Position Paper:
Elevating Corporate Relations through Institutional Commitment
NACRO Benchmarking Committee – July, 2016

Background

NACRO is a network of over 500 U.S. and international academic corporate relations officers dedicated to providing professional development opportunities and sharing best practices. Members develop and advance comprehensive, mutually beneficial relationships with industry and establish common language and metrics for peer comparison.

The role of NACRO's Benchmarking Committee is to examine and evaluate the role of the academic corporate relations office through conducting membership surveys, developing publications, and identifying and sharing tools for members to successfully run and improve holistic corporate relations programs in the 21st century. The Benchmarking Committee represents a collective voice, setting an aspirational high bar for the next generation of professional contributions to higher learning and university-industry partnership. As part of this effort, the Benchmarking Committee investigates "good practices" from our membership to share methods and programs aimed at increasing collaboration and coordination across universities, with the ultimate goal of increasing engagement and investment from industry.

During the last year, a sub-group within the Benchmarking Committee formed to explore how to streamline processes and workflow across multiple university functions that engage industry. This position paper[1] stems from discussions on this topic over the past year, and works to provide recommendations for effective engagement and solutions to elevate strategic university and industry partnerships.

Overview

During 2015-16, a sub-group of NACRO's Benchmarking Committee defined a framework to help elevate the role of corporate relations on university campuses. The group aimed to promote discussions regarding the commitment needed to facilitate effective corporate engagement. These commitments include allocating resources and ensuring a continued place at the table for strategic planning discussions related to the growth and evolution of industry activities at research universities. Elevating cross-campus discussions on corporate relations activities also allows industry-facing units to build a deeper understanding of university strengths and work smarter to determine the capabilities to best serve industry partners.

Through this effort, two primary components for integrated corporate relations within a university environment became clear. Corporate relations offices benefit significantly by:
1. Creating a "culture of readiness" to integrate corporate relations activities across units
2. Implementing a team approach internal to campus

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[1] From Wikipedia: Position papers in academia enable discussion on emerging topics without the experimentation and original research normally present in an academic paper. Commonly, such a document will substantiate the opinions or positions put forward with evidence from an extensive objective discussion of the topic.

Creating a culture for institutional integration of corporate relations

Corporate relations is most effective when practiced in a university or college/school culture that recognizes and embraces the value and methods of building comprehensive engagement. Changing the culture of a university or a college/school towards embracing the comprehensive corporate relations process and methods demands extensive communication about the benefits and positive outcomes achieved by each individual organization, as well as our peer and aspirant universities. With the vision and buy-in from university leadership, and their participation in the process, corporate relations officers can be substantive members of the team, which drives the increase of industry engagement for greater impact and investment.

The group identified the following areas necessary for effective institutional integration of corporate relations, as detailed in Figure 1.
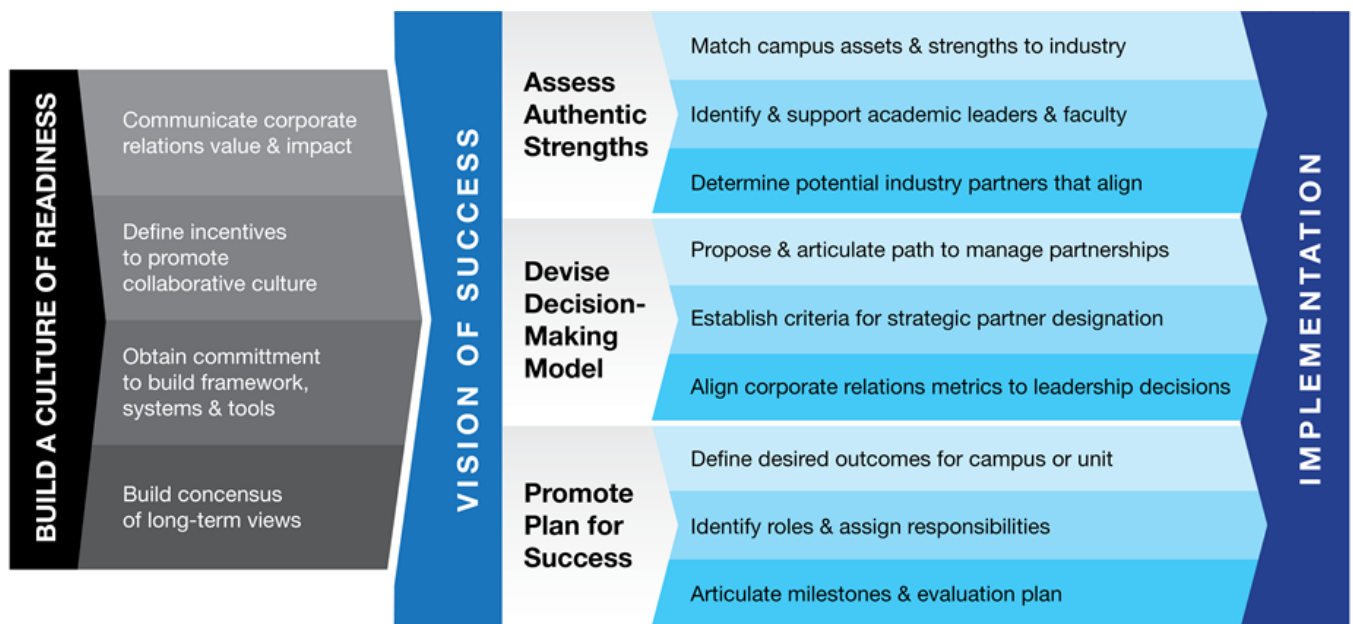
Figure 1 – Build a Culture of Readiness: Institutional Integration of Corporate Relations

1. **Build a culture of readiness to support effective corporate relations**
    - Delineate paths to assess, evaluate, and communicate corporate relations value and impact across the university
    - Define incentives and rewards for faculty and staff participation in building industry partnerships
    - Obtain leadership commitment to build the framework, systems, and tools for the community and alumni to seek and develop strategic partnership strategies with industry
    - Track and evaluate the impact of corporate relations as it enhances economic engagement, accepting this is a long-term view
    - Articulate career path for corporate relations officers to advance, while building expertise and experience

2. **Vision of success for a comprehensive approach to corporate engagement at a university**
    - Craft a vision and goal statement for integrated, comprehensive corporate relations

- Define measures of success and metrics for offices/individuals and include a timeline
- Create a plan with, and for, target companies, connecting to applicable metrics and goals
- Delegate responsibility for developing strategic plans for industry sectors of interest and target companies for strategic partnerships
- Clarify how and when strategic plans for industry sectors/relationships will be updated
- Allocate resources to meet the needs of the plan
- Define process of evaluation with interim milestones and system of making improvements
- Identify leaders in each stage of the process

In order to effectively implement a vision of success, the group recommends the following:

a. **Assess authentic strengths of interest to industry**
   - Analyze, identify, and prioritize genuine assets and strengths to industry needs
   - Identify and support academic leaders and faculty who engage with companies
   - Provide training and mentoring to researchers and leaders who engage in significant industry discussions with the aim of deepening long-term partnerships
   - Determine potential industry partners that align with university strengths

b. **Devise a decision-making model for campus-wide corporate relations decisions**
   - Propose and articulate decision-making pathways to manage partnerships, including setting priorities with strategic companies, managing transactions, and communicating outcomes
   - Define process to integrate data related to industry interactions
   - Establish criteria for how the university designates strategic industry partners and people/resources involved in the process
   - Delegate appropriate offices and staff to integrate background documents and data regarding companies of interest for partnership
   - Communicate the parameters of success and then plan appropriate public announcements to recognize institutional or unit achievements
   - Align corporate relations metrics to complement leadership decisions

c. **Develop and promote a plan for long-term successful outcomes**
   - Identify what a "big win" with a partner or prospect looks like
   - Define desired and extraordinary outcomes for campus or unit, including positive milestones and metrics of success
   - Allocate resources for the objectives articulated in the plan
   - Identify roles and assign responsibilities, including who will lead the efforts and who will develop and implement the plan
   - Articulate milestones and evaluation plan, including points for redefining the plan and/or cancelling activities
   - Create communication frameworks for the team implementing this strategy and for informing and updating the company

Implementing a team approach across the university

The corporate relations office and officer often has the role to coordinate and facilitate both within a particular company and with university colleagues who are teaming to build the strategic partnership with

the corporation. They are also responsible for providing observations and updates to university leadership on the progress of industry interactions.

There are many campus entities involved in effective and strategic relationships with corporate partners. These include colleagues in sponsored research, philanthropy, business (service) contracts, technology transfer, alumni relations, as well as faculty and students. These partnerships are defined in the 2011 NACRO whitepaper *Five Essential Elements of a Successful Twenty-First Century University Corporate Relations Program*, which is available at http://nacrocon.org/resources.

In addition, there are many interdependent components to be developed, made available, and understood by the corporate relations team in order to effectively define, plan, and implement strategies for integrated partnerships within a unit, school, and across a university (see Figure 2 below). These elements include:
1. Collecting and analyzing data on previous engagement with a specific company
2. Determining the best path for effective internal distribution of information
3. Achieving consensus on the end-goal and drafting a plan to achieve success
4. Understanding which faculty members are interested in partnering with this company and learning what strengths each has to offer
5. Identifying a campus leader to champion this corporate partnership

Figure 2 – Corporate Relationships: Implementing a Team Approach for the University

To refine a successful path forward to corporate engagement, tools and resources will be required to form, analyze, and execute the action plan. Chief among these tools is a database to track progress and milestones, identify project lead(s) and staff with assigned responsibilities, project sufficient time and resources for the integration of information and appropriate communication to all team members, and allocate budgets for the costs of doing business such as travel and meetings.

The role of the corporate relations office and officer must pivot between driving the business processes for coordination and integrating the university offerings available to the partner. These dual-facing activities are essential to successfully forging industry partnerships. Processes involved in coordinating and integrating with the target company include:
- Formalized internal meetings and updates with team members and appropriate campus leadership
- Systematic company meetings and communications

- Defined agreement structure and progress communications with company and university until final signatures are obtained
- Comprehensive progress tracking of defined plan for the partnership

In order to advance effectiveness and efficiency, corporate relations officers need to:
- Support leadership to develop a culture of readiness to enhance corporate engagement
- Obtain the tools and resources necessary to accomplish the articulated goals

The ultimate goal is to increase investment to campus from industry, which may include funds from the company, innovation for public benefit, opportunities for students, or in-kind support.

Conclusion

As part of the shift discussed in the 2011 NACRO Whitepaper, *Five Essential Elements of a Successful Twenty-First Century University Corporate Relations Program*, many universities continue to seek new and diverse sources of external funding to support their missions. Investment from industry is one area where universities can drive revenue-generating engagement while serving the campus and partners' mutual interests. This is made possible through effective campus leadership, a clearly articulated vision for corporate engagement, and a commitment to delivering relevance, value, and impact that drive industry and academe together.

As described in this position paper, NACRO's Benchmarking Committee recommends emphasizing two primary drivers to successful and integrated corporate relations:
- Create a "culture of readiness" to integrate corporate relations activities across the campus
- Implement a team approach across the university

The evolution and maturation of corporate relations on university campuses needs to include an increase in sophistication of the methods and tools for collaboration and team-building across the campus. The success also demands a clear delineation of the leadership decision-making model for industry partnerships, and the individual and campus metrics used in the implementation of the strategy.

In building to this success, the role of the corporate relations officer includes advancement of the partnership to mutually beneficial goals, as well as internal tracking and monitoring. The internal efforts of the implementation team and leadership participation and contribution to the process are critical and must be managed efficiently and effectively. Corporate relations can help intersect and bridge the complementary functions of the coordinated team and campus leadership through communication and data reflecting progress and outcomes. By articulating the process of comprehensive corporate relations to campus colleagues and leadership, corporate relations officers will be in a better position to seek the tools and resources to bring forward more effective and impactful partnerships with industry.

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