**HOW TO ORGANIZE A CAMPUS-WIDE COURSE REDESIGN PROGRAM
USING NCAT'S METHODOLOGY**

I.   The Critical Components of a Successful Course Redesign Program

Since 1999, NCAT has worked with hundreds of colleges and universities in their efforts to produce successful course redesigns. From that experience, we have learned what works and what does not work in redesigning individual courses as well as in launching successful campus-wide course redesign programs. That experience forms the basis of the redesign methodology we have developed. When our partners follow that methodology, the projects and programs achieve their goals. When partners do not, the projects and programs do not achieve their goals. We have learned from both our successes and our failures, and our goal in this guide is to share that knowledge with you.

The reason NCAT has achieved such strong results in its course redesign work is that we run *programs* with specific characteristics based on what we have learned in working with large numbers of institutions, faculty members, administrators, and students. We establish clear, high expectations of program participants, and we follow up to make sure they meet those expectations. Course redesign requires institutions to do a number of things they have never done before and to address an issue—reducing costs—that few have seriously expected them to address. Clarity and consistency of approach are crucial in order to produce successful course redesign projects.

We regard course redesign as a means to an end: the transformation of the campus community's understanding of the relationship between quality and cost. Many colleges and universities have adopted exciting new ways of infusing technology to enhance the teaching and learning process and to extend access to new populations of students. But most institutions have not fully harnessed the potential of technology to improve the quality of student learning, to increase retention, and to reduce the cost of instruction. NCAT offers persuasive data that show how course redesign using information technology can offer a broad solution to higher education's historical cost/quality trade-off. Specifically, NCAT's redesign methodology can address higher education's primary challenges: enhancing quality, improving completion rates, expanding access, and increasing institutional capacity.

NCAT's approach to developing and implementing a course redesign program relies on five key components:

- Organize a public program with clear and specific goals
- Take a "funnel" approach
- Provide resources and support for participants
- Use a competitive process
- Require accountability

Later in this guide, we provide more specifics about each stage of the successful process we have designed (e.g., timelines, workshops, materials), but first, we want to focus your attention on the main components of a course redesign program's structure.

Organize a Public Program with Clear and Specific Goals

Institutions of higher education are familiar with grant programs offered by both public agencies and private foundations. The NCAT approach has some similarities to those programs in that we give the initiative a name: (The Pew Program in Course Redesign, The Roadmap to Redesign, The Missouri Course Redesign Initiative, Changing the Equation, and so on.) We issue a Call to Participate and a set of Application Guidelines that include clear and specific goals, a detailed program timeline with deadlines and expected activities, selection criteria, and so on. We award grants to support the redesign activity. The initiatives are public—meaning, easily accessible to and understandable by all campus constituencies. We put things in writing and expect participants to do the same.

Most campuses that undertake an initiative of some kind related to the academic program tend to forgo one or more of the aforementioned actions. They typically try to preselect suitable candidates either through their own knowledge of the campus or via in-office (backroom) discussions and deals. The goals of the initiative are generally vague ("Use technology" or "Improve teaching and learning"), the timeline is virtually nonexistent, and usually, nothing is written down.

Offering an organized program sends the message that campus leadership is serious about improving learning and reducing costs, and it encourages the campus community to respond in a meaningful way.
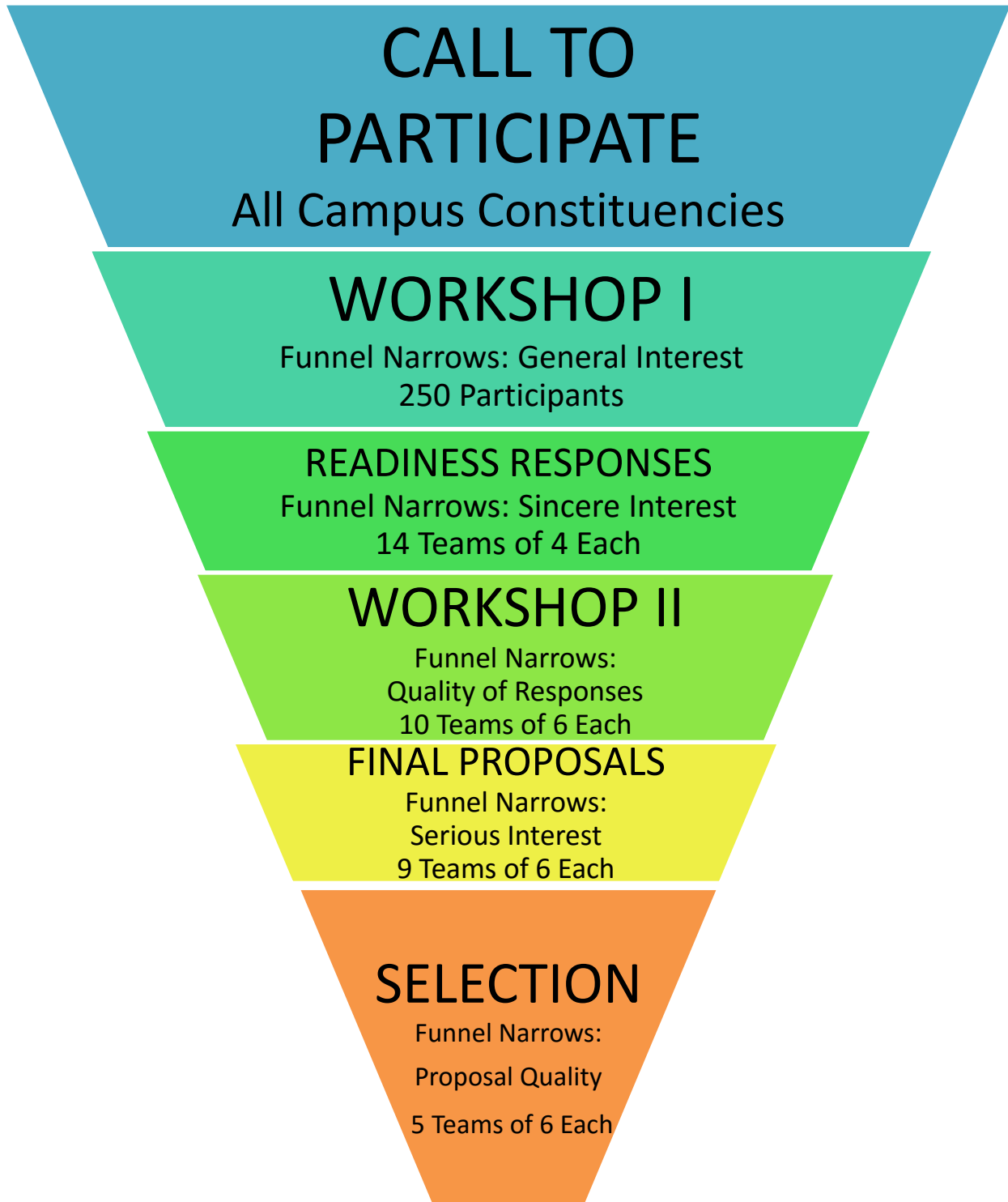
Take a "Funnel" Approach

What do we mean by a *funnel approach*? In the early stages of the program—the top of the funnel—we try to engage as many faculty members, administrators, staff and external constituencies as possible. Program announcements are sent to that wide audience to make them aware of the program. The goal is to develop significant interest in and understanding of the value of course redesign on campus. We expose as many members of the campus community as we can to the concept of course redesign, even though not all of them will ultimately participate directly in a redesign project. The point is to change the conversation about what is possible—that one can reduce costs while simultaneously increasing or maintaining quality—and to teach as many people as we can about certain strategies that address both simultaneously. The more folks who know about or are involved in the program in some way, the greater the receptivity to scaling course redesign throughout the campus once successful models have been developed. We want the campus community to understand that students will flourish by using technology appropriately in any course or discipline. Successful projects demonstrate conclusively that the combination of learner-centered principles and the appropriate use of information technology is a primary factor in increasing student success and reducing instructional cost.

In the next stage of the program process—the middle of the funnel—we require prospective participants to complete a series of tasks to demonstrate their seriousness of purpose, their understanding of and compatibility with the program's goals, and their ability to initiate and complete a successful course redesign. By judging how well applicants perform those tasks, we narrow the funnel.

At the bottom of the funnel, the tasks become more specific and demanding, resulting in detailed course redesign plans that meet the program's goals.

As the funnel narrows, we keep those from the top of the funnel informed about the process. Again, the more folks who are knowledgeable about the program in some way, the greater the receptivity to scaling course redesign throughout the campus once successful models have been developed.

THE NCAT FUNNEL

CALL TO PARTICIPATE
All Campus Constituencies

WORKSHOP I
Funnel Narrows: General Interest
250 Participants

READINESS RESPONSES
Funnel Narrows: Sincere Interest
14 Teams of 4 Each

WORKSHOP II
Funnel Narrows:
Quality of Responses
10 Teams of 6 Each

FINAL PROPOSALS
Funnel Narrows:
Serious Interest
9 Teams of 6 Each

SELECTION
Funnel Narrows:
Proposal Quality
5 Teams of 6 Each

Provide Resources and Support for Participants

NCAT organizes its programs with the assumption that most members of the higher education community do not know how to engage in course redesign; that is, they do not know how to improve student learning while reducing instructional costs. To do so, they need resources and support. Our process is one of teaching and learning. Throughout the process we offer workshops and individualized consulting sessions to help program participants understand NCAT's strategies for quality enhancement and cost reduction. Once teams participate in the workshops, they become much more prepared to formulate their own strategies for both quality enhancement and cost reduction. Prior to a workshop experience, it is difficult for most faculty and staff to imagine how to approach the issues simply by referring to NCAT's website—even though the website has an abundance of resources and examples. The workshops are key in providing (1) examples, (2) organizing principles, (3) a national perspective, and (4) lots of opportunities for discussion.

In addition to the kinds of resources and support described earlier that support redesign projects, we recommend providing financial resources in the form of grant awards. It is amazing how hard people will work if they are rewarded for their efforts in the form of a grant. The grant doesn't have to be large. The grant dangles a carrot to incent faculty members and others to participate in a new endeavor. And the public awarding of grants sends a message to the campus community that the effort is an important one and deserves recognition. Grants are typically spent on two things: (1) faculty released time to enable a subset of full-time faculty to focus on planning and implementing the redesign and (2) expansion or improvement of the campus technological infrastructure to meet new demands as the volume of student engagement inevitably increases.

Use a Competitive Process

Every NCAT course redesign program has relied on a competition to enable the strongest projects to emerge. If there is no competition, the "funnel" will be narrowed from the outset. Just like other grant programs, NCAT programs involve a competitive process to select participants. Application Guidelines are developed that fully describe the program and establish clear criteria for selection. The idea is to establish an atmosphere of competition so that individual departments will strive to be selected to participate in the program. Establishing a competition also conveys the message that the program is highly valued.

NCAT funds only proposals that meet the criteria of improving student learning for all students in the course while simultaneously reducing instructional costs. The program is open to everyone on campus, but applicants must qualify before moving forward in the application process. Applicants respond to a series of readiness criteria to determine whether they are prepared to engage in course redesign. Those who successfully respond to the criteria, the semifinalists, engage in further tasks before submitting a final proposal. Thus, by following this competitive process until the desired number of projects has been produced, we gradually weed out those who are unprepared to mount a successful project.

Require Accountability

NCAT course redesign programs have an excellent record of success for a variety of reasons. All of the characteristics discussed previously contribute to that record, but the fifth one—requiring accountability—is probably the most important. We strongly believe in offering carrots in the forms of grants, support and resources that will entice faculty and staff to achieve

something that has seldom been achieved before: increase student learning while reducing instructional costs. But we also believe in sticks.

What do we mean by *sticks*? First, we establish rules for participating in the program—and we enforce them (e.g., redesign the whole course, improve learning, reduce cost, use technology). We require up-front, detailed planning. We carefully monitor and follow up with all projects during the implementation phase, and we intervene if the redesign plans are not being followed. We collect data on learning outcomes, course completion rates, and cost reduction at three stages: during proposal development, after the pilot term of implementation, and after the first term of full implementation. We require both informal and formal progress reports, the latter occurring after the pilot term of implementation and after the first term of full implementation. Informal reporting can occur on campus via scheduled face-to-face meetings and/or via e-mail. Prior to awarding a grant, we ask recipients to sign a formal grant agreement. Finally, if a project fails to carry out its redesign plan, we take the grant money back unless the circumstances are beyond the project's ability to control. Carrots and sticks—both are important in conducting a successful program in course redesign.

Q: Wouldn't it be easier to preselect one or two courses that we think would be successful rather than mounting a full program?

A: Even though preselecting courses to redesign might be easier, there are two compelling reasons not to do so. First, you lose the benefits of the funnel approach, which enables lots of people to learn about the concept of course redesign even if for various reasons they do not actually redesign a course. It is hard to overstate the importance of developing campus-wide awareness of course redesign throughout the process. The more people who are involved at each stage, the likelier the prospect of future growth and sustainability. Second, because course redesign is a new activity, it is difficult to predict accurately who will and will not come forward with a good idea. The program application process will help each institution decide which courses are the most ready for redesign. Program leaders can encourage certain departments to become involved either informally or formally as part of the selection criteria of the program. In addition, because it is so important to produce good models of course redesign in the initial round—to convince the campus that it is possible to increase learning while reducing costs and to develop course redesign leaders who can help others in subsequent rounds—you want to be able to choose among final proposals to ensure that you get the strongest result.

Q: What are some of the consequences of not having a competition?

A: Two things are affected: quality of participation and quality of proposals. Without a competition, participants receive the message that they will get a grant regardless of whether they participate in the process and regardless of the quality of that participation.

With a competition, everyone who engages in the process fully participates in all parts of the process, completes all tasks, and fully responds to our queries. A decision not to have a competition invariably produces comparatively weak responses at each stage because in the belief that the outcome is predetermined, teams do not take the process seriously.

If you do not hold a competition, we guarantee that you will spend more time and effort on the program and will enjoy far weaker results than you would if you held a competition. If you do not hold a competition, program participants will receive the message that they will be funded whether or not they meet the program's expectations. And again, if you do not hold a

competition, there will be differences at all stages of the process: differences in attendance at workshops, formation of teams, seriousness of readiness responses, and proposal quality.