Evaluating and Refining a University's Seed Grant Program for Community Engagement

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Evaluating and Refining a University's Seed Grant Program for Community Engagement

Abstract
Poster from the annual meeting of the Council on Social Work Education in Tampa, Florida held in October 2014

Keywords
seed grant, community engagement, community, VCU, partnerships

Disciplines
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Comments
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Evaluating and refining a university’s seed grant program for community engagement

Jennifer F. Jettner & Valerie L. Holton

Background

At VCU, community engagement is a key strategic focus area that is integrated across teaching, research & outreach. The goal is to develop collaborative partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Since 2007, the Council for Community Engagement (CCE) has provided 1 year seed grants ($20,000) for projects in which partnerships were:

- Interdisciplinary (2+ academic units)
- Community-engaged (1+ partners)
- Integrated (teaching, research, and/or outreach)

Methodology

Impact Domains

- Project History
- Partnership
- Funding
- Scholarship
- Ongoing Impact

Data Collection

- CCE grants over 5 years (2007-2012)
- Faculty survey
- Partner survey
- Surveys sent Fall 13

Sample Size

- 30 PIs
- 24 Partners
- 34 CCE grants

Response Rate

- 86% PIs
- 75% Partners
- 89% CCE grants

Methodology

 Partnership Development

- Relationship status after grant period (3.6+)
  - 96% Maintained
  - 4% Not Maintained

- 92% of maintained partnerships were newly formed according to partners

Challenges

- Lack of Time
- Difficulties in Coordinating across multiple agencies
- Communication & unclear expectations
- Building Trust with target population
- Consistent & Long-term Funding

Successful Partnerships

- 792 students involved
- 63% in service-learning
- 60% of PIs report experience influenced student scholarship & careers
- 115 scholarly products generated by faculty
- 74% grantees stated majority of goals were met
- 50% were conference presentations
- 20% were journal articles
- ‘multiplier effect’ by increasing capacity & involvement over time

CCE Seed Grant Adjustments

- Partnership development workshops
- Sustainability planning workshops (i.e., external funding & service-learning)
- Exploring ways to increase focus of seed-grants (i.e., issue themes)
- Exploring ways to increase quality of relationship (i.e., partnership/building grants)

While promising, findings indicate need for wrap-around system to further support growth of ‘seeds’

Study Aims

Few studies have assessed the effectiveness of seed grants as a strategy to support the development of high quality, high impact university-community partnerships.

Thus, we asked...

1. Do the CCE seed grants facilitate successful university-community partnerships?
2. Can CCE seed grant money be a catalyst for sustainable partnerships?

Lessons Learned

Evaluation Adjustments

- 2-year PI follow-up surveys
- Annual Partner surveys

CCE Seed Grant Adjustments

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“We are making VCU a bright star on the national map through our commitments to student success at every level, to conducting research, to saving lives, and to enhancing and empowering our communities.” – President Rao