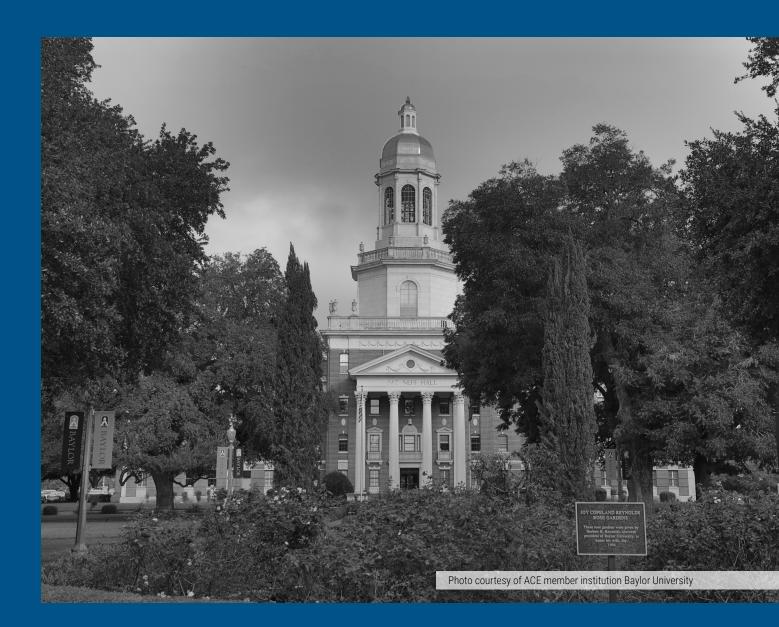# Building the Research Enterprise for Learner Success: An ACE-Huron Collaborative Initiative

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ACE and Huron: Collaborating to Build the Research Enterprise for Learner Success

Introduction

The American Council on Education (ACE) unites higher education under a vision for the future, galvanizes member institutions to make change, and leads collaboration across the sector to design solutions for today's challenges. In service of this mission, ACE has seeded communities that foster partnership and the exchange of ideas among higher education institutional leaders. By creating these communities, ACE seeks to provide a platform where leaders can share their experiences, challenges, and solutions, ultimately shaping a more equitable and sustainable future for postsecondary education.

In parallel, Huron Consulting Group enables the research enterprise within these institutions by enhancing their research capabilities through strategic planning and expert guidance, as well as with technology and supporting resources. Passionate about the vital role of robust research in advancing knowledge and societal progress, Huron is dedicated to helping institutions overcome obstacles and maximize their research potential.

To achieve their goals together, ACE and Huron are collaborating to develop practical and innovative solutions for the challenges faced by educational institutions, break down challenges, and cultivating an industry-shared perspective to guide institutions and leaders toward their unique objectives.

Challenge Topic Overview

Enhanced institutional reputation and distinction, attraction and engagement of faculty and students, and addressing common and community challenges are just a few of the many easily recognized benefits for colleges and universities to engage in research. Large-scale research universities support hundreds of millions of dollars in extramural research activities annually. However, there are also many institutions that remain focused on instruction and learning as a primary mission and are also motivated to support and enable research activity considering its broad benefits and impacts.

An active research enterprise comes with its own set of obstacles, the greatest of which may be making the substantial investment required to build and support a research enterprise in an ever-more competitive landscape while maintaining academic centricity. Institutions will need effective leaders, a defined strategy, and intentional planning and execution to successfully tackle these challenges—which is perhaps why so many colleges and universities are appointing and formalizing inaugural research leadership roles. To better prepare member institutions and stakeholders, Huron and ACE selected the first focus area of the partnership: *Building a high-impact research enterprise in the context of a primary academic and instructional mission*.

Challenge Exploration and Working Group Pilot

In fall 2023, ACE and Huron convened university and college leaders to discuss the objective of building a high-quality research enterprise aligned to the academic and instructional mission.[1] In this learning and teaching-focused cohort, the dialogue centered around recognizing complications and difficulties specific to the research enterprise, determining what constitutes high-impact research, identifying key performance indicators (KPIs)

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[1] Participants included April Bowling, vice president, research, Merrimack College; Paul Bracke, associate provost, Institute for Research and Interdisciplinary Initiatives; Maureen McCarthy, executive director, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Quinnipiac University; Rebecca Kohn, provost and vice president for academic affairs, Elon University; and Poorna Kushalnagar, strategic research officer, Gallaudet University.

for research growth and integrating research into institutional priorities, such as financial investment and space planning.

Overall, the group collectively agreed that the challenge was worth further definition and that Huron and ACE's leadership in developing a framework and associated tools and enablers would be welcome and impactful across this peer community.

Outcomes

From the pilot session a set of questions emerged to guide the development of a flexible research model within instructional settings, which institutions can consider and adapt to their own environments and contexts. These questions were divided into six target areas:

1. **Institutional Commitment and Policy:** What is required of the institution to support research as a component of the organizational mission? What is the overlap of research into other institutional administration and policy areas, and how can this overlap be accommodated within policy? How can the strategy for research best support institutional and instructional strategy? How does investment align with both strategies?
2. **Leadership and Structure:** What type of involvement is required of institutional leaders? What positions and roles are critical to success, and how are roles and responsibilities best aligned? What administrative infrastructure is required for successful research in support of the instructional mission? Administrative infrastructure can include personnel, policies, and technology.
3. **Curriculum and Co-curriculum:** How can faculty be engaged to identify new and more equitable ways that will expand research into the educational experience? How can research be identified and pursued as a complement to academic programs and course-based instruction? What support and enablement will be needed to develop research programs and activities in new areas?
4. **Faculty and Staff Support:** How do institutional policies and practices around faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure best accommodate the research contributions? How can faculty be developed into researchers and educators? What are the competencies for effective administrative support staff? How can this workforce be built and developed?
5. **Mobility (Translation):** What structures and frameworks are necessary to translate research into the classroom as well as to the community at large? How can the educational research experience translate to postsecondary education or career placement? How can the research experience be recognized within academic programs?
6. **Partnerships:** How can institutions collaborate with other educational institutions (kindergarten through postsecondary) as well as with industry, government, and nonprofit stakeholders for the betterment of the community? How can these partnerships be identified and optimized to enable research and instructional missions as well as to address global and community needs?

Next Steps and Work to Accomplish

These six target areas echo findings from the ACE Transformation Labs and are illustrated by the ACE Model for Comprehensive Learner Success, a framework for implementing lasting institutional change, which presents an opportunity to continue the collaborative, cooperative effort to further build out each of these areas.

Leadership and structure and institutional commitment and policy were identified as the most foundational areas with outcomes that will most likely drive the other areas of focus. Two working groups were then formed—one for each of these target areas—to explore the more detailed ways in which universities and colleges can optimize the benefit and impact of research activities on the teaching and learning-centric mission.

Over six months, these groups convened regularly to analyze these topics, develop a shared point of view, and codesign resources to support the development of high-quality research enterprise aligned with learner success.

We are excited to share the outcomes of these working groups, including the tangible tools and actionable approaches they produced.

Collaborating to Build the Research Enterprise for Learner Success: Leadership and Structure

Introduction

Many colleges and universities that focus primarily on teaching and learning are seeking to enhance their research and scholarship activity as an opportunity to elevate and distinguish the student learning experience. Numerous institutions have either recently recruited for or currently have an inaugural chief research and scholarship officer role. With no precedent, these institutions are exploring what positions and roles are critical to success and how these roles and responsibilities are best aligned across the many institutional units, functions, and leaders. These high-level leadership questions are followed by more tactical administrative infrastructure questions, such as what are the personnel, business unit, and staff needs for successful research in support of the instructional mission?

With these driving questions in mind, Huron and the American Council on Education (ACE) convened the Leadership and Structure Working Group.[2]

Resource: Position Description

The Leadership and Structure Working Group, which consisted of individuals who served in a role akin to that of a chief research and scholarship officer (CRSO), as well as other administrative and academic colleges and university leadership roles, had conversation that focused heavily on the ultimate leadership role, including what makes this role successful and impactful. A useful tool emerged from this discussion—a **CRSO position description**—a framework that institutions can apply to outline this critical role that will shape and lead the institution's research and scholarship agenda. Discussion themes that informed the required experience and institutional alignment included:

- Using the word *research* is limiting and is too closely associated with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The title should be framed as a chief research and *scholarship* officer, and the role should be open to individuals with demonstrated research and scholarship success in any field of study—including the humanities and fine arts.
- Demonstrating research success and impact is critical, but research success is not a standalone qualification. A successful CRSO recruit must also have a demonstrated record of engaging students and the building research and scholarship activity into the learning environment to underscore this primary institutional objective.
- Having leadership skills, including communication, partnership, innovation and motivation, is necessary to meet the training and mentorship demands of a research-emerging faculty and cultivate a research-collaborative culture.
- Defining a new role and building infrastructure around the research and scholarship mission is not a small undertaking; the individual should have prior administrative leadership experience, such as a department chair or associate dean for research.
- Aligning the CRSO role to report to the provost or chief academic officer and engage as a member of their cabinet as a peer and partner to academic deans is the best practice, especially when this role is the first of its kind at the institution.

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2   Working group participants included Rebecca Kohn, provost and vice president for academic affairs, Elon University (working group chair); Truc Ngo, associate provost for research administration, University of San Diego; Poorna Kushalnagar, strategic research officer, Gallaudet University; Wayne Glasgow, senior vice provost for research, Mercer University; and Julye Bidmead, director, Center for Undergraduate Excellence, Chapman University.

Best Practice Roles and Responsibilities

In addition to focusing on the qualifications and what is necessary to make an individual successful in a CRSO role, the working group further defined the CRSO roles and responsibilities, keeping in mind how the performance and impact of the CRSO will be measured on a regular and ongoing basis. The following themes should inform the development of the CRSO institutional responsibilities and the implementation of a CRSO role:

- The purpose of the CRSO is to lead the institution in enhancing the impact, capabilities, and positioning of the research mission within the student learning experience. This enterprise-wide aspiration can only be achieved through a strategic and comprehensive approach, effective planning, and success monitoring and reporting.
- As the leader of the research and scholarship enterprise, one key performance indicator (KPI) for the CRSO role is the level (dollar value and diversity) of externally sponsored research and scholarship. Though not responsible for the success of any one proposal, the CRSO should coordinate strategic, institutional efforts to secure funding and support research initiatives.
- A primary role of the CRSO is to establish faculty support and research development mechanisms. The CRSO must focus time and effort on the faculty—especially for a faculty that is newly engaging in research and initiating opportunities in scholarly activity—including providing guidance, resources, and mentorship to facilitate their scholarship and research endeavors and motivate the integration of research into instruction.
- Operational units that are responsible for the administration of research, such as an institutional review board or office of sponsored programs, should also report to this leadership position and enable and facilitate the operational aspects of compliance. The CRSO must set the faculty standard and have a strong appreciation for adherence to ethical standards, regulatory requirements, and compliance protocols, and they must also work with deans to hold faculty accountable and provide necessary support for compliance.
- This role will certainly be focused on external engagement, including with industry and federal, state, and local government agencies to build collaborative opportunities. The CRSO to must also engage with the community as another critical external partner; this partnership should foster relationships that can enhance the institution's research mission, create additional opportunities for learners, and make a lasting impact on the community.
- The effectiveness of the CRSO is reliant upon adequate and appropriate data, metrics, and reporting in a transparent environment so that the objective of both the CRSO and the university's research enterprise can be harmoniously aligned and measured. Clearly defined KPIs for both the role and the enterprise and frequent reporting of success, wins, and lessons learned will enable collaboration and administrative harmony.

Closing

This initial guidance and outline for a key institutional role is just one aspect of the broader leadership and structural considerations necessary for supporting and advancing an institutions' research and scholarship. However, it is likely that this leader will champion the work ahead and will undertake the additional efforts needed to address the other framework target areas.

Collaborating to Build the Research Enterprise for Learner Success: Institutional Commitment and Policy

Introduction

Many colleges and universities consistently reaffirm their primary focus on teaching and learning through ongoing investment and prioritization of the educational mission. However, when these institutions endeavor to expand their research and scholarship capabilities—especially in support of the education and service missions—it prompts important questions about the level of institutional commitment and the policies that are necessary to support research activities. To fully grasp this, it is important to understand the interplay between research and other administrative policies within the university by exploring ways to integrate research within the existing framework or recognizing the need for new policy creation. Ensuring that research investments align with the institution's mission and strategy is also important, as is supporting both research and instructional strategies to effectively allocate resources, further the institution's goals, and enhance the student experience.

With these concepts and questions in mind, Huron and the American Council on Education (ACE) convened the Institutional Commitment and Policy Working Group.

Institutional Commitment and Policy Needs

The working group focused heavily on the policy concept, beginning with the enterprise vision and approach to deploying policies that elevate research activities within instructional-focused universities and colleges. Several themes were identified to guide institutions as they adapt and expand their existing policy frameworks to accommodate and elevate research activities.

- Policies should be developed with intentionality in mind. For research and scholarship-related policies, the purpose and intent should consider institutional goals, objectives, and risk tolerance, in addition to federal or regulatory requirements.
- Institutional policies that guide the research rhetoric need to be enable research and encourage participation in research and scholarly activities; they need to have appropriate flexibility and not to be burdensome.
- Research and external engagement carries an inherent amount of risk. Therefore, institutional policies that impact research have to allow for an appropriate amount of risk. The institutional culture may need to adjust by adopting a different risk tolerance.
- Stakeholder buy-in is critical for successful implementation of policies (and advancement of the research agenda); the process for developing and implementing policies should be collaborative and create a receptive, shared-success culture.
- Policies are distinct from procedures. Policies provide the overarching principles and guidelines that inform decision-making, and procedures detail the specific steps and actions that are required to implement those policies.

Resource: Policy Checklist

From these more global and conceptual considerations, the working group drilled down into the more tactical aspects of policy development. They examined the overlap between research and other university policies, how

and when research activities can be governed within existing policies, and when research-specific policies or embedded considerations may be necessary. The **Institutional Commitment and Policy Indicators Checklist** emerged as a useful tool for gauging an institution's support of its research and scholarship objectives, as well as for providing a structured approach in identifying gaps.

Other Institutional Commitment Support

Beyond those key indicators of institutional commitment and essential policy attributes, the working group also discussed the many ways beyond just institutional policy that institutional commitment to research and scholarship can be documented:

- **Faculty Handbook:** Understanding and defining faculty alignment with research and scholarship is a key component of demonstrated institutional commitment. As such, an institution's faculty handbook is a tangible way to demonstrate institutional commitment to research. It offers clarity and structure as to how research and scholarship are integrated into expectations of faculty and their professional development and consistently promotes a scholarship culture.

  Specific provisions or topics in an institution's faculty handbook are necessary to define and underscore faculty's responsibilities, expectations, and opportunities for success in research and scholarship.

- **Institutional Strategic Plans:** An institution-level or research-focused strategic plan can be a clear and decisive way of communicating the commitment to research expansion and growth. However, not all institutions have such plans—or they may not dive as deep into these details—so these more formal plans were not noted as a primary method of documenting intent, commitment, and goals.

  There are demonstratable benefits of an enterprise strategic plan in accelerating research and scholarship growth and impact and unifying an institution. The alignment of resources and investment in an institutional strategic plan that elevates the research mission in the instructional context is critical.

- **Institutional Policies:** Given the regulatory linkage and level of federal government oversight, a core set of policies is required for the compliant and effective administration of research and externally sponsored activities. Many institutions, regardless of the size of the research enterprise, recognize this fact and focus on developing those minimally required policies to enable compliance and manage risk.

  Even more challenging, and perhaps less obvious, is the institutional task of adapting those broader, enterprise-wide policies for the considerations and nuances of a research environment and sponsored funding.

- **Financial Policies:** Clear guidelines must be set for indirect cost recovery, sponsored travel, and other research-related financial policies to showcase the institution's commitment to research and to enable the necessary administrative tasks associated with externally funded activities. Institutions must proactively and carefully consider the impact of growing research expenditures on the overall budget model and make strategic investments in research infrastructure and support.

  As an example of such a policy that underscores the requirements of a successful strategic plan, colleges and universities incorporate extramural activities into the institution's financial operations as both a revenue source and an investment opportunity.

- **Other Visible Indicators:** A variety of other means can communicate, document, and reinforce an institution's recognition of the value of research and scholarship within a learning- and teaching-

centered institution, particularly in enriching education and the student experience. Working group members identified websites that are dedicated to research, resource, and funding support for research and scholarly efforts (e.g., support staff, funding for faculty development, adequate library resources).

Closing

Flexible policies and visible support structures can advance the research and scholarship goals of any higher education institution. This is perhaps most imperative for instructionally oriented institutions that are looking to integrate research because research must be woven into a policy structure that is focused on teaching.

The working groups have provided a useful approach for institutions to successfully accomplish this objective. Building on this foundation, future efforts will expand to other areas, as informed by the ACE Model for Comprehensive Learner Success.

If you are interested in participating in future conversations about building the research enterprise for learner success, contact Lindsey Myers, director and principal program officer, Education Futures Lab, ACE, at lmyers@acenet.edu.

Chief Research and Scholarship Officer

Institutions can use the following framework to design this critical role that will shape and lead their research and scholarship agenda.

ACE University is seeking a visionary **chief research and scholarship officer (CRSO)** to lead and advance its research agenda and academic scholarship. The CRSO will foster a culture of innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and academic excellence across all faculties. This senior leader will have a proven track record in securing research funding, driving impactful research initiatives, and enhancing the university's global reputation. Join us to shape the future of research and scholarship at ACE University.

Demonstrated Experience

- Senior-level faculty experience
- Proven success in securing external funding for research (of any field of study) from diverse sources
- Diligent educator with experience in successfully engaging students (of various types) in their research program
- Prior experience in an administrative leadership position within higher education (chair, assistant dean, dean)
- Strong leadership skills, with the ability to inspire and motivate faculty peers across disciplines
- Foundational knowledge of and appreciation for research and sponsored programs administration and regulatory requirements
- Excellent communication, interpersonal, and negotiation skills to support building a research culture and bringing teams together
- Experience in fostering interdisciplinary and external collaborations and partnerships
- Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of research and scholarship

Responsibilities

- Develop and implement strategic plans for research and scholarship to enhance the university's impact, capabilities, and positioning as well as the student learning experience
- Promote and facilitate efforts to secure external funding from diverse sources to support research activities and scholarship programs
- Foster a supportive environment for faculty by providing guidance, resources, and mentorship to facilitate their scholarship and research endeavors and integrate research into instruction
- Ensure adherence to ethical standards, regulatory requirements, and compliance protocols in all research activities
- Address any compliance issues promptly and effectively by working closely with relevant stakeholders
- Forge strategic partnerships with industry, government agencies, community partners, and other academic institutions to enhance collaborative opportunities
- Facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations and initiatives to address complex societal challenges through research and incorporate students into this work
- Lead the development of new research programs and initiatives that align with emerging trends and priorities in academia and industry
- Serve as the primary advocate and spokesperson for research-related matters within the university community and beyond
- Represent the university in relevant professional organizations, conferences, and forums to promote its research agenda

Reporting and Alignment

This position will report to the office of the provost and play a pivotal role in establishing the research atmosphere at ACE University. They will work hand in hand with the provost, deans, and other academic leaders on campus to foster the university's research agenda and academic scholarship.

Institutional Commitment and Policy Indicators Checklist

The following are some of the **key indicators of institutional commitment** to research and scholarship, along with the **essential policies or policy attributes** discussed during the working group sessions. **Please utilize this checklist to determine which of these indicators your institution displays.**

Faculty Handbook

Demonstrating an institutional commitment to research within the **faculty handbook** offers clarity and structure as to how research and scholarship are integrated into expectations of faculty and their professional development and consistently promotes a scholarship culture.

- **Governance:** Include provisions that outline the decision-making processes as they relate to research and scholarly activity.
- **Faculty Appointment Guidance:** Detail the criteria, expectations, and procedures used to govern faculty appointments, reappointments, and promotions that integrate research and scholarly criteria.
- **Responsibilities of the Faculty:** Outline the research and scholarly activity duties, obligations, and expectations for the faculty, including engagement with students, publication standards, acquisition of grants, contributions to the academic field, and active engagement in scholarly pursuits.
- **Faculty Workload Expectations:** Provide guidance on how faculty should balance research and scholarship activities with instructional, teaching, and other service requirements. This should include information such as standard teaching loads and course reduction policies.
- **Leaves of Absence:** Allow faculty the opportunity to take a sabbatical or leave of absence to promote and enhance the quality of research and scholarly activities at the institution.

Faculty Recruitment and Retention

Faculty recruitment and retention guidelines and policies that specifically seek to build and grow research and scholarship along with institutional capacity indicate that the university is committed to building a faculty that contributes to its multifaceted mission.

- **Position Types and Position Descriptions:** Determine which distinctions in faculty positions are used to recognize and account for research and scholarly activity that is integrated and concurrent with teaching activities. Clearly articulate expectations for research and scholarly activity that allows for distinctions and variations across fields in setting professional metrics and success measures.
- **Faculty Retention:** Define a plan to retain faculty and to anticipate how existing faculty will participate in the institution's goals. Institute policies that focus on retaining existing faculty in addition to recruiting new faculty.
- **Selection Criteria:** When defining selection criteria (or adding new faculty positions), incorporate the requirements and focus on research and scholarly impact—including publication record, grant acquisition, teaching and graduate records, and scholarly reputation—as essential selection and recruiting criteria.
- **Search Committee Training:** Provide training and guidance for search committees to ensure that they understand how to effectively assess candidates' research and scholarly potential as well as how to balance these skills against other considerations.
- **Research Seminars and Presentations:** Invite candidates to give research seminars or presentations during their campus visits, and allow faculty members to evaluate the candidates' research and scholarly impact firsthand.

Fundamental Organizational Policies and Guidelines

Fundamental organizational policies and guidelines are focused on a university's broader operations but should be optimized to foster a research-enabling operating environment. These policy elements advance the institution's ability to conduct scholarly activities efficiently across various functional areas.

- **Enhance University Policies:** Account for the nuances of research by establishing clear guidelines for conducting research across functional service areas.
- **Procurement and Purchasing:** Integrate research into procurement policies and procedures to ensure compliance with federal and sponsor requirements as well as to determine potential exceptions or distinctions for grant-funded purchases, requirements for vendor screening, flow-down provisions, etc.
- **Human Resources (HR):** Establish standard HR infrastructure for a research organization, such as job descriptions for common research roles, hiring processes for soft-funded positions, etc.
- **Information Technology (IT):** Ensure that IT policies contain provisions for requirements that are specific to research and sponsored activities, such as limitations in foreign-vendor technologies, requirements for data and information security, mandatory screenings, etc.
- **Financial Policies:** Update financial policies to account for sponsored program nuances, such as a non–fiscal year calendar management and sponsored cost transfers.
- **Risk Tolerance:** Ensure that policies incorporate a balanced risk-management perspective to manage risks associated with research activities, enable the need for innovation, and consider the necessary ethical implications.

Institutional Strategic Plans

A **college or university's strategic plan** shows its high-level priorities and aspirations.

- **Incorporate Research and Scholarly Activity:** Explicitly integrate research and scholarship, either as an institutional goal or focus area or as a critical component of institution, service, and engagement.
- **Measurable Outcomes:** Define clear, measurable outcomes related to research within the strategic plan to allow for the assessment of progress and accountability in achieving research-related goals.
- **Student Research Opportunities:** Foster a culture of inquiry and discovery by incorporating opportunities and goals within the strategic plans for students to engage in research and scholarly activity under the mentorship of faculty members.
- **Faculty Engagement:** Involve faculty members in the strategic planning process to ensure that the research- and scholarship-related goals and objectives of both the institution and the faculty are aligned.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Build flexibility into strategic plans to accommodate changes in the research landscape, allow for emerging priorities, and foster an environment of innovation and responsiveness.

Other Indicators

Other indicators can also help create a consistent and supportive environment for researchers by cultivating a culture in which research is valued and encouraged.

- **Internal Funding Mechanisms:** Establish clear policies for internal research funding—including eligibility criteria, application procedures, and allocation mechanisms—to support faculty research endeavors.

- **Financial Conflict of Interest:** Develop robust policies and procedures for managing financial conflicts of interest related to research activities to ensure transparency, integrity, and compliance with regulatory requirements.
- **Budgetary Systems for Research:** Implement budgetary systems that are tailored to support research activities—including provisions for seed funding, cost-sharing arrangements, and overhead allocation—to facilitate research project management and sustainability.
- **Research Collaboration and Partnerships:** Foster policies that promote collaboration and partnerships in research, including mechanisms for securing subawards, managing collaborations with external partners, and facilitating interdisciplinary research initiatives.
- **Faculty Recognition and Incentives:** Design policies and incentives to recognize and reward faculty engagement in research—including provisions for release time, grant writing support, and career advancement opportunities—to foster a culture of research excellence and innovation.
- **Commitment of Resources:** Commit resources to match the institution's goals. If programs do not have adequate funding, they will not be successful.