# Benchmarking in 13 Steps

This document gives you a high-level, step-by-step guide to developing your own benchmarking process. We've written this as a guide for the Project Leader and Project Manager. These steps are not written in stone. This process needs to work for you and your institution, the time and energy you have and the culture of your campus. So adapt these steps to work for you.

First Stage: Organizing the Project

1. **Be clear about your goals**. Define what you want to accomplish with the benchmarking process. *Hint*: Don't forget the professional development and team building opportunities here.

2. **Find your partners and line up your sponsors**. Determine who on your campus you want to work with to do the benchmarking - your partners, e.g., IT, Library, Center for Teaching and Learning, Research Units, etc.. Then determine who on campus "cares" about the work - your sponsors, e.g., Provost, VP of Research, Dean of Libraries, CIO, etc. *Hint*: Use this as an opportunity to build institutional support and community. Some sponsors may emerge later as you develop the benchmarking framework and gather information of interest and value to their domain.

3. **Build your project team**. Identify the staff members from your and your partners' units who will do the bulk of the work. Some staff may work on multiple service areas for a substantial amount of time; other staff may be brought in as focused consultants on only one service for a limited amount of time. *Hint:* Benchmarking is a great opportunity to build cross-organizational teams. A good team will make a tremendous difference. Finally, a good Project Manager will change your life.

4. **Identify and define services**. Identify and define the initial set of services that you want to benchmark and the boundaries and classes of these services (by "classes of services" we mean the larger categories, e.g., "Teaching," that several services roll up into). You can borrow service definitions that have been developed by other campuses and/or such organizations as ECAR. Do what works for your campus / organization and what you can explain to others. *Hint*: Berkeley found it very valuable to look more comprehensively at a broad swath of teaching, learning, research, and enabling services, but this took extra time. Also, as the process unfolds and you refine the definition of a service, you will likely find yourself combining and breaking apart ("slicing and dicing") certain services --- that is, saying that this service includes this but not that.

5. **Identify peers.** Who are you comparing yourself to and why? Comparative peers, i.e., institutions you consider at roughly the same level as your institution? Aspirational peers, i.e., institutions who you want to be like? How many peers?   More peers means more work for your teams, but the more data you gather. *Hint*: You will probably need at LEAST 7 peers to make this meaningful. You also might want to add additional peers to
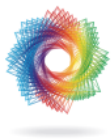
some of the services to include exemplars in an area. Make sure that you get input and final approval on these peers from your sponsors.

6. **Help your team with criteria, with ranking, and with strategies for improvement**. Bring your team together before they begin their analyses (step 7) to help them understand about how to think about service criteria, tiers, and strategies for improvement. This is where you will have some challenges. Brainstorm with the team about how to define common criteria to look at for each service area based on your institutional priorities. For example, is it more important to have "common good" services (services available to everyone on campus)? Or what if an institution has a number of local service delivery groups but no coordinated effort? Talk about whether you will grade (tier) institutions on a curve or not --- that is, is it ok if for some services every institutions has the same ranking? Finally, regarding strategies for improvement, some staff may have little experience thinking about budgets and staffing. Tell them there will be help down the road on this, from other team members, etc. *Hint:* You will come back to a number of these questions later on in steps 9 and 12 below. You don't have to figure out everything now but rather give the team an early preview of what some of the challenges will be and how to handle them.

Second Stage: Now the Fun Begins and The Project Teams Do Their Work

7. **The Deep Dive**. Have your teams gather data about what your peer institutions provide for a particular service area. This dive is primarily based on gathering info from the web. The team will be working to do several things at once in this phase: define the service; define and refine the criteria; and define and refine the tiers (i.e., that is, what makes a great, good, so-so, embarrassing service). The team will use the Interim Report format to gather information (see next step). *Hint:* Some staff members will be tempted to do very extensive information gathering and data analysis. This is not bad, but this will be a good time for teams to think carefully about how much time to spend and how much detail is really needed at this point.

8. **Develop Interim Reports.** Have your teams (or individual analysts) create interim written reports to present the information they've gathered about their service areas. This interim report should include the Service Definition; Criteria; Tiers; and any explanation the team believes is necessary to understand their methods.

9. **Review and Discuss, and then Discuss Some More**. Have the team present their work in progress to the larger team of analysts. Get feedback on all areas, especially about the service definition and what makes a good service. Do this in a seminar format where the teams of analysts are sharing, supporting, and learning from each other. Encourage the teams to present what they have and not worry about it being perfect. The goal here is see where folks are, help them if they are stuck, and coordinate across service areas. *Hint:* From the group conversation and from your review as project
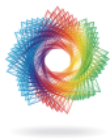
leader, give each team clear and concise directions on the issues / refinements you want a particular team to address in the next stage.

10. **Deeper Dive + Phone Interviews**. Based on feedback step 9 above, the team goes out and does more work to finish the Interim Report. The team may also do phone interviews with representatives from your peer institutions. We HIGHLY recommend having team members do at least a few phone interviews. These are highly beneficial on multiple fronts, especially in gathering information related to "strategies for improvement."

11. **The One-Pager and Building "Strategies for Improvement."** Have your teams (or individual analysts) take all of their information for a given service and condense it down to one page! The one-pager includes: Service Definition; Criteria; Tiers; and Strategies for Improvement. To define "strategies for improvement" you need to ask your team to answer the question: what would it take to move our institution up from Tier X to Tier Y. What will it take in terms of one-time and on-going staff, campus coordination, etc. Phone interviews with other campuses can often shed light on this. *Hint*: Coming up with "strategies for improvement" may be tough for some of your staff, but encourage them to stretch themselves and think about what should be done and what it will take to do it. Note, you (the Project Leader) will refine this information later.

12. **Review and Discuss, and then Discuss Some More**: Have teams present again to the whole group of analysts, especially related to tiers and strategies for improvement. Based on this feedback the team/analyst then does final edits to the one pager.

13. **Normalize, Package, Present:** The project leaders will need to spend time to carefully review and edit all of the one-pagers to make sure that there is consistency in everything from grammar and layout to rankings and recommendations. *Hint*: The final one-pagers are likely to be given as a package and/or as separate analyses to campus leaders and budgetary decision makers. So make sure that you, as project leader, believe in the quality of analysis and presentation.

Going Further: Turning from Benchmarking to Strategy….