



EVALUATION OF THE 100,000 STRONG IN THE AMERICAS INNOVATION FUND

ANALYZING THE INNOVATION FUND'S IMPACT THROUGH INTERNATIONAL STUDENT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

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Bereket Abera, Ashton Bitton, Akira Kawasaki, and Adrienne Todela



DISCLAIMER

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Partners of the Americas, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the United States Department of State, or the United States Government.

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ACRONYMS

DOS	United States Department of State
HEI	Higher Education Institution
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
NAFSA	NAFSA: Association of International Educators
POA	Partners of the Americas
RFP	Request for proposal
SENA	Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje
US	United States

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

This evaluation seeks to determine the extent of which completed workforce development exchange programs made possible by the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund (hereafter the Innovation Fund) have prepared program participants for the global workforce. This evaluation also seeks to understand the factors which have supported or hindered the implementation of these programs. These findings will thereby identify and inform Partners of the Americas (POA) of ways in which their technical assistance might be strategically focused to support increased Higher Education Institution (HEI) collaboration and student engagement for future Innovation Fund grant awardees.

This evaluation is expected to be of use to HEIs currently implementing or hoping to implement workforce development exchange programming, POA to inform future technical assistance, corporations or governing bodies interested in pursuing public-private partnerships, and other bilateral and regional partners and stakeholders involved in international workforce development exchanges.

The Evaluation Team's primary research questions for this program effectiveness evaluation are:

1. To what extent have completed Innovation Fund programs prepared students for the global workforce?
2. What specific factors helped or hindered the achievement of expected results?
3. What areas for improvement exist and adjustments are required to ensure effectiveness in achieving expected results for future Innovation Fund programs?

EVALUATION DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION METHODS, ANALYSIS, AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The Evaluation Team used three types of data collection methods:

1. **Desk Study.** The Evaluation Team reviewed documentation pertaining to Innovation Fund programs completed between January 2014 and December 2017 including (1) final reports from HEIs, (2) previous Innovation Fund evaluations, and (3) POA monitoring and evaluation tools.
2. **Survey.** The Evaluation Team administered one quantitative questionnaire via Survey Monkey to Innovation Fund administrators and faculty in the US and LAC to gauge their perceptions of the impact of the Innovation Fund. The Evaluation Team gathered 25 responses which informed the team's KII protocols.
3. **Key Informant Interviews.** The Evaluation Team identified and interviewed 55 Innovation Fund recipients and program participants including 42 HEI administrative staff and faculty and 13 student participants in-person in Wisconsin and Illinois, US and Mexico City, Mexico and over Skype throughout the Americas. KIIs were conducted using a semi-structured interview format.

The Evaluation Team used mixed methods research and analysis when identifying themes and patterns in the qualitative and quantitative data collected during the study. Additionally, the team drew on the training of its team members in qualitative data collection and analysis to inform the Evaluation Team's transcribing and coding methodology.

The following limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting the Evaluation Team's analysis:

- **The difficulty of contacting direct beneficiaries and the limitations of program record-keeping.** Although the Evaluation Team spoke with 13 Innovation Fund student participants regarding their experience and impact from their Innovation Fund program, most reports of impact were through administrators and faculty on behalf of their participants.
- **Absence of a baseline against which progress can be measured.** No prior evaluations have been conducted to assess the overarching impact of Innovation Fund programs on students.
- **Social desirability bias.** Although the Evaluation Team made it clear this was an independent, external evaluation, some interview participants were still under the impression that this was an internal evaluation. Thus, administrators and faculty may have presented their Innovation Fund program outcomes and their participant's experiences to represent their institutional interest in being awarded future Innovation Fund grants.

FINDINGS

Key Finding 1: The Innovation Fund is used for differing strategic purposes

Administrators and faculty indicated utilizing their Innovation Fund grant for differing purposes, ultimately to help HEIs achieve their strategic goals for study abroad. Administrators and faculty recognized the following four primary roles in which the Innovation Fund grant was used: (1) as a seed fund for new program ideas, (2) as a scale up for existing programs, (3) as a way to increase the HEI's culture of internationalization, and (4) to establish new partnerships. These roles helped HEIs succeed in achieving their strategic goals, which in turn had direct benefits for students through the implementation of educational programs.

Key Finding 2: Shared academic values, similar administrative capabilities, and longer relationships create stronger HEI partnerships

HEI partnership strength was found to be a decisive catalyst to Innovation Fund programs achieving their expected outcomes and expanding international student mobility in higher education. Strong institutional partnerships lead to effective program design and implementation which benefits learning outcomes for student participants. While having shared academic values is foundational for strong HEI partnerships, having the same program administration capabilities further bolsters the likelihood of a sustained partnership. Additionally, these two elements were unanimously present in previously established, long-standing institutional partnerships, contributing to a higher level of program effectiveness as opposed to that seen by HEIs in newer partnerships.

Key Finding 3: Institutional buy-in of Innovation Fund programs is crucial to program sustainability

The Evaluation Team found institutional buy-in to be a major contributor not only to HEI partnership sustainability, but to Innovation Fund student mobility programs. Sustained student mobility programs post-Innovation Fund grant period means more students will acquire knowledge and skills appropriate for the global workforce, snowballing the Innovation Fund's intended impact. HEI partnerships with well-established institutional buy-in for international student mobility programs operated efficiently throughout the grant period as opposed to those who did not have strong institutional buy-in. Additionally, the Innovation Fund application process increased communication and collaboration between institutional departments, particularly academic and international student mobility teams, which was a phenomenon for several HEIs. Ultimately, all administrators and faculty pointed toward institutional allies and faculty champions as being critical to program sustainability.

Key Finding 4: Financial support from the Innovation Fund grant increases student access to study abroad

Administrators and faculty reported financial support from the Innovation Fund grant as a means by which increased student recruitment was made possible through student incentives, such as scholarships. This in turn increased the diversity of Innovation Fund program participants, allowing a number of minority students to study abroad for the first time. Many administrators and faculty regarded increased student diversity as playing a major role in making student exchanges impactful. Finally, the hard skill-specific grant rounds of the Innovation Fund created opportunities for study abroad to previously underserved disciplines, such as industrial engineering.

Key Finding 5: Student barriers to study abroad still remain

Despite the Innovation Fund's ability to break down barriers to study abroad for many students, the Evaluation Team identified some barriers that remain. Some of these barriers could be addressed by the Innovation Fund, and some may be outside of its scope. Commonly, an HEI's lack of study abroad culture, or integration of study abroad programs with academic programs, or students' lack of financial resources are major barriers for most HEIs. Additionally, students may have existing commitments outside of school which act as barriers to study abroad, such as household responsibilities or a job. The Evaluation Team found this was particularly the case for students attending community and technical colleges.

Key Finding 6: The Innovation Fund strengthens the global workforce

The Evaluation Team found that Innovation Fund student participants came away from their programs with hard and soft skills that prepared them for the global workforce. This was achieved in various ways including (1) intercultural perspectives gained by students, (2) Innovation Fund-related outputs produced by students, and (3) the indication that students' continuing studies and/or career choice was influenced as a direct result of their participation in the Innovation Fund.

CONCLUSION

The Innovation Fund has managed to prepare students for the global workforce through its distribution of small grants and relationship- and capacity-building activities targeted at HEIs. As was found and discussed in previous evaluations conducted on the Innovation Fund, the use of the Innovation Fund's small grants leverages HEI systems to support international workforce and exchange programs for post-secondary students throughout the Western Hemisphere. The Evaluation Team confirmed and built upon these findings by identifying the ways in which leveraging these HEI systems contributed to the program's impact of preparing students for the global workforce, as follows:

- **Hard and soft skills linked to workforce outcomes.** Innovation Fund participants gained hard skills through practical engineering, health, and nutrition projects, among others. These hard skill-oriented projects also contributed to student participants gaining soft skills such as leadership, patience, teamwork, and interpersonal skills. Some participants entered the workforce as a direct outcome of their Innovation Fund program participation.
- **Increased diversity and inclusion among program participants.** Students in disciplines previously underserved by international exchange programs, such as industrial engineering, were able to participate in an exchange program due to the Innovation Fund's hard skills emphasis. Additionally, new student populations and nontraditional students were able to participate in

exchange programs due to HEI administrators and faculty using Innovation Fund money to provide scholarships for their program participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To respond to the needs of Innovation Fund grant awardees through the following recommendations, the Evaluation Team recommends increasing POA's personnel and administrative resources. The Evaluation Team recommends the following adjustments and activities to be implemented by Innovation Fund staff at POA to better ensure the intended Innovation Fund impact of preparing students for the global workforce is achieved.

Recommendation 1: Adjust and scale up modes of connecting HEIs

Suggested actionable measures:

1. Send invitations to conferences and Innovation Fund award ceremonies as soon as possible in advance.
2. Host a knowledge-sharing forum for all participating HEIs.
3. Offer a small start-up stipend for HEI administrators and faculty to seek out partners in-person.

Recommendation 2: Develop and conduct targeted capacity-building trainings

Suggested actionable measures:

1. Design, conduct, record, and distribute a workshop with advice on how to find a sustainable HEI partner match.
2. Design and host a workshop, webinar, or manual with Innovation Fund administrative guidance, including cost-share guidance, for HEI administrators and faculty.
3. Design and conduct a workshop to train administrators and/or faculty how to teach students to translate their Innovation Fund experience in the global workforce.

Recommendation 3: Focus on garnering institutional buy-in

Suggested actionable measures:

1. Reassess RFP application deadlines.
2. Continue to give feedback on completed Innovation Fund programs.
3. Design, record, and distribute a learning module series on internationalizing HEIs and study abroad offices.

INTRODUCTION

The 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative was launched by the Bureau of the Western Hemisphere Affairs at the US Department of State (DOS) with the goal of increasing the annual number of students to and from the United States (US) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) to 100,000. To reach this goal, higher education institutions (HEI), such as colleges and universities, make education abroad accessible for all students, regardless of their major, socio-economic status, or the type of HEI in which they are enrolled, through small grants under the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund (hereafter the Innovation Fund). The Innovation Fund is a public-private sector collaboration between the DOS, POA, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, US embassies, multinational corporations, and foundations.

Through this dynamic collaborative effort, Innovation Fund grants fuel strategic new partnerships among HEIs to catalyze innovative and sustainable student exchanges and training programs with hard skills emphases. Since its inception in January 2014, Innovation Fund grants have been building institutional capacity, increasing student mobility within the Americas, and enhancing regional education cooperation and competitiveness, all in the aim to build a hemisphere of students ready to compete and thrive in the 21st century workforce. As of April 2019, 198 Innovation Fund grants have been awarded to teams of 362 HEIs from 25 countries in the Western Hemisphere and 42 US states.

Now after five years of implementation, POA has contracted with the Evaluation Team to complete a program effectiveness evaluation of the Innovation Fund by looking at HEI programming that has been made possible by Innovation Fund grants thus far. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the results of the Evaluation Team's research and findings. The remainder of the report is organized as follows:

- The remainder of this section describes the purpose, key questions of the evaluation, and background of the Innovation Fund;
- Section 2 presents the Evaluation Team's findings, analysis, and conclusions; and
- Section 3 describes the Evaluation Team's recommendations for future programming.

EVALUATION PURPOSE

This evaluation seeks to determine the extent of which completed workforce development exchange programs made possible by the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund (hereafter the Innovation Fund) have prepared program participants for the global workforce. This evaluation also seeks to understand the factors which have supported or hindered the implementation of these programs. These findings will thereby identify and inform Partners of the Americas (POA) of ways in which their technical assistance might be strategically focused to support increased Higher Education Institution (HEI) collaboration and student engagement for future Innovation Fund grant awardees.

The goals of this Innovation Fund program effectiveness evaluation are as follows:

1. To gain a greater understanding Innovation Fund program context and assess the results, strengths, and weaknesses of the program;
2. To inform ways in which POA can provide targeted technical assistance to HEIs to help address barriers to student engagement in Innovation Fund study abroad programs;
3. To identify programs that result in increased bi-directional collaboration among HEIs to increase study abroad; and
4. To collect feedback on the support and activities of the Innovation Fund program to identify

effective practices and enhance results.

This evaluation is expected to be of use to HEIs currently implementing or hoping to implement workforce development exchange programming, POA to inform future technical assistance, corporations or governing bodies interested in pursuing public-private partnerships, and other bilateral and regional partners and stakeholders involved in international workforce development exchanges.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The Evaluation Team's primary research questions for this program effectiveness evaluation are:

1. To what extent have completed Innovation Fund programs prepared students for the global workforce?
2. What specific factors helped or hindered the achievement of expected results?
3. What areas for improvement exist and adjustments are required to ensure effectiveness in achieving expected results for future Innovation Fund programs?

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In 2016, after the completion of the first round Innovation Fund grant programs, an independent evaluation was conducted on the experiences of LAC participating HEIs in the Innovation Fund. This evaluation found that the Innovation Fund’s distribution of small grants “encourage HEI investment” and that “new or strengthened [HEI] partnerships can play a catalytic role in increasing HEI capacity to engage in student mobility in the Americas.”¹ In 2017, NAFSA conducted an additional evaluation on the Innovation Fund which found more evidence to support that small grants, such as those distributed by the Innovation Fund, “can have a long-term impact on higher education institutions, encouraging the creation of policies and programs that will benefit students and the community for years to come.”² These evaluations were critical in determining information and best practices as to how HEIs can succeed in sustaining their institutional partnerships post-Innovation Fund grant period. The following report now seeks to shed light on the Innovation Fund’s ability to meet its intended impact: to use those leveraged HEI partnerships to prepare students throughout the Western Hemisphere for the global workforce.

The goal of the Innovation Fund is to expand access and engagement in study abroad programs among Western Hemisphere HEIs for a larger and more diverse body of students. Achievement of this objective and goal feed into the program’s intended impact: “The expanded preparation of Western Hemisphere post-secondary students to have the language, experience, and cross-cultural skills necessary to be successful global leaders in the 21st century workforce.” To meet these goals, the main objective of the Innovation Fund is to increase sustainable exchanges and cooperative partnerships among Western Hemisphere HEIs. This is to be achieved by POA, DOS, and NAFSA through the following tasks:

1. Identify and foster relationships with private sector donors;
2. Host capacity-building workshops and webinars on the Innovation Fund and the Innovation Network;
3. Manage and coordinate small grant awards to HEIs in the Western Hemisphere;
4. Provide technical assistance to HEIs during RFP phase and during program implementation;
5. Host and support the Innovation Network, an internet-based partner-building platform; and
6. Host award ceremonies and an annual conference to bring Innovation Fund champions together.

POA implements these activities to support HEIs participating in the Innovation Fund in finding HEI partners, building the capacity of HEI administrators and faculty to implement sustainable study abroad programs, and to ensure recipients of Innovation Fund grants have the resources necessary to carry out impactful exchange programs under the Innovation Fund. As a part of assessing the Innovation Fund’s ability to prepare students for the global workforce, the Evaluation Team bore these activities in mind when considering ways in which POA’s activities might be better targeted and tailored for the needs of Innovation Fund grant recipients. POA has a standard set of indicators by which the Innovation Fund is measured, which can be found in Annex I. The following evaluation uses a separate set of indicators, however, detailed below.

¹ *Potentiating Student Mobility in LAC: An Evaluation of the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Program*, Alejandra Villanueva and Bonnie L. Shepard, POA internal document, 2016.

² [*Short-Term Grants, Long-Term Impact: Creating Institutional Change in Study Abroad*](#), NAFSA, 2017.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS TO RESEARCH

Evaluation Design

This program effectiveness evaluation was conducted using a mixed-methods research approach drawing on information gained from an initial desk review, a survey, KIIs, and field visits. These methods were used to determine the extent to which Innovation Fund programs have prepared student participants for the global workforce and to identify areas of opportunity and recommendations for ways in which POA could provide support to HEIs for future Innovation Fund programs.

The Evaluation Team comprised four members external to POA:

- Bereket Abera
- Ashton Bitton
- Akira Kawasaki
- Adrienne Todela

Additionally, the Evaluation Team received strategic input from their capstone advisor at the George Washington University and POA Innovation Fund staff based in Washington, DC.

Data Collection Methods

The Evaluation Team used the following three types of data collection:

Desk Study. The Evaluation Team reviewed relevant documentation pertaining to completed Innovation Fund programs between January 2014 and December 2017 including but not limited to (1) final reports and supplementary documentation submitted by HEIs, (2) previous evaluations of the Innovation Fund, and (3) POA's Innovation Fund monitoring and evaluation tools and logic framework. Each Evaluation Team member took notes and drew out key highlights and gaps in knowledge from these documents, reconvening and sharing this information to inform this evaluation's research questions.

Based on this desk research, the Evaluation Team determined that the most strategic area on which to focus the Innovation Fund program effectiveness evaluation would be on the impact of the initiative and on the overall state of Innovation Fund projects throughout the Western Hemisphere. In addition to the wealth of final program reports available to the team covering students' past program experiences, the Evaluation Team concluded that a mixed-methods approach would provide the most insight and information for the purposes of this program effectiveness evaluation.

The Evaluation Team constructed an evaluation matrix, shown in Figure I, upon completion of the initial desk research which informed the remainder of this program effectiveness evaluation methods by identifying which individuals the team would reach out to as they correspond to each research indicator.

Figure I. Innovation Fund Program Effectiveness Evaluation Matrix

Data Source(s)	Indicator	Data Collection Instrument	Number of Respondents
<p>I. To what extent have completed 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund programs succeeded in preparing students for the global workforce?</p>			
<p>HEI Program Reports submitted to Partners of the Americas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 1: Administrative staff/faculty and student reported student soft/hard skills gained from program • Indicator 2: Administrative staff/faculty reported recruiting new student populations for their programs • Indicator 3: Administrative staff/faculty reported recruiting students from new disciplines for their programs 	<p>Desk Review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 Reports submitted by HEIs • 2 Evaluations conducted previously on the Innovation Fund
<p>HEI Innovation Fund Program Administrators and Faculty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 1: Administrative staff/faculty and student reported student soft/hard skills gained from program • Indicator 2: Administrative staff/faculty reported recruiting new student populations for their programs • Indicator 3: Administrative staff/faculty reported recruiting students from new disciplines for their programs 	<p>Interview protocol</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42 Participants
<p>HEI Innovation Fund Program Administrators and Faculty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 1: Reported student soft/hard skills gained from program 	<p>Survey</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 Respondents
<p>Innovation Fund Program Participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 1: Reported student soft/hard skills gained from program 	<p>Interview protocol</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 Participants

2. What specific factors helped or hindered the achievement of expected results?			
HEI Program Reports submitted to Partners of the Americas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indicator 5: Administrative staff/faculty reported level of strength of HEI partnership ● Indicator 6: Administrative staff/faculty reported level of institutional buy-in of the program ● Indicator 7: Administrative staff/faculty and student reported barriers to student participation in Innovation Fund programs 	Desk review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 9 Reports submitted by HEIs ● 2 Evaluations conducted previously on the Innovation Fund
HEI Innovation Fund Program Administrators and Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indicator 4: Administrative staff/faculty reported level of program support from Partners of the Americas staff ● Indicator 5: Administrative staff/faculty reported level of strength of HEI partnership 	Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 25 Respondents
HEI Innovation Fund Program Administrators and Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indicator 4: Administrative staff/faculty reported level of program support from Partners of the Americas staff ● Indicator 5: Administrative staff/faculty reported level of strength of HEI partnership ● Indicator 6: Administrative staff/faculty reported level of institutional buy-in of the program ● Indicator 7: Administrative staff/faculty and student reported barriers to student participation in Innovation Fund programs 	Interview protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 42 Participants
Innovation Fund Program Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indicator 7: Administrative staff/faculty and student reported barriers to student participation in Innovation Fund programs 	Interview protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 13 Participants

3. What areas for improvement exist and adjustments are required to ensure effectiveness in achieving expected results for future Innovation Fund grant programs?

This will be answered through comprehensive analysis of responses and indicators listed above in questions 1 and 2. The Evaluation Team’s recommendations will address any opportunities to enhance the Innovation Fund’s effectiveness, impact, and sustainability in the Western Hemisphere.

Survey. The Evaluation Team administered one quantitative questionnaire online via Survey Monkey to 39 Innovation Fund administrators and faculty in the US and 26 Innovation Fund administrators and faculty in LAC to gauge their perceptions of the impact of the Innovation Fund on their institution’s study abroad capacity and on their student participants’ soft and hard skills takeaways from their Innovation Fund exchange program. The quantitative questionnaire is provided in Annex II. These individuals represented public universities, private universities, public technical and community colleges, and private colleges throughout Canada, the US, and the LAC countries with Innovation Fund participant HEIs. For the purposes of this report, since the Evaluation Team was only able to speak with one administrator from a Canadian HEI, the responses from this administrator will be categorized with responses from US HEIs. These individuals were selected based on having participated in and completed an Innovation Fund program between January 2014 and December 2017. The Evaluation Team received these individuals’ respective contact information from POA, and the individuals had expressed interest in participating in the Innovation Fund program effectiveness evaluation. The Evaluation Team gathered 25 responses out of the total 65 solicited. These responses informed the Evaluation Team’s KII protocols.

Key Informant Interviews. The Evaluation Team identified and interviewed 55 Innovation Fund recipients and program participants including 42 HEI administrative staff and faculty and 13 student participants in-person in Wisconsin and Illinois, US and Mexico City, Mexico and over Skype throughout the Americas. Figure 2 shows the interview participants by type and geographic location.

Figure 2. Participant breakdown by type and geographic location

	US	LAC	Total
Student	4	9	13
Administrator	16	7	23
Faculty Member	15	4	19
			55

To capture both US and LAC perspectives of the Innovation Fund in the one week of fieldwork which was allotted to the Evaluation Team, the Evaluation Team split into two fieldwork teams. The fieldwork teams and their respective interview site visits are shown in Figure 3. Mexico City and Puebla, Mexico

were chosen due to the concentration of HEIs that had previously received Innovation Fund grants. Wisconsin and Illinois were chosen due to the variety of HEI types there that had received Innovation Fund grants. This purposeful selection of HEIs for site visits was to gain a more detailed perspective as it pertained to varying types of HEIs (a university versus a technical college) and their roles in implementing the Innovation Fund (as a primary grant awardee versus their HEI partner).

KIIs with student participants were made possible through the contacts of past Innovation Fund HEI administrators and faculty, which could risk a slight bias toward student participants who had a positive experience with their Innovation Fund program experience. Although a bias may exist, the Evaluation Team believes the value of speaking with student participants to gain their perspective as to how the Innovation Fund program may have impacted them outweighs the risk.

KIIs were conducted using a semi-structured interview format. Each interview was attended by two Evaluation Team members and was led by one team member which was decided in advance. The Evaluation Team member not leading the interview took detailed notes during the interview and asked probing questions throughout the interview. All notes taken during the KIIs were consulted to verify any names, places, or other details which may not have been clear in the KII audio recordings during transcription. Most KIIs were conducted via Skype for US HEI administrator and faculty perspectives and most were in-person during fieldwork in Mexico for LAC HEI administrator/faculty and student perspectives. The KII protocols for both HEI administrators/faculty and student participants are provided in Annex II.

Figure 3. Fieldwork team distribution

Team A, US	Team B, LAC
Skype KIIs with those in non-field visit countries > Green Bay, WI > Appleton, WI > Green Bay, WI > Chicago, IL > DeKalb, IL Ashton Bitton Akira Kawasaki	Skype KIIs with those in non-field visit countries > Toluca, MX > Mexico City, MX > Puebla, MX Bereket Abera Adrienne Todela

Data Analysis

The Evaluation Team used qualitative and quantitative analysis of KIIs and a survey to identify evidence-based findings and conclusions per this program effectiveness evaluation. Mixed methods research and analysis involves the combined and iterative use of qualitative and quantitative research procedures in research, allowing the Evaluation Team to explore emerging themes from quantitative data collection through additional probing questions during qualitative data collection. Using mixed methods research allowed for themes and patterns to emerge from qualitative and quantitative data collected during the study and iteratively be analyzed. The team drew on the training of its team members in qualitative data collection and analysis to inform the Evaluation Team’s transcribing and coding methodology.

Research Limitations

The following limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting the Evaluation Team’s analysis:

- **The difficulty of contacting direct beneficiaries and the limitations of program record-keeping.** The administrative nature of HEIs is such that student participants' contact information is frequently not retained by Innovation Fund administrators and faculty. Given the fact that the Evaluation Team was conducting research on programs which had taken place between 2014-2017, the majority of HEI administrators and faculty were no longer in contact with Innovation Fund program student participants. While the Evaluation Team was able to speak directly with 13 Innovation Fund program participants regarding their experience and subsequent perceived and lived impact due to the Innovation Fund, the majority of the Evaluation Team's ability to capture this student impact was through anecdotal reporting from Innovation Fund administrators and faculty on behalf of their Innovation Fund program student participants. Furthermore, students with whom the Evaluation Team was able to speak had been referred to by administrators and/or faculty, leaving room for additional selection bias by the program administrators and/or faculty.
- **Absence of a baseline against which progress can be measured.** Although prior evaluations of the Innovation Fund were conducted to assess the ways in which HEIs might sustain their partnerships, no evaluations had been conducted in assessment of the overarching impact of these exchange programs on students.
- **Social desirability bias.** Many respondents expressed strong appreciation and an enthusiasm for the Innovation Fund, and although the Evaluation Team made it clear this was an independent, external evaluation, some interview participants were still under the impression that this was an internal evaluation. Thus, administrators and faculty may have presented their Innovation Fund program outcomes and their participant's experiences to represent their institutional interest in being awarded future Innovation Fund grants.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION: KEY INSIGHTS

Key Insight I: The Innovation Fund is used for differing strategic purposes

Administrators and faculty indicated utilizing their Innovation Fund grant for differing purposes, ultimately as a means to help HEIs achieve their strategic goals for study abroad. This first insight addresses the second research question: “What specific factors helped or hindered the achievement of expected results?” Administrators and faculty recognized the following four primary roles in which the Innovation Fund grant was used: (1) as a seed fund for new program ideas, (2) as a scale up for existing programs, (3) as a way to increase the HEI’s culture of internationalization, and (4) to establish new partnerships. Some administrators and faculty indicated the Innovation Fund played only one of these roles, and some indicated that the Innovation Fund played multiple roles simultaneously at their HEI.

Seed fund for new program ideas

Some administrators and faculty explained that since the Innovation Fund was a relatively small grant, it came with a lower risk, and as such it allowed them to ‘think outside the box’ and think in more creative ways to create new programming which directly benefited students and would otherwise not be possible to implement. Furthermore, creating this new program strengthened future HEI partnerships due to having created this initial program together. Eighteen administrators and faculty reported utilizing the Innovation Fund for new and innovative program ideas. Specifically, seventeen of these administrators and faculty from the US and one administrator from LAC identified the Innovation Fund to have had this specific role within their HEI.

“What [the Innovation Fund] did was it triggered brainstorming. We were trying to think [of] what we could do that would be different, so it triggered more creative thinking. There were lots of good conversations across parts of the university that normally would not have gotten together to work on something like this.”

Administrator, Virginia Commonwealth University

Most informants viewed this opportunity made possible by the Innovation Fund to be valuable especially because they found grant programs for undergraduate study abroad development and exchanges to be rare. Some, for example two faculty at Northern Illinois University, spoke to having had some programming ideas with an existing HEI partner prior to the Innovation Fund however, they were not able to bring it to fruition and thus utilized the Innovation Fund as the catalyst to actually realize and implement those ideas. Other administrators and faculty spoke of creating their program ideas as a result of finding out about the Innovation Fund through a request for proposals, as was the case at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Furthermore, all administrators and faculty mentioned that whether it was a new relationship or an existing relationship with a partner HEI, that they were able to strengthen that relationship for the future as a result of having created this initial program together under the Innovation Fund. This is important because as it was a new program, it would allow them to learn from what worked and did not work so they may improve and replicate their programs for future students. Some administrators and faculty from HEIs, particularly the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, the University of Texas at El Paso, and Virginia Commonwealth University, indicated they were able to maintain their HEI partnership under these circumstances.

A faculty member at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the only LAC institution in which the Innovation Fund was used as a seed fund for a new program idea, explained that the programming concept of the Innovation Fund was entirely new for them. This faculty member explained that although student mobility is not new, generally student mobility occurs at an individual basis for

students. This is due to the financial structure at their university only allowing each student to apply for individual study abroad programs external to the HEI. Therefore, the Innovation Fund helped this faculty member to create a program for the first time in partnership with another university to both send and receive groups of students together.

Scale up for existing programs

Many administrators and faculty indicated that although they already had an existing program with an HEI partner, the program was not standardized. Therefore, the Innovation Fund helped to standardize their educational programming, directly benefiting students through international programs that would have otherwise been discontinued. Sixteen administrators and faculty indicated that they already had existing program ideas prior to the Innovation Fund and therefore saw the Innovation Fund's role to scale up these existing programs.

Although these administrators and faculty had existing programs, they had concerns regarding the lack of standardization of those programs prior to the Innovation Fund. An administrator from Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, for example, expressed the lack of standardization was a concern because standardization is important for the program's success as well as for the program's ability to continue. In order for the program to be made permanent, standardization needs to take place. Thus, administrators and faculty saw the Innovation Fund as playing the role of mitigating concerns so that upon standardization, administrators and faculty would be able to scale up their existing program during the grant period of the Innovation Fund, as well as to continue it post-Innovation Fund grant period.

Similarly, an administrator at FAE Centro Universitário reported challenges in scaling up their program to what they envisioned. For example, although FAE Centro Universitário already had an agreement with Siena College at the time, students from Siena College were not coming to FAE Centro Universitário because they did not offer classes in English nor did they offer a Portuguese training program. Therefore, with the Innovation Fund, FAE Centro Universitário expanded their existing language program and enhanced it to be a Brazilian Studies Program as well as creating the Global Experience Program taught in English. The way in which FAE Centro Universitário used the Innovation Fund grant in turn allowed a greater number of students from Siena College to travel south by breaking down language barriers previously impassable.

Administrators at Universidad Panamericana noted that, although they had a similar study abroad program during the summer term, they were able to improve upon their existing program through the Innovation Fund. They improved it by specifically tailoring the program to emphasize a particular discipline for student participants; the nature by which Innovation Fund grant programs are designed in the RFP process. These administrators explained that this discipline focused program was important to them because of the hard skills their students gained in their discipline as a result. The specifics of these hard skills will be discussed in Key Finding 6. In addition, these administrators were able to expand their program reach and recruit students typically unable to study abroad, medical school students in their case, precisely because of the subject matter focus of the study abroad program. An administrator at Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro also touched on the importance of the subject matter focused program when speaking on the importance of standardization of study abroad programs. This administrator added that once programs like these are standardized within an HEI, it would then be easier to adapt similar programs to other fields and subject foci, thus allowing study abroad programs to be more accessible to more students.

HEIs in the US also identified the need to better the programs they already had. For example, a faculty member at the University of California San Diego explained that although they already had a similar program, they were previously not able to scale up the program and include the necessary elements, like a corresponding course, to be as impactful as they had hoped because they lacked the time and financial resources to do so. With their Innovation Fund grant, however, they were able to come together with their partner and build in that initial infrastructure to be what they had envisioned

so that it may be replicated in the future. Other improvements to existing programs mentioned by administrators and faculty included offering variations of the same program, such as long-term and short-term exchanges including a bi-directional component, the simple but valuable addition of in-person exchange to a program that was previously only based online, and involving students in an existing faculty bi-directional research exchange. The Innovation Fund, therefore, also allowed the opportunity for HEIs to create new ideas and to be innovative in their improvements of existing programs.

Lastly, an important element that was discussed by the majority of administrators and faculty from US HEIs was that their need to improve a program stemmed from their desire to strengthen their partnership and collaboration with their partner HEI in LAC. Administrators and faculty saw a direct link of increased programming to having a stronger HEI partnership, which would in turn pave the way for continued partnerships for continued programming that positively impacts their students and prepares them for the global workforce.

Increase the HEI's culture of internationalization

Administrators and faculty noted that the Innovation Fund played a role in increasing their HEI's culture of internationalization, in other words, mainstreaming study abroad across academic programs. Thus, by building the capacity of study abroad on an institutional level, the Innovation Fund made opportunities for HEIs to have increased international education opportunities which directly benefited students from educational programming across academic programs and disciplines. Fourteen administrators and faculty identified that the Innovation Fund played a role in their HEI's culture of internationalization.

An administrator at FAE Centro Universitário, for example, indicated that before finding out about the Innovation Fund, although their HEI had an International Education Office created in 2005, the office was yet to be systemized and mainstreamed across academic programs. Therefore, upon their discovery of the Innovation Fund in 2014, this administrator saw the Innovation Fund as an opportunity to mainstream the office by having an international student office where exchange students could find a common space.

An administrator at Universidad de La Sabana also viewed their use of the Innovation Fund in this way. They viewed their Innovation Fund grant as an opportunity to aid their HEI to be more capable in implementing study abroad programs, so ultimately it opened their HEI to increased international education opportunities. Specifically, this meant building capacity for administrative support for incoming and outgoing students so as to provide for a more holistic experience for student participants in Universidad de La Sabana's program. When the capacity of administrators and faculty to implement programs was built through the Innovation Fund, they were able to be more familiar and knowledgeable about grant application processes and therefore be better able to utilize their experience to apply to other grants after their Innovation Fund grant period.

As a result of internationalization made possible by the Innovation Fund, international education programs were able to gain visibility within HEIs. Such was the case at FAE Centro Universitário; an administrator noted that although building capacity was a challenge, they overcame it. In this process, they had grabbed the attention of their academic office and gained the approval of the HEI president. An additional impact of internationalization is the ability for administrators and faculty to now create and replicate new programs, as well as to expand to other fields and focus areas for future programs.

An outlier of the positive experiences of mainstreaming international programs, when compared to what was being said by all of the other universities, was revealed by an administrator from Universidad Ana G. Méndez. They viewed internationalization not particularly in the form of a study abroad office but through the inclusion of faculty members in the process of implementing international exchange programs. This administrator found this to be a benefit for their HEI because when there was a high turnover in their international programs office in 2017, their faculty members were able to get the international programs office to sustain their HEI partnership and thus their international programs.

This was perhaps an unexpected outcome of the Innovation Fund grant, yet it was successful in maintaining the sustainability of their international programs by sustaining their HEI partnership with plans for additional joint programs. This administrator mentioned the programs in their planning stages are stalled due to external challenges outside of their control such as the financial crisis and the impact of the 2017 hurricanes.

Establish new partnerships

Finally, most administrators and faculty indicated that they had initially applied for the Innovation Fund with existing HEI partners. However, upon their successful completion of an Innovation Fund grant, while maintaining a good relationship with existing HEI partnerships, they were also able to create new partnerships and conduct similar beneficial international educational programs for students with their new partners because of the framework within which they were able to establish this partnership under the Innovation Fund. Fifteen administrators and faculty identified the Innovation Fund's role for their HEI as a means to create new HEI partnerships. Fourteen of these informants created their partnerships after their Innovation Fund grant period, while only one administrator indicated creating a new partnership during their Innovation Fund grant period. For example, an administrator at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México specifically noted that as a result of the successful implementation of their Innovation Fund program, they had greater confidence to implement international programs and therefore were inspired to go and create new HEI partnerships.

As a result of their participation in the Innovation Fund, administrators and faculty in US HEIs also became much more aware of the lack of their students participating in study abroad programs in LAC countries compared to Asia or Europe. A faculty member from Fox Valley Technical College, for example, spoke to the importance and having the desire to capture study abroad opportunities within the Western Hemisphere so they can continue to build relationships between US and LAC HEIs. An administrator at California State University Long Beach explained that, in their case, they were able to create a new partnership as a result of having joined POA's Innovation Network, an online networking platform. Another HEI who had won an Innovation Fund grant reached out to this administrator to form a partnership and conduct an exchange program. Their reasoning for creating new partnerships after the Innovation Fund grant period was due to their perceived importance and value of exchange for international research and to deepen those international research relationships.

The outlier in this finding was found by one faculty member from Snow College. This administrator had actually saw the Innovation Fund's role in establishing new HEI partnerships right from the beginning. This administrator explained that as a small community college in rural Utah, they did not have the connections to get things started when they considered applying to the Innovation Fund. In fact, only one international HEI partnership existed at the time this administrator applied for the Innovation Fund, which was located in Japan. However, with the personal support from POA, as well as the Innovation Fund Partnership Conference, this faculty member from Snow College was able to achieve their goal of connecting and networking with LAC HEIs, allowing them to implement their Innovation Fund program.

Key Insight 2: Shared academic values, similar administrative capabilities, and longer relationships create stronger HEI partnerships

HEI partnership strength was found to be a decisive catalyst to Innovation Fund programs achieving their expected outcomes and expanding international student mobility in higher education. Strong institutional partnerships lead to effective program design and implementation which benefits learning outcomes for student participants. This evaluation defines the strength of an HEI partnership through the following elements: (1) the length of the partnership, (2) the frequency and modes in which communication takes place, (3) existing presence in the partner HEI's country, (4) collaborative nature

between HEIs during program design and implementation, (5) shared understanding of program outcomes between HEIs, and (6) shared program administration and management systems between HEIs. All 25 survey respondents positively rated the strength of their partnerships at 4.36 points in a 5-point scale (with 1 being the weakest partnership and 5 being the strongest partnership), and the majority ranked their HEI partnership strength as “Excellent.” KIIIs conducted with administrators and faculty revealed notable nuances across these elements ranked so favorably, however. The Evaluation Team found that while having shared academic values is foundational for strong HEI partnerships, having the same program administration capabilities further bolsters the likelihood of a sustained partnership. Additionally, these two elements were unanimously present in previously established, long-standing institutional partnerships, contributing to a higher level of program effectiveness as opposed to that seen by HEIs in newer partnerships.

Shared Academic Values and Horizontal Dynamics Fuel Collaborative and Strong Partnerships

Sharing the same foundations in academic mission and vision and recognizing that each institution has capacities to offer the grant partnership are critical to collaboration. These elements create a common space where dynamic program design and implementation can thrive, cultivating stronger HEI partnerships throughout the grant period and resulting in stronger programs for student participants. This can be seen in the survey data, where all 25 survey respondents ranked having a collaborative process during program design and implementation and having a common understanding of program outcomes as the two most important elements that positively supported their implementation of an international student mobility grant. Moreover, when prompted to rate their collective HEI partnership’s performance on having a collaborative process, the majority of respondents ranked theirs as “Excellent” and “Very Good,” scoring an average 4.33 in a 5-point scale. Additionally, the majority of respondents also positively reported their partnership’s shared understanding of program outcomes, ranking theirs as “Very Good,” scoring an average 4.08 in a 5-point scale.

All administrators and faculty interviewed also highlighted shared academic values and program outcomes as critical to the collaborative spirit between their respective partnerships. This valuation came from both long-standing partnerships such as that seen between FAE Centro Universitario with Siena College and newer ones such as that seen between Fox Valley Technical College and a Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA) center in Cartagena, Colombia. However, the FAE Centro Universitario representative noted that because they had a long-standing relationship with Siena College at the start of their Innovation Fund grant program, it was easier to ensure that what both universities envisioned as program outcomes were the same because of previous collaboration revealing similar academic values time and time again. In contrast, although it was the first time that Fox Valley Technical College partnered with this SENA center and there were some implementation difficulties, the Fox Valley Technical College administrator nevertheless said that both HEIs had similar academic values and saw eye-to-eye with what they hoped their student participants would acquire from the program that they were able to manage through design and implementation.

On partnership dynamics, comments were also made on the Innovation Fund’s model of instituting a prime grantee to lead grant management and handle communication with POA, and with partner HEIs as sub-grantees. On one hand, the representative from Universidad Panamericana, a sub-grantee, felt that there was no hierarchy in decision making, specifically highlighting that they played equal roles in design and implementation with Northwestern University, the prime grantee. They reported that both schools tapped into each other’s strengths and supported each other where there were capacity gaps. In contrast, a representative from Universidad La Salle, the sub-grantee HEI of the Innovation Fund grant which University of New Mexico primed, reported a rocky start to their new partnership due to a programmatic model for use during the grant period presented without consultation, forming an unequal power balance as the basis of their partnership from the start. However, the representative from Universidad La Salle noted that through more communication and

planning between the HEIs, this programmatic model was eventually adapted to work in the Mexican context of Universidad La Salle.

Similar Capabilities in Program Administration and Management are Ideal for Partnership Strength

While having shared academic values and equal power dynamics is foundational for strong HEI partnerships, the purpose and essence of academic activities are emphasized when programs are administered effectively. This is especially true when it comes to international student mobility programming, where logistics such as administrative approvals, travel preparation, and housing selection are crucial when running the show. The Evaluation Team found that HEIs with relatively more established international student mobility offices were able to handle administrative and logistical responsibilities more effectively which in turn positively impacted program implementation. These partnerships reported better design and implementation outcomes of their programs as a result. For example, faculty members from Northern Illinois University pointed out the advantage of having similar established international student mobility offices with their long-standing partner Universidad de La Sabana. The representative highlighted that both HEIs have similar processes, including hosting pre-departure and orientation sessions, that helped ensure a logistically smooth experience for their students at both HEIs.

In contrast, there were several partnerships that had notable variance in their program administration and management capabilities, with one partner fairly established in their processes while the other was fairly new and unfamiliar with international program processes, which caused challenges across the board and negatively affected the run of the program. For example, a representative from Fox Valley Technical College spoke toward their experience with their new SENA center partner in Cartagena, that was filled with logistical challenges. The Fox Valley Technical College administrator alluded to the newness of that SENA center in the field of international student mobility. Although it was a great step to open up international student mobility opportunities, the representative reported how unprepared their partner institution was in terms of logistical responsibilities, such as securing lodging or transportation, that they, having a more established international student mobility office, took over those logistical duties to ensure that their students were taken care of. This administrator contrasted that experience with the relatively smoother partnership they had with Universidad de Buenos Aires after their Innovation Fund grant period with SENA. The representative said that the more positive experience was due to Universidad de Buenos Aires' more established international student mobility office which was able to take care of administrative and logistical responsibilities in a more effective manner than their SENA center counterpart.

Overall, administrators and faculty from several HEIs highlighted the importance of familiarizing themselves with the administrative systems of their partner HEIs and agreeing on responsibilities for program management from the beginning to avoid any logistical challenges by way of preemptive adaptation to the systems. This was stressed specifically by administrators and faculty from Snow College and the University of Texas at Austin. The faculty member from Snow College commented on how it was an administrative learning experience to have worked with the SENA system because its large bureaucracy contributed to delays in approvals and decision-making that hindered program design and implementation. An administrator from the University of Texas at Austin reported having a similar experience with Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the largest public HEI in Mexico. The University of Texas at Austin representative said that although their direct liaison was helpful in navigating the bureaucracy of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México to the best of their ability, they still experienced some logistical challenges because their program was administratively under-resourced due to the allocation priorities of the university. Finally, administrators and faculty from the University of Texas at El Paso and the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay reported that working with HEIs with different administrative systems than they have was a learning experience for their next HEI

collaboration and pointed out the importance of building program management capacities between HEIs to better implement their academic activities within programs.

Long-Standing Relationships Contribute Most to Partnership Strength

Ultimately, the Evaluation Team found long-standing relationships show more positive signs of equal power dynamics and similar capabilities in program administration and management, which prove beneficial to overall program design and implementation, and thus learning outcomes for student participants. There was a notable disagreement between survey and interview responses. On one hand, the majority of survey respondents rated the length of their partnership as the second-to-last element out of six that contributes to partnership strength and positively supports the implementation of their Innovation Fund program. On the other hand, the majority of interviewees highlighted the importance on partnership length, valuing long-standing relationships because they were already familiar with the capacities and processes of their partner HEI which contribute to a faster, more secure, and more flexible design and implementation process, instead of a longer period of introduction and navigation of administrative processes that those in new partnerships have to go through.

All administrators and faculty interviewed representing LAC HEIs had long-standing relationships with their partner HEIs. Many respondents had an ongoing HEI partnership lasting more than 10 years. The majority of these partnerships started between single faculty relationships that became institutionalized over the years, with a few creating relationships between academic partnerships in the beginning. The sentiment among administrators and faculty from these HEIs points toward the ease of working with an institution you already know. To this point, a representative from Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México summarized this ease by citing the importance of prior collaboration as a means to become familiar with a partner's academic vision and mission, be aware of their strengths, and ultimately know it is a good match.

All administrators and faculty representing US HEIs varied in their responses, with several reporting already maintaining long-standing relationships with their partner HEIs, and a few creating partnerships specifically for the Innovation Fund grant. For new partnerships, HEI administrators and faculty reported that a highlight to their introduction process was participating in what they called "relationship-building missions." For example, during the Innovation Fund grant competition round with SENA, POA hosted a relationship-building mission to Colombia where US administrators and faculty were invited to travel to Colombia to network with Colombian HEIs with the aim of finding a potential partner with whom to apply for the Innovation Fund. Administrators and faculty from Fox Valley Technical College and Snow College shared the same experience. Administrators and faculty from each school reported that they had not known about SENA previously, and that the Innovation Fund grant and the POA-hosted visit allowed for them to get to know SENA and find their respective partners during the competition round. However, they also shared that since they were new partnerships, the HEIs were getting to know each other at the same time that they were designing and implementing study abroad programming. This dynamic revealed incompatibilities in administrative and management systems which hampered several logistical components that negatively affected the run of their respective programs.

An example in contrast to the impact of having a long-standing partner versus a new one can be seen in the case of Virginia Commonwealth University. During its Innovation Fund grant period, administrators from Virginia Commonwealth University partnered with Universidad de Guadalajara, a long-standing partner, but also with Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, a new partner. Virginia Commonwealth University's administrators highlighted that this model served not only to deepen the relationship with their existing partner, but also to create, gauge, and potentially continue a new one, if the relationship proved to be successful during the Innovation Fund grant period. According to the administrators from Virginia Commonwealth University, although the triad successfully carried out the program, they confronted administrative complications with their new partner post-grant period

that they were not able to anticipate and could not resolve, therefore leading to the end of the relationship. On the other hand, Virginia Commonwealth University and Universidad de Guadalajara continues their partnership.

Key Insight 3: Institutional buy-in of Innovation Fund programs is crucial to program sustainability

The strength and continuation of HEI partnerships and of international student mobility programs are subject to the internal politics of HEIs. This evaluation examined the role of institutional buy-in among HEI administration, not only on the design and implementation of Innovation Fund programs, but on the provision of support and championship afterwards to advance internationalization of higher education. Institutional buy-in refers to the support of senior administration and other surrounding actors, including government, public and private entities, and communities, to not only the implementation of the Innovation Fund program but of international student mobility programming within an HEI broadly speaking. The sustainability of international student mobility programming means more students will acquire appropriate and competent knowledge and skills for the global workforce. The Evaluation Team found that HEI partnerships with well-established institutional support for international student mobility operated in a relatively efficient manner throughout the grant period, avoiding administrative barriers and questions of value. On the other hand, the Evaluation Team also found that application to the Innovation Fund grant increased communication and collaboration between institutional departments, particularly academic and international student mobility teams. To sustain the impact of these programs and at the very least the continuation of the partnerships, all administrators and faculty pointed toward institutional allies and faculty champions.

Institutional Support for International Student Mobility Contributes to Ease of Program Design and Implementation

Levels of institutional support for the Innovation Fund grant and international student mobility programming in general varied between HEIs as reported by administrators and faculty. Several HEI informants commented on the collaboration between faculty members and international student mobility offices during the grant period. The representative from Salve Regina University reported that application to the Innovation Fund grant facilitated increased collaboration between different departments within the HEI because the application required both academic and subject-matter input but also administrative. This informant said that collaboration between offices does not usually happen at Salve Regina University, so it was a positive learning experience. Administrators and faculty from Clemson University and Fox Valley Technical College noted the importance of working with an international student mobility office or, at the very least, an individual with the ability to write strong proposals. Proposal writing for international grants is generally a skill that faculty members are not expected to have. In contrast, a faculty member from Western Michigan University had a different experience where there was minimal support from the university's international student mobility office specifically during the grant application process. Therefore, all of the work on this Innovation Fund grant application was borne by two faculty members. This faculty member shared that the office helped in logistical responsibilities but did not seem to champion the program, that it was not able to continue afterwards.

On the other hand, a few administrators and faculty shared the positives of having not only faculty support and administration support, but also external actors which contributed to an almost hassle-free experience throughout the grant period. For example, the representative from FAE Centro Universitário shared that shortly prior to the release of the Innovation Fund RFP, the Brazilian Ministry of Education increased its advocacy for internationalization of higher education, and thus it was easier to receive buy-in from high level administration at the university to apply for the Innovation Fund grant

because it naturally aligned the university strategy with that of the government. The representative from Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro shared that their academic department not only has support from high-level administration within their university, but they also have had consistent financial support from the state government's office that advocates for science, technology, engineering and math fields. This readily available funding makes program fundraising easier and helps them focus on other aspects of design and implementation that contributes to better learning outcomes for student participants.

Institutional Allies and Faculty Champions are Critical to Program Sustainability

Institutional support and faculty champions before and during an Innovation Fund grant period is critical for program design and implementation, but the presence of these post-Innovation Fund grant period is vital for program sustainability. The majority of HEI partnerships examined in this evaluation have been sustained to varying degrees by institutional allies and faculty champions post-Innovation Fund grant. Strong HEI partnerships with established international student mobility offices and a long history of collaboration were able to sustain support after the Innovation Fund grant period. For example, both administrators and faculty from the long-standing partnership between Universidad de La Sabana and Northern Illinois University reported an expansion of their programs, offering a dual-degree opportunity and plans to extend the reach to other academic departments. However, newer HEI partnerships experienced challenges in sustainability of institutional support across the board. The faculty member from Snow College lost all their faculty champions at their partner institution, a SENA center, when an administrative turnover happened. For this faculty member, it was unfortunate that the partnership was not able to be formalized during the Innovation Fund grant period because a high-level agreement may have helped sustain the relationship even at a basic level without having to rebuild from scratch. A similar case occurred at Virginia Commonwealth University where an administrator reported that their new partnership with Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla was stunted due to loss of institutional allies at varying levels due to an administrative turnover.

The other side of the coin is acquiring faculty champions who would continue to teach the programs themselves, become motivated to create new ones, and share the programs' value across academic departments. An administrator from Universidad Ana G. Méndez highlighted that part of their sustainability plan is to secure faculty champions that will push to advocate for international education through institutional succession in the administrative offices. The administrator positively reported that they were able to check that part of their sustainability plan and credited faculty exchanges during their Innovation Fund grant period as the main driver for faculty members to see the value of international student mobility and to support it further.

Key Insight 4: Financial support from the Innovation Fund grant increases student access to study abroad

The Innovation Fund increases student access to study abroad programs through various uses by administrators and faculty recipients of Innovation Fund grants. This section contributes to the first research question, "to what extent have completed Innovation Fund programs prepared students for the global workforce," by highlighting some distinctive factors which lead to the preparation of more students for the global workforce by means of using the Innovation Fund grant to break down student barriers to study abroad opportunities.

Increased Student Diversity

The Evaluation Team found that diversity was one distinctive criterion that most administrators and faculty considered for student recruitment and selection to their Innovation Fund programs. US administrators and faculty especially considered student diversity in various aspects including gender,

ethnicity, fields of interest and first-generation college status. On the other hand, an administrator from Universidad Ana G. Méndez pointed out a difference between how mainland US defines diversity and how this administrator believed it is defined by attitudes and practices in Puerto Rico. To the administrator, by mainland US standards, Puerto Rican students are already diverse because the majority are ethnically Hispanic and are first generation students. In this case, they focused on recruiting a more diverse group of students for their Innovation Fund program specifically with regard to their fields of study. Through interviews, the Evaluation Team found that LAC administrators and faculty tend to pay less attention to recruiting diverse program cohorts by means of students' social characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. Thus, for diversity, administrators and faculty from LAC HEIs were more concerned with students' fields of study. Regardless of the difference in definitions of diversity between those in the US and those in LAC, overall the survey showed that 88 percent of administrators and faculty recruited new student populations for their Innovation Fund programs. This survey defined new student populations as ethnic or racial minorities, economically disadvantaged, first generation college students, or underrepresented demographics.

The Evaluation Team found that the Innovation Fund grant was used to decrease economic barriers to students studying abroad. Typically, study abroad is a costly investment for students, so it is especially difficult for economically disadvantaged students to participate in study abroad programs. A faculty member from North Carolina State University reported that some of their program participants were first-time passport holders who had never traveled outside of the US. Thus, the Innovation Fund is increasing mobility of a more diverse group of students.

Student Incentives

To implement student exchange programs, administrators and faculty and their HEI partners faced different motivations or attitudes of students for their programs. As an overall tendency, many US administrators and faculty found it difficult to recruit a sufficient number of students to follow through with the programs, while LAC administrators and faculty were more readily able to recruit and send students to the US in their programs. Yet, LAC administrators and faculty did need to put quite a bit of effort into recruiting students. Through the interviews and survey, the Evaluation Team observed several ways in which administrators and faculty incentivized students to apply for their Innovation Fund programs.

First, most administrators and faculty, especially those in the US, stressed that the provision of scholarships through some of their Innovation Fund grant money was a very strong incentive for students. An administrator at the University of Pittsburgh reported most of their Innovation Fund grant money was spent on student participants in the form of scholarships, and it made a huge difference in terms of their ability to recruit students through this incentive. An administrator from FAE Centro Universitário mentioned that in order to expand partnerships, the university offered scholarships for inbound students from the US. In the case of LAC, some administrators and faculty could provide scholarships or pay for travel expenses on behalf of their student participants. Therefore, particularly for US students, scholarships were found to be a strong motivator for students to study abroad.

Another common method to encourage students to apply for exchange programs is to allow for credit transfers or integration of the program with other student academic requirements. For example, an administrator at the University of Texas at Austin emphasized that curriculum integration with their partner HEI was key for increased student enrollment, and a good practice overall. They conducted "curriculum matching," or integrating this study abroad program with students' academic plans of study, to ensure that student participants could graduate on time and as planned if they chose to study abroad. A faculty member from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México also mentioned that a credit transfer system made their Innovation Fund program much more attractive for students than a pure cultural exchange with no credit-bearing merit.

While many administrators and faculty used the Innovation Fund grant for voluntary exchange

programs, some administrators and faculty used the grant to incorporate a travel component into an already-existing program. A faculty member from Northern Arizona University used the grant for an existing program which required one year of research activity overseas. In a case such as this, the Innovation Fund grant made an already-required travel component to this program more attractive and attainable to prospective students by alleviating financial burdens for student participants.

Disciplinary Relevance

As a characteristic of the Innovation Fund, all grants are associated with certain disciplinary areas, such as health, science, or engineering, and these disciplinary foci change depending on the grant round according to the corporate sponsor. More than half of administrators and faculty surveyed indicated that this subject-focused funding scheme was an attractive element of the Innovation Fund. Through Klls, many administrators and faculty in both the US and LAC mentioned how this disciplinary relevance affected their student program participation in various ways.

One commonly held opinion was that the subject-focused funding scheme of Innovation Fund opened up study abroad opportunities for students who conventionally are underserved by study abroad opportunities. For example, administrators at Georgia Southern University succeeded in their goal of increasing the number of men participants in their programs due to their Innovation Fund program's subject-focus on engineering. Traditionally, the vast majority of their students who had studied abroad were women. Since most of Georgia Southern University's engineering students are men, and the university won the Innovation Fund competition focused on engineering, more men were able to study abroad since Georgia Southern University. In the case of Georgia Southern University, not only did the Innovation Fund increase study abroad opportunities for students in underserved disciplines, but it also worked to make the university's study abroad opportunities more gender-equitable. To this extent, creating study abroad opportunities for students in disciplines traditionally underserved by study abroad programs is an outstanding positive feature of the Innovation Fund.

Another common positive opinion held by administrators and faculty regarding the Innovation Fund's ability to increase the disciplinary relevance of study abroad opportunities is that the Innovation Fund allows intensive academic and project-based programs to be conducted between HEIs. Because of the hard-skills focus which Innovation Fund programs must have, most Innovation Fund programs include not only cross-cultural activities but also academic exchanges and hands-on, hard skills-oriented projects. A faculty member from Universidad Panamericana emphasized that the Innovation Fund grant helped their students to focus on research on obesity, and that travel to the US helped their students learn about the specifics and nuances of obesity in a different context. For such context-sensitive subjects, international student exchange effectively broadens students' academic and technical knowledge.

Some administrators and faculty viewed disciplinary relevance from a different angle. Faculty members from Northern Illinois University, which implemented an exchange program focused on industrial engineering, voiced that generally departments in this discipline teach the same skills in the same way they would be taught anywhere else in the world. This comment insists that effectiveness of study abroad and exchange programs may vary by discipline, and this is particularly affected by the

“We could visit a municipal water treatment plant in Texas and learn how it was expanded. This was something we usually cannot experience in Mexico.”

Student, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México

This student reported gaining practical experience through his participation in this Innovation Fund program. This student also had a chance to present on his experience at a conference in Argentina. These kinds of practical experiences bolster students' skills and knowledge in an international context, leading to a more prepared international workforce.

degree of curricular homogeneity that exists within the discipline.

Finally, disciplinary relevance of Innovation Fund programs positively affected students' participation in the programs. Administrators and faculty rated 4.48 on average out of 5.00 in their survey responses for how influential they thought their program's disciplinary relevance was to increasing student interest in participating in their program. This evidence demonstrates how effectively disciplinary relevance mandated by the Innovation Fund increases student access to study abroad.

Key Insight 5: Student barriers to study abroad remain

Despite the Innovation Fund's ability to break down barriers to study abroad for many students, the Evaluation Team identified some barriers that remain in terms of program coordination and student recruitment viability through KIIIs with administrators, faculty, and student participants. Some of these barriers could be addressed by the Innovation Fund, and some may be outside of its scope.

HEI's Lack of Study Abroad Culture and Integration

For those administrators and faculty that had no previous experience with international programs or mainstreaming them throughout their HEI, the biggest challenge for them was to establish a culture of study abroad on campus from scratch. Typically, administrators and faculty from smaller HEIs and those in remote areas mentioned this type of difficulty as a barrier for coordination of study abroad programs. Their hardships can be categorized into three major groups: (1) student visa acquisition, (2) safety concerns of studying abroad by students and parents, and (3) language barriers.

The first and most common obstacle was acquisition of student visas. As reported by most administrators and faculty in both the US and LAC, visa application preparation is an arduous and time-consuming process, and language barriers make this process even more challenging. A faculty member from Flathead Valley Community College shared an episode of how difficult it was to support Colombian students in acquiring US visas. Their partner HEI was located in a rural part of Colombia, and Colombian students found that even a trip to Bogotá to apply for their US visa was extremely challenging, and there were many miscommunications regarding required documents for the visas. A faculty member from Snow College experienced similar issues with security US visas for students coming from their partner HEI, which led to the cancellation of one student's trip to the US. Visa acquisition requires a certain degree of expert knowledge and experience, so for those administrators and faculty who do not have a culture of study abroad and integration of international procedures within their HEI, much more support was necessary.

Another barrier mentioned by administrators and faculty as hindering their HEI's ability to integrate study abroad and international programs on an institutional level is frequent safety concerns by students and parents regarding studying abroad. The Evaluation Team found safety concerns were only an issue for students coming from the US and going southbound. In LAC, no administrators or faculty reported safety concerns as being an issue for students traveling to the US. University of California San Diego explained that the news around border security issues in Tijuana, Mexico amplified safety concerns among students and their parents. A faculty member from Snow College also mentioned students' perceptions of safety as one of their challenges for study abroad program recruitment and implementation. This faculty member said, "There's a lot of politics with the wall [between the US and Mexico]. Definitely parts of Mexico are really dangerous, but other parts are not. There are pretty dangerous parts in the US as well." Thus, determining ways in which to alleviate safety concerns and increase an institutional culture of study abroad is a common challenge for administrators and faculty at HEIs in the US.

Finally, some administrators and faculty found it difficult to manage the language barriers between US students and LAC students. There were several ways as to how administrators and faculty managed language issues. Administrators at FAE Centro Universitário reported that their solution was

to establish an International Student Office and open a Portuguese language course to support foreign students. From the US side, an administrator from Virginia Commonwealth University focused on recruiting Spanish language learners within their university for their Innovation Fund program. This faculty member voiced they wished as many students to have the opportunity as possible, however, considering what the program could offer with its intensive Spanish usage, their recruitment approach was reasonable and effective.

A lack of study abroad culture is an inevitable issue for those HEIs with administrators and faculty that only recently started working on internationalizing their institution. Yet, it is meaningful to know the reality of these barriers which students face in study abroad program participation.

Lack of Financial Resources

Another common student barrier to study abroad participation is a lack of financial resources. Although the Innovation Fund grant was frequently used to reduce students' financial burden in participating in the program, students usually did need to pay a certain amount in order to participate. Plus, once the grant period is over, most administrators and faculty needed to increase the program fees required to be paid by students to make up for the cost difference previously covered by their Innovation Fund grant. A faculty member from Western Michigan University mentioned that their HEI partners' students' lower socioeconomic status negatively affected their ability to obtain student visas to travel to the US. Even though the university provided financial aid for first generation students from the partner HEI to come to the US, the DOS did not approve their visas because of income insufficiency. Recruitment of first-generation students certainly is a good practice to increase diversity, but the next challenge is how to assure adequate resources for them.

Student lack of financial resources ties to another problem related to student barriers to program participation, which is the cost-benefit conflict of participating in a program as opposed to a job or paid internships. Faculty members from Northern Illinois University reported that a great deal of paid internship and job opportunities become available for their students during summer, and this Innovation Fund program happened to overlap with this period. This left students with the decision to pursue an international program with which they would need to either pay money to participate, or stay in DeKalb, Illinois to pursue a paid summer opportunity and earn money. Students therefore tend to choose to pursue jobs or paid internships over exchange programs including this Innovation Fund exchange. Similar comments were made from administrators and faculty at Snow College, the University of Texas at Austin, and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. These comments confirm that students' lack of financial resources is a hindering aspect to student program participation.

Existing Commitments

Lack of study abroad culture and financial resources are the two main barriers for student participation. Meanwhile, some administrators and faculty, especially those at community colleges and technical colleges, mentioned students' existing commitments as an obstacle for study abroad participation. Unlike four-year universities, two-year colleges tend to serve nontraditional or returning students who have external commitments such as a job, housework, or family care. In KILs, administrators and faculty from Flathead Valley Community College and Fox Valley Technical College touched on such matters as especially relevant to their students and as a major barrier to student recruitment in their programs.

Key Insight 6: The Innovation Fund strengthens the global workforce

Finally, this section highlights the intended impact of the Innovation Fund; to strengthen the global workforce by preparing students, and thus answering the first research question. Administrators,

faculty, and student participants indicated that students' participation in the Innovation Fund exchanges indeed played a role in strengthening the global workforce. This was achieved through Innovation Fund programs which catalyzed (1) intercultural perspectives gained by students, (2) hard and soft skills gained by students, (3) Innovation Fund-related outputs produced by students, and (4) students' continuing studies and/or career choice, influenced as a direct result of their participation in the Innovation Fund.

Intercultural Perspectives Gained by Students

Nearly all administrators and faculty with whom the Evaluation Team spoke, both in the US and LAC, reported students gaining intercultural perspectives as a direct result of their participation in an Innovation Fund program. More so, administrators and faculty also highlighted that the Innovation Fund's bi-directional focus allowed students to form deeper connections with each other and to form an understanding of intercultural perspectives. The programs were structured so that, for example, a group of students from Mexico arrived in the US and worked or studied alongside American students. Likewise, the same group of students and faculty from the US would then go to Mexico to conduct the same research study or hands-on project. Therefore, a deeper connection was made, which strengthened intercultural understanding. Students from both sides of the exchange were able to learn from each other, as well as when they traveled to the host HEI's country.

"I think the emphasis on bi-directional exchange and a mixed group of Americans and Colombians working together during the course are unique elements. It's not just about a homogenous group coming to a new place; it's an element of interculturality and sharing of cultural differences and similarities. It allowed friendships to grow. It was very nice."

Administrator, Universidad de La Sabana

An administrator from Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México explained that they had a three way exchange between Mexico, the US, and Argentina, and noted that their Innovation Fund program was especially fruitful because most of the students selected in the US and Argentina had not previously had the opportunity to travel outside their country. While conducting their research on obesity, an administrator from Universidad Panamericana explained, Mexican students traveled to the US to see a different context, where they had American students with them to brainstorm ideas for new research. American students then traveled to Mexico to finish the research with their counterparts. Therefore, not only were the students able to learn about the other's story in obesity research, but they were also able to learn about each other's culture and language.

A faculty member from Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla dove deeper and spoke of the additional insight students gained as a result of the Innovation Fund program. In their case, all six of the women, three American and three Mexican, acted as mentors to each other when one group was visiting the other and created a sort of sisterhood. For example, the Mexican students showed them around, showed them what to eat, attended cultural activities, showed them what goes in a small town, what to eat for a certain holiday or religious party, and cooked in the kitchen together. The American students also gave the Mexican students the same treatment in the US. Therefore, the faculty explained, these students were able see and learn about "not just the 'big C' culture, but also the 'small c'" through more personal experiences through bi-directional immersion.

The same faculty member explained further the importance of such an ordeal; the importance of "breaking the idea of who the other is." For example, this faculty member noted the importance for the Mexican students to understand that America is a multicultural society; not everyone is rich like in the movies, and not everyone has white skin like in the movies. Ultimately, as a result of "breaking the idea of who the other is," as this faculty member saw with their students, it positively changes a person's worldview and helps them be a more flexible, tolerant, and empathetic person.

A student participant from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México also remembered that they were shocked and nervous the first time they met their American counterparts at the airport.

When they ended up living together, sleeping in the same room, and doing everything together, however, they realized that although they were coming from different cultures, their cultures were not really that different and they could work together. Additionally, a student participant from Virginia Commonwealth University spoke of how they were able to gain an intercultural perspective through the cultural exchange of being with the Mexican students and having them present throughout the entire process. This student also gained further intercultural perspectives because, as a result of the community service project working at a nonprofit in which they participated, they met Mexican migrants and other migrants traveling to the border through Mexico, which they found to be invaluable.

Hard and Soft Skills Gained by Students

Administrators and faculty from almost every HEI were confident that their students attained tangible skills from the Innovation Fund programs in which they participated, and student participants interviewed had the same sentiment. It was found that there were a mix of hard and soft skills that students acquired, usually with both playing a role in the same instance, which ultimately works toward strengthening the global workforce. As a direct result of these Innovation Fund programs having a subject matter focus, many students were able to gain hard skills from their participation in the program. Including the already detailed intercultural perspectives, students gained soft skills that will be a value to them both professionally in the global workforce and personally throughout their lives.

Of administrators and faculty surveyed, 96 percent indicated that their students gained hard skills through their Innovation Fund program. Of those surveyed, 91.6 percent of respondents believed that having the element of practical activities in their student mobility program effectively facilitated student participants' acquisition of the subject-relevant hard skills. Other existing elements they believed played a role include a specialized curriculum, choice of faculty, provision of supplementary resources, program length, professional networking, student research projects and photovoice projects, and language proficiency.

Additionally, 100 percent of administrators and faculty surveyed indicated that their students gained soft skills through their Innovation Fund program. Specifically, such soft skills include communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem solving, critical observation, conflict resolution, patience, leadership, cultural competency, time and stress management and etiquette, interpersonal skills, and time management. See Annex III for a table demonstrating the percentage breakdown of each soft skill administrators and faculty believe their students gained.

Administrators and faculty believed that the Innovation Fund, in the way that it is structured, plays a large role in these skills being attained by their students. For example, an administrator at Fox Valley Technical College spoke specifically of how the Innovation Fund grants come out focusing on workforce, like a recently sponsored grant round by MetLife which focused on a number of various study abroad topics that all pertain to workforce development. This administrator at Fox Valley Technical College explained that as a technical college, they focus on workforce development, and therefore their missions aligned, which is why it made sense for them to apply for the Innovation Fund in the first place.

These skills, both hard and soft, sets students up for future success, especially in their career. Moreover, despite variances in disciplinary relevance for Innovation Fund participation, it is clear that all student participants at least gained soft skills from their experience. The administrator at Fox Valley Technical College also explained that the skills gained as a result of students' participation are important because of the emphasis of professional development that increases their chance of employability regardless of the career path they choose. Therefore, these administrators are also aware of the importance of equipping their students with the tools and critical thinking on how to articulate and translate their Innovation Fund experience in their favor when, for example, in an interview process so they may capitalize on it.

Innovation Fund-related Outputs Produced by Students

As part of their Innovation Fund program, many students had the opportunity to perform an output, for example, by giving a professional presentation or entering in a competition, which is valuable to their future careers and prepares them for the global workforce. For example, an administrator from California State University Long Beach indicated that their students gave a professional presentation on their research findings in both Spanish and English to a large community forum in downtown Long Beach, California.

Other students entered competitions as part of the Innovation Fund exchange program. As an example, faculty members at Fox Valley Technical College spoke of their American and Colombian business students pitching different entrepreneurial ventures in Colombia, of which they received feedback upon which to improve. Additionally, an administrator at the University of Pittsburgh relayed how American and Brazilian engineering students developed a mobile application and pitched it at a Design Expo; a fairly large event with hundreds of people, including engineers, business people, and faculty members.

Continuing Studies and Career Choice

Administrators, faculty, and students indicated that participating in the Innovation Fund had a positive impact on students' continued studies and/or career choice in both the US and LAC. For example, an administrator at the University of Pittsburgh spoke of a success story regarding one of their students; how now, a previous African-American woman engineering student who participated in an Innovation Fund program works for Amazon. Although making a direct link to the Innovation Fund here is challenging, the administrator believed this student's participation in the Innovation Fund program had an impact on her desire and ability to pursue this career. Another administrator at the University of Texas at Austin indicated that their geoscience students were involved in what was academically significant to their plans of study toward their degree, super engaging, and connected them to their career outcomes. This administrator mentioned that some of the students even got immediate jobs off of participating in this Innovation Fund program by high-profile companies because they were involved in this particular super cutting-edge research.

An administrator from Virginia Commonwealth University pointed out that all of their six students involved in the exchange program were now living abroad or are about to move abroad and have overall been accomplished young women. One student from Virginia Commonwealth University, for example, indicated that her participation in the Innovation Fund exchange program had resonating impacts. First, her experience solidified her decision that she wanted to do Peace Corps, and more so that she had the desire to do her service in Latin America. Therefore, she ended up applying for and accepting a Peace Corps position in Paraguay. Second, as a political science major during her undergraduate degree with foci in international relations, Spanish, and religious studies, she expressed that the Innovation Fund program pushed her even further into an international relations focus. Finally, since the Innovation Fund program, she has considered pursuing a master's degree in International Human Rights or becoming an immigration lawyer after the conclusion of her Peace Corps service. These student testimonials gave the Evaluation Team a deeper understanding of the impact Innovation Fund programs had on students and their future endeavors.

CONCLUSION AND AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

Conclusion

The Innovation Fund has managed to prepare students for the global workforce through its distribution of small grants and relationship- and capacity-building activities targeted at HEIs. As was found and discussed in previous evaluations conducted on the Innovation Fund, the use of the Innovation Fund's small grants leverages HEI systems to support international workforce and exchange programs for post-secondary students throughout the Western Hemisphere. The Evaluation Team confirmed and built upon these findings by identifying the ways in which leveraging these HEI systems contributed to the program's impact of preparing students for the global workforce, as follows:

1. **Hard and soft skills linked to workforce outcomes.** Students gained hard skills through practical engineering, health, and nutrition projects, among others, contributing to student participants gaining soft skills such as leadership, patience, teamwork, and interpersonal skills. Some Innovation Fund student participants have already entered the workforce, not only within the discipline in which their Innovation Fund exchange program was based, but as a direct outcome of having participated in their Innovation Fund exchange program.
2. **Increased diversity and inclusion among program participants.** Students in disciplines previously underserved by international exchange programs, such as industrial engineering or computer science, were able to participate in an international exchange program due to the Innovation Fund's hard skills emphasis. New student populations, such as first-generation students, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and nontraditional students were also able to study abroad due to the Innovation Fund allowing HEIs to use the funds to provide scholarships for their Innovation Fund exchange programs.

The success of the Innovation Fund model and its impact on student participants throughout the Western Hemisphere leaves the program with a positive outlook for future programmatic impact. To ensure the Innovation Fund remains effective in achieving its intended impact at scale, the Evaluation Team identified the following areas of opportunity upon which POA can act to support future Innovation Fund grant participants.

Areas of Opportunity

Although HEI administrators and faculty reported general satisfaction with administrative support provided by POA staff on their Innovation Fund programs, the Evaluation Team identified some ways in which POA staff could provide more strategic and targeted support to future Innovation Fund program administrators and faculty. Areas of opportunity identified are as follows:

1. **Partnership-building Support.** Administrators and faculty emphasized that, despite the availability of the online networking platform the Innovation Network, that finding, forming, and sustaining an HEI partnership would benefit from additional support provided by POA. Administrators and faculty expressed wanting there to be ways to meet and collaborate with potential Innovation Fund partners in-person prior to committing to a partnership, in particular. While there are various in-person networking opportunities available intermittently throughout the year by means of Innovation Fund award ceremonies and POA's annual Innovation Fund conference, many administrators and faculty expressed frustration at the often-last-minute invitations and high out-of-pocket cost necessary to attend. This is an excellent opportunity for POA to adjust and build upon their in-person networking events and opportunities.

2. **Capacity-building Support.** In addition to partnership-building support, HEI administrators and faculty identified needing more targeted administrative capacity-building support for both their institution and their partner institution. Survey respondents, for example, ranked shared program management, monitoring, evaluation and learning systems and processes and their collective performance at adequately implementing these processes as having low positive impact on their implemented Innovation Fund program. This serves as an area of opportunity for POA to provide targeted capacity-building support at created shared and agreed upon program management, monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems and processes for HEIs prior to the release of RFPs and after HEI partnerships have been solidified.
3. **Garnering Institutional Buy-in.** As identified in previous evaluations conducted on the Innovation Fund and as confirmed in the Evaluation Team's research, institutional buy-in of Innovation Fund programs from leveraged HEI systems are not only made possible by small Innovation Fund grants but can be a crucial piece in maintaining the sustainability of these programs. Many administrators and faculty of sustained Innovation Fund programs reported having stable institutional buy-in of their program, and those with Innovation Fund programs which were unsustainable reported having unstable or totally lacking institutional buy-in of their program. Considering that greater institutional buy-in of international exchange programs could also contribute to decreasing barriers to student participation in programs through financial, academic, or other incentives, this offers POA an opportunity in terms of strategizing ways in which greater institutional buy-in could be achieved as a means to break down student barriers to study abroad.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To respond to the needs of Innovation Fund grant awardees through the following recommendations, the Evaluation Team recommends increasing POA's personnel and administrative resources. The Evaluation Team recommends the following adjustments and activities to be taken by Innovation Fund staff at POA to better ensure the intended Innovation Fund impact of preparing students for the global workforce is achieved.

Recommendation 1: Provide partnership-building support through adjusted and scaled-up in-person networking opportunities

Suggested actionable measures:

1. *Send invitations to conferences and Innovation Fund award ceremonies as soon as possible in advance.* Smaller HEIs are at a disadvantage in terms of quickly securing the funds necessary to attend these in-person partnership-building opportunities. By allowing more time for HEIs to plan for these events, the likelihood of smaller HEIs to get the higher-up institutional buy-in necessary to secure the funds to attend these events could increase, thus increasing event participant turnout and improving the efficacy of this partnership-building method.
2. *Host a knowledge-sharing forum for all participating HEIs.* While some administrators and faculty from primary awardee HEIs attended various workshops, forums, or other events, administrators and faculty from HEI sub-awardees (partners) were often not invited, made aware of these events, or able to attend if they were aware of them. The Evaluation Team recommends hosting an accessible knowledge-sharing forum via an online forum call to incorporate perspectives and learning from both primary awardees and sub-awardees of the Innovation Fund grants.
3. *Offer a small start-up stipend for HEIs administrators and faculty to seek out partners in-person.* This may be another opportunity for HEI administrators and/or faculty to build more solidified partnerships with their Innovation Fund partner institution in-person rather than solely through virtual interactions via the Innovation Network. Multiple administrators and faculty emphasized they would be much more comfortable taking part in the Innovation Fund if they were able to have the chance to meet and collaborate with their partner in-person prior to the start of their Innovation Fund program.

Recommendation 2: Develop and conduct capacity-building trainings targeted at program management

Suggested actionable measures:

1. *Design, conduct, record, and distribute a workshop with advice on how to find a sustainable HEI partner match.* Although shared academic strategic visions and common understanding of the intended impact of an exchange program with an HEI partner is a good component of a sustainable HEI partnership, the Evaluation Team found that these characteristics alone were not strong enough to hold a partnership together long-term. POA could provide a workshop on how to form a more effective, long-term partnership match by identifying things to look for when thinking of an HEI partner, other than shared academic programming and outcomes, such as compatible administrative and managerial capacities.
2. *Design and host a workshop, webinar, or provide a manual with Innovation Fund cost-share guidance for HEI administrators and faculty.* Many administrators and faculty reported major difficulties

particularly with the cost-share component of the Innovation Fund, either within their HEI or with their partner HEI.

3. *Design and conduct a workshop to teach administrators and/or faculty how to teach students to translate their Innovation Fund experience to the global workforce.* Student participants will come away with soft and hard skills from their Innovation Fund program and will then need to know how to market and communicate those skills to future employers. To achieve the intended impact of the Innovation Fund, this is a key ability for students to obtain.

Recommendation 3: Garner institutional buy-in so as to break down student barriers to Innovation Fund program participation

Suggested actionable measures:

1. *Extend RFP application deadlines.* Although administrators and faculty reported receiving stellar guidance regarding what makes a winning proposal from POA, Innovation Fund RFPs tend to be announced with applications due within a very tight turnaround time. From the administrators and faculty with whom the Evaluation Team spoke, the turnaround window for some RFP announcements and due dates was between one to two weeks. Such a short turnaround time puts a great strain on HEIs, particularly those who do not have a designated grants office, potentially excluding smaller, minority-serving HEIs such as technical and vocational colleges.
2. *Continue to give feedback on completed Innovation Fund programs.* Some administrators and faculty expressed confusion regarding a lack of feedback on their programs and/or reports submitted to POA. Others who had received feedback (instituted by POA for programs since 2017), however, expressed gratitude and satisfaction for the feedback overall. The Evaluation Team recommends continuing to provide this feedback, particularly regarding what could be done better by HEIs, for future Innovation Fund programs.
3. *Design, record, and distribute a learning module series on internationalizing HEIs.* This is particularly applicable to LAC HEIs who reported lacking a culture of internationalization, or study abroad applicability to students' academic plans of study, to be a major barrier to student participation in Innovation Fund programs. This learning series could include topics such as building relationships between study abroad office staff and faculty members or incorporating study abroad opportunities with applicable credit or other degree requirements.