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# IUCRC Evaluator Protocol: Recommendations for Improving the IUCRC Evaluation Effort

# Overview

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- Background
- Key Questions
- Revision Principles and Strategy
- Proposed Changes
- Conclusions
- Questions/Discussion/Next Steps

# Background



- Past discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of our evaluation effort
  - Response rate
  - Role of Advisor
  - Etc.
- Had preliminary discussion at 2006 meeting
  - Evaluation grant was under review for renewal:
    - » Discussed a general strategy
- Agreed to form a committee to make recommendations about possible changes
  - Denis Gray (chair)
  - David Meyer
  - Gary Phye
  - Craig Scott
  - Eric Sundstrom

# Background



- Process
  - Established some goals/questions
  - Held three conference calls
  - “Homework” assignments between calls
  - Developed a set of recommendations

# Defining Questions



- Defining Questions
  - What is working and not working well in our current approach?
  - How can we enhance the value we provide NSF, the directors and other IUCRC stakeholders via our evaluation activities?
- Approach
  - Deal with highest priority issues
  - Not a complete an exhaustive review

# Working and Not working



## Working

- Utilization-focused evaluation emphasis (provide actionable information to key stakeholders)
  - Open-ended comments and suggestions
  - Benchmarking and longitudinal comparisons
    - » Survey feedback can produce some surprises
- LIFE Form data is valuable for project decision making
- Evaluator's report is useful, manageable and fulfills an important accountability function
- Producing good high quality studies that contribute to the literature and understanding of I/U cooperation

# *Working and Not working*



## **Not working**

- Response rate on surveys is suffering and with it the value of the feedback
  - Faculty feedback seems particular problem
  - Value of faculty feedback may decay over time
- Perceive a “questionnaire burden” among participants
- Timeliness of our feedback sometimes suffers and with it the value of the feedback
- Unclear about the follow through on and the value of the exit interview

# Working and Not working



- General Observations:
  - Although the goal(s) of our evaluation activities are implied in various documents, we do not currently have an explicit goal statement to guide our efforts
  - Current evaluation protocol is a combination of a survey feedback, applied and fundamental evaluation efforts
    - » While all have value, it is not clear if we need to address all of them as part of the core evaluation effort



# Enhancing the value



## Revision Principles

- Emphasize providing feedback that is timely and actionable
- Where possible and valuable maintain continuity of database for historical and longitudinal analysis purposes
- Be sensitive to data gathering burden placed on respondents without sacrificing value of information
- Changes should be work neutral for evaluators
  - If we drop significant activities, should try to add other value adding activities

# *Enhancing the value*



## Revision Strategy

- Develop an explicit overall goal statement(s) for the evaluation effort
- Attempt to shorten and focus currently used P/O questionnaires for annual data collection
- Continue to solicit targeted studies (student theses, evaluator initiated) to supplement and amplify core evaluation effort
- Solicit feedback from other stakeholders (evaluators, NSF and directors) about the merit of proposed changes
- Attempt to complete changes in time for fall 2007 data collection activities



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# *Proposed Changes*

# *IUCRC Evaluation Goals*



## Primary

- To help document IUCRC outcomes and accomplishments at both the center and program-level
- To promote continuous improvement at both the center and program level by providing timely and actionable data-based feedback, analysis & advice (e.g., ombudsperson)
- To identify and communicate center and program-wide best practices

## Secondary

- To help promote a better understanding of industry/university research cooperation

# Process/Outcome Questionnaires



## Industry Questionnaire

- Create a shortened “short” form of the P/O questionnaire by
  - Dropping questions that do not seem to provide value
    - » Firm identification questions
  - Consolidate the “open-ended” questions
  - Consider moving research evaluation questions to a “Center-level” (rather than project-level) LIFE form
    - » Enhance the analysis provided from project and center-level LIFE forms
  - Current Question Length
    - » Long: 44 (37 FC; 7 OE)
    - » Short: 27 (20 FC; 7 OE)
  - Proposed Question Length
    - » Shortened Short: 18 (15 FC; 3 OE)
    - » Shortened Short sans Research: 11 (8 FC; 3 OE)
    - » Center LIFE Form: 7 FC

# Process/Outcome Questionnaires



## Faculty Questionnaire

- Create a shortened version of the P/O for use during Year 1-5 by
  - Dropping questions that do not seem to provide value
  - Consolidating some multi-item “scales” into one question
  - Rely on Center Director Report for publication counts etc.
- Create a very short “what’s working, what’s not working” version of the P/O for Year 6-10
- Current Question Length
  - 29 (27 FC; 2OE)
- Proposed Question Length
  - Short: ~15 (13 FC; 2 OE)
  - Very Short: ~ 5 (3 FC; 2 OE)

# *Process/Outcome Questionnaires*

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- Supplemental and Targeted Studies
  - Periodically, the P/O questionnaires might be supplemented with additional questions to support an I/UCRC approved supplemental study

# Exit Interviews

- In spite of their intuitive value, they do not appear to currently be providing significant benefit to center stakeholders
  - Why?
    - » Not done
    - » Not done in a timely fashion (don't know when they leave)
    - » Information is not different from what directors already know
    - » Respondents are not really forthcoming
    - » Questions are not getting at real issues
    - » Failure to provide aggregate analysis of them
- Options:
  - Drop and Consider an “Entrance Interview”
  - Experiment: Attempt to remedy the implementation and analysis problems and then decide whether to drop or not
    - » Proposal from Meyer & Scott



# LIFE Forms



- As currently used LIFE forms provide information that helps IAB and director decide on project funding priorities
- With modest analysis effort LIFE data may also provide information about member satisfaction and investment in the center
- Feedback on center-level LIFE form could be provided immediately

# LIFE Forms

1 = Int.

2 = Inter w Change

3 = Not Int.



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	Proj 1	Proj 2	Proj 3	Proj 4	Proj 5	Inter	Inter Ch	Not Inter
Mmb 1	1	1	1	1	3	4	0	1
Mmb 2	1	2	3	2	3	1	2	2
Mmb 3	1	2	1	2	1	3	2	0
Mmb 4	3	3	1	3	3	1	0	4
Mmb 5	1	2	2	1	3	2	2	1
<b>Total</b>	4 x 1 0 x 2 1 x 3	1 x 1 3 x 2 1 x 3	3 x 1 1 x 2 1 x 3	2 x 1 2 x 2 1 x 3	1 x 1 0 x 2 4 x 3			

# Other Issues



- Consider exploring methods for using more qualitative methods for collecting data
  - Center focus group on administrative and research issues
- Consider Student P/O based on Jennifer Schneider's work in year 6-10

# Conclusion



- I/UCRC Evaluation Project is a unique evaluation effort that appears to be providing value to NSF & other stakeholders
- Greatest value appears to be in providing data and feedback that helps NSF and Centers improve operations and performance
- Our recommendations are just that – recommendations
  - I/UCRC Evaluation Project could enhance those benefits by beginning to make some changes in the nature of its questionnaires and interviews and other steps
- Will need full discussion internally and consultation with key stakeholders, especially directors, in order to make this work

# Next Steps

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- Discuss strategy
- Discuss recommended changes and their implications
- Develop follow up plan to solicit input from other stakeholders
- Develop implementation plan for change