

Southern Association of College and University Business Officers  
“BEST PRACTICES”  
Submission

**Integrated On-Line Planning and Budget Development System**

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*Abstract:*

*The planning phase of this project began in Fall 2002 with the development of 10-5 year strategic priorities for the College. Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC) formed a cross-functional committee to review its' current practices and develop strategies for improvement. Both strategic priorities and unit plans were crafted through an inclusive process involving faculty and staff from all Departments. The cornerstone of this process was the in-house development of an on-line system that clearly linked College strategic priorities and unit plan goals and objectives with financial resources. The system was designed to summarize all of the budget requests and modifications at the institutional, cost center, expenditure classification and detail object levels. There were many advantages realized through implementation of the on-line planning and budget development system:*

- facilitated a process that kept the College's focus on institutional strategic initiatives and unit goals and objectives during the budget development process*
- provided a mechanism for end users to directly link planning objectives with budget allocations*
- provided the Executive Cabinet with "real time access" to detail and summary data as budget decisions and allocations were developed and modified*
- facilitated an inclusive process that involved input from all departments*
- promoted thoughtful, informative, and productive discussion during budget hearings that resulted in cost savings and effective realignment of fiscal, physical, and human resources*
- simplified and expedited development of the FY04 Operating Budget document due to the Community College System Board and Board of Regents in August 04*

Introduction of the Organization:

Baton Rouge Community College opened its doors on August 20, 1998. Starting out with 1,866 students, BRCC has grown to over 5,700 students. The college has received SACS candidacy status, and is approved to offer Pell Grants to students needing financial aid. Approved to build a \$65 million campus, BRCC is expanding and presently has five buildings, with two others under construction scheduled to open in 2005.

BRCC offers 5 Associate Degrees and 1 certificate degree. Our Workforce, Corporate and Continuing Education Division offer short-term courses for business and industry or for self-fulfillment. A brand new baseball team, the BRCC Bears, will kick-off Spring 2005. Final plans for the college will realize a 20-acre campus, accommodating up to 14,000 students.

Statement (restatement) of the Problem/Initiative:

How often have we heard the well-worn phrase, “Planning must drive the budget!” In reality, many of us may feel that planning is simply an organized process of wishful thinking and that budget limitations control our organization’s ultimate destiny. Too often, this is typically what happens when planning and budget processes are developed in isolation or out of sync. In an effort to ensure integration of these critical institutional functions and to facilitate informed decision-making, BRCC formed a cross-functional committee to review its’ current practices and develop strategies for improvement.

Design:

The planning phase of this project began in Fall 02 with the development of 10-5 year strategic priorities for the College. In early Spring 03, unit plans with associated goals/objectives were then developed for each Department. These plans were directly linked to one or more of the strategic priorities established for the College. Once unit plans were reviewed, discussed, and approved at all levels, the cost center managers for each Department were charged with submitting budget requests on-line that facilitated successful implementation of their respective plans. Formal budget hearings were then conducted by the Executive Cabinet (Chancellor, Vice-Chancellors of Academic Affairs, Administration and Finance, and Workforce, Community and Continuing Education). Program priorities and tentative unit budget allocations (based upon the Governor's FY04 Executive Budget recommendations) were then established by the Chancellor and the Executive Cabinet for the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

#### Implementation:

The cornerstone of this process was the in-house development of an on-line system that clearly linked College strategic priorities and unit plan goals and objectives with financial

resources. A user-friendly “point and click” ACCESS program was developed that enabled staff to create, edit, and print unit plans as well as the associated budget request for each. Line item budget detail requests were input into the system along with specific justification for each cost center. To assist the cost center managers in developing their unit plan requests, links to a number of reference documents were added to the program, including the institution’s strategic priorities, historical financial data, current year budget/expenditure data, salary and related benefit tables, and the College’s planning calendar. The budget/expenditure data was accessed through an interface with the College’s financial accounting system (BANNER). Finally, comments/suggestions and comment response buttons were added to solicit feedback from the end users that would promote further refinements/improvement of the system. Security controls were placed on the system by the assignment of user ids and passwords to cost center managers. Upon receiving notice of the College’s FY 04 appropriation by the Governor in June 03, final budget adjustments were made in the system for each cost center. Unit plans were then modified by each Department to align goals and objectives with final budget allocations.

Benefits:

Advantages realized through implementation of the on-line planning and budget development system:

- facilitated a process that kept the College’s focus on institutional strategic initiatives and unit goals and objectives during the budget development process

- provided a mechanism for end users to directly link planning objectives with budget allocations
- provided the Executive Cabinet with “real time access” to detail and summary data as budget decisions and allocations were developed and modified
- facilitated an inclusive process that involved input from all departments
- promoted thoughtful, informative, and productive discussion during budget hearings that resulted in cost savings and effective realignment of fiscal, physical, and human resources
- simplified and expedited development of the FY04 Operating Budget document due to the Community College System Board and Board of Regents in August 04

This approach has enabled BRCC to effectively align limited financial resources with its’ strategic priorities and objectives. It has received tremendous support and “buy-in” from faculty and staff, who feel that they have played an integral role in this process and their concerns and challenges have been well communicated and received by the Executive Cabinet. Also, this system is easily transferable to other institutions as it structured through an interface of two industry-standard programs, ACCESS and SCT/BANNER.