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INSIDE:

Monitoring the Effectiveness of Youth Protection Efforts

By Omar Andujar, MBA

> While the implementation of campus wide youth protection efforts is undeniably a step in the right direction, to be effective, monitoring and evaluation must be positioned at the heart of such efforts.

In recent years, colleges and universities across the country have sought ways to implement or strengthen measures aimed at protecting minors on campus and limiting associated risks. In the aftermath of serious cases of child abuse in higher education institutions, the emphasis of such measures have primarily focused on awareness and prevention of child abuse. These efforts have included the introduction of new training requirements, more frequent screening of those working with minors, central tracking systems, and the establishment of campus wide standards for youth activities.[1] However, what happens after the implementation of these types of efforts? How do you ensure widespread adoption of your *minors on campus* policies, and what systems are in place to measure program effectiveness and ensure compliance?

While the implementation of campus wide youth protection efforts is undeniably a step in the right direction, to be effective, monitoring and evaluation must be positioned at the heart of such efforts. Without a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating institutions' youth protection efforts, they will find themselves stumbling in the dark as they attempt to measure whether the established objectives are being met. This article will provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating controls to protect minors on campus and will share insights on how the University of Florida (UF) implemented this type of initiative.

FIRST THINGS FIRST: INSTITUTING YOUTH PROTECTION EFFORTS

The creation of dedicated offices, positions, or cross-functional committees responsible for youth protection is becoming increasingly common among colleges and universities. In 2012, UF took on this approach and was among one of the first institutions to create an office (the Office of Youth Conference Services) that would act as a clearinghouse for university-affiliated youth activities. One of the most instrumental primary steps UF took when developing this type of office was to assess its current conditions and youth protection practices. This involved scouring several internal and external environments on a number of fronts. In addition to taking inventory of its youth activities, UF focused on reviewing six key areas: existing policies, child protection laws, compliance controls, key partnerships, potential risks, and industry leading practices.

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The information collected throughout this type of assessment can be particularly useful when shaping the direction of the initiative. For instance, results from an assessment may reveal that the number of campus youth activities is far greater and more diverse than previously reported. To strengthen an institution's ability to maintain an up-to-date inventory of campus youth activities and related risk exposures, they may elect to establish a central tracking mechanism and require that activities register in advance of program operations. Identifying and prioritizing how to address potential risk exposures is essential. A preliminary assessment will help detect an institutions exclusive needs and will provide a clear framework for developing measures for protecting minors and limiting institutional liability.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NEXT: PLAN TO MONITOR

Much like the need for a well thought out assessment is irrefutable during the design phase, a sound monitoring and evaluation plan is imperative during the implementation and post implementation phase. That being said, what does a plan for monitoring and evaluating campus youth protection efforts look like? What are the core-monitoring areas? What resources are required? What type of tools can be used to monitor? How often do oversight activities take place? How is the collected information used, and who are monitoring results shared with? These were among the many questions that arose when UF began to develop its monitoring plan. As institutions seek to define and understand the specifics of their monitoring and evaluation efforts, it is important that the impetus and unique objectives of such efforts remain a focus.

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One of the most common purposes for monitoring is to measure compliance with formal requirements. However, monitoring can serve a number of purposes. For instance, institutions can also direct their monitoring activities towards examining the effectiveness of existing policies and procedures. These activities will help uncover any gaps and determine whether policies have been consistently adopted throughout the institution. Monitoring can also help identify trending or emerging areas of concern, as well as best practices used by programs. For example, through its monitoring activities, an institution may find that its athletic camps have adopted exceptional drop-off and pick-up procedures and may recommend them as a model for other youth-serving programs. Another advantage of ongoing monitoring and evaluation is that it contributes to keeping the initiative a focus. It's not uncommon to see a high level of interest immediately after new institutional policies are announced and implemented; however, as time passes some may lose sight of the initiative. Regular oversight will help maintain awareness, promote accountability and keep relevant stakeholders engaged.

CORE AREAS AND MONITORING STRATEGIES

Once the monitoring objectives are clearly defined, the next step is to decide what core areas will be included in the scope of monitoring activities. Because the number of risks identified during the assessment phase can be vast, attempting to simultaneously address them all may create challenges. A good place to begin, is to prioritize risk exposures by their level of impact. Common areas of potential vulnerability to minors on campus may include: inadequate supervision of minors, negligent hiring, lack of training, regulatory risks, mandatory reporting requirements, transportation risks, absence of waivers or releases, and privacy risks.[2]

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With monitoring activities in place, institutions will need to determine how such efforts will be orchestrated. When instituting its monitoring functions, UF decided to use a series of strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of its youth protection efforts and verify compliance with relevant standards. Most notably, UF achieved this by using the following tools: program scorecards, onsite monitoring visits, and regular feedback gathering activities. These tools played a strategic role in UF's efforts to effectively monitor its *minors on campus* efforts.

1. Setting a Baseline

In an effort to systematically collect data that would help measure how university youth activities performed against established compliance metrics, UF developed and implemented a program scorecard process. The scorecards provided programs with initial feedback related to four key areas: adequate staff-to-participant ratios, adherence to training requirements, compliance with background screening policies and central registration of youth activities. Program sponsoring units and key stakeholders were informed of scorecard results and recommended next steps. The proactive intent of this process was to set a baseline that would contribute to the further enhancement of youth protection efforts and help strengthen overall program performance.

2. Establish a Visible Presence

While scorecards provide a consistent method for measuring progress related to specific indicators, there may be occasions where more in-depth reviews are needed. In an effort to continue to validate compliance with formal requirements and to provide targeted technical assistance, UF incorporated site visits to its monitoring and evaluation efforts. These type of visits are comprised of the following monitoring

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activities: interviews with key program personnel, program document reviews, observation of program activities and verification of staff requirements. The following table outlines suggestions that may provide a basis for developing an onsite monitoring process.

Monitoring Activities	Suggestion
Staff Interviews	The interview process provides a mechanism to engage appropriate parties and become further acquainted with programs. Additionally, this process creates a platform for two-way dialogue regarding established youth protection efforts. Consider developing interview questions that will help you identify risks to minors and assess whether programs have adequate systems to mitigate them.
Document Reviews	Institutions may want to examine the following documents during this phase: • Participant Rosters • Staff Rosters/Schedule/Duties • Check-in/Check-out Procedures • Program Rules/Behavioral Expectations • Description of Staff Training Requirements • Description of Monitoring Activities • Consents and Releases • Proof of Insurance
Program Observations	Another good practice institutions should consider is the observation of program activities. During program observations, determine whether required staff-to-participant ratios were met. Were activities coordinated in a way that prevented one-on-one interactions? Were minors properly accounted for? Were restroom protocols adhered to? These type of questions will help you determine whether established standards are being adopted.
Validation of Staff Requirements	Review personnel records to determine whether staff have suitable qualifications. Determine if staff have successfully completed required trainings. Ask whether all staff were properly screened. Was verification of background checks on file? Determine how program policies were shared with program staff. Were signed staff acknowledgements in place?

Because of the various elements involved in this type of in-depth review, it may be impossible to visit all university youth activities. A more practical approach is to visit a percentage of identified youth programs. Monitoring visits can be initiated through a simple random selection process or institutions can divide programs into categories (i.e., by age range, type of activity, level of risks, etc.) and use a stratified sampling method. Institutions can also establish a self-monitoring process and require program supervisors to use agreed upon tools to monitor for compliance. Though this is currently not common a practice, it may prove to be a reasonable approach and help promote greater accountability among the responsible parties. Site visits can then be used as a way to confirm that the self-monitoring actions are taking place as expected and more in-depth reviews can be geared towards programs in need of additional support.

3. Check-in with Key Stakeholders

In addition to the use of scorecards and site visits, UF regularly gathers feedback from key stakeholders. A good feedback system is essential to the success of campus youth protection efforts. These structured opportunities for reflection allow institutions to routinely evaluate whether their youth protection efforts are achieving the desired results, and if any future adjustments are necessary.

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GETTING STARTED

Navigating through the implementation process can be challenging without a strategy. Upon deciding to establish a system to monitor and evaluate youth protection controls, institutions must determine the steps it will take to successfully introduce such efforts. While there is no "one size fits all" approach the following steps can be taken to help get the implementation process started.

1. Set the "Tone from the Top" – It's important that leadership share their support for the initiative at the onset of the implementation process. Leaders can stress the importance of such efforts and clearly set forth expectations to ensure effective implementation. This will help further emphasize the institutions commitment to providing a secure environment for minors on campus and to foster a culture that promotes compliance with applicable child protection laws and policies.

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2. **Define Roles** – Start by identifying which parties will be involved in the monitoring and evaluation process and to what extent. Designate who will be responsible for carrying out day-to-day monitoring activities (e.g., youth protection office, compliance, risk management, cross-functional committees, etc.). Who should be included in program interviews? Who should be notified of monitoring results? Who is responsible for follow-up? And, who has the authority to enforce compliance? Clear lines of responsibility will help ensure as seamless an implementation as possible.

3. **Involve Stakeholders** – One of the first steps UF took when instituting its monitoring functions, was to elicit feedback from key stakeholders. This helped further refine proposed monitoring objectives and strategies, and achieve greater buy-in. Because implementing this type of initiative is a campus wide effort, institutions should identify potential partners and look for ways to leverage existing resources. Potential partners include: legal counsel, risk management, internal audit, human resources, and program sponsoring units.

4. **Formally Announce** – Be intentional about announcing the initiative to the appropriate parties. Clearly communicate the impetus, implementation timelines, specific processes, concrete next steps, available resources and any additional information regarding the initiative. Develop quick reference guides in anticipation of the type of questions that may arise.

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5. Evaluate the Plan – During implementation it is important to continually evaluate the process. Assess whether any changes are needed. Determine if existing resources are suitable. Reflect on the steps that have been taken and review the efficiency and effectiveness of practices and procedures.

CONCLUSION

An increasing number of institutions have implemented positive measures to improve the campus climate for children and youth. One of the more tangible steps institutions have taken to achieve this is the creation or enhancement of *minors on campus* policies. However, without regular oversight it may be difficult to determine the effectiveness of such efforts. Monitoring and evaluation will help institutions measure the impact of their youth protection programs, promote accountability and transparency, engage stakeholders, and create opportunities to plan for future enhancements. Given the many benefits of monitoring and evaluation, it's hard to ignore the reasons why such efforts are becoming an essential piece of campus youth protection measures. The strategies presented in this article can be used to formulate and implement a system that would enable colleges and universities to strengthen their *minors on campus* protocols. ∎

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ENDNOTES

[1]Andujar, Omar. "The Essentials: Core Strategies for Protecting Minors on Campus," University Risk Management and Insurance Association (URMIA) Insights, June 2014, http://my.urmia.org/enews/2014/june

[2]"Managing the Risk of Minors on Campus," Arthur J. Gallagher & Co., 2012, www.ajgrms.com/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_28406_581934_0_0_18/ManagingRiskMinorsPaper_6-14-12_final.pdf