ASSOCIATED COLLEGES OF THE SOUTH

Faculty Evaluation Toolkit: Implementation Guide

This Implementation Guide offers a brief introduction to the Toolkit, an overview of change at the institution level, and guidance on where to start and how to determine who should be involved.

A Guide for Implementing the Toolkit

Revising faculty evaluation processes is both a challenge and an opportunity. Faculty evaluation influences teaching, research, and service expectations, so it plays a **central role in shaping both individual careers and institutional cultures**. However, many institutions recognize that existing evaluation processes **don't fully reflect the complexities of faculty work, nor do they always ensure fairness, transparency, or alignment with institutional values**. Despite calls for clarity and equity, implementing meaningful change can feel overwhelming.

The goal of revisiting your faculty evaluation system is to create one that not only serves your campus's mission but also supports and **recognizes the diverse strengths of your faculty**. ACS has been at the forefront of assessing and improving faculty evaluation processes. The previous AVDF planning grant enabled us to review relevant scholarship, have cross-institutional conversations, and develop resources to support academic leaders in conducting campus discussions on effective and equitable faculty evaluations. It laid the groundwork for conversations that ACS institutions need to consider to improve faculty evaluation processes. The result, the ACS's Faculty Evaluation Toolkit, is designed to support you in navigating the change process by offering **adaptable, research-informed strategies** for faculty evaluation reform. The Toolkit has a solid introduction to why and how effective faculty evaluations matter, as they enable administrators to honor and reward the complexity of faculty work. In the extensive literature reviews included throughout the Toolkit, you will see that scholarship demonstrates the need for centering equity in faculty evaluation processes. The resources in the Toolkit enable ACS schools to review their policies and practices to ensure that they are robust and rigorous but also holistic and fair.

Recognizing that no single approach fits all institutions, the Toolkit allows campuses to choose and customize processes that align with their unique cultures and needs and lead to meaningful, sustainable change. This change requires a thoughtful, collaborative process among faculty, administrators, faculty developers, and others to build a shared understanding and trust.

The Implementation Guide for the Faculty Evaluation Toolkit establishes **a framework for thinking** about **constructive conversations** your campus might need as you seek to increase **equity in your faculty evaluation practices**. The framework links familiar campus challenges with particular tools and approaches detailed in the ACS Toolkit for Conversations & Considerations of Faculty Evaluations. The guide seeks to

- help Chief Academic Officers (CAOs)* and campus faculty leadership quickly identify **high-leverage places for review** and **conversations** towards improvement, and
- **navigate planners to resources** (literature, workshop designs, analytical approaches, etc.) for accelerating positive change.

* The term **"chief academic officer" (CAO**) is used throughout to refer to the role of the individual holding accountability for the academic programs. Different institutions title this role differently (ie, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost, Dean). For simplicity, the Guide refers to CAO with general meaning to be interpreted by campus.

Understanding Institutional Change

This toolkit is designed to support campuses in navigating institutional change by providing adaptable, research-informed strategies that promote equity, transparency, and institutional alignment. This section offers some principles of **change management**, or the strategies, processes, and communication approaches that help organizations successfully implement and sustain change. In your case, it would involve guiding faculty and administrators through the process of revising faculty evaluation methods in a way that minimizes resistance, builds buy-in, and ensures long-term success. By recognizing that change is a process requiring collaboration, iteration, and clear communication, institutions can foster a fairer and more effective faculty evaluation system.

Understanding the Need for Change

Traditional faculty evaluation systems often contain unintentional biases and opacity that can negatively and unevenly affect career advancement. By implementing more equitable evaluation practices, institutions can better recognize diverse forms of excellence, foster inclusive campus cultures, and ensure that all faculty members have equal opportunity to thrive.

Building Your Coalition

Successful evaluation reform requires engagement from across your campus community. Before selecting tools from this toolkit, consider establishing a representative working group that includes faculty from various ranks and backgrounds, administrators, and where appropriate, student voices. This coalition approach ensures multiple perspectives inform your reform efforts and builds the broad-based support necessary for lasting change.

Assessing Institutional Readiness

Each institution begins this journey from a different starting point. The toolkit includes a readiness assessment to help you identify your institution's strengths and potential barriers to change. Understanding your current landscape will allow you to select the most appropriate tools and determine the pace of implementation that best suits your campus context.

Planning Your Implementation Path

Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, this toolkit offers modular components that can be adopted incrementally or comprehensively. Begin with a clear implementation timeline that includes pilot phases, feedback loops, and checkpoints to assess progress. Phased implementation allows for adjustments based on early learnings and helps manage the scope of change.

Communicating with Transparency

Effective communication is the foundation of successful change. As you select and implement tools from this toolkit, maintain regular, transparent communication about the rationale for changes, how decisions are being made, and how feedback is being incorporated. This transparency builds trust in the process and reduces uncertainty and resistance.

Embedding and Sustaining New Practices

For reformed evaluation practices to take root, they must become embedded in your institution's culture and operations. The toolkit includes strategies for codifying new procedures in faculty handbooks, incorporating training into onboarding processes, and establishing regular review cycles to ensure continuous improvement of evaluation systems.

Understanding How to Implement Institutional Change

Our entering assumption is that **academic institutions exist within complex systems** – human beings with different backgrounds, hidden and recognized biases and preferences, varieties of student motivations, rapidly changing societal norms, fixed and variable cost structures, etc. Complex human systems are **not machines**. Therefore, to effect change, we can't just change a part. We need to analytically build new policies *and* to question practices, make explicit things that are currently tacit, and design approaches for revising "as is" in ways that cultivate "buy-in" from the stakeholders most central to the institutions' formal and informal protocols. While this might seem overwhelming, **keeping actions simple** while staying aware of the larger context matters.

Our project recommends this approach (i.e., small steps within larger contexts and as parts of larger trajectories towards change) in a variety of ways. We first encourage institutions to skim through the Toolkit before choosing a small and relevant next step for action. Academic leaders report finding themselves in one of **three general circumstances**:

a) **No active change program has been started, but you and others are increasingly aware that problems exist** in your evaluation system (whether frustration over some faculty carrying low or high service loads or agreeing to do service and then simply fading on the needs, or inconsistent quality of portfolios submitted for review, or students' evaluations of innovative or minority teachers as being 'too hard' or 'unqualified' when you suspect some bias is in play) – ***skim the Toolkit for ideas and then convene a multi-stakeholder group to evaluate and build a plan for one or more high leverage first steps.***

b) **An active change process started but you have encountered problems** (often traceable to one or more stakeholder/stakeholder group feeling excluded and thus not "buying into" what has been started) – ***skim the Toolkit not for tactical steps but for the implicit approaches to inclusivity of wide varieties of stakeholder involvement and to over-communicating the objective, the rationale for the objective, and the process and timeline***.

c) **You have other priorities and limited time**. Caution that faculty turnover through voluntary separation is expensive (not only lost organizational knowledge and cultural capital lost when a good faculty member gets frustrated or burned out from formal or informal unrealistic expectations or from felt sense of lack of inclusion, professional safety or belonging, but also from the lost momentum caused as faculty-student mentoring relationships are severed) – ***Increasing research exists quantifying the problems (often tacit) so reviewing the roadmap section below more closely might be in order. Look for leverage between this process and a larger strategic planning process or seeking small conversations as first steps toward evaluating need for interventions or plans.***

From a how-to perspective, the primary process challenges can be inferred by the frequency things appear within the Toolkit. Here are emerging insights:

- Communicate early and often.
- Involve wide ranging institutional stakeholders in the conversations to cultivate robust solutions and buy-in…including the registrar.
- Stage your plans; don't try everything at once but go step by step.
- Get clear about data (yours and in literature); hidden biases are real.
- Unintended consequences easily occur when overloaded individuals make well-meaning choices that work around explicit and implicit protocols. Do the hard work of equity with the intention of creating outcomes you most want.

Where to Start

As one philanthropist recently mused, even Google Maps asks for your current location before telling you where to go next! The same will be true with this process. **Knowing where you are** (strategically, culturally, temporally, etc.) will increase your ability to **start with high leverage conversations**, ones that create the most shift using the least energy or effort. Then, you can identify actions to infuse into existing initiatives (such as, using a strategic planning process to assess the degree to which your Faculty Handbook and promotion portfolios align; asking a well-regarded teaching and learning officer to facilitate conversations among high-impact teachers about new evaluation metrics they see; or seizing on awareness of faculty turnover or low morale as an opportunity to host listening sessions about the institution and departments' feedback and development processes). Each of these **small steps** can increase leaders' clarity about where we are right now and where we need to go.

Strategically, starting with even a cursory **root-cause analysis** will help leaders clarify both what might be problematic and what underlying factors or contributing variables might need deeper attention if the organization hopes for lasting change. Therefore, whether or not you already think you know "the" problem, **skim through this guide and the Toolkit with curiosity.** Then have an exploratory conversation with several key stakeholders to clarify your highest leverage pathway.

Scale your choices. For example, the Toolkit includes a section on aligning processes with institutional values. The activities there can be done through a high-level discovery conversation among Academic Affairs leadership and several faculty leaders as a veritable diagnostic measure, or it can be done as a full semester's taskforce objective if alignment is a dominant challenge.

Next, sketch a **stakeholder map** to be sure that any process includes awareness of (if not also participation from) various groups of people. Remember that stakeholders include everyone for whom the process or outcome matters, even if they do not have a decision-making role in the process. For example, the town in which a college thrives is a stakeholder group for civic engagement projects, even though the town's people have no formal role in who is hired or promoted at a college. The registrar is a stakeholder in evaluation and review processes at the implementation stage, therefore soliciting their opinion or consultation about any potential procedural change being designed will increase the likelihood that such a person will be able to effectively deploy a new process. The registrar might not need to be in lots of planning meetings, but keeping the person aware of the conversations will improve ease of implementation later.

Code your stakeholder list, such as who might have decision *recommendation* responsibility different from decision *making* responsibility; who needs to be *consulted* or involved (because they will be potentially affected by or need to implement something), differently from who needs to be kept *informed* as the process unfolds (because they might be affected in ancillary ways even though not directly involved in the actual process itself). Use that stakeholder map to build strategic pathways. Be sure you **stay aware of the various stakeholders** throughout.

Third, actively and repeatedly **communicate.** The informal grapevine will fill in gaps where reliable information does not exist; therefore, leaders have a strong incentive to *over*communicate (and to do so through multiple channels). Help stakeholders understand context, why something matters, who is involved (how they are involved and why that person or those individuals), and a timeline by which additional information will become available. Keep the message simple and repeat it often. In addition to the conversation process, clarify who has what form of responsibility – who is accountable for outcomes, responsible for doing what specific part or making which decisions, will be consulted about what and at what stages, and will be informed about any progress, challenges, or outcomes before such information is made public more broadly. **Communicating systematically can accelerate progress** and **foster integrity** in a process towards lasting change.

Finally, look for **quick wins** that build momentum towards **deeper high-value changes**. Parts of this implementation guide can be done once as a step towards something and can also be institutionalized as routine assessment norms biannually or on a cycle that fits your context. Continuous improvement is iterative by nature.

Neither this Implementation Guide nor the Toolkit itself are complete, and **no one approach fits all circumstances**. Therefore, **skim through the topics and content** included – keeping in mind what you already know and what resources are available – to guide your decision about where you and your college should start.

Stakeholder Mapping: Who Should Be Included?

The concept of "stakeholders" refers to myriad people and roles interacting with an institution. Mapping of stakeholders refers to the process of diagramming the relationships between and among people/roles and dimensions of the institution and its activities. A stakeholder map can vary widely in complexity from being highly quantitative and formally charted to being informal and sketched during conversation. The following stakeholders have emerged as relevant to various objectives or activities as this Implementation Guide was created. This **high-level list** can be **nuanced** by a planning committee:

- Academic Affairs leadership and staff, whether in decision or advisory capacities and whether affected by the process or by the need to be able to share reliable information with others who are more closely affected by the process.
- Faculty, including tenure track and term level (nuancing faculty by promotional level, department/division or area of study, and by disciplinary vs multidisciplinary assignment) and including faculty with and without governance or evaluative responsibilities, training responsibilities, and/or strategic service responsibilities.
- Staff with procedural and compliance responsibilities, including registrar, human resources, handbook review teams, etc.
- Students at different levels of study and in different fields of study (see section on biases in student evaluations).
- Geographic community in circumstances where strategic town-gown relationships inform civic engagement work between students or faculty in the university and stakeholder segments within the local population.

Contexts to consider when mapping stakeholders' relevance to a process might include:

- **Type of work being done within the larger conversation** about equity in evaluations (e.g., the tenure and promotion committee's relevance or the registrar's relevance might be different if an institution is analyzing the faculty handbook or designing a process for formalizing service allocation than if the institution is considering implications of hidden biases in student evaluations – though both stakeholder groups matter in the larger conversation).
- **Form of involvement requested or** promised (e.g., a business approach called "Responsibility Charting" differentiates between ways in which people or groups might be involved into

categories of who's responsible for doing and/or deciding what, who's accountable for the outcomes and thus might have a different form of managerial relationship to a process, who should be consulted about the work or outcomes as those responsible are doing the work, and who should be informed before the outcomes are more generally with concerned constituencies or stakeholders).

- **Heterogeneity of the stakeholder group** in relationship with the proximity of that group to the work being done (e.g., "students" might be treated as a heterogeneous group when faculty are trained how to build an effective portfolio but might be nuanced by major or level when considering evaluative approaches to measuring teacher effectiveness).

Using a stakeholder map to inform decisions can help to increase the efficiency of a process (getting something done with the fewest number of right people practical) while also increasing buy-in (helping stakeholder groups more willingly go along with and/or agree with adopting new practices as those emerge – without buy-in, managers might reach compliance but without the embracing of change required for lasting effectiveness). Here are a few ways in which a stakeholder map might help the conversation process:

- Building task forces or committees with the "right" voices and perspectives in the room
- Clarifying the form of inclusion one or another person can expect (i.e., from responsible to informed) in what stage of work
- Collaboratively deciding who needs to attend which meetings (and knowing why or to what end)
- Increasing adoption of future changes
- Decreasing unforeseen/unanticipated challenges