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Mid-Atlantic Teaching Faculty Alliance: Fostering the Advancement of VITAL Faculty Through a Cross-Institutional Network

2025 Finalist of the Delphi Award

by Barielnen Vita and KC Culver

From the Delphi Project database of

Example Best Practices to Support VITAL Faculty

- ✓ Annual Off the Tenure Track Retreat
- ✓ Committees for Focused Work
- ✓ Meetings and Meetups

Example Best Practices in the Change Process

- ✓ Emerging from Rutgers University Camden's Non-Tenure-Track Working Group
- ✓ Designing for Expansion
- ✓ Getting Institutional Buy-in

Introduction

The Mid-Atlantic Teaching Faculty Alliance (MATFA), located in the Philadelphia area, is a decentralized grassroots organization that brings together VITAL faculty from different colleges and universities in the Northeast. This innovative cross-institutional network aims to support pedagogical effectiveness, professional growth, and equitable working conditions for VITAL faculty. Institutional change to better support VITAL faculty happens in isolation, and many VITAL faculty have little awareness of the heterogeneity of policies and practices at other institutions. MATFA leverages its cross-institutional network to support the “cross-pollination” of equitable policies across departments, colleges, and campuses. These policies are related to salary, teaching load, parental leave, service expectations, voting rights in shared governance, contract lengths, classroom observations, and promotion pathways.

MATFA’s primary mechanism for cross-pollination is its annual “Off the Tenure Track” retreat, which brings together VITAL faculty and institutional leaders to facilitate effective educational practice and institutional policy changes.

It also organizes more informal meetups. MATFA's work is organized into three committees: retreat committee, grant writing committee, and research writing committee.

MATFA originated out of a working group committee at Rutgers University Camden in 2019 that focused on policy changes to create an equitable and sustainable system for faculty who are off the tenure track. Seed funding for the first retreat was provided by the Rutgers Mutual Mentoring Grant Program. They have worked to get buy-in from institutional leaders at several member campuses. MATFA leaders have also engaged in intentional design to support national expansion of the Teaching Faculty Alliance.

Example Best Practices to Support VITAL Faculty

Off the Tenure Track Retreat

The annual retreat is designed to rotate between universities and to bring together VITAL faculty and institutional leaders as partners in driving institutional change. The inaugural "Off the Tenure Track" retreat was held at Rutgers-Camden in 2024, bringing together 65 faculty from nine institutions of high education. In 2025, Temple University took the reins by hosting the retreat, growing its participation with more than 100 participants from 15 unique institutions. The retreat's distinguishing feature was its programming, which included panels, activities, small talks, and workshops. The sessions focused on identifying ways and practices through which neighboring institutions have successfully created sustainable education-forward career tracks that support the university's educational mission, students', and faculty success. In addition to learning about different institutional policies and practices, participants also engaged in discussions on faculty isolation, successful strategies unique to VITAL faculty, conducting discipline-based education research, grant writing, evaluation with IRB, and stigmatization.

The retreats have been highly successful in fostering a sense of community among VITAL faculty. Evaluation data shows that 93% of attendees found the retreat activities to be effective in creating a sense of community, while 96% rated the sessions as effective in addressing their needs for career growth, networking, and advancement. These outcomes demonstrate that the retreats are not simply events, but meaningful opportunities for faculty to connect, share, and strengthen their professional identity.

These conversations have also generated concrete institutional changes. Among the participating institutions, Rutgers-Camden has improved its promotion guidance for non-tenure-track faculty, and its department of biology has adopted new criteria for teaching excellence. Additionally, collaborations between Rutgers and Temple biology faculty have produced a more equitable teaching observation process that will focus more on growth and development in teaching rather than solely on promotion. These policy innovations are direct outcomes of the comparative dialogues fostered at the retreats.

MATFA plans to host the 2026 retreat at the University of Delaware to bring the retreat to the southern end of their region while the 2027 retreat is planned for a more northern location. The retreat is free for participants.

Meetings and Meetups

The Alliance holds virtual general body meetings where they engage in organizational planning, share resources and opportunities, and discuss institutional policies. These meetings allow participants to learn more about the organization, get involved, and learn more about working conditions for VITAL faculty. The group also hosts in-person events that are more social in nature. These meetups allow members to get to know one another better

and build relationships outside of work. Given that members live in different locations in the Northeast, locations for meetups are intentionally chosen to be close to rail systems and other public transportation.

Committee Work

MATFA is organized into three committees: the annual retreat committee, a grant writing committee, and a research writing committee. Each committee includes members from different institutions. Since this is a grassroots effort and is not tied to a specific institution, MATFA is dependent on volunteers to make it successful. Focusing volunteer efforts in these three areas helps MATFA reach its goals. The grant writing committee demonstrates a focus on seeking funding for initiatives, including institutional and other independent grants. The research writing committee allows MATFA's work to be grounded in existing scholarship and data about the institutions where members work.

Example Best Practices in the Change Process

Recognizing the Importance of Cross-Institutional Engagement

MATFA emerged from a VITAL faculty working group at Rutgers University Camden that was formed in 2019. The working group recognized that supports for VITAL faculty varied across institutions, and so in 2023, when they were awarded an internal grant that funded the first annual "Off the Tenure Track" retreat, they brought together VITAL faculty and leaders from nine institutions. The engagement of participants from multiple institutions laid the foundation for the creation of MATFA as a non-hierarchical, collaborative network that encourages each other to become unified change makers.

Getting Buy-In from Institutional Leaders

A key reason that MATFA's efforts have been successful is that they have gotten institutional buy-in at the highest levels of leadership across several institutions. They have invited provosts, deans, and chancellors to participate in their programming and day-long events; they have also received tangible supports from institutions in order to host the annual retreats. The inclusion of administrative leaders in MATFA events builds understanding of VITAL faculty's working conditions that promote changes to better support VITAL faculty at the individual institutions.

Designing for Expansion

MATFA has been intentional in their planning process to create structures that are sustainable, so that it's not dependent on the vision or labor of specific individuals. Their work is also grounded in the potential for this model to be adapted by VITAL faculty in other parts of the country to be able to tap into a geographically close network of resources, support, and guidance.

Learn more about the Mid-Atlantic Teaching Faculty Alliance's efforts to support all faculty at <https://www.teachingfacultyalliance.org/>

Visit The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success for more example practices and a wide range of resources and toolkits to better support VITAL faculty at pullias.usc.edu/delphi

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