

**Council on Postsecondary Education
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Regional Stewardship Program Update

Program Background and Overview

Across the country, postsecondary institutions are being called upon to become more engaged with their local communities and regions. Economists like Richard Florida are providing convincing evidence of the powerful role these institutions can play in improving quality of life and bringing economic prosperity to their regions if they assume the role of a change agent and become an integral part of their physical location, rather than as an “ivory tower” whose interests stand apart from those of the community and region. National organizations such as the Alliance for Regional Stewardship are providing models for how postsecondary and regional interests and resources can be integrated for mutual benefit and are outlining the changes that must occur to maximize postsecondary institutions’ impact on their regions.

While various local and regional models have developed in response to this challenge across the country, on April 24, 2006, with the enactment of House Bill 380 by the 2006 General Assembly, Kentucky became the first, and still only, state to define and fund a statewide effort to support stewardship among all of its comprehensive universities. The bill authorized funding of \$1.2 million in 2006-07 and \$3.6 million in 2007-08 for a Regional Stewardship Program. Kentucky is unique in its statewide commitment to directly support postsecondary efforts to address quality of life issues in its regions and, at the same time, help achieve the goals set forth in *The Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997* (House Bill 1) and the Public Agenda for postsecondary and adult education in Kentucky for 2005-2010.

Kentucky’s stewardship work to date has received national recognition. In addition to invitations to present its approach at various national meetings, two of its institutions (Morehead State University and Northern Kentucky University), because of their commitment to outreach and partnerships, have been designated as engaged institutions by the Carnegie Foundation. In addition, all of Kentucky’s comprehensive universities have received recognition as partners in the national American Democracy Project. The Regional Stewardship Program is a catalyst to support the institutions in their efforts to become valuable partners in their respective regions.

The overarching goal of the Regional Stewardship Program is to promote economic development, livable communities, social inclusion, improved P-12 schools, creative governance, and civic participation through public engagement activities initiated by comprehensive university faculty and staff. The Council on Postsecondary Education administers this program and distributes funding to the comprehensive universities. In order to

maximize the effectiveness of this program, the Council approved guidelines in July 2006. These guidelines describe requirements for accessing program funds and outline appropriate uses of program funds.

In order to accomplish this goal, the program provides funding for the comprehensive universities in three areas.

- Infrastructure funds support the development and maintenance of organizational structures, personnel, information systems, and community relationships necessary to sustain stewardship activities.
- Regional grant funds support comprehensive university efforts to build intellectual capacity in targeted priority areas.
- Stewardship initiative funds support specific public engagement activities at the universities that improve economic prosperity, quality of life, and civic participation in the region or state.

Accountability System

The Council's guidelines for the regional stewardship program build in several levels of accountability for results. First, the funding is phased and each institution must reach certain benchmarks in each phase to be eligible for funding in the next phase. For example, no institution can apply for the bulk of the funds to implement regional initiatives until they have a Council approved plan for redesigning their infrastructure (e.g., reorganize outreach efforts to create a one stop shop office for partnership creation and address promotion and tenure issues). Similarly they cannot apply for competitive stewardship grants until they have completed their environmental scans and had their capacity building proposals based on those plans approved and funded.

The Council retains control of the funds (not recommending their inclusion in institutional base budgets) until the institution provides a report demonstrating substantial progress in implementing promised work. Until that point the funds are made available through a Memorandum of Agreement that clearly outlines the goals that must be met to ensure continued funding. For example, the Council will not recommend allocation of the initial funds for infrastructure change to the institutional budgets on a recurring basis until the goals promised in those plans are accomplished with the funds currently provided through an MOA. While the enthusiasm and progress to date suggest that the institutions will qualify to receive the funds in a timely manner, these guidelines ensure accountability at every step of the way. In addition, institutions are required to submit annual updates on all items listed in the MOAs.

Finally, and most importantly, as the institutions launch their initiatives targeting regional challenges the Council requires regular reporting on progress in the metrics for improvement outlined in the funding proposals. For example, NKU has targeted improving participation in high quality early childhood programs in its region. Early childhood development was identified as a challenge by the northern Kentucky Vision 2015 regional plan. Reports to the

Council will measure and identify increases in the number of children participating in such programs and the improvement in the quality of early childhood centers in the region.

Program Implementation Process

In July 2006, the Council approved guidelines for the distribution and application of these program funds, and the Council staff hosted a two-day workshop of institutional representatives involved in the Regional Stewardship Program. The University of Kentucky, University of Louisville, and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System also participated in the workshop to support their own partnership work and to develop their roles in supporting the work of the comprehensive universities. At the workshop, Representative Frank Rasche and Kentucky Chamber of Commerce President Dave Adkisson spoke about the importance of regional stewardship in Kentucky. John Melville and Doug Henton, national experts in regional stewardship, took the institutional teams through practice runs of working with regional advisory councils. In addition, Mr. Melville and Mr. Henton shared their expertise from working with other universities and other regional stewardship efforts.

A part of the Kentucky Engagement Conference in November 2006 was dedicated to the Regional Stewardship Program. The session allowed program participants to interact with Council staff and learn more from one another. At this session, institutional representatives suggested that the Council create an informal working group to address program implementation issues. The Council created this group of representatives from each comprehensive university and the Kentucky Campus Compact, a coalition of college and university presidents dedicated to building civic engagement into campus and academic life. The group met in March and August 2007. The meetings provide valuable opportunities for institutions to discuss their progress and lessons learned, provide input into program implementation issues, and interact with Council staff.

The meetings have also been helpful in that representatives from NKU, who were involved in regional stewardship efforts before the state program was created, have been available to answer questions and share their expertise. NKU participated in the Making Place Matter regional stewardship pilot project sponsored by the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. This project supported the Vision 2015 regional planning effort that was already taking place in northern Kentucky. So NKU is unique among the comprehensive institutions in that it has been active in regional stewardship efforts since 2004. It already has made significant infrastructural changes to encourage regional stewardship efforts. In addition, the region's strategic plan, Vision 2015, is already in place to help guide the university's stewardship efforts.

Progress and Accomplishments

One of the first priorities during the infrastructure development process was for campus officials to assemble a regional advisory committee comprised of local government and community leaders, business and industry representatives, education leaders, policy professionals, interest groups, and citizens from across the university's area of geographic responsibility to assist in identifying regional needs, opportunities, and stewardship priorities. The regional advisory committees will help develop and approve strategic plans and proposals for stewardship funding aimed at building intellectual capacity and meeting regional needs. Council guidelines require the advisory committee's endorsement of funding proposals before Council consideration of those proposals.

The Vision 2015 steering committee serves as NKU's advisory board, and Kentucky State University has assembled a representative advisory board. The other institutions are in the process of creating these advisory boards. Because some of the universities' areas of geographic responsibility span more than 20 counties, the challenge is to both include the groups of people required by Council guidelines and assure that the committee represents the entire region.

Other specific activities outlined in the Council guidelines and progress to date include:

1. Develop a plan for aligning institutional priorities, resources, and infrastructure to support stewardship initiatives

To qualify to receive the initial phase of stewardship infrastructure funds, each participating institution was required to submit a comprehensive plan to the Council for making regional stewardship a campus priority consistent with Council-approved guidelines and indicating how program funds will be used to support implementation of that plan. Institutions submitted their infrastructure plans in the fall of 2006. The Council staff reviewed and evaluated the proposals, provided extensive feedback to the universities including campus visits with university leadership and stewardship teams, and worked with them to create revised proposals that met the Council guidelines.

All of the infrastructure plans were approved by the Council by April 2007 and are available on the Council's Web site. Among the most important features of these plans are strategies to better align institutional promotion, tenure, and faculty reward systems with regional stewardship work. To date, all comprehensive universities have received \$200,000 in infrastructure funds for FY 2006-07 and a \$50,000 allotment for FY 2007-08.

2. Modify organizational structures, institutional practices, and reward systems to support stewardship activities by faculty and staff.

The infrastructure plans submitted by the universities outline what organizational changes will be made and the process for these changes. Institutions were asked to address the following areas: mission, vision, and strategic priorities; planning and budgeting; engagement

infrastructure; recruitment and professional development; incentives and reward systems; learning environment; information and reporting systems; and campus-community interaction.

Highlights from these plans include:

Eastern Kentucky University is creating a Regional Stewardship Faculty Committee with faculty from each college. Committee members will serve as liaisons between the Office of Regional Stewardship and each of the colleges, provide information on funding opportunities for professional development activities, and monitor performance of regional stewardship projects in their respective colleges.

Kentucky State University has committed some of its own funds for competitive grants and faculty release time to promote stewardship activities. And, as part of the curriculum revision process, there will be a focus on incorporating service learning, which is a component of regional stewardship, into core classes of the Integrative Studies Program.

At *Morehead State University*, the Center for Regional Engagement was created as a component of the Institute for Regional Analysis and Public Policy, which is the university's Program of Distinction. MoSU, like KSU, has committed institution funds for a competitive grant pool for faculty to initiate regional engagement activities.

Because *Northern Kentucky University* has already made substantial infrastructure changes to support regional stewardship work, the institution used its 2006-07 infrastructure pool allocation to build intellectual capacity in three priority areas—early childhood education, informatics, and public health. Faculty and staff have provided technical service, continuing education, and applied research in early childhood education; provided research and consulting expertise in the area of informatics; and worked with community partners to develop and implement a comprehensive approach for meeting public health and health education needs. All of these activities directly support goals set out in the region's Vision 2015 plan.

Murray State University plans to emphasize stewardship in a number of ways. The institution will recognize engagement through an institutional award similar to those for teaching and research excellence. Campus leaders are also considering a new model for faculty workloads and evaluation based on differential roles for faculty that better allow a focus on stewardship work.

Western Kentucky University has refocused an existing center, the ALIVE Center (A Local Information and Volunteer Exchange), on stewardship work. WKU plans to include stewardship as an item of accountability in the deans' annual reports to the provost and will establish an "Engaged Department" grant program that provides awards for departments desiring to be engaged with at least one regional priority.

3. Identify key indicators of regional economic vitality, quality of life, and civic participation and configure information systems to collect and track these data.

The Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center has identified more than 100 benchmark indicators organized around the areas of communities, education, economy, environment, and government. In addition, the center has created a State of the Commonwealth Index, comprised of 26 quality of life indicators. Since these indicators have already been identified as important elements in quality of life, some of the data are available at the county level, and the data can be collected over time, the Council has asked universities to choose an appropriate subset of indicators developed by the KLTPRC to assess the impact of their regional stewardship programs.

4. Engage in environmental scanning activities, convene advisory committee meetings, and host public forums to identify regional or state needs, opportunities, and stewardship priorities.

NKU's environmental scanning activities are relatively well established. The other universities are ramping up their efforts in order to help inform the work of their regional advisory committees. The other universities are beginning the work of integrating current research and conducting additional scans to ensure regional stewardship initiatives are strongly linked to data-based definitions of regional needs.

5. Produce a planning document that highlights regional needs, opportunities, and priorities and recommends strategies for addressing needs or taking advantage of opportunities.

The Vision 2015 plan guides the stewardship work of NKU and its regional partners. Currently, this is the only fully developed regional plan submitted as part of the Regional Stewardship Program. The other comprehensive universities are in the process of working with regional partners to create these strategic plans.

6. Increase awareness among advisory committee members, the campus community, and regional stakeholders of university resources and how those resources can be directed to address identified needs or take advantage of identified opportunities.

Presidents and other campus leaders are emphasizing regional stewardship in both internal and external communications. For instance, President Mary Sias has provided reports on regional stewardship to the KSU Board of Regents. President Wayne Andrews at MoSU has repeatedly emphasized that engagement is a university-wide priority and responsibility. NKU's President Jim Votruba is known throughout the state and country for his institution's commitment to regional stewardship.

7. Establish partnerships with local and regional governments, P-12 schools, community and civic organizations, businesses, hospitals, foundations, and philanthropic organizations to garner financial or in-kind support for stewardship activities and increase program impact.

All the institutions had created partnerships with external organizations before the implementation of the Regional Stewardship Program, and the Council expects the number and impact of these partnerships to increase as a result of the Regional Stewardship Program. NKU provides a prime example of the goals of the Regional Stewardship Program. NKU is involved in a number of partnerships in the northern Kentucky/greater Cincinnati region that have provided financial support for regional stewardship activities. For instance, the university is creating an Institute for Nonprofit Capacity Building, and the United Way has committed funds to hire a director and support staff to launch the institute. The university is working with community partners to prepare business plans for the various Vision 2015 initiatives planned for implementation.

8. Encourage faculty members to generate proposals and engage in stewardship activities that promote regional or statewide economic development, livable communities, social inclusion, creative governance, and civic participation.

All the institutions have placed a great deal of emphasis on faculty buy-in for engagement activities and professional development activities to help faculty take advantage of stewardship opportunities. Proposed incentives to encourage faculty stewardship activity include competitive grant pools, formal awards and recognition, and release time to focus on stewardship activity.

9. Identify key indicators related to the nature and extent of institutional/community interactions and configure information systems to collect and track these data.

This topic was discussed at the August 2007 meeting of the implementation working group, and the Council is working with the institutions to identify these indicators. The Regional Stewardship Program indicators will be aligned with the Council's key indicators of university engagement. The Council is working with the institutions to identify a common statewide data collection system that can be most efficiently developed through a statewide contract with an appropriate vendor.

10. Provide professional development for faculty in engagement related areas and find creative ways of integrating public engagement into teaching and research activities at the institutions.

The universities are active in this area. Regional stewardship has been added to the agendas of faculty orientation and/or faculty development workshops at all the universities. For instance, at ECU, the interim director for regional stewardship chaired this year's New Faculty Orientation Committee, and regional stewardship was discussed several times throughout faculty orientation at the beginning of the fall semester. KSU will focus on regional stewardship in their fall and spring faculty institutes as well as special initiatives throughout the academic year. In addition, UK hosts the annual Kentucky Engagement Conference that features national experts in the field of engagement. Each comprehensive university co-sponsors the event and sends 20 faculty and administrators to participate in this professional development event.

Next Steps

With the infrastructure changes designed to improve the universities' ability to partner with their regions well underway, the institutions are focusing their efforts on working with partners to achieve a better quality of life in their regions. They will work with their regional advisory committees to identify regional issues, assess resources that can be applied to regional priorities, develop goal and success measures, and develop a stewardship roadmap of short-, medium-, and long-term actions that are needed to address regional priorities. The institutions will then submit these plans to the Council and identify funding priorities for their implementation to be supported by remaining regional stewardship funds.

The Regional Stewardship Program has created excitement on the campuses of the comprehensive universities, especially among the faculty, staff, and administrators who highly value applied research, teaching, and service. The program is helping provide resources and expertise to help the institutions make a long-term commitment to stewardship. And it is raising awareness that regional stewardship is fundamental to linking the resources and knowledge of the universities to the needs and challenges of their respective regions. By tackling these tough problems with the help and expertise of regional partners, the universities will ensure that Kentucky's people, community, and economy benefit from and understand the importance of the postsecondary education sector.