



# Exploring New Horizons for **Designing Sustained Professional Development for VITAL Faculty**

**By:**  
**Adrianna Kezar and KC Culver**  
Pullias Center for Higher  
Education  
University of Southern California

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## Introduction

This report analyzes the design process that campus teams use to create sustained professional development (SPD) programs such as faculty learning communities for VITAL faculty. We begin with a description of the larger research project that this report contributes to, including an overview of our earlier research and methodology for the current phase of research. In this section, we also detail two design frameworks created in our first phase of research that campuses learned about to support their planning processes. We then organize the findings for this report into three areas: (1) expanded goals of SPD, (2) how broader policy and practice changes supported their design process, and (3) the success and challenges that planning teams experienced when engaging the design frameworks.

Through describing the design frameworks, reviewing the processes of planning teams in different campus contexts, and identifying common successes and challenges, this report offers a focus on the design process, which is often overlooked in favor of a focus on products and outcomes in higher education. As such, this report can be useful for educational developers and others who plan sustained professional development programs, as well as for institutional leaders who convene planning teams, committees, and the like.

Second in a series, this report is focused on designing professional development, and sustained professional development in particular, for VITAL faculty (Levy, 2019).

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***We use the term VITAL faculty — an asset-based term — to refer to contingent or non-tenure track faculty (including visiting faculty, instructors, adjuncts, lecturers, research faculty and clinical faculty) as a way to affirm what they are, rather than what they are not.***

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Academic leaders may wonder why they should support VITAL faculty given the many priorities that they face. Previous research from the [Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success](#) demonstrates that lack of support for faculty has led to student attrition, declining graduation rates, poor academic performance, and challenges for students in identifying a major (Kezar & Scott, 2019). Alternatively, studies have shown that when VITAL faculty are better supported, they use evidence-based teaching practices that enhance student retention and performance (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007; Nugent et al., 2008). Also, reports such as *Dispelling the Myth* (2013) document that it costs a modest amount to provide support like professional development for VITAL faculty. While sustained professional development costs more than say, asynchronous workshops, the costs are still low.

If you are having trouble obtaining traction to provide better support for VITAL faculty, we recommend the Delphi Project report [The Imperative for Change \(2014\)](#). Additionally, the positive morale developed through supporting VITAL faculty has much larger impacts than just student success — it improves campus climate, faculty motivation and leads to an environment where faculty can thrive.

One reason institutions have been slow to recognize the need for dedicated leadership and supports for VITAL faculty is the myth that VITAL faculty are temporary, so there is no need to invest in them. A study by the University of Michigan demonstrated that most of their VITAL faculty (full and part-time) stay for decades. Many studies conducted of other individual

campuses show the same trend, such as the report [The Non Tenure Track Faculty: The Landscape at U.S. Institutions of Higher Education](#). Data about VITAL faculty on your own campus will likely tell a similar story — that the majority of your VITAL faculty have been working for your campus for a long time as well. It is time to abandon this myth and start the important work of supporting all faculty on campus.

Another myth is that faculty as professionals are internally motivated by “the calling” to teach, so external motivation does not matter, since faculty will perform whether they are supported or not. But data suggests that faculty entering the profession today are willing to leave academia if they are not provided with support, a career track, and work-life balance (Gonzalez & Terosky, 2016). And as a result, we have started to see more turnover in the faculty ranks in recent years (American Federation of Teachers, 2023). Campus leaders need to also abandon this myth or we will continue to see problematic levels of turnover in the future.

These issues are more pressing than ever post-pandemic with the high levels of turnover and dissatisfaction among faculty. Faculty feel less connection and sense of belonging than in any previous time. And policies related to VITAL faculty are outdated and inappropriate in an era when they are on the front line supporting students who also have greater needs. Academic leaders must rise to the challenge of supporting VITAL faculty and sustained professional development is a critical way to show that support, one which addresses issues of isolation and mattering.

## Section 1: Study Background

In this section, we provide an overview of our two-phase research project focused on professional development for VITAL faculty. We summarize the results of our earlier, phase one research and introduce two design frameworks: the multilevel framework of influences on the success of sustained professional development and design for equity in higher education, which adapts liberatory design thinking for the higher education context. We also overview several types of SPD programs being implemented for VITAL faculty at campuses across the U.S. and summarize the benefits of participating in such programs we identified in our earlier work. We conclude with a description of the methodology for our phase two research, from which this report stems.

### Research on Liberatory Design Thinking

Our initial research (Culver et al., 2022a) explored change processes on three campuses that had improved policies and practices to better support VITAL faculty. In doing so, we engaged liberatory design thinking, extending the existing model by adapting existing phases of liberatory design thinking and identifying new phases where the work of design is particularly influenced by the higher education context. The Design for Equity in Higher Education (DEHE) report and toolkit identify three dimensions of the higher education environment that shape how design thinking works: politics and power in professional bureaucracies, structural and cultural constraints, and the importance of equity-center practice. The DEHE framework is presented in Figure 1.

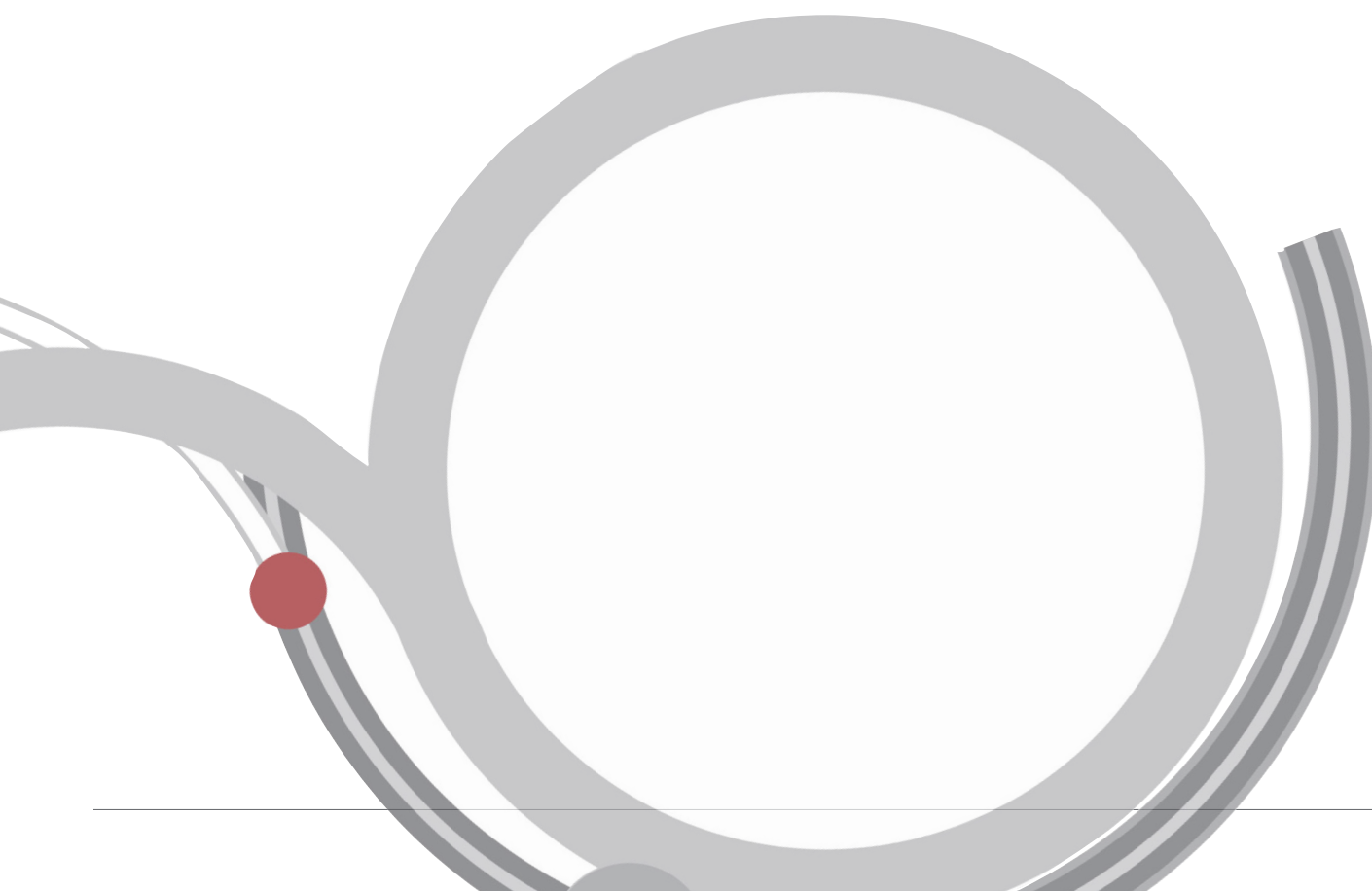
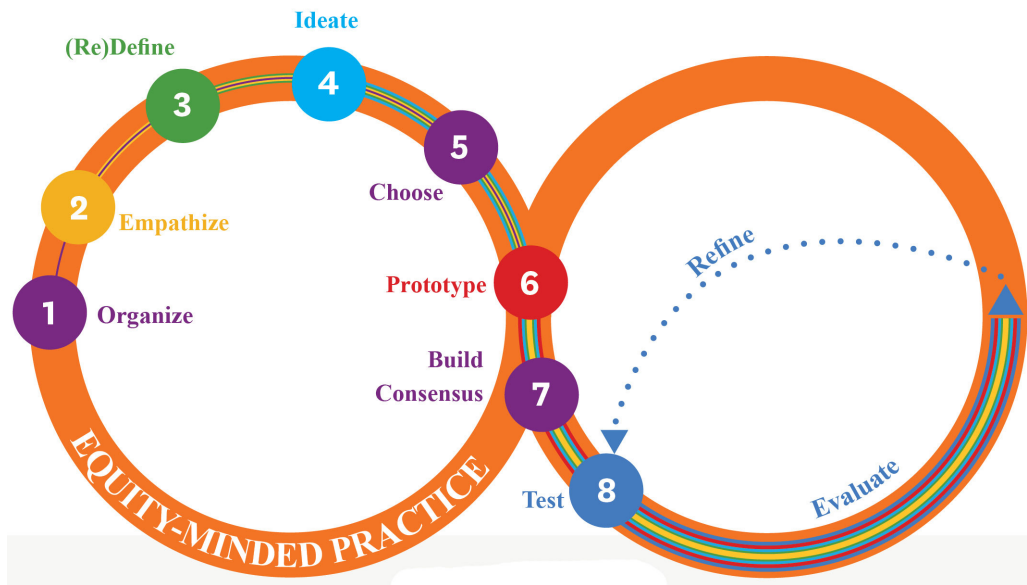


Figure 1. DEHE Model and Phases Overview



#### Organize (1)

Form design team.  
Define objectives.  
Assess participation for representation and political will.

#### + Empathize (2)

Gain well-rounded understanding of colleagues' experiences and perspectives.  
Use multi-pronged approach to data gathering.

#### + (Re)Define (3)

Synthesize and connect findings.  
Identify most relevant context(s), stakeholders.  
Develop a narrative that captures complexities.

#### + Ideate (4)

Brainstorm a wide variety of potential solutions and encourage creativity.  
Look for innovative models for inspiration.

#### + Choose (5)

Assess feasibility of ideas given context.  
Decide which ideas to expand upon and draft.

#### + Prototype (6)

Draft solutions and learn by building.  
Share with key stakeholders.  
Develop a solution narrative.

#### + Build Consensus (7)

Share problem-and-solution story.  
Get buy-in from various coalitions.

#### + Test (8)

Facilitate scaled implementation.  
Evaluate and get feedback.  
Refine and revise for future iterations.

## Phase One Research on Professional Development

Our first report in this series, Designing accessible and inclusive intensive professional development (Culver & Kezar, 2021), as well as the associated toolkit (Culver et al., 2022b), provided background about the growth of VITAL faculty on campus, as they now make up the majority of faculty in U.S. higher education across all institutional types and most disciplines. Our first report also detailed the suboptimal teaching and learning

environment that VITAL faculty work within. The above reports are part of The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success, which provides dozens of research reports, summaries and resources about the changes in the faculty composition, the poor working conditions they face, and how this has led to a phenomenon called lack of opportunity to perform based on the accumulation of negative conditions (e.g. late hiring, job insecurity, poor pay, lack of evaluation and professional development, lack of access to job materials) that make it impossible for them to provide a quality education and perform to their ability (Finkelstein et al, 2016; Kezar et al., 2019; Kezar & Sam, 2010; Kezar & Maxey, 2016).

Our initial report on professional development for VITAL faculty, the first of its kind, focused on campuses that had already established professional development opportunities for this population and provided important case study research on the goals, designs and experiences within such professional development offerings. This report was based on data from our first phase of study, where we identified campuses that have altered their professional development to specifically meet the needs of VITAL faculty. The literature illustrates that previous efforts to offer professional development to VITAL faculty typically expanded eligibility for participation in existing efforts focused on tenure-track faculty. However, because their schedules, needs and inclusion on campus are so different, these professional development efforts have been documented as wanting and not meeting VITAL faculty needs (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). The overall methodology for our first phase of research was a

qualitative research design utilizing interviews and document analysis. We identified 14 campuses for study based on recommendations from the POD Network, a national organization of professional and organizational development specialists. The 14 campuses represented a diverse set of institutions, including both public and private institutions; two-year and four-year institutions; institutions with research-focused, teaching-focused, and comprehensive missions; and institutions located in rural, suburban and urban areas.

### ***Multilevel Framework of Influences on the Success of Sustained Professional Development***

Based on our initial research, we identified the multilevel framework of influences on the design and implementation of professional development for VITAL faculty shown in Figure 2, with a focus on helping designers be intentional with planning and evaluation of programs to create opportunities that are accessible and inclusive based on an assessment of VITAL faculty needs and various context considerations. At the broadest level of our framework are environmental factors, including external, institutional, and disciplinary policies, processes, and cultures. On the campuses we studied, these factors tended to present opportunities and constraints related to the role of professional development, the value that was placed on it, and the opportunities for VITAL faculty to participate.



Figure 2. Multilevel Framework of Influences on Design and Implementation



The second level includes factors related to the design and sustainability of initiatives. Structural factors we identified through research included where initiatives were located, who led professional development efforts, and how programs were funded. The design of initiatives was also influenced by efforts to create strategic alignment, partnerships and coordination with others within the institution and across institutions. Another influence on design was the types of knowledge from scholarship and professional networks of the people leading efforts.



Other design-related influences included the purpose and objectives of initiatives, group composition, needs assessment, evaluation, and rewards and recognition of participants. Design-level factors affected the success and sustainability of initiatives.

Influences at the environmental and design levels also shaped key implementation decisions, including how participants were recruited and chosen, the role of facilitators, the type of content covered, the projects or other deliverables expected of participants, the mode of delivery, and the length and scheduling of program components. These implementation choices were crucial for engaging VITAL faculty, as they evaluated the benefits and costs of participating given their many other responsibilities.

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**If leaders consider the role of professional development in evaluation, contract renewal, and opportunities for more stable employment, then the professional development initiative can be much more successful, but this often does not occur.**

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This multilevel framework can help designers be more intentional in creating and revising programs through considering the influences at each level and designing offerings with all these factors in mind, rather than simply expanding access to existing programs that were not designed for VITAL faculty. A key example is that campus leaders will design a professional development opportunity based on assumptions that participation will contribute to evaluation and promotion, but as these assumptions do not hold for VITAL faculty, the lack of rewards and recognition disincentivizes these faculty from participating. If leaders consider the role of professional development in evaluation, contract renewal, and opportunities for more stable employment, then the professional development initiative can be much more successful, but this often does not occur. Our first report also documents the challenges that occur when trying to design in this more comprehensive way, whether it be access to resources or communicating with VITAL faculty, who may not have much of a connection to campus.

### ***Types of Professional Development Programs and Design Principles***

Our first phase of this study allowed us to identify a range of offerings for VITAL faculty, from online workshops to sustained professional development (SPD) such as book groups and faculty learning communities, including how each type of program we learned about has been redesigned using aspects of this framework. However, we found none of the campuses were engaged with using all of the design principles needed to make a robust learning experience for faculty. We were able to document a full range of professional development options that can enhance the repertoire of offerings for campuses to consider going forward.

From our interviews, we also identified considerations for designing these professional development programs to meet the needs of VITAL faculty, even if campuses had not utilized all of these practices. We also garnered

some of the first information about the wide range of benefits VITAL faculty and those that work with them report from professional development that goes beyond instructional improvement including sense of belonging, institutional integration and knowledge of resources, professional networking, career development and advancement, advocacy and leadership opportunities.

## Methodology for Phase Two Research on Professional Development

The current report is focused on our second phase of research, building on the work conducted in phase one of the study. In order to understand how campuses can use more comprehensive approaches to designing programs, we recruited campuses for an action research project, based on case study of the design processes used to create SPD for VITAL faculty, informed by the findings from our first-phase research. We had 10 campuses that expressed interest in participating in the second phase of research (see Appendix for tables listing participants), including five campuses from phase one. This study occurred in 2022-2023 during the global pandemic, and three campuses withdrew from participation during the study due to bandwidth and resource constraint. Even though these campuses dropped out, we do have early data that we report on from them; additionally, we used their experiences to understand some challenges that can occur when engaging in efforts to best design professional development for VITAL faculty.

This phase of research began with an orientation to the project for all of the campuses, including the Multilevel Framework, the Design for Higher Education framework, and our findings from the first research project; this

orientation also allowed campuses to learn about each other. Our research for this phase of the study included a focus on both the perspectives and outcomes of VITAL faculty on their campuses and on design teams' process.

### *Faculty Survey Data*

At three timepoints, we collected survey data from VITAL faculty at participating institutions related to their professional development needs, their professional development engagement and experiences, and the benefits of participating we had identified in our phase one research. The survey was designed by the research team and drew from a number of existing sources, including Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) perceived cohesion construct, the leadership efficacy scale from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) Survey Instrument (Dugan et al., 2013), and items related to teaching practices from the Postsecondary Teaching Practices Inventory (Walters et. al., 2016) and the Teaching Practices Inventory (Weiman & Gilbert, 2014). The PIPS instrument is a rigorously developed survey with an emphasis on eliciting specific teaching practices that can be analyzed in terms of student-centered practices and instructor centered practices.

To collect baseline data, we asked campuses to determine their population of interest, as the survey results could be used to inform their planning processes. Some campuses included all of their VITAL faculty, while others limited their sample to previous SPD participants. Baseline survey data was collected in spring 2022; we had 621 responses across campuses and provided a report to each campus with the results specific to respondents at their institution.

Then we collected pre-participation and post-participation surveys from the VITAL faculty that were part of their new/revised SPD program. Pre-participation data was collected from 68 faculty between August 2022 and January 2023; one campus opted to use the baseline data collection as their pre-survey. Post-participation data was collected between January and June 2023, depending on the length and timing of the SPD program; there were 79 responses to our post-survey. At each timepoint, respondents could opt-in for a drawing to win one of five 9th generation iPads; winners were randomly selected and notified in August 2023.

The relatively small sample of VITAL faculty who completed both pre- and post-participation surveys limited our ability to conduct robust longitudinal analyses. Therefore, we created a cross-sectional dataset where each respondent was represented one time. This data includes the perspectives of 690 VITAL faculty. Our sample featured a wide presentation of VITAL faculty, reflecting differences in demographics, teaching emphasis, institutional type, and working conditions. Results from this data are examined in our third report in this series, Sustained Professional Development for VITAL Faculty: Engagement and Benefits.

### ***Data for This Report: Design Team Process***

We met individually with campus design teams over an 8-month period (January-August 2022) where they engaged in designing a new SPD experience or modifying an existing program. During these meetings, we collected data from them about their goals, observed team planning meetings, and offered insights into best practices. At the end of the planning period, we sent a survey to design team members to collect impressions about their planning process to complement our observations. This survey was based on our phase one research, the multilevel model and our observations. Then the campuses implemented their new SPD program from September through May of 2022-23, depending on their format and schedule. Some took place just in fall, just in spring and some over the course of the whole year.

After the SPD programs concluded, we conducted focus group interviews with campus design teams (including as many design team members as possible). These interviews focused on their insights about design now that the experiences had been completed, changes in design in real time, implementation issues and reflections and learnings.



## Section 2: Expanding Goals of Sustained Professional Development

Professional development for VITAL faculty has traditionally been focused on new VITAL faculty, usually in their first year or semester and focused on teaching. Most of this professional development has not offered sustained engagement over time. One important area we documented was the expansion of goals on campuses that had already designed some initial professional development and through their needs assessment they discovered other needs that their professional development could address. While all aspired to a wider variety of goals, in the end, some of these goals as designed were not executed based on being responsive to VITAL faculty needs, inappropriate goal for the SPD mechanism, turnover among the planning team, or funding. However, since we had their initial ideas for these expanded design goals, we felt it valuable to report those.

### What are the Four Types of Sustained Professional Development (SPD)?

In phase one of our research, we identified four types of SPD programs that offer VITAL faculty sustained engagement over time, usually with a cohort of peers:

**Faculty learning communities:** Campuses modestly modified the traditional faculty learning community (FLC) model used by Miami University (Cox, 2004), for instance by shortening the program to a semester (rather than a year) and integrating a facilitator to guide discussions, assign readings, etc. Some FLCs also featured cohort-specific designs, such as an adjunct FLC specifically for part-time VITAL faculty.

**Course transformation/Action teams:** These groups allow for a disciplinary focus within SPD, where faculty focus on issues such as course redesign or creating curricular alignment across courses.

**Certificate/badge programs:** The programs allow for VITAL faculty to engage in learning and discussion over time and offer an option for faculty to engage in a more asynchronous manner, as many times program components are offered on-demand.

**Discussion groups:** Discussion groups, including teaching circles and special interest groups, were a more informal way for VITAL faculty to connect with colleagues over time while discussing issues related to teaching and/or faculty careers. These programs tended to require the least commitment of time and energy from VITAL faculty, as attendance was usually optional, but also had less of an impact on VITAL faculty's development according to our interviewees.

However, one of the most important takeaways from this research is the need for campuses to more intentionally think through the various VITAL faculty populations — teaching, research, clinical, and field or public service — as well as their different learning needs (e.g., how to obtain bridge funding, sustaining external partnerships, successful grant writing, leadership in teaching) across the VITAL career (e.g., moving toward interest in advanced teaching, career planning, leadership and change, and mentoring).


### ***Leadership and Promoting Change***

Three campuses developed SPD with the goals of promoting leadership and change projects on campus. At one campus, the design team planned to focus on ways mid-career VITAL faculty can be leaders in service. In order for VITAL faculty to apply, they developed a plan for a problem they wanted to address. The focus of their SPD sessions was on learning about campus offices, governance, and decision making; meeting various unit heads to develop their professional network; being introduced to institutional data; and learning about the change process, providing efficacy and ownership to take on challenges they face. They then completed a project to help connect all these pieces. They developed a proposal for funding where they named a problem on campus, developed a solution, provided evidence for the proposed solution/work, and developed a plan to execute change. Two proposed projects were so strong that institutional leadership decided to provide funding and execute them. One was focused on availability of sabbaticals for VITAL faculty and another one was focused on how classrooms were not fit for active learning.

Another campus created SPD aimed at leadership development, designing a wide-ranging curriculum that began with building community and relationships pivotal to being a leader; learning information about faculty leadership roles and skillsets; meeting individuals from across campus in various leadership roles such as student affairs, general counsel, and budgeting; exploring professional goals they might pursue as leaders; and describing ways to advocate for themselves. VITAL faculty attended faculty senate meetings and other governance structures, so they understood pathways to creating change. They identified issues and considered ways to address salary issues, for example, but also gained a deeper understanding of institutional constraints such as the budget, enrollment trends, and the business model of campus, so that as the VITAL faculty made proposals for changes, they had a better understanding of institutional realities. At the end, their faculty reported feeling empowered, greater efficacy for being able to self-advocate, and more connected and had developed community. They reported understanding the big picture of campus — not just their unit or department or personal experiences. VITAL faculty now understood the university more broadly and how it operates as a system and how all the parts they reviewed in the SPD curriculum fit together.

At the third campus, their SPD served as an ongoing planning group that focused on changes needed to better support VITAL faculty — each year the topics change based on needs assessments. Over 10 years, they have tackled establishing promotion tracks, rewards, and awards for teaching; creating professional development; and improving VITAL faculty communications, among dozens of other changes. This SPD differed from those

at the other two campuses that were more focused on developing leaders who could engage various changes over time and be involved in governance and leadership. On this campus, the changes themselves were more the focus than was leadership development.



A challenge to this approach to SPD is then there may not be funding to follow up on ideas raised, as was the case on one of our two campuses, which then can lead to problems in terms of VITAL faculty feeling the process is less valuable and diminishing their sense of efficacy.

### ***Involvement in Governance***

Related to leadership and change, some campuses also wanted to use Sustained Professional Development to expand involvement in governance. Campus leaders found VITAL faculty were often unaware of ways to get involved or did not have an understanding of governance more generally. SPD would allow participants to learn about the governance structure, to meet governance leaders, to imagine various roles VITAL might play, and to consider how to prepare themselves to play a leadership role in governance. For example, the design team on one campus used an online vision board so that designers could flesh out SPD ideas for part-time VITAL faculty. The design team suggested that the new program could focus on the information provided in the faculty handbook, including understanding the language that is used, learning about the organizational structure of the institution, and discussing how the handbook informs the role of part-time VITAL faculty on their campus. Another campus also described the need for greater VITAL faculty involvement in governance and used SPD as an avenue for accomplishing this goal by providing education about the governance system and conversations about ways to get involved.

### ***Applying for Promotion***

A few campuses set the goal to help VITAL faculty with promotion, since once they had made a career path available, they identified either that few went through the process or that those going through the process felt they did not have adequate information. For example, one campus noted that there were inconsistencies in the experiences of promotion across different programs and colleges, especially by VITAL faculty in instructional and more administrative positions.

In 2019, this campus held its first-ever workshop for appointment and promotion guidelines for VITAL faculty in specific roles. However, despite the accomplishments of the event in raising awareness about inconsistencies and inequities related to promotion, many VITAL faculty still were not applying for promotions for which they were eligible. Therefore, the design team felt that an SPD program targeted to these VITAL faculty could increase the number of successfully-promoted VITAL faculty across the career tracks available to them.

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### ***More Advanced Themes Related to Improved Teaching***

Several campuses considered goals around advanced teaching or more specialized teaching topics as a new goal for SPD. For example, on one campus the design team thought a new SPD program focused on barriers facing VITAL faculty who are interested in teaching program-specific courses, including honors-option courses, undergraduate research courses, and the first-year seminar, would help expand their involvement in such courses.

At another campus, part-time VITAL faculty who have taught for an average of four to six years have expressed interest in continuing engagement in sustained professional development, suggesting the need for an advanced certificate program that supports their ongoing growth. As a result, designers planned to create a professional development certificate for faculty who teach ‘college credit plus’ courses to high school students. To complete this track, faculty could choose one live or on-demand event from each of three categories: diversity, equity, and inclusion; teaching strategies; and self-care. Participants were also expected to complete a reflective essay about each event to be awarded the certificate.

Designers at a different campus similarly decided that a certificate program that included a number of topical badges would help to create more advanced options around professional development beyond their current offerings. Proposed topics included effective teaching online, providing effective and timely feedback, maintaining a presence in online sources, humanizing the learning environment, and universal design for learning.

Another college also identified the need to offer more advanced professional development and created a teaching fellowship program where VITAL faculty proposed individual projects related to course redesign, integrating instructional technologies, or using new types of assessments. There were eight faculty who received the fellowship this spring; the faculty who participate have a lot of interest in instructional effectiveness and are self-motivated.

These campuses were interested in creating SPD that extended existing instructional development offerings, to provide VITAL faculty with access to more advanced and specialized knowledge, as well as opportunities for ongoing engagement in professional development.

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### ***Leadership in Teaching: Course Coordinators***

Not only do campuses need VITAL faculty to be leaders on campus, but they also need their leadership in relationship to teaching. Many VITAL faculty have teaching as their primary focus, so having them play key leadership roles in assessment, scholarship of teaching and learning, mentoring other new faculty, and the like is important.

On one campus, they created an SPD program focused on a yearlong experience for course coordinators who were coordinating sections of the entry-level science and mathematics courses, with in-person workshops throughout the calendar year, a summer institute where course coordinators worked with some of the faculty who teach those courses, and monthly meetings in the fall where course coordinators led discussions with course instructors. The main goals were to:

1. Increase inclusive teaching in the courses,
2. Build community among course coordinators and the course instructors to facilitate feedback on teaching, and
3. Develop leadership skills necessary to be an effective coordinator.

### ***Engaging New VITAL Faculty Populations***

Several campuses saw an SPD as an opportunity to reach populations that they had not in the past. For instance, one university received feedback that their research and clinical faculty members wanted more professional development that was focused on their specific roles. These faculty were also more isolated on campus and seeking more community. Planners at this campus thought that SPD could be a great way

to tailor support as well as provide community for clinical and research faculty that are often isolated. Other campuses thought about populations in terms of career stage. One campus realized they had many opportunities for early career or new faculty but few for mid-career. They decided to expand to mid-career faculty who were often exploring new goals for themselves such as leadership, leading change, and governance. The expansion to these new populations then led to some of the new topics or goals discussed throughout this section.

### ***Career Development***

Some campuses considered SPD as a venue for helping longtime VITAL faculty to think about their career plans and goals. In reflecting on this area as a goal, campus planners felt that a mentoring process or coaching might be more appropriate to achieve this goal, at least initially until they had broader interest and buy-in from faculty. They also talked about the value of shadowing different roles, so this would possibly involve a different approach as well. Or some switched to more specific goals as noted in this section such as leadership, governance, or promotion.



## Potential Challenges when Expanding Goals

We found that, at several of the campuses, they were using professional development structures such as faculty learning communities to meet other needs for VITAL faculty because no other structures existed. Because professional development is often one of the first areas where campuses focus as they increase support for VITAL faculty, there can be a tendency for the SPD effort to morph into other areas of support that may be better served through another work or planning vehicle. On two campuses we worked with, their faculty learning communities were focused on helping develop broader policy and practice changes. For example, on one campus, their SPD was focused on providing mentoring, developing promotion process, implementing professional development programming, expanding a website (and other communications approaches) for communicating with VITAL faculty, and planning for ongoing data gathering among VITAL faculty. While an admirable goal, a learning community structure may not be the right one to effectively conduct such work.

This issue can likely emerge when the design team recognizes that to develop meaningful SPD, they first need to address these broader campus issues so that VITAL faculty can partake in the SPD efforts (see our first report for more information), but we found that planners often did not assemble the right planning group that could execute on these broader issues.

Another reason they leveraged the SPD groups was that VITAL faculty often lacked advocacy and influence to get another sustainable planning mechanism. With support from the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the SPD structure can provide support and funding for such work, as people are often paid to participate in SPD. As a result, this approach became much more sustainable than trying to assemble a planning group with VITAL faculty, as there is not a tradition to pay VITAL faculty to be in such groups. VITAL faculty find it hard to advocate for and obtain funding to be on planning groups. Yet, if they served on committees, on some campuses this was included as part of their service contract. Campus leaders should explore if there are paths for VITAL faculty to serve on committees or be paid for work so they can be part of these important planning efforts.

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**In considering goals, it is important to prioritize and consider which goals are most important and whether there is the capacity — both financial and human — to support goal expansion.**

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Other vehicles brought up for conducting the broader campus support systems or other goals included ‘discussion dens’ where VITAL faculty could engage common challenges, and more targeted professional development days aimed at governance or promotion.

In retrospect, the planners we worked with acknowledged these were not the right

teams to be working on the broader goals they had outlined, because they felt they did not have the power to inform that other broader planning work. In sum, senior leaders need to be part of the process of creating teams that examine the broader policies and practices to shape VITAL faculty working environments so that the team can effectively meet these goals. If they choose to have two (or more) separate planning groups (broader goals and more focused) then they should connect these two groups so there is synergy between the work the two groups are doing.

Also, some campuses had plans to expand goals but ended up lacking the human resources or financial capacity to do so. In considering goals, it is important to prioritize and consider which goals are most important and whether there is the capacity — both financial and human — to support goal expansion.

There was also a gap between VITAL faculty and the goals of planning groups. In feedback through the evaluation processes that planners conducted, they heard that the VITAL faculty they wanted to engage often had not thought about these new goals (leadership, governance, cultural change, career paths), at least the majority of them. As a result, this made these planning groups less likely to be successful, as the goals they were trying to achieve were not widely understood or valued by VITAL faculty. If goals are expanded, then the campus needs to consider a careful communications plan prior to offering SPD to support these goals. Many planners think more broadly about key goals that VITAL faculty should be considering (leadership, governance,

change, career path/advice), but VITAL faculty do not have the same experience or knowledge of these issues, so they may not recognize the value of such institutional goals. A communications plan is needed in order for such efforts to be successful on many campuses, including getting feedback from VITAL faculty about recruitment materials for SPD focused on new goals to see if they resonate.

Most planning groups agreed that sustained professional development works well for creating community and sense of belonging for VITAL faculty, improving teaching, and potentially offering change/ leadership development. Other areas, such education around career advancement and leadership in governance/service, did not seem to fit as well into the SPD format. Thus, our study is a cautionary tale about overusing SPD as a vehicle for the many changes needed on campus, where coaching, mentoring, book clubs, committees, governance groups, and other vehicles might work better. Some goals remain untested and future research should explore areas that seem promising such as credentials.

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**Most planning groups agreed that SPD works well for creating community and sense of belong for VITAL faculty, improved teaching, and potentially offering change/ leadership development.**

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## Revisiting Goals

As they planned, several teams revisited their goals; some realized they were too ambitious, while others realized that they needed to achieve a specific goal before reaching another one. For example, one planning group wanted to focus on helping VITAL faculty to go through the promotion process but then realized that, prior to that, VITAL faculty needed to develop relationships and feel a sense of belonging. They needed to scaffold the SPD experience in order to accomplish their ultimate goal. This team also realized that SPD may not be the best format for the promotion process and perhaps another vehicle would be better to accomplish this goal. Another group wanted VITAL faculty to explore further career options and leadership roles they might take on campus. They learned that many VITAL faculty just were not thinking about long-term career paths, so they needed much more communication about why such planning is desirable in order to attract VITAL faculty to participate in the SPD.

Others revised goals were based on the needs and interests of VITAL faculty who showed up for SPD, when these needs and interests were different than the planning team had anticipated. For example, one SPD had very focused goals but the VITAL faculty who attended sessions were experiencing burnout, so the curriculum had to respond to the moment. They shifted sessions to focus on wellbeing, creativity, and avoiding burnout, as VITAL faculty were voicing that they felt depleted and being in a creative space was refreshing.

Another campus originally thought that teaching improvement was the best focus, but VITAL faculty who participated in the SPD had a strong need for sense of belonging; teaching improvement was a secondary goal to them. This planning group had even set up their SPD based on focus groups they held to assess VITAL faculty's needs, but faculty who showed up were different from ones that they had assessed the needs of. So two levels of needs assessment are necessary — one of the overall campus to determine broad areas of concern, but then also a second for those who participate. Even if VITAL faculty sign up for a SPD program on a specific topic, sometimes it is their only opportunity for engagement on campus, so they show up even if they lack interest in the stated focus or goals. This reality also illustrates the need for many more options for engaging VITAL faculty.

There was concern about developing curriculum for SPDs that often were abandoned to the needs of VITAL faculty when they showed up. Goals for each session became very fluid, and planners felt very torn about abandoning content they knew to be valuable and what people had signed up to learn about. They were unsure if these modifications were the right choices — was it serving the entire group? Might a few more of the vocal VITAL faculty's needs be impacting the needs of others? Is responding to the moment the right thing to do for their overall growth and development? Others worried that once they expanded the SPD purposes based on VITAL faculty input, they might be trying

to address a need that is best met another way. Several planning groups noted that certain faculty came each week with “gripes” — issues where they had experienced inequities during their career and brought up these issues no matter the session topic. Campus planners felt a tension where each week they returned to these same concerns — allowing voice, but not getting anywhere in terms of addressing the issue raised. Campus planners recognized that people’s pain needed to be acknowledged but felt stuck in a loop. They referenced the need for healing spaces or conversations and perhaps affinity groups that can address these traumas and concerns such as microaggressions, disrespect, pay inequity, limited agency, and lack of influence or voice. A few campuses had created spaces for these conversations and felt it helped to pull these conversations away from the SPD spaces. Yet all acknowledged that this would continue to be an issue as long as campus cultures remained so inequitable.

### ***Revisiting Goals Means Revisiting Plans/Curriculum***

Campus planners also recognized that revisiting goals meant a lot of work, as they needed to revise their curriculum and plans. Some planning groups waited to plan until they met with participants the first time, worried about having to revise a curriculum, and this became one way to be responsive and not create lots of additional work.

Others made significant changes and felt it worked this time given how committed their planning team was. However, they thought this might not work for other campuses with a less invested team. One campus team initially planned one semester but expanded to a year. This meant bringing in lots of additional content, but it allowed for more complex thinking on their projects. They also needed time to develop relationships and make connections. The fluid and dynamic nature of design, while an asset, came with many costs. We describe these further in the sections below.

For others, the real time additions or revisions to the SPD curriculum worked well as they were more minor — not based on changes in goals but merely responsive to information that people needed to meet the stated goal. For example, the sustained professional development that focused on leadership and change realized VITAL faculty had very limited knowledge about many offices on campus. As a result, they added speakers from additional units to come and provide information.

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## Section 3: Policy and Practice Changes that Supported Teams' Successes

Most of our teams did not make broader policy and practice changes that our design models recommend. In Section 4, we describe why we think this happened and provide recommendations for making sure these types of changes are made with future planning groups. However, one issue for campus leaders to consider is their readiness for change. It will be difficult to create meaningful sustained professional development opportunities for VITAL faculty if the campus has not created awareness about the need to support VITAL faculty broadly (See [The Imperative for Change](#)), established some baseline policy and practice changes (See [Delphi Project Campus Guides](#)), and created support for VITAL faculty professional development with some workshops and basic options. This early work then provided the changes such as implementing promotion processes that would motivate VITAL faculty in order to engage in sustained professional development. Or overcome challenges — such as part-time faculty not having access to email during semesters when they do not have classes, but yet they might want to be involved with professional development because they have more time. Having a solid foundation or readiness is important to support the work of designing these programs to be successful. We have created a policy brief aimed at helping campuses to develop the readiness to support their sustained professional development planning efforts (Kezar and Culver, 2024).

Three campuses in our study were able to execute on making broader policy changes in support of SPD, but not all happened through the design team that was part of this action research project. Instead, these campuses had been engaging in the work over a longer period of time — often 5-7 years — putting in place progressive sets of changes aimed at providing VITAL faculty with a series of supports including longer-term contracts and job security, better salary and benefits, promotion processes, involvement in governance, orientation and mentoring, and better feedback and evaluations, among other changes. One campus completed this work just prior to joining our project and the other two were in the midst of making policy changes. Please see our case studies about these campuses for even further details about their work.

In exploring what factors allowed these teams to make policy and practice changes, play a larger role on campus, and engage more of the design thinking ideas presented, we identified the following reasons: they assembled a more diverse team, their team was able to think from an institutional perspective, they partnered with key groups across campus, and they had a long-term approach to planning/design. Each of these areas is detailed in Section 3.

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Here, we detail some of the key policy and practice changes campuses had put into place that supported design teams in their planning processes:

- Providing Longer-term contracts and promotion opportunities for VITAL faculty
- Increasing VITAL faculty's access to mentoring and professional development
- Developing awards and similar opportunities to recognize VITAL faculty achievements
- Creating structures for ongoing assessment of VITAL faculty's working conditions
- Using SPD as a vehicle for advocacy of VITAL faculty needs

Creating VITAL faculty tracks (e.g., teaching tracks, research tracks) recognizes the reality that, for many VITAL faculty, their role is a career. Promotion opportunities and longer-term contracts also help faculty feel incentivized to participate in SPD. They orient and mentor VITAL faculty so that they are aware of the SPD. These various changes not only support more engagement with current SPD offerings but also ongoing participation.

One campus included key individuals from the provost's office that could help connect the SPD design to the broader policy changes. The change process was also a joint effort between faculty and administrators, which we will see was different than at other campuses in our study. Even though they did not think that the SPD program that they developed and piloted during the action research project was able to obtain the faculty enrollments they hoped for, they also learned that, in addition to policy changes, there needs to be a communications plan about new SPD that includes information about policy and practice changes. The campus planners realized the need for more communications after they spoke with VITAL faculty, as many were not aware of the changes that had been made or the goals of the new SPD. Now, this campus is not only well-positioned for future SPD but also has

changed the culture of support around VITAL faculty, which is improving the campus in many ways.

Another campus also came to our action research project after several years of policy changes that increased security for their VITAL faculty with longer term contracts, a promotion track, and mentoring, but the campus was still working on issues of salary, workload, governance, and professional development. They represented a campus that was still in the midst of broader policy changes and hoped to use the SPD to conduct work on some of those issues, so their SPD focused on VITAL faculty becoming leaders and advocates for change. Their team also had an advocate in the provost's office who could connect them to these broader policy changes. This team was able to leverage the earlier policy work to help in being successful in designing and executing the new SPD. As with the first campus we described, they felt their first iteration of this new SPD was an experiment where they learned about issues that would help them in future years, and overall the planners felt it was a successful design to help the campus continue to make meaningful change for VITAL faculty.

**“ These design teams made several broader policy changes that enabled their SPD to be more successful, motivating VITAL faculty’s participation in professional development. ”**

The third campus had been engaged in creating better support for VITAL faculty over the last eight years, with efforts to create promotional ranks, improve climate, build community, clarify policies, create flexibility for instructors to work on research, and increase access to professional development. They are still working on a host of issues, and the SPD they developed focused on addressing many of these issues. The goal of their SPD was to bring together VITAL faculty in order to develop accurate information, advocacy, policies, and data relevant to VITAL faculty. Their initial SPD effort started in 2012, out of a recognized need to provide a space for community building and professional growth for instructional faculty, with sponsorship from the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). In the next few years, their program expanded to include faculty in other VITAL career tracks while continuing its focus on understanding promotion criteria and experiences, helping faculty balance multiple roles within their departments, and engaging students in the classroom. Because of their early efforts, their Office of Faculty Affairs became a co-sponsor of the program in 2016, reflecting recognition of its importance and contributing to its sustainability as a campus entity. In this year, SPD participants implemented a networking event for all VITAL faculty on their campus and began advocating for representation in their shared governance work.

These design teams made several broader policy changes that enabled their SPD to be more successful, motivating VITAL faculty’s participation in professional development. They were also better able to synergize work in order to meet the goals of their SPD due to the long-standing connections between institutional leaders, professional development experts, and VITAL faculty. By leveraging these connections in deciding who would be on their SPD planning teams, they were able to bring in individuals who were knowledgeable about the challenges VITAL faculty were facing while also having a broad understanding of how their institutions worked, what levers were available to them, and how they could align their SPD efforts with broader institutional goals.

## Section 4: Successes and Challenges Design Teams Faced

### Engaging the Multilevel and Liberatory Frameworks

As a part of this action research project, we had teams learn about two frameworks aimed at improving their planning so that they could make sustained professional development more accessible and inclusive for their VITAL faculty. These frameworks are described in more detail in Section I of this report. In this section, we describe how campus teams engaged these frameworks — aspects that seemed to be easily engaged or implemented and those that were more challenging. We provide recommendations for campuses that want to maximize their use of these models in order to develop the best professional development for their VITAL faculty. We also document the role of the design teams. In the following section, we note the alignment of the successes and challenges that campuses commonly faced with these frameworks.

One overall finding is that design team composition was critical to teams' ability to be able to utilize ideas from the frameworks. Teams that lacked key administrators who could provide a broader perspective about the campus structures and environmental influences (e.g., state systems) limited their ability to be able to consider many aspects of the multilevel model. This includes partnerships needed to successfully make policy and practice changes, and an understanding of larger policies that might limit the success of the programs they were designing. Teams need to be empowered to be able to identify and change problematic policies and be given a charge that allows them to explore needed changes more broadly than just the design of professional development, because professional development is connected to a broader system of faculty policies. In general, seeing faculty policies and practices as highly inter-related and connected was a principle that led to more efficacious outcomes.

### *Design for Equity in Higher Education*

Design for Equity in Higher Education (DEHE) modifies liberatory design thinking for the higher education context, offering a structured design process that centers equity-minded practice in the development of new programs and policies. Our data suggested that planning teams easily and readily used DEHE principles in their teams. When we asked about their overall process for planning, we generally heard about most of the phases articulated in DEHE, outlined in the Study Background of this report. They could clearly articulate how they used information from this framework in planning.

### *Multilevel Framework of Influences on the Success of Professional Development*

The multilevel framework (Culver & Kezar, 2021) articulates different levels of influence on the success and sustainability of professional development programs for VITAL faculty. Campus planners noted being informed by the multilevel framework but could articulate few specifics about how it shaped their planning. When we probed

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about why they struggled to use this approach, they typically stated time constraints, lack of information about broader institutional or external issues, and lack of agency to control aspects of the model — such as changes to faculty policies, rewards and resources. None of them questioned the value of the multilevel model and, in fact, noted they wished they could have used it to plan, but they did not feel they had the knowledge, agency, or power to use it. This challenge suggests the importance of planning teams members having access to senior leaders and broader campus resources if they are to be effective.

## Design Team Process Successes

Campuses were able to easily engage in several dimensions of the design frameworks we shared with them, such as including VITAL faculty in planning processes, conducting needs assessment, using VITAL faculty perspectives and voice into planning processes, and utilizing data and outside models and resources. We also saw that several campuses were able to partner with key external groups and have collaborative decision-making processes facets of the multilevel model. Some campuses also engaged professional development expertise as recommended in the multilevel model. Below we share the ways campuses were able to use these models to advance their efforts

### Needs Assessment

Each campus engaged in various forms of needs assessment, often three forms. Campuses conducted surveys and focus groups to hear from VITAL faculty. They were careful to reach out expansively to hear different voices. They also conducted needs assessment once the VITAL faculty showed up for the SPD experience. Then, many SPD facilitators conducted ongoing needs assessment throughout the SPD experience. Assessment has become a very prominent part of higher education practice, and we found that campus planning teams were adept at conducting and using needs assessment.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS |                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| DESIGN FOR EQUITY     | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK      |
| Emphathize            | Design<br>Needs assessment |

### Obtaining VITAL Faculty Representation in Planning and Understanding their Perspective




Planning teams often included several VITAL faculty, and the few that did not made sure to reach out to VITAL faculty throughout their processes to obtain feedback on plans. Our research identified how inclusive and respectful the planning team processes were, with VITAL faculty reporting that they felt heard, felt comfortable bringing up concerns, and believed that their opinions were valued. One planning team was made up of representative VITAL faculty from across campus, with one administrator to coordinate the provide support for the group.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| DESIGN FOR EQUITY     | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK |
| Organize              | VITAL Faculty Needs   |

Several teams had a few VITAL faculty leaders who made a point of reaching out to their colleagues for their viewpoints. All planning teams also made sure to share emerging design ideas out with VITAL faculty groups and seek their input for the plan. For example, the design team that focused on developing leadership among course coordinators was planning a summer institute but was worried about whether the timing would work so that faculty would be able to participate. They took their idea out to VITAL faculty who suggested that each team could meet separately to make sure they could participate in it. Teams generally reported that this was an easy and valuable step to take.



### ***Clear Goal Setting and Values***

Each of the planning teams started with their goals. They also stated the values that would guide their planning experience, such as respect, agency, efficacy, belonging, community, etc. As the opening section on goals already explored, they used needs assessment to determine goals, they spent time trying to clarify the goals with the team members, and they refined goals based on both VITAL faculty voice, current campus conditions and information they reviewed.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS   |   |
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| DESIGN FOR EQUITY   | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK   |
|  |   |

### ***Use of Data, Models, Previous Experiences***




Campuses collected information about previous SPD, reviewed evaluations, looked to other campus models, some that was provided by the research team but they also brought in other models from conferences they went to. One campus that was using a course coordinator model had explored this model at other campuses in order to develop their approach. Another campus was 10 years into efforts to support VITAL faculty and they had a massive amount of older data and current data from a new study done to understand the needs of research and clinical faculty. The planning team had access to these various forms of data and used it to help inform various aspects of their curriculum ranging from the sessions on developing VITAL faculty website, communications plan, and inclusion in governance.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS   |   |
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| DESIGN FOR EQUITY   | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK   |
|  |  |






### ***Engaging Perspectives Around Professional Development Best Practices***

Most teams included experts in the area of faculty professional development, and this was universally found to be valuable and an easy step to engage. These individuals brought in data and models about best practices in sustained professional development related to facilitation, scheduling, orientation and curriculum materials, as well as areas already described such as needs assessment and goal setting. One campus had two departments that were developing SPD that was focused on improving teaching within very specific disciplinary areas with different norms around teaching. The CTL director and staff members sat on the planning committee to act as a resource for the faculty planners who were experts in their disciplines but did not have information about best approaches to teaching improvement or professional development.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS   |   |
|---|---|
| DESIGN FOR EQUITY   | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK   |
|  |   |



### ***Collaborative Decision Making and Design***

While these teams brought together faculty and administrators, tenure-line and VITAL faculty, and staff across various units, including individuals with different amounts of power, they had very collaborative decision-making and design processes. Some teams noted that they had not considered power would be an issue until they read our materials. But they came to realize quickly that VITAL faculty in particular might defer to others if not valued and respected. Some teams took some time to get to this collaborative space and started with tenure-line faculty or administrators speaking more and outlining ideas, but this changed over the course of their planning processes.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS   |   |
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| DESIGN FOR EQUITY   | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK   |
|  |   |

### ***Working with a Resource Office like Center for Teaching and Learning, Provost's Office, Faculty Senate***

Across our planning teams, working with a resource office or being affiliated with another unit helped them in planning and implementation. Most found partners that facilitated their efforts, and this step was quite easily engaged by most. Several planning teams worked closely with their Center for Teaching and Learning and found this a valuable and accessible resource. As noted above, the CTL helped them identify resources for topics, gave facilitation tips, access faculty who have facilitated before, and helped them reflect on key design questions around engagement and modality.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS   |   |
|---|---|
| DESIGN FOR EQUITY   | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK   |
|  |  |

Two teams also described the advantages of teaming with the Provost’s Office, which helped them access resources to pay VITAL faculty who participated or facilitators who led. They also were able to obtain access to people across campus to speak at Professional Learning Communities. A champion in the provost’s office or a provost’s representative was on the team, the planners noted how much easier it was for the team to engage and make the SPD work.

One campus worked closely with its faculty senate which provided data, access to communications vehicles and other planning subcommittees of the senate, resources, and a network to connect with other departments and units.

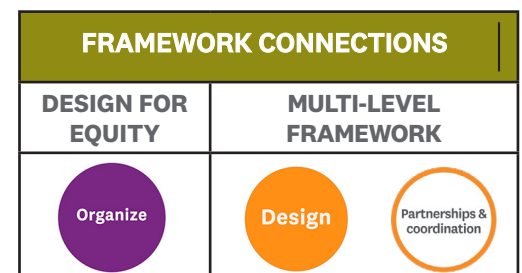
## Design Team Process Challenges

Our research highlighted many challenges teams faced when engaging in a complex design process, even when they had been introduced to and understood the importance of the models we shared with them. Some are unavoidable, such as major leadership turnover, key planning team members leaving suddenly, severe resource constraints, and other campus crises. Having conducted this study during a time of a global pandemic, we were aware that focusing on some of these unavoidable and extreme circumstances would not develop transferable results. Instead, we focus on challenges that we could see happening on campuses at any point in time, ones that are more commonplace and could be navigated with knowledge. Some of these issues teams encountered even though they were aware of them ahead of time. Thus, we use data from our study to help interpret why these challenges remained so entrenched and difficult to overcome.

### *Assembling the Right Design Team*

Our teams were asked to assemble the group that could best execute on their goals. We made recommendations for key people to include—VITAL faculty, representatives of faculty that were key to their objectives, faculty of different ranks and years of experience, administrators, staff in key units, people who were innovative thinkers, influential members of campus, and representatives of key offices like CTL or academic affairs. The most common challenges we saw related to design team composition were:

- A very narrow set of faculty who could not broadly represent faculty interests
- A group of almost exclusively faculty with no other members of campus to provide access to resources and support
- Teams that were located primarily or entirely in the CTL
- Members who had very entrenched views of ways of doing SPD



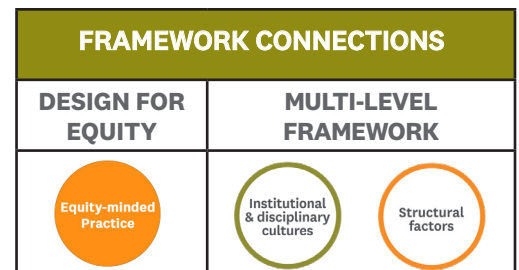
One campus team reflected on their team make up: “We thought about all the right people who should be on the team, but then we felt pressure to get started and stopped exploring the issue, and ultimately we did not have the ideal team.”

One commonality among most campuses that withdrew from this study was that the planning teams were made up primarily or entirely of individuals from within the CTL. These teams were vulnerable to division restructuring and personnel changes that limited their capacity to continue designing and implementing a new program amidst these changes. Having representatives from different parts of campus can help support continuity in the face of such external influences.

Only three of the design teams assembled the right teams with a various assortment of people that enabled them to engage an institutional perspective, partner with appropriate offices/units, and obtain the influence, resources and knowledge to develop the design and implementation needed for successful SPD.

### ***When a Complex Team is Assembled, Designing Within a Short Period of Time Without Trusting Relationships***

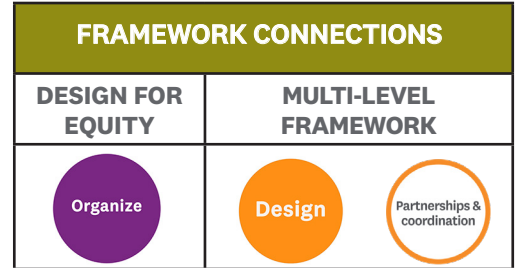
Some campuses did assemble a very diverse team that had the expertise, perspective and knowledge to design the SPD. However, with such diversity comes the need to help develop relationships so everyone feels on equal footing to contribute and have a voice. Often, the members of these groups have had little time to interact in other settings. VITAL faculty, in particular, did not have trusting relationships with tenure-line faculty or administrators. Our teams generally were able to develop positive relationships, as noted in the last section under collaborative decision-making, but this time comes with the compromise of spending less time reviewing data and other models, building out the new goals, and designing something more complex. The investment of time into building relationships may be the right decision for these teams as they work together in their next steps, but in the short run, it impacted having a strong design for their SPD.



We recommend, if possible, planning time for relationship building and complex design processes, which is a longer time frame than these SPD planners have used in the past. The three teams who we documented had made broader policy changes that enabled their SPDs to be successful engaged in this project as part of a longer time frame within which they situated their work.

**Providing Voice and Empowerment to VITAL faculty But Not Enough Time, Information or Training to be Successful Perspective**

VITAL faculty noted that they could be a barrier to planning, as they had very limited perspective about the broader campus and its policies and practices. So engaging the multilevel model was very challenging for them in particular. Several VITAL faculty reported that they struggled to understand the multilevel model so engaging it was virtually impossible for them. Campus planning teams may want to specifically engage VITAL faculty that have expertise in both areas — overall campus and VITAL faculty experiences. Although this limits who can serve, it will be helpful for obtaining a team that can fully engage the planning process. One campus team was all VITAL faculty other than one administrator. At first, the administrator tried to provide this information to the group but felt they were dominating meetings so they stepped back. The VITAL faculty group noted they were dismissive of the administrator’s ideas. It was only at the end that they realized the administrator had valuable information that that was essential for the SPD to meet its goals, as well as for the planning process itself.

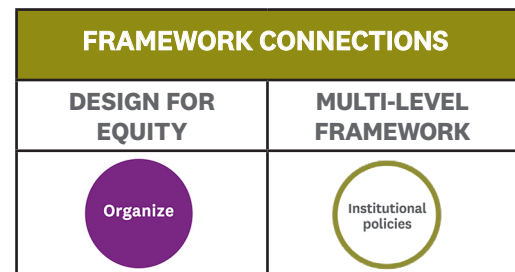


Planning teams will need to balance agency, voice, and power dynamics with different forms of knowledge and perspective (VITAL faculty bring an understanding of their experience, while administrators can bring perspectives about the institution).

We recommend that VITAL faculty be given some training to be able to gain knowledge needed to be members of design teams. Two of our design teams did engage in such training and it provided very valuable. This does require more time, and longer planning cycles as has been alluded to throughout this section.

**Lack of Incentives or Support for Planning Team which Lead to No Work Between Meetings Which Meant they had Limited Bandwidth to Focus on all the Aspects of Multilevel Framework**

Lacking the right team and broader policy change and institutional perspectives often led design teams to find they could not devote enough time to these activities:



- A group of almost exclusively faculty with no other members of campus to provide access to resources and support
- Teams that were located primarily or entirely in the CTL
- Exploring important dimensions such as disciplinary or external factors
- Conducting robust needs assessment and identifying research and models to inform their efforts

Especially when teams included several VITAL faculty who volunteered to participate on top of their many other responsibilities, the intermittent meetings and episodic engagement meant they lost their train of thinking.

**Being Very Attentive to VITAL Faculty Voices can be Daunting or Lead to an Overly Diffuse Focus**

Each campus engaged in needs assessments processes. After conducting needs assessments (and sometime relying on multiple forms of needs assessment that had been conducted), design teams often felt overwhelmed by the number of different needs and perspectives offered. Furthermore, on some campuses, their VITAL faculty differed widely in terms of role, experiences, and needs, which made it challenging for planners to define the focus for their sustained professional development.

For example, at the university where designers had planned to focus on professional development for research and clinical faculty, groups who often felt left out of existing professional development offerings, the responses to their needs assessment brought up an assortment of needs, and they felt compelled to address them all to be responsive. This did not allow them to focus their goals on the needs of specific groups as they had hoped.

While being responsive to needs is a good practice, it is also important for planners to use their expertise and make judgments about needs they have observed over time, rather than being swayed by data that is collected at one point in time. There is also a need to balance attention to current needs with long-term trends and issues facing VITAL faculty – some that new faculty or those responding to the needs assessment may not know about.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| DESIGN FOR EQUITY     | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK   |
| (Re)Define            | Design <span style="margin-left: 20px;">Purpose &amp; objectives</span> |

**Engaging External and/or Non-local Institutional Factors**

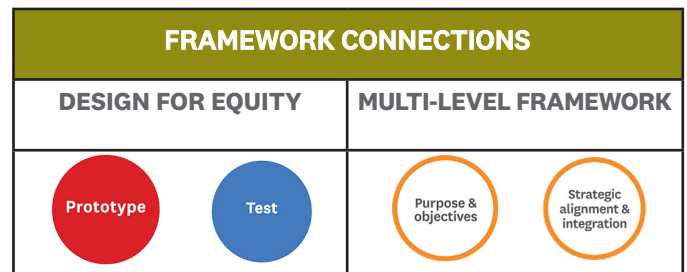
Planning teams universally reported that they did not have teams assembled that could provide information about external factors in our multilevel model that could shape SPD such as state policy, unions, disciplinary societies, and the like. They also had very limited knowledge of campus resources and broader offices. The three teams that worked with the provost’s office or academic senate were exceptions to this, and they were able to engage these broader resources.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| DESIGN FOR EQUITY     | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK |
| (Re)Define            | Environmental         |

As noted earlier, only these three teams had an institutional perspective, which strengthened their influence and ability to obtain resources to address issues they identified. Most faculty lack knowledge about the operations of the campus unless they have been in a campus leadership role. For VITAL faculty, they tend to be even more removed from this perspective (although many part-time VITAL faculty are in positions that provide them an institutional perspective so this asset should not be ignored). Design teams that were weighted heavily with faculty perspectives were unable to imagine the ways they could obtain support for SPD and broader supports needed like promotion, changed incentives, or resources to pay for involvement in SPD.

### **Short-term Planning Cycles and Design Without Attention to Implementation**

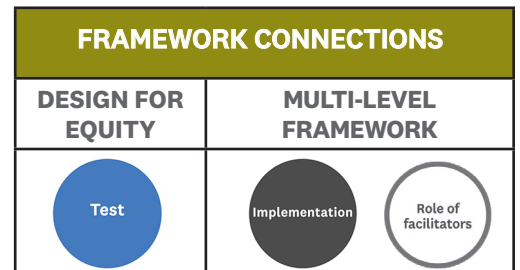
One major issue we saw across all teams was the tendency for short-term planning and not thinking long term. They seemed to be oriented toward a lot of iterative short-term cycles of experiments rather than a broader institutional plan around SPD and creating support for VITAL faculty. Campus planners have a cycle of identifying audience, goals/purpose, and content, and so even when they were presented with a broader and more complex planning approach, their thinking defaulted to previous planning approaches. Our data show that their program designs and their evaluations included measures and ideas that were about general issues of modality, topics, faculty engagement, and program goals, rather than the broader set of issues in the models we presented.



If no one on the planning team was holding them accountable to think differently, then they got stuck in this limited approach, even as they desired to plan differently. We recommend that a team member be tasked with examining the teams' planning approach and pushing designers to consider a broader set of issues on an ongoing basis.

### **Staying Flexible has its Pros and Cons**

All teams emphasized the importance of flexibility. Even if they conducted research, looked at existing data and models, and had done a needs assessment, the SPD participants that show up in a cohort can differ each time, so planning and can design can only get you so far. Additionally, most PLC facilitators obtained feedback after each session to find out what was working for participants and what they didn't like. Based on this information, they kept fine tuning. They noted how important it was to hear VITAL faculty voices, and VITAL faculty reported that being able to provide feedback made them feel better about the experience.






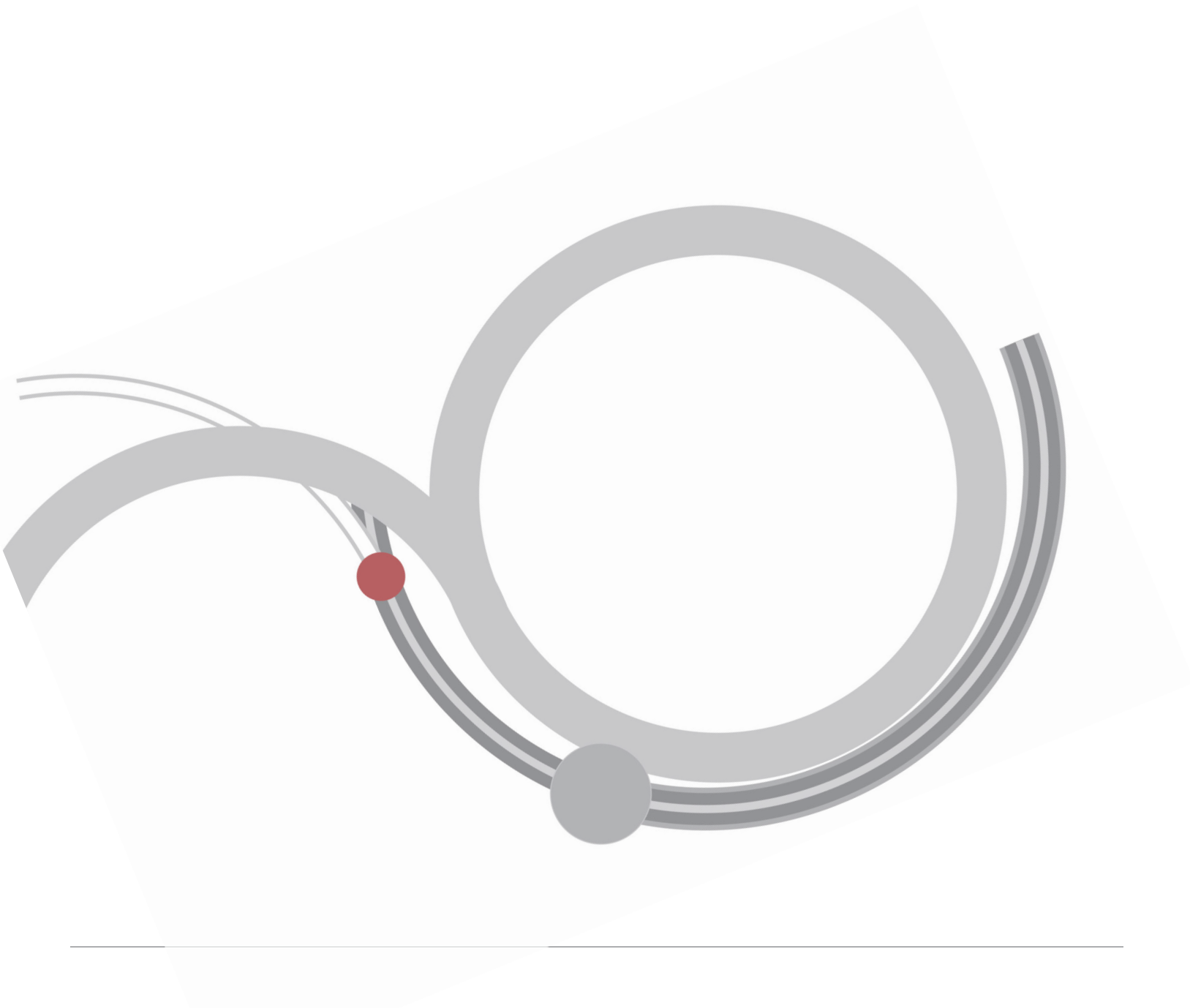
Planning groups can try to come up with a schedule, agenda, learning goals — a general structure — but then the challenges and needs of VITAL faculty make it hard to go much farther, especially if they want to be responsive to their particular needs. If SPD planners and facilitators did not attend to these needs, they saw VITAL faculty drop out or disengage, so they felt being responsive was necessary to keep motivation levels high. Thus, each team described an inherent design challenge. As long as VITAL faculty face the same difficulties and lack of institutional support, designing responsive and meaningful SPD will remain a difficult prospect.



### ***Evaluating and Demonstrating Success***

There was a general lack of planning for assessment, which impacted teams' ability to demonstrate value and get continued funding/resources to support sustainability. A few campuses did assess their programs, and this helped them successfully argue for continued funding. Campuses need to integrate a plan around evaluation during planning, rather than as an afterthought.

| FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS   |   |
|---|---|
| DESIGN FOR EQUITY   | MULTI-LEVEL FRAMEWORK   |
|  |   |



## Section 5: Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

In this report, we sought to identify the expanding goals for SPD that campuses are beginning to design, to situate their work within larger policy and practice changes to better support VITAL faculty, and to identify several of the common successes and challenges that design teams faced during their planning process. Based on these findings, we offer the following overall recommendations for campuses as they continue to expand sustained professional development opportunities for their VITAL faculty.

### **Readiness for Change is Needed to be Able to Move Forward Successfully**

Campuses should consider what prework they may need to conduct prior to establishing a design team and implementing sustained professional development. If a comprehensive review of policies and practices related to VITAL faculty has not already been conducted, then this work should happen first. Throughout this report, we have underscored that planning professional development without considering the entire system of faculty supports will not be as successful and potentially will not be accomplished at all.

### **Plan Collaboratively and Cross-functionally**

Programs are stronger when they are designed by people who have different perspectives and expertise. Our multilevel framework identifies four levels of influence on the success of sustained programs, so the planning team should incorporate at least one member who has a strong understanding of each level. The participatory design principle of the DEHE model recommends including VITAL faculty on the planning team; identifying representatives who understand VITAL faculty's needs across units and/or roles is a plus. Include at least one representative who has expertise in designing and implementing professional development; many campuses have pockets of professional development offerings in departments and colleges that do not reach their potential because this expertise is absent. Some team members should have a good understanding of forging partnerships with other offices and programs that can strengthen the SPD. Finally, ensure the team includes at least one member who has a strong understanding of the environmental level of influences. While it may not be possible to have a provost or dean participate in every planning effort, there are often individuals who have gained this expertise from their role in shared governance, previous institution-wide committees, or other connections.

### **Design Team Composition is Critical to Outcomes**

This report highlighted how the design team's composition will shape its ability to design sustained professional development that is successful and sustainable. As noted earlier, teams that lacked key administrators who could provide a broader perspective about the campus structures and environmental influences (e.g., state systems) limited their ability to consider many aspects of the multilevel model. These include partnerships needed to successfully make policy and practice changes and an understanding of larger policies that might

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limit the success of the programs they were designing. Teams also need to be empowered to identify and revise problematic policies and be given a charge that allows them to explore needed changes more broadly than just the design of professional development, since professional development is connected to a broader system of faculty policies.

### **Create Time for Planning Team Development**

Convening teams like this may not be common on your campus, and members may not know each other. It is important to allow time for team members to get to know one another and build trust so that they feel comfortable making suggestions, giving critiques, and the like. It is also important to give time to ensure that team members understand the goals of the team and have the necessary knowledge to be able to see the bigger picture. In particular, VITAL faculty may not have a strong understanding of institutional policies and other environmental influences that will make a difference in the program success. Consider the design team an opportunity for professional development for each team member to learn more about the way the institution works, including organizational structures and the different cultures that exist.

### **Use Data — and Expertise — to Guide Decisions**

Conducting a needs assessment is a critical first step for understanding the needs of VITAL faculty. At the same time, the campuses who were most successful also used other forms of data, including institutional data, faculty handbooks, and personal experiences, to guide their decision-making. Some campuses were overwhelmed by the diversity of needs they uncovered when examining data. Use the expertise of team members to narrow goals appropriately, deciding which needs should take priority right now and which needs might be better addressed through a format other than SPD or at a later time.

### **Situate Work Within Larger Institutional Changes to Better Support VITAL Faculty**

Sustained professional development is only one facet of the support that VITAL faculty need to be able to be effective and fulfilled by their work. Even the most well-designed program will not get buy-in from VITAL faculty if they face structural or cultural obstacles to participating. Explore ways for engagement in SPD to contribute to evaluation, to open up leadership opportunities or more secure employment, or to offer rewards and recognition that support career development.

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## Conclusion

While we found that many design teams faced challenges in fully implementing the frameworks we provided them with, many of the campuses in our study demonstrated good design processes. You can read more about the design process and the resulting SPD program that each campus implemented through our case studies, which examine campuses individually.

Action research projects like the one showcased in this report can help to identify challenges and struggles that take place as campuses strive to implement best practices in a world of complexity and changing circumstances. Our research with campuses helped to identify some of the practices that can be more easily engaged as well as the pain points for campuses when trying to create better environments for VITAL faculty. While such research cannot remove the identified obstacles, it can shed light on them, increasing leaders' awareness of what they will encounter as they strive to improve. We hope these insights will help leaders advocating for and with VITAL faculty.

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## Appendix

**Table 1. Institutions that Implemented New/Modified Programs**

| Institution  | SPD Model    | New/Revised SPD Program Implemented   | Primary Program Focus                               |
|--|--------------|---|---|
| Boise State University                                       | FLC          | “Localizing” CTL’s Adjunct Faculty Learning Community in Social Work (online program) and Math Department           | Instructional effectiveness                         |
| Inver Hills Community College and Dakota County Tech College | FLC          | Community of Practice for first-year and adjunct faculty  | Institutional integration                           |
| Iowa State University  | FLC          | Term faculty learning community   | Leadership development                              |
| Kennesaw State University (College of Math & Science)        | Action Teams | Leadership development for course coordinators to lead action teams with course instructors                         | Leadership development; instructional effectiveness |
| University of Denver   | FLC          | Purpose and Pathways program for mid-career VITAL faculty   | Leadership development                              |
| University of Georgia  | FLC          | VITAL faculty FLC with a focus on inventorying PD opportunities and awards available to VITAL faculty across campus | Advocacy for VITAL faculty                          |



**Table 2. Institutions That Faced Significant Challenges**

| Institution                              | SPD Model Proposed | Program Purpose Proposed                         | Reason New/Revised SPD Program Was Not Implemented                  |
|--|--------------------|--|---|
| Embry-Riddle University-Worldwide Campus | Certificate/badge  | Certificate Program                              | Organizational restructuring impacted design team's ability to plan |
| New School, Parsons School of Design     | Certificate/badge  | Badge program around DEI                         | Study timeline did not meet campus needs for program development    |
| Sinclair College                         | Certificate/badge  | Advanced certificate for adjuncts                | CTL personnel changed; limited capacity and different priorities    |
| University of North Carolina Charlotte   | FLC                | Advanced adjunct FLC for alumni of existing AFLC | CTL personnel changed; limited capacity and different priorities    |

## Project Team

### Adrianna Kezar, Director and Principal Investigator



Adrianna Kezar is the Dean's Professor of Leadership, Wilbur-Kieffer Professor of Higher Education at the University of Southern California, and Director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education. She is an expert on change leadership, diversity, equity and inclusion, faculty, STEM reform, collaboration, and governance in higher education. At the Pullias Center, Kezar directs the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success, The Change Leadership Toolkit for Advancing Systemic Change in Higher Education, Building a Culture of Shared Equity Leadership in Higher Education and the Faculty, Academic Careers & Environments (FACE) projects. In addition, Kezar serves as the Executive Editor of *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*.<sup>n</sup>

### KC Culver, Assistant Professor of Higher Education, University of Alabama and Co-PI



KC Culver is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration at the University of Alabama. Her work focuses on improving equity in the policies, programs, and practices related to the academic mission of higher education, with a focus on faculty careers, teaching practices, and the impact of students' academic experiences on their outcomes. She also serves as Associate Editor of *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*. Dr. Culver earned her Ph.D. from the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at the University of Iowa and is an affiliate of the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California.

## About the Pullias Center for Higher Education



USC's Pullias Center for Higher Education is the world's leading research center on student access and success in higher education. The Center is focused on advancing equity in higher education and providing innovative, scalable solutions to both improve college outcomes for underserved students and enhancing the performance of postsecondary institutions. Begun in 1995 as a University of Southern California Rossier research center focused on higher education policy and practice, the Earl and Pauline Pullias Center for Higher Education was established in 2012 with a generous bequest from the Pullias Family estate. For more information, please visit: <https://pullias.usc.edu>.

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