**Guidance for Seeking External Feedback for the AES PR Process**

Built into the AES Program Reflection (PR) process is an opportunity for unit leadership to strengthen the reflection process by seeking feedback, guidance, suggestions, and/or ideas from an entity/entities outside the unit. This step happens before AES PR conversations with divisional leadership. The purpose of this step is to provide an opportunity for diversity of thought and the introduction of different perspectives that could strengthen a unit’s future plans by:

* Pressure-testing the assumptions and evidence that are informing the unit’s decisions, based on their reflection and assessment;
* Uncovering potential blind spots that the unit team may not be aware of (which can be hard to see when we’re deep in the weeds of our own work); and
* Providing potentially new ideas for activities and/or ways of tracking progress that can help a unit achieve its goals.

This document does not intend to be prescriptive or exhaustive but proposes suggestions for areas that might be ripe for feedback and potential models for seeking feedback.

Areas of AES PR Template for Which to Seek Feedback

Following your unit team’s discussion(s) there are 4 components of the AES PR Template document that will have been completed. These 4 areas are the areas where you should seek feedback from an external entity. Below is a table with each of those components and corresponding questions that may be useful to ask of an external entity

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| *AES PR Template Component* | *Potential Questions* |
| Summary Assessment of Past and Current Unit Activities | * Based on the data point(s) our unit used to assess our previous activities, would you reach the same conclusions that we did? Why or why not?   + If not, what additional evidence do you think would be helpful for us to examine? * How has your unit approached assessing the your activities? What have you learned through that? |
| SWOT Analysis | * Are there important opportunities or threats that you think our unit might be overlooking? * Of the strengths that we listed, are there particular ones that you think we could/should leverage to help us achieve our goals? * Of the weaknesses we listed, are there particular ones that you would caution us not to ignore? * Is there something in our SWOT analysis that raises questions for you? |
| Summary of Ideas for Activities | * Based on our assessment of past activities and our SWOT analysis, do our proposed activities seem reasonable and high-leverage (having the greatest potential impact for achieving unit goals)? * Are there activities that we may not have considered that we should? * In your opinion, do any of our proposed activities have a particularly low or high return on investment (ROI)? |
| Summary of Unit Goals reflection | * Based on what you’ve learned about our unit, do our unit goals make sense? * Do our goals, as written, capture your understanding of what our unit wants to accomplish? * Are our unit goals SMART (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant [to mission and college-priorities], **T**ime-Bound)? |

Primary Models for Seeking External Feedback

There are a multitude of ways, and many sources from which, to gather external feedback. The impetus is not for each unit to use the same method, but that each unit seeks feedback in the way that best fits the unit’s needs. Below are 3 primary potential models that units can utilize.

*Seeking feedback from another unit within the college*

* One way of gathering useful feedback might be to sit down and having an in-depth conversation with a director from a different unit within Hostos; this could be a unit within or outside of your division.
* Potential Sources: Some potential options for units that might be beneficial to seek out:
  + Units that may serve a similar primary stakeholder group as yours (e.g. another student facing unit; a different unit that has an external focus; etc.)
  + Units that are working on the same college-wide priority as yours
  + Units that have accomplished something that you’d like to learn more about.
* Things to Consider:
  + Regardless of the unit you identify, it should be a unit that you believe engaging in discussion with would broaden your perspective about your own unit.
  + Be sure to select a unit that will push your thinking and help you challenge assumptions.

*Visiting a site outside of Hostos*

* Some units may prefer to seek feedback from another unit that has the same primary function as its own; in this case, it would be beneficial to identify a unit comparable to your own, at a different college. (e.g. a registrar’s office receiving feedback from another registrar’s office; athletics department connecting with the director of another school’s athletics department; etc.)
* Potential Sources:
  + A different CUNY College (particularly another community college)
  + A different college in New York
  + Another college (within CUNY, outside of CUNY, etc.) where the comparable unit may have accomplished something of interest to your unit or might be involved in a project of interest.
* Things to Consider:
  + Visiting a comparable unit outside of Hostos is a good way to learn more about how a unit with the same primary functions may execute its responsibilities in a different way; this is also a good way to build connections.
  + Visiting the actual site is a helpful way to see how the unit operates “in action”; this allows you to see how they unit may approach things similarly or differently and learn. Work with the external unit to figure out how best to accommodate this.
  + While it would be great to be able to visit the actual selected unit, the most important thing is to be able to have a discussion with director of a unit outside of Hostos that is comparable to your own; this can happen at a coffee shop, over the phone, etc.

*Inviting an external person(s) to conduct a site visit of your unit*

* Similar to above, inviting the director (and staff, if appropriate) of a comparable external unit to visit your unit can be a way to garner useful feedback by providing a peer with an opportunity to see your unit in action and share back what they observed.
* Potential Sources:
  + A different CUNY College (particularly another community college)
  + A different college in New York
  + Another college (within CUNY, outside of CUNY, etc.) where the comparable unit may have accomplished something of interest to your unit or might be involved in a project of interest.
* Things to Consider:
  + If you invite a peer to observe your unit’s operations, it might be helpful to provide them with a list of a few things that you’d like them to observe in particular; an external peer may not know how to focus their observation and comments; advance guidance will help frame the visit.

Complementary Method for Seeking External Feedback

The following method (below) could be helpful for acquiring additional information or doing a deeper dive into an aspect of your unit’s draft template. This option is not advisable as a standalone method for seeking external feedback as it doesn’t lend itself well to holistic feedback, but it can yield useful, targeted information.

*Crowd-sourcing feedback from multiple sources*

* As part of your AES Program Reflection Process your unit may have identified a particular component where you could use some additional feedback, thoughts, or ideas; for example, as part of your unit team’s discussions it may have arisen that there’s an activity that you’re unsure of, you’re wondering if it might make sense to tweak a unit goal based on your unit’s assessment, or you’d like external thoughts on a segment of your SWOT analysis. In the case where there is a specific thing you’d like feedback on, crowd-sourcing feedback may be appropriate and helpful.
* Potential Sources:
  + Survey
    - Develop a short survey to administer with clear, specific questions
    - Try to identify a diverse and appropriate group of respondents to survey
  + “Focus group”/group conversation
    - Identify a small group of people (no more than 10) with whom to have a guided conversation and seek feedback/perspectives
    - Have clear, specific questions prepared in advance.
* Things to Consider:
  + Crowd-sourcing feedback is helpful for gathering external feedback on a pointed issue, challenge, or question with which the unit is wrestling; if the unit is looking for general overall feedback, other models for soliciting feedback would be more appropriate
  + This method is best used with a small set of items for feedback; a good guideline is if you’re seeking feedback on more than 3 separate items, other methods for soliciting feedback would be advised.
  + A “Focus group”/group conversation provides the opportunity to ask real-time follow up questions. However, if scheduling might be a challenge, scheduling one-on-one conversations or collecting thoughts asynchronously via a survey might be a better option.

Process Steps

Regardless of the model you select for soliciting external feedback, the process will look the same for all units:

* Following the unit team’s discussion(s) and the completion of the first two parts of the template document, decide what it is about your unit’s operations, future plans, or self-assessment that you’d like to be the focus of an external review; which aspects would be most helpful to receive feedback. Put another way, what do you hope the external reviewer will help clarify?
* Based on the goals of your external review, determine which model for seeking feedback would be most appropriate
* Identify who you will reach out to (at Hostos, within CUNY, or beyond); decide which source(s) you’ll try to connect with for external feedback; if you need guidance/advice in this regard, connect with the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) for some ideas.
* Before meeting with the external reviewer/peer evaluator, once you’ve identified who you will seek feedback from, share the draft of the template document, questions you would like them to consider, and any potentially helpful supporting documents.
* During your meeting be sure to document the feedback, suggestions, ideas, and perspectives; they will be part of the documentation you reference during your conversation with your divisional VP.
* After the external evaluator/peer reviewer, and before you meet with your divisional VP, revisit your notes and consider how the feedback you received might have implications for how you might adjust your unit’s proposed activities.