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An Opportunity for Community:
Building a Community College Center for Community Engagement in a “Distressed” Suburb

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of the
Doctorate of Education
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Abstract

Over the past several decades, poverty rates in the United States have been rising more rapidly in the suburbs than anywhere else. Today, in fact, more poor people live in U.S. suburbs than in its cities. While poverty is painful in any setting, a suburb in decline can present its residents with particularly difficult obstacles, including deteriorating public infrastructure, underfunded schools, fragmented social services, time-consuming travel to distant jobs, and a lack of coherent political influence to address those liabilities. For the community colleges that serve such regions, the rise of suburban poverty challenges the institution's traditional mission of community service. Seattle-area Highline College is one such institution. Serving the low-opportunity suburbs of South King County, Washington, Highline has opted to redouble its community-engagement initiatives in support of its diverse neighborhoods. Its ultimate vision includes the establishment of a Campus Center for Community Engagement that unites the region's community-development resources, raises community voice, and provides a platform for sustained, community-driven renewal. In doing so, Highline draws on a deep tradition of community empowerment as an element of the two-year college mission, as well as a pro-active, asset-based vision of educational institutions as backbones of community empowerment. This capstone project examines Highline College's institutional readiness to build a Campus Center for Community Engagement and, from there, explores the feasibility of achieving that vision, cataloging its potential opportunities, challenges, and next-step recommendations toward eventual implementation.

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An Opportunity for Community:
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in a “Distressed” Suburb

Former United States poet laureate Kay Ryan once observed that “Right near your home, year in and year out, a community college is quietly . . . saving lives and minds” (“Poet Laureate,” 2009, n.p.). Her remark captures both the local and universal dimensions of the community college mission. As early as the mid-1940s, the Truman Commission envisioned community colleges as a nationwide network of community-serving, two-year public institutions, each offering convenient, low-cost programming to meet the needs and opportunities of its immediate district (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). Since then, the community-building function of these institutions has persisted as a core element of their mission. As recently as 2009, through its Open Door Project, the American Association of Community Colleges reaffirmed community engagement as one of four cornerstones of the “the democratic and egalitarian principles on which community colleges are based” (Myran, 2009, p. 2). A few years later, two of the system’s longest-standing and most outspoken advocates for community engagement asserted that, if anything, the “commitment to individual needs as well as the larger economic and social needs of communities . . . has become more central to the mission” of community colleges over time (Myran & Parsons, 2013, p. 12).

Despite the durability of these ideas, their local manifestations may vary considerably from college to college. To begin with, the variations are magnified by the diversity of communities that the nation’s 1,123 community colleges serve (American Association of Community Colleges [AACCC], 2015). Local district profiles can differ substantially, depending

on whether the college serves a large or small, wealthy or impoverished population base in a rural, suburban, semi-urban, or central city setting (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Hardy & Katsinas, 2006; Katsinas, 2003). Furthermore, few locales remain perfectly stable over time. Long-term, any community's fortunes may rise or fall as industries, populations, infrastructure investments, and other social forces flow into, out of, or near its geographic boundaries. As a result, to make effective locally-grounded decisions, campus leaders must know "more than anyone else knows about the demographic, economic, educational, and cultural dimensions of the community" (Ivery, as cited in Myran, 2009, p. 27).

While every community faces uncertainty, the dynamic forces of community change are especially evident, today, in the nation's suburbs. Once a sanctuary of middle-class prosperity, stability, and homogeneity, many suburban neighborhoods have undergone significant transformation in recent decades, becoming some of the most racially segregated, economically challenged, and socially fragmented sub-regions in the country. According to the Brookings Institution, between 2000 and 2010, the nation's number of suburban poor grew by more than half, roughly double the 23% rate of increase in the urban core (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). By the decade's end, for the first time in U.S. history, more poor people lived in suburbs than in cities — 15.3 million versus 12.8 million, respectively. The post-recession recovery has failed to alter these trajectories (Kneebone, 2014; Kneebone & Holmes, 2016). Today, more than a third of the nation's poor live in suburbia, increasingly in concentrated tracts where more than 40% of residents live below federal poverty thresholds. Unsurprisingly, by most standard quality-of-life measures — family income, housing affordability, school performance, and public health and safety — the trends in these suburbs are generally all downward (Kneebone & Berube, 2013).

For community colleges that serve such suburbs, these national trends raise very particular, local challenges. At one level, the backdrop of large-scale social and economic forces may seem too formidable for any single community organization — least of all, the local community college — to affect. But, as regional public institutions, two-year colleges may in fact serve as key resources in mobilizing a response. Surely, their community-serving mission obligates them to try.

Statement of Problem: One Campus's Response to Suburban Decline

This capstone project is situated at the intersection between declining suburbs and the community colleges that inhabit them. The project site, Highline College, serves southwest King County, Washington, a Seattle-area sub-region that has been particularly hard hit by the forces of suburban decline. The college's district, in fact, appears as one of four case studies in the Brookings Institution's *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America* (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). Well before that book's publication, however, the college's leaders recognized the challenges that were impacting the neighborhoods around the campus. More importantly, they chose to react. Over time, their response gradually gained momentum, nuance, and dimension, culminating in a period of particularly intense activity between spring 2014 and 2016. Given that history, Highline College offers a promising exemplar in discerning how community colleges might define effective community-engagement in a declining suburban environment, what factors encourage and discourage such engagement there, and how colleges might measure their effectiveness in serving opportunity-poor suburban communities.

As an eventual goal, the college's leaders have considered the possibility of locating a Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) on or near Highline College's campus. At

full implementation, the C3E facility could serve as a platform for community dialogue, research support, community-building, civic education, and co-advocacy, providing a resident-driven antidote to externally-imposed solutions. Realistically, however, an undertaking of that magnitude will require years of planning, investment, and partnership-building to finalize. For the period of the capstone activity itself, the goal has been to develop a blueprint for such a center. That near-term objective, it is hoped, will serve to illuminate a path toward aligning one institution's community-engagement efforts with the changing circumstances of its declining suburban communities.

Justification and Rationale: Project Goals as Professional Inquiry

In seeking to advance the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) initiative, the capstone interweaves two lines of inquiry. One examines Highline College's culture and context as a unique case, drawing on that analysis to assess institutional readiness for a project of C3E's scale. At the same time, building on that assessment, the project also evaluates C3E's practical feasibility, offering Highline's leaders a set of findings and recommended next steps. In pursuing these lines of investigation, the project raises three problems of professional practice that are relevant to higher education leaders and, in particular, to leaders of community colleges.

First, the project promises to sharpen the definition of *community engagement* as that term commonly appears in the mission of public two-year colleges. Despite the widespread use of the phrase, community college leaders have struggled to define it precisely. In a two-part mid-1990s exploration of the topic, for example, O'Banion and Gillett-Karam (1996a) traced five decades of shifting definitions, expectations, and manifestations of collaboration between colleges and their communities. In the two decades since then, though the conversation has

continued, clarity has remained elusive. Even with the mid-2000s debut of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, colleges have continued to grapple with describing, measuring, and communicating their expectations of community-to-campus relationships (Driscoll, 2009; Sandmann, Thornton, & Jaeger, 2009b). Weisman and Longacre (2000) argue that, for community colleges, the uncertainties are magnified by competing definitions of *community* itself, which may reference a sociopolitical, geographic, affective, or intersectional set of constituencies.

These ambiguities raise some significant challenges in higher education leadership. At a public policy level, an unclear community-engagement initiative can threaten the institution's ability to satisfy the expectations of external stakeholders, including legislators, community advocates, and private funders (Pierce, 1996; Vaughan, 1991). For the local campus, uncertainty in mission, goals, and metrics can muddy the institution's strategic planning and assessment activities, potentially leading to a frustrating misalignment between staff activities and the metrics that define institutional success. Further, an ill-defined community-engagement initiative can divert resources from other functions, ultimately undermining the college's ability to provide core services to the community (O'Banion & Gillett-Karam, 1996b; Vaughan, 1991). Through one campus's experience, the capstone revisits these persistent questions of mission.

Second, the project contributes to the professional literature on community college geographies, adding new suburb-specific applications to the existing body of urban- and rural-area studies. According to the 2010 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, suburb-serving, single-campus public community colleges like Highline College are a minority among two-year institutions, comprising only 11% of the national total (Indiana University

Center for Postsecondary Research, n.d.).¹ Within that sub-set of colleges, those specifically serving a low-opportunity suburb comprise an even narrower, yet growing slice of the percentage. Given that suburban poverty has accelerated significantly in just the last ten to 15 years (Kneebone & Berube, 2013), the impacts on community colleges offer an important emerging area for study, complementing the literature on colleges' response to urban and rural decline. Additional inquiry into opportunity-poor suburbs will help to round out those context-specific conversations of community college impact.

Third, through its theoretical foundation, the project contributes to a larger professional conversation around the role of ethics in educational decision-making. A number of scholars have noted the relatively small space that ethics occupy within the study of educational leadership (Branson, 2010; Shapiro & Stefkovitch, 2011; Starratt, 2004). As Branson writes:

Our current educational leadership literature is still brimming with calls to recognize the place of ethics in the professional development of leaders. . . . Surely, this is a clear indication that we have yet to find the most effective way to help prepare our current and future educational leaders for being able to confidently and effectively deal with their complex, problematic and unavoidable ethical decision-making responsibilities (p. 1).

By grounding itself in an explicitly ethical rationale, the project speaks to Branson's concern.

Theoretical Framework: The Ethical Imperative to Respond

The ethics of educational leadership provide a useful theoretical lens for examining the role of community colleges in addressing suburban decline. In essence, the decision-making questions are these: First, when confronted with community-wide challenges, what are the obligations of a community-serving educational institution to respond? Second, to the degree

that such obligations apply, what is the role of leadership in guiding a response that is effective, sustainable, and equitable? The answers to these questions lie largely in the ethical domain.

Ethical Decision-Making in Education: Four Essential Frames

In his seminal work on the topic, Starratt (1994) establishes three foundational frames — the ethics of justice, critique, and care — for ethical decision-making among educational leaders. Building on that work, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) add a fourth ethic, the ethic of the profession. Those four primary ethics can be briefly summarized as follows:

Ethic of justice. Rooted in liberal democratic ideals, the ethic of justice emphasizes rules, procedures, and processes that ensure equal treatment of people and cases. It is characterized by rational and analytic approaches to problems, often invoking legal principles or abstract concepts of fairness, equity, and justice. Applied to education, the ethic of justice encourages not only a just community inside the institution but also a curricular investment in developing democratic citizens. As a decision-making guide, this ethic emphasizes objectivity, consistency, and a non-consequentialist view that places principles above individual impacts.

Ethic of critique. To a degree, the ethic of critique rejects the justice paradigm, questioning the power relationships that underlie the very definitions of fairness in society. Applied to the classroom, the ethic of critique asks that the curriculum actively encourage learners to challenge inherited definitions of equity. Closely aligned to critical theory and critical pedagogy, the ethic of critique attempts to give voice to those who have been marginalized by traditional hierarchies. Matters of race, gender, ability, and class inform decision-making under this frame.

Ethic of care. The ethic of care turns away from power relationships to emphasize,

instead, values of “care, concern, and connection, in finding answers to . . . moral dilemmas” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 16). As a leadership guide, the ethic of care encourages listening, collaboration, and attention to emotions in dealing with individuals and constituencies. In the classroom, it favors emotional safety and trusting relationships over unbridled competition. Through this type of educational experience, students learn to observe, consider, and respond empathetically to others. Though its adherents have come to include many men, the ethic of care retains its feminist roots in resisting traditionally patriarchal values (Gilligan, 1982, as cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011).

Ethic of the profession. In adding a fourth ethical frame, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) argue that, even when considered collectively, the ethics of justice, critique, and care do not account for the range of ethical factors that educational leaders must consider in decision-making. Noting that ethical guidelines are well accepted in fields such as law and medicine, they insist that educators are similarly obligated to articulate a set of principles that place the interests of learners first. Personal beliefs, professional codes of conduct, and community values form a backdrop for — but should not displace — the centrality of the student. While acknowledging that ethical codes naturally invoke a justice frame, Shapiro and Stefkovich argue that an effective professional ethic must incorporate the other frames as well.

A Fifth Frame: The Ethic of Community

In passing, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) mention yet another ethical frame — the ethic of community — that draws in the work of Furman (2004). Furman suggests that, within an educational setting, the communal interest should take precedence over the individual’s, provided that the community’s interests have been articulated through authentic, egalitarian

dialogue. Here, Furman makes a direct connection to a collaborative definition of social justice, arguing that such definitions must be “constructed by the community through the processes of deep democracy — open inquiry and critique — with a broad scope of participation across community members” (p. 229). Two decades earlier, the then-president of Portland Community College, Daniel Moriarty, drew that same ethical circle. In his commentary on the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges’ *Building Communities* (1988) report, Moriarty (1992) asserted that “Forming a community of learners, a community of educators, and a community of citizens constitutes an essential goal, however idealistic, of moral leadership” (p. 63). Though writing in an operational rather than ethical context, Harlacher (1969) staked a similar moral claim. Whatever the college’s community-development role might be, Harlacher warned, the final decisions must be left to the citizens.

Applications to the Project: Suburban Decline as Ethical Imperative

Arguably, in confronting the dynamics of suburban decline, institutional values are a core motivator. Surely, such engagement is unlikely to attract new resources to the college. In fact, as Vaughan (1991) and others have noted, it may drain resources from other functions. Further, given the lack of a cohesive political voice across most declining suburbs, the college is unlikely to gain prestige or power from its efforts there. There are, in short, few practical reasons to be involved at all in the problems of suburban decline. The ethical reasons to do so, however, are both plentiful and powerful.

In their frame-setting reflection on the future of urban community colleges, Myran and Parsons (2013) put forward a lofty obligation for campus engagement in community affairs:

[Whether] the service area includes a high-density urban center and related

neighborhoods, an urban/suburban transition fringe, [or] suburban areas, . . . the community college offers the promise of a better future for individuals, businesses, and the communities it serves. It is a beacon of hope, a partner with other organizations in economic and social transformation (p. 8).

In doing so, they suggest that suburban-serving community colleges, like their inner-urban counterparts, inherit a mission-level duty to confront the challenges of metropolitan-area decline.

For institutions in declining suburbs, the work of economic and social transformation can entail some special challenges. For one thing, almost by definition, a deteriorating suburb is in transition. Day by day, the region's struggles affect its shifting demographics, employment opportunities, political profile, and need for services. Meantime, across suburban municipalities, the collective ability to respond is often constrained. Suburban neighborhoods are politically and socially fragmented by design, reflecting their developers' original intent to create smaller, more homogenous communities outside the city core (Jackson, 1985; Katz, 2000; G. Orfield, 1981; M. Orfield, 2002; Rusk, 2003). When these communities face pressure, their fragmentation works against regional cohesion and policy-level clout. Further, both within suburbs and between them, transportation links are often poor. Increasingly, jobs are somewhere else (Kneebone & Holmes, 2015). For low-income suburban residents who must travel to work, longer commutes drain additional time and resources, placing greater pressure on the economic and family stability of their households (Johnson, 2015; Tu, 2015). Meantime, reflecting the suburban landscape's middle-class roots, local social services are either underdeveloped, scattered, or both. Further, as other neighborhoods gentrify, the less desirable suburbs increasingly serve as gateway communities for new immigrants and as landing places for low-income residents who have been

pushed out of formerly-affordable areas elsewhere, often from traditional communities of color — even in progressive cities like Seattle (Balk, 2015). In short, as suburban resources and infrastructure deteriorate, the residents' racial and ethnic diversity generally grows, as does the need for more effective services.

The social justice implications are vast. If these economic and demographic trends continue unchecked, the nation's opportunity-poor suburbs stand to become widespread regions of stubborn poverty, racial isolation, and political and social disenfranchisement — as the recent Ferguson, Missouri, police shooting of Michael Brown made all too plain. Though media attention highlighted the event's racial dimensions, the tragedy also underscored the economic hopelessness, re-segregation, and political disenfranchisement that had come to plague that low-income St. Louis suburb (Raasch, 2014).

On the other hand, with the right mix of investment and collective vision, the rich diversity of these metropolitan sub-regions ideally could provide a foundation for vibrant, inclusive regeneration. What will determine the direction that these neighborhoods take? What role might the community college play in shaping that direction? For the local institution, the question is both operational and unavoidably ethical.

Project Question

As a problem of professional practice, the project's central guiding question asks this: To what degree can the establishment of a Campus Center for Community Engagement at Highline College serve to align institutional capacities with the assets, priorities, and socio-cultural expectations of a diverse, opportunity-poor suburban community? As a campus leadership topic, the inquiry touches on institutional vision, strategic planning, and community relationships.

Key Definitions

The question incorporates two key definitions:

Community engagement. In the project's context, *community engagement* implies an ongoing, interpersonal, and structured institutional relationship with grassroots representatives of the community. In its last element, the definition departs from frameworks that emphasize connections to educational institutions, government agencies, local industry, and positional community leaders (Boggs, 2012; Cantor, 1991; DeCastro & Carp, 2008).

Opportunity-poor suburb. The term *opportunity-poor suburb*, as it is used here, applies the Kirwan Institute's Communities of Opportunity framework (powell, Reece, Rogers, & Gambhir, 2007) to define a distressed sub-region of a larger metropolitan complex. Kirwan's researchers describe "opportunity-poor" neighborhoods as disproportionately low-income, racially concentrated, and isolated from education, employment, transportation, healthcare, and other regenerative resources.

Literature Review

The relevant literature begins with the project's theoretical frame and proceeds, from there, to incorporate three further areas of scholarly inquiry — suburban demographic and economic trends, community college practices in community engagement, and social-activist collaborations between public anchor institutions and disadvantaged communities around them.

Ethics in Community College Leadership

When Starratt (2004) argues that the school leader's role is fundamentally ethical, he draws on Cooper's (1991) conception of the "citizen-administrator" in public service, placing moral obligations on both the institution and its decision-makers to identify and confront

community challenges. In taking up that duty, Starratt argues for the co-production of solutions, working directly with the community, as the educational leader's first mandate. Starratt extends that obligation beyond a mere do-no-harm, individually-focused, or caretaking role, arguing that local educators must take a pro-active stance in confronting the structural inequities around them, mobilizing the community to respond.

Though Starratt's context is the public school, other scholars have applied similar reasoning to the community college, where the institutional mission embraces a commitment to equitable higher education access. For example, Wood and Hilton (2012) apply Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2011) four-part frame specifically to the public two-year college, arguing that decision-making in that sector must be "grounded in the notion that community colleges must serve the needs, interests, and public good of the local . . . service region of the institution" (p. 206). In doing so, Wood and Hilton bring the argument full circle, returning to community engagement as a fundamental ethical principle in community college leadership. As a result of that commitment to equity, Oliver and Hioco (2012) argue that the decisions of community college leaders often have direct, local links to social justice. Along similar lines, in the mid-1990s, a number of scholars (Canine et al., 1996; Gillett-Karam, 1996; Ottenritter & Parsons, 1996; Taber, 1996) explicitly linked community colleges to the ethics of communitarianism (Etzioni, 1993b), suggesting that local campuses could help counter individualism and alienation by nurturing community-driven, co-equal mechanisms for problem-solving. McCarty (1996) has cited feminist ethics in calling for a more compassionate, connected approach to civic engagement in the community college. Writing in the late 1970s, Myran (1978) argued that the community college's values system obligates it, among other things, to improve the community's

quality of life. Decades later, Myran and his colleagues (Myran, Myran, & Galant, 2004) added a spiritual dimension to that argument, asserting that campus leaders inherit a “sacred responsibility” (p. 11) to uphold those values. In his book-length examination of ethics in community college leadership, Vaughan (1992) takes the mandate well beyond the campus gates, arguing that community colleges are uniquely obliged to treat ethics as both a matter of academic inquiry and a requirement of local co-citizenship, particularly in giving voice to the less-advantaged members of the community. In Vaughan’s vision, the community college serves not only as an ethical actor but also as the teacher of ethics in the community. Collectively, these inspiring voices provide a rationale, motive, and decision-making framework for confronting community challenges — including those that increasingly face today’s suburban communities.

Suburban Decline: National and Local Trends

For over a decade, the dynamics of suburban decline have been attracting the attention of popular media, appearing in feature stories in *Atlantic Monthly* (“The Suburban Ghetto,” 2003), *Christian Science Monitor* (Sappenfield, 2002), and *Newsweek* (Tyre & Philips, 2007). Recently, the scale of that transformation has been highlighted by the Brookings Institution’s *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America* (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). Often referenced in popular media (Michel, 2013; Niederberger, 2013; “Poverty Rates,” 2014; “Work Together,” 2013), *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America* fueled an ongoing effort at Brookings to conduct additional research, develop web resources, collect case studies, and update data on suburban decline at the Brookings website confrontingsuburbanpoverty.org.

The conversation is not new, however. Earlier studies — among them, Jargowsky (2003), Lucy and Phillips (2000), Madden (2003a, b) and M. Orfield (2002) — have explored

the shifting regional political, social, and economic systems that have led to the conditions Kneebone and Berube describe. The most enduring explanation, in fact, traces its roots to the mid-1920s. In *The City*, Park, Burgess, and McKenzie (1925) proposed a concentric zone model of metropolitan-area development that envisioned a sharp demarcation between poor, urban residential areas and the more affluent neighborhoods surrounding them. Decay occurs as inner-city problems spread ever outward into older, closer-in suburbs.

Later scholars have largely adapted this model to explain the dynamics of suburban poverty despite its inability to explain the phenomenon's current complexities (Holliday & Dwyer, 2009; Murphy, 2010). Nonetheless, as regionalist thinkers have continued to argue, the welfare of suburbs inevitably depends, in large part, on their relationship to the resources and infrastructure of the central city (Lucy & Phillips, 2000; Katz, 2000; Rusk, 2003). In contrast to the objectivist Brookings approach, some of these writers deliberately integrate demography, inequity, and geography. Providing a literal picture of the changing urban-suburban landscape, the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity has conducted significant opportunity-mapping studies of various metropolitan complexes. Typically, these studies examine a wide variety of "community life categories" (Fitzsimmon & Lavey, 1976) such as education, employment, transportation, social services, housing, government operations, and leisure activities to arrive at a comprehensive picture of community health. When presented in map form, the data graphically illuminate sub-regional hotspots of racial re-segregation, job loss, wealth disparity, and health and safety challenges (powell, Reece, Rogers, & Gambhir, 2007). Increasingly, across the United States, these hotspots are suburban.

Because the C3E project is place-based, the local Seattle-area impacts of these dynamics are also relevant. Those, too, have been amply documented in scholarly, governmental, and popular resources. In addition to Kneebone and Berube's (2013) case study of nearby Tukwila, Washington, the Kirwan Institute has issued several reports on sub-regional inequities across the Seattle metropolitan area (Kirwan Institute, 2010; Kirwan Institute & Puget Sound Regional Council, 2012). As early as 2008, then-King County Executive Ron Sims highlighted those inequities in announcing the county's Initiative on Equity and Social Justice (Whitney, 2010). In an accompanying *Seattle Times* op-ed, Sims (2008) lamented the fact that that "in communities as forward-thinking as Seattle and King County, the color of your skin or your home address are good predictors of whether you will have a low-birth-weight baby, die from diabetes, or your children will graduate from high school or end up in jail" (n. p.). Since then, the county has continued to produce an annual *Equity and Social Justice Report* (King County, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015b) that, despite Executive Sims' best intentions, continues to reflect significant regional disparities (Figure 1). As subsequent editorials have lamented, the numbers remain sobering ("Stark Reminder," 2013; "Too Many," 2015). Between 2000 and 2012, 95% of King County's 85,000 new households have been either wealthy or poor — that is, earning over 180% of the \$70,000 county-wide median or earning less than half of that figure (Balk, 2015). The current King County Executive, Dow Constantine, describes today's local economy this way: "It's people doing really well, and people making espresso for people who are doing really well" (Johnson, 2015).

The disparity has a directional dimension as well, with nearly all of the high-income growth concentrated in Seattle or its eastside suburbs, while the region's lower-income, more

diverse populations shift southward along the inter-urban freeway corridor (Balk, 2015). The pattern, in fact, extends beyond King County's southernmost boundary into neighboring Pierce County (Modarres, 2015). In many cases, the south end's newcomers are younger, less well-educated, and with larger families to support. Regrettably, their neighborhoods often lack equitable access to educational resources, transit, nutritious food, healthcare, affordable housing, public safety, and safe outdoor spaces. "People need all those things to thrive," the *Seattle Times* recently editorialized ("Too Many," 2015). "Without them, communities — mostly concentrated in South King County — suffer the consequence." To longtime residents, the sentiment is old news. More than a decade ago, the South King Council on Human Services (2005) summarized the area's challenges in a slim publication titled, fittingly, *A Matter of Need*.

Community-Engagement in the Community College

The community college story, in its broadest sense, has been told repeatedly. Many of the comprehensive accounts maintain a largely appreciative tone (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Diener, 1986; Gleazer, 1968; Palinchak, 1973). Others have taken a more critical view (Beach, 2010; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994). Meantime, in addition to book-length treatments, many abbreviated histories have appeared as background chapters (Baker, Dudziak, & Tyler, 1994; Griffith & Connor, 1994; Sydow & Alfred, 2013; Tillery & Deegan, 1985), as article-length summaries (Bragg, 2001; Boggs, 2012; Gilbert & Heller, 2013), or as commemorative histories marking various milestones in the system's history (AACC, 2001; Boggs, 2010; Vaughan, 1985).

Within this broad historical landscape, however, a more narrowly-crafted set of histories have specifically traced what some have called the "horizontal" mission of the two-year college

— that is, its relationship to the wider community (Cross, 1985; Shearon & Tollefson, 1989). In the context of this capstone project, that history follows a particular definition of *community engagement* itself. It is not, for example, solely a set of relationships with local business, industry, and economic-development interests (Cantor, 1991). Nor is it strictly an educational partnership with nearby K-12 and post-secondary institutions (DeCastro & Karp, 2008). Although these partnership structures are essential elements of community engagement in its broadest sense, they fall short of the more comprehensive definition that advocates like Boone (1997) have put forward. Boone defines community engagement as:

A process in which the community college functions as a leader and catalyst in effecting collaboration among the people, their leaders, and community-based agencies and organizations in identifying, confronting, and resolving critical community issues that are adversely affecting — or have the potential to adversely affect — the community, its people, and their quality of life (1997, p. vii).

In tracing that aspirational definition, the most focused and comprehensive narratives include Boone (1997), Gillett-Karam (1996), McGuire (1988), Myran (1978), and O'Banion and Gillett-Karam (1996a). Across these various accounts, a rough set of eras emerges.

Foundations of community engagement: 1900 to the mid-1960s. Within the two-year public colleges, the roots of community engagement extend back to the system's founding principles. As early as 1915, junior college advocate Alexis Lange argued for civic education and participation in the community welfare as functions of the two-year institution (cited in Canine et al., 1996). During the early 1930s, the American Association of Junior Colleges began to encourage community service through its journal, its annual meeting addresses, and a history

written by AAJC's then-executive secretary, Walter Crosby Eels (Hankin & Fey, 1985).

Throughout the Great Depression, local junior colleges often served both as educational and cultural centers of their rural communities (McGuire, 1988). Later, in the aftermath of World War II, the President's Commission on Higher Education (1947) significantly expanded the community-serving function of the two-year colleges, enlisting them in the Commission's dual goals of reducing inequities in educational access (Gilbert and Heller, 2013) and encouraging greater civic engagement across the country (Boone, 1997; Fonte, 2009). During the Postwar Period, faculty and staff were increasingly encouraged to participate in community affairs (Gillett-Karam, 1996; O'Banion & Gillett-Karam, 1996a). Over those decades, two-year colleges began to integrate the community more deeply into campus life, a phenomenon that one future luminary, Ervin Harlacher, summarized in his mid-1960s doctoral dissertation. There, Harlacher (1965) noted the expansion of community advisory groups, community utilization of college facilities, and collaborations with community agencies, among other activities, as examples of an increasingly community-centered role for the two-year college (Gillett-Karam, 1996; O'Banion & Gillett-Karam, 1996a).

The expanding profile of community education: Mid-1960s to mid-1970s. In the subsequent decade, the expansion of the two-year colleges' role in their communities aligned with broader societal forces. More than three decades later, Putnam (2000) would note that, despite the era's political turbulence, the mid-1960s represented the nation's peak in civic engagement across all sectors. In that social context, the community college system once again expanded significantly — not only in its sheer size but also in its expectations of community integration. Four years after Harlacher's 1965 dissertation study, several landmark publications

appeared on the same topic. They included Harlacher's (1969) own *The Community Dimension of the Community College*, Cohen's (1969) *Dateline '79: Heretical Concepts for the Community College*, and Myran's (1969) *Community Services in the Community College*. That same year, 1969, saw the founding of the National Council on Community Services for Community and Junior Colleges (Hankin & Fey, 1985). These voices urged two-year colleges to provide the necessary educational supports to sustain community problem-solving in local economic, social, and civic matters, setting out a collaborative, even catalytic vision for community-based education. Though lofty in many respects, this vision nonetheless continued to emphasize the campuses' educational role, relegating other community functions to a secondary emphasis (Hankin & Fey, 1985; O'Banion & Gillett-Karam, 1996a). Widely viewed as the "bible" of the community services movement, Harlacher's (1969) book placed the roots of that movement squarely in educational soil, noting that its heritage arose from the intersection of university extension services and K-12 community schools. For the most part, Harlacher emphasized educational supports for community work, suggesting that the campus offer its research capacities, faculty expertise, facilities, and event-planning resources to advance community initiatives. To be fair, however, Harlacher also hinted at broader possibilities. In defining the "frequently overlooked" college role that he called *community development*, he envisioned "college and community joining together in attacking unsolved problems" (p. 29). The nature of those problems, he implied, need not be limited to the educational sector.

From community education to renewal: The mid-1970s to mid-1990s. Any such limitation was soon swept aside by a voice from outside the two-year college community. In a February 1974 address to the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, the

then-president of the Carnegie Foundation, Alan Pifer, upended the traditional hierarchy of education and service, asserting that the community colleges should see themselves first as community members and only secondarily as higher education providers (Harlacher & Gollattscheck, 1978; McGuire, 1988; Pifer, 1974).

That year, 1974, would become a watershed in the story of community-engaged two-year colleges. Gleazer's (1974) landmark article, "After the Boom," signaled a shift outward, beyond the campus, as the system's new direction. A few months after Pifer's address, a remarkable list of opinion-makers convened in Orlando for a three-day symposium exploring the proposition that community colleges are "a dynamic social force [that] must be directly involved in improving the community" (Valencia Community College, 1974, p. iii). Woven into the symposium's plenary addresses were terms and concepts that would prove central in the community-engagement discussion, going forward. Among these were Harlacher's *community renewal college* (p. 27), Gleazer's *open college* (p. 16), and Myran's conception of *community-based education* as "the instrumentality that weaves the educational fabric of the community into a whole" (p. 9). Not long afterward, the 1974 Assembly of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges chose to focus on a policy framework for community-based community colleges (Schenkman, 1975). The mid-1970s also saw the formation of COMBASE, a consortium of two-year colleges whose acronym reflected, however obliquely, a commitment to community-based solutions (COMBASE, 2015). The organization continues today.

These signature events, key voices, and aspirational concepts marked a transformative point in the system's community-engagement mission, situating colleges as "vital participants in the total process of community life" (McGuire, 1988, p. 8). Later works (Gleazer, 1980;

Gollattscheck, 1976; Harlacher & Gollattscheck, 1978) further sustained this vision. As the 1980s drew to a close, the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges proposed *Building Communities* as “the new rallying point for the community college in America” (AACJC, 1988, p. 7). Invoking language that would echo through later literature, the commissioners defined *community* as “not only a region to be served, but a climate to be created” (p. 7).

As community services expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, however, even its proponents began to raise cautions. As early as 1972, Cohen worried that the community dimension of two-year colleges risked becoming “narrow, inchoate, and removed from the mainstream of college operations,” adding that its ill-defined functions are therefore difficult to assess (1991, n.p.). Cohen cited Navajo Community College as a promising counter-example, conceding, however, that NCC’s comparatively rich funding base, integration with tribal services, and cultural ties to the Navajo heritage gave it advantages that few other colleges could match. A decade later, Parnell (1982) returned to the land-grant university as a model for sustainable, high-quality integration of educational resources with the real needs of the community, whether in rural, urban, or suburban settings. Without such a model, Parnell famously warned, community education could come to be associated primarily with belly dancing and poodle grooming classes. Others were skeptical of the entire enterprise. In a mid-1980s essay on the community college’s next generation, Tillery and Deegan (1985) directly countered Gleazer’s enthusiasm for community work. “However noble,” they wrote, Gleazer’s vision is “widely viewed as unrealistic for an already overburdened college” (p. 21).

The Communitarian period: 1990 to 2000. Despite the hints of caution that had arisen in the previous period, the 1990s saw, if anything, an even more fervent commitment to

community-engagement within the two-year college literature. The popularity of books like *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, 1985) and *Spirit of Community* (Etzioni, 1993b) eventually linked community colleges to the ideals of *communitarianism* that Bellah, Etzioni, and others propounded as a “a constructive and inclusive response to the core angst of our time” (Etzioni, 1993a, p. 49). In a recent retrospective, Etzioni (2014a) reflected on that angst:

When everyone just watches out for number one, the result is a rough-and-tumble society, one that is too self-centered and isolating. [People] looked for more togetherness and more attention to the common good. Polls showed that people welcomed the balance between ‘I’ and ‘we’ that communitarianism offered (p. 32).

To strike that balance, communitarians argued that community values could mediate between two seeming opposites — personal autonomy and common good (Etzioni, 2014b). Though it calls itself as a philosophical school and draws upon philosophers such as Robert Sandel (1996) and Charles Taylor (1992), communitarianism leans toward application, particularly to politics and social policy (Gillett-Karam, 1996). At its height, communitarianism’s adherents saw the movement as a middle-ground response both to the laissez-faire libertarianism of the 1980s and to the fear of central government control that had spawned it. Any entity that could foster greater community coherence and dialogue was a potential ally in the communitarian agenda.

As Gillett-Karam’s (1996) succinct summary points out, the community colleges were almost ideal candidates to play that mediating role between individual and community. As if sensing that alignment, the communitarian movement essentially adopted the community college system. Communitarian futurist Robert Theobald (1994) situated two-year colleges as the “heart and brain” of their communities, preparing citizens to recreate their neighborhoods and the wider

society (p. 21). Sounding a similar note, the Communitarian Network claimed two-year colleges as a critical resource in attaining a communitarian society (Canine et al., 1996). Across the Atlantic, in Geneva, the worldwide Communitarian Summit featured an address on the American community college movement (Taber, 1996). The inter-institutional attraction, however, was clearly mutual. In 1993, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC) invited Etzioni himself as keynote speaker at its annual conference (Canine et al., 1996). In introducing the renowned speaker, the then-president of AACCC spoke appreciatively of his informal conversations with Etzioni, noting that communitarianism's evolution shared many principles with the community college movement. At the height of the communitarianism's rise, *New Directions for Community Colleges* devoted a special issue to the two-year colleges' role in what the editors called community renewal (Parsons & Lisman, 1996). Though many of the entries focused on the practicalities of civics education, service projects, and campus change-management, the journal's editors clearly envisioned a social-catalytic role for the community college system on a nationwide scale. In an introduction that could have been written yesterday, they called upon local campuses to join with their local communities in co-developing solutions to the government dysfunction, growing economic disparity, and technologically- and globally-driven erosion of family-wage employment that characterized U.S. society at the time.

Importantly, these ideas captured the imagination not only of academics and social reformers, but also of charitable foundations. These third-parties were able to infuse significant financial resources into the initiative. In the early- to mid-1990s, the Hitachi Foundation's Community Forum Project, Ford Foundation's Urban Partnership Project, and the Carnegie Foundation's community-building initiatives integrated community colleges into their efforts

(Canine et al., 1996). Of particular note was the Kellogg Foundation-funded Academy for Community College Leadership Advancement, Innovation, and Modeling (ACCLAIM), which focused exclusively on the community-building function of two-year campuses. Earlier, as a follow-up to the AACJC's (1988) *Building Communities* report, Kellogg had funded the \$1.7 million Beacon Project, which ultimately engaged more than 250 colleges in community-building activities across a broad range of functions — pedagogic reforms, international education, diversity initiatives, technology deployment, and service (Barnett, 1995). Now, with ACCLAIM, the focus narrowed to emphasize grassroots ownership and co-planning in joint efforts at community renewal, with the college acting as convener and leader (Boone, 1992; Boone, Pettitt, & Weisman, 1998; Lisman, 1996). Between 1992 and 1996, ACCLAIM enlisted five campuses in in-depth initiatives to address such region-wide social challenges as workforce under-preparation, adult illiteracy, economic stagnation, income disparity, and drug-related public safety issues. Even today, the ACCLAIM initiative surely stands as one of the most ambitious, large-scale, and sustained examples of deep community engagement in the history of public two-year institutions.

Service learning: The bridge to a new century. Even as communitarianism's influence was at its peak, the seeds of another community-engagement initiative — service learning — were taking root in higher education. Simply defined, service learning is the practice of incorporating community-based projects and experiences into students' formal education (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Schine, 1997). Though it can take many forms, the practice is intended to involve students in their communities, encourage them toward service, enrich their lives, and augment their learning through self-reflective practice. In turn, the community

benefits from the energies, talents, and expertise of participating students and faculty.

In many respects, the service learning movement drew its inspiration from a broader resurgence of community-engaged dialogue at the topmost levels of higher learning. Its key proponents, in fact, included no less prominent figures than University of California President Clark Kerr and the then-president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Ernest L. Boyer. In their mid-1990s writings, Boyer and Kerr, among others, called for a renewed emphasis on local communities as a priority within higher education (Noel & Earwicker, 2015). With such formidable voices behind the idea, a wide range of colleges and universities publicly embraced local engagement “as a natural evolution of the traditional . . . social contract between society and higher education” (Sandmann, Thornton, & Jaeger, 2009a, p. 1). At the turn of the new century, Erlich’s (2000) *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* compiled a diverse sampling of institutional and disciplinary perspectives on this theme. The same period saw the launch of such national-level initiatives as the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, Community–Campus Partnerships for Health, and the Defining and Benchmarking Engagement Project of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (Noel & Earwicker, 2015). By 2006, the Carnegie Foundation had launched its initial pilot of an elective Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, offering a potential framework for defining and measuring community engagement across all of post-secondary education (Driscoll, 2008, 2009; Sandmann, Thornton, & Jaeger, 2009b). In the Carnegie approach, service learning figures prominently (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009).

The nation’s community colleges enthusiastically embraced this new energy for

community work. Among the many community engagement-related initiatives and organizations that flourished in higher education during this period, National Campus Compact arguably offered the greatest potential relevance to the two-year colleges. Today, Campus Compact lists nearly 1,100 two- and four-year institutions among its members, united by a common dedication to campus-based civic engagement (Campus Compact, n.d.). Initially, however, only a limited number of elite four-year institutions dominated the organization's membership (Elsner, 2005). As a wider range of institutions joined the movement, some two-year colleges advocated for a more sector-specific resource to promote service learning in their institutional setting. The Community College National Center for Community Engagement (CCNCCE) met that need. Founded in 1990 as an offshoot of Campus Compact, CCNCCE served for the next 25 years as a clearinghouse for information, grants, and collaboration opportunities for service learning in the two-year colleges (Zimmer, 2015).

Other prominent community college leaders joined the chorus. One was Lynn Barnett, AACC's director of community development. Barnett (1996) described "the burgeoning service learning movement [as] a genuine match with the mission of community colleges as teaching and community-serving institutions" (p. 14). That "burgeoning movement," in her view, was a natural extension of AACJC's *Building Communities* (1988) report and the Beacon College Project demonstrations that followed from it. Funders evidently agreed. In 1994, AACC received one of 65 grants through the Corporation for National and Community Service's Learn and Serve America project to strengthen service learning infrastructure through data collection, demonstration grants, and technical assistance. Designed in partnership with Campus Compact and CCNCCE, the AACC proposal received additional support from Beacon's original

underwriter, the Kellogg Foundation (Barnett, 1996). Eventually, over its 18-year lifespan, the project engaged over 100 community colleges, 32,000 students, and 2,400 faculty (AACC, n.d.). Along the way, it produced a variety of handbooks and reports as guiding resources (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2002; Jeandron & Robinson, 2010; Prentice, Robinson, & Patton, 2012).

In addition to its community benefit, service learning may offer particular educational advantages for two-year college learners. To begin with, community college students are more likely to remain in their communities — and, for that matter, to have existing community connections — than their four-year campus counterparts (McClure, 2013). Perhaps as a result of those connections, community college students report significant personal, educational, and professional benefit from community service, despite the additional pressures that these activities can place on busy commuters with work and family responsibilities (Holland & Robinson, 2008). Evidence suggests that both their subject mastery and their civic engagement benefit (Greenwood, 2015; Prentice, 2009, 2011).

In light of these many fortunate intersections, it is small wonder that Campus Compact chose the community colleges for its initial pilot of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification's indicators (Zlotkowski, 2004). The resulting 130-page guidebook offers four reasons for that choice. To some degree, the rationale repeats familiar themes. First, community colleges are closer to their communities. Second, despite that closer relationship, they are paradoxically underreported in the academic literature on civic engagement. Third, their students already represent the demographics of higher education's future — more diverse, less college-aware, and more likely to squeeze their studies in between other responsibilities and life events. Finally, there are the traits of the two-year system itself — relatively new, rapidly

growing, nimble, and rooted in democratic ideals. Taken together, this four-part rationale concisely explains why community engagement remains a two-year college focal point.

Recent developments: The redefinition of community engagement. In very recent years, the community college literature around community engagement has lost some of the energy of its communitarian-era peak. Globalization may be one cause. Building on the work of Levin (2001), Ayers (2011, 2013) argues from a linguistic perspective that, in the missions of two-year colleges, the local and global communities have gradually been conflated as campuses increasingly train workers for jobs in transnational industries.

To some extent, however, community engagement has likely been pushed aside simply by more pressing concerns. For example, Sydow and Alfred (2013) single out the 2008 recession as a significant turning-point in the community college landscape. In the post-recession era, they argue, campuses have faced increasing expectations of accountability in an environment of shrinking public resources. As a result, the system's leaders have been tasked with re-prioritizing their fiscal, human, and educational resources to align with a more finely-honed set of goals. In their case studies, Sydow and Alfred emphasize developmental education reform, career pathway-based curricula, flexible delivery models, and transfer alignment. These innovations collectively serve to bolster what has become, in essence, the primary measure of community college effectiveness — completion rates. Compared to earlier eras, the new vision is reductionist and inward-turning. In Sydow and Alfred's conception, community perceptions of the campus are linked solely to "managing image and brand" (p. 69).

The recent, efficiency-minded focus on completions has been reinforced by a variety of nationwide measurement and reform initiatives, including Achieving the Dream (McClenney,

2013), Complete College America (Jones, 2015), and the Voluntary Framework for Accountability for Community Colleges (López, 2014; Stout, 2013). The combined effect has influenced the very mission statements of two-year colleges, increasingly shifting their language toward terms that link student attainment to resource efficiencies (Ayers, 2015). Often the reform-drivers have been charitable foundations — some recent arrivals, some familiar stalwarts — whose newly-corporatized approach emphasizes market-driven, metrics-oriented solutions to educational challenges, a phenomenon that has been noted particularly for its impact on public schools (Ravitch, 2010; Reckhow, 2013). Admittedly, a few foundation initiatives — including Lumina’s Goal 2025 and Ford’s Corridors of College Success — have retained a broader vision of community development in their educational investments (Karp & Lundy-Wagner, 2015; Lumina Foundation, 2013). But, even there, completions are the primary objective. When Lumina calls for building “a social movement around attainment” (p. 11), the movement’s ultimate goal is individual, not communal.

Meantime, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Kresge Foundation recently joined forces to convene a new Commission on the Future of Community Colleges. The group’s report, *Reclaiming the American Dream* (AACCC, 2012) bears little resemblance to the previous commission’s *Building Communities* (AACJC, 1988). Where *Building Communities* famously defined community as “not only a region to be served, but a climate to be created” (p. 7), the 2012 commission offers a simple “three Rs” formula for the system’s future — redesign students’ educational experiences, reinvent institutional roles, and reset the system to create incentives for student and institutional success. Despite its promising label, the second *R* calls

for colleges to “refocus institutional mission and roles on 21st-century education and employment needs” (p. 28). Community-building is omitted.

In fairness, to some degree, the new emphasis on accountability incorporates equity as a core principle. There, opportunities for community-building may re-emerge. For example, a recent special issue of *New Directions for Community Colleges* explores the social-reform role of today’s urban campuses (Myran, Ivery, Parsons, & Kinsley, 2013). In doing so, the editors revisit a robust tradition of neighborhood-level engagement specifically among community colleges that serve the urban core (Fitzgerald & Jenkins, 1997; Reitano, 2002; Weidenthal, 1989). In this latter-day iteration, however, the term *multi-racial democracy* emerges as a new aspirational frame. Conceptually, the phrase recombines the ideals of equity, community voice, and social justice into a new, more culturally-responsive form of communitarianism that, in its essence, is transferable to today’s increasingly diverse, opportunity-poor suburbs.

Certainly, the need for community-building has not ebbed. At least, the topic has not disappeared from the popular press. In the midst of the current U.S. presidential primaries, columnist David Brooks (2016) opined that “today’s problems relate to binding a fragmenting society, reweaving family and social connections, relating across the diversity of a globalized world.” Evoking themes from Bellah’s (1985) decades-old study, Brooks went on to claim that the election season represents an opportunity “to rediscover a language of loving thy neighbor, which is a primary ideal in our culture, and a primary longing of the heart.”

In like manner, at the turn of the millennium, Putnam’s (2000) *Bowling Alone* famously resurrected the very same concerns that, 15 years earlier, had emerged from Bellah’s (1985) neighborhood interviews. Though his methodology is primarily quantitative, Putman similarly

documents 30-plus years of decline in political, religious, civic, and charitable engagement across the United States. In assigning causes to this inter-generational shift, Putnam cites suburbanization, electronic entertainment, and the time pressures faced by multi-income households. Even more recently, *The Vanishing Neighbor* (Dunkleman, 2014) has identified a similar set of forces — among them, urban sprawl, personal technology, and a broadly consumerist, individualistic ethic — that have segregated communities, alienated individuals from one another, and undermined collective democracy.

Notably, even in these very recent analyses, suburbanization continues to appear as a cause of community fragmentation. But the rise of suburban re-segregation, poverty, and disempowerment reminds us that the suburbs, too, are victimized by the loss of neighborly ties.

An alternative history: Community engagement as institutional overreach. Given the complex social and educational function of community colleges, it is hardly surprising that the institution has drawn skeptics. Among these commentators, the history of community engagement as a mission element receives an especially critical treatment.

The system's most prominent scholarly critics — among them Brint and Karabel (1989), Dougherty (1994), and Zwerling (1976) — have argued that, as second-rate educational providers, community colleges perpetuate the very same social and economic inequities that they purport to fight. In summarizing these critiques, Dougherty notes that two-year campuses serve a paradoxical role of democratizing access to higher education while, at the same time, they protect the interests of both employers and more elite universities by absorbing and redirecting the community's less-advantaged students. The same, unflattering analysis appears in broader critiques of the U.S. education system's increasingly corrupt role in promoting private gain

rather than public good (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Labaree, 1997). In that context, for example, Labaree (1997) concludes that the comprehensive community college has simply replaced the comprehensive high school as a tool of social reproduction, tracking differently-advantaged students into various levels of career mobility. Outside of the academy, public policy organizations have raised similar concerns about the community college's mixed impact on inequality (Century Foundation, 2013; McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). In describing how local faculty and staff enact this paradoxical social role, Clark (1960a, b) famously invoked the term *cooling out* to define the routine practices — placement testing, career counseling, college success orientations, and early-warning systems — that gradually, gently, and covertly persuade two-year college students that they are unfit for traditional post-secondary studies.

Within that general critique of the community college as social sorter, scholars have singled out specific academic programs that perpetuate inequities. Workforce preparation offerings, for example, have been criticized for pigeonholing students into sub-baccalaureate occupational credentials that provide little social mobility (Grubb, 1996; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Pincus 1986, 1980). Other critiques have focused on industry-funded, customized training as a mechanism that enlists local community colleges in the cynical task of driving down labor costs, preparing expendable workers, and undermining the liberal arts studies that promote critical civic engagement (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000; Pincus, 1989). More recently, remedial coursework has been critiqued from the same equity perspective, due to its disproportionate impact on disadvantaged populations (Bailey, Bueschel, & Venezia, 2009; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Bettinger & Long, 2005; Jaggars & Stacey, 2014). Other critics have blamed the two-year system's baffling, cafeteria-style array of educational pathways as a root cause of its poor

performance with first-generation attenders (Bailey & Smith Jaggars, 2015; Grubb, 2006; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006; Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Viewed through any one of these lenses, the local community college may appear to exacerbate more socio-economic injustices than it solves. Whatever the programmatic focus of the critique, however, a common thread is that community colleges are simply “so overloaded with diverse missions that it is impossible to do any of them well” (Smith Morest, cited in Beach, 2010, p. 57). Critics argue that this expansionist habit, whether intentional or inadvertent, ultimately undermines institutional effectiveness (McPhail & McPhail, 2006). Beach (2010) painstakingly traces this theme in his history of the two-year college system. Unsurprisingly, he includes community engagement as yet another potential distraction. For example, in his synopsis of Griffith and Connor’s (1994) *Democracy’s Open Door*, Beach uses phrases like “idealistic rhetoric,” “ebullient optimism,” “naïve myths,” and “traditional community college boosterism” (pp. 51-52) to describe the authors’ community-oriented approach. Although Beach is kinder in his critique of Roueche, Taber, and Roueche’s (1995) study of community collaborations, he nonetheless hints that the system’s mid-1990s emphasis on community-building may have emerged not from altruism, but instead from a self-serving interest in maintaining local political support during a period of dwindling state resources. That argument, Beach adds, had been advanced explicitly by Canadian scholars Levin and Denison (1989), who saw their system’s emerging social-welfare functions as part of a larger entrepreneurial shift toward providing whatever services the immediate community might reward, potentially fueling a cycle of ever-greater dilution of the colleges’ core mission. Over the years, even the staunchest community-engagement advocates have raised cautions about such endeavors, including their

potential to breed faculty resistance, proliferate services, raise encroachment concerns from community organizations, and blur the college's planning functions through collaboration with differing organizational cultures (Hankin & Fey, 1985; O'Banion & Gillet-Karam, 1996b).

One of the most succinct rebuttals to this line of argument comes from former AACC president G.B. Vaughan. In a markedly reflective essay, Vaughan (1991) counters that, despite the risk of overreach, each community college should strive to live at the boundary between its educational core and its mission's edge — that is, at the intersection between the institution and its community. Vaughan wisely acknowledges the dangers inherent in this practice, noting that they include limitlessness in perceived needs, an unclear public identity, a loss of academic status, and difficulty jettisoning outlived elements. But the resulting institutional vibrancy, staff engagement, and nimbleness can be worth the perils involved, Vaughan argues. If it is intentionally managed, the “core-edge tension” can focus, rather than dissipate, institutional energy. Far beyond simply mirroring its social environment, the “effective community college provides the *leadership* . . . to anticipate movements within society and to assimilate them into the college's educational mission” (p. 3, italics in original). It was a message that Vaughan (2007) would revisit some 15 years later, calling it the system's “citizenship role” (p. 16). In between, his core-edge metaphor would find its way not only into studies of community college mission and vision statements (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008) but also into the foundational documents of large-scale engagement initiatives such as the ACCLAIM Project (Boone, 1997).

Community Colleges as Community Conveners

In their aspirational language, Boone (1992, 1997), Harlacher (1969), Vaughan (1991), and others have framed a professional dialogue around community colleges as broadly engaged,

co-equal partners in addressing community needs. These visionary voices lead naturally into a third body of literature that traces successful collaborations between disadvantaged communities and the institutions within them. Though much of this literature lies outside the community college field — and is, therefore, a less prominent component of the present project — it is nonetheless important to the project’s design. Without a sense of these exemplars, it is difficult, if not impossible, to envision the manner in which a community college could establish such a catalytic relationship with its community at a metropolitan-area scale.

Fortunately, a number of scholars have documented examples of effective asset-based, community-driven organizing in an urban-suburban context, often citing community colleges as critical partners (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Pastor, Benner, & Matsuoka, 2009). Others have incorporated the community college into more theoretical frameworks for community organizing (Connor, 2003). In effect, these voices place college-to-community partnerships in a context of social change, suggesting that these transformative relationships can transcend the boundaries of purely educational practice, arguing that higher education institutions can convene and support an ongoing, multi-constituent initiative to build community capacities and power, strengthening the self-directed political voice, economic stability, and welfare of local residents.

Similar themes appear within the literature of community colleges. Recently, for example, the Corridors of College Success initiative has applied the *collective impact* model of social intervention to the problem of community college attainment, particularly among low-income students (Karp & Lundy-Wagner, 2015). In its pure form, the collective impact approach calls for five ingredients — a civic infrastructure of long-term community partners, a common set of success metrics, mutually reinforcing activities, constant communication across

constituents, and a backbone organization to hold the partnerships together (Kania & Kramer, 2011). While none of the community colleges served as a backbone in Corridors of College Success (Klempin, 2016), several of the two-year colleges' most ardent advocates have claimed that, in fulfilling that role, the campus offers assets that no other institution can match. Nearly a half-century ago, Harlacher (1969) set the stage for this argument, identifying six unique traits that position two-year campuses for a substantive role in community development. In addition to their place-based mission, governance systems, and service geography, Harlacher highlighted the colleges' dynamism as an asset, describing them as "unencrusted with tradition, unfettered by a rigid history, and eager for adventure" (p. 9). He saw neutrality, too, as a strength:

The community college . . . is disinterested in terms of the community power structure, it has no profit motive, it has no axe to grind, and it has the human resources to do the job. It is the unified force that casts aside red tape, apathy, jealousies, and asks what the community problems are and how 'all of us together solve them' (p. 9).

Boone (1992) echoes many of Harlacher's points, citing the two-year colleges' mission-defined embeddedness in community, multidisciplinary and comprehensive curriculum, positive public perception, and an informed understanding of the local political, economic, and social environment of the campus's region as key assets in community-building. Others have emphasized the informational, human, and physical capital that any large-scale institution of higher education can bring to its local area (Goddard & Vallance, 2013). Where Harlacher (1969) used the term *catalytic agent* to define this boundary-spanning role, Hankin and Fey (1985) prefer *synergism* to define the broad problem-solving consortia that the local community college, acting as hub institutions, can convene.

Applied Project Design

The capstone project's long-range goal seeks to harness the synergism that Hankin and Fey (1985) imagine. In service to that goal, the year's activities have been guided by a project design that incorporated guiding questions, project parameters, methodology, activities, projected outcomes, and proposed evaluation protocols. In addition, the design took into account the most relevant history and contextual elements.

Guiding Questions

As the project unfolded, a set of community, institutional, and ethical questions provided a stable framework for inquiry, assessment, and reflection.

Community-referenced questions. The project's community dimensions were arguably its most important and, at the same time, most delicate to navigate. There, the guiding questions included the following:

1. In a highly diverse, socially and jurisdictionally fragmented suburban region, how might the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) identify, recruit, and engage the most appropriate set of local representatives?
2. What supports — tangible, social, and educational — are necessary to facilitate and sustain community participation in such a center?
3. What are the appropriate types, number, and range of problems for such a center to engage? How might C3E encourage effective community voice without overstepping the social and political constraints of a public agency and without setting unrealistic community expectations?
4. How will the center communicate its effectiveness to community constituents?

Institutional questions. Institutionally, the establishment of a Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) will demand a significant commitment of time, energy, and resources. For the center to be sustainable, its activities must meaningfully engage college staff, creating durable relationships between campus and community. To begin to answer these concerns, the capstone's institution-related questions included the following:

1. What are the appropriate institutional staffing and governance structures to support, guide, and sustain such a center?
2. From what resources can the college draw its contributions to the center? What external resources, if any, can be tapped to address shortfalls?
3. How will the center communicate its effectiveness to institutional constituents?

Ethical questions. Finally, the project demands that its participants address a substantive set of ethical questions. At its heart, the work anticipates a rebalancing of power and priority-setting between the institution and its communities. Over time, these relationships must remain authentic and flexible, responding to changes in people and in local priorities. For the purposes of the capstone's inquiry, then, the relevant ethical questions included these:

1. How can the center's mission, values, and principles be shaped to establish an enduring commitment to authentic, co-equal collaboration?
2. At a more operational level, how can the center establish decision-making and dispute resolution processes that align with its mission, values, and principles?

Taken together, these questions framed the capstone project's dimensions. In beginning to answer them, the capstone offered the Campus Center for Community Engagement's planners a foundation for creating a resource whose functions are clearly defined, effective, sustainable,

and authentically respectful of community. This project's sponsor, Highline College, came to the project with questions of its own. Through its president and trustees, the institution articulated an interest in understanding the prospects, opportunities, obstacles, and best practices that might inform the development of such a center on campus. The capstone sought to provide that guidance.

Project Parameters: Geographic Limits and Scope of Work

Geographic limits. The proposed Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) seeks to serve the communities within Highline College's district boundary. As the oldest community college in King County, Highline has accumulated more than a half-century of experience serving that geography (Highline College, 2016). Like many community colleges, Highline began as an extension of the local school district, initially occupying portable buildings on the now-abandoned Glacier High School campus. When the college opened in 1961, its 15 faculty served a first-year enrollment of 385. In 1964, Highline moved to its present 80-acre campus in Des Moines, some 100 blocks south of the original Glacier site. Today, the college enrolls over 16,000 students and claims 350,000 alumni. With an annual budget of just over \$40 million, the college's current workforce numbers nearly 775, including roughly 170 full-time faculty, 300 adjunct faculty, 250 staff, and 55 administrators (Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges, 2015).

By Washington statute, Highline College serves the area defined by the Highline, Federal Way, and Tukwila school districts (Community and Technical College Act, 1991). That geographic footprint extends across eight municipal and county jurisdictions, some 75 square miles of land, and over 280,000 local residents who comprise some of the most diverse

populations in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2014).² The majority of the district's residents — 51% — self-identify as non-white, compared to a state average of 29% and a King County average of 36.5%. Within the district's communities of color, roughly 11% describe themselves as African-American or black, 13.5% as Asian, 2% as native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 18.5% as Hispanic or Latino (any race). Nearly 7% of the region's residents claim a multi-racial identity.

Economically, Highline's service district persistently falls below state and county-wide averages in key indicators (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Although a significant portion of local employment is in manufacturing (12.2%), education and healthcare (18.4%) and the professions, science, and management (10.3%), some of the district's largest employers include Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, Tukwila's South Center Mall, and the services supporting these entities. Accordingly, a large share of locally-available jobs are in lower-paying sectors such as retail trade (11.3%), transportation and warehousing (8.6%), and recreation, accommodation, and food services (12%). At \$26,359, the in-district per-capita income is less than two-thirds of the county-wide \$40,665 figure. Some 13% of Highline's residents live below the federal poverty level, compared to 9% statewide and 7.5% across King County. Over 17% lack healthcare insurance coverage. Where the state's free-and-reduced lunch eligibility rate is 45%, the comparable figures for Highline's feeder school districts are 59.2% in Federal Way, 68% in Highline, and 78% in Tukwila (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2015). For those same districts, the transitional bilingual enrollments range from Federal Way's low of 16.5% to Tukwila's high of 39.3%. The statewide average is just over 10%.

As a community-serving institution, Highline College strives to reflect the demographic

profile of its district. If anything, Highline over-represents its region's diversity. At present, the college's student body is just over 25% white/Caucasian (Highline College, 2016). Many of the institution's signature programs — among them, TRiO Student Support Services, the Mathematics Engineering and Science Achievement (MESA) center, Umoja Black Scholars Community, and the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) program — specifically serve the campus's diversity. Among its economic development resources, the college houses a Small Business Development Center (SBDC), the StartZone microenterprise initiative, and the Puget Sound Welcome Back Center, which supports professional re-entry for internationally-credentialed immigrants. In large numbers, local immigrants enroll in Highline's extensive basic education programming. According to the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2015), Highline served more students in non-credit basic skills courses than any other community or technical college last academic year. Statewide, 19,465 students enrolled in such courses, with 5,462 those — or nearly 17% of the Washington's total — at Highline. On a headcount basis, 40% of Highline's students list basic education as their immediate goal, compared to a state average of 11%.

As Figure 2 illustrates, Highline College's service area overlaps significantly with census tracts that King County government has identified as the lowest-opportunity areas within its borders. The region's neighborhoods are disconnected from one another by city jurisdictions, often separated by sections of unincorporated King County. Finally, they are among the most racially and linguistically diverse communities in the region (Figure 3). Of particular interest to the Campus Center for Community Engagement are the municipalities of Burien, SeaTac, Tukwila, and Des Moines. Situated south of Seattle and north of Federal Way, these smaller

communities — each under 50,000 in population — lack the political, economic, and social resources of the larger cities around them.

Scope of work. During the September 2015 to May 2016 project period, the activities conformed to the general conception of a feasibility study, with the goal of creating a roadmap toward the Center’s establishment. Throughout this evaluation, the work was marked by extensive, active consultation with faculty and staff, community provider-partners, and community representatives. Authenticity and community relevance were constant touchstones. Within those general principles, the scope of work concentrated on matters of proposed membership, governance, educational services, location, staffing, and assessment.

Membership. Among its proposed outcomes, the project set out to develop a set of membership recommendations for consideration by the college’s president and trustees. Within this objective were several subsidiary activities. For example, going forward, a key question is to determine whether the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) should develop a stand-alone identity or should, instead, affiliate with an existing community-wide group or initiative. Further, the capstone project sought to explore different types of potential membership, which might include provider-partners, community advisors, staff advisors, subject-matter experts, co-advocates, and community-engaged students.

Governance. If the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) project is to proceed, it will require a clear mission, operating principles, membership co-expectations, and avenues for modification of these agreements over time. Two priorities are of equal importance in drafting documents to address each of these matters. One is maintaining alignment with the college’s mission and strategic plans. The other is the honoring community’s voice. During the

capstone period, one task was to craft founding principles that balance those two interests.

Educational services. A third priority of the capstone was to evaluate and recommend a set of services that the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) might provide. While the literature suggests that the local two-year college can act effectively as a community-wide backbone, the relationship resources requires a careful balance between community and college interests. On the one hand, it makes little sense to offer services that the community does not want. Conversely, just because the community asks for a particular resource, that does not mean that the college can offer or sustain it. Within the range of choices, some will necessarily make more sense than others. However, any one of these services might be seen as irrelevant, redundant, or even intrusive if its provision collided with existing community resources or priorities. Among these many options, then, the capstone project sought to identify the most community-responsive, sustainable educational services that C3E could incorporate.

Location and support staff. Long-term, the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) will require some staff support and a dedicated location(s) for its activities. In securing those resources, some key priorities include creating an identity for the center, assigning and orienting its personnel, and ensuring that the space is accessible and welcoming. Accordingly, the capstone's inquiry included an evaluation of some potential space assignments, basic facility design, and staffing structures. While that evaluation took into account the campus's current space and funding limitations, it also looked outward, exploring possible shared-use arrangements that might leverage local developments adjacent to the campus.

Assessment. Like any project of substance, the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) initiative will require thoughtful attention to measures of effectiveness. A

final capstone task addressed the development of a proposed evaluation protocol both for the center's start-up and for its long-term sustainability. Those recommendations appear below.

Sequence of Activities

To accomplish its scope of work, the capstone's timeline anticipated some need for flexibility. Meaningful community relationships, after all, require patience to develop. They evolve at the community's pace, not the institution's. Further, community needs can change over time, either gradually or suddenly. Even while allowing for these variables, however, the capstone's work plan followed a rough sequence of phases.

Phase 1: Internal resource-gathering (fall 2015). The project began with an inventory of institutional interests and its potential commitments of staff time, space, services, and other resources to support the effort. To avoid later disillusionment, it seemed advisable to confirm these matters — conceptually, at least — before external partners were invited into the conversation. The initial guiding conversations illuminated the expectations and hopes of the institution's leaders, providing a foundation for later work on the center's membership configuration, key functions, and operational principles. At this stage of the project, institutional resources space, staff support, educational services, and funds were evaluated. Equally important, the Campus Center for Community Engagement secured the conceptual support of the campus president and trustees.

Phase 2: External relationship development (fall-winter 2015-16). Once the college's expectations and limitations were outlined conceptually, the work turned to a structured effort to gather the input of internal stakeholders as well as potential community partners. To a large extent, their guidance was acquired operationally, through one-to-one or small-group

conversations as a routine component of partnership-building. More formally, the work drew on stakeholder-produced documents, meeting minutes, and transcripts of input-gathering sessions. As the project moved toward more binding commitments, draft operational documents were crafted for stakeholder commentary.

Phase 3: Operational documentation (winter-spring 2016). At its final stage, the project engaged with matters of policy, procedure, and documentation. These items required both institutional and community input, drawing on functional relationships in place between the two. A critique of draft materials on mission, scope of services, processes, and metrics rounded out the year's work.

Project Methodology: Positionality, Evidence-Gathering, and Analysis

As a doctoral-level project, the capstone's approach drew on the framework of the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID), which envisions a culminating experience that "treats the 'practice' part of students' lives as the wellspring of inspiration that makes their doctoral study richer and more powerful" (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006, p. 29). In the CID vision, the doctoral journey ends with an in-service residency, where students engage in self-conscious evaluation and integration of their experiences. Proponents of that approach are not limited to graduate schools of education, however. Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs (2010) describe a growing interest in applied graduate studies across a variety of disciplines, including not only education, but also business, healthcare, and public administration. In a management context, Raelin (2008) identifies three characteristics that distinguish this emerging educational practice. First, the learning is acquired in the midst of action and the task at hand. Second, it emphasizes creative and collective activity while, third, it challenges the practitioner to question

underlying assumptions of practice.

Even though Raelin's (2008) examples emphasize corporate environments, he devotes several chapters to the academic theory and assumptions that underpin his own argument. At the foundational level, Raelin rejects the epistemologies of positivism and logical empiricism in favor of a constructivist view. "Knowledge undergoes construction and transformation [and is] as much a dynamic as static concept, as much a collective activity as individual thought," Raelin writes (p. 67). From that vantage point, learning occurs constantly in everyday life, building not only on experiences, but also on values, affiliations, and even emotions. This view of knowledge acquisition, Raelin argues, is of particular relevance in the development of organizational leaders, especially those who aspire to lead collaboratively.

Within that epistemological framework, advocates of practice-based study note that its pedagogy reflects deep traditions within adult education. For Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs (2010), those wellsprings include Vygotskii's (1962) notion of *social situatedness* and Knowles' (1986) *learning contracts*. Raelin (2008), in turn, draws on Kolb's (1984) *experiential learning*, Bandura's (1986) *social learning theory*, and Bruner's (1978) *scaffolding*, among other pedagogies, to ground what he calls the *action project*. The centerpiece of Raelin's model, however, is Schön's (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. There, Schön proposed that advanced practitioners build knowledge — and, potentially, even theory — as they reflect on challenges of practice, reiteratively engage in problem-posing, data-gathering, acting, evaluating, and reflecting, and then share publicly what they learn. Raelin concludes that effective leadership requires mastery of these "metacompetencies" (p. 13).

Proponents argue that insider-led, workplace-based study benefits not only the learner,

but also the host organization. Raelin (2008) situates work-based learning at the crossroads between adult education and organizational development, arguing that one cyclically becomes the platform for advancing the other. Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that this synergy produces a distinct form of extra-disciplinary *mode 2* knowledge that deliberately blurs the distinction between user and creator, generating applications that, while grounded in traditional academic study, have their primary value outside of the academy (Gibbons et al., 1994, as cited in Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010).

While highlighting the unique qualities of project-based worksite learning, its advocates also recognize the utility of established research traditions as sources of guidance in question-design, evidence-gathering, and analysis (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010). The choices may be shaped by the nature of the project, the disciplinary orientation of the practitioner, and the characteristics and interests of the host organization. In this capstone's instance, the design borrows some characteristics of a single-organization case study. A number of researchers — among them, Hancock and Algozzine (2011), Stake (1995), and Yin (2014) — have set out the foundational considerations for case-study inquiry. As Stake (1995) phrases it, much can be learned from a sustained attempt to “catch the . . . particularity and complexity of a single case” (p. xi) both in its own detail and in its interaction with its context. This capstone has sought to accomplish just that.

While drawing on the tradition of case study, however, the current capstone remains fundamentally an insider-led, practice-based project. In setting the stage for such an undertaking, Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs (2010) advocate a mindset that is “active, personal, experience-based, linking theory and practice, illuminative, and reflective” (p. 160). In keeping

with that orientation, this project's findings and recommendations have been informed by methodical observation of public conversations, documents, events, and initiatives that occurred over the capstone's timeframe, both in public and in operational settings within the institution. The site-based evidence was drawn primarily from close observation of the life of Highline College, its communications, publications, community partnerships, and operational activities between September 2015 and May 2016. The work built on a yearlong practicum conducted at Highline between summer 2014 and spring 2015. Earlier observations of the college's functions — particularly between April 2014 and the present — provided important background.

Positionality and objectivity. By its very nature, the capstone took the form of an insider-led, participant inquiry. Adherents like Greene (2014) and Unluer (2012) summarize the advantages of that approach as essentially three-fold. The insider, proponents argue, benefits from contextual knowledge of the organization under study, access to its people and resources, and an ability to interact naturally in organizational functions and relationships without disturbing them. Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs (2010) see additional advantages in workplace-based projects that are led specifically by long-term incumbents. In addition to their deeper personal investment in the host organization's success, seasoned employees offer an extraordinarily nuanced understanding of the "micro-politics" of that organization (p. 33).

Of course, there are dangers as well. One is the potential for bias and excessive subjectivity. Another is the risk of professional harm to co-workers and organizational partners. While conceding that subjectivity is virtually unavoidable in any workplace project, Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs (2010) offer a variety of bias-reduction strategies — including self-reflection and disclosure, triangulation of results, and participant review of findings — to control the

approach's risks. They go on to devote an entire chapter to the ethical considerations of insider-led inquiry in an organizational setting. Throughout the project's evidence-collection and analysis, I was mindful of the need to balance the assets and liabilities of my position within the project, the college, and its communities.

As one of the four vice presidents at Highline, I carry a proportionate share of responsibility for all of the college's four mission pillars, locally called *core themes*. Of particular relevance to the C3E project is Core Theme 3, which obligates the institution to "strengthen and expand the presence and role of the college within the communities it serves" (Highline College, 2016). In spring 2014, when the campus trustees and president called on campus leaders to redouble the college's engagement in the community, I sought permission to nominate Highline as one of four Working Families Success Network (WFSN) pilot sites, seeing that designation as a first step toward the larger C3E initiative. The WFSN and C3E initiatives are, in that sense, my responsibility. I do not, however, manage the initiatives directly. In them, my role has been to organize people and resources, represent the college's executive leadership, and set a general direction for project-related activities. During the capstone period, the evaluation of C3E's feasibility served as a temporary addition to my role.

In that sense, even though I have direction-setting responsibility for the C3E project, I am not its designated leader. No mandate has called for C3E to come into being, nor have I been placed formally in charge of its development. In their continuum of interactivity between the insider-leader and other stakeholders, Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs (2010) might place my involvement at the midpoint, which they label *developmental*. A developmental project, they argue, requires greater leader-participant interaction than a purely observational, information-

gathering report, but far less than an action research initiative in which everyone unites around a single pre-defined goal. In the developmental middle-ground, the project leader engages intermittently with other stakeholders when appropriate, gathering impressions and information that can guide organizational development, rather than implement a specific outcome.

Despite the relative distance of that position, however, I recognize that my objectivity has been unavoidably influenced by such a close connection to the project's major elements. I care about the long-term success of the college, its community, and the people associated with both. More concretely, I also recognize that I have a professional stake in the project's outcomes. Without doubt, these personal and professional investments work against objectivity. Those limitations are somewhat offset, however, by a correspondingly deep contextual understanding. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is further offset by my lack of familiarity with the specific responsibilities of guiding a community-engagement initiative at the C3E scale. That level of campus-to-community partnership falls outside the typical duties of the academic vice president, particularly in its direct relationship to grassroots community-based organizations. Though focused primarily on community college CEOs, studies of campus-to-community connections suggest that such alignments form primarily at the level of leadership peers — with school officials, government and agency heads, and business-owners, for example — rather than with everyday resident groups (Deggs & Miller, 2013; Parker, 2010; York, 2001). In attempting to bridge that divide, the project enters into unfamiliar territory for everyone.

It should be stressed that the inquiry focused solely on institutional processes, not on the people who work, study, or volunteer in that setting. No data was collected from individual interviews, surveys, or personally-identifiable, private, or confidential materials. No attempt was

made to measure or draw conclusions about the characteristics, responses, or development of individuals or groups. All participants were adults, their demographics generally reflecting the college's and community's diversity of ages, ethnicities, and racial self-identifications. The nature of their participation was role-driven. As appropriate to the project tasks, individuals joined the endeavor as part of the regular course of their professional or volunteer capacities. As a further protection, personal identifiers — names, position titles, and specific affiliations — have been omitted from the report narrative, whether the original remarks appeared in an operational meeting, project-related email, or working draft. Document authorship has been assigned only to institutionally archived materials.

For the project's activities to proceed authentically, it was important that participants viewed their contributions as a routine component of their daily activities, not part of a research study. As appropriate, I informed individual respondents verbally that my leadership of the project was in partial fulfillment of the requirements of my practice-based doctoral studies. However, because the vast majority of activities took place in public and operational settings, the need for such disclosure arose rarely. Internally, because the project had secured the conceptual support and approval of Highline College's president, college staff naturally contributed to the project as appropriate to their roles, with little or no risk to them. Across the project's potential non-college partners, individual and agency contributions remained strictly voluntary.

Evidence-gathering: Project setting, participants, and other sources. To provide evidence for analysis, the project's design followed in the footsteps of organizational case study, gathering data both from direct observation of organizational process and from institutional documentation of those processes (Hancock and Algozzine, 2011; Stake, 1995).

Setting. The project activities took place in the day-to-day work environment of Highline College, its service district, and the offices, conference rooms, and informal meeting places where college staff interact with community members. Unavoidably, at the scale of a community college district like Highline's, community-building interactions occur in a variety of settings. In this particular project's case, for example, many operational discussions took place over coffee or lunch with a single respondent. At the other end of the scale, over 100 community members attended project-relevant events like September's Harwood Institute in Tukwila.

Participants. Participants included the relevant staff and faculty of the college, as well as representatives of service providers, community-based organizations, and other agencies that have entered into college-community partnerships. Internally, the project drew heavily on interactions with the college's trustees, president, and executive staff, as well with various individuals, committees, and project teams that have a role in the college's community-engagement efforts. External contacts included city- and county-level human services staff, board members of community-based organizations, county council staff, and executive directors of non-profit organizations.

Due to the dynamic nature of community engagement itself, it is difficult to fix a precise number of participants who were directly engaged in the project over the capstone period. Nonetheless, it is possible to estimate the number of individuals who played a consistent, in-depth role in project-related groupings. That estimate — roughly 60 to 80 people, altogether — included the college's trustees (n = 5), executive staff (n = 5), academic deans and directors (n = 15), student services leads (n = 7), and direct-service staff in the college's Working Families

Success Center (n = 8). Outside the college, relevant representatives included government agencies (n = 8), non-profit providers (n = 8), and community-based organizations (n = 14).

To capture useful material from these interactions, the material was gathered in personal notes, taken both during and after relevant conversations or events. To a large extent, the in-process notes simply recorded facts, operational matters, and impressions as they emerged in the moment. An additional, reflective commentary focused on capturing opportunities, barriers, connections, and common concerns that lingered after the immediate interaction. In no case did the notes include any observations or characterizations of participant behaviors. The notes themselves were maintained on a single, password-protected laptop computer.

Documents. In addition to operational conversations and observations, the project drew on a substantial body of documentary evidence. Common items included official college publications, meeting materials, relevant grant applications, draft operational documents, interim project evaluations, and summaries and compilations of work-group responses to planning-related questions. These operational work-products were organized into a tabbed set of binders. Publicly accessible, institutionally archived publications were cited in the report's reference list.

Experience. Finally, Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs (2010) point to experience as an important source of evidence in insider-led workplace inquiry. Throughout the capstone activity period, I served as the chief academic officer of Highline College, a role that I have held since 2008. Prior to that date, I served for eight years as an instructional dean at Highline and, before that, for seven years as an academic administrator at another Washington community college. My 35-year career in the community college includes over a dozen years as a full-time instructor. It also includes over 25 years of experience as an accreditation team evaluator and chair, a role

that requires significant contextual sensitivity as well as facility in discerning campus-wide themes from a mixture of documentary evidence and interviews. Collectively, those experiences have informed my understanding of the two-year campus, its evaluation, Highline College, and Highline's service district.

Framework for evidence-gathering. To provide an organizing framework for data collection, the project specifically followed the trajectories of four distinct, but related campus-to-community collaborations — the South King Council on Human Services (SKCHS), Bring It to the Table, Working Families Success Network (WFSN), and Communities of Opportunity (COO). Though different from one another in many ways, all four share the common goal of creating greater unity, wider and more equitable access to opportunity, and a louder community voice across the landscape of South King County. For example, SKCHS represents a long-established, community-driven, and essentially college-independent collaborative that could eventually serve a region-wide backbone organization. By contrast, Bring It to The Table is a fledgling, college-led initiative designed to foster similar dialogue across similar entities. WFSN, in turn, stands as a functioning, college-housed collaboration among community-based providers, potentially able to support region-wide, issue-driven conversations. Finally, COO brings the considerable resources and organizational infrastructure of county government and the Seattle Foundation into the regional neighborhood-redevelopment picture.

For the capstone's purposes, each of these initiatives and entities illustrated a different framework of relationships among the college, local service providers, government, and community members. In effect, each offered either a potentially competing prototype for the Campus Center for Community Engagement's (C3E's) development or, more constructively, a

potential pillar in the C3E's eventual foundation. Accordingly, the four initiatives — and, importantly, the interplay between them — served as the project's primary organizational framework for evidence-gathering. A more detailed description of each follows.

South King Council on Human Services. Over 100 members strong, the fee-based South King Council on Human Services (2013) traces its roots to a United Way-funded initiative in the 1990s, originally intended to gather the South King County region's providers for information-sharing, coordination, and joint advocacy. In late-summer 2015, SKCHS underwent a comparatively sweeping process of re-visioning, with the intention of redefining its role as a regional convener and, in some sense, an emerging community support organization. Significantly, no comparable area-wide collaboration exists to compete with SKCHS in those functions. SKCHS's relevance to the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) is two-fold. On one hand, the college has offered to host SKCHS as an on-campus backbone from which C3E could directly evolve. In that scenario, Highline College might provide such assets as office support, fiscal management, grant-writing resources, and convening space to advance SKCHS's evolution as the eventual center of C3E's structure. On the other hand, if SKCHS opts to maintain its identity as a stand-alone non-profit, it could easily emerge as an independent competitor to C3E. In that event, the college's interests would be better served by "coming alongside" SKCHS, to quote one board member's phrasing. During the capstone project period, SKCHS significantly expanded its range of community support services, suggesting that its inclinations leaned toward independent expansion. When asked, the college provided staff resources to support SKCHS's data-sharing and grant-writing workshops, as well as a video project designed to highlight successful South King County community leaders. In addition to

my operational participation in these initiatives, I met monthly with SKCHS's board president and, periodically, with individual board members and SKCHS's executive director throughout the capstone project period.

Bring It to the Table. Highline College's Professional-Technical Education division launched the Bring It to the Table initiative in spring 2015, offering the quarterly series of campus-hosted events as an opportunity for community organizations across the region to convene, converse, and share their collective ideas for partnership both with Highline College and with one another. The first breakfast gathering June 5, 2014, attracted 28 organizational representatives, while a second dinnertime event February 4, 2015, drew 32. A year later, a February 11, 2016, luncheon brought almost 40 participants to campus. As a potential platform for the Campus Center for Community Engagement's development, the events served as an early prototype of a college-led, campus-centered model for community collaboration. As a data source, then, the gatherings had particular value. Not only did they provide in-person opportunities to listen and observe project-relevant conversations; they also produced both raw and summarized records of attendees' written responses to open-ended questions around community need, opportunity, and possible collaboration structures. The list of invitees, in fact, could easily form the first iteration of a Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) steering committee. Though I did not organize or facilitate the events, I attended both sessions, participated in their planning, and reviewed their written products. At the capstone period's end, Bring It to the Table continued to offer promise as a sounding-board and advisory venue for C3E's next-step planning process.

Working Families Success Network. The Campus Center for Community Engagement

(C3E) concept deliberately builds on Highline College's successful spring 2015 launch of a Working Families Success Network (WFSN) center on campus. By design, that facility brings together college staff and community-based organizations in a set of partnerships to address the non-academic needs of low-income adult learners and their households. For the college's part, WFSN's key attraction was its ability to remove extra-institutional barriers that, left unaddressed, too often derail the academic plans of non-traditional students. To those ends, WFSN's services include work and income supports, public benefits screening, and social service referrals.

Beyond its direct impact on student attainment, however, Highline's leaders further believed — and continue to believe — that WFSN can create a foundation for deeper dialogue around community needs, local assets, and the potential for additional collaborations. By forming an intentional circle of partnership with its low-income adult enrollees, the college hopes to engage constructively with those students' families, employers, neighbors, service providers, and faith-based and cultural communities in an ongoing effort to better understand community needs, assets, and opportunities for synergy.

As a source of evidence for the capstone inquiry, WFSN offered a tangible prototype of a campus-housed service center that could both identify and respond to community needs. The capstone period overlapped closely with WFSN's second year of implementation. Over that time, WFSN's funders required regular program evaluations, both written and interview-based, of the center's progress. The resulting records — along with the process of preparing for them — became invaluable as sources of information for the capstone inquiry. Though I did not directly supervise WFSN, I provided guidance to its dean-level leadership team, participated in grant-related evaluation tasks, and advocated for Washington's WFSN colleges at both the state

and national levels. Through these activities, I gathered a considerable storehouse of text, interactions, and impressions to draw from.

Communities of Opportunity. Finally, Communities of Opportunity (COO) represents a relatively formalized, well-resourced, conceptually-based attempt to achieve many of the same goals as C3E's. Jointly funded by King County government and the Seattle Foundation, COO describes itself as a "place-based initiative that aims to improve race, health and socio-economic equity in King County . . . by partnering with communities to shape and own solutions" (King County, 2015a, n.p.). Its framework reflects the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity's geography-based approach to identifying and confronting regional inequities, often borrowing Kirwan's language to describe them (Kirwan Institute, 2010). Recognizing that South King County generally houses the most opportunity-poor neighborhoods in the region, COO's work had focused — at least, initially — on Highline College's service area.

Despite those alignments, Highline's two prior applications for COO funding had been denied, one in October 2014 and the other in late-January 2015. Both applications effectively proposed the C3E start-up as a funding target. In its initial rounds of grant-making, COO's awards emphasized well-established community-based organizations in South King County, many of them issue-directed. Successful applicants included African Americans Reach and Teach Health, Futurewise, Global to Local, The Mockingbird Society, OneAmerica, Open Doors for Multicultural Families, King County Public Defender Association, Puget Sound Sage, Skyway Solutions, and the White Center Community Development Association. Collectively, these recipients spanned such interests as healthcare, housing, justice, foster youth, and immigration rights. As COO officials said publicly, the first few funding cycles were targeted at

organizations that could demonstrate quick, reliable outcomes. Later, in COO's second round, the funders awarded fewer contracts, this time more clearly emphasizing regional collaborations such as White Center's Promise Neighborhoods initiative and the Food Innovation Network, a food production, preparation, and marketing collaborative headquartered in Tukwila.

As Highline College's primary COO grant-writer, I had the opportunity to read COO's materials, develop the college's proposals, attend county-organized COO information sessions, and hold multiple conversations with COO officials. These documents, comments, and impressions formed the fourth body of evidence for the capstone's investigation.

Supplementary sources. Of course, the four primary initiatives were not the sole information sources for the project. Over the course of the capstone, I also represented the college in smaller-scale, but related initiatives. One was Global Leadership 2040, a multi-agency collaboration intended to build a civic-engagement curriculum for emerging leaders in local immigrant communities. Through the municipal human services community, I offered the college's support to a budding anti-poverty initiative led by the South King County mayors. More tangentially, I advised the college's representatives in region-wide collaborations such as the Communities of Opportunity-funded Food Innovation Network (FIN) pilot. These additional connections provided depth, resonance, and detail to round out the available evidence.

Approach to analysis. Stake (1995) draws on Erickson (1986) in arguing for the term *interpretation* as the central task of case analysis. That interpretive process, Stake argues, takes place throughout the course of the investigation, potentially altering even the research questions themselves as unexpected phenomena, relationships, and insights emerge. Hancock & Algozzine (2011) paint a similar picture, arguing that "making sense of the information collected from

multiple sources is a recursive process [requiring] repetitive, ongoing review of accumulated information in order to identify recurrent patterns, themes, or categories” (pp. 62, 67). In developing the capstone project’s findings and recommendations, ongoing interpretation served as a key tool. Often in real time, the analysis attempted to discern promising avenues from discouraging ones, desirable structures from potentially troublesome ones, and valuable resources from those of little worth. As such, the analysis was both reflective and iterative, moving between different lines of inquiry even as tentative conclusions began to emerge.

The first-phase interrogation of Highline College’s leadership, goals, challenges, and history formed the backdrop against which the other evidence was tested for relevance, applicability, and context. As an overarching organizational framework, the analysis focused on commonalities and divergences in the project’s four primary investigative threads — South King Council on Human Services (SKCHS), Bring It to the Table, Working Families Success Network (WFSN), and Communities of Opportunity (COO). Working from the relevant notes, journal entries, project documents, and observations of these four exemplars, the effort sought to identify common themes as well as contradictions in the quartet of stories. To a degree, this cross-comparison allowed for triangulation of the evidence as well as a comparative evaluation among competing models. Because the project did not seek to build theory, no open system of coding was used. As insights took shape, they were sorted into groupings that aligned with the proposal’s guiding questions. Eventually, this non-linear methodology led to the findings and conclusions that end this report. In keeping with Raelin’s (2008) admonition toward rigorous public self-reflection, key stakeholders reviewed an executive summary of the report prior to its final submission. Their feedback provided a final check for accuracy.

Contextual and historical issues of importance. Like any place-based institutional intervention, the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) project derives its energy, trajectory, and limits from its context — in this case, Highline College and its surrounding communities. That context, predictably enough, includes a mixture of assets and liabilities that emerge from the institution's story.

Tax Day 2014: Resetting expectations for engagement. On April 15, 2014, the president of what was then Highline Community College called a rare, all-campus meeting to announce some important changes at the institution. By the event's 2:30 start-time, some 200 faculty and staff had gathered around the circular tables that filled the banquet hall's brightly sunlit floor. In people's prior experience, mid-year presidential speeches had usually brought news of budget cuts, leadership shake-ups, or other crises. Consequently, as the president stepped onto the low stage and approached the podium, the crowd waited quietly, expectantly, and perhaps a little anxiously to hear what he had to say.

This time, the message was different. Highline Community College, he said, would be dropping the word *community* from its name, reverting to the original two-word Highline College title, effective July 1. The change had been prompted, the president explained, by the impending launch of the college's first baccalaureate degrees. In anticipation of that new status, the trustees had concluded that a two-year college name might weaken the marketplace value of Highline's new four-year credentials. In his remarks, the president was careful to acknowledge that the top-down decree represented a departure from Highline campus culture. Normally, months of input-gathering would precede a decision of that magnitude. But in this case, he said, the trustees would not be dissuaded.

Behind the scenes, in fact, the college's executive leaders had considered a more collaborative process for contemplating the name-change. In their regular weekly meetings, the president and vice presidents had contemplated forming task forces, convening community forums, conducting surveys, and vetting the proposal through formal college governance channels. With the trustees already invested in the decision, however, the college's leaders concluded that any lengthy community-wide deliberations would ultimately run the risk of appearing disingenuous. Given the college's history of trust in its senior leadership, the downsides of a sham process seemed too great.

To be sure, the name-change had its detractors even at the board and executive levels. Even so, the majority came to see the action as, at the very least, a welcome occasion for recommitment to Highline's core values. To reinforce this connection, the president's April 15 remarks set out the aspirational goal that, through its actions, Highline College would demonstrate that its commitment to community had been strengthened, rather than weakened, by the deletion of its middle name. "We want to use the name change as an occasion for deeper discussion and commitment to attainment and community engagement — as the board directed us," the president said. "For those that are concerned that our mission will be eroded, I ask you to put your energy in support of those initiatives that make certain that it's not."

Looking back: Revisiting institutional foundations. Highline College's commitment to its community did not begin that day, of course. The president's aspirational message reinforced a longstanding, campus-wide orientation toward community engagement that had manifested itself, both formally and informally, in a number of highly visible community-based initiatives over time. Programmatically, some of the longest-standing and most prominent examples

included a countywide supported-employment program for adults with disabilities, the campus's economic development and microenterprise resources, and Highline's large non-credit English as a Second Language (ESL) program, based primarily in neighborhood sites. For many years, until 2008's budget shortfall forced its closure, the college had operated a branch facility in nearby Federal Way, eventually housing an alternative early-college high school at that site. At the district's far-north end, to supplement its longstanding ESL offerings there, Highline had partnered with the YWCA to offer workforce certificate programs at White Center's Greenbridge Learning Center. Meantime, as recently as May 2013, the college had promoted its chief outreach officer to an expanded position as director of community engagement.

In short, an expectation of community engagement was nothing new to Highline. In fact, in an ironic twist, the staff-selected theme for the 2013-14 year's kick-off week had been, "Community is our middle name." When that middle name literally disappeared a half-year later, the reversal slowed no one. Admittedly, a few people quipped that the next fall's theme should be "Community *was* our middle name." But, tangibly, the president's April 15 remarks — the "Tax Day Speech," as it became known — ushered in a flurry of new, outward-turning activity. New connections to the community arose, as did new ways of making those connections. For example, the Athletics Department and Institutional Advancement Office joined forces to sponsor a "sports diplomacy" initiative, bringing youth and adult soccer teams from local immigrant communities onto the campus for skills workshops and informal tournaments, often with community resource-providers available on the sidelines. Building on a three-year track record, the college's Black and Brown Male Youth Summit was joined in 2014 by a female-only counterpart. Soon after, a two-day Latino Summit brought over 300 middle-

and high-schoolers to Highline. Meantime, the Administrative Services Office loosened its facility-use guidelines, allowing the vice presidents to waive rental fees for partner-sponsored events. That change opened new opportunities for providers such as the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project and OneAmerica to hold immigration workshops onsite. Hundreds attended. In this same period, Academic Affairs hired its first off-campus program administrator, giving that individual oversight of the college's White Center offerings and launching a site-sharing negotiation with Federal Way Public Schools.

It is hard to argue, of course, that these new initiatives were motivated specifically by the Tax Day Speech. But, collectively, they suggest that the college succeeded in retaining — even growing — its community-engaged momentum, in spite of losing its symbolic middle name. Nearly two years after the address, the president returned to its themes in a faculty-wide meeting. After an update on district-wide socioeconomic data, he noted that, “In South King County’s context, our college’s role in the community is far more important than it might be otherwise.” To fulfill the institutional mission in that environment, he added, the college’s culture must be “unconditionally welcoming.”

An imagined future: The Campus Center for Community Engagement idea. Over the same period, as the campus’s community-engagement initiatives continued to blossom, the Campus Center for Community Engagement idea began to gain a foothold in the college’s executive-level conversations. The concept was particularly attractive to Highline’s president, who had gained familiarity with college-housed, non-profit incubators as part of a 1998-2002 USAID project in South Africa. Closer to home, in South King County’s setting, the concept’s attractiveness drew from several wellsprings. For one, the center offered an opportunity to

heighten the influence of neighborhood-level community members, a longstanding goal of Highline's executive-level leaders. The phrase *community voice* was one that the president himself often used, both with his leadership team and with the community itself. Routinely, when welcoming community groups to campus, he encouraged them literally to see the college as theirs. In that vision, residents not only would feel comfortable accessing the campus and its services, but would develop a sense of ownership there, ultimately taking an active role in shaping the institution to meet their needs.

Attaining that vision, however, had proven elusive. The college's leaders were constantly reminded of South King County's neighborhood fragmentation, high resident turnover, and lack of grassroots leadership. The word *fragile* often came up in executive-level characterizations of the community's fabric. In some aspirational sense, then, the Campus Center for Community Engagement came to be seen as a potential antidote to that sense of disconnection. As an extension of the college's outward-looking community-engagement work, the center might create a stable, campus-based home where community voice might flourish.

Ironically, the concept gained considerable momentum from a frustrating series of lost opportunities. One irritant was the county's two-time rejection of the college's Communities of Opportunity applications. But, by far, the most acute disappointment was Sound Transit Authority's July 23, 2015, decision to locate its proposed ST2 light rail line along the Interstate 5 freeway corridor, rather than in the median of the Pacific Highway arterial, closer to campus. With the full support of Highline's trustees, college officials had pressed hard for the Pacific Highway option during ST2's public comment period. Students and staff joined the effort, participating in hearings, meeting with transit staff and, eventually, testifying before Sound

Transit's board itself. The college's pro-Pacific Highway argument was two-fold, incorporating both a college-centric and community-centric rationale. On the one hand, Pacific Highway's greater proximity to campus would result in safer, more convenient, and more visible access to the college, encouraging greater participation in the college's educational programming over time. On the other hand, from a community-development perspective, that option would better serve car-less residents, create more transit-oriented development, and destroy fewer low-income housing units. "[The alignment] is fundamentally an equity issue," Highline's president repeatedly testified. Student and staff testimony reiterated that theme.

Needless to say, when the Sound Transit's decision was announced, many on the campus felt betrayed. Once again, it appeared, the community's collective voice had been silenced. Its disorganized, latecomer advocates had seemingly been outmaneuvered by a better-coordinated contingent of developers, business owners, and city planners. In a campus study session, one participant called the Interstate 5 option "transit for white people." A *never again* sentiment took hold among some of the college's stakeholders, often reinforced in conversations with community members themselves. If only a more established center for community collaboration had been in place, the argument went, perhaps the outcome would have been different.

Ironically, the college's disappointment quickly turned into political leverage with Sound Transit. While Highline's president had been making the rounds of transit-related hearings and one-on-one conversations, the county's elected officials had repeatedly assured him that the college's interests would be taken into account in the alignment decision. County staff, in turn, had generally conveyed a similar message to the college's executive team. Almost immediately after the transit board's unwelcome decision became public, transit officials reached out to the

college's trustees and president, inviting them to help shape the nearby station's design. Though the stop would be a block east of Pacific Highway — and, hence, at least two blocks east of the campus entrance — the college was encouraged to offer its ideas for making the site as student- and community-friendly as possible. With newfound political capital to spend, the college opted to refloat an earlier proposal to co-develop a county-owned community services facility at the light rail station.

That facility, if funded, could house the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E), offering a tangible shell for the C3E vision. The college, county government, and the region's community-based organizations all agree that the sub-region's services are too scattered to meet people's needs, particularly for low-income residents. Campus support staff, for example, routinely complain that "It's a two-hour bus ride if I send someone from the college to the closest [public benefits] office for assistance." Just as often, providers themselves echo that complaint. To address the concern, a county-owned human services center could bring together a wide variety of much-needed governmental supports — public health, unemployment services, public assistance, safety, and county housing, among others — in one transit-friendly location, adjacent to the community college's educational services. Non-profit providers could share that space, offering healthcare, employment assistance, financial coaching, mental health counseling, education and training referral, and other services, all in a convenient one-stop setting. For its part, the college could provide intake advising onsite. Ideally, the lobby would offer an inviting, open space for community gatherings, celebrations, and cultural exhibits. In the evenings, the building's conference rooms would be available for community groups to meet, confer, and plan. At that point, with some facilitation from Highline College or one of its community partners, the

Campus Center for Community Engagement could coalesce as a platform for participant-driven social and political force, a single gathering place for the region's neighborhood leaders. That, in effect, is the future that college officials have traced for the county's staff in the wake of the light rail decision. Admittedly, it is an ambitious request, but not an unreachable one. After a Communities of Opportunity planning session, one county staff member rephrased the concept as "an opportunity hub that leverages the collective community resources offered in South King County that creates a strong and sustainable social infrastructure for families." That language aligns seamlessly with the college's vision.

Project Outcomes

Figure 4 presents the original draft logic model for the Campus Center for Community Engagement as a whole, integrating both its timeline and its key objectives. In many respects, the initial model followed the developmental sequence outlined in the ACCLAIM Project's framework (Boone, 1992, 1997; Boone, Pettitt, & Weisman, 1998; Lisman 1996). In his book-length examination of that initiative, Boone (1997) and his colleagues outlined 15 necessary "processual tasks," each a key step in institutionalizing what they called Community-Based Programming (CBP) in the two-year college sector. The 15 tasks can be grouped into a set of larger building blocks:

1. Defining *community-engagement* and aligning it with institutional mission (Tasks 1-3)
2. Assembling and orienting internal and external steering-group members (Tasks 4-6)
3. Building a community-driven decision-making coalition (Tasks 7-9)
4. Selecting a pilot-test community issue (Task 10)
5. Developing and implementing a response plan to that issue (Tasks 11-12)

6. Evaluating and reporting results (Tasks 13-14)

7. Using the results to address new issues and implement new strategies (Task 15)

When grouped into these larger segments, Boone's processual tasks align almost perfectly with Tadlock's (1978) much earlier, nine-step planning process for what he called *community-based education*. Whatever name is applied to these processes, at full implementation, they are intended to drive a virtuous cycle of college-and community collaboration. In each sequence, the parties jointly select an issue, develop a response plan, and formatively assess that plan's success, sharing the feedback to inform the next round of problem-identification and co-planning.

A similar, self-sustaining cycle is the long-term goal of Highline's Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E). In its larger context, however, the center seeks to establish itself as a community-institutionalized resource, able to carry out repeated cycles of issue-identification, planning, response, and evaluation. Accordingly, the capstone project served, in part, to create the structural framework for that longer-term outcome, adapting a CPB-like approach to the demographic diversity, geographic dispersion, and resource challenges of South King County. Figure 5 offers a revised model as, in itself, one of the capstone's key products.

Other outcomes follow from the project work plan. Draft governance documents, proposed membership configurations, and other deliverables appear as appendices to this report. The report's final findings and recommendations, as well, represent outcomes that Highline College can incorporate into its C3E planning efforts.

Evaluation Methods

The project's plan anticipated two levels of evaluation — first, a formative assessment of

in-process development and, second, a proposed summative measure of long-term project value.

Developmental evaluation: A model for in-process assessment. Patton (2011) has offered *developmental evaluation* as an appropriate approach for assessment of social innovations that are under development. Neither formative nor summative in intent, developmental assessment recognizes such organizational systems, metaphorically, as organisms that actively coevolve with their environments. In making that linkage, Patton grounds his approach explicitly in systems thinking and complexity theory, integrating concepts of nonlinearity, emergence, adaptation, uncertainty, and coevolution. To illustrate the connection to human endeavor, Patton draws on such metaphors as Gladwell's (2000) tipping points, Gleick's (1998) chaos theory, Taleb's (2007) black swans, and Wheatley's (1992) new science. Within these frameworks, as the development process unfolds, the system's objectives and structures necessarily remain in a state of near-constant transformation.

In that context, Patton argues, an effective evaluation design should intentionally contribute to — rather than inhibit — innovation. To meet that objective, developmental evaluators simultaneously assume both a functional and an evaluative role within the system under development. They are team members, leaders, and stakeholders who also undertake an evidence-based assessment of the system as it evolves, identifying and encouraging opportunities for in-process revisions and new directions. By intentionally avoiding the typical evaluation goals of either improving (formative) or valuing (summative) a given process, developmental evaluation invites dialogue, actively incorporates environmental change, and advances the further development of the system itself. McDavid, Huse, and Hawthorn (2013) note that evaluation designs of this kind can help to overcome the inherent time-span limitations of

traditional system design and evaluation.

Given the complexities of the Campus Center for Community Engagement's (C3E's) start-up, a developmental evaluation approach lends itself well to the C3E project. Such an approach could accommodate the diversity of project stakeholders, the blended roles of the participants, and the instability of the project environment.

Summative evaluation: The metrics of long-term impact. In the very long term, it is possible to envision a summative evaluation design for the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E). That design would, of necessity, reflect the multi-constituent nature of the center's core activities. That is, the evaluation would measure and document impacts across C3E's stakeholders — the college, its partners, and the community. As this capstone proposal's draft logic model (Figure 4) anticipates, a long-term assessment of the C3E's value would look for improvements in three key metrics:

1. Improvements in the host college's community engagement measures
2. Improvements in the partner organizations' self-defined measures of impact
3. Improvements in quality-of-life measures across the community

As the proponents of collective impact have argued, a common set of success measures, equitably benefitting all parties, hold the greatest promise of promoting long-term sustainability and progress in any collaborative community-building endeavor (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Findings and Implications

Over the inquiry's timespan, the local evidence yielded a variety of project-specific findings. In keeping with the project's guiding questions, those findings can be organized into community, institutional, and ethical dimensions.

Community-Referenced Findings

The project's community-referenced questions centered around matters of community need, representation, issues-identification, and communications. Within that framework, the relevant findings include the following.

Finding 1: Need for the project. Taken altogether, the capstone's evidence confirmed the community's need for an entity like the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E). Informant after informant expressed frustration at the lack of service coordination, political unity, and community voice across the South King County region. In keeping with the literature on regional disparity, the concern was often expressed in competitive terms, pitting wealthy city-dwellers against their poorer suburban cousins. As one government official complained, "All of the resources go to Seattle when the need is down here." The remark echoed a sentiment that is commonplace across local community-based organizations, bureaucracies, and neighborhood residents. One non-profit board member repeatedly lamented the difficulty of drawing Seattle-based funders southward for a firsthand look, adding that "The only reason they come down here is to go to the airport." An executive of a Seattle faith-based provider offered a similar rationale in explaining his organization's search for south-end partnerships. "We knew that we had to shift to the south, because so many have fled [Seattle]," he said.

In addition to its apparent unfairness, informants often noted the lack of south-end coordination as a source of inefficiencies. A longtime community organizer puts it this way: "There are a lot of silos [in South King County] that may overlap, but there's nothing to tie them together." The problem occurs at both a region-wide and neighborhood scale. At a White Center community meeting, a local non-profit manager lamented the disconnection between

King County Housing Authority's Seola Gardens and Greenbridge neighborhoods, two mixed-use redevelopments no more than 1.5 miles apart. "They're like two different countries," the manager said. In the political sphere, the consequences of community fragmentation have been evident in a wide variety of lost opportunities. For example, despite its potential value, the South King County Equity Plan has never been finished. That effort was launched at a November 2013 Equity Summit on Highline's campus, complete with a roster of high-profile speakers, funders, and collaborating organizations that included King County Executive Dow Constantine, the Kellogg Foundation, El Centro de la Raza, and the Atlanta-based Partnership for Southern Equity (DePaolo, Twersky, & McMichael, 2013). Today, the plan consists of a hand-drawn graphic and a few pages of notes. Several observers noted that the effort may have stumbled largely due to the absence of a long-term champion, particularly one whose base is outside the city. The story is common in South King County. A few years earlier, the Highline Communities Coalition succeeded in developing a more thorough, if less equity-driven, regional unity initiative (Barone et al., 2013) that seemingly faltered — in part, at least — due to the group's inability to establish the recommended staff, technology, and administrative center for such an effort. Sound Transit's ST2 alignment decision offers a sharp reminder that sustained, community-wide voice remains a critical need across Seattle's south suburbs.

Finding 2: Community representation. For an initiative like the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E), the recruitment, selection, and support of community representatives will present several especially difficult challenges.

First, the number and diversity of potential candidates is overwhelming. Even a quick inventory of existing college partnerships runs into the dozens. As new immigrant and resident

groups emerge, new community organizations emerge with them, whether formally or informally. The Eritrean, Southeast Asian, Latino, Somali, Iraqi, Pacific Islander, Burmese, Bhutanese, Filipino, Kenyan, and other communities have established cultural, civic, and social service groups of many kinds. Sometimes, as with the Burmese, one national identity may be represented by several cultural sub-groups. While that range of diversity is energizing, it presents significant challenges to any dominant-culture conceptions of representation.

The second challenge, paradoxically, is the relative invisibility of many community groups and their leaders. Despite their large numbers, they are often hidden from institutional view. In arguing for invitational soccer events as a low-barrier avenue for bringing communities onto the campus, Highline's president noted that the region's ethnic communities have "a history of hiding." The capstone reconfirmed that stubbornness of those obstacles. Despite its deliberate focus on widening the college's community relationships, the capstone's activities yielded only a handful of new grassroots-level contacts. The reasons are many. They include economic disparities, system opacity, lack of trust, and differences in community expectations. The upshot, however, is a consistent sense that potential neighborhood-level leaders are stretched thin. Often busy with multiple jobs, long commutes, and plentiful family and community obligations, they have little leftover capacity for navigating institutional bureaucracies. A *Seattle Times* profile of Kenyan immigrant Simon Nakhale illustrates that all-too-common dilemma (Tu, 2015). To travel from his Renton-area apartment to his three jobsites — two in downtown Seattle and the other in Auburn — Mr. Nakhale regularly leaves home at 2:25 a.m. and returns after 6:30 p.m., leaving his car-less wife Shivambo to cover, as best she can, their five children's daily school and community activities.

For the handful of community members who gain institutional acceptance as leaders, the pressures, if anything, only increase. Many end up as executive directors of micro-scale non-profit organizations. In South King County alone, the long list of examples includes Para Los Niños, the Kenyan Women’s Association, Iraqi Women’s Association, the Somali Health Board, and Coalition for Refugees from Burma. Rarely do these organizations employ more than two or three staff members, if any. In some cases, no one — not even the director — is paid. Whatever the organization’s financial meager resources might be, the leaders’ constant challenge is to raise more dollars for program activities. That challenge diverts energy away from organizational objectives and, instead, into a near-constant cycle of grant-seeking and fundraising. As the director of one start-up organization puts it, “As a young non-profit, we need more money — like a lot of others.” The Global Leadership 2040 project, which arose as an attempt to broaden community representation, eventually came to illustrate precisely the challenge there. Though the planners originally invited more than a dozen community members, only two appeared for the first handful of meetings. Eventually, they too withdrew, leaving the project in the hands of professional, mostly white, non-resident agency staffers.

In short, the geographic and ethnic dispersion, time constraints, and competing priorities of South King County’s potential community leaders argue for an especially thoughtful recruitment strategy for enlisting C3E representatives. Ideally, that strategy will be incremental and long-range, with an eye to capacity-building and support for participation, whether the college develops a stand-alone C3E membership or opts, instead, to merge with a existing group.

Finding 3: Community challenges. The community’s range of challenges is as scattered as its potential leaders. Over the course of the capstone activity period, Highline’s

community partners continued to raise a bewildering range of local challenges that, in their view, all merited the college's involvement. Some of the most common items included juvenile justice, transit equity, housing access, food security, and options for school-to-college transition for teen immigrants. Often, the requests were population- and neighborhood-specific as well. The Somali voice, for example, came primarily from SeaTac; the Burmese, from Tukwila or Kent. The most prominent Latino advocates, in turn, were interested in Burien's concerns, while Pacific Islanders drew their leadership from the White Center area, emphasizing the needs of those Seattle border neighborhoods.

Differences in geographies and constituencies are only part of the complexity. Time plays a role, too. As local conditions change, community needs change. Further, as community leaders themselves gain insight, power, and voice, they articulate new and different issues. As one longtime community leader puts it, "When asked what they want, community members will say one thing one time and something completely different the next time." It is not that they're confused, she hastens to add. It is a matter of their building more sophisticated requests on the foundation of greater systems knowledge.

Given the geographic dispersion and demographic diversity of South King County, it is hardly surprising that common ground is difficult to find. In such an environment, it seems ill-advised to force consensus, particularly since trust-building is a foundational element of community work. On the other hand, the professional literature makes a clear case for establishing a well-defined set of community-engagement objectives. Forging actionable goals, while honoring community dialog, will remain a core task of any coalition-building effort in metro-Seattle's southwest suburbs.

Finding 4: Community communications. Given the close link between communications and coordination, it should be no surprise that both are cited, with almost equal frequency, as a South King County concern. For example, at a Bring It to the Table event, one non-profit staff member lamented the extra time required to attend multiple meetings, at different locations, to keep up with local developments. “During community/organizational meetings such as this one,” the individual noted, the biggest challenges “are information overload.” Another participant asked to “create better connections and resources in the community and set up regular meetings and connections,” adding that “the challenge is who is going to set up and coordinate those meetings.” Comments like these underscore the need for a stable, accessible hub to improve regional communications.

Equally important is the equity of those communications. For example, in describing an ideal collaboration, one local immigrant group’s leader stressed the need for “responding directly to community needs and involving community in decision-making.” An equity advocate put the matter this way: “Our ideal model of collaboration keeps community at the center of decision-making and makes sure the community is at the table and engaged early and often.” Another participant offered similar sentiments, advocating “collaboration . . . between CBO partners/ethnic communities and institutional partners where resources are shared equitably and CBO/ethnic communities have voice and opportunity to shape programs and services that really address community needs.” Among its three organizational goals, one Food Innovation Network (FIN) partner links community to empowerment: “We want to increase the sense of community [so that our clients] feel empowered in this community and can impact this community.”

Fortunately, Highline College has seen some success in its endeavors to build wider,

more equitable collaboration across communities. Nearly a decade ago, the United Way of King County (2007) featured Highline and its longtime partner, Para Los Niños, in a study of successful collaborations between large-scale institutions and small, community-based groups. In that report, the authors noted that “the biggest behavioral shifts need to come from the large organization. . . . Therefore, it has become the responsibility of [Highline College] to foster a partnership in which . . . the small organization takes the lead” (p. 24). The study went on to identify six themes — acknowledging power differentials, committing to deep relationship, maintaining openness to mutual influence, fostering flexibility and adaptability, building trust, and valuing all partners’ skills — as keys to healthy collaborations across organizational difference. The template remains relevant today in envisioning an equitable, culturally responsive, and effective relationship between South King County’s communities and a region-wide, institutional hub that might tie them together.

Institutionally-Referenced Findings

The capstone’s inward-looking, college-oriented questions concentrated on matters of mission alignment, educational services, staffing and governance structures, sustainability, and communications. Relevant findings include the following items.

Finding 1: Mission alignment and metrics. In the area of mission alignment and metrics, the capstone project’s findings are mixed. On the positive side of the equation, Highline College’s current mission and strategic goals are well suited to supporting an initiative like the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E). On the other hand, the institution’s community-related metrics are insufficiently clear to define C3E’s trajectory.

In a global sense, the commitment to community engagement is embedded in the historic

mission of the two-year public campus and enshrined in the state's Community College Act (1967) that had created Highline College in the first place. A Highline-specific commitment to community had appeared as early as 1996 in the campus's first strategic plan. In that plan, one of seven operating principles called on the institution to "take an active role in the community [and] support community coordination efforts" (Highline Community College, 1996, p. 4). The document went on to identify three strategic initiatives as priorities for institutional planning. Of these, the second focused on the community. Though its language emphasized marketing activities and traditional K-12 and business partnerships, Strategic Initiative Two sought to expand not only the college's visibility in the community, but also its involvement with that community. Despite some additional wordsmithing, the sentiment remained durable in future strategic plans. A decade later, Highline Community College (2006) adopted new language — "Strengthen and expand the presence and role of the college within the communities it serves" — to express the same aspiration (p. 2). That phrasing remains current today, enshrined in what is now called Core Theme Three (Highline Community College, 2001). In August 2013, the obligation was formally embedded in the institution's mission statement, compelling the college to "sustain relationships within its communities" as one of its key functions (Highline College, 2013). Collectively, this documentary history helps to reveal the roots of the institution's present-day commitment to community service. Clearly, the everyday outward-turning activities of Highline's current faculty and staff rest on a solid foundation of formal governance support.

Less clear to people, however, are the metrics that define success there. Almost from the beginning, in fact, the college's Accreditation Steering Committee (ASC) has expressed dissatisfaction with Core Theme Three's measures. As recently as late-summer 2015, the group

continued to debate whether community surveys, community participation in campus events, or self-assessments like the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification provided the best tools for assessing Highline's attainment of its community-engagement goals (Highline College Accreditation Steering Committee, 2016). As one ASC member bluntly expressed the matter, "There is a difference of opinion about what should be counted and how it should be counted." Further, though a causal link would be difficult to establish, the February 2016 suspension of the college's Community Engagement Advisory Committee may reflect the campus's struggle to define its outward-turning goals and to prioritize them against other, more pressing objectives. "I TRULY want to find a way to make this committee worth all of our whiles when we meet," the chair emailed. "I will make sure we re-convene sometime after the spring after all dies down. Until then let's utilize our email capabilities . . . to SHARE information." Early community-engagement advocates like Cohen (1991) and Parnell (1982) worried about that very condition, predicting that campuses' community-oriented initiatives might forever be less well-defined, planned, and resourced than other mission elements. To some extent, Highline's experience bears out that worry.

Finding 2: Suitability of services. Despite the ambiguities in Highline's community-engagement measures, the evidence suggests that Highline College is well-positioned to assume a community-wide coordinating role. Response to the WFSN initiative, for example, has emphasized the potential for service-coordination. "It's the coolest thing ever," a local school official said of WFSN. "Families don't have to go to 10 different places to get services." Similarly, despite the college's failure to secure Communities of Opportunity (COO) funding in 2014 and 2015, the county's COO staff have continued to encourage the college's continued

involvement there, using the phrase “quarterback organization” to describe the college’s role. For similar reasons, the Global Leadership 2040 partners identified the college as the natural choice to coordinate that work. Even more notably, perhaps, the campus’s high profile during Sound Transit’s light rail discussions arguably demonstrated the college’s potential to convene grassroots stakeholders around matters of regional interest. To the extent that Highline College’s expertise, physical resources, jurisdictional footprint, and community-oriented values are recognized across the South County region, that community-level sentiment confirms the findings of Boone (1992, 1997), Cohen (1969), Harlacher (1969), Myran (1969, 1978, 2009), Pierce (1996), and others who have argued that the local community college is well-suited to a synergistic role in the community.

Attaining that role, however, requires significant confidence-building across a variety of resident constituencies. Arguably, the best foundation for such trust is a record of relevant service that, fortunately, Highline College has many mission-appropriate opportunities to build. For example, an especially easy resource to share is the college’s off-hours facilities. During the capstone period, community members often referenced the positive impact of in-gatherings held on campus. For college-sponsored outreach events, enthusiasm remains high, attracting hundreds of attendees. Informal activities like the college’s “sports diplomacy” initiative are popular and appreciated. When formal community-organized events move onto the campus, participants benefit from the quality of campus facilities and services, as well as gaining greater familiarity with Highline, its setting, and its people.

As an educational institution, though, Highline has far more to offer than simply its buildings and grounds. Its human capital is even more valuable. For example, with relatively

little institutional impact, Highline's faculty are able to conduct issue-specific briefings for community members, government officials, and community-based organizations. Likewise, the college is well-equipped to offer seminars, training programs, or formal coursework in community leadership skills. The campus can also provide facilitators and evaluators to support community-engagement activities. For grant-dependent non-profits and community-based organizations, Highline's knowledge-capital can be tapped for needs-assessment data, environmental scans, and evaluation designs. During the course of the capstone, in fact, an economics student agreed to conduct a much-wanted study of local food bank recipients. Another group of students signed up to assist with production of a video highlighting South King County success stories.

The wide range of possibilities, however, introduces the corollary challenge of prioritization. To maintain fidelity to its mission, the college will need to emphasize services that leverage its existing strengths — faculty expertise, research capacity, convening spaces, support resources, and educational programming. In identifying particular services to offer, however, a formal needs-assessment is likely to be counter-productive. In describing the White Center community, for example, one non-profit manager stressed that “The last thing that community needs is another needs-assessment. They've been needs-assessed to death.” The sentiment echoes Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), who describe community needs-assessment as “basically an effort to count up the emptiness in an individual or neighborhood” (p. 14). Surely a more community-driven, respectful approach can be found.

Finding 3: Resources and sustainability. Despite the project's eventual promise, the capstone period itself was marked by an over-layer of resource constraints. Institutionally, those

constraints include both operational and capital dollars. Community colleges, to begin with, are among the lowest-funded educational institutions in the public sector. Despite serving roughly half of the nation's undergraduates, the public two-year system has consistently garnered less than one-fifth the resources of its four-year counterparts (Sydow & Alfred, 2013). The gap, if anything, has worsened over time. According to the Century Foundation, in the last decade, per-student operating expenditures rose \$14,000 at public research universities, while in public two-year colleges the increase was \$1 (Stout, 2016).

The pattern of under-funding holds true in Washington. In the state's 2015-17 biennial budget, the community college system's allocation — which was, at best, a flat carry-forward from the prior biennium's figures — later proved to be hiding a \$7 million annual shortfall in employee compensation costs (Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges, 2016). The gap was further widened by the community colleges' \$32 million share of the *Moore v. Washington State Health Care Authority* (2014) judgement. When the 2016 supplemental budget failed to fund either of these liabilities fully, the system's projected deficit grew to \$23 million by FY 2017. For Highline College in particular, these shortfalls exacerbate a legacy of disproportionate funding. Today, on a per-student basis, Highline is among the lowest-funded community colleges in Washington (Morgan & Lutes, 2014). Worsening matters, the institution's lean budget limits its capacity for securing outside resources. Only in the last months of the capstone period, in fact, did the college secure a permanent, fulltime grant writer.

Even as the capstone's activities drew to a close, the project's resource challenges remained largely unanswered. For example, with the three-year WFSN grant set to expire in 2016-17, no replacement funds had been identified to fill that gap, let alone to expand WFSN

into a platform for the Campus Center for Community Engagement's (C3E's) development. On the contrary, the college will be challenged to sustain the direct \$80,000 liability of WFSN's lone staff member. Stated bluntly, the C3E objectives cannot be met through extensive staff hiring. In fact, in all likelihood, the initial work will fall entirely to existing employees. As a consequence, messaging and workload sensitivity will remain an essential leadership concern in implementing C3E.

Campus space is equally constrained. Coincidentally, during the same timeframe as the capstone's activity, Highline College undertook to revise its *Campus Master Plan* at the request of the City of Des Moines. As that effort rolled forward, the campus's long-term facility limitations became, if anything, increasingly painful to contemplate. Highline College's building stock is aging, heavily used, and largely devoted to general classrooms and labs, leaving scant room for new program start-ups or community gathering areas (Highline College, 2014a). With little hope of additional state-funded capital investment in the near future, the college will likely meet its most pressing facility needs primarily through minor renovations and reallocation of existing space. Expansion is virtually unthinkable.

Obviously, as a consequence, the institution is ill-positioned to set aside, remodel, and furnish large-scale facilities for a stand-alone C3E. Instead, in its early phases, the center will likely continue to co-occupy spaces already committed to use as offices and conference rooms. The Working Families Success Network (WFSN) start-up illustrates that challenge. Currently, the WFSN project shares an office in Building 1, originally designed as the college's business office and senior administrative suite. As part of the college's master planning update, half of that building was permanently repurposed to house the campus testing center, effectively

blocking any further expansion of WFSN's footprint. Elsewhere on campus, potential WFSN spaces were similarly reassigned to instructional uses or to faculty offices. A few areas, for financial reasons, were simply left in an unusable condition.

In light of these fiscal and facility-related constraints, the Campus Center for Community Engagement's (C3E's) start-up will require especially careful management of its financial and physical resources. Long-term, the project will almost surely require significant investments from outside Highline, both in facilities and in personnel. Though grants and contracts may offset some of C3E's early needs, its long-range viability will depend on innovative and durable resource-sharing agreements among the initiative's partners.

Finding 4: Internal communications. Evidence suggests that Highline College has yet to establish stable communications protocols to disseminate its community-engagement goals, activities, and success measures. To the extent that the college's outward-turning initiatives are reported to the campus at large, the information emanates almost exclusively from the Institutional Advancement Division and reflects only the activities that readily known to that division's staff. On the college's website, community-building information appears largely in pages controlled by Institutional Advancement. But other important connections are lost elsewhere. For example, the StartZone microenterprise initiative's site names a variety of promising and steadfast community partnerships that appear only on that page. Meantime, despite ongoing attempts to support an internal communications committee for the Working Families Success Network project, the work struggles to establish a durable, widely-known identity for WFSN outside of its immediate circle. Even at the capstone's close, the WFSN site lacked an agreed-upon, client-friendly name.

As noted elsewhere in this report, the college's struggles with Core Theme Three metrics only serve to deepen the difficulty of communicating institutional expectations, achievements, and plans around Highline's community-building priorities. It seems clear that, to support an initiative like the Campus Center for Community Engagement, internal communications should be a priority.

Framework-Referenced Findings

The capstone's theoretical framework drew on the literature of ethics in educational leadership. As a form of hypothesis, that framework predicts that any college-initiated response to community challenges will necessarily incorporate an ethical dimension. Accordingly, in part, the capstone sought to examine the ethical considerations that might motivate campus leaders to engage — or, for that matter, to decline to engage — with economic and social challenges in their districts. The evidence suggests that ethics are very much at play in leadership decisions of that kind, but with differing emphases in the choice of ethical lens. Of the five ethics that Starratt (1994), Shapiro and Stefkovitch (2011), and Furman (2004) collectively identified — justice, care, critique, the profession, and community — Highline's leaders draw heavily on the latter four, but very little from the first.

Downplaying “justice”. The ethic of justice, which emphasizes equal treatment and stable decision-making rules, is generally rejected by Highline College's senior leaders. Instead, in attempting to address local challenges, the leadership routinely grants special permissions, makes special arrangements, and liberally interprets governing regulations. In executive-level conversations at Highline, there is open distaste for rules and the compliance-minded bureaucrats that enforce them. “Watchers,” they're called, after Dr. Seuss's (1973) ominous overseers. The

college's leaders have similar disdain for anything that appears as a one-size-fits-all, systemic fix. Ideas of that kind are routinely labeled "Kool-Aid." That anti-conformist stance manifests itself in a wide range of tangible results. In one instance, it may mean waiving the prerequisite grade-point averages for classes at a nearby alternative high school. In another, it may mean underwriting the costs of an after-school Arabic 101 course as an outreach investment, simply because it offers the place-bound, heavily-Somali students a dual-credit option that they would not otherwise have. It manifests itself in programming like the Black and Brown Male Youth Summit and Umoja initiative, where the investments openly target specific inequities.

Emphasizing care, critique, and community. Whereas equal treatment rarely motivates Highline College's ethical decisions, equity often does. The college's leaders draw a sharp distinction between *equal* and *equitable*, noting that, in an inequitable world, equal opportunity is insufficient to correct disparity. Other ethical frames must come into play. For example, from an ethic-of-care perspective, that means rejecting traditional hierarchies and power relationships in favor, instead, of authentic and compassionate listening. The commonly used phrase "universally welcoming" reflects that orientation toward care. Similarly, in encouraging community voices to shape the college, Highline furthers that ethic. As the college president recently put it, "It is hard to lead a community-based initiative without listening." The ethic of critique, in turn, calls more strongly for activism. It expects leaders to critique the structural inequities — often assumed, hidden, taken for granted, or all three — that sustain disparity. Here again, the Highline College's leadership consistently chooses to confront inequities that arise, for example, in its institutional data. The investments in the Umoja Community, the Black and Brown Male Youth Summit, and the summit's Young Educated

Ladies Leading (YELL) counterpart were ultimately motivated by stubbornly low attainment rates among Highline's African-American and black students. Likewise, when enrollment figures revealed that Latino students were perennially underrepresented in Highline's degree programs, the institution chartered a Latino Center for Higher Education (L@Ché), an annual Latino Summit, and an expanded variety of outreach activities in that community.

In orientating the college to its community, Highline's senior leaders enact the final pair of ethical frames — profession and community. In line with Cooper's (1991) model of the citizen-administrator, Highline's trustees and executives clearly extend their responsibility beyond the campus gates. Problems within the community are not ignored, nor are they seen as some other entity's duty to address. Starratt (2004) would see this outward-turning orientation as central to moral school leadership. Shapiro and Stefkovitch (2011) might call it a professional obligation. In its emphasis on encouraging community voice, Furman (2004) might invoke the ethic of community.

Given the prominence of these ethical frames in Highline's daily decision-making, the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) stands to benefit from a strong administrative mandate for equitable and community-oriented behavior in such partnerships. Unsurprisingly, the community expects no less. At a recent Bring It to the Table event, when participants were asked to characterize an ideal collaboration, one ethnic-community group defined the goal as "Responding directly to community needs and involving community in decision making." A county workforce-development contractor called for "Equity across all systems [that] creates space for all voices, destroys silos, and results in harmonic convergence." An advocacy organization's representative added that "Our ideal model of collaboration keeps community at

the center of decision-making and makes sure the community is at the table and engaged early and often.”

In designing an equitable framework for C3E’s operation, one of the college’s greatest assets is its alignment with community values.

Generalizability

Even the most ardent proponents of workplace-based, insider-led inquiry caution against the urge to generalize from its findings. Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs (2010) argue that, by nature, most projects of that kind will be comparatively small-scope, addressing a single, particular challenge or opportunity within the host organization. Further, the peculiarities of one workplace context may be very different from another’s, even within the same sphere of enterprise. Because of these limitations, Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs adopt Bassey’s (1999) notion of *fuzzy generalizations* to define the boundary of what may transfer from one worksite project to another. In their view, the contextual richness of insider-led, workplace-situated inquiry gives it significant potential value to the wider community of practice, illuminating ideas that may have “some general application in a similar context” (p. 3).

Whether or not the inquiry itself is workplace- or project-based, the ability to generalize from a single case is a matter of significant debate in its own right. Ruddin (2006) flatly rejects the practice. While acknowledging that controversy, Stake (1995) nonetheless adds that “people can learn much that is general from single cases” (p. 85). Evoking Bassey’s (1999) notion, Stake uses the term *naturalistic generalizations* to define the points of resonance that arise between readers’ life experiences and the vicarious experience of a case description (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). In effect, Stake argues for a middle ground. While a single case may offer limited

generalizability in itself, it can suggest connections to other, similar contexts.

Much the same could be said of this capstone project. Without doubt, Highline College is in many ways unique. The college's history, locale, leadership profile, and programmatic mix are special to that campus. No other two-year campus offers that precise admixture of elements. Yet, in many respects, Highline's experiences offer a window into the leadership challenges that arise when a community college chooses to deepen its engagement with a service area in decline. That call-to-action is by no means isolated. Over time, across the United States, two-year campuses have repeatedly faced turbulence in their communities, whether those communities have been urban, rural, or suburban. Inevitably, colleges will face those challenges again.

In this project's case, perhaps the most widely applicable ideas arise from the alignment between Highline College's story and the professional literature. First, both confirm that a catalytic, community-driven, grassroots-level definition of community engagement can be integrated with the community college mission, despite the persistent challenges of measuring success there. Second, both suggest that this definition has evolved — and continues to evolve — over time, often in resonance with larger societal shifts, potentially incorporating present-day issues of racial and economic equity. Third, resource constraints typically limit the two-year college's community-engagement activities, requiring careful prioritization, internal resource leveraging, and external partnership-building to sustain them. Fourth, given the special socioeconomic dynamics of declining suburbs, the community-building mission of the local two-year campus may manifest itself there in unique ways that, while adapted from rural and urban settings, differ from those more familiar prototypes. Finally, both the capstone inquiry and the literature suggest that the ethics of educational leadership play a role in motivating campus

decision-makers to confront local challenges. Taken collectively, these alignments have helped to ground the capstone's wayfinding recommendations for Highline College's next steps.

Despite the uniqueness of Highline's story, its experiences can, it is hoped, help to illuminate the path of other institutions that face similar conditions. Further, to the extent that the capstone yielded meaningful information for Highline, the methodology may be applicable elsewhere.

Limitations and Opportunities for Additional Inquiry

Almost by definition, the capstone's lack of generalizability speaks to the product's severe limitations. Not only was its evidence drawn from a single institution with a unique history, culture, and leadership dynamic, its potential for prejudice remains unavoidably high, given the writer's direct professional stake in the project's outcomes. Further, the list of participants simply reflected people's pre-existing roles in the institution or its partners, constraining the potential for divergent views. Most of the documentary evidence, in turn, was institutionally generated, reflecting many of the same predispositions as the human informants.

Suggested Avenues for Further Investigation

Despite the project's limitations, a useful by-product of the inquiry may be its potential directions for further investigation. Several lines of inquiry suggest themselves. They include college-suburb relationships, leadership decision-making, and community-engagement metrics.

Suburban community colleges. For community colleges affected by suburban decline, the rapid rise of poverty, racial re-segregation, and civic fragmentation in those sub-regions merits additional attention. As the literature amply demonstrates, public two-year colleges have a long history of investment in local economic, social, and civic redevelopment of urban and rural communities, often triggered by critical incidents such as factory closures. While the

deterioration of suburban areas may be more gradual and diffuse, the reaction of the local community college is nonetheless of interest. Additional inquiries could profitably explore the degree to which the documents, leadership statements, and programmatic initiatives of suburban-serving campuses are responsive to local conditions, particularly when the socioeconomic trends are downward. Potential research questions could probe whether campuses are aware of such declines, whether they choose to engage, and, if so, why and how they enact that engagement. Exemplary campuses could provide other, similarly situated institutions with valuable guidance on best practices.

Ethical decision-making frameworks. Another line of inquiry might concentrate on the processes that inform a community college's choice to engage in local redevelopment initiatives, regardless of setting — in effect, shifting the focus from *where* to *why*. This approach would broaden the environmental context to include urban, suburban, and rural colleges that face community decline, focusing on the leadership motivations that shape the campus's response. Viewed through its theoretical framework, the current capstone's evidence suggested that Highline College's leaders drew heavily from a sense of moral obligation in opting to engage with community-wide challenges. A variety of strategies could investigate whether the same could be said for other leadership teams in similar circumstances. The relative prominence of different ethical lenses — justice, care, critique, profession, or community — might be of particular interest in that inquiry.

Community engagement metrics. Highline College's ongoing struggle with community-engagement metrics suggests that, for similarly situated colleges, the challenge may be widespread. Washington's community colleges, at least, confirm that supposition. Recently,

in response to persistent questions on the topic, the state's Research and Planning Commission (2014) conducted a review of its members' community-engagement goals and metrics. The results indicate that at least a third of Washington's community and technical colleges include a community theme in their missions. However, the associated measures vary considerably. While some emphasize task-accomplishment, others focus on counting items such as website hits, contract-training offerings, college representation in community organizations, and attendance at community-oriented events on campus. Others rely on surveys, job placement data, and fundraising tallies to gauge the alignment between college services and community need. Even engagement itself is defined differently, college to college. The disparate themes include workforce and economic development, college fundraising efforts, and marketing impacts on enrollment. Meantime, if Highline College's experiences are any indication, the structured, self-evaluative approach of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification may have limited value, particularly for campuses that lack a robust service-learning program.

These many variations argue for some additional, focused investigation of what present-day community colleges mean when they state a commitment to community engagement. It also suggests that colleges could benefit from assistance in designing meaningful, sustainable success measures for these activities. Of particular interest is the community's perspective. The capstone's inquiry suggested that the community itself can help to shape a definition of effective college engagement. Existing studies typically explore these expectations from the perspective of positional leaders, rather than the residents who directly receive college services. A fruitful arena for investigation might emerge from a concentrated effort to tease out the neighborhood-level voice in these matters.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The capstone period provided a welcome opportunity to test the C3E project's original blueprint and, where necessary, to make revisions. During the capstone period itself, September 2015 to May 2016, the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) did not materialize formally. The project's sponsors did not expect that it would. The inquiry did, however, reach a set of conclusions that, it is hoped, will guide C3E's next steps. The resulting recommendations are divided into two categories — implementation and capacity-building.

Implementation Recommendations

The first set of recommendations focus externally, emphasizing the college's relationship to its communities. Taken as a whole, these recommendations largely reject the premises of the original logic model (Figure 4), which derived its framework from earlier, seemingly similar attempts to establish a durable, college-centered community development collaborative. The capstone's evidence suggests that the initial model's design — sequential, single-issue, and centrally-led — may be ill-suited to the extraordinary diversity of South King County's people, issues, and organizational partnerships. Particularly in the region's non-profit sector, community-wide collaboration is undermined by the predominance of small organizations, their continual competition for funding, and the ongoing proliferation of identity- and topic-specific organizations in response to new needs and new populations. That context sharpens the fundamental question of whether, in establishing a Campus Center for Community Engagement, Highline College should develop its own entity, incubate a promising competitor, or simply support a highly informal, multi-organization collaborative. In the recommendations that follow, a revised logic model (Figure 5) begins to take shape.

Recommendation 1: Take a multi-issue approach. As an early step in Boone's (1992, 1997) community-based education (CBE) model, he calls for the college and community to identify, collectively, a single issue for intensive study and response. Though attractive in its simplicity and focus, however, Boone's recommendation may be unrealistic for a region of Southwest King County's diversity and fragmentation. Instead, an alternative approach might argue for a multi-issue menu of initiatives, with prioritization based on their proximity to the institution's core functions. In many respects, such a strategy invokes Vaughan's (1991) notion of "core-edge tension" as the zone of greatest institutional vibrancy.

As its highest-intensity partnerships, the college should favor opportunities that directly engage one or more of its academic program areas. For example, through its Opportunity Youth dual-enrollment contracts, the college is well positioned to offer teen-age English Language Learners (ELL) a state-sanctioned pathway to a diploma in partnership with Highline's robust adult English as Second Language program. By promoting wider awareness of these options among immigrant communities, the campus can help to address the challenge of teen arrivals who "time out" of high school age before gaining sufficient English mastery to meet state graduation requirements. In much the same way, the college can play an important role in youth justice diversion simply by providing access to its campus-based high school completion programs. With some basic case-management assistance from a youth advocacy provider, Highline could help keep low-level offenders close to home and in school, offering a place-based alternative to the current practice of processing south-county youth into downtown Seattle's King County Youth Services Center (YSC), where their connections to school, family, and neighborhood resources are disrupted.

As an added benefit, by prioritizing initiatives like these, the college and its community partners can simultaneously advance the community-improvement goals of county officials, cities, and school districts, bringing additional leverage to the tasks. That does not mean, however, that Highline should abandon projects that are farther from its core mission. In addressing matters such as housing, food security, and transportation equity, the college can — and should — offer its expertise, organizational resources, and convening power to assist the efforts of other leadership groups. These collaborations, though, can be prioritized at a lower level of institutional commitment, with the campus acting more as a community clearinghouse than a service-providing partner. Maintaining those connections, however, remains important for two reasons. First, as a trust-building measure, it reinforces a message of community care and participation. Second, as the college's programs evolve, second-tier collaborations may eventually transform into first-tier priorities. Food security offers an apt illustration of that potential. As Highline's recently-launched Urban Agriculture certificate program matures over time, it could form a cornerstone of a regional initiative to provide healthier, lower cost, and more sustainable access to nutrition.

In the end, the best strategy is a both-and proposition. No collaborations should be rejected out of hand. But, in prioritizing them, the college should sort the opportunities primarily based on programmatic connections, rather than following a sequential, issue-by-issue protocol.

Recommendation 2: Maintain a multi-geography strategy. In King County's Communities of Opportunity (COO) framework — and embedded in the very notion of anchor institutions — is a predisposition toward a region-wide footprint. In Highline College's pair of unsuccessful COO applications, the institution offered to assume precisely that profile,

convening a community dialogue across the county's entire southwest area. "Areas like Southwest King County require large-scale initiatives that engage broad constituencies . . . to achieve sustainable transformation," the college's initial application loftily noted. "Highline College can provide a neutral, unifying platform for collective impact on that scale" (Highline College Foundation, 2014, p. 1).

As the capstone project matured, however, that geography-wide vision gradually appeared more and more naïve. For one thing, the COO initiative itself seemed less region-serving over time. While COO had originally promised to focus on the neediest corner of King County, the project's interests eventually broadened to incorporate more scattered, wealthier communities elsewhere. That shift, confirmed privately by county officials, was publicly evident in the attendee list of COO information sessions and related events. Meantime, as the initial rounds of COO awards were announced, they appeared to favor issue-driven partnerships on a sub-regional scale.

In light of the region's extraordinary diversity and community dispersion, none of these developments should have been a surprise. Certainly, they align with the literature on suburban fragmentation and racial segregation (e.g., G. Orfield, 1981; M. Orfield, 2002; Holliday & Dwyer, 2009). Collectively, however, they also reinforce the notion that a single, region-wide initiative around community engagement will be difficult both to organize and to sustain. Consequently, for the near term, the college may be better served by maintaining a web of community-tailored connections that are organized under a relatively informal regional umbrella. A robust set of very local, population-specific partnerships will ideally build trust and maintain relevance at the neighborhood level. Perhaps only the college's senior leaders, in fact, may need

to contemplate the region-wide significance of these activities.

That does not mean, however, that a region-wide view fades into irrelevance. After all, as regionalist scholars have repeatedly insisted, the only sustainable solution to suburban decline is a multi-jurisdictional approach, incorporating the wealthiest as well as the neediest communities. Accordingly, the college should continue to engage in — and, as appropriate, advocate for — King County’s Communities of Opportunity (COO) vision.

Recommendation 3: Continue to seek county resources: Participation in the Communities of Opportunity (COO) initiative offers more than an opportunity for community engagement. It also offers potential resources. For that reason, despite the college’s early disappointments in the COO process, the institution should persist in its efforts to seek additional funding there. In this regard, the most significant opportunity may lie in Sound Transit’s plans for its college-area light-rail station. There, the college’s location, resources, and political leverage can help to sustain a dialogue that, if successful, could lead to investment in a county-owned home for the Campus Center for Community Engagement itself.

To a large degree, this recommendation is reactive. In light of Highline’s severe space restrictions and capital-funding shortfalls, only the county’s resources are sufficient to meet the Campus Center for Community Engagement’s (C3E’s) facility needs. Beyond the liability of initial construction costs, the college lacks the ongoing resources to maintain additional square-footage. Further, even if such commitments were financially feasible, they would surely draw resources from the institution’s primary educational mission, raising legitimate questions around fiscal priorities. For all of these reasons, C3E’s interests are likely to be better served through a co-tenancy relationship with Sound Transit or King County.

Recommendation 4: Convene multiple steering groups. The ACCLAIM Project’s model calls for two steering groups — one, an internal environmental scanning team, and the other, a community decision-making committee — to direct the college’s community-based programming (Boone, 1992, 1997). In a setting like Highline College’s, however, that simple structure may be insufficient to meet the Campus Center for Community Engagement’s planning needs. The project’s large geographic spread, along with the diversity of communities within that geography, argues for a more complex configuration. Four groups are recommended:

Group 1: Internal inventory. Even before the capstone’s launch, Highline had already initiated an internal Community Engagement Advisory Committee, under the direction of the director of community engagement. That committee assembled college staff who had already enmeshed themselves in community collaborations. Members represented Institutional Advancement, the offsite Marine Science and Technology (MaST) center, Women’s Programs, and the Working Families Success Network. The director commonly expressed the view that, before the college could expand its community linkages, it needed to understand those already in place. “You can’t go visit other people’s houses until you clean up your own,” he often said. The observation seems valid. For the college to develop its community connections further, it should continue to draw on the expertise of its knowledgeable insiders. To do otherwise would undermine that committee’s existing momentum.

Group 2: Environmental scanning. To supplement the Community Engagement Advisory Committee’s efforts, the college should form a second group whose role focuses externally. In many respects, that assignment aligns with the ACCLAIM Project’s environmental scanning task. For Highline College, it is a critical missing link. During the

capstone period, information on community needs flowed into the college from a bewildering array of sources — local government officials, nearby schools, community-based organizations, regional socioeconomic studies, and the neighborhood connections of college staff. At present, the college has no mechanism to collect and monitor this type of input. Worse, no one is tasked with the responsibility to respond. To close those gaps, a Partnership Opportunity Committee should be convened immediately, ideally under the direction of an executive-level administrator. At a minimum, the group should include a faculty economist, ESL instructor, off-campus programs supervisor, student housing director, and other staff members who regularly come into contact with local communities and their organizations. The committee's chair should have sufficient authority to commit college resources to the top-priority needs identified by the group.

Group 3: Intermediaries. In agreeing to host one of the state's Working Families Success Network (WFSN) pilots, Highline College's leaders reasoned that the regular, on-campus presence of service providers would help to inform the institution's community engagement activities. The evidence suggests that the hypothesis was valid. Over time, the college's WFSN collaborators have surfaced additional community needs and, in many cases, have recruited new partners to meet those needs. Though more periodic, the Bring It to the Table events have elicited similarly valuable information on community conditions as they appear to local agencies and non-profit organizations. In the medium term, by convening a committee of such partners, Highline College should formalize the input-gathering processes that WFSN and Bring It to the Table now offer. As community intermediaries, the committee's members can aid the institution not only in highlighting local needs and the resource people who can meet them, but also in connecting the college to emerging community leaders. From those

leaders, the college can recruit its fourth and final steering group.

Nearly a half-century ago, Harlacher (1969) effectively advocated a similar strategy. Using a military analogy, one of his informants suggested that the colleges should engage local service providers as “beachheads” in the community, leveraging their neighborhood-level trust and access to introduce college staff to the community’s leaders. While Highline might choose a different metaphor to describe it, the durability of the approach argues for its wisdom.

Group 4: Community advisory. While the need for authentic community representation is fundamental to the project’s success, the recruitment and engagement of community advocates should build gradually on existing relationships. In addition to encouraging referrals from intermediaries, the college may wish to begin with an open-invitation, consensus-driven membership structure rather than a formal, representational one. As the capstone period drew to a close, the White Center Advisory Committee appeared to be thriving on precisely that approach, closing each meeting with a simple, inclusive question: “Who else needs to be here next time?”

Potentially, the college’s student body itself offers an under-tapped pool of candidates for community representation. With hundreds of adult learners on campus each day, many of them in non-credit English as a Second Language (ESL), the college regularly hosts a network of widely representative community members. Some are already both students and community leaders.³ Others surely have connections to important neighborhood voices — or have the potential to become those voices themselves. Through classroom announcements, invitational events, or point-of-service surveys in locations like WFSN, the college could begin to solicit interested participants from among current enrollees. In 2015-16, the campus’s First Fridays

Leadership Institute offered a prototype for just such an initiative, convening a leadership development series specifically targeting recent immigrants from non-credit ESL courses. Similar efforts should be encouraged, particularly among student populations currently receiving resettlement, retraining, or other aid that — for the time being, at least — reduces their dependence on income from direct employment.

Recruitment, however, is only one consideration. Because the area's neighborhood-level representatives are often over-burdened and under-resourced themselves, the C3E initiative must pay adequate attention to compensation, orientation, and support as candidates are brought aboard. One longtime partner of the college's community-building efforts — in this case, a non-profit board member — has repeatedly argued for a stipend system to offset the costs of travel, childcare, and lost time when residents participate in collaborative activities. At a February 2016 campus gathering, one equity advocate made essentially the same case, pointing out that one of the region's "challenges are resourcing community and grass roots organizations to be at the table." In response to that input, the college's initial Communities of Opportunity proposals set aside a substantial sum for participant reimbursement (Highline College Foundation, 2014). That practice should be woven into future funding applications and program plans. Even the simple act of providing onsite childcare and high-quality food service can help to offset participants' lost family- and mealtimes.

Capacity-Building Recommendations

The second set of recommendations focuses on Highline College's internal, capacity-building needs. To construct a solid foundation for a Campus Center for Community

Engagement (C3E), the college should consider a series of initiatives that address the success measures, motivations, and staff responsibilities of the college's wider outward-turning efforts.

Recommendation 5: Clarify the college's community-engagement goals. Given the imprecise state of Highline College's current community-engagement metrics, a thoroughgoing revision of those measures would surely offer benefits. Without it, the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E) will likely face challenges in aligning its functions with college goals. The opportunity for clarification is both qualitative and quantitative.

Qualitative objectives. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (2006) emphasizes the importance of shared vision in motivating institutional transformation. Of greatest value in this work, Senge argues, are intrinsic visions — self-referential pictures of what the institution wishes to become — rather than externally-focused, competitive definitions of success. In fostering institutional growth, leadership's task is to move from personal vision to a common vision, gaining authentic commitment from stakeholders by integrating their own aspirations into the whole. When that happens, a virtuous cycle of motivation takes hold:

Visions spread because of a reinforcing process of increasing clarity, enthusiasm, communication and commitment. As people talk, the vision grows clearer. As it gets clearer, enthusiasm for its benefits builds. And soon, the vision starts to spread in a reinforcing spiral of communication and excitement (p. 211).

Senge's description, however lofty, offers down-to-earth currency for Highline College's near-term planning efforts. While community engagement has long been an element of Highline's mission, relatively little language is available to clarify what that term precisely means. Admittedly, attitudinal orientations — “universally welcoming,” for instance — are

regularly shared. Likewise, successful community-oriented events and initiatives routinely garner reinforcing praise from campus leaders. But the campus may have reached a point where, to maintain momentum, a more detailed vision would be timely. That vision might profitably include the nature of Highline's desired community relationships, examples of preferred partnerships, a sense of desired outcomes, and a rationale for those choices. Ideally, as Senge suggests, the picture would incorporate the personal visions of community-committed staff and faculty, perhaps derived from the proceedings of associated committees, task groups, and local collaborations. Collectively, these inputs can begin to shape a picture of what a community-engaged Highline College should look like.

This general suggestion raises a more specific, tactical set of questions around the Campus Center for Community Engagement (C3E): When is the right time to share the C3E concept more broadly across campus? How should that sharing occur? To date, the C3E concept has traveled in relatively narrow circles, primarily among executive-level campus leaders and a handful of county officials. So far, the circle's hub has been either Sound Transit's light-rail route or the county's Communities of Opportunity initiative. Although a premature announcement of C3E could undermine inter-agency negotiations around its development, the college should prepare for a wider dissemination of the C3E vision as soon as appropriate. Otherwise, to the project's detriment, the campus community may feel excluded.

Quantitative objectives. The widespread dissatisfaction with Highline's community-engagement measures necessitates, in itself, a mandate to improve them. In support of C3E's development, however, the revision should ideally contemplate a catalytic, C3E-like role for the institution. In light of the Accreditation Steering Committee's longstanding struggle with Core

Theme Three's metrics — not to mention the seemingly parallel struggles of other two-year colleges in Washington — no one should expect the work to be easy. It is nonetheless necessary.

One promising approach would, in effect, start with the vision. If the college's leadership could frame a clear picture of community engagement's ideal contours, better metrics may suggest themselves. In any event, it is unlikely that they would be any worse. With a vision-setting framework in hand, a cross-constituent committee could take on the task of rewriting Core Theme Three's objectives and measures. Positional participants would include the director of institutional research, director of community engagement, the current Accreditation Steering Committee's chair, and a leadership-level representative of Community and Continuing Education. Other members might be recruited from one or more of the internal steering groups mentioned in Recommendation 4, above. Working together, the committee would seek to translate the institution's vision into words and numbers.

In setting out to craft those measures, several avenues appear promising. For one, because the college's ultimate goal is greater community input, Core Theme Three's metrics should begin now to incorporate regular feedback from local residents, whether through surveys, focus groups, or structured evaluation processes. The college's recent, first-time attempt to survey its professional-technical advisory committees may offer insights into best practices there. Going forward, community feedback of that kind will be essential to C3E's development and sustainability. Second, despite some lingering skepticism around Carnegie's community-engagement measures, the college may wish to revisit elements of that self-evaluative process. With the next round of competition now set for 2020, Highline has time to consider a second application. Admittedly, in 2015's competition, only three community colleges appeared among

the 83 first-time designees (New England Resource Center for Higher Education, n.d.). Even so, as demonstrated by its successes in other national awards, Highline College has every reason to seek a place at Carnegie's elite table. If the college chooses to participate, however, the effort will require significant energy and broad support, engaging a wide range of interested parties from inside and outside the campus. Even if the Carnegie approach ultimately proves inapplicable to Highline's context, the competition's rigorous self-assessment protocols can only assist the institution in identifying its own path forward.

Recommendation 6: Make community engagement everybody's job. The evidence suggests that one of Highline's community-engagement roadblocks is the scattered staff ownership of that work. Though a leadership-level administrator is assigned to direct the college's outward-turning efforts, campus-wide participation and investment has not yet risen to a tipping point that might sustain an effort of C3E's scale. Paradoxically, the director's appointment may be, in itself, a potential impediment to achieving that level of involvement. With an administrative position assigned by title to the college's community-engagement effort, faculty and staff may be more inclined to see it as someone else's work, not theirs. Others may be reluctant to take independent action out of a misdirected fear of undermining, contravening, or side-stepping the director's purview. The siloing effect is likely exacerbated by the director's organizational assignment within the Institutional Advancement Division, which interacts less regularly and less broadly with faculty and staff than any of the other three divisions. Meantime, understandably, the director's limited staffing level creates a potential bottleneck for community response, particularly when the college receives multiple requests in a short timeframe.

A solution, however, may be easily adapted from the college's approach to its other core

themes — that is, clarifying that it is everyone’s responsibility. Coincidentally, at the April 2016 trustees meeting, the college president hinted at that very idea. Wrapping up a series of impromptu compliments for the director’s recent achievements, the president reflected that “we put too much pressure on [the director’s] success. The college needs to own and be part of that engagement.” Precedent suggests that the redistribution of accountability can begin at the vice-presidential level. For example, in arguing against the appointment of an executive-level diversity officer, Highline’s president regularly offers the view that Highline already has four chief diversity officers. “I expect all of the [four] vice presidents to take diversity as part of their role,” he told a recent Administrative Cabinet meeting, repeating a now-familiar expectation for Core Theme Two accountability.

The same expectation could be extended to Core Theme Three. If community engagement were framed decisively as a shared responsibility across all four vice presidents, a considerably broader set of resources would come into play. Each division could be asked to incorporate community engagement into its annual work plan, articulating division-specific goals for engagement as well as the divisional assets to advance those efforts. Even more promising, perhaps, is the corollary opportunity to coordinate efforts across the major divisions. In aligning the year’s work plans, each vice president could pro-actively claim — or reactively accept — the community-engagement priorities best suited to that division’s resources, culture, and energies. Despite its two-page brevity, the college’s current *Mid-Cycle Strategic Plan* (Highline College, 2014b) offers a prototype for that approach, distributing a short list of community-engagement tasks to each division. If that pattern were sustained, staff investment would surely broaden.

Recently, in an action research study of community engagement on a two-year campus,

Purcell (2014) came to a similar recommendation. The study's findings yielded several insights into institutional capacity-building for community engagement, beginning with an argument for "distributed leadership" as an ideal organizational model for that work. "Leadership for community engagement is not encapsulated in a single individual or office," Purcell concludes. "Instead, leadership is distributed throughout the organization and within the community through community partners" (p. 208). Purcell's findings stress the centrality of boundary-spanning behaviors in facilitating communication — and, as a consequence, mutual action — both within and between organizations. With sustained practice, Purcell argues, those behaviors feed a cycle of ever-improving collaboration across organizational silos. The model is instructive to Highline College's current community-engagement effort.

Of course, a distributed leadership approach introduces a risk that the director's priorities may be over-shadowed by the interests of other divisions. Again, however, the college can draw on existing protocols to mitigate that threat. Already, even though all four vice presidents contribute to all four core themes, each individual theme has its own executive champion. In like manner, the college could maintain the primary assignment of Core Theme Three to the Institutional Advancement Division, allowing that division's vice president — and the director who reports there — to set the stage for college-wide efforts to support their priorities.

Recommendation 7: Continue to stress ethics and values. To the degree that community engagement has gathered momentum at Highline College, that momentum has drawn heavily on the energies of the president, trustees, and executive leadership. Often, their encouragement has referenced values. When Highline's president calls upon the campus to be "universally welcoming," he is invoking the language of values. A like-minded Maryland

president, DeRionne Pollard, uses the phrase “radical inclusivity” in much the same manner (Stout, 2016). Statements like these are clearly aspirational, not functional. They do not define a tangible goal, operational strategy, or schema for prioritizing institutional effort. Instead, they define a campus way-of-being. Despite its lack of specificity, the message shapes behavior. At a national WFSN convening, when one of Highline’s deans reported on campus buy-in, she noted that Highline’s senior leaders had “connected [WFSN] with the college’s core values of social justice, meaningful service to our community, and a strengths-based perspective.”

Evidence of that kind strongly suggests that the motivational emphasis on values has been effective and should, if anything, be augmented. To do so, two paths appear especially promising — one, an appeal to mission, and the other, an appeal to values.

Mission-linked appeal. One clear opportunity lies in the structure of the college’s four core themes. Predictably enough, some themes naturally receive more emphasis than others. The first theme, student attainment, almost by definition captures the lion’s share of institutional effort. Close behind, the diversity theme has inspired large-scale, durable investments in staffing, events programming, professional development, space, and institutional policy, including a rare board-level policy statement. It has also garnered major national awards for Highline, including American Association of Community Colleges’ (2014) coveted Award of Excellence for Advancing Diversity.

While little can be gained — and much can be lost — by any attempt to divert energy from one core theme to another, the college may wish to link community engagement more explicitly to its other core themes. In light of South King County’s extraordinary diversity, a linkage between Highline’s community- and diversity-related initiatives should be almost self-

evident. But, operationally, the intersection has not been fully exploited. To date, the college's highest-profile diversity initiatives have been internally-focused, emphasizing matters of pedagogy, student and staff recruitment, and campus climate. For example, Highline's active Culturally Responsive Educators (CRE) group concentrates on curriculum, instructional materials, and learning strategies with current students. Though community members attend signature events like the Black and Brown Male Youth Summit and its successors, those events are primarily designed to expose attendees to what's available inside Highline, not what it can do outside the campus gates.

Even so, the energy behind these internally-directed initiatives suggests that they could easily be integrated with an intentional, outward-turning attempt to build problem-based bridges between the college and its diverse neighborhoods. In-gathering events, for example, could include some deliberate opportunity for faculty and staff leaders to engage with community representatives. The Culturally Responsive Educators' professional-development rubric, which already includes a "Know your students" metric, could move beyond individual identities to incorporate neighborhood conditions. In these and many other ways, the college leadership could begin to fuse diversity work with community work, leveraging those complementary motivations. In doing so, Highline could join Myran, Ivery, Parsons, and Kinsley's (2013) call for "multi-racial democracy" as the "unfinished business" (p. 2) of greater college-to-community collaboration.

A values-related appeal. A second, related opportunity lies in the region's rising income disparity. At a values level, social justice resonates across Highline's culture. Faculty, staff, and students readily participate in lectures, documentary showings, and other events that highlight

economic or social injustices. Members of the campus community regularly use the phrase *social justice* to define an important element of their professional and institutional role. As one example, in response to anti-Muslim comments in the U.S. presidential campaign, the college president sent a campus-wide email that invoked social justice themes. “We speak today to say these words of hate, fear, and discrimination are not reflective of our community and all that we hold dear,” he wrote. “We strive for social justice that includes all and an accountability that is true to our College’s values.” The message’s widespread support surprised no one.

Clearly, injustice affects South King County. Just as Highline College could harness its diversity-related energies to promote greater community engagement, the campus’s distaste for unfairness could encourage its outward-turning efforts. To forge that linkage, however, campus leaders must articulate it. Importantly, the message need not be solely affective. For the more pragmatic listeners, it can invoke Core Theme One’s focus on student attainment. The Working Families Success Network (WFSN) initiative, in fact, springs precisely from the proposition that financial stability goes hand in hand with college success. Certainly the reverse proposition — that poverty undermines educational attainment — is well documented. In the early years of the Achieving the Dream initiative, the Community College Research Center reviewed two decades of data on the links between student traits and attainment. The results confirmed that students in the lowest-income quartiles were far more likely to begin in a community college and, regrettably, were far less likely to complete degrees or transfer (Bailey et al., 2004; Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005a, b). Among others, Kezar, Walpole, and Perna (2015) have highlighted the persistent structural, curricular, and socio-cultural barriers that undermine persistence among low-income college enrollees. Because these students typically work more

hours, commute farther to campus, and carry greater family responsibility than their higher-income classmates, they are less likely to attend continuously full-time, less able to withstand emergencies, and less available to access campus supports . The result, predictably enough, is a legacy of inequitable outcomes. Based on 45 years of data, the Pell Institute (2015) recently concluded that today's high-income young people are eight times more likely (77%) than their low-income peers (9%) to obtain a bachelor's degree by age 24.

That level of disparity is an affront to Highline College's values. Rightly framed, it is also a call for greater community engagement. After all, as WFSN seeks to demonstrate, strong community networks offer one way to support the college's most financially vulnerable students. Not coincidentally, that idea has currency at the highest levels of community college culture. At Achieving the Dream's (AtD's) most recent national conference, the keynote address returned to the system's history of community engagement, this time in service to attainment among at-risk learners (Stout, 2016). The organization's new president told a 1,900-member audience that:

The concept of engagement [must be] broadened beyond the internal stakeholders . . . to include the formation of strategic partnerships with K-12, employers, universities, CBOs, and others, with the community college positioned to step up and be the community catalyst and leader of community-designed plans for addressing educational attainment gaps. And, for our internal stakeholders, we can no longer afford to leave anyone on our campuses behind (pp. 9-10).

The language re-invokes much earlier voices who called for a catalytic, community-building role for their campuses. Here, however, the focus is on equitable outcomes for today's enrollees — an equally inspiring, if narrower, goal that resonates with Highline College values.

Concluding Comment

It almost goes without saying that years, if not decades, of successful collective effort would be required to affect South King County's metrics on a community-wide scale. Still, as a final goal, a tangible set of community impacts — employment, income, housing and food security, health, and political participation, among others — are arguably the only worthwhile objectives to strive for. As its history suggests, the local community college can play a key, catalytic role in creating that hoped-for future. Moreover, driven by an ethic of community, the campus can lead the effort in a new manner, emphasizing residents' assets and participation rather than their shortcomings and dependency. In their critique of the “deficiency orientation” that drives most community-renewal efforts, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) point out its many failings. The typical approach, they argue, fragments people's efforts, channels funding to providers rather than residents, undermines the influence of community leaders, and promotes the idea that outside experts — and the relationships between them — matter more than community members and their ties. Further, because being “worse” than last year or “worse” than other areas is the key to ongoing funding, the model reinforces a cycle of dependence and keeps everyone's aims at survival level. As a result, it precludes real change.

Clearly, there is a danger in over-selling the community college's ability to alter that pattern, particularly in a scattered suburban area like Washington's South King County. But, without a clear alternative to unify and galvanize the community's energies, real change is unlikely, if not impossible. For Highline College, what began as an accident of place has evolved into an ethical obligation to bring its resources, values, and people into a shared effort to address its district's current circumstances.

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Footnotes

¹ Under Merisotis and Shedd's (2003) competing classification scheme, Highline's size and setting would place it among the 25% that would fall under the less familiar — but, in this case, more descriptive — label of Community Mega-Connector Institutions. See Merisotis, J. P., & Shedd, J. M. (2003). Using IPEDS to develop a classification system for two-year postsecondary institutions. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, (122), 47-61.

² The author is indebted to Highline College economics instructor James Peyton, Ph.D., who originally compiled the district-specific data profile referenced here.

³ Through professional connections, the author is familiar with two recognized community leaders who have recently studied at Highline College. Both are executive directors of organizations representing local ethnic groups, one Middle Eastern and the other Latino. To protect their educational privacy, their specific organizational affiliations are not disclosed in the text.

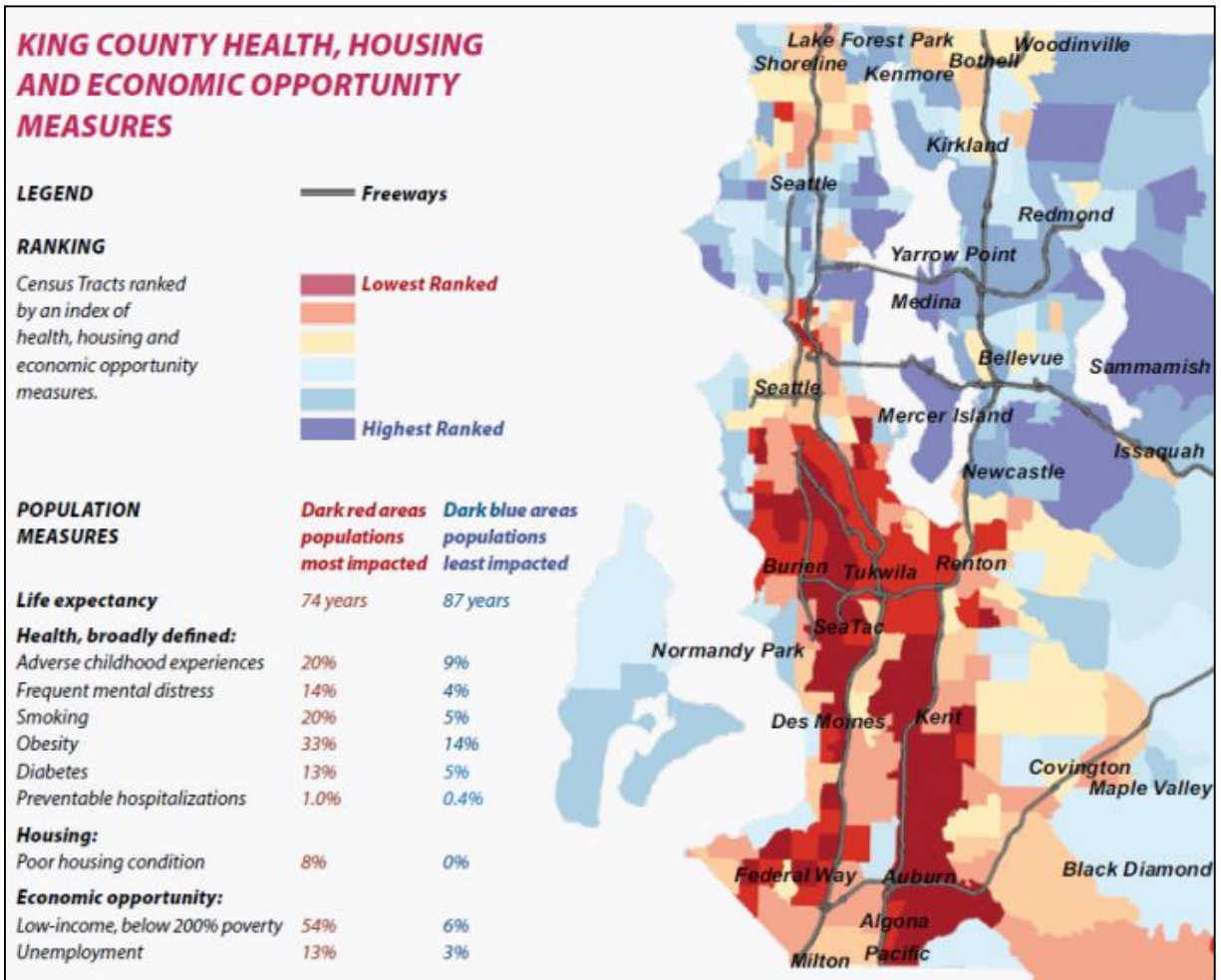


Figure 1. King County, Washington, opportunity map (King County, 2014)

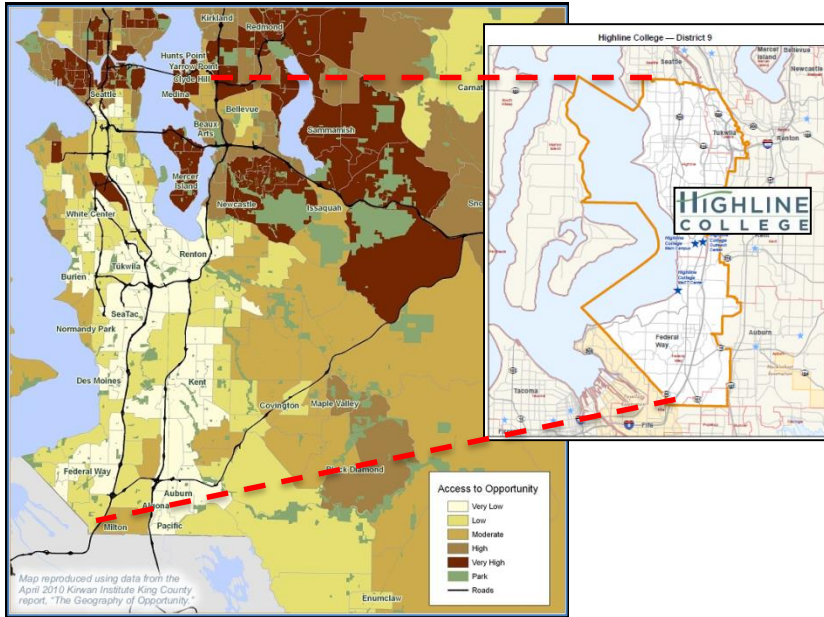


Figure 2. County opportunity map (Kirwan Institute, 2010) and Highline College district

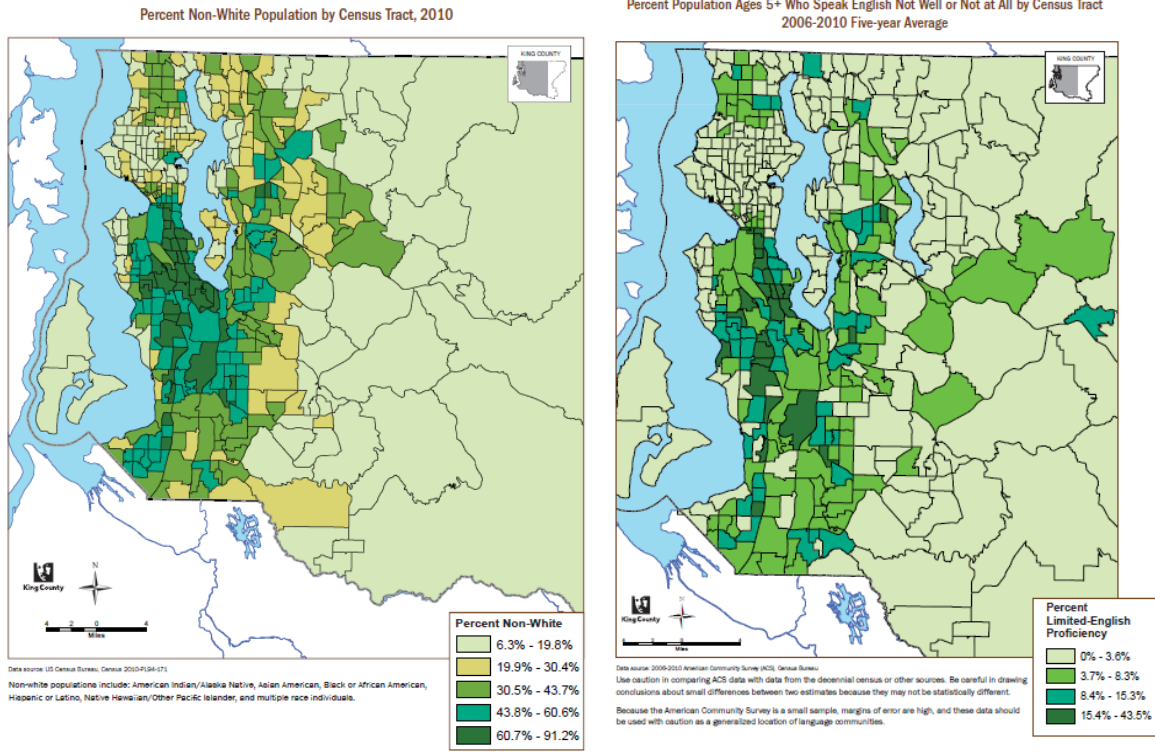


Figure 3. Race and language diversity in King County (King County, 2012)

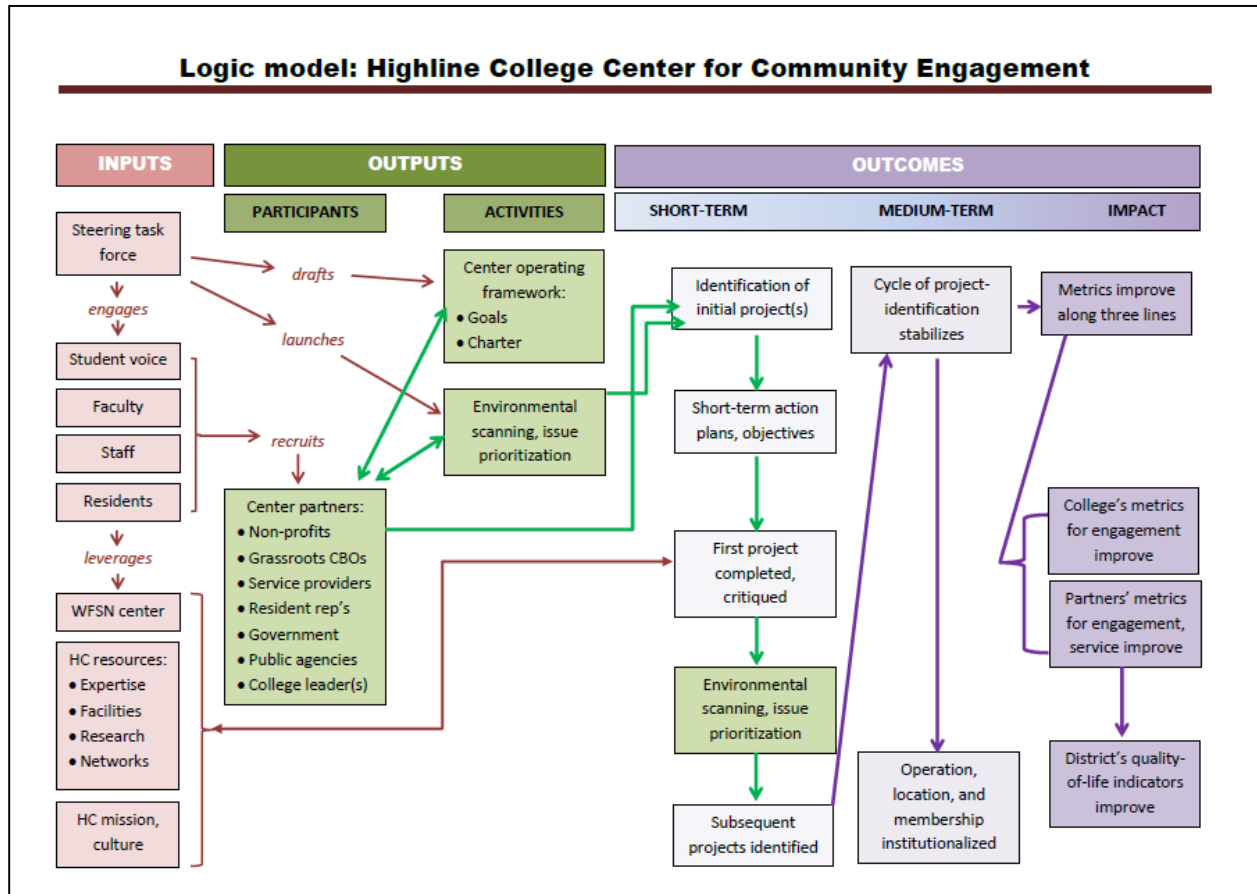


Figure 4. Draft logic model

Revised logic model: Highline College Campus Center for Community Engagement

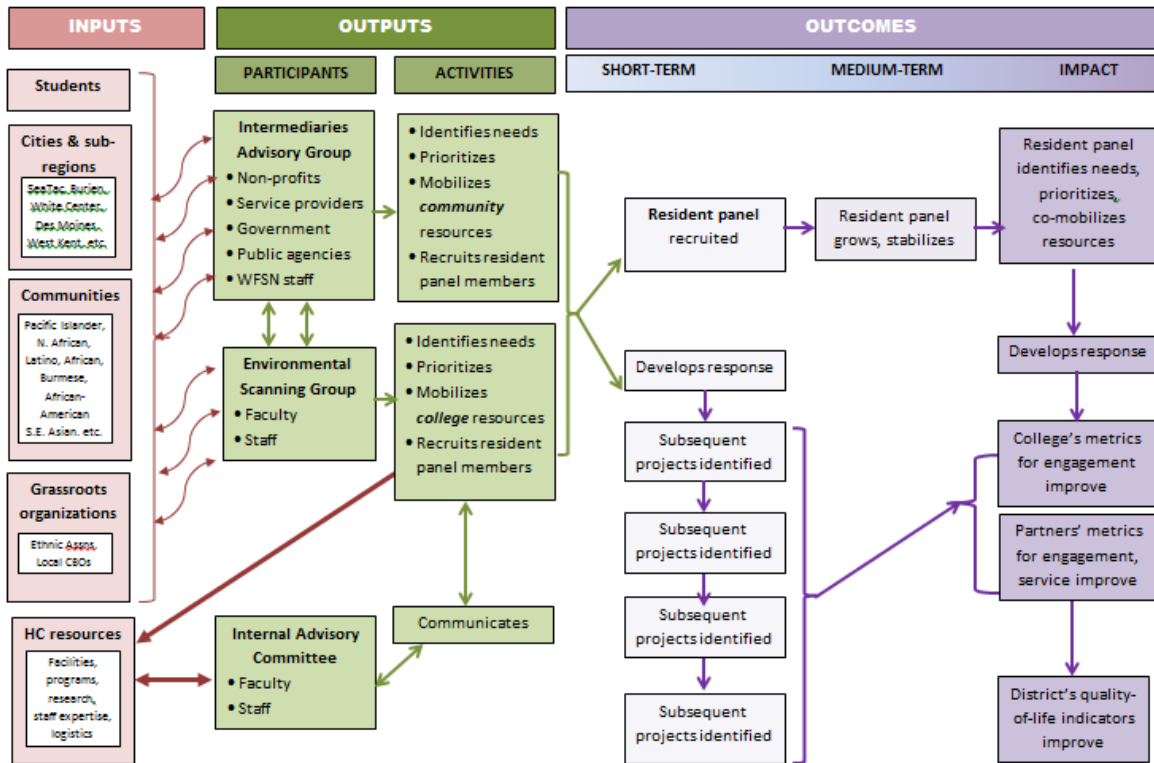


Figure 5. Revised logic model