The Engaged Department Grant enabled the Women’s Studies Department successfully to achieve our initial goal, which was the development and implementation of a course on feminist activism and community organizing, and developing other curricular civic engagement projects. Along the way we learned many lessons.

**Key Lessons**

1) **Enhanced understanding of civic engagement**

   We applied for the grant with some very specific goals in mind. From that first meeting with our cohort we gained a much broader vision of the nature of civic engagement. We learned that civic engagement is a much more collaborative process than we had originally envisioned. We knew that we wanted to include the community in discussions of developing our curriculum in ways that would be of greater service to the community, but had not thought about approaching the community as to what they might want from us and in collaboration with us. This was quite eye-opening and has extended our vision of our civic engagement possibilities.

   2) **Increased mutual awareness and understanding of partners’ and departments’ needs, goals, and resource and the need for regular and continued information sharing.**

   Our conversations with community partners were incredibly fruitful, far more than we had imagined. We were all quite stunned by how little our community partners knew about what we actually teach in our department. We were also very unaware of our partners’ needs actually are. We learned from this that we need continually to make our partners aware of the subject matter of our courses. We also learned that we need to have regular updates on our community partners’ needs so that we can better address these through service learning and internships. We also discovered that the possibilities of ways we can collaborate are endless. We discovered so many possible projects – if only we had the time and resources!

   3) **Need for ongoing institutional support in terms of funding and support staff**

   We were only able to accomplish all that we did because we had the funding to hire a graduate assistant who implemented much of the major work of the grant. We also were able to use grant moneys to have meetings with partners, and to fund honoraria for class visits and lectures. It became clear to us that the main thing we need in order to continue with the work we want to do in civic engagement is to have a full-time staff person whose position is dedicated to this work, as well as release time for faculty and funding sufficient to carry out the civic engagement projects. Until the university is willing to institutionalize civic engagement through regular staffing and funding, I think we will be an institution dedicated to civic engagement in name only. As a department, we do not have the time nor the funds to carry out the work of civic engagement in the way we would like.
4) Need for full support and investment of Engaged Team from the beginning
The main impetus for writing the Engaged Department grant proposal came from one person on the team, with genuine commitment and support from one other person, and willingness on the part of the others. The team fully supported civic engagement efforts and had long supported the idea behind the grant, but though initial energy for the project was high, only two team members were invested and dedicated enough to the project to see it past the first six months. Each of us on the team also faced some substantial life challenges during the course of this grant, so the timing may not have been in our favor, but everyone’s initial investment might have helped to sustain commitment over the long haul. Also, much of the work of the grant happened over the summer, because that is when we had the time, so the two invested members and the graduate assistant took on the bulk of the work.

We had a major problem staffing the Activism course. The team member who had committed to teach the course backed out, as did the other team member who was the back-up person. Again, team members were facing personal challenges as well, but a deeper commitment might have prevented this problem. Also, the Dean, who had strongly supported our efforts, was unable to commit funds to hiring an outside person to teach the course.

5) Inclusion of community partners and perhaps students on the Team would have enhanced the process.
Our team consisted entirely of faculty and staff from our department. The faculty/community line is a bit blurry, since faculty are heavily invested in the community and serve on boards of community organizations. However, having some community people who are not associated with the university on the Team from the beginning would have added some important perspectives and dimensions to the project.

Also, inclusion of some students on the Team would also have added some unique perspectives. This might have been a problem due to the transient nature of the student population, but I think it might have been a good addition.

6) Broadening of the definition of “community”
We began with a fairly defined community of feminist organizations. Even these, however, were fairly narrow in scope. As the grant continued, we widened the scope of the organizations we included. It became clear to us, however, that “community” needs to include more than organizations that serve the community. Who this might include and how we might make that next step is something that would need much more thought and attention.

Next Steps
1) Request funding for a civic engagement staff position
2) Request release time for civic engagement for faculty
3) Request funding to support costs of civic engagement, e.g., honoraria, community meetings, etc.
In order to do the kind of quality civic engagement we would like to do in our department, it is clear that we need ongoing institutional support in terms of funding and time. We need at the very least a half-time, but ideally a full-time staff position dedicated to coordinating civic engagement efforts in the department. We barely scratched the surface of our civic engagement possibilities, and simply continuing to stay current with community partners’ changing needs, programs, and visions would take a considerable amount of time.

It would also be helpful for faculty members to have release time to work on civic engagement efforts. This would enable us to engage in some of the projects suggested by community partners, such as teaching Women’s Studies courses in the community, or doing research that supports community partners’ work.

Also, our commitment to community partners, all of which are nonprofit agencies, includes our ability to contribute to the costs of meetings, to pay honoraria for speakers, to pay for field trips for students, etc.

All of these require investment of funds and support from higher levels of administration.

2) Permanent staffing of the Activism course.
We hope to hire someone either as an adjunct, or in our next faculty hire (which could be several years away), or recruit another faculty member from another department, to teach the Feminist Activism course on a regular basis. This will require commitment of funds from the Dean.

3) Yearly reports to community partners and annual meetings with community partners.
As was stated earlier, we were surprised by how unaware community partners were of the substance of our curriculum, as well as how unaware we were of community partners’ programs, challenges, and opportunities. It is clear that we need at the very least to provide annual updates of changes and additions to our curriculum, our service-learning efforts, etc. It would be beneficial if we could meet at least once a year to update each other on changing needs and visions.

**Recommendations for the Engaged Department Program**
The main recommendation we have is that the program be more forthcoming in the grant application process about the expectations and the full nature of the process and the paperwork involved in this grant. Our team was quite thrown by two things at that first meeting. The first was that we were free to re-invent the wheel, so to speak. We had invested a lot of time into developing a specific project for the grant, and then were told at that first meeting that civic engagement meant first collaborating with the community partners, and then developing projects. We understand now why this makes sense, but it would have been helpful to come at this with this understanding from the beginning.
We were also thrown by the amount of paperwork involved. While it ended up not being terribly overwhelming, there was enough sense of “this is so much busy work and we don’t have the time,” that the less invested members lost interest. Again, it would have been helpful to have more information about all of this when applying for the grant, rather than after having received it, so that people really know what they are getting into and won’t feel disenchanted from the beginning, which did happen with a couple of our team members.

Thank you for funding our efforts. The grant did allow us to have very fruitful discussions with community partners, and with some in particular we have developed much greater mutual awareness and partnership. It enabled us to develop a course that has been long needed in our department. It gave us a much richer awareness of our possibilities, and we hope we are able to sustain these efforts.