

Workshop Report: *ADVANCE and Beyond*
Thinking Strategically about Faculty-Based Institutional Change

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The project seeks to advance understanding of the processes of organizational change that are important in ADVANCE Institutional Transformation (IT) projects. ADVANCE projects work to increase women's representation and involvement in academic STEM through system-wide efforts to identify and remove organizational constraints that lead to gendered biases in institutional policies and processes. Our team has previously studied ADVANCE IT projects and developed and published analyses of the interventions they developed to address gender inequities at different levels of higher education systems. From the research we have also developed an initial list of processes that are important in accomplishing the change goals. In this workshop we sought to explore and understand these processes in greater depth. By making these processes explicit and showing how they are used *in situ*, we hope to demonstrate how to design and guide strategic initiatives that can succeed in complex and dynamic contexts.

The goals of this workshop project have been

- to describe a set of important organizational change processes as observed in a selection of ADVANCE IT projects
- to learn whether and how similar processes have been important in other ADVANCE IT projects and in other institutional change projects in STEM higher education
- to offer useful advice to change agents who work on faculty-based institutional change in a variety of arenas, within and beyond ADVANCE.

Design and Conduct of the Workshop

Our workshop used focus group techniques to examine specific change processes that we have learned from previous work¹ to be highly relevant to successful institutional change. We used tested strategies to engage participants in expanding, critiquing, reflecting on, and articulating aspects of these change processes that we had identified as important in our research. Through conversation we derived more extensive, complex, and nuanced data on each of these change processes. The way we carried out the workshop ensured that it was both a stimulating and useful experience for participants and a procedure for rigorous, high-quality research. We have come to call this method the focus-group workshop.

A distinguished group of 18 participants attended the focus-group workshop held in December 2018 (Appendix). Together they represented ten ADVANCE IT projects and several STEM change projects outside ADVANCE, as well as people who have studied or evaluated these

¹ Austin, A. E., & Laursen, S. L. (2015). *Organizational Change Strategies in ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Projects: Synthesis of a Working Meeting*. Boulder, CO, and East Lansing, MI. <https://www.colorado.edu/eer/content/workshop-report-public113015>

projects. They included well-regarded leaders with expertise in faculty development, STEM instruction, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and people with expertise in change strategies in complex organizations. A group this size enables a level of interaction that prompts an array of ideas and builds collective knowledge, while ensuring opportunity for all voices to be heard. Our participant group was experienced and diverse, offering a range of perspectives and creating a generative environment that stimulated ideas. Developing the list of invitees required considerable time and thought. Ultimately, our participant group represented people with a variety of institutional roles and experiences, ranged in their focus on research, practice, or both, and were diverse in race, gender, geography and institutional type and positionality. We find that, when we have tapped into the ADVANCE community, which has a history of sharing ideas and purposefully learning from each other, people bring well-embedded habits that enable them to participate actively and generatively in the workshop discussions, such that individually they both contribute and gain.

For easy communication, we established a website with logistics and travel information, participant biographies and pictures, agenda and pre-reading tasks, and links to the Google Docs used to capture notes during the meeting. Sharing these materials ahead developed excitement and readiness to engage in the discussions, and allowed people to prepare thoughtfully.

The meeting was held in Chicago, IL, on November 29-30, 2018. The agenda included a reception and working time on Thursday afternoon followed by a dinner, so that participants got to know each other, and then additional sessions on Friday, ending in time to let people fly home that evening. Initial invitations set the tone of the meeting to cultivate a sense of trust, respect, and collegiality, and set expectations for advance preparation and active participation.

The agenda was designed to start with a topic of common interest to which all participants could contribute. This initial conversation was followed by smaller breakout groups organized around topics relevant to the research and of importance to the participants. Each breakout group reported to the full group and further group discussion expanded and deepened the discussion. We used multiple ways to capture the data: the three PIs and two student assistants took notes, and each breakout group had a designated recorder to capture notes. Access to the shared Google Docs provided opportunity for individuals to reflect and make additions. All discussions and breakout sessions were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim, with participants' informed consent under an IRB-approved protocol. Our evaluator, Elizabeth Creamer from Virginia Tech, is experienced with ADVANCE projects and our research study. She assisted in creating an inviting atmosphere, monitoring any issues as they arose, and reflecting on emergent lessons and findings.

Workshop Outcomes for Participants

From evaluation data and informal feedback, we found that participants expressed appreciation and a sense of being valued for sharing their ideas and experiences. In this way, the workshops served not only as data collection for the research but doubled as broader impact activities in

which participants felt renewed in their work, more broadly connected in professional circles, and ready to carry with them lessons that can travel. For example, one participant wrote,

I was so pleased with our meeting in Chicago. I felt intellectually challenged at the same time I was cushioned by a supportive and innovative group. I get discouraged from time to time by how much work we have left to do in building a diverse and inclusive academy. But I am buoyed by meeting new partners like you all.

Our external evaluator, Elizabeth Creamer, Virginia Tech, noted, “The workshop format and facilitators are extremely skilled in creating an environment for ADVANCE leaders to reflect on practice and to generate new knowledge and insight in an inclusive way.” The meeting was structured not just as “a vehicle to pass along a set of ‘Best Practices,’” she noted, but as “an opportunity for active knowledge construction.” Opportunities to pause, reflect on practice, and share “noticings” with other participants in an extended conversation felt like a “luxury” but were also immediately useful, as one participant noted.

I found the meeting preparation to be useful for my own reflection (and I've already used the questions in a conversation with others on my campus). I was inspired by what has been accomplished in ADVANCE projects. And I have some new ways of framing some of the work we're doing around teaching, learning, and student success.

Creamer’s observations and participants’ responses in the evaluation data tie positive outcomes for participants to careful planning, preparation and workshop design that enabled them to participate effectively. These comments give us confidence that the focus-group workshop is a beneficial experience for participants. We also find it to be a useful method for building knowledge. In the next section, we discuss some of the research findings thus derived.

Workshop Findings

These findings come from qualitative analysis of the meeting notes and transcripts. For each theme of the focus-group workshop, one researcher reviewed the notes and transcripts and wrote an analytical memo about key points raised in the discussion. These memos were reviewed by the research team as a group and used to prepare this second-round analysis.

Revising our Ideas: Faculty-Based Change

Our initial language for describing the kinds of institutional transformation projects of interest in our research was “faculty-based” change. We intended this term to describe change efforts that are not necessarily faculty-driven or faculty-led, but do rely on broad engagement with and participation by faculty in order to achieve and sustain the desired change goals. With widespread participation, the changes are not just procedural, but become cultural changes that are embedded in the values, norms, discourses and behaviors of faculty working in departments.

Curious as to whether this descriptor would characterize a broad scope of change projects, we began the meeting with a discussion of what this meant, and whether it was an appropriate label, guided by these questions:

1. In what kinds of faculty-based change projects have you been involved?
2. To what extent and in what ways do you see your institution's change work as an organizational and system change project? What does that mean to you?
3. How have you engaged faculty in your change work? In what ways do your change goals affect the everyday work of faculty and others?
4. What faculty engagement approaches have worked for you—or have failed in an interesting way? What have you learned about how best to engage faculty in change? To what extent have you adapted your approaches for different faculty groups or for other stakeholders, and why?
5. What might be different about your project if you were at a different institution? When you hear about other change projects, what do you realize would not work at your institution? Why?
6. Findings from our previous work suggest that change has to happen on a variety of levels. What have you learned about navigating both bottom-up and top-down aspects of change?
7. The ADVANCE program has emphasized the importance of recognizing the role of intersectionality in change projects. Briefly, ‘an intersectional perspective requires that change agents from majority groups create venues through which underrepresented minority [faculty] can be recognized on their own terms as primary change drivers—and not as objects of study, goals to be reached, or passive recipients of change.’² To what extent, and in what ways, has attention to intersectionality been part of your change project? If it has, what are some key lessons you have learned about intersectionality and change processes?

The discussion raised both plusses and minuses to this framing. While faculty are long-lived within the institution, thus in many respect “holders of culture,” and bring a critical lens to any change initiative, such terminology may alienate other constituents on a campus by seeming to exclude them, and can efface the diversity of “the faculty,” who are not a monolith. This term may also limit the scope of change in unintended or unhelpful ways. Alternatives such as “faculty-initiated” or “faculty-driven” were also problematized as imperfect. As one participant noted, this is not just a semantic question: As soon as you label an effort “faculty-based,” you must add caveats—of course administrators, staff and students matter; of course the institutional context matters too. “So you’re not going to win this one,” she suggested wryly. Given the role of faculty in the institution as holders of culture, wondered another participant, “Isn’t calling it ‘institutional change’ enough?” This conversation represents the nuance and complexity in the

² Jovanovic, J., & Armstrong, M. A. (2014). Mission possible: Empowering institutions with strategies for change. *Peer Review* 16(2).

workshop conversations, and it gives us confidence in the focus-group process as participants were both thoughtful and willing to challenge our ideas.

Scaffolding Processes of Organizational Change

The workshop agenda addressed seven change processes that we have found to be important in the ADVANCE IT projects that we have studied. We think of these as “scaffolding” processes that provide connective tissue for the interventions, linking them together in ways that make them more synergetic and lasting. They are not interventions in and of themselves, but, we believe, they make the interventions work more effectively and prevent important elements from falling through the cracks. Being strategic in a change endeavor means attending to these processes, which include

1. Building a leadership team
2. Engaging with institutional leaders and faculty governance structures
3. Building alliances across campus
4. Communicating with multiple stakeholder groups
5. Making use of theoretical perspectives
6. Making use of data & research
7. Planning for sustainability

Here we describe in more detail insights about two of the processes that we discussed with workshop participants. We choose these themes for elaboration here because the conversation on these themes was particularly well developed and cross-cutting, extending beyond the meeting segments in which they were formally addressed. These exemplify the range and scope of the discussions as well as the nuances reflected in participants’ insights and perspectives.

Building alliances and communicating with allies

Building alliances across different units and constituencies inside the institution, and with organizations or people outside the institution, is important for practical and moral support, particularly in localized change efforts. Through our analysis of notes and transcriptions from the discussions, we derived several insights about alliances from what participants shared, guided by these discussion questions:

1. What approach(es) has your project taken to create relationships
 - a. with existing campus groups and key people within your institution?
 - b. across differences of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, etc.?
 - c. with supportive communities, people or organizations outside your institution?
2. What approach(es) has your project taken to communicating with multiple stakeholder groups (e.g. participants, key campus leaders, the institutional community)?
3. Why have you taken these approaches?

4. What challenges has your project encountered in creating alliances (internal and external) or communicating with stakeholders?
5. What lessons have you learned about the role of alliances and communication in institutional change efforts?

Participants agreed that collaborative efforts inside the institution are useful, but can lead to complications. One leader shared an example of a challenge encountered when a human resources unit assumed responsibility for professional development of chairs and deans. From participants' points of view, such professional development would be better positioned within a faculty office such as academic affairs. Irrespective of the change effort, some challenges arise from who feels ownership and how credit is given, and whether the collaboration encourages or discourages future sharing of ideas.

Communicating with regents or boards of trustees and legislators can be tricky. Clarity of language is important, as groups may not use terms the same way—for example, some uses of “faculty diversity” refer to identity dimensions such as race and gender, and others to intellectual and political commitments. In doing this “translating,” some nuance and complexity important to academics can be lost, but it is equally important to bring other stakeholders into the conversation at a level appropriate for them. For change leaders, the challenge may lie in conveying complex ideas in simpler ways without loss of integrity or meaning. This is hard work that may be unfamiliar to faculty leaders, yet it can be vitally important to ensure that everyone is on board and to relate the change project to institutional priorities. Developing talking points for a president is an example of a time when it is important to make these connections.

Likewise, on campus, communicating across offices or committees can be complicated. Here too everyone may not share the same meanings or connotations of language about diversity, inclusion, or intersectionality. It is important to listen to stakeholders' concerns and adjust communication efforts in response. External evaluators can be valuable partners in identifying points of confluence, such as when different ideas may be related but expressed differently. In this way, evaluators can help in developing talking points and in revealing assumptions of which change leaders may not be aware. Similarly, external advisory groups can be helpful in strategizing communication, such as when they share successes and frameworks from their experiences that assist with communicating and benchmarking.

Alliances among multiple campuses or with other organizations, such as disciplinary or professional organizations, may also be valuable. Alliances can provide expertise and can reduce the risk for an institution by sharing work and knowledge across sites. Partners off campus can provide ideas and support morale in the face of challenges. Building trust in multi-institutional networks or alliances is key, and this takes time. Trust can be jeopardized by unilateral actions, for example when a decision is made outside of the network that affects how one institution will participate, especially if that information is not shared in advance of the rumor mill or press coverage. Rebuilding that trust will again take time and effort.

One challenge in such alliances is the “chicken or egg” problem: the professional organization is waiting for its membership to provide leadership on an issue, but members are seeking leadership from the organization. Sometimes the organization needs to get out in front, perhaps naming the issue, initiating the conversation or making a recommendation. Societies and organizations must be cognizant that, in communicating priorities or vision, they are both inclusive and responsive to local nuances (e.g., not alienating one group because of the terminology used).

It is also important to be candid and generous in claiming success: successes may belong to the organization, the individual institution, or both. Likewise, within an institution, many groups or units may contribute to success. Feeling ownership is important in furthering working relationships and in offering leverage for future funding. Ownership of data can be another source of tension, such as when important data are available, but leaders are unwilling to share (e.g., the climate for minority faculty is poor) or can't come to consensus on how to share it.

Translating ideas between individual institutions and the alliance as a group can be challenging and may jeopardize change efforts if not handled carefully. It is important to develop a shared vision while still recognizing that approaches and strategies may need to differ among partners. What “glue” holds the alliance together? One useful practice is rotating representation from each partner when the group assembles: it helps to build awareness of the roles and interests of people on other campuses, can diversify the local community within the broader project space, and prevents the inter-institutional network from becoming a clique of connected individuals. Attention to leadership development and succession planning is also important, particularly since alliances are often initiated by a charismatic leader. How will leaders step aside, create space for others and support institutionalization of the work?

This discussion illustrates how the change processes discussed during the meeting often informed each other. In discussing communication and alliance-building, developing and communicating shared vision, participants engaged with the topics of leadership succession. This in itself is a separate process – as we have identified it – but is informed by and also informs other processes. This suggests ways in which the scaffolding processes function as connective tissue to link and support the change initiatives.

Leadership

Leadership in a change project is important in several respects. Our discussion of leadership in change project was guided by these questions:

1. As you think about the faculty-based change work in which you have been involved, how would you describe the approach to leadership in your project?
2. What are key characteristics of those on your leadership team, and what formal and informal roles do they play? What role did diversity play (or not) in the development or selection of team members?

3. How have you built and sustained your project leadership team?
4. Have different kinds of leadership been needed at different points within the life of the project? When and why?
5. How has your project leadership engaged with formal institutional leadership and/or faculty governance structures?
6. If senior-level institutional leadership shifted during the course of your change project, what was the impact of such a shift? How did your project handle this shift and its consequences?
7. What lessons have you learned about the leadership needed for this kind of project?

The discussion around leadership issues in organizational change processes centered on two major themes: building an effective leadership team and handling challenges in developing effective leadership that advances change goals. Workshop participants offered the perspectives and advice presented below.

An effective team must include the capacities needed for the work to be done. Strong leadership teams will include multiple “layers” of leadership that may include skills, expertise, and important perspectives such as:

- Experience in senior-level institutional administrative positions
- Understanding of how to lead a project
- Experience in formal and informal leadership roles on campus across a range of institutional settings
- Knowledge of HR issues
- Expertise and involvement in campus in equity and diversity issues
- Expertise in research on equity, gender, and organizational change issues
- Experience as task leaders and as socio-emotional leaders
- Experience with managing conflict and understanding how conflict works in institutions and change processes.
- Commitment to supporting the change goals
- The perspective that conflict is normal and potentially productive.

These are not qualities that every team member must have, but rather potential assets that may be useful in the work and that different team members may bring to the work. Indeed, diversity of the perspectives within the group as a whole is also important, and this too must also be carefully considered. For example, some people are called upon often to serve on teams, so it is important

to consider who gets over-tapped and to make sure that individuals are not tokenized, but are invited to serve because they will assist the team in meeting its goals.

Participants noted that in building project teams, institutions sometimes take a “stumbling attempt at inclusivity”—that is, they take a stance that “everyone” needs to be represented. This can result in having “structure rather than expertise”—ironically, making it harder to get the work done. For example, too much emphasis on departmental structure or representation can be a challenge, because people may be situated so fully in their departments that they have difficulty taking an institutional perspective. Good team members must be trusted to look beyond their own departments toward the issues relevant to the whole campus. In sum, the group noted, it is strategic to aim for a team of people who can collaborate well. Done well, it results in a “sweet team” of people who have both strong commitment and the relevant knowledge or expertise.

To build effective team processes and team members’ ability to work together, participants offered the following advice:

- Make sure the team leader has the time to put into the leadership role.
- Plan for the time and work needed to build the team.
- Engage the group in training around implicit bias.
- Encourage all team members to become adept and accustomed to engaging in difficult conversations and handling conflict.
- Train team members to be good facilitators and good listeners.

The discussion also clarified some challenges for teams in working with institutional leaders. One challenge is managing the balance between symbolic and working leadership roles. Funding agencies may expect or require the direct involvement of senior-level institutional leaders in leading the project. But sometimes these leaders are not fully committed, or they are committed but not have the time to invest at a substantial level. Sometimes it may be best to create an arrangement in which the provost provides overall support, but another leader takes on the active responsibility and substantive involvement.

Leadership teams for change projects need to recognize that senior leaders can change, so they need to have a plan for this circumstance. For example, one ADVANCE project team, faced with the departure of supportive senior-level institutional leaders, focused on embedding faculty members who were deeply committed to ADVANCE goals into their faculty governing body. From such a position, they could encourage the development and approval of institutional policies relevant to ADVANCE goals.

Workshop participants noted that effective change project leaders need to be comfortable with the “invisibility” of some of their work. For example, some of the institutional structures or policies they work to create may become part of the institutional fabric and lose explicit connection with their ADVANCE project. Such developments may signal effective

institutionalization of the ADVANCE work. At other times, institutional leaders themselves may prioritize other issues and the work loses prominence. Either way, there are costs to experiencing such invisibility, such as when significant achievements are not attributed to those who worked to accomplish them. This seems to happen more frequently to women and to men of color, and such invisibility and lack of attribution for achievements may contribute to these leaders' choice to leave the institution or step down from leadership roles. Indeed, some workshop participants were aware of situations where women who had developed significant leadership skills through their ADVANCE work ultimately chose to leave the institution due to a hostile climate. While their abilities and skills continued to benefit their new institution, workshop participants recognized the irony that these leaders had to depart to find more conducive climates.

Conclusion

The workshop accomplished the goals we had set. We (and the participants) learned a great deal more about the processes around which we organized the workshop discussions, as illustrated by the themes highlighted in this report. For each of the seven processes, participants resonated with the relevance and importance of each process, and they engaged in fruitful and rich discussions that expounded upon our original ideas, provided examples, and offered insight and nuance.

Moreover, we learned that our workshop participants agreed that these processes were important in ADVANCE-focused change projects as well as in other STEM education-focused change projects. That is, participants' comments and shared experiences highlighted common themes and issues across contexts that were focused on a diverse variety of STEM-related change goals. As one person wrote,

I would say that a large fraction of what was discussed was of value on a variety of things that I do. While there are some things that I suspect are distinctive for ADVANCE projects, most of what I heard appears to cross different kinds of change projects. So I agree with the premise that there are things learned from ADVANCE that are applicable to other projects, and things learned from other work that likely can assist ADVANCE projects.

Participants' enthusiasm for the opportunity to discuss these change processes also illustrated the importance and utility of providing space for such considerations. The workshop reinforced our sense that a major study on key change processes will be useful to a broad array of change agents who are striving to identify effective approaches to STEM-related change in a range of institutional types.

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Appendix: Workshop Participants

Sherrice Allen, North Carolina A&T State University

Marilyn Amey, Michigan State University

Mary Armstrong, Lafayette College

Susan Carlson, University of California system

Elizabeth Creamer, Virginia Tech (retired)

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