

# BUILDING CAPACITY

## CREATING AND LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS

The nation has made an unprecedented investment in community colleges to simultaneously increase college completion and stimulate economic recovery. One of the most substantial investments was the Trade Adjustment Act Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program of the United States Department of Labor (U.S.DOL). Beginning October 2011, the TAACCCT program was intended to support the efforts of community colleges to develop training programs and build their capacity to innovate (United States Department of Labor, 2011).

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) recognized the potential importance of TAACCCT to enhance community colleges' ability to better serve all students. Through professional development, research, evaluation and networking, TCI invited these colleges to share what they were learning and ways in which they were changing their policies and practices with the goal of improving student outcomes. TCI collaborated with 24 consortia to publish *Strategies for Transformative Change* briefs that describe specific strategies that each consortium implemented. Looking across these briefs, we identified a number of key topical areas under which the grant-funded innovations (strategies) could be organized, including partnerships, career pathways, and intrusive student support, and we examined how the consortia engaged in capacity building to accomplish their goals.

How did TCI think of capacity building? Our thinking went beyond the question of short-term changes and a focus on compliance to long-term change that has the potential to improve performance while sustaining access. We looked for evidence that changes were accompanied by data and other indications that colleges were focusing on activities that would allow them to create structures and processes to engage in deep and collective capacity building necessary to sustain change (Sharratt & Fullan, 2013; Kezar, 2014).

This brief is one in a series that focuses on capacity building of TAACCCT funded consortia. In this brief, we describe ways in which we saw three consortia creating and leveraging partnerships to accomplish their goals of preparing individuals for living-wage employment and providing skilled workers for industry. While the colleges used various methods to broaden participation and buy-in to meet students' and employers' needs, there were similarities in their approaches to building capacity.

### Transformative Change Overview

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) is dedicated to sustaining and scaling change that closes equity gaps and improves student outcomes in the community college education context.

## The Community College Consortium for Biosciences Credentials (c3bc)

The Community College Consortium for Biosciences Credentials (c3bc) is a national consortium comprised of twelve colleges in eight states. The Consortium received a Round Two TAACCCT grant to increase education and training in four areas of biosciences: biomanufacturing, medical devices, lab skills, and learning technologies. The Consortium was organized in hubs with a lead and two partner colleges in each hub.

Strengthening existing and building new collaborations with employers, industry associations, and workforce agencies was central to the work of the Consortium. More than 40 employers partnered with consortium colleges in a variety of roles including: developing curriculum, teaching courses, providing internships, and serving on advisory groups.

The factors most critical to building capacity were

- history of partnerships and leader commitment to build on existing relationships and trust;

- willingness to expand to collaborate with workforce agencies and new employers;
- linking with professional associations to identify trends and build strategies; and
- employers perceived that collaborating would benefit their workforce and productivity.

## Oregon CASE

Oregon CASE (Credentials, Acceleration, and Support for Employment) was a statewide consortium that included all 17 community colleges, the Oregon Employment Department's Central Trade Act Unit and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Unit, along with other public and community partners. The Consortium received a Round One TAACCCT grant to enhance career pathways, provide coaches to support student success, and develop a process for granting credit for prior learning for students in these five sectors: Business and Management, Food and Natural Resources, Health Services, Human Resources, and Industrial and Engineering Systems.



The factors most critical to building capacity were

- hiring a TAA liaison to join the consortium management team and support processes and communication;
- holding frequent, regular meetings with management team;
- providing professional development for college and workforce staff; and
- developing Intergovernmental Agency Agreements between TAA and each community college in the state.

## Florida TRADE

The Florida TRADE (Transforming Resources for Accelerated Degrees and Employment) Consortium included 12 state and community colleges with a Round Two TAACCCT grant to improve upon Florida's training and education system in advanced manufacturing. This work of the Consortium was accomplished through improved alignment of partnerships and resources that included members from education, workforce, and industry.

The factors most critical to building capacity were

- initiation of project by the presidents of the colleges;
- continued active involvement of partnership of presidents, including coming together to develop a sustainability plan;
- collaborative development of shared foundational principles: transparency, communication, and flexibility; and
- engagement of broad group of stakeholders.

## What We Learned about Capacity Building

These three consortia all recognized the importance of partnering with employers and workforce providers to build curriculum and implement the programs and services to better serve students. Recognizing the needs of regional employers within the community college regions of the consortium, the colleges brought employers together to share their experiences with and perspectives toward the workforce needs, and they utilized this information to identify competencies that would shape the content of designed programs of study. Employers saw the benefit of participating with the colleges – with some employers having already participated in partnerships begun prior to the grant – including some investing their own resources to provide work-based learning opportunities for students and to engage with college staff to match students to job openings.

The colleges in all three consortia also gave early focused attention to enhancing the relationship with area workforce representatives to improve systems for sharing information. Within these partnerships, the consortia fostered collective commitments to build practices and processes to address the academic and employment needs of students in their regions.

The act of building a consortium was in itself a capacity building activity for the colleges. The active, sincere, and sustained engagement of leaders within the three consortia was essential to creating a shared agenda around which they dedicated grant and college resources. Each college had broad as well as specific interests and needs to fulfill, and still worked collaboratively with other colleges in the consortium to build synergistic relationships that enabled both institutional and collective capacity building. Within each consortium, the colleges developed a shared understanding of the change strategies, they shared expertise and information, and they learned from one another.

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TCI is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and the Joyce Foundation, and this publication was prepared pursuant to a grant from the Lumina Foundation (Grant Agreement Number 8829) to the University of Illinois Board of Trustees.

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Richie, D. (2016). *Building capacity: Creating and leveraging partnerships*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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