Excellent Practices Framework

This document was created by the Washington Community and Technical Colleges Research & Planning Commission. It is meant to provide guidance for assessing the value of practices that have been developed, utilized and shared by other institutions or organizations and to inform the development of evaluation plans for assessing the value of such practices at your own institution.

Definition of "Excellent Practices"
For the purposes of our work, the term "best practice" has been replaced with "excellent practice." While the term "best practices" has been in vogue for several years, the goal should be to integrate practices (whether developed, adopted, or adapted) that have been proven to be "excellent" for your college in terms of "fit" and positive results based on evidence.

Our working definition: *Excellent practices are strategies, activities or approaches that have been shown through research and evaluation to be effective and/or efficient.*

Principles
While there is considerable value in identifying what practices others have found successful at their college and utilizing that information to inform decisions about strategies, activities or approaches, the college should be cautious about adopting others' practices wholly. Each institution is unique and this uniqueness must be taken into account when borrowing "excellent" practices. An institution must determine if a given strategy, activity or approach is consistent with--a good "fit" with—the goals, capabilities, and culture of the college.

It is also prudent to ensure that borrowing "excellent" practices from other colleges does not stifle innovation or the development of new, "excellent" practices at your institution. (A new idea that is piloted and successfully implemented at your institution may become an "excellent" practice that others may want to borrow and adopt or adapt at their institutions.)

Targeting Areas for "Excellent" Practice Development
There is a considerable range of topics worthy of the time and effort it takes to develop or adapt "excellent" practices. The list below is not meant to be exhaustive, but to provide a framework for thinking about the institutional priorities.

- Economy - The economic well-being of the institution, cost controls, new revenue, revenue enhancements, etc.
- Ecology - The stewardship of natural resources, energy efficiency, waste reduction, etc.
- Equity - Services for vulnerable and traditionally under-served populations, improving access to resources, alleviating burdens caused discrimination or negative externalities experiences by different populations, "doing what's right", etc.

- Efficiency - Process improvement, reduction of wasted effort or paperwork, increases in productivity while maintaining or improving quality of work, balancing speed and simplicity with rigor and completeness in College operations, etc.
- Effectiveness - Improving student outcomes, addressing accreditation requirements, addressing federal, state, or local requirements, etc.

Suggested Process Steps

The process of developing, adopting or adapting successful practices can take many forms. The brief process suggested below was informed by the literature and the experiences of researches in the Washington CTC system.

Step 1: Research & Theory Development

1. Start with a review of the relevant literature.
2. Construct a theoretical framework/theory of practice relevant to your institutional priorities.
3. Provide specifics of what seems to work for whom, under what conditions and at what cost.
4. Use the *Rubric for Evaluating Excellent Practices* (Attachment 1) to help you determine the degree to which the practice might be considered "excellent" for your purposes.

Step 2: Evaluation

An evaluation plan should be developed early on and should include both summative and formative evaluations on a regular basis. Generally, "excellent practices" don't just happen. They occur over time and along a continuum that addresses data collection and analysis to measure impact, sustainability, replicability, and alignment. Again the *Rubric for Evaluating Excellent Practices* (Attachment 1) can be a valuable tool for developing an evaluation plan.

In addition to the items listed in the Rubric, an evaluation should include a determination about how the practice fits with the goals, capabilities, and culture of the college.   The practice should also be tested against available/applicable standards.

Step 3: Action

A rigorous evaluation plan should provide data that will inform decision-making about the future of the practice under consideration. Hopefully, it will tell you what is working well and help you make modifications where necessary. One the most important--but sometime most difficult—decisions that may come from evaluation activities is this: If the practice fails to show promising results, it should be modified or discarded.

Attachment 1: Rubric for Evaluating "Excellent" Practices

	Excellent (3)	Promising (2)	Emerging (1)
Delivery Time	At least 6 terms of data for consistent delivery of intervention	At least 4 terms of data	At least 2 terms of data
Data Collection/Types	Robust collection methodology using both qualitative and quantitative	Mixed methods/data types utilized	Limited data collection; reliance on one data type
Results	Success in multiple cohorts, consistent results	Success in at least 2 cohorts	Based on literature review, policy study, and/or successful pilots
Statistical Significance	At least one outcome with a substantial effect size is statistically significant at the 5% level	Outcome change is statistically significant at the 10% level (marginally significant)	Outcome change may be seen only in descriptive statistics but not yet statistically significant.
Impact	High Impact: greater than 11% impact or greater than 100 students over time	Medium impact: 1-10% change or at least 30 students	Low or no statistical impact: <1% or <30 students
Sustainability	Self-sustaining and/or integrated into operational budget	Need some initiative support	Requires external or one time funding
Replicability	Transferable to other colleges, contexts, types of students or in sequential cohorts	Transferable to any college, context or type of student	Undetermined or unique to the college, context, or a type of student
Policy Alignment	Aligns with statewide initiatives and/or addresses multiple college or policy goals	Supports single college initiative or a single policy goal	Addresses only a department or division goal

Colleges may want to add criteria to this rubric, including how suitable a practice is likely to be for the outcome(s) you hope to achieve, the target population, the preparation of your faculty/staff, available resources, institutional culture, etc. It may be that certain criteria are not relevant and should be deleted. It might also be useful to determine the minimum "score" required to continue with the implementation of the strategy, activity or approach.