

Pam Eddinger, President, Bunker Hill Community College, Boston

M: Today we welcome Pam Eddinger, president of Bunker Hill Community College in Boston, Massachusetts. Bunker Hill is one of the more than 700 community colleges that have received federal grants known as TAACCCT -- T-A-A-C-C-C-T. The US Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant program. TAACCCT helps community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education expand and improve their ability to deliver education and career-training programs that can be completed in two years or less, and prepare program participants for employment in high-wage and high-skill occupations. So let's jump into the questions that we have for you today. Tell us how TAACCCT has helped Bunker Hill Community College broadly.

PAM EDDINGER: I think part of the magic of having had four rounds of TAACCCT grant is how the work of the college is enhanced on multiple levels. One of the advantages of having had four rounds of TAACCCT grant -- and we had different kinds of partnerships for each one of the four -- is that it was very organizing, geographically. For example, it led us or prompted us to look at partnerships across different states, beyond Massachusetts, into New

York, into the different areas that we wouldn't normally think about if we are really just tightly knitted in our own community. So, geographically, it's organizing, and we get to really leverage different kinds of knowledge from different places. Because we are so industrious, in the best sense of the world, all the time -- that we make use of every single dollar -- and there's so few of it -- and every single hour, sometimes we don't get the self-reflection. We don't get to stop. We don't get to think about the process by which we want to launch into that innovation. So I think the grants do that, as difficult, sometimes, they are to implement, because there are so many moving parts. It creates that space, and I really do appreciate it. So, geographically, systematically. In terms of creation space in your head, I think it's organizing in that way. So that's one level that I see. The second level that I find to be really effective -- maybe it's because Bunker Hill was at that point in time in our institutional growth -- is that it took a lot of "let's try, let's try, let's try" into the next stage of "let's pilot and let's institutionalize." It propelled the college into realizing its vision, or at least its mission of, we're going to be STEM-focused. We're going to be Allied Health-focused. Because those two are the high-

growth, middle-wage jobs that are available in New England and in the Greater Boston area. Whereas, if I didn't have those funds, would we have done it? Yeah, we would have done it, but it wouldn't be two or three at a time. It would be one at a time. And the sense of having the richness, and then having the support to innovate, was very exciting. It was extremely exciting. And all of those programs now are institutionalized. And now, in round four, the conversations about advising, social and emotional development, all of the things that we think about as tied to retention and student development and advising -- we're growing those pieces. So I see us moving from the main of the academic environment and building out those programs. Now we're building out the programs that have to do with student development and student retention. And for community colleges, those two pieces really are two out of the three legs that support us. The last leg, of course, is going to be the financial. (laughs) The students kind of have to be able to afford to come to college, to get those pieces that are programming and student support. But it's brought us a long way.

M: How has the TAACCCT grant changed the role of Bunker Hill in the larger education landscape?

PAM EDDINGER: What the TAACCCT grant did, going backwards into K-12, is to begin to build the pathway from K-12. Because, in order for us to recruit for these programs that we're building in Allied Health or in STEM, we had to go back to our K-12 partners and say, "Hey, there's an entry point here. We can receive your students over the summer so they can move into these TAACCCT-grant programs. So when the TAACCCT grants came into place, what grew in front of that were things like the STEM Starter Academy that Massachusetts started funding, that are workshops and developmental-math clusters that prep students to go into the programs that we're building for TAACCCT. But we're building on the far end of the TAACCCT grant, and I think the employers are part of it. You can either go into a career or you can transfer. So it made the student preparation for transfer, I think, much more vibrant. And I think a lot of the four-year colleges are seeing that. And because we have to do that, encapsulate at work, we're getting better at saying to our K-12 partners, "Let's align our curriculum so that that transition isn't so hard." Or we're saying to the four-year partners, "That's a better [articulation, just?] to make sure all the courses transfer somehow." So it triggers other questions that are much more system-wide questions.

M: How do TAACCCT grants bring education and workforce closer together?

PAM EDDINGER: Right, so, we don't want to just build three programs out of TAACCCT. We really want to kick-start the conversation of what is K-16 like? One of the magical things about these kinds of conversations is that it stops the very, very silver-bullet-oriented conversations of, "If you take these three courses, you'll get a job and you'll be OK for life." (pause) I rue the day that somebody thought about workforce development as a one-and-done. And I think the wonders about the TAACCCT grant is that it triggers those questions about how our workforce can develop and can evolve. And it's very affirming that we're not dividing the liberal-arts students from the workforce-development students, because they're really a nice combination of both.

M: What have you learned in the process of implementing TAACCCT?

PAM EDDINGER: A lot of the sparks were here on campus already. And so, that's part one. Part two is that the TAACCCT grant came at the right time. It was fuel for the fire. So, I already had people talking about an LPN program or a Pharmacy Tech program, or the IT folks have always been scheming. (laughter) They're wonderful that way. They had

a million things that they want to try, and the TAACCCT grant -- the money, the impetus, and, really, the excitement -- came at the right time. And the third is really allowing it to develop. And it was the right time. It was the right timing. But then, I also think that it was also the right timing for a lot of colleges who were getting TAACCCT grants, because it had been such a long time since we had a large tranche of money. So folks were ready. Now we're in a different stage, I think. Now we know what to do with the money. If another couple of million, 10, 15, 20, 50 million dollars comes to us, we'll immediately know what we need to do next, because we are now in that growth mode.

M: How are the benefits of TAACCCT sustained in the long run?

PAM EDDINGER: The sustainability, I think, is built-in now, because all of these programs are part of our operating budget. The faculty, they're embedded into our operating budget. It's going to take time to grow the numbers in a class, and I think that really is our next piece that we need to pay attention to. We have two or three classes of the Pharmacy Tech students growing already. We're beginning to get more internship sites. I know that, at some point, I'm going to need more room. (laughter) I'm going to need additional faculty. And that's true. I

mean, it's scaling up within the program, but it's also growing the relationships. Now I need to begin building the pathway from the high schools into these programs. We're taking some of the IT programs that we built using TAACCCT-grant money, and adopting it for high-school curriculum that will bear college credit. So those students, once they are done, with close to 30 credits at high-school graduation, can just come to us for a year in the IT programs that are built with TAACCCT money, and then they can move on to a four-year college or move out to get a job. So we're talking about a great deal of compression and preparation. So it's building that pipeline. One of the hardest things that we're going to have to keep up is actually building industry relationships, because those can easily fall through the cracks. But when you look at industry, your CEOs move all the time. Which means the amount of time that I have to spend out in the community, or our faculty, or our deans -- if we want to grow the programs -- will have to increase. I'm out of the office probably about 70 percent of the time, building those kinds of relationships, but it's paid off because the reputation of the college grows those relationships. It's the difference between looking at startup costs and maintenance costs. So, what the TAACCCT grant has done for us is, it's

given us the government equivalence of venture capital.

(laughs) Would we have developed those programs anyway?

Yeah, but it would have taken a lot longer. I know what my requirements are to get that startup going. I know what startup in a box looks like. And unless I can meet those demands, I'm not going to start a program. Rather, I meet those demands by making sure that I have enough in my general budget, or if there's pilot money from somewhere, or if it's TAACCCT money. I know that it's going to take me this much money to get it started. And I know then, once I get it started, the possibility of me maintaining it as an institutional project will be probably about 90 percent. And I think that every college has a similar checklist, and their presidents probably have it in their heads, that to start a program -- here are the five key factors that you have to have to start that program.

You've got to have demand. You've got have a partner in industry. You've got to have the faculty to write your curriculum. And you've got have a good project manager.

M: As a leader and college president, what has TAACCCT taught you?

PAM EDDINGER: Trust your faculty. If I were to give away everything else in a project, the one thing that I would want to have in front of me is to have a committed faculty

member who's excited. Without that, everything else falls apart. I know I talked a lot about money and planning and all of that, but, ultimately, it comes back to that. It's that interaction between the faculty and the student. And that makes the program live. Because a lot of grant administration is building systems to be accountable, sometimes we get so wrapped up in the structure of the grant that we forget that there's a heart to the grant. And I know I do. Once in a while, I just get wrapped up in all of these little papers and grids and stuff that I have to fill out. And you sort of have to stand outside of yourself to say it is about the paperwork, but it's not about the paperwork. (laughter) It is about the student who has learned something and is now in a different place. And I think the relationship between TAACCCT and community college is in DNA of the grant. If we're talking about economic recovery, which was the original foundational idea of this grant, community colleges are where transformation happens. It's a very different function of the community college, but it's not the function that everybody always talks about and points to. It is not just workforce development. It is really human-potential development, in the most dramatic way. So the TAACCCT grants really acknowledge that. It acknowledges the work piece, of

course. Everybody has to work. But it also sort of validates the belief in talent; in talent that's to be developed; in the longevity of that development. And for me, there are not very many places in the world that want to put 50, 60, 70 million dollars on the table and say, "You go develop human potential." (laughter) So, yeah, it's been a really joyful process. And it's taught me a great deal of patience.

M: Thank you, Pam Eddinger, president of Bunker Hill Community College in Boston. Stay tuned for additional conversations about the impact of TAACCCT with community-college presidents in this podcast series. The Labor Department implements the TAACCCT program in partnership with the Department of Education. One-point-nine billion dollars in TAACCCT grants were awarded under the TAACCCT program. For more information, visit TAACCCT.org.