Building Strategic External Partnerships to Advance Student Success

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Who We Are

The Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership in ways that help institutions of higher education make the choices that matter most to improving student outcomes in four areas:

- Completion
- Equity
- Labor Market
- Learning
Our Work

Eight major initiatives, including:

• Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence
• Frontier Set
• Presidential Fellowship
• American Talent Initiative
• Tackling Transfer
• Guided Pathways partner
Why focus on external partnerships in the context of guided pathways?

- Clarify paths to student end goals
- Help students choose and enter a path
- Help students stay on their path
- Ensure student learning
Why focus on external partnerships in the context of guided pathways?

• All students come from somewhere.
  • Opportunities exist to develop efficiencies in onboarding to help get students onto pathways.
• Pathways need to lead somewhere.
  • Strong partnerships are essential to alignment with what comes next.
• Community colleges are one part of a larger regional education/employment ecosystem.
What kinds of partnerships should colleges prioritize in the pathways context?

- 4-year institutions
- Employers/Industry
- K-12
- Community-based organizations
Elements of the collective impact model can support strategic partnership

- Common agenda and goals
- Shared measurement
- Mutually reinforcing activities
- Continuous communication
- Backbone support

Common Agenda and Goals

• Agreement about the complex problem, need, or challenge
• Joint ownership of the specific goal or outcome that the group is seeking to achieve

College Example
Santa Barbara City College’s partnership with K-12 districts has yielded a mandatory college-preparatory curriculum for middle-high school students designed together by high school teachers and college faculty to advance planning and sense of purpose.
Shared Measurement

- Partners agree on and operationalize a set of common measures to assess whether goals are being met
- Baseline and ongoing data need to be shared across organizations
- Time and space to jointly review the data

**College example**
Harper College’s partnership with three K-12 school districts led to the Northwest Educational Council for Student Success. Partners combine and share data, and regularly meet and discuss data and progress. Result: Increased math readiness by 20 percentage points over four years.
Mutually Reinforcing Activities

- Jointly designed and aligned activities across partner organizations
- Redesign policies or processes with the student in mind – think about the student’s experience *across* organizations
- Leverage shared resources
- Look for gaps in pipelines or processes and decide who is responsible for filling the gaps

**College example:** At Broward College, clear program maps for each of the college’s eight career pathways delineate clear paths to a bachelor’s degree. Faculty and staff at Broward and 4-year partner FIU meet annually to collectively identify strengths and gaps in existing program maps and collaborate to continuously improve.
Continuous Communication

- Frequent, structured, and open communication
- Executive-level engagement across organizations
- Transparent feedback from all partners

College example: At Lake Area Technical Institute, there is continuous communication between the college and industry partners, ensuring that pathways are constantly updated based on industry needs and expectations.
Backbone Support

• Ensures alignment between partners
• Monitors progress in meeting goals
• Housed within a partner organization or set up as a separate entity; dedicated staff
• Remains neutral

College Example: Northern Virginia Community College’s *Pathway to the Baccalaureate* involved partnerships with K-12 districts and George Mason University. A backbone organization is housed at NOVA.
Case Study: A Systems Approach to Solving the Nursing Gap

For years, the Orlando region struggled to build a sufficient pipeline of nurses. Throughout the community, entities operated in competition with one another.

Leveraging an industry veteran to serve as a neutral moderator, Valencia College and other colleges came together to collectively solve the skill gap with investment from the healthcare industry:

- **Data-Driven Constituent Meetings**: Churn rates, wage trends, and historic and projected skill gap data helped convince hospitals and colleges that a new approach was needed.
- **Summit**: College presidents and hospitals CEOs gathered to discuss how to align curriculum and expand capacity, including discussions around how hospitals needed to invest in the solution themselves and how community colleges could add BSN programs without disrupting 4-year enrollment.
- **Continuous Collaboration**: Department heads and faculty continue to meet throughout the year, providing a forum to continue to build consensus around shared goals, share best practices (e.g., involving employers in recruitment, launching weekend/evening programming) and a structure to ensure partnership sustainability.

### Goals & Progress

Since 2016, the Orlando region has opened three additional post-licensure BSN programs, representing capacity for a 109% increase in BSN admissions, or a total of 6,600 students, within the next five years.
How can colleges make an effective case for partnership?

• What is the value proposition for the partner?
  - Business case?
  - Equity case?
  - Marketing case?
  - Political case?

• How can the college be a solution provider for the prospective partner? Specifically, how will partnership in pathways help solve a problem that the partner organization is facing?
Example: Making the case to a 4-year institution

You are the president of a community college that is located near a large, relatively non-selective regional university. Each year, large numbers of your students transfer to the regional university, but their outcomes for baccalaureate completion are poor. Meanwhile, your college has spent the last several years implementing guided pathways to the associate’s degree. You hypothesize that by partnering with the regional university your college could better align its pathways with the expectations of the 4-year institution, resulting in better outcomes for your students who go on to transfer. How can you make this case to the 4-year partner, who may see your college as competition for enrollments?
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Employers needed to understand what it takes for colleges to ramp up programs. Colleges needed to understand how to frame partnership as a business proposition rather than a pitch for businesses to “do good.”
Activity: Making the Case

How can you make the case for partnership in developing guided pathways to different external partners? Take **10 minutes** with those at your table to discuss how you might make the case to your table’s assigned partner organization, considering the questions on your handout. If you have time, you can begin discussing the other partner organization on the handout.

*Take 10 minutes to discuss, then we’ll regroup to debrief.*
Activity: Making the Case

Debrief:

• How can the community college be a solution provider for K-12 districts in the context of guided pathways? How might you best appeal to the K-12 system?

• How can the community college be a solution provider for regional employers? What role do guided pathways play? How could you best make this case?
Institutional Spotlight

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Questions? Reflections?
Thank you!

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