."

- "Make sure that the choice is data driven – not that you choose something, then go fetch data to back up your decision."
- "Have meaningful dialogue regarding the collected data. Rather than bend data to meet what you want to do, let the data determine the direction."
- "Make sure that the plan really is based on institutional research. If the plan is chosen and then institutional research is 'cooked up' to support it, the committee will be able to tell."

II. FOCUS ON LEARNING

A. EXPECTED QEP IMPACT / VALUE-ADDED

- "Ask early, 'What difference will the QEP make?'"
- "Clear explanation of what plan hopes to achieve."
- "There should be genuine opportunity for impact/change that can be documented in meaningful terms."
- "Focus on the questions 'what will the institution change, look like or do as a result of the QEP?'"
- "Select a topic that will make a clear difference for your students, and involve large numbers of them."
- "You MUST be able to link your topic directly to impact on student learning."
- "Make a clear link between QEP and student learning. Be OBVIOUS!"
- "Make sure that your topic improves student learning and you can explain the correlation between topic and the improvement of student learning."
- "Understand that student learning can be defined in a variety of ways and that the QEP may have impact on students beyond the classroom."
- "Keep asking, 'How will this [QEP implementation] help our students?'"

B. STATEMENTS OF INTENDED OUTCOMES

i. Emphasis on Student Learning

- "Keep in mind this is not being done for SACS[COC], it is being done to enhance student learning."
- "That is the bottom line on the whole process. Not clearly tying the QEP to student learning makes it more difficult to embrace and understand."
- "Carefully consider what you want students to be able to do as a result of the QEP actions. It is easy to focus on organizational activities and not on actual student learning."
- "Make sure the institution is able to clearly associate the QEP goals with tangible student learning outcomes."
- "Be very clear about just how this will improve student learning … very concrete factors."
- "Set out concrete visible outcomes for student learning."

ii. Clarity and Manageability

- "Most QEPs I have reviewed have been weak when it comes to defining specific student learning outcomes."
- "Make sure SLOs[student learning outcomes] are clear from the very beginning. This might help everything else align better."
- "Make sure your student learning outcomes are really student learning outcomes and not general goals. Each SLO needs to be measurable."
- "Make very specific outcomes…rather than amorphous, general statements of what you want to "instill" or "engage" students in."
- "State the outcomes in a fashion that lends itself to either documenting or measuring if the outcome was achieved."
- "Be sure that you keep in mind early on how important it is that the learning outcomes are assessable."
- "Do NOT overstate the number of outcomes."
- "Don't use too many learning outcomes."

C. APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES | INTERVENTIONS

i. Literature | Best Practices Review

- "Look at what your students do/can do now and compare that to what you want them to be able to do five years from now - what will make that happen?"
- "Clear demonstration of knowledge of best practices and existing research literature concerning the topic of the QEP."
- "Research, research, research the best practices to determine what your institution is capable to achieving."
- "Look for models that exist and have been proven to be best practice."
- "Make sure that the research has been done to support the QEP. It should support the goals and activities."

- "Begin with a sound theoretical framework based on a thorough lit review, and develop student learning definitions and outcomes from this framework."
- "Provide a rationale that incorporates both local assessment data and evidence from the literature (is what you propose really going to address the need? What is the evidence for this?)"
- "A review and an analysis of comparable/equivalent practices at other institutions, when available, should allow an institution to judge 'best practices' that may affect its ability to allocate personnel, space, equipment, and time in support of its proposed QEP."
- "Do not feel the need to incorporate all of every best practice that is currently being described to improve student learning, student engagement, etc. Focus on the need indicated by College data."

ii.   Alignment Between Proposed Activities and Intended Learning Outcomes

- "As in the classroom, activities should link to SLOs."
- "It's surprising how often the QEP fails to make the connections clear."
- "Be sure what you propose to "do" will address the need you have identified. As simple as this sounds, institutions sometime forget to focus their plan of activities on solving THE problem they have spent so much time identifying."
- "It's easy to focus on the initiatives and what the institution is going to do, and that is important, however, everything needs to connect back to whether the actions are advancing the student outcomes."
- "Map the process for clarity and linkage."
- "Provide a direct relationship to the outcomes for each goal and activity outlined. Create curricular alignment charts to help address the outcomes."
- "Use charts within the QEP document to show how SLOs align with goals and activities. This will help the readers of the QEP more clearly understand the overall plan."
- "If you can diagram the alignment between SLOs and your goals/activities, you can more easily see the correlation of one to the other. If they don't align, or you can't explain how you plan to have them align, you need to go back to the drawing board."
- "Providing the committee with a chart that clearly outlines which activities have been designed to address specific SLOs and goals is very helpful -- sometimes this information is hard to ferret out in the narrative."
- "When the SLOs, goals, and activities are in alignment, it is easier to create buy-in, assess the work and factually tell one's story about the QEP's impact."
- "If the alignment of QEP learning outcomes and QEP goals and activities cannot be explained to current students AND THEN BY CURRENT STUDENTS BACK TO THE QEP TEAM, then the outcomes and goals need to be realigned. The relationship should be clear, direct, and even obvious."

III.   CAPABILITY

A. MANAGEABLE SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES/INTERVENTIONS

i. Perspective

- "Scope is probably the greatest challenge for the institution. Many overestimate what they can accomplish."
- "Don't try to remake the universe!"
- "Do not try to change the world. Choose a small piece and change that."
- "Don't try to save the college with one QEP."
- "Don't try to solve every single problem in one overambitious QEP. Focus on the most significant issue."
- "Do not try to 'fix' everything. Start small. Momentum will spread if you have a good topic."
- "Don't try to fix every perceived institutional issue with one QEP. Again, the QEP is (I think) an opportunity to showcase a single major effort to improve the quality of student learning."
- "Don't look for a 'silver bullet' or a meta-solution. Locate a manageable part of the problem and target its solution."
- "The perception is that the scope of the QEP needs to be large and complicated. The QEP scope and activities need to be clear, doable, and manageable without draining the resources of the institution."
- "Imagine what you want your ten-page Impact Report to say during the QEP planning phase. It will help you stay focused on student learning and help make sure the scope isn't too big."

ii. Balance (Aspirational yet Attainable)

- "In my visits, the issue of scope continues to be the biggest challenge because ambition overrules logic."
- "Shoot for the Moon not Mars! You want the implementation to be visionary and reachable not impossible."
- "Start with aspirations … and filter with what is realistic."

- "Far more visiting committees suggest institutions narrow their QEP scope than add to it."
- "The most frequent problem is needing to 'eat a squirrel, but ordering an elephant.'"
- "[Scope] needs to be narrow enough to be a project, but broad enough to be relevant across campus."
- "It is important to challenge or stretch the institution, while at the same time being attentive to what is achievable."
- "Aim high, but be careful not to become overly ambitious. It is better to do well with a narrow [scope], than to stumble around while trying to do too many things at one time."
- "Preferably chooses to do one thing very well as opposed to two things mediocre."
- "It is wonderful to have grandiose ideas and plans but in reality, if they aren't practical or doable, they are useless. Stick to the basics and plan what you know you can accomplish within a reasonable time period. Don't try to impress the reader - try to be practical."
- "Targeted and laser-like focus on implementation activities that are truly manageable is far better than grandiose dreams that are not realistic."
- "While it is valuable to frame the QEP in a broad way, it is equally valuable to identify a finite set of specific activities within this framework that can reasonably be carried out and evaluated in the five years of the QEP."
- "This is just like a dissertation – stay focused on something meaningful with wide impact, but doable."
- "Refine-refine-refine and narrow the scope – much like a dissertation which normally starts with a BROAD topic and finally get narrowed down to a manageable scope."
- "The QEP must be doable. It is a single 5 year project. I recommend that folks look at it like a dissertation. The dissertation is not something that must define one's career. It is a good solid research project that is the foundation for the career. The QEP similarly does not have to be definitive project of all time. It should be a good solid project that sets the foundation for continuous improvement for years to come."
- "It can be challenging to find the right balance between a project that brings significant change/improvement, and one that is over-ambitious. Your institution's past record at implementing new initiatives, and the process followed in those previous efforts, is the best roadmap."

iii.   Prioritization / Delimitation

- "Do not try to throw everything on the wall to see what sticks."
- "Focus, delimit, and use a scalpel, not a broad brush."
- "Narrow the focus--targeted activity rather than shotgun activity."
- "Avoid the temptation to aggregate multiple initiatives into the QEP."
- "You have to keep the faculty from wanting to throw in everything, including the kitchen sink!! After 10 years of this process, colleges are narrowing the scope more than we did when it first began, but faculty get excited and want to just do everything they can't think of doing related to the topic."
- "If you do not find a narrow and specific focus, you will be trying to track and monitor way too much and will not be able to find out what worked and what did not work."
- "Focus on 1 specific pressure point that is impeding student success. … Treat the QEP as a focused experiment involving multiple elements of the college to improve student performance in a key way that the college believes will make a significant difference."
- "A good check for this is to ask the questions 'Who will do this?' and 'Who do we need to hire to do this?' The scope of any task is limited by the personnel who manage the task."
- "It is critical that you look at the full scope of activities/programs you plan to offer. With each activity, financial and human resources required need to be addressed so that an objective review can help to assess which activities are practical and doable. Once the cost analysis is completed, the team should prioritize which activities they are going to do and make it happen. This promotes buy-in from campus constituents and reduces the likelihood of alienating key partners because of a failure factor."

B. ADEQUATE RESOURCES

i.   Financial Expertise

- "Make sure that you involve you CFO in the QEP planning process. It is much easier if they get it and there is buy in."
- "Be realistic about the amount of time and money required to implement your plan. . . . Involve your budget people early in the process so there are no surprises."
- "University financial personnel should be involved in creating the business plan because the on-site team member will probably from the financial area. Often academic personnel put together business plans that make complete sense to them, but are indecipherable to business people."

ii.   Alignment of Resources with the Proposed Activities

- "Make sure the scope of the project is appropriate for the available resources."
- "Limit the scope of the project to something that you are clearly able to accomplish without the addition of too many resources."
- "Make sure both human and fiscal resources can handle it."
- "Rely on faculty in the affected field to help you judge what is a realistic scope for the implementation goals."
- "Just as with any aspect of a strategic plan, if the QEP draws too many resources from other essential processes, it will be resented by faculty, students, and staff."
- "Narrow the focus and ensure it relates to capabilities and resources of your institution. Ask, is this doable?"
- "You will have to narrow the scope until it fits your time, money, and assessment budgets. But keep track of the ideas you have to abandon as you move toward an appropriately-sized QEP. You might find ways to bring them into play later, and you can consider them as a starting point for the next QEP topic conversation."
- "Be willing to realistically commit adequate resources to the project. Don't look at the QEP budget as something that can be cut during financially difficult times. Really commit to an adequate budget. You'll need to develop a fairly detailed schedule regarding implementation to get a handle on budget needs."

iii.   Identification of Costs

- "A cost analysis must be completed in order to determine that you have the resources available to make the QEP happen."
- "Look beyond direct costs and be sure you take into consideration or are prepared to respond to questions related to increases in indirect costs or overhead."
- "Be able to provide a basis for all estimated costs in the budget (e.g. comparable institutional data or CUPA median salary, equipment quotes, etc.)"
- "Everyone underestimates the human cost. Plan for what it takes and don't try to be too cheap."
- "In evaluating the financial commitment, do not overlook the cost of overloads to faculty contracts."
- "Often, I observe that institutions will commit personnel especially faculty in a QEP plan without being realistic as to the additional time and workload."
- "Clearly allocate the percentage of workload to be devoted to the QEP for those who have other work responsibilities."
- "It is foolish to believe your people can accomplish this while doing their current job. Key people will need release time. If you overwork them, they may leave in the middle and you will have a big problem!"
- "Be sure to consider incorporating needed funding for appropriate professional development to ensure ongoing quality support."

iv.   Budget

- "Start thinking about the budget right at the beginning; don't make it an add-on after the topic is selected and an assessment and implementation process is devised."
- "Tying the budget to evidence that is part of the college strategic plan and allocation of resources delineated at the institutional level are keys."
- "To me, it is always important for the institution to set aside a separate budget line item or line items that fund the QEP. Otherwise, the temptation might be there to use those funds for something else if the budget gets tight."
- "Don't forget to include the resources that you already have that you will be using to implement the plan under financial support."
- "If the QEP will require new resources, be sure to have a plan for how those resources will be secured."
- "Make clear which resources are 'new' and which are 'redirected'."
- "There should be buy-in from the president and board about resources, without which the QEP will fail."
- "Consider pre-approval of the QEP budget for the entire five year period by the governing board."
- "While it is important to show that an institution has taken this project seriously, it is also important not to setup a budget that is too lofty when the institution has financial difficulties."
- "Overstated spending does not enhance the Plan and only raises unnecessary questions."

C. IMPLEMENTATION DESIGN

i.   Coherence

- "Organization creates clarity."
- "The project should be considered as a 'gestalt' rather than a collection of unrelated parts."
- "You should build a model that demonstrates how all of the pieces come together to achieve the result."
- "Clear connections between the various parts of the QEP-- that is, between the learning goals, the implementation plan, the resources needed, and the assessment of the plan, all item-by-item."

ii.   Project Management

- "Many institutions seem to invest heavily in topic selection and developing the outcomes; be sure to take implementation and assessment seriously from the inception of the QEP planning process."
- "Assign duties and roles explicitly and ahead of time."
- "Take a project management approach to developing a plan that involves identifying tasks, who does them, when, how much does it cost, and how each task is assessed…"
- "Focus on preparing a QEP document that is coherent and consistent that provides plenty of detail on the tasks, their management, the assessment of outcomes, and how they will be implemented (staffing, resources, etc.)"
- "Identifying who will be responsible for ensuring the QEP happens is vital. The work of everyone is the work of no one. Committees are helpful, but at the end of the day, one individual has to have responsibility for making sure things get done."
- "A clear organizational chart with specific names of key individuals and roles demonstrating the leadership structure of the QEP, starting with the CEO all the way to the ground floor. A clear credentials chart demonstrating the credentials of each QEP leader to serve each assigned role."

iii.   Timeline and Contingencies

- "Plan and develop a timeline that allows for incremental reviews of intended student learning outcomes reflected in the QEP."
- "Be certain to create a time table for each phase of your QEP project, inclusive of budget requirements, statement of commitment and relevance to student learning."
- "The timetable should take into effect institutional academic protocol. For example, it may be unrealistic to assume a set of new courses can be added within a few months of approval, given that approval must be sought through a variety of academic committees and administration."

- "Build into place a system for on-the-ground tweaking and revision as needed."
- "It is important to acknowledge that plans must be flexible to accommodate unexpected outcomes and unanticipated circumstances that affect the multi-year implementation of a QEP, so contingency planning might also be useful. I really wouldn't expect any QEP to be implemented precisely as planned."
- "A clear contingency plan should an element of the QEP not work out as planned. Just some reflection on what the institution might do if funding suddenly becomes a problem, for instance. What would the institution do if state legislation impacts the scope of your QEP?"

IV.   BROAD-BASED INVOLVEMENT

A. CAMPUS UNDERSTANDING

i.   Communication and Education

- "Communicate regularly throughout the institution regarding the QEP…"
- "Start with the basics - even the definitions of QEP and SACS. Take this process from conscious to subconscious with all the variety of social media options available. Different learning styles exist. Take advantage of that variety."
- "Knowledge of the QEP from all levels, especially administration."
- "Make sure that interpretation and execution [of the QEP] are commonly understood. When it looks as if faculty have a very different understanding of the plan than administrators do, this is a very bad sign."
- "In order to achieve buy-in from the top to the bottom, the campus community and stakeholders need to understand what, when, who and how the QEP will improve student learning."

ii.   Presentation and Marketing

- "Choose a leader of the QEP that can write well, concisely, clearly and is able to enthusiastically explain to all constituents why it is important."

- "Presentation [of the QEP] is key. If you say it's the worst task it will be perceived as such. If it's a great learning opportunity and way to improve the school, it becomes a positive. Create some fun and entertainment in the process."
- "Marketing the QEP to the stakeholders is important; however, the focus should be on the topic and how the institution hopes to help students succeed. It should not be about marketing SACSCOC through the continued use of the term QEP."
- "Put an end to over-the-top marketing of the QEP. Money is being wasted on t-shirts, mugs, pens, banners, videos, brochures, etc. in an effort to impress upon the visiting committee the extent to which the college community is aware of & supports the QEP. In some ways, it is misleading - as if displaying it enough in a variety of ways & venues will make it happen."

B. CAMPUS PARTICIPATION

i. Multiple (Relevant/Appropriate) Constituencies

- "Be certain to have multiple people from several different groups (faculty, administrators, staff) working together on the QEP."
- "Work with the Student Life to identify students to serve on the committee. You need students who are interested, will show up, and will be around for the Reaffirmation visit."
- "What is the overall attitude of students who will be directly involved in the QEP toward the purpose and value of the QEP project?"
- "Make sure that students and those directly involved with students outside of the classroom (like tutors, lab staff, etc.) are involved from the beginning and not just told what to do."
- "Include all constituencies in the process. This should include external parties such as business representatives, community leaders, church leaders, civic, etc. who … support the school."
- "Not only must all relevant constituencies be engaged in designing the QEP, they must all be engaged in carrying it out. While a single unit may manage the implementation of the QEP, there must still be an institution-wide group involved in the key decision-making and assessment activities. This process may well require addressing rivalries, turf-issues, role ambiguity, and decision-making processes in a direct and constructive fashion."

ii. Intentional Campus Engagement Process

- "Understand who all of the stakeholders are and how they are best reached. Consider how you get to the less engaged members of your faculty, staff, and student body so that the loudest voices are not the only ones heard."
- "Be sure to have faculty not only throw out ideas but flesh out those ideas. Just having a topic is not enough. The faculty must see a clear direction for the QEP topic and how it will affect student learning."
- "I don't think there is a single model of 'campus engagement.' Institutions should make a deliberate effort to invite broad participation in the development process (selecting the topic) but then fleshing out the final proposal and implementation can fall to a more targeted team. I see it as a funnel. In the beginning, the wide mouth of the funnel should take in many ideas, suggestions, and data points but ultimately the process must result in a product that is sufficiently narrow, focused, and well developed enough to be viable."
- "The approach will vary depending on institutional culture. It is imperative that relevant faculty committees/offices are central in the design and implementation of the QEP and that they take ownership of the QEP. For some institutions, the QEP is widely embraced and marketed. For others, the QEP might be less visible as a QEP even as it is integrated into ongoing efforts to enhance quality."
- "Even though you will ultimately narrow the scope of the QEP, it is important to see evidence of broad participation, especially at the conception phase. As a reviewer, I like to see the comments and suggestions of many students, faculty, and staff in articulating weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. There will be winners and losers in the process of competing for a QEP topic, but every campus has intellectual energy and creativity for this part of the process."

iii. Project Leadership

- "The troops on the ground can provide feedback concerning the effectiveness of the plan. However, at the same time, it is important to not let a few over-zealous individuals push the rest of the committee to select unreasonable goals/objectives. This is where leadership must become involved."
- "Appoint a faculty member to be the chairperson of the development committee rather than a professional staff member."
- "Chair or co-chairs need to have final authority – to many cooks in the kitchen can produce an unorganized, unfocused disaster."

- "…the credibility of the person or persons given the assignment to coordinate implementation of the project. They need to be seasoned, respected faculty (since it's all about student learning) who are given the PD support & time they need to lead & nurture early adopters for the project."

V.   ASSESSMENT PLAN

A. INTEGRAL PART OF THE QEP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS (PROACTIVE ASSESSMENT PLANNING)

- "Assessment needs to be developed at the same time as the QEP plan and activities, not as something after the fact."
- "Make sure the assessment piece is being considered as you establish your outcomes. Think, 'how will we assess this outcome' from the beginning."
- "Think about assessment from the beginning, not as an afterthought. This helps focus the conversation on things you can actually know about. I like to guide conversations in three steps: what do we care about, how do we know about it, what can we do about it?"
- "Don't leave assessment as the last thing to consider after the topic is selected. Put it at the beginning of the conversation and put resources into it."
- "Keep assessment in the forefront of your mind … constantly ask 'How are we going to measure that?' as you roll through the process of determining a QEP. Many things sound good but are difficult/ impossible to measure or won't yield sufficient or substantive data. Keep asking that question!!!"

- "Have assessment in mind at the beginning and the end. Get your institutional research team into the process at the beginning. Be sure faculty understand that assessment is a central part of the QEP."
- "Get your IR staff involved from the start. Have someone from IR on the committee."
- "You will need a strong institutional effectiveness team involved from the beginning of the QEP topic discussion throughout its implementation."
- "Front-end training of impacted personnel is essential to identifying tools and approaches."
- "Advance development of faculty and staff in the assessment process is essential at the front end of the [QEP] experience."

B. DESIGN

i.   Comprehensive
- "Must use more than pre- and post-test assessment tools."
- "Be sure that your assessment plan includes both formative and summative components."
- "Measure not only the Learning Outcomes, but measure the effectiveness of the processes as well."
- "Assessment needs to be addressed for the final outcomes, but also for each implementations step along the way, so that adjustments can be made as necessary."
- "Utilize a convincing mix of direct assessments of SLO's and background/monitoring assessment to ensure that the QEP is functioning properly and as intended."
- "Ensure that you fully develop an assessment plan for the SLOs as well as for the operational plan. A plan to assess the efficacy of the operational plan will aid institutions to locate issues early and make incremental changes in a timely manner."

ii.   Deliberate and Selective
- "Do not try to do too much, but make sure the data you are collecting from the assessments is useful."
- "I think (unfortunately) some institutions err on the side of caution by over specifying assessments – the kitchen sink approach."
- "[Develop] goals that are narrow in focus so that the institution does not stretch itself too thin; some institutions say they are going to evaluate many things, often this is not possible as resources are not available to do so."
- "Create a hierarchy of items to be assessed so that time is not wasted measuring non-essential aspects of the program."
- "Take the time to really drill down to what's most important to you and how you're going to assess it. And then take time to develop a detailed assessment plan and timeline for those assessments."
- "Answer these questions: Why is your assessment tool being used? Why is it most appropriate? What other tools did you consider?"

iii.   Manageable and Meaningful
- "Don't let the assessment and analysis skeptics ruin a good plan that common sense dictates will work."
- "The assessment of the QEP should be reasonable in both scope and ability to be analyzed."
- "Take the time to develop a detailed assessment plan and timeline for those assessments."

- "If the tools require too much time particularly for faculty it will be difficult to get buy-in."
- "Make sure [your proposed assessments] are something your people (faculty, staff, IR, etc.) can do with the resources you have available."
- "This [assessment] can get out of hand … if [QEP] is too broad and there are many opportunities for assessment. Only assess what you can manage and you have resources to do something about."
- "Try to find measures that will give meaningful results without being too cumbersome to collect. Think about those who have to provide the data when deciding what is necessary."
- "Develop a realistic assessment plan, using the most appropriate instruments and methods; the plan should be flexible and allow for triangulation. Make sure that results can be used for improvement of plan activities."
- "Emphasis on quality versus quantity in terms of assessment. Having fewer but direct and specific assessment tools/approaches is much better than having a laundry list of different things. This is a real problem for institutions because they are going to be overwhelmed with data collection resulting in data overload…Assessment is to support the program planning and development, not to be the primary focus of the institution's activities."
- "Imagine getting your first set of assessment data back and what you think it will say. Then ask, will this assessment data help the institution know what actions to take next? If not, it's not likely useful. Assessment data that just yields 'Oh, that's interesting' but doesn't guide toward realistic actions is not useful."

C. METHODS

i. ALIGNMENT (CONSTRUCT AND CONTENT VALIDITY || CREDIBILITY)

- "Make sure the assessment tools suggested actually measure what you articulate as changes in student learning."
- "Be sure that your assessment tool is valid, whether you borrow one and adapt it to your needs or whether you create it yourself."
- "Provide a matrix aligning goals with assessments."
- "Mission, Needs and Assessment Strategies should be connected strongly to the QEP Topic. In my committee experiences, the weakest connection has been with Assessment."
- "Have assessment processes clearly defined and connected to SLOs."
- "Show how your assessment methods are related to the student outcomes of your QEP."
- "Make the connections between the activities, outcomes, and assessment measures very clear."
- "Assessment tools and approaches to assessment must align with the objectives and activities of the QEP. A matrix will all of these components will help show clearly if this alignment exists."
- "It is essential that the institution show direct alignment between the assessment strategy and the student learning outcomes. Don't just say you'll use ETS' Proficiency Profile or the CLA. Tell us precisely how those instruments will measure [specific] aspects of your SLOs."
- "Use tools that are directly relevant to the expected outcomes. Do not try to make a tool fit the outcomes if it is intended for measuring something else."
- "When even the best of QEPs have misaligned assessments, the team will learn that much of its work was in vain and opportunities were lost. Take the time to identify assessments that will enable you to tell your story."
- "Please explain how the assessment tools will provide meaningful data that will enable the institution to determine the impact of the intervention in the context of the intended outcomes and the overall mission."
- "[Assessments] need to fit the topic and the character of the school. Standardized tests are not the way to go if your faculty don't embrace them. Likewise, rubrics won't work if your faculty distrust them."

ii. ASSESSMENT TOOLBOX (TRIANGULATION || CONFIRMABILITY)

- "Direct measures must be first on the list. Indirect measures are certainly appropriate for support and depth. If the topic does not readily align with some reasonably direct assessment method then it is likely problematic. This is not to say that we shouldn't work on student learning related to hard to measure topics but, as a showcase of quality enhancement, the QEP should be specifically aligned with direct assessment to the greatest extent possible."
- "Be sure to include mixed methods (both quantitative and qualitative); both provide data to tell stories to your different constituencies."
- "Standardized tests give great data but it is not always the best information. Qualitative data … is harder to report but gives great information about student learning."

- "Balance qualitative and quantitative data…Mix local tools with standardized measures for the richest data and opportunities for improvement."
- "Use multiple measures that will demonstrate dimensional views of outcomes being assessed."
- "Make sure to provide adequate detail on the chosen assessment tools to ensure the review committee has confidence that you are able to determine the extent to which the student learning outcomes have been accomplished."

iii. BENCHMARKS (BASELINE, PROGRESS/INTERMEDIATE, TARGET)

- "Get/have baseline data with which to compare in order to show/measure results."
- "Must establish the baseline of where the institution and its students are at the start of the QEP, and then assess where they are at the end."
- "Establish some baseline measures from existing assessment data, or conduct assessment in order to establish such measures during the development of the QEP."
- "Use existing institutional data to establish baseline measures and develop benchmarks for each year of implementation."
- "Use a simply laid-out grid to track progress on specific measures. Update and publish the grid regularly so people know whether you are making steady progress toward the goals and objectives of the QEP."
- "Seek to establish specific numerical goals for the student learning outcomes in order to make assessment more meaningful."
- "Conduct appropriate baseline data sampling in advance so that the targets you set for QEP learning goals appear clear and reasonable."