

DRAFT

THE TEAGLE FOUNDATION GUIDELINES FOR WRITING FRESH THINKING WHITE PAPERS

Best practices: what we've learned from our grantees and others

- An *executive summary* is a great way to start. It provides context for the work (including a statement of objectives and issues, that is, what specific problem / question / concern is the White Paper addressing, and how the group “operationalized” the larger issue of the “disciplines and liberal education”), and more importantly, a list of *actions*—who does what next? (This is not the same as recommendations.)
- Following the executive summary should be a fuller articulation of each of the actions. A *specific follow-up plan*, along with a proposed *time table* for accomplishing the action, is extremely helpful.
- Presenting *concrete findings and evidence* rather than rhetoric in the main body of your White Paper can make it stronger. For example, narratives that provide a genealogy of the project, describe the context and issues framing the work, chronicle working group meetings, list participants involved, etc. should be appendix items.
- While each of the White Papers will focus on your respective disciplines, it's worth thinking about writing them so that they are not “bound by departmental walls” and to encourage thinking about them in ways that cut across disciplines and campus departments.
- Including a *table of contents* or reference guide that points readers to specific sections of the White Paper quickly and easily can help facilitate the transmission of knowledge.
- Carefully consider the *length of your White Paper*. Short and sweet (5,000 words or less) can be a good thing as shorter pieces have a better chance of holding a reader's attention. That said, there is an argument for producing longer pieces if this is what the group requires. If so, then a clear system for organizing the document that allows readers to find information quickly is key (such as a detailed table of contents or index).
- Typographically friendly presentation is very much appreciated!
- Incorporating too many quotes or footnotes can be distracting (in terms of presentation); providing links (to websites, if appropriate) can be more friendly to the eye.
- Writing the White Paper with a clear idea of who your *audience* is. In our minds, the audience for Fresh Thinking White Papers includes faculty, campus leaders, and others at higher education organizations.

Beyond the White Paper

- ***Be creative with available technology.*** How about building an accompanying *web page*? Some working groups already have project websites which, we hope, will continue to be maintained even after the grant period is over. For those working groups that don't have a project website, it might be worth it to consider building one. These websites can house additional information or resources that are not found in the White Papers (e.g. project work plan and participants; the group's reading list—if it had one—with annotations; a “public” version of the progress reports submitted to the Foundation; list of challenges and lessons learned; summary of presentations and / or papers on project findings, etc.). ***Podcasts*** and / or streaming ***video*** of, say, interviews or conversations (formal or informal) with working group members, can be incorporated into web page to present ideas and findings in different ways. Remember, sound bites can be powerful!
- Laying out a clear ***dissemination plan***, articulating how the group might like to see the paper actively distributed by others in higher education. This should include a section on “attention and follow-through,” that is, how the group will engage existing committees and sub-groups within the disciplines, to report on activities. Accompanying the dissemination plan could be a ***utilization and implementation plan*** that lists resources / support structures needed to ensure that the know how in the White Papers gets used “on the ground.” Are specific material or intellectual resources needed? Maybe not much, but this can be a way to “convince” an institution that the action items can be done with few resources.
- ***Such dissemination plans should attempt to “embed” White Papers to enhance discussion / usage.*** The Foundation has been thinking hard about getting the knowledge produced from Fresh Thinking projects used widely by others involved in higher education, especially faculty. One of our ideas involves ***seminars on (selected) White Papers***. Faculty from a range of institutions (identified by their presidents) will be invited to participate, to discuss and grapple with the ideas presented in the White Papers. We have plans to follow up these seminar sessions with a small round of mini grants for those faculty to do something (related to the White Paper or seminar discussions) on their own campuses. The working group could consider doing something along these lines—inviting along with faculty, members of their disciplinary societies—either in a face-to-face session, or using “e-learning” software such as *Elluminate* (www.illuminate.com).

Presenting project findings at a ***conference*** is always a good idea, but how about running a conference solely devoted to the group's work? This is what a Teagle working group based at Cornell University on *Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Disparities in College Completion and Achievement* did in October, 2007 with their leftover grant funds (additional funds, we're certain, had to be raised). More information on this conference can be found at www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/cornell.aspx .

Other conference possibilities include a “national conversation about the disciplines” which brings the six working groups together.

- ***Leveraging the project into something bigger, perhaps even something better.*** Just because the grant period is over doesn't mean that the project, in one way or another, can't be continued. Case in point: With a Teagle grant, a working group based at Barnard College on *Integrative Learning in Liberal Education* ran a series of interdisciplinary faculty seminars focused on pedagogies based on cognitive research and

culminated in the development of a “place-based course” called *River Summer* which the group piloted in summer, 2005. Building on the success of pilot, the group secured funding from the Mellon Foundation and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to run another iteration of the program. For more, see <http://environmentalconsortium.org/taskforces/fieldstudies/riversummer/riversummer.htm>.