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Presentation Title: Institutionalizing effective grant funded programs: A success story

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Presentation Description:

As budgets tighten at institutions of higher education and federal funding agencies, universities are increasingly struggling with questions of how to institutionalize and sustain successful programs initially funded on short-term soft money. Northern Kentucky University (NKU) had two such National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded projects focused on undergraduate STEM majors: Scholarships, Opportunities, Achievements and Results (SOAR) and Focus on Occupations, Recruiting, Community, and Engagement (FORCE). Independent evaluation for these projects indicated that FORCE activities had increased several measures of student success, including retention and graduation. As these projects wound down, NKU's STEM center, the Center for Integrative Natural Science and Mathematics (CINSAM), institutionalized the successful program activities, albeit on a smaller scale or different format due to funding restrictions.

Here, we share some lessons learned from the process of institutionalizing Projects SOAR and FORCE through CINSAM:

- STEM-wide groups of faculty and NSF funding were important to initiate and refine programs that display a strong, local evidence base of effectiveness. Takeaways:
 - Short-term soft money is a key component that allows for testing ideas and building an evidence base for new programs. The end results are both a strengthening of the broader literature and improving local decision-making.
 - Short term soft money is not sufficient for continuation of identified best practices. For sustainability, institutional funds (or possibly endowments) are required.
- CINSAM's existing infrastructure (personnel, administrative structure, relationships with departments)—along with support from STEM departments (especially chairs), deans, and other administrators—was central to the institutionalization of the programs. Takeaways:
 - Centers that work across departments have the power to help universities institutionalize and sustain effective programs.

- Base-funding for infrastructure (e.g. a center) that supports these initiatives is important as a scaffold on which to build these programs.
- Repurposing of an existing position to create a Director of Recruitment and Retention (DRR) was a critical factor in enabling CINSAM to assume responsibility for managing successful program components from SOAR and FORCE. Repurposing of existing scholarships was also key in institutionalization of SOAR. In one expensive FORCE initiative, STEM students were developed as leaders and paid to act as STEM Ambassadors. In the absence of grant funding to support payment of STEM Ambassadors, the experience was transitioned into a leadership course for upper level STEM majors. Takeaways:
 - In this budget environment, repurposing of resources devoted to lower priority or less effective purposes is often required for long term implementation of effective, high priority programming.
 - Positions like CINSAM's DRR could be very useful in other organizational structures (such as advising centers, departments, schools, or colleges) at NKU and elsewhere.
 - Some programs may be changed somewhat to allow for institutionalization in a less resource-intensive format (e.g. STEM Ambassadors' training and programming now accomplished through a course).

In conclusion, institutionalization of grant-funded programs can be difficult in this budget environment but creative approaches to leveraging existing infrastructure and resources make it possible. In this presentation, we will present approaches that could benefit those seeking to institutionalize effective pilot or grant-funded programs.