

Improving Sustainability of Grant Funded Initiatives at South Florida State College

Transforming Practices, Strengthening Outcomes, and Sustaining Momentum

South Florida State College is a public community college in Florida with campuses in Highlands, DeSoto, and Hardee counties. The college is part of the Florida College System, offering over 70 programs, including academic and professional certifications. Housing is available at the college for students who prefer or require housing services. Over 60% of students enrolled are Pell Grant eligible, and around the same percentage attend part-time. The college has both online and face-to-face offerings, aligned with regional workforce development opportunities and students' needs.

Enhancing Grant-Related Practices

The chief business officer (CBO), who oversees all aspects of financial and administrative operations, recognized a need to strengthen the integration of grant-funded initiatives into budget development practices. There was a need to better align grant opportunities with the college's strategic and operational goals. The CBO wanted to be better prepared with well-informed 'asks' when donors or funders expressed interest in contributing to the institution.

The institution also aimed to examine the lifecycle of grant-related activities and identify ways to enhance processes. With improved processes, efficiencies could also be realized by ensuring that all departments and individuals impacted by the grant activities could assess and plan for the impact on their operations. Better support systems and information could also equip people working across the institution who do not sit in the business office or have financial or grant management expertise to manage their grant-related work activities.

Incremental Improvements Lead to Positive Change

South Florida State College began by modifying the Budget Builder templates to meet its institutional needs. Because its grants vary greatly in duration and size, the college needed to modify the templates to match the realities of its funding ecosystem.

Improvement Project

Build Business Office Infrastructure to Support Grant-Related Business Practices

Toolkit Used

Budget Builder

Results

- Support for grant solicitation and grant-related budgeting activities, pre- and post-award, are now integrated into business office practices.
- Customized resources from the Budget Builder toolkit are being used to support solicitation of grant requests, development of grant budgets, and analysis of resource needs of grant-funded initiatives when grant funding sunsets. As new grant opportunities emerge, budgets are being developed more quickly and accurately.



“There are two mindsets around grants. One is that any money is good money. The other acknowledges that grant opportunities and activities need to align with the organization’s goals and the outcomes we’re trying to achieve. We are trying to operate with the second mindset and be more focused on what we need, what we pursue, and how we prepare to sustain the work when grants end.”

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Peter S. Elliott,

*Vice President for
Administrative Services*

Over time, based on feedback and experiences using the templates, additional modifications were made to align template content with business office objectives, and different versions of the templates were designed and refined.

The modifications to the Budget Builder allow the college to capture narrative grant information that supports the assessment of grants – proposed and active – and their alignment with institutional goals. The resources built using the Budget Builder also support the development of grant budgets, allowing users to better assess resources needed to support successful grant outcomes. The cycle of one-year and multi-year grants was considered as processes were developed, especially related to ongoing resource needs after grant funding sunsets.

Institutionalization of Practices

The CBO created a designated role to support grant activities in the business office to ensure that new processes were adopted, sustained, and continuously improved. This role is designed to provide comprehensive life-cycle support to grant processes that intersect with the business office. As the new templates and processes are deployed at the institution, information is being captured to create more efficient practices. For example, as detailed budgets and resource needs are documented for one project, that detail can be shared with others developing grants so they have examples to follow and contextual information to share.

Work to integrate grant resource needs into operating budgets is also underway. As processes are improved to assess outcomes from grant investments, the CBO and executive leadership will be in a solid position to prioritize resource allocation when grants are sunsetting, decisions must be made, and resources must be reallocated to sustain outcomes.

Sustaining Momentum

South Florida State College will continue to strengthen processes to support the optimization of grant-related efforts on its campuses and strengthen the integration of business office activities and grant activities. Customizing, testing, and refining the tools available through the NACUBO Student Success Hub will continue. The team that worked with the CBO on this project has demonstrated creativity and a willingness to experiment with new processes and approaches. That commitment to creativity and innovation will continue.