HOW TO GET BUY-IN for FACULTY ACTIVITY REPORTING SOFTWARE
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INTRODUCTION

Universities ask their faculty for information about their teaching, research and service activities between eight and twelve times per year. These requests help administrators complete essential tasks such as annual faculty activity reports; updates to faculty web profiles; and reports for accreditors, presidents' offices, boards of trustees/regents and more.

Unfortunately, this type of reporting is often perceived as a time-consuming, menial task that takes faculty away from their primary duties. The core issue is this: universities don’t have a central place for documenting this type of information, and campus administrators are forced to ask faculty for it repeatedly.

Universities all over the world invest in faculty activity reporting software that streamlines the collection and reporting of faculty activity to showcase their university’s unique accomplishments. A good faculty activity reporting solution offers many benefits to a university, such as:

- Ease of collecting information so faculty aren’t overwhelmed by requests for information
- Simplified reporting processes so reports can be created in a matter of minutes
- Per-unit customization so that each academic unit can use its own unique reports
- Improved accuracy overall

The problem? It can be difficult to gain buy-in for new technology and the change that comes with it, even if that technology is meant to make things easier.

“Buy-in” is when people are committed to something, when they are convinced of its worth and are willing to support it. Gaining buy-in for a faculty activity reporting solution from university decision makers, faculty and administrators may be a challenge. Not everyone is receptive to change, especially when it requires faculty members to contribute time out of their busy schedules. The key to faculty buy-in is to communicate the benefits of the change.
When introducing any change into an organization, it’s crucial to keep in constant communication with your faculty and staff. Leaders often blindside their organization by rolling out new initiatives without communicating why they’re necessary and the plan for their implementation. This creates chaos and frustration within a university.

The simplest thing you can do to get buy-in for a new faculty activity reporting solution is to be transparent and communicate quickly and clearly.

**IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM YOU’RE SOLVING**

Start by communicating the problem so your stakeholders understand why you are implementing a new system. Present your faculty with evidence of the many faculty activity information requests that they receive each year and discuss the time-consuming process of responding to these requests. Be sure to discuss negative impacts caused by inaccurate reporting, such as accreditation issues, out-of-date faculty web profiles and delayed responses to external stakeholders—but keep focus on the problem from the faculty’s point of view (their time and effort for each information request).
Make it clear that the new faculty activity reporting solution will eliminate those one-off information requests, saving faculty time. It's important that faculty understand and believe that the new system will benefit them significantly.

TELL THEM HOW YOU’LL SOLVE IT

Walk stakeholders through the implementation process and concisely communicate your expectations. Consider and address the following questions:

- What are your faculty activity reporting goals and how is a new reporting solution going to help you achieve them?
- How will information be entered into the system? Will temporary workers or departmental assistants help enter historical information?
- How many years of information will you expect faculty to backfill?
- Which reporting needs will you fulfill using the system in one year? Three years from now?

Clearly define your expectations so everyone is held accountable for contributing to the greater good of the university. If you don't set expectations, faculty will underestimate the urgency of using a new faculty activity reporting solution.

Next, show faculty and staff that a smooth transition plan will be in place and resources will be available to them. This will give them a sense of security and insight on the scope of the project. It will also help them understand the work that needs to be done and how to do it most efficiently.

Most importantly, be available for questions. Create a communication plan including a timeline, key talking points, instructions and FAQs so faculty and staff have resources to refer to if they have questions. Buy-in cannot be achieved without open and honest two-way communication, and by communicating clearly you’re more likely to gain the support of your faculty and staff.
Of course, whenever you implement a new system throughout a university, there will be some hesitation and concerns from users. People often are resistant to significant change, either because they are too busy to learn a new system, are comfortable with the current way of life or may not like change in general.

However, part of a successful software implementation is managing change throughout the university, and there are ways to do this effectively. Follow these tips to address faculty concerns and pave the way for a smooth implementation.

**LISTEN TO THEIR CONCERNS**

The benefit of faculty resistance is the opportunity to gather real feedback. Those who are hesitant about the new system are more apt to give candid feedback on the implementation process and the solution itself. Listen to these faculty members and give them credit for helping you identify potential flaws that you may not have addressed without them.

Make sure anyone with questions or concerns feels heard, and do what you can do accommodate their needs and reassure them about the process. Better yet, incorporate the great feedback you obtain into customizing your faculty activity reporting system, so it is a solution that all your faculty will embrace.

**THE THREE MAIN FACULTY CONCERNS**

- **Who will be able to see my activity?**
- **How much time will this take?**
- **Is my information secure?**
A common concern of faculty is apprehension about how their information will be used. Typically, faculty only grant access to their personal information as needed, so implementing faculty activity reporting software is a big change. Form a governance committee to ensure faculty’s concerns are addressed and information is only used as appropriate. Forming this committee early on in the implementation is a smart strategy, to ease faculty concerns before they arise.

With any cloud-based system, there are bound to be security concerns. It’s important to have a full understanding of a system’s security and communicate with those whose information is stored within it. This helps address the concerns that faculty will have regarding the security of their information.
Once you’ve communicated the need for a new system, shared your implementation plan and addressed concerns, it’s time to get everyone excited about it.

**PILOT TEST THE SOFTWARE**

To rally faculty, start by pilot testing the new faculty activity reporting system. Pilot testing is a crucial part of gaining buy-in. Without conducting pilot testing, faculty often will not take the time to provide feedback on a new system until it’s time for them to use it to prepare their first report, such as an annual faculty activity report. Conducting proper pilot testing that obtains real faculty feedback helps address their concerns faster, ensure the system fits everyone’s needs and gets faculty excited for the benefits they will reap after implementation.

Pilot testing involves having each academic unit of your university systematically test out the new software before it is officially implemented, so that they can offer real-time feedback on the system and identify issues before launch. This not only helps ensure your faculty activity reporting system is configured to meet all your faculty’s needs, but also gets everyone engaged with the new system early on.

Pilot testing is a critical step in successfully implementing a faculty activity reporting solution. To read more about the topic, see our e-book Conducting Proper Pilot Testing.
Provide Incentive

Make the implementation process fun! Find ways to encourage faculty to participate and adopt the system early on, to secure buy-in and accelerate your success. For instance, during the onboarding process there will be multiple training sessions that will benefit from as much participation as possible. In order to persuade faculty to attend training sessions, provide lunch at the meeting and make it more of a social event. Another way to increase engagement and excitement is to create an incentive program once the system is live. Rewarding early adopters with small prizes and rewards is guaranteed to generate chatter and help gain buy-in.

Get creative! Whatever the reward or prize, the point is to spark excitement and generate buzz so that faculty members will have a positive impression of the faculty activity reporting solution.
CONCLUSION

Implementing a faculty activity reporting solution is a significant undertaking, but can be greatly eased by taking steps to gain buy-in from faculty. Since they will be the ones using the system, it is essential to get them involved from the start, excited about the new system and sharing their feedback.

To effectively gain buy-in for online faculty activity reporting, you must remember to communicate clearly, emphasize the benefits for faculty, ease potential concerns, and most importantly, rally employees.

ABOUT DIGITAL MEASURES

Digital Measures focuses exclusively on web-based data management and reporting for universities. Activity Insight™, its popular faculty activity reporting solution, is trusted by 60% of the largest 500 universities in the United States and universities in more than 15 countries. The Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based company was founded in 1999.