I. Ends Monitoring Report

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I certify that the information contained in this report is true.

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Submitted (date)

Context & Definitions

The term “institutional research” has been redefined and reimagined throughout the history of the field. As one researcher wrote, “despite the maturation of the profession, the question – What is IR? – seems to be perpetual” (Bill Knight, IR Primer, 2003). One explanation is that IR continues to evolve in response to the changing higher education environment in which it operates (Bill Lasher in Rice, Coughlin & Howard (Eds.), AIR: The First 50 Years, 2011). An added complication within the current context is that higher education itself is at an inflection point. Acknowledging the evolving status of IR and the environment, the Executive Offices chooses to define “institutional research” broadly to include the “data, analysis, and decision support function” at a college or university. The function may have different names at different institutions, such as institutional research and planning, institutional effectiveness, business intelligence, decision support, or strategic analytics, and encompass one or multiple offices or units. Further, the terms “IR professional” and “institutional researcher” are understood to include the professionals who contribute to this broad function, regardless of title, and operate within the variously named offices.

The reporting period covered is July 2018 to June 2019. The current Ends policies were adopted by the Board of Directors on August 15, 2018. Consequently, interpretations will continue to be refined and tightened with the selection of more specific priorities and the development of action plans and timelines.
Global Policy Language

AIR is a global association of higher education professionals. AIR exists to empower those individuals at all levels to utilize data, analytics, information, and evidence to make decisions and take actions that benefit students and institutions and improve higher education. This must be done within AIR’s available resources and in such a manner that the value to higher education is worth the investment of those resources.

Interpretation 1
To accomplish AIR’s mission to empower higher education professionals to use data, analytics, and information to make decisions and take actions that benefit students and institutions, the Executive Office focuses our efforts in four operational focus areas: 1) education and training, 2) knowledge center, 3) communities and networks, and 4) advocacy and policy.

Rationale 1
The four focus areas cut across AIR’s operations and activities. They serve as a framework for understanding the contributions of current work and new initiatives for the accomplishment of the Ends so that priorities can be selected and resources can be allocated.

Evidence 1-A
The four operational focus areas are described below.

- **Education & Training.** AIR develops and delivers an array of education and professional development opportunities for higher education professionals with a goal of improving institutional decision making through the effective and ethical use of data.
- **Knowledge Center.** AIR contributes to the production, collection, and dissemination of innovative research, practices, and tools to support and expand data use and data literacy.
- **Communities & Networks.** AIR partners with other organizations to advance data-informed decision making and facilitate cooperation among higher education professionals.
- **Advocacy & Policy.** AIR advocates for policies, regulations, and legislation to support data availability, infrastructure, transparency, and accountability. AIR also provides the perspective of data professionals in policy discussions.

Evidence 1-B
Key accomplishments within the four operational focus areas are highlighted below. While not encompassing all AIR’s operations or activities—many of which are foundational and important—these 2018-19 accomplishments showcase initiatives and actions that position AIR for future success, while continuing to provide immediate value to members and the broader higher education community.

- **Education & Training.** Highlights from 2018-19 include the development of a suite of webinars that provide training on specific how-to topics, present initiatives and projects that expand the field, and serve career development at both personal and office levels. AIR also launched the redesigned National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Data Institute: Using Federal Datasets
to Support Research on Postsecondary Education (NCES Data Institute) and introduced The Art and Science of Data Visualization: A Data Bootcamp (Data Visualization Bootcamp) at the 2019 Forum.

- **Knowledge Center.** Highlights from 2018-19 include the launch of the second edition of the National Survey of IR Offices. It expands on the original baseline survey from 2015-16 and includes access to a benchmarking tool with the option to purchase premium benchmarking. Also, AIR developed a new rubric to guide institution-level assessment of the data function as part of AIR’s long-standing partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Institutional Transformation Assessment project. The content will be used as the foundation for expanded work in this arena.

- **Communities & Networks.** Highlights from 2018-19 include the second annual Enterprise Summit: Analytics, jointly planned and hosted by AIR, EDUCAUSE, and the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO). The summit brought together 350 leaders and professionals from IR, information technology (IT), and business offices to enhance collaboration to address institutional challenges and opportunities. The three organizations will release a joint statement on the value of analytics in Fall 2019 with a goal of spurring the expanded use of analytics in decision-making by senior leaders.

- **Advocacy & Policy.** In 2018-19, the AIR Data Policy Advisory Group provided input and feedback for U.S. Department of Education Technical Review Panels, Gainful Employment Disclosure changes, and proposed changes to IPEDS reporting requirements. AIR partnered with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) to press for changes to guidance from the U.S. Department of Education regarding the availability of student financial aid data within institutions for program evaluation, reporting, and research.

**Interpretation 2**

“This must be done within AIR’s available resources and in such a manner that the value to higher education is worth the investment of those resources” is interpreted to mean that AIR conducts our work in a financially prudent manner that prioritizes investments in activities, products, and services that align with the Ends directive “to improve higher education.”

**Rationale 2**

The interpretation is consistent with and reinforces interpretations of the executive limitation policies regarding the financial health of the Association. Specifically, the limitations within the “Financial Activities and Conditions” policies and “Financial Planning” global policy establish guidelines that compel AIR to manage and plan within our means and to create a stable and secure financial system that protects against undue risk in pursuit of the Association Ends.

**Evidence 2**

- AIR is operating within the executive limitations and in a fiscally prudent manner as demonstrated by the interpretations and evidence provided for Policies A & B within the quarterly VI. Financial Activities and Conditions monitoring reports from July 2018 to June 2019.
• AIR’s 2019 financial planning process included projected revenues and expenses for the development and delivery of products and services that align with the Ends within each of the four operational focus areas described in Interpretation 1 (above). The interpretation and evidence for the financial planning process are documented in the global policy of the V. Financial Planning monitoring report from February 2019.

A. Policy Language

AIR educates institutional researchers, higher education leaders, and professionals and organizations on the value of institutional research.

Interpretation 1

AIR informs higher education leaders, professionals, and organizations of the institutional value of establishing and supporting coordinated data, analysis, and decision support functions that contribute to the achievement of the strategic goals and missions of their institutions.

Rationale 1

Institutions are collecting and storing more data and providing greater access to an expanded array of analytical tools for college and university staff. The democratization of data is positive as it has unlocked additional capacity to support decision-making, but at many institutions the work is uncoordinated and siloed with staff lacking the necessary knowledge and skills. The absence of coordination and data literacy skills impacts an institution’s ability to deliver quality education and improve student outcomes. It also increases the risk of well-intended people misusing data as they have not been trained on the appropriate methods of data use. It is important for AIR to promote not only the value of effective and ethical data use, but also the knowledge and skills needed by individuals within an institution, and the essential role of IR.

Evidence 1

While still determining the long-term scope and focus of AIR’s efforts in this area, one early activity is participation in the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Gates Foundation) partner network as a resource and thought partner on how to design and deliver education, training, and support to build the IR/data capacity needed to transform institutions for increased student success. AIR received funding during the reporting period to write a summary report, Strengthening Data Capacity at the Frontier Set Institutions, documenting our observations of the challenges and opportunities Frontier Institutions face when working towards institutional transformation and support needed within the network.

Interpretation 2

AIR educates higher education leaders, professionals, and organizations of the value of a coordinated data, analysis, and decision support function that contributes to the strategic goals and mission of the institution.
Rationale 2
Informing the higher education community about the value of a coordinated data, analysis, and decision support function is not enough to bring about long-term and sustainable change at institutions. This level of change requires AIR to serve as an advocate and a resource for building a case for implementing an evidence-based decision culture. It also requires AIR to provide the training and tools that help institutions to examine their policies, practices, and structures surrounding data and data use, and provide models for implementing and sustaining culture change.

Evidence 2
AIR has testified to the value of a coordinated data, analysis, and decision support function through our work with the Gates Foundation and within other association partnerships, such as EDUCAUSE, APLU, NACUBO, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). AIR is developing more specific strategies and an implementation timeline for the longer term.

Interpretation 3
AIR educates institutional researchers on the value of a coordinated data, analysis, and decision support function that contributes to the achievement of the strategic goals and mission of the institution.

Rationale 3
Since our inception, AIR has supported IR professionals as they contribute to institutional missions and goals. With the increased availability of data and analytic tools, IR professionals have an opportunity to lead and shape the data revolution at their institutions and within higher education more broadly. The opportunity for IR to play a leadership role in building and sustaining evidence-based cultures requires AIR to align our education and training offerings with the emerging needs of IR professionals to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to succeed in these new and evolving roles.

Evidence 3
AIR is considering new ways to educate IR professionals for current roles and for the future. Topics and existing work that are foundational to the framing and development of new educational products and services include:

- **The necessity of an institution-wide user-focused approach.** Existing publications, such as *Statement of Aspirational Practice for Institutional Research* (the Statement), and courses, such as *A Holistic Approach to Institutional Research* (Holistic course) are grounded in this perspective.

- **Understanding of the IR profession (today and tomorrow).** Resources and publications, including the National Survey of Institutional Research Offices (NSIRO), the Holistic course, the Duties and Functions of Institutional Research, the Statement, and *A New Vision for Institutional Research* (Change magazine) seek to connect the reality of today with the possibilities, opportunities, and expectations of tomorrow to ensure that the field remains relevant today and tomorrow.
• **Institutional change in pursuit of student success.** AIR is a resource and thought partner within the higher education community for how to build the IR/data capacity needed to increase degree completion and close equity gaps. Current work includes participation in the Gates Foundation partner network and APLU’s Powered by Publics initiative.

• **Commitment to collaboration across the higher education community.** In addition to our role as a resource and thought partner, AIR’s commitment to collaboration strengthens the IR field and higher education overall, such as our partnership with EDUCAUSE and NACUBO on the expansion of use of data and analytics.

B. Policy Language

**AIR empowers and supports higher education professionals in ...**

• Contextualizing data across campus and throughout higher education.

• Learning methods and tools of the institutional research profession.

• Evaluating the effectiveness of institutions.

• Conducting research and scholarship.

**Interpretation 1**

AIR educates, trains, and empowers IR professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively and ethically provide, utilize, and communicate data, analytics, information, and evidence for decision support.

**Rationale 1**

Knowledgeable and skilled IR professionals who transform data into usable, timely, and actionable information are essential to a data-informed decision culture. This interpretation underscores AIR’s core competencies and directs our time, energy, and resources.

**Evidence 1**

A significant proportion of AIR’s education, training, and knowledge portfolio is currently focused on Policy B’s “learning methods and tools of the institutional research profession” and “conducting research and scholarship.” Efforts from the reporting period include:

• An expanded set of educational opportunities for learners interested in new data and technical skills, research methods, and analysis tools through 20 different webinars; IPEDS workshops, tutorials, and courses; the NCES Data Institute; the Data Visualization Bootcamp; Forum pre- and post-conference workshops; and eAIR Tech Tips and Visual Display of Data.

• Three cohorts of learners participated in the Holistic course during the reporting period. The 72 participants work in roles across functional areas with a broad array of roles, scopes, and authority.
• The 2nd edition of the NSIRO launched in Fall 2018 with the addition of new benchmarking tools. The launch of the survey was accompanied by a series of webinars focused on NSIRO use cases. A national report will be released within the next year.

• The Data Visualization Bootcamp premiered at the 2019 Forum with over 100 participants. This day-and-a-half experience explored practical, strategic, and theoretical approaches to data visualization in higher education and allowed participants to customize their experiences based on their interests.

• The redesigned NCES Data Institute provides an intensive introduction to NCES datasets and research methodologies. Early career professionals participated in the 2019 Institute, which included a six-week online course, a group research project, and a three-day convening at the U.S. Department of Education offices in Washington, DC.

• The AIR Professional File continues to serve as a resource and platform for IR professionals to disseminate their original research and effective practices, as featured in the Spring 2019 volume.

Although the ability to “contextualize data,” as noted in Policy B, is a key concept embedded in many of our education and training offerings, additional thought and planning will be required for a more specific and robust interpretation to serve as a foundation for future educational products and services. Similarly, further study and planning is needed to more fully address “evaluating institutional effectiveness.”

**Interpretation 2**
AIR educates, trains, and empowers early career, mid-career, and senior IR professionals to effectively and ethically provide, utilize, and communicate data, analytics, information, and evidence for decision support.

**Rationale 2**
This interpretation recognizes that for AIR to effectively educate, train, and support IR professionals, it is necessary to offer education and professional development opportunities that are specifically designed and delivered for IR professionals at different stages of their careers.

**Evidence 2**
Some of AIR’s education and training activities are appropriate for IR professionals at all points in their careers, such as, the Forum, or were created to teach specific skills, such as research methods. However, many of AIR’s offerings are concentrated on the needs of early career or new professionals, such as the Data & Decisions Academy. Plans and timelines for creating and introducing more advanced level options are being examined and prioritized.

**Interpretation 3**
AIR supports the growth of data literacy among non-IR professionals within higher education.
Rationale 3
Data literacy is the foundation of data-informed decision cultures because it helps ensure the consistent and knowledgeable application of data, analytics, information, and evidence, and facilitates the identification of opportunities for collaboration across units in support of institutional and student success. AIR can contribute to the expansion and sustainability of evidence-based cultures by providing opportunities for professionals outside of IR to learn requisite skills and abilities to understand how to use data, analytics, information, and evidence.

Evidence 3
Although professionals outside of IR have always been welcome to participate in AIR activities, training, and events, a focus on non-IR professionals is a new area of emphasis. Consideration and planning are underway to more clearly identify the priority audience(s) as well as the specific products, services, and/or resources needed.

Early efforts in this area from the reporting period include workshops and presentations sharing resources, knowledge, and skills that improve data literacy at gatherings of student affairs professionals (NASPA), IT professionals (EDUCAUSE), business officers (NACUBO), housing officers (the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International; ACUHO-I), senior leaders (APLU), student success staff (AASCU), student veterans (Student Veterans of America; SVA), and faculty and assessment professionals (Assessment Institute).

C. Policy Language
AIR provides opportunities for the development of professional and interpersonal skills.

Interpretation
AIR supports the career and professional development of IR professionals so they can gain the knowledge and skills needed for their current positions, with a focus on leadership and management roles.

Rationale
With the growing importance and visibility of the data, analysis, and decision support function, the expectations and opportunities for IR professionals to serve in leadership roles are expanding. Leadership roles often require the cultivation of new perspectives, abilities, and skills, such as entrepreneurial mindsets, development of partnerships across functional areas, and persuasive communication about the value of evidence-based decision making to a range of audiences. To support IR professionals interested in advancing their careers, it is important that AIR provide opportunities to cultivate these new perspective, abilities, and skills.

Evidence
AIR incorporates strategies for improving skills related to collaboration, communication, and political savvy within current content and offerings, such as the Holistic course and the Data Visualization
Bootcamp. However, more advanced professional development opportunities and/or dedicated leadership training are needed. AIR is actively exploring a range of options for meeting this growing need within the IR community.

**D. Policy Language**

*AIR promotes the development of professional networks.*

**Interpretation 1**

AIR provides opportunities for IR professionals to learn, grow, and connect with each other.

**Rationale 1**

For the IR profession to innovate and thrive in a changing environment, professionals must have opportunities to learn and engage with a diverse array of ideas, practices, experiences, perspectives, and individuals within the broader, global IR community.

**Evidence 1**

The largest event hosted by AIR each year is the annual Forum, which provides a venue for IR professionals around the world to come together in a single location and learn from each other. The top (self-reported) reasons that individuals attend the Forum are networking and learning, and careful attention is given to designing opportunities, activities, and spaces for participants to create and strengthen professional connections and gain new perspectives and insights. This intentional approach to creating and strengthening professional connections and peer learning is incorporated into our face-to-face educational offerings, including the Holistic course, Data Visualization Bootcamp, and NCES Data Institute. Although AIR’s digital professional networking opportunities are currently limited, we are actively exploring ways to expand and strengthen the infrastructure and opportunities in the digital space.

**Interpretation 2**

AIR partners with other organizations to expand data-informed decision making at colleges and universities and to facilitate stronger connections between IR professionals and other higher education professionals. Collaborative work is currently focused on associations representing IT professionals, business officers, student affairs professionals, and senior leaders.

**Rationale 2**

For data-informed decision making to advance real changes for the benefit of students and institutions, AIR must work in cooperation with other higher education organizations to amplify, leverage, and coordinate strategies, approaches, activities, and work. As time and resources are limited, AIR has prioritized collaborations with associations and professions within higher education that have a substantial impact on the creation and continuation of a strong data, analysis, and decision support function.
Evidence 2

AIR has worked to build and strengthen collaborations by partnering with other organizations to achieve common goals through collective action and to build connections across association memberships. Examples of joint activities include:

- AIR, EDUCAUSE, and NACUBO will release a joint statement on the value of analytics in Fall 2019 with a goal of spurring the expanded use of analytics in decision-making by senior leaders.

- AIR and EDUCAUSE formed an Advisory Group on IT/IR Collaboration (AGIIC) comprised of members from each association. AGIIC’s charge is to jointly develop short- and long-term methods to enhance cooperation and highlight examples of effective cross-business unit efforts.

- AIR and the Institute of Higher Education Policy (IHEP) will co-host an interactive policy summit in August 2019 for institutional teams that use data to promote student success and affect policy change. This is the third time that AIR and IHEP have collaborated to bring together federal and state policymakers with institutional data professionals to share knowledge and expertise for the creation of improved policies.

- AIR staff participated in the conferences of several IR-related associations, including AIR affiliated organizations: Achieving the Dream (AtD), Mid-America Association for IR (MidAIR), Pacific Northwest Association for IR and Planning (PNAIRP), Texas Association for IR (TAIR), California Association for IR (CAIR), Canadian IR and Planning Association (CIRPA-ACPRI), Australasian Association for IR (AAIR), and Higher Education Strategic Planners Association (HESPA).

- At the 2019 Forum, AIR convened the leaders of affiliated organizations during the 2019 Forum to facilitate personal connections and the sharing of ideas across associations; it was the third such gathering. During the conference, AIR also supported networking events for Taiwan AIR (TW-AIR) and visitors from Brazil’s National Nuclear Energy Commission (CNEN) education ministry.