

Leadership Transitions in a multi-institution AGEP Alliance: Legacies, Challenges and Opportunities

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Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate
New York – Predominantly Undergraduate Institutions

About the NY-PUI Alliance: This Alliance brings together three universities with the goal of developing, implementing, studying, institutionalizing, evaluating and disseminating a model focusing on career development for AGEP population doctoral degree students in STEM, who successfully transition into early career STEM faculty positions at predominantly undergraduate institutions (PUIs), or who enter postdoctoral STEM scholar positions and then transition into early career STEM faculty positions at PUIs. The AGEP PUI Alliance works with AGEP population doctoral degree students, postdoctoral scholars and early career faculty to provide them with mentoring, professional development training, and the teaching pedagogy skills necessary to succeed faculty positions at PUIs. The AGEP Alliance model work is through partnerships between Stony Brook University - The State University of New York (SUNY), Suffolk County Community College - SUNY, and Farmingdale State College - SUNY.



This poster is dedicated in loving memory of Dr. David L. Ferguson, Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Technology and Society at Stony Brook University. Dr. Ferguson served as Principal Investigator on the NY-PUI Alliance and a co-investigator on every Stony Brook AGEP since its arrival to Stony Brook, and SUNY in 2000. *"And when great souls die, after a period peace blooms, slowly and always irregularly."* – Maya Angelou

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Poster Abstract

From the start of project negotiations through the present, the NY-PUI Alliance project the team has seen considerable change and transition and all institutions' leadership and team membership. This poster aims to present strategies and activities for continuing the National AGEP mission of transformational change across Alliance institutions when leaders at critical junctures are in a state of flux. We aim here to discuss the importance of strong team relationships and cohesiveness between Alliance members that work to ensure opportunities for project advancement during periods of institutional leadership transition. We also provide examples of ways we are leveraging our unique positions within our institutions, the identities we have built for our spaces, and the relationships built at the faculty level to build a more grassroots level of momentum during these times.

Pre- Award (2017-2018)



The NY-PUI Alliance begins award negotiations with the National Science Foundation. During Negotiations, the Alliance PI (who serves in the role of Dean and Vice Provost for Graduate Education) accepts a position at another institution and the Alliance must identify a new PI.

New PI Selection (1) : The original Alliance PI was selected because of their role at the lead institutions and their history of supporting transformative change aligned with the project goal and participant population. The Alliance built its project leadership team anticipating the possibility of leader transition, and as such had another Alliance Co-I with decades of developed expertise in diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and has been part of the AGEP leadership teams at the lead institution since AGEP's inception. This team member is selected to replace the original Alliance PI. The Alliance decides that when the institutional role the original PI left is filled by the lead institution, that person will be added as a Co-I on the project.

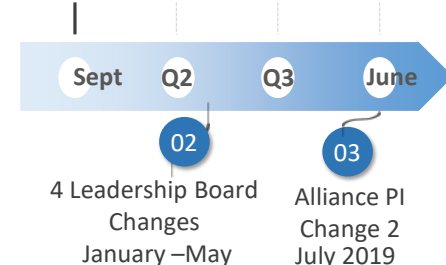
Change Lessons Learned: The proposal development process offers early opportunities for new project teams to build foundational communication and relationships and plan collaboratively for potential organizational changes. Having clear project management plans, timelines and delineations of responsibilities as part of the proposal plan can help mitigate some of the confusion and fear. Ensuring shared vision of the project is crucial (Henderson et. Al, 2012).

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Unplanned Change and Crisis Management

Shaw Bonds (2017) defines unplanned change as "Organizational changes that are not foreseen prior to the need to change, often made necessary by shifts in the organizational environment." Each leadership transition experiences by the Alliance was an example of unplanned change. When unplanned change occurs, the response is often intuitive, fast paced, and dependent on available resources (Shaw Bonds, 2017). These changes have been ongoing, placing the Alliance team in a constant state of transition as the team, model, project, interventions and dissemination plans adapt to new team members within the Alliance Organization. The act of crisis management, or "the process of preparing for, mitigating, responding to, recovering from, and learning from emergency incidents" (Shaw Bonds, M) is a much needed and often overlooked skillset needed by Alliance Leadership in moments of unplanned change.

Project Year 1 (2018-2019)



Less than 48 hours after returning to New York from our first NSF Site visit the Alliance team is notified of the unexpected passing of the Alliance PI. The lead institutional role of the original PI at the lead institution has been filled, but the new faculty member is not yet at the institution. Leading up to this event, all Alliance institutions have experienced considerable changes to institutional leadership in roles that serve on the project's external leadership board.

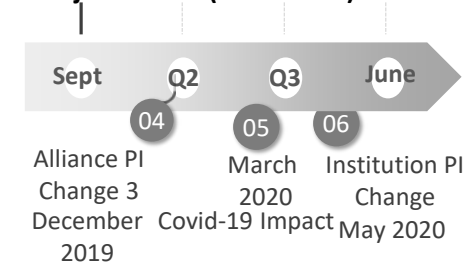
New PI Selection (2): The Alliance is faced with the difficult decision of naming a new PI when the new structurally aligned person at the lead institution has not been on-boarded, and the lead institution has not yet identified a faculty member to replace the Alliance's recently deceased PI. Desiring stability and consistency during an emotionally difficult time for the team, the Alliance selects a non-faculty Co-I on the project to serve as an interim Principal Investigator until the new Graduate Dean and Vice Provost arrives and is on-boarded.

Change Lessons Learned: When change outpaces the team's ability to regroup, reframe, and recover, it can present considerable challenges to project progress. Teams must be open to rethinking and revising project strategies and activities when change happens. Focusing on relationship building amongst participant groups, and fostering conversation between those groups can advance project goals despite unplanned change. Quickly and effectively preparing institutional leadership for stakeholder ship can take different forms at different institutions. It is important to give teams the opportunity to both privately and collectively grieve when a team member dies (Coehlo, 2009).

Change Vs. Transition

Change is an event that triggers the critical process of transition in which people "unplug" from an old world and plug into a new one (Bonds, 2016). It is in the space of making transition where changes are successful or not. Bonds (2016) presents three stages of the transition process: The losing or letting go of the old; the neutral zone; and the new beginning. For any change to lead to a successful outcome, Bonds argues that leadership must think through, plan for, and guide an organization's members through each of these transition stages. Transitions, particularly when they overlap, are simultaneous, or lacking space for recovery from one transition to the next can leave teams exhausted, overwhelmed, and uncertain of mission or purpose (Bonds, 2016). The wave of changes faced by the Alliance resulted in the team facing a constant state of transitions in crisis management mode.

Project Year 2 (2019-2020)



The Lead Alliance Institution begins the onboarding of the soon-to-be Alliance PI. Recognizing the need to rebuild a robust institutional leadership team, the lead Alliance brings on an additional faculty expert in institutionalization of broadening participation efforts. At the same time, the team is notified of the retirement plans of the Principal Investigator at one of the Alliance institutions. We begin a new cycle of leadership transition for that institution, and the Alliance, who as a whole is also bringing onto its external leadership committee two new University provosts and two new chief diversity officers. These events all occur prior to the start of New York Statewide shut downs of in person instruction across the SUNY System, which occur in March of 2020.

New PI Selection (3): Our retiring PI works with the Alliance Leadership to identify, on board, and welcome to the project the new Principal Investigator for that institution. Careful consideration is taken in identifying the new PI, who has considerable past experience in developing STEM efforts to broaden participation, established connections with the other Alliance institutions, and personal experience as an AGEP scholar.

Transition Lesson Learned: Constant and active communication, and listening are critical to success during crisis management. Persuasive and Effective Communication by the project team to institutional leadership is critical for fostering buy in and development of strong relationships (Eckel et al., 1999; Lindquist, 1978; Curry, 1992)

The Next Beginning

The extent of the changes to Alliance team leadership, institutional leadership, and the world at large created a situation in which transition overlapped and change felt like a constant state of being. Although time consuming, making space for team members to acknowledge and express feelings of nervousness, confusion, and uncertainty and opportunities to strengthen intragroup connection can help teams normalize the experience of transition and arrive at new beginnings with a clear sense of vision and purpose (Bonds, 2016). The NY-PUI Alliance believes they may be at a place of new beginning where we are able to celebrate successes that took place during our many transitions, reflect on what worked and didn't work in our process, and structure our alliance in a such a way that we are better prepared for future unplanned change and crisis management

Project Year 3 (2020-2021)



The Coronavirus pandemic brought with it additional unplanned and unexpected changes for which the Alliance needed to rethink, revise, and adapt its efforts. Having as part of the Alliance team faculty and staff experts from multiple institution types and areas of expertise in critical topics such as online learning, team management, project management, student development and community engagement presented us with the opportunity to think carefully, and from multiple perspectives on how best to sustain a sense of engagement for our participants and ensure training and interventions could continue in a distance format. Continuing the Alliance practice of biweekly all team meetings but adding technological capabilities such as recording, transcribing, and asynchronous workflow environments (Microsoft Teams) allowed the project to continue to advance in the face of changing availabilities and schedules.

In recent months all Alliance institutions have added to both their Alliance leadership teams and to their project management teams, through the addition of more Co-I's and staff to support project efforts. These additions have resulted in "deeper benches" at both the leadership and programmatic levels and as such we are better able to reassign and rethink roles and work delegation when crises occur. The alliance is currently recruiting its second cohort of participants who we anticipate will also conduct the majority of their intervention and programmatic components online until it is safe for us to return to group convening. Alliance is rethinking its current meeting structure to allow responsible parties and teams to meet with deeper focus on core project objectives (publications, dissemination, scholarly research, programming, evaluation, etc.)

Transition Lesson Learned: All aspects of Alliance and project activity should be in a continuous state of assessment, evaluation, and change. This requires understanding of previously unconsidered fields of study such as change management, organizational behavior, and community engagement theory.