

STRATEGIC PLANNING | PHASE 2

VISION TEAM REPORTS

**BETTER THE WORLD THROUGH
RESEARCH AND CREATIVE WORK**



University of Colorado **Denver**

THEME

BETTER THE WORLD THROUGH RESEARCH AND CREATIVE WORK

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What We Aspire To Look Like In 2030

CU Denver is a bustling hub of community conversation, idea exchange, multi-directional support, and asset-based inquiry—all focused on creating better lives and a healthier planet. Together, our diverse faculty, staff, and students explore research and creative work that is deeply meaningful to our partnered communities.

Through robust faculty mentorship, embedded sharing networks, a world class research and creativity hub in the heart of Denver, and distributed community workshops, we engage with and feel inspired by each other's work. We recognize that our uniqueness makes a difference and that our collective intelligence yields visionary approaches to the world's most complex problems.

We are curious, nimble, and dynamic—comfortable with change and insistent on fostering a culture of radical inclusivity for all who join our community. Everyone is granted the agency to impact what we do and how we do it. Our inclusive approach emboldens all to shape our university into their reflection. We relentlessly hold ourselves to the highest standards of equity, respect, empathy, and care.

We enthusiastically disrupt entrenched ways of thinking. We value serious play and we grant the gift of time and purposeful slowness to our researchers, creators, designers, and artists. We value and champion truly impactful work. Our expanded metrics demonstrate our commitment to making a difference and embrace community engagement, work that amplifies traditionally underrepresented voices, interdisciplinary collaboration, and cross-departmental and cross-institutional team building.



What We Aspire To Look Like In 2030

WHERE WE EXCEL

Diversity: Our students bring diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and life experiences to enrich our community in ways unique to our location in Denver, and to our relationships with our partnered institutions and campuses. Our students are our lifeblood and one of our greatest assets.

Urban location: Our prime urban location connects us to important industry and community partners. We are central to the vitality of downtown Denver, and positioned perfectly to utilize both where we are and how we're connected to catalyze and support important research and creative work.

Academic community: We are an integral part of larger, overlapping academic communities, including the University of Colorado system and the Auraria Higher Education Center. In sum, this community offers broad and deep expertise across a kaleidoscope of richly diverse research and creative work.

Nimble, scrappy, and efficient: We get things done. We move faster and more efficiently than most institutions of comparable size. We are resourceful and resilient. With our work ethic and a get-things-done attitude, we embody an innovative spirit that directly impacts the quality of our output.

Applied and engaged: We foster an environment that values applied, engaged research and creative work. Our work lives out in the world. We value connection to our students and their communities. Our work reflects these relationships.

WHERE WE STRUGGLE

Structural and financial impediments: Our work can feel disconnected and siloed because of structural and financial impediments. The systems in place do not promote connected, cooperative work. Many faculty researchers collaborate despite the barriers, but it is not encouraged or facilitated by our financial models or administrative structures.

Time and space: To produce truly disruptive research and creative work, there must be time and space to do so. Currently, research faculty and staff are crippled by the tyranny of immediate and mundane, yet necessary responsibilities.

Risk: Innovation in research and creative work requires risk-taking. Our institution does not demonstrate the patience, trust, and recognition of the importance of slowness or the embrace of failure for risky research and creative work to flourish. We currently reward work that is well-defined, clearly stated, and monetarily valuable in black and white terms.

Mentoring: Mentorship is vitally important, across all stages of one's career. Currently, research faculty and staff miss a robust, integrated, and systemic approach to cross-college and cross-departmental mentorship.

Belonging: Not everyone feels a sense of belonging and agency over their work. There exist "haves" and "have-nots" at CU Denver. Some feel like their work is valued, while others feel like they are outsiders and are not valued.

Work/life balance and mental health: Those willing to sacrifice work/life balance to produce research and creative work quickly are rewarded and held up as the most successful and accomplished. Rewards and accolades are proportional to one's willingness to sacrifice mental health and to work around the clock. This is not sustainable.

Goal 1: Inspire And Connect

Through our research and creative work, we will inspire fresh insights into the complex issues impacting humanity, such as climate change, racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation equality, quality education for all communities, health and wellness, access to healthcare, access to food and water, housing access, the impacts of the Anthropocene on our environment, employment, and transportation.

To inspire outside connections, we will leverage our location in the core of one of the fastest growing cities in the country and our diverse students who bring deep connections to underserved communities. This vibrant and complex context will orient us toward leading with listening, thinking laterally, and discovering unlikely solutions to problems that matter. It will offer genuine opportunity to engage with private industry and community expertise. High quality, community- and industry-connected research methods, designs, and spaces will foster connection that is authentic and real.

To inspire inside connection, we will cultivate people, spaces, and networks to support collaboration across disciplines, pooling strengths and diversifying participation. We will build on our collective expertise across the CU System, on the AHEC Campus, and within CU Denver to inspire unconventional and disruptive solutions to meaningful challenges.

To further inspire and connect our research and creative work, we will hire more researchers, artists, and designers. These individuals will be primarily, but not exclusively, housed in the tenured and tenure track ranks. We will lead the country in reversing trends that result in unsustainable workloads for faculty and staff alike and are caused, in part, by short-sighted hiring practices.



Goal 1: Inspire And Connect

STRATEGY 1.1

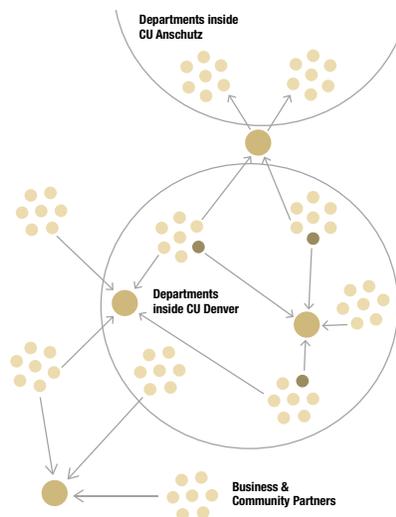
Entrust faculty and staff to facilitate and energize cross-disciplinary and community collaboration.

The human capital within the current faculty and staff is an institutional strength that can be better leveraged by creating connections across units and into the community. Fostering new connections and partnerships requires time, focus, and patience along with the realization and acceptance of the fact that the dividends are often years away.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 1.1.1** Create chaired “Research and Creative Work Connector” positions among the faculty and staff that provide time and resources to create connections across disciplines and units. Pursue large-scale, multiple investigator external funding.
- **Initiative 1.1.2** Create chaired “Community Connector” positions among the faculty and staff that provide time and resources to connect research and creative work with underserved communities. Pursue external funding to support or expand these community connections.
- **Initiative 1.1.3** Use cluster hires across Departments and Schools/Colleges to build capacity in the tenure/tenure-track ranks in areas of existing or emerging strengths and establish deep connections.

1 | Connectors & Cluster Hires



STRATEGY 1.2

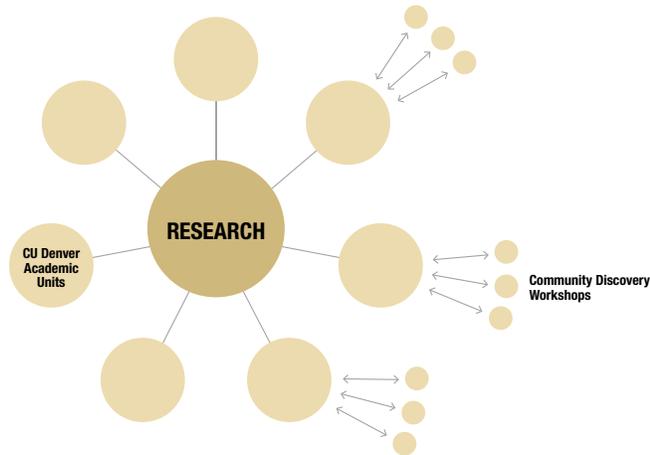
Establish a university-wide mentoring and championing strategy that extends across a career.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 1.2.1** Use “Entering Mentoring” workshops to train faculty and staff on how to be effective mentors.
- **Initiative 1.2.2** Institutionalize best practices in mentoring that cater to different faculty, staff, and student positions and include mentors outside of primary units.
- **Initiative 1.2.3** Build truly two-way connections into our community partnerships such that external entities and individuals both give and receive mentoring and championing.
- **Initiative 1.2.4** Recognize that JEDI doesn't stop at recruitment. The retention and career growth of faculty and staff from underrepresented groups need to be supported in line with the findings and recommendations of the Equity Task Force.

Goal 1: Inspire And Connect

2 | Physical Spaces



STRATEGY 1.3

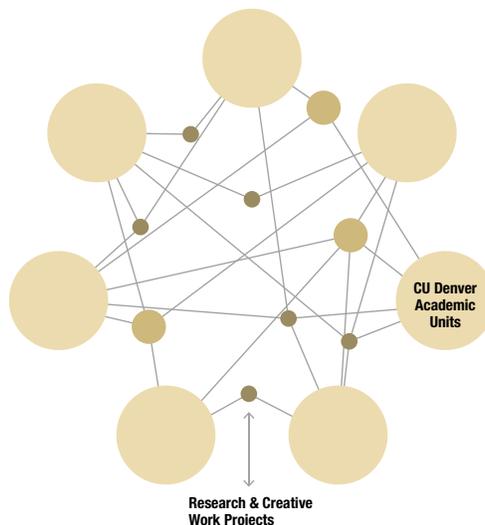
New physical spaces that distill, collect, distribute, and engage.

Even in an increasingly virtual workplace, the need for physical spaces for faculty, staff, and students to engage with each other is essential to develop and support collaboration. Moreover, to engage our surrounding communities, a distributed network of spaces for testing, prototyping, and exploring ideas important to them is vital for building trust and meaningful connection.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 1.3.1** Establish a “Centralized Research Park” as a space to meaningfully and deeply connect faculty, staff, and students in unlikely ways.
- **Initiative 1.3.2** Expand and grow incubator spaces for prototyping and testing new ideas and translating those ideas into entrepreneurial ventures.
- **Initiative 1.3.3** Create “Distributed Community Discovery Workshops” as spaces to celebrate and foster community-connected designs and methods.

3 | Virtual Networks



Goal 1: Inspire And Connect

STRATEGY 1.4

New virtual spaces that disseminate, cross-pollinate, and catalyze discussion.

The proliferation of virtual spaces and networks is a blessing and a curse. An intentional and cohesive strategy will help amplify research and creative work, and provide a centralized space for researchers and creators to connect.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 1.4.1** Create a database to connect research and creative work virtually modeled off of Colorado PROFILES.
- **Initiative 1.4.2** Continue to invest and grow the social media presence of CU Denver research and creative work via various mediums, including YouTube, webinar series, podcasts.
- **Initiative 1.4.3** Evaluate how faculty and CU Communications can better connect to promote research and creative work.



Goal 2: Support And Disrupt

Through unprecedented support of our faculty, staff, and students to research and create, CU Denver will disrupt deeply-rooted approaches that prevent new insights and fresh questions. We will offer our researchers, artists, and designers the valuable gift of time by reducing overall workload, providing a flexible distribution of effort, and addressing the tyranny of the immediate.

In our pursuit to support and disrupt, we will celebrate failure, promote play, and support risk-taking. We recognize that some of the world's most disruptive, meaningful advancements have occurred by accident, through serendipitous conversation, lateral thinking in the face of apparent failure, and merely as the result of opportunity for deep and slow reflection. We will address the threat that poor mental health exerts on the creative process.

We will redistribute workload. We will leverage our unique position, in the urban core of Denver, to engage with private sector practice and community expertise to reimagine the delivery of curriculum. In doing so, our researchers, artists, and designers will be free to discover, play, test, fail, reflect, and ultimately elevate their work to never-before-seen heights.

Goal 2: Support And Disrupt

STRATEGY 2.1

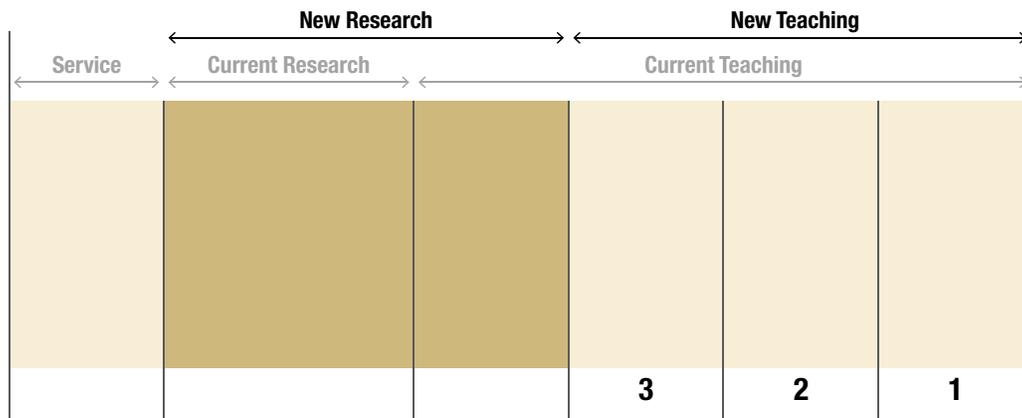
Radically rethink and customize the distribution of workloads.

Faculty and staff are often hired with a prescriptive distribution of their workload that does not change over time. For example, the 40:40:20 Teaching:Research:Service distribution for tenure track faculty. These distributions can poorly reflect the reality of how an individual spends their time. Moreover, it places faculty and staff into a one-size-fits-all box, while not valuing those that carry disproportionate teaching, service, or teaching loads, even though those individuals often have the largest impact on research and creative work.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 2.1.1** Balance and adjust workload distribution not only at the time of hiring but also over time as roles change, to reflect an individuals' strengths and the needs of their units.
- **Initiative 2.1.2** Develop attainable, low barrier-to-entry course release programs.
- **Initiative 2.1.3** Reduce annual teaching load by one course for all full-time research faculty.

1 | Reduce Teaching Load



Goal 2: Support And Disrupt

STRATEGY 2.2

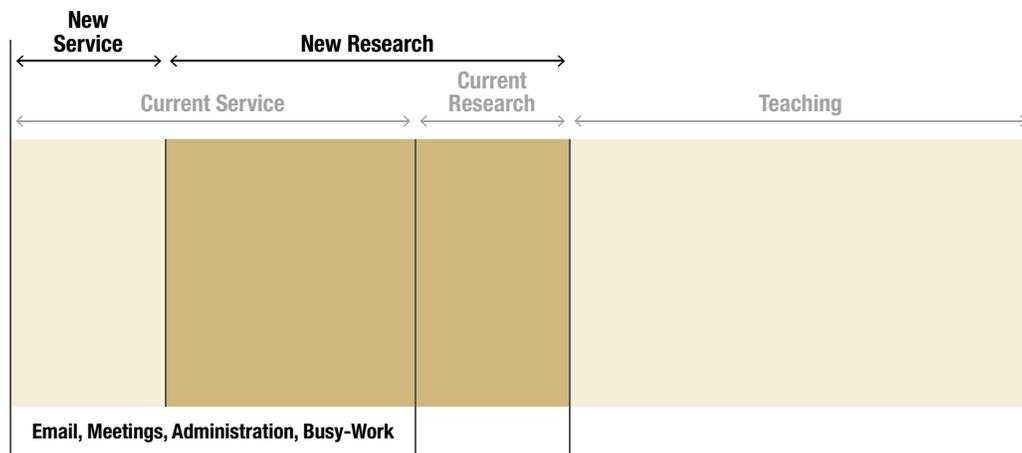
Reduce the administrative burden on those conducting research and creative work.

A nearly ubiquitous response from our stakeholder analysis was concern over low-level, administrative tasks overwhelming faculty and staff at the expense of the time needed to support impactful research and creative work. Many stakeholders recognized their own deficiencies in time and project management skills, which is an area where a modest investment could yield substantial gains. Others related challenging experiences with respect to grant management and accounting.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 2.2.1** Provide faculty and staff training, time management tools, and useful strategies for developing a healthy work/life balance, developing a personal routine, prioritizing research over busy work, and setting aside time for unscripted play, explorative conversation, and reflection.
- **Initiative 2.2.2** Offer faculty improved tools for managing research and associated finances.
- **Initiative 2.2.3** Develop alternative modes of communication while recognizing that email's original utility has run its course.

2 | Reduce Service



Goal 2: Support And Disrupt

STRATEGY 2.3

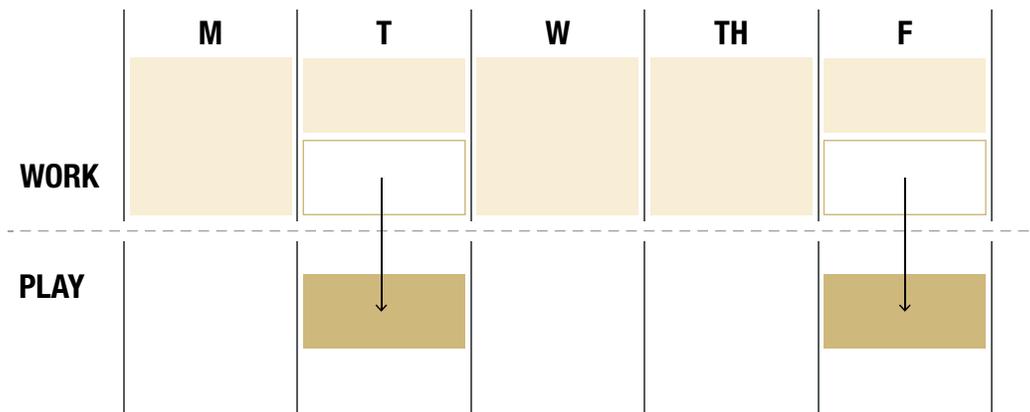
Promote, connect, and enthusiastically encourage unscripted time.

Creativity is born in the unlikely connections between disparate ideas and fields of study. Carving out time and space for playful, unscripted thinking and connections amongst faculty and staff is akin to planting the seeds for innovative research and creative work. Faculty and staff need regular, routinely scheduled time and dedicated spaces to playfully explore, freely make mistakes, and iteratively develop ideas that can only emerge at the intersections of multiple fields, and with like-minded, but complementary collaborators. We will actively train our faculty and staff in the valuable skills of maintaining work/life balance, prioritizing one's research and creative work above busy work, managing one's daily, weekly, and monthly schedule effectively, developing a personal routine, and carving time out of every day to do inspiring disruptive work.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 2.3.1** Alternative sabbaticals for faculty and staff across units and in the private sector.
- **Initiative 2.3.2** Institutionalize 'meeting free Mondays' and 'email-free Fridays' to promote time for thinking, unscripted collaborations, and play.
- **Initiative 2.3.3** Lectures/symposia between two unlikely departments that alternates, Pecha Kucha-style.
- **Initiative 2.3.4** Internal seed funds for cross-unit collaborations that support the 2030 Strategic Plan.

3 | Support Play



Goal 3: Empower And Incentivize

We will incentivize departments to address outdated Review, Tenure, and Promotion (RTP) processes to celebrate the work of our most disruptive thinkers. In tandem, we will build a system of promotion and recognition for the essential staff who make research and creative work possible. We will create a system that values, empowers, and promotes the work of historically underrepresented/BIPOC faculty and staff. To make a difference in the world, we will move beyond entrenched reward systems, reframe who and what we value, relentlessly challenge the phrase “it’s just the way we’ve always done things,” and continuously improve our rewards and incentives.

CU Denver’s unique personality, as a resilient, nimble, interrogative, and reflective institution positions it well to lead the country in fundamentally rethinking academic incentive systems and the values upon which we base empowering our best and brightest.

We will articulate CU Denver’s distinguishing values from our upper administration down to our reimagined RTP standards that celebrate and reward disruptive research beyond traditional RTP modalities. We recognize that time, space, and money are the most valued resources. Beyond these, we will additionally reward people with new connections, extended networks, and unique leadership and development opportunities. We will operate with the understanding that if we want to meaningfully and fundamentally address the complex challenges we face, we must value the exact things that will get us there: cross-disciplinary sharing and collaborating, meaningful engagement and partnership with our most underserved communities, and the pursuit of work that takes risk, values failure, and seeks to disrupt entrenched ways of thinking.



Goal 3: Empower And Incentivize

STRATEGY 3.1

Broaden and clarify how we define impactful research and creative work.

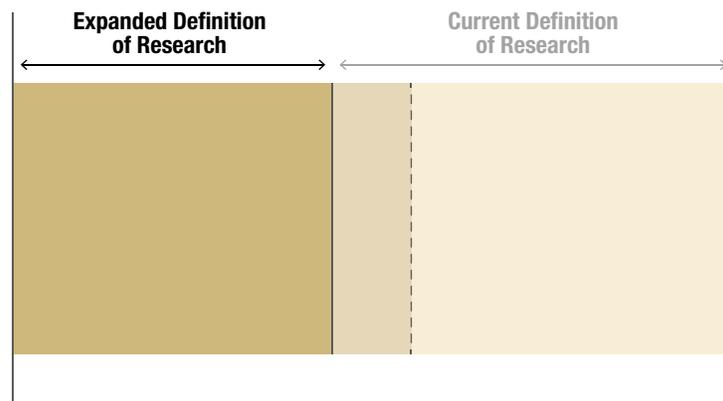
Faculty and staff are empowered and incentivized to pursue high-risk, high-reward research and creative work. We will expand the aperture on what we consider impactful beyond the conventional measures of research productivity.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 3.1.1** Hold an annual event that identifies current global challenges and identifies how to pivot research and creative work strengths to address these challenges.
- **Initiative 3.1.2** Identify and promote exemplars of unconventional research and creative work with high impact within the CU Denver community.
- **Initiative 3.1.3** Develop seed funds that will annually support disruptive research in areas of local, national, and global need.

1 | Redefine Research

STEAM



STRATEGY 3.2

Align our RTP criteria for faculty and promotion and evaluation criteria for staff with our values.

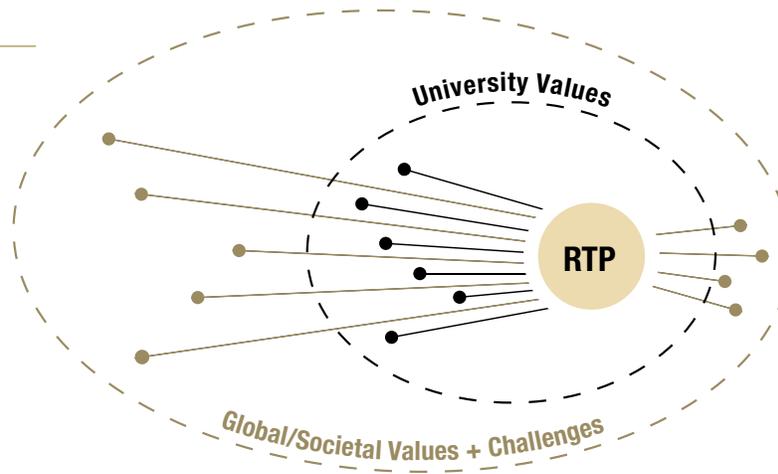
We recognize that radical changes in research and creative work culture will only come to fruition if the proper incentives are in place. We will place value in research and creative work that engages with underrepresented and underserved communities, cross- and interdisciplinary research, team science approaches to complex problems, intellectual property, and entrepreneurial activities.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 3.2.1** Identify institutional values that emerge from the 2030 Strategic Plan that can guide research and creative works.
- **Initiative 3.2.2** Align RTP criteria across faculty and staff ranks with our values, while honoring the academic freedom that each unit has in developing their criteria.

Goal 2: Empower and Incentivize

2 | Redefine RTP



STRATEGY 3.3

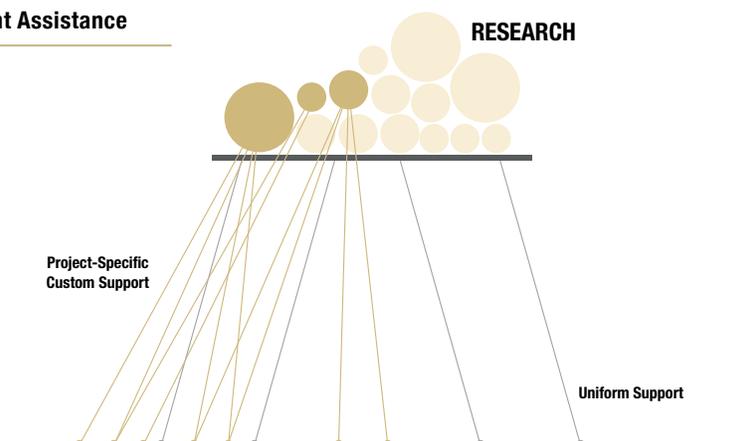
Support research and creative work through dynamic development assistance.

We will bolster research and creative work by providing support structures and tools that improve faculty members' ability to compete for external funding and support, as well as provide internal seed funding for campus-wide initiatives that will catalyze discoveries and the interdisciplinary teams of tomorrow.

INITIATIVES

- **Initiative 3.3.1** Hire focused faculty expertise that supports, builds upon, and extends currently identified disruptive research themes.
- **Initiative 3.3.2** Support staff who not only administer and facilitate, but also help frame and conceptualize research (i.e. grant writer, graphic designers).
- **Initiative 3.3.3** Business development and entrepreneurial support—hire people from successful startups and innovative companies who help to identify and catalyze disruptive ideas in our research and creative work.

3 | Dynamic Development Assistance



Interactions

There are significant connections between our theme and many of the other Vision Teams. During Phase II, we had particularly fruitful conversations with the 'Put Our People At The Center' and 'Empowered By Our Inclusive Excellence' Teams. Although we have not had the chance to see the final recommendations from each of these Teams, our conversations identified overlapping goals with respect to redefining RTP/Promotion criteria, hiring practices, and mentoring and supporting faculty and staff so that they can achieve their full potential. There appears to be nearly unanimous support for achieving faculty and staff diversity that mirrors our student body.

In terms of numbers of engagements with stakeholders (faculty members, staff members, students, alumni, donors, and external partners), we estimate that we connected with several hundred different people throughout our three-month process. In total, our team consisted of twenty members. Some members connected with as many as fifty or more different stakeholders, through listening sessions and emailed surveys, while others connected with four or five, through deeper conversations and interviews. Our team averaged about ten connection points per person, for about two hundred connections to stakeholders in total.

ABOUT THE PROCESS



ABOUT THE PROCESS

LETTER FROM THE STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE CHAIR

Dear Chancellor Marks,

When you charged our strategic planning steering committee you told us that CU Denver has built incredible momentum in the last 50 years and that there is great pride among our community about our progress. I was also struck by your comment that across your 100 Days of Listening tour nobody told you that we were done, but rather, our community is ready to capitalize on our unique strengths to become the type of university our city, state, and nation need.

During Phase 2 of our strategic plan, we brought together a team of 130+ exceptional students, faculty, staff, and friends that broadly represented the university community. They were organized in eight Vision Teams and a Steering Committee and asked to engage in an inclusive, innovative process to envision our future.

In the following pages you will find their work – the ideas conceptualized, articulated, and conveyed by our own community. These are dreams of what CU Denver can become by 2030 and high-level strategies for how we might get there. The work is phenomenal and I could not be prouder of our team!

I am immensely impressed by, and grateful for, the work of our Vision Teams, Steering Committee, and the Comcast Media Technology Center/Inworks Design Innovation team that facilitated this process with creativity, flexibility, and unmatched professionalism. I am confident that their work delivers on your charge to dream big and determine how we can carve out our unique and impactful future.

I look forward to working with you over the next several weeks to take these ideas and shape our community's very best thinking into a cohesive strategy for CU Denver that will guide us over the next decade. I could not be more excited for our future, and truly believe we will be the university the world needs in 2030!

Sincerely,

Marty Dunn

*Dean, College of Engineering, Design and Computing
Chair, Strategic Planning Steering Committee*

ABOUT THE PROCESS

BACKGROUND

CU Denver embarked on an ambitious [strategic planning process](#) in January 2021 to create a bold, exciting vision and strategy that will differentiate CU Denver by 2030.

After Chancellor Michelle Marks' [100 Days of Listening](#) tour, it was clear that our university community has tremendous pride and momentum, as well as a strong desire to launch CU Denver to national recognition as a leading public urban research university.

In January 2021, Chancellor Marks charged a team of faculty, staff, and students with collaborating on the development of a refreshed outlook for CU Denver, one that would capture a vision for 2030, strengthen and differentiate the university. The process was human-centered and inclusive by design and engaged hundreds of participants and generated thousands of ideas.

With the right vision, plan, execution, CU Denver can become a model university that truly meets the needs of all.

THE PROCESS

The strategic planning process used a unique method called design innovation (see page 5) that encourages big, bold idea generation, and the participation of the entire campus community. The process was divided into three phases:

Phase	Timing	Goal of Work	Format
PHASE 1 Our Vision for 2030	January 2021	Set the Vision	Broad community input was invited via multiple channels; 3,674+ ideas generated.
PHASE 2 Strengthen and Differentiate	February – April 2021	Develop the Themes	Eight multidisciplinary, cross-functional “Vision Teams” were charged to focus on themes informed by the 100 Days of Listening tour; they imagined, distilled, and recommended 4,000+ bold ideas.
PHASE 3 Synthesize & Deliver Our Strategic Plan	April – June 2021	Build the Strategy	Based on Vision Team reports and community input, a cogent and integrated strategic plan will be developed and released.

ABOUT THE PROCESS

PHASE 1: OUR VISION FOR 2030

Phase 1 consisted of foundational work around CU Denver's purpose, vision, values, and graduate characteristics. This began with gathering input from the CU Denver community through a series of community sessions and an online survey. The information-gathering process was rooted in appreciative inquiry – an inclusive, strengths-based approach to identify the most important attributes of our identity and ambitions — and served as a “north star” for the rest of our strategic planning work.

PHASE 2: STRENGTHEN AND DIFFERENTIATE CU DENVER — CURRENT PHASE

Phase 2 brought our community together to think big, dream, and strategize to determine how we can take CU Denver to the next level by 2030. This phase launched eight Vision Teams, organized around major themes informed by Chancellor Marks' 100 Days of Listening tour. These multidisciplinary, cross-functional teams were diverse and represented all corners of the university, bringing tremendous institutional knowledge to the table. They were charged with digging deep into our institution in order to develop goals, strategies, and initiatives to strengthen and differentiate CU Denver around their theme. A team of faculty, staff, and students from CU Denver's Comcast Media Technology Center/ InWorks, facilitated their work by co-creating a customized design innovation process with each of the Vision Teams.

The Phase 2 work represents the culmination of significant thought, discussion, data collection, and research that will inform the strategic plan for the future of CU Denver. The Vision Team reports are featured in this document.

PHASE 3: SYNTHESIZE AND DELIVER OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

In Phase 3, the Vision Teams' work is being reviewed, synthesized, and distilled into a bold, exciting, integrated, cohesive strategic plan for CU Denver in 2030. We will present working drafts of this strategic plan through a series of community feedback sessions in early- to mid-May 2021. Following these sessions, we will begin the process of writing the final report, which will be a top-line synthesis of the community's work focused on high-level goals and strategies. The report is expected to be delivered to the CU Board of Regents in June 2021 and shared with the community shortly thereafter. Operationalizing the plan will follow in Fall 2021.



ABOUT THE PROCESS

HOW WE DID IT: PHASE 2

Phase 2 Participation



2,000+
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS



8
VISION TEAMS



130
VISION TEAM MEMBERS



4,000+
STORIES, IDEAS, AND
ASPIRATIONS GENERATED
BY VISION TEAMS

ABOUT DESIGN INNOVATION

[Design innovation](#) (DI) is a human-centered approach that blends the mindsets, methods, and languages of design thinking, systems thinking, engineering design, and business innovation to discover, define, develop, and deliver innovative solutions to complex problems. The process centers the concepts of creativity, openness, mindfulness, adaptability, empathy, and freedom to explore radical and impactful ideas about our future.

A team of faculty, staff, and students from CU Denver's Comcast Media Technology Center/InWorks, co-led by Professor Kristin Wood and Lauren Hebert, facilitated the VisionT Teams' work. At a high-level, the teams:

- Kicked off their work by broadly engaging our community to understand individual points of view related to their theme.
- Analyzed what they heard to identify the opportunities where CU Denver could make the greatest impact.
- Generated initial ideas about how we could best make that impact and tested those ideas again with our community.
- Incorporated the community's feedback and created bold, differentiating ideas to take CU Denver to the next level by 2030.

This process was built around four sessions that intentionally brought together all eight Vision Teams in order to facilitate cross-collaboration and inspire new and bold ideas at the intersection of the distinct teams.

