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Sustainability for ATE Projects

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Who We Are

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- **Ithaka S+R** is a research and consulting service that focuses on the transformation of scholarship and teaching in an online environment, with the goal of identifying the critical issues facing our community and acting as a catalyst for change.
 - Research
 - Consulting

The Sustainability Problem

We have seen:

Educational projects returning to funding agencies for additional grants to support core operations once a project is up and running

Funding agencies seeking ways to encourage projects to become sustainable after the grant period

Project leaders seeking ways to support the resources they have developed after the grant ends



Our work has addressed

Mindsets

Business Models

Strategies

Practices



Our definition, so far:

For those projects *that will require ongoing support*, ‘sustainability’ is the ability to generate or gain access to the resources—financial or otherwise—needed to protect and increase the value of the content or service for those who use it.



There is no single ‘right’ sustainability model

Each depends on the circumstances and aspirations of the people and projects involved.

Experimentation will be necessary to see which models work best.

There is no SUSTAIN-O-MATIC...



But there are some basic principles...

- It's not just about the money
- It's not just about 'getting by'
- It's all about identifying value to users...
- ...and knowing that the particular value-to-stakeholder equation is almost certain to change over time...



Case Studies in Sustainability

- Major support from the JISC-led Strategic Content Alliance; additional funding from NEH and NSF in 2009
- 12 case studies
- Diversity of geography, disciplines, project type, institutional home
- **How did project leaders define and address their post-grant sustainability goals?**



What did we find? Plenty of challenges

MINDSETS. Making the switch from a funded “project” to an entrepreneurial “ongoing enterprise” is one of the most difficult but important challenges.

COSTS. Hidden cost contributions can obscure the real costs of operating a resource. Leaders must have a clear understanding of total project costs.

REVENUE. Reliance on a single revenue source can put projects at risk. Hybrid business models and a portfolio of sustainability strategies is most effective.



Five Things Sustainable Projects Do

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Empower leadership to define the mission and take action

Create a strong value proposition

Creatively manage costs

Cultivate diverse sources of revenue

Establish realistic goals and a system of accountability





Audience

CASE STUDY: eBird

Crowd-sourced database of bird observations

Initial version of the project was aimed at creating valuable data for ornithologists

A shift to user-focused strategy led to major changes and steep increase in popularity of site

The screenshot shows the eBird homepage. At the top, there's a banner featuring three birds (a Vireo, a Kingbird, and a Red-tailed Hawk) with the text "eBird" and "Wings across the Americas". Below the banner is a navigation bar with links: Home, About eBird, Submit Observations, View and Explore Data, and My eBird. There are also links for "Sign In" and "Register as a New User", and a "Translate to" dropdown with options for English, Español, and Français. To the right, there's a "Support eBird" section with a "Donate Now" button, and logos for The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon. The main content area features a "Welcome to eBird" message and a "eBird News and Features" section. The news section highlights "eBird Version 3 Launched" on October 07, 2011, with a detailed description of the changes made.

Lessons Learned: Sources of Support

A sustainable model may include a variety of types of support, financial and non-financial

Some diversity of sources is good... but reliability trumps diversity.

Some good examples of using private partnerships to reach mission and/or revenue goals

And a willingness to keep trying new approaches



Partners

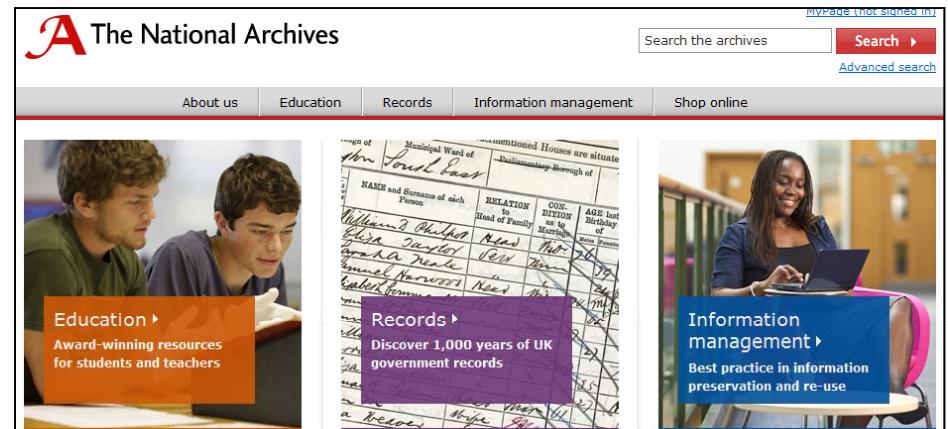


CASE STUDY: The National Archives (UK)

**Commercial partners bid
to digitize series that
are pre-selected and
bundled by TNA staff**

**TNA staff choose vendor
and negotiate terms**

**Huge cost savings and
some revenue,
But some constraints...**



Licensed Internet
Associates Program

Lessons Learned: Partnerships

Can take many forms, from a “partnership of equals” to more of a vendor-client relationship

When partner roles are well articulated, strategic partnerships can help maximize reach and innovate without requiring major investment

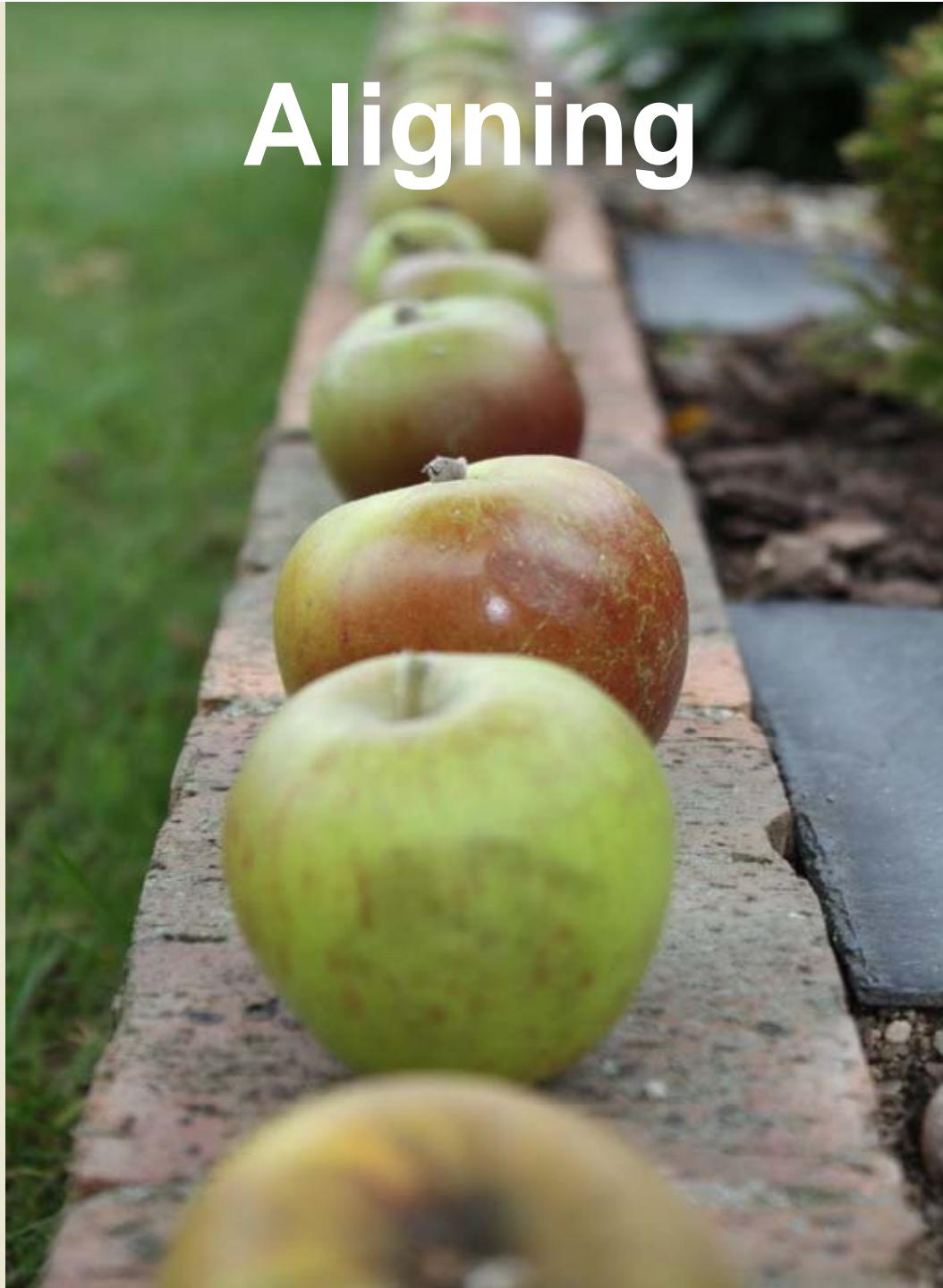
However...

Must carefully balance benefits and constraints

If a partner is not able to contribute as planned, need to have a backup



Aligning



Aligning with Host Institution

Host support played a bigger role than before in many of the places we studied:

- When grants stopped or slowed
- When a business plan to generate revenue did not reach targets
- When changes to a government funding formula reduced expected levels of support

Lessons Learned: Aligning With the Host

- Focus on activities that directly support host's mission
- Develop plan to communicate value to institutional administrators
- Two places even changed their names to more clearly express their mission:

Center for Computing in the Humanities became:

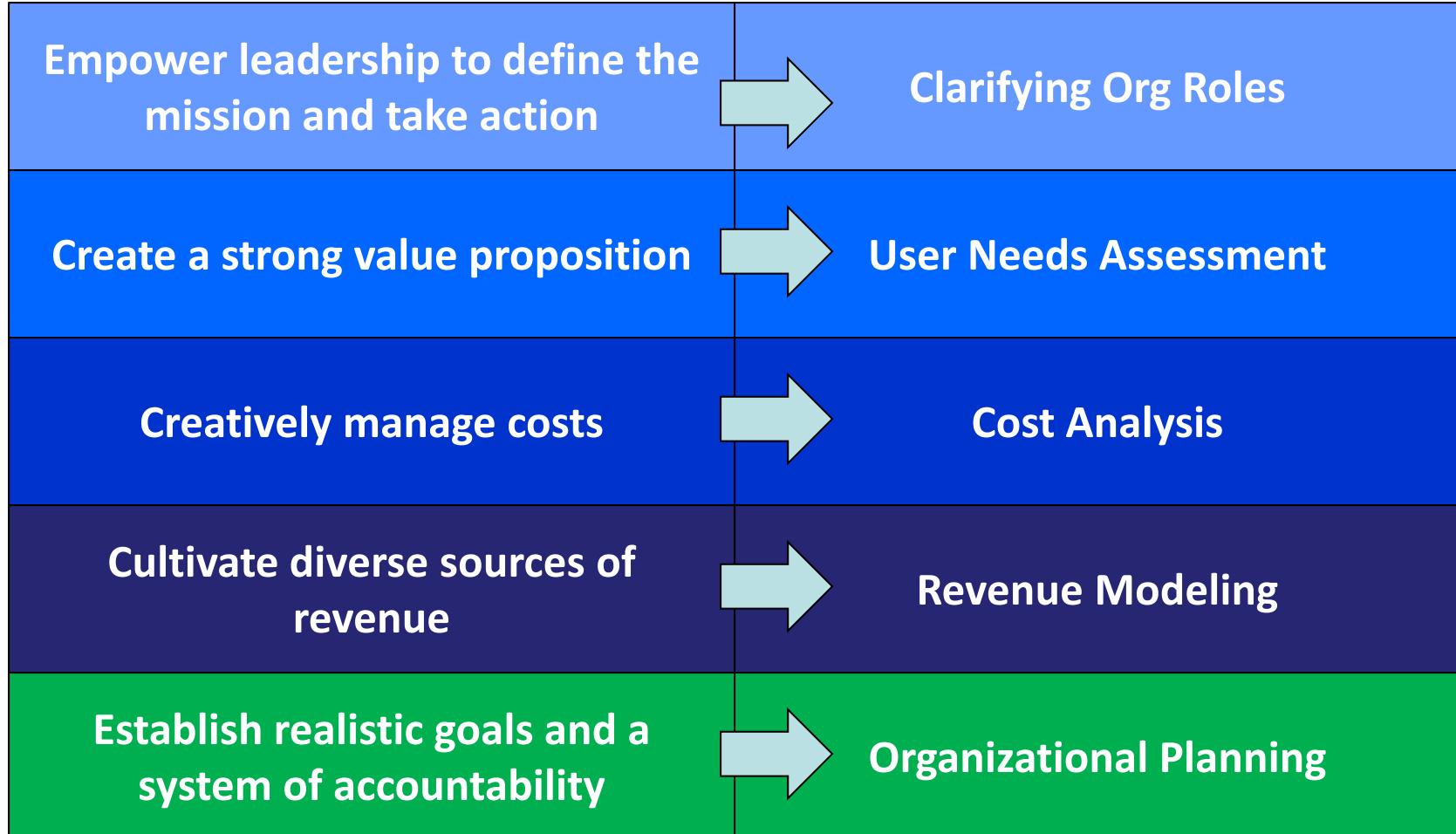
Department of Digital Humanities

BOPCRIS, a digitization center, became:

The University of Southampton Library Digitisation Unit



Great examples. Now how do we get there?



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Framework for Post-Grant Sustainability Planning

Developing a plan for post-grant sustainability

- 1. Describe the post-grant impact you want**
- 2. Set specific goals for each element you will need to sustain to achieve this**
- 3. Identify activities that will be needed to achieve these goals**
- 4. Determine the costs of these activities**
- 5. Build a revenue plan to obtain financial and other resources needed to support ongoing activities**



Framework for Post-Grant Sustainability Planning

	Content & Curriculum	Events	Outreach & Audience	Technical & Access Needs	Staffing	Other
Set Goals <i>To achieve post-grant impact, what must be sustained?</i>	Will you need to develop and update content and/or curriculum?	Will you need to hold events post grants?	What outreach activities must continue; to whom will they be directed?	Will the project's website continue? Will online resources need storage? Archiving?	Who is needed to maintain post grant activities?	Are there other components critical to post-grant impact?
Identify Activities <i>What ongoing activities will be needed to accomplish the goals above?</i>	Labor (of staff or volunteers) in developing or editing content.	Event planning and execution.	Development and execution of outreach plan.	Maintaining and updating software; labor of staff; hardware updates	Succession planning for leadership; staff training & retention, volunteers as needed.	What ongoing activities are needed to accomplish the other components listed above?
Determine Costs <i>What resources will be required to support activities?</i>	Included here should be direct costs as well as needs for non-financial resources, including volunteer labor and in-kind services.					
Build Revenue Plan <i>Where will project obtain resources needed to cover costs?</i>	Included here should be a plan addressing all possible sources of revenue, including direct and indirect support from host institutions, potential earned income, and additional grants, donations, or endowment payouts.					

*This chart is adapted with kind permission from the Ithaka S&R *Framework for Post-Grant Sustainability Planning*.

12 Case Studies, Many Lessons

For an “index” of the topics covered in the 12 case studies and case study updates, check out our

BRIEFING PAPER
on
www.ithaka.org

Briefing Paper

Revenue, Recession, Reliance: Revisiting the SCA/Ithaka S+R Case Studies in Sustainability

2011 Case Study Updates

Produced and funded by the Strategic Content Alliance

You've received a grant and made the case to your organisation to digitise content or otherwise develop an online resource. Your team executes the plan to the letter, and the result is a thing of beauty. What happens next?

Those who manage digital resources in the education, research and cultural heritage sectors face considerable challenges. The projects they create require ongoing support, development and promotion in order to find an audience and achieve the desired impact. How are projects developing strategies to meet these ongoing needs once their start-up funding ends?

In 2009, the Strategic Content Alliance (SCA) commissioned Ithaka S+R to investigate emergent internet business models for digital resources, culminating in twelve detailed case studies and the summary report *Sustaining Digital Resources: An On-the-Ground View of Projects Today*. Two years later, after the recession and many serious budget cuts, how are these projects faring? The SCA funded Ithaka S+R to revisit all twelve studies to see how their sustainability models have held up over the past two years. The report, *Revenue, Recession, Reliance: Revisiting the SCA/Ithaka S+R Case Studies in Sustainability*, provides a concise summary of the findings.

This paper highlights key factors for sustainability outlined in the report and suggests the case studies that best illustrate the successes and challenges of developing a sustainable digital resource, drawing on the experiences of those who have been there.

Who is this briefing paper for?

- Project leaders of content-based digital resources
- Faculty members, researchers, staff or others at universities, research and cultural institutions leading digital content-based projects
- Administrators at institutions involved in managing digital resources
- Those who fund or otherwise support digital resources

Why is sustainability planning important?

- The initial build is just the beginning! Ongoing digital resources take ongoing time and effort.
- Grants are important, but may be too fickle to count on in the long run. Conceiving of a longer-range plan for support is vital.
- Users will expect content to be current and timely; stale content and old links are warning signs that a resource may be dead or dying.

Five Key Factors for Sustainability

Leaders of digital projects may face a monumental challenge: trying to collect, edit and disseminate high-quality digital content while operating on a limited budget. Five key factors are essential for the ongoing success and sustainability of digital initiatives in not-for-profit sectors: 1) dedicated and entrepreneurial leadership; 2) a strong value proposition; 3) minimizing direct costs; 4) reliable revenue sources; and 5) accountability and metrics for success. Our case studies provide some examples of how project leaders are sustaining their projects for the long term.



Thank you.

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ATE Targeted Research Report

Wayne Welch, University of Minnesota (ret.)

Assessing the
Sustainability of the
Advanced Technological
Education (ATE) Program

(November 2011)

Purposes of this presentation

1. Explain how we measured sustainability.
2. Describe what we learned.

Background

NSF/ATE Umbrella grant, 2008

University of Colorado

Liesel Ritchie, PI

One of nine projects

Wayne Welch, Co-PI

University of Minnesota, Rainbow Research, Inc.

Advisory Committee: 3 ATE PIs, 3 test experts

How we measured sustainability

1. Identify what is to be measured
2. Define the elements
3. Develop measures
4. Review and pilot test
5. Select population
6. Distribute and follow-up
7. Process and check data
8. Analyze
9. Report

1. Identify what is to be measured

- The **sustainability** of **things** that remain in place after ATE grant funding ends
- **Sustainability**: *continuation or persistence*
- **Things**: accomplishments, activities, changes, materials, graduates

2. Define the elements

Literature review

Advisory committee

Interviews

WMU survey

Define the Elements: WMU Survey

WMU Annual Survey Question (2008)

“Imagine your institution in the future,
perhaps 3 years after the ATE grant has
ended: What things started during the
grant will be or are still in place?”

Define the Elements: PI statements

“Teaching methods adapted by our faculty as part of ATE will continue to be used.”

“Changes made in our technological education program will keep going after our current grant ends.”

“The recruitment efforts developed through the grant will be incorporated into the college’s general recruitment activities.”

Define Elements: Statements were made about these components

- Programs
- Collaborations
- Educational Materials
- Faculty
- Facilities
- Students
- Institution
- Revenue

Develop measures: Quoted statements

Indicate the extent to which you Disagree or Agree ...

“Changes made in our technological education program will continue after our ATE grant has ended.” (Circle one)

AA Strongly Agree

A Agree

U Uncertain

D Disagree

DD Strongly Disagree

NA Not Applicable

Review and Pilot Test

- First draft 65 statements
- Expert review 35 statements
- PI review 28 statements
- Final version 23 items (10 minutes)
- Named “Peer-Generated Likert Items”

Select Appropriate Population

- Active grants at least one year old
 - Grants expired between 2007 and 2009
 - Remove duplicates, planning grants, etc.
-
- Final population: 261 projects and centers

Mail Survey and Conduct Follow-Ups

- Mailed initial packet
- First follow-up: Reminder letter
- Second follow-up: Reminder e-mail
- Third follow-up: Re-mailed packet

(Approximately two weeks between contacts)

Process and check data for accuracy

- Received 212 completed surveys
- Response rate of 81.2%
- Conducted a nonresponse bias study:
Found no evidence that respondents
differed from nonrespondents

What we learned

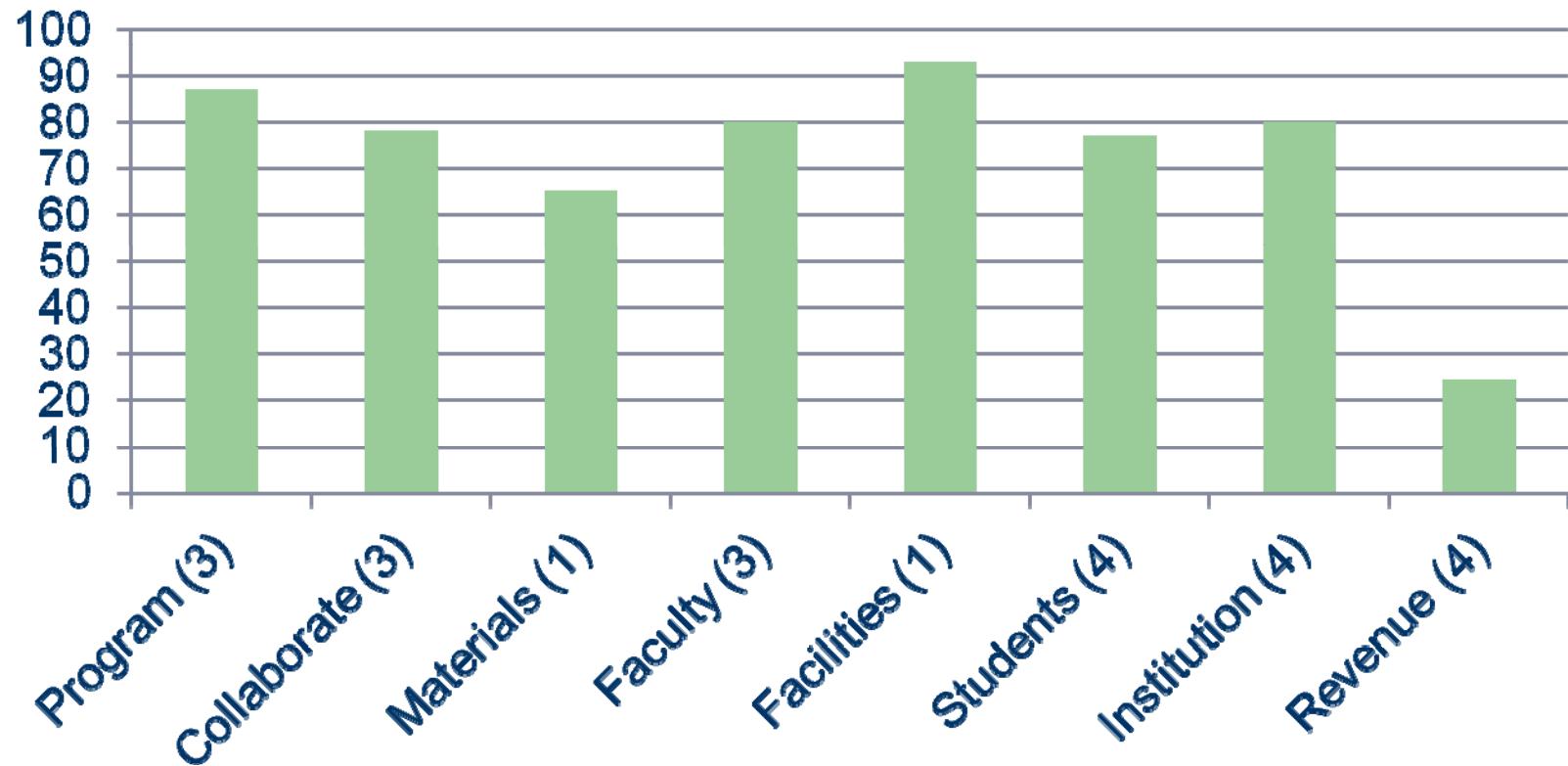
- Computed percent Strongly Agree and Agree for positively stated items
- Example: “*Changes made in our technological education program will keep going after our current grant ends.*”
- 90.9 % Agreed or Strongly Agreed

What we learned

- Computed percent Strongly Disagree and Disagree for negatively stated items
- Example: “*Most of the programs and activities started during our ATE grant will come to an end when our NSF funding stops.*”
- 78.2 % Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed

Mean % affirmation by element

(N of statements per element in parentheses)



What we learned

- ATE PIs will provide research information
- Evidence of considerable sustainability
- Difficult of obtain non-NSF revenue
- Focus on expected success areas
- Have reasonable expectations

Areas of further study

- Yea-saying response bias
- Handling “Not Applicable” responses
- Additional validation evidence
- Using survey as a sustainability check list

Concluding Remarks

- Described method to measure sustainability
 - Peer-Generated Likert Items
 - Presented evidence of ATE sustainability
- Working on new grant for continued research
 - Group comparisons
 - Predictor variables
 - Scale scores
 - Survey validation

Want more information?

- Welch Report 1: The Sustainability of ATE Program. Available at these web sites.
- <http://evalu-ate.org/>
- <http://www.colorado.edu/ibs/decaproject/>

Questions



- *Does this information match your experiences?*
- *What problems have you encountered in sustaining your grant?*