

# Technical Review Panel No. 41 Managing Reporting Burden

## Final Actions

On March 19 and 20, 2013, RTI International, the contractor for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) web-based data collection system, convened a meeting of the IPEDS Technical Review Panel (TRP) in Washington, DC. Meetings of the IPEDS TRP are conducted by RTI to solicit expert discussion and suggestions on a broad range of issues related to postsecondary education and the conduct of IPEDS. The TRP is designed to advise and work with RTI to improve IPEDS data collection and products, data quality, and user-friendliness. The TRP does not report to or advise the Department of Education.

RTI's specific purpose for TRP 41 was to solicit input from the postsecondary education community regarding the reporting burden for institutions. The panel consisted of 36 individuals representing institutions, researchers and other data users, state governments, the federal government, higher education associations, and others.

NCES has taken steps to identify and develop strategies to minimize reporting burden by making it easier for institutions to report data. Burden has been specifically addressed at two previous TRPs (#29 and #30). Furthermore, in 2010, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a study on IPEDS burden. GAO contacted keyholders at 22 institutions as well as software providers.<sup>1</sup> The conclusions of the discussions of the TRPs as well as the findings of the GAO report suggested that burden might be effectively addressed through providing increased resources, communication, and trainings for data reporters.<sup>2</sup> As a result, several new workshops were developed as part of the IPEDS training curriculum, outreach was increased with targeted communications to specific institution groups, and new and strengthened resources for IPEDS data reporting were introduced.

RTI convened this meeting of the TRP to discuss strategies for further reducing the institutional burden for the more than 7,400 institutions that report data to IPEDS. The panel considered ways to simplify the components by eliminating potentially duplicative or unnecessary data. Given that many of the items collected in IPEDS are mandated or otherwise necessary, the panel also explored further strategies that might be helpful to minimize institutional reporting burden.

After the conclusion of the TRP, RTI posted a summary of suggestions to the web for public comment. RTI solicited comments by notifying keyholders and coordinators through a "This Week in IPEDS" email announcement. Comments were left open for approximately 30 days and the comment period closed on July 19, 2013. During the comment period, RTI received 5 comments from interested parties. Following the comment period, RTI outlined recommendations for NCES based on the outcome of the TRP meeting and subsequent public comment period. NCES has taken the actions listed below.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2010, August). Institutions' Reported Data Collection Burden Is Higher Than Estimated but Can Be Reduced Through Increased Coordination. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved April 2, 2013, from <http://www.gao.gov/assets/310/308691.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Respondents to the 2010 GAO study ranked the Student Financial Aid Survey component as the most burdensome, followed by Human Resources, and Finance. The report notes that the content of these components may be more complex and are most likely to require collaboration across departments. Institutional Characteristics, 12-Month Enrollment, and Completions were ranked as the least burdensome. Note that the rankings observed in the GAO study may have been influenced by the year the study was conducted (August 2009 to August 2010); major changes were made to the SFA component in 2008-09 and 2009-10 to comply with requirements of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA), (P.L. 110-315).

## **Proposed Revisions to the IPEDS Survey Components for All Institutions**

NCES made the following revisions to the IPEDS survey components to reduce the institutional reporting burden while protecting the utility and quality of the data being reported.

### **Institutional Characteristics**

The estimated enrollment items on IC were added in 2006-07 to fill a perceived need for an early estimate of fall enrollment, due to the fact that the IPEDS Fall Enrollment component is not collected until the following spring. However, NCES has determined that these data are insufficient, their inclusion in the IPEDS Data Center is a source of confusion to data users, and they are not being widely used. Further, these data are not displayed on College Navigator because they are estimates.

NCES requested and received clearance on the deletion of estimated enrollment items:

- early estimates of full-time and part-time undergraduate students;
- early estimates of first-time undergraduate students; and
- early estimates of graduate students.

(Implementation Year: 2014-15)

### **Human Resources**

The TRP considered eliminating several data items from the HR component to reduce the institutional reporting burden. Additional discussion and review on this topic will occur in TRP 44, scheduled for July 22 and 23, 2014. TRP 44 will discuss improvements to the Human Resources survey component. After the conclusion of TRP 44, RTI will outline additional recommendations for NCES based on the outcome of TRP 44 and the subsequent public comment period.

## **Additional Measures for Reducing Reporting Burden**

In addition to controlling IPEDS response burden through managing the length and complexity of the IPEDS components, NCES has taken additional steps to minimize institutional reporting burden.

### **Leverage Higher Education Community Resources**

Data providers would benefit from knowing how other institutions use IPEDS instructions and definitions to identify required data, develop or confirm the data collection methodology, acquire new information if necessary, and create data systems to store the data.

#### **IPEDS Listserv**

NCES continues to leverage the IPEDS listserv to foster communications with providers and potential users of the data. The primary purpose of the listserv is to provide a forum for discussion of IPEDS-related questions and topics. IPEDS keyholders, coordinators, and other interested individuals can sign up by accessing the listserv homepage, at: <http://ipedslistserv.rti.org/>.

NCES monitors listserv discussion to ensure that correct information is being distributed.

### **Continuous NCES Review of Survey Instruments, Instructions, FAQs, and Edits**

Clear and consistent instructions and definitional consistency makes reporting easier for institutions and improves the overall quality of the data reported.

### Ongoing Data Review

NCES conducts periodic reviews of each component. An ongoing data review has yielded several changes to system edits. Additionally, NCES has addressed some ambiguities in current instructions to improve the quality of data reported.

### **NCES Review of Nonapplicable Items from Survey Screens**

Given the increased data demands placed on institutions over the last several years, streamlining and eliminating some of the duplicative and unnecessary data in the IPEDS survey components would reduce the amount of time spent to prepare and report data and could improve the quality of data reported.

### Screening Questions to Determine Applicability

When possible, NCES uses screening questions to determine applicability for reporting a particular category. NCES added a screening question for degree-granting institutions to determine level of reporting on new Academic Libraries component. Additionally, NCES added a new screening question for for-profit institutions to determine businesses structure.

(Implementation year: 2014-15, preview year: 2013-14)

### **Increase Training Opportunities**

Considering the varying levels of data providers' knowledge and expertise about IPEDS, providing training opportunities to data providers will help alleviate some of the concerns raised about reporting burden.

### Face-to-Face Workshops

The Association for Institutional Research, AIR, subcontractor for development of IPEDS training initiatives, offers opportunities for continuing education through a variety of face-to-face training workshops. These workshops allow data providers to learn in a group setting, often alongside colleagues from a variety of educational backgrounds.

### Online Keyholder Courses

Additionally, working with NCES, AIR developed two new IPEDS keyholder courses to provide self-paced, on-demand online training:

**Course 1** – For keyholders with 0-9 months of experience, explains keyholder responsibilities, campus planning for IPEDS submission, key IPEDS concepts, and where IPEDS data appear in the public domain (available August 2014).

**Course 2** – For keyholders with 9-24 months of experience, covers how to improve IPEDS data quality, increase data submission efficiency, and access and use IPEDS data (available late Fall 2014).

### Online Video Tutorials

Working with NCES, AIR developed online video tutorials based on key concepts that are critical to IPEDS reporting. The tutorials are embedded in the data collection screens and are also available from several locations in the IPEDS Data Provider Center and from the AIR website. Topics include: component overviews, definitions and concepts, data tools, and additional tutorials related to IPEDS.

## **NCES Communication**

Careful management of changes to IPEDS, including consideration of and focus on implementation schedules and communication with data providers, can also help to reduce burden.

### Keyholder Outreach

As part of its outreach efforts, NCES notifies all keyholders and coordinators via email when proposed changes have been posted at the IPEDS Data Provider Center. The summary of changes calls attention to the burden estimates, survey components affected, source for the change, and implementation schedule.

NCES offers institutions a "preview" year for additions to IPEDS data reporting forms. During the preview year, new items and associated reporting instructions are available for preview through the Survey Materials web page, to give institutions one-year advance notice of how new data items will be collected in the future.

NCES continues to produce and send "This Week in IPEDS" email bulletins to foster communications with keyholders and coordinators and to announce updates related to data release.

### Targeted Communication

The data collection system allows keyholders to provide contact information for additional institutional staff who are involved in IPEDS reporting. Currently, the keyholder can provide contact information for additional institutional contacts specific to student financial aid, finance, and human resources reporting. This has allowed NCES and the IPEDS Help Desk (RTI) to communicate directly with these contacts about critical issues specific to the survey components in which they are involved, and further enables and encourages keyholder communication with these colleagues and additional data providers at their institution.

Prior to the Spring 2015 data collection, NCES will upload library contacts from the current Academic Libraries Survey into the IPEDS Data Collection System. NCES will begin communicating with keyholders, coordinators, and library contacts in Spring 2014 to help them prepare for the new Academic Libraries (AL) component.

### Resources for Software Providers.

NCES continues to work with the vendors of student information system software to ensure that tools within that software are aligned with IPEDS reporting requirements and are updated on a regular basis. The Resource Center on the IPEDS website contains resources for software providers that can be used in the development of IPEDS reporting functions. Software providers and other third parties that assist in reporting to IPEDS can register to receive email notifications of the availability of IPEDS materials, including proposed changes, approved changes, IPEDS data collection calendar, survey materials, glossary, and web tutorial training materials.

### Annual IPEDS Update

Working with NCES, AIR developed an online tutorial for keyholders to review changes to collection processes and survey components (available August 2014).

### **Additional Measures for Reducing Reporting Burden**

In order to provide better estimates of burden on an ongoing basis, NCES will ask IPEDS keyholders to report voluntarily the time required to complete each survey component as follows: in the 2012-13 data collection, the 2014-15 data collection, and every third year thereafter. NCES estimates a burden of 0.2 hours to track, record and report this time for the following components: Institutional Characteristics and Admissions, Completions, 12-month Enrollment, Graduation Rates, 200% Graduation Rates, Outcome Measures, and Fall Enrollment. NCES estimates it will take 0.4 hours for Student Financial Aid, Finance, Human Resources, and Academic Libraries, because these four components typically involve additional offices at the institution and require keyholders to get time estimates from others at the institution.