

**STRATEGIC PLANNING | PHASE 2**

# **VISION TEAM REPORTS**

**TRANSFORM THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS**



University of Colorado **Denver**

## THEME

# TRANSFORM THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

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# What We Aspire To Look Like In 2030

**CU Denver embraces external partnerships as a cornerstone of realizing our university values and accomplishing our mission. We develop and foster synergistic relationships where we have equal agency in creating mutually reinforcing activities that have important impact. Our intentional, holistic, and inclusive approach to partnership allows us to bring our unique position and expertise to a variety of collaborations that serve our communities and co-create positive change.**

Our students, faculty, and staff succeed because our partnerships support individual and collective success, and create unrivaled opportunities for growth and learning. Our partners succeed because we listen to their needs, curate our best-matched people, opportunities and resources, and offer a customized pathway for ongoing engagement.

In 2030, partnership is a core value of everyone and everything we do at CU Denver. Our partnerships and their impact on our students and the community is what sets us apart from other universities.

## WHERE WE EXCEL

Our current, organic approach to partnerships has resulted in some impactful and mutually beneficial partnerships, in part, because CU Denver employs mission-driven and community-minded faculty and staff, and serves passionate, driven, and thoughtful students. Our past success is also the result of the generosity of our alumni and community partners who continue to walk with us and support us to improve in our partnerships with them.

We excel at connecting an individual unit and well-matched partner for a specific purpose. When we are in partnership, we are generous with our time and expertise and work hard to limit the internal administrative burden on our partners. We have some deep and long-lasting partnerships. Our partners find our students to be engaging, thoughtful people who bring value and new perspectives, and our faculty to be knowledgeable experts who bring information and new thinking.

Our mission-driven, do-it-yourself culture has provided the flexibility and autonomy for people at CU Denver to create unique partnerships that have had short- and long-term impact. Many programs and units have embraced the fact that partnerships are key to their success and to the educational experience we offer at CU Denver.



# WHERE WE STRUGGLE

CU Denver currently has a plethora of impactful yet overlapping, disconnected, and varying partnerships grown out of individual needs, connections for students, donor interests, educational needs of our programs, and personal networks without an overarching vision or strategy.

There is no easy way for all potential partners to access CU Denver, although there are some nodes of access to specific units. It can be difficult for partners to know where to start, and to find their way through the dense network of university employees, units, and systems. Sometimes our partnerships are uneven and lack sustained followup and cultivation. Feedback shows that as a result, these potential (and even current) partners choose not to approach or expand partnership when we make the process and relationship unnecessarily difficult. Some of this complexity is a result of the decentralized nature of the university, but part of it is of our own making.

When we are at our worst, we do not understand the political and power dynamics of our partnerships, we compete internally for partnership connections, we focus more on what we will “get” from the partnership than on what we have to give, and we fail our partners through our well-meaning but myopic actions or through benign neglect.

The result of our struggle is a siloed system of partnership that usually serves the needs of individual CU Denver programs but that requires persistence and patience from our partners. This approach leaves untapped CU Denver expertise and resources, and limits what CU Denver can learn from our communities. Our approach implicitly disadvantages partners who have less time and resources and ultimately limits the opportunities and success of our students.

This disconnected system prevents us from widely sharing a compelling and collective story about the impact of our partnerships which means fewer potential partners are aware of the opportunities to work with CU Denver.

Overall, our partnership approach lacks an overarching strategic lens, shared commitment and resources for partnerships, and shared accountability for mutual success.

## Metaphor and Imagery

Current: A lovely container garden of partnerships — separate requiring individual efforts to provide soil, fertilizer, sun, and water, with mixed outcomes as a result.

Future: A cohesive and thoughtfully cultivated field that supports a variety of partnerships — some rigid and orderly, others natural and blended—with an intentional system for getting nutrients and water to every kind of partnership and an understanding of the anticipated fruits of this collective labor.



# Goal 1: Partnerships Guided By Values

## IDEA

CU Denver approaches partnerships as the foundation for fulfilling our purpose and mission as a public, urban, research university. We are guided by our values and partnership principles with a deep understanding of power dynamics and the university voice and role in community and systems change. Our partnerships are a cornerstone of our academic mission and our position as an anchor institution in Denver and across Colorado.

Many of our strongest academic programs would not be possible without our external partners hosting capstone projects and internships, providing mentorship, hiring students, and giving faculty the opportunity to use and grow their expertise in real-world environments. As a premier anchor institution we have a responsibility to be a good neighbor and create additional value for communities beyond our educational mission.

We learn side-by-side with our partners and they challenge us to grow and evolve in ways that help us realize our full potential.

## STRATEGY 1.1: PARTNERSHIPS AS A UNIVERSAL CORE VALUE

Designate partnerships as a core value for CU Denver, adopt a set of partnership principles, and communicate from the top leadership that partnership is a cornerstone of our mission and success.

Adopting partnerships as a core value communicates internally and externally where we are going to put our resources and commitment. By making partnerships an intentional core value, we can set goals and hold ourselves accountable for the outcomes. This is important across the entire institution. Declaring this intention from the Chancellor's office, in conjunction with CU Denver leaders in innovation, advancement, and equity will be a strong message that will help lay the groundwork for culture and structural change. It will also show high-level support for the new managing director to help them succeed.

To help further guide our partnership interactions, we should also adopt a set of university-level partnership principles in the short term. In the longer term, these principles could be integrated into our CU Denver values. In the short term it will be important to call out these specific principles for how we expect faculty, staff, and students to guide partnerships through their lifecycle.

In the use of these principles, we must openly acknowledge the harm and/or benign neglect that we have inflicted on our partners in the past, and be willing to work through reconciliation with curiosity and growth mindset rather than defensiveness.

(The Vision Team has drafted the following set of partnership principles as a start to this work.)



# Goal 1: Partnerships Guided By Values

## PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

<b>Defined Partner Spheres</b>	We focus our partnership efforts to match defined opportunities and needs within CU Denver, across the CU system, among Auraria campus partners, in Denver, around Colorado, across the Rocky Mountain Region, the US, and with our international partners around the world.
<b>Mission Driven</b>	We unite with partners who are aligned with our mission and share our values by clearly articulating our values and intentionally exploring the values of others.
<b>Mutually Reinforcing</b>	We ensure that our partnerships are creating mutually beneficial relationships and we each have equal agency in addressing our collective challenges and needs. We acknowledge the complex aspects of partnership driven by power, competition, cooperation, and mutual need.
<b>Make It Matter</b>	We seek out partners who are proactive and have intent and capability to co-create meaningful, creative solutions.
<b>Value Outcomes And Relationships Equally</b>	We build relationships beyond our immediate, transactional needs, and mend relationships where we have caused harm, in order to create sustaining transformation in ourselves, our communities, and our world.
<b>Do What We Say We'll Do</b>	We focus our partnership efforts to match defined opportunities and needs within CU Denver, across the CU system, among Auraria campus partners, in Denver, around Colorado, across the Rocky Mountain Region, the US, and with our international partners around the world.
<b>Coordinate Our Efforts</b>	We coordinate our efforts across CU Denver to maximize our impact and ensure that we can be an effective, comprehensive, and supportive partner.
<b>Partnering For The Long Run</b>	We find ways to continue partnerships beyond a single project and to continually evolve the relationship together.

# Goal 1: Partnerships Guided By Values

## **STRATEGY 1.2: BUILD AN OVERARCHING PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY**

While individual schools, programs, and units have some carefully thought out partnership strategies, CU Denver as a whole needs an overarching and inclusive vision and strategy for partnerships. This will help guide decisions about infrastructure and use of resources and help align the many means of partnering across campus.

A key to this strategy is to start by assessing our existing assets and resources. Build on what we have and only dismantle or reorganize if what we have can't be grown or amended to be what we need. This approach honors the good work that has been happening, helps elevate the existing experts and best practices in partnerships, and helps focus new resources on real gaps. Our ability to be bold and creative in our partnerships rests on this right balance of autonomy, flexibility, and connectedness. We should take a network, systems-view or landscape analysis lens rather than simply trying to create an inventory list that is constantly changing.

## **STRATEGY 1.3: SIMPLIFY AND SUPPORT OUR PARTNERS IN ENGAGING WITH US**

Employ professional staff who act as a partnership concierge to provide a customized experience, ensure warm handoffs between programs, schools, and units with the end result of providing holistic and partner-focused relationships.

Create a public-facing menu/catalog of opportunities for partnering with CU Denver to showcase our capacity and capabilities and help partners find the right entry point.

Routinely ask partners for feedback and reflect together on our partnerships in order to continually improve. Taking the partner view through user experience and human-centered design thinking can help make sure that our partnerships are truly, mutually beneficial and that the process of partnering with us is easy and accessible.

Map out and build easy-to-use pathways and pipelines for our partners. Rather than our partners having to do the work of figuring out where to start and how to engage, we want to provide a bit of a roadmap that works from the user (partner) perspective. The difference between a pathway and a pipeline could be described as—pathways are a bit more customizable based on our mutual needs, pipelines are a bit more transactional (as in, we know we have a clear need for a pipeline of local government partners to be capstone clients for our Master of Public Administration students).

In thinking about the pathways and pipelines, house staff in physical spaces that provide a higher level of accessibility to CU Denver. This includes keeping and enhancing the idea of a "front door" and a physical and virtual home for partner resources.

This strategy builds off of the broader infrastructure and systems view of our existing partnerships, partner pathways, points of entry, and gaps.

# Goal 1: Partnerships Guided By Values

## **STRATEGY 1.4: SUPPORT FACULTY AND STAFF IN BEING GOOD STEWARDS OF OUR PARTNERSHIPS**

Build a new, hub-and-spoke infrastructure (dedicated staff, IT systems, communication channels) to ensure that we are well-organized and connected across campus to serve our partners in ways that meet our principles. This infrastructure should add to the existing partnership structures at the unit levels to create an abundance of new opportunities for everyone, rather than create administrative barriers, additional expenses, and systems with limited access.

Create tools, toolkits, trainings, and peer learning opportunities that help guide faculty and staff through partnership conceptualization, development, and maintenance – all rooted in our values and principles. Use best practices and expertise that already exist at the school and unit level and compensate those experts for their time in helping build this new culture and supportive tools. These tools would walk an employee through how to create the partnership, how to maintain and cultivate it, and when and how the partnership can be tracked for future success.

Because so many of our partnerships are focused on student success, these supports should have a heavy focus on these types of partnerships in alignment with the larger student success strategic plan goals and with the partnerships for student success goal herein. In addition to tools, the University could create professional development programs that incentivize and reward staff and faculty for student success partnerships. CU Denver's staff and faculty are committed to our students and will gladly engage when provided support and tools.

Create incentives for faculty and staff to engage in partnerships and add accountability for Deans and other leaders to ensure we are all committed to and supporting the partnership strategies.

# Goal 2: Partnerships For Student Success

## IDEA

CU Denver engages in mutually-beneficial, reciprocal, ongoing, and holistic partnerships that drive enrollment, retention, life-long learning, and workforce-ready student success for the people who come to CU Denver at any point in their educational journey.

## STRATEGY 2.1: PARTNERSHIPS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS ARE EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Building on partnerships as a core value in the foundational goal, our partnerships for student success are the most directly linked to our educational mission. Make the creation and cultivation of partnerships that support our students a responsibility for every staff and faculty member, as well as the campus as a whole. CU Denver's culture needs to value, incentivize, and reward individuals for building and maintaining student supporting partnerships.

Partnerships sustain and create opportunities for CU Denver's students. CU Denver's students are frequently first generation, from historically marginalized backgrounds and identify as Black, Indigenous and/or People of Color (BIPOC). Partnerships are more critical for students from these communities because historically they have been excluded from accessing structures of power in government and industry that lead to jobs. Whether they are women, people of color, differently abled, or from a marginalized religious background, many groups have been excluded from open and ready access to the networks of people and organizations that can provide mentors, internships, jobs, and lifelong connections for career success. Our commitment to partnerships for student success can help overcome these network barriers.

We know that employers look to us to help diversify their workforce. We must be clear about the ways in which we are serving our students and honoring our partnerships while holding our partners to a high standard of inclusion and embracing students for everything they have to offer, not just their background and identity.

## STRATEGY 2.2: CENTER OUR ALUMNI AS PARTNERS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS AND AS LIFELONG LEARNERS

CU Denver can strengthen its partnerships with and through our graduates. We should step up to meet our alumni interests by seeing them as more than bragging rights and donations when they succeed. Our alumni are some of our greatest champions and they are eager to give back to the university and to our current students. By strengthening and broadening our connections with our alumni we create mentorship/internship/job connection opportunities with our current students and lifelong learning opportunities for our alumni in micro-credentials, certificates, and additional degrees.

A key to this strategy is to create targeted efforts that bring alumni into classrooms as guest lecturers, into relationship with students as mentors, into roles as internship and capstone project hosts, and into our career and educational events as successful professionals with stories to share. Our alumni have unique vantage points, having experienced our programs and found their way in the professional world. Their guidance on how to help our students be workforce ready is a valuable asset and gift. Like our other partners, our alumni need clear points of entry and obvious partnership pathways in order to find the optimal ways to serve our students.



# Goal 2: Partnerships For Student Success

But the new alumni pathways don't end with connections to lift up our existing students. Our alumni also want and need ongoing learning opportunities after their initial educational achievement with us. As higher education evolves to offer more accessible and rigorous lifelong learning opportunities, our alumni are well positioned to take advantage of our professional development and continuing education programs.

As with all of our partnership activities, specific units are already engaging alumni in some of these ways. This strategy will benefit from all of the elements of the foundational goal to have a stronger infrastructure and collective culture supporting partnerships with alumni.

## **STRATEGY 2.3: LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS TO GUARANTEE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND MENTORSHIP FOR EVERY STUDENT**

Partnerships create jobs. Many of CU Denver's students attend to "get ahead" in life. Unlike students for whom college was the next thing paid for by parents, many of CU Denver's students are here because they want to change their lives and the trajectory of their families. Classroom education may provide knowledge and some skills but partnerships create mentorships, internships, networks, support systems, and jobs. With a stronger, campus-wide focus on partnerships for student success and more coordination across partnership activities, CU Denver should be a place where students are guaranteed an opportunity to have a mentor and experiential learning experience.

CU Denver owes its students the opportunity to create meaningful connections with partners and to have real-world experiences in their chosen fields of study. For this strategy to be accomplished we'll need more partners, more collaboration to ensure partners are consistently engaged, and more support for partners to fulfill their role in these relationships. Many staff and faculty are already creating these opportunities, but in some areas they are doing so without expertise and support. Imagine the possibilities for our students if our structures, processes, faculty, and staff were fully enabled to create these connections.

## **STRATEGY 2.4: INVEST IN A UNIVERSAL LOCATION WHERE PARTNERS CAN CONNECT TO SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS**

CU Denver's distributed structure can make it difficult for external partners to find a way to connect. External partners want to connect to support students, but are often unable to find their way through our weird structures and language (what is a provost?).

Building on simplifying and supporting our partners in engaging with us in the foundational goal, create a single location for external partners to engage in supporting student success. Since many of our partners are primarily interested in connecting with our students, this enhanced point of entry would provide easy access, support, and the ability for CU Denver to nurture, cultivate, and follow-up on partnerships. A central, well resourced location demonstrates and furthers the commitment to make student partnerships a core value.

CU Denver has already invested in LynxConnect, but to create guaranteed mentorships or internships for all students would take a significant resource commitment. A strengthened and broadened LynxConnect would make this a reality.

Again, the balance of cross-campus coordination, ease-of-use, autonomy, and flexibility is important for individual units to meet their different needs when it comes to required experiential learning for degree programs.



# Goal 2: Partnerships For Student Success

## **STRATEGY 2.5: ESTABLISH PRIORITIES, AREAS FOR GROWTH, OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND EQUITY, AND ADDRESS HISTORIC WRONGS IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

It is necessary that partnerships are a core value, but it is also critical that a group start to identify entities and industries that warrant additional support and ideation. While it is useful for all CU Denver partnerships, this level of strategy is particularly important for partnerships for student success with larger, more complex organizations. For example, both the city and county of Denver and Denver Public Schools are important affiliates that warrant specific planning and resource commitments. These entities are key to successful student partnerships and CU Denver should be committed to providing concierge-level service to each of them.

In addition to the core affiliates, CU Denver needs to create a strategy that recognizes that all partners are not the same and that we cannot sacrifice our core principles. This strategic plan should identify new, emerging, and disruptive partners who can challenge us to think differently about our educational experiences and how we support our students with experiential learning.

## **STRATEGY 2.6: EXPLICITLY EVALUATE ALL STAFF AND FACULTY ON HOW THEY SUPPORT STUDENT PARTNERSHIPS**

Building on supporting faculty and staff in being good stewards of our partnerships and partnerships as a core value in the foundational goal, CU Denver should adopt metrics and be held accountable for meeting or not meeting goals related to partnerships for student success. This accountability should extend to the individual level as well. Many primary units already do this by evaluating faculty on engagement in experiential learning and creation of student learning opportunities. By making partnerships (and potentially other core values like DEI) part of an annual evaluation that includes plans, goals, and metrics, we demonstrate to our students and community that we want to be different.



# Goal 3: Partnership To Change Our World

## IDEA

CU Denver uses its organized and collective expertise and resources in partnership with people, communities, organizations, governments, and companies to co-create solutions for the challenges of our time and drive equitable, positive change on our campus, in Denver, across Colorado, and around the world.

As a public urban research university on a unique campus, anchored in a growing and dynamic city with a colorful history, and in a state with vast opportunities and deep inequities, CU Denver has a responsibility to harness its talent, knowledge, assets, and resources to help build a more equitable community. The challenges of our time are intensely complex, multidimensional, and dynamically evolving. Enduring solutions require collaboration among many types of organizations and people, with many different ways of understanding the challenges and acting on potential solutions. Our approaches must be iterative, innovative, and adaptive and trusted relationships are required.

CU Denver must build a reputation as being a valuable, consistent, and relevant partner in these conversations. This reputation must be earned through our organized, valued, and consistent participation, and through innovative communication about our work. We must understand what we bring to the table and we must be coordinated and organized in our approach.

Key metrics should look beyond the number of partnerships and overall impact and take a network lens to measure and track the components of success of our relationships such as trust and value.

## STRATEGY 3.1: BE WHERE THE FUTURE IS BEING ENVISIONED

Employ professional staff as Community Connectors to represent the campus in community and statewide conversations and bring together cross-disciplinary faculty and staff experts with students and university assets to participate in co-creating solutions. These Community Connectors strategically and proactively represent CU Denver at various “tables” around the state and region with a natural pathway to engage with partners in the work.

A key to this strategy is employing the right professionals who are systems thinkers and can see and act on “connecting the dots” among partners and within the university. They must be committed to representing CU Denver as a whole and must be perpetually curious about our partners and our own capabilities and assets. They must be supported by campus leadership, internal communication channels, and a culture of responsibility for partnership success and accountability to staying organized and connected internally.

Another key to this strategy is understanding the landscape and timing of conversations about the challenges of our time, and choosing our engagement wisely, based on our capacity and skills and the alignment with our values.



# Goal 3: Partnership To Change Our World

## **STRATEGY 3.2: CREATE THE SPACES WHERE THE FUTURE IS BEING ENVISIONED**

Proactively convene conversations about complex community and societal issues, our collective future, and community needs, with the purpose of engaging our partners to better understand a challenge, and to bring together cross-disciplinary teams of faculty, staff, students and alumni with university assets, to co-create solutions. Then, commit to our right role(s) in carrying forward action on the issues—rather than convene and leave.

A key to this strategy is using our existing assets in physical space, event planners, skilled facilitators, systems thinkers, subject matter experts, and engaged students to create experiences that generate new, collaborative ideas that no individual could have come up with on their own.

In the long term, this strategy may require new assets and investments aligned with goals related to student success, research, and creative activities, innovation, and our place.

## **STRATEGY 3.3: AFFIRM OUR ROLE AND INTEREST IN THE COLLECTIVE FUTURE WITH A PUBLIC INITIATIVE**

Create a major, well-publicized, consistent, and externally valued initiative to affirm our commitment and role in the challenges of our time. The purpose is to be clear about our value and right role — and to show our commitment with an impactful initiative that engages students, alumni, faculty, staff, and partners. This could include:

- An annual “grand challenges” initiative.
- A community challenge annual theme.
- Acting as an incubator for smaller components of big solutions.
- A data hub (similar to NYU, Brown and UNLV).
- A multidisciplinary innovation hub.

This strategy must be deeply guided by our partners and we must be clear about our right role(s) and the power and political dynamics involved for us and our partners. We can not create this initiative in isolation and still be true to our partnership principles.

## **STRATEGY 3.4: USE A “THINK TANK” MENTALITY FOR PROACTIVE AND RESPONSIVE PROJECTS**

Use the think tank model to create a scholarly venue that responds to requests and proactively seeks partnerships. These partnerships provide knowledge and thought leadership and allow CU Denver faculty, staff, and students to learn from the expertise of our partners. In this realm our role is one of knowledge generation, sense making, observing trends, and creating translated-to-practice and accessible information to inform decision makers. The think tank model also allows CU Denver to use its voice and influence to help catalyze change.

# Goal 3: Partnership To Change Our World

Scholarly think tanks are catalysts and hubs for new ideas and new ways of thinking. They have an understanding of the broader context and timing of when their knowledge could be used to make change. They are connected to decision-makers and often take their direction about research topics and questions directly from those decision-makers. They have rigorous, multidisciplinary approaches and ways of seeing solutions that span the boundaries of traditional academia and the realm of community and policy change.

A key to this strategy is finding all of the various think tank-like entities we have on campus and creating something that is additive, not competitive with our own current work. Another key to this strategy is having a clear business plan and connecting the think tank work to student experiential learning.

# Goal 4: Putting The Soul Into Our Brand And Reputation Through Partnerships

## IDEA

CU Denver tells its partnership stories in a way that brings CU Denver's brand (CU in the City) to life by inspiring new, diverse partnerships, embodying our reputation as a values-driven organization seeking equity for all, celebrating our success, and reinforcing our value as a partner.

### STRATEGY 4.1: BUILD THE REPUTATION OF CU DENVER BY TELLING THE STORY OF PARTNERSHIPS TO REINFORCE THAT OUR SOUL IS THE COMMUNITY AND OUR IMPACT IS MULTIGENERATIONAL

From bridges to bike lanes, our research partnerships literally built this city. And, while concrete, bricks and mortar might be the outward evidence of our work, our community partnerships and creative activities have ensured that Denver continues to be a city that was built by her people, for her people. Our students and alumni broaden this impact across the United States and the world through student success partnerships. From supporting rural communities to creating more equitable classrooms we begin and end in the Mile High City.

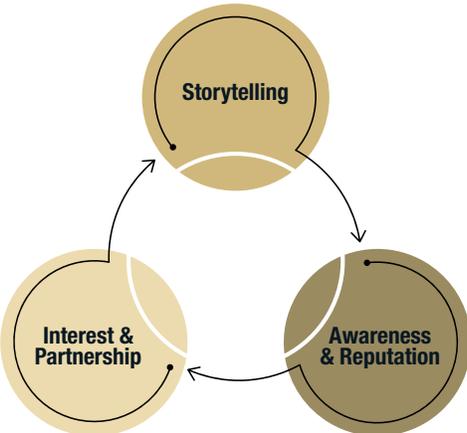
At CU Denver, we believe in research. And research shows that when a first-generation student achieves an advanced degree it sets their life, and the lives of the generation before them and after them, on a new course.

CU Denver may be young, but it will exist long after Denver's booms and busts. In order to continue to be a catalyst for socioeconomic mobility, CU Denver needs to continue to build our reputation as a reliable partner that seeks reciprocal benefits for the students, staff, and faculty that we serve.

Additionally, CU Denver has existing relationships with institutions and industries that need to be cultivated to continue to build trust. It is imperative that CU Denver nurture these partnerships, and trumpet their impact.

We believe that our storytelling drives awareness and increased belief in our reputation, which drives an increased interest in partnering with us, which creates more stories to tell.

We must invest in our storytelling in order to increase our partnerships. The way we tell our stories is the innovation in this strategy.



# Goal 4: Putting The Soul Into Our Brand And Reputation Through Partnerships

## INITIATIVES:

Create an immersive, interactive experience by leveraging new technology such as virtual and augmented reality, so people can see and feel the multigenerational benefits of our partnerships in the community. Imagine: Walking across a bridge and seeing that it was evaluated for strength and safety by CU Denver's civil engineering students; an alumni profile pops up when you pass the building for the nonprofit organization they lead; standing in a classroom where our students are creating equitable learning spaces.

Shift the focus from telling the story of a partnership to highlighting the impact the partnership has had. This includes leaning into the human experience in all aspects of our partnership storytelling. We would rather have people walk away knowing the impact of our partnerships than knowing how the partnership was created. Our stories make it clear that we value our partnerships and that they are not just a transaction between a university and organization.

## STRATEGY 4.2: RECOGNIZE THAT OUR PARTNERS ARE BRAND AMBASSADORS

When we tell our partnership stories we can lean into our partners and recognize them as being some of our best communicators. When we connect students with our partners for experiential learning or conduct research with our partners, we become connected in a way that links our futures. Our partners are trusted community resources and CU Denver should recognize and be a partner to preserve that. Even further, CU Denver can continue to gain trust and credibility in key underrepresented communities on a local and global scale by being strategic about our partners and recognizing success. To begin moving in this direction, CU Denver needs to develop an institutional mindset that our partners can be our greatest advocates for the university and students and support their efforts in telling our joint stories.

## INITIATIVES:

Allow people to experience the partnership and feel the impact through experiential marketing and brand activation. An example of these types of brand activations would be Game of Thrones and the Red Cross running a blood drive by allowing attendees of South by Southwest to sit on the iron throne. People experienced the partnership and understood their contribution to the end goal. We can attract interest, boost engagement, and showcase our values through interesting brand activation.

Equip our partners with the tools and resources needed to effectively tell the story of our partnership together. This includes the creation of joint creative and marketing materials as well as ideas to encourage further collaboration. We encourage our partners to share the story of our partnership and its impacts on key stakeholders and work together to share the impact of our work with the broader community. The goal would be to leverage the principles of brand borrowing to elevate both CU Denver and our partners, simultaneously. For some partners, access to our communication resources (video, print, written) can be a benefit and a way that we create a mutually beneficial campaign.

Another idea would be to show the breadth and depth of our partnerships by developing actual activations and installations through key communities to highlight impact. For example, painting on the streets in the bike lanes to demonstrate how it was made safer by CU Denver (and partner). This creates an interactive experience where people can journey through the city and see the impact of our partnerships.



# Goal 4: Putting The Soul Into Our Brand And Reputation Through Partnerships

In the form of an app, members of the community could take a physical (or virtual) tour and experience our impact in the wild. This could include visiting key landmarks of our research in action, learning more about our work in classrooms and frequenting locally owned businesses by alumni, all of which were made possible through a vast network of partnerships. A Pokemon Go for CU Denver, if you will.

Our partners would welcome these opportunities for us to showcase them and how we partnered with them and could use the materials for their own marketing efforts.

## **STRATEGY 4.3: REINFORCE THE PARTNERSHIP SPACE BY COMMUNICATING ABOUT RADICAL INCLUSIVITY**

By leaning into our value of radical inclusivity, CU Denver will increase our partnership potential and continue to build brand equity and reputation. CU Denver needs to develop a strategic plan towards partnership as noted above. As part of that plan, CU Denver needs to acknowledge and recognize how it can use its partnerships to further equity for its students, acknowledge historic wrongs, and seek community based solutions to decenter whiteness. This work should be connected to the strategic plan goals of being empowered by our inclusive excellence.

### **INITIATIVES:**

CU Denver should shift how we talk about and tell the story of our partnership while it is happening by bringing CU Denver into the community and the community into CU Denver. This includes rethinking our downtown location as a destination and giving people an opportunity to come in, while also creating activations outside of our space. For example, setting up a tent and passing out water, sunscreen, and snacks to peaceful protestors during the Black Lives Matter movement this summer. Or removing barriers to our space and allowing community organizations to use buildings to conduct business and create impact.

By communicating in authentic and dynamic ways about our own evolution toward being an equitable and inclusive organization, we can inspire partners on their journey and find others who will newly align with us as they see our commitment and transformation.

# INTERACTIONS

The partnerships goals intersect across all of the other vision teams because good partnerships will be required in order to achieve other goals (such as experiential learning for students) and because other goals will need to be met for partnership goals to be realized (such as partnered research being considered differently in promotion and tenure).

Specifically, we have seen links in the following places:

## **Be Empowered By Our Inclusive Excellence**

- We also believe we need a change in the culture of responsibility. Equity is everyone's responsibility and partnerships should be everyone's responsibility too.
- We also know that our partnership work has caused harm in the past. We need to acknowledge and reconcile that harm. This should be done through the same process and lens as our other reckoning and reconciliation work.
- We want our future partnership work to be based in values of equity and to be as intentional and forward thinking as our journey to inclusive excellence.

## **Lead In Student Success and Educate For The Future**

- We believe that our strategies fit nicely with the interests of the student success group in providing career services, experiential learning and student-focused opportunities through partnership. Our strategies will help ensure that these partnerships are equitable, mutually beneficial, well-matched and holistically serve our partner needs
- Our toolkits and principles will help us be more consistent while retaining the customized and personal touch with our partners.
- We see our strategies as additive in ensuring that part of the partnership pathway includes providing lifelong learning opportunities to partners and that faculty and staff are accountable for good partnership work.

## **Better The World Through Research and Creative Work**

- We believe that goals around incentives, tenure, promotion and work balance are critical to the success of our strategies for co-creating community and societal change with partners.
- Multidisciplinary, cross-campus, partnered research and creative activities goals align with our strategies to be in and create places where we understand and work toward solving the complex issues of our time and proactively create a new future.
- To meet our partnership goals, faculty especially need the incentives, training, support and freedom to do community-based, community-driven and partnered research.

## **Put Our People At The Center**

- Our strategies around culture change and accountability for good partnership stewardship connect with some of the goals for people at the center.



# INTERACTIONS

## **The Art Of Innovation and Mission-Driven Entrepreneurship**

- Our lifelong learning opportunities align with some goals within this area.
- We believe that targeted efforts in partnerships can build exciting and innovative initiatives.

## **Leverage Our Place**

- The place goals align with our interests in having physical spaces that are welcoming and create an atmosphere that matches our partnership principles. They also align with our goals of having a stronger front door presence and physical places for partners to use our resources.

# 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
<b>PHASE 1</b> Our Vision for 2030	January 2021	Set the Vision	Broad community input was invited via multiple channels; 3,674+ ideas generated.
<b>PHASE 2</b> 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.
<b>PHASE 3</b> 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.

