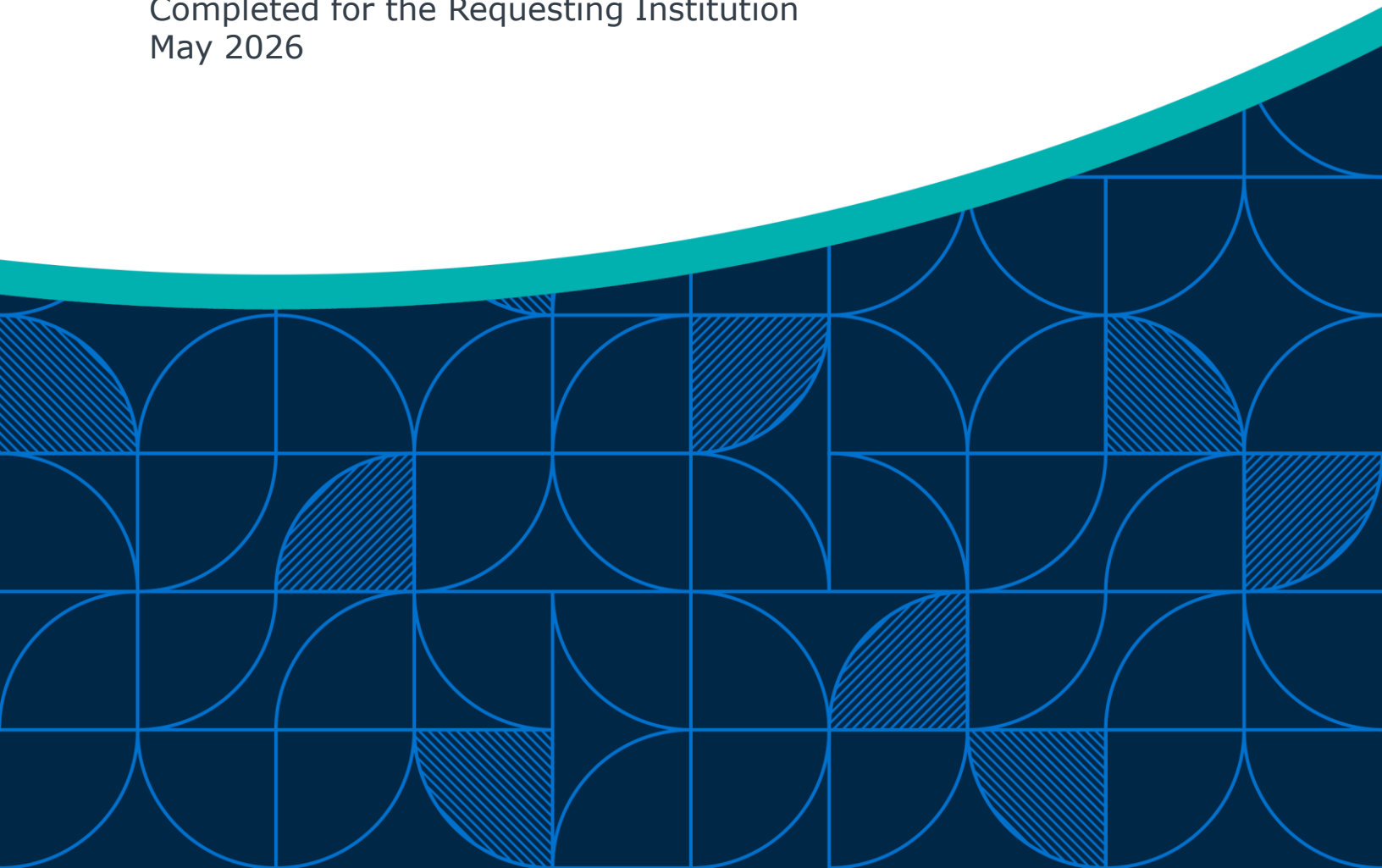




RESPONSIVE RESEARCH

# Faculty Development Structures, Coordination, and Engagement Models

Completed for the Requesting Institution  
May 2026



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### Legal Caveat

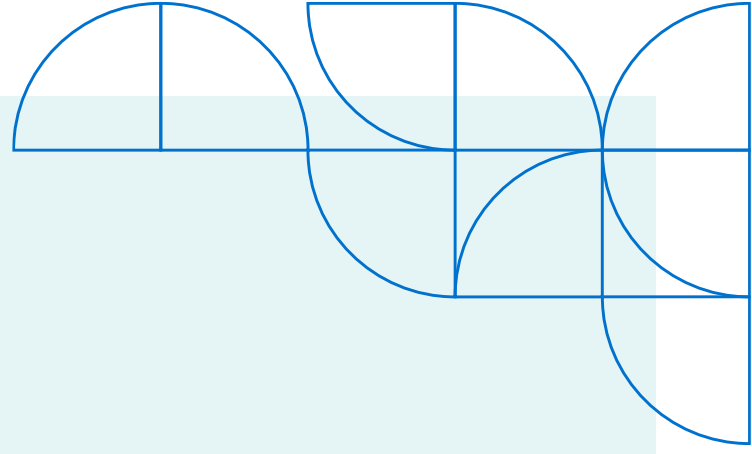
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# Table of Contents

Executive Overview . . . . .	4
Research Findings . . . . .	5
Faculty Development Infrastructure Strategy. . . . .	6
Faculty Development Organizational Design and Services at Profiled Institutions. . . . .	8
Faculty Engagement and Relational Infrastructure. . . . .	10
Program Models and Measurable Impact. . . . .	13
Possible Vision for Hybrid Centralized-Decentralized Faculty Development Model . . . . .	14
Institutional Readiness and Change Management . . . . .	15
Appendix . . . . .	16
Research Methodology . . . . .	17

# Executive Overview

## *Project Challenge*

As leaders at the Requesting Institution explore how to structure and scale faculty development and advancement efforts, they approached EAB for support in understanding how peer institutions organize, resource, and sustain faculty development units, including balancing centralized coordination with distributed ownership, earning faculty engagement, and demonstrating the value of faculty development investments.

See the [Research Methodology](#) section for further details.

**Prioritize sustainable, institutionally embedded models over grant-funded or individual-driven approaches.** While some contacts have expanded faculty development through external funding or strong individual leadership, these models are vulnerable to disruption when funding ends or leadership changes. Contacts that rely on temporary or individual-driven structures risk losing momentum, underscoring the importance of stable funding, clear ownership, and embedded organizational design to ensure continuity.

**Balance centralized coordination with relationship-driven engagement.** Centralized faculty development units can improve visibility, alignment, and accountability, but overly rigid structures may conflict with faculty preferences for autonomy and informal engagement. Relationship-driven models based on personal networks and collaboration often generate strong participation but may lack long-term sustainability without formal systems (e.g., dotted line relationships across units that survive individual turnover). Effective approaches combine centralized infrastructure, like one-stop webpages or question triage, with relational touchpoints that maintain faculty trust and engagement.

**Clarify coordination across distributed units rather than attempt to eliminate fragmentation.** Most contacts operate with fragmented faculty development structures, with multiple units contributing to programming and support. While this can create ambiguity around roles and ownership, some contacts view multiple entry points as beneficial, recognizing that faculty engage through relationships rather than organizational structures. Leading approaches focus on improving communication, clarifying responsibilities, and coordinating efforts across units rather than fully consolidating activity.

**Design faculty development efforts around faculty needs and priorities to propel participation.** Faculty more often engage in programming that directly supports their priorities, including research productivity, career advancement, and teaching effectiveness. Even in resource-constrained environments, targeted, low-lift programming aligned with these needs (e.g., reserved time and space for grant proposal writing) can generate strong engagement, demonstrating that relevance, rather than scale or investment, is the primary driver of participation.

**Position faculty development as both a professional development function and a community-building mechanism.** Beyond skill development, faculty development units increasingly support faculty belonging, connection, and retention. Programming that fosters cross-departmental relationships and informal engagement can reduce isolation and strengthen institutional culture. However, these outcomes are often difficult to measure, creating challenges in demonstrating return on investment and sustaining support.

Source: EAB interviews, analysis, and AI-enabled research support. AI-assisted content reviewed and finalized by EAB researchers.



# Research Findings



# Faculty Development Infrastructure Strategy

## Foundational Faculty Development Structure

### Balance Centralized Coordination with Relationship-Driven Engagement

Contacts are actively navigating how to formalize faculty development structures without undermining the relational dynamics that lead to faculty engagement. While centralized units can improve coordination, visibility, and accountability, overly rigid structures may conflict with faculty preferences for autonomy and relationship-based engagement. At Institution B, faculty development has historically operated through a highly relationship-driven model, with strong engagement built through informal interactions and trust, but leadership is now working to formalize a centralized hub to ensure long-term sustainability.

One model for a centralized hub would be for a faculty development/excellence director to report to an associate vice provost for faculty affairs or similar position and to receive formal assignment to serve as the linchpin among faculty development units. This can include:

- *Dotted line reporting* to the faculty development/excellence director for roles that might operate elsewhere (e.g., accessibility staff within an IT unit) but consistently address faculty needs, or programs relevant to faculty development (e.g., mentoring).
  - At Institution B, college-based teaching and learning roles that report to deans still have 30 percent of their role allocated to the Institution, and while that does not entail a dotted line reporting structure today, a future model here or elsewhere could formalize that allocation via a dotted central reporting line.
- *Recurring meetings and required collaboration* among this faculty development/excellence director and peers (e.g., center for teaching and learning director) to make informal coordination explicit and repeatable as roles turnover.
- *Triaging faculty needs* among distinct offices, both personally and via responsibility for a webpage hub of relevant services and units.

### Avoid Overreliance on Grant-Funded or Individual-Driven Models

Faculty development efforts that depend on temporary funding or key individuals are particularly vulnerable to disruption. At Institution A, for example, faculty development initiatives expanded through grant funding but were significantly scaled back following the loss of external funding and leadership turnover, resulting in reduced staffing and stalled coordination. This highlights the importance of stable funding, clear ownership, and embedded organizational structures to sustain faculty development efforts over time. While grant funding may support a specific initiative, staff salaries and unit operations should receive foundational funding from the Institution to sustain continued faculty development support.

# Faculty Development Infrastructure Strategy (cont.)

## Foundational Faculty Development Structure (cont.)

### Clarify Coordination Across Distributed Units Rather Than Eliminating Fragmentation

Most contacts operate with some degree of fragmentation across faculty development activities, including teaching support, research development, and mentoring. However, fragmentation does not inherently reduce effectiveness. At Institution C, duplication among their multiple faculty development units is not viewed as inefficient, as faculty engage through relationships rather than navigate organizational structures. Faculty access faculty development support through those multiple units by going to the most familiar staff member or remembering a resource from a past engagement, and where needed receive redirection to the more appropriate unit. This avoids faculty disconnecting from a centralized office if they lack a personal connection to the singular unit and its staff.

Leading approaches focus on clarifying roles, improving communication, and maintaining multiple accessible entry points for faculty. At institutions with more nascent centralized infrastructure, faculty development leaders often begin with faculty-led mapping efforts. Faculty working groups focus on primary faculty development needs (e.g., research, instruction, career progression) and map available resources and relevant units; this exercise can also surface gaps a centralized unit might fulfill.

As centralized faculty development coordination evolves, a centralized unit and director can convene relevant units and peers and can own coordination across campus. This director would maintain an inventory of campus services and contacts to enable the redirection that multiple entry points require.



There's no such thing as too much support... 'all hands on deck' lets us work together toward the same goal... and it boils down that faculty reach out to who they know."

Director of Faculty Development  
Institution C

Source: EAB interviews, analysis, and AI-enabled research support. AI-assisted content reviewed and finalized by EAB researchers.

# Faculty Development Organizational Design and Services at Profiled Institutions

## Organizational Design

### Faculty Development Units Remain Small

Contacts worked within very small units, typically either as an independent director or with few supporting staff members. The largest office included five staff beyond the director. The leader is often considered staff, but may maintain faculty-like practices such as Faculty Senate attendance. Contacts did not address whether their role as staff was a requirement, but all shared previous faculty experience and eligibility for return to faculty positions.

### Contact Roles and Faculty Development/Advancement Center Title



Former **Director** (active faculty concurrently)

**Office of Faculty Advancement, Retention, and Excellence**



**Director** of Faculty Development (staff)

**Division of Strategic Educational Alliances**



**Director** (staff)

**University Teaching and Learning Commons**

## Services

### Services Vary Little Across Faculty Career Stages

Contacts described faculty development services as broadly accessible across faculty populations, with relatively little differentiation by career stage, tenure status, or appointment type. While some units prioritized participation in select programs based on institutional impact or capacity constraints, contacts did not describe fully separate service portfolios for early-career, post-tenure, adjunct, or academic staff populations.

Contacts at Institution B emphasized broad faculty engagement rather than heavily segmented programming models. Rather than structuring services by faculty rank or appointment type, the institution relied on relationship-based outreach and informal feedback networks spanning faculty career stages and disciplinary backgrounds. Contacts noted intentionally maintaining contact networks that included newer faculty, senior researchers, and professional-track instructors when gathering input on programming and institutional initiatives.

At Institution C, faculty development workshops were broadly open to faculty populations, while participation in the institution's Certificate of Excellence in Teaching Online (CETO) program was initially prioritized for full-time faculty with high student impact due to limited capacity and stipend availability. Adjunct faculty were later permitted to participate, though without stipend eligibility. The Institution also maintained a separate instructional development pathway for graduate teaching assistants through its G-STEP program.

Source: EAB interviews, analysis, and AI-enabled research support. AI-assisted content reviewed and finalized by EAB researchers.

# Faculty Development Organizational Design and Services at Profiled Institutions (cont.)

## Services (cont.)

Contacts shared limited detail on formal faculty mentoring models, and did not describe multiple, clearly differentiated mentoring programs creating a need for faculty to choose. Instead, mentoring appeared to happen primarily within colleges, departments, or faculty-led networks rather than a central faculty development unit.

At Institution A, some colleges began developing their own faculty development activities, including mentoring and research support, after institution-wide planning efforts surfaced gaps in faculty development infrastructure. However, the contact did not describe a centralized mentoring program or formal navigation process for faculty choosing among mentoring options.

Contacts at Institution C described skepticism toward assigned mentorship models, noting that formal mentor assignment can feel hierarchical and that faculty often identify mentors organically over time. Contacts pointed instead to institute-style models, where faculty work over an extended period with more experienced colleagues, as a way to generate lasting mentoring relationships without relying on a traditional assigned-mentor structure.

Contacts provided limited information regarding services specifically designed for academic staff populations, and efforts centered on academic faculty.

## Conferences and Other Inter-Campus Networking Surface Emerging Needs

Contacts noted participation in national conferences, peer networking, and monitoring sector trends enabled them to anticipate emerging faculty development needs. Directors can then take these perspectives to their campus contacts (more on these relationships in the following section) to validate relevance. This approach allows leaders to validate needs quickly and design responses that reflect both local context and broader higher education trends.

For example, colleagues across campuses began discussing their undergraduate students departing class suddenly, and learning that students did not perceive a class as relevant they would leave – to our contact, this specific instance reflected a larger generational shift and need for faculty to understand their students' perspectives (and consider in advance how to address this behavior if it arose in their classroom).

A focus on distinct units' strengths and perspectives prevents true duplication when addressing emerging needs. As our contact at Institution C described, centralized faculty development staff prioritized a semester-long Generative AI Institute for Teaching that focused on GenAI use in teaching and learning, while colleagues in the College of Engineering developed a more technical offering for faculty creating GenAI tools. Recurring meetings among faculty development unit leaders and open communication across units can ensure related services differentiate by local strengths as well as needs.

# Faculty Engagement and Relational Infrastructure

## Faculty-Centered Engagement and Trust-Building Strategies

### Trust and Relationships Propel Participation More Than Formal Structure

Across contact institutions, faculty engagement is primarily driven by trust, credibility, and consistent interaction rather than formal programming alone. At Institution B, faculty development leaders intentionally position themselves as “trust brokers,” serving as intermediaries between faculty and administration to surface candid feedback and increase adoption of institutional initiatives. However, this model introduces risk, as relationship-driven engagement can be difficult to sustain without formal systems that outlast individual leaders. Formal job descriptions and evaluations that require soliciting, synthesizing, and elevating faculty feedback would ensure this role outlives an individual director’s practices.

Faculty development staff also earn faculty trust by remaining active in the scholarship of teaching and learning and by contributing to university service (e.g., committee membership, faculty senate attendance) – these investments signal faculty development leadership and staff share faculty perspectives and community.

### Design Programming Around Faculty Needs to Maximize Engagement

Faculty are most likely to engage with programming that directly supports their priorities, including research productivity, career advancement, and teaching effectiveness. Even in low-resource environments, targeted programming can be highly effective. For example, writing sprints at Institution A have generated strong participation by directly addressing faculty needs around research output, demonstrating that relevance is the primary driver of engagement. These sprints dedicate a time and space to research and/or proposal writing to facilitate protected writing blocks and provide snacks as well as camaraderie to ease the writing process.

### Leverage Existing Networks as Core Engagement Infrastructure

Rather than relying on surveys or broad outreach, leading contacts embed engagement within existing faculty interactions. At Institution B, department head convenings serve as a key coordination layer, enabling feedback collection, policy vetting, and co-creation of initiatives. In return, these convenings offer department heads a network of peers unavailable within their own departments. About 75 percent of department heads attend monthly.

Consistent communication strategies, such as structured weekly newsletters, further reinforce engagement and visibility across faculty populations. Leadership also described a “kitchen cabinet” approach of building personal relationships with faculty of different perspectives and roles (e.g., early career, adjunct) to seek one-on-one input informally on faculty needs and possible unit responses.

Source: EAB interviews, analysis, and AI-enabled research support. AI-assisted content reviewed and finalized by EAB researchers.

# Faculty Engagement and Relational Infrastructure (cont.)

## Faculty-Centered Engagement and Trust-Building Strategies (cont.)

### Offer Consistent, High-Value Information to Remain Top-of-Mind

The faculty development director at Institution B distributes a weekly email newsletter. Sending the newsletter Tuesday mornings (contacts have determined 8:30 am achieves maximum open rates among faculty) ensures the office remains top-of-mind as faculty need support. Additionally, the newsletter positions the team as the coordinating resource for faculty development across decentralized efforts.

### Elevate a Weekly Newsletter to Spark Engagement and Build Trust



1

#### Lead with Faculty-Centered Helpful Information

Capture attention early with faculty-valued content to save time, improve practice, etc.

2

#### Format to Facilitate Reading

Distinctive headings, bullets, bolding, and visuals enable faculty to access desired information quickly

3

#### Reserve Highly Sought Information for the End

Teach readers to anticipate highly desirable information (e.g., about funding) when they read to the end

X

#### Limit Off-Topic Additions

Politely decline requests to integrate general campus announcements or reminders

80%

Open rate achieved by Institution B weekly faculty development newsletter.



Source: EAB interviews, analysis, and AI-enabled research support. AI-assisted content reviewed and finalized by EAB researchers.

# Faculty Engagement and Relational Infrastructure (cont.)

## Faculty-Centered Engagement and Trust-Building Strategies (cont.)

### Position Faculty Development as a Community-Building Function

Faculty development increasingly serves as a mechanism for fostering community and belonging, in addition to professional skill development. At Institution C, institute models and faculty communities of practice create sustained engagement and cross-departmental relationships, helping reduce isolation and strengthen institutional culture. This expands the role of faculty development to include retention support, faculty satisfaction, and community-building outcomes.



#### Informal, Relationship-Building Spaces in Support Faculty Connection

At Institution B, faculty development leaders invest in low-structure engagement opportunities, including social events:

- Quarterly coffee houses
- Annual beer gardens

The director has also intentionally designed the office as a drop-in space for faculty interaction. The office regularly offers coffee and snacks, and contacts note that investing in high-quality snacks creates goodwill and faculty excitement. For a relatively small cost faculty development leaders can demonstrate care for faculty members and encourage continued visits. At a far higher cost, examples like [the faculty wellness space at Auburn University](#) become a campus destination with massage chairs and zero-gravity chairs, a VR experience pod, and teaching demo lab as the most eye-catching attractions.

Even at a lower investment, these environments build trust, surface candid feedback, and create ongoing opportunities for connection beyond formal programming.

# Program Models and Measurable Impact

## Program Design and Outcome-Oriented Approaches

### **Sustained Programming Models such as Ongoing Institutes Achieve Stronger Outcomes than One-Off Workshops**

Ad hoc workshops alone are often insufficient to drive meaningful change. Institutions are increasingly adopting sustained programming models, such as institutes and certificate programs, which allow for deeper skill development and relationship-building over time. At Institution C, semester-long institutes and certification programs have demonstrated measurable impact, including improvements in student outcomes such as reduced DFWI rates and increased GPA.

### **Faculty-Led Models Increase Ownership and Expand Capacity**

Institutions are experimenting with faculty-led approaches, such as communities of practice, to increase engagement and reduce reliance on centralized staff. These models empower faculty as contributors, align with academic culture, and expand programming capacity without requiring significant additional staffing resources.

### **Demonstrating Return on Investment Remains a Persistent Challenge**

Despite institutional investment, faculty development units often struggle to quantify impact beyond participation metrics. Leadership at Institution C emphasized the difficulty of measuring outcomes such as belonging, retention, and faculty experience, which are critical but less tangible. Leading approaches to addressing this challenge include linking participation to student outcomes, collecting faculty feedback, and tracking engagement trends over time.

# Possible Vision for Hybrid Centralized-Decentralized Faculty Development Model

Developed for the Requesting Institution

## **A Hybrid Model Entails Centralized Leaders Own *Coordination*, While Faculty Development Staff and Work Remain Distributed**

A centralized leader would coordinate among the Center for Faculty Development and Advancement, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and relevant roles in the Research and Development office as well as the colleges. Coordination could entail:

- Convening peers across units regularly to discuss collaborative opportunities, identify and mitigate risk of duplication, and surface emerging needs
- Maintaining an inventory of faculty-facing services
- Hosting a university-wide one-stop-shop webpage for faculty development services
- Employing a “kitchen cabinet” model to solicit input across faculty segments and serve as a conduit to leadership for faculty messages
- Connecting with faculty development colleagues on other campuses to monitor trends and emerging needs

Dotted line reporting relationships can create more formal relationships, especially if faculty-oriented staff work in less-relevant functional units (e.g., IT).

## **Leverage Recurring, Faculty-Centered Communications and Events to Focus Faculty Development Attention**

A well-designed weekly newsletter can establish the centralized office as top of mind for faculty and can serve as a channel spanning faculty development services for further coordination. Events further establish the centralized office as a universal resource for faculty support, with events spanning:

- [Informal social gatherings](#) encouraged by comfortable spaces and welcoming snacks
- [Planned social gatherings](#) such as quarterly coffee chats, annual celebration events
- Work-oriented sessions such as space and support for [writing sprints](#) or syllabus redesign

## **Aim to Evaluate Impact of Faculty Participation on Faculty Success Metrics (e.g., Time to Promotion) and Student Success Metrics (e.g., DFWI rates)**

Assessment of centralized faculty development, and where possible efforts distributed across campus, offers a valuable and often missing contribution to university faculty development. Ability to leverage centralized datasets (e.g., student success outcomes) and dedicate time for analysis would allow the director to contribute to strategy discussion campuswide.

Source: EAB interviews, analysis, and AI-enabled research support. AI-assisted content reviewed and finalized by EAB researchers.

# Institutional Readiness and Change Management

## Governance, Alignment, and Structural Evolution

### Balance Efficiency Goals with Academic Culture and Autonomy

Contacts describe ongoing tension between centralization efforts aimed at improving efficiency and faculty preferences for autonomy and flexibility. While centralized models can improve coordination and reduce redundancy, overly rigid structures may limit engagement. Effective approaches balance centralized oversight with decentralized, relationship-driven engagement strategies that align with faculty behavior.

### Align Faculty Development Functions with Academic Governance Structures

Misalignment between faculty development roles and academic governance can limit effectiveness. At Institution B, key functions such as instructional design and accessibility are not fully aligned under academic affairs, creating ambiguity and coordination challenges. Contacts are addressing this through:

- Centralized oversight,
- Dotted-line reporting structures, and
- Clearer accountability mechanisms for:
  - Recurring cross-unit coordination meetings,
  - Accessibility remediation and support processes,
  - Maintenance of faculty-facing service inventories, and
  - Faculty referral/navigation processes across decentralized units.

### Leverage Periods of Institutional Change to Redesign Faculty Development Models

Faculty development efforts are often reshaped during periods of financial or organizational change. At Institution C, recent restructuring and budget pressures have significantly altered ownership and staffing models, creating both uncertainty and opportunity. These moments allow institutions to redefine strategy, clarify roles, and build more sustainable and aligned faculty development structures.



# Appendix



- Research Methodology



# Research Methodology

## Project Challenge

Leadership at the Requesting Institution approached EAB with the following questions regarding faculty development and advancement efforts:

### *Resource Coordination and Alignment*

- What units contribute to faculty development at contacts' organizations, both at the campuswide and individual school/college levels?
- How do these units intersect? What roles are distinct to different units?
- How do contacts avoid silos among units? To what extent do committees or other organizing bodies coordinate units?
- What role does shared governance contribute to faculty development resources? What relationships exist among faculty governance groups and faculty development units?

### *Faculty Development Services*

- What services are available to faculty across career stages (e.g., early career, post-tenure) and instructor types (e.g., non-tenure track faculty)?
- To what extent are services from the faculty development unit(s) available to academic staff?
- Which unit(s) offer faculty mentoring? If multiple, how do these mentoring programs differentiate, and how do faculty navigate which mentoring to pursue?
- How do unit leaders determine what services to offer on emerging needs (e.g., faculty AI use), and how do leaders prevent duplicative or even contradictory offerings?

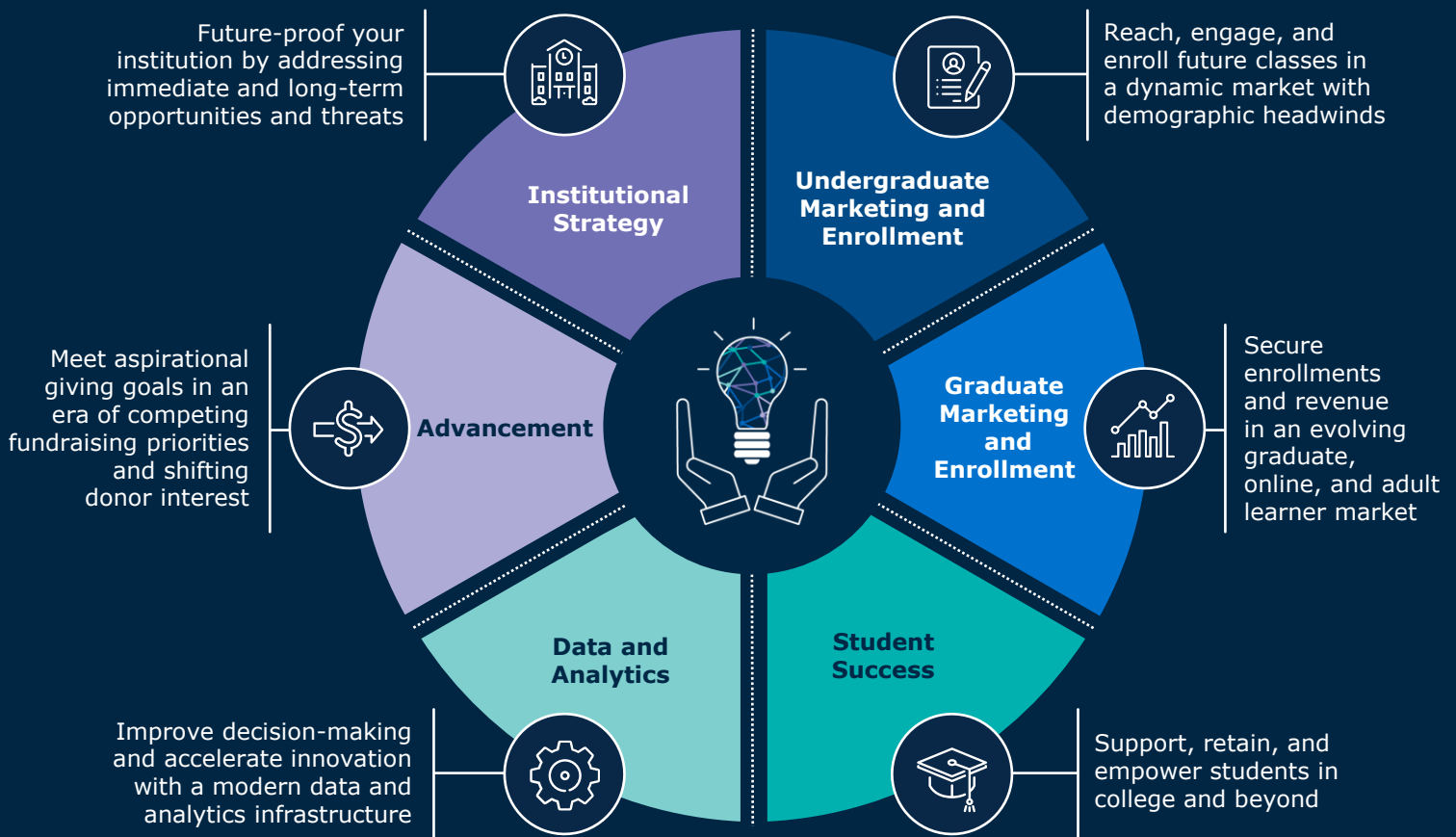
### *Faculty Development and Advancement Centers*

- What role leads the faculty development and advancement center? Is the leader considered faculty or staff, and is that flexible or a formal or informal requirement?
- How many staff work in the faculty development and advancement center? What are their responsibilities?
- How is the faculty development and advancement center funded?
- How is the faculty development and advancement center evaluated?
- What benefits or drawbacks to contacts observe in their faculty development and advancement center model?

## Research Limitations

Fewer faculty development experts than hoped were willing to participate in interviews and this research leverages their perspectives as well as best practices in faculty development to the greatest extent possible.

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