ACCS ASPIRE 2030
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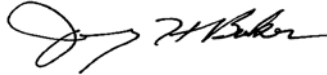
Jimmy H. Baker
CHANCELLOR

M E M O R A N D U M #2020-EXE-060

DATE: June 22, 2020

TO: ACCS College Presidents

FROM: Jimmy H. Baker, Chancellor

RE: ACCS ASPIRE 2030 – Capital Improvement Projects RFP

It is my pleasure to announce the launch of ACCS ASPIRE 2030, a system-wide initiative to inspire community-focused strategic planning for capital improvement projects. The acronym ASPIRE (Achieving Systemwide Potential through Increased Resources and Engagement) aptly captures the initiative's intent - for our system to realize its potential for improving Alabama through strategic investments in local college projects; projects that will engage the local community, strengthen relationships with key stakeholders, better align services to business and industry needs, and, ultimately, increase student success.

ACCS ASPIRE 2030 will be introduced to ACCS college presidents at their regional Economic Development Leadership Forum meetings on June 23 (northern region), June 25 (central region) and June 30 (southern region). At each meeting, I will talk to you more about my vision for the initiative and then my staff will deliver a presentation on the associated Request for Proposals. At that time, you will receive a portfolio that will contain all the information you need to participate in ACCS ASPIRE 2030. The package will include detailed instructions for completing Phase 1 of the proposal development process as well as a full suite of resources to assist in your team's work and to inspire you to "dream big."

I expect every college to participate in ACCS ASPIRE 2030 and to fully engage both internal and external stakeholders throughout the process – students, faculty, staff, and administration from within the college and key community representatives from outside the college (partners from K-12, higher education, local government, business and industry, non-profits, and economic development organizations). Engagement of key community stakeholders in strategic planning is the first step in our colleges becoming true anchor institutions in their communities, and the level of engagement demonstrated in your proposals with carry significant weight during the evaluation process.

Thank you in advance for the hard work that you and your teams will perform in ACCS ASPIRE 2030. I look forward to reviewing your proposals.

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ACCS ASPIRE 2030

Request for Proposals

Overview

Community - A commitment to community service is central to the Alabama Community College System mission and values. Community engagement is also an institutional strategy: a way to advance our colleges' goals of improving college transfer, increasing student completion, supporting the needs of local business and industry, and achieving equity in student participation and success. Equally important, it is a way for colleges to demonstrate to the communities and students they serve that they value them and want to work with them to further common interests.

ACCS ASPIRE 2030 is a system-wide initiative designed to inspire <u>community-focused</u> strategic planning for capital improvement projects. Through ACCS ASPIRE 2030, college presidents are encouraged to "dream big" in envisioning what their colleges should look like in 2030. But those dreams and visions should be guided by the overarching goal of serving local communities more effectively, and should be refined with input from a broad base of community stakeholders. By engaging external partners in the planning process, colleges will be connecting their work to that of potential community partners who can provide vital supports to students. Colleges will also be gaining valuable insight on community issues where the college can have a positive impact.

Each president is therefore encouraged to form committees to assist in completing a preliminary college self-analysis, in formulating long-term strategies for college growth and improvement, and in developing the college's ACCS ASPIRE 2030 capital improvement proposal that will help the college execute those strategies. Each committee should include appropriate representation from external stakeholders who have the potential to provide unique and valuable contributions to the committee's work.   Evidence of this broad-based inclusion of both internal and external stakeholders will be required as the first submission in the RFP process and the quality of this evidence will carry weight in the Phase 2 evaluation of capital improvement proposals.

The RFP Process

ACCS and its member institutions have a responsibility to ensure that the capital improvement projects funded through ACCS ASPIRE 2030 reflect careful, deliberate, and unhurried planning. Therefore, the RFP process for ACCS ASPIRE 2030 is designed in stages, with ample time

devoted to each stage to ensure the feasibility of external stakeholder engagement. (See Appendix B for a basic projected timeline.)

- **Phase 1: Self-Analysis**. During this phase, the groundwork will be laid for successful participation in ACCS ASPIRE 2030. Presidents will form strategic planning committees to assist the president in performing preliminary research, exploration, and a thorough college-self assessment. Two separate submissions are required during this phase: (1) documentation of strategic planning committees and (2) the Phase 1 Self-Assessment. The Chancellor and Board of Trustees will review submissions and provide feedback, which is to be used in the development of the college's capital improvement proposal in Phase 2.
- **Phase 2: Proposal Development**. During this phase, the college presidents will review feedback from the Chancellor and Board of Trustees on their self-analyses. Presidents will work with strategic planning committees to narrow priorities and develop detailed proposals for capital improvement projects. Proposals must conform to content and format requirements, which will be communicated to the presidents at the time feedback is returned on initial self-assessments at the end of Phase 1. The Chancellor and Board of Trustees will evaluate each proposal and determine which projects will be funded and at what amounts. Colleges will then be notified of their awards.

Phase 1 Instructions

Strategic Planning and Formation of Committees. Phase 1 begins with each president devising a process for ACCS ASPIRE 2030 strategic planning and forming one or more teams (committees) to assist the president in research, college self-assessment, strategy development, and eventually (in Phase 2), the creation of the college's capital improvement proposal. Committees should be composed of both internal and external stakeholders:

Examples of Internal Stakeholders	Examples of External Stakeholders
Students	Local K-12 Systems
Faculty Members	Higher Education Colleges/University Partners
Staff Members	Local Government Leadership
Administrators	Business and Industry Representatives
Foundation Members	Non-Profits
	Economic Development Organizations

Committee membership should be broad based to ensure diverse perspectives. Committee members should be selected because they possess a unique ability to contribute actively and productively to the work of the team. Each member should be assigned a role and specific responsibilities and must accept and acknowledge those assignments at the outset.

Once all committees are formed and their membership confirmed, <u>document each committee and their first meeting</u> using the form provided in **Appendix A**. Use a separate form for each committee and insert additional rows as needed to accommodate all members. (Appendix A is available in original Microsoft file format on the ACCS website under Staff Resources in the folder titled ACCS ASPIRE 2030 Resources). Type all required information except members' hand-signed initials.

Committee rosters will serve as an attachment to the response to Self-Analysis Question #1, which must be answered and submitted in advance of the remaining question responses. **Bundle the response to Question #1 and your committee rosters into a single PDF** and save the file with the following naming convention: ACCS ASPIRE 2030 – Self-Analysis Question 1 – College Name. Example: ACCS ASPIRE 2030 – Self-Analysis Question 1 – Bishop. Send files to the ACCS Office of Research, Grants, and Development by email to Dr. Vicky Ohlson (vicky.ohlson@accs.edu) and ensure your submission is received by **12:00 noon on Friday, July 31, 2020.** Committees should continue to work past this date, with minutes and attendance taken to provide documentation of stakeholder involvement as may be periodically requested.

Resources. ACCS has compiled a repository of resources to assist committees in their strategic planning work. These include reading resources on each topic addressed in the required Self-Analysis, as well as useful guidebooks, labor market reports, community directories, and more. The repository is housed on the ACCS website and accessed by scrolling to the bottom of the homepage, clicking on Staff Resources, then clicking on ACCS ASPIRE 2030.

The College Self-Analysis. All colleges will conduct a self-assessment that will lead to the identification of needs, a prioritization of those needs, a development of strategies to meet those needs, and, eventually, a capital improvement plan. After colleges have submitted their self-analyses, the Chancellor and Board of Trustees will review those submissions and develop and return feedback to the college presidents to be used for further work in Phase 2.

The College's self-analysis must include the following components, formatted as indicated:

- Cover page with the title "ACCS ASPIRE 2030", subtitle "Phase 1: Self-Analysis", College Name, Submission Date (separate lines for each, all centered). College logos are optional.
- Cover letter (1-page limit) from the college president to the Chancellor on college letterhead, signed by the president.
- Narrative response to the self-analysis questions given on pages 7 - 15. The self-analysis is limited to 75 double-sided 8.5" x 11" pages (150 total pages). Double-space lines and use Times New Roman 12-point font with 1-inch page margins. Number each page in the bottom right hand corner as "Page X of Y". Organize the narrative in the same order as the questions are presented and with the same headings.

- Supporting attachments (if needed). Attachments must be labeled as "Attachment X: Attachment Title" in the top right-hand corner and referenced accordingly in the narrative. Attachments do not count against the 150 page limit.
- Complete package should be neatly bound (spiral or comb-style).

Submissions of the self-analysis must be made in both hard copy and electronic format. Hand-deliver or mail the hard copy to the ACCS office of Research, Grants, and Development, Attention: Dr. Vicky Ohlson, Executive Director, ensuring receipt by **5:00 p.m. on Monday, September 14, 2020**. Email an electronic copy to Dr. Ohlson at vicky.ohlson@accs.edu by the same deadline.   Physical mailing address is P.O. Box 302130, Montgomery, AL 36130-2130.

ACCS ASPIRE 2030
Phase 1: Self-Analysis

Strategic Planning

Overview: Strategic planning is one of the major steps colleges can take to address the challenges of tomorrow's higher education environment. Strategy is a tool the college can use to find its competitive advantage and place within that environment. Strategy should be devised and executed collaboratively, with the involvement of all the college's stakeholders, both internal and external. Strategy that is formed and pursued through intentional, collective efforts that engage all those invested in the college's success, and more broadly, the success of the community served by the college, will result in an institution that operates more efficiently, makes smarter choices among competing priorities, and sets the course for a more successful and sustainable future. Keeping this in mind, please answer the following questions on strategic planning.

1. **Strategic Planning Process**: Describe the college's strategic planning process, particularly as it relates to the ACCS ASPIRE 2030 initiative. Identify key stakeholders in the college's success, and tell how are they involved in this strategic planning process. What roles do they play and what responsibilities do they assume? Use the *Strategic Planning Committees* template in Appendix A to support and summarize your narrative response. **This portion of your response to the ACCS ASPIRE 2030 RFP is due by 12:00 noon on July 31, 2020. Follow instructions on page 7 for format and submission. Make sure to attach Appendix A as supporting documentation of stakeholder engagement.**

2. **Major Strategies**: What two to three critical strategies (objectives) will best ensure that the college fulfills its mission over the next ten years?

3. **Primary Audiences**: Who are the college's main audiences, how are their needs and aspirations changing, and what things will the college do to meet those needs and further those aspirations?

4. **Education Environment**: How is the education environment in which the college operates evolving and how will the college answer the challenges that this evolution brings, including dealing with competitors, both traditional and non-traditional?

5. **Priorities**: What does the college not do that it should consider doing, or what is it doing that it should consider not doing (including, but not limited to, program offerings)?

Teaching and Learning

"Laser-focused on the student experience" – that has been the mantra of ACCS for more than a year. Teaching and learning are at the heart of the student's experience. It is crucial we focus on the part of

schooling that impacts learning more than any other area - teaching. The incorporation of fundamental teaching strategies proven to increase learning for all students should be the goal of every instructor, whether delivered virtually or face-to-face. Creating a more equitable learning environment will allow our state to achieve a greater level of social justice through higher education. Achieving this goal requires an intentional effort to build leadership throughout the faculty ranks, with individual and departmental accountability for constant improvement based on data. An active and supportive learning environment more conducive to a deeper and more relevant learning is a continuous process, the effectiveness of which will be evident by a closing of socioeconomic student achievement gaps and a decrease in instructor and section variance in performance indicators. Remember these tenets of effective teaching and learning as you perform a self-analysis of instructional operations and respond to the following questions:

1. **Instructional Program Reviews**:
   a. Colleges utilize instructional program reviews to determine the sustainability of programs within their institutions. Please outline the college's current procedures to review instructional programs of study, including General Education/Academic Transfer. Should the college's instructional program review process be enhanced?
   b. Does the college's instructional program review process effectively address community needs? If so, how? If not, what can the college do to ensure that it does in the future?
   c. What are the college instructional divisions' (academic, career-tech, and health programs) current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis)?
   d. How will the college's instructional program reviews (past, present, and future) inform the improvement of all programs moving forward?

2. **Instructional Costs**:
   a. Analyze and document the college's five (5) most productive programs (revenue vs. cost) and five (5) least productive programs (revenue vs. cost).
   b. What strategies does the college employ to reduce the cost of instruction?
   c. How will the college maintain or increase the affordability of courses and course materials?

3. **Setting Priorities for Continuous Improvement**: How do you plan on prioritizing the quality and improvement of instructional programs, student-centered services, and the overall student experience at your institution?

4. **Ensuring Course Quality**. How will the college ensure that all courses, both academic transfer and CTE, are of the highest possible quality and what steps will the college take to continually improve student learning outcomes at the course, program, unit, and college levels?

5. **Distance Learning**: What did the college learn about its capacity to deliver quality instruction remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic? Were any surprising strengths discovered? Were any distance learning gaps and challenges exposed, and if so, how does the college propose to address those?

Student Success

Laser-focused on the student experience – what are the implications? We believe that a high-quality student experience fosters student success – completion, seamless transfer to higher education, or direct placement in a well-paid, rewarding job. Fully realizing the potential of a laser focus on the student experience will require a coalition of education providers, non-profits, businesses, and government working together toward a common vision of student success. Keep these thoughts at the forefront as you respond to the following:

1. **Student Completion**. Describe the college's current strategies for increasing the following measures of student success and, given the resources to expand or improve those strategies, tell what actions the college would take:
   a. Persistence rate
   b. Retention rate
   c. Graduation/completion rates
   d. Transfer rate
   e. Employment rate
   f. Certification/licensure rates?

2. **Student Engagement**. What strategies does your college use to engage students in the overall college experience and how does the college ensure students are aware of all the services designed to increase their success?

3. **Enrollment Management/Recruitment**. Describe your college's strategic enrollment management planning process and identify the greatest barriers to a more successful student recruitment program. What can the college do to reduce or remove those barriers?

4. **Student Services/Experiences**. What kinds of services or experiences will tomorrow's students demand that the college is not providing now, and what can the college do to ensure it provides those services and experiences?

5. **Underserved Populations**. What challenges does the college have in serving underserved or disadvantaged people (first generation, older adults, low-income individuals, minorities, those with no high school diploma or GED, etc.) and how does the college plan to strengthen its outreach and support of these populations?

6. **Dual Enrollment**. What is the college's strategy to increase access for high school students to dual enrollment programs and what is the anticipated impact to enrollment?

Community Development

The United Nations defines community development as "a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems." In simple terms, it is the process of making a community a better place to live and work. Community development is a prerequisite for economic development and must happen before local industry can develop and prosper. For community development to occur, people in a community must believe working together can make a

difference and must organize to address their community's needs collectively. Reflect on the communities that the college serves and these characteristics of community development as you respond to the following questions:

1. **Leading, Convening, and Supporting**. In terms of how community development would apply to the college's strategic plan, what should be the college's role in:
    a. leading community development efforts locally?
    b. convening community groups and leadership locally?
    c. supporting community development efforts locally?

2. **Community Weaknesses/Opportunities**. What are the known community weaknesses or opportunities that have realistic solutions for which the college should take a proactive lead in collaborating with others to solve or resolve? How will the college engage the community to tackle these issues?

3. **Community Partnerships**. In what ways does the college partner with community organizations to benefit the community? For example, does your college actively encourage staff to participate in community development efforts, groups or activities? Please elaborate to include details of engagement and staff involvement. What opportunities exist for further staff involvement?

4. **Community Data/Information**. Does the college have access to reports, data and other information related to local community assessments? If so, what types and what have they revealed? If not, what is your plan to acquire such information?

Community Engagement

Community engagement is the heart and soul of community development. Through community engagement, an organization first begins to establish the relationships that are needed to support their community development efforts.

Community colleges are the institutions of higher education most firmly rooted in their communities. We draw most of our students from our local communities, and a majority of our graduates stay in the community to live and work. But for our colleges to become true anchor institutions in their communities, and for community partnerships to meaningfully support student success efforts, our colleges must become more skillful in their engagement efforts. Please answer the following questions about your college's community engagement strategies:

1. **Relationships with Key Community Leaders**. How does the college foster relationships with key community leaders and what can the college do to strengthen existing relationships and form new ones?

2. **Community Service Improvements**. Based on what you know about changes taking place in the community, what are some areas in which you can improve to better serve the community?

3. **Engagement of Community on College Campus**. What existing programs/events/etc. does the college offer that brings the community together on your campus? What new programs/events/activities can the college offer to expand this community engagement?

Economic Development

Economic development is the process by which the economic well-being and quality of life of a nation, region, or local community are improved according to targeted goals and objectives.[1] For many years, ACCS community and technical colleges have been involved in economic development in the form of the occupational education of students through CTE programs and non-credit workforce development training. But in the last two decades, community colleges across the nation have greatly broadened their economic development role to include contract training, small-business development, and local economic planning. These new activities have the potential to take our colleges to a new level of community service: from institutions focused solely on educating students to ones that also meet the needs of business and the local economy. Consider these ideas as you answer the following questions:

1. **Supporting Growing Industries**. What are the 5 industries slated to grow the fastest in the college's service area over the next 10 years? Is the college currently supporting these industries, and if so, what will college need to do to support their expected growth? If not, could the college expand services and training opportunities to those industries and what will that require?

2. **Dealing with Declining Industry**. List every program offered for which there is negative employment growth (over the next 5 years) and the college's plan to either improve or discontinue those programs.

3. **Engagement with Economic Developers**. How do you, personally, and your college plan on becoming more engaged with economic development professionals, community leaders and business and industry leaders in the communities you serve? How can the college facilitate existing business and industries to grow and assist in encouraging prospects to locate in your community?

4. **Additional ED Contributions**. Beyond workforce training, how does your college plan to contribute to economic development in your region?

Workforce Development

"Given the climate today—economically, politically, and educationally—the interest in how colleges are meeting the needs of the workforce has never been greater. The ability and relevancy of higher education to prepare the future workforce is being examined by legislators, business and industry, employers, funders, and the general public. Some have questioned whether higher education feels a sense of urgency to serve as matchmaker between education and jobs."[2]

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[1] Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, June 18, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_development
[2] *How Community Colleges Support the Local Workforce*, by Rhonda Tracy, Former Chancellor, Kentucky Community and Technical College System, as posted on The Evolllution: A Destiny Solutions Illumination website,

ACCS must answer this question decisively and prove what we know to be true – Alabama's community and technical colleges are the best vehicle for strengthening our workforce and moving the state forward. Consider how your college is helping prove this statement in your own service area as you respond to the following:

1. **Advisory Committees**. Which of your CTE programs has the strongest, most active business and industry participation in its advisory committee, and how has this been achieved? What will the college do to extend these best practices to all programs?

2. **Assessing Workforce Needs**. Does the college effectively assess the workforce needs of local employers (workforce availability, lack of skills of current workforce, talent pipeline, etc.)? If so, describe the strategies that are used to assess their needs. If not, tell what the college must do to improve.

3. **Work-Based Learning**. What is the college's plan for expanding opportunities for students to participate in work-based learning and how will the plan help support local business and industry with a skilled workforce?

4. **Workforce Development Hub**. Does the college serve as the central hub for regional workforce development activities, and if not, what steps can the college take to become that hub?

Adult Education

In 2019, 66% of all jobs in Alabama required some form of postsecondary education[3]. This shows that Alabama has already surpassed the expectation for the nation (65% by 2020). Still, approximately 14% of Alabama's working-aged adults have no high school diploma or GED[4]. With a civilian labor force estimated at 2,247,700 in January 2020, this means Alabama has nearly 315,000 workers unqualified for the vast majority of available jobs. Our Adult Education (AE) programs are crucial to alleviating this gap and helping all Alabamians achieve economic and social mobility. Are you fully aware of the situation in the communities you serve? If not, then investigate, and then respond to the following questions as applicable.

1. **Adult Education Programs in College's Service Area**. If your college has no AE program, then explain why and how the adult population without a high school diploma in your service area is being provided the educational services needed to obtain a high school diploma or GED. Discuss the effectiveness of those services in meeting the needs of your service area thus far. Do not answer questions 2 – 6.

   If your college does have an AE program, then skip this question and answer questions 2 – 6.

June 17, 2020: https://evolllution.com/revenue-streams/workforce_development/how-community-colleges-support-the-local-workforce/

[3] Source: Emsi Analyst (labor market data tool), Occupation Table for State of Alabama, retrieved June 18, 2020.
[4] Source: United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts – High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2014-2018, retrieved June 18, 2020.

2. **Barriers to AE Program Improvement**. What barriers exist in improving the enrollment and academic performance of your adult education program, and what are your plans for overcoming those barriers in the future?

3. **Technology/Distance Learning Challenges**. What have been the technology and distance learning gaps (from the perspective of students, staff, equipment, and financial resources) for adult education that you have found since COVID-19 and how are you correcting those moving forward to complement and improve the quality of training in Adult Education?

4. **Transitioning AE Students to For-Credit Programs**. Describe the steps that you have taken to incorporate adult education into your strategies for increasing college enrollment, particularly with Career Pathways. Discuss how the college has been or will be using adult education staff to contextualize academic instruction to support the technical or academic path to sustainable employment for Adult Education students.

5. **IET and Career Pathways**. Describe how you have incorporated or plan to incorporate Adult Education services into Integrated Education and Training (IET) models to prepare a skilled workforce, and indicate whether or not your college dedicates/assigns a Career Pathways coach or college recruiter to the adult education program.

6. **Community Partnerships**. Discuss (using specific examples) how your college uses community partners (Career Centers, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, regional workforce development boards, social service case managers, public and private education providers) to message and promote the opportunities available through adult education, workforce, CTE, and academic transfer programs.

Financial Management

In an era of steep competition and stagnating revenue growth, community colleges across the nation are increasingly tasked with doing more with less. Nevertheless, as the best vehicle Alabama has for building a strong workforce and moving the state forward, ACCS remains laser-focused on providing the highest quality student experience. It has never been more important, therefore, for us to maximize resources and achieve greater efficiency. This will require that our colleges think and plan creatively, leveraging partnerships and tapping external funding sources while implementing innovative cost-cutting measures. Think about these things as you respond to the following questions:

1. **Strengths and Weaknesses**: Identify three (3) challenges at the college that have the greatest negative impact on its sustainability and three (3) strengths of the college that have the greatest positive impact on its sustainability?

2. **Shared Services**: What opportunities are there within the college or between your college and one or more neighboring colleges for implementing shared services to reduce costs?

3. **Untapped Internal Potential**: Does your college have existing debt that can be refinanced, or other financial resources that can be utilized to maximize the college's ability to make programmatic and infrastructure improvements?

4. **Prospective External Support**: With limitations on state funding, how can your college better leverage financial support from external stakeholders, such as business and industry partners?

5. **Other Innovative Ideas**: What other actions, in addition to those addressed in questions 2 – 4, could the college take that would generate additional revenue, reduce expenses, or otherwise help the college achieve greater efficiency?

Technology

"Just as rapidly changing technology has created new and constantly evolving job types and competencies requiring new skills, it has facilitated significant progress in accommodating the needs of a broader range of students. It can also revolutionize the delivery of education, allowing access to higher education for greater numbers of students at lower cost and with more flexibility. However, for any technology solution to have a transformative impact on student learning and success, it must have as its foundation the specific goals, needs, and interests of the students themselves. While technology can be added to existing structures with the goal of making them marginally more efficient and flexible, technology also offers the opportunity to catalyze more significant reforms to educational structures and practices"[5]

Reflect on your institution's current technological state and how an investment in technology might serve to significantly improve the student experience and nurture student success. Then respond to the following questions.

1. **Online Teaching: Professional Development**. What resources are available to provide professional development for faculty to teach online courses and how is the college currently maximizing those resources? Given additional resources, how could the college improve in this area?

2. **Technology in the Classroom**. How will you seek to upgrade equipment and increase opportunities for students to use the newest technology as part of their classroom experience? What would be the college's desired outcomes and how will the college track and measure them?

3. **Cybersecurity Protection Plan**. How do you plan on protecting the college from cybersecurity threats, attacks and evolving security challenges presented in today's climate?

4. **Needed Technology Upgrades**. What technology upgrades are necessary to ensure safety, security, and health of students, faculty and staff in a post-coronavirus future?

5. **Support of Students Use of Technology**. How will you support the students' use of new technologies outside of normal business hours?

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[5] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology, Reimagining the Role of Technology in Higher Education: A Supplement to the National Education Technology Plan, Washington, D.C., 2017

Campuses/Facilities

The number one goal for a college in planning for capital expenditures should be to ensure that physical facilities support the operational and instructional goals and plans of the college. Colleges need to have the right quantity, size, quality, and location of its facilities, and the notion of what is "right" for the coming decade may be very different from what was "right" in even the most recent past. Simply considering the trend toward digital and distance learning makes this very apparent. Answer the following questions only AFTER you have determined what the college's course/program offerings are going to look like. Quantify answers to the extent possible.

1. **Instructional Sites**. How many campuses/instructional sites does the College operate and in what locations?

2. **Scope of Instructional Offerings by Site**. What instructional programs/courses will be offered at each campus/instructional site and how many students will be present at one time for each program/course of instruction?

3. **Sufficiency of Facilities**. Currently, are there sufficient instructional and student service spaces at each campus/instructional site for the number of students projected for each program/course of instruction? If not, are there buildings or areas of buildings that could be renovated, either through remodeling or through technology upgrades, to provide sufficient spaces? Is parking a limiting factor at any location?

4. **Needed Improvements**. What improvements to existing physical infrastructure (for example, deferred maintenance issues such as leaky roofs or technology upgrades to security systems) must be made to ensure the college can safely, effectively, and efficiently provide instruction and student services at all planned sites?

ACCS ASPIRE 2030: College Planning Resources

Descriptive Table of Contents

Strategic Planning

NCES Projections of Education Statistics to 2028. Provides projections for key education statistics, including enrollment at postsecondary institutions by age group, gender, race/ethnicity, and student level**.** Published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education, May, 2020. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020024.pdf.

Stop Planning! Short article on more effective strategic planning with a focus on strategy rather than planning. By Peter Eckel and Cathy Trower published in *Inside Higher Education*, February 14, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/02/14/colleges-need-rethink-strategic-planning-opinion

Reimagining Higher Education Post-Coronavirus. Short article on higher education strategies and decision-making by Steven Mintz published in the *Higher Ed Gamma Blog, Inside Higher Education*, April 14, 2020. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/reimagining-higher-education-post-coronavirus.

Achieving Institutional Sustainability Through Relevancy. Chapter 3 from the book *New Directions for Community Colleges* by Jud Hicks and Stephanie Jones, September 5, 2019. "The pursuit of relevancy is a rural community college's chance to evolve, adapt, to obtain long-term sustainability. This chapter discusses ways that institutions can demonstrate their relevancy to support their sustainability." Retrieved from the Wiley Online Library at https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/cc.20367.

Admin 101: How to Manage the Strategic-Planning Process. This article published in the Chronicle of Higher Education (September 27, 2019) by David D. Perlmutter described how to navigate the middle ground between strategic plans that fail because they are perceived as top-down mandates and those that collapse under the weight of too much input from too many committees. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/Admin-101-How-to-Manage-the/247126.

Admin 101: Tips on Carrying Out Your Strategic Plan. This is a follow-up to David D. Perlmutter's first article on strategic planning and was published in the Chronicle of Higher Education on October 22, 2019. It contains practical strategies for making sure that your strategic plan is effectively implemented and not simply shelved for another 5 years. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/Admin-101-Tips-on-Carrying/247365.

Teaching, Learning, and Student Success

The New Learning Ecosystem. Short concept paper on creating a more effective education-to-employment system designed for adult learners; developed by a team at the *Strada Institute for the*

Future of Work, November 2019. Retrieved from https://www.stradaeducation.org/report/the-new-learning-ecosystem/.

2020 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report – Teaching and Learning Edition. Comprehensive annual report that focuses on trends, technologies, and practices shaping the future of teaching and learning; By Malcolm Brown and others at the global non-profit *EDUCAUSE*, a higher education technology association, 2020. Retrieved from https://library.educause.edu/resources/2020/3/2020-educause-horizon-report-teaching-and-learning-edition.

The Transformation-Ready Higher Education Institution – How Leaders Can Prepare For and Promote Change. Comprehensive report on research conducted by *Huron*, the *American Council on Education (ACE)*, and the *Georgia Institute of Technology* on how higher education leaders are addressing disruption and building sustainable institutions; by a panel of contributors, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.huronconsultinggroup.com/resources/higher-education/transformation-ready-higher-education-institution.

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ACCS ASPIRE 2030 Strategic Planning Committees

Complete a separate table for each working committee. Insert additional rows as needed to accommodate all committee members. Attach as supporting documentation for your response to Question 1 of the Self-Analysis. Response to Question 1 is due by July 31, 2020.

Committee Name		Date of 1st Meeting	
Committee Charge or Purpose			
Membership Roster					

Name (Typed) and Initials (Handwritten by Member or Attach Documentation of Attendance at Virtual Meeting)	Job Title	Organization	Email Address and Phone Number	Roles/Responsibilities

ACCS ASPIRE 2030
Phase 1 Projected Timeline

ACCS ASPIRE 2030 Kick-Off at Regional Economic Development Leadership Forums

June 23rd, 25th, and 30th

Self-Analysis Question #1 Response Due with Committee Documentation

July 31, 2020

12:00 Noon

Complete Self-Analysis Narrative Response Due

Sept. 14, 2020

5:00 p.m.

Review of Self-Analyses by Chancellor and BOT with Feedback to Presidents

Deadline TBA

SUCCESS IS WHAT COUNTS

A Community College Guide to Community Engagement & Strategic Partnerships

A RESOURCE FROM **PUBLIC AGENDA**

SUCCESS IS WHAT COUNTS

A Community College Guide to Community Engagement
& Strategic Partnerships

THE PURPOSE & VALUE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Most often, large-scale institutional change work is viewed as an expert-driven process. Get the best information, bring trained minds to bear, make the best decision with internal and external expertise, and only then reach out to wider audiences to persuade them to sign on. Those outside the circle of internal decision makers tend to be viewed as audiences to be educated or persuaded, or sometimes as problems to be managed. Rarely are they seen as vital resources for achieving student success goals.

Authentic community engagement, by contrast, involves substantive give and take with those outside the college who have an interest in the decisions that are made, or who potentially have a role to play in strengthening the college's work. Such engagement efforts begin with a commitment to building new or improved forms of partnership across various silos and boundaries with those in the community and region who may not be deeply familiar with the work of the college and the needs of its students. While broad-based community engagement is not appropriate for every initiative, is it essential for the long-term success of ambitious change efforts like those sought by Achieving the Dream (ATD) colleges.

ATD has identified broad engagement as one of its core principles, and community engagement and communication as one of the essential capacities that colleges must purposefully develop in order to fulfill their missions. This guide is designed to enhance the ability of colleges to strengthen community engagement efforts. Such efforts are critical for forging meaningful partnerships with key external stakeholders such as K-12 schools, universities, employers and community-based organizations. This guide is also designed to help strengthen efforts to engage internal stakeholders across the institution by connecting their work to that of potential community

partners who can provide vital supports to students. For colleges to become true anchor institutions in their communities, and for community partnerships to meaningfully support student success efforts, colleges must become more skillful in their engagement efforts.

Carefully planned and executed community engagement efforts can…

- foster a sense of shared responsibility for the student success agenda among key actors in the broader community

- help unearth critical internal and external obstacles to student success and generate solutions that can be collaboratively pursued

- strengthen and forge new creative partnerships on behalf of better outcomes for all students and specific populations

- serve as a powerful form of professional development for faculty and staff

- generate qualitative data to improve outcomes and inform interventions and strategies

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is best viewed as a primer, a starting point for community engagement efforts. As the college team charged with community engagement efforts begins to plan, this guide will help ensure the work begins on strong footing. In the following pages, we will outline general principles of effective engagement, and provide tools and resources to support effective broad-based community engagement practices.

We recommend that a cross-functional team within the college be charged with spearheading community engagement efforts and that this team be empowered to plan, organize and conduct a range of engagement activities that are carefully aligned with the overarching goals and near-term student success priorities of the college. As the group pursues its community engagement strategy, expanding involvement to include key community partners, allies or friendly critics will help strengthen and protect the work.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Understand Your Audiences

Chances are, the community partners you seek to engage do not know all that much about the work of the college or the challenges and constraints that colleges face as they seek to significantly improve outcomes for students. Understanding your target audiences' experiences with and perceptions of your college will help you determine what types of data, information and stories will be most useful to them.

Go Beyond the Usual Suspects—Be Creative

While it's fine to consult with the regulars—those with whom you already have strong connections in the community—engagement efforts are more useful, and tend to be considerably more interesting and fun, if you can bring fresh faces, energy and ideas to the table.

Listen More, Talk Less

Community engagement is not well-served by a great deal of speechmaking or pontificating. Work hard to set the stage for honest dialogue, and keep in mind that you are more likely to gain the respect and trust of potential partners if you start by listening and make active listening an ongoing priority.

Set a Constructive, Problem-solving Tone

While making the case for your work involves creating a sense of urgency, avoid easy polarization and stridency when engaging community partners. It is important to move beyond "sounding the alarm" to create discussions that have forward momentum. The best community engagement efforts foster a sense of possibility for potential partners.

Start Where People Are

Be attuned to what potential community partners care and worry about. Whether it's K-12 schools, community-based organizations or regional economic development agencies, all potential partners are operating with a set of interests and constraints that shape their work and their view of the college. Engage community partners using their interests, concerns and language—and avoid jargon completely.

Offer Choices for Deliberation

Letting people wrestle with alternatives, and pointing out the pros and cons of various approaches to enhancing student success efforts, communicates that there are no easy answers and that many points of view are welcome and essential. This technique (which Public Agenda calls "Choicework") also helps people with very different levels of expertise engage both the issues and each other more effectively than less structured forms of dialogue.

Commit to Real Work and Ongoing Co-creation

Too often, community engagement is viewed as a box to be checked. It's tempting and common for colleges to approach engagement in thin ways through one-off listening sessions or the creation of an advisory group that is consulted periodically. Be clear-eyed about the fact that meaningful community engagement entails a commitment to ongoing, long-term collaboration and to the co-creation of real work.

THREE STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Various strategies can be employed to reach out to stakeholders, raise their awareness, gain their insights, and build the common ground from which real collaboration can flow. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, and they are best pursued in phased combination. We will discuss the following community engagement strategies here:

• Focus groups
• Stakeholder dialogues
• Community forums

Focus groups

Focus groups—essentially small group research interviews—are a tool that can accomplish some, but not all, of the goals of community engagement. They are an efficient means of informing the Planning Team of the priorities and concerns of various stakeholders.

Moreover, there is no better way to prepare for the open give and take of broader community engagement efforts than by exploring issues first via focus group conversations. Doing so can help you understand critical stakeholders' starting point attitudes, frame the issues you wish to talk about, develop background materials for deeper engagement, surface the interests of key stakeholders, and identify potential hot-button issues that could threaten deeper collaboration.

But, while focus groups achieve some community engagement goals, they do not achieve them all. They provide a reading of people's state of mind, but do not, by themselves, help them develop their thinking very much. They can illuminate confusion but do not constitute the communication needed to correct it. They clarify differences in priority among various stakeholders, but do not help communities work through those differences to build the common ground and collaborations that can best serve students and improve colleges.

While focus groups are an efficient way to gain input from various important stakeholders or from the community more generally, these sorts of engagements do not do as much to legitimize your plans with stakeholders and the community overall as other broader, more inclusive strategies.

Stakeholder dialogues

Focus groups, the method just discussed, keep control in the hands of those conducting them. For example, people are typically incentivized to attend focus groups, either by being offered a stipend or otherwise compensated for their time. Because a focus group is a form of research, it's easy for the organizer to steer conversation directly to the topics he or she wants to discuss, and the resulting information is theirs to do with as they choose.

By contrast, stakeholder dialogues are by nature a less controlled process. Participants are not research subjects; they are stakeholders external to the college community who are voluntarily contributing their time and ideas. These sessions can be conducted with highly homogenous groups—like local employers, for example. Or, depending on your purpose, they can be more diverse, with several different stakeholders represented, such as staff from community-based organizations, local employers and faith leaders.

The idea is to engage key stakeholders in productive dialogue about the work of the college, to elicit their interest in and ideas about said work, and to identify opportunities for collaboration. Stakeholder dialogues allow you to target the specific groups that are most important to your work. They are less transactional than focus groups and therefore don't require compensation for people's time. Because they aren't a formal research strategy, they are more likely to serve as a vehicle for relationship-building and for the cultivation of relational trust between college practitioners and potential community partners. The downside of stakeholder dialogues is that they remain relatively contained, and thus do not help with raising broader awareness of and engagement with your efforts. Because they tend to focus on smaller groups of formal stakeholders, these types of dialogues are also more likely to become echo chambers for a small subset of influencers.

Community forums

In contrast to the research emphasis of focus groups, and the contained nature of stakeholder dialogues, community forums are a common strategy for engaging a broad cross-section of a community in dialogue, including both specific stakeholders and average citizens. Community forums are the most public of the community engagement strategies we are discussing in this manual in the sense that these are large-scale civic events meant to engage all sectors of the community in the work of the college.

While there are several models that have been widely applied for broad-based community dialogue, most are variations on a basic set of elements. Public Agenda's Community Conversations model has been used in scores of communities across the country, including in dozens of community colleges. The key features of the Public Agenda Community Conversations model may be summarized as follows:

• Nonpartisan coalition of sponsors/organizers

• Diverse cross-section of participants

• Small, diverse dialogue groups

• Nonpartisan discussion materials that help a wide range of actors better understand an issue and consider options for action/collaboration

• Trained, nonpartisan facilitators

• Forum follow-up and follow through

Community Conversations are designed to reach the largest number of people and gain the broadest input. Because of the intentionality with which experts and non-experts are engaged as equals in deliberation, Community Conversations are most likely to yield "ah ha!" moments and fresh insights for the college, external stakeholders and "ordinary citizens" alike. Through broad-based engagement of this type, college practitioners come to understand their work in new ways, formal stakeholders in the community connect the dots between their priorities and those of the college, and the insights and experiences of students, families and taxpayers become vital resources for problem solving and creative collaboration.

While Community Conversations are certainly the most robust of all the strategies, they are also labor intensive. Not only do they require a significant amount of lead time to plan carefully, but they also entail the development of a host of capacities for the organizers. Framing issues for deliberation, organizing a sponsoring coalition, training facilitators, executing follow-up and implementing chosen actions are among the most critical tasks involved in successful Community Conversations work. If you are not already experienced in public forum work, capacity-oriented technical assistance from engagement experts can be helpful. In the next section of this guide, we provide some of the basic tools for Community Conversations. A detailed Community Conversations Organizer manual is also available on the Achieving the Dream website: http://achievingthedream.org/resource/140/planning-guide-campus-and-community-conversations.

Table: Strengths and Weaknesses of Three Community Engagement Strategies

Type of Engagement	Pros	Cons
Focus groups	Efficient way to gain insights from key audiences	Less inclusive, less likely to be viewed as legitimate
	Allow for maximum control of information	May require money and expertise to do well
Stakeholder dialogues	Engage key groups as advisors and thought partners	Limited impact on community overall
	Support relationship-building between college and community	Can become echo chambers for a small number of influencers
Community forums	Raise broadest awareness of the college's work	Labor intensive, require significant lead time and follow-up effort
	Generate wholly new ideas and partnerships	Require special skill sets or technical assistance

Community Engagement as a Pedagogical Opportunity

One final note: As an exercise in democratic decision making, community engagement efforts can offer interesting and important pedagogical opportunities for your students. Students could, for example, receive extra credit for helping to organize Community Conversations. They could be part of action teams that follow up on engagement activities. They could act as facilitators or recorders at dialogues as well as being participants. They could follow the public policy implications of the questions you're pursuing as they stretch from the community to the state and even the national level of government. Your engagement activities could thus provide valuable experiences for students in the areas of democratic process, citizenship and community politics, thereby serving your Achieving the Dream initiative in yet another way.

PUBLIC AGENDA'S COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS MODEL:

A Guide for Organizers

Public Agenda's Community Conversations model involves several key principles and guidelines that can be applied flexibly to different settings and issue areas of interest to the college. Whether you're looking to strengthen partnerships with K-12 schools, more effectively engage faith communities and community-based organizations to enhance supports for at-risk students, or build stronger working relationships with local employers and regional economic development agencies, Community Conversations can serve as a powerful catalyst for progress.

In the following pages, we provide a step-by-step overview of the activities involved in organizing and catalyzing the results of Community Conversations in the service of deeper and more durable community engagement. This information and these checklists are designed to take some of the guesswork out of your higher-stakes community engagement efforts and ease the burdens that come with hosting and making the most of large community forums.

To recap, the key elements of a strong Community Conversation include:

Local, Nonpartisan Planners and Sponsors

Community colleges will be most successful in recruiting diverse participants and creating powerful follow-up if they enlist the help of a diverse group of stakeholders to assist in sponsoring and planning the dialogue. Purposeful involvement of community-based organizations, K-12 schools, employers and others in the planning process is crucial for success.

Diverse Participants Beyond the Usual Suspects

True Community Conversations should include representation from a broad cross-section of participants. Participation should reflect the diversity of the community (not just the professional community), the college's Advisory Board members, and a few well-known concerned citizens. The goal is to include students, families and taxpayers as well as experts and professionals and to ensure that all groups and stakeholders are represented.

Dialogue in Small, Diverse Groups with Trained Facilitators and Recorders

A genuine exchange of views occurs most easily in small, diverse groups with well-trained nonpartisan facilitators to facilitate the dialogue and recorders to document the proceedings for effective follow-up. Carefully structured, small group dialogue entails careful attention to issue framing, process design, and the preparation of facilitators and recorders. See Appendix B: "A Recipe for a Great Facilitator: A Self-Assessment Tool."

Careful Issue Framing

Over the last 15 years, we have found effective, nonpartisan issue framing to be essential for providing people with a structure for engaging in an issue with which they may have little experience. Public Agenda has created dozens of "Choicework Discussion Starters" on a range of topics to help frame issues for broad-based community engagement. In 2006, Public Agenda developed a Choicework Discussion Starter for use by ATD colleges called "Success Is What Counts: A Community Conversation to Help All Community College Students Achieve." We updated the original Choicework in 2016, and sharpened its focus to help a diverse array of stakeholders think about their potential role in collaborations aimed at strengthening the student success efforts of ATD Colleges.[1]

Follow-up and Follow Through

It is important that these dialogues be part of a process that connects to the college's ATD agenda, thereby contributing to success at the college. If the dialogues are only discrete meetings that come and go, with no discernible connection to the life of the college, the ATD initiative, students, or the community, then they will have been of little value. Thus, a major focus of this guide is how to connect these dialogues to actions aimed at helping more students succeed through effective follow-up activities.

[1] See Appendix A.

PICTURING A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Each Community Conversation should be a significant event that serves as a point of departure for ongoing collaborations of various kinds. Typically, each will have somewhere between 60 and 120 participants. The session begins (or sometimes ends) with a celebratory meal and is followed by welcoming remarks by the conversation's sponsors or planners, after which participants move into small discussion groups of about 10 to 12 people each.

Each group should be as diverse and representative of the campus and/or community as possible. The small group discussion is designed to take about two hours; the entire event will take about four hours.

Community Conversation at a Glance—Sample Agenda

5:30–6:10   Registration, Dinner

6:10–6:30   Introduction
               Host provides welcome, purpose, agenda overview
               Brief presentation of key college data points to set the stage
               Instructions for breaking into small groups

6:30–8:15   Small Group Discussion
               Break into groups of 10-12, each with a trained facilitator, recorder
               and Choicework discussion starter materials

               6:30   Overview, introductions, ground rules

               6:40   Presentation/discussion of Choicework materials

               7:20   Interim summary of common ground, concerns/
                        disagreements, outstanding questions

               7:30   Bridging from dialogue to action

               8:00   Prioritize action ideas for report out

8:30–9:00   Lively, Fast-Paced Report Out
               Rep from each group shares 1-2 minutes of highlights:
               key priorities, ideas for action, or difficult areas of disagreement

GETTING GOING:

Creating the Planning Team for a Community Conversation

The Planning Team is responsible for the actual work of organizing the Community Conversation as well as making sure that appropriate follow-up takes place in a timely manner. The team should be a diverse group of individuals who are interested in the project, bring a variety of skills and resources to the table, and are willing to commit the time necessary over the next few months to make it happen. The Planning Team should include people with access to and credibility with various important segments of the populations you want to participate in the conversation (e.g., a local immigrant community).

What Does the Planning Team Do?

- Makes major strategic decisions, including topic selection and customization of discussion materials; conversation location; media policy; etc.
- Creates workgroups to manage various planning tasks, drawing from its ranks and recruiting additional people as needed to get the job done
- Spearheads communication efforts (in coordination with workgroups) such as developing talking points, promotional materials and media guidelines
- Coordinates and executes follow-up activities such as mailing thank-you letters, drafting and distributing conversation summary report, etc.

Who Should be on the Planning Team?

Although your college is taking a leadership role in this effort, Community Conversations work best if they are presented and run by a coalition of local institutions and organizations. Doing so gives the initiative broader reach into the community and communicates that the conversation will be open to multiple interests and viewpoints. Wider sponsorship brings a greater variety of skill sets to the proceedings and opens up possibilities for long-term partnerships and follow-up.

Plan for about 5-10 different community organizations/institutions to join the Planning Team, which should have about 12-20 members total. In addition to college personnel, the college may have a "community relations officer" of some kind, and it will likely make sense to include that person. Beyond this, whom might you recruit to the initiative? Might any of your trustees enjoy this kind of project? What about alumni?

In addition, you should consider approaching the following potential community partners:

- Local employers (especially those who hire community college graduates) and/or the Chamber of Commerce

- The local K-12 public school district and/or local four-year colleges

- A local chapter of the Urban League, YMCA, religious institutions, social service organizations and the like

- Local government officials

- Respected active citizens who have worked with you in the past, or with whom you would like to develop a relationship

- A local community or education foundation

This is a great opportunity to reach out to organizations and potential partners with whom you may not have worked in the past. Colleges may be tempted to take on the lion's share of work themselves, particularly if they have a public relations or community relations department. But it is very important to create a true team of people from within and outside of the college who will take responsibility for various aspects of the work involved. Both your Community Conversations and your long-term possibilities for follow-up work will benefit.

It takes some extra planning up front to bring a good mix of community interests on board, but it is worth the time to make this a true community effort. It's a good idea to consider some "unlikely" partners: people and organizations of different experiences, backgrounds and maybe political leanings. Planners do not have to agree on politics or education policy, as long as they agree that community dialogue is an important way to help tackle community challenges. It's critical to think about who will be able to implement the action ideas that emerge from the conversation and to involve those parties from the beginning.

A Note on Additional Conversation Sponsors

There may be organizations and/or individuals you'd like to have at the table who, for one reason or another, may be unable to join the Planning Team or provide staff, but who would be interested in lending their name and general support or endorsement to the endeavor. We suggest you think of these people and groups as "sponsors," and feel free to list their names in your materials and communications about the conversation. In addition, sometimes it's a good idea to reach out to certain groups or organizations for political reasons, or to help diversify your team. Of course, it's always preferable if they can join the Planning Team, but if they can't, you can still offer to include them as a sponsor.

Explaining the Initiative to Potential Planning Team Members and Sponsors

It's best to be ready with a brief and straightforward "pitch" that explains the purpose of the Community Conversation, why you are hoping these particular people or groups will want to get involved, and what that involvement will entail. Your "talking points" might include the following:

- We are organizing a Community Conversation about helping more community college students succeed.

- It is based on a model of public engagement developed by the organization Public Agenda, which has been used in dozens of communities nationwide. The model is carefully designed to be:

  o Inclusive, going beyond the "usual suspects" to include a true cross-section of stakeholders and community members.

  o Productive, with trained facilitators and recorders working with small groups of diverse participants and carefully prepared discussion materials.

- The conversation is an integral part of the college's work through its Achieving the Dream Initiative, which is about closing achievement gaps on campus and helping more students reach their goals. The results of the conversation will be used to:

  o Further refine our understanding of the issues and help generate solutions.

  o Build support for efforts already in place and develop new programs.

  o Forge new community relationships and strengthen existing partnerships.

It is best to explain the Community Conversations initiative in a way that will make sense to the people you are talking to—in other words, that will relate to their personal background, their work at the college or their organization's mission or goals. Help them see how their involvement in the process can enable them to further the work they are already doing, as well as contribute to the college, its students and the community overall.

For example, when talking to local employers or the Chamber of Commerce, you can explain how a successful process will ultimately lead to better-prepared potential employees, and that a community that sees its local businesses getting involved in community life is more likely to support those businesses in the future.

It's important that members of the Planning Team and sponsors understand that this isn't a typical public relations event. Make sure they are comfortable with the idea that this is an open dialogue and not about selling pre-decided solutions.

DIVING IN:
The Community Conversation Organizing Structure

Your Planning Team should begin its process with a three-to-four-hour Planning Workshop to review the Community Conversations model, set the goals of your conversation, make some key strategic and practical decisions, and divide into workgroups to follow through on various planning tasks.

There are four main categories of work to be done, so it usually makes sense to divide responsibilities into four working groups. Each step requires attention to detail as well as a vision of how it contributes to the overall conversation. The four working groups can each address one of the following categories of work: recruiting participants, organizing nuts and bolts (logistics), managing conversation facilitators, and coordinating strategic communications and follow-up.

1. Recruiting Participants: Reaching Beyond the Usual Suspects

This work group…

- Should be composed of diverse members with knowledge of and standing in the various sectors of the community you wish to recruit.
- Implements your recruitment plan by distributing fliers, making follow-up phone calls, etc.
- Keeps track of participant registration in advance of the event, and pre-assigns registered participants to small discussion groups.

TIPS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

- Invitations should come from personal contact by credible sources and respected figures within targeted sub-communities.
- Over-recruit those participants least likely to come.
- Consider involving students through appropriate classes. For instance, a political science or education professor might offer class credit to his or her students if they get involved in the conversation as organizers or participants.
- Even though this section is organized around groups that should be represented, each person should be invited as an individual, bringing his or her own points of view, rather than purely as a representative of a group.
- In addition to personal outreach, it is a good idea to send written invitations. This helps people feel they are being included in something special.
- Communicate that this meeting is different—more interesting, engaging and welcoming—than most community forums or meetings.
- Also communicate that this meeting matters. Talk about why it is so important to improve outcomes for local community college students, and that the organizers are going to use the results of the meeting to improve policies and support new initiatives to help students succeed.

2. Planning Tasks and Timeline: Organizing the Nuts and Bolts

This work group…

• Selects and secures the location for the Community Conversation.

• Coordinates meal and meal-related needs.

• Ensures that all necessary equipment and supplies are prepared and in place.

• Sets event timeline and oversees day-of-event staffing (including participant registration, equipment/venue set-up and clean-up, etc.), and provides general support and troubleshooting to other workgroups.

CHECKLIST FOR MANAGING THE PLANNING TASKS AND TIMELINE

10-12 weeks before Community Conversation

o Establish the Planning Team

o Schedule an initial Planning Workshop

8-10 weeks before Community Conversation

o Planning Team members attend two-to-three-hour Planning Workshop

o Set date and location of Community Conversation

o Define scope of community; choose and/or customize conversation topic

o Decide on media and observer policy; address other strategic considerations

o Planning Team members join one of four workgroups; workgroups begin their tasks

4-6 weeks before Community Conversation

o Extend invitations to participants and observers (via mail, email, in person, etc.)

o Recruit facilitators and recorders

o Confirm location and food reservations/orders

o Planning Team and workgroups meet as needed

2-3 weeks before Community Conversation

o Continue recruiting participants; use targeted outreach to assure a diverse participant group

o Begin initial contact with media (if appropriate)

o Planning Team and workgroups meet as needed

1 week before Community Conversation

o Hold facilitator/recorder training

o Make reminder calls to participants.

o Finalize all logistics; walk through meeting spaces and confirm placement of tables, food, etc.

o Finalize opening and closing plenary plans, decide who will handle questions, etc.

1 day after Community Conversation

o Planning Team debrief (invite facilitators and recorders to attend)

o Send participants a simple, thorough thank-you letter that includes your timeline for issuing a report of the results and a rough outline of next steps. Encourage them to help increase community engagement by inviting their networks to learn more about what you're doing and how they can get involved.

1-3 weeks after Community Conversation

o Invite participants to join an online discussion network for ongoing conversation (if appropriate)

o Follow-up workgroup (or entire Planning Team) meets to plan follow-up actions

o Analyze small group discussion outcomes

o Compile evaluation results

o Create summary report

o Share report with participants and internal stakeholders

1 month (and beyond) after Community Conversation

o Create recommendation memo or other follow-up action plans

o Report to participants about what actions have been taken and/or what other impacts the conversation has had

o Use the report to engage the internal campus community in new ways

3. Preparing Facilitators and Recorders: Committing to Skillful Facilitation

This work group…

• Recruits and plans training for facilitators and recorders.

• Plans and manages moderating needs for all opening and closing plenary sessions in coordination with the "nuts and bolts" team.

TIPS FOR MANAGING FACILITATORS AND RECORDERS

Recruiting Facilitators

We can't stress enough how important it is to focus on recruiting good facilitators (and recorders). Facilitators play a key role in conversations and have a very large impact on the experience. While the following guidelines can help you to select facilitator trainees, the most important qualifications—"people skills," the ability to think on one's feet, and a real interest in supporting an open, inclusive dialogue—should be kept in mind regardless of a candidate's background on paper or other "political" considerations.

Depending on how many facilitators you will need for your conversation (one each per small group of 12-14 people), you should recruit a few extra people who are willing to act as alternates. It's always possible that you will have an influx of walk-ins and will need to form an extra discussion group, or that someone may have a last-minute family conflict or emergency and won't be available to moderate on the day of the conversation. Also, as you may plan to hold more than one Community

Conversation, you will want to have a selection of trained facilitators who can serve in the future. Finally, some people prefer to co-moderate or co-record, so you can double up on these functions in a couple of instances if you wish.

The Best Facilitators

o Know the material and are familiar with the issues, but are not advocates

o Are simple and straightforward, providing leadership for the dialogue process without being controlling

o Remain nonpartisan and steer the conversation away from herself/himself and toward the group

o Diligently work to ensure that all voices are heard and valued

You will need facilitators with the following skills, knowledge and background:

o Group facilitation skills and experience—especially in working with diverse groups and the general public (as opposed to only with professionals).

o Ability to create an environment in which it is safe and comfortable for people to express their views.

o Ability to help participants articulate the reasoning, experiences and values supporting their positions.

o Ability to play devil's advocate and challenge people (in a friendly, civil way, of course) to consider alternate viewpoints.

o Comfort with and ability to manage group conflict.

o Ability to take a nonpartisan moderating stance and put the health of the conversation above any other interest in the topic.

o Nonpartisan credibility. Some people may be able to moderate in a nonpartisan manner but, because of past associations, will not be viewed in that light by members of the group.

o Some general familiarity with community college and education reform debates, although expertise is not required. This attribute is less important than the others.

o Ideally, the facilitator team overall will roughly reflect the demographics of the community. Diversity of race, ethnicity and gender is important in any conversation about community college student success.

See Appendix B, "A Recipe for a Great Facilitator: A Self-Assessment Tool," to help ensure facilitators are adequately trained.

4. Coordinating Strategic Communications and Follow-up

This work group…

• Creates basic communications tools and products, such as talking points for recruiting participants, a flier/invitation for the event, and a "pitch letter" to explain the event to potential partners and allies.

• Manages media relations.

• Creates a post-forum summary report and leads post-forum communications with participants.

• Manages communications with participants about action opportunities both before and after the event.

COORDINATING COMMUNICATIONS & EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Your Planning Team as a whole will have decided how much focus you want to place on media relations and other kinds of communications. There are three fundamental communications tools you will find useful:

o A set of talking points to help you explain the initiative that convey factual information about the conversation as well the intent behind it.

o A flyer that succinctly explains the purpose of the Community Conversations and gives basic information —such as when and where it will take place—in a visually appealing presentation.

o A "pitch letter" that explains the event to potential partners and allies and includes talking points tailored to each recipient.

The Planning Team should use multiple venues and strategies for disseminating information about the Community Conversation. While social media is an essential tool, personal outreach is equally important.

LINKING COMMUNITY DIALOGUE TO MEANINGFUL ACTION BY THE COLLEGE AND THE COMMUNITY

In our experience, almost everyone who attends a well-organized, well-run Community Conversation comes away feeling that the experience was exciting, refreshing and extremely valuable. To this end, the Planning Team should think early on about how to create the conditions for effective follow-up after the event. See our Checklist for Managing the Planning Tasks and Timeline for a proposed timeline and process for turning your dialogue into action through careful follow-up.[2]

Tips for Basic Follow-up

o Send a brief thank-you email to all participants the day after the conversation, and outline your next steps. Do not wait more than 24 hours after the event to connect with participants.

o Provide a summary report of the Community Conversation to all participants. If you think it will take considerable time to put this together, make sure your initial thank-you note indicates that a report will be following in the coming weeks.

o Report back to the community on the themes and ideas for action that emerged and the commitments made by participants, and give a description of future community engagement plans. Also offer opportunities for participation/collaboration on any of the follow-up work, and encourage report recipients to share the report and invitation with their networks.

Tips for Deeper Follow-up

o Create action task forces to plan and promote specific policies or initiatives based on the directions for action that emerged from the Community Conversation.

o Continue and expand the dialogue that was begun in the Community Conversation via an online platform or through additional face-to-face meetings.

o Convene a leadership session to react to the results of the deliberations and use the Community Conversation outcomes as tools for the engagement of faculty, staff and administrators at the college.

o Conduct a focus group to better understand the areas of disagreement identified at the meeting, and/or to dig further into issues participants asked for more information about.

o Take advantage of the fact that many people simply want to help in any way they can after a Community Conversation and may be open to volunteering or raising money for the college and its students.

[2] See pg. 17

APPENDIX A:

Choicework Discussion Starter:
Success is what Counts: Improving Community Partnerships
to Help All Community College Students Achieve

Nearly half of all students seeking higher education choose a community college, but less than half of them finish what they start. Although over 80 percent of the 1.5 million students who enter community colleges each year indicate that they intend to attain a bachelor's degree or higher, less than 40 percent earn any form of college credential within six years.[3] Low student completion rates coincide with economic forces that have made a postsecondary degree more important now than ever.

Community colleges remain the nation's gateways to good jobs for millions of students who dream of a better tomorrow. Yet too often these dreams are cut short. For the first time in our history, the current generation of college-age Americans will be less educated than their parents' generation. Those without an education will be unable to compete in a national landscape that more than ever before demands high-level job skills.

As colleges across the country innovate to better meet the needs of the diverse students they serve, many are increasingly focused on deepening their community engagement efforts. For these colleges, high-functioning community partnerships are critical components of the student success agenda.

This Choicework Discussion Starter was created to help diverse stakeholders from the college and broader community engage in action-oriented dialogue about the potential for strengthened partnership on behalf of better outcomes for students.

It is important to note that Choicework materials such as these are not meant to limit the conversation to only three ideas, but to provide a useful, stimulating starting point for dialogue. When properly moderated, they help people from a wide range of backgrounds engage in collaborative problem solving.

This guide can be used in a range of settings, including focus groups, stakeholder dialogues and broad-based Community Conversations. It can also be used for a variety of purposes: to take stock of and improve existing community engagement efforts, to surface fresh ideas about new forms of partnership, or to build new shared understanding across boundaries of various kinds. Regardless of the setting or specific purpose of the dialogue, the guide aims to help colleges and community partners cultivate a strong and durable sense of shared responsibility for student success.

[3] Community College Research Center, 2014.

Three Approaches to Building Strong Community Partnerships

1. Make sure students are prepared for college-level work through stronger K-12 partnerships

2. Help students manage the pressures in their lives through deeper collaboration with community-based organizations

3. Ensure a rigorous and relevant academic experience through creative partnerships with employers and four-year institutions

While all of these are worthy and important goals, each with a firm evidence base, the purpose of this dialogue is to help us explore opportunities, set priorities and get clear-eyed about the hard work involved in building strong community partnerships on behalf of better outcomes for our students.

As you discuss the approaches below, consider the following questions:

• What's difficult about each approach? What's easier?

• Given the needs of our students, and what our data tell us about what is most likely to derail them, which of these approaches is most important for the college to pursue?

• To what extent do we already have these partnerships in place? Are our current efforts strong and effective enough?

• Because we don't have the resources to do everything at once, where should put our focus and why?

• What specific steps are entailed in moving from ideas to action here? Can we sketch 3-month, 6-month and 9-month action plans aimed at moving us forward in concrete ways?

APPROACH 1: Make sure students are prepared for college-level work through stronger K-12 partnerships

For a variety of reasons, too many students arrive at community college without a solid enough foundation for success. With adequate preparation, students are better able to take advantage of the educational opportunities the college has to offer, and less likely to be thrown off course by the pressures in their lives. Our highest impact community partnerships will be those we build with K-12 schools to ensure that students graduate from high school ready for college-level work.

Therefore, we should do things like:

• Work with high schools to create a data dashboard that assesses student progress starting in 9th grade to ensure students will be ready for college-level work by the time they graduate

• Build strong dual-enrollment programs that allow students to earn college credits —and get exposure to the culture of college—while still in high school

• Develop summer bridge programs with high schools that help acquaint at-risk students with college culture and fill gaps in academic and study skills before their first fall semester

Questions for Approach 1:

While strong partnerships between colleges and K-12 schools might be our best bet for closing achievement gaps and helping far more students succeed, this approach depends on multi-level relationship-building based on the shared recognition that high schools and colleges are jointly responsible for student success.

• What is the quality and depth of the current relationship between the college and nearby K-12 schools?

• Are the schools' senior leaders in regular contact? In what ways do college faculty and high school teachers currently interact?

• Do high school guidance counselors and college advisors tap common sources of information about career pathways and/or communicate regularly with each other?

• What are the current incentives and disincentives for focusing on improving K-12 partnerships?

Helpful Resources:

Promising Directions for K-12 and Community College Partnerships
http://www.sr.ithaka.org/blog/promising-directions-for-k-12-and-community
-college-partnerships/

K-12 and Community College Partnerships for Access, Readiness, and Success
https://www.hobsons.com/resources/entry/k-12-and-community-college-partnerships
-for-access-readiness-and-success

Self-Assessment of Effective Community College/K-12 Partnerships
http://www.careerladdersproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/H2C-Partnership-
Self-Assessment-Tool2.pdf

APPROACH 2: Help students manage the pressures in their lives through deeper collaboration with community-based organizations

Many community college students have complicated lives. Most have many responsibilities and few resources, and many are first-generation college-goers who are unconfident learners. Too many of our students' college aspirations are overwhelmed by the pressures they face. Community-based organizations tend to be trusted in the community because they understand the social and cultural context of the individuals and families they work with, and they structure their services to respond quickly and flexibly to the needs of the communities they serve. For these reasons and others, creative partnerships with community-based organizations are our best shot at helping significantly more of our students persist in the face of life's challenges.

Therefore, we should do things like:

• Partner with individual community-based organizations serving key populations (e.g., formerly incarcerated individuals, transitional youth, displaced workers) to deliver jointly-developed programming focused on academic skill-building, tutoring in critical reading and self-management strategies

• Commit to a long-term, coalition-based strategy for multiple community-based organizations and the college to pursue common student success goals, focusing first on the creation of data and information sharing systems and key progress indicators (KPIs)

• Work with local faith leaders to identify opportunities to weave support and encouragement for postsecondary attainment into the work of churches, mosques and synagogues

While strong partnerships between colleges and community-based organizations might be our best bet for closing achievement gaps and helping far more students succeed, this approach depends on multi-level relationship building in a context of scarce resources and competition.

- What is the quality and depth of the current relationship between the college and community-based organizations?

- Do senior leaders from community-based organizations and the college interact regularly and in meaningful ways?

- In what ways are faculty and staff from the college exposed to or made aware of the work of key community-based organizations and how it relates to the lives and prospects of students?

- What are the current incentives and disincentives for community-based organizations to partner with the college?

Helpful Resources:

The Role of Community-Based Organizations in the College Access and Success Movement
http://www.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/docs/pubs/pcn_roleofcbo.pdf

Best Practices for Working Effectively with Community-Based Organizations to Support and Connect with Underrepresented Students
http://docplayer.net/3194651-Best-practices-for-working-effectively-with-community
-based-organizations-to-support-and-connect-with-underrepresented-students.html

Partnerships Between Community Colleges and Prisons: Providing Workforce Education and Training to Reduce Recidivism
http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/prison-cc-partnerships_2009.pdf

APPROACH 3: Ensure a rigorous and relevant academic experience through creative partnerships with employers and four-year institutions

The most important thing we can do to promote student achievement is to provide a clear, coherent and high-quality educational experience that is challenging and engaging, and that gives students the experiences they need to meet their educational and career goals. It is not enough for the college to focus only on students' completion of certificates and credentials: the college must also work to ensure that students' educational paths lead to career advancement and/or further education. The most important thing the college can do to help students achieve is to focus on partnerships with transfer institutions and employers to create clear programs of study and educational experiences for students that are rigorous and relevant.

Therefore, we should do things like:

- Work with employers in high-growth sectors to provide work experience programs for students (internships, co-ops and job shadowing) and externships for faculty, and to tap in-kind resources that businesses may have available for colleges (space, materials and expertise)

- Build partnerships between faculty members at the community college and four-year institutions to provide community college students with more project-based experiences and undergraduate research opportunities

- Partner, on an ongoing basis, with key employers in the community and the four-year institutions that graduate their employees to ensure the community college curricula and programs of study are clearly aligned with labor market needs and the program requirements of the four-year institutions

Questions for Approach 3:

While the creation of clear pathways for students that begin with the end in mind (careers and/or further education) is likely our best bet for ensuring that more of our students achieve their potential, this approach depends on translating the work of the college for an employer community that may not understand its value, and on building multi-level relationships with four-year institutions in the context of competition for students and resources.

- What do we know and not know about the labor market outcomes of our students, the needs of local employers, and the credentials that are most sought after in our community?

- What are the current incentives and disincentives for employers to partner with the college?

- Do senior leaders from the college and our transfer institutions communicate regularly and in meaningful ways?

- In what ways do faculty and staff from the college and our transfer partners currently work together to create clear pathways for students? What makes it harder and easier for us to work with four-year institutions?

Helpful Resources:

Breakthrough Employer Engagement Practices
http://achievingthedream.org/resource/16229/breakthrough-employer-engagement-practices

Business and Community College Partnerships: A Blueprint
http://www.iwnc.org/documents/LearnEarnBlueprint.pdf

The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges
https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2016/05/aspen-ccrc_transferplaybook_05-2016.pdf

APPENDIX B:

A Recipe for a Great Facilitator: A Self-Assessment Tool

Skill Area	Poor (1)	Great (10)	Personal Score (1–10)	Improvement Strategies
Listening	Poor listening skills, including the inability to discern what others are saying, track the line of thought being expressed, or pick up on the subtext of the conversation. Short attention span. Cuts people off mid- sentence. Distracting or closed-off body language.	Ability to hear beyond what is being said to identify the core meaning. Can answer the questions: What does this person's statement say about what they value? What is the main point they are trying to make? What are they trying to say that others might miss?		
Objectivity	Biased about the subject matter; biased about groups and/or persons involved with or affected by the subject matter. Unable to refrain from commenting about the subject matter or inserting personal opinion into the conversation. Seen as having a position or agenda regarding the issue at hand.	Reflects good "behavioral neutrality" on the subject. Ability to refrain from making personal comments about the subject matter. Does not reveal a personal position on the subject. Remains unbiased and neutral in conversation and when moderating.		
Self-awareness	Lacks awareness of the group's perceptions of and reactions to the facilitator's style and behavior. Rigid or inflexible style of delivery and speech.	Sensitive to the group's perceptions of and responses to the facilitator's style and behavior. Can flexibly adapt speech and method to best suit the situation.		
Group Awareness	Low awareness of group dynamics. Inability to read body language including when participants are confused, uncomfortable with the conversation, or tuning out.	Aware of group dynamics, including what is signaled by body language. Ability to sense how participants are responding to turns in the conversation. Knows when it is time to move on in the conversation, or when more elaboration is needed on an issue.		

Skill Area	Poor (1)	Great (10)	Personal Score (1–10)	Improvement Strategies
Responsive Control	Either over-controlling or insufficiently assertive. Not able to maintain an appropriate level of control of the group, or to moderate the tenor of the discussion. Inability to reign in dominant or aggressive speakers or to elicit comments from silent participants. Intimidated or "cowed" by experts, politicians and loudmouths.	Knows when and when not to intervene in order to reinforce ground rules, and to keep the conversation on track. Can effectively ensure that all participants have an opportunity to speak by drawing out silent participants or managing dominant or aggressive speakers.		
Sense of Humor	Either excessively dour or serious, or inappropriately or excessively comedic.	Able to use humor appropriately to set a relaxed, informal tone for the conversation, or to defuse a difficult or awkward situation.		
Adaptability	Overly dependent on scripted, predictable environments. Does not handle uncertainty or last-minute changes well.	Able to adapt to unexpected situations with grace and humor, while keeping the key principles and objectives in mind.		
Public Speaking	Poor verbal communication skills. Either intimidated by speaking in front of groups, or has a need to be the center of attention.	Comfortable and eloquent when speaking in public settings; sets a relaxed and respectful tone. Uses language appropriate for the audience. Able to verbally synthesize information well.		
Image	Perceived as either elitist/aloof, or as overly charismatic. Seen as unprepared or disorganized, short-tempered, manic or volatile.	Seen as warm, calm, approachable; can "connect" with people from a wide range of backgrounds, ages, experiences, etc.		

PUBLIC AGENDA

THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

For more information about this study, visit:
http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/success-is-what-counts

Or contact: highered@publicagenda.org, tel: 212.686.6610