ADVANCE Projects: Reflections on the Start-up Experience

Beth Mitchneck
Lead Co-PI
University of Arizona
Reflection 1

• You will make mistakes
  – Acknowledge the mistake
  – Know that everyone makes mistakes
  – Know that you will make others
  – Fix it
  – Move on and let it go

• True external evaluator, meetings, hires
Reflection 2

• Be flexible and let it go
  – Proposed not set in stone
  – Know that conditions change
  – Do flag the change with program officer

• One group did not want to implement as proposed, continual changes in personnel
Reflection 3

• Choose a management style that works for you and your team
  – Voice versus efficiency
  – Inclusiveness versus effectiveness
  – Consensus versus multiplicity of views

• Large executive committee bi-weekly meetings became monthly co-PI meetings
Reflection 4

• Know and communicate effectively with your NSF program officer
  – What a difference!
  – Program officer = resource and ally
• Being on the same page will make the start up easier
• Opposition is hard
Reflection 5

• Communicate with other ADVANCE programs
  – Not about competition
  – But collaboration and sharing information
  – Benefit from one another’s successes

• Know you’re not crazy
Reflection 6

• Know your limits to avoid burn out
  – You can’t do it all
  – I was a co-chair of a workgroup as well as the day-to-day manager
  – I would choose one rather than try to do both
  – Began compensating my office
Reflection 7

• Know, understand, work with and appreciate other people’s limits
  – Play to people’s strengths
  – Reorganize as necessary
  – You may lose valuable people if you don’t
  – You may lose the right people if you don’t

• The team as work in progress
  – Shifting co-chairs, employees
Reflection 8

• Stay focused
• You cannot be all things to all people
  – Many new and great ideas will come up while you are ramping up
  – Remember you have a contract with NSF
• Heat about not working equally on gender, minority, disability and LGBT concerns
Reflection 9

• Your budget is not a source of funding for everyone else in the university
  – Remember and record financial commitments made to you
  – Remember and record financial commitments that you made to other people
• Push back from someone who had felt that funding was committed
• You’ve got $5M!
Final Reflections

• The frustration is worth it but let it go
• Trust yourself but get everything else in writing
• Give credit to the wrong people if it will help the effort
• Think deeply about precedent
• Make sure that you have the right people around the table
• Have fun