

Formative Evaluation of the National Science Foundation's Career-Life Balance Initiative

Client: National Science Foundation

Overview

Insight developed a formative evaluation of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Career-Life Balance (CLB) initiative. The CLB is a 10-year initiative that supports family-friendly policy solutions to promote work-life balance among science and engineering graduate students, postdoctorate fellows, and faculty at institutions of higher education. Supplemental grants can be used, for example, to hire temporary staff to maintain research while investigators are on family leave, support dual-career hires, and research and disseminate family-friendly best practices. The CLB initiative seeks to increase the retention of women—particularly women of color—in tenure-track science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) faculty positions and promote family-friendly policies internationally.

This 18-month formative evaluation assessed the CLB initiative after the first 3 years of implementation. The evaluation aimed to assess

the implementation of the initiative, analyze the policy adoption among grantees, and gauge the CLB's progress towards its program goals.

For this project, Insight—

- Coordinated with an expert committee of professionals with expertise in issues related to gender, STEM, career-life balance, and evaluation design to review the evaluation plan, focus group protocols, and interview protocols
- Identified current literature on the issues of women in STEM and career-life balance policies through a document and environmental scan
- Conducted focus groups with NSF program directors to document the structure of the supplemental grants, program activities to date, communication and outreach by NSF, and successes and challenges in implementation and operation
- Conducted in-depth interviews with more than 50 grantees to provide a series of case studies focused on policy adoption and overall perceptions of the initiative's implementation, successes, and barriers

The findings of the CLB Initiative's successes and challenges to date and recommendations for improvements informed NSF's efforts to improve the initiative. The results also informed the creation of an impact evaluation plan.

Products

Progress report; final report

