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# Higher Education Sustainability:
## What Colleges and Universities that Serve Low-Income Students Should Be Considering Before It Is Too Late!

**John MacIntosh**, Lead, SeaChange Capital Partners
**Bassam M. Deeb, Ph.D.**, President, Trocaire College (NY)

March 20, 2024, at 3:00–4:00 pm Eastern in Zoom

*"From our perspective, the other party has waited to the point that they have too little run room for us to think about how to partner most creatively. We aren't up for a wind sprint and don't feel that much can come out of being in a pressure cooker situation."*

College President 2/2024

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# The Transformational Partnerships Fund

- Supports institutions of higher education interested in exploring partnerships that could fundamentally improve how they operate and serve students — especially students of color, students from low-income families, and other underserved populations.

- Partnerships include: shared services, joint academic offerings; full or partial mergers;  preferred and well-funded teachouts.

- TPF provides a safe space for discussion and deliberation, referrals (independent), and grants of up to $100,000 (and seed grants of $10,000 to help single institutions get organized)

- Established by SeaChange (a nonprofit) and the ECMC Foundation with additional support from Ascendium Education Group, The Kresge Foundation, and the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation.

# Observations from the Front Line

- Growing recognition of the role of partnerships in response to demographic, market, and technological forces.

- 146 inquiries/303 institutions, 31 grants (103 institutions) totaling $1.8 million covering public/private, 2-year/4-year, and multiple geographies.

- Range of partnerships – It's not all about mergers.

- The importance of a safe space early in the process.

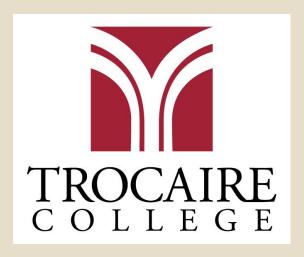- TPF grants can *sometimes* help motivate action and generate enthusiasm.

# Sample Grants

- Southern New Hampshire/ Urban College

- Trocaire / Medaille

- Villanova/ Cabrini

- Fort Hays/ North Central KS/ Northwest Technical KS

- Lewis / St. Augustine

- Presentation College (closure)

- Pennsylvania College of Fine Arts – ???

# Observations from the Front Line (con't)

- Degree of difficult is very high given multiple stakeholders (students, alums, faculty, administration, trustees, community, regulators), their level of commitment/passion, the long gestation period, and ethical issues

- Success factors: start early, courage/will/bravery on *both* sides, focus on mission/students, trust and coordination between trustees and president; thoughtful use of advisers; and communications.

- A small number of "key" issues

- As the number of partnerships grows, the exploration process will be increasingly normalized, and institutions can learn from their peers.

# An Institutional Perspective

Bassam M. Deeb, Ph.D.
President

# Sustainability Question

▶ Begin with an internal, honest, confidential, and data driven discussion about the state of the institution that is strictly at the Board–President level.

▶ Identify threats (internal or external) to the institution.

▶ Boards should designate a small working group to serve as thought partner to the President and as a bridge to the full board.

▶ Presidents need to have courage to take risks and go beyond personal gain/loss.

# Options

- Colleges and Universities often speak of collaboration as a way to ensure success.
- Boards and Presidents need to clearly and concisely define collaboration (i.e. merger, acquisition, integration, consolidation, strategic partnership, strategic alliance, shared services…..).
- Definition should take into consideration willingness and capacity of the institution to execute, state and other regulatory agencies in your locale, accreditation requirements, US Department of Education, etc.

# The next set of steps

- Internal game plan outlined and agreed to by Board and President
- Exploration phase
  - This could take many forms and may or may not involve third party providers.
  - Requires open dialogue between Presidents of interested institutions.
- Selection phase
- Execution phase

# Selection Phase

▸ After the exploration phase, how will your college or university narrow down and determine validity of interest?

◦ Financial elements
◦ Mission and value proposition
◦ Student profile
◦ Legacy of engaged institutions

# Execution Phase

▸ Once a decision is made to move forward:

◦ Who will be part of the working team?
◦ What approvals will be required?
◦ What timelines will need to be followed?
◦ What is the sequence of approval required?
◦ What is the communication plan – especially how will you handle leaks or loss of confidentiality in the process?

# In retrospect

- How will you determine that the project is on track?
- What exit strategy (ies) do you build in any collaborative venture?
- Are you willing to walk away?

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