



Improving Budget Request Processes for Non-Financial Leaders at Sam Houston State University

Centering Students, Transforming Practices, and Improving Outcomes

Sam Houston State University, located in Huntsville, Texas, enrolls approximately 21,000 students annually across its eight colleges. The institution offers medical, doctoral, graduate, and undergraduate programs at its physical campus and through its online offerings. Sam Houston State is a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, with a mission to center students and consistently offer accessible, quality post-secondary education with a focus on career readiness.

Cultivating a Collaborative, Systems-Thinking Approach to Budget Development

Deans and departmental leaders at Sam Houston State historically presented their budget requests to a cross-functional group of campus representatives in a content-dense meeting format that allowed little time for inquiry and dialog. A newly appointed chief business officer (CBO) hoped to refine the process to allow more time for conversation and interdisciplinary engagement by providing leaders with a concise guide that would support preparation for more focused, consistent budget submissions.

After modifications to align with institutional priorities and funding parameters, the Budget Builder Discussion Guide provided contextual information to support advanced meeting preparation. The guide provides prompts to support analysis of the cross-functional impact of requests. It encourages a 'systems-thinking' approach to budget requests, supporting conversation about resource needs to implement, sustain, and scale potential budget requests.

Setting Expectations and Strengthening Submissions

The CBO encouraged leaders submitting budget requests to prioritize their lists and come to their presentation meetings prepared to discuss their top three to five priorities.



Improvement Project

Improve Planning and Budgeting Approaches to Support Resource Allocation Decision-Making



Toolkit Used

Budget Builder



Results

- To support consistency and alignment with strategic priorities, the CBO customized the Budget Builder Discussion Guide and shared it with deans and other campus leaders to help them develop their presentations of their budget requests.
- By supporting advanced preparation of budget requests with the guide, presented and submitted requests were better aligned with institutional priorities and budget allocation parameters.



“We recognized we needed to be more transparent about the dollars available to be allocated, and to honor people’s time by providing them with better guidance in advance of, and throughout the budget development process. It was important that we find better approaches to encourage people to think more long-term and link their requests to our institutional goals and priorities.”

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Amanda Withers,

*Chief Financial Officer and
Senior Vice President for Operations*

Contextual information about the total dollars available and the total dollar value of prior years’ requests, which had far exceeded available funds, was provided before the meetings. This advanced information about funds available generated requests that were more in line with resource availability.

Elements of the Budget Builder Discussion Guide encourage users to consider student outcomes, student engagement, and sustainability and scalability of initiatives that demonstrate improved student outcomes. The guide also prompts consideration of the interdepartmental impact and potential resource needs across the institution when developing and presenting budget requests. These guide components set the stage for substantive conversation during budget presentations and planning meetings.

Optimizing Outcomes and Honoring People’s Time

The time and effort required to develop, submit, and review budget requests are significant at Sam Houston State. By refining materials that can be provided to leaders before budget planning and better supporting leaders’ work in developing and prioritizing budget requests, the CBO hoped to create a more efficient process that would support more efficient budget planning activities.

The Budget Builder tool and related process modifications have established the foundation for a more collaborative budget development process. Subsequent budget planning meetings featured in-depth conversations about factors that support the prioritization of one initiative over another and a stronger analysis of interdependent financial factors. For example, as a result of using the Budget Builder, the institution was able to complete a more comprehensive cost analysis of resources required to onboard a new employee, and expense allocation was revised to more accurately reflect the cost borne by respective departments or divisions.

Sustaining Momentum

The use of the Budget Builder and modified processes will continue to be leveraged in future planning and budgeting cycles, with a future focus on supporting resource allocation decisions that are consistently aligned with desired strategic and operational objectives, especially those linked to improved student outcomes. In future planning cycles, the CBO plans to build capacity to develop proforma budgets, supported by the systems thinking and collaboration facilitated using the Budget Builder Discussion Guide.