

CONSORTIAL LEADERSHIP

Toward Large-Scale CHANGE

By Adrianna Kezar

Many funders, policymakers, and higher education stakeholders are interested in bringing to scale fundamental changes in higher education (Kezar, 2011; Zemsky, 2013). Yet academe has a history of individual faculty, staff, and departmental changes producing slow incremental change (Kezar, 2013). Institutionalization of change across a campus has long been considered an ambitious, almost unreachable goal (Zemsky, 2013).

There is now less patience and more urgency to determine strategies that scale change beyond single institutions, largely driven by accreditation, policy mandates, and national higher education organizations initiatives (Smith, & Petersen, 2011; Zemsky, 2013). Thought leaders are pushing the boundaries and looking for levers to increase the adoption of new and promising teaching practices across faculty, advising and support strategies among staff, and new financial and productivity approaches within administration. Projects such as Achieving the Dream, Completion by Design, 21st Century Scholars Program, and other newer, large-scale projects involve statewide or national-level groupings of institutions aimed at scaling change. Many of these projects involve sets of institutions that have no prior experience working together.

However, one promising area related to this scaling strategy involves campuses with prior experiences working together; this involves multi-campus projects that are connected via a consortium or system office (Smith, & Petersen, 2011). The anticipated benefits include the ripple effect that a few institutions that are part of a system can have on others within that system such as the learning that can occur across institutions and the support institutions can provide each other in a change process.

Yet, even though there are calls for multi-campus projects, there is surprisingly little information on the results of organizing work this way and how to best structure such efforts to be successful (Boyce, 2003). It might turn out that the complexity of having campuses work together might be counter-productive or too time-consuming; that campuses compete or do not trust each other; or that experience and learning on one campus cannot translate to another. Thus, it is not a given that multi-campus projects can be effective modes for change. And in fact, if not well designed, consortial-led change projects can have many challenges and difficulties that can outweigh their benefits.

This article describes the lessons drawn from an evaluation I conducted of 10 multi-campus consortial projects through the Teagle Foundation's "Faculty Work and Student

Learning in the 21st Century” portfolio of grant projects (referred to below as the Teagle study). The key focus of these grants was examining how faculty work should change in response to the changing conditions—indeed, the changing nature—of undergraduate liberal education. In addition, the grants asked how liberal arts colleges can maintain a quality, high impact learning environment within a changing and challenging environment.

Ten grants were awarded in 2012-2013 to consortia and groups of colleges. A description of the projects is provided in Table 1. Through this multi-campus, collective approach, the initiative reached close to 100 colleges, moving toward the kind of scale that funders and others have in mind. Some of the lessons from the projects, particularly about integrating technology or alterations in faculty roles, are presented in a national report: (<http://www.teaglefoundation.org/getmedia/f5560934-c4db-42e3-8e52-439bd7aa82f6/Kezar-Sustaining-Change>). This discussion focuses on ways that consortia can help support change and the best ways for them to structure work and leadership to meet these goals.

We know very little about how consortia can lead change, so these projects helped address this important gap in our knowledge.

The lessons discussed below focus on the issue of how consortia (as well as groups of campuses) can support individual colleges in changing to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex environment. They emerged from an interview study involving one to two hour semi-structured interviews with 55 faculty and administrators on the campus sites that participated in the consortia project, as well as the consortia staff and leaders. We highlight some of the key characteristics that make consortia so effective at catalyzing change; ways that consortia can best design change projects to ensure effectiveness; ways consortia with varying strengths (mission and networks) can be leveraged for change; and challenges that consortia face in conducting this work in change. These lessons are important for consortial and multi-campus leaders, but also for funders, higher education stakeholders, and campus constituents who participate in these efforts.

In Short

- There is now less patience and more urgency to determine strategies that scale change beyond single institutions, largely driven by accreditation, policy mandates, and national higher education organizations initiatives.
- The value of consortia for scale are their ability to create safe spaces for innovation; learning communities that challenge status quo ideas; a cadre of change consultants that can visit many different campus to spread innovations; and centralized support for the difficult work of change.
- Consortia are critical as they provide built in competition between institutions to motivate high quality work, can hold them accountable for completing the work, and can assist campus leaders with understanding the best change strategies to keep their projects moving forward.
- While challenges can be experienced such as the complexities of navigating across multiple institutions or having different institutional types working together, several Teagle Foundation-funded consortia developed strategies to overcome these common challenges.

Adrianna Kezar is a professor and co-director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California. Her research expertise is in change and leadership in higher education. She also leads the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success: www.thechangingfaculty.org

TABLE 1. TEAGLE FOUNDATION “FACULTY WORK AND STUDENT LEARNING IN THE 21ST CENTURY” PROJECTS

	Project	Description
1.	Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC)	This project facilitated development of a new model for supporting undergraduate research, one that allowed an undergraduate at one of COPLAC’s member campuses to carry out an undergraduate research project under the guidance of a faculty member at another campus via electronic technologies.
2.	Independent Colleges Enterprise (ICE)	Worked to create a model for blended electronic and face-to-face course delivery that could be shared across several colleges.
3.	Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA)	The project built a community of interest among faculty seeking to enhance teaching effectiveness and scale evidence-based pedagogies.
4.	New York Six Liberal Arts Consortium (NY6)	Created intercampus partnerships through use of blended learning and developed technology-supported instructional models that can be replicated or modified for faculty use in a wide range of disciplines.
5.	Southeastern Pennsylvania Consortium for Higher Education (SEPCHE)	The Building Faculty Capacity for 21 st Century Teaching project scaled evidence-based practice
6.	The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)	Worked to develop faculty leadership in support of integrative liberal learning across the curriculum.
7.	Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM)	The project worked with member institutions to restructure introductory courses so that they more effectively develop students’ higher order thinking, and restructure faculty work to ensure the sustainability of these courses.
8.	Imagining America	This project operationalized the concept of civic professionalism—to foster in both faculty and students a commitment to bringing the formal academic training into the real world.
9.	New American Colleges and Universities (NAC&U)	Explored holistic or collaborative departments models and revised evaluation frameworks to support collaborative work.
10.	The Associated Colleges of the South (ACS)	This project on blended learning supported a range of experiments in flipped classrooms, collaborative courses, and the evaluation of blended course delivery across member institutions.

WHY CONSORTIA WORK TO CREATE CHANGE

The Teagle study identified why consortia were an effective approach for funding change efforts. The campus participants cited many reasons the consortium added value to their on-campus work and commented that if funding had gone directly to their campus the changes might not have been as profound or bold—or happened at all. This is particularly significant as campus constituents have a vested interest in funding coming to their own institutions versus into a consortium.

Four of the most significant reasons consortia are so pivotal to change:

Consortia can create a safe space for experimentation

Many project leaders described the how consortia can facilitate change because of their ability to bring together many campuses to innovate together. For example, a leader within New American Colleges and Universities (NAC&U) was working on ways to rethink departmental structures to

be more collaborative and to align campus evaluation systems to reward collaborative work—fairly radical work and thinking. Consortial work gives permission to do this do this kind of work. As one participant in this project noted: “Twenty campuses working together makes this kind of innovation work safe and can propel campuses to put in place what might be considered difficult innovations in other places without the network of support.” Similarly, various initiatives focused on technology, which can sometimes be thought of as a threatening idea within liberal arts colleges. However, participants suggested this work felt less radical within a consortium—they recognized they were not alone in this work.

Consortia offer an opportunity to learn from others and challenge the status quo

Projects that work at the consortial level force campuses to confront their own norms and approaches by seeing how work is done differently on other campuses. Many project

participants admitted that without having their own value system exposed and challenged through working with others, change would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. For example, a campus developed an effective way to communicate new faculty roles that was shared with others; another campus discovered how information technology staff can better support faculty in ways that were adopted by other campuses; in another project, leaders created a template for faculty evaluations that garnered support at the host campus but also at campuses within the consortium.

Making the project itself a learning community was the most common way to challenge assumptions and encourage change. Learning communities provide a way for change to become part of an ongoing dialogue and help people to make sense of change as it unfolds. For example, some consortia (e.g., Imagining America, Southeastern Pennsylvania Consortium for Higher Education (SEPCHE)) started by making use of learning communities where participants read common texts to educate themselves and discuss the proposed innovation. Such learning communities helped generate greater buy-in among faculty for the work by helping them understand the innovation in greater detail and what it meant for their work and roles. Some project participants commented that initially reading and talking seemed like a waste of time, but then it made their efforts quicker once implementation began.

One challenge with learning communities is not letting the energy peter out or letting the groups prematurely disband. One campus leader in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) project described his experience with utilizing a learning community approach:

It's always been hard to get collective action but this time we tried the learning communities model and set

up an expectation that change is not something that one or two faculty innovators do, but that departments do, working together to create change. Departments that are very different from one another set up learning communities, and it's really taken off. Since learning communities are new to campuses, being able to work with other leaders within the consortia that had set up the change work through learning communities made work back on their own campuses easier. Having the consortial project set up as a learning community allowed them to experience what a learning community was like, making it easier to describe its value and set one up on their own campus.

Consortia offer centralized support that individual campuses lack

Individual faculty and institutions involved in the projects often commented about ways their consortium assisted with their own efforts. These included providing centralized support for assessment and evaluation, drawing on campus leaders to help with infrastructure support, and providing resources or ideas for learning communities. Consortia that offered all three of these resources had projects that made more progress and were sustained. Those that made less progress often had participants who felt they needed more than just administrative management through the consortium.

For example, SEPCHE offered some evaluation templates, developed ongoing meetings for campus leaders, and suggested ways the peer-to-peer training model might be translated for use on individual campuses. In other cases, support came by way of a consultant who provided leadership and guidance to keep the various campus teams moving forward, e.g. AAC&U hired a consultant to shepherd the teams

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through their work. Campus teams really appreciated that someone was there to coordinate communication; guide conversation and meetings; coordinate follow up and notes, hold people accountable; facilitate communication across different teams that had related but different goals; and even send brainstorming ideas and articles to prompt thinking. This kind of support can be institutionalized across a consortium. For example, the Great Lakes College Association (GLCA) is now launching a consortially based teaching and learning center, providing a central support resource for campuses that do not have the ability to set up their own center and enhancing those campuses that already have a center by providing additional resources.

Consortia can create a cadre of change consultants

Many consortium-trained faculty became consultants for other campuses in the project. In fact, the notion of training a set of consultants within the consortium who could service all campuses after the grant was seen as a way to sustain the change after the grant's conclusion. Many campus teams commented, "You cannot be an expert on your own campus, but you can on others." There are now experts that can be drawn upon from other campuses who will be listened to in ways that change agents might not be on their own campuses.

Several campuses had already invited a faculty member from another campus to give a talk to help their efforts to change faculty roles or integrate technology. Also, savvy consortial leaders set out from the beginning to make some project participants "change consultants" (perhaps not always telling them they had that goal in mind) as they worked with faculty over the course of the project. Several consortia leaders talked about the importance of the project

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creating a "road show" that could go around to various campuses and help introduce the ideas for change and kickstart the necessary discussions.

ELEMENTS OF CONSORTIAL WORK TO SUPPORT CHANGE

These important advantages of consortial change efforts are not inherent in the process but are a result of well-designed consortial projects with effective consortial leadership. Consortia leaders in most cases had designed their projects to ensure success in promoting change. Elements that make a significant difference in fostering change include: identifying the appropriate role of consortium in relationship to campuses; documenting progress and holding campuses accountable; and helping campuses learn change strategies. Again, while there are other key elements, these were ones that interviewees found resonated with them most.

Identify appropriate roles: Campus teams as experts and consortial leaders as facilitators

Although working in multi-campus efforts can help develop safe spaces and innovation, it can also make campus leaders insecure. Consortial staff can be seen as meddling outsiders driving an agenda set by national organizations. And campus leaders might question whether consortial staff understands their campuses contexts well enough to lead change. It is important that consortial leaders make a clear effort to define their roles as facilitators and to acknowledge campus faculty, staff and administrators' expertise.

In bringing together faculty and administrators from campuses, consortial leaders were careful to identify themselves as guides for a group process drawing on the expertise from the various campuses. As the GLCA project leader noted: "the faculty are the designers of the ideas in our initiative, and I am the facilitator. I really think this is how it works best." As facilitators, they often introduced literature, consultants, and ideas, but offered them merely as points of reference. For example, the NAC&U consortial leaders noted: "we know it is best for us to be a resource and a support—providing too much direction not only oversteps our role, but we take away campus agency and ownership needed to lead change back home."

Consortial leaders typically asked questions to try to broaden thinking without challenging or threatening people's ideas. Because campuses often differed in their culture and policies, consortial leaders were careful to help frame discussions as providing a menu of options rather than specific guidance for campuses. In addition, they also saw their role as helping people think beyond their own individual campuses to broader principles and examples. It is often hard to get people to think beyond their own specific campuses to more general policy ideas that might be valuable; the role of consortia leaders was to facilitate that movement from

specific to more general ideas that could be helpful for campuses across the consortium.

Documenting progress to keep the momentum for change and holding campuses accountable

Change is a long process, and it is easy for campus constituents to get lost in the process and lose momentum. As a result, consortia played a key role in collecting updates to help campuses see their own progress and generate enthusiasm and motivation to move forward. At the end of many of the projects, consortial leaders had teams develop either case studies or reports; individual campus participants noted that these reports helped them to see their progress and the value of being involved. It gave them renewed energy to keep moving forward, and they appreciated the consortium pushing them to develop these products throughout the process and at the end.

For example, as a leader with AAC&U noted: “there was a real sense of accomplishment when they finished the final project narratives.” Similarly, the Associated Colleges of the South case studies about integrating technology into the classroom became a source of pride for faculty, and some faculty at ACS campuses leveraged it into more national attention and even became identified as leaders in this area across the country, reinforcing their passion to conduct this work on campus.

As campuses engage in typical change processes, there are often few mechanisms for accountability to ensure that the work gets done. Consortial leaders in these projects could and did create accountability systems through regular reports, checking in, and ongoing communication. AAC&U leaders asked not for only written updates, but also regular phone calls to ensure the campuses were moving forward. This built-in accountability led to meetings that were more focused because consortial leaders did not have to update people on different project initiatives, as reports were already available, and they could spend project time during meetings brainstorming solutions to problems.

Helping campus leaders learn about strategies to create change

For campus leaders who do not always know how to go about promoting change, a consortium can be a central resource, offering advice on how to implement and navigate change. Within the Teagle initiative, consortia/projects that made good progress helped campuses to figure out strategies for institutional change, combining this effort with consortium events that could supplement and add to work on campuses.

For example, SEPCHÉ had an annual workshop that faculty attended. The lessons learned through the workshop prompted individual campuses to create their own workshops and online resources to spread better teaching techniques even further; campus leaders in turn worked to alter

campus policies and practices. AAC&U’s and Imagining America’s consortial leaders connected campuses to change consultants when they saw these campuses running into barriers to change. Leaving campus teams to devise their own change strategies in isolation did not work well since most had to deal significant obstacles; without an avenue through which the consortium could overcome hurdles, the projects would have failed.

LEVERAGING CONSORTIAL MISSION AND NETWORKS

Although there are several general design principles in terms of the ways consortia can help support change, there are two recommendations about how consortia need to think strategically about their own mission and networks in order to be successful with change projects and more likely to scale those changes over time.

Optimize consortial focus and alignment

The Teagle funded projects typically made more progress if they were well aligned with a long-term mission of and goals for the consortium. Projects that moved in a direction that were not a part of the consortium’s work often floundered. For some that moved in a new direction consortial leadership was able to establish a connection with past work that helped to frame it as part of the ongoing work of the consortium. For example, Imagining America’s civic professionalism focus was connected to earlier efforts to develop service learning on campuses. Other consortia had projects that were clearly and strongly aligned with years of work, which tended to make the projects more sustainable and likely to continue into the future. As the GLCA project leader noted: “We are known for doing faculty development work; this was a natural extension of our work.”

Use consortial networks to spread change

Some consortia are very well networked to other groups. Their efforts to create change can be extended through these networks to other groups. For example, Imagining America is connected to The Pericles Project, Campus Compact, AAC&U, and other groups that have shared an interest in civic professionalism. Another example is ACS working with National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education, making changes they supported accessible to other liberal arts colleges. These consortia and their leaders also presented at a variety of conferences that were part of their extended network. Project funders should seek out well-networked consortia for increasing their impact. The more consortia can create extended networks and funders can pursue consortia that are well networked, the more likely changes are to scale.

CHALLENGES

While consortia have distinct advantages for helping initiate, sustain and spread change, there are obvious challenges

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in working across many campuses. Consortial leaders and campus participants reported ways they navigated challenges; even just being aware of these challenges helps consortial projects in anticipating and planning for them.

The four main challenges are: consortial leaders' ability to communicate with faculty and middle level campus leaders such as deans; trust; logistical issues of time and location; and conflicts related to differing institutional sectors. Consortial leaders admitted to wishing they knew more about challenges ahead of time. Instead, they experienced a lot of “just in time” learning to ensure that their projects did not falter. Identifying these challenges can help consortial leaders in their planning efforts.

Moving beyond typical consortial constituents

Projects that succeeded in creating change were able to work with several key leadership groups on campus at once: senior leaders, middle level executives such as deans and department chairs, and faculty. But, without an awareness of all the groups that needed to be brought in, there was a tendency for consortial leaders to focus too much on one group that is often most engaged with the consortium: senior leaders.

The projects that made the most progress moved beyond the individuals with whom they had the strongest ties and communication. Also, some of the consortia have made a concerted effort over the years to develop more programming for faculty so they became a trusted and known resource. This has helped with getting faculty-led initiatives off the ground. But where these relationships did not exist, achieving buy-in from the faculty was more difficult, making it a struggle for these multicampus efforts to move forward.

For example, Independent Colleges Enterprise (ICE) recognized that the consortium had worked primarily with administrators and not faculty. Thus, their work at creating blended learning courses experienced difficulty when faculty were needed to participate but had not been part of the planning or even the long-term work of the consortium. Without any relationship to build upon, they found few partners to move the work forward.

Developing trust

Over the course of change projects, sometimes consortia leaders needed to provide feedback on progress, implementation of the projects, or strategies used—some of which could be sensitive. Building trust between consortial leaders and campus administrators, staff, and faculty is necessary so that critiques are delivered and accepted. Distance, lack of regular contact, and other barriers inherent in multi-campus work can prevent the development of trusting relationships.

A story told by a SEPCHE leader helps demonstrate the way trust between the consortium and campus leaders helps facilitate change:

As a consortium leader I need to be trusted by many groups and develop relationships. Until those relationships are built, lasting change in risk taking is unlikely to occur. For example, I went to the leadership this last week and told them that they need to work on the part-time faculty. I noted that they had good penetration in the full-time faculty but they needed to move on to part-time. If I hadn't built trust with the campus leaders, it is unlikely they would have come on board so easily to the next level of commitment.

Addressing logistics in working across locations

Operating a consortium means working across different campuses and sometimes across different regions and time zones. Project participants described the challenges of setting up conference call times, the liabilities of depending on non-face-to-face communication for much of the time, and the negative results of not being as responsible in visiting wiki and other shared communication sites.

Meeting in person is important for promoting progress; consortia that have campuses that are located closer together can facilitate more frequent interaction. A face-to-face meeting up front is essential, although virtual meetings and

communication can work better in later stages. Consortial leaders need to plan for how groups will work across whatever distance exists between the campuses. Most consortial leaders noted that managing logistics is one of the difficulties of multi-campus initiatives, but that the benefits are so important that this is something for which they need to plan.

Being aware of challenges related to consortia or multi-campus projects with different institutional types

In the past, consortia were largely made up of similar institutions. However, new configurations are emerging where institutions from different sectors are coming together around similar work like service learning or undergraduate research. Imagining America and the Integrative Learning project of AAC&U are examples of consortia that brought together institutions from very different types of institutions. Participants in Imagining America describe this challenge:

Talking about promotion and tenure policies at a research university, a regional doctoral, and a liberal arts college are quite different, and we often talked past each other. It slowed down and often stalled our change processes.

As projects dealt more with specific curricular issues or faculty policies, differences in institutional type made it more difficult to apply an idea in different settings. As consortia bring together individuals from very different campuses, consortium staff members need to be aware that institutional differences can lead to miscommunication and difficulty working together. This will require spending more time up front to promote common understanding and setting up ground rules for working collectively.

Some projects dealt with this challenge by seeking to understand at the beginning what were the common issues they could talk about, breaking up campuses into working groups by type, or even providing more individual consultation on other issues. While institutional differences were most common, disciplinary differences also emerged. ACM realized that the courses that faculty teams were working to modify were very different (religious studies, chemistry, history) so they had a set of key questions related to critical thinking objectives, preventing faculty from getting too into the weeds about course details. Before they developed this tool, faculty discussions were too granular and frustrating for those involved. Therefore, it was the job of the consortial leaders to keep the discussion at the right level and to develop tools to guide such discussions.

CONCLUSION

We are in a new era where campuses will find themselves increasingly unable to find funding to support local change efforts. Foundations, government agencies such as National Science Foundation, National Institutes for Health, National Endowment for the Humanities, policymakers, and others are increasingly demanding that campuses work to scale efforts in much more substantial ways. And as projects go forward using more multi-campus approaches, the advice offered here can help promising initiatives scale and sustain change. Higher education has responded poorly (or not at all) to changes in the external environment. Going forward, proactive changes that can benefit the overall enterprise are needed. The projects involved in Teagles's Faculty Work and Student Learning in the 21st Century show such promise and the way to approach change for higher education in the future. □

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