

# 2017 Best Practices Proposal Form



**CACUBO**  
Central Association of College  
& University Business Officers

Completed proposals are to be submitted to  
Donna Rohlfer, Coordinator, CACUBO Best Practices Awards, [rohlfedm@miamioh.edu](mailto:rohlfedm@miamioh.edu).  
The deadline is May 1, 2017.

## **Best Practices Program Submission:**

**Title: Implementing Liberating Structures: Tools for Innovation, Empowerment and Innovation**

## **Primary\* Contact Information:**

*The primary contact must be a CACUBO member institution of higher education.*

Institution: University of Michigan

Address1: 5025 Fleming Administration Building

Address2: 503 Thompson Street

City: Ann Arbor State/Prov: MI Zip Code: 48109

Salutation:  Prof.  Dr.  Mr.  Mrs.  Ms.

First Name: Catherine Middle Name/Initial: L

Last Name: Lilly Suffix (Jr, III, etc.)

Professional Title: Senior Consultant

Email : clilly@umich.edu

Phone: 734-717-6302 Fax:

\*Additional team contacts may be listed at the bottom of this form.

## **Institution Information:**

Institution:  Research  Comprehensive/Doctorate  Small Institutions   
Community College

Year Founded: 1817

Geographical Location: Midwest

Number of Students: 40,000

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Website: umich.edu

## **Statement of the Problem:**

*Provide a brief statement identifying the challenge your institution encountered that benefited from your best practice.*

*Do your supervisors fail to engage employees even when they value individuals and would wish to encourage the best performance from everyone? Do you want to contribute the best of your intelligence and give the same opportunity to others? Do you think teams that work well together produce better results? Have you noticed the power of information that can come from the unexpected source or speaker? Do you find your employees engaged in unwitting practices that promote silos, avoid difficult-yet needed conversations and resist creative solutions? If the answer is yes, you are not alone.*

*In administrative groups located in both central and decentralized units, many employees experience stifling hierarchical, bureaucratic culture and practices, not to mention barriers to innovation and collaboration. Though the University of Michigan's Business and Finance organization has a strategic goal of developing and strengthening a leadership culture, traditional leader behaviors too often stifle the very participation, inclusion of diverse ideas and empowerment to resolve problems that we seek. Employees often experience over-controlled behaviors in meetings and 1:1 conversations including boring powerpoint presentations, over-managed discussions, rigid agendas, little participation or dialogues, all which lead to under-participation and reduce energy. Conversely, they can also participate in under-controlled group dynamics where only the loudest voices are heard and no structure supports closure or true exploration of multiple points of view. Too often, power and position dominate purposeful participation by the very individuals whose perspectives could contribute the most meaning to the discussion.*

## **Identify the Solution (250-words maximum):**

*Describe how you identified and developed your best practice solution including those involved with the process, impact on the organization, finances and resources.*

In pursuing the goal of Leadership, at the 2015 NCCI Conference (NCCI is the Network for Change and Continuous Innovation in Higher Education) U-M employees were exposed to a Liberating Structures, a best-practice strategy and approach that is widely and effectively in use at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and other institutions. They explored what it would take to implement it locally. [Liberating Structures](#) was developed by Keith McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz as a portfolio of simple, easy-to-learn tools and approaches that enable effectiveness in a variety of group purposes. In the last 2 years, leaders in the University of Michigan and in Business and Finance initiated a number of multi-day Liberating Structures immersion training sessions, in order to provide several hundred U-M employees with a variety of easy-to-use tools that promote creativity, generative interactions, inclusive behaviors and innovative ideas. The use of these tools has been picked up by at least 30 higher education institutions across the US and Canada with continued good reception and immediate adoption

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and results. The most recent immersion session in Business and Finance was focused specifically on the application of these tools and approaches to the challenges faced by supervisors at all levels to foster a culture of purposefulness, listening, collaboration, inclusivity, trust – and serious fun!

## **Implementation Timeline:**

*Provide a bulleted list of the steps and implementation timeline of your best practice solution.*

1. Summer 2015 UM Staff exposed to Liberating Structures at an NCCI Conference
2. Fall 2015 UM Staff conduct site visit to University of Wisconsin-Madison to attend Liberating Structures Immersion Workshop and Community of Practice
3. May 2016 – First Liberating Structures (LS) Immersion workshop held on U-M campus, initiated by Business and Finance leadership with cross-institutional leadership support; Special focus on LS to amplify benefits of Diversity and Inclusion and challenge unwitting structures that privilege institutional members. Very positive reception and instantaneous use by participants across campus
4. Sept 2016 – Ross Business School hosts LS Immersion workshop for Ross faculty, students and staff; special focus on LS structures that enhance community of learners and pedagogy. Several case examples emerge of LS used successfully in classrooms.
5. Summer 2016 Executive VP/CFO and Leadership team identify the spread of LS as a strategy for creating empowered leadership
6. September 2016- Cross-campus LS Community of Practice formed to support continued learning and practice
7. April, 2017 Liberating Structures Immersion workshop held for Business and Finance supervisors, with a focus on using LS for engagement, inclusion and empowerment. Design supported immediate application of participants to real-life work situations.

## **Benefits & Retrospect:**

*Learners of Liberating Structures do not make a big pronouncement or signal loudly what they are doing when they use the different tools and structures they have learned. Rather, they quietly plan a meeting or event differently or speak up to suggest alternatives to the limited and energy-consuming "Big Five" structures that are consistently in place in University cultures. Because the tools have nomadic agency (that is, they get picked up and easily employed in another context), we are witnessing a "stealth implementation" of the 33 liberating structures across campus. You can see them being implemented in meetings, retreats, classrooms and ongoing community events such as all-supervisor gatherings, update meeting and planning sessions. With very little training, the several hundred staff and students and handful of faculty who have been trained are reporting feedback like, "that was the best meeting we have ever had", "thank you for engaging everyone so effectively", and "I can't believe we got through that difficult topic with such a good outcome."*

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## Additional Team Contact Information:

### Additional Contact #2:

Institution: University of Michigan

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Address2: 503 Thompson Street

City: Ann Arbor State/Prov: MI Zip Code: 48103

Institution:  Research  Comprehensive/Doctorate  Small Institutions   
Community College

Salutation:  Prof.  Dr.  Mr.  Mrs.  Ms.

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*updated Feb 2017*