
PRE-CAMPAIGN FEASIBILITY STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR NORTH IDAHO COLLEGE AND FOUNDATION

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

Before any initiatives can be taken in developing a viable funding program, appropriate preliminary information must be gathered. The purpose of this pre-campaign audit is to provide objective data to the leadership of North Idaho College and Foundation concerning the possibility of seeking private sector support to assist in the completion of key institutional projects.

STUDY PROCEDURE

Personal interviews were conducted with 44 College and community leaders throughout the greater Kootenai County area (list attached). A series of open-ended questions was asked in each interview. All interviews were pre-scheduled and conducted in a private, confidential setting. Although attention was given to a specific pattern of questions, each interviewee was encouraged to give his/her own thoughts and feelings.

FAVORABLE FACTORS

A number of perceptions expressed by community leaders during the interview process appear to substantiate possible major gift support for the projects listed in the case.

- North Idaho College (NIC) is perceived to be a valuable regional asset worthy of philanthropic support.
- The teaching and learning atmosphere at NIC is considered first rate.
- The presence of community leaders throughout the region who are involved with the NIC family (Foundation board members and volunteers, program advisory committee members, etc.) indicates a willingness to get involved with the College.
- There is recognition that NIC students are “local students” and their training and education has an immediate impact on current and future workforce needs in the area.
- Current regional and national economic conditions require an even greater presence for the College throughout the northern part of the state.
- All three projects listed in the case are perceived to have value in the region, but timing and funding are concerns. Among the listed projects, expansion of the Meyer Center has potentially the highest priority while the joint use project and plans for the KTEC property are viewed as much more long term.
- There is some sense among community leaders that the health care “industry” is where future jobs and careers will be available, and the expansion of the Meyer Health and Sciences Center could be seen as a jobs creation project rather than a traditional college building expansion project.
- The recent history of success of the NIC Foundation fundraising in the private sector (the Meyer Center campaign, Foundation annual fundraising, special events, new scholarships, receipt of planned gifts) is a clear indication that the community will respond to the College if they believe in the importance of the “ask.”
- Although limited, there are major gift prospects in the area which might indicate success in a major gifts campaign. However, most are not convinced about the value and priority of these projects.
- The recent school bond approvals and community fundraising successes (the KROC Center, Cd’A Library, Hospice House, etc.) indicate the general community will respond positively to well-planned, well-communicated requests.

UNFAVORABLE FACTORS

In addition to the favorable factors identified, a number of concerns were raised that cannot be ignored, and if not resolved to the satisfaction of the community, they have the potential to negatively impact the current and long-term fund raising potential of North Idaho College and Foundation.

- There is a widespread perception that the college lacks a well defined long range plan. If there is a vision, that plan has not been publicly communicated. Respondents expressed a need to see how the College expects to function in the changing environment of reduced state support, declining local tax base, increased enrollments, rising tuition demands, and accompanying requests for more financial aid, academic degree tracks, professional and technical training, etc.
- Interviewees had very little sense of where the three projects listed in the case fit into the College's plans or the community's needs.
- The biggest concern expressed about the Meyer Center expansion project was the validity of the need. At the moment there appears to be little support from the medical community and the regional hospitals.
- Legitimate concerns were expressed about the local/regional economy and, in particular, how the area has begun to transition away from dependence on mining and timber and the critical role the college must assume in this transition.
- Most assumed there is little hope in the near future for sufficient state resources to help fund any of the three projects listed in the case.
- There is a perception that the leadership of the College has not been an active participant in the "visioning" of the community.
- Despite discussions with some key donor prospects, there was no evidence of a significant lead donor to launch a major gifts campaign and only modest expressions of willingness to volunteer.
- The plan to begin a multi-million dollar campaign in the near future was thought to be unreasonable given so many issues in the community including the fact that there are still some significant donors who are committed to their KROC payments and other pledges.

CONCLUSIONS

After careful evaluations of the favorable and unfavorable factors identified in the study, we conclude that NORTH IDAHO COLLEGE does not have the capacity to launch a major fundraising campaign...at the moment!

The major limitations to raising significant funds now appear to be:

- The absence of a college long range plan and where these building projects fit within that plan.
- A lack of a verifiable need statement and case for expansion of the Meyer Health and Sciences Center.
- The uncertain economic conditions in the NIC service area.
- Pessimism about the possibility of state funding in the financial equation for any of the projects listed in the case.
- Little cultivation of community prospects who might be expected to provide lead gifts in the campaign.
- The absence of a significant seven figure lead gift and available volunteers to help "raise the funds."
- Competition from other projects in the community (either pledge payments to past campaigns or new projects).
- Uncertainty about the role that the health care community could play in the Meyer Center project since local healthcare providers are struggling to determine their own future in the wake of recent national healthcare legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The leadership of NIC should report a summary of the study results to the college and community leaders who participated in the interview process. This report step will provide an opportunity to express appreciation for their involvement in this important exercise as well as to provide assurances that the College “listened.”
- The college should be prepared to answer the questions about the long range plan for the institution and in specific terms, where these important building projects fit into the plan.
- Expansion of the Meyer Center should not move forward until there is a more detailed plan which answers specific concerns about program demand, space utilization, capital and operating cost projections, staff requirements, review of alternative delivery options, funding options (with or without state support), and verification of need from the medical and healthcare community.
- As a critical regional asset, leadership of the College and the NIC Foundation should consider a more active role in community issues, planning, and responses to the changing character of the area.
- Despite past fundraising successes, the NIC Foundation must have clearer direction from College leadership about its role and function. In the changing world of private sector philanthropy... prospects, donors, and volunteers are demanding more accountability, transparency, and value in their giving. More discussions and conversations between College trustees and Foundation leadership will help to focus attention and energies on the critical strategies necessary to achieve expanded private sector support.
- Following completion of the college long range plan and visioning process, the leadership of the NIC Foundation should revisit the opportunity to conduct a significant fundraising effort throughout the multi-county service area to help meet approved projects.