

The Panhandle and Its Heart – The I-27 Corridor

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Theme Group Name

The Panhandle and Its Heart – The I-27 Corridor

Members

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Introduction

The charge given to the I-27 Corridor Theme Group was to consider the pivotal role WTAMU will play along with “schools, industries, businesses, and cultural activity in building a quality place to live and study.” During the initial meeting of the committee, it became apparent how little, if any, information filters from various administrative and decision-making boards and committees to the community at large. It was noted that (a) if a community lacks sufficient information when making decisions or promoting itself, the community risks not reaching its full potential and (b) knowledge of currently evolving issues can directly affect which path an organization might take.

To focus on a “stronger university-community cooperation that will allow WTAMU to evolve as a preeminent institution,” Gina Woodward initiated a SWOT analysis to determine perceptions of WTAMU in the communities of the Texas Panhandle. Determining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and the role each would play in bridging WTAMU and the community was instrumental in determining the committee’s direction.

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The SWOT Analysis produced a common theme: There is no easily accessible central repository of information/data concerning the current and prior economic and social activity of the Texas Panhandle and the impact community institutions have on such economic and social activity. Without a central repository for data, a large “weakness” in the SWOT analysis has emerged resulting in a strategic lack of information that should be filtered from various local administrative and decision-making boards and committees.

To illustrate this current lack of robust communication, one only has to consider the number of Panhandle residents and WTAMU faculty and staff that can address the following:

- The economic impact of Panhandle industry in the State of Texas.
- Current employment needs of the Texas Panhandle.
- WTAMU impact on the workforce of the Panhandle.
- WTAMU impact on the artistic culture within the Panhandle area.
- Ever-evolving accomplishments/achievements of WTAMU’s colleges and school.
- Current demographics of the Texas Panhandle.
- Purpose and effectiveness of the WTAMU Small Business Development Center, the Center for Learning Disabilities (TAMUS Designated Center of Excellence), the WTAMU Speech and Hearing Clinic, and other vital organizations.

While this type of information is available online through a myriad of websites, many of the sites are not user-friendly and accessing this information can be tedious and time-consuming.

The committee concluded that to counteract the SWOT weakness, a governance board comprised of key community members from WTAMU and across the Panhandle could be a means for accomplishing such needed communication. The mission of the governance board would be one that identifies, facilitates, and communicates the evolving needs and accomplishments of the University and of the community in an ongoing, ever-present, up-to-date system. The committee discussed the importance of the governing board’s function as a facilitator by providing indirect and/or unobtrusive assistance through collecting and disseminating information to be used by the University and community organizations in their strategic planning.

Another concern that surfaced during the SWOT analysis was that WTAMU’s quality as a regional University is housed only with graduates of WTAMU. Educated members of the community who are not graduates of WTAMU do not view the University as a first choice for their children, but rather as a school for those who cannot do better.

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As an institution of higher learning that is striving to achieve a doctoral status in the Carnegie classification of universities, it is a natural fit that WTAMU should serve as a “clearing house” of information to be collected, synthesized, and distributed to the general population for the purpose of informing both community residents and residents beyond the Panhandle about the merits of WTAMU and the distinctions of the Texas Panhandle. The information disseminated should be useful not only to the University in promoting its reputation of educational excellence, but also by businesses, grant writers, government officials, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, etc. in promoting the strategic significance of the Panhandle. The “clearing house” will be governed by the aforementioned board. The Board’s intention would be to not preside over actions or solutions for any organization, but rather to provide usable information for community and University organizations in promoting WTAMU and the Panhandle area, to aid in decision-making, and/or to formulate solutions for existing problems. Continuous effort on the part of the governing board to make known the quality of WTAMU and its working partnership with the Panhandle community over the course of several years may support not only WTAMU’s emergence as a preeminent institution, but also the Panhandle as a formidable contributor to the cultural and economic impact in the State of Texas.

Innovation

To ensure prestige, the governing board should consist of a small number of high profile members. The board will oversee a liaison whose main function is to carry out the board’s mission. The liaison is key to the success of this proposal, is to be a paid position at WTAMU, and will be subject to a yearly evaluation of job performance by the governing board. The liaison will need to be adept in public relations/marketing/publishing/public speaking and reading/analyzing research. The liaison will gather, synthesize, and distribute information under the governance of the board. The number of entities or organizations from which information will be drawn is not limited, but the information ultimately disseminated will be at the board’s discretion. The organizations from which information is gathered is expected to continually change according to the evolving needs of the community and the University.

The liaison will have a contact person within each organization that has an appropriate level of authority to provide essential information. Together, the liaison and the contact person in a given organization will agree on the information to be presented to the governing board. The governing board will then determine the information to be disseminated to the community based upon the information’s impact level.

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There will be at least two avenues for distribution of information: (1) A publicly available WTAMU webpage maintained by the liaison that houses the facts and data collected by the liaison and approved by the board, and (2) public speaking engagements at community organizational meetings across the Texas Panhandle in which the liaison will prepare presentations catering to the special interests of the audience and will promote the exploration of the web site for additional information. Naturally, there will be an upfront time investment as the liaison establishes relationships with organizations in the Texas Panhandle, creates an effective website, and acquires facts and data.

To be effective, the web-site for communicating information about the Panhandle to the regional community and beyond must be a top result in a search engine and load quickly. Presentation of the information should be succinct, informative, and impactful. A potential student, parent of a potential student, a faculty member, potential faculty member, or Panhandle resident should be able to navigate the website with ease and come away from the experience with an understanding of the quality possessed by every college and school associated with WTAMU. A visitor should also come away from the webpage experience with a clear understanding of WTAMU’s partnership with the Panhandle community: a working relationship beneficial to both parties. At present, the extent of WTAMU’s benefit to the community is not widely known among the populace of the Panhandle, WTAMU students, or WTAMU faculty and staff. It is the charge of the governing board to make known such information in elevating a heightened perception of WTAMU’s strategic role in the community. Elevating the perception will require significant and ever-evolving strategic planning on the part of the governing board.

Once the initiative is implemented, effectiveness of the website will be measured with an evaluative rubric, an example of which can be found below. Two categories in the rubric, the number of visitors and the monitoring of website usage will be indicative of whether or not the information being posted on the website is of value to the people of the Panhandle. In turn, the success of the two categories, the number of visitors and the monitoring of website usage, will indirectly measure the success of the liaison and the governing board.

Example Rubric

Score	4	3	2	1
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Organization of information	Logically organized yielding ease of navigation	Logically organized but ease of navigation needs modification	Organization of information does not yield ease of navigation	Organization of information is not apparent and ease of navigation is impaired
Website Appearance	Esthetics	Esthetics need minor modifications	Esthetics need significant modifications	Esthetics are not apparent
Availability of Data	Data is at a scholarly level and is current and up-to-date	Data is at a scholarly level and more than 50% of data at any given time is up-to-date	Data is at a scholarly level and less than 50% of data at any given time is up-to-date	Scholarly level data is not being maintained
Frequency of Information Update	Information is updated weekly	Information is updated monthly	Information is updated quarterly	Information is updated yearly
Mobile Version of Web Site	All functions/pages on website are functional on a mobile version	Only significant functions/pages are available on a mobile version	Limited mobile functionality that requires connection to full site for significant functions	Mobile version unavailable
Number of visitors	Steady Increase in monthly visitors over the course of a year	Minimal increase in monthly visitors over the course of a year	Number of visitors remains static over the course of a year	Number of visitors decreases over the course of a year
Monitoring web site usage	Sources sending traffic to the site are systematically gathered and categorized	Sources sending traffic to the site are periodically gathered and categorized	Sources sending traffic to the site are gathered but not categorized	Sources sending traffic to the site are not monitored

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Key Idea (1)

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A governing board whose mission is to identify, facilitate, and communicate the evolving accomplishments and needs of the University and the community. The governing board functions as a facilitator by providing indirect and/or unobtrusive assistance through collecting and disseminating information that might be used by organizations in strategic planning.

Goal 1:

Establishment of a governing board

- Limited number of board members
- High profile members

Action 1.1:

Creating suggested bylaws that will govern the board

Measurable Outcome 1.1.1:

The action can be measured using an evaluative rubric to determine whether or not the information being gathered is of value to people in and out of the region.

Goal 2:

The board will oversee a liaison whose main function is to carry out the board's mission. The liaison is key to the success of this proposal and is to be a paid position at WTAMU. The liaison will gather, synthesize, and distribute information under the governance of the board.

Action 2.1:

WTAMU must approve funding for a liaison position.

Action(s) 2.2:

The liaison will maintain a WTAMU Heart of the Panhandle website that houses facts and data collected from organizations that are filtered

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through the liaison and approved by the board. The approved information will then be available on the website for use by the general public.

Measurable Outcome 2.2.1:

The action can be measured using an evaluative rubric to determine whether or not the information being posted on the website is of value to people in and out of the region and if it effectively strengthens WTAMU's reputation as a premier regional university.

Action 2.3:

The liaison will arrange to be a guest speaker at community organizational meetings across the Texas Panhandle and the state. The liaison will prepare presentations catering to the special interests of the audience and will promote the exploration of the Heart of the Panhandle website for additional information.

Measurable Outcome 2.3.1:

As a WTAMU employee, the liaison will be subject to a yearly evaluation of job performance and will be evaluated by the governing board.

Appendices and Additional Facts and Analysis

References