

# SPOTLIGHTS



California Community Colleges  
Institutional Effectiveness

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*Spotlights is a series of vignettes relating the experiences and benefits gained from participation in the Partnership Resource Team (PRT) process of peer technical assistance as part of the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI). This latest edition focuses on the efforts at Clovis Community College, which used two PRTs over separate cycles to build and then expand its research capacity.*



Clovis  
Community  
College

## New Beginnings and Ongoing Work

*Multiple PRT Cycles Build and Expand Research Capacity*

In fall 2016, everything was new at Clovis Community College (CCC): new college, new name, new president, and new directions to pursue.

"We were brand new in so many ways; we needed to create an Educational Master Plan and decide which directions we wanted to go," said President Lori Bennett. "Sure, we had been a center location for some time, but as a college, this was really new beginnings for us."

A few months earlier, the

Board of Governors approved CCC as the 113th community college in the state of California, building on the previous year's grant of Initial Accreditation from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC).

"Before becoming a formal college, the institution developed some good strengths," noted Bennett. In particular, CCC did considerable excellent work in building partnerships with their feeder high schools, developing dual credit work in English and reducing greatly the need for remediation in English for many students. "The institution had established a culture of working as teams to strengthen student success," continued Bennett, "we had a 'can do' approach to our work."

### LETTER OF INTEREST TO I&EP

The previous Clovis president, Deborah Ikeda, had submitted a Letter of Interest (LOI) in the spring of 2015 to participate in the Partnership Resource Team (PRT) process, a technical assistance component of the

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**Constituent groups at Clovis Community College gather to engage in conversations about student success measures.**

Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI).

The PRT process uses a colleagues-helping-colleagues model to provide support on issues that matter most to client institutions, and is available to colleges, districts, centers, and even the community college system itself.

CCC's LOI was approved and IEPI Project Director Dr. Matthew Lee assembled a team of subject matter experts drawn from a statewide pool of volunteers. Team composition on each PRT is based on a process that matches the knowledge, skills, and experience of those volunteers with the Areas of Focus identified by the client institution.

**“The PRT... kept us on focus, listened to our concerns and ideas, and did something very important: They let us find our own way.”**

*-President Lori Bennett*

The team facilitates the client institution's development, implementation and initial evaluation of an Innovation and Effectiveness Plan (I&EP) in a three-visit process over twelve to eighteen months.

The I&EP that CCC created during this process comprised two areas: planning and decision-making and building research capacity.

## PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING

Bennett noted that “while [the institution] had developed some good solid efforts to establish its identity in our community, the college, as a college, was really starting from the ground up.”

Clovis needed to develop and implement an educational master plan (EMP) to help prioritize facilities needs. Additionally, the college wanted to develop a strategic plan, a directional plan to reach institutional goals for success and pursue the college's mission.

“There were other plans, too, that we needed to either update or create to operationalize the larger plans we were developing, including guided pathways,” Bennett continued. “We also needed to make sure that our integrated planning model and decision-making processes were in place to explain what and how we were going to do what we needed to do.”

The college, as part of the PRT process, developed planning and participatory governance manuals that established a common vocabulary for planning and decision-making as well as clarified a committee structure with defined roles for constituent group members.



## BUILDING RESEARCH CAPACITY

The college was very interested in developing data tools that would help ascertain exactly where administrative and faculty leaders could make improvements to help students become more successful.

Like many other California community colleges, CCC found itself with large amounts of data on success, learning and efficiency, but in need of ways to collect and report out this information in a manner that would be useful for faculty and administrators in making sound decisions.

“We knew that we had so much actionable data out there, but we needed to build ways to get at the data and share it with people,” Bennett observed.

To this end, CCC used the PRT process and the Seed Grant that comes with it to create a warehouse to store the data, purchase data visual display software, and research predictive data tools.

Bennett summarized the process this way, “The PRT helped us with the work that we needed to do. They kept us on focus, listened to our concerns and ideas, and did something very important: They let us find our own way. We had the energy and the drive and the passion to reach our goals; we just needed support in how we might get our work done.”

Bennett concluded that the college was very

satisfied with the commitment, knowledge and support of the PRT that came to Clovis. “It was a great process to help us frame our work,” she said.

But for Bennett, there was more work that needed to be done.

## CLIENT INSTITUTION CEO AND PRT LEAD

As the PRT process has matured, the number of CEOs who also serve as PRT Leads at other institutions has increased. Bennett is one of those CEOs.

“I plainly see the value in the PRT process, and when I was given the opportunity, I jumped at being a PRT Lead,” she said.

“We have so many talented professionals out there and we are all trying to tackle the same issues, just in our own contexts. The PRT process is an important way to connect colleges to the larger pool of knowledge across the system,” Bennett added.

In annual evaluations of the longer-term effects of the PRT process, colleges and districts report that the PRT process is effective in helping them address targeted Areas of Focus over the process cycle. Moreover, many client-institution CEOs see the PRT process no longer as a one-time tool for one innovation plan, but rather as an ongoing tool in a college’s improvement toolbox.

Why not Clovis?

“I was so happy with the work in our first PRT, that I wondered why not bring back another PRT for the next steps in building our institutional effectiveness?” Bennett reflected.

“Think about it. The PRT process provides a team of experts in the field to facilitate your work and provides up to \$200,000 of seed capital to access the resources to get the important work done. Why would I not access this great resource again?” mused Bennett.

That is exactly what Clovis Community College did.

The college delivered a second Letter of Interest to expand the work completed as part of the first PRT process. This time, the college focused on enrollment and schedule management, professional development, and research capacity.

Bennett noted, “I was particularly pleased with our continued work in building research and technology tools to access and deliver data to our college teams.”

## RESEARCH GROWTH AND EXPANSION

In the first PRT, CCC focused on accessing and building out research capacity. In the second PRT process, Clovis expanded its efforts to use visual tools to display data and generate regular reports



**President Bennett outreaches to local veterans and community members.**



Clovis has taken steps to build a team approach to problem-solving.

that college professionals could use.

"We have so many different audiences and preferences for reporting and presentation that we tailor our reports to meet the different needs, whether it be a complicated dashboard with lots of ways to disaggregate the data or an infographic that clearly states the 'result' or 'conclusion' of the data," said Alex Adams, CCC's Director of Research.

"Creating easy-to-use and visually appealing displays has been a focus, particularly in program review packets and reports," noted Michelle Johnson, Senior Research & Planning Analyst.

Many of these reports and projects are directly related to the

two PRTs in which the college has participated. Moreover, during the second PRT cycle, CCC faculty very clearly highlighted a desire to dig into the "why" behind the data reports. Consequently, the college is currently engaged in two focus group projects and conducting two nationally benchmarked surveys that the institution has not administered in the past. "We are excited to see where these new projects take us," added Adams.

## THE ROLE OF TRUST

The creation of tools and techniques is certainly important for improvement, but it is not enough. During the visits for both PRT cycles, discussions centered not

only on the production of reliable reports and the growth of data use at the institution, but also on the relationship between the researcher and users of the information. It comes down to trust.

"The work our office does and the impact we have at the college is completely dependent on the trust that we have built with the college by being responsive and transparent and providing useful reports that are easy to understand," observed Adams.

Adams added that the trust has been cultivated by strong support from Bennett and needs to be further nurtured for the college to expand its continued research work.

## ANOTHER PRT?

Pleased with the results of Clovis's first two PRTs, might the college consider another round of technical assistance?

"Absolutely. We are slammed with so many things right now, COVID-19, the Call to Action, Vision for Success, Equity, Pathways. As soon as I catch my breath, you can be sure that I will be accessing PRT technical assistance again," Bennett confirmed.

Why not? ■

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