



For the Board of Trustees:
The Bellevue College Priorities Report

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— EDITORS —

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Preface

The Bellevue College Priorities Project is an initiative in response to a request by the Bellevue College Board of Trustees. The purpose of the project is to collect input on the priorities and values of the college's internal and external stakeholders with the intent to inform the materials and criteria for recruiting the next college president and guide the college through the next three to five years. Over the course of the 2021–22 academic year, the college engaged Attain Partners, a consulting firm experienced with strategic planning in higher education, to gather feedback and insights from stakeholders across various internal and external constituency groups. Attain Partners also conducted an environmental scan addressing key questions and issues expected to impact the college's future. The results of Attain Partners' efforts are documented in the Priorities Project *Stakeholder Insights Report*, which synthesizes the constituency feedback and insights into summary themes and provides representative comments supporting those themes.

This report, the *Bellevue College Priorities Report*, serves as an executive summary of the contents of the *Stakeholder Insights Report* and is additionally informed by efforts such as the *Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey*. Prior to completion, the report was presented to the campus and opened for comments and suggestions for 28 days. This final report includes recommendations to decision-makers across the college, including the board of trustees and senior leadership, but also to all members of the campus community who serve as decision-makers advancing the college's mission, upholding the college's values, and contributing to the college's culture. It is intended that these recommendations be taken under advisement and result in a response that may include commitments and plans that address the feedback provided by the community.

Summary, Synthesis, and Reflection on Findings

Overall, the information gathered by Attain Partners from our internal and external stakeholders confirms much of what is already known and understood by many of us at the college—while we have so much to offer our students, we frequently find ourselves mired in a culture that divides our community and a climate of bitterness and distrust. The issue of the culture at Bellevue College is woven throughout the *Stakeholder Insights Report* and flares up frequently across various college internal and public-facing venues. These divisions impede opportunities to build support and partnerships and to advance meaningful change. Addressing these divisions needs to be a—if not *the*—priority for college leadership and everyone in the campus community who seek to provide a meaningful experience to our students and to participate in collaborative and meaningful decision-making at Bellevue College.

A thread found throughout the *Stakeholder Insights Report* is the idea of community. Although the word may no longer be in the name of our college, it is clear that community is as important as ever both for our identity as a college and the steps we must take to address our immediate and long-term challenges. We as a college need to mend our sense of community.

Internally, we are a college community in crisis. According to the campus climate survey administered late Fall 2021, only 23% of employees (and 54% of students) were satisfied with the extent they feel all community members experience a sense of belonging or community at BC; only 47% of employees (58% of students) themselves were satisfied with their own sense of belonging or community at the institution. It is imperative for everyone—but especially college leadership, faculty, and staff—to work to mend our divisions and rebuild our sense of community that has been shaken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and events in the recent and distant past.

Externally, we are not as deeply engaged in our community as we should be. Our location and proximity to major companies is seen as an unleveraged strength. Many of the external stakeholders engaged for the *Stakeholder Insights Report* did not feel the college was doing much to engage with them or their represented organizations; others declined to participate in the opportunity to provide feedback as they did not feel they could provide meaningful insights due to a lack of familiarity or any sort of relationship with the institution. The role of BC in addressing the educational, civic engagement, and socioeconomic needs of our local residential community was a frequently cited core element of who we are as a college needing greater emphasis, particularly our role in providing accessible education to a diverse population.

The following sections of this report provide recommendations in response to the feedback collected and aggregated in the *Stakeholder Insights Report* in service of our broad institutional interest in centering the idea of community in our work and in our future.

Recommendations to the Board of Trustees

Recommendations regarding the next BC Presidential Search.

The primary purpose of the Priorities Project initiative is to inform the process and criteria for selecting the next president of Bellevue College. Given the short tenures of Bellevue College presidents in recent years and the impact of continuous turnover on the ability of the institution to plan and act strategically, the success of this selection process—including the success of our next president—is crucial in serving our students and the broader community in the next several years.

We recommend the board of trustees take under advisement the following considerations, provided in no particular order, when developing the position description and criteria for the purposes of recruiting the next college president:

- **Proactively initiate outreach with the campus community**
There is a strong desire for a president who is visible and accessible, and who initiates engagement with students, faculty, and staff.
- **Engage and partner with local businesses and organizations**
Stakeholders expressed a need for the next president to advance the college through corporate partnerships and advocacy with government agencies and local organizations.
- **Courage and commitment to vision**
The Stakeholder Insights Report includes advice to the next president encouraging them to take risks and make difficult decisions. Doing this effectively will require a clearly communicated vision from which these decisions are informed.
- **Focused attention to community-building**
A president who demonstrates compassion, patience, empathy, and active listening is both desired and more likely to be effective in mending the campus culture and rebuilding the campus community.
- **Inspire trust through accountability**
The next college president will be entering an institution in which trust is not assumed. They will need to earn the college's trust by holding themselves and others accountable.
- **Talent recruitment and retention**
The college has experienced high levels of turnover across the institution, and is looking to the president to recruit and retain a leadership team to promote greater stability at the college.
- **Mobilize support**
The next president will need to be effective in mobilizing support for strategic changes across various constituencies.

- **Demonstrated support for equity-focused leadership**
Much of the discourse at Bellevue College is communicated through the lenses of diversity, equity, and inclusion. To be able to effectively participate and respond to those conversations, the next college president should be well-versed in the concepts underpinning those values and be seen as an informed and active sponsor of those values.
- **Informed on issues affecting community colleges**
The college will be facing a myriad of challenges in the coming years. A president with a breadth of knowledge on issues facing higher education, such as teaching & learning, enrollment, innovation, and the role and core mission of community colleges, will be best prepared to respond to those challenges.

In support of recruiting the best future president for Bellevue College, we recommend the following considerations in terms of the recruitment process itself:

- **Establish a search committee inclusive of the breadth of our community's diversity**
To be inclusive of the breadth and depth of experience and perspectives, the search committee for the next president should include diverse representation across racial and ethnic identities, gender identities, periods of length of service to the institution, and employment classifications, as well as representation of both internal and external stakeholders.
- **Advertise the president position through venues frequently used to recruit DEI leaders**
Given the necessity of having a college president who exemplifies the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, advertising the position through channels frequented by those serving as executive DEI leaders will hopefully draw a stronger pool of candidates.
- **Include a link to the *Priorities Report* in the institutional profile accompanying the posting**
This report is designed to effectively summarize both the immediate and mid-term needs of the college. Being upfront with this information should result in better informed applicants who are prepared to address the college's critical needs.
- **Center "community" as the theme for finalist presentations and forums**
The concept of community as referenced in the first section of this report would serve as an effective topic for the college and local community to evaluate and reflect on the finalists for the role. An example prompt for such a presentation follows:

Please prepare a 20-minute presentation addressing the following questions on how Bellevue College can strengthen relationships with its local community and rebuild its own internal sense of community.

- *The location of Bellevue College provides opportunities for major organizational partnerships as well as pathways for local students across identities, abilities, and backgrounds to find success. As president of Bellevue College, how would you leverage those strengths and opportunities to maximize success for learners in our own community?*

- *Over the course of the past several years, and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the college community has become increasingly divided. As president of Bellevue College, what strategies would you employ to mend the campus culture and bring us together as a community?*

Other Recommendations to the Board of Trustees

Beyond the decision of the next president of Bellevue College, the board of trustees can take steps themselves to work to address the goals of building relationships with the external community and rebuild the sense of community of the college's internal constituents.

- **Assume support for the college's leadership**
In order to allow for the next college president to exercise visionary and courageous leadership, they need to have the support of the board to be able to implement necessary difficult decisions. Giving time and opportunity for college leadership to address challenges and hold themselves accountable will sow opportunities for trust-building across the college, allow leaders to learn from their mistakes, and reduce the harmful effects that frequent leadership changes inflict on the college's mission and sense of community.
- **Activate networks to identify and build new partnerships**
The members of the board are themselves key networking opportunities for the college. Having board members initiate and encourage their own partners to engage with the college can result in both deeper and broader connections than the college's executive leadership could do on their own.
- **Advocate for the college in the political/community spheres**
Similarly, the board can play a key role in supporting the college through their words and actions with government representatives and local businesses and community organizations, through both formal and informal—though collaborative—channels.
- **Clarify to internal and external communities the scope of the board's decision-making**
While the board of trustees makes some of the largest decisions at the college, their role is also quite limited, and constituents may not be aware of the distance between the board and many of the operational decisions within the college. Clarifying the scope of the board's decision-making should aid in expectation-setting for those who use the board's public comment period seeking intervention and are frustrated at the lack of action.
- **Lead efforts to shape and clarify the college's identity**
The size of Bellevue College has contributed to its ability to provide a wide breadth of academic offerings. As the college faces an increasingly competitive enrollment environment and associated budgetary challenges, college leadership will look to the college's identity to determine what is mission-critical and what is supplementary. The board should begin efforts to work with the new president and internal and external communities to define the college's identity and scope.

Recommendations to Senior Leadership

The college's senior leadership are the most visible decision-makers at the institution and play a key role in advancing the college's mission and modeling the college's values. These recommendations are for those leaders, though they can be adapted for leaders across the institution.

Recommendations as we prepare for our next college president.

As the college prepares to recruit its next president, the current senior leadership team can undertake the following actions to address the issues raised in the Stakeholder Insights Report.

- **Explicitly identify decision-makers and justification in decision-making**
There is frequently an information gap that separates the decision-makers from the decisions, regardless of intent. Taking greater care to explicitly identify the individual or body making the decision, as well as justification, including evidence when possible, will aid in instilling a sense of ownership of decision-making—including the accountability and trust that such ownership assumes.
- **Determine which positive aspects of pandemic operations should continue even as the pandemic recedes**
As the severity of the pandemic ebbs and flows, college leaders should identify what operational changes from responding to the pandemic would be beneficial for the college to continue into the future.
- **Develop an employee recruitment and retention strategy**
Given the concerns about employee turnover persistently raised in the Stakeholder Insights Report, developing and then implementing an employee recruitment and retention strategy—with a heavy emphasis on promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion—would promote stability at the institution and contribute toward improved morale and climate.
- **Develop an internal communications framework and strategy**
Many stakeholders cited inadequate communication as an issue at the college. With so much information, so many channels by which that information can be shared, and the variety of audiences for which information will have different levels of relevance, we need to collaborate, coordinate, and develop guidance to ensure information is distributed with the recipients' needs in mind.
- **Establish a framework for stakeholder-informed decision-making**
When it comes to decisions that affect individuals or groups at the college, many feel they are not sufficiently consulted in the time leading up to those decisions. Developing a framework that establishes general guidance on how decision-making incorporates stakeholders or their representatives, such as BC Governance, affinity groups, and/or the impacted individuals or groups themselves, can support expectation-setting and create streamlined channels to including feedback and improve decision-making at the college.

Recommendations for the first years of the next college president's leadership.

With the expectation of the college successfully recruiting a president and initiating some of the other recommendations in this document, the following recommendations are intended to provide direction for the next college president and college's senior leadership with the president's support.

- **Update the academic master plan**
As the college works to clarify its role and identity, academic leadership must work with faculty and other relevant stakeholders to revise the academic master plan to incorporate the college's refined identity and scope, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and technological advances on the modality and nature of instruction.
- **Build relationships and a support structure for alumni**
College alumni are an incredible resource for the college, bridging our internal and external communities. Investments should be made to build mutually beneficial relationships with the college's alumni, providing community and resources in exchange for networks and support
- **Evaluate the institutional structure for effectiveness and financial health**
The financial sustainability of the college is necessary for it to continue to execute its mission and support the community. As the college's identity is refined, institutional leadership should evaluate how the various divisions, departments, and offices are organized and align them strategically to maximize their effectiveness in executing the college's mission with its limited resources.
- **Establish definitions and frameworks for advancing the college's values**
Beyond state-mandated requirements to define diversity, equity, and inclusion, college leadership should work to define the values of access, sustainability, quality, accountability, integrity, and community engagement. These institutional definitions will provide a shared basis to inform decision-making and evaluate institutional success in uplifting those values.
- **Further align communication and marketing with the college's vision**
Bellevue College has undergone a massive amount of change in the past several years. As the college continues to undergo efforts to define its vision and identity, efforts will need to be invested in to communicate that vision and identity and market the college in its contemporary state.

Recommendations to the Campus Community

Addressing the culture and rebuilding the sense of community at Bellevue College is everyone's responsibility; no single individual or small group of individuals can do that work alone. This final section makes recommendations to every faculty and staff member at the college, to be adapted by students where appropriate. This is in recognition of all members of the campus community as decision-makers of decisions large and small, and as agents and representatives of the college.

Recommendations to ourselves as individual decision-makers.

These recommendations are actions or considerations that each member of the college community can take to advance the college's mission and mend the culture and sense of community at the college.

- **Reflect on how we all advance the college's mission**
Everyone at the college has a role in advancing the college's mission, even if our work is not directly involved in teaching, learning, or community engagement. We are all here to serve our students. By seeing ourselves and each other as contributing toward the forward movement of the college, we can begin to rebuild our community around a shared purpose and goal.
- **Consider the college's values in decision-making**
Each of us makes decisions regularly; we should keep our college's values in mind when making those decisions.
- **Assume good faith and seek to educate**
In times of conflict, disagreement, or when mistakes are made, everyone can significantly contribute toward an improved culture, climate, and sense of community by assuming others are acting in good faith. Approach concerns and issues with the goal of developing and educating colleagues, and avoid language that accuses or implies harmful intent.
- **Represent the college with the understanding that its reputation is built by everyone**
Actions of leadership, staff, faculty, and students contribute to the college's reputation through our words and actions. We should strive to represent the college in a manner consistent with our efforts to advance its mission and realize its vision.
- **Act with integrity and be accountable**
Integrity and accountability are key values that each of us are responsible for ourselves. We should endeavor to be honest and to admit and seek to learn from our mistakes.
- **Engage with distributed information**
For communication to be effective, we must give due attention to the information that is distributed to us. Doing our part to be better informed will allow us to more meaningfully contribute to the conversations and decision-making that occurs on campus.

- **Separate the people from the problem**

Due to the fact that we can get emotionally invested in topics, we may not always be inclusive of all perspectives. By separating ourselves from the problem, we are able to solve it without harming relationships. It will also help us get a clearer understanding of the problem at hand.

Recommendations for partnerships across the college.

Throughout our work at Bellevue College, we form both formal partnerships and informal partnerships. Through these partnerships we can rebuild our community and create and sustain a more effective institution.

- **Collaborate to reduce silos**

The college, like many organizations, naturally forms silos that frequently operate independently and with specialized knowledge. We should leverage our formal and informal partnerships to build networks and share information across relevant areas.

- **Build partnerships and communication lines to aid students in need of support**

The better we know the roles and responsibilities of our colleagues, the more effectively we support students. We should endeavor to work with our cross-functional colleagues to better support and serve students when we learn of a need or issue.

- **Partner and innovate to reduce non-tuition/personnel costs**

There are many costs to students that we all have opportunities to address. Continuing current partnerships and exploring future partnerships and innovations to reduce the cost of attendance can make measurable and meaningful impacts on improving student access and success.