

iUtah External Advisory Board Report

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Overall, iUtah progress has been enormous. Michelle Baker is commended for taking over a large, complex project in its leadership transition and leading it to major, new successes over the past year. We especially enjoyed the integration talk and seeing the significant advances that have occurred. GAMUT is functioning well and providing important data. The social science team has made interesting and unexpected discoveries with the survey that they recently created. EOD has made nice outreach efforts. The network image of the publications is very impressive. The interactions with the state agency stakeholders are important and well highlighted. The annual report is exemplary.

Recommendations

Here, we provide a set of recommendations that are geared towards the concluding years of the project and, most importantly, the completion of a successful Reverse Site Visit (RSV).

1. Highlight project impacts during the RSV. Activities and outputs have been emphasized, but not impacts (i.e., significant advances that will benefit science and society well beyond the life of iUtah). In some talks on Thursday, we heard a few exciting intellectual advances, but still not impacts. The progress is extremely impressive, but the impacts must be highlighted during the RSV. Some possible examples that could be pulled out as impacts include: (a) the new conceptual model that was created by a post-doc; (b) the new approach for measuring mercury that was developed by an undergraduate student; (c) and the high school students that are committed to pursuing STEM in college. Other key impacts should be identified and highlighted. Don't be afraid to brag, but do so by focusing on fewer and more compelling impacts.
2. Practice, practice, practice. The presenters who cannot keep even remotely close to their allotted time detract from the meeting. They will not perform well at the RSV. Message discipline and presentation discipline are critical.
3. Have a clear organization scheme for the RSV presentation(s). Consider using the conceptual model as the organizing principle for the research presentations. A good model, such as has been created for iUtah, can be used to highlight: knowledge and infrastructure gaps; past, present and future research; and key intellectual contributions and impacts. It is very important to think through the one, two, or (at most) three key points that you want reviewers to remember; this applies to individual presentations as well as the project overall. Useful slides to conclude

with are: (a) “iUtah by the numbers” that highlights important numbers such as people, diversity, publications, grants, etc.; (b) research impacts highlighting two to three major, long-lasting impacts; and (c) broader impacts highlighting your two to three most significant broader impacts. The networking diagram (before and after) tells a nice story. In addition, the merging of puzzle pieces can be used to put progress in perspective. This iconography will help in convincingly demonstrating the progress and value of iUtah.

4. Simplify and strengthen the broader impacts presentation. Highlight and provide more detail on a key subset of broader impacts. A recitation of all possible definitions of Broader Impacts is very wonky and not very exciting. Either use this as a (more concise) overall organizing principle from the beginning of the EOD talk or (preferably) do not use it at all. We would like to see some numbers (in terms of people affected) and more discussion of how diverse groups are truly being impacted. The overall goals and most important successes need to be clarified. Also, explain where you are going in the future. Perhaps it will be most effective to identify where iUtah can have THE most significant impact. We encourage you to: (a) assess needs; (b) identify a small number of desired outcomes; and (c) enact a plan that can meaningfully change lives in these one or two areas.

5. Emphasize diversity and inclusion whenever possible. Be sure to highlight and include female and underrepresented co-leads at the RSV. Include people pictures on slides.

6. Address evaluation and assessment and describe how recommendations were responded to.

7. Describe BUGI and iVL objectives, plans and successes. Since the GIRT and Decision Theatre funds were re-directed to BUGI and iVL, reviewers are going to want to hear about the successes realized from doing so. You can easily tell the story of how you responded to challenges and turned problems into successes.

8. Describe sustainability approaches and successes.

9. Consider reducing the number of acronyms to a minimum.

Other comments

An All Hands Meeting should ideally start with a summary of the project objectives, accomplishments and major successes to date, and a summary of where you wish to go in the upcoming year. Students and other newbies would benefit immensely from seeing the bigger picture. A combination of the material presented by Jim and Michelle on day 1 would satisfy this important need.

With respect to the EAB—please settle on specific dates and an agenda early, and do not change it for the EAB. Both the start time and the ending of the second day changed significantly.

iUtah may wish to consider how to make the best use of the EAB for the remainder of the project. Focusing more on integration, overviews, and challenges may be a better use of time, instead of exposure to the individual efforts of students and post-docs. This year, much of day 2 represented a repeat of day 1.