STARTING AN INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH FUNCTION AT YOUR SCHOOL

What an Independent School Needs to Know

EXPLO ELEVATE
INNOVATIVE SCHOOLS COOPERATIVE

1 What value does the IR role and/or function provide to independent schools?

2 In what ways have different independent schools organized the role and for what reasons?

3 How can schools ready themselves to ensure the IR function is highly effective?

4 What are examples of projects that independent schools have taken on under the guidance of their IR Director?

The IR department at most colleges and universities "embraces data collection and analytical strategies in support of decision making at the institution".

OPERATIONAL + STRATEGIC

Data collection and analysis can only be purposeful when done in the larger context of supporting a school's overall vision and mission.

WHY AN IR?

1. Provides an opportunity to share evidence of success.
2. Supports the school in driving institutional improvement.
3. Allows for more specific initiatives that are data-based.
4. Showcases the school's priorities and values.

Full-time IR

Consider school "readiness"

Consider a committee that can support the work of the IR function

Part-time IR

A person with the skill set and interest, already at the school

Consider ability to communicate directly with leadership

Ad Hoc Committee

Opportunity to join and disband as needed

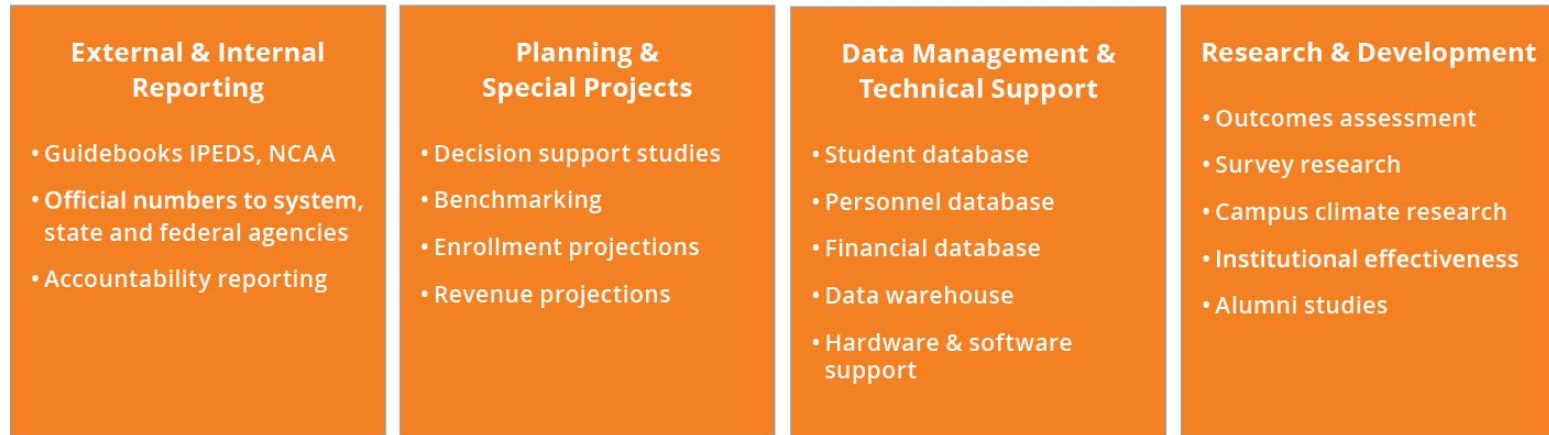Consider strategic "chairs" who can support the work and maintain continuity
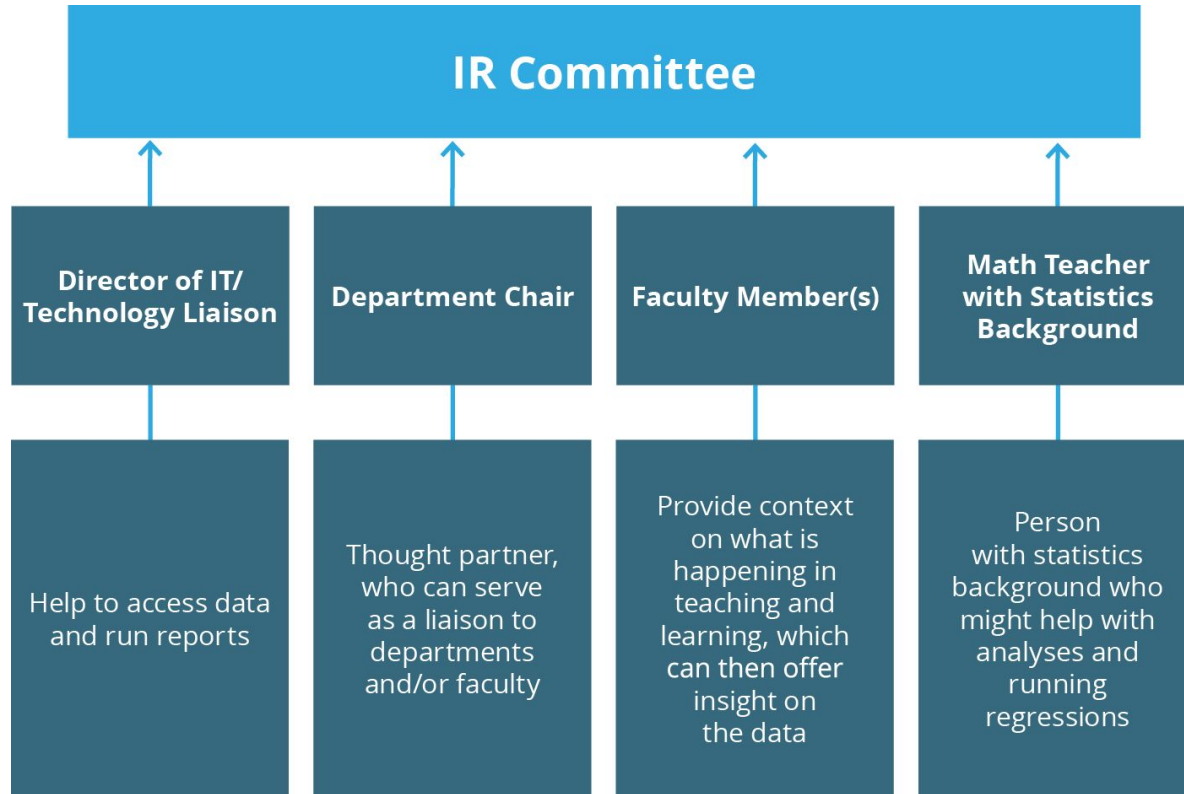
Outsourced IR Function

External organization that supports the work of the school

Consider ways to ensure the work permeates across the school and doesn't become siloed
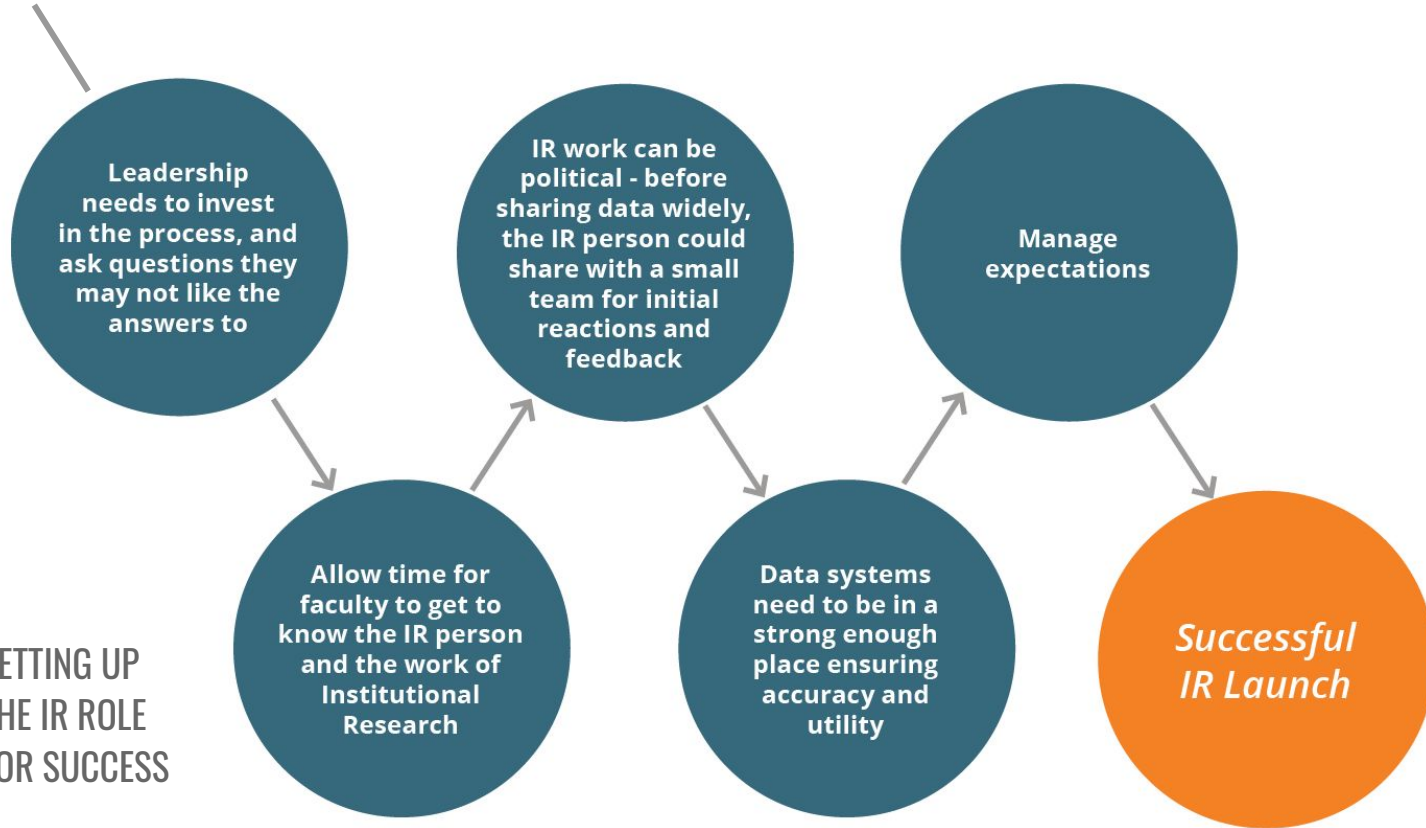
Key Skills of the IR

- Ability to understand and synthesize data
- Fluency in translating data to layperson terms
- High EQ - the ability to build rapport with faculty
- Sees the big picture/able to think about key questions
- Has an understanding of K-12 education

SETTING UP THE IR ROLE FOR SUCCESS

Leadership needs to invest in the process, and ask questions they may not like the answers to

Allow time for faculty to get to know the IR person and the work of Institutional Research

IR work can be political - before sharing data widely, the IR person could share with a small team for initial reactions and feedback

Data systems need to be in a strong enough place ensuring accuracy and utility

Manage expectations

Successful IR Launch

Readiness Assessment

CATEGORY	READINESS LEVEL 1 ⟶ 3 ⟶ 5		
Alignment between Board and School Leadership	Data-based decision making is pushed by the Board but is not a shared belief within school leadership (Head, Assistant Head), and thus there is some active or subtle resistance.	While school leaders may not be fully bought in to data-based decision making (in contrast to the Board), there is a "sponsor" (e.g. the person who manages an IR function) who has institutional capital and cares deeply about this line of work.	Leadership and the Board are in alignment to the importance of data and generate, or are open to, thoughtful research questions that promote school-wide improvement and interrogating the status quo.
Leadership Support of a Data Culture	Leadership (Head, Assistant Head) has some sense that data can inform school-wide improvement, but does not promote a culture of data across the school.	Leadership has considered some research questions related to basic data-based questions around enrollment and attrition, but has not considered more complex research questions.	Leadership recognizes the importance of data-informed decision-making and promotes a data-based culture across the school.
Data Systems + Infrastructure	Some data exists, but it is disorganized and disjointed. Systems do not speak to one another and data collection is messy - data integrity principles are not followed to ensure data is valid and able to use.	Data is usable, but only for basic research questions that ask "how much, how many, etc." Questions that are more thoughtful and require an in-depth data analysis using multiple data sources cannot be answered due to the current state of the systems themselves.	Data collection systems are in place - e.g. data is housed in databases, collected systematically, and there is a point person managing the data systems across the school. Different types of databases are able to speak to one another to

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