



2021 AIR National Survey of IR Offices: Executive Leadership for the Data and Analytics Function

The *AIR Statement of Aspirational Practice for Institutional Research* (2016) and *A New Vision for Institutional Research* (Change magazine, 2016) call for executive leadership of the data and analytics function, such as a chief data officer (CDO). We included questions in the 2021 AIR National Survey of IR Offices to explore how institutions are answering the call, what proportion of institutional research (IR) office leaders fill the CDO role (or similar), and how serving in the CDO position (or similar) influences IR office leaders' evaluations of institutional data capacity.

Chief Data Officer

Of the 520 institutions that responded to the 2021 AIR National Survey, fewer than half have CDO positions (Table 1). This varies across the major institutional sectors: public 4-year, public 2-year, and private not-for-profit 4-year. More public 2-year institutions have this position than 4-year institutions (public or not-for-profit).

Nearly three-fourths of institutional CDO positions are filled by IR office leaders. Office leaders at public 4-year institutions are slightly more likely to hold that position than office leaders in the other two sectors

Table 1. Prevalence of CDO Position by Institutional Sector

	All Institutions	Public 4-year	Public 2-year	Private NFP 4-year
% Institutions with CDO Position	42%	38%	48%	43%
Of those, % of IR Office Leaders serving as CDO	74%	79%	76%	65%

Of the IR offices that responded to the 2018 and 2021 AIR National Surveys, 252 provided information about the CDO position. While the percentage of institutions with the CDO position increased slightly between the surveys, the percentage of those positions held by IR office leaders dropped (Table 2).

Table 2. Longitudinal Changes to the Prevalence of CDO Position

	2021	2018
% Institutions with CDO Position	42%	41%
Of those, % of IR Office Leaders serving as CDO	75%	84%

Executive Cabinets

We asked IR office leaders about their relationships with their institutions' executive cabinets. We learned that less than 20% of office leaders are members of president/chief executive officer (CEO) cabinets while 40% are members of provost/chief academic officer (CAO) cabinets (Table 3).

These numbers vary by sector. For example, office leaders at public 2-year institutions are more likely to be members of the president/CEO cabinet compared to colleagues at 4-year institutions.

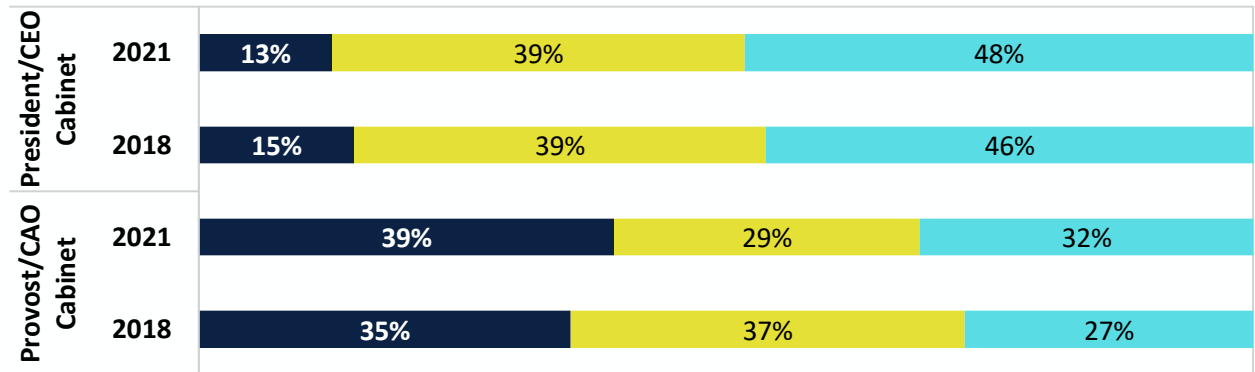
Table 3. Office Leaders' Relationships with Executive Cabinets

	All Institutions	Public 4-year	Public 2-year	Private NFP 4-year
President/CEO Cabinet				
Member of cabinet	17%	10%	37%	12%
Not a member but attends meetings as needed	38%	40%	37%	37%
Not a member and does not attend meetings	45%	50%	26%	51%
Provost/CAO Cabinet				
Member of cabinet	40%	44%	38%	37%
Not a member but attends meetings as needed	33%	33%	42%	30%
Not a member and does not attend meetings	27%	23%	20%	33%

Of the IR offices that responded to the 2018 and 2021 AIR National Surveys, 253 provided information about executive cabinet relationships. Chart 1 shows that when compared to 2018, fewer office leaders in 2021 are members of their institutions' president/CEO cabinets while more office leaders are

members of their institutions' provost/CAO committees. Also, the percentage of office leaders who are not members of CEO or CAO cabinets and do not attend meetings increased between 2018 and 2021.

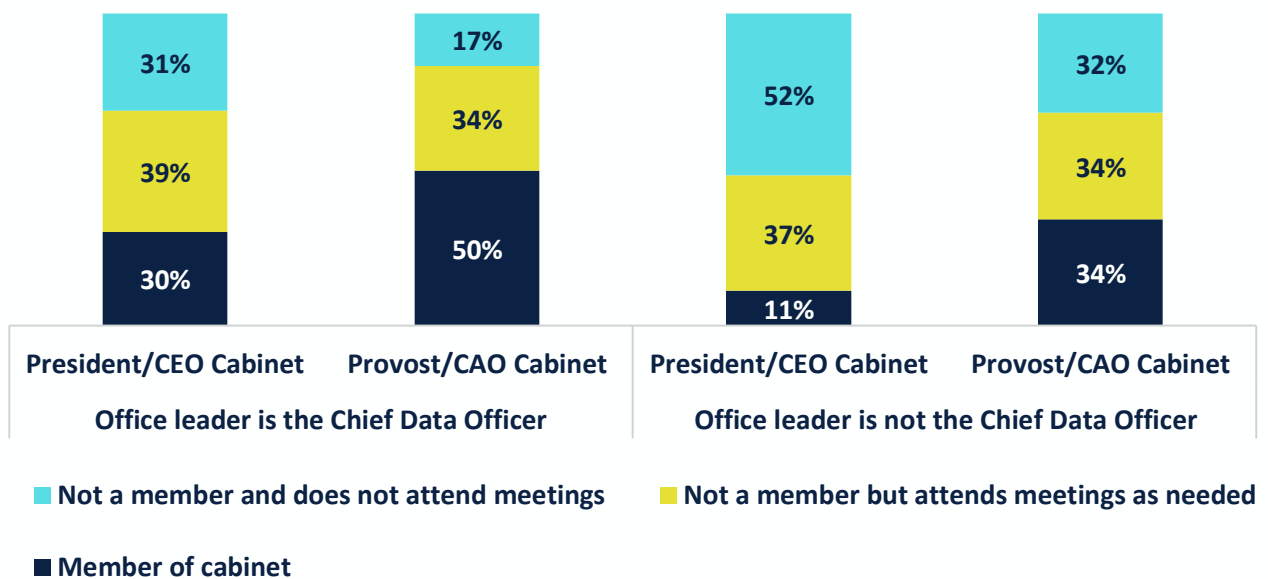
Chart 1. Longitudinal Comparison of Office Leaders' Relationship with Executive Cabinets



- Member of cabinet
- Not a member but attends meetings as needed
- Not a member and does not attend meetings

We found that IR office leaders who also serve as their institutions' CDOs are more likely to be members of the executive cabinets, or attend meetings as needed, compared to those who do not serve as CDOs (Chart 2).

Chart 2. Relationship between IR Office Leaders, CDO Status, and Executive Cabinets



References

Swing, R. L., & Ross, L. E. (2016). *Statement of aspirational practice for institutional research*. Tallahassee, FL: AIR. <http://www.airweb.org/aspirationalstatement>

Swing, R. L., & Ross, L. E. (2016, March/April). A new vision for institutional research. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 6-13. <https://www.airweb.org/resources/publications/studies-and-reports/a-new-vision-for-institutional-research>

Methodology

The 2021 AIR National Survey of IR Offices attempted to survey IR office leaders at more than 3,000 postsecondary degree-granting institutions. Institutions of all sectors, types of control, and sizes were included in the sample. In total, responses were collected from 1,142 institutions, and 554 of those institutions completed the survey in full. To ensure comparable results, incomplete responses are excluded from this report. In addition, responses from for-profit institutions, administrative units, international institutions, private not-for-profit 2-year institutions, and institutions in U.S. territories are excluded due to low response rates.

The findings presented in this report are based on 520 responses that represent U.S. postsecondary, degree-granting institutions at public 4-year (146 institutions), public 2-year (125 institutions), or private not-for-profit 4-year institutions (249 institutions).

Suggested Citation

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