

# RITA Midterm Report

## Pine Technical and Community College

November 2016



### EVALUATION QUESTIONS


1. To what degree is RITA reaching its enrollment goal?
2. What capacity is being built to sustain the RITA model beyond the grant period?
3. Is the program being implemented according to the original plan?
4. With what level of quality is the program being implemented?


### RITA Model Components


- Communications
- New or enhanced curriculum
- New technology infrastructure
- Student support
- Student employment
- Industry partner engagement


For Year 3 of the TAACCCT grant, the RITA consortium underwent a midterm evaluation to document their progress in implementing their grant programs. Each school in the consortium participated in the evaluation. The Improve Group captured information from staff, faculty, and student interviews to determine successes and challenges at Pine Technical and Community College (PTCC). Seven staff and faculty, and 2 students participated in interviews.


### Successes

 **Upgraded technology raises college stature and improves academic experience beyond IT students.** Interviewees described the state-of-the-art technology that students are learning with through the lab updates. Faculty described this technology as being relevant for the next five years. In addition, the investment in an upgraded college-wide Wi-Fi network has served to improve student and staff wireless access in all areas of the college. Internet services in the area are limited and many students rely on connectivity on campus in order to complete their work.

 **Professional development among faculty has improved curriculum.** Faculty have utilized the grant to build their knowledge and skills in the coursework they offer to students through relevant conferences and consortium-wide gatherings. The relationships faculty have built across the consortium have the potential to draw in students from other schools and broaden the audience for RITA programs.

 **Coaching support has helped students consider their job prospects.** The focused advising that has occurred through the grant has been described as bringing “an enhanced student experience from inquiry to graduation.” Advisers have helped students think about their future careers and demonstrated to faculty their value in supporting students.


 **The cyber security program has improved offerings for the school.** The cutting-edge curriculum is noted for its potential to attract students and employers in the burgeoning field. The curriculum has been developed to be offered online, as well as face-to-face. Employers have taken note and asked for interns from the program.


 **RITA has supplemented PTCC’s marketing efforts.** With grant funding, RITA staff have piloted new tactics such as Customer Relationship Management software and processes for marketing the IT programs. RITA has also contributed to a shift towards social media and away from traditional marketing methods.


## Sustainability


1. **Professional development opportunities** have created new ideas on instructional delivery that can advance beyond the grant period. Instructors are more open to new options for course delivery and other faculty are taking note of innovations. Online courses will continue to exist and allow students at other consortium schools to enroll in certain PTCC IT programs.
2. **Upgraded technology will continue to exist** in labs and across the campus after the grant closes. However, concerns remain about the plans for longer-term maintenance given the quickly moving field.
3. Certain **marketing and recruitment processes** that RITA staff developed have been embedded into the Admissions department due to the integration of RITA staff into the campus. These practices will help cultivate greater student enrollment and experience.
4. PTCC researched software solutions and found that it could take advantage of existing Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) **software subscriptions** to enhance internal practices with no added cost.

## Challenges

 **The future is uncertain.** With leadership, staff, and faculty changes in the months prior to the grant evaluation, communication about the future has been inconsistent. Most interviewees were unsure what plans were in place to transition out of the grant; one remarked that this can make the school look disorganized to external audiences (e.g. employers and students) who are unclear about the future of the Networking and Cybersecurity programs. In another case, an interviewee remarked that certain positions from the funding and their responsibilities (such as EEAs) have not been translated to existing positions in the college.

 **Grant development without full support of key implementation staff led to tensions among college staff and the RITA staff charged with rolling out the grant.** Interviewees observed that some staff implementing the grant activities were not necessarily on board with the grant or the activities required of it. One noted that grant timelines forced practices for doing grant required deliverables, such as curriculum development and obtaining MnSCU approval quickly, required later follow up and updates to programs rather than a one-time methodical approach that MnSCU processes typically engender. RITA staff highlighted that change should be expected as part of the grant process, especially technical curriculum.

 **PTCC's enrollment may not support programs.** With a small student body, RITA placed an emphasis on getting more courses hybridized and online to extend its reach to more students. However, a couple interviewees felt that the faculty has not been cultivated to embrace online teaching as a philosophy for the future. Despite improved efforts, some interviewees felt that student recruitment for the IT programs has not been enough to generate a sustainable pipeline after the grant ends. Of note, RITA staff mentioned that the RITA program enrollment is growing while enrollment numbers for other programs are decreasing.

 **Funding for a specific program creates tension between departments.** The grant has provided the IT programs with substantial resources for faculty and staff, faculty and staff development, and IT infrastructure. Some interviewees expressed concern that this sets the expectation for continued substantial funding and it does not prepare staff to achieve success with more limited resources. One interviewee expressed concern that grant funds create an expectation of what the college can support. From another standpoint, staff that were integrated into existing departments to ease the tension between the IT program and the rest of the college were not always seen as being effective at achieving grant aims.



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