

# Future-Proofing Institutions: CTLs as Engines for Institutional Resilience

Barbara Bird and Rosie Dutt

## Abstract

Educational developers support institutional leaders in navigating the complex challenges of higher education. This support is carried out through four key functions of a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL): Sieve, Hub, Incubator, and Temple. Together, these functions help institutions build resilience in challenging times.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network Conference, resilience, sieve, hub, incubator, temple

As institutional leaders navigate unprecedented change in higher education, educational developers and CTLs have become cornerstones for supporting needed change in response to emerging needs and supporting academic leaders' strategic initiatives. The 2024 POD Network Conference showcased CTL contributions to institutional change. Interestingly, those contributions fit the four CTL purposes that Mary Wright (2023) discusses in her research on CTLs: Sieve, Hub, Incubator, and Temple.

As sieves, they sort and filter vast amounts of teaching and learning data to extract actionable insights. As hubs, they facilitate connection and collaboration across departments and units, fostering campus-wide dialogue. As incubators, they nurture faculty development and support innovation in teaching and curriculum design. As temples, they cultivate spaces of care, reflection,

and professional well-being for faculty and educators. Educational developers use their expertise as hubs, sieves, incubators, and temples to help chief academic officers adapt to shifting needs and succeed in their change initiatives.

How does the sieve function of CTLs support change initiatives?

CTLs continuously engage in teaching and learning research and emerging trends in student needs. For example, current student demographics require a shift from teacher-centered to learning-centered strategies and course designs (Davis, Gray, Rzeszutek, 2024; Ives, 2024; Mitchell, 2024); from content-focused to learning-focused syllabi (Clepper and Forstie, 2024); and toward new pedagogies that address current student learning challenges (Duong, 2024; DeClercq and Nelson, 2024; Schroering et. al, 2024). CTLs are

seldom recognized for the heavy lifting done through both their research and synthesis of material, which saves faculty time and energy.

This “sieve” work means that faculty are handed research-based strategies that address shifting educational needs, building faculty expertise without nearly as much strain. CTLs also help faculty with cultural shifts such as technology and AI (Caines, 2024; Kokaisel and Groccia, 2024; Ludwig and Reder, 2024).

How does the hub function of CTLs support change initiatives?

At both the individual and system levels, cross-functional connections enhance the successful implementation of strategic initiatives. CTLs have the power to foster effective relationship-rich connections due to their expertise as connectors.

CTLs are connectors, bringing different campus units together. For example, CTLs have served as hubs for improving equity in faculty evaluations by connecting with the faculty personnel committees and administration to collaboratively create a framework for assessing teaching effectiveness (Brunow, 2024). CTLs also engage cross-disciplinary collaboration to gain funding and support (Sella, et. al, 2024).

[Smith et al. \(2022\)](#) suggest that CTLs foster more than temporary collaborations by creating a “culture of collaboration, more specifically a culture of partnership.” Sustained collaboration across the institution creates a partnership culture where each unit or department contributes to and relies on

others for specific shared goals, expanding the unit's vision from an individual unit to an institutional perspective. This shift to the institutional perspective is essential for many significant change initiatives.

How does the incubator function of CTLs support change initiatives?

The incubator CTLs focus on growth– they help create a growth culture, as Mary Murphy discusses (2024). As a consequence of the growth mindset that CTLs promote, they help faculty generate their own data on their improvement efforts using micro-credentials for teaching effectiveness practices (Daniels, 2024; Lopez, et. al, 2024). Another common CTL program that prompts faculty’s growth mindset as teachers is engaging in their own Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), which provides data on specific student learning experiments (Bayraktar, Taggart, and Henry, 2024; Kim, 2024; Singer-Freeman, 2024; Strombom, 2024).

Often, growth starts with data. CTLs have always used data, but data use has increased in response to the pressures higher education is facing, especially for liberal arts institutions, to evidence effectiveness. CTLs use learning analytics to expand educational outcomes (Bitfulco, et. al, 2024), accompanied with multiple sources of data to improve departmental outcomes (Supriya, Parker, and Kennison, 2024). By promoting faculty effectiveness through growth and data incubation, CTLs have developed experts who can generate a faculty culture of growth; a culture that can be essential to academic leaders who need faculty to engage in new initiatives.

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How does the temple function of CTLs support change initiatives?

Change produces emotion, often navigating strong emotions, opinions, and fears. Educational developers navigate the complex and difficult change process through their skill at facilitating connections and conversations (Harlyn, Hammons, and Hurgubise, 2024; Malcolm, et. al, 2024; Williams, Carruth, and Hull, 2024).

For example, a growing trend in educational development is to create or adopt Teaching Effectiveness Frameworks that outline key principles for improving teaching and learning (Abrue, 2024; Brunow, et. al, 2024; Jacobson and Flaming, 2024; Todd & Tonya, 2024). CTLs are leading this movement due to their expertise in teaching and learning; however, their success relies on their skills in creating temples, communities where faculty are seen, heard, and valued.

### Conclusion

Resilience amid our current complex challenges requires expertise in all four CTL functions: sieve, hub, incubator, and temple. CTLs help academic leaders build adaptable, forward-thinking, future-ready institutions committed to the success of all students. With the help of CTLs, institutions can navigate our complex higher education context with resilience.

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