



Community College Survey Solutions (CCSS) FAQ

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Overview & Purpose

Q: What is the primary purpose of the Community College Survey Solutions (CCSS) service?

A. Community College Survey Solutions (CCSS) is The RP Group's suite of survey services designed specifically for community colleges. The primary purpose of CCSS is to provide actionable insights into the institutional structures, practices, and environments that shape how students and employees experience their college.

Currently, CCSS includes:

- A student campus climate survey developed by The RP Group
- An employee campus climate survey developed by The RP Group
- The Community College Success Measure (CCSM), developed by the Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL)

These tools are community college-centric, designed by and for community colleges, to support inquiry, equity, and continuous improvement. The RP Group plans to expand CCSS in the future to include additional surveys that meet the evolving needs of the California Community Colleges system.

Q: Will you ever offer more than the three surveys that you currently have? If so, what topics will those cover?

A. We plan to expand the CCSS suite to include additional surveys focused on topics such as basic needs, transfer experiences, student success factors, and more, based on emerging needs across the California Community Colleges system. We welcome input from the field! If there are specific topics you'd like to see addressed through future surveys, we encourage you to share your ideas with us. Email us at research@rpgroup.org. Our goal is to build tools that reflect the evolving priorities and challenges faced by colleges and their communities.

Q: How can these surveys help my college improve?

A. By providing data-driven insights into the experiences of your students and employees, the surveys can help identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement within your institutional structures and processes. This information can then inform strategic planning, resource allocation, and targeted interventions to create a more supportive and equitable campus environment.

Q: What kind of response rates can we expect for these surveys?

A. Response rates can vary significantly depending on factors such as the mode of administration, the level of promotion, the incentives to participate, and the perceived relevance to the participants. Typically, response rates for similar campus surveys range from 10% to 60%. We will work with your team to implement strategies to maximize participation.

Q: What should action planning look like after we've completed the survey?

A. After completing the survey, the most crucial step is to show the results to your campus community and demonstrate that actions are being taken based on the feedback. This "closing the loop" process is vital for building trust and encouraging future participation.

Action planning should involve:

- Disseminating Results: Share key findings with relevant stakeholders (e.g., leadership, faculty, staff, student groups).
- Developing Action Plans: Based on the results, collaboratively develop concrete action plans with clear objectives, responsible parties, and timelines.
- Communicating Progress: Regularly update the campus community on the progress made in addressing the identified areas. This could include town halls, newsletters, or dedicated web pages.
- Continuous Improvement: View the survey as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment and improvement.

The RP Group can work with your college in these follow-up and action planning efforts to help maximize the impact of your survey results. Additionally, colleges may wish to conduct follow-up qualitative research (e.g., interviews or focus groups) to dig deeper into specific areas of inquiry unearthed in the survey findings, providing richer context and understanding.

Q: Why is it important to plan ahead for how we will use the survey results?

A. Planning ahead is crucial to maximize the impact of the survey. Before administering the survey, it's important to clearly define the reasons for conducting it and outline a plan for how the results will be used. This proactive approach ensures that the data collected is relevant to your college's goals and that there is a clear pathway for translating insights into action. It also helps manage expectations among participants and stakeholders.

Survey Use & Impact

Q. How can CCSS survey results be used by our college/district?

A. Colleges can use CCSS survey results in a variety of important ways, including:

- **Strategic Planning:** Using the data to shape institutional priorities and drive evidence-based decision-making.
- **Accreditation & Program Review:** Incorporating the findings into self-studies, annual plans, and other accountability processes.
- **Equity Efforts:** Identifying disparities in stakeholder experiences to inform equity-minded practices and interventions.
- **Student & Employee Engagement:** Launching conversations across campus communities to foster inclusive environments.
- **Grant Applications & Reporting:** Using the data to demonstrate need or show progress on funded initiatives.

These surveys are designed to offer actionable, campus-specific data that supports your continuous improvement and compliance efforts.

Q. Will we receive statewide or peer comparison data as part of the results?

A. Yes - as available. When enough colleges participate, we will provide statewide and/or peer group comparison data to help contextualize your results. These comparisons can support broader institutional reflection and benchmarking.

Q: How can the surveys be used to support institutional improvement?

A. The surveys are designed to provide colleges with actionable, data-informed insights. They offer an aggregate view of stakeholder experiences to help colleges identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth. The goal is to support evidence-based planning, foster inclusive dialogue, and inform continuous improvement efforts. These surveys are not designed nor intended to evaluate or single out individual leaders, faculty, or staff. Rather, they focus on systems, policies, and practices to guide meaningful, institution-wide reflection and change.

Q: What happens if survey results highlight issues that cannot be immediately fixed?

A. Surveys often reveal areas that require long-term planning or significant resources to address. The value of the survey lies in identifying these areas and initiating conversations and strategic planning around them. Even if a problem cannot be solved immediately, understanding its scope and impact is the first step toward finding solutions. We encourage colleges to communicate openly about the findings and the ongoing efforts to address them, even if a full resolution is not immediate.

Survey Design & Content

Q: How were the surveys developed?

A. The Campus Climate (Students and Employees) surveys were developed using a general five-step process:

1. Identifying Topics: Key areas of inquiry were identified based on relevant research and community college contexts.
2. Identifying Relevant & Existing Survey Items: Existing validated survey items were reviewed and considered.
3. Drafting & Adapting Survey Items: New and adapted survey items were drafted to address specific research questions.
4. Reviewing Draft Survey Items: Content and constituency experts reviewed the draft surveys for clarity, relevance, and appropriateness.
5. Refining the Survey: The surveys were refined based on cognitive interviews and various validation methods (e.g., factor analysis) after survey piloting to ensure reliability and validity.

Q: What's the difference between The RP Group's Student Climate Survey and CCEAL's CCSM?

A. Both the RP Group's Campus Climate Survey and CCEAL's Community College Success Measure (CCSM) are powerful tools designed to support continuous improvement at community colleges. While they share key characteristics—such as being voluntary, anonymous, improvement-focused, and supportive of data-driven decision-making—they differ in their emphasis, structure, and intended use.

- The RP Group's Student Climate Survey is designed to assess the overall climate of a college. It offers flexible modules focused on students and is highly customizable to meet local priorities. CCSM is action-oriented, helping colleges identify areas for institutional improvement based on the lived experiences of students and staff.

- The CCSM Survey, developed by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges and the Center for Organizational Responsibility and Advancement (CCEAL), has a more targeted focus. It explicitly centers equity by examining the experiences of underserved student populations and identifying predictors of student success. CCSM uses threshold-based reporting to help colleges assess whether they are meeting key benchmarks for supporting equitable student outcomes. This is an institutional needs assessment, not a campus climate survey. It was initially focused on the experiences of men of color and aims to understand students' perceived quality of services and whether their needs are being met at the college. This can help address disproportionate impact and close equity gaps in students' experiences.

In short, CCSS provides a broad, flexible snapshot of campus climate, while CCSM delivers a more equity-centered, research-based analysis of student success factors, particularly for historically marginalized groups.

Administering both surveys can provide a more complete and actionable picture of the student experience, supporting colleges in advancing equity, improving outcomes, and fostering a more supportive environment for all.

Q: How are The RP Group's Campus Climate Surveys different from the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC) and Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) surveys?

A. While some concepts may overlap, these surveys have distinct primary focuses:

- National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC): The NACCC is a national survey specifically focused on campus racial climate. Its design provides information for how institutions can improve racial equity on campus.
- Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE): This survey focuses on specific student experiences and behaviors known to be associated with various student outcomes. While it may share some content with The RP Group's Campus Climate surveys and CCEAL's CCSM survey, CCSSE primarily investigates student behaviors and their engagement with the institution.

- The RP Group Campus Climate Surveys: Our surveys are designed to assess the broader campus environment—how welcoming, inclusive, and supportive it feels to both students and employees. While they include attention to race-based experiences (similar to NACCC and CCSM), our surveys also explore a wider range of factors that shape campus climate, such as sense of belonging, perceptions of safety, academic and professional support, and experiences inside and outside the classroom. The goal is to provide actionable data that reflects the full spectrum of campus conditions affecting learning, working, and thriving.

Q. How are respondents' anonymity preserved when surveys include open-ended questions?

A. First and foremost, it is up to the college to decide whether or not to include the open-ended survey questions. To ensure anonymity, especially when surveys include open-ended (free-response) questions, we follow strict protocols designed to prevent responses from being traced back to individual participants.

Here's how we protect anonymity:

- Verbatim Responses in a Separate File: Open-ended responses are provided to the college/district exactly as written, but they are delivered in a *separate file* from the quantitative data. This separation ensures that responses cannot be linked to any specific participant's demographics or survey answers.
- Any identifying information that a participant voluntarily includes in a written response is the only potential source of identification. Colleges are advised to handle those with discretion and survey respondents are reminded how the data will be shared with the colleges such that they can make an informed decision regarding how much information they share in their open-ended responses.
- Voluntary Participation: Responses to all questions are always optional. Participants are encouraged to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable.

This approach balances the richness of qualitative insight with a strong commitment to protecting participant confidentiality

Customizing Your Survey

Q: Can I see what questions each survey asks?

A. Of course! Email research@rpgroup.org to request a copy of any survey.

Q. Can we add college/district-specific questions?

A. Each survey allows you to customize up to three questions at no additional cost. However, you have the option to customize additional questions for an additional fee.

Q: Are the surveys offered in any languages other than English?

A. Translation of the survey is possible and a common practice. We are currently exploring Spanish translations for statewide use later this year. If your college requires a Spanish version immediately, we can include the translation cost in your service agreement. While ethically sound, it's important to acknowledge potential differences in survey interpretation between native and non-native English speakers.

Q: Can we offer incentives for completing a survey? Will The RP Group provide any?

A. The RP Group does not offer statewide incentives for completing the survey. However, colleges are welcome to offer their own local incentives to encourage participation. If your college chooses to do so, we can—at no additional cost—add a question to the survey to collect students' names and email addresses for prize eligibility. This information is provided to your college in a separate file and is never linked to the survey responses, ensuring student anonymity is preserved.

Survey Implementation & Accessibility

Q: How long does each survey take to complete?

A. Each survey takes 15-20 minutes to complete.

Q: In what modality are the surveys administered?

A. At this time, the surveys are only available as online options.

Q: Who owns the survey data, and how is its safety and security ensured?

A. The RP Group and the college/district jointly own the survey data. We work closely with a dedicated team at your college/district throughout the survey process to ensure clear procedures for data safety and security. We utilize secure file transfer protocols with industry-standard encryption methods for sharing data. Detailed instructions for securely accessing your unitary survey data will be provided.

Q: How do we ensure that survey participants do not submit multiple responses?

A One option to prevent duplicate survey responses is to limit responses based on IP address. However, we do not recommend this option if there are situations where students or employees might access the survey via a shared computer network (e.g., campus computer labs). Given the time investment required to complete the survey, we do not expect a high incidence of multiple responses from the same individual.

Q: Are your surveys accessible to individuals with visual impairments?

A. Yes, we utilize the Alchemer Survey platform, which has explicit accessibility features for individuals with visual impairments or who use screen readers (e.g., Low Vision Mode, allowing respondents to increase contrast ratios, font

sizes, and font weight). Furthermore, our surveys intentionally avoid the use of any JavaScript-based questions, which can be difficult for screen readers to interpret. For more visually complex questions (e.g., matrices of radio buttons), we include Screen Reader Table Summaries. Alchemer's Accessibility Conformance Report can be made available upon request.

Getting Started & Pricing

Q: How do I sign up for the service?

A. Please complete the [inquiry form](#) on our website to sign up for this service. A member of our team will follow up with you to discuss options, timelines, and costs. Once these details are finalized, we will send you a service agreement to sign to initiate the process.

Q: What information will be needed to sign up?

A. We will need to know:

- Which survey(s) you would like to sign up for
- When you are looking to administer the survey

Q: What is the cost for signing up?

A. We use a fee-based structure for the surveys that is determined by the college/district's credit and non-credit full-time equivalent student (FTES) information for the most recent year, and their RP Group membership status. Please visit [here](#) for the most up-to-date information on costs.

Q: What is included in the base cost?

A. The base cost includes everything needed to successfully administer the survey and begin using the results. Specifically, it covers:

- Survey administration and technical support

- Up to 3 customized questions developed in collaboration with your team
- Standardized language templates for promoting the survey
- A complete dataset of responses
- An accompanying codebook to help interpret the data

This package is designed to provide colleges with a solid foundation for understanding campus climate and engaging in data-informed conversations.

Q: What add-ons are possible?

A. We offer a variety of add-ons to help colleges dig deeper into their data and use results to inform action. We'll work closely with your team to determine which options best align with your goals, audience, and capacity. Add-ons include:

- Additional customized survey questions (beyond the 3 included in the base package)
- A presentation of key findings for your team or campus stakeholders
- Data tables disaggregated by key student or employee groups
- A short memo summarizing major findings and suggested next steps
- Follow-up focus groups to explore questions or patterns surfaced by the survey

These options are designed to support meaningful interpretation, dialogue, and planning tailored to your college's context.