

ASSOCIATED COLLEGES OF THE SOUTH

Proposal for A New Dimensions Initiative

I. Introduction:

This Associated Colleges of the South has identified a number of new dimensions for its program, many of which would be assisted substantially by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. They have all emerged from a planning process in which the consortium's presidents and chief academic officers, in particular, reviewed where the ACS has been in the past and charted its course for the future. The initiatives identified here are those that are very important to ACS but are without funding at this time. The funding requested in this proposal would enable the member institutions to test and experiment with new ideas, bring together groups whose members have not been in regular contact, and form new interest groups. We would also be able to extend certain initiatives beyond what is otherwise possible, and we would be able to engage additional human resources who could help to solidify and extend a number of our initiatives. We would also like to take advantage of the fact that 2001-2002 is the tenth anniversary of the founding of the consortium by holding a series of seminars and workshops that can demonstrate and showcase some of the distinctive programs undertaken by the faculty, students, and staff of member institutions.

II. Special Note About ACS:

A special note should be added about the consortium and its nine-year history. Throughout this period, it has attempted vigorously to identify ways of strengthening the academic programs of its institutions, so that the thirty thousand students enrolled in ACS institutions may receive the most effective education possible. At the same time it has taken steps to bolster the academic offerings, it has focused attention on enhancing administrative efficiency and effectiveness.

The mechanism for bringing about these results has been cooperation; ACS has fostered cooperative relationships and arrangements, thereby enabling the institutions to carry out activities that they could not conduct as well on their own.

With the splendid support of foundations such as The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the consortium has trained teachers to make more effective use of technology, thereby strengthening their roles as teachers, advisors and mentors. Library resources have been enhanced; access to electronic materials has been expanded. International opportunities have been improved and expanded, giving students exciting opportunities to broaden their horizons. Active teaching and learning experiences have been promoted and interdisciplinary cooperation has been fostered. Collaborative research has been stimulated, and service opportunities have been opened for students. In the administrative area, the group has instituted "benchmarking activities," identifying best practices in a variety of management functions. Purchasing efforts have also been initiated; substantial actions have been undertaken in energy conservation, and the chief financial officers are currently creating an interactive budget-planning model.

As our fifteen institutions look to the future, they want to maintain the momentum the consortium has helped to spark. They want to move aggressively into the second decade, solidifying ACS as an agile and entrepreneurial organization. The grant proposed by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation would help considerably in this effort.

III. Program Features:

The high-priority projects identified in this proposal fall into academic, administrative and collaborative or inter-consortial categories.

Academic Projects

Interest Groups:

New funds would provide a stimulus for interest and disciplinary groups within the consortium. Additional funds would enable the consortium to bring together a number of interest groups, which have not come together in any extended way or developed any collaborative projects for the future. For example, those groups would include faculty from women studies, the arts, Latin American Studies and Asian Studies. Funds would be used to bring the groups together, identify common interests, and explore the possibility of cooperative efforts such as joint research, cooperation on course development and ACS-wide workshops.

Information Fluency:

Additional funds would be particularly helpful in augmenting the ongoing information fluency program, particularly in terms of providing staff and consulting service to the project.

Linking Intellectual and Character Development.

A project of special interest to the ACS academic deans is connecting intellectual development and character growth through campus programs. Additional funds could bring academic and student life representatives together to uncover ways in which they might work together to create synergies between the character and intellectual development of students.

Offering Academic Symposia and Workshop

Funds would be particularly helpful in making possible a variety of conferences on a variety of topics, including those mentioned above. Such conferences would attract individuals or teams from the various campuses working on common projects or demonstrating successful projects that have been undertaken since the beginning of the organization.

Enhancing Experimentation and Exploration.

The consortium could benefit significantly by having funds available to respond to unforeseen developments and opportunities or to experiment with ideas proposed by consortial members.

Administrative Activities

Stimulating Activities among: Administrative Interest Groups:

With additional funds, the consortium could bring together various administrative groups that have not collaborated to this point. The presidents have designated the physical plant representatives, institutional research officers, career planning officers and those involved in multicultural activity as worthy of special attention. Funds could help to gather them together to identify problems or issues with *which they* could deal effectively in a collaborative manner.

Instituting Additional Benchmarking Activity:

The consortium would like to pursue other benchmarking activities building on successes in the areas of registrars and admissions. Examples are the student life offices and the business office area in which comparative studies could produce numerous lessons or "best practices" to be shared throughout the consortium.

Arranging for Temporary Staff and Consulting:

In a number of areas the consortium does not have the human resources to follow up on a project or an intriguing idea. Consulting or temporary staff could provide a considerable boost to the consortium.

Taking Advantage of New Opportunities:

With additional funds, the consortium would be in a position to respond quickly to new and unforeseen opportunities in the administrative area. They might occur in energy conservation, the purchase of natural gas, student loans or various other areas.

Communications:

If additional funds were available, the consortium could put together more on-line or print publications, bringing the consortium to the fuller attention of the ACS faculty, students and staff as well as to outside audiences. The ACS could produce a ten-year report, a review of the activities of ACS interest groups and a directory of faculty interests and expertise.

Inter-Consortial Collaboration

Extending the Consortium's Information Fluency Initiatives:

With additional funds, the consortium could explore ways of reaching out beyond its information fluency effort to other consortia. In this way, we could learn from other organizations while sharing the ACS experience.

Broadening the ACS Environmental Studies Initiative:

The consortium would like to explore possible partnerships with other consortia that are also interested in environmental studies and service. With additional funds, the consortium could reach out to these organizations, distributing information on ACS initiatives and exploring collaborative projects for the future.

IV. Concluding Comments:

ACS seeks \$500,000 to underwrite these new dimensions of its program. With such funds, there would be a considerable value-added extension of initiatives that have already been undertaken by the consortium. Moreover, such funds would enable us to launch new projects already deemed to be of keen interest to the consortium. Funds would also enable the consortium to respond to new possibilities that may arise. Such funds would enable ACS to be flexible, adaptable and responsive to such unforeseen circumstances.

In conclusion, the presidents and chief academic officers of the ACS join me in thanking the Foundation for this opportunity. We hope that we have clearly identified those areas in which a great deal is at stake for the consortium and for which additional funds would be exceedingly helpful.