



## Strategy #8: Engaging Communities Collaborative Work Team

To: Tim Sheehan, VP for Govt. & Community Relations

From: Jennifer Seltzer Stitt, Director of Community Relations;

Date: 05/31/2022

SLCC's commitment to our community is central to our mission, vision, and values. At its most basic, engagement is an educational strategy and a way to advance institutional goals of improving transfer preparation, increasing student completion, aligning with workforce needs, and achieving equity in student participation and completion. It is a way to demonstrate that we value our students and our communities and want to work with them to advance our common interests. At its best, engagement is a promise to strengthen the communities we serve through inclusive and transformative education.

We know from experience that individual efforts in service of our community are worthwhile. They play a valuable role in scholarship, student learning, employee connection, college visibility, and community well-being. But they can also be inconsistent and ineffective at advancing long-term college and community strategic goals.

Institutionalization of outreach and complex partnerships, sustained commitment of scarce resources, and a commitment to nurturing mutually beneficial partnerships more closely correlate with access, higher retention, increased public appropriations, and increased campus diversity. (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). And, by leveraging the college and community economic, human, and intellectual resources, these partnerships improve the long-term welfare of our communities.

The College long ago took steps to institutionalize engagement. It is one of the reasons we are one of only a handful of community colleges to receive the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. It is also why, as we face new pressures to increase college-going rates and our communities struggle with uneven growth, we have chosen to revisit how we manage outreach and community relations, both of which are firmly rooted in the principles engagement.

In September, Cabinet charged the Engaging Communities CWT with making recommendations about our institutional process and structures for engaging with communities. Specifically, the CWT was asked to

1. Develop a replicable approach for community relations and outreach
2. Apply the methodology to targeted geographic communities and make specific recommendations

Over the past eight months, CWT members brought together individuals from across the College and community. Together we developed proposals designed to support truly collaborative relationships that strengthen equitable access to post-secondary education and provide space for mutual learning that benefits college and community.

### **Recommended Approach to Engaging Communities**

Engagement is an iterative and sometimes messy process. It “is not a singular event with a beginning, middle, and comfortable end point. Rather it is an ongoing, evolutionary process, where one change triggers another, often in unexpected places.” ([Barbara Hill](#)) With that in mind, we propose the following steps to engage with our communities.

1. Ground engagement in the [Principles of Partnership](#). SLCC encourages faculty, staff, and community partners to use these design principles as guidelines when developing partnerships.
2. Identify the community with whom we would like to engage. For example, the Engaging Communities CWT used geographic boundaries to define the community we wanted to engage.
3. Get to know the community. Learn about, for example, their culture, demographics, written and oral history, socioeconomic dynamics, community assets, goals, and SLCC’s history of engagement with the community.
4. Build relationships in the community. Connect with community leaders, informal community historians, and [community gate keepers](#).
5. Invite participation. Gather internal stakeholders to identify SLCC partnership objectives. Similarly, engage external stakeholders to help identify community goals and objectives.
6. Agree on common goals for the partnership. The facilitator, more often than not this will be the College, will propose goals based to college and community partners for formal or informal approval.
7. Identify how to measure success. Partners establish consistent measurements for all entities or for themselves.
8. Engage in consistent communication. Set a schedule that outlines when and how partners will communicate.
9. Adjust methods based on feedback and data. This is an iterative process.

## **Recommendations –West Valley City and Kearns Metro Township**

### **Why West Valley and Kearns?**

The Engaging Communities CWT emerged, in part, as a result of a mismatch between our investment in West Valley City, Kearns Township, Rose Park, Magna, Westpointe, and Glendale and growth in SLCC enrollment from these zip codes.

Over the last decade, SLCC increased its presence west of I-15. Apart from South City Campus and the Library Square Center, all SLCC campuses and centers are located West of I-15. We have also increased high visibility programs in west Salt Lake County communities. For example, we recently launched our third PACE high school program and a new PREP middle school summer program in schools located west of I-15. Staff and faculty sit on numerous boards and conduct academic, cocurricular, and outreach projects in these communities.

At the same time as we grew our presence in these communities, West Valley City, Kearns Township, Rose Park, and Glendale all experienced significant population growth. In West Valley City and Kearns, and to a lesser degree in surrounding communities, Hispanic/Latinx and other minority populations outpaced general population growth. During the same time, Kearns “experienced a [51%] growth in the population whose highest level of formal education is less than 9th grade.” Despite our efforts to connect these communities to post-secondary education, the percentage of the population enrolled in SLCC remained largely static.

In 2021, the University of Utah announced its intention to serve as an anchor institution in West Valley City, open a hospital and training center located five blocks from SLCC’s West Valley City, establish a new West Valley University Neighborhood Partner initiative, and engage in significant k-12 outreach in West Valley City and the surrounding areas. The hospital, scheduled to open in 2026, will employ 1,200 individuals. While our work predates these new efforts by the University, their expansion bestows an urgency to and provides new opportunities for our efforts in West Valley City and Kearns.

These factors and our pursuit of the Hispanic Serving Institution designation made West Valley City and Kearns a natural place for the CWT start its work.

### **Recommendation 1 – Strategies, Objectives, and Measures of Success**

The CWT falls under the College’s equity in participation and completion goal. The CWT’s task is to identify strategic community relations and outreach objectives that support equity in participation and community-identified goals, establish how we can measure progress, and recommend potential actions to achieve success.

Based on internal and external feedback and discussion, the CWT identified the following objectives:

1. Understand/strengthen/innovate outreach and education to increase college access, persistence, and success.

2. Be an accessible and authentic partner invested and integrated in the communities that call West Valley City and Kearns Township home.

The CWT recommends measuring progress toward these objectives with the following tools:

1. Survey once every three years to gauge community knowledge of, connection to, and perceived benefit of partnership with the College.
2. Supplement survey results with an analysis of participation rates and evaluations of SLCC sponsored academic and community programs located in West Valley and Kearns.
3. Track overall college enrollment, persistence, and success of students from West Valley City and Kearns zip codes, with specific attention equity (student demographics in each area mirror the communities we are measuring).

#### New Resources or Shift in Resources

1. Funding and staff resources to support community survey and data analysis.

#### **Recommendation 2 – Adopt and support dual mission at West Valley Center**

The CWT devoted considerable time and energy to understanding the identity of SLCC’s West Valley Center, the communities it is designed to serve, and the connection between the two. We identified two significant areas of disconnect.

First, we found that staff, faculty, and community members lack a shared understanding of and language to talk about what West Valley Center and the College offer West Valley City and Kearns. Unlike, for example, South City Campus, the West Valley Center lacks a strong identity and presence that defines the Center – and, by extension, the College – to its surrounding communities.

The CWT identified several factors that weaken the Center’s identity, including but not limited to –

- Inability for a student to enroll in and complete a program at the Center;
- Few culturally relevant classes taught at West Valley Center; and
- Limited capacity for community engagement with the Center.

We also spent significant time discussing the impact of class cancellations and block scheduling, but do not have conclusive data to share at this time.

Second, just as we want the community to see us and understand what we have to offer, community members would like to be seen. In listening sessions, community members expressed a desire to engage with culturally fluent staff and to see the diversity of their communities reflected in the Center’s academic, cocurricular, and community programming.

To build connection with our surrounding communities, we recommend Cabinet make explicit and approve a dual mission for West Valley Center that supports a clear academic identity and community-based programming that reflects, honors, and celebrates college and

community culture. All subsequent recommendations in this section are designed to reinforce the Center's unique dual mission and community-minded ethos.

### Academic and Student Support Service Programming

The CWT supports Academic Affairs' intention and current efforts to expand Allied Health academic and workforce training at West Valley Center. The area focus will provide an academic identity to the Center. The CWT recommends the following be incorporated into efforts to strengthen academic and student support programs at the Center:

- Employ inclusive pedagogy and teaching strategies in academic and workforce training at the Center.
- Offer classes and workshops in languages other than English, as appropriate.
- Provide contextual English classes as appropriate and/or professional English tutoring for English Language Learners at the Center.
- Identify and implement best practices for increasing enrollment and creating connection between the College and concurrent enrollment students and their families. For example, hold concurrent enrollment classes at West Valley Center and offer students and their families campus tours and parent nights.
- Increase ODMA programming at West Valley Center to reflect the diversity of its students and community (in addition to, not in place of, existing Dream Center programming).

### Community Education

1. Establish a Community Advisory Council composed of community leaders and gatekeepers to help guide community programming, recruit residents to lead community workshops, and build community participation. (Council managed by site coordinator in cooperation with Community Relations.)
2. Host one youth education program session (i.e., Bridge Program) at West Valley Center to increase community interaction with the Center.

### Increased Visibility as Welcoming and Community Oriented Center

1. Display community-created art in West Valley Center.
2. Increase visible use of multiple languages in the physical space and in community marketing. (ongoing)
3. Make improvements to the exterior and parking lot to increase visibility and create a more welcoming space.

### New Resources or Shift in Resources

1. Infrastructure Costs
  - a. Construction/Renovation of classrooms and backroom to allow increased health sciences training and community gathering space necessary for expansion of academic and community offerings

- b. Beautification funding for parking lot and sidewalk
- 2. Staffing Costs
  - a. Shift current site coordinator position to include Academic and Community Learning Center site coordination. (This will carry expanded duties, including community outreach, and, as a result, may move the position to a higher pay category.)
  - b. Create a new part-time position under the Academic and Community site coordinator to assist with outreach, scheduling, and event management.
  - c. Compensate community volunteers serving on the Community Advisory Council.
- 3. Meeting, event, and outreach budget
  - a. Establish a meeting, event, and outreach budget to meet the community component of West Valley Center’s dual mission.

**Recommendation 3– Increase strategic K-12 outreach**

With the creation of the Admissions Office in 2016 and the closure of SLCC’s School Relations Office, the College redirected the majority of its efforts on high school students, typically junior and seniors, and adults actively seeking information about and engaging directly with colleges. While Admissions more narrow focus is necessary in order to achieve its goals, it created a noticeable void in outreach to K-10th grade and their families.

For these reasons, which have been well-detailed in other CWT reports, most notably the P-20 Pipeline CWT reports, we recommend the College adopt the following actions to support increased K-12 outreach:

- 1. Expand partnerships with schools that feed into West Valley City and Kearns Township high schools, with emphasis on those high schools with PACE and Trio programs. Partnerships include expanding middle school participatory action research programming at Kearns Middle School and direct SLCC school and program engagement with these schools where appropriate and possible.
- 2. Increase outreach and access programming with a focus on elementary, middle school, and early high school programs. Depending on capacity, this could include participating in partner schools’ classroom or school-wide programs; creating age-appropriate materials that highlight opportunities and benefits of college (including concurrent enrollment); developing in-class presentations followed by on campus tours and parent workshops.
- 3. Train interested community organizations, in partnership with USHE, to assist students and families with FAFSA completion.

New Resources or Shift in Resources

- 1. Increase staff coordinating school and community outreach from part to full time. Right now, we anticipate starting a part-time Community and Youth Outreach staff member in mid-July. The person will be located in the Office of Community Relations. We will be able to accomplish more robust outreach if we can move the position to full time.

2. Increase outreach capacity by training ambassadors. An Outreach Ambassador Team could draw on work study and college internship students, student leadership and club members, and SLCC staff, faculty, and alumni volunteers from a broad range of cultural, racial, and ethnic identities and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.
3. Hire a Middle School Program Coordinator for Kearns Junior High School to develop and implement culturally responsive programming that centers on community needs and cultivates genuine relationships with students and families, yielding to SLCC deepening its role and connection to the community.

#### **Recommendation 4 – Visibility in Community**

In listening sessions and informal conversations, community members expressed a desire for consistent participation and visibility at events in their community. For example, community members would like to see us at local festivals, fairs, and in trusted gathering places. While these events do not necessarily yield immediate enrollment, consistent visibility in communities demonstrates that we are willing to engage with and invest in a community. It also builds trust, expands our community network, and strengthens the College brand.

Based on community feedback and the benefits of visible participation in community-based events, the CWT recommends:

1. Expansion of outreach and access efforts at community events, at community gathering points, and at local government and community meetings
2. Direct student, staff, and faculty volunteers, where possible, to West Valley City and Kearns

#### **New Resources or Shift in Resources**

1. Increase staff coordinating school and community outreach from part to full time. Right now, we anticipate starting a part-time Community and Youth Outreach staff member in mid-July. The person will be located in the Office of Community Relations.
2. Increase outreach capacity by training ambassadors. An Outreach Ambassador Team could draw on work study and college internship students, student leadership and club members, and SLCC staff, faculty, and alumni volunteers from a broad range of cultural, racial, and ethnic identities and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

#### **Implementation and Expansion**

This report captures the committee’s best thinking at this moment in time. Engagement is an ongoing dialogue, requiring successive iterations of analysis, recommendations, and adjustments that reflect new voices in the process and new developments in the College and community. We recommend that the CWT spend the second year guiding the implementation of the strategy. We suggest that the CWT also be responsible for regular updates to the community through a public facing webpage and continued engagement around activities.

After implementation, we recommend that the CWT transition to an ongoing working group accountable to Cabinet, essentially institutionalizing the methodology and the work. With the help of data sciences, Community Relations will identify and research the next community to engage in the methodology proposed by this CWT. With the approval of Cabinet, Community Relations would convene a working group to carry out the engagement strategy developed.