

**2020 Commission
Enhancing Community Partnerships Report**

Introduction

Western Carolina University has a long and productive history of working with community partners to improve the quality of life in our region, state, nation, and world. We firmly believe that enhancing community partnerships should not be treated as a supplement to what we do, but rather as an integral part of our core mission. Our Quality Enhancement Plan, our commitment to the Boyer Model of scholarship, and our embrace of the Stewards of Place model all reinforce our commitment to enhancing community partnerships.

The primary purpose of our work was to examine and suggest ways that WCU faculty, staff, and students can and should work to enhance community partnerships. We do not have the authority, nor would it be in the best interests of the community, for our committee to suggest actions for non-WCU entities. Further, we recognize and appreciate that many partnerships are initiated by individual relationships, rather than institutional initiatives, and we encourage those to continue and flourish into the future—regardless of the strategic goals laid out in this document.

We believe that enhancing community partnerships is best achieved by realizing four primary goals: (1) creating a single, visible entity for facilitating communication between external partners and WCU, (2) fostering community development, (3) fostering economic development, and (4) aligning internal processes and reward systems to foster participation in community partnerships.

Before continuing, we wish to make two comments about terminology that should help the reader interpret our vision. First, we struggled to agree on an appropriate definition of our region. Members of the subcommittee had previously used three different definitions of the region: 11 counties, 18 counties, and 23 counties. Further, some argued convincingly that WCUs region should include Eastern Tennessee, Northern Georgia, and the upstate of South Carolina, whereas others argued that our region should end at the borders of the state. In the end, we concluded that it would be counterproductive to enforce a rigid definition of our region. Instead, we accepted that the scope of our region does, in fact, vary for different partnerships and goals. Second, we recognized the important role that non-academic outreach units play in developing community partnerships. Although there is no consistent naming convention for these units, they include the many centers, institutes, commons, clinics, and programs at WCU.

Goal #1 Foster communication between the institution and the community to maximize community partnerships.

Rationale:

- Groups inside and outside of WCU need a single office where they can explore community partnerships.
- There are many effective partnerships in place, and we don't want to disregard, stymie, or reinvent that work, instead we need to recognize those partnerships and build on them.
- Many stakeholders have ideas for new partnerships, but they do not know how to go about bringing the right people together.

Initiative 1.1: Create an executive-level position to support and coordinate community partnerships. This liaison should be housed in academic affairs and must be knowledgeable about both academic affairs and community relations. This individual will, along with other duties, (1) coordinate a new community advisory board, (2) create an inventory of available community resources, (3) facilitate a series of regional community forums, and (4) organize a Speaker's Bureau. To maximize its effectiveness, this office should be housed in Academic Affairs. Some existing WCU outreach units might report to this liaison and operate under the auspices of an Office of Community-University Partnerships.

Initiative 1.2: Create an institutional council with representatives from each college to enhance internal communication about community partnerships. A major task of this Council is to create a Community Partnership Annual Report. This report should conduct an inventory of partnerships for that year, list the specific community partnership goals for the year, tie each partnership to one of these goals and determine whether that goal was met or not. This report should conclude with potential goals for the following year. Over the course of a number of years, this process should help the university assess where we have been and where we are going in the area of community partnerships.

Initiative 1.3: Review the content, placement and promotion of the community partnership link on the WCU website. The revised community partnership page should include opportunities for community members to find out about how to access university resources and foster community partnerships.

Goal #2 Foster community development in the region by promoting teaching, scholarly activity, and service that enhances WCU's stewardship of place.

Rationale:

- WCU possesses expertise and resources that can aid community partners.
- Art, entertainment and athletic events play a key role in drawing alumni and community to the university.
- Collaborative community partnerships provide opportunities for engaged student learning (QEP), scholarly activities, and improving the communities where we live and work.
- Although we recognize that community development and economic development are related, we believe that they each necessitates slightly different initiatives.

Initiative 2.1: Actively engage in Cullowhee revitalization by facilitating a comprehensive community development plan for Cullowhee, and participating in the formation of a community council for Cullowhee. While all communities in our region are important, it is imperative that the university becomes more proactive in the efforts to improve Cullowhee.

Initiative 2.2: Support the Millennial Campus by initiating public-private partnerships that promote community development. This initiative must be aligned with recommendations of the Chancellor's Millennial Campus Task Force, the mission of the academic units, and the needs of the community.

Initiative 2.3: Conduct an annual audit of university resources that are available to the community and alumni, including but not limited to recreational facilities, athletic events, arts and entertainment, historical/cultural attractions and events, and health care. The Community Partnership Advisory Board will review these resources each year and look for ways to increase awareness, access and usage.

Initiative 2.4: Facilitate a series of annual conferences of local government, nonprofit and community leaders in the region who will come together to share needs and opportunities for community partnerships. The topics of this series should be based on community needs. This series should be organized by existing outreach units including (but not limited to) the Local Government Training Program and the Public Policy Institute.

Initiative 2.5: Create a council of campus outreach units who meet twice a semester to discuss potential partnerships and opportunities to improve community development.

Goal #3: Stimulate and enhance sustainable economic development in the region by promoting teaching, scholarly activity, and service that enhance WCU's stewardship of place.

Rationale:

- As a regional comprehensive university, WCU is committed to sustainable economic development in the region
- WCU possesses facilities and expertise that can facilitate this type of economic growth

Initiative 3.1: Support Cullowhee revitalization by developing entrepreneurial projects and partnerships in Cullowhee. While all communities in our region are important, it is imperative that the university becomes more proactive in the efforts to improve Cullowhee.

Initiative 3.2: Support the Millennial Campus initiative by initiating public-private partnerships that promote economic development. This initiative must be aligned with recommendations of the Chancellor's Millennial Campus Task Force, the mission of the academic units, and the needs of the local economic development entities.

Initiative 3.3: Facilitate a series of annual conferences of business and economic leaders in the region who will come together to share needs and opportunities for community partnerships. The topics of this series should be based on regional economic needs. This series should be organized by existing outreach units including (but not limited to) the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, the Rapid Product Realization Center, and the Small Business and Technology Development Center.

Initiative 3.4: Extend our economic development activities by increasing the quantity and outcomes of our partnerships with community colleges.

Initiative 3.5: Develop ways to incentivize and support business R&D efforts to collaborate with WCU research and grant opportunities.

Initiative 3.6: Explore new ways for WCU students, faculty and staff to support local businesses, including, but not limited to extending the use of the Cat Card to local businesses.

Goal #4 Align internal processes and reward systems to foster community partnerships.

Rationale:

- Individuals will not fully participate in community partnerships unless there are tangible rewards
- The Boyer scholarship model offers opportunities for faculty to benefit from their work in community partnership work, provided that work produces scholarly products that can be peer-reviewed and the results disseminated. However, individual departments maintain the right to determine the degree to which non-traditional scholarship will be rewarded, and as such rewards will vary across campus.
- Much of the work that individuals contribute to community partnerships might be better classified as service. While service is expected of all faculty and many staff, it is typically the least rewarded component of faculty and staff duties. Recognizing and rewarding external service in a significant way might be the most effective way to encourage faculty and staff participation in community partnerships

Initiative 4.1: Recognize and incentivize community partnerships by creating a faculty award for educationally-based community partnerships. This award would be similar to the prior Chancellor's Award for Engaged Teaching. The Chancellor's Award for Engaged Teaching held a unique place at WCU because it represented a base salary increase and because it recognized the central place of community partnerships in the role of the university.

Initiative 4.2: Reward and incentivize community engagement and public service by creating a staff award for community partnerships. Similar to the faculty award, this award should include a base salary increase.

Initiative 4.3: Create a formal place in the AFE/TPR process for faculty to list community partnerships and describe the nature of the partnership. Departments should choose the degree to which they want to count community partnerships in their AFE/TPR processes.

Initiative 4.4: Require that each department's Collegial Review Document ensure that they specify that faculty members will receive service credit for external as well as internal service. Further, external service should be defined not only as service to the profession, but also as using the faculty member's professional expertise to increase community partnerships. This, of course, does not preclude departments from including community partnerships under the scholarship and service sections of their DCRD, as appropriate.

Initiative 4.5: Promote the university's support of employee-initiated "service-hours" and investigate the possibility of increasing the number of hours.

Conclusion

Western Carolina University is, and has always been, an externally focused university. Our unique approach to teaching and learning and our role as a regionally engaged university reinforces the centrality of community partnerships to our university's mission. We recognize and appreciate the excellent work already being done in this area and, although we do not have the space to list examples of everything that is working, we want to acknowledge that there is a great deal that our faculty, staff, and students are already doing in the area of community partnerships. This report should therefore be read as a guide to further improve a feature of our university that is already working quite well.

As we noted at the outset of this report, enhancing community partnerships is best accomplished through individual relationships. We hope that all four goals and nineteen initiatives recognize this essential fact, while creating and reinforcing institutional structures to make these individual relationships and partnerships flourish. If faculty, staff or students have community partnerships that exist outside of this structure, we encourage them to continue and for the university to find ways to reward this behavior.