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Essentials Skills in Building and Sustaining a Faculty Development Center: Budget and Staff

Todd Zakrajsek
University of North Carolina School of Medicine

Dr. Todd Zakrajsek began his career as an adjunct professor, teaching at a small private college, a technical school, and distance education classes. Securing a tenure-track position at a small regional college in the Pacific Northwest in the fall of 1994, Todd started a center for teaching and learning in his third year there. For his efforts he received a budget of \$50 his first year. The next year it went to \$5,000 and a one-course release. In year three, the budget was \$20,000 with additional release time. While there, he was promoted to associate professor and tenured, partly for his campus-wide faculty development work. In 2001, Todd resigned tenure to take a position as the founding director of a center for teaching and learning at a research university in the Midwest. With a staff of himself and an office professional, he began to develop resources for a campus with approximately 650 full-time faculty members. In 2003, the faculty development center he was leading was merged with the learning technologies group, and Todd was asked to be the director of the combined office. About this time, he also served as Co-PI on a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant to provide resources to distance and adjunct faculty. In 2008, Todd resigned his job as faculty development director to accept a position as the Executive Director of a large research extensive university in the South. He was successful in assisting with the transformation from a long-standing and successful teaching center into a center providing support in teaching, research, and leadership. There, he was responsible for hiring six positions and managed a budget of \$1.2 million. In 2012, Todd began working in the School of Medicine at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, as an Associate Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and also in the Academy of Educators to assist in building resources for faculty in the School of Medicine.

Given Todd's extensive experience in faculty development for over 15 years in a variety of types of institutions, regions, and faculty served, we have asked him

to write a series on essential issues needed by directors of faculty development efforts. This series is designed to suggest areas for faculty developers to consider along with tips and techniques Todd has found to be helpful along the way. In this issue, Todd focuses on budget and staff concerns. Possible future topics will include how to get and maintain support on campus, what programs to offer, bringing outside experts to campus, assessing/documenting your successes, and strategic planning. If there is a topic you would like to see covered, contact the Editor-in-Chief at tassonjp@miamioh.edu.

You have been a successful faculty member, and now you have the opportunity to lead a faculty development effort on your campus. The problem is, you have no direct training in this area, which requires a plethora of skills, such as knowing how students learn in a variety of disciplines, financial planning, human resources, project management, time management, politics, counseling, conflict resolution, peer observation, technology advances in education, curriculum development, and assessment. Much like starting a small business (or assuming leadership of an existing business), there is no one best way to start a center for teaching and learning (or to assume leadership of an existing center). Also, like most businesses, if there is not a good “return on investment” in terms of cost relative to the value in the products and services offered, one can quickly “go out of business.” There is increasing pressure on college and university budgets, and in order to sustain or grow a center for supporting faculty, one must demonstrate value. For this installment, I will focus on the areas of budget and staffing and the implications for these areas in terms of starting and sustaining centers for teaching and learning. I write from the perspective of what I have learned that may be helpful to you. I have also strived to include information that is not traditionally covered pertaining to successfully leading a faculty development effort. That is, the following are a few things that are extremely important, yet rarely discussed.

Budgets

To be a faculty development director, you must be able to manage a budget skillfully. Budgets for centers devoted to teaching and learning range from virtually nothing to millions of dollars per year. I have worked with annual budgets ranging from \$50 (yes, FIFTY dollars) to \$1.2 million. Let me first say that I feel it is a huge mistake to wish blindly for a really large budget. With each level of budget comes a different responsibility, and in times of budget cuts, a 20% cut from a million dollar budget typi-

cally ends up being a person's (or many people's) job. That is a headache nobody wants.

I am absolutely convinced that the biggest mistake a faculty development director can make is to lament not having enough money and, more specifically, to allow the "lack of adequate budget" to impact what is accomplished. There are very few directors of centers/institutes/department/units who feel they have adequate funding. That is, one certainty on campus is that everyone is always looking for more base funding. While it is to be expected that you will constantly request more funding, each time it should be done with a proposal for growth, not merely for sustaining basic functions. If you argue that you need more money in order to provide essential support, it suggests that at present you are not being successful. If you find yourself in a position where you argue for increased personnel or fiscal support because you are stressed, overly busy, and unable to function in your current situation, I believe you have made an error. Being "swamped" indicates you did not grow your effort at a responsible pace that is sustainable. Assuming a role of leadership for an existing center is a different framework. When you step into an existing effort, you may find that what is being done is not sustainable on the current budget. When you are new in a position, it is the perfect time to "rightsize" your efforts relative to your budget.

If you are building (or rebuilding) a center, build a center that is sustainable with the resources you have at present. A very strong approach is to do more with the funding you have than one would expect (that means doing things effectively, not stressing yourself out doing a lot with little funds), document what has been achieved through the current funding, and then discuss what additional support could be provided with additional funds. To keep a positive framework with regard to your budget, compare what you have or have been offered with no support at all, rather than the amount you need to do all you feel needs to be done. If you have nothing and someone gives you \$1,000, it feels like a lot of money. If you determine you must have \$10,000, and are given \$1,000, that same amount feels like terribly small.

In addition to having a mindset of what you can do with the funds at hand, you will need to be able to *read* your budget. Do not trust others to do this for you. Figure out how to log in to your web-based budget and understand where your money is and how it is spent. If you do not have a web log-in system, find out how you can track your budget. Even if you have never been good at balancing your personal checkbook, you can learn how to work with your center's budget. It really is not as difficult as many think, and it will impress upper-level administrators if you have a good

handle on your budget. Your overall goal is to hit the end of the year with zero to 2% of your starting budget. That is, if you have a \$10,000 budget, ideally, you want to end the year with somewhere between \$0 and \$200. If you can do that, you will quickly demonstrate that you know how to handle money. There are several ways to manage your budget. Below are listed a few of the primary considerations.

Ask for Assistance.

If you cannot figure out your budget, ask for assistance. If the person assisting you talks too fast for you to understand, ask her to slow down. If the individual seems short on time, ask to come back later for more information. Take good notes and set aside time right after the conversation to spend quality time with your budget. One valuable strategy is to ask someone who is directing an effort similar to the size of your center and who has been working in the area for a number of years to help you to understand how budgeting is done. If you are in a small office, it may well be that an administrator has been assigned to “handle the budget” for you. If this happens, ask that person if he or she might be able to teach you how to handle the budget as you know that is an important skill to develop. Get control of your own budget as quickly as you are able (even if it takes a year or two for that to happen).

Understand Personnel Versus Operating Costs.

Identify how much of your budget is set aside for salary and benefits. The rest is likely operating money. As you grow your budget and the size of your center, always keep an eye on what proportion of your budget is for personnel versus operating costs. If you have most of your money in personnel, you will have great people to do things but will have next to no money to support activities. If you have relatively small personnel expenses, then you will have a lot of money to do things, but not much help to get things done. Keep in mind that if you do experience a budget reduction when most of your money is in personnel, then you will likely have to lay off staff. When possible, I like to have about 65-70% in personnel costs, resulting in 30-35% in operating costs. This gives you good staffing to help with programs and adequate operating costs. The added advantage is that this also allows you to absorb up to about a 25% cut without being required to terminate staff.

Get a Foundation (Gift) Account.

Determine if your budget is all in one account or in multiple accounts. Even very small budgets may be split among two or more accounts. It is very helpful to understand which accounts come with which restrictions. Crazy as it may sound, some accounts (typically, accounts with state-generated funds) have extremely rigid restrictions, perhaps not allowing for the purchase of any food for events. Other accounts (typically, foundation or gift accounts) will have next to no restrictions, allowing for purchase of food, alcohol, and gifts. If you do not have a gift account, ask if it is possible to have one created for your center. If you are told “no,” check to see if perhaps you can share one with another office, such as the provost. Once you have a gift account, people can donate to your center and those funds can be used for many things, such as food. I have talked to many people who have lamented the fact they cannot purchase any food. In one position I held, shortly after starting to direct the center I asked for a gift account. I then asked a few people I knew well to donate very small amounts to that account. That allowed me to get the account up and running. It takes only about \$50 to provide a modest lunch at a book discussion. For \$500 per year one may be able to purchase food for several different types of events. The account I started with a few very small requests from friends maxed out while I was at that institution at close to a quarter of a million dollars. Life looks very different as a faculty development director when you have over \$220,000 in an account that has very few restrictions (as long as it is used for faculty development efforts).

Plan Your Budget.

Map out your budget for the year. Even with a relatively small budget, figure out where you expect to spend your funds over the next 12 months. Take this budget to your supervisor and get feedback. This meeting will show that you understand budgeting, can think strategically how you will allocate limited resources, and give your supervisor (perhaps a provost or associate provost) an idea of the types of efforts you will undertake. This will also be very helpful later when you demonstrate “return on investment.”

Stay Positive.

Almost everything people know about your effort will be determined based on how you talk about your effort. If you complain that you don't have enough money, it will sound like you are not able to do much. If

you criticize those who cut your budget, well, you may be criticizing the same individuals who also support your efforts. It is best not to talk about your budget with others, but when you do, be positive. The goal here is to impress everyone with how far you can make a dollar go, and how well you manage the funds you have. In the height of terrible budget reductions, I always tried my best to be as positive as possible. This is not to say that you express happiness with budget cuts, only that you talk about it relative to the institution and try to be positive. "Yes, it is unfortunate that our budgets were cut. The university is certainly going through some tough times. I have an idea for a new program that I think will do great things and not cost much. Tell me what you think of. . . ."

If my budget is cut by 25%, I will do my best to figure out what has to be cut and what other less resource-intensive activities I can implement. It is totally appropriate to demonstrate to your supervisor that you are disappointed with a cut, and to explain very rationally what will be cut and what can be done, but be careful about negativity. This may change when you have been in your position for many years, but at the beginning, don't give anyone a rationale to shut down your center. Never say, "With a 25% budget cut there is no way I can continue to support faculty." That statement is never followed with a response by your supervisor of, "Well, I didn't think of that; I will have your budget fully reinstated." Ride out the tough times, and when funding is available again you will be at the top of the list.

Pool Resources Through Collaboration.

Don't be embarrassed to ask others on campus for funding support. Look for collaborators. When you have potential partners, show your budget for the proposed event and ask for assistance. I once found a department that *never* used the budget they were allocated for faculty development. My proposal to that department was that I would find them an outside speaker on a topic of their choice, make all the arrangements, and evaluate the event. All they had to do was to "pay for everything." Essentially, I provided an in-house consulting service whereby I did the work and they paid so the event would break even. It worked out great, and we ended up doing the same thing the following year. They spent the funding they were allocated to support their faculty, as per their mandate, and because I was a campus-wide faculty development director, I ended up with "credit" for delivering the event. It was a total win-win.

Understand One-Time Monies Versus Base-Funding Increases.

There is a huge difference between one-time (also called nonrecurring) money and base budget adjustments. Base adjustments means a given amount of money will be placed into your budget every year for the foreseeable future. This is the best funding to secure, but also extremely difficult to get in times of tight budgets. One-time money is an amount transferred to your account for the current fiscal year with no expectations that you will receive the funding ever again. Often, accounts with state funds do not “carry-forward,” meaning if the money is left in the account at the end of the year it will be lost. According to some budget models, if you have money left in the account at the end of the year it is an indication that you had “too much money,” and your budget may be reduced the following year. Even if that is not standard policy, it is a poor idea to leave more than 2% of your budget in your account at the end of the year. Foundation or gift accounts typically are allowed to roll forward, meaning you don’t have to spend all of the funds in those accounts. Keep in mind that budgets do not allow for state money to be moved to a foundation account. Therefore, you should do your best to spend your state money first and then your foundation funds. If you are strategic with your budget, you may be able to find individuals with “extra money” late in the fiscal year. Plan your end-of-the-year event with your foundation funds and then just prior to your event look around to see if you can secure any “one-time” monies from co-sponsoring units on campus. Although those funds likely will come from state accounts, meaning they cannot be used for food or gifts, you may be able to use those funds for some of your events and, in the process, save some of your foundation funds. I have had people offer to transfer as much as \$30,000 to my account just weeks prior to the end of the year as one-time money. If you have an event or travel planned and can make quick use of the money, you win. Do be careful, though, for there are pitfalls. In one case, I did not have the time to spend the money I accepted from another office, meaning it was transferred to my account, and then at the end of the year, it showed as a surplus that was not carried forward. This was actually a bad thing for my budget as I risked having my budget the subsequent year reduced for having too much left over at the end of the year. As a result, I had to write a budget justification showing what had happened.

Staffing

In addition to budgets, personnel issues are rarely discussed, but

extremely important. Getting the right people into the right positions, supporting their work, and keeping everyone happy is a challenging, yet extremely rewarding job. Similar to budgets, I have never met a director of a center or institute who would turn down additional staff. Also, similar to budget discussions, there always exists the opportunity to complain that it is impossible to get anything done because you don't have enough assistance. Again, reframing is the key. Do not compare what you are able to do with all that could possibly be done. That is depressing. Compare what you are able to do with nothing being done at all. That will keep your efforts exciting and rewarding part of the job. Following are some tips to assist you with being an effective supervisor.

You Run the Show.

It may be massively uncomfortable to you at first, but you are "the boss." Most faculty developers were previously faculty members, and in my experience, faculty members don't like bossing others, and they really don't like to be bossed, either. I recall early in my faculty development career cringing every time a work-study student called me "boss." Keep in mind that you are the key staff member of the faculty support effort. You can say, "It isn't me; it is the effort of everyone who works in the center." This may well be true, but it is you who chooses the direction of the effort and then works with people to help them be successful. Strategic planning and supervision takes much more time than most realize. *Good* supervision and planning takes even more time. Whether you are the only person in your office, or the supervisor of a team of individuals, there is only so much you can do. If you are new to supervising others, there is a wake-up call headed your way. Each time a person asks if you have "a minute," you will see 15 to 30 minutes disappear from your day. Every time you proof someone else's work, you will be spending time for something they will get "credit" for producing. Whenever two or more of your staff do not get along, you will spend hours getting them to function well as a team. You will also likely experience depression related to the fact that you no longer have a direct hand in "doing" the work you thought you would be doing. The bottom line is to fully understand what it is you are expected to do and then determine how much you can do. Much like your budget, you have only so much time. Stretching yourself too thin will have a negative impact. Not doing enough work is also problematic. It is extremely important to figure out how much you can do and stick to that amount. All that said, if you amass a great team, and manage the resources and team well, your work with many faculty members allows

you to have a significant impact on a vast amount of student learning. Don't get too frustrated with the time you spend putting out fires. Most managers of teams fail to realize that, like a fire fighter, putting out fires can be an important job. As you build your efforts, keep in mind that "doing" the work will likely shift to helping others "get the work done."

Start Fast, and Plan for the Future.

Be particularly careful when you start your new job. In the first several weeks it will feel like you are not doing much, and, as a result, you are likely to start agreeing to work on many projects. A few short months later you will find yourself extremely busy with all of those projects and won't have time to do the work you need to do. Try to approach the situation strategically. Use the first few months of the job to learn as much as you can about the organization and what is needed. That said, it is important to provide some resources or opportunities. Do a few things with high visibility, such as a book discussion group or workshop, but mostly, just get a solid foundation. I would suggest running a workshop about one month into a new job on a topic that you know well. People will be shocked at how quickly you "hit the ground running." Overall, do take time to learn the culture and the new job, but be careful not to spend too much time on "getting up to speed." My experience has been that you have three to six months to get rolling. If you don't show any outcomes by six months, it may well call into question as to whether they have the right person in the position, unless you were a total novice when you started and they understand that you need to build an entirely new set of abilities.

Do a Personnel Skill Audit on Your Staff.

If you are supervising others, find out as quickly as possible where they are strong and where support is needed. Have some initial meetings with each person. Ask the person to describe an average day and when he or she experiences floods of work and when there are times that are slow. Ask about strengths and in what areas there is a desire to grow. Budget extra time in the first two months of your new job to go over just about everything your staff does. As the person leading the efforts, you should have a good sense of what your office is doing. Explain to the staff that you will be "looking over their shoulders" for a bit of time to give you a full perspective of all that is done. This will buy you time to assess how *well* each person is doing his or her job and also how *much* is being done. As individuals demonstrate expertise and as you better understand what

is being done you can back off and spend that time doing other things.

Move People as Needed.

Determine if you need to make any personnel changes. There are three major categories into which I place anyone working for me: “solid employee”; “needs support and training, but has potential”; and “in the wrong position.” It is one of the toughest aspects of a job as supervisor, but if someone is in the wrong position, and if HR will allow it, you need to terminate their position. We would all like to be very kind and keep people in their jobs, even if they are not very good at what they do, but the fact is that does great disservice to the organization, to their colleagues, and, in many respects, to themselves. Often, someone who struggles requires a great deal of support from others in the office, resulting in those individuals having a difficult time doing their jobs. Before you make any decisions regarding personnel changes, however, *always* talk to both your supervisor and human resources. It may be literally impossible to remove a person from a current position. Know very clearly what is allowed and what is not before you do or say anything. You can find yourself in a lot of hot water if you don’t follow policy.

Also, read employee handbooks and other guidelines cover to cover. In each organization I have worked I have found policies and procedures that human resources had missed or given me advice contrary to the written policy *about human resource policies*. Human resources is a “resource” for you. However, it is your responsibility to follow policy. Nobody expects a situation where there is a poorly performing employee who cannot be terminated, but it does happen. If there is such a person in a position for which you are considering being the director, you may even want to pass on the opportunity. A dysfunctional support person who cannot be terminated really is that much of a problem. If you accept the position and find out there is a person who refuses to improve and refuses to leave, talk to HR for advice, and proceed with extreme caution. There are times when a single sentence can make things much worse for you. The bottom line is to “document everything.”

Know When to Grow.

Always consider if additional staff would be helpful. Hiring someone, even as a work study, when there is not enough work to do is unfair to the person being hired. That said, if you have the work, additional staff can really move your center forward. Adding full-time staff at the university

or college level is typically a very big deal. My advice is that once you get rolling in your new position figure out how you could make very good use of an additional person in your office. Ask for the “slot” every year, and be understanding when it is turned down. Eventually, you will get your slot. My very strong recommendation is that if you are offered a staff line, figure out very quickly what that position could do (which will be covered if you have been asking for a period of time), and then proceed at a quick pace to fill the position. If budgets decrease, you may well find that the staff line you were promised no longer exists. Don’t move so fast as to make a mistake with regard to the slot, but move as quickly as possible. Often, if you hire the right person you can shift job responsibilities a bit later relatively easily, provided you don’t move the level of the job to one where more pay is needed.

Keep in mind that there are many ways to increase your staff aside from a full-time position, for instance, work study, volunteer staff, and shared appointments. Ask around about work study and how allocations can be secured. Typically, there are funds on campus that will pay students to work in your office. Their salary does not come out of your budget. I have had as many as 10 work-study students at a time at no cost to my budget. Student workers can be very helpful at a very low cost.

Depending on your activities, you may be able to secure volunteers or unpaid interns. Although I generally dislike having people work for me who do not get paid, there are times where individuals can do time-limited projects that they find to be a great benefit. For example, I have had graduate students produce resources for the center’s website. Then, when the graduate student is on the job market, he or she can point to resources he created for the center for teaching and learning. This is a great addition to a vitae and demonstrates a strong teaching and learning focus.

Shared appointments are another way to secure additional assistance at either a fraction of the cost of an entire position, or maybe at no cost at all if the other office is willing to donate a portion of a position. For example, it may be that the technology division of your campus does some faculty support efforts and feels it would benefit from being affiliated with your center. It may be that a person would have a portion of their time allocated to your center, whereby that person works with you, but is paid by the technology division. I have also worked within this model with great success.

Conclusion

Overall, there are so many exciting things that can be discussed with

respect to being a faculty development director that mundane issues like budget and staffing are rarely even considered. Consider, however, what can be done in your new role if you have no assistance and no funding. Budgets seem messy, and everyone in administration admires someone who understands budgeting and is responsible with the limited funds that are available. Most people either are afraid of budgets or just don't like them, and, as a result, they fail to understand the budget process. My experience has been that they really are not that difficult, and people who are good at budgets are excited to help those who want to learn. Staffing is another issue that is rarely discussed. Challenges like wanting more staff and having poorly performing subordinates are discussed, but strategic staffing is often ignored in discussions of center activities and resources. That said, when you have a well-functioning team, work is not really work at all. I love watching talented individuals do what they do well. I also love it when a work-study student can put together a flyer for a workshop in 30 minutes that I could work on for hours and still have it look poorly designed.

Having good employees and a basic understanding of your budget are extremely important in providing you and your center with a solid foundation from which to work. Topics to be addressed in future articles include how to get and maintain support on campus, what programs to offer, bringing outside experts to campus, assessing/documenting your successes, and strategic planning.