Continuous Improvement Reports 2023-24
Administrative and Student Support Units
Development and Completion Guidelines

Continuous improvement is a systematic and ongoing process of gathering and interpreting information, then using the results to enhance the work of the unit. It is a process designed to answer the question: Are the efforts put forth by the unit producing the desired results? The process ultimately establishes direction for improving quality, satisfaction, efficiency, and effectiveness of the unit.

Institutions of higher education undertake continuous improvement efforts often in response to external drivers, however, more importantly, should be the internal drive for constant enhancement. To this end, the commitment to the continuous improvement process must have longevity and be strategic in nature.

The unit may select one or more persons to lead the assessment effort, however, it is critical for all staff to be actively involved in designing, implementing, and analyzing the continuous improvement process. Staff participation and ownership is essential for the long-term success of continuous improvement efforts.

A *Continuous Improvement Plan* is developed with an understanding of the data/results gathered during the previous assessment cycle. What did the data/results reveal? How will these data be used to create an Action Plan for the subsequent year? A *Continuous Improvement Plan* addresses the following sections of the continuous improvement template: (1) Mission, (2) Outcomes, (3) Alignments, (5) Activities, (6) Assessment Methods, and (7) Targets. The Plan is usually developed prior to the beginning of the fiscal year (administrative units)/academic year (student support units) and often in conjunction with the writing of the previous year's *Continuous Improvement Report*.

A *Continuous Improvement Report* summarizes the year's assessment efforts. The following sections of the continuous improvement template are addressed in the *Continuous Improvement Report*, assuming a *Continuous Improvement Plan* was previously developed: (4) Summary Statement of Assessment-based Accomplishment and Improvements, (5) Activities – review the activities and adjust, if necessary, to accurately reflect the year's work, (8) Assessment Results and Discussion, (9) Documentation, and (10) Continuous Improvement Action Plan. Section 11 (Language, Grammar, and Formatting) should be considered in the completion of the *Continuous Improvement Plan/Report*.

The following sections provide descriptions and suggestions for each component of a *Continuous Improvement Plan/Report*.

1. **Mission**

    -*Why does the unit exist?*
    The mission is a concise statement that describes the unit's purpose and primary functions and identifies who the unit serves (i.e., what the unit does, how the unit does it, and whom the unit

serves). Clearly articulating the focus of the unit serves as the foundation for continuous improvement.

It is important to review your unit's mission for two purposes. First, does your mission still accurately portray the responsibilities of your unit? If not, you may want to revise your mission statement. Second, your outcomes should reflect your mission. ***By executing your outcomes, you are actually accomplishing your mission; the true purpose of assessment.*** If you are not assessing various aspects of your mission, then your *Continuous Improvement Report* may be incomplete.

Example (Administrative Unit): The mission of Technology Services is to provide highly reliable information technology infrastructure, computing tools, and end user services to support and empower the University constituents, as they achieve their academic, administrative, and public service goals.

Example (Student Support Unit): The mission of the Department of Residence Life is to support and encourage the personal development and academic success of each student in our residential community through purposeful programs and services that complement the total educational experience at Winthrop University.

2. Outcomes

-What does the unit desire to achieve?

Identifying clearly defined outcomes is an integral part of the continuous improvement process and should be derived from the unit's mission statement. Operational outcomes are specific statements, generally process-oriented, that address the unit's performance, particularly in regard to operations, programs, and services. On occasion, an administrative or student support unit may identify student learning outcomes (SLOs), which clearly state the expected knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that individuals are expected to acquire and reliably demonstrate by the end of the educational experience.

Generally, outcomes should <u>not</u> change from year to year. An outcome should be able to accommodate a variety of activities from year to year. If, however, you eliminate an outcome, provide a brief statement below the table explaining why the outcome is no longer included in your *Continuous Improvement Plan/Report*.

- An outcome should be carried over from the 2022-23 *Continuous Improvement Report* to the 2023-24 *Continuous Improvement Plan/Report* if the outcome is central to the functioning of the unit.

- An outcome may be added to a Plan/Report, reflecting new projects, aspirations, or goals.

- An outcome may not be carried over to the subsequent year's Plan/Report because the responsibility for that outcome may have shifted to another unit.

- An outcome may not be carried over from the 2022-23 *Continuous Improvement Report* to the 2023-24 *Continuous Improvement Plan/Report* because it was simply a bad outcome, for

whatever reason. This is a common occurrence when in the developmental stage of an assessment process.

- A unit should strive to include three to five operational outcomes in its *Continuous Improvement Plan/Report*.

Example (Administrative Unit): Implement procedures that will foster awareness, inclusion, and diversity of the Winthrop workforce.

Example (Student Support Unit): Provide support for diverse students in order to encourage a sense of belonging, connectedness, and active engagement on campus.

3. **Alignments with the Winthrop Plan, Division Strategic Plan, and University Level Competencies (ULCs)**

-How does the unit's work support the institution?

The continuous improvement efforts of the unit should support the work of the division and the institution. In this way, the collective work of all units within a division and of all divisions across the institution advances the mission of the University. As appropriate, operational outcomes should align with the Winthrop Plan and the Division's Strategic Plan, while student learning outcomes should align with the University Level Competencies (ULCs), specifically identifying the individual goal, initiative, or competency supported.

4. **Summary Statement of Assessment-based Accomplishment and Improvements**

-What continuous improvement efforts were employed and what was their impact?

The summary statement of assessment-based accomplishments and improvements highlights the impact of engaging in data-informed actions on unit performance.

- This summary statement serves as a short executive summary, highlighting accomplishments based on data-informed actions and, therefore, linked to a previous Action Plan(s). This section is designed to be the outcome's "assessment elevator speech," providing a high-level understanding of improvement efforts.

- This summary statement describes and provides examples of how changes undertaken since the last assessment cycle (2022-23) or previous cycles have had an impact on unit performance in 2023-24. Note the connection between the prior Action Plan(s) and current activities and results.

Example (Administrative Unit): Based on last year's enrollment consultant's best-fit student predictive model, this year the Office honed the predictive model, implemented an applied/accepted student outreach initiative by Student Ambassadors and Alumni Affinity Groups, and communicated with neighboring 2-year institutions regarding articulation agreements for transfer students. This year, the best-fit student predictive model was further verified, over 3,000 students received a personalized communication from students or alumni, and two articulation agreements were negotiated.

Example (Student Support Unit): Based on last year's analysis of student survey data, this year the department conducted more extensive Resident Advisor training, enhanced communications with Operations, and invested in housing software. This year, student survey data indicated greater student satisfaction with the check-in process (supported by the housing software) and response time for facilities requests, however, they were less satisfied with the RA staff and their residence life experience, in general, as compared to the two previous years.

5. Activities

-What data-informed activities were undertaken?

Activities describe the actions taken in support of attaining the desired outcomes.

- Activities should be articulated in detail and be reflective of the Action Plan included in your 2022-23 *Continuous Improvement Report*. Recall that this Action Plan is intended to be implemented in 2023-24.

- The assessment process should build from year to year. Each year's *Continuous Improvement Report* should be related to the previous one, thus Reports should not be stand-alone unrelated documents. ***The data-driven Action Plan developed for the 2022-23 Continuous Improvement Report should be executed and assessed in 2023-24.***

Example (Administrative Unit): The Office of Financial Aid provided one-on-one appointments with admitted students and/or parents during WorldWide Winthrop Day (WWWD) and June Orientation sessions. Revisions were made to the financial aid presentation given during Orientation to incoming students and parents to encourage families to determine their out-of-pocket expense and search for alternative financing sources. Additionally, staff revised the financial aid portion of the Orientation Guide and developed a cost of attendance brochure that was mailed after financial aid awards were provided to admitted students.

Example (Student Support Unit): The Dean of Students Office implemented a mandatory online alcohol program for all incoming students (i.e., freshmen and transfer students). Additionally, the Office partnered with other departments (i.e., New Student and Family Programs, Wellness Services, Health and Counseling Services, Residence Life, Academic Affairs, Council of Student Leaders) to provide programming on issues affecting students, including wellness, alcohol, and bystander intervention.

6. Assessment Methods

-How will the unit determine if the outcomes have been achieved?

Assessment methods are the strategies, techniques, tools, and instruments used for collecting information to determine the extent to which desired outcomes are attained. The methods chosen should allow the unit to evaluate its effectiveness, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

- Use multiple methods of assessment for each outcome, identifying at least two assessment measures per outcome.

- Employ a combination of direct and indirect assessment methods, if possible. Direct methods include actual evidence of outcome attainment (e.g., audit). Indirect methods assess perception of the realization of the outcome (e.g., survey).

- Utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, if possible.

Example (Administrative Unit): The assessment method is two distinct year-to-year comparisons, with the first tracking Eagle Club memberships and the second addressing scholarship fundraising growth.

Example (Student Support Unit): The probation students' attendance record at the *Serious About Success* Seminars is one assessment method, with a second measure being an attendees' satisfaction survey.

7. Targets

-What level of performance is expected?

Targets are a measure of the performance level expected. It is important to determine how success will be defined for each of the expected outcomes. A target level of achievement, indicating a reasonable level of improvement, should be set for each outcome.

- *When will you know that your outcome has been accomplished?* This is an important question to answer, as it will drive your Action Plan for the subsequent year.

- A justification for the established target should be provided, indicating why this level of performance is attainable.

Example (Administrative Unit): The target is a 30% overall student response rate on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Since the last three NSSE administrations averaged a 25% response rate, a 5% increase in response rate seems reasonable since it is associated with a university-wide marketing campaign. Prior to this NSSE administration, marketing and incentives were not used to encourage students to complete the survey.

Example (Student Support Unit): Starting in January 2019, one of the student contacts made by the Transfer Orientation Leader and Mentors focused on course registration, therefore, we anticipate seeing a decrease in the number of non-registered transfers for Spring 2020, as compared to Spring 2019 when outreach was not conducted. Our target will be a 10% decrease in the number of new Fall 2019 transfers who were not registered for the Spring 2020 semester in comparison to the prior year. There were 62 non-registered new transfers from Fall 2018 who were not registered for Spring 2019, so we anticipate seeing a decrease to 56 new transfer students from Fall 2019 who were not registered for Spring 2020.

8. Assessment Results and Discussion

-What is the current state of affairs?

Assessment results are the findings gathered from executing the activities. Analysis of the data/information determines the extent to which the unit's expected outcomes have been realized. A systematic data collection and analysis process maximize the impact of the efforts. When data are

appropriately presented (e.g., table, graph), identification of strengths and areas needing improvement is enhanced.

In analyzing the data, the following should be considered:

- *Were the outcomes attained? Why or why not?* These questions can be answered by indicating if the target was or was not attained. If you did not set a target (e.g., gathering baseline data), then one should be included in your subsequent year's *Continuous Improvement Plan*. It will be difficult to determine if you have been successful without setting a target (i.e., the level to which you aspire).

- *What strengths were reflected? How can these be further strengthened?*

- *What strategies were successful? What strategies were not?*

- *What areas for improvement were identified?*

The Discussion of Assessment Results section of the template provides an opportunity to interpret the data/results and to explain what they mean to your unit. This may include providing a context for the data/results, comparing data/results to a previous year(s), etc.

In order to associate a document with a data claim, place the name of a numbered document after the data or assessment tool. A very simplistic example: 2,614 respondents (87%) indicated a rating of "4-agree" or "5-strongly agree" on "The information I received before arriving for Orientation was helpful" question of the Orientation Student Survey. (1 – Orientation Student Survey; 2 – Orientation Student Survey Data Table) Then include these documents, numbered and named in this fashion, as part of your documentation submission. A data claim should not be made without including a specific supporting document.

Example (Administrative Unit): At the end of FY19, ten (10) uStores were operational (i.e., collecting revenue), including Recreational Services, DiGiorgio Student Union, The Inn at Winthrop, Campus Police, Physical Education Sport and Performance, Printing Services, Records and Registration, Graduate School Online, World Languages and Cultures, and CCC – Tests and Fairs. Another twelve (12) uStores are in development, including University Events, Health and Counseling, International Center, Graduate School CPE and SBI, CVPA Office, CCC – Alternate Spring Break, Student Financial Services, Special Courses – Psychology, Delta Alpha Pi, Digs Campus Center, CBA – Management Institute, and Music Department. (21 – Marketplace Ustores)

With the e-commerce software, Marketplace, implemented in July 2018, the office hoped to have ten uStores operational in the first year with an additional five uStores added in each subsequent year. A website with informational and training materials has also been developed to support new and existing users. (22 – Marketplace website screen shot)

Example (Student Support Unit): For the DSU post-assessment for the 2019-20 academic year, 25% (9/36) DSU members participated in the survey. In the assessment, students were asked a variety of questions that centered on their proficiency and development in several areas on a scale of 1-5, with "1" being low and "5" being very high.

The following overall results were obtained. Note that these results represent responses to 17 items by 9 students for an overall number of responses equaling 153.

1% (n=2) of responses were ranked at a "1," 4% (n=6) of responses were ranked at a "2," 17% (n=26) of responses were ranked at a "3," 32% (n=49) were ranked at a "4," and 45% (n=69) were ranked at a "5." (1 – DSU member self-assessment)

In assessing these results from a macro perspective, 5% of responses indicated that students viewed themselves as progressing at a low rate (selecting a "1" or "2"). 17% ranked themselves as moderately progressing ("3"), and 77% ranked themselves as progressing at a high rate ("4" or "5"). This 77% exceeds the target rate of 60% and indicates that students perceive an enhancement in their skills as members of DSU and student leaders as a whole. We are concluding that DSU provides students with activities and opportunities that enhance their interpersonal and professional skill. These skills are important as they are transferable and will serve them in their other leadership roles and future careers.

In assessing these results from a micro level, 44% (4 of 9 students) indicated a "3" or lower rating for "Enhanced Self-Esteem." 33% (3 of 9 students) selected a "3" rating for "Conflict Resolution," "Understanding Leadership Concepts," and "Work Collaboratively." These areas will need to be addressed in our planning for next year.

9. **Documentation**

   -How do you verify your assessment methods and data claims?
   Documentation includes the materials/documents that provide evidence of the assessment methods used and the assessment results attained.

   - <u>List and number</u> the supporting documentation below the table in the order in which they are presented within your *Continuous Improvement Report.* This may require renaming the document for ease of understanding by a reviewer. For example, *6 – New Staff Orientation Program Fall Survey* will be listed below the table in the Supporting Documentation section of the report and in the Assessment Results section. The actual document will also be included in your submission.

   - Include titles and dates on documents, spreadsheets, graphs, tables, etc. These titles should match the document name in the list of supporting documents and the electronic file name. Include the number of the document within the electronic file name (e.g., *4 – ACAD Course Evaluation* is the electronic file name for document #4.) Consider highlighting the data within your documents that directly support your results.

   Example (Administrative Unit): 60% (42) of the 70 participants in the Winthrop New Staff Orientation Program (total number of participants in the fall and spring programs combined) completed the written survey questionnaire at the end of the program. The questionnaire asks participants to rate three statements on a 1-5 Likert scale, with "1" being strongly disagree and "5" being strongly agree. (6 – New Staff Orientation Program Fall Survey; 7 – New Staff Orientation Program Spring Survey)

Example (Student Support Unit): All ACAD students completed a course evaluation at the end of the Fall semester. Five evaluation questions addressed student's introduction to support services and resources that align with their academic pursuits. A five-point Likert Scale ("1"=Strongly Agree, "5"= Strongly Disagree) was used. (4 – ACAD Course Evaluation)

10. Continuous Improvement Action Plan

-What data-informed action will be employed in the next assessment cycle to achieve the desired outcome?

The Continuous Improvement Action Plan describes the data-informed activities to be undertaken in the subsequent year to enhance your unit's quality and/or performance.

- A Continuous Improvement Action Plan requires action, not "continuing to monitor." For each outcome, your Action Plan should answer the question, *What are you going to do in 2024-25 based on the data you gathered in 2023-24 for this particular outcome?* A specific plan for continuous improvement, based on the data you gathered, must be developed for each outcome.

- The Continuous Improvement Action Plan for each outcome should not be the same. Repeating the same Action Plan for each outcomes does not allow for specific action based on analyzing data by outcome.

Example (Administrative Unit): For FY20, UCM will hold more Brand Camps in the fall semester for interested faculty and staff members. Frequently asked questions from the first Brand Camp presentation will be addressed in fall Brand Camp presentations. The office also will promote correct usage of official marks by utilizing the Daily Digest for occasional brand tips and by expanding the Visual Identity System to include more guidelines for correct usage (e.g., in email signatures). Additional co-brands will be developed, and staff members will address campus-based graphics in areas such as Student Affairs. In that division, there is opportunity for re-working graphics and pairing those with new co-brands. We will also work with the academic colleges, specifically College of Education and College of Visual and Performing Arts, through initial dean-level conversations to set future collaborative goals.

Example (Student Support Unit): Having completed one year of the Collegiate Leadership Competition curriculum, we recognize several deficiencies in the preparation of students for the competition. Practice sessions will focus on fully listening to one another and on leading from the back, not always from the front. We will conduct mini-competitions to simulate the competition atmosphere, having judges provide scores and written feedback to the student participants. Videoing activities in practice sessions will also allow students to see and hear how they are actually working together.

11. Language, Grammar, and Formatting

-Is your story complete and understandable?

Your report should tell the story of your unit's work throughout 2023-24 and plans you have developed for improvement in 2024-25. The reviewer is not familiar with your unit and will need to have sufficient information to thoroughly understand your assessment efforts.

- Do not use abbreviations that a reviewer may not understand. Use the full name with the abbreviation in parenthesis for the first reference and then the abbreviation in later references. For example, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is noted in this fashion the first time it is referenced and, subsequently, as NSSE.

- Write in sentences with capital letters and appropriate punctuation; use bullet points, if appropriate.

- Provide enough information so the reviewer can fully comprehend your "assessment story," and easily link this year's assessment work to both previous and future years' work.