



Grantee Spotlight:

Planning for Financial Sustainability at Radford University and California State University, Dominguez Hills



By Lauren K. B. Matlach

Dr. Matt Dunleavy of Radford University and Dr. Kamal Hamdan of California State University, Dominguez Hills embrace the challenge of ensuring the financial sustainability of their grants. Although the two have differing approaches to ensuring the sustainability of their endeavors, conversations with them highlight three common themes:

1. the importance of planning for financial sustainability early in grant implementation,
2. interrelatedness between project quality and financial sustainability, and
3. the role of partnerships in ensuring financial sustainability for the long-term.

Meet the Grantees



Matt Dunleavy, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Vinod Chachra, IMPACT Lab at Radford University

Radford University is a 2017 Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grantee. Its project, Appalachian Support for Specialized Training (ASSET), is a self-paced, competency-based online professional development program designed to help rural teachers meet the needs of all students in today's increasingly challenging classrooms. The grant and match funding support the creation and piloting of microcredentials based on the What Works Clearinghouse's Practice Guides. The microcredentials can be used both as credit towards professional learning requirements and can be combined to earn graduate credits. To ensure financial sustainability, Project Director Matt Dunleavy is currently working with partners to determine an appropriate price point so that long-term, Radford University can continue offering the modules for a reasonable cost to districts. Read more about Radford University's SEED Grant:

- [Radford University's Communities360 Grantee Profile](#)
- [ASSET Program Website](#)



Kamal Hamdan, Ph.D.
Annenberg Endowed Professor and Director, Center for Innovation in STEM Education (CISE), California State University, Dominguez Hills

California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) is a 2019, 2014, and 2009 Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Grantee. Its Residency for Equity through Action and Learning (Project REAL) is a 15-month program that enables STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) teacher candidates to earn a preliminary teaching credential and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. It also places CSUDH graduate-level teacher candidates in a year-long residency with trained master teachers in high-need and historically understaffed secondary partner schools within CSUDH's service area. One of the unique aspects of the program is that teacher residents receive fabrication technology skills training through the college's Fab Lab. Project Director Kamal Hamdan's long-standing relationships with partners have enabled the program to evolve and grow over time. Read more about CSUDH's TQP grant:

- [CA Institute for Innovation at Improvement \(CSI3\) Project REAL Website](#)

1. Start financial sustainability conversations as soon as possible.

Radford University

“We’ve completed a lot of important groundwork,” Dr. Matt Dunleavy shares. “We looked at what the research said on sustainability. We spoke to our program officer at the U.S. Department of Education, and we began that conversation early.” Further, early in the grant implementation, they used the EED TA Center’s resources for sustainability. In particular, *Sustainability Planning: A Comprehensive Guide for Your Teacher Quality Programs* grant and the 2017 New Grantee Workshop sessions that focused on logic models and sustainability were key resources that kickstarted comprehensive sustainability planning.

While many might shy away from applying a business mindset to education, Dunleavy has found it helpful to his work at Radford: “Most universities don’t have a business mindset, but we need it if we are going to sustain our endeavors even in the medium term--especially in this current national crisis.”

Dunleavy views Radford University’s SEED grant from the U.S. Department of Education and its requirement for match contributions as the seed funding for a long-term endeavor and applies the mindset of a lean startup to grant design and implementation.

“In the beginning, we were hyper-focused on how to sustain the grant in terms of staffing,” explains Dunleavy. “We wanted to make sure we were creating a high-quality product that states and districts would want.”

Now that the team has created multiple microcredentials and piloted them with key district partners with promising results, the team is thinking about how to monetize the microcredentials moving forward. However, he wishes he had begun discussions with partners earlier about their available funding.

“If you can get a State Education Agency (SEA) or a Local Education Agency (LEA) to commit to cost share up front, and have that money specifically earmarked for an initiative, that’s the best scenario,” says Dunleavy. “If you can’t get the commitment during proposal writing, then the conversation about cost sharing needs to begin almost immediately [after winning the grant]. Three years seems like a long time, but it’s not.”

University of California, Dominguez Hills

Often, organizations design a project first and then focus on funding and sustainability later. Dr. Kamal Hamdan flips this model in his approach, which begins with a question: What is sustainable?

“Embrace the match [funding requirement]” shares Hamdan. “You cannot say, ‘I will figure it out later.’ It has to be embraced from the beginning.”

Resource from the EED TA Center

- [Sustainability Planning: A Comprehensive Guide for Your Teacher Quality Programs Grant](#)

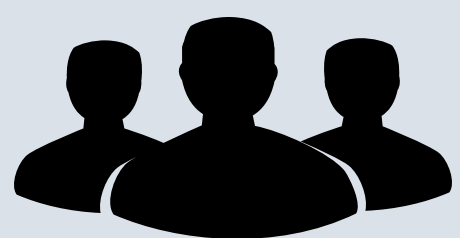
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~Matt Dunleavy***

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~Kamal Hamdan***

Key Question for the Grantees

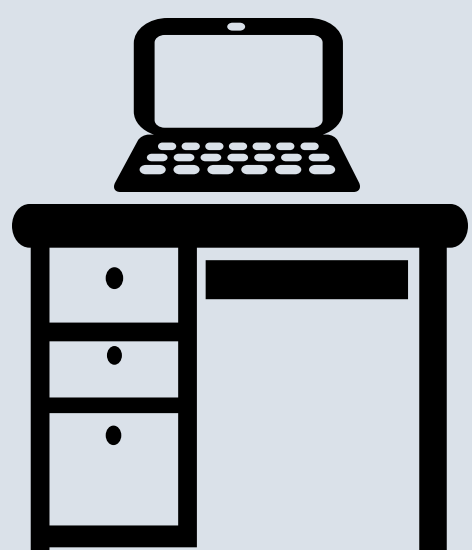
How have you been able to meet the match requirements of your grant?

Radford University



Personnel

Radford University calculates a percentage of salaries and benefits for staff working on the grant based on the amount of time they work on the grant activities.



Physical space

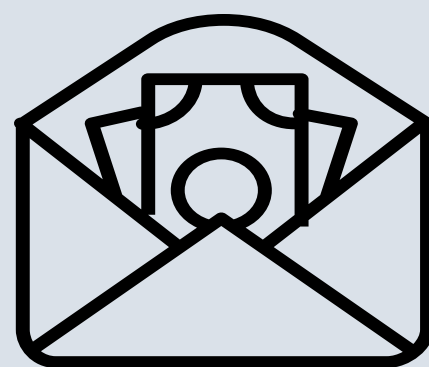
The grantee calculates the cost of renting the physical space to house ASSET on Radford University's campus.



Tuition

The grantee uses both federal funds and in-kind contributions from Radford University to pay for the tuition of educators participating in the ASSET microcredentials during the grant period.

California State University, Dominguez Hills



Donations

Multiple businesses and foundations contribute funding, including Toyota, Northrup Grumman, Southern California Edison, Annenberg Endowed Foundation, and local foundations.



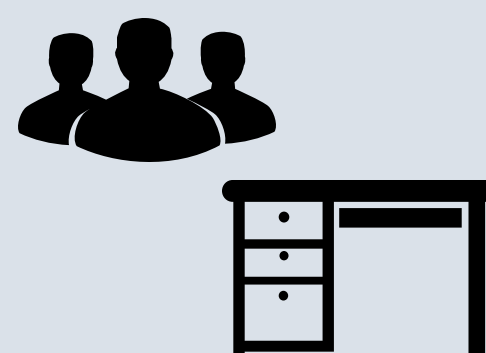
State Funding

CSUDH obtained grant money from the State of California which focuses on the recruitment and preparation of STEM teachers, which aligns with the TQP grant work.



Stipends

Green Dot Public Schools pays the teacher and mentor stipends associated with the TQP grant.



In-Kind Donations

These donations include personnel and physical space.

When writing TQP grants, Hamdan works with internal and external funders to determine how much federal funding they could match, and then uses that information to inform the project design and scope. Internally, he collaborates with the advancements team and CSUDH's Provost's Office on campus to find streams of funding they can use and then identifies the exact funding amount available for the match requirement. He also contacts external partners, including businesses and foundations, to determine their contributions. Given the short turn-around times on grant applications, finding this information can be "a bit of a scramble", but having this information up-front is beneficial in the long run. Using the available information, Hamdan and his team develop a TQP proposal that is reasonable to implement given the amount of match funds available and based on the long-term funding outlook.

2. Financial sustainability is predicated on having something worth sustaining.

Radford University

During Radford University's SEED award period, each participating rural teacher receives unlimited access to all microcredentials. To date, the university has received very positive feedback on the microcredentials and has preliminary research findings from a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) documenting significant learning gains in pedagogical content knowledge for participating teachers.

To Dunleavy, demonstrating program quality was essential to financial sustainability. "Starting the conversation about financial sustainability early is critical but, at the same time, the initial focus needs to be on identifying critical SEA and LEA needs, research, and building a state-of-the-art product that people can access... that will effect change."

Because Radford University has established a high-quality product, they are now able to engage with SEAs and LEAs to determine an appropriate price point for the future. "You can't have that conversation with credibility if you haven't set the groundwork of creating a product that people are willing to buy... The quality of the instruction that we've built will enable us to monetize [our work] and ensure financial sustainability."

California State University, Dominguez Hills

Program quality is also a driving factor for financial sustainability at CSUDH. Hamdan works with multiple partners and donors, including Green Dot Public Schools, Toyota, Northrup Grumman, and local foundations. When seeking funding, Hamdan asks for modest donations at first but encourages donors to increase donations over time when the project is proven successful and the partnership is mutually beneficial. Given the quality of the REAL Program, Hamdan has seen partners step up and provide additional funding over time. For example, Green Dot Public Schools has increased its in-kind support towards stipends, enabling CSUDH to increase the scope of its program and prepare more future teachers. Similarly, Northrop Grumman has increased the size of its monetary donations over time because of the success of the project.

3. Partnerships are integral to financial sustainability.

Radford University

Conversations about money need to begin with trust. Strong internal and external partnerships set the foundation for useful conversations around financial sustainability.

"Start conversations with people who already trust you and [with whom] you already have credibility," Dunleavy shares. For example, Dunleavy suggests working with staff from budget and financial planning offices in key partner districts to get a better sense of current professional learning needs and what price points are reasonable for districts. In addition, Dunleavy also suggests working with the evaluation partners to conduct pricing studies to understand what would be considered affordable from the teachers' perspective. This information is helping Radford University develop its pricing strategy for after the grant funding ends.

California State University, Dominguez Hills

When asked what he is most proud of related to financial sustainability of the grant, Hamdan said he's proud of the long-term relationships he has created with partners. "It's personal now," he explained. "I've gotten to really know them. There is a genuine willingness to engage and talk from the heart. It enables us to be honest and frank." This is true for both internal and external partnerships.

Hamdan has worked closely over the years with the Office of Advancement Services, which focuses on the stewardship of non-state support, and the Office of University Development, which works to gain financial support and gifts from alumni and friends. The university benefits from the profile of having a grant like a Teacher Quality Partnership grant, so their working relationship is mutually beneficial. "I'm their favorite customer," he jokes.

Another critical part of establishing strong partnerships is ensuring there is strong alignment between the organization's mission and the grant objectives. "Tell your story and speak about your passion," Hamdan advises, "but refuse to manipulate the story to fit what the funder seeks." Hamdan has turned down funding opportunities that did not align with his mission of preparing more high-quality educators. That said, he has established long-standing partnerships with Toyota, Northrop Grumman, and others.

Ensuring strong alignment and building strong relationships has been integral to CSUDH's success, and not just the sustainability of the grant. "The TQP grant extends way beyond preparing teachers," says Hamdan. "It's opening windows of opportunities to many more people through the preparation of those teachers."

For example, after holding an event for families on campus to learn more about CSUDH, Northrop Grumman decided to increase its hiring of graduates from CSUDH and hired six students not involved in Hamdan's REAL program.

"Those six people were STEM majors at CSUDH connected to TQP but were not aspiring teachers, and now those six people from the inner city are now getting paid to work at Northrop Grumman," explains Hamdan.

Looking Ahead: Making Program Sustainability a Reality

Financial sustainability is only one of four components of sustainability planning, but it is essential. As Dunleavy and Hamdan look ahead, they want to ensure that their excellent work continues long after the grant.

"Our grant comes from the heart," shares Hamdan. "This is what we are about. This is our life. This is what is at stake. We want to make sure that the best practices we have piloted, tested, and evaluated for the grant become part of the university and improve the work of the university over time."

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