

External Advisory Board (EAB) Report on AGEF PROMISE Academy Alliance Meeting, Nov. 20, 2019

The EAB notes the remarkable progress in refining the proposed program, in its responsiveness to the agency input resulting from the reverse site visit, and the re-visioning of the program during the strategic planning retreat earlier this year. It is also notable that the program has maintained enthusiastic participation from campus Provosts, the University System of Maryland, and the faculty and administrators supporting success of the program.

Overall, the EAB finds that the funding agency may have too narrowly defined success. The EAB suggests that more flexibility in program direction be allowed. Importantly, we recognize the intent of the program as testing a model for advancing postdoctoral fellows to the professoriate in a mixed university system. Given the limited number of fellows to be supported through the program, another goal is implementation of the program to transform the culture of the institutions involved. This would support continued investment in scholars and ultimately contribute to enhancing faculty diversity and the research, teaching, and service missions of the University System of Maryland (USM).

In responding to the questions presented to the EAB, a number of considerations were articulated in discussion. These are grouped below in context of the overall program.

1) Overall Program

- a) Need to plan for increasing faculty buy-in to the program and its goals. This might involve meetings with department chairs and faculty to address, clarify and negotiate issues around hiring of a postdoc into the department. Ensuring that faculty see their hand in deciding who is hired will be vital to the future success of the candidate in that department.
- b) Need for a centrally organized and accepted policy to assure shared interpretation by faculty and other participants. We Recommend adding a faculty education component to be included in activities chart.
- c) Focus on one track (not two) if necessary, assure uniform policy with built-in safeguards against rejection of candidates by departments upon conversion to FTE or consider alternative outcomes.
- d) View the program as a vehicle to change the broader institutional culture of identifying, recruiting, evaluating, and hiring faculty.

2) Program Model

- a) Employing entrance and exit interviews to assess and determine findings and outcomes. Define changes and perceptions of participants, possibly change measures of persistence, self-identity, and self-efficacy.
- b) Clarify the track differentiation and mechanism within the five participating universities. What does "pre-determined" mean if candidate can change institutions? Is that slot still guaranteed?
- c) Coordination plan is needed between internal and external evaluators. Specific recruitment activities are needed to assure a strong applicant pool. Use other programs to recruit senior/second postdocs.
- d) Articulate a plan for providing residence time on various campuses to experience local environment and receive training (especially on skills acquired in teaching postdocs).

- 3) Implementation of the program
 - a) Examine faculty buy-in through ethnographic assessment and study of participants and their experience.
- 4) Evaluation of the program
 - a) If possible, control groups (e.g., postdocs in other disciplines) should be identified and evaluated for comparison on specific points or goals of the program.
- 5) Dissemination of the program
 - a) Internal evaluator, drawing on information from the external evaluation process, should write a narrative of the project and describe principle components that can be shared with other institutions that might see their own potential role in employing the model. Additionally, identify university systems that may adapt the model on a system-wide basis.
 - b) Dissemination could include non-publication activities such as presentation to other institutions or organizations like APLU. Articulate the overall plan to appropriate level administrators such as chairs and deans of respective schools to foster understanding and cooperation.
 - c) Follow postdoc participants so that, over time, achievement of outcomes and/or tenure data can be obtained for USM's own learning.
- 6) Educational Research component
 - a) Discussion in the main meeting and in the EAB-only conference focused on the research project and its role in the overall program. The research project's goals of examining the curriculum evaluation process, and the study of search committee behavior ties into the larger goal of institutional change and modifications in evaluation of candidates and hiring practices. This is an underlying strength of the model that can feed back into the faculty and the system-wide goals of the program.
 - b) There may be opportunities within the two proposed studies to see how a postdoc experience itself is evaluated, which would extend the impact of the overall project.
- 7) Future role of the EAB
 - a) We recommend a quarterly conference call over the next year with alternating topics and project leadership. We can also aid the evaluators with feedback on reports to NSF.
 - b) Use the EAB as a buffer with funding agency leadership or a tiebreaker if there is a need to deciding the direction of program as related to the proposal. The EAB can participate in publicizing the program through members' respective postdoctoral mentoring and fellowship networks to boost applications.