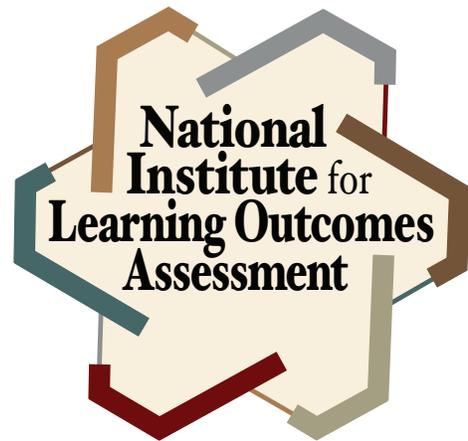


April 2020



**Planning for Effective
Communication of Assessment:
A Toolkit for Practice**

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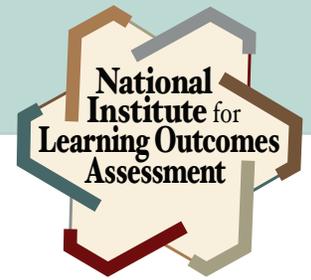
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NILOA Mission

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), established in 2008, is a research and resource-development organization dedicated to documenting, advocating, and facilitating the systematic use of learning outcomes assessment to improve student learning.



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Planning for Effective Communication of Assessment

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

This toolkit is designed to help you effectively communicate about the value and importance of assessment. Stemming from NILOA's work around transparency and the [Evidence-Based Storytelling Toolkit](#), this resource helps create a plan to disseminate assessment related information as well as evidence-based narratives. Here, we introduce guiding questions and activities to develop a communications strategy.

The toolkit includes the following elements:

Making the Case: These resources help guide you through reflective questions regarding appropriate communication channels and messaging that can help make the case for assessment and the evidence-based story you are trying to tell. Questions in this section encourage you to reflect on the communication strategies that are most effective for your context, as well as the language that can best resonate with your audience regarding the value of assessment.

Communicating Value: Once you reflect on the best approach to make the case for the value of assessment and effective communication methods, this selection of the toolkit walks you through the important elements needed to communicate to your audience. Elements such as clearly identifying the problem and how assessment helps resolve it are addressed here.

Sample Templates: Finally, the toolkit provides sample templates to create your own communications plan and subsequent outreach plan. These templates aim to help you document concrete steps to take toward implementing a communications strategy for assessment.

Communication Guiding Questions

The following questions are designed to help you explore different elements for developing a communication plan to support a shared understanding of assessment – whether within a department or unit, across a college, or throughout an institution. They focus on the areas of communication channels, messaging, planning, and timeliness.

Communication Channels

- What methods will be used to communicate on a regular basis, and with whom? What channels are most effective: informal or formal? For which audience(s)? How do you know?
- What type(s) of information should be prioritized for each audience or will it be unilateral?
- What assumptions are there about effective communication processes and practices? Are they accurate for your organization?

Messaging

- What is the purpose of the message or communication?
- What types of information will be shared? What information needs to be communicated and to whom?
- From whom should the communications originate? Do different audiences need different messaging, tone, messengers, and frequency of information?
- What is the central message you are trying to communicate?

Communication Planning

- How will general information about assessment processes, practices, and results be communicated to the wider institutional community, including students? How often?
- How will the main message be reinforced? How will you ensure audiences understand the message?
- Is the length of the message appropriate for the audience and purpose of the message?

Timeliness

- How will the institution ensure that information shared is consistent and up to date whether online, in print, or in person?
- Does timing of sharing certain information need to be part of communication planning (such as when to share the results from a survey to students or when faculty receive feedback on assessment forms/reports)?

Making the Case for Assessment

The Communication Guiding Questions on page 4 will help determine the approach to communication to undertake, but they do not help determine the messaging around the value of assessment to different audiences. This set of questions is designed to help you become clearer on the value of assessment by developing clear “value propositions” as to why an institution/program/unit would engage in assessment in the first place.

Making the Case for Assessment Work

- What value does assessment offer to the student? Faculty? Program? Institution? (Stakeholder?)
- What problem(s) or questions is assessment helping/trying to solve or address?
- What methods will be used to address this problem?
- How does assessment, undertaken in this way, strengthen our institutional or academic brand?

Making the Case for the Value of Assessment

- What are our assumptions about what makes for a good assessment program? In other words, what does good assessment look like for us?
- How has assessment been used to successfully in the past?
- How does the mission of your institution support assessment and how might assessment support the mission of your institution?
- What is the philosophy at your institution regarding assessment (see [philosophy activity](#))?
- Other issues or contextual considerations for value proposition development (state-related, institutionally specific, initiative-related, historical considerations, etc.).

Making the Case Long-Term

- How does assessment help support new initiatives? How can assessment be integrated into new strategic efforts? How is assessment relevant to current and forthcoming efforts?
- With what other ongoing work is assessment aligned or could be aligned?

Communicating the Value of Assessment

There will inevitably be confusion from faculty, staff, and students within the institution as well as among external stakeholders about the value and purpose of assessment. As such, anyone talking about or leading assessment efforts should be ready with a brief explanation of the value of assessment to the institution/program/unit. This activity is designed to develop clear, short arguments about the value of assessment modeled after the development of “Elevator Pitches”.

Elements to Consider	
Provide Some Context: What Is It?	Explain the background of assessment efforts and the relationship to the institution – where did this work come from and what it is for? Be prepared to answer the “What is assessment?” question.
Problem Identification: What Problem Does this Address?	What challenges, problems, or issues does assessment address for the institution/program/stakeholder? Be prepared to clearly state why this work is important. Be prepared to answer the “So what?” question.
How Assessment Helps: How Does it Help?	What value does it add, or in what ways does assessment help solve the identified problem(s)? Be prepared to address how assessment efforts can help.
Address Misconceptions and Concerns	What concerns or areas of confusion will you need to address that are specific to the stakeholder with whom you are speaking? What misconceptions need to be cleared up? This may entail talking about how this is different from things that were done before.
The Individual: Why Does This Matter to Me?	Be prepared to address the inevitable question of “what do I have to do differently” or “How does this impact me?” Be prepared to answer, “Why does this matter to me?” questions.

Complete Your Own

Elements to Consider

**Provide Some Context:
What Is It?**

**Problem Identification:
What Problem Does this
Address?**

**How Assessment Helps:
How Does it Help?**

**Address Misconceptions
and Concerns**

**The Individual: Why
Does This Matter to Me?**

Sample Communication Plan Template

This template can serve as a starting point for determining the different stakeholders involved, their roles and responsibilities, their interests in assessment, best means of communication, and how often they will be informed. Use the responses from the questions explored earlier in the toolkit to help you complete the template. In essence, use this form to develop the outlines of a communication plan for assessment of student learning at your institution or within your program/unit.

Stakeholder	Role and Responsibility	Key Interests and Issues	Mode and Means of Communication	Frequency of Communications
List Stakeholder here	Insert role description here	Areas of interest for involvement in assessment	Best means of communication (e.g. electronic) as well as mode (e.g. email)	How often will the stakeholder receive communications? By whom? To be informed or involved?

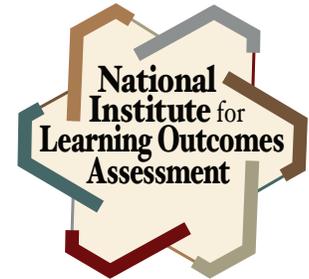
Sample Outreach Plan

An essential part of effective communication is determining a plan of outreach to the different audiences targeted in communication approaches. Based on the communication plan on the page prior, use the sample outreach plan to help develop more detailed and targeted approaches for specific audience groups.

Audience(s)	Key Message	Objectives (Actions Desired)	Media Format	By When (Frequency)	Responsible	Notes
Faculty						
Administration						
Students						
Others?						

About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org>.
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.
- NILOA's Founding Director, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001.



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