

# ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

## Determining the College's Impact on the Economic and Social Mobility of Graduates

At Elgin Community College (ECC), engagement with the Community Vibrancy Framework provided the opportunity to focus its strategic planning on strengthening the institution's impact on the local community and to identify metrics where it can make the most difference.





### **Elgin Community College (ECC)**

serves approximately 11,000 students on three campuses located between Chicago and Rockford, Illinois. A Hispanic-Serving Institution, more than half (51%) of its students are Latinx. ECC has been an ATD Network college since 2009 and a Leader College of Distinction since 2021.

“ECC saw partnering with ATD as a means to determine the college’s impact on economic and social mobility of graduates and used the opportunity to create a shared understanding among our leadership of what we were trying to accomplish with our many new community-oriented initiatives,” says ECC President Peggy Heinrich.

“We know our impact doesn’t end with graduation,” says Phil Garber, ECC’s vice president of planning, institutional effectiveness, and technology. “We want to know what impact we are having as an institution in the environment around us. Are we making a difference? Are we leading to the well-being of the communities that we purport to serve?”

Using the Community Vibrancy Framework, ECC is working to ensure that the credentials it offers are of worth and to identify areas where the college needs to establish programming in industries and communities where there is current or predicted future job growth, especially for underserved community members.

Exposure to the framework helped the college recognize that it can be more strategic in targeting underserved communities. The college is considering expanding access by focusing on Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) populations, households that earn more than the federal poverty level but are still unable to afford basic needs such as food, housing, transportation, child care, health care, and technology. Within the ALICE population, the college is interested in targeting adults who have some college but no degree or who have a degree but may need an applied certificate to go with it.

The college is also working to expand access by developing a better understanding of the important role that family and extended family play in many of its student communities, particularly its Latinx community. It has begun to conduct intentional outreach and bring key community partners — such as the Elgin Hispanic Network, a robust network of Latinx owners, and El Centro de Información, which functions as a sounding board — onto campus to participate in planning and decision-making.

### **Building Capacity**

Participation in the Community Vibrancy Cohort came at a good time for the college, college leaders say, as it was in the midst of building capacity for all its community relations activities. The college is currently:

- Reorganizing staffing positions to focus more attention on community relationships and partnerships, including establishing a cabinet-level position responsible for community and government relations and staff to implement

improvements in administering programs for community members

- Introducing a college-wide community ambassador program to make interactions with the community more meaningful and to more strategically match college experts in support of community activities
- Launching a customer relationship management (CRM) system through Salesforce as a central location to house all of the college's partnership data in one place



## Exploring Impact Data

Exploring data on outcomes from Illinois community colleges is complicated for two reasons: Federal, state, and county data systems are neither sufficiently interconnected nor aligned and, unlike in many other states, community college districts are not organized by county, which is how data is often collected.

“Our Illinois Department of Economic Security doesn’t talk to the Illinois Department of Higher Education or the Illinois Community College Board, which doesn’t talk to the U.S. Census, which doesn’t talk to the Bureau of Labor Statistics,” says Vice President Garber, who notes that ECC also enrolls students from four public school districts in portions of five counties (Cook, Kane, McHenry, DuPage, and DeKalb), and not from one county.



ECC is now using Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO), a data-sharing partnership between the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Census Bureau, state departments of education, and state labor market information offices. The data, college officials say, includes institutional information that allows the college to look at its graduates and compare their workforce outcomes with other Illinois colleges and nationwide trends.

President Heinrich notes that the college is looking at data from a policy perspective as well. They will advocate with the state of Illinois for the establishment of longitudinal data systems that better connect education, labor market, and employment data to provide more accurate information on post-graduation outcomes.

# LESSONS LEARNED

## Key lessons ECC leaders identified for the college include:

- **Determine the extent to which current community-serving programs are having the desired impact.** For example, ECC is in the process of upgrading how it deploys college experts to serve the community and make the program more strategic and aspirational. Rather than operating an ad hoc system through the marketing department that links whatever staff is available to community activities and services, the college is working to create a college-wide program that matches the specific expertise and focus of college leaders, faculty and staff, and programs with community needs and gain more follow-up information and feedback for the new CRM system.
- **Advocate for improved state longitudinal data systems** that can help track economic impact and combine education and workforce data that can be readily and easily reported by community college service areas.
- **Consider the value of establishing a cabinet-level post and office** focused on community relations and/or new boundary-spanning partnerships.
- **Upgrade tools and staff capacity to build, manage, and optimize partnerships**, including:
  - Introducing a CRM and non-marketing outreach programs
  - Building data-literacy skills of staff involved in community outreach programs
  - Considering hiring more Latinx staff who have deep roots and connections within the Latinx community

**ATD's Community Vibrancy Framework** brings ATD's strategic vision to life by supporting colleges in moving their student success work beyond completion and connecting their institutional transformation efforts with community impact. The framework helps colleges expand access to previously underserved communities, strengthen early momentum and completion of degrees and credentials, establish greater economic and social mobility for their students, and connect these gains with stronger and more vibrant communities. It also encourages colleges to become boundary-spanning institutions and is the backbone of ATD's approach to innovation, coaching, and service delivery. To test the framework and associated curriculum, ATD engaged 15 ATD Network colleges to be part of its first Community Vibrancy Cohort. This profile is one in a series that explores how colleges are using the framework and lessons learned to date.



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