

# IEC Subcommittee Report

## Theme 3: Outreach and Engagement

### Section 1: Aggregate Summary Statement

During the process of developing the strategic plan, there had been conversation about creating a more robust culture of external engagement at Washington State University, which led to Theme 3 of the strategic plan. The initial conversation and business of the Theme 3 Subcommittee included ideas to strategically coordinate efforts around advancement, research, and public policy – as well as efforts to be more tactically focused with respect to communication and engagement locally around campuses, in the Puget Sound area, statewide, regionally and nationally. There was enthusiasm for supporting a culture where we individually become ambassadors for WSU working from the same playbook. To that end the university has already begun to effect change to better meet the goals of the strategic plan with respect to Theme 3 – these changes and initiatives were begun from conversations around Theme 3 of the strategic plan:

- Dr. Elson Floyd, late president, created an advancement model, aligning our communications and marketing with fundraising so that we have consistent messaging to support our development goals and to establish a platform for increased public-private partnerships.
- Dr. Dan Bernardo, interim president, asked for creation of the “Playbook” to align the university at the institutional leadership level.
- Dr. John Gardner, vice president for development and CEO of the WSU Foundation, created and is leading a Strategic Marketing Council to create alignment in our university messaging to students and families, as well as to private and public audiences and partners.

In addition to these initiatives underway, we also have sub-goals to better coordinate and leverage our activity between alumni, donors, and our public policy advocates so they understand WSU’s true impact. These include strategies to better message and engage as one university geographically dispersed so that all of our audiences and partners know that there are many points of entry and engagement with WSU – demonstrating that we are a coordinated institution, while also reinforcing support for our branch campuses in their local activities, initiatives and community relations.

Perhaps not surprisingly, as the Subcommittee further considered strategic communications, the topic that surfaced was with respect to how we could improve internal communications. The Subcommittee heard an amount of frustration in how information is relayed – the use of primarily President’s Perspectives and WSU News to convey our news and priorities appears to be insufficient. The committee came to the consensus that to the extent WSU can better share information internally about our activities, priorities, successes and strategies, we would be stronger as an institution in engagement with external audiences. To further those conversations in coming months, the Chair of the subcommittee will be working this issue directly with Advancement and Communications to explore:

- How to better tailor messages to internal versus external audiences. For example, Dr. Bernardo uses direct HTML correspondence with great success, how can we standardize this and create separate such communications for external leaders, and communication from Chancellors in local communities?

- Use of blogs and other types of internet and social media – Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Carving out Presidential communications as a priority area – mass communications, talking points, strategic stakeholder engagement, and then transmitting relevant information back out internally to communications directors so that we all stay in alignment with the university message.

The convening of the Theme 3 Subcommittee has been a valuable process that has precipitated changes at WSU to better foster a culture of external outreach and engagement. It will be exciting to track our metrics over the coming months and years.

## **Section 2: Suggested Metrics**

To be determined.

## **Section 3: Activity Report**

The Theme 3 Subcommittee had one formal meeting in May with a second planned for follow up in September. This was primarily due to busy schedules and the passing of Dr. Floyd, as most members of the Subcommittee are deeply engaged in outreach and this was a time that required engagement for purposes of conveying continuity of leadership. In addition, while the Subcommittee appreciated the larger meeting for purposes of a collective update, there was more appreciation for individual or smaller meetings where they could provide thoughtful feedback. Those were a priority for the Subcommittee and there were a number of individual meetings and conversations between the Chair and individuals member of the Subcommittee. Additionally, the Chair convened meetings and received input from each of the Chancellors, many of the Deans and Regents Professors, University Council, Vice Presidents, and student leadership. The Chair also made a point to collect input from the consultants engaged by WSU on our outreach efforts. To that point specifically, many of the outreach efforts were refined as a result of input from the Theme 3 process, including the process around the institutional reputational analysis, strategic messaging, and plans for a post 125th anniversary-marketing initiative.

With respect to refinement of the strategic plan itself, the Subcommittee focused its efforts on refining and redefining:

- Metric 41, regarding the number of academic units or programs with advisory boards that include alumni and constituency representatives. It is not clear yet what WSU as an institution wants to capture with this metric. For example, we absolutely want to be engaging with our alumni over the course of their lives and their careers, but is there a specific goal or goals to where we want to work with them for the benefit of WSU in support of our goals around research and education?
- Metric 49, regarding the U.S. News and World reputational score. This metric is too focused on one ranking. The Subcommittee is at a consensus that this metric alone is not valuable. The Shanghai and Time of London Rankings are equally as valuable for research institutions, particularly in academic communities. Additionally – and this is something the IEC

itself wrestled with – WSU has a set of existing and aspirational peer institutions that is often a more valuable reference point for comparative analysis.

After one-on-one phone conversations and e-mail exchanges to discuss the two metrics and record feedback, Subcommittee staff will aggregate this information into a report to the Subcommittee Chair for analysis.

The Subcommittee's next meeting is scheduled for September 29 with a draft agenda to discuss the analysis of metrics 41 and 49, internal communication strategies, and next steps and action items for the Subcommittee.