

TIPS TO SUSTAIN ATE PROJECTS AMID COLLEGE LEADERSHIP & OTHER PERSONNEL CHANGES

During the [September 2024 CCPI-Cast](#) a college president and two experienced [Advanced Technological Education \(ATE\)](#) program principal investigators offered advice for keeping grant-funded projects going when administrator turnover occurs.

Dr. Daniel J. Phelan, president of [Jackson College](#) in Michigan, advised webinar participants “to hardwire” ATE projects by embedding them in the college’s strategic planning process. He also recommended keeping industry partners engaged, “because those are the leaders in the community. They’re going to be connecting, hopefully, with the president, anyway, or the senior leadership.”

Phelan, who is chair of [CCPI-STEM’s](#) Midwest Regional Network, pointed out “change can happen from anywhere,” and urged people to build “bench strength” on their teams. He also suggested using scenarios for contingency planning.

“Think holistically about change. It’s going to happen. People take jobs; life conditions happen. But think about the multiple tiers in which you design and put these proposals together and think about if something happened, if there was a change, where would we go? So think about the depth of your grant writer, the business partners, the faculty and staff involved, and the upper levels of the c-suite,” he said.

Communicate & Advocate to Build Support

Dr. Kevin Cooper, principal investigator of [Project Vision](#) at [Indian River State College](#) in Florida, has seen project plans stall when community college teams learn their president is leaving. During the past four years, about three colleges in each cohort of 17 colleges mentored by Project Vision have had a top administrator leave, Cooper said.

If the college is developing an Advanced Technological Education (ATE) project proposal, Cooper said, he and his colleagues have learned to put things on hold during the transition to a new president. “Typically it’s a six-to-nine-month settling time. Someone comes in and learns the ecosystems. And then I would say we go forward with 50% of the proposals,” he said. Cooper is the academic dean at Indian River State College where he has also led several other ATE grants.

Communication, advocacy, and support are all needed to keep a funded project going after the departure of the president who approved the ATE grant proposal to the [National Science Foundation](#).

“You need to educate whoever comes into that role above you—your leadership—on the importance of the project to the community college” Cooper said, reminding the webinar audience members that they are first community college faculty members and secondarily principal investigators of ATE projects.

“So you really need to align your goals with the goals of your bosses and make sure the goals of the ATE project align with your bosses,” he said.

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Keep Bosses in Loop

Keeping her bosses informed about the activities of [InnovATEBIO](#), is a high priority for Dr. Linnea Fletcher. She is the principal investigator of InnovATEBIO, the National Biotechnology Center based at [Austin Community College \(ACC\)](#) in Texas where she teaches biotechnology and serves as the chair of the Biotechnology Department.

"I think communication is number one ... and you never want to surprise them with anything. You have to communicate anything that's going to possibly happen negative or positive. And then, if you constantly do that, they will help you with whatever you need," she said.

Dr. Richard Rhodes, former ACC chancellor, had her make presentations to the college's trustees about InnovATEBIO's activities at least once per year.

She meets with c-suite administrators twice a year, sends them and her dean biweekly reports, and communicates frequently with advisory board members and the project's industry and education partners.

Fletcher advice to ATE principal investigators (PIs), as the leaders of these NSF-funded grant projects and centers are known, for dealing with c-suite transitions is to ask for a meeting with the new leaders. After Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart became ACC's chancellor in October 2023 Fletcher met with him, provided him with information about the center's plans, and asked him how the center could help with his ideas for the college.

"I always remind people that, yes, you are PI of a center grant or a project, but number one, you are a faculty member at a community college. You need to understand: What is the mission of your community college?" Fletcher said.

The CCPI-Cast discussion that involved Phelan, Cooper, and Fletcher was moderated by Dr. Elizabeth K. Hawthorne, co-principal investigator of CCPI-STEM, principal investigator of [FORCCE-ATE](#), and senior professor emerita of computer science and cybersecurity at [Union College of Union County, New Jersey](#).

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