



# 14 BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFICIENTLY ENTERING DATA INTO ACTIVITY INSIGHT

# ABSTRACT

A key step in implementing Activity Insight is entering existing faculty activity information. This guide offers best practices that Digital Measures has gleaned from clients' experiences during the data-entry phase, as well as our own experiences with two sizeable data-entry pilot projects where we entered more than 700 full CVs into Activity Insight.

## DATA ENTRY OPTIONS

Digital Measures' clients can choose from several options when entering CV data into Activity Insight:

1. Requiring faculty to enter their own information, who may then delegate the task to a student or graduate assistant
2. Delegating the work to administrative staff
3. Hiring a temporary data-entry team

Digital Measures' clients leverage a combination of the three methods, most typically working with a temporary data-entry team. When a significant amount of CV information needs to be entered quickly, the best option is to either delegate the work to administrative staff or hire a temporary data-entry team. In either of these cases, the best practices indicated here can be applied to obtain a better result.

*Important note: don't spend time and resources manually entering data that can be imported from other systems!*

## BEST PRACTICES FOR DATA INPUT

Before you begin the project, it's important to pilot Activity Insight with a group of stakeholders. This will ensure your university is collecting all information required to report on faculty activity accurately and efficiently. You may also find that in order to enter this information in Activity Insight, the solution will require customizations. Piloting is a necessary step before beginning a data entry project.

The following data entry best practices allow your campus to streamline the data-entry process and avoid project bottlenecks and headaches. These best practices are organized according to the order in which you will likely need them when conducting such projects.

# ONE

## ASSIGN A CAPABLE PROJECT MANAGER

As with any project, planning is the key to success. The old saying, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” is especially true in these circumstances. Develop detailed procedures — including those for training — that outline expectations and milestones from beginning to end. This will help ensure your project runs smoothly and that all moving parts are in sync. Being fully prepared can save a great deal of time, fruitless efforts, rework and frustration.

# TWO

## HIRE EXPERIENCED WORKERS TO EXPEDITE DATA ENTRY

A dedicated team of experienced workers can greatly accelerate the data-entry process. Hiring workers who have conducted similar projects rather than students, for example, will yield significantly higher quality results. Granted, more experience means more money; but these workers will be more productive which should make up for the difference.

# THREE

## DETERMINE THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PAGES TO BE ENTERED

By calculating the number of CV pages to be entered, you can determine the magnitude of the data entry project, including its estimated duration. Armed with this information, you’ll be better able to monitor worker productivity and the progress of the project.

If you’re dealing with a large number of CVs and pages, consider automating this calculation using counting software such as [AnyCount](#), which is available online for less than \$100. This software makes it simple to count the total number of pages of multiple documents placed in a single folder.

# FOUR

## CALCULATE THE NUMBER OF WORKERS NEEDED

Based on the results of its pilot projects and confirmation from its clients, Digital Measures determined that one data-entry worker, on average, enters one faculty member's 15 to 16-page CV in one eight-hour workday. Therefore, one worker can enter about five CVs per week. Use this average, combined with the total number of pages to be entered, to determine how many workers to hire.

Consider the number of CVs that must be entered and the deadline for entering them. For example, if 500 CVs — averaging 15 pages each — need to be entered into Activity Insight in eight weeks, this equates to approximately sixty-two CVs per week ( $500 \div 8 = 62$ ). Since one worker can enter approximately five CVs per week, in this scenario you would want to hire a minimum of 12 data-entry workers ( $62 \div 5 = 12$ ).

# FIVE

## PAY WORKERS BY THE HOUR

Paying workers by the hour instead of per page is a better arrangement for all parties. Though it may seem advantageous to pay workers per page of CV information entered, this strategy places focus on the number of pages completed instead of the data entry itself. Paying by the hour also prevents workers from becoming discouraged at the onset of the project when their pace is slow due to their unfamiliarity with Activity Insight and the general structure of CVs. Overall, data entry workers will be more comfortable, and ultimately more productive, if paid hourly.

# SIX

## FORECAST COSTS

Although we recommend paying workers by the hour, it helps to know the average cost of entering a page of CV information in order to estimate the overall project cost.

In best practice number four, you forecasted how many workers you would hire to complete the project in a certain time frame. Now you can use that time frame to determine approximately how much the project will cost. Multiply the number of weeks forecasted by 40 to determine the total number of hours it will take to complete the project. Next, multiply that number by the hourly rate you plan on paying the workers and then multiply that number by the amount of workers you plan on hiring. This should bring you to the total cost of hiring a data-entry team to complete the project.

# SEVEN

## CONSIDER HIRING EXTRA HELP

According to Digital Measures' pilot projects, you can expect to experience up to 50 percent attrition among your data entry workers. This is due to both the repetitive nature of the work and staffing changes you may make on the team. Consider hiring double the number of workers calculated to complete the project, especially if the stakes are high and the project deadline is firm, such as when Activity Insight is being used for rapidly approaching accreditation reporting.

# EIGHT

## AIM FOR AS SMALL OF A DATA ENTRY TEAM AS POSSIBLE

In the previous point, we mentioned that you should consider hiring extra help. But keep in mind that hiring temporary workers is a delicate balancing act. You'll want to hire more workers than may be necessary to accommodate for attrition, but not hire so many that project management becomes burdensome. The goal is to hire fewer, better qualified workers who have more extensive work experience from which to draw, and generally require less training and supervision.

# NINE

## ANTICIPATE QUESTIONS

To reduce the number of questions asked by workers, develop a "where does this go" cheat sheet that corresponds to your campus' customized screens and fields. You can get extra mileage out of this cheat sheet by using it to train anyone working with Activity Insight, including faculty and administrative staff.

# TEN

## REGULARLY ASSESS AND COMMUNICATE THE PROJECT'S PROGRESS

A change in project workers is common when working with a contingent workforce agency, as workers' time is tightly scheduled in an attempt to avoid employment gaps. To help prevent workers from being prematurely removed, regularly assess the project's progress and communicate this with both the contingent workforce agency and the workers. The last thing you want is for workers to be unexpectedly pulled from your project.

# ELEVEN

## ENCOURAGE PRODUCTIVITY

Data entry is an independent and menial task, which means it can be easy for workers to get distracted. To optimize the workspace, place workers in one room so they are able to motivate each other. It may also be beneficial to allow the workers five to 10 minute breaks every so often to refresh their minds and allow for them to collaborate with one another and ask questions.

# TWELVE

## MAKE IT EASY FOR WORKERS TO GET ANSWERS

To ensure rapid progress, you need to answer workers' questions in an efficient manner. If you need to enter more than 100 CVs, or if you will have more than five data entry workers, it's advantageous to have someone sitting next to them who can immediately answer their questions and update cheat sheets. Especially at the beginning at the beginning of the project, workers will have a lot of questions.

If that's not an option, establish a Google Group ([groups.google.com](https://groups.google.com)) or other discussion board to use as a place for workers to post questions. Then once a question is answered, it's documented for the rest of the group to refer to throughout the project. If fewer than 100 CVs are being entered, you can probably manage questions and answers via email.

# THIRTEEN

## USE REPORTS TO MONITOR WORKER PRODUCTIVITY

Digital Measures designed two reports during its pilot projects to help monitor worker productivity. One report allowed us to monitor daily productivity by displaying the total number of records entered by each worker. If a worker enters significantly fewer or more records than the average, you can evaluate why the worker is entering data at a faster or slower pace than expected.

The second report displayed the number of records entered per faculty member. If the report shows significantly fewer or greater records have been entered compared to the number of pages on the faculty member's CV, you can assess whether a worker is being overly thorough or isn't paying enough attention to detail.

# FOURTEEN

## EMPHASIZE ACCURACY OVER SPEED

In our pilot projects, we found that those who worked faster actually produced lower quality work. Quick but error-prone workers should be reminded to slow down and pay closer attention to ensure accuracy.



# CONCLUSION

Working with a large number of either temporary data-entry workers or administrative staff to enter CV information into Activity Insight is a large undertaking. By following the guidance presented here, you should be equipped to efficiently tackle each of the project's steps. Doing so will lead to completing the project on time, on budget and without frustration.

# ABOUT DIGITAL MEASURES

Digital Measures focuses exclusively on web-based data management and reporting for universities. Activity Insight™, its popular faculty activity reporting solution, is trusted by 60% of the largest 500 universities in the United States and universities in more than 15 countries. The Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based company was founded in 1999.

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