

**Change Leadership Toolkit**

**Case Studies:**

**University of Colorado Boulder**



**An Addendum to the**

**Change Leadership Toolkit:**

**A Guide for Advancing Systemic Change**

**in Higher Education**

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# CHANGE LEADERSHIP TOOLKIT

## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

These Case Studies accompany the Change Leadership Toolkit and demonstrate what it looks like in action to use Leader Moves to promote systemic institutional change. Each case highlights a few key Leader Moves and includes an overview of each institution, the leader at the forefront of the change process, and a description of the Leadership Context and Levers used to achieve the change goal. Collectively, these Case Studies showcase the combinations of Leader Moves and Levers that leaders can use to drive change across different types of institutions. It is important to note that given the lengthy time period for changes and keeping the document brief, these are just examples of Moves, Levers and Leadership Context elements and are not fully inclusive of the leaders' change processes.

In any systemic change project, there are a variety of conditions that may influence the Moves leaders choose to make, the Levers they may use, and the ultimate change that is made. As a result, for these Case Studies, we chose to represent leaders in different roles, institutions with varying characteristics, and various types of change projects in order to reflect this diversity and showcase how the Toolkit is useful in a variety of situations. Visit our Change Leadership Toolkit Case Studies web page to see other examples, <https://pullias.usc.edu/clt-case-studies/>.



## CU BOULDER: Leader Moves for a Teaching Quality Framework (TQF) Initiative

### About the Institution

As the flagship institution of the **University Colorado system**, the University of Colorado Boulder (CU) serves about 36,122 students with a majority at the undergraduate level. CU is one of only 35 U.S. public research institutions in the Association of American Universities (AAU), a group of institutions widely recognized as America's leading research universities. With their values of lead, innovate and impact, CU prides itself on leading innovative practices to support and positively impact their campus and broader community.

### CASE STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Leader Role(s) and Agency:** Noah Finkelstein, professor who conducts research both on physics education and on how educational transformations get taken up, spread, and sustained.
- **Goals of Change:** Adoption of more scholarly approaches to teaching evaluations campus-wide through the Teaching Quality Framework (TQF) initiative.
- **Level/Scope of Change:** Campus-wide
- **Institutional Type:** State Public, Research 1
- **Moves Highlighted:**
  - Create Vision, Expectations and Pacing (V)
  - Communication (C)
  - Develop Strategy and Resources (S)
  - Leading People and Teams (T)
  - Fostering Diversity (D)
  - Engage in Advocacy and Navigate Politics (P)
- **Levers:**
  - **Lever Category 1:** Campus (system, state) strategic plan(s), including mission, master plan, diversity plan, and other plans
  - **Lever Category 5:** External partnerships & organizations, including regional, community, state, national or international
  - **Lever Category 7:** Funding streams and sources

## Setting the Stage: About the Project

This Case Study highlights Noah Finkelstein, Professor of Physics at CU Boulder, and the Leader Moves he made to develop and adopt a new framework for supporting and assessing teaching on his campus. Noah is one of the Principal Investigators in the Physics Education Research (PER) group and is a fellow and founding co-director of CU's Center for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Learning. He co-directs the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU's) national Network of STEM Education Centers, and is helping build the STEM Discipline-Based Education Research (DBER) Alliance and coalitions advancing undergraduate education transformation. Given his robust involvement at the campus, regional and national levels, Noah was experienced and well-positioned to lead the development and implementation of the Teaching Quality Framework (TQF) at CU Boulder. The purpose of the TQF was to provide a richer evaluation of teaching that would encourage broader adoption of evidence-based teaching practices and enhance student learning at CU Boulder.

A precursor to the TQF was the **CU Science Education Initiative**, a **\$5 million effort to transform teaching practices on campus across STEM departments** at CU Boulder. In 2013, around the time of this initiative, CU Boulder was also selected by the **Association of American Universities (AAU) to participate in the STEM Education Initiative**. This program was a “five-year initiative to improve the quality of undergraduate education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields at its member institutions.” This award served as the foundation for developing the TQF at CU Boulder. Noah and the change leadership team also secured a **National Science Foundation (NSF, #1725959)** grant to further cement the TQF and scale its work. Below we look at some of the most prominent Leader Moves made toward adopting the TQF at CU Boulder.

## Change Leader Moves



### Overview of Leader Moves

Within an institution where change initiatives were common but not always sustained, Noah took the lead to help develop and adopt the TQF in collaboration with various campus programs and departments. He began by developing a vision as to what this could look like based on existing research (V1, V2). He worked across various departments of the institution to communicate this vision, began to develop a compelling message for why the TQF was needed, and thus generated initial buy-in (C1, C2, C3, C8, C10). Nested in his communication efforts was a strategy of developing a grassroots movement to ignite systemic change that would result in investment from senior-level leaders and grant acquisitions to support and expand project goals (S1, S2, S3, S5, S6, S8). Part of this strategy revolved around identifying and recruiting key faculty and staff members as part of the formal leadership team for the TQF and those who were in

key areas (across departments in varying roles) to support the work (T1, T2, T3, T6, T8). Noah also made sure the team represented a diverse group of leaders with both STEM-specific and more general teaching and learning expertise who could speak to how the TQF could be implemented with a DEI lens in mind (D1, D2, D4, D5). Because of Noah's role and longstanding engagement in other campus initiatives, existing partnerships, allies, and political acumen, he was able to steer the grassroots efforts to advance the project goals (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6). Let's dive more deeply into how Noah used the Leader Moves to create systemic change with the TQF initiative.

## Create Vision, Expectations and Pacing (V) - Focus on V1, V2

The origins of the TQF lie in the **CU Science Education Initiative to transform teaching practices on campus across the STEM departments** at CU Boulder. This existing campus initiative and the creation of a **white paper** served as the initial vision-building for the TQF change project (V1, V2). Noah and colleagues were guided by the central question, “Why haven’t teaching evaluations changed to align with the latest research on teaching and learning?” The paper was grounded in a decade of scholarship, highlighted innovative teaching evaluation strategies, and supported the need for change and adoption of the TQF (V2). This initial white paper was subsequently revised several times in a way that allowed for varying feedback to be implemented. For example, every time the team presented the white paper at a department meeting, they would take feedback from faculty and implement any insights that would add not just to the paper, but the overall vision for the project (V1, V2). Noah made the case that “now is the time to establish this vision to improve where we are at,” connecting the TQF to the bigger picture of the university by aligning it with institution-wide priorities (V2). Noah aligned his efforts with goals that already existed in the university under the Provost’s strategic plan (V1). With a vision in hand, he was able to move forward to recruit more members to join the project and move towards adoption of the TQF.

## Communication (C)- Focus on C1, C2, C3, C8, C10

In order to make progress, communication was an ongoing Move that Noah activated. Noah gathered stakeholders (i.e., department chairs) and clearly articulated motivating factors (i.e., connecting opportunities to external initiatives (AAU STEM Initiative) for change) that persuaded them to join the change team for TQF (C3). He did this by developing a **compelling and coherent message** about the vision, goals and value of

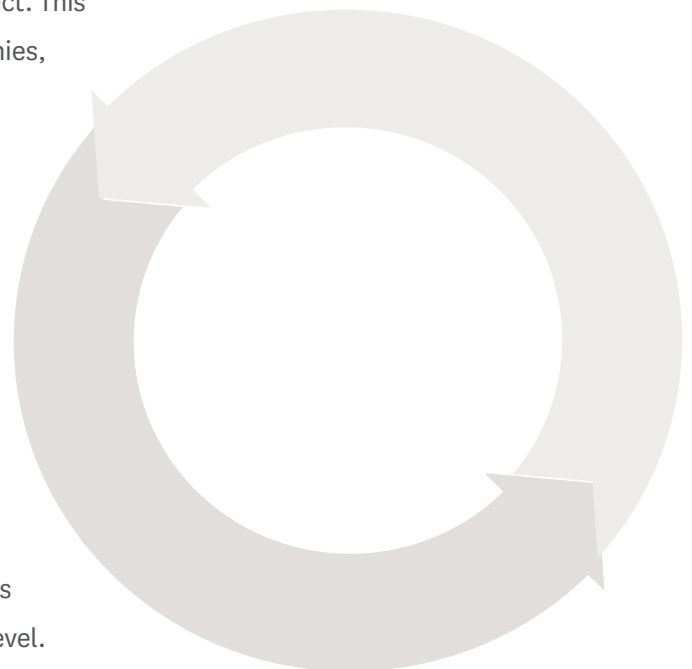
a new teaching evaluation framework (C1). In their white paper, Noah and his co-authors drew from national data and literature to support the need for the TQF. This messaging was consistent with what he shared with campus colleagues and leaders in order to garner interest and buy-in for the TQF (C3). Communication efforts also included frequent check-ins with leaders and stakeholders across the campus, externally, and leaders high up in the institutional hierarchy (C8). Noah had a lot of “1:1 personal meetings” to create transparent conversations about vision, purpose, goals and outcomes for the TQF (C2). He listened to the feedback provided and had “lots of meetings to see what they [faculty] cared about, how to meet their needs and concerns” and “how this initiative sits with other work” that was already being done. The team went to the Provost and to the Chancellor when establishing the TQF project and said, “we would like to do this and can we attach your names, and they said yes.” Communicating what was going on with senior-level leaders was important to get top-down approval which held symbolic value and legitimize the initiative. Once the project was in progress, Noah made sure to communicate early wins to both the Provost and Chancellor. For instance, once the team acquired the AAU grant to support the program pilot, Noah got the vice-president of the AAU to come to campus and meet with the Provost and President to review project successes (C8, C10). This engagement with AAU and senior-level leaders was leveraged to communicate the collaboration at a national level and bring prestige to the change initiative. Later communication efforts included marketing of the project by creation of a logo and tagline, “T1 at the R1,” which was promoted on the website to share information about the project with both the campus community and externally (C10). What is showcased here are two communication strategies: one of regular 1:1 meetings with departments (both the entire faculty and faculty leading the change effort) and another where campus-wide stakeholder meetings were open to the public and advertised to all potential stakeholders.

## Develop Strategy and Resources (S)-Focus on S1, S2, S4, S5, S6, S8

To achieve the goals and outcomes of the TQF, part of the buy-in strategy was around getting the right people on board in the initial phase of the project. As noted above, the collaboratively-developed white paper helped guide the vision and also helped stakeholders coalesce around an organized message. Noah served as a primary messenger of the purpose of the project given the reach of his established networks (highlighted in Communications Change Moves on the previous page). He gained grassroots support during the ideation stage when connecting with faculty colleagues across departments before approaching the administration to achieve buy-in; this strategy helped him assure senior-level leadership that there was interest and motivation for the change. The initial pilot had 11 participating departments. Once Noah got the various faculty on board, he held meetings with them individually and a group to craft a pitch and a statement that explicitly said, “we want to fulfill the vision that the Provost had established in one of his student success initiatives” (S6, S8). While aligning the TQF with the Provost’s strategic goals helped set the vision for the project (as referenced in the Vision section above), it also gave the initiative legitimacy, promoted buy-in, and supported leaders in garnering new resources. Noah asked the Provost, “we need you to endorse this effort, allow us to do this effort, we need you to come in and publicly support and endorse this in the future and we need money.” This strategy was effective, as the Provost came back to them and said they could have two of their three asks (public and private support for the initiative, but not funding). Noah adds how this is an example of starting with the grassroots level and building a coalition “that the Provost couldn’t ignore”(S8). The conversations that Noah had with various stakeholders across the campus were part of what he calls the “intentional work” at the development stage prior to pursuing the grant funding. According to Noah, these tactical conversations were what allowed the team to go get the grant and say, “there’s enough interest so that we can go about doing that [grant proposal]” (S1, S2).

One of the major strategies that helped the TQF succeed was alignment with the AAU STEM Initiative (S6). Noah and the leadership team were able to secure an AAU grant for three years of the project. This grant funded the initial pilot of the TQF. Through these grant monies, the team was able to pay participating faculty for three quarters, and the college matched this rewards structure with an additional three quarters of funding (S2, S5). This strategy soon expanded beyond STEM disciplines to the humanities. To build trust and commitment to the project, departments were charged as the key units of change, which led to the development of the departmental action team model (S4).

The AAU had as its goal to transform teaching practice at a department level, but according to Noah at this point the “campus readiness” for change was beyond that end. As a result, the team was “working at other layers” across departments and at the college level.



Noah was interested in moving “beyond supporting individuals as part of a course transformation” and going after “departments as key units for change,” instead working to get multiple departments on board and targeting schools and colleges in addition to departments (S1). To sustain and scale the change project, more resources were needed to continue incentivizing participating faculty. To do so, Noah got key scholars in the teaching evaluation transformation sphere to help position the TQF for an NSF grant (S2). He collaborated on the proposal with two other institutions engaged in meaningful changes to their teaching evaluation processes. Noah shared how they “were fortunate to win an NSF grant” that allowed them to “conduct this [TQF] work” (S2, S5). The resources provided by the AAU grant helped with the developmental phase and solidified institutional leadership commitments, and then the NSF grant allowed for sustained change and scaling of the initial pilot. The NSF support, and the success of engaging more units in departmental transformation laid the groundwork for collaboration with the deans of the two largest colleges at CU: Engineering & Applied Sciences and Arts & Sciences. These deans subsequently both funded the project within their respective colleges and communicated their expectations that all academic units in these colleges would engage in the TQF initiative.

### **Leading People and Teams (T) - Focus on T1, T2, T3, T6, T7, T8**

Noah also identified and recruited key advocates and champions for the TQF work (T1). This intentional recruitment resulted in a diverse set of stakeholders for the project (T2). Noah shared how initially he went to eight department chairs he had worked with previously to gain buy-in from various units (T2, T8). He generated excitement by meeting with these leaders and sharing the TQF project and its flexibility for engagement where “[departments] could opt in and opt out at any time” (T3, T6). As noted in the prior sections, the

AAU grant provided initial funding that was then matched by the institution and later expanded through an NSF grant that provided incentives and rewards to motivate engagement from participating faculty (T7). There were also key leaders positioned in strategic areas to advance the project. One of the Co-PIs for the grant was the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education (T1, T2). Connecting the grant to this leader was a way to expand the team and build more champions, which helped to institutionalize the TQF.

### **Fostering Diversity (D) - D1, D2, D4, D5**

Noah shared that Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) were embedded in the project as part of their understanding of institutional transformation. Examples of how DEIJ was inserted include the evaluation process, which used a rubric informed by work at the [Carnegie foundation around principles of improvement](#).

Noah was explicit and intentional in mentioning that “diversity has been a major theme of focus for the project itself, not only within the project, but then the object to focus on diversity as an educational practice and transformation, something that can be valued and infused in that [TQF] evaluation system...” (D4). There was also discipline diversity as a way to elevate voices in an interdisciplinary manner (D5). Noah emphasized that the diversity of the team, their expertise, and backgrounds (such as those in educational research and transformation work) were needed to engage in effective pedagogical moves that engaged systemic change (D1, D2). He shared, “we were very intentional about bringing in voices from very different kinds of academic units” to ensure diverse perspectives (D5).



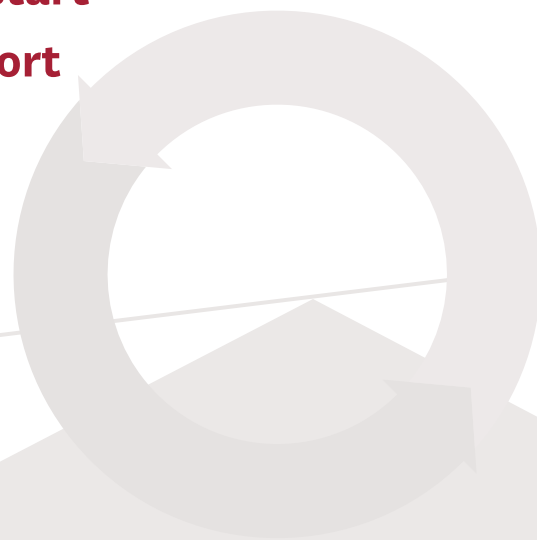
## Engage in Advocacy and Navigate Politics (P) -Focus on P1, P2, P4, P5, P6

Leader Moves can be used individually or in combination with one another. For Noah, Navigating Politics was intertwined with other Moves he made to advance the TQF. A key Move activated in combination with the others shared above was Noah's use of his political acumen to mobilize the change leadership team, develop and execute strategies, and ultimately move the TQF project along (P1). The initial grassroots approach helped him identify and organize people of influence, allies and experts to help craft the vision and purpose to present to upper-level leadership. This understanding of how to effectively work across roles, disciplines, hierarchies, and power structures led Noah to seek buy-in from top-level institutional leaders and external partners, creating a broad coalition (P4). The intentionality behind developing both a grassroots leadership team and cultivating strong support from the Provost's office through alignment with the Provost's strategic plan allowed the team to leverage existing strategic priorities and generate momentum for the change (P5, P6).

Once the initial pilot through the AAU grant began, Noah ensured that AAU leadership had on-campus meetings with senior leadership at CU (P2, P4). Making this connection helped in strengthening senior leader commitments and managing any skeptics by leveraging a national partnership and affiliation (P1, P2, P5). Similarly, within the development stage, Noah had connected with "like-minded" individuals through the Bayview Alliance who also wanted "to go after teaching evaluation" as a focus of transformational change and who were influential nationally (P1, P2). He intentionally got two of the teaching evaluation transformation "luminaries," Pat Hutchings and Mary Huber, who are designers of the Bayview Alliance, to join the advisory board and help shape the project (P2, P5).

**“In short, our strategy was to start a grassroots movement, support a grassroots movement, and then get top-down support.”**

**— Noah Finkelstein**



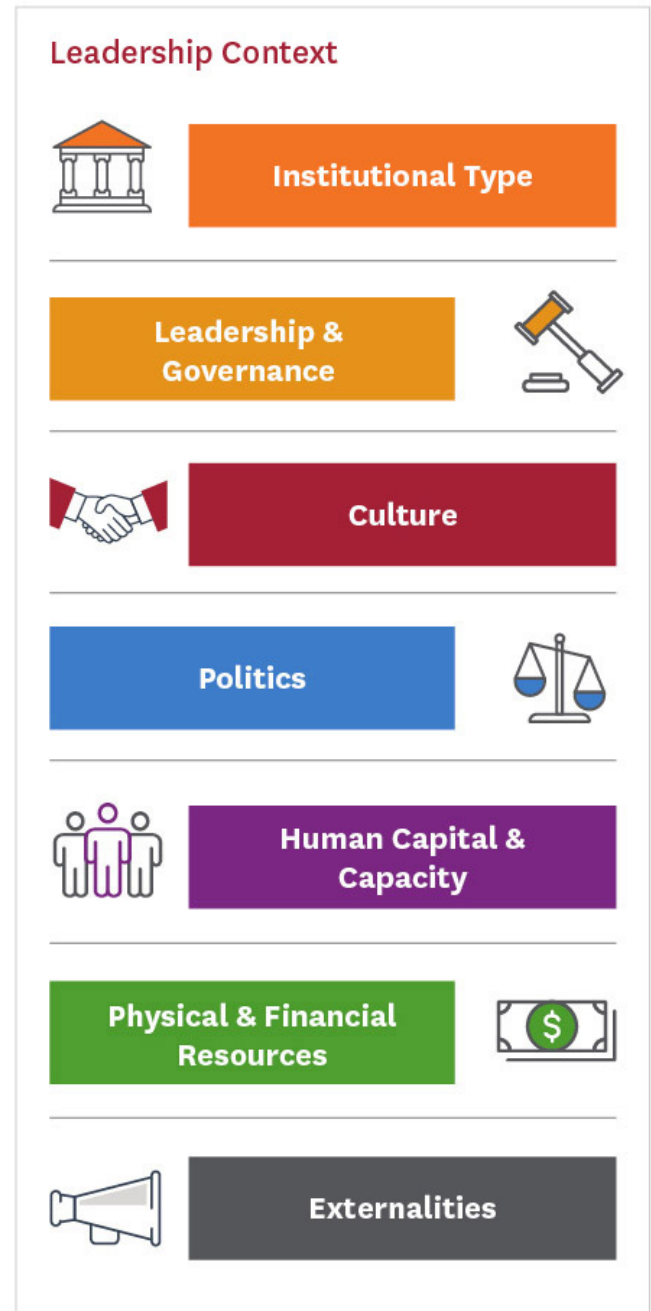
## Focus On: Leadership Context

Leadership Context involves the set of internal and external influences that shape a leader's change landscape, influence the Moves made, and provide opportunities or challenges to consider when developing a change strategy. At CU Boulder, one significant contextual factor was institutional type.

Because of CU Boulder's identity as a selective research university, where research is prioritized and teaching tends to be undervalued, any approach to revamping teaching practices had to carefully consider this context. As a result, Noah and his team employed key Vision (V) and Strategy Moves (S) to ensure that the TQF project was strongly rooted in the scholarship of teaching and learning in order to connect with the campus's value on research and scholarship. Additionally, he made Communication Moves (C) that ensured dissemination through scholarly avenues such as white papers and journal articles in addition to standard presentations and email messages in order to consider this aspect of Leadership Context.

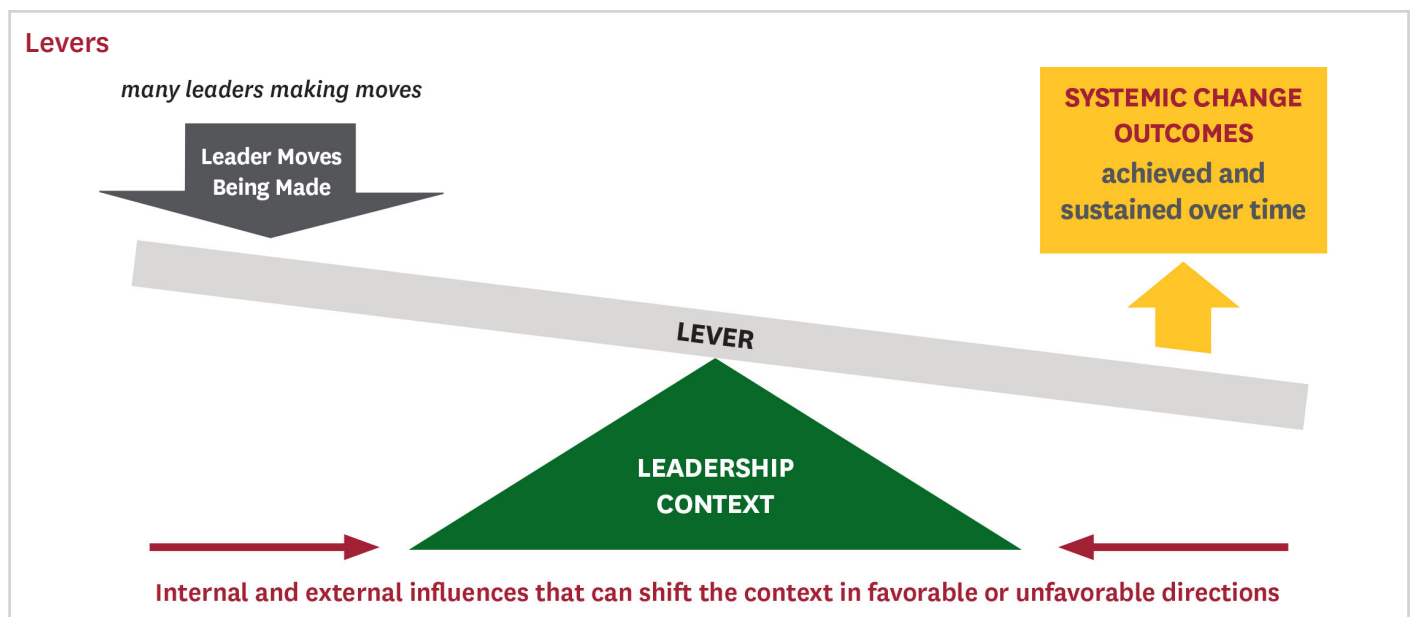
Another notable aspect of Leadership Context at CU Boulder was its organizational culture. CU Boulder prides itself on having a culture of innovation. Noah mentioned early on that CU Boulder was an institution where many initiatives sprouted, so he knew that pursuing the TQF initiative initially would be doable. However, while the university's culture supported experimentation and innovation, it did not necessarily support sustainability and scale. Noah noted, "it's a standard practice here for an initiative to start," however, "support, scaling, and sustaining of initiatives is not a stable thing for us." Thus, Noah

knew he would need to pay extra attention to the growth and institutionalization of the TQF, as the university's culture was not set up to support these phases of change as much as initial phases. Moves around Leading People and Teams (T) helped build support for the project among key senior leaders who could help the project grow and institutionalize and Moves around Developing Strategy and Resources (S) ensured that the project would have the funding support it needed to sustain over time. Noah's understanding of these aspects of Leadership Context helped him achieve systemic change where other initiatives had failed.



## Focus On: Levers

When leaders engage in systemic change efforts, they are faced with many opportunities to amplify change. In the Toolkit, these opportunities are referred to as Levers. A Change Lever is an opportunity that can be leveraged or that can be “pulled upon” or manipulated to advance or accelerate the desired change. Noah and his team identified several aspects of their Leadership Context that could be leveraged to maximize change. In this section, we describe the most prominent examples of Change Levers from Noah’s project.



- Lever Category 2: Campus (system, state) strategic plan(s), including mission, master plan, diversity plan, and other plans:** As noted in the Change Leader Moves around Strategy, this lever was used when the call to senior leadership was made. Noah and the change leadership team aligned the TQF with the Provost’s initiative for student success outlined in the strategic plan, which allowed the team to gain buy-in and support for the TQF.
- Lever Category 5: External partnerships & organizations, including regional, community, state, national or international:** For the TQF change to be successful, CU Boulder’s connection with AAU was crucial to engage leaders in the systemic project from a financial standpoint, but also from a partnership perspective. Noah leveraged this external partnership with AAU to generate buy-in across campus as the TQF was developed and implemented. The prestige associated with the award greatly eased this process. Noah mentioned how he was able to bring AAU to speak to campus leadership about how great the work with TQF was and to push leadership to recognize its value as well.
- Lever Category 7: Funding streams and sources:** With the AAU partnership came the opportunity for some grant money that was used to incentivize the leadership participating as part of the change team. The grant funding also provided leverage for the change leadership team to ask senior-level leadership for money without leaving it fully to the university to fund. This lever continued with the acquisition of the NSF grant, which helped expand the project through further rewards and incentives for participating faculty, programs, and departments. Ultimately this external funding facilitated a pivot to more sustainable internal funding once the initiative demonstrated its promise and impacts.

## Key Takeaways

In this Case Study, Noah exemplified how a grassroots-level movement with intentional and strategic linkages to senior leaders and powerful external allies can lead to a systemic change within an organization. Given his agency within CU Boulder, Noah was able to mobilize a group of leaders to develop and implement the new Teaching Quality Framework (TQF). Leveraging resources from external associations, Noah was able to garner institutional buy-in from administration to carry out project goals and acquire specific change grants to incentivize engagement in the project.

## Reflections to Help You Ignite Change

This Case Study provides an example of how Noah used the Moves outlined in the Change Leadership Toolkit to enact systemic change at his institution. We offer the following questions to get you thinking more deeply about Leadership Context, Leader Moves, and Levers:

- How did Leadership Context shape Leader Moves in this case?
- How did this Case Study help you to better understand Levers and how they can help motivate or amplify change?
- What stands out for you in terms of significant Leader Moves that were made?
- What influence did the leader role and/or agency have on the project?
- What did you learn that you can apply to your campus change initiative? How might you use the Toolkit to advance change leadership on your campus?



