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

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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
Higher Education

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Domains</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project History</td>
<td>CCE grants over 5 years (2007-2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>Faculty survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Partner survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>Surveys sent Fall 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Impact</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 PIs</td>
<td>86% PIs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Partners</td>
<td>75% Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 CCE grants</td>
<td>89% CCE grants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
- 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’.

“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