

Community Engagement and Strategic Planning: Making the Commitment Real

Nancy L. Zimpher

Abstract

Embedding community engagement into the fabric of the university requires a well-articulated strategic vision. This article shares lessons learned by the president of a comprehensive research university, focusing primarily on two case studies, both urban institutions. The article discusses two strategic planning processes—one at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the other at the University of Cincinnati.

A recent report issued by forty members of the academy—including me—“calls the question” on civic engagement, noting that the time has come, not for another “call to give engagement a try,” but for true commitment (Wingspread Statement 2004) on the part of the nation’s colleges and universities. In the more than ten years that have passed since Ernest Boyer called for a new American college marked by engaged scholarship and teaching and the Kellogg Commission’s amplification, academe and our community partners seem to have embraced the reasons for engagement. Yet we still struggle with how to institutionalize it and make it systemic.

“What is needed is not another call to ‘give engagement a try.’ Instead, we believe it is time to call the question: The question of commitment.” As our Wingspread statement challenges, “...We call the question. We ask presidents and chancellors to take the lead in supporting institution-wide change, raising up new leaders and articulating a vision for how engagement will invigorate their institutional mission.” (Wingspread 2004, iii)

My Wingspread colleagues and I contend that engagement is not an alternative mission, but is “central to and supportive of the historic goals of education, discovery and serving the public good” (Wingspread 2004, 6). Each institution must find its own unique way to commit to engagement. True to my belief that “vision trumps everything,” I believe that a precursor to that kind of engagement is a well-articulated vision. Only institutional vision and strategic action can provide the definition and cohesion needed for sustained and effective engagement. I have also come to believe that the prerequisite to a vision is an effective process of evaluation, examination, and rethinking—in other words, a strategic visioning process.

Leading an institution through a major planning process that results in a vision that meaningfully infuses engagement into the university's mission can be a challenging act. Steven C. Coats (2005) suggests that effectively conducted visioning efforts in fact remain relatively infrequent occurrences in large part because of three obstacles:

- **Accountability** – A vision represents the future, and it can be an overwhelming notion to be held accountable for delivering something tomorrow that may be considered impossible or infeasible today, especially in an environment of rapid change.
- **Time** – In this context, time does not mean the time commitment to carry out a visioning process, but rather the demand that constituents place on leaders to deliver on visions now, “right now,” as Coats says. Expectations for deliverables can be high.
- **Getting it right** – No one can predict the future with 100 percent accuracy, and therefore mistakes are bound to be made in any visioning process. Those mistakes are likely to come with some criticism.

Hopefully, these obstacles will not cause college and university presidents to shy away from the idea of strategic visioning. In the two comprehensive visioning processes I have led during the past several years, both at urban research universities, I can say with experience that these obstacles can sometimes be daunting, but they are not insurmountable. While strategic visioning can prove to be a demanding and sometimes uncomfortable experience, it is simultaneously refreshing and exciting. Above all, the visioning process is an essential tool for examining a university's future, questioning the status quo and redefining priorities.

At the risk of making the idea sound even more challenging, let me emphasize that I have found that establishing institutional vision is a continuing *process*, not a one-time act. I have often reiterated, at planning sessions I have convened as chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and as president of the University of Cincinnati, that the strategic planning process is a dynamic one. It is something that begins but does not end. Consequently, one of its chief legacies is that systematic planning becomes a characteristic of the university going forward.

The strategic vision also represents a course of action that a president is uniquely positioned to lead, but not in isolation or alone. Countless members of the University community and the public at large, especially in my first months on the job at both UWM and UC, pressed me to answer the question: “So, Madam President, what is your vision for the University?” To answer that question without a truly collaborative visioning process involving the University's larger constituencies would result in a vision that rings false, is far less than holistic, and is much less likely to overcome the obstacles discussed above.

That's not to say that a chancellor or president does not have the duty to exercise leadership in the visioning process. At UWM, I put forward the concept of The Milwaukee Idea, borrowed from the long history of The Wisconsin Idea, as a starting point. I convened a months-long process of consultation to explore just how the University might live out this concept. It would have been far more difficult to achieve results if I had tried to impose or devise plans from the top down. At UC, our vision, UCI21: Defining the New Urban Research University, required an equal amount of effort, and specifically, town hall meetings, engaging over 240 individuals from diverse constituent groups in serious debate about UC's future. Ultimately, we invited over twenty-four hundred people to a series of college- or division-led input sessions and our very active Web site attracted over twenty-five thousand visits during the course of our planning process.

Leadership Framework

Before I go into more detail, I should outline the underlying framework of my approach to leadership. Through my observations of other leaders throughout my career as well as my experiences as a leader in several contexts—not just as a university president—I have learned to employ five principles of leadership that continue to guide me each and every day. I speak of these in many of my presentations and have written about them as well. They bear repeating as a foundation for my approach to strategic visioning, especially in the context of community engagement. They are as follows:

- **Vision trumps everything.** As mentioned earlier, I believe that organizations are most effective when a well-articulated and ambitious vision of the future exists, reflecting the rich traditions of the past as well as our aspirations for the future. This vision, hopefully, will include a “Big Hairy Audacious Goal” (BHAG), a concept I borrow from business gurus Jim Collins and Jerry Porras (Collins and Porras 2002). I would also add, as former Connecticut College President Claire Gaudiani once observed, “Don’t dream scrawny!”
- **Vision is derived at the hands of many.** To be most effective, vision must be created by extensive consultation with the many stakeholders that make up a university community—students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, business leaders, civic leaders and more. I believe that we can be inclusive of the various constituencies on campus and in the community and align these diverse interests in a coherent vision of the future.
- **Collective vision derives only from collective action.** It is sometimes opined of the academy that when all gets said and done, more gets said than done. So we have to act! Ideas are meaningless without action.

- **Institutions must have a targeted set of actions—not too many, not too few—and hold themselves accountable for the results.** Referencing Michael Fullan’s “ready, fire, aim” theory of institutional change, we need to act our way into new ideas and skills (Fullan 1993). Fullan says that vision emerges *from* more than it *precedes* action. Don’t wait for the perfect plan—you must instead begin to act and learn from what you do.
- **Institutions must ensure that they have the pocketbook for their aspirations.** A vision that is not backed up with funding and incentives will be doomed to fail.

These five dimensions of leadership and change have provided the under-girding for the strategic visioning processes undertaken during my tenure at UWM and UC, but when it comes to the important question of community engagement, I also hold a deep personal commitment.

Personal Journey

I began my career as an educator. My undergraduate major was English, and like many in that day, I obtained a teaching certificate to enhance my employment prospects. My early teaching assignments took me from the high-performing suburbs of Washington, D.C. to the foothills of the Ozarks, and along the way, I learned that teaching was an “engaged profession.” It is not possible for a teacher to enter a classroom filled with children without becoming aware of the context from which the children come. Family dynamics, economic profiles, neighborhood circumstances and other factors all matter very much in the make-up of the child entering your classroom and how that child learns and grows.

I went on to become a teacher education professor at Ohio State University and eventually an administrator who placed education students into field experiences. I also served as the dean of the OSU school responsible for preparing future teachers. This work brought me into contact with district superintendents, building principals, teachers, professional organizations, parents and students. It also acquainted me with the high levels of poverty in America’s urban school districts (where some two-thirds of students are on free or reduced price lunch programs), high levels of illiteracy among their parents and high drop-out rates. Each of the public universities I have been affiliated with—OSU, UWM and UC—works diligently to address educational problems and helps prepare local students to enter college and successfully complete it. Thus my involvement in the educational community has provided me with a deep and fundamental early lesson about community engagement from preschool through college; a very firm foundation for engagement in a broader context.

The opportunity to engage in that broader sphere, specifically in relation to neighborhood revitalization, presented itself when OSU launched an ambitious plan for neighborhood renewal in an area known commonly as “east of High.” High rates of poverty, low homeownership rates, and crime plagued these neighborhoods, and in 1995, OSU incorporated Campus Partners for Community Urban Redevelopment as a

nonprofit community redevelopment corporation. Complementary to this work, OSU formed a group of campus departments to serve as consultants to Campus Partners in the area of human services and to research and develop recommendations addressing public education, health and well-being, social services and employment. As the dean of OSU's College of Education at that time, I led this organization, formed from an existing Interprofessional Commission.

Later in this article I also will discuss in more detail a neighborhood initiative at UC, but let me emphasize here that through both of these opportunities—in public education and in the neighborhood revitalization—I soon came to believe that community engagement is exactly what a university should be doing. When I got to UWM and UC, I brought with me, as a result, an inclination to believe that engagement is, as our *Calling the Question* report affirms, “central to the purpose of higher education. It cannot be just an add-on to an existing mission....[It] instead becomes the animating core, where ‘service [engagement] is a central and defining characteristic,’ as Barbara Holland wrote in a 1997 comparative study of twenty-three engaged institutions” (Wingspread 2004, 7).

Case Studies: UWM, UC

At UWM, our vision—The Milwaukee Idea—emerged from an idea that lay dormant and ripe for use in the urban context. The name draws on the nuances and history of the state's long heritage of The Wisconsin Idea and the concept that the University of Wisconsin was founded on the premise that “the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state.” It was a BHAG that worked uniquely in the context of that state and as we extended the meaning to the urban setting of Milwaukee.

The seeds of this idea were planted in my first plenary address to the UWM Faculty Senate. On that occasion, just two months after my arrival on campus, I invited one hundred people from campus and the Milwaukee metropolitan area to a daylong plenary session to help create The Milwaukee Idea. The Committee of 100, as we called it, worked for one hundred days to develop the specifics that would lead UWM into the future. Small groups or “affinity groups” formed to focus on five areas: education, the economy, health, international initiatives and the urban environment. We added a sixth focus in response to concerns of faculty over the role of research: frontiers of knowledge and research. A seventh, Quick Wins, was added to create short-term initiatives that would gather momentum. Large group plenary sessions were convened about once a month, while small group meetings were held as agreed upon by each sub-group.

When I accepted the position as UC's twenty-fifth president, I pointed out to the many people who asked, “So, are you going to bring us The Cincinnati Idea?” that The Milwaukee Idea was not an idea that could be easily transported to my new home city. True to the principle that each institution must find its own path to community engagement, The Milwaukee Idea's true power lay in its rich meaning for the city of Milwaukee and Wisconsin. Finding UC's right path would become a top priority when

I arrived in Cincinnati after members of the presidential search committee and members of the University's Board of Trustees made it clear to me that they saw a need for an academic plan to guide the institution.

Within two weeks of reporting for my new job at UC, I addressed the faculty and told them a visioning process would soon be announced. Later that fall and continuing through April, that process began in earnest; we called it the Comprehensive Academic Planning Process (CAPP). We convened eight town hall sessions with more than 240 participants from all varieties of UC stakeholder groups, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, neighbors, and civic and corporate partners. We formed action teams from our town hall participants to focus on twenty-one strategies. Simultaneously, colleges and other units hosted more than ninety input sessions that were attended by more than twenty-four hundred people. Additional feedback came via our Web site, which garnered thousands of hits. After much discussion and consultation, we called our vision UC|21—shorthand for the University of Cincinnati leading in the twenty-first century. We also appended a tagline which made our title complete: UC|21: Defining the New Urban Research University. (Full details can be found in our Technical Report on our Web site at www.uc.edu/uc21.) The vision lays out six strategic goals, with all of them under-girded by engagement.

- **Goal 1: Place Students at the Center** — UC|21 calls on the University to adopt a “yes/and” rather than an “either/or” strategy when it comes to our students. As a public institution, UC maintains a deep commitment to making college accessible to students who may not have enjoyed an equal opportunity for education. At the same time, our University is committed to quality, offering many programs that maintain highly competitive and selective admissions criteria. In our call to provide both access and selectivity we must do both well and work closely with our education, business, religious and civic partners across the region to do so. In the end, Goal 1 is about student success, and it would be difficult to achieve that goal without fully engaging our broad range of partners. Two examples of our initiatives that now support this goal are our Center for Access & Transition (CAT), which works to help students entering UC with learning deficits get up to speed and transfer into baccalaureate colleges, and the College Access/Success Partnership (CAP), a coalition of leaders in the education, business, religious and civic sectors across the Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky region. CAP is committed to taking a seamless approach to education beginning in early childhood and continuing through a college degree to ensure that all children in our region have the resources and support they need to achieve a post-secondary education.
- **Goal 2: Grow Our Research Excellence** — UC|21 seeks to build on UC's greatness as a major research university to benefit society, have a meaningful economic impact and enhance the quality of life for all. The University has a long and distinguished history of life-changing research—Albert Sabin's oral polio vaccine is just one quick example. Our call to transform the world through research requires that we be truly and actively engaged in the world around us. One of our most compelling examples of the relationship of research to engagement is our

Niehoff Studio, an interdisciplinary program that draws upon the talents of UC students and faculty to resolve pressing needs in our urban neighborhoods.

- **Goal 3: Achieve Academic Excellence** — With UC|21, we seek to encourage an environment of high-quality learning and world-renowned scholarship. We have developed a set of six core values—scholarship, citizenship, stewardship, leadership, partnership and cultural competence—that play a central role in this commitment. In addition, a large share of UC’s academic stature is connected to its commitment to real-world learning; the University is the founding place of cooperative education, the consummate example of university-community engagement and a practice now emulated at over fifteen hundred institutions worldwide. With such values and commitments, our aspirations for academic excellence cannot be dissected from community engagement. Thus, UC|21 is inculcating these core values into renewed examinations of our First-Year Learning Experience, Honors Scholars Program, Experiential Learning and more.
- **Goal 4: Forge Key Relationships and Partnerships** — UC, throughout its 187-year history, has fostered a profound and reciprocal connection to its home city of Cincinnati. That relationship extends beyond the University as an intellectual resource to its role as a cultural center and economic driver. The University in fact had roots as a municipal university that joined the State of Ohio university system as an affiliate in 1968 and then became a full state university in 1977. UC|21 reaffirms the University’s commitment to even deeper community ties and calls UC to establish and nurture partnerships with our colleagues within the University and with our local and global communities. One illustration of our commitment to this goal is UC’s Institute for Policy Research, our multi-disciplinary research organization, which dates back to 1971. The IPR has long collaborated with local, state and national organizations to address issues of public policy. Another example is our new Center for the City, to be launched in 2006. The center will act as a simple and convenient portal for community organizations seeking UC expertise, as well as helping UC better understand the community we serve. Further, the center will match UC fellows to community needs and community fellows to UC programs.
- **Goal 5: Establish a Sense of Place** — In the fourteen years before my arrival at UC, the University had embarked on a physical master plan that transformed its urban landscape. UC|21 seeks to build on that renaissance to create an environment where the University community and the community at large choose to spend time, not just to pursue the academic enterprise, but to live, play and stay. This goal envisions a sense of place not just on our campus, but for the entire area we call Uptown—an array of neighborhoods north of downtown Cincinnati that encircles our urban campus. You will learn more about our Uptown efforts later in this article, but one recent example that brings this goal to life is Stratford Heights, a privately built, owned and operated village that opened in fall 2005 just across the street from our Uptown campus. Primarily a student residential complex, it was completed as a result of UC’s partnership with neighborhood redevelopment corporations.

- **Goal 6: Create Opportunity** — UCI21 reaffirms our University’s place as a center of opportunity, for students and others who may be lacking other venues of opportunity. It also asserts our role as a creator of economic and workforce opportunity, working in tandem with business and the community. The CAT and CAP examples I have already discussed are clearly evidence of Goal 6 as well as Goal 1 and are a form of programmatic stewardship. We believe we also “create opportunity” through financial stewardship, an example of which is our emerging EdVenture Capital Program that, if approved, would create learning programs driven by marketplace demands. Yet another example of financial stewardship is our new “We’re All UC” fund-raising campaign, targeting faculty and staff on an annual basis and providing our partners in the community with solid evidence that we view ourselves as a worthwhile investment of our own personal resources, just as we ask for their financial support.

The foundation on which to build these UCI21 aspirations can be amply found in the physical transformation that UC has experienced over the last sixteen years, complete with signature architecture that has attracted much national acclaim. My predecessor, Joseph A. Steger, began this tremendous environmental reshaping in 1989, and our transformative approach to innovative “place and space” began to cross over into the surrounding neighborhoods. As a result, UC became a partner in several neighborhood redevelopment corporations. The Board of Trustees, in fact, approved the investment of up to \$75 million of our endowment for neighborhood redevelopment, an infusion the University would expect a return on, just as it does when investing in the stock market. As I arrived on campus, UC was playing a leading role in the formation of the Uptown Consortium, a nonprofit community development corporation working to improve Uptown in a myriad of ways ranging from economics to physicality, to safety and opportunity. I serve as its first board chair. Along with UC, the consortium brings together four of the area’s other large employers—Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens, the Health Alliance of Greater Cincinnati and Tri-Health—all working together to bring about a better quality of life in Uptown.

The consortium has hired a CEO, Tony Brown, to oversee its operations and recently has hired a public safety and neighborhood services director, Dwendolyn Chester. Working in cooperation with Uptown residents and a consultant, the consortium has identified five priorities for enhancement: public safety, transportation, housing, economic development and neighborhood services (including education, health care and economic inclusion). Recently the consortium won \$52 million in New Markets Tax Credit allocations that will be used to leverage up to \$200 million in private investment.

Given my passion for community engagement, I am truly excited about this coalition’s potential to achieve tangible results. I am equally energized about the possibilities for community engagement within the larger framework of higher education overall. I have come to see engagement as an intervening variable that makes even more meaningful the purposes of teaching and learning, discovery and intervention.

Community engagement is, in short, the essence of a public university and its reason for being.

Lessons Learned: A Checklist

Below, I offer a list of lessons that I have learned over the course of my career at three major public research universities in three major Midwestern cities. I will focus on seven markers that may inform other university presidents who choose to pursue a strategic visioning process that commits to community engagement:

1. Pay attention to the local context
2. Acknowledge institutional capacity and self interest
3. Lead through vision
4. Transition vision to action
5. Assure the pocketbook for aspirations
6. Use presidential convening power
7. Go public and walk the brand

1. Pay Attention to the Local Context There are more ways than one to get to know the local context and what it means to the University. The concept of “local knowledge” is perhaps the most universal understanding among university presidents and is a top priority for any new president. It is, I believe, the chief step in achieving a truly engaged university, for engagement grows out of a thorough knowledge of the local context, including the local community, the immediate region, the state and the larger geographic area.

Paying attention to the local context also means establishing personal contact with key stakeholders in the university community—the Board of Trustees, faculty, key community leaders, alumni and donors. This process begins during the search process and increases as the new president makes the transition into office.

At UWM and UC, we began to plan even before my arrival on campus for my entry into the local context and the ways in which I would get to know my new hometown. At UC, we nicknamed this process, “Day One, Week One, Month One,” and later amended it with “Year One.” In actuality the plan still operates to this day in an evolved form. Put simply, my goal was to meet, greet and get to know as many significant campus and community leaders as possible as quickly as possible. My phone calls, visits and meetings included key political leaders like the governor, the mayor, the city manager and instrumental civic and corporate leaders. I also agreed to do as many presentations to local groups as possible, including civic organizations, corporate gatherings, realtors’ groups, investors and women’s organizations. These many speaking engagements gave me the chance to communicate my resolve to put community interests at the top of the action list for both UWM and UC.

When it comes to the visioning process itself, it is equally vital to invite members of the community to participate so as to gain a community perspective on the university's future. At both UWM and UC, although the character of both processes differed to meet the unique needs of each institution, those invited to participate included key civic, business and community leaders. It is easy to underestimate the challenge of being a newcomer, and in both cases, joining community organizations as well as making early and close friendships helped to establish deep relationships that are needed to understand and better serve the local context.

2. Acknowledge Institutional Capacity and Self-Interest I mention the first—institutional capacity—as an acknowledgment that institutions of higher learning bring tremendous resources to bear upon a wide variety of societal needs. Yet often these efforts take on a non-systemic character, with expertise dealt out in bite-sized pieces. A fully-vested community engagement commitment stretches the institutional capacity to pursue a holistic strategy that should prove more effective in dealing with the rich array of community challenges.

I bring up the second—self-interest—as an admission that public universities rely on public goodwill for support, and therefore, community engagement is a fulfillment of self-interest; in other words, meeting the community's needs meets your institutional needs by generating public support for higher education.

Universities interested in true community engagement would be wise to pay close attention to both of these issues. I have gained a very personal perspective on this issue as I have worked with K-12 collaborations. In both Milwaukee and Cincinnati, I discovered a tremendous amount of engagement with local school districts—well over 150 different projects at each. These efforts met vital needs and involved very committed faculty working to make a difference. But, in my view, these varied projects are often “boutique” in nature and do not always bring about a holistic impact. I believe it is a leader's task to address this issue and challenge the institution to pursue a more comprehensive strategy. Both the Milwaukee Partnership Academy at UWM and the College Access/Success Partnership in which UC is involved are efforts to take a more holistic approach.

On the issue of institutional self-interest, I would further stress that public support is more easily attained and sustained if the citizens, especially those in key and influential positions such as the governor or legislators, believe that universities have a substantial impact on societal needs. Beyond public support, universities also benefit from the generosity of private donors residing in their local community. While many contributors are alumni with a natural affinity for their alma mater, many donors in the local community may have been educated elsewhere. Such donors will be more likely to support an institution that is taking steps to address community issues. It is, then, in an institution's own best interest to become fully engaged in the community.

3. Lead through Vision As I stressed above, a president must resist the temptation to answer the question “What is your vision for the university?” without considerable input from key stakeholders. Instead, the president must defer to a vision that is created at the hands of many. The presidential role is really one of guide or moderator, leading a collaborative group of key institutional constituents through the visioning and planning process.

It is crucial that institutional ambitions be discussed honestly and comprehensively and that concepts of research, teaching and learning, and community engagement be developed and vetted collectively. At UWM, the Committee of 100 fulfilled this function, while at UC, it was the CAPP. In my role as chancellor at Milwaukee, I put forward the inspiration for our visioning process, which I found in the historic context of The Wisconsin Idea. In Cincinnati, our visioning process proved more challenging. There was no particular historical call for engagement; the process came at a juncture when a physical transformation had massively changed the campus landscape and the need was beginning to be voiced for an over-arching academic plan.

So, at UC, we found the inspiration we were looking for in the national context, after careful study of a series of important perspectives on the university of the twenty-first century. Among the noted academic works we explored were *The Future of the City of Intellect* by S. Brint (Brint 2002), *The Future of the Public University in America: Beyond The Crossroads* by J. J. Duderstadt and F. W. Womack (Duderstadt and Womack 2003), *A University for the Twenty-first Century* by J. J. Duderstadt (Duderstadt 2000), *The Creation of the Future* by F. H. T. Rhodes (Rhodes 2001), and *Reinventing the Research University* by L.E. Weber and J. J. Duderstadt (Weber and Duderstadt 2004).

Our concept of a new university for the twenty-first century began to emerge. We found specific calls for the engaged university: “...There is little doubt that the need for and the pressure upon universities to serve the public interest will intensify,” writes James Duderstadt in *A University for the Twenty-first Century*. “The possibilities are endless: economic development and job creation; health-care; environmental quality; the special needs of the elderly, youth, and the family; peace and international security; rural and urban decay; and the cultural arts. There is also little doubt that if higher education is to sustain both public confidence and support, it must demonstrate its capacity to be ever more socially useful and relevant to a society under stress” (Duderstadt 2000, 135).

“[P]ublic service must be a major institutional obligation of the American university,” Duderstadt also writes (*ibid.*, 146). “The public supports the university, contributes to its finance and grants it an unusual degree of institutional autonomy and freedom, in part because of the expectation that the university will contribute not just graduates and scholarship, but the broader efforts of its faculty, staff and students in addressing social needs and concerns. It is of some concern that the role of public service in higher education has not received greater attention in recent years, since this was an original mandate for many of our institutions.”

Ultimately, we translated our discussion into a call to be a leader in the twenty-first century, which we abbreviated as UC|21. But our conversations also led us into a long debate over the use of the word urban, with deeply felt and cogent reasoning on both sides. Those opposed argued that the word “urban” was associated with too many negative issues—poverty, blight, racial strife, crime and a myriad of other problems. Some also suggested that a research institution should not focus so prominently on local commitment. Others, however, made the case that urban does not mean disadvantage—cities are dynamic centers with a rich array of cultural offerings, and cities are where our future lies, as by the year 2025, 75 percent of the world’s population is expected to reside in urban areas. These proponents contended that the University’s very identity was so interwoven with its namesake, the city of Cincinnati, that it would be a glaring omission to try to sidestep that reality. In the end, as president, I broke the stalemate; the “urban” modifier was maintained.

4. Transition Action to Vision Community engagement demands much more than discussion and promises, it requires actions that prove the commitment is real. Thus in Milwaukee, The Milwaukee Idea initiated “first ideas” as actions that were implemented as proof of the vision, including the construction of the first Milwaukee Idea house, the development of a nonprofit management institution, a diversity center, a tech transfer initiative and more. With UC|21, the six strategic goals—place students at the center, grow our research excellence, achieve academic excellence, forge key relationships and partnerships, establish a sense of place and create opportunity—are being translated into a set of deliverables that will result in concrete action. Among the Phase One actions we have planned at UC are an entrepreneurial launch pad that will encourage new business development on campus and off, a Center for the City that will provide a portal to community groups interested in accessing UC expertise, and an Academy for Teaching and Learning that will create Teaching Fellows. Our rapid pace, I am certain, will lead to some mistakes as we move along, but we need these actions now to show the community we are serious about our intentions to serve the community in new and different ways.

5. Assure the Pocketbook for Aspirations Perhaps Coats, as I mentioned at the outset of this article, should list “money” as one of the chief obstacles to visioning. When it comes to any visioning process, and especially one that espouses a deep commitment to community engagement, financial resources must be brought to bear to ensure success. Funding a vision cannot be left to chance, especially in the difficult environment where public funding for state universities is dwindling.

At UWM, we were very fortunate that the state did come through for us in the legislative biennial budget process just two years into my tenure. In the previous legislative session, the University of Wisconsin-Madison had been awarded an earmark for institutional growth that was intended to be replicated during the next biennium. UWM requested that the UW System sponsor such a request for Milwaukee in tandem with the second biennial request from Madison. The Madison campus succeeded in its second request, and UWM did, too—garnering an \$11 million earmark for The Milwaukee Idea. While a turn of fate led to a reduction of the earmark during the

second year of that biennium, this award gave considerable leverage to our vision and allowed many of our first ideas to be launched.

Such a state funding scenario is not likely for UC or for many public universities for that matter. Still, we are working diligently to ensure that we have the revenues to support our ambitions, especially our engagement plans. With UC121, we are pursuing a strategy—called “50 in 5”—to grow our revenues over the next five years by 50 percent. Increased revenues from federal grants and contracts, increased enrollment generating tuition, more entrepreneurial activities, belt-tightening consolidations and efficiencies, and the revenue generation that comes from increased student retention and transfer capacity, are all part of our UC efforts. Complementary to our vision, we have also reorganized our budget process, tying it to our six goals.

6. Use Presidential Convening Power A university president is uniquely positioned to serve as a community convening power. Especially when it comes to community engagement, there are perhaps few others aside from a university president who can play such a neutral yet forceful role in bringing all sides to the table, from disparate groups to potential partners. In all of my experiences as an administrator and president, I have been heartened to find then when the call is made to invite people to participate in a town hall, forum, plenary session or other gathering, they do come. They also come willing to work and meet deadlines. This call to action also leads to collective ownership of the vision, and as I suggested earlier, people more willing to support the vision not just in word but also with funding.

Leadership plays a central role in achieving results. A president has the power to design the table, call constituencies to that table and set the agenda for dialogue. I also believe that strong presidential leadership can turn opportunity into results.

7. Go Public and Walk the Brand It would be pointless to have a vision concerning community engagement and not take the message to the “public.” I am a strong believer in telling the story with constancy and frequency, and not just internally. The presidential inaugural presents an opportune moment to share a vision for community engagement—at UWM and UC my inaugural address provided a large, public forum for sharing both visions. Many other settings, from Rotary speeches to Chamber of Commerce briefings, also offer the chance to spread the word to the community.

Sharing the message also gives the signal that you intend to be held accountable. Inviting the news media to hear your story also means that the media will help to hold you to your promises. I can think of no better way to keep a university’s attention riveted on outcomes and deliverables than to have the press and the public clamoring for results.

In going public with the engagement vision, the leader plays a critical role in carrying the message, tirelessly and unrelentingly. Some have called this kind of messaging “branding.” Although I am sometimes labeled a “walking billboard” because I

faithfully wear the school colors, I know that good branding is much more than color schemes, logos or graphics. At both UWM and UC we have taken branding our vision to deeper levels.

The academic vision of the engaged university becomes “walkable” through the leader’s activities and messages. It can also be proliferated through the graphic design of printed materials, the use of lapel pins and other insignia. When it comes to the community engagement agenda, finding ways to carry the vision and message broadly and consistently into the community is key to convincing the community that the university really is interested in reaching out.

Final Thoughts

Presidential leadership in institutional engagement is anchored in a personal commitment to the community. It is extended through a set of guiding principles on leadership and institutional change that results in vision-framing and action. The stronger the vision, the more likely it is that actions will result—especially assuming widespread endorsement of the vision and commitment to action.

This article has attempted to compare and contrast the visioning process of two larger public research universities, each with a unique context and a commitment to engagement. The two contexts are similar in demography, but unique in mission; similar in commitment to vision, but unique in the vision that resulted respectively; similar in crafting a set of actions, but different in the manner in which these actions are being implemented. These similarities and differences simply demonstrate the varied pathways to institutional engagement, offering hopefully a helpful roadmap for others in attaining the truly engaged research university.

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Author Information

Nancy L. Zimpher is the twenty-fifth president of the University of Cincinnati and its first woman president. She previously served as the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. A teacher and educator, she also served as Dean of the College of Education and executive dean of the Professional Colleges at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. She serves as chair of the Urban Serving Universities, a coalition of public research universities serving inner cities, and on the boards of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges and the American Council on Education. She has been appointed to Ohio's newly formed Partnership for Continued Learning, a state initiative focusing on Ohio's education pipeline from early education, through postsecondary education and to the workforce, and also co-chairs the Ohio Articulation and Transfer Advisory Council. She is the recipient of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education's Chief Executive Leadership Award.

Nancy L. Zimpher
University of Cincinnati
625 University Pavilion
P.O. Box 210063
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0063
E-mail: nancy.zimpher@uc.edu
Telephone: 513-556-2201
Fax: 513-556-3010