12-month Enrollment (E12) Survey Component
Edit Explanations & Context Boxes
Tutorial Script
2024-25 Data Collection

This tutorial explains how to use edit explanations and context boxes.

Edit explanations and context boxes are two methods of providing additional information about reported data in IPEDS. While they are similar, they are not interchangeable.

To help reduce errors and improve data quality, interactive edits are run on data entered or uploaded to the IPEDS survey screens. Potential errors in the data result in edit flags, which may require an edit explanation to be entered in order to resolve them. Edit explanations are an opportunity to provide clarification about the data entered. They are not released publicly.

Context boxes, on the other hand, are optional, but offer an opportunity to provide additional information to help in the interpretation of your institution's data. Some context boxes are published on the College Navigator website.

Edit flags are generated based on data submitted in prior years, in other sections of the survey component, or in other IPEDS survey components. When an explanation is required to resolve an edit flag, first double check the data entered. If the data are correct, provide a clear and comprehensive explanation of why the data entered are, in fact, accurate.

A clear and comprehensive edit explanation will minimize follow-up questions during the IPEDS Help Desk and NCES data review processes.

Let's look at an example from one of the survey components.

In the 12-month and Fall Enrollment components, a high percentage increase in IPEDS University's enrollment may need to be explained.

If IPEDS University simply entered "our enrollment increased" as their edit explanation, this would not be sufficient for NCES' quality review process. Indeed, the edit flag appeared because the institution's enrollment increased so significantly. The following is a more informative and helpful explanation: "The large increase in enrollment is due to the addition of our nursing program that has attracted many new students to our institution."

Let's move on to context boxes. Context boxes are also used to provide additional information that will help reviewers interpret data you have reported. Context box text should be clear, concise, and factual. A context box is not to be used for marketing purposes or as an edit explanation. Although context boxes are optional, NCES encourages institutions to take advantage of the opportunity to provide context for your data when appropriate.

Here is an example of how to effectively use a context box. This text box from the Institutional Characteristics component explains that the tuition reported does not reflect tuition for all programs offered at the institution: "Tuition and fees for traditional on-campus programs are reflected in this section. Tuition and fees for on-line and evening programs are different and are available in the Catalog or by contacting Example College."

In some cases, the text from a context box will be posted with the corresponding data on College Navigator. Context boxes that will be posted on College Navigator are clearly identified in the data collection system. The text entered in these context boxes must be appropriate for College Navigator and should be edited for spelling and grammar.

The IPEDS Help Desk reviews all context box text for suitability for College Navigator, and may edit text if necessary.

For more information on the material presented in this tutorial, please contact the IPEDS Help Desk.