Introduction

The Community Engagement Task Force (CETF) addressed the broad community parameters of San Diego State University. It also included four core elements (working groups) of community that define our campus and its future – Alumni Engagement, Campus Climate, Economic Development and K-12 Partnerships. The CETF and its working groups addressed the four framing questions of our charge noting the need to consider current strengths, emerging opportunities and the ability of the campus to address challenges.

The specific charge to the Task Force, rather than its working groups, was to consider current initiatives in which we and our partners are engaged and to determine whether we should focus on specific areas and/or develop new initiatives aligned with our educational goals. Early in our discussions, it was apparent that we are engaged in such a broad spectrum of community engagement activities, from KPBS to the Osher Institute to academic internships to the Compact for Success to the Looking Glass Neighborhood to the Zahn Center (just to name a few) that our group would be hard pressed to identify them all, let alone evaluate them in a meaningful manner in the relatively short time allotted us. However, it is clear that out SDSU already has significant strengths in all areas of community engagement.

This statement summarizes shared work based on community input and group discussion. It also includes a budget (see Appendix A). The statement begins with a summary of three themes that emerged across all work. These themes took varying forms – a “need,” a “required action” and a “consistent challenge” marking the growth of our campus community.

One noteworthy omission from the work of this group is mention of “students.” Our first commitment is always to students. However, to honor response limits and task force charge, such references are limited. We close this introduction by noting our commitment as a community remains to what we create as an educational environment for current and future students and alumni.

Themes: Communicate, Connect & Assess

The best way to convey the tenor of community forums and group discussions is to review three pervasive themes, often discussed as actionable items.

Communicate: Although the campus has many means and media for communicating, community members continually expressed the need for effective communication and ease of access to information.

Connect: The San Diego State University community connects with many groups and for a variety of reasons. Community members expressed a need to continue to have this occur, and to organize connections in a way that presents a unified impression of campus and allows for the coordination of outreach efforts.
Assess: The campus community values evidence-based decision making, and all discussions pointed toward the need to continue this approach. Campus Climate discussions, for example, included this theme as a way to learn who we are today as a campus.

Communicate / Connect / Assess:

Although we have many methods for communicating, the need for effective communication and ease of access to information came into discussions with the task force and each of the working groups. Research suggests that improved communication for the purpose of human connectivity, often leads to higher employee satisfaction and improved morale. Mechanisms to connect people across campus, whether the goal be research groups or interdisciplinary programs or faculty-staff interaction, are fragmented and leave much to be desired.

Further, ways to connect members of the campus community to the local community, to the business community, to alumni, need to be improved and honed. Improving communication can also lead to better work coordination, increased opportunities for: community, alumni and business partnerships, through collaborations, engagement, and cross-pollination. A lack of communication impedes SDSU at every level and in every medium; community and productivity both suffer when we do not communicate effectively.

The need for evidence-based decision making requires that we periodically survey faculty and staff on morale, engagement, and other issues related to campus and campus climate. The last such surveys were undertaken in 2008 during the Shared Vision process and a campus climate survey was done in 2004. SDSU does not have empirical measures of the opinions and needs of faculty and staff. Regular surveys would provide statistical information on challenges and opportunities.

We found that as we examined the working group recommendations or tactics to achieve certain goals, data was lacking. Surveys and other forms of data collection are critical to provide benchmarks as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of any new programs established.

Primary Recommendation:

- “SDSU Connect: Community Engagement Liaisons” Restructure/develop communication/information infrastructure systems to facilitate interaction among the campus and its communities. This restructure would include:
  - an employee/local community engagement coordinator;
  - a dedicated staff member to coordinate alumni volunteerism;
  - a dedicated staff member to coordinate K12 projects;
  - a dedicated staff member as economic development coordinator.

These individuals would be the central repository for information on varying initiatives and work in conjunction with each other to facilitate collaborative projects.
Community Engagement Coordinator:
Staff position to develop programming; meet regularly with college area community groups; supervise K-12, Alumni and Economic Development; etc.
One of the critical functions of this position would be to institute regular surveys of faculty and staff (3-5 years)

Alumni Volunteer Coordinator:
Develop relationships with key campus constituents who utilize volunteers and serve a true resource for alumni and the community to help students succeed. The duties of the position focus on utilizing student interest data and other known alumni data to establish comprehensive virtual volunteerism primarily, but not limited to, virtual mentorship. A point person for alumni volunteerism will also help facilitate effective cross divisional understanding, awareness, partnerships, and knowledge.
An advisory board would be created to support the strategies for engaging volunteers; K-12 advocates, alumni business leaders would be key figures to link diverse initiatives. This advisory board would also have strong representation from Student Affairs, the colleges.

K-12 Liaison:
Staff position to coordinate, focus and initiate community engagement and partnership development for parents, students, business, industry, schools, and districts.
An advisory board would be created to support the strategies for assessing and developing partnerships: K-12 advocates, alumni business leaders would be key figures to link diverse initiatives.

Economic Development Coordinator:
Position to coordinate, focus and initiate community engagement and partnership development for between campus faculty, programs, and leadership with private and public partners ranging from local to national entities.

Budget Implications:

The Alumni Working Group and the Campus Climate Working Group both considered funding for the necessary infrastructure. K-12 also stressed the need for an information liaison. We have included them in tentative budget, and also include a liaison for economic development. In considering the working group recommendations and input through forums and web-responses, we deem this a wise investment. Estimated 3 year total: $1,080,000.

Additional Recommendations:

Based on the K-12 group analysis and discussions, preparing English-language learners for university education should be a clear priority in the San Diego region. A focus on bilingual programs is critical.
Recommendation:
Initiate a program that will establish SDSU as a national leader in the field. A tenure-track hire in this area is essential, with possibilities for future cluster hires if this initiative were to be considered an area of excellence to develop.

Budget implications:
The initiative would include salary for 12-month faculty member charged with developing/coordinating K-12 English language learner programs and funds for initial start-up programs to be determined by working with the K-12 liaison. Estimated 3 year total: $600K

The Economic Development Working Group set three goals with varied tactics to put them forward. Technology transfer, entrepreneurship, partnerships with businesses, incubators were mentioned more than once in the report. Suggestions were put forward to recognize and embrace entrepreneurial partnerships on and off campus (e.g. technology accelerators), provide opportunities to expand new and existing linkages (e.g. faculty training in target areas: intellectual property), as well as increasing our visibility and direct engagement of the private sectors with advisory or affiliate programs.

One important concept included the notion of “cluster” hiring to facilitate many of these goals and strengthen existing programs is key. It also underlines the critical need to build our tenure-track faculty. To begin this process there needs to be a clearly identified group/groups that would be the target of such development to best assess factors such as:
   a) the number of faculty to be hired and the associated funding required;
   b) the potential financial sustainability of the group;
   c) existing strengths already on the campus;
   d) the cross-campus structure and impact of proposed cluster.

There is also a potential for revenue in focusing on areas of excellence. The Bioscience Center is as an example. This center has brought together a number of researchers addressing some very interesting research that is both basic and applied (http://www.sci.sdsu.edu/bsc/) and has garnered both private (Shiley, Gold and others) and public (NIH, etc) funding.

Recommendation:
-Determine specific area for cluster hires in areas of excellence to strengthen programs and increase their competitive edge.

Budget implications:
Allocate up to $3 million to cover initial salaries, start-up programs, etc. Specific budgetary breakdown is dependant upon the research and academic area/s in which the clusters fall.

1 K-12 Liaison funding including in “SDSU Connect” recommendation.
See Appendix 1 for budgetary breakdown
Please refer to Final Reports of Working Groups for other background information:
http://go.sdsu.edu/strategicplan/files/01461-economicdevfinalrpt.pdf
http://go.sdsu.edu/strategicplan/files/01453-wgcampusclimatefinalreport1216122.pdf
http://go.sdsu.edu/strategicplan/files/01452-wgalumniengagementfinal122012.pdf