



WHAT WORKS - A PKAL ESSAY

GETTING SUPPORT AND BUDGET FOR YOUR GREAT IDEA I

This essay is about how to successfully translate your enthusiasm for a new project into dollars you can spend on it.

The Situation

Let's assume you have a great idea for a new course or curricular program; you want a new pedagogical approach, or put on an academic event, or engage students in a worthy service learning project; or perhaps you need a new piece of research equipment, etc. But in the press of daily duties, instead of sitting down with your chair to explain how this new idea will be good for you and for your students and colleagues, you dash off an excited and hurried e-mail.

Almost instantly by return message your department chair says that unfortunately the department simply has no money for your project. Discouraged, you wonder what has become of the department's budget. And then you think perhaps you should be going straight to the dean or the academic vice-president with your idea. After all, they might fund it!

Well, maybe, but not likely. At least not right off. Yes, the chair probably was the right person to start with. But, perhaps you made the wrong approach. Or perhaps not, but maybe the chair had not yet learned how best to assist colleagues to succeed in situations like this.

Experienced chairs, upon hearing a good idea, often suggest how the idea might be expanded and massaged from *yours* to *ours*. The experienced chair may suggest ways that the idea links with departmental priorities; and she or he might then explore with the dean how the idea might become part of the forthcoming year's budget proposals. The chair's problem-solving skills and dispositions, creativity, institutional knowledge, and leadership are critical here, particularly when it comes to assisting newer and less experienced departmental colleagues.

(Comprehensive faculty development offices collaborating with wise deans offer a chair a variety of ways to develop professionally in that role. But department chair training is a topic for another essay.)

Three Questions

So, if your approach to your chair is not successful— for whatever reason, then who might you approach for guidance before going directly to the dean or VP?

- ◆ The associate academic dean or associate vice-president for new program development
- ◆ The director of the faculty development office
- ◆ The director of pre-award research service
- ◆ The director of the office on your campus that works on corporate and foundation giving.

Peter A. Facione
Senior Associate
Stratus-Heery International Inc.

If your idea offers the reasonable prospect of generating more revenue than it will cost to continue in operation, then it could be a winner. This might mean that you will have to make the credible and truthful case that a bit of support now can move you toward a lot of external funding or new tuition revenue later.

For example, your project might:

- ◆ improve student retention, thus building enrollments and equating with greater tuition or state allocation revenues
- ◆ help the institution attract new groups of students
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And, when you go to talk with these people, how much money should you ask for? None.

Ask them instead for advice about how you might make your idea fundable. Often their knowledge of institutional support systems, the connections they can help you establish with other faculty who may have similar interests, and the experience these colleagues have with funding sources and how to tap into them, is far more valuable than any amount of money they may be able to give you from their often meager budgets.

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Knowing about the roles and responsibilities of administrators at different levels can be quite helpful to you.

There are some exceptions to this, of course. For example, an academic administrator who is responsible for curriculum development, research stimulation, or community service projects may have a budget specifically for projects like yours. But often those pots are limited and the amount you can receive might not be enough to really make your idea fully successful.

So be ready to listen to their advice. Oh, yes, do accept the money, if it is offered.

Further, what do you need to know that will help you be more successful in eliciting the right advice and securing needed resources?

Understanding the responsibilities and range of fiscal authority available to a typical chair, dean, or academic vice president can increase your chances of gaining support from an administrator at one of those levels.

For example, when you understand the fiscal authority, you will be better able to suggest one or two realistic ways an administrator at that level might be able to support your idea. The *my-idea-is-so-great-you-must-fund-it* approach is not an optimal starting point; nor is the *I-been-done-so-much-wrong-by-you-and-your-kind-that-now-you-owe-me* approach.

Administrators know that there always are more good ideas than resources to support them. Priorities have to be set, comparative evaluations made, and many worthy things left unfunded.

How then will you bring your good idea forward in a way that encourages the right administrator with the right degree of discretion and financial wherewithal to become committed to the development, support, and success of your idea?

Knowing about the roles and responsibilities of administrators at different levels can be quite helpful to you. Let's start with the department chair.

The Chair

The chair's job is to focus on curricular quality of approved courses and programs. This means the chair has to worry about staffing all the necessary sections of departmentally offered courses, providing for the equipment and supplies needed to teach those courses, and being sure that adjuncts and full-time faculty are following the approved course syllabi and exercising good judgment in their approach to pedagogy and grading.

Naturally, to achieve academic excellence in all its programs and courses requires the chair to worry about how to support faculty in their professional development as teaching-scholars.

In public and private liberal arts colleges and at regional comprehensive universities, but more so in publics, the typical department chair has control of two small, highly regulated budgets:

- ◆ the part-time faculty budget for hiring adjuncts to cover classes
- ◆ the non-salary operating budget.

The part-time faculty budget: Deans give chairs a specific amount of money to use to hire part-time faculty for purposes of covering expected student demand for sections of departmental courses. A lot of the chair's time is spent identifying good candidates, training them in what is expected of instructors in your department, and monitoring and evaluating their performance.



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The part-time salary budget is often a little short of what the chair might think is really needed. But that is because the dean is stretching part-time faculty salary dollars to cover student demand in other parts of the school or college. There are always negotiations going between chairs and deans over the needs of one department as opposed to another for more part-time faculty.

Hiring new long-term full time faculty is perhaps one of the most centrally important and expensive duties of a department chair and school dean. The dean controls the hiring of full-time faculty; however, everything from drafting the job description to conducting the search and interviews to recommending candidates is the responsibility of the chair.

The chair effectively controls the part-time hiring only, but is heavily involved in all of the department's hiring. If the department is conducting a national search, the chair may be seeking additional funding from the dean to cover the search expenses, and perhaps, negotiating to secure from the dean a special start-up expense fund or course releases in order to recruit the new hire.

The first question the VP will ask is how much is the dean and the chair putting in to sweeten the pot? The goal in these budget decisions for the chair and for the dean is to attract to your department and your school the best possible new faculty colleague.

But what if there are funds left over in the department's part-time faculty budget? Could the chair not use these to support you? Often the answer is no.

For example, deans watch very closely how the adjunct part-time faculty budget is used. Hiring more adjuncts than authorized by the dean or granting course releases that reduce a faculty member's teaching responsibilities without the dean's approval is not allowed on most campuses.

What else do chairs worry about fiscally?

The non-salary operating budget: This second budget is intended to cover the day-to-day costs of departmental activity, including postage, phones, copier usage, supplies, faculty and staff professional travel, new and replacement lab / studio / office equipment, and the like.

And in some institutions the chair may not be allowed the discretion to move dollars from one of those non-salary accounts to another; although thankfully, such an extreme degree of regulation is less and less in vogue. Yet, even in normal times this non-salary operating budget is typically not more than adequate. And chairs typically are not allowed to move dollars from the part-time faculty budget into any other budget category.

If lab supplies for instruction are consumable and enrollments are growing this can severely limit what a chair may have left in the non-salary operating budget to use for other things. In many institutions the costs of consumable instructional supplies is shifted off the department's operating budget by means of course fees. That way the students who use those consumable supplies pay for them and the expense can be predicted to be directly proportional to the enrollment.

The current practice in the great majority of colleges and universities is that toward the end of the fiscal year, unexpended departmental funds are *swept up* by the dean and then again by the central administration for other priority uses.

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These might include covering:

- ♦ unexpected cost overruns in other academic or non-academic departments
- ♦ uncollected tuition or other expected but unrealized revenues
- ♦ emergency repairs to buildings or boilers or major equipment.

It is the rare school or department that can actually carry forward surpluses into the next fiscal year.

Chairs and deans working in a *spend it or lose it* budget system will have committed their non-salary operating funds early in the fiscal year to support:

- ♦ departmental or school projects
- ♦ special events planned last year to be presented this year
- ♦ equipment upgrades
- ♦ faculty professional travel
- ♦ student assistants
- ♦ other things they know will be needed as the year goes along.



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Even if there is money in the budget, it is highly unlikely that the chair or the dean has not already spent it in his or her own mind. (As a provost I worry when they have spent it twice over in their own minds!



The approach here is not to secure permanent funding for your idea, but simply to give you a little support to get things started.



Depending on the time of the year when you ask, the chair may be worried about over-committing. Prudent budget administrators at all organizational levels track their month-by-month rate of expenditure:

- ◆ A departmental budget being spent down too quickly is a red flag for upper administration because there simply are not the dollars in the dean's or vice-president's office to bail out departments that over-spend.
- ◆ Some deans put selective freezes on departmental budgets or withdraw authority from the chair to spend out of the budget if the rate of expenditure is too high.
- ◆ Some deans penalize departments that overspend by taking the over-spent amount out of their next year's allocation or out of their gift accounts.

- ◆ As a positive incentive some deans add back into the departmental budget in the next year the amount that the department chair under-spent.

Budget administrators at higher levels have both the authority and the responsibility to disapprove of expenditures and to extract funds from lower level budgets in order to fulfill their fiduciary obligation to balance the budget of their school or their division of the institution each fiscal year.

Thinking about all of these pressures on the chair or the dean of a small school, it is not surprising that she or he might reach the end of the budget year without enough money to cover all of the professional travel expenses of the faculty.

It is not surprising either that most chairs and directors of programs find new ideas at once exciting and frustrating. They are exciting because they suggest new possibilities; frustrating because, quite frankly, few chairs, program directors, or deans of small schools have the budgetary wherewithal and flexibility to support an unplanned new endeavor.

Yes. But what chairs do have to offer you is a good sense of what the dean, the academic vice president, and the president of the university are saying that is important. And this can be very valuable intelligence. At times the best thing most chairs can give you is an accurate, up to date, and operationally understandable sense of what higher-ups are calling their strategic goals for the school, the academic division, and the university.

Your challenge, with the help of your chair, is to explain in a realistic and understandable way how what you want to do advances what they want to do.

But, bottom line, can you ever get money from a chair?

Yes. Typically you can get some. Propose that:

- ◆ he or she allocate to your uses the money which otherwise would have been spent on you anyway, e.g. your proportional fair share of:
 - ◆ the department's travel dollars
 - ◆ student assistant dollars
 - ◆ copier dollars
 - ◆ replacement equipment or new equipment dollars
 - ◆ staff support dollars.

This approach requires that you agree to forgo those reimbursements or services this year in order to direct those dollars toward your new idea.

- ◆ perhaps there is a gift fund (many of which do not expire at the end of the fiscal year) with enough flexibility in its charter to allow some of its funds to be directed toward your project just to get you going.

The approach here is not to secure permanent funding for your idea, but simply to give you a little support to get things started— one-time seed money.



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Alternatively, you might propose:

- ♦ some release from your normal teaching or departmental duties. This might give you the time for putting the necessary effort toward moving the project forward, closer to the point where some external agency or some higher administrative office will fund it. You need the time to engage in these early setup or pilot activities. A course release is one way.
- ♦ a creative shifting of your teaching responsibilities. Maybe you can teach an extra course this semester in order to have one fewer next semester. Or maybe you can move a couple of courses you would otherwise be teaching during the academic year into the summer program and teach them without pay in order to have the time during the academic year to write a grant proposal for a May or June deadline.
- ♦ that the chair guide you toward the programs, if any, in your institution that support summer stipends or research releases. Writing a proposal to do a pilot project supported by internal institutional funds coming from the Dean or VP level is often an excellent first step toward writing a successful proposal for a much larger externally funded grant.

That you were funded internally to get started demonstrates to external funding agencies that your project was deemed to have merit and to have the support of your institution.

Deans

In smaller institutions, some public comprehensives, and in those schools that are not organized into traditional departments what was true about chairs is true about deans. Budgetary discretion does not allow moving funds at that level between personnel accounts and non-salary operating accounts. Budgets are limited and must be focused on supporting already-approved programs and services, not new things. Rules limiting what deans and chairs can or cannot do with the money, especially in some of the more *command-and-control* style administrations, are extensive.

All that being said, possibilities still exist.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Dean

If the chair's job is to focus on curricular quality and staffing all the necessary sections of courses, then one might think of the dean's job as making it possible for the chair to do that by providing the chair with high quality full-time and part-time faculty, and with the budget needed to support at least the instructional, if not the service and research missions of the department.

The dean is the one most directly responsible for hiring and evaluating the faculty, even if the dean is advised in this by the recommendations of departmental and school committees and chairs and guided in this by written documents expressing standards and procedures.

For faculty not yet tenured, the dean's decision whether or not to issue a new contract for subsequent service is critical to shaping the quality of the instructional experiences for a great many students who are taught by those part-time and full-time non-tenured faculty. The dean, by word and action, makes faculty evaluation standards operational.

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The dean:

- ♦ establishes starting salaries and recommends raises
- ♦ When necessary, makes the critical recommendations to the vice-president regarding disciplinary action.
- ♦ creatively assists tenured faculty to move professionally in those directions where they will be most successful and most useful at different times in their careers, whether that is toward more teaching, more research, or more service or administrative work at any given point along the way.

So when you approach the dean with your good idea, you should keep in mind that this is not a singular interaction in isolation of all that has gone before or will come after. The Dean probably knows you and your work better than you might realize.



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The dean probably has in mind some notion of your progress toward tenure or toward your next promotion or toward your future as a leader among your peers at the school or the departmental level. Thus, the dean's conversation with you may not be limited to this particular project.



Good deans remember people who have good ideas and show initiative and energy, even if the dean cannot support the person at that moment.



She or he will want to hear:

- ♦ how you see this fitting into your long-term program of teaching and scholarship
- ♦ how you see this advancing yourself professionally so that your success can bring greater credit to your department and your school and institution
- ♦ how you see this work supporting the curricular mission and initiatives of the department or the school or the university.

Putting your idea into the context of the bigger picture, not just for you alone but for your institution, is an important part of making this conversation a positive and successful experience for you.

Good deans remember people who have good ideas and show initiative and energy, even if the dean cannot support the person at that moment and in the way the person is asking. Good deans are talent scouts and coaches, mentors and leaders. They are always looking for motivated people whose work and vision they can use for the betterment of that person and of the school.

Yes, you can be successful in getting money and time from the dean, and substantial political support too. Or not.

A dean can usually do literally ten times more by way of dollars than a chair can do. They also have the resources in most cases to fund course releases, or the authority to approve non-standard teaching load distributions.

Some deans can do more, for example, those who:

- ♦ have their own school level alumni and advisory boards
- ♦ are managing their own continuing education programs and retaining some of the excess revenues
- ♦ have faculty secure substantial external funding each year.

And, given how budgeting works in most institutions, some academic vice presidents can do ten times more by way of dollars than a dean.

Beside hitting their revenue targets and doing so within the limits of their expense authorizations, most deans have the additional responsibility of developing new programs and initiatives in keeping with the strategic goals of the president and their own strategic goals for the school.

Strategic planning at the school level can include:

- ♦ focusing on new academic majors and degree programs
- ♦ creating collaborative centers to focus the energy of scholar teachers on research or service activities of significance to the mission and identity of the school
- ♦ establishing new academic ventures aimed at increasing educational opportunities for current or new groups of students (e.g. study abroad programs, continuing education and adult learning programs, e-learning initiatives, clinical internships and community-based service-learning opportunities, and partnerships with K-12 schools).

When you talk to the dean about your idea, one thing a good dean will be doing is trying to figure out whether your idea connects to a project already moving forward or one in the works. If not, your chances of a positive reception drop quickly. If your new idea, no matter its objective merits, does not connect, it is simply not going to get the dean's attention, energy, or financial support.

Deans do not decide between good ideas and bad ideas; they decide which of the good ideas connect with their strategic goals and which do not. It's not about you. It's about the limitations of what any one organization and its leadership can do at any given time.



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Actually most Deans will try to find a bit of money to support a good idea. But where do Deans look when they are *trying to find* money? Apart from gift funds and the indirect-cost returns we discussed above, Deans tend to look in two others places: lapsed salary dollars and year-end sweep-ups.

- ◆ **Year-end sweep-ups** are the dollars left in various program budgets and accounts at the end of the fiscal year. Often these are very small amounts, but there are many budgets and accounts. When one sweeps these dollars together in the eleventh month of the fiscal year, one can accumulate a nice little pile. Even after you put some money aside to cover the normally expected expenses for the final month of the fiscal year and the problems which occur because a few accounts are going to be in deficit, there should be some left.

The larger the organization and the more budgets and accounts it has, the more predictable from year to year these sweep-ups can become. If the organization offers a positive incentive to chairs to stay within their approved expense budgets, then they will and the dean will have even more money to work with when the year end sweep-ups are gathered.

- ◆ **Lapsed salary dollars** are the dollars that come free when a full-time faculty member goes on leave without pay or disability leave, retires and is replaced with a lower paid person, or is funded in whole or in part by an external grant.

Most universities back each faculty line in the budget with sufficient dollars to pay that person their salary for the academic year. This is known as a fully funded position control system. So if part or all of a given person's salary does not have to be paid using institutional dollars for whatever reason, then those dollars can be used within that fiscal year for some other purpose.

You are more able to secure funding for expenses that do not require a commitment which extends beyond the current fiscal year.

Yes, there are often rules about this. For example, sometimes the vice-president gets to use those dollars, not the dean. Sometimes a dean who can access those dollars is permitted to use them only to hire other temporary faculty—which means to fill courses with needed instructors and to pay for course releases, therefore.

Vice-presidents are often granted greater discretion, including in some institutions the authority to move those dollars within a given fiscal year into staff salaries, scholarships, physical facilities project, or non-salary operating budgets.

It is fiscally risky for an administrator regularly to fund basic on-going year-to-year operations by relying on there being sweep-ups and lapsed salary dollars. Yes, statistically that risk can be mitigated somewhat with a prediction formula. And, yes, occasionally during tough budget years one might have to fund things that way just for a short time. But in the end, budgeting that way is like paying for Tuesday's dinner with Saturday's dinner allowance and hoping the family will not be hungry at the end of the week.

Most fiscally prudent deans and vice-presidents wait to see how much year-end money materializes and then they use those funds for one-time expenses, such as:

- ◆ hiring temporary faculty or staff
- ◆ supporting particular events or projects that will be completed within a given year
- ◆ purchasing equipment
- ◆ supplementing the capital project budget
- ◆ giving out scholarships
- ◆ issuing travel reimbursements
- ◆ taking on consultants, or other additions to the institution's investment pool.

So, when you have a project that connects with a strategic goal, you are more apt to be able to secure funding for expenses that do not require the dean or the VP to make a commitment which extends beyond the current fiscal year.



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Think of which expenses those might be before you go into the meeting with the dean. Be ready to suggest how the dean can become an enthusiastic supporter of your project, your partner, patron, and sponsor, by offering two or three ideas for things that you can make happen this year if the dean can *find* one-time money.

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Deans, contrary to popular belief, are human. And once they start giving to the cause, it is easier to get them to contribute again in future years. And, like other modes of charitable giving, contributions tend to increase over time if the person or agency receiving those gifts consistently demonstrates that the support is appreciated and not taken for granted, and that the money is always being used prudently and effectively.

I would bet against your receiving a gift from the dean if:

- ◆ you are arrogant, condescending, or antagonistic toward administrators
- ◆ you express openly all your unresolved issues with authority
- ◆ you act as if the dean owes you the money
- ◆ you communicate that the dean should simply put blind trust in whatever it pleases you to do.

We sometimes think of alumni and university friends as important benefactors, worthy of careful treatment. But for chairs and faculty within the organization, the dean and VP and president are the three most important benefactors for your program.

As your development office will tell you, prudent stewardship and respectful cultivation are the watchwords of good fundraising. Ultimately, in external fundraising:

- ◆ People give to people.
- ◆ They give to winners not whiners.
- ◆ They give to people who will make happen what they would like to see happen.

And all the same basic human truths about external fundraising apply inside the institution. Deans want to be partners and benefactors in making good things happen; they do not want school resources used on losing propositions or projects with no apparent connection to larger values and goals.

Academic Vice Presidents

The job of the academic vice-president is four-fold.

- ◆ make happen whatever the president wants, e.g. achieve the goals of the institution's strategic plan.
- ◆ keep the academic support systems (academic budgeting, information services and library, enrollment management, admissions, financial aid, student information systems, faculty personnel services, academic advising and student support services, faculty governance, curricular review and accreditation processes, research services and compliance, interface with housing and student affairs, interface with facilities and physical plant operations, etc.) running smoothly and in the background.
- ◆ hire, evaluate, mentor, and fund the work of deans and academic directors, and assist them in charting out how each of their units can contribute to the overall good of the institution.
- ◆ establish the official budget and enrollment targets for revenues and the official limits of the allowable expenses for each school and large administrative unit within the academic affairs area, and within this, approve proposals to fill vacant and new faculty and staff lines and to undertake new major strategic initiatives.



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The academic affairs area generates 80% or more of the annual revenue for the great majority of universities. That means that the academic affairs division carries the rest of the university. This revenue comes largely from enrollments in the form of tuition, fees, and in the case of publicly supported institutions, enrollment-based governmental allocations.

If the institution's budget is properly built at the macro level, then each year when the institution hits its enrollment targets, the revenues are there to support everything that had been built into the expense budget of academic affairs and the rest of university as well.

So, if your project is not one of the things that a dean or director had anticipated and built into his or her budget, are you out of luck? No.

There is one more possibility. A dean, director, or the vice-president may have put aside some money specifically for the good ideas that she or he knew were going to come along during the year.

This may be in the form of a budget for:

- ◆ special projects
- ◆ new initiatives
- ◆ strategic objectives
- ◆ targets of opportunity
- ◆ internal grants
- ◆ discretionary funds
- ◆ contingency funds
- ◆ curriculum development
- ◆ research support.

The closer your idea connects with one or more of the strategic goals or objectives of the institution, the better.

But do not underestimate the notion that for a vice-president or dean revenue generation is a strategic objective. If your idea offers the reasonable prospect of generating more revenue than it will cost to continue in operation, then it could be a winner. This might mean that you will have to make the credible and truthful case that a bit of support now can move you toward a lot of external funding or new tuition revenue later.

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One Last Thought

I've been a chair, division director, dean, and provost in public and private institutions for 29 years— but who's counting. And one test I have seen administrators use at every level in deciding whether or not to support an academic idea is whether the person who brings it forward is willing to become its champion. Are you willing to do the hard and not often glorious work it will take to move the idea from concept to reality?

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Each year people suggest things that it would be good for someone else to do. While we appreciate the advice, we are not too likely to leap at these kinds of proposals. If it is not something you feel passionate enough about to put your energy and effort into, how do you hope to persuade others to make it a high priority on their lists of far too many good things to do? ■