As the new chair of an academic department, I misjudged the issue that would be the biggest problem for me. I knew that performance reviews would be a challenge, but that was expected—by me and by the faculty. Building teaching schedules, recruiting new faculty, working with administrators, students, faculty, and other stakeholders were obvious components of the job description that I was equipped to handle. As an accountant, I assumed that the budgeting process would be simpler for me than for other discipline directors. Little did I know that this would be the most difficult administrative challenge from within the department.

When I first looked at the budget, I was shocked at the infinitesimal size of the dollars. But, after all, this was a regional state university, and I quickly got over that reaction. At my first faculty meeting, I established some norms for travel and development—faculty needed to be making presentations to qualify for travel funds; university guidelines on travel limits would be enforced; memberships and subscriptions should be relevant to our mission but would have to be limited; faculty should be frugal with phone and duplicating charges; scholarship involving significant postage or other costs would be scrutinized carefully. Nonetheless, faculty showed up in my office on a regular basis with travel requests, needed purchases, empty copy cards, and any number of financial requests which seemed to be reasonable but expensive. Unfortunately, the requests made in May, when the department funds were almost totally expended, were met with poorly concealed amazement on my part.

After two years of experience with the budget and the faculty, I came to the realization that I was spending the department's dollars on a first-come, first-serve basis with little to no regard for the priorities in the department's mission or strategic plan. Planning, no matter how early or how structured, did not resolve the issue of fair (not equal) distribution. Those faculty who made legitimate requests early in the fiscal year (or most likely received early acceptances at conferences) received funding, while those who submitted to later meetings were oftentimes left without full funding. Additionally, the faculty who didn't travel but wanted resources for projects or memberships were left out if the request was not made early in the year. Something had to be done to address the inherent inequities, but it took another two years of failed attempts to find a workable solution.

The answer for our department was a system of individual faculty development accounts where each faculty member earns funds to be spent on development activities. The model for our department is
focused on our particular needs, but the general concept can be used for any department willing to invest some time developing guidelines. What follows is a set of general rules for the process we used and examples from our experiences.

**FACULTY GOVERNANCE IS IMPORTANT**

The department budget belongs to all faculty, and so all faculty should be involved in spending decisions. A faculty member should lead the development of a model. As the department chair, I reminded faculty that I held the responsibility for the financial health of the department but that I would share that responsibility with them for the areas that were not related directly to running the department. For us, this meant that I subdivided the budget. The first part of the budget was mine and was used solely to keep the department operating: office supplies, most duplicating, student-generated long-distance telephone charges, and department memberships (in contrast to individual memberships). The second part was designated as the faculty development account. The amounts differed from year to year, depending upon changes in administrative costs, but usually the faculty development amount represented 60 percent or more of the total budget. Faculty would have the opportunity to shape how that money was spent rather than have a single individual in control. The faculty were enthusiastic!

**MISSION AND STRATEGIC PLAN**

In order to wisely allocate the faculty development budget to individuals, we had to be specific about our strengths and weaknesses. We also had to review those strengths and weaknesses in light of our mission and our vision for the future. Without a clear picture of where we wanted to be and what it would take to get us there, a development plan would be little more than a mathematical allocation process. We wanted to make sure that all faculty were clear about our departmental objectives and what we needed to do to get there. We also wanted to send the message to the rest of the college that our resources were not being squandered frivolously. We recognized that our mission and strategic plan would not be perfect and so the development plan would be flawed also. Importantly, we acknowledged early in the process that any mission and related development plan would have to be reviewed on a regular basis.
KEEP IT SIMPLE

As faculty deliberated on possible schemes, very elaborate models were proposed to accommodate every nuance of behavior and reward. Implementation seemed to be impossible or, at least, tremendously unwieldy. Fortunately, the faculty committee kept me involved and was willing to work with me for clearer guidelines with fewer caveats. Several drafts were reviewed by the dean of the college for feedback and discussion. The first version was extremely simple: One page that noted the points awarded for specific behaviors that would address some of our significant weaknesses. The variable part of the faculty budget would be allocated in direct relation to the number of points an individual accumulated. The dean liked it, the faculty liked it, and we implemented it.

REVIEW, REVISE, RESUBMIT

All faculty were given a base of funding to utilize so all had development opportunities. Not all of the base was in free dollars. For instance, all faculty were given a copy card with 500 copies on it. If a professor wanted to make more than 500 copies, the additional cost would come from his or her account. Similarly, the choice to use long-distance telephone calls, to belong to a specific professional organization, or to travel to meetings became an individual decision. Faculty became responsible for their accounts with the result that the long-distance charges went down and the cost of duplicating everything decreased. (Duplicating was not charged to a faculty member's development account if the materials were submitted to the department in time to be duplicated in the least expensive way; if it was a last-minute job, the cost came from the faculty member's development account.) After four years, the model, while still better than what we had started with originally, needed adjustment. The faculty went back with a vengeance. Now that we had lived with this plan, we had some strong ideas for improvement. The reward structure was slightly expanded, and some revisions to resources for nontenure-track faculty were developed. Now we review our plan every four years.

WARNINGS

This model has worked very well for our department, but we recognize that some departments would find an individual development budget difficult to implement. Our department has only two disciplines, and the similarities are far greater than the differences. Additionally, our full-time faculty numbers are small and our costs are more easily controlled and budgeted since technology costs are centralized in the main administration. Finally, removing the burden of presentation from the funding criteria for professional travel has not always encouraged faculty to take advantage of continuing professional
education. Nonetheless, our faculty are solidly behind this model. Our collegiality is stronger for having worked out a way for everyone to share in development that has actually resulted in more discretionary dollars to be spent. Faculty are able to stretch these dollars much farther and with much more thoughtful decision making than the original model, where only one person was in control. For us, this exercise in faculty governance has truly been successful.

Linda M. Marquis is chair, Department of Accountancy, Northern Kentucky University.

E-mail: marquis@nku.edu.