

Improving the Use of Designated Innovation Funds at Atlantic Cape Community College

Aligning Innovation with Strategic Priorities

Atlantic Cape Community College serves 6000+ students annually at multiple campuses across the southern coastal region of New Jersey. The institution offers over 80 academic, certificate, and professional programs. Students served live in communities where employment opportunities have shifted significantly over the past decade, and future opportunities remain equally dynamic, and unpredictable. The institution's chief business officer (CBO) and her colleagues strive to be agile, open to new ideas, and supportive of innovation.

Making the Most of Designated Innovation Funds

Atlantic Cape maintains a designated Innovation Fund to support investment in improving student outcomes. These funds were underutilized; therefore, a structured process was needed to elicit ideas from college stakeholders, generate requests for funds aligned with strategic priorities, and create practices allowing for assessment and evaluation.

The institution hoped to encourage more submissions for the use of the funds by developing a process that is transparent and accessible. The CBO wanted to develop an approach to generate more consistent submissions that could be evaluated and funded in line with the budget planning cycle. It was important that the process developed supported the alignment of submissions with institutional objectives and goals linked to improved student outcomes and set the stage for measurement of outcomes once initiatives were funded.

Customizing Budget Builder and Supporting Processes

Atlantic Cape's CBO brought together a small team of subject matter experts, including institutional research, academic, and student advising professionals, to provide input to modifying the Budget Builder templates and developing process guidelines. The working group stayed focused on its objective—to prompt requests to fund well-considered initiatives that aligned with Atlantic Cape's mission and strategic goals.

Improvement Project

Leverage Funds Designated to Innovate and Improve Student Outcomes More Effectively

Toolkit Used

Budget Builder

Results

- The use of the Budget Builder templates and supporting resources increased the quantity and quality of submissions of requests for innovation funds. The templates were customized by Atlantic Cape to align with their goals and were refined over cycles of use.
- Campus engagement with innovation fund activities was materially increased due to improved communication practices. Developing a support infrastructure for stakeholders submitting funding requests demonstrated success as improvement cycles were completed.



“The use of the NACUBO Budget Builder Toolkit helped us to discover and address barriers beyond our initial expectations. Yes, requests were funded. But other ideas that were put forward that did not receive innovation funds were still able to happen because of interdisciplinary conversations that occurred through this process. I could call them secondary outcomes, but they had an equally significant impact. This work led to so much more than just the projects that were funded.”

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Leslie Jamison,
Chief Financial Officer

Once the form was finalized and processes mapped, invitations to submit requests for funding were sent to employees working in diverse areas of student-facing operations, inviting them to submit innovative ideas, using the form as the submission vehicle. Campus stakeholders received a letter introducing the process and were invited to attend optional information sessions. The letter and sessions were designed to encourage submissions and provide information about the criteria that would be used to prioritize submissions.

Moving Ideas into Action

Two cycles of innovation funding have been successfully completed at Atlantic Cape using the Budget Builder form and supporting resources. A dedicated ‘help desk’ resource in the Institutional Research office was identified to support completion of requests. All submissions reflected a focus on students, and tactics to improve student outcomes that submitters identified through their day-to-day engagement with students. While all submissions were worthy of consideration, selections were made based on feasibility to launch the effort and use funds within the required timeframe. As a collateral benefit, the review of submissions generated collaborative conversations, leading to identification of other ways that barriers to student success could be reduced.

The CBO and her colleagues modified the Budget Builder form template. They designed a process that sets the stage for sustainable funding for initiatives that will not only receive one-time innovation funding, but when improvements to student outcomes are demonstrated, resources needed to sustain and scale offerings will be integrated into the operating budget going forward. New application protocols are also evaluated continuously and enhanced to improve proposal submissions.

Sustaining Momentum

Atlantic Cape will continue to follow their new protocols for leveraging Innovation Fund dollars. Cross functional committees as well as individuals will be encouraged to apply for funds. A knowledgeable administrator will serve as a point of contact about the use of funds and serve as the facilitator for the process. This person will remain a resource through implementation and measurement of outcomes, ensuring that new processes are institutionalized and continuously refined as needed.