

# The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

## Northern Michigan University

Project Details		
<b>Title</b>	Developing Feedback Mechanisms and Enhancing Campus Leadership Communication	<b>Status</b> ACTIVE
<b>Category</b>	5-Leading and Communicating	<b>Updated</b>
<b>Timeline</b>		<b>Reviewed</b>
	<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b> 09-01-2011	<b>Created</b> 08-29-2011
	<b>Target Completion</b> 12-15-2012	<b>Version</b> 1

### 1: Project Goal

**A:** This Action Project will develop processes for effective leadership-guided communication and recognized feedback mechanisms. It will review the communication role for all levels of leadership, develop clear expectations of leaders' communication, and provide for its evaluation. Current methods of disseminating information on decisions and collecting feedback will be studied in order to build effective two-way communication channels into the university infrastructure.

### 2: Reasons For Project

**A:** The Systems Appraisal identified, and campus discussions affirmed, opportunities to develop and enhance campus communication. A need exists for better dissemination of information and feedback mechanisms to address two issues: perceived lack of decision transparency and realization that feedback does not always make its way up or down the leadership chain. Expectations for communication skills for leadership positions and communication must be clarified through campus-wide processes.

### 3: Organizational Areas Affected

**A:** All employee groups in the campus community will be affected by this Action Project. The stakeholders most involved in the project are employees at the supervisory and middle management levels, executive management, Human Resources, Communications & Marketing, and collective bargaining representatives.

### 4: Key Organizational Process(es)

**A:** This Action Project potentially affects all organizational units – leadership and communication are core to most processes. The intended key areas are:

- Decision-making processes. This Action Project helps to identify employee communication needs relative to decision-making by establishing recognized feedback mechanisms that allow needs and opinions to funnel up and down to the appropriate leadership level. This will more accurately identify those needs and positively impact employee satisfaction. Effective communication between and among the levels and units within the institution will increase with the development of feedback mechanisms.
- Leader communication skills. This Action Project helps identify communication traits of successful leaders and plan for needed training and resources. Ultimately, campus-wide standards would influence future selection of leaders.
- Leader evaluation process. Clarifying leadership job descriptions and developing campus-wide standards for the evaluation of leaders will increase consistency in job performance and evaluation, permit better measures collection and analysis, and reduce confusion on the part of both leaders and subordinates regarding true job responsibilities.

### 5: Project Time Frame Rationale

**A:**

- Sep.-Nov. 2011 – Conduct a communications audit: Identify leaders' current understanding of their communications role; identify perceived current state of feedback mechanisms from all the campus community; identify actual feedback mechanisms; analyze the collected data and summarize the communications audit. An academic service learning project in an

MBA Business Communications course will complete the majority of this work under the oversight of the instructor, Action Project Task Force, and Director of Human Resources.

- Nov.-Dec. 2011 – Identify successful leader communication traits and conduct gap analysis. Established human resource tools, employee surveys from existing templates, focus groups, and a study of best practices will be employed.
- Jan.-Apr.2012 – Update job position descriptions; Develop feedback mechanisms; Plan communication skills and feedback mechanism training;
- May-Sep. 2012– Pilot train leaders in communication skills and feedback mechanisms; Develop Leadership Evaluation Plan; Pilot Leadership Evaluation Plan and revisions
- Oct.-Dec. 2012 – Assessment project's outcomes; Revise processes based upon assessment
- Dec. 2012 - Conclude project

## 6: Project Success Monitoring

**A:** Identified critical success factors are transparency for “buy-in, leader support and good information as measured by campus community participation in dialog and data collection, and leader engagement in the issues and solutions at regularly scheduled administrative meetings. At the outset, discussions with project sponsors, task force and key stakeholders on project goals will reinforce the scope. Information will run through campus media to promote awareness and understanding of the project's intent and avoid apprehension or distrust. If one method of data collection, such as surveys, lacks satisfactory response, then alternative methods will be employed.

Mid-term and final reports will be presented to the President's Council, as well as posted to the NMU AQIP website. The Action Project Review received from AQIP after submitting our Annual Report will be posted at the NMU AQIP website.

A timetable with agreed upon milestones, expected outcomes and lead person(s) will help ensure the project's tracking. The Action Project Task Force will employ an existing collaborative tool, SHARE, to manage the documentation and communication needs. SHARE has worked well for past projects. In addition to the mid-term and final reports, progress will be included in the regular AQIP status reports to the President's Council.

## 7: Project Outcome Measures

- A:**
- Development of ongoing assessment of information dissemination through recognized campus communication channels and leadership communication roles.
  - Creation of defined process for a feedback mechanism to funnel ideas and opinions up and down the leadership chain.
  - Implemented leadership communication strategies that include, but are not limited to:
    - Inventory developed of needed communication traits of successful leaders
    - Communication expectations defined for each leadership position with updated job descriptions on file
    - Revised leader evaluation form(s) and procedures as it relates to communication that are pilot tested
    - Leadership communication skills training plan built and resources identified based upon a needs analysis
  - Creation of a plan for Action Project assessment as a long-term measure of effectiveness that can be incorporated into the Systems Portfolio. For example as a post-test, the initial procedure used to identify leaders' current understanding of their communications role and perceived current state of feedback mechanisms could be replicated, comparing the results to the pre-project data.
  - Possible ancillary benefits are increased employee trust and morale, time-savings due to increasingly efficient communications, and enhancement of the selection of future leaders.

*Note: This project declaration was reviewed by Danielle J. Moffett, AQIP Coordinator at Western New Mexico University.*