Community Building

As a Carnegie Community Engagement Classification institution, we strengthen our relationships with those we serve by cultivating a campus culture grounded in communication, collaboration and engagement that fosters a sense of belonging, safety, and support for all.

Full Recommendation

Community Building

Seven cross-campus working groups composed of over 200 faculty, staff, students and community members were formed to address our institutional key priorities—Academic Excellence, Community Building, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Research and Creative Scholarship, Sustainability, Internationalization and Well-being.

Numerous campus engagement activities were conducted by the seven key priority working groups during spring 2022, with over 450 registrations across the 18 themed listening sessions centered around the seven priorities. In addition, over 350 student survey responses were received that answered specific priority questions from a student lens. Next, the working groups began analyzing data and incorporating community feedback as they worked toward identifying, developing and recommending achievable, metric-based goals that centered around these seven key priorities.

The Community Building working group was charged with examining how we can create an environment at WMU that fosters a sense of belonging, safety and support for all faculty, staff and students. They also explored ways that the University can engage with the greater regional community, including through service learning, corporate engagement and athletics, to strengthen our relationships with those that we serve.

After a multiple-step review process, the following is their submitted recommendation, which includes possible strategies and metrics that were essential in informing the goals and objectives. Further, they serve as a starting point for prioritization and refinement of institutional initiatives as the strategic plan moves into implementation. In addition, if available, the Strengths, Opportunities, Aspiration and Results (SOAR) summary reports, as well spring 2022 process reports, are attached as unedited appendices to provide further clarity and context.

Finally, this work could not have been completed without our dedicated community members who shared their time, expertise and commitment to improving our institution as they built these recommendations. Working group contributors are recognized in full at the end of this document.

Recommendation

Goal: As a Carnegie Community Engagement Classification[1] institution, we strengthen our relationships with those we serve by cultivating a campus culture grounded in communication, collaboration and engagement that fosters a sense of belonging, safety and support for all.

Community Building Objective 1: Provide robust, accessible opportunities across campus and at all levels that cultivate a collaborative campus culture and advance our reputation as an institution of choice.

Objective 1 Possible Strategies:

- Invest in training to encourage, support and sustain cross-campus collaboration between faculty, staff, students, leadership and our greater community partners.
- Drive the importance of a collaborative culture by weaving collaboration into performance reviews, creating a cross-functional accountability structure to support these connections and integrating collaboration into all WMU onboarding programs.
- Expand and deepen collaboration opportunities through transparent communication of WMU's goals, objectives and initiatives across campus to facilitate genuine collaborative relationships between Business & Finance, Student Affairs, Academic Affairs and Athletics, leading to collective "wins" for WMU, alumni and our partners.
  - Leveraging and promoting the use of internal knowledge bases to facilitate additional communication between groups will identify where there are duplicate services, allow the opportunity to streamline processes, enhance efficiency and improve the services we provide.
- Challenge all WMU constituents to pursue collaborative projects and programs that drive positive outcomes and foster thriving partnerships.
  - Coordinate themed topic sessions to connect people with shared passions from diverse backgrounds to collaboratively take on initiatives as a subcommittee.
- Document and disseminate successful collaborative projects to capture best practices, share knowledge, acknowledge and archive contributions, and celebrate successes.

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[1] **Carnegie Foundation's Elective Classification for Community Engagement:** "The Carnegie Foundation's Elective Classification for Community Engagement is a way for Colleges and Universities in the US to gain recognition for institutionalizing community engagement." *Carnegie Elective Classifications - American Council on Education. Retrieved from* *https://carnegieelectiveclassifications.org/*

Objective 1 Possible Metrics:

- Track the number of internal WMU constituents (faculty, staff, students, administration) who have received collaboration training and increase it by 15% in the next 3 years.

- Track the number of student engagement/placement opportunities via collaboration-based connections and increase by 15% in the next 3 years.
- Track the percent reduction of duplicated services and set a goal to eliminate redundancy.
- Capture the number of collaboration activities completed within a year.
    - o   10% increase in collaboration activities completed year over year.
    - o   Track percentage of participation by stakeholder category (faculty, staff, students, administration, alumni, partner).
- Capture cost savings associated with combining initiatives that utilize the same goods and services (e.g., software).
- Add a question to future employee engagement surveys to create a baseline and track the number of constituents who have worked on collaborative projects with others outside their unit and division and increase by 10% in the next 3 years.

Community Building Objective 2: Facilitate consistent, transparent and accessible communication between WMU and those we serve to strengthen our local, regional and global partnerships.

Objective 2 Possible Strategies:

- Establish a committee to review existing communication strategies, identify duplication of efforts and determine best practices for centralizing communication.
    - o   Define employee expectations related to communication and use onboarding tools for platforms, such as training videos about using the new GoWMU to access information and strategies for disseminating messages.
- Create an externally focused community webpage and heavily promote it as the ideal source for community members to find information about engagement, resources, events, announcements and success stories at WMU.
- Rebrand and promote GoWMU as the best place for employees to get information and ensure resources are available for a robust marketing campaign to create awareness of this effort.
    - o   Develop a dashboard on GoWMU that makes it easier to access information needed by faculty and staff.
    - o   Create channels on GoWMU by college/department that features news, events and information specific to each area.
    - o   Integrate a "Headlines" notification similar to Google news notifications but with WMU-specific information.

- o Build a community board tool for informal communications between employees.
  - o Devote a section of GoWMU to explain processes and procedures in an effort to increase transparency.
  - o Discover ways for users to "like" or subscribe to information they would like to see more of.
- Develop a GoWMU app that people can utilize when they are not on their computer.
  - o An app may also be more engaging for students as they are more likely to check info on an app.
  - o Explore opportunities for an external GoWMU-type app that helps to centralize communication for our external partners.

Objective 2 Possible Metrics:

- Develop and utilize best practices as determined by the communication coordination committee.
- Within 3 years, 80% of employees will have attended a communication onboarding/training session to learn about how we are centralizing information.
- Within 3 years, 75% of employees have signed up for GoWMU-type app.
  - o Track percentage of external participation for GoWMU-type app.
- Increase in positive content engagement on website and app.

Community Building Objective 3: Pursue mutually beneficial, collaborative partnership opportunities in the places where we live and thrive that bolster our ability to be a responsive, community-engaged leader.

Objective 3 Possible Strategies:

- Institute programs that invite "off campus" WMU constituents to provide input and suggestions into pedagogy and University resource use.
- Improve student, staff, faculty and administrative engagement within the communities where WMU has a presence (Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Battle Creek, Benton Harbor) by participating in impactful events and discovering ways to give back to the community.
  - o WMU Meets Kalamazoo
    - ▪ Create a Meet-and-Greet event in downtown Kalamazoo, where we visit multicultural businesses and support our local community while showing Bronco pride by wearing brown and gold. It could be held in fall and spring.
  - o WMU Gives Back week
    - ▪ WMU constituents volunteer in the communities they live in. During that week, each person has a paid day off to go volunteer. This is our time to give back. It happens twice a year—collaboratively in

fall as a college or departmental effort, and again individually in spring (with supervisor approval).
- Create more engagement opportunities with Senior Leadership.
  - Fall kick-off lunch with the President
    - Invite all staff, faculty, students and community members to an open house/cookout at the President's house with various workshops running throughout the day, making it a paid, family-friendly, fun way to kick off the year.
- Increase networking and connection opportunities for employees.
  - Host a campus-wide team-building day. Conduct cross-training or some similar form of engagement program between different academic colleges or departments.
  - Develop a Behind the W or Passport Program that enables employees to learn about the university, better understand the different branches of our institution and promote transparency on multiple levels.
- Create new traditions and points of pride for all constituents.
  - Invite more external community partners and alumni to play a larger role at Bronco Bash. Grow outside engagement and broaden support for alumni-based businesses by partnering with established community events, such as Art Hop.
- Enhance students' pride and engagement within their college or departments.
  - Visit your college day—learn the history of the college, alumni, careers, etc. Ensure outreach efforts fully engage with all students, with emphasis on including online, regional and transfer students.
  - Ask the students what events they feel are missing and would want to see. Utilizing technology to market these events to them directly for a better response rate.
- Invest in ongoing training for all WMU employees to support and encourage authentic external engagement informed by cultural humility.

Objective 3 Possible Metrics:

- Survey after events to get feedback from all constituents.
- Increase the number of external events hosted by the University by 25% within 3 years. Percent increase in number of collaborative events years over year; track attendance for growth.
- Within 5 years, 80% of employees participate in a day of service.
- Within 3 years, 50% of employees participate in networking and connection opportunities.
- Document metrics and track click-through rates related to student-focused communications.
- Track increased student participation in marketed events.

Appendix A: Community Building SOAR themes and notes

Strengths

- Resilient
- Resourceful
- Adaptable
- Talented
- Collaborative
- Supportive

Opportunities

- Maintaining connections and partnerships
- Continuing to adapt
- More opportunities for engagement
- Provide safe way/places to engage with fellow faculty/staff/community members
- Create/identify resources that allow challenges to be addressed
- We need to celebrate success with all of our colleagues (i.e., faculty, staff, admin). We persevere and realize success despite the challenges.
- We need to make sure that our faculty/staff is reflective of our student body.
- Workloads on staff and faculty – more transparent conversations with admin to rethink what job structure looks like going forward: more flexibility in hours, location, lifting some of the research requirements on faculty, etc. Different rules for different people. Consistency!

Aspirations

- Transparent
- Inclusive
- Diverse
- Connected
- Engaged
- Bridge builders
- Innovative

Results

- Streamlined financial support for students
- Positive feedback on employee satisfaction surveys
- High levels of employee engagement at all campus events
- Improved WMU reputation among prospective students and families

Appendix B: Community Building Working Report

January 2022

The working group completed the SOAR process to share ideas about internal and external community building at WMU. From this process, we came up with the following themes for community building.

> External Community Building: Communication, Student Opportunities, Partnerships with Programs

> Internal Community Building: Communication, Collaboration, Campus Activities

We brainstormed possible strategies for each theme—See 2.17.22 Breakout Room Jamboard notes.

February 2022

We held 4 listening sessions – 2 focused on external community building (in-person in Grand Rapids and virtual) and 2 focused on internal community building (in-person in Kalamazoo and virtual).

Participants in the listening sessions brainstormed strategies for the themes we developed for external and internal community building.

March 2022

The working group categorized the strategies from the listening sessions—See Appendix D— Master List of Ideas from Listening Sessions.

Three subcommittees were formed to develop objectives, strategies, and metrics for communication, collaboration, and engagement to improve external and internal community building at WMU using listening session notes and student survey data.

April 2022

The working groups provided feedback on the 3-subcommittee work plans on communication, collaboration and engagement.

The subcommittee chairs met together to combine their 3 plans into 1 comprehensive action plan.

May 2022

The working group met in May to edit the final action plan and submitted it on May 6.

Appendix C: Master List of Ideas from Listening Sessions

Suggested Strategies from Breakout/Listening Sessions

INTERNAL STRATEGIES

Events/Engagement—ENGAGEMENT

- Networking or connection opportunities. Employee to employee info sharing
- Hold cross-functional events to bring areas together to drive open communication
- More "mixers" where community members can come and talk…could even have different topics each week/month/quarter
- Campus-wide team-building day
- Cross-training or some similar form of engagement (especially for staff) in different academic colleges ("Field trips?")
- Monthly "spirit days" with themes
- Networking events/regular opportunities to "mingle" with people from across campus
- We need a "donut day" like from The Office. A day everyone gets excited about and looks forward to…
- Give staff a day off to volunteer
- Winter festival

Information Sharing/Collaboration—COLLABORATION

- Departmental and other channels for informal communications
- Develop onboarding around university-wide platforms
- Bi-weekly staff meetings for staying up-to-date
- Cross training
- Opportunities to learn about what others do
- State of the University event with presentations from all colleges/divisions
- Monthly department updates or large quarterly updates
- Training on communication tools and enhanced onboarding for employees on available comm channels
- Employee to employee info sharing
- People should report back from various groups they participate in
- Communicate: we often have too many silos
- Communicate, model, and encourage cross collaboration at any level
- Provide feedback when ideas are shared and communicated across campus
- Need someone (of group) to keep track of ALL university communications
- Not a strategy, but a best practice; sometimes less is more. Too many emails and newsletters can cause our most important message to get lost in the daily deluge

- Remember that the info we WANT them to know isn't as important as the information they NEED to know and are looking for
- More opportunities for professional development, networking, learning what others do
- Shared working spaces
- Create job shadowing opportunities and goals to increase relationship building, knowledge of other areas, and to generate ideas for how to work better together
- University "around the world" …give every unit/college a chance to show off what they are doing
- Develop a plan to create a sense of belonging – it doesn't matter which department, location or college you work at, but become proud of working at WMU

Onboarding—COLLABORATION

- New faculty meetings similar to new administrator training sessions
- Bring back the "Behind the W" program
- More comprehensive onboarding (and reboarding?) to help better acquaint employees to services and programs on campus
- Mentorship program for new hires and seasoned WMU veterans
- Making sure new hires know where to find info/what communication channels exist
- Have new employees serve on university committees
- Blanket permission/encouragement for new employees to join committees internally and externally

Technology/Channels of Communication—COMMUNICATION

- Develop a standardized communication vehicle that will reach the campus community
- Make campus community more aware of existing communication channels
- Dashboards for important initiatives that are centrally located
- Campus-wide portal (perhaps through GoWMU) where campus community can connect
- A "community board" tool for informal communications for employees
- Understanding generational differences in their preferred communication (email, social media, phone calls, text, mail, etc.)
- Have information shared out in a central location; less emails that go unnoticed
- Make sure website and directories are frequently updated
- Use of Teams for digital collaboration
- We use social media almost exclusively to get awareness out to both our internal and external constituents

- Text alerts – not "just" for emergencies. Students want you to text or use group.me. Message them instead of emailing
- "Headlines" notification – like Google news notifications on your phone but with WMU-specific information
- Communication tool for employees – intranet?
- Consolidate communication tools
- Shared community board for employees to share news, kudos, and celebrate wins
- Create channels…information that's most important to staff, most important to faculty, most important for students…that would help employees focus on what is crucial for them to know related to their job/role
- Departmental and other channels for informal communications

Transparency/Rules for Communication—COMMUNICATION

- Ask questions
- Be receptive to feedback
- Don't ask for feedback if it won't be considered and the decisions have been made – it's a waste of our time. Only ask for feedback if it will really be considered and then share the decision-making process
- Ask for feedback (not blessings)
- Clear and transparent communication
- Don't assume that those at the top (VP's, Deans, Dept hairs, Directors, etc.) share relevant information with those in their reporting chain
- Listen
- Share actions taken after listening sessions
- Open communication about items of gossip among employees; speak truth and eliminate speculation
- Devote a section of GoWMU to explain processes and procedures – increase transparency
- Include relevant/appropriate groups in decision making (not just admins and faculty)
- Everyone should have a voice
- Develop more university-sponsored things rather than being departmental (and don't create more, get the existing things university wide)
- Need more transparency in communicating decisions – who made the decision, and why, and who was consulted
- Communication is often stifled because people feel they don't have any involvement and their voice has been dismissed in the past – so they stop participating
- More communication of university-wide things in general
- We are very good at the 1-hour meeting. Get in, state your business, get out.

- We use social media almost exclusively to get awareness out to both our internal and external constituents
- Text alerts – not "just" for emergencies. Students want you to text or use group.me. Message them instead of emailing
- "Headlines" notification – like Google news notifications on your phone but with WMU-specific information
- Open meeting minutes during virtual meetings
- Provide closure and note what was accomplished or what still needs work
- Using Teams to connect with my co-workers
- Clarity of structures that span the university (e.g. social media)
- Develop more university-sponsored things rather than everything being departmental (and don't create more – get the existing things university-wide)
- Way to communicate with all students
- Talk to staff/faculty/students about HOW and WHAT they would prefer to hear about
- Don't make people waste time looking for information – be quick, succinct, and helpful
- Assigning duties at the end of strategy meetings so that the entire team feels accountability towards the project
- Agendas for meetings sent ahead of time, and notes from meetings sent in a timely manner

Messaging—COMMUNICATION

- Make sure all our communications speak to the right audience. Make content and voice relevant to them.
- Language used needs to be understandable by general public
- Ensure messages speak to all audiences

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Getting Feedback from External Partners

- Establish feedback loops in forums, tools, media to provide the opportunity for all to be heard
- Listening sessions in the community and on campus
- LISTEN to our partners and the things that they need/want (not what WE think they want). Hold more events such as dedicated community listening sessions to keep a pulse on the community
- From Education: before changing programming, seek input from local school district administrators about the needs (teachers) and seek feedback on how well-prepared teachers are to enter the workforce
- Ask community members and organizations – how can we best serve you?

Networking/Community/Events

- Provide social mixers between internal (WMU) folks and community partners. Have regular online forums with both WMU people and community members
- Do an active fundraiser for a charity – everyone
- Sponsor community gatherings on campus; free admission
- Connect and gather in a social capacity with groups that identify with common interest and others that have very different interests – look for areas of mutual community building
- Having a university presence in unexpected places like community-wide events such as art hop, parades, festivals
- Partner with an OLLI to establish a class for educating the community about the history of the Edison neighborhood (as part of Edison ECE University)
- Work with community partners to appoint a person to assist in getting communication out to staff/colleagues as well as back to students as necessary
- Parking is always an issue, so WMU employees need to be aware of how to get electronic parking passes for guests, give clearer directions/visual maps of depts
- Create a community volunteer day to encourage connection and work in the community we are a part of
- Host more events on campus with local families in mind – even "fun" engagement events (e.g. we could have a giant egg hunt, we have lots of sledding hills, etc.)
- In-person events where WMU faculty and staff have opportunities to interact with community

Effective Tools/Strategies

- Ads/billboards
- Local Papers
- QR codes to specific pages/events
- Challenge people to communicate in five words or less as a way to improve DEI outreach
- Know our audience – best practices
- One consistent around campus method or message
- Better communication infrastructure/platforms
- If we have services available, how do we get the community to find us and take advantage of our resources for collaboration
- When there are events that RSO or individuals attend, can there be a log of what, where, and who?
- More diverse stories
- Identify "champions" to share strategic information and/or news relevant to WMU success stories
- Portal to capture events and activities to determine publicity purposes
- Provide more resources (staff) to help with communication

- Empower Corporate Engagement committee to spread the word about engagement to the corporate and nonprofit community
- Utilize wmich.edu/corporate to highlight important and diverse stories around campus
- Promote university-wide social media accounts for different areas to faculty/staff
- Make our community partners much more aware of all the great things happening around campus – perhaps a dedicated webpage for community that gives information on events, announcements, cool things happening
- Introduce a system that offers a fun way to connect with people or streams a thread (similar to TikTok).
- Gather more ways that partners could utilize our resources in exchange for us bringing students and faculty closer to real life and relevant business needs
- Identify more tangible opportunities to bring partners on campus or into the conversation (projects, engagements, iterative partnership journeys)

Community Outreach/Liaison/Liaising

- Establish WMU community liaisons that line up with each category of the strategic plan's areas of community engagement focus
- Develop a place or front-facing team to track community opportunities (volunteer, board positions, etc.) available to WMU faculty and staff and ways they are already involved
- Designate staff/faculty to partner with strategic community partners by sitting on boards – open channels of communication
- Have targeted community groups to join that provide WMU the biggest bang for their buck that involve them in priority areas
- Send WMU students/faculty/staff into surrounding communities to sponsor activities in their areas of expertise
- One central volunteering center; everything is currently siloed by department, so one office where students go to for volunteering opportunities
- Focus on communities with diverse populations and reach out to them
- Connect with underserved populations to help them to see what they can be
- Many WMU faculty/staff sit on boards in the community – important to have communication go both ways
- Blanket permission/encouragement for new employees to join committees externally and internally
- Proactive community outreach that aligns with other University or corporate investments. During the alumni development (GR) process, we found this to be reactive and not focused
  - GRR has one of the only Aviation Flight Charter schools, and WMU has a globally recognized flight school/training center. That sounds like a good opportunity to recruit and support
- Community engagement through the arts and athletics

Recruiting/Curriculum

- Provide families of potential students with opportunities to meet with staff and faculty
- Have courses/department have courses that focus on community engagement/participation
- Experiential learning, scholarships, advisory boards, mentors, career prep, financial literacy
- KRESA – don't see much participation with WMU education students. Not sure if they are going somewhere else, but would love to see them doing practicums at KRESA
- Meet with department heads regarding specific needs and requirement to ensure students understand what is needed upon graduation and realistic job opportunities
- Recruit students from WMU's Early Learning Education department to teach professional development classes for Early Learning professionals in the Edison ECE Career Pathway

Community Building
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