

NOTE: "Asking college and university presidents to develop priorities forces them to think about the needs of all Ohio college students, not just their own. The fact that the presidents of all 37 institutions of public higher learning in Ohio signed off on the recommendations suggests they are satisfied with the results."

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Capital idea: editorial

In the past, Ohio's two- and four-year public colleges and universities competed with each other for a share of the state's limited budget for capital projects. This year, Gov. John Kasich asked the schools to decide among themselves how to divide \$400 million -- \$350 for individual campus projects and \$50 million for projects of statewide benefit. This experiment in inter-university cooperation appears to have succeeded.

The push for greater cooperation began during the administration of Governor Kasich's predecessor, Ted Strickland. He and Eric Fingerhut, then chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, created the Ohio University System in 2007 to encourage the often-competing campuses to think of themselves more as a single institution with common goals.

Governor Kasich took that a step farther this year. He convened a commission to establish guiding principles for capital-improvement spending for higher education, and then to use those guidelines to recommend which projects most deserve state funding.

Ohio State University President E. Gordon Gee heads the commission. Other members include University of Toledo President Lloyd Jacobs and the leaders of Miami University, Lakeland Community College, Zane State College, the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, and the Inter-University Council of Ohio.

The list they came up with is appropriately dominated by almost \$208 million in maintenance and renovation projects, including almost \$14 million for Bowling Green State University, nearly \$16 million for UT, and more than \$4.5 million for Owens Community College. In 2010, the state's public campuses had a collective backlog of about \$5 billion in maintenance projects, and that was before the 2011-2012 state budget cut college capital improvement funding to zero.

And while the single-largest project -- \$50 million for a chemical and biomolecular engineering and chemistry building -- goes to Ohio State, the list also supports public-private partnerships, workforce development, and interdisciplinary approaches on campuses across the state. Included is \$2 million for an anatomy simulation center at UT.

The rest of the editorial is available here: <http://www.toledoblade.com/Editorials/2012/02/17/Capital-idea.print>

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