Operating Capacities

Strategic Partnerships

Putting observed practices to work

This activity walks you and your team through a collection of observed practices — good ideas from lean institutions that are making progress in narrowing attainment gaps and increasing student success. Let them serve as a source of inspiration for brainstorms.

Observed practice

Establish strategic partnerships to boost capabilities (e.g., technology), or obtain strategic guidance (e.g., through national collaboratives) to accelerate time to impact and contain costs related to continuous innovation

To discuss

- **What makes a partnership strategic?**
- **What institutional capabilities would benefit most from strategic partnerships?**
- **What organizations might be strong partners to our institution? What would each offer our institution? What value does our institution offer partners?**

Observed practice

Make sure appropriate stakeholders are involved with partnership decisions. For some institutions, this may mean including just a few leaders, for others it can include stakeholders from every function affected by the partnership

To discuss

- **Who should be involved in partnership decisions and why?**
- **How might we involve them in the process and in decision-making?**

Observed practice

Pursue partnerships with K-12 institutions (and community colleges, for four-year colleges) to increase access and grow enrollment (e.g., dual credit / early college programs for high school students, alliances with specific culture groups)

To discuss

- **What educational partnerships (e.g., K-12 institutions, community colleges) make the most sense for our institution?**
- **How might educational partnerships increase access and grow our institution's enrollment?**
- **What's the value for the students at the partnering institution (e.g., dual credit / early college programs, specific culture groups)?**
- **What value does our institution bring to the relationship?**

Observed practice

Find ways to build rapport and support with the surrounding community and government agencies while establishing the institution's unique role (e.g., enrollment bus to reach more parts of the community, or building alliance with state governor)

To discuss

- **What's important to our community?**
- **What community-building activities might our institution engage in?**
- **What initiatives do local and federal government agencies lead? Which relate to student success efforts at our institution and why?**

Observed practice

Routinely revisit partnerships and, where possible, consider bringing more products and services in-house over time (e.g., strategic consulting services)

To discuss

- **What partnerships exist at your institution?**
- **What value do they offer?**
- **What would happen if they stopped.**
- **Do any partnerships duplicate internal work, products, and services at your institution?**
- **What might be the value in bringing these partnerships in-house?**
- **Is there interest in learning how to do them in-house?**

Observed practice

Seek partnerships with local employers and chambers of commerce; consider forming industry-based advising committees to help inform curriculum and programming aligned with workforce needs

To discuss

- **What are your community's workforce needs?**
- **How are they changing?**
- **Which organizations (e.g., businesses, chambers of commerce) are most concerned about the skills of the emerging workforce?**
- **What are some advising committees that could help align curriculum and programming with workforce needs?**

Observed practice

For ideas at the vanguard of higher education, explore co-developing with a technology partner, which can allow for having more input into the technology (e.g., Blackboard Analytics, Hobsons)

To discuss

- **What technology could help your institution best serve students?**
- **What potential technology partners seem most relevant?**
- **How might you co-develop with a technology partner?**