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Initiating a change effort: An exercise

Instructions: Read through these questions. Circle the ones that seem most important to explore at your own institution. Can you answer those questions clearly with what you know about your institution now? If not, how would you go about answering them? Who would you talk with? What documents might you read? What evidence could you cite to justify the answers you give to the questions that matter most to you? If some of these elements need attention at your institution, what experience have you already had with change that might offer some insight into how to begin the change process?

1. Do you have a mandate for change? If so, from whom? What level of influence does that individual or group exert at your institution? How is that influence exercised?
2. Are there competing visions or goals for your institution or do you have reasonably shared goals and a common vision?
3. Has your institution undertaken any other significant change projects recently? Are there some lessons from those experiences that you can bring to this new change effort? What worked well and what did not and how did people respond to the change efforts?
4. How are important decisions made at your institution?
 - a. How loosely coupled is your organization? If there is a strong sense of shared purpose, what contributes to that coherence? If not, what might be done to bring people together to seek common goals and to build shared expectations about what the future should be?
 - b. What decisions are made centrally and what decisions are made locally?
 - c. Is it clear who makes decisions and the basis for those decisions or is decision-making diffuse?
 - d. Who has the most power in your institution? Is it clear what agenda those people are pursuing?
 - e. Can you see a way to make your goals a response to the interests and goals of the people who exercise the most power?
5. Has a convincing case been made for the necessity of large-scale change?
 - a. Who might fear the change most?
 - b. Who stands to gain and who stands to lose if large-scale changes take place?
 - c. How do different groups view the prospect of change?
6. Do you understand the factors in the institutional culture and history as well as in the external environment that can support or resist change?
 - a. List ten adjectives that describe your campus culture.
 - b. Do you have distinctive subcultures that you would describe differently and that may react in distinctive ways to change?
 - c. Has anyone tried to launch a large-scale change effort before and, if so, what stories do people tell about that experience?
7. Is the campus ready to change? If not, what might you do to create a more receptive climate for change?

- a. Do the promotion and tenure guidelines and approaches to preparing documentation of faculty work recognize, document and encourage faculty behavior that supports the goals of the changes planned?
- b. Is there an infrastructure in place to support the kinds of interactions or activities that are required to support the changes planned?
- c. Does your campus have a culture of inquiry or a culture of evidence that supports intentional and evidence-based change?
- d. Do you have a way to learn from your experiences and to apply what you learn in productive ways?
- e. What kinds of information are available to you to guide your work?
- f. Is budgeting linked in a meaningful way to planning and are institutional goals clear and kept in mind when decisions are being made about how to allocate resources?
- g. Is there an institutional strategic goal that matches up with the changes you would like to introduce? How might you position your agenda as a response to or solution to that goal?
- h. What is the relationship between your governing board and the campus community? Is the Board supportive of change and do its actions support innovation and accept the risks that attend innovation?
- i. Has your senior administration been in place for a while or have you had a number of recent transitions and turnovers? Are further turnovers expected? If your President/Chancellor, Provost or Dean has recently joined the institution or recently assumed office, can you discern what he/she wishes to accomplish?

8. What happens at your institution when rumors begin to fly or when people misinterpret something said by senior administration, faculty or staff leadership or your governing Board? Are you ready to manage the inevitable reactions that will ensue once change has reached a stage where it cannot be ignored or explained away? How does information spread at your institution and how accurate is the information that people have about the condition of your organization, its prospects, and the priorities that have been put in place for the future?

9. Do you have a culture of engagement at your institution?

- a. How is engagement defined or experienced on your campus? Is your focus primarily on an **Individual scale** (e.g., student engagement in learning, individual scholarly interests), a **unit level** (department, program, college, center or institute?), an **institution-wide** sense of a learning community, **institution/community collaboration** at a local and regional level, interactions on a national and multinational scale?
- b. How would you assess the different components of a culture of engagement on your campus? Do you have a supportive environment for changes of the kinds you propose?

Use as simple 4 point scale of (1) very supportive, (2) fairly supportive, (3) exists but limited, (4) must be developed in order to create a supportive environment for the changes you envision.

- Creation of innovative and relevant educational programs, research and information resources that draw on the region or communities you serve
- Appropriate academic structures and approach to faculty and student work
- Scholarship that arises from and contributes to efforts to promote human well-being in a healthy environment
- Partnerships that address social, economic and environment issues at home and abroad
- Integration of efforts across the campus and a focus on coherence and progressively more challenging expectations and signature assignments

- Resources to invest in the future either new or repurposed from other activities or functions
- A shared understanding of engagement