

University of the District of Columbia
Strategic Planning | Strategic BrainTrust Report
June 24, 2022

This Strategic BrainTrust Report serves as the foundation for the upcoming work that the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) and LINK Strategic Partners (LINK) will engage in together. This report will reflect topics, themes, and ideas from an exploratory conversation held on June 10, 2022, during which LINK and UDC discussed how to successfully engage in facilitation and planning efforts to aid in updating UDC's current strategic plan, *The Equity Imperative*. This is a living document and adjustments can be made where appropriate. Below is a list of attendees from the discussion:

University of the District of Columbia

- Christopher Bell, Chairman of the Board of Trustees
- Dr. Arlene King Berry, Faculty Senate President
- Maria Byrd, Associate Vice President, Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness
- David Franklin, Chief Operating Officer
- LaVerne Gooding-Jones, AFSCME President, Local 2087
- Monique Guillory, Ph.D., Chief of Staff/Senior Vice President, Interim VP of HR
- Patrick Gusman, Deputy Chief of Staff
- Leeann Hall, Vice President, Marketing and Communications
- Tonya Harris, Student Representative
- William Latham, Ph.D., Chief Student Development and Success Officer
- Ronald Mason, Jr., J.D., President
- Professor Albert Pearsall, Faculty Association President
- Lawrence T. Potter, Jr., Ph.D., Chief Academic Officer
- Deidre Robinson, Executive Assistant
- Avis Russell Esq., General Counsel
- Rodney Trapp, Alumni Representative, Vice President, Advancement
- Kemmel Watson, Staff Representative, Coordinator of Development
- Annie Whatley, Assistant Vice President, External Relations

LINK Strategic Partners

- Michael Akin, President
- Corey Barenbrugge, Chief Operating Officer
- Ernest Boykin, Associate
- Jevin Hodge, National Engagement Coordinator
- Jamal Holtz, Special Assistant to the President for Equity, Belonging and Public Affairs
- Eugene Kinlow, Associate
- Carole Lambert, Operations
- Sherryl Newman, Director of Community Engagement

The BrainTrust began with a round of introductions followed by a robust discussion based on the series of BrainTrust questions drafted by LINK.

Define Success. How do you define a successful strategic plan and planning process? At the end of our work together, if we have done ____, we will have been successful together.

Success will be achieved when all voices of the University are heard in a fair and equitable manner. The strategic planning process must be multi-dimensional and tap into feedback from students, faculty, and staff, as well as stakeholder groups including alumni, donors and funders, elected and government officials, and the broader community. The process must be inclusive and flexible culturally, thematically, and mathematically—diverse among all dimensions with clear numerical representation for each group. In addition, it must bring the voices of all UDC sites into an open conversation that isn't afraid to reconsider the way we do things.

Success will be a strategic plan that can be understood and implemented. Success will be a strategic plan that supports all students that matriculate at the university and all the staff the university employs regardless of the campus, program, or position. The plan must be a living document, laying out an adaptive framework that propels UDC to the next level and takes advantage of the many resources available, specifically leveraging the role and vision of the staff and faculty. This plan will be UDC's "North Star," a dynamic plan that is able to change with the times while also being SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound) goals.

Success will also mean receiving increased investment from government, corporations, foundations, and philanthropic groups to achieve these goals. UDC must continue to be seen as the flagship state university of the District of Columbia that it is. This will allow for more talent sourcing and retainment opportunities among the staff, more research and grant opportunities for the faculty, and a greater number of students benefiting from a strong academic program and an affordable, quality higher education experience.

Appropriate metrics are critical to show that, at the end of the plan's five years, the actions taken under the plan reflect the evolving environment and move the needle for the University in a positive way.

Start with Why. You could bring your time and talents anywhere; you choose to bring them to UDC. What's your why? What about the University's mission and future trajectory gets you up in the morning?

In discussing their why, the UDC stakeholders cited the opportunity to learn and grow, and to discover the potential, possibilities, and impact of UDC. They are excited by the people they get to interact with and the opportunity to help students navigate their path to future success. They are ready to be "Number One," to polish and show UDC in a clearer light, and to capitalize on UDC's identity as a local and regional economic driver and committed community member.

Some of the UDC stakeholders present were not just faculty but alumni of the university, allowing them to reflect on their own journey and how it powers this work. They cited their love for the school, their need to give back, and their desire to share the transformative power of education to change and shape the overall community we live in.

Is. Grow. Glow. Using the index cards or chat box via the virtual meeting platform, attendees were asked to give their “one or two word” answers to the following prompts:

- **UDC is:** possibilities, transformative, necessary, transitioning, transcending, poised, evolutionary, complex, and forging ahead.
- **UDC is good at:** managing finances, motivation, cultivating students, visioning, reimagining, teaching, internal communications, self-reflection, locations.
- **UDC can do better at:** enrollment and retention, alignment, marketing, identity formation, matriculation processes, customer service, giving back to the community, engaging faculty and staff, collaboration, and a commitment to customer delight.

Aspirations, Opportunities & Core Objectives. If you could wave a magic wand, what would you do/support/change to enable UDC to best meet its strategic objectives? What opportunities can UDC embrace as it looks to this new strategic plan? What are the most important strategic priorities for UDC that need to be reflected in the strategic plan?

There were several focus areas that this stakeholder group thought were key to capitalizing on opportunities and creating core objectives that will guide the new strategic plan. Infrastructure was frequently mentioned, specifically as it relates to physical plant areas. For this, the group felt that acquiring resources to address deferred maintenance, undertaking needed remodeling, providing more student housing, and strengthening infrastructure to build a forward-facing environment were important to make UDC competitive across all potential markets.

Another top focus was investment in staff, both professional and administrative. We heard that building morale and attracting and retaining faculty and staff are high priorities, as well as including staff in decision-making and advancing pay equity. Achieving these objectives means creating a system for recognition and reward across the enterprise that makes it possible for all to thrive. Additionally, meeting participants felt there must be a push for the continuation of learning across the board for staff members, and promotion of a culture of lifelong learning.

Stakeholders examined the need for a cohesive strategy to engage the governmental, private, and public sectors at the local, national, and global levels by distinguishing UDC in the marketplace of ideas, knowledge, research, and innovation. As the state university of the District of Columbia, UDC needs support from these sectors for funding, students, faculty, and research opportunities.

One big challenge discussed is talent migration. Given the current labor market and overall economic environment, UDC must address staff and faculty recruitment and retention aggressively and consistently. UDC is the educational institution of choice in our nation’s capital, and that must be the message for faculty and staff alike for recruitment and retention.

Lastly, there were comments on the opportunity for the design, development, and cultivation of a DCPS/PCS to UDC pipeline. This would entail reaching out to high school juniors and

encouraging them to “get a jump on the application process,” and advising them of their conditional acceptance at UDC. By increasing its visibility with DC students and families, UDC can demonstrate its ability to offer specific programs and planned acceptances to DCPS/PCS students who are on track for graduation.

Key Stakeholders and Target Audiences. Who are the individuals and groups that need to be engaged during the strategic planning process? Let’s discuss who should be prioritized for interviews versus broader audiences we should seek to reach through our survey? Who is not currently engaged but should be?

We heard that there are many stakeholders and that our collective job will be to make this planning process as inclusive as possible. Initial internal stakeholders discussed included: faculty and front-line staff, school advisory boards, the student body (including student government across the various schools), student peer groups, and the more than 50,000 UDC alumni worldwide, of whom 27,000 are in direct contact with UDC.

Externally, the initial stakeholder list is broad and diverse: DC high schools, which are feeders to the university; school counselors who guide the students and could encourage attendance; churches in prominently Black communities; local government and ANC commissioners; Federal governmental agencies and departments, such as Department of Education; local businesses and business groups; research entities; and grant providers. This list should include anyone who can and does touch higher education and could provide guidance, support, funding, and access to UDC.

Looking at target audiences, we recognize that the student stakeholder universe is broad. It will include the current students and those who have different goals and paths they want to pursue. There are students poised for graduation who are not only interested in a four-year program, but also students interested in attending community colleges, people who want to be part-time students, international students, and students who may have had a hard time when they went away to college and are returning home. There is a strong audience of older adults who are returning to college and want workforce training or are looking to get or finish their degrees. It will be critical to find a way to connect with the people who need to embrace the idea of UDC as a great institution. This means using the right marketing and media channels to inform their thinking and educate them on what UDC has accomplished and the university’s bright future moving forward.

As the strategic plan is completed, a principal consideration is around who needs to understand the plan and how it gets presented to the many constituents who will be part of its implementation and feel its impact. This will guide who needs to be engaged in its creation.

Equity Imperative. UDC has an Equity Imperative, and this strategic plan is designed to continue to move the University forward. How can this strategic planning effort (and the resulting strategic plan) most effectively advance UDC’s equity priorities?

This plan must look at level setting and “equity mindfulness.” Are people coming to this conversation with the same set of understanding and skills? This is key because equity means different things to different people, and it is important to know this and adjust accordingly. Equity must also be examined on a global level within the context of socio-economic structures that have been historically designed to advantage and disadvantage specific groups. This new plan cannot “just” talk a good game; it must be backed up with real investment in people and processes and systems, so it is not simply a buzzword but a foundational value of the university *and* our partners, funders, champions, etc. The priorities around equity must be clear, bold, transparent, and authentic.

Equity at UDC must consider our students and how to ensure they are fairly represented, and that includes looking at the financial challenges to students and those looking for educational advancement. We must be intentional about broadening the conversation to individuals with disabilities who need to be engaged and included. Additionally, this must embrace members of various groups including the Latinx populations, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, international students and faculty, and all the other groups and individuals who make up our dynamic shared community.

Additionally, this plan should create dynamic ways to support the value contributions of our faculty and staff, including around issues of pay, resources, and advancement. The imperative should establish the university as a place that will foster growth and opportunities for learning and advancement for faculty and staff, including opportunities for advanced degrees, more research and partnerships, and opportunities to enhance the overall experience for faculty and staff to promote a feeling of belonging.

Lessons Learned & A Look Ahead. What were lessons learned from the previous strategic process? What worked well and/or needed improvement? Are there any emerging trends – internal or external – that you anticipate impacting UDC in the months and years ahead? Given the priorities you have outlined, what are the major challenges and obstacles to meeting these?

The process must be inclusive and comprehensive, one in which stakeholders are consistently engaged and heard. Faculty, staff, students, other internal and external stakeholders, and District residents should have their voices represented throughout the process and should be prepared and encouraged to act as ambassadors for UDC and the strategic planning process. Everyone should know the principal themes of the strategic plan and understand their own role in making the plan successful.

Historically, DC public schools have incentivized students to attend colleges outside the District. That approach and the Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) program are barriers to enrollment. Stronger partnerships with DCPS, PCS, and independent schools must be forged in order to effectively offer superior university programs and degrees to DC residents.

The District is home to potential major donors to UDC. The strategic plan should prepare current UDC supporters to frame the conversation with potential major donors. Additionally, the plan should set the parameters and language for future donors through various platforms and outreach.

Effective communications around the planning process and the plan itself must include a feedback loop and accountability loop. Meaningful data collection and timely reporting will enhance communication and understanding of the goals and objectives of the plan.

Planning Horizons & Progress. What planning horizons make sense (5 years? Today? Future?) from an operational, fiscal, political (etc.) sense? What are the key measures that UDC uses to gauge progress against your mission? Are there any new measures you want to introduce?

The strategic planning process should lay the foundation for the university's future by taking into account the timing, direction, and attention needed to be successful. It must incorporate an understanding of the dynamic ecosystem in which UDC operates and be ready to adapt when and where there will be unforeseen events. The plan then becomes a living document with the flexibility and strength to adapt as circumstances warrant.

Measures for the plan must be specific, achievable, dynamic, and relatable; there is no room for ambiguity in order to be successful. The measures include practical statistics as well as some broader points such as economic impact measures to demonstrate the “magic” of UDC on its student populations (community college, university, workforce, Law School) and its faculty and research components. These goals and statistics are what UDC can use to attract, retain, and promote.

Single Best Piece of Advice. To conclude our discussion, each participant offered their single best piece of advice as UDC and LINK begin their work together.

- Engage in active listening.
- Weave the themes.
- Be bold.
- Promote cross training.
- Focus on equity of voice.
- Inclusivity.
- Engagement is key.
- Collaborate. Remove silos.
- Continue to create a positive energy environment meeting the needs of all stakeholders, including those we haven't reached before.
- Establish camaraderie. Be comfortable saying what we haven't said before.
- Establish an environment that allows us to build a conducive learning structure that can be entered into in various ways and be agile for all.
- Balance attainable and aspirational.
- Report data and regular updates.
- Always ask what's next.
- Listen, reflect, and share.
- Remember our why.
- Let's not count the time, let's make our time together count.
- Overcommunicate.

- Look outside the box.
- UDC pride must be upheld.
- Tell us what lives in your head and your soul.
- Hold LINK accountable for what we're doing right and what we get wrong.
- Remember whom we're serving.
- The plan is the institution's plan, not the President's plan.