



**Creating Effective Listening Systems  
Normandale Community College**

**2009-2010 Luoma Leadership Academy Action Team Project**

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## Executive Summary

Normandale defines success as being a recognized leader in academic excellence, student support, and community and workforce development. It employs a variety of strategies to accomplish this goal include focusing on community needs, being accountable to the community it serves, and fostering collaboration among faculty, staff, administrators, and community partners. The successes of businesses are, in turn, contingent on the availability of skilled labor and the vitality of the community in which they operate. As such, businesses and Normandale share mutual interests - which can be cultivated through effective mechanisms to communicate and address their needs and potential solutions to those needs.

Over the past year, our Luoma research team has explored how Normandale Community College could develop an effective listening system that would provide opportunities for faculty and staff to use in planning and developing programs, services and outreach efforts. There are three key elements in the developing a system to nurture and develop relationships with community partners: people, processes, and technologies. Through interviews with Normandale staff, business partners, and Minnesota state administrators, we investigated existing practices to collect, synthesize, and communicate business needs to the institution.

Interviews with staff provided abundant evidence of strong relationships and ties with the business community. The interviews also highlighted a number of opportunities to enhance those relationships and to improve the flow of communication both within the college and ultimately between the college and local businesses. In particular, the college could benefit from the development of a more systematic method for collecting and sharing information.

Our specific suggestions include:

- Incorporate the development and sharing of information about businesses and partnerships as a component in work plans at all levels of the organization and designate a staff person to take the lead on coordinating these efforts.
- Communicate and reward successful practices and implement accountability measures to incent and ensure success.
- Create an internal web portal to facilitate the collection and sharing of information about business partnerships and about the business community. This could include the use of a centralized calendar.
- Create an external web portal to provide a single point of contact for the business community. This would have to be managed by staff but that function could be distributed across business units depending on the nature of the inquiry.
- Survey staff to track involvement in organizations such as Chambers of Commerce and Rotary

- Make wider use of social networking tools, particularly those targeted to professionals and businesses.

In the longer term, the college should explore the use of a centralized contact management system (CRM) and should also make sure that efforts underway for the development and expansion of an alumni system be coordinated with the listening system project. Alumni, as they work and move forward within their careers, are an excellent resource and contacts in the business community that could be tapped into to greater effect. Normandale should also expand the scope of this evaluation. In particular, working with the Office of the Chancellor to leverage system-wide and state-level connections with business and engagement of the Normandale student population and post-secondary institutions that serve Normandale graduates will help create an effective listening system that supports Normandale's core mission.

Public institutions and private corporations face the need to provide more with less. Tight budgets provide ample incentive to partner and share resources to deliver greater value for the money. At the same time, the pace of change requires partnerships that are adaptable, collaborative, and multilayered. Lastly, all public institutions and private corporations must seek and embrace the technology tools that would develop multidimensional connections with each other. The recommended approaches will evolve over time but the underlying principles for fostering partnerships and communication mechanisms will remain (Sorbel):

- Balance of short and long term goals
- Enhance dialogue
- Create an environment that encourages new ideas
- Leverage existing efforts using collaborative approaches
- Support relationship managers
- Customize the relationship experience
- Provide incentives to ensure buy-in
- Implement measures and accountability systems

## Part I: Introduction

The role of the community college is principally focused upon the delivery of transfer curriculum, associate degrees for occupational programs and postemployment training. During economic downturns, demand increases among persons seeking quick certificate programs that will allow them to reenter the workforce. Businesses look to local community colleges to provide a work-ready labor force and retraining and skills upgrading to increase incumbent worker efficiency and productivity. For all stakeholders, establishing alliances and partnerships with local businesses is essential to understand the evolving needs for workforce training, to inform curriculum development, and to equip students with the skills and knowledge that are in demand.

Traditionally, businesses faced with the threat of an inadequately prepared workforce that would jeopardize their competitiveness partnered with educational institutions to provide critical thinking and problem-solving skills required in an increasingly knowledge-based, service-driven economy. Schools benefited from the generosity of their business partners by receiving up-to-date equipment, incentives for student attendance and scholarship, and opportunities for students to learn through real world work experiences. In successful partnerships, the benefits radiate and rebound from one partner to another, resulting in mutual rewards for participants: businesses, students, the institution and the community. In the new lifelong learning economy where “working learners” will be trained and retrained, it is increasingly apparent that business and education partnerships will need to strengthen to meet the evolving and growing educational needs of the nation.

During the present difficult economy, educational institutions must go beyond simply asking for money from corporations. Educational leaders must cultivate interdependent relationships between their schools, companies, and community leaders. Building relationships before asking for resources is a critical first step toward creating long-term sustainable relationships. Showing an authentic desire to listen, understand and respond to the needs of the business community is a means toward that end. The foundation of these interdependent relationships is trusting, mutually beneficial relationships between business leaders and educational leaders.

Educators must have the time and motivation required to develop these relationships. Administrators must ensure that these activities are effectively supported and meet the varying needs of the functional units within the institution. Businesses must feel that they are heard and their participation produces results. An effective “listening system” is vital to the success of the institution, student and community.

## Part II: Methodology

### Project Scope

The initial project proposal identified the need for a listening system capable of seeking feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders including businesses, community organizations, transfer institutions, alumni and others. Based on discussions with the project sponsors and advisors the decision was made to more narrowly focus on the business community and the following project outcomes:

- **Identification of Information Needs** – what information about the business community is needed by various departments within the college.
- **Assessment of Current Practices** – what information is being collected and to what extent is information shared across functional areas of the college.
- **Identification of Critical Elements of an Effective Listening System** – what processes or systems are suggested by the literature or identified in successful systems at other colleges.
- **Recommendations** – what systematic process for Collecting and Sharing Information about the Business Community could be implemented

These project goals align well with many of the objectives and goals outlined in the Normandale Community College Strategic Plan: increasing the colleges understanding of its market and the needs of current and prospective students, delivering programs in response to the needs of the community, and engaging and responding more effectively to business and to the community.

Four primary methodologies were employed to collect the information needed for the project:

- 1) interviews with key college staff;
- 2) interviews with business partners;
- 3) interviews with system and state level staff; and
- 3) a review of the literature on effective listening systems and the identification of promising practices in the area of environmental scanning and business information.

This represented a further narrowing of the project scope since students, alumni and post-secondary institutions that receive Normandale graduates were not interviewed. These are important audiences that should be included in further analyses.

### Staff and Faculty Interviews

The staff interviews were designed to solicit information from key functional areas of the college, many of which have traditionally had strong connections to the business community. These areas included college leadership, the college foundation, grants administration, customized training/continuing education and service learning. In

addition, academic department leadership was also included because of the strong relationship between academic programs and employers.

The primary purposes of the interviews were to determine what types of information are needed, what information about the business community is currently being collected, what software or systems are used to store that information and the extent to which information is shared. The staff and faculty that were interviewed were also able to provide insights into the challenges and potential solutions for an effective listening system.

A list of staff members who were interviewed is included in Appendix B. Appendix C is a copy of the questions that formed the basis of the interviews.

### **Business Partner Interviews**

Based on recommendations from Normandale staff, two business partners were selected to be interviewed: Oak Ridge Conference Center and Health Partners.

Health Partners was selected because they not only have close ties to specific academic programs, they also partner with the college for grant opportunities and have existing relationships with the foundation office. Oak Ridge Conference Center provided an opportunity to gather information from the perspective of a business that has provided services to the college but also has untapped opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

A list of the individuals interviewed and the interview questions are included in Appendix D.

### **Other Interviews**

Additional interviews were conducted with customized training and Perkins Grant staff at the Office of the Chancellor. Richard Tvedten, System Director for Customized Training, provided a system-wide perspective on customized training and Mary Messimer (Program Manager (now retired), State Perkins Grant Unit) provided background information about technical programs and the use of advisory boards. In addition, Mark Ritchie, Minnesota Secretary of State, provided us with a broader state perspective. Despite the current economic downturn, his office registered over 63,000 new businesses last year. Touch points with businesses at the Secretary of State Office, the Department of Employment and Economic Development and in the MnSCU system create opportunities for collaborative data sharing and outreach.

### **Literature Review/Best Practices**

A review of the literature on environmental scanning helped to shape the focus of the project, identify critical elements of effective systems and identify types of information that could be useful and promising practices that could be sustainable. In addition to a review of the literature, information was also collected on promising practices at other colleges and universities, both within and outside the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

### **Part III: Information Needs**

Information about businesses and the business community is used for a wide variety of purposes across the college including fundraising, developing customized training options, grant partnerships, and program development and evaluation. In addition, information about businesses and relationships with the local business community is important for helping students set up internship and service learning opportunities. Programs, particularly technical programs, also develop strong relationships with businesses as vendors for supplies and equipment and providers of information about new technologies.

Although information about the business community is used for a wide variety of purposes across the college, the types of information that staff indicated they needed was fairly consistent:

- General information and data about the business climate in the area, including current workforce trends, trends in new product areas and information about high demand/high growth occupations that may relate to the college's program areas. This information is needed to assist with developing new programs, developing customized training and to ensure that students are prepared.
- Information about specific businesses and organizations, including contact information, information about the organization's mission, the products or services they provide or use as well as training needs and trend in labor skill requirements.
- Information about existing relationships between businesses and other areas of the college.

It was noted by some of those interviewed that information about startup companies is particularly useful, but also particularly difficult to get. In addition, although small businesses generally have less ability to participate in partnerships with the college, they are in some ways the ones the college can best serve because they are the most in need of workers with a broad range of skills and general education.

## **Part IV: Assessment of Current Practices**

College faculty and staff have developed many strong relationships with the business and non-profit community and there is consistent participation by leadership and staff in community organizations such as the Rotary Club and the Chamber of Commerce. In addition, in recent years there have also been a number of successful, and high profile, outreach events such as the continuing “Java with Joe” sessions with local business and community leaders and the successful “Talk of the Town” fundraiser in Fall 2009. At the program level, there are advisory boards and departments have developed relationships with businesses as vendors and as options for student placement into clinicals and internships.

Those interviewed represented a cross-section of functions: foundations and grants, service learning, customized training, college administration, planning, faculty and academic programs. All of the staff interviewed collect and use information about the business community and about their contacts with businesses. The way the information is stored and the level of detail, however, varies based on the specific needs of the staff. While there is a clear willingness to share information, the processes for sharing data are informal and much of the information is not easily accessible or easily searched by others.

Staff identified the following as specific needs related to the development of a listening system focused on the business community:

- The ability to easily and efficiently share information across functional units of the college. Any system that is put in place needs to be easy to use (e.g., data input and retrieval) and not be burdensome to maintain.
- Access to information about a business or non-profit’s other existing partnerships or relationships with the college.
- Training and professional development to help staff be better prepared to elicit and recognize the type of information that may be useful to others at the college and to help provide a more consistent message back to the business community.
- Access to current information about business trends to help in program planning and to help ensure that students will have the skills they need.
- A primary point of contact at the institution for the business community.

These topics, as they arose in the interviews, are discussed in greater detail below.

### **Collecting and Sharing Information**

All of those interviewed maintain some information about their business contacts and relationships but the level of detail and the way that information is stored varies considerably and creates complexities for aggregation and sharing. The information sharing that occurs tends to be ad hoc and informal in nature.

Information is maintained in a variety of formats at the department or individual staff member level and is generally not easily accessible to other staff. When it is accessible to others, it is often formats that are not easily searchable.

The Foundation and the Grant Development Office share a common contact management system, Raiser's Edge. The Foundation uses the system to track current and potential donors and the Grant Development office uses it to track contacts with grant partners. There were mixed reviews about the ease of use of the system and the accuracy of the historical data. Although some felt that the system could be overly complex, others felt that it could be used in a way that a minimum amount of information about contacts is entered. Other units and departments, particularly faculty and academic departments, rely primarily on word processing documents and spreadsheets to maintain their information.

Much of the sharing that occurs is possible because units include information about their businesses partnerships on their individual department websites. The Grant Development and Service Learning websites provide the greatest amount of information. Some of the staff in other areas of the college mentioned that they look on those sites for information about partnerships.

The Grant Development office provides assistance to other staff at Normandale in the preparation of grant proposals and in moving proposals through administrative review, submission and monitoring. The grant website includes a list of funded and completed projects (<http://faculty.normandale.edu/~grants/index.html>). The project summaries generally include a list of internal and external partners. The site contains considerable information, but is not easily searchable and does not generally include contact information for the grant partners. More detailed information, including copies of documents related to each project, is maintained primarily in Excel spreadsheets, Word documents and in paper form.

The service learning website includes a list of key community partners, most of which are non-profits that offer service learning opportunities. The entries for each organization include a description of the organization and its mission, contact information and a description of the volunteer opportunities that are available (<http://faculty.normandale.edu/~servlearning/partners.htm>).

The Foundation website includes a list of events and a link to the current issue of the *Creating Futures* magazine. The magazine contains a list of donors, including businesses ([http://www.normandale.edu/pdf/promote/Fall\\_09\\_Futures\\_website.pdf](http://www.normandale.edu/pdf/promote/Fall_09_Futures_website.pdf)).

Most of those interviewed would welcome a system that would allow for sharing information more easily but also expressed concern that any system that was developed not be burdensome to maintain. It was noted that some staff have started to use SharePoint, but its use is not universal or consistent or explicitly designed to function as a CRM system. Others raised concerns that faculty and staff simply don't have the time to enter information into tools like SharePoint and wikis. It was also reported that an effort to use the RightNow technology for this type of information sharing had not been successful. RightNow is a technically complicated and expensive system to use for occasional users.

Cross functional meetings as a means of sharing information were discussed by some of those interviewed. The general view was that in the past such meetings did not have a clear enough focus and that the meetings were perhaps too frequent.

One interviewee suggested yearly cross-functional planning meetings as an option that would be helpful but added that they should not be overly frequent and that the meetings needed to include not just the upper levels of administration, but at least one level down to be effective.

Although in the interviews staff expressed a willingness to share information, there was not a universal understanding of the extent to which such sharing could increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their own work as well as the collective work of the college. Because the sharing that currently occurs is fairly limited, there may be issues that arise once sharing becomes more widespread and contacts are viewed as a resource for college as a whole rather than 'belonging' to a particular department or unit. In addition, there were some concerns raised regarding the level of detail that would be shared, particularly the level of detail and the extent to which information might be shared about businesses that contract for staff retraining. The concern focused on the potential release of information to competitors of those businesses.

### **Professional Development Needs**

In addition to the more formal relationships and sources of information discussed above, faculty and staff also often have relationships and contacts with businesses on a less formal level. These contacts can be an important source of information about the business community but staff and faculty are not trained to collect this type of information. They may not have a clear sense of what information is important to share with others in the college and, even if they do, there is no clear mechanism for doing so.

Concerns were also raised about the consistency of messages delivered to the community. A related suggestion was to provide additional training in how to approach businesses and how to promote services and opportunities for partnerships that the college could provide.

### **General Information on the Business Community and Business Trends**

Staff expressed the need for more information about the general characteristics of local business and industry and for information about trends. A number of those interviewed noted that grant development staff have helped them with environmental scanning activities, but this has been restricted to the process of preparing individual grant proposals. Outside of this grant process there is not an easily accessible source for this type of information.

Concern was also raised that programs frequently rely on the business and industry contacts that they already have. This overreliance on existing contacts provides less opportunity to learn new information and may bias the perception of overall business needs. Easier access to economic and business information would help ensure that advisory boards are representative of the business community that is being served.

## **No Single Point of Contact for Businesses or College Staff**

Some of those interviewed noted that businesses like to have a single point of contact. Businesses that do not yet have a relationship with the college may not be able to easily identify the specific department or staff person that could address their questions or needs. Those that do have an existing relationship may only know one person at the college. Those staff must then act as a clearinghouse of information about other areas or departments (e.g., a business contact or community member may be looking for a speaker for an event, want to know about providing opportunities for students at their organization, etc.). Although many deans and chairs are familiar with campus wide contacts and are able to make referrals, this is not necessarily true of all faculty and staff.

There is also a lack of a single point of contact for college staff as exemplified by the suggestion for a better college intranet. The existence of partnerships with other areas of the college was highlighted as a critical need by a number of those interviewed but, while some information is available on the websites noted above, those sources are scattered over the college website and may not be known to all staff.

Some of those interviewed mentioned that previous efforts were undertaken to create a master list of partnerships but that the list or database had not been made available or its location is not known.

## **Additional Concerns**

A number of those interviewed suggested that additional coordination and information could be provided by the Office of the Chancellor. For example, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) discipline workshops could be used to share information across institutions and the system Foundation and Customized Training staff could increase their work on developing system-wide strategies and resources and sharing information across campuses. Improvements to the graduate follow-up process and better information about graduates, including information at a more actionable level, were noted as important information needs. The graduate follow-up survey was widely cited as being burdensome and of little value in its current form.

Alumni were identified as a rich but underutilized resource for business contacts and a source of information about the business community and business trends. Although this may begin to improve as the alumni association gears up its efforts, the concern was raised that the potential for alumni to serve as a resource, other than for financial contributions, will not be realized unless it is made a clear priority.

## **Part V: Critical Elements of Effective Listening Systems – A Review of the Literature and Best Practices**

### **Literature Review on Environmental Scanning/Listening Systems**

The types and characteristics of scanning efforts undertaken by colleges and universities take a variety of forms. The literature primarily distinguishes scanning efforts on four dimensions (see Morrison's review of the literature on scanning):

- Frequency (e.g., ad hoc vs. continuous)
- Intensity of Scanning Effort (e.g., passive vs. active)
- Organizational Structure (e.g., committee vs. planning/budget staff)
- Depth of Information/Level of Detail – Does the scanning effort include information on: competitors, campus climate, demographics, technological trends, economic trends, emerging industries, political trends, etc.

Of particular importance to this project are factors that the literature suggests will help improve the success of scanning efforts. The literature indicates that an effective listening system, as it fits into overall scanning efforts, would be most successful if the effort is:

- Ongoing
- Fully integrated within the institution's business practices
- Sufficiently comprehensive to provide the breadth and depth of information needed to make decisions and
- Has strong presidential recognition and support

The literature on building client partnerships also provides some guidance. That both public institutions and private corporations need to be able to provide more with less creates an incentive to partner in order to share resources to deliver greater value for the money. At the same time, the pace of change requires partnerships that are adaptable, collaborative, and multilayered. The literature provides some underlying principles for developing these partnerships (see Sorbel):

- Balance of short and long term goals
- Enhance dialogue
- Create an environment that encourages new ideas
- Leverage collaborative technologies
- Support relationship managers
- Customize the relationship experience
- Create new service delivery models

### **Innovative Practices at Other Colleges and Universities**

A review of practices at other colleges and universities indicate that there are a number of innovative ways to incorporate the critical elements of an effective system into the institution's business practices.

## **Provide a Primary Point of Contact for the Business Community**

A number of colleges and universities include a business/community portal prominently displayed on their website. Although many colleges include a link to customized training or continuing education, the more robust sites are broader in scope. These sites provide an ongoing link to the business community and provide businesses with an easy way to connect with a broad range of services and information at the college. Two institutions with sites that address this broader goal are Harrisburg Area Community College and the University of Minnesota

The Harrisburg Area Community College site includes a prominent link to information for the Business Community (<http://www.hacc.edu/Business-and-Community-Portal.cfm>). The site includes links to a variety of services for employers such as the college conference center, job fairs, the college's Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies as well as information on student internships, how to post job vacancies and a link to workforce training. The site also includes information about doing business with the college.

The "Business Resources" link on the University of Minnesota website (<http://www1.umn.edu/urelate/obr/>) connects a member of the business community to the website for the Office of Business Relations. As with the Harrisburg site, businesses are provided information on an array of services and opportunities—hiring, consultant services, training opportunities, etc. An additional feature of the University of Minnesota site, however, is that it provides a single contact for additional information.

## **Interdepartmental Collaboration and Cross-training**

As Normandale and other community colleges continue to experience economic setbacks, innovative approaches are necessary to meet the ever changing needs of businesses. Currently, one school within the MnSCU system has structurally designed a position that reports to two departments to increase engagement and communication with the business community.

This approach ensures efficient staffing through cross training between the Customized Training Department and Foundation Office. This position will represent the combined interests of these two departments and promote good communication and collaboration efforts among other departments. The position will be responsible for connecting the college and businesses for mutual growth opportunities and increase sponsorships in the form of charitable giving and donations.

The Customized Training Representative will be responsible for promoting cases to support internal and external constituencies and will, identify and enhance revenue generating efforts through annual fund and sponsorship opportunities.

## Part VI: Recommendations

The information needs and concerns about current practice enumerated by the staff illustrate the need to have information about businesses and the business community at levels of detail and in formats that can serve both operational needs within the college as well as more strategic and programmatic planning needs. It is critical that all staff are aware of the uses of information, the value of sharing information and the ways that having information about activities elsewhere in the college can be leveraged and can make their own efforts more efficient and effective.

In terms of general information about the business community, the main concern has been the lack of a centralized source for the wide variety of information needed and the lack of information on new and emerging businesses. In terms of operational needs and the need for information about existing relationships and partnerships, it is clear from the interviews with staff that the primary issue for the college is not a lack of information. Rather the primary roadblock has been the lack of sharing of information across functional areas of the college. Departments have done a good job in developing partnerships, but that development process could be more strategic.

The following recommendations, based on the information gathered from staff and business interviews and a review of the literature, are classified into two phases. Phase I contains recommendations that can be implemented fairly quickly with moderate effort and resources. Phase II includes options that should be explored, but that will require greater resource and financial commitments and which will need to be more thoroughly evaluated for their sustainability and cost effectiveness. Ease of use and the ability of any system to meet *current* needs will be critical to ensure widespread adoption.

It is important to keep in mind that the steps outlined in Phase I will still require resources to implement and maintain. There will be a need for continued strong leadership support and professional development will need to be put in place to train and encourage faculty and staff to use the new systems and to contribute to their usefulness and success. The college may want to explore using the development and maintenance of these systems as opportunities for providing internship opportunities for computer or business students.

For implementation of these recommendations to be effective, it is critical that the first recommendation, the designation of a lead staff person and the incorporation of these goals into work plans across the college, be implemented and have the full and visible support of the President and the Executive Team.

## Recommendations

Phase I	Phase II
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate the development and sharing of information about businesses and partnerships as a component in work plans at all levels of the organization and designate a staff person to take the lead on coordinating these efforts.</li> <li>• Communicate and reward successful practices and implement accountability measures to incent and ensure success.</li> <li>• Create an internal web portal to facilitate the collection and sharing of information about business partnerships and about the business community. This could include the use of a centralized calendar.</li> <li>• Create an external web portal to provide a single point of contact for the business community. This would have to be managed by staff but that function could be distributed across business units depending on the nature of the inquiry.</li> <li>• Survey staff to track involvement in organizations such as Chambers of Commerce and Rotary</li> <li>• Make wider use of social networking tools, particularly those targeted to professionals and businesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the components implemented in Phase I and determine if they are useful and sustainable. Identify efforts that may need to be revised, expanded, or dropped.</li> <li>• Explore the use of a centralized contact management (CRM) system. Features could include a web-based form to input and access data and a database from which web content about businesses can be extracted and published to a web site or Intranet. A variety of options exist, including inexpensive options such as open source CRM software, a simple MS Access database, etc.</li> <li>• Coordinate the development and expansion of an Alumni system with the listening system project. Included as a part of the alumni system there should be opportunities for alumni and current students to connect in events including Student Success Day.</li> <li>• Expand the scope to include students, alumni and post-secondary institutions that are key destinations for Normandale graduates. Also work with the Office of the Chancellor to explore options at the system and state-level.</li> </ul>

The following sections outline, in greater detail, the recommendations that are included in the first phase of the development of an effective listening system.

### Work Plans and Accountability

Incorporating the management of business contacts in work plans would encourage departments to collect more information, collect it in a more systematic way, and improve the access to the information by others within the college.

In order to enhance the collection and sharing of information about the business community and about existing partnerships and relationships, it is critical that the effort have strong support from leadership. One method of communicating its

importance is to require that departments and divisions include this as part of their work plans. It is critical that it be seen not as just another add-on responsibility, but rather as an important component of the college's work and as a mechanism that can be of benefit to all staff and faculty. It will also alert staff that these efforts are viewed as being important enough that departments will be accountable for the progress they make.

Departments, as part of their work plan development, should develop measurable goals for collaboration and information sharing. As part of this effort, the college should designate a staff person to take the lead and ensure that the implementation of these efforts is monitored.

One method for communicating the importance of this aspect of the work plans is to hold focused meetings on the development of goals. To be effective, these meetings should include members of the Executive Team (Cabinet) and the Deans Council as well as key staff in areas such as grants administration, service learning and diversity. Other strategies for communicating the importance of this effort and to incentivize efforts are to publicly communicate and reward successes.

Although one staff member should be the main point of contact for the development of the listening system, the effort must clearly be collaborative and involve staff in all functional areas, not just areas traditionally viewed as having an interest in or ties to the business community.

In the interview with Health Partners, for example, there was strong interest in collaborating on diversity issues. It was suggested that the diversity directors at Health Partners and the college collaborate on an initiative to recruit underserved populations to a two year health care program. This would benefit the college and help address the employment and diversity needs of Health Partners. The interview also included a discussion of the need for expansion in the Pharmacy Tech area.

### **Internal Web Portal – Provide Links to Information Currently Available.**

This portal would be geared towards faculty and staff and would serve as a clearinghouse for sources of information about the business community and about business trends. Below is a list of the types of information sources that should be included. Specific information sources and links are included in the Part VII (Resources).

- General Information about the Business Community and Labor Market Trends (e.g., Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, ISEEK, U.S. Department of Labor). Links to these sources of information would provide an objective source of data on trends that would be broader than the information that can be gained from individual contacts and partners. Increased use of this type of information could lead to a more strategic approach to developing future partnerships.
- Sources of Data on Demographic and Population Trends (e.g., Minnesota State Demographic Center and the U.S. Census Bureau)

- Sources of Information about Specific Companies (including links to the Normandale Library Website which provides access to databases with information about individual companies)
- Information about Existing Relationships and Partnerships with the Business Community (e.g., college grant and service learning websites). This site would include information generated as part of the work plan process discussed in the previous section.
- Advisory Board meeting minutes
- Access to a shared outreach calendar
- Shared drive for other files related to business contacts/outreach

It should be noted that as part of this process, privacy and security concerns would have to be addressed.

### **External Web Portal – Single Point of Contact for the Business Community**

A primary point of contact for the business community would provide an easier way for businesses, particularly those who do not yet have an active partnership or relationship with the college, to find out more about what services and information are available. The web site should include information on entrepreneurship and ways in which the college can support small business, particularly since they represent a large and growing share of total employment. It could also be a resource for college staff when presented with questions from businesses about aspects of the college that they may not have much knowledge about.

The sites created by other institutions, such as the University of Minnesota and the Harrisburg Area Community College can serve as models. The system can be designed to provide referrals to the most relevant point of contact within the institution. A directory of contacts should be provided to facilitate referrals.

### **Track Staff Involvement and Membership in Community Organizations**

The staff at Normandale is very active within the community. Conducting a staff survey regarding memberships in organizations such as the Rotary, Chamber of Commerce and other business and community organization would provide information about existing and potential avenues for communication with the business community and also present an opportunity to look at any cost savings that could result from consolidating individual memberships.

### **Develop a Coordinated Social Media Strategy**

As part of the effort to share information and develop partnerships, the college should develop a coordinated social media strategy and encourage staff and faculty to participate.

Professional development should be undertaken to encourage and facilitate the broader use of social networking sites geared towards professionals. In particular LinkedIn is recommended as a good site to use. There needs to be both a continued institutional presence as well as a presence by faculty and staff. Ideally, students – and later alumni – would maintain accounts and this could be used as a mechanism for staying in touch with those people. Use of the social network for advisory boards, career fairs, mentoring, networking and other functions would ensure more widespread adoption.

To ensure that information is kept up to date and the potential of the site maximized, it is important that maintenance of official college sites and accounts be assigned to a staff person as a specific responsibility.

## Part VII: Conclusion

As stated earlier, the three key elements in developing an effective listening system are people, processes, and technologies. Without a doubt, of the three elements, people are the most important. As with any effort to shift institutional paradigms, it is important to identify the early adaptors. Normandale Community College is fortunate to have many faculty and staff who are actively involved in the business community. The early adaptors must work with institutional leaders to develop new opportunities to partner with the business community. The institutional leaders must support them and nurture these enterprises and ensure that successful models are communicated and replicated across the organization. As the number of faculty and staff who are listening to the voices of the business community increase, so will the need to institutionalize replicable and scalable processes to support them. The result will be a growing culture that embraces listening to its customers' needs and partnerships that will enrich the Normandale experience.

One of the most of important elements of the recommendations we have outlined above is evaluation of key stakeholder roles, needs and potential contributions. Other institutions may have developed effective practices, but those practices must be tailored to the specific long and short term goals of Normandale. The most successful partnerships with business are those in which the long and short term goals of each partner are aligned. The evaluation process will help to prioritize opportunities to achieve the best results given current assets and constraints (e.g., financial, institutional culture, etc.). It will also be broader in scope than this study and include important stakeholders such as students, alumni and educational institutions that receive Normandale transfer students. The scope of stakeholders should not be limited to the local community and must include the Minnesota State College and University system and the State of Minnesota. These institutions maintain significant connections with the business community. All parties could benefit from efficiency gains through collaboration, including businesses that could be made more aware of Normandale as a community resource. Implementing an effective listening system requires a process where all stakeholder voices are heard.

Finally, it is always important to remember that technologies are tools to make the processes and procedure easier for the people who used them. It is always better to have clearly articulated goals, the people and processes in place, and well defined requirements before seeking the technology solution that will enable them to succeed.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Project Description and Team Charge**

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Luoma Leadership Academy  
2009-2010 Action Learning Projects

#### **Project #7**

**Project Title:** Creating Effective Listening Systems for Community and Businesses

**Problem:** The current economic situation has focused more attention on the ability of colleges and universities within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) to meet the workforce retraining needs of the state. The recent Legislative Audit (2009) notes that MnSCU institutions need to improve the data collected on recent graduates. These findings are part of a larger need to develop more systemic approaches to collecting, synthesizing, and communicating community and business needs to institutions. The upcoming System report Leadership Reaches Out to Business is one such example, but individual institutions must also build their capacity to "listen" to their external stakeholders if they are to remain competitive with proprietary schools.

**Team Charge:** This team would conduct research to identify essential elements of an effective listening system, capable of seeking out feedback from businesses, community organizations, transfer institutions, alumni, and other external stakeholders; analyzing that information in relation to the System mission and resources and an institution's mission and capacity; and providing access to the information in ways that campus faculty and staff would find useful in planning and developing programs and services. The team's research would also include communicating with colleges known to have effective systems in place. The final report should identify essential elements of effective listening systems and exemplary practices in this area. The team would be expected to model action learning in its work and to work with Normandale Community College in piloting some of the recommendations.

**Executive Sponsor:** Joe Opatz, President of Normandale Community College

**Team Advisor(s):** Rick Smith, Dean of Enrollment Management, Marketing, and Multicultural Services

## Appendix B Normandale Interview Contacts

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Michael Berndt	Dean of Planning/Institutional Effectiveness
Colleen Brickle	Interim Dean, Health Sciences
Ken Bursaw	Cooperative Education Coordinator
Brenda Dickinson	Dean of the Normandale Center for Applied Learning (Customized Training/Continuing Education)
Wanda Kanwischer	Director of Service Learning
Mary Krugerud	Grant Development Director
Joe Opatz	President
Dennis Peterson	Director of Prior Learning Assessment
Rick Smith	Dean of Enrollment Management, Marketing and Multicultural Services
Chuck Waletzko	Executive Director, Foundation & Resource Development
Teri Wichman	Dean, of Business, Social Sciences and Libraries

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Questions for College Staff**

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1. Could you briefly describe how contacts with the business community fit in with your role at the college?
2. What kinds of information do you need to collect about businesses that you currently have relationships with? What types of information do you need to help you develop new relationships?
  - a. What type of information is collected and maintained (e.g., general contact information, data about the business such as number of employees, identification of new and growing businesses)?
  - b. Are there types of information you need or would like to have that you don't currently have access to?
  - c. Is there a formal process for collecting and maintaining the information?
  - d. Is specific information about meetings or contact with representatives of the business community documented in anyway?
  - e. How is the information about businesses stored and retrieved (e.g., software, data systems used, paper files, etc.)?
3. What kind of information do you need to get from your contacts in the business community and what types of information about the college or its programs do you need to communicate back to them? How is this currently accomplished?
4. Do you share information your relationships with local businesses with other staff or organizational units at the college?
  - a. Is the sharing informal or are there more formal procedures or structures in place?
  - b. What types of information about the contacts other college staff have with the local business community would be useful to you?

## Appendix D

### Business Interviews: Contacts and Interview Questions

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#### Business Contacts Interviewed

Organization	Name
<i>Oak Ridge Conference Center</i>	<i>Kelly Parkhurst, Global Sales Manager Sarah Shoemaker, Global Sales Manager</i>
<i>Health Partners</i>	<i>Scott Schnuckle, Sr. VP, Dental, Pharmacy &amp; Business Development</i>

#### Background Questions for Business Partners

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1. Could you briefly describe how contacts with the Normandale Community College fit in with your role?
2. What kinds of services do you need to access from the college?
3. What types of information do you need to help you develop and manage relationships with Normandale Community College?
  - f. What type of information is collected and maintained (e.g. College President, Departmental Deans, Continuing Education and Training, College Foundation Office)?
  - g. Are there types of information you need or would like to have that you don't currently have access to?
  - h. Is there a formal process for collecting and maintaining the information?
  - i. What processes are in place to track your contacts at Normandale Community College?
4. What kind of information do you need to get from your contacts at the community college and what types of information about the college or its programs do you need? How is this currently accomplished?
5. Do you share information regarding your relationships with Normandale Community College with other staff or organizational units at your business?
  - a. Is the sharing informal or are there more formal procedures or structures in place?
  - b. What types of information about the contacts at Normandale that other staff members possess would be useful to you?

## **Appendix E**

### **Normandale Community College Leadership Structure**

#### **President's Executive Team and Cabinet:**

Dr. Joe Opatz, President  
Julie Guelich, Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Dr. Lisa Wheeler, Vice President for Student Affairs  
Ed Wines, Vice President for Finance and Operations  
Michelle Thom, Chief Human Resource Officer

#### **Deans Council/Administrative (the above plus these):**

Brenda Dickinson, Dean of Continuing Education and  
Customized Training  
Catherine Breuer, Interim Dean of Student Affairs  
Dr. Colleen Brickle, Dean of Health Sciences  
Jeff Judge, Dean of Humanities  
Matt Dempsey, Director of Information Technology Services  
Michael Berndt, Dean of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness  
Patricia Gonzales, Director of Nursing  
Teri Avis Wichman, Dean of Business and Dean of Social  
Sciences and the Library  
Tina Wade, Dean of Math, Science and Education  
Tonya Hanson Huber, Registrar  
Craig Erickson, Director of Fiscal Services  
Chuck Waletzko, Executive Director, Normandale Foundation

## **Appendix F**

### **Resources for Environmental Scanning and Information about the Business Community**

#### **Documents Related to Academic Program Planning**

*The Needs Assessment Instructions for Academic Programs* provides information about documenting needs and resources. It was compiled by the Academic Programs unit within Academic and Student Affairs in the Office of the Chancellor and provides links to a wide variety of resources.

<http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/academicprograms/instructions/progdevel-needsassessment.pdf>

#### **Literature on Environmental Scanning and Listening Systems and Environmental Scanning Websites**

Morrison, J. L. (1992). Environmental scanning. In M. A. Whitely, J. D. Porter, and R. H. Fenske (Eds.), *A primer for new institutional researchers* (pp. 86-99). Tallahassee, Florida: The Association for Institutional Research.

<http://horizon.unc.edu/courses/papers/enviroscan/>

Horizon On-Ramp – Links to data sources for education environmental scanning

<http://horizon.unc.edu/onramp/index.html>

#### **Business Community and Labor Market Trends**

Iseek (<http://www.iseek.org/news/trends.html>)

MN FutureWork – A collection of articles highlighting current trends and news that impact industry, the economy and careers

<http://www.iseek.org/news/trends.html>

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) – Data and Publications – Links to current economic highlights (e.g., national, state and county unemployment rates, employment projections, employment change, job vacancies by occupation, industry, firm size, etc.)

[http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Data\\_Publications/index.aspx](http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Data_Publications/index.aspx)

DEED Community Profile Tool [www.mnpro.com](http://www.mnpro.com)

U.S. Census Bureau – Business & Industry <http://www.census.gov/econ/index.html>

U.S. Department of Commerce – Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) <http://bea.gov/>

U.S. Department of Labor – Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov/>)

#### **Demographic Trends**

Minnesota State Demographic Center (<http://www.demography.state.mn.us/>)

U.S. Census Bureau ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov))

### **Existing College/Business Partnerships and Relationships**

Normandale Foundation Web Site

<http://www.normandale.mnscu.edu/alumnifoundation/foundation.cfm>

Normandale Grants Web Site

<http://faculty.normandale.edu/~grants/Fundedprojects.htm>

Normandale Service Learning Site <http://faculty.normandale.edu/~servlearning/>

### **Individual Businesses**

Normandale Library Website – Selected Resources for Businesses. Includes links to the Business & Company Resource Center, Business Source Premier, Hoover's Handbook of Private Companies, etc.

[http://research.normandale.edu/rqs.phtml?subject\\_id=9](http://research.normandale.edu/rqs.phtml?subject_id=9)

Annual Reports – <http://www.annualreports.com/>

Career One Stop Employer Locator

[http://www.acinet.org/acinet/employerlocator/emp\\_loc\\_industry1.asp?nodeid=18](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/employerlocator/emp_loc_industry1.asp?nodeid=18)