

Community Colleges Must Be Resilient by Design

COMMUNITY PARTNERS DISCUSSION TOOLKIT

Business as Usual No Longer Works. Plan for a Future of Change.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS FACILITATOR GUIDE

It is likely that no college, no matter how healthy it currently may be, can continue to operate with business as usual; all will be pressured to adapt or risk becoming irrelevant or insolvent. Even further, these changes will take place at a faster pace than what colleges are used to, requiring rapid and ongoing adaptation.

This reality may seem daunting, but all of these factors also present an opportunity for community colleges to recommit themselves to rapid responsiveness in alignment with the public's ever-changing needs. In doing so, they can respond in a way that doubles down on the traditional mission of community colleges to propel economic mobility and growth for individuals and communities, and to help lay the foundation for civic society.



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Thank you for being a facilitator for *Resilient by Design* discussions. This facilitator guide and its accompanying PowerPoint will help you prepare for and conduct these sessions. If you have questions, email resilient@aacn.edu.

NOTE: The discussion guide and this facilitator guide are written with the expectation that a college employee — or a consultant on behalf of the college — will be the conversation facilitator.

Why Colleges Are Planning for a Future of Change

The next decade will present pivotal moments for community colleges. While individual colleges and the field as a whole have made critical improvements, the accelerating pace of change — in the labor market, the economy, student demographics, and other forces — means that colleges will continually face both familiar and new challenges.

The report *Resilient by Design* identifies the forces that will shape higher education as the pace of change accelerates and the magnitude of change increases. It was prepared by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) on behalf of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

As *Resilient by Design* explains, colleges must begin planning for a future that is quite different from the present and that will continue to evolve in new ways.

This new future demands that colleges develop processes for evaluating, discussing, and rethinking their own policies, practices, priorities, and performance. It compels colleges to plan for change while ensuring a quality learning experience for all students.

Community partners are an essential part of this work. Everyone in the college/community ecosystem must think strategically about how best to use resources — time, money, and talent — so that community colleges, along with their many community partners, can continue to meet their missions in a rapidly shifting future.

[Download](#) and read the *Resilient by Design* report.



Desired Outcomes

As the *Resilient by Design* report explains, colleges and their community partners must become more informed so they can prepare for changes as they become clear, more nimble so they can react to new events, and more open to new ideas about how the college might operate.

Thus, *Resilient by Design* conversations should guide participants toward:

- ▶ Acknowledging that business as usual can no longer be effective and that the future environment will require change and reinvention.
- ▶ Understanding and preparing to act on the forces of change that already are affecting higher education and ultimately will have an impact on all colleges, their partners, and the communities they serve.
- ▶ Having honest conversations about community needs and how community partners and the community college can together re-envision their relationships. This approach will quite likely require beginning new dialogues rather than simply continuing existing conversations. Community partners should be friendly critics — or even outright critics — of current policies, practices, and procedures.
- ▶ Being prepared to actively work with colleges to address concerns and introduce new ways of working together to better serve students and the community. The goal should be a joint process to educate and support students rather than separate roles in which each sector does its part and then hands off the students to the next step in the pipeline.
- ▶ Thinking strategically about how colleges should prepare to be effective and sustainable as the future unfolds.



These discussions are not about tweaking practices or introducing a series of new initiatives. They are about rethinking the fundamental ways a college functions and how new types of collaborations with community partners — ideally partnerships that address particular issues of common concern — can help all stakeholders successfully meet a challenging future.

This discussion guide asks community partners to think boldly. Through these discussions, participants will ask themselves difficult questions, challenge long-standing practices, and create new ways of working.

YOUR ROLE AS A FACILITATOR: ENCOURAGING BOLD THOUGHT

Many colleges are already transforming their business and educational models to help more students prepare for living-wage careers. Colleges have introduced new practices such as partnering with employers to co-create and co-teach programs; changing their tuition pricing models; and building academic and career pathways that can guide students from K–12 to community college, university, and even post-baccalaureate education as needed.



Your group's ideas about how the community college might evolve in constructive ways to meet future needs will be highly valuable. The best way to develop these ideas is to center your group discussion on the shared challenges presented by the coming future, the common interests held by community partners and community colleges, and the unique capacities that various community partners offer. Most important, your discussion should focus on the essential collaborations that can be forged to better serve both students and the broader community.

Part of your role as a facilitator is to push participants to be bold and to keep the conversation honest. In discussions, participants often default to what is most familiar. That approach will not take the college where it needs to go. The following tips can help you inspire bold, innovative, accurate thinking:

- Tell participants that you want bold, innovative thinking. Do not allow anyone to use “We’ve always done it that way” to justify any idea or recommendation.
- Help participants think through the ideas they raise and determine if these ideas will create real change. For example, ask, “If we implement this idea, what would the results be?” and discuss whether the initial idea would make an impact. What data might you need to see if the idea would make an impact? What changes might make the idea more powerful?
- Be conscious that a pretty significant shift in organizational cultures likely will be needed, not just new policies and practices. Change management will be an ongoing requirement.
- Participants, like other human beings, often voice assumptions that are not backed up by data. Whenever possible, start the conversation with relevant data. (See Preparation: Gathering Data, page 8.) If a participant cites data or evidence without providing the source, ask, “How do you know this?”
- While you want participants to acknowledge concerns about the college’s practices or outcomes, do not let the conversation devolve into complaints. Keep the focus on solutions. And do not allow for musings along the lines of “If only we had more money.” The goal is to understand the reality and work to improve it.

Planning: Start With College Leaders

Before you begin, make a plan with the leaders of your college. After reading the report and discussion guide, you will want to discuss the following questions:

- ▶ What are your college's goals for the *Resilient by Design* discussions? Which community partners will you involve? (See Planning: Identifying the Community Partners You Will Invite to Discussions, page 7, for suggestions.) You likely will have separate conversations with different types of community partners.
- ▶ The discussion guide devotes one section to each of the report's central themes. As you decide which section(s) each community partner will focus on, consider these questions:
 - » Which of the issues raised in the report are most relevant to your college's interactions with the community partners?
 - » Which issues are most important to your college's current work, upcoming work, or strategic planning?
 - » How can you encourage participants to do the bold thinking required to develop innovative solutions?
- ▶ What work do college leaders need to do before broadening the conversations to community partners? Do college leaders need conversations about, for example, goals for the work, who should participate and when, and how much time should be invested in this planning?
- ▶ What takeaways from campus *Resilient by Design* discussions apply to community partner conversations? How will you include these takeaways in upcoming discussions?
- ▶ What data will you present to community partners as part of these conversations? (See Preparation: Gathering Data, page 8, for suggestions.)
- ▶ What will you do with the results of these conversations? Who will review the notes that result from the discussions, and how will you decide what steps to take next? How will you use findings from community partner conversations to inform future campus discussions?
- ▶ How do you plan to interact with community partners over time and keep them engaged? (See Follow-Up: After the Discussion, page 13, for suggestions.)



Planning: Identifying the Community Partners You Will Invite to Discussions

Page 4 of the *Community Partners Discussion Guide* shows examples of community partners in three sectors: the education sector; the business sector; and nonprofits, community organizations, and government organizations.

For most colleges, having separate conversations with members of each sector will make sense. As you identify which community partners to invite to these discussions, follow these guidelines:

- ▶ Think broadly about the types of organizations and businesses that might partner with you. Do not stop with types of groups you already interact with.
- ▶ Invite the people, businesses, and organizations you already know, and include people who are familiar with your college and its mission.
- ▶ Do not stop with the people you already know. Broaden your pool of partners by inviting groups you have not worked with in the past. Use the *Resilient by Design* work as an opportunity to be active in new places and to engage new people, businesses, and organizations.
- ▶ While you likely will need to give participants some background about the college, its work, and its future plans, try to limit the time spent on sharing basic information. You want to maximize time for discussion.





Preparation: Gathering Data

Once you identify the goals for the community partner discussions, including which sections of the guide you will focus on, gather data that you will share with participants before or during the discussions.

For each community partner discussion, share data that reflect the current student experience and outcomes at your college and that are most relevant to the community partners. You may include different data for partners from different sectors.

You may also choose to compare some data from your college to national data. Following are examples of data to share, along with suggestions about where you can source data you do not already have.

For each topic, work with your college's institutional research office to answer the following questions:

- ▶ What data do we already have on these topics? Which of these data are most important? What important data are we missing?
- ▶ Who will gather the additional data we need (using the sources mentioned in this guide or other locally available sources)?

Workforce and outcomes data

- ▶ What industries and occupations in your service area are most in demand or are experiencing the greatest gap in supply? What is the service area's economic development plan, and how might that plan affect demand for education and training?

Potential sources, in addition to your internal student data, include:

- » Employment statistics and projections by industry and occupation produced by your state government; and
- » Subscription-based labor market databases, such as Lightcast or JobsEQ.

- ▶ What happens to your students when they leave your college? What percentage graduate? What percentage transfer? What percentage are employed in living-wage jobs? What percentage are no longer enrolled, have not earned a credential, and have not transferred after six years?

Potential sources, in addition to your internal student data, include:

- » Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) outcomes measures;
- » National Student Clearinghouse [StudentTracker](#);
- » National Student Clearinghouse [Postsecondary Data Partnership](#) (if you are a member);
- » [National Community College Benchmark Project](#) (if you are a member);
- » U.S. Census Bureau's [Postsecondary Employment Outcomes](#) (if your state/system participates);
- » U.S. Department of Education's [College Scorecard](#);

Preparation: Gathering Data

- » Unemployment insurance data from your state; and
 - » Perkins grant or other follow-up survey data, if response rates are high.
- ▶ How many students are enrolled in each of your programs, and what employment opportunities are available to students after completing each program? What percentage of students are on track to living-wage jobs?

Potential sources, in addition to your internal student data, include:

- » [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#); and
- » Sources cited in the previous section.

Enrollment and student needs data

- ▶ What is your current enrollment? What proportion of students are dual enrollment students? Show the five-year trend line for enrollment. Also show the 10- or 20-year trend line.
- ▶ Are the demographics in your area changing? If so, how are they changing? How do the characteristics of your current students, in terms of age, income, and race/ethnicity, compare with the characteristics of the overall population of your service area? Will the characteristics of the people in your service area be different in the future?

Potential sources, in addition to your internal student data, include:

- » Regional population statistics and projections produced by your state government;
 - » High school graduate numbers compiled by your state Department of Education;
 - » [Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's projections of high school graduates](#); and
 - » U.S. Census Bureau population data.
- ▶ Is the number of students in the student groups you typically serve growing or shrinking?
- ▶ What kinds of educational experiences do students (and potential students) in different student groups seek?

Potential sources, in addition to your internal student data, include:

- » Center for Community College Student Engagement surveys including the [Community College Survey of Student Engagement](#), the [Survey of Entering Student Engagement](#), and the [Dual Enrollment Survey of Student Engagement](#) (if your college participates in these surveys);
 - » CollegeAPP data (if you subscribe); and
 - » Other survey/focus group data.
- ▶ What percentage of your students have food or housing insecurity?
- » A potential source of data is the [Hope Center Student Basic Needs Survey](#) (if your institution participates).

Preparation: Customizing and Using the PowerPoint

The accompanying PowerPoint presentation provides slides you can use for your discussion.

Use the sections of the PowerPoint that are relevant for your conversation, and add information that is specific to your college.

The PowerPoint deck includes:

- ▶ Slides you can use to start your discussion, including why your college is undertaking this work, an overview of the *Resilient by Design* report, and your approach to the conversation.
- ▶ Slides for each section of the report, including key points from the report and the discussion questions.
- ▶ Sample data slides you can use to create charts that show data for your college.
- ▶ Suggestions for customizing the presentation for your college.



FACILITATION BASICS

If you are new to facilitation, consider these suggestions:

- **Know your audience.**
- **Establish clear goals for the session.**
- **Vary your approach during the conversation.**
If the size of your group allows, have some full-group time and smaller breakout sessions.
- **Use activities to engage participants.** Use activities that allow people to provide input in different ways (e.g., writing and speaking), engage in some informal discussion, and process their thoughts. Activities that include physically moving around (e.g., to a different part of a room) also help people stay engaged and can inspire better thinking.
- **Be comfortable with silence.** Often people are hesitant to speak. But participants also become uncomfortable with long silences. Be patient and allow the silence to continue. If you wait, someone will speak. This approach also leaves breathing room for people who need time to gather their thoughts.
- **Make room for everyone to speak.** Do not let one or two people dominate the conversation. Give everyone the opportunity to speak, and do not hesitate to say, “Let’s hear from someone else.” Also, the goal is not to have everyone agree but to give everyone room to state their opinion.
- **Go where the conversation takes you.** Use the discussion questions as a guide and a starting point. (See *Having the Discussion and Using the Discussion Guide*, page 12, for information about questions that you should always use.) The goal is to have a productive discussion that generates useful ideas related to your goals for the session in the time allotted for the conversation.
- **Make a plan for next steps.** Leave time at the end of the discussion for next steps. Do you need to set a time for another meeting or identify who is responsible for specific tasks and when they will be completed? Should you identify others who need to be consulted or brought into the conversation before moving forward? Do not end the meeting with only a list of ideas. Make sure you have a plan to turn them into action.



Having the Discussion and Using the Discussion Guide

Share the [Community Partners Discussion Guide](#) and full [Resilient by Design](#) report with participants, and tell them which section(s) of the guide you will be using for your conversation. Ask them to read the report before your conversation.

- ▶ Start the discussion with some background on *Resilient by Design* and why your college is hosting these conversations. Explain the college's goals and the role of participants.
- ▶ As you discuss why this work is important, share relevant data about your college. Ask some questions about the data. Also invite questions about the data and discussion from the participants.
- ▶ Summarize the key points from *Resilient by Design* that apply to the section(s) of the report you are discussing.
- ▶ You may not have time for all of the questions, but always ask the questions with this arrow  symbol. (Ideally, participants will have read relevant sections of the report and will be prepared to answer the first question, "What most resonated with you from the relevant sections of the report?") Other than that, choose the questions that are most relevant to your college. You also can ask participants to identify the questions they most want to discuss.
- ▶ Designate a notetaker for your session.



Follow-Up: After the Discussion

In the weeks and months following the discussion, you might want to keep community partners engaged and show them how the college is using their ideas. Following up in this way can help the college get ongoing input.

In addition, consistently engaging participants will make rolling out new plans easier. People who are involved in designing changes are more likely to support them. They also can explain new ideas to people who were not involved in the discussions and become ambassadors for reform. If all participants do not agree, that is also okay. Hearing concerns as soon as people are ready to articulate them will serve the college well. You can:

- ▶ Summarize the group conversation in a follow-up email.
- ▶ Provide summaries of other *Resilient by Design* discussions.
- ▶ Provide updates — or ask for additional input — as discussions continue or the college's plans evolve.



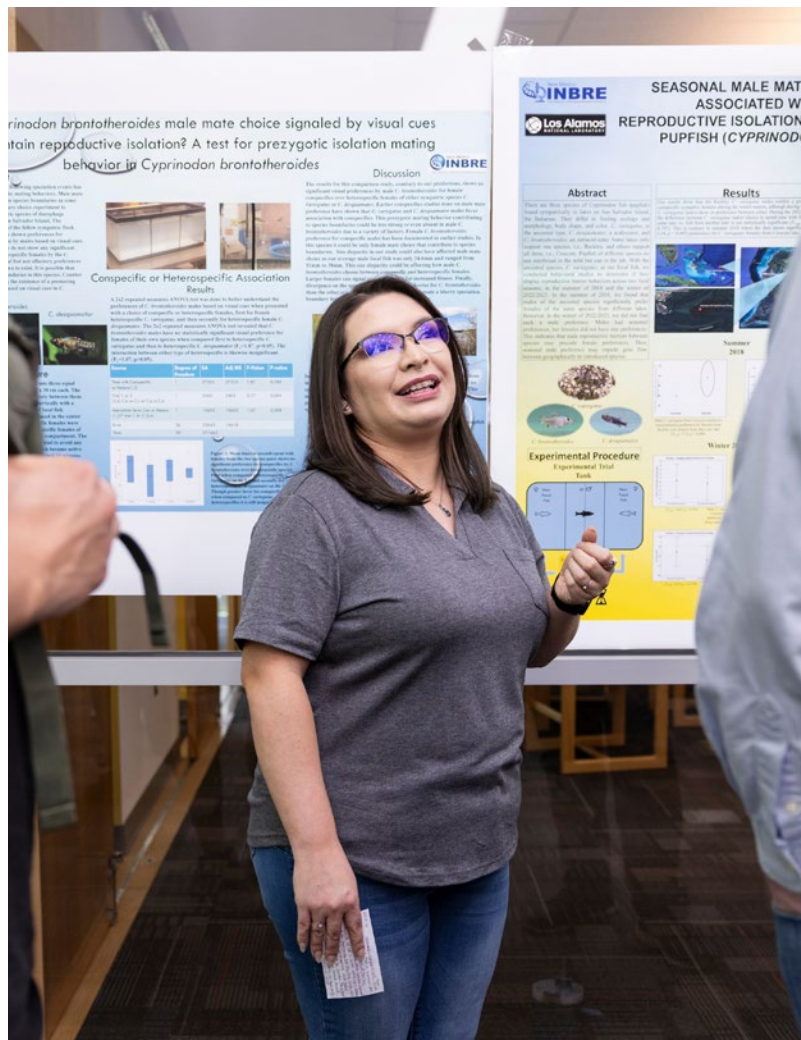


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