



The**RP**Group



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2025 Survey of IRPE Offices in the California Community Colleges System

Full Report

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Executive Summary

Since 2006, The RP Group has surveyed institutional research, planning, and effectiveness (IRPE) offices across the California Community Colleges (CCC) system to:

- ❖ Identify key research and planning priorities and activities of the IRPE offices;
- ❖ Document staffing profiles and identify budget changes;
- ❖ Examine professional learning needs of the IRPE offices; and
- ❖ Identify other resources or professional development to best support the IRPE field.

Key Findings

In fall 2025, 94 college and district IRPE offices responded to the survey (70% response rate). Highlights from the analysis of survey responses include the following:

1. Organizational Structure and Workforce Trends

IRPE offices maintain high-level institutional visibility, with the **vast majority of college leads reporting directly to Presidents or Superintendents (67%), and district leads reporting to Vice Chancellors (77%)**. This structural alignment is increasingly reflected in leadership participation, as over half of IRPE college leads now sit on executive cabinets. A significant shift has also occurred in the workplace environment: **77% of offices now utilize a hybrid employment model** that combines in-person and remote work, a sharp increase from 59% in 2023, signaling a permanent move away from strictly on-site operations.

2. Staffing, Budget, and Capacity Challenges

While staffing levels are rebounding toward pre-pandemic norms—averaging 4.6 FTE in 2025—**the field remains under significant strain**. A staffing gap persists between college-level offices (4.4 FTE) and larger district counterparts (6.1 FTE). Despite modest growth, 57% of offices report major challenges in providing high-quality equity support. Respondents report that chronic vacancies, "one-person shops," and the overwhelming volume of new state mandates, such as Vision-Aligned Reporting¹ (VAR), have led to widespread burnout and a "capacity gap" that often limits offices to basic compliance reporting.

¹ Vision-Aligned Reporting (VAR) is a statewide program reporting process that was implemented in fall 2025. For more information, see the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office's [Vision-Aligned Reporting website](#).

3. Evolving Functions: From Research to Strategy

The role of the IRPE professional has expanded far beyond traditional data collection in recent years. Specifically in 2025, college IRPE offices reported that they led or facilitated:

- ❖ **Integrated Planning:** 82% lead college-wide planning and evaluation, while nearly 60% lead program review processes.
- ❖ **Accreditation & Equity:** Half of all offices lead accreditation efforts, and 84% provide critical data support for equity initiatives.
- ❖ **Emerging Mandates:** Involvement in VAR is near-universal, with only 1% of offices reporting no involvement.

District IRPE offices show a distinct focus, placing greater emphasis on 320 reporting, MIS data submissions, and Business Intelligence (BI) compared to college offices.

4. Data Infrastructure and the AI Frontier

Technical infrastructure is stabilizing, with 78% of offices maintaining access to a data warehouse. While Banner (48%) remains the primary SIS, **the visualization landscape is now evenly split between Tableau (51%) and Power BI (53%)** (almost 10% using both), with Power BI seeing a significant jump in adoption since 2023.

AI adoption has reached a tipping point, with **51% of offices currently utilizing AI** tools such as ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot. However, this adoption is primarily characterized by "**decentralized experimentation**" rather than formal strategy. Despite half of the field using these tools, only one institution reported having a formal, documented AI policy, highlighting a critical need for future guidance on data governance and ethical implementation.

5. Strategic Successes and Future Needs

Success in the field is currently defined by intentionally hiring equity-minded staff and automating technical workflows. To sustain this momentum, IRPE leads are calling on The RP Group to provide "nuts-and-bolts" training in AI and programming languages (e.g., SQL) and in implementing standardized data governance frameworks, and to advocate for the field with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). By moving from "data producers" to "strategic partners," IRPE offices are positioned to lead institutional change, provided they receive the structural and technical support from their colleges, The RP Group, and the CCC system necessary to close the existing capacity gap.

Comparing 2025 Results with Previous Surveys

Since the survey's inception in 2006, the organizational footprint of IRPE offices has undergone a dramatic transformation, **moving from isolated data centers to central pillars of institutional strategy**. While only 32% of offices were responsible for college-wide planning two decades ago, nearly all offices (99%) were involved by 2023, a trend that solidified in 2025, with 82% now leading or facilitating these functions. Staffing has followed a similar trajectory of professionalization and growth; whereas only 23% of offices exceeded 3.0 FTE in 2006, the 2025 average has climbed to 4.6 FTE, finally nearing the pre-pandemic benchmark of 5.0 FTE. This growth is also reflected in leadership structures, as more research offices report having dean and vice president roles within their offices than 20 years ago (62% in 2025 vs. 21% in 2006), with over half of college leads now serving on executive cabinets. However, while budgets and staffing have stabilized after years of rapid expansion, the 2025 data reveal that the "technical breadth" of the office has reached a new peak: nearly all offices now provide essential data support for once-peripheral areas like information technology (IT) management, grant development, and VAR, often without a corresponding increase in specialized personnel.

Comparisons to National IR/IE Offices

Comparing the **2024 AIR National Survey of 118 public, 2-year institutions** with our 2025 results reveals that CCC IRPE offices face unique regional pressures while still facing the same nationwide challenges. While our 4.6 FTE average exceeds the national **public 2-year institution average of 2.9 FTE**, both identify a critical capacity gap. This strain is reflected in the **13% of 2-year IR** offices nationally operating as "one-person shops" (compared to 6% in the CCC) and the fact that only **47% of IR offices** nationally meet goals without overtime—a reality mirrored locally by the 31% of CCC office leads who identified inadequate staffing and excessive workloads as barriers to providing high-quality, equity minded support.

In California, IRPE offices are significantly more integrated into leadership; 67% report to a president compared to **29% nationally**, and 52% sit on executive cabinets. This alignment **corresponds** with a national trend in which **58% of 2-year IR offices** seek closer ties with their presidents. Furthermore, CCC IRPE offices lead in flexibility, with a 77% hybrid rate, nearly double the national average of **44% for public 2-year institutions**. Despite a heavy **compliance burden that consumes roughly 29%** of work at two-year institutions nationwide, national IR/IE and CCC IRPE offices maintain a near-universal commitment to student success and equity, **as demonstrated by direct contributions to equitable student success (for nationwide IR offices) or providing data for equity efforts (for CCC offices)**.

Conclusions & Implications

The 2025 survey reveals a relentless expansion of IRPE workloads and institutional responsibilities compared to 2023. While staffing and budgets are stabilizing near pre-pandemic levels, the rapid adoption of technologies like AI and Power BI—often without formal governance—presents new complexities. IRPE offices continue to value The RP Group’s legacy frameworks (such as the [Six Factors of Student Success](#) and the [Through the Gate Transfer Initiative](#)) even as they navigate a significant "capacity gap" driven by staffing shortages combined with high-stakes mandates such as VAR.

The RP Group will utilize these findings to refine support for the IRPE community, focusing on technical challenges, data governance, and equity-centered inquiry. We hope these results provide IRPE offices with the benchmarking data needed to communicate their critical role and structural needs to college presidents, executive cabinets, district leadership, and boards of trustees. By leveraging these findings, offices can more effectively advocate for increased staffing and institutional support to bridge the current capacity gap in an increasingly data-driven landscape.

Introduction

Project Purpose & Background

A primary objective of The RP Group is to continually assess the research and planning capabilities present within the California Community Colleges (CCC) system. In 2006, The RP Group launched its inaugural survey of institutional research, planning, and effectiveness (IRPE) professionals to effectively gather this insight. Since 2009, this assessment has been conducted biennially, making the 2025 cycle the 10th administration to date. Historically, the insights derived from these efforts have been shared with the statewide community through publications and presentations at RP Group events.

In 2025, The RP Group once again surveyed IRPE offices to capture current data regarding staffing levels, operational budgets, core functions, the use of student information systems and visualization dashboards, and professional development requirements.

Leveraging the data collected in this year's cycle, The RP Group aims to:

- ❖ Pinpoint the primary priorities and operational activities of CCC IRPE offices;
- ❖ Track shifts in departmental budgets and document current staffing configurations;
- ❖ Evaluate the perceived value and relevance of The RP Group's professional development programs;
- ❖ Guide the programming and strategic content for the annual membership meeting; and
- ❖ Advocate for the specific needs and interests of IRPE offices.

The conclusions presented in this report highlight the survey's most significant takeaways and outline specific ways The RP Group can enhance its support, education, and advocacy for the field. Furthermore, these findings provide the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) with actionable insights to improve data transparency, accuracy, and communication, ultimately fostering student-centered improvements across the system's colleges and districts.

In This Report

This report summarizes survey responses from 94 college and district IRPE offices in the CCC system. It begins with a description of the survey methodology, followed by an overview of IRPE offices':

- organizational structures,
- staffing profiles,
- budgetary and staffing changes,

- organizational functions (led or supported),
- RP Group membership status,
- current IRPE challenges and successes, and
- professional development needs.

Finally, we offer conclusions and implications.

Methodology

This survey was administered online via SurveyMonkey in September and October 2025. An email invitation with a direct link to the survey was sent to the lead contact at each IRPE office. Of the 135 total IRPE offices in CCC colleges and districts, 81 college offices and 13 district offices responded to the survey (94 in total), yielding an overall response rate of 70% (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of Colleges and Districts Responded to the 2025 IRPE Survey

Survey Response Rates among IRPE Offices

Category	Response Count	Non-Response Count	Total	Response Rate
College IRPE Offices in Single-College Districts	38	14	52	73%
College IRPE Offices in Multi-College Districts	43	21	64	67%
District IRPE Offices in Multi-College Districts	13	6	19	68%
Totals	94	41	135	70%

As indicated in Figure 1 on the following page, 46% of survey participants were located at IRPE offices at colleges within multi-college districts, 40% of all survey participants were from IRPE offices in single-college districts, and 14% of survey participants were from district IRPE offices in multi-college districts.

Table 2 on the next page displays the distribution of responding IRPE offices by college and district size, based on full-time equivalent students (FTES) in the 2024–25 academic year. A little over a quarter (28%) of colleges were small (fewer than 5,300 FTES), while a quarter were medium in size (25%), and almost half (47%) were large colleges. District IRPE offices were overwhelmingly from large districts (92%) with more than 14,600 FTES in 2024-25.

FIGURE 1

IRPE college offices comprised the largest proportion of survey respondents

Percentage Breakdown of College & District IRPE Office Type (n = 94)

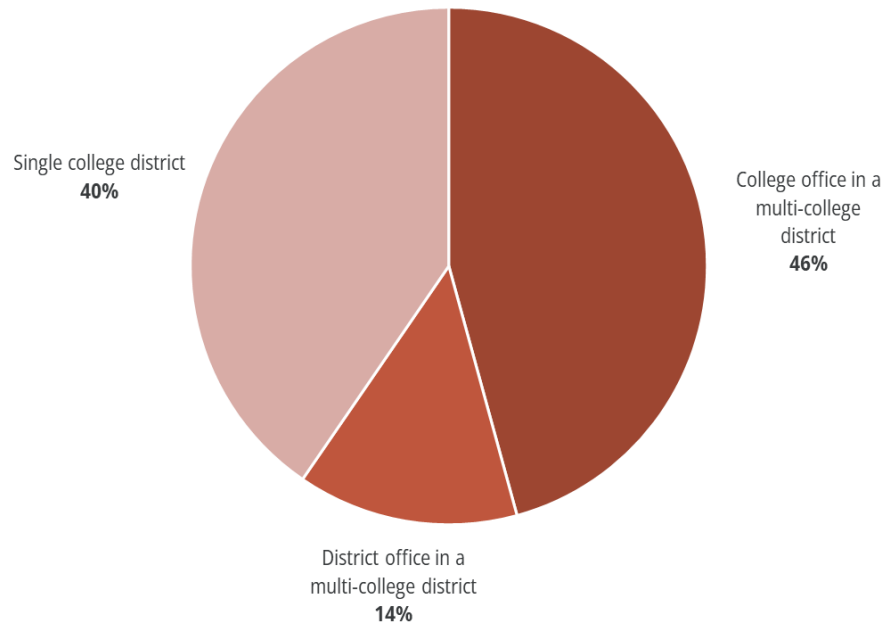


TABLE 2

Most colleges that responded came from large colleges/districts

College/District Size by FTES Category

FTES Category	Count	% of Group
Colleges		
Fewer than 5,300 FTES	23	28%
5,300 - 9,700 FTES	20	25%
More than 9,700 FTES	38	47%
Districts		
6,900 - 14,600 FTES	1	8%
More than 14,600 FTES	12	92%

Changes for the 2025 Survey

Questions on the 2025 survey were similar to those in the 2023 version, except for the inclusion of questions about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) by IRPE offices. Additionally, several comparisons are made with the [2024 Association for Institutional Research \(AIR\) National Survey](#), which collected information on [IR/IE office work](#), [staff](#), and [organizational structure](#) to give context about how California community college IRPE offices compare to 2-year, public institutional research and effectiveness offices nationwide. Drawing on data from 118 U.S. public, 2-year institutions, the 2024 AIR National Survey analyzed office structures and leadership while introducing new inquiries into the distinct responsibilities of institutional effectiveness versus institutional research. The AIR survey also examines the maturity levels of institutional data functions and the rising prevalence and core duties of the Chief Data Officer role. In 2023, AIR surveyed its members to explore [AI adoption in the IR/IE profession](#), and we compared these findings with AI adoption within CCC IRPE offices.

Limitations

When examining the findings presented in this survey, it is important to keep in mind that a key limitation of this type of research is that survey results are not comprehensive and only include responses from those college and district IRPE offices that elected to participate in this study. Even though the response rate is relatively high, there may be some differences in the characteristics of those offices that responded versus those that did not. As a result, caution should be used when generalizing results from these data.

Survey Findings

Organizational Structure of IRPE Offices

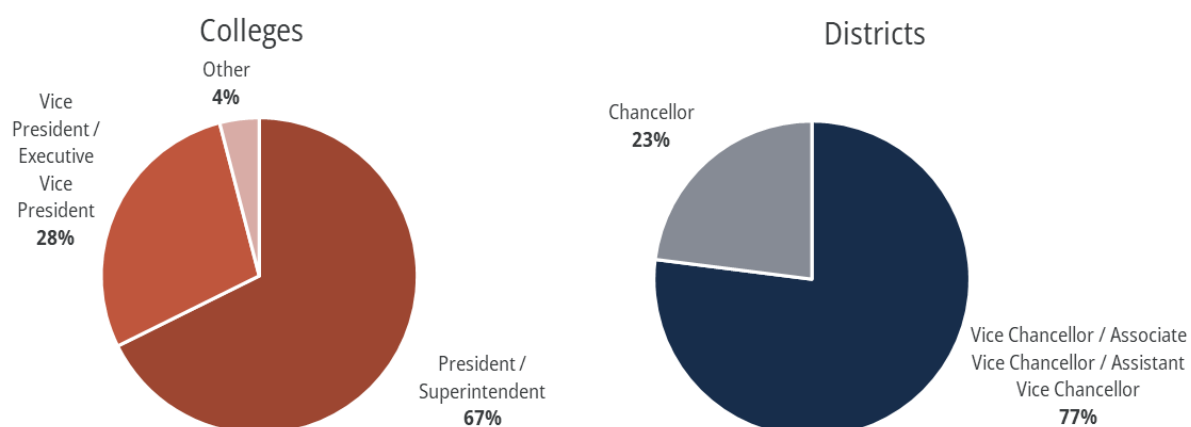
Most IRPE offices are reporting to Presidents/Superintendents or Vice Chancellors.

The majority of colleges (67%) report to a president or superintendent, while over a quarter (28%) report to a vice president or an executive vice president. Among respondents from district IRPE offices, 77% reported to a vice chancellor/associate vice chancellor, and 23% reported to a chancellor (see Figure 2). This percentage of CCC IRPE offices reporting to a college or district chief executive officer (CEO) (61%) is more than double the national average of 29%, as reported in the 2024 AIR survey.

FIGURE 2

Most IRPE offices are reporting to Presidents/Superintendents or Vice Chancellors

IRPE Reporting Structure for Colleges and Districts



Most offices reported offering hybrid employment options with a blend of remote and on-site employment (77%), a significant increase from 59% in 2023. Another 21% of offices reported offering on-site employment only, and only 2% offered fully remote employment. These rates demonstrate higher workplace flexibility in the CCC IRPE system than nationally. The AIR survey found that only 44% of IR/IE offices nationwide report being allowed hybrid work, and 30% are strictly on-site.

Data Access, Software Usage, and AI Adoption

This portion of the report summarizes findings regarding IRPE office infrastructure, data dashboard preferences, and AI adoption. Since no significant differences were observed between college and district IRPE offices, data are presented as an aggregate.

Most offices (78%) maintain access to a college or district data warehouse. The most frequently used Student Information Systems (SIS) are as follows:

- ❖ Banner: 48%
- ❖ Colleague: 31%
- ❖ PeopleSoft: 19%
- ❖ Other: 2%

All IRPE offices reported using data dashboard software: 51% use Tableau, 53% use Power BI, and almost 10% use both. Notably, Power BI adoption has risen significantly from 39% in 2023. Approximately 15% of offices reported utilizing alternative data dashboard software, with Precision Campus emerging as the most popular choice.

Over half of the offices surveyed (51%) currently utilize AI in their day-to-day operations. Usage is characterized primarily by decentralized experimentation:

- ❖ Unstructured Usage (22%): Individuals experiment independently with no formal departmental policy.
- ❖ Emerging/Oppportunistic Usage (19%): Early adoption of AI on a case-by-case basis with minimal oversight.

Popular AI tools included ChatGPT (45%) and Microsoft Copilot (33%). A smaller proportion of offices reported using Google Gemini (6%). Other AI tools utilized included Claude, Google NotebookLM, and PlayLab.

Despite this level of adoption, institutional governance remains in its nascent stages, with only one institution reporting a formal, documented AI policy.

Nationally, IR/IE offices utilize AI at much lower rates, with AIR data indicating that 82% of offices nationally remain in the "reactive" or "not occurring" stages of AI maturity. Additionally, 74% of national respondents cited a lack of formal strategy as their primary barrier to adopting new technologies.

IRPE Office Staffing & Budget

In 2025, participating IRPE offices saw modest staffing growth, with average Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) rising to 4.6—up from 4.1 in 2023 and nearing the 2019 pre-pandemic

benchmark of 5.0. The CCC IRPE average FTE exceeds the national average of 2.3 FTE for public, 2-year institutions.

These FTE figures, which include vacancies expected to be filled within six months, reveal a staffing gap between college-level offices (4.4 FTE) and their district counterparts (6.1 FTE). Staffing generally scaled with institutions, ranging from 5.3 FTE at large colleges to 3.1 at smaller colleges. Comparisons between district sizes were omitted due to limited sample variance. See Table 3. The differences in average FTE by position between college and district IRPE offices are broken down in Table 4.

TABLE 3

Staffing generally increased with institution size

Average FTE by Institution Size for College & District IRPE Offices

Institution Size	College	District
Large	5.3	-
Medium	4.2	-
Small	3.1	-
Total	4.4	6.1

Note: Comparisons between district sizes were omitted due to limited sample variance.

TABLE 4

District IRPE offices had more staff on average than college IRPE offices

Average FTE by Position for College & District IRPE Offices

Position	College	District
Vice President/Vice Chancellor	0.3	1.1
Dean	0.9	1.0
Director	0.8	1.1
Coordinator	0.4	1.0
Research Analyst/Specialist	2.5	3.2
Research Assistant	0.7	1.0
Technician	0.4	0.5
Clerical Support	0.7	1.3
Student Assistant	0.5	1.0
Other	1.1	1.6

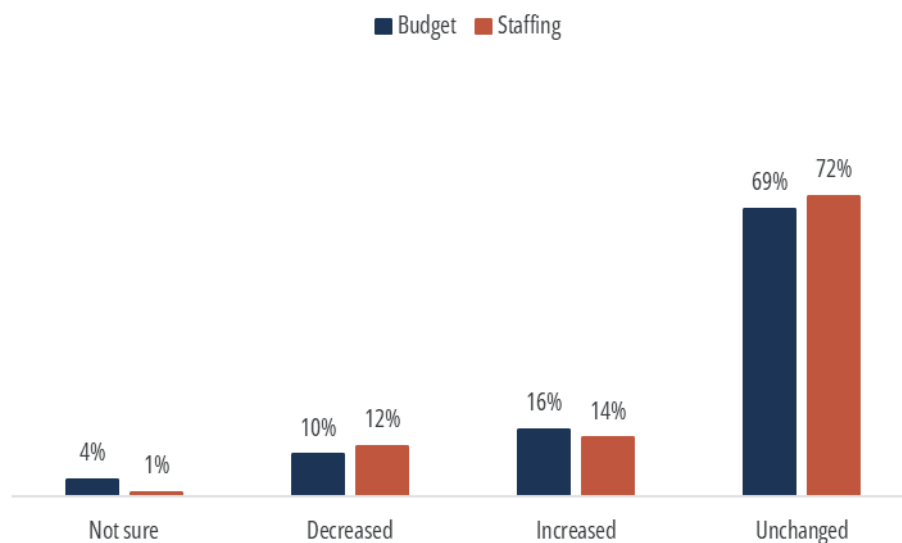
Note: The top five positions with the biggest differences between college and district offices are **bold**.

Financial and personnel stability characterized the transition from the 2024–25 to 2025–26 fiscal years (Figure 3). Approximately three-quarters of college IRPE offices reported no change in operating budgets (69%) or staffing levels (72%).

FIGURE 3

Budget and Staffing have generally remained unchanged across IRPE offices

Changes in IRPE Office Operating Budgets & Staffing from 2024–25 to 2025–26



Organizational Functions Led by IRPE Office Personnel

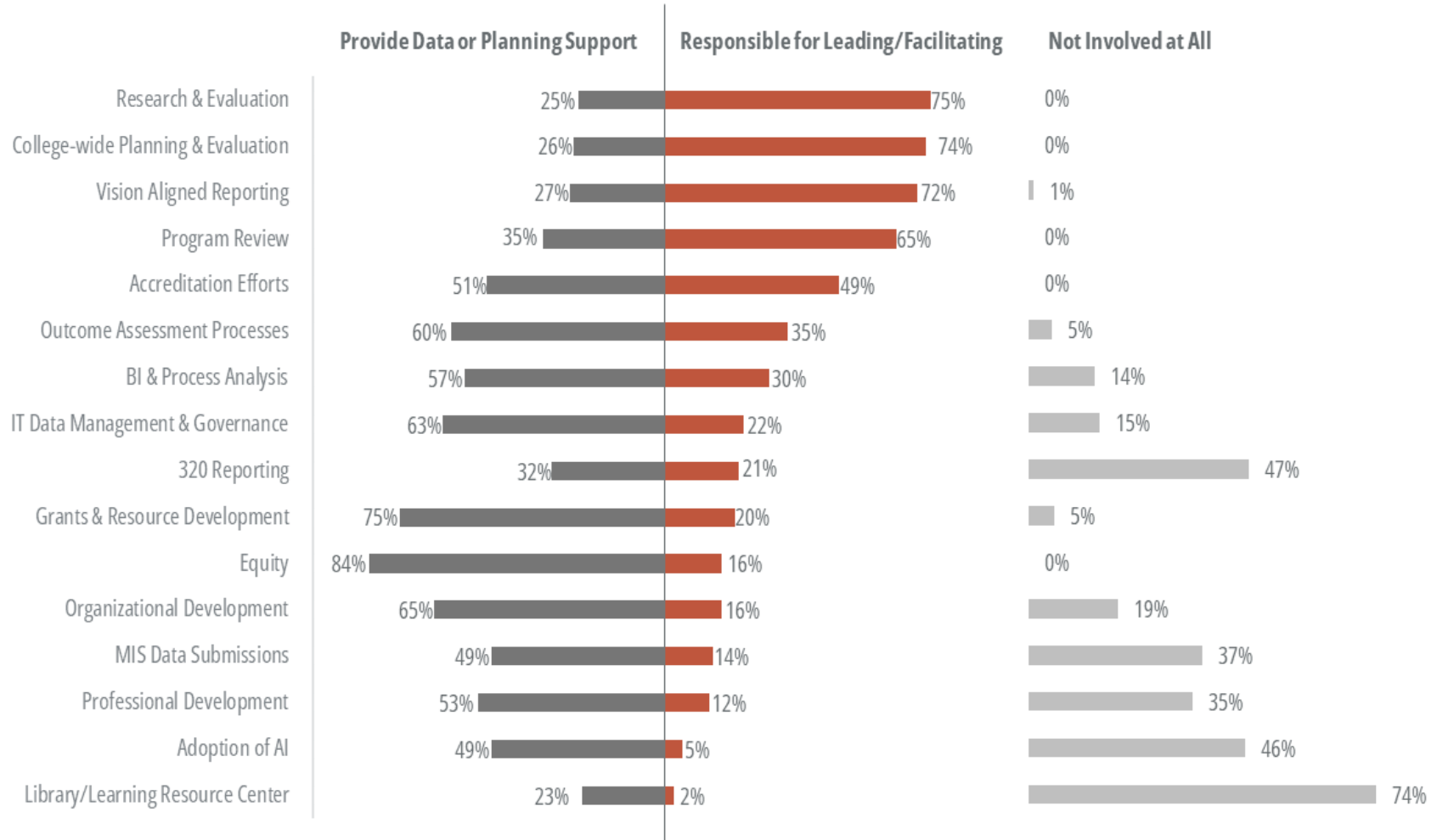
Figures 4 and 5 on pages 14 and 16, respectively, show whether IRPE offices supported or led various functions and responsibilities. The research and planning functions described by college IRPE office respondents reflect a shift from a primary focus on institutional research in decades past to a broader set of functions that include leading and/or facilitating all levels of planning (including program review and strategic planning), accreditation, equity, organizational development, and grants and resource development (see Figure 4 on the next page).

All college IRPE offices reported being involved in college-wide planning and evaluation, research and evaluation, program review, and accreditation. Only 1% reported not being involved in equity. Unsurprisingly, most college IRPE offices were responsible for leading or facilitating research and evaluation activities (75%), college-wide planning and evaluation functions (74%), Vision-Aligned Reporting efforts (72%), and program review (65%). Despite a sizeable proportion indicating they lead accreditation efforts (49%), only 36% of college IRPE offices indicated that the Accreditation Liaison Officer resided within their IRPE office.

FIGURE 4

IRPE Offices at colleges are involved in research, planning, VAR, and program review, but many are not involved at all in libraries, adoption of AI, or 320 reporting

College IRPE Office Functions & Responsibilities



Although not leading the following efforts, a considerable percentage of college IRPE offices reported that they were providing data or planning support for equity (84%), grants and resource development (75%), professional development (53%), organizational development (65%), and IT data management and governance (63%). Most college IRPE offices reported they were **not** involved in libraries or learning resources centers (74%), 320 reporting (47%), and MIS data submissions (37%). Interestingly, almost half of college IRPE offices (49%) reported providing data or support for AI adoption, but almost as many (46%) were not involved at all. Vision-Aligned Reporting appears to be a new function primarily led or facilitated by college IRPE offices, with only 1% reporting no involvement.

The research and planning functions of district IRPE offices differed from those of college IRPE offices, placing greater emphasis on data management and reporting (see Figure 5 on the next page). A high proportion of district offices reported leading or facilitating in several areas, including 320 reporting (54%), business intelligence (BI) and process analysis (54%), planning and evaluation (54%), and MIS data submission (54%). However, almost all district offices (92%) that responded to this survey indicated that they were not at all involved in libraries or learning resource centers. Additionally, about half indicated that they were not involved in professional development (54%) or outcome assessment processes (46%). Most district offices were involved in adopting AI in some capacity, either supporting (38%) or leading (31%) the efforts. Finally, most district offices reported involvement in Vision-Aligned reporting responsibilities, with only 8% reporting no involvement.

Table 5 on page 17 provides a comparative breakdown of the functions led or supported by college and district IRPE offices.

Additionally, we inquired about IRPE offices' involvement in their executive cabinets or leadership teams. Over half (52%) of college IRPE office leads indicated yes, compared to only 46% district IRPE office leads. However, the proportion of district office leads involved in executive leadership increased significantly from 31% to 46% compared to our previous administration of this survey.

FIGURE 5

IRPE Offices at districts are involved in 320 reporting, BI and process analysis, planning and evaluation, and MIS data submission, but many are not involved at all in libraries, professional development, or outcome assessment processes

District IRPE Office Functions & Responsibilities

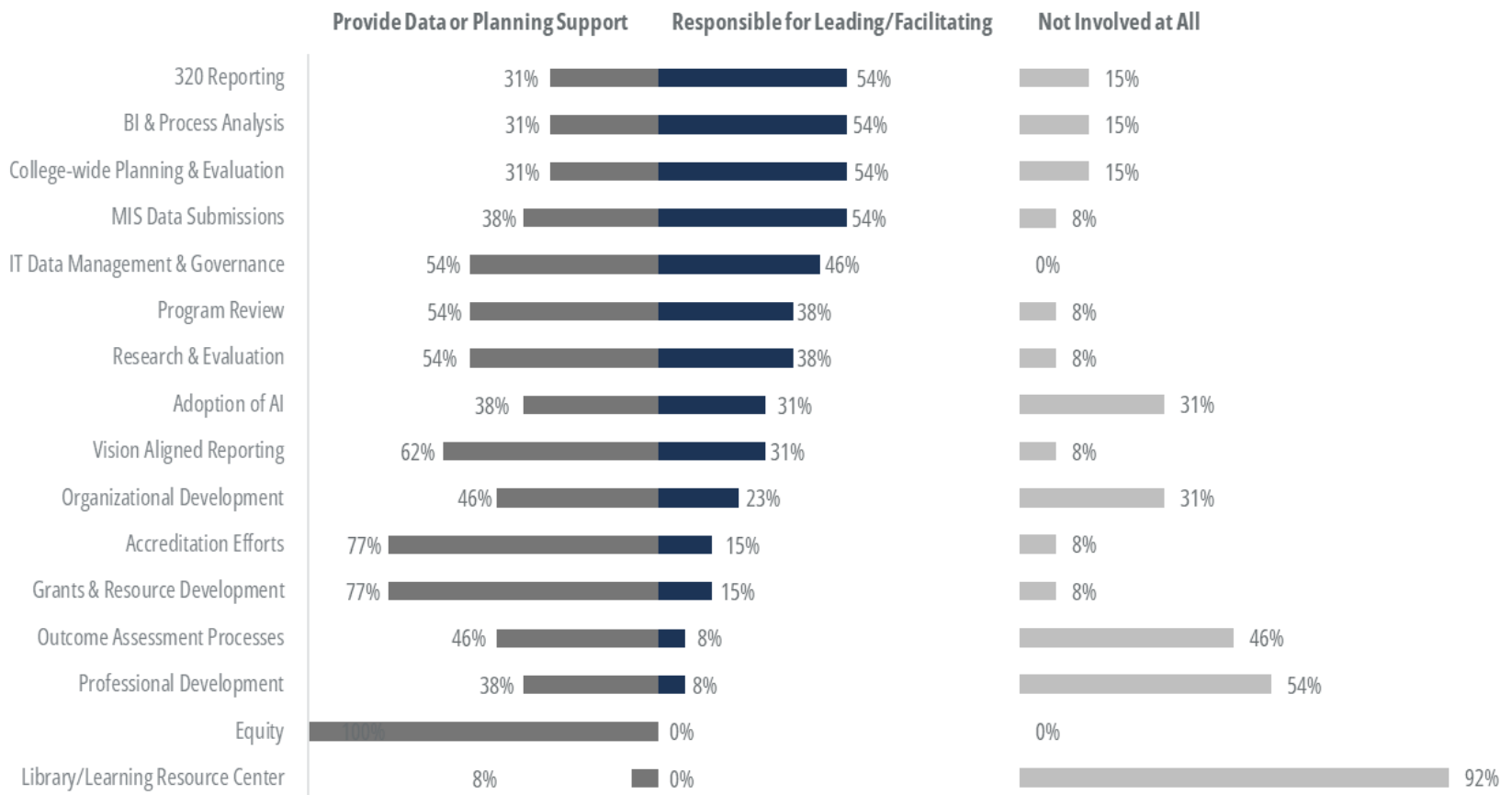


TABLE 5

College IRPE offices lead more research, planning, and reporting functions, while district IRPE offices lead more reporting and data governing functions

Percent indicating that they lead or support each function, College vs. District IRPE offices

IRPE Office Location	Colleges		Districts	
	Lead	Support	Lead	Support
320 Reporting	21%	32%	54%	31%
Accreditation Efforts	49%	51%	15%	77%
Adoption of AI	5%	49%	31%	38%
BI & Process Analysis	30%	57%	54%	31%
College-wide Planning & Evaluation	74%	26%	54%	31%
Equity	16%	84%	0%	100%
Grants & Resource Development	20%	75%	15%	77%
IT Data Management & Governance	22%	63%	46%	54%
Library/Learning Resource Center	2%	23%	0%	8%
MIS Data Submissions	14%	49%	54%	38%
Organizational Development	16%	65%	23%	46%
Outcome Assessment Processes	35%	60%	8%	46%
Professional Development	12%	53%	8%	38%
Program Review	65%	35%	38%	54%
Research & Evaluation	75%	25%	38%	54%
Vision-Aligned Reporting	72%	27%	31%	62%

Note: The top five functions in each column are highlighted in light red and bolded.

When comparing functions with national IR/IE offices, the **CCC IRPE offices demonstrate a significantly more integrated leadership role than their counterparts nationally**, with 82% of CCC offices leading college-wide planning, and 15% of 2-year institutions nationwide providing institutional-level decision support. While both groups are heavily burdened by compliance, which accounts for 24% of offices at two-year institutions nationally, CCC offices are more likely to have a broader portfolio that includes leading accreditation and program review. Despite these structural differences, IRPE offices both within the CCC system and nationwide maintain a near-universal focus on student success, with 99% of CCC offices and 95% of offices nationally collaborating on success initiatives.

RP Group Membership, Resources, and Support

Membership

The vast majority (89%) of respondents indicated that their institution was a member of The RP Group. The five institutions (four colleges and one district) without institutional memberships cited limited budgets or cost-effectiveness as the reason for not joining. Notably, three of these institutions were small colleges (fewer than 5,300 FTES).

Helpful RP Group Resources

When questioned about RP Group resources, reports, frameworks, and professional development that their office found helpful in their day-to-day operations, several resources were mentioned by survey respondents. Specifically, respondents mentioned a robust peer connectivity network, with the listserv² and regional meetings³ serving as primary tools for crowdsourcing solutions. Trusted legacy frameworks such as the [Six Factors of Student Success](#) and [Through the Gate Transfer Initiative](#) continue to provide the foundational research for local equity and transfer work. For technical support, the [VAR Academy](#), Multiple Measures Assessment Project ([MMAP](#)) webinars, and [Disproportionate Impact \(DI\) guides](#) were cited as critical for navigating state mandates and onboarding new staff. Finally, leadership programs like [Leading from the Middle](#) and annual conferences⁴ provide the professional development and community engagement necessary for long-term institutional growth.

Annual IRPE Engagement Meeting

The RP Group holds an annual IRPE Community and Member Engagement Meeting in the spring. The feedback regarding requested topics, content, and formats for these meetings revealed a strong desire to transition from "compliance-heavy" reporting to "innovation-led"

² The [RP Group listservs](#) are robust resources that facilitate knowledge-sharing among California community college practitioners on research methodologies, planning tools, effective practices, relevant studies, leadership, and other useful resources to aid in student and college success.

³ [Regional Research Groups](#) offer in-person and virtual meetings throughout the state, focused on the latest institutional research and planning issues and developments taking place in California.

⁴ The RP Group holds two annual conferences: the [RP Conference](#), which is the largest gathering of institutional research, planning, and effectiveness professionals in the California Community Colleges system (held in April), and the [Strengthening Student Success Conference](#) (held in October), which offers a unique opportunity for CCC professionals to connect across roles and campuses.

practice. **Requested content focused on evolving from compliance to innovation**, summarized into five key areas:

- ❖ **AI & Emerging Tech:** Members want hands-on labs for integrating AI with programming languages such as SQL/Python, building data chatbots, and navigating the ethics of predictive modeling.
- ❖ **Data Governance & Standards:** There was a high demand for "rubber-meets-the-road" tools, including a statewide data governance handbook template and guidance on new federal race/ethnicity coding.
- ❖ **Policy & State Mandates:** Practical "work-in-progress" sessions on implementing VAR, AB 1705,⁵ and direct policy updates from the CCCCCO.
- ❖ **Strategic Planning & Return on Investment (ROI):** Moving beyond data production to focus on data-informed resource allocation and streamlining program review.
- ❖ **Leadership & Advocacy:** Topics on staff retention, "coaching up" new analysts, and navigating complex legal issues like public records requests for equity data.

Preferred formats included collaborative methods such as "community of practice" sessions, peer case studies, and crowdsourcing solutions for shared struggles (e.g., SIS cloud migrations), as well as interactive, hands-on workshops and roundtables. Respondents also mentioned a desire for hybrid formats in which in-person sessions provide "authentic connection" and networking, with virtual (i.e., Zoom) options for broad accessibility.

Current IRPE Successes & Challenges

The 2025 survey of IRPE reveals an office landscape defined by high demand and significant structural strain. While 57% of offices report challenges in providing high-quality equity analysis, successful offices provide a roadmap for sustainability through intentional staffing and robust data infrastructure. Table 6 offers a summary comparison of these challenges and successes.

⁵ [Assembly Bill 1705](#) is a California law that requires community colleges to enroll students directly into transfer-level English and mathematics courses, largely eliminating the use of remedial, non-credit courses that can hinder degree completion.

TABLE 6**Staffing, technology, leadership, and workload were key themes impacting equity support***Challenges and Successes to Providing High-Quality Equity-Minded Support Reported by IRPE*

Focus Area	Challenges	Successes
Staffing	High turnover and "one-person" offices	Intentional, equity-minded hiring
Technology	"Messy" data and system transitions	Automated SQL/R workflows and dashboards
Leadership	Performative outcomes and low literacy	Strong executive support and data coaching
Workload	Competing state/federal mandates	Integration of data into local planning cycles

In open-ended responses, IRPE leads attributed their success in providing high-quality, equity-minded support to these key drivers:

- ❖ **Intentional Hiring:** Prioritize recruiting staff with specific academic or professional backgrounds in social justice and equity-minded frameworks.
- ❖ **Technical Automation:** Leverage "ad-hoc warehouses" and SQL/R workflows to automate routine reporting, allowing staff to focus on deep, actionable analysis.
- ❖ **Institutional Trust:** Secure executive "buy-in" and high-level political capital because when IRPE is ingrained in college processes, data move from being "produced" to being "acted upon."
- ❖ **Collaborative Partnerships:** Develop close ties with DEI offices, IT, and Student Services to ensure that data analysis is integrated into the campus culture rather than conducted in a silo.

Obstacles that were reported in open-ended responses as hindering IRPE offices' abilities to provide high-quality, equity-minded support fall into four primary categories:

- ❖ **Chronic Capacity Issues:** Severe staffing shortages, "one-person shops," and long-term vacancies (some up to two years) limit many offices to basic compliance, leading to widespread burnout.
- ❖ **Infrastructure Gaps:** Technical transitions (e.g., building data warehouses or moving to Power BI) often create temporary periods of data instability and limited accessibility, compounded by "messy" data and a lack of standardization.
- ❖ **Political & Cultural Hurdles:** Success is hindered when there is a lack of data literacy or "political will" among leadership. Resistance to using data in faculty performance reviews further complicates the researcher's role.
- ❖ **"Initiative Fatigue:"** Constant, duplicative state and federal mandates and piecemeal grant funding pull staff away from local, high-priority equity work.

Some of these challenges were also reflected in the AIR survey data. Both groups are heavily occupied by reporting requirements. IRPE offices nationally dedicate 24% of their work output to compliance, a trend that mirrors local CCC concerns about state mandates such as VAR. Additionally, "one-person shops" appear to be widespread, with 13% of offices nationwide operating with 1.0 FTE or fewer. Finally, burnout is another common issue, with AIR data indicating that only 46% of IR offices nationwide can meet institutional goals without regular overtime.

Professional Development Needs

IRPE offices were queried about ways in which The RP Group can best support their offices and institutions. IRPE office leads are calling for a shift toward "nuts and bolts" technical support and organizational advocacy. Key requests include developing a **data governance and stewardship framework, along with practical toolkits for hiring and classification studies** to ensure IRPE competencies are clearly defined for Human Resources and search committees. There is also a strong desire for "skill-builder" workshops focused on programming languages (e.g., SQL), data storytelling, and longitudinal analysis, specifically geared toward onboarding new analysts and helping small- or rural-college researchers connect through dedicated affinity groups.

Beyond technical training, the community is looking to The RP Group to serve as a high-level advocate with the CCCCO, ensuring the field's voice is heard at the outset of statewide mandates like [Vision 2030](#) and VAR. While members deeply value the existing culture of community and the move toward equity-centered work, they suggest The RP Group can further bridge the gap by providing grant opportunities for local institutional effectiveness projects and creating more accessible, "rubber-meets-the-road" guides that translate complex data into actionable campus strategies.

Conclusions & Implications

The 2025 Survey of IRPE Offices continues to serve as a critical census of the field, documenting the ongoing evolution of IRPE offices and providing essential benchmarking data on staffing, functions, and technological adoption. These findings are instrumental in helping The RP Group refine professional development, advocate for the profession, and support institutional effectiveness across the CCC system.

A primary implication of this report is the widening "capacity gap" as IRPE workloads expand into high-level strategic leadership while staffing levels, though rebounding, remain below ideal institutional needs. Locally, the transition to hybrid work—now at 77%—and the integration of leads into executive cabinets demonstrate a field that is more

strategically positioned than offices nationally. However, the rise of complex mandates like VAR and the decentralized adoption of AI highlight an urgent need for formal data governance and "nuts-and-bolts" technical training.

While college IRPE offices increasingly lead institutional planning and equity efforts, district offices continue to provide the vital infrastructure for data management and state reporting. The shared commitment to student success remains a cornerstone of the profession, with nearly all offices now deeply embedded in equity-centered inquiry.

Ultimately, these results provide IRPE professionals with the evidence needed to communicate their office's critical role to institutional leadership, ensuring that as data demands grow, the resources and structural support necessary for student success grow alongside them.

Appendix: 2025 Survey of IRPE Offices

Q1. Who is filling out this survey?

Answer Choices

- Your name:
- Your title:
- Your institution:
- Your email address:
- Phone Number:

Q2. What is the exact title of your office?

Q3. Where is your office located?

Answer Choices

- Single college district
- College in a multi-college district
- District office in a multi-college district

Q4. What was the total full-time equivalent students (FTES) count for the college during the 2024-25 academic year?

Answer Choices

- Less than 5,300 FTES
- 5,300 - 9,700 FTES
- More than 9,700 FTES

Q5. What was the total full-time equivalent students (FTES) count for the district during the 2024-25 academic year?

Answer Choices

- Less than 6,900 FTES
- 6,900 - 14,600 FTES
- More than 14,600 FTES

Q6. What is the current full-time equivalent (FTE) per position type at your office, including positions that are currently unfilled but that you expect to hire in the next six (6) months? For example, if your office already has one full-time Research Analyst working 40 hours per week, and your office has plans to hire another Research Analyst at 30 hours per week in January, please include the value of 1.75 in the Research Analyst comment field.

Notes: (1) If you don't have or plan to hire a position, please list "N/A"; and (2) If the position includes "Senior" or "Associate" attached to one of the terms below, please use the listed term - e.g., Senior Research Analysts should be listed with Research Analysts and Associate Deans should be listed with Deans.

Answer Choices

- Vice President/Vice Chancellor
- Dean
- Director
- Coordinator/Manager
- Research & Planning Analyst/Specialist
- Research & Planning Assistant
- Technician
- Clerical Support
- Student Assistant
- Other (please specify)

Q7. Where within the organizational structure does your IRPE office fit? Reports directly to the:

Answer Choices

- Chancellor
- Vice Chancellor/Associate Vice Chancellor/Assistant Vice Chancellor
- President/Superintendent
- Vice President/Executive Vice President
- Other (please specify)

Q8. How has your office's operating budget and staffing changed when comparing 2025-26 to 2024-25?

Answer Choices

- Operating budget
- Staff

Q9. Which of the following employment options does your office provide for personnel?

Answer Choices

- On-site employment only
- A blend of remote and on-site employment

- Fully remote employment

Q10. What position at your institution serves as the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)?

Q11. Does the ALO role at your institution reside in the IRPE office?

Answer Choices

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q12. Does the executive cabinet or leadership team at your college/district include the IRPE office lead at your institution?

Answer Choices

- Yes
- No
- Does not apply

Q13. Please describe how the IRPE office lead at your institution is included on the executive cabinet or leadership team. For example, are they included in all meetings and institutional decision-making processes, or do they serve in a more ad hoc role providing advisory support for the leadership team on a case-by-case basis?

Q14. Nationally, many offices have shifted from a focus primarily on institutional research to a broader function that includes leading and/or facilitating all levels of planning (including program review and strategic planning), accreditation, organization development, and outcome assessment processes. Given your office's current scope of work and function, how involved is your office with the following planning processes?

Answer Choices

- 320 reporting
- Accreditation efforts
- Business intelligence and process analysis
- College-wide planning and evaluation
- Equity
- Grants and resource development
- Institutional adoption of artificial intelligence
- IT data management, data warehouse, and data governance

- Library/Learning Resource Center
- MIS data submissions
- Professional development
- Program review
- Programmatic research and evaluation
- Organizational development
- Outcome assessment processes
- Vision Aligned Reporting

Q15. Does your office have access to a college/district data warehouse?

Answer Choices

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q16. Which student information system (SIS) is your college/district using?

Answer Choices

- Banner
- Colleague
- PeopleSoft
- Other (please specify)

Q17. Which data dashboard software is your office using?

Answer Choices

- Microsoft Power BI
- Tableau
- Our office is not using dashboard software
- Other (please specify)

Q18. Is your office utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) in day-to-day operations?

Answer Choices

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q19. Does your office have any documented policies about the use of AI for IRPE operations?

Answer Choices

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

Q20. How would you rate the scale of adoption for AI in your office at present?

Answer Choices

- Unstructured / Ad Hoc - No formal policy. Individuals experiment on their own.
- Emerging / Opportunistic - Early adoption, case-by-case use, minimal oversight.
- Developing / Guided - Some shared practices, guidelines, and informal norms.
- Systemic / Structured - Formalized policies, workflow integration, compliance guardrails.
- Strict & Methodical / Optimized - AI is embedded in governance structures, risk management, and continuous improvement.

Q21. Which of the following AI service providers is your office utilizing for day-to-day IRPE operations?

Answer Choices

- Google Gemini
- Microsoft Copilot
- OpenAI (e.g., ChatGPT)
- Other (please specify)

Q22. Please provide some examples of the primary use cases for AI in your office (e.g., coding, data analysis, research, drafting emails, writing reports).**Q23. What type(s) of AI support and/or professional development would be helpful for your office and/or institution?****Q24. As presently constructed, does your IRPE office face any challenges in providing high-quality, equity-minded data analysis and planning support for programs and initiatives at your college/district?**

Answer Choices

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q25. What are some of the reasons why your IRPE office has been successful in providing high-quality equity-minded data analysis and planning support for programs and initiatives at your college/district?

Q26. What are some of the reasons why your IRPE office faces challenges in providing high-quality, equity-minded data analysis and planning support for programs and initiatives at your college/district?

Q27. The RP Group holds an annual IRPE community and member engagement meeting in the spring of each year. What topics, content, or format would you like to see at that meeting?

Q28. Is your institution a current member with The RP Group?

Answer Choices

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q29. Please share the primary reason(s) why your college/district is not currently an RP Group Institutional Member.

Q30. Please list any RP Group resources, reports, frameworks, and/or professional development activities that your office finds particularly helpful in day-to-day IRPE operations.

Q31. How else can The RP Group best support your office and/or institution now or in the future?

The RP Group

As the representative organization for Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness (IRPE) professionals in the California Community Colleges (CCC) system, The RP Group strengthens the CCC system's ability to conduct high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and student success for all students.

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