



Strategic Intervention Brief #7 *Strengthened Accountability Structures*

Strategies for Effecting Gender Equity and Institutional Change

In this Brief we describe interventions that seek to define and enhance accountability for gender equity and diversity within the institution. While climate initiatives may increase individuals' sense of personal accountability for creating an equitable and supportive environment in their own workplace, here we focus on structural interventions, particularly institutional processes or functions that assign responsibility for actions, policies, and reporting on gender equity. Department chairs or heads, deans, and other institutional leaders have important accountability roles discussed here; more general leadership development for this group is discussed in Brief 4. Likewise, communications strategies can play a role in enhancing accountability by informing and engaging stakeholders; these are discussed in Brief 13.

Rationale

The need for new accountability structures arises as institutions implement other interventions to advance women in STEM. Many examples show that—even with the best of intentions—when no one is made accountable, backsliding follows. People return to previous practices; well-designed programs are diluted or weakened; and processes are followed variably, leading to inequity in treatment or in access to benefits. Thus, lack of accountability is a serious risk to the sustainability and consistency of ADVANCE efforts over time.

While participation is voluntary in some activities offered by ADVANCE projects, such as individuals' participation in faculty development, other activities address processes and policies that apply across a college or the entire institution, and in these cases it must be clear who is responsible for implementing and monitoring them. For instance, if departments are asked to follow new procedures and guidelines for recruitment and hiring (see Brief 5), then someone must ensure that these guidelines are followed and apply appropriate consequences if they are not. Similarly, accountability needs emerge when changes are made to institutions' processes of tenure and promotion (Brief 6) or to policies on flexible work arrangements that accommodate faculty members' changing personal circumstances over time (Brief 8). To sustain mentoring and faculty development programs might require assignment of responsibility to specific individuals for offering the program and ensuring its high quality. Other accountability structures, particularly those involving the gathering and review of data, may address the institution's general progress on gender equity.

Assigning accountability can also be viewed as a measure to increase the transparency of processes. Because women may be excluded from informal networks where valuable professional information is shared (Sonnert & Holton, 1995), it may be argued that increased accountability benefits women by making information about policies and practices equally available to all. It may also be argued that if women faculty assume informal accountability roles (e.g., within departments) because they value the outcomes of equity initiatives, the work will be viewed as service and devalued as “institutional housekeeping” when they are reviewed for promotion (Misra, Lundquist, Holmes & Agiomavritsis, 2011). Furthermore, if accountability for gender equity and inclusion is managed informally and handled only by individuals with particular interest in these issues, sustainable organizational change may not actually be occurring. In contrast, formal accountability structures affect the institution as a system in ways that contribute to deep, sustainable organizational change.

Purpose and Audience

The general purpose of these structures was to assign responsibility for programs, policies, and reports related to institutional progress on gender equity and to define consequences if procedures were not followed or if programs and policies were not administered fairly. Designating formal accountability for specific elements of an institutional transformation effort could also increase awareness of the issues and signal the importance of equity and diversity among institutional goals (see Brief 13).

Because these were college- or institution-wide functions, the active participation of administrators was essential. ADVANCE leaders took on roles of researching, proposing, and advocating for accountability structures as they developed policies and procedures to enhance gender equity and made wise use of their allies who held formal and informal leadership roles. Valian (2009a,b) suggests ways that administrators at the department, college, and institutional level can demonstrate and practice accountability for gender equity.

Models

Not all ADVANCE institutions in the first two rounds were explicit in addressing accountability structures, although some likely built these into their activities without fanfare. Institutions' reports show that some created new administrative positions to oversee equity issues or assigned specific oversight and reporting functions to existing roles. Some defined new procedures or standardized or enhanced existing processes, such as department- or college-level requirements for plans or reports about diversity. Others institutionalized the gathering, reporting, and review of data by campus leaders.

New or reorganized positions

Some institutions identified several accountability functions and defined new positions to oversee and implement this set of functions. A distinctive example is the Equity Advisor model developed at the *University of California Irvine*, in which designated faculty members based in each college oversaw and promoted best practices in recruitment and hiring for faculty positions and provided support for mentoring and career advancement for existing faculty in the college. In other models, institutions designated an associate or assistant dean, in a new or existing position, to oversee searches and lead faculty development. These roles were housed in colleges, under the provost or in offices responsible for diversity or faculty affairs.

Accountability procedures

Some institutions defined points of oversight as they modified specific procedures, especially those involving faculty hiring and advancement. For example, search committees might be required to report data on the composition of the applicant pool and the steps they had taken to diversify that pool, while the dean, provost, or equity advisor then would have responsibility to review and sign off on this report before the search could move forward. In other cases, broad accountability for gender equity might be assigned to unit leaders. For example, colleges or departments might be required to prepare a plan for improving diversity and equity in their unit, and review criteria for reappointment of department chairs or deans might then include progress on this plan as a measure of their success in this arena.

Communication of data

Institutions collected a variety of data to report to the NSF ADVANCE program on specific program-wide metrics (Frehill, Jeser-Cannavale & Malley, 2007). Some ADVANCE projects built a clientele for these data among institutional leaders and institutionalized data-gathering and reporting so that the data could be used for regular monitoring of institutional progress on gender equity. Typical measures included faculty composition and salaries by gender and by rank; composition of applicant pools for faculty positions; and demographics of recipients of promotions and awards. Some projects carried out climate surveys or salary equity studies at regular intervals while others used the COACHE faculty surveys of job satisfaction and

engagement (<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=coache>). Various campuses reported sharing data with their provosts, faculty senates, campus commissions on the status of women, ADVANCE advisory boards, and/or with deans and chairs at retreats or workshops. Others used specific disciplinary data on institutional and national faculty composition as a tool in working with departments and search committees.

Examples

UC Irvine appointed one or two Equity Advisors in each school to provide local assistance in recruitment and retention. The equity advisors' main efforts focused on hiring: they met with search committees to educate them about expectations and best practices for searches, reviewed and approved search and recruitment activities, offered recruitment support, met with candidates, and assisted with dual-career hiring opportunities. They held signature authority at several stages of the search process. For existing faculty, they also offered advice and troubleshooting of problems, nominated faculty for awards, and worked with deans on other gender equity issues, such as salary equity reviews. Some organized mentoring and faculty development activities tailored to their colleges, especially for pre-tenure faculty. The equity advisor role addresses accountability in two ways: search committees were accountable to them, and they, in turn, were accountable for providing several types of support, such as education of search committees on strategies for inclusion (see Brief 5) and assisting with dual-career hiring situations (see Brief 10).

Case Western Reserve University developed criteria for accountability of deans that addressed recruitment, advancement and retention, institutional climate, and faculty development, as well as overall progress on the representation of STEM women. Deans were given authority to sign off on search committees' short lists before candidates could be invited to campus.

Georgia Tech reviewed faculty handbooks for clarity, consistency, and independence of evaluation procedures and established an Office of Faculty Career Development Services intended to standardize faculty appointment procedures across colleges. These activities were institutionalized through the Office of the Vice President of Institute Diversity.

At *Hunter College*, annual reports held departments accountable for equity in distributing resources to faculty. Strong performance was rewarded by extra funding from the provost.

At the *University of Maryland Baltimore County*, departments were required to commit to a diversity plan before they could open a new faculty search. Evaluation of chairs and deans incorporated progress on departmental diversity plans and was tied to departmental resources.

Utah State University instituted the role of ombudsperson for each promotion and tenure (P&T) case. These non-voting members of the P&T committee monitored the committee's work to ensure that policies were followed and procedures uniformly applied. Brief 6 provides additional details about this role, which was felt to reduce procedural error and dispel perceptions of inequity.

The *University of Rhode Island* established IDEA (Institutional Data Enhancing Academics), a university-wide committee, to improve and institutionalize the mechanisms by which benchmark data are collected. The committee worked to identify the data needs of all IDEA members, to consider aggregation of these needs, and to transfer benchmarking activities permanently to Institutional Research following the grant period.

Evaluation

There are few examples of evaluation of accountability structures as stand-alone efforts. Stepan-Norris (2007) evaluated the impact of the equity advisors on hiring at *UC Irvine* and concluded that their presence had a positive effect on the hiring of women. The equity advisors' interaction with the dual-career hiring program was also positively associated with hiring women. The report recommended that equity advisors

should have clear job expectations and procedures and should participate in collaborative professional development sessions to share challenges and good ideas.

Affordances and Limitations

Affordances of accountability structures include the following:

- Structures that hold departments accountable (e.g., signature authority over searches, required diversity plans, inclusion of diversity criteria in review of chairs) were perceived as sending a clear message that diversity was valued and taken seriously by upper administration. We observed these measures more commonly in smaller and more centralized institutions, but less commonly in institutions where departments held strong autonomy over faculty-related processes.
- Gathering and communicating data to institutional leaders and stakeholders helped to raise awareness of issues and thus to increase their felt responsibility for progress on the issues.
- Accountability for new or enhanced programs and processes operated best when the need was anticipated and built into their design, rather than added on later. In this way, thoughtful design of accountability can also help in ensuring the sustainability of these processes after a grant. Moreover, including accountability plans from the start of a project conveys the point that accountability is a “normal part of business” rather than an “extra” to be addressed only if there is time or interest.
- New or reorganized positions were used creatively to combine a number of functions related to diversity and faculty support, thus potentially contributing to improvements in workplace climate and the success and retention of all faculty, not only women. Such positions also served a symbolic purpose in signaling strong organizational support for diversity and long-term commitment to an institutional agenda of inclusiveness.

In general, accountability structures served to enhance other ADVANCE efforts, rather than as a stand-alone measure. Increased accountability must be coupled with appropriate support and resources for the accountable party to do the job. For example, if search committees are held accountable for increasing diversity of the applicant pool and ensuring equity in evaluating candidates, they must also receive education and help for how to do this.

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