

# INTERVIEWS W/ COLLEGE VICE PRESIDENTS & PROVOSTS ON EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

## *Summary*

### **Introductory Remarks**

Overwhelmingly, all respondents said that executive development at this level is critical. One respondent commented, “VPs come to us with great abilities, but the MnSCU learning curve is so high!

Several respondents commented that it is essential to provide a forum for professional development at the system level, saying that while there are meetings that allow for professional development, there is no organizational structure in place for vice presidents and provosts. Others added that a process is needed so that vice presidents and provosts can identify their ambitions and interests and then obtain career development assistance within the system. It was acknowledged that “good employees leave the system, because there isn’t a natural progression or pipeline approach.”

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDED TO LEAD EFFECTIVELY WITHIN INSTITUTIONS (#1)**

Professional development topics that were perceived as needed by vice presidents/provosts included:

- Financial Statement 101 Course (Finance for the Non-financial Administrator)
- Union Contracts
- Bonding Cycle for Capital Projects
- Funding Cycles from the Legislature
- Code of Conduct (in-depth course for executives, including enforcement)
- Overview of the System vs. Campus roles and services
- Conflict Resolution
- Higher Learning Commission Accreditation
- Communication (formal and informal resources)
- Discerning Information Integrity
- Continuous Improvement, Benchmarking, Measurable Outcomes
- Fundraising
- Overview of Academic Affairs (for non-academic vps)
- Managing People (managing performance, progressive discipline)

- Legal Framework Overview for MnSCU

Respondents commented that the current C-suite meetings work well for those included, but that nothing exists for those in areas outside of Academic Affairs, Student Services, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Finance. Many also noted that national conferences are underutilized by many vice presidents and provosts in the system and are the main way of learning what other organizations are doing.

Typical forums that were suggested for executive development included:

- National Conferences
- Participation in National Associations
- Informal Gatherings within the system (e.g., gathering of provosts at Rutgers last fall)
- Joint professional training with presidents, vice presidents, and provosts – twice a year
- Joint planning sessions in a retreat setting with presidents, vps, and provosts
- Based upon individual needs, provide a menu of options, including internships, externships, doctoral programs, executive retreats, and institutes
- Service opportunities (e.g., HLC reviewer, board membership in national associations)

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDED ON A PERSONAL LEVEL TO FEEL EQUIPPED TO DO THE JOB (#2)**

Multiple respondents replied that these jobs can be “killers” due to the workload and that they are often very isolating. Often folks in these roles are called upon frequently to serve in visible ways in their communities as well. Topics that would help vice presidents and provosts deal with these realities included:

- Balancing Work/Life (personal/professional)
- Time Management
- Decision Making Skills
- Integrating Values into Behavior
- Communication Skills (giving/receiving feedback effectively)

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVENTS WORKING WELL AT CAMPUS OR SYSTEM LEVEL (#3)**

Overall there was agreement among all respondents that current C-suite meetings are working well and are meeting some development needs for vice presidents within the system. The

meetings mentioned most included: CAO and CSAO semi-annual meetings, monthly CFO calls, Metro Alliance meetings, and the General Advisory Committee of the Vice Chancellor.

Several respondents mentioned that there are fewer opportunities for vice presidents and provosts to meet outside of the metro area. One person commented, “I feel lucky to be part of the metro alliance....I worry about CAOs in other parts of the state who aren’t able to meet with their outstate counterparts.”

One responded said that “there is nothing for provosts (except for serving on an advisory group).”

Responses regarding what’s working well at the campus level varied. One responded noted that their president wants each “chief” to attend one out-of-state conference a year. Another noted that their institution has invested in staff development funding for all staff to attend conferences or other development activities.

#### **CAREER GOAL/POSSIBLE PRESIDENCY (#4, #5)**

About half of respondents said that they would be interested in pursuing a presidency within the system. Most respondents commented that progression toward a presidency is difficult because there is no formal mechanism for vice presidents and provosts to express their interest and to get the kinds of experiences that will prepare them to compete for presidencies. Development must become a priority that is understood by presidents and expected by VPs. One respondent commented,

“I came to Minnesota \_\_\_\_\_ years ago because of the number of president positions that will vacate in the next several years. No one has approached me about my interest in developing toward a presidency within MnSCU, but others outside the state have (headhunters).”

Respondents recommended the following components of a good development approach for those aspiring to presidencies.

1. Goal Setting
2. Measurement
3. Organization Development
4. Continuous Improvement
5. CFO or Finance Training
6. Rotation among different senior leadership positions to gain breadth of experience

## **RIGHT OR WRONG TIME TO ADDRESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS GIVEN CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE (#6)**

Every respondent agreed that now is the right time to invest in professional development needs of vice presidents and provosts. Individual comments included:

- Given the exodus we're seeing due to retirements, relocations and scarcity of institutional leadership happening simultaneously, we cannot afford not to do professional development now.
- The key is how you go about it - develop cost-effective ways to accomplish training. Tap into internal resources.
- I understand we're all being challenged with the economy....it would be the wrong thing to do to give up professional development....that has been the most disturbing thing about the current travel ban. If we don't have professional development, we will all stagnate....it is very shortsighted not to have professional development.
- This is a critical time....there has to be a shared burden of leadership....we need the enhanced cohesiveness in the system by cohorts of leadership development
- Need to build the leadership pipeline.....
- There can't be a wrong time to improve your senior leadership; maybe do it without a lot of investment of resources. Can't afford not to ...reasons why:
  - There are a number of people at retirement age and regardless of the economy ... if they can manage a retirement ... would behoove us to do some succession planning. If we know that people are happy in Minnesota in their current positions. If they are here and from this climate, a VP from Arizona not likely to aspire to be president here. Will come and get experience and then leave.
  - I see this type of thinking at the dean level. Philosophy on interviewee's part. I used to teach in business and marketing ... you don't stop doing everything in your business in a bad economy ... you still have to do some marketing. If you pull back and don't spend on your people ... you hurt morale.

## **IDEAL VISION (#7)**

Respondents had a wealth of ideas for how executive development could be structured for vice presidents and provosts. Many suggested individual development plans that take into account each person's unique development needs. It was also suggested that individual development plans should be linked to institutional and systemwide succession plans.

Other ideas included:

- A Map of Career Pathways. "Round it Out" experiences needed and how to obtain those experiences. What is needed to strengthen the resume. Shadowing at the OOC for networking (an political) experiences.
- Professional development opportunities that translates into credits earned toward a doctorate in education that is flexible. As a system we can capacitate our own development, but we currently don't.
- Sabbaticals – Campus Exchange Programs or Internships
- Mentoring --Identify good administrators in various areas of responsibilities that can be tapped into and work with newer administrators.
- Continue what we are doing....making it more convenient using WebEx and ITV....Metro Alliance has created a cohesive working group among CAOs in the metro; Anytime we can host a national conference we should.....
- Would like to see the system take a visible, firm stand for the need for professional development...Would like the Chancellor say something about the importance of professional development and encouraging administrative group to take advantage of professional development opportunities
- VPs should have oncall mentoring by a seasoned president....Individualized plan that goes along with annual evaluations....
- Joint visioning meetings with presidents, vps, and the MnSCU staff
- Organized guru assignments (oncall mentoring w/presidents)
- Set aside amount for professional development for the second in command (based upon IDPs and percentage allotted to those plans as they are submitted and followed through---1% devoted to people in leadership positions)
- Professional development in conjunction with other convenings – personal and professional development; range of cutting edge and practical skills
- Alternative delivery may be an option – when it is more about information and updates for those types of sessions; things that can fit into the busy schedule
- I would like to see more peer review discussion and leveraging the expertise that is available across the system

### **QUESTION WISHED ASKED (#8)**

Here are some questions that respondents wished were asked in the interview:

- What concrete opportunities are needed to develop professionally?
- At the system level, what incentives will lead to the retention of our best and brightest?  
*(Also, it's very impressive that anyone would ask me what my goals are/ Maybe we need a work plan for development of these groups, including Deans, that explains the expectations of professional development. Should be a system-driven focus even though these are the presidents' direct reports and we have a specific hierarchy.)*
- What has been your best professional development experience?
- In retrospect, what voids in your training have caused you anxiety or contributed to not being able to perform up to par?

Final comments included,

*“ I'm glad that people are asking about executive development in a systematic way. We have power as a system that we as an individual campus can't do. Power together is better than sitting on my campus trying to figure out what to do here.”*

*“New administrators at our campus ask “What type of support is available for us?” I tell them that there are “chief” meetings and OOC staff to help at the drop of a hat.”*