

# SPOTLIGHTS

College Experiences in the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative

*An Evaluation Activity*

VOLUME 1 | SERIES 1 | JUNE 2016



Participate | Collaborate | Innovate

*This vignette is the first in a series of college spotlights relating the experiences and benefits gained from participation in the Partnership Resource Team (PRT) and from the goal setting activities using the framework of indicators under the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI).*

*The PRT process provides technical assistance to institutions to help identify, develop and implement ways to improve their institutional effectiveness. The indicator framework is designed to help colleges assess progress primarily for internal planning purposes.*

*This document represents an evaluation activity with two objectives: First, to share the experiences of the participating institutions with the field to build collective learning; and second, to help gauge the effectiveness and significance of the IEPI components.*

*The vignette is based on structured interviews with institutional and PRT team leaders, results of a focus group with the Barstow work team, and a review of the documents completed as part of the process.*

*The focus of this spotlight centers on the Barstow experience through the PRT process itself. Subsequent editions of this publication will highlight the unique stories of additional colleges.*



## Augmenting Existing Efforts: The *Human Factor*

The leaders at Barstow Community College (BCC) face two challenges shared by many California community colleges: ensuring the integrity of the data used for strategic decision making as well as for state and federal reporting and developing a consistent and forward-looking enrollment management plan for strategic, fiscal, and instructional goal setting.

The BCC experience with these common hurdles is unique because

of the college's remote location in California's High Desert region and its relatively small size (in terms of headcount and full-time equivalent students).

BCC's location in the Mojave Desert, about halfway between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, limits its access to key professionals to address its data integrity and enrollment management challenges.

Moreover, the college lacks the human bandwidth to access data and to plan for the demographic shifts and regional changes that impact enrollment. At Barstow, the limited number of faculty and staff "wear many hats" and work full time resolving pressing day-to-day tasks.

### THE COMPONENTS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE



- Develop a framework of indicators and college/district goals.
- Make Technical Assistance Teams (called Partnership Resource Teams, or PRTs) available to institutions that express interest in receiving assistance.
- Enhance professional development opportunities for colleges and districts related to institutional effectiveness.
- Provide access to resources, tools and best practices

### SETTING THE STAGE FOR IMPROVEMENT

What BCC needed was access to the "human element" that would help the college discover resources and how best to use them.

Barstow began by creating a local work group to analyze and reflect on the situation to meet the identified challenges. Concurrent with that effort, the college president, Dr. Deborah DiThomas, learned of the establishment of the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI) and saw the program in general and the PRTs in particular as a way to help meet the college challenges.

“As soon as I read about the IEPI and the technical assistance teams, I thought to myself, this is something that could really help us get to where we need to go. So, I immediately reached out and asked ‘How do I sign up?’”

## THE ROLE OF THE PRTS

Technical assistance is provided at no cost for those colleges identified as needing support. The PRTs draw heavily on community college personnel with the requisite expertise and familiarity with the system to assist colleges, districts, and centers.

Using this broad array of competencies and skills, the PRTs provide technical assistance on a wide variety of topics to improve institutional effectiveness.

Under the IEPI model, the PRTs make three visits to the college. The first visit gathers information on the college’s *Areas of Focus*, helps the college reflect on its situation, and facilitates internal conversations. The PRT then provides ideas for improvement and best practices in



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the form of a *Menu of Options*.

During the second visit, the PRT helps the college draft an *Innovation and Effectiveness Plan (I&EP)* to address its *Areas of Focus*.

In the Follow-up Visit, the PRT facilitates conversations about progress on the I&EP - what is working and where things might have stalled - and may make suggestions on how to improve implementation of the I&EP.

Barstow Community College took the first step in the PRT process by submitting a letter of interest briefly explaining how a PRT could help the college improve the quality of the data and plan for enrollment shifts. The college was accepted in the first cohort of PRT colleges.

President DiThomas reflected on what prompted her to express interest in the program and funding was not the main reason. “I want to be clear. The providing of access to funds was important to us at Barstow. No question. However, it was the access to colleagues and peers to help us best use the resources which was most important to me. Providing us with access to software and technology alone without the connection to professionals to help us use them would have left us pretty much right where we were.”

## BUILDING A COLLECTIVE VISION (VISIT 1)

The presidentially led team at Barstow comprised a wide range of faculty, administrators, and classified staff, including the faculty SLO coordinator, the vice presidents

## THE BARSTOW PLAN

### DATA INTEGRITY

- Ensure critical data is reported appropriately
- Fully implement and use the local database system
- Ensure data input processes are clearly defined with timelines, accountability, and monitoring

### ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

- Implement data cleanup for critical information needs
- Develop a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan (SEMP)
- Build internal enrollment management capacity

of instruction, student services, and administrative services, academic deans, and technology staff.

During the first visit, the PRT members met with the Barstow work group throughout the day, both individually and as a group. The Barstow professionals reported that they valued the “multiple meetings with multiple groups” to build a “shared understanding” of the challenges. In particular, the college appreciated the opportunity, during the first visit, to share personal experiences and struggles with data integrity and enrollment management.

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**“The first visit accomplished what we wanted it to. It was about saying ‘here is where we want to go’ and not about being ‘told’ what to do from a single voice.”**

*-Dr. Deborah DiThomas*

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Importantly, the BCC work group prized the time to validate their thinking and integrate their colleagues’ feedback into the plan to address the data integrity and enrollment management issues: “We felt we knew what we needed to do, but it was good to get an outsider’s perspective in a nonjudgmental setting.”

DiThomas explained further, “The first visit accomplished what we wanted it to. It was about saying ‘here is where we want to go’ and not about being ‘told’ what to do from a single voice.”

## THE VALUE IN VISITS

- The chance to interact collegially with peers
- Validation of college thinking from nonjudgmental experts
- Developing a plan at the outset clarified the project goals
- The connection of resources and experts
- Pacing of visits gave time to collect thoughts
- The opportunity of multiple looks at the challenges to develop a fuller scope
- A team of experts tailored to meet the college’s objectives

After Visit 1, BCC appreciated the fact that when the team “went away from the visit, both the college and the members took time to collect thoughts” and share at the next visit.

For BCC, it was personal. “After the first visit, we concluded why we needed to change, took time to embrace the change, and began the work that needed to be done together,” an administrator noted. A faculty lead added, “We realized it was not any one person or one department’s fault. It was the institution’s challenges and we needed to address them collectively through this lens.”

## FROM PLAN TO ACTION (VISIT 2)

After the PRT provided input in the form of a Menu of Options for consideration, the college went to work building the I&EP. “The plan helped us frame the issues and decide who at the college would do what and, in turn, clarify the role the PRT members would play when they came to see us,” DiThomas observed. Part of the plan, for example, was to bring in a recognized leader in the field of enrollment management who led “down to earth” conversations

about what needed to be done.

As part of the PRT process, the college applied for and received \$150,000 in funds. “The process for applying and receiving the grant funds was simple. What to do with the money was another question entirely,” a college leader added. “We thought about it, and we decided that the funds should be directed to our most pressing needs in the area of enrollment management and data integrity: the lack of expertise.”

Dr. DiThomas brought the IEPI project to Barstow’s governing board, laying out what the group was trying to do and how the PRT and the grant would target the reasons for the challenges in the first place. The grant provided the seed money to bring a consulting team to Barstow to do an analysis of needs.

Based on findings, the College determined that it would need additional funding to go forward with a complete “revitalization” of their student system. The president then took an item to the board for approval to utilize an additional \$400,000 of district funds to support data integrity efforts that were begun through grant funding.



**BCC built a data governance group and brought the database system vendor to the college for a three-day visit to evaluate the current state of the information system and to help conduct a needs assessment.**

The BCC board of trustees responded by authorizing \$400,000 for the purchase of software and technological infrastructure to put the expert’s recommendations into motion. This “shot in the arm” helped the college put into place what the PRT and the professional experts suggested after listening to the college needs.

### THE VALUE IN VISITS

Of particular use to the college were the number and pace of the visits. “It was not just some consultant coming to the college to spend a day with us and then leave,” a leader noted. From the BCC perspective, the timeline for the visits afforded both the BCC faculty and staff and the PRT members a chance to be contemplative about the work being done.

“It also provided us with a ‘fuller scope’ and the visits were about ‘empowerment’ rather than ‘direction,’” a college leader noted. The team makeup was also a valued component of the process. “The PRT expert members were tailored to our specific problems. They were also generous with their time. We appreciated the chance to take a day out on our own to send a team to observe how a college that ‘gets it right’ does it right,” said one administrator.

The time spent by the experts and members to visit to Barstow campus was also appreciated. One faculty member indicated “It really put a face on the experts. That was important to us—that people were willing to come here and talk with us.”

### NEXT STEPS (VISIT 3 FOLLOW UP)

In preparation for the follow-up visit, the college prepared a status update to share with the team the steps that they had taken. For example, BCC built a data governance group and brought the database system vendor to the college for a three-day visit to evaluate the current state of the information system and to help conduct a needs assessment.

In addition, the college established an enrollment management committee and met with a recognized expert in the field. The college cleared calendars and had 70 faculty, staff, and administrators attend the training.

Finally, the college purchased a data warehouse search tool to house the data currently in the college’s database system, and eventually to provide real-time tools for data access for faculty and staff.

The work continues at the college, but the PRT provided key support to frame the challenges going forward.

One BCC leader summed it up this way: “We cannot stress enough that while the access to funds and software and technological know-how was great, it was the chance to interact with leaders on how to use them that really mattered. Being shown a series of enrollment management plans was great, but dialoguing about how do we build one here? That team involvement in this process was invaluable.” ■

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*Robert Pacheco, Ed.D.,  
External Evaluator  
BOB@PACH3.CO*



CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY  
COLLEGES CHANCELLOR’S OFFICE  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA  
916.445.8752

**MATTHEW C. LEE, Ph.D.**  
Project Director

**THERESA TENA**  
Vice Chancellor, Institutional  
Effectiveness  
CCC Chancellor’s Office

**BARRY GRIBBONS, Ph.D.**  
Deputy Chancellor  
College of the Canyons



COLLEGE OF THE CANYONS/  
SANTA CLARITA CCD  
SANTA CLARITA, CALIFORNIA  
661.362.5500