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

Jennifer Jettner
Virginia Commonwealth University, jettnerjf@vcu.edu

Valerie Holton
Virginia Commonwealth University, vholton@vcu.edu

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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
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?

Impact Domains     Data Collection
- Project History
- Partnership
- Funding
- Scholarship
- Ongoing Impact
- CCE grants over 5 years (2007-2012)
- Faculty survey
- Partner survey
- Surveys sent Fall 13

Sample Size     Response Rate
- 30 PIs
- 24 Partners
- 34 CCE grants
- 86% PIs
- 75% Partners
- 89% CCE grants

Partnership Development
Relationship status after grant period (N=49)
- 96% of Pi respondents
- 92% of Partner respondents
- 36% 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

Sustainable Partnerships
- 47% of projects continued past funding period
- For every $1.00 invested, grantees leveraged $1.36
- 76% of additional funds were from external sources

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

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’

Study Aims

Lessons Learned

“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