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Sustaining a Public Agenda for Higher Education

A Case Study of the North Dakota Higher Education Roundtable

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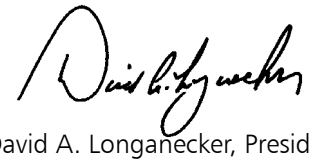
Table of Contents

Foreword

Higher education fortunes in state budgeting processes often have more to do with the health of the economy and the relative priority of competing needs such as health care and corrections than with what the state's higher education infrastructure needs to effectively meet state goals. Since the turn of the century, appropriations to higher education institutions have mostly mirrored economic fortunes as institutions first suffered substantial cutbacks during the 2001 recession before growing substantially as states tried to replace some of those losses. Now we are seeing state budget shortfalls growing again, and higher education institutions are bracing for another shift in their fortunes. But the lack of stability in funding both complicates institutions' planning and helps contribute to large fluctuations in tuition pricing. It also can reflect a lack of a larger vision for how higher education is linked with a larger, well-defined public agenda for higher education.

Like many other issues, the extent to which states have a clear, coherent, and widely understood sense of what they are paying their higher education institutions to do and how they should be interacting with the state and its citizens, including corporate citizens, varies considerably. And while having such a public agenda is no guarantee that the funding streams will become instantly more stable, it improves the likelihood that institutions know what is expected of them and that they will be able to count on the resources they need to fulfill those responsibilities.

Even when a state can claim a widely accepted public agenda, there remains the significant challenge of sustaining that vision as time passes and leadership changes throughout the state's institutions. This paper examines how North Dakota built a state public agenda through the establishment of a Roundtable that incorporated the views of a wide array of stakeholders and influential state leaders and then set it on solid footing for that vision to be sustained. It also describes how the Roundtable's work helped changed the climate toward higher education in North Dakota from skepticism and occasional hostility to greater trust and collaboration. North Dakota's efforts in this respect have provided an example for other states to emulate, and yet the Roundtable's future is not fully assured as the paper goes to print, which helps prove the point that sustaining the agenda while allowing it to adapt to changing conditions might be the biggest challenge of all.



David A. Longanecker, President
Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

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As with all projects of this size, a number of individuals and organizations worked to bring this report to fruition. First, this study was the product of my appointment as a Policy Fellow offered by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) as part of its *Escalating Engagement: State Policy to Protect Access to Higher Education* project, which was supported through a grant from the Ford Foundation. It would not have been possible without the support of Brian Prescott and Dolores Mize at WICHE. The staff at the North Dakota University System, particularly Debra Anderson and Terry Meyers, spent a significant amount of time tracking down historical documents, answering numerous questions, and helping arrange meetings. Former North Dakota Chancellor Eddie Dunn and North Dakota Senator Ray Holmberg offered a wealth of knowledge, and both were overly generous with their time in helping me fill gaps or inconsistencies in the historical record. At the University of North Dakota, Dean Dan Rice and professors Margaret Healy and Jeffrey Sun spent countless hours allowing me to discuss the roundtable with them. Graduate students Valerie Johnson and Dean LeFor provided invaluable assistance in finding the reports, legislation, and other documents used in this study. They also helped analyze the data and, most importantly, kept me organized and on track. Finally, all North Dakota Roundtable members and other persons involved in this study gave generously of their time throughout the research and review processes. The outcome of this study is truly a collaborative effort – one including both participants and nonparticipants in the roundtable process. This report is dedicated to the future generations of North Dakotans for whom the roundtable members sought to make the state a better place to work and live.

Jason E. Lane

About the Author

Jason E. Lane is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, affiliate faculty in the Public Policy Program in the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy and contributing faculty to the Comparative International Education Policy Program at the University at Albany, SUNY. Previously, he served on the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of North Dakota, where he currently holds affiliate faculty status. His research focuses on higher education governance and accountability, regional development, and understanding linkages between higher education, governance, and business and industry. Lane is author of several journal articles and book chapters, has coedited (with M. Christopher Brown) two monographs on institutional accountability (Examining Unique Campus Settings: Insights for Research and Assessment and Studying Diverse Students and Institutions: Challenges and Considerations), and is associate editor of the forthcoming sixth edition of the book Organization and Governance in Higher Education. He received his Ph.D. from The Pennsylvania State University.

Executive Summary

Many states are creating special forums (e.g., task forces, roundtables, and commissions) to assess and improve state policy related to higher education and workforce development. One of the more prominent, and arguably more successful, of these initiatives is the North Dakota Higher Education Roundtable. Legislatively initiated in 1999, the Roundtable brought together 61 representatives from state government, higher education, and business and industry to create a new vision for the state, determine how higher education could help achieve that vision, and align accountability and funding mechanisms to support the pursuit of the vision. Now, more than seven years after the Roundtable first met, the vision set forth in the original report continues to direct decision making in the university system and guides policy making and debate in the legislative and executive branches of North Dakota's state government.

Based on document analysis and 40 interviews with Roundtable participants and other stakeholders across North Dakota (a description of the methods used can be found in Appendix A), this report assesses the factors that enabled the Roundtable vision to be sustained for more than seven years, identifies obstacles encountered during the sustainability process, and provides suggestions to help other states build and eventually sustain their own public agenda. Of note, while this study focuses on sustaining a public agenda for higher education, the lessons learned could be applicable to creating and sustaining public agendas for other policy arenas.

There were three primary components of the Roundtable initiative that led to a sustainable agenda. First, there was significant effort placed on defining the nature of the relationship (compact) between higher education, state government, and business and industry. Second, the Roundtable produced a written, detailed agenda to guide decision making in all areas related to higher education. Third, the Roundtable served as a "face and place" for the agenda to exist. While this report addresses all three issues, it focuses on the latter, as it is the component that has enabled the agenda to be sustained.

In fact, the agenda for higher education created by the Roundtable has proved remarkably enduring. The agenda proved so visionary that it required almost no alteration in its first seven years. Such success is particularly noteworthy given that there has been almost complete turnover in academic and political leadership. Had the Roundtable been disbanded immediately following the issuance of its original report in 2000, the significant changes that followed – in the operation of the higher education sector and in the political and business environment in which the university system functions – would likely not have been realized. Indeed, the sustainability efforts proved even more important, given that even with a record of proven success, there continue to be questions raised about the relevance and impact of the Roundtable.

Factors for Creating a Public Agenda

Several factors were identified in the study as being critical for initiating an effort to reform a state's higher education system and the relationship between it and external stakeholders.

State-focused agenda. The Roundtable began by discussing the existing reality of the state and creating a state-focused vision for success in the 21st century. The discussion about higher education took place within this context, concentrating on how the North Dakota University System (NDUS) could help the state achieve that vision and the policy reforms and resources necessary to support the system in those efforts.

Strong leadership. Strong and dedicated leaders were needed to create an environment conducive to fostering change. The legislators who chaired the Roundtable, along with external consultants, worked to refocus the discussion of the Roundtable group from debating what was wrong with the university system to figuring out how the university system could help the state achieve future success.

The use of data (not anecdotes). From the outset, the Roundtable members were presented with state, national, and international data to help them understand the current realities facing the state. This data allowed the Roundtable members to base their discussions and decisions on facts, not individual anecdotes.

Private-sector engagement. Involvement from the private sector proved critical for altering the nature of the discussion and subsequent policy action. The private sector, as a third party, was able to validate concerns and needs raised by both higher education and government leaders.

Factors for Sustaining a Public Agenda

A number of actions were identified in the study as being critical to sustaining a public agenda focused on reforming a higher education system and its relationship with external stakeholders.

Diversify membership. The Roundtable included leaders that represented higher education, state government, business, and industry, as well as the

needs of the diverse geographic regions across the state.

Simplify the message. The vision of the Roundtable was distilled into simple messages that could be easily communicated to audiences of diverse levels of knowledge, interest, and experience.

Engage the press. Engaging the press was initially critical for communicating the vision of the Roundtable to stakeholders across the state and later proved useful as the editorial boards of the four major newspapers defended the Roundtable process and its positive impact on the state.

Link the vision to planning. Linking the roundtable vision to institutional and system planning was a critical recommendation of the Roundtable report, as it forced the higher education sector to create tangible goals. The report serves as a constant reminder that policy and programmatic decisions at the system and institutional levels should be focused on the achievement of the vision.

Creating and sustaining a public agenda: Suggestions for states.

This report concludes with suggestions to help other states conceptualize a process that allows them to sustain a public agenda over many years and throughout academic and political turnover. These suggestions are derived from the analysis of the factors contributing to the success of North Dakota Higher Education Roundtable, as well as the obstacles encountered by it. The following five suggestions are the core elements of the recommended process.

Reviewing and defining the compact. The first step in creating a sustainable public agenda is defining the nature of the relationship between the sectors engaged in creating the agenda.

Engage stakeholders. Sustainability requires more than simply allowing people to testify to a committee or provide a general assessment of needs or concerns. It is about engaging them in the discussion and allowing them to participate in the evolution of that discussion – not just giving them the opportunity to inform that discussion.

Create clarity, assign responsibility. The agenda should have a clear set of goals and assign responsibility to respective members or sectors for achieving those goals. Achievement of the Roundtable vision required participation from the legislature, business and industry, and higher education. Because responsibility was assigned upfront and accountability measures were clearly defined, the various sectors (and the public) could hold responsible those not fulfilling their duties.

Make it relevant. The citizens of the state need to understand how the agenda (or plan or vision) impacts their lives and why it is important for the state to not just support, but actively pursue, the agenda.

Communicate the agenda and its successes. In order for an agenda to endure in spite of turnover in the political and academic realms, it is important to create and continue momentum. The agenda needs to be embraced by a multitude of people, ranging from faculty and press to the general citizenry. Efforts should be developed to communicate the agenda to as many different groups as possible, as well as to keep those groups informed about the successes resulting from the agenda.

Reinforce the agenda through integration. For real change to occur, planning and decision-making systems at the institutional, system, and state government levels need to be realigned to support the new agenda.

Included at the end of this paper is an epilogue that brings the story of the North Dakota Roundtable up to date as of September 2008. It specifically covers the activities of the legislative Interim Committee on Higher Education that began its work following the 2007 legislative session. The epilogue can be found on page 15.

Introduction

Several policy-oriented groups, ranging from the National Collaborative for Higher Education Policy[1] to the National Conference of State Legislators, have expressed the need for states to create a new public agenda for postsecondary education. These calls are reactions to significant changes in state environments, including the globalization and digitalization of the economy, increased competition for limited state resources, demographic shifts, and greater demand for a highly skilled workforce. Recognizing the critical role of higher education in this new era, a report from the National Governors Association calls for the creation of a new compact between states and higher education to "better align postsecondary education with…economic needs, which will position [the states] to compete in the global economy by producing a highly skilled workforce and by unleashing postsecondary education institutions' power to innovate."[2]

Creating and *sustaining* a new public agenda is substantially more difficult than merely acknowledging that one is necessary. First, there exists a need to define the nature of the relationship (compact) between key sectors (e.g., higher education, state government, economic development, and business/industry). This is particularly critical if there is a history of a hostile or confrontational relationship between any of these sectors. Second, a public agenda needs to be clearly defined. Policy scholars generally describe an "agenda" as "the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of the government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time".[3] For the purposes of this report, the terms "public agenda" and "vision" are used interchangeably to describe a list of priority topics and directional goals within those topics. Third, the public agenda has to have a place and a face. The National Conference of State Legislatures' (NCSL) Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education argued that identifying "a place or structure to sustain the public agenda" is a critical component to an agenda's realization.[4] Without a structure to sustain, evaluate, and adapt the agenda to the changing needs of the state, any agenda can fall prey to political maneuvering, special interests, and embedded power structures.

One method used by states to create a public agenda – or to amend an existing one – is through the convening of roundtables, commissions, task forces or other special working groups. These groups generally have a specific set of charges outlined by their creating entity, be it the legislature, the governor's office, citizens groups, or others.[5] Working groups like these take on a variety of different structures, involve individuals with different responsibilities from different sectors, and are given a variety of charges, depending on the state and the priorities for change. Some foster change; others do not. Some accidentally catalyze change, while others end up as proverbial window-dressing, so the creating entity can give the appearance of having "done something" about a specific set of problems.

However, there are some design and operational characteristics that can increase the chance of success in creating a state's public agenda, particularly with respect to higher education. The North Dakota Higher Education Roundtable (hereinafter referred to as "the Roundtable") is an example of a successful, adaptable state structure that helped foster and sustain change.

Roundtable Resources

The North Dakota University System (NDUS) website provides access to the initial Roundtable report, as well as accountability reports and other documents and presentations about the initiative.

<http://www.ndus.nodak.edu/reports/default.asp?ID=355>

Begun in 2000, the Roundtable not only created a "new compact" among higher education, the state's elected leaders, and taxpayers, it also created an agenda that sustained the changes fostered by that compact for more than seven years. In fact, the National Conference of State Legislatures cited the North Dakota Roundtable as a model for reform because it serves as "a place to 'house' ongoing, statewide discussions about how well the [higher education] system is performing," a characteristic NCSL suggests is necessary for reform efforts to be sustained.[6]

Using interviews with leaders in the state, media coverage, and state and institutional documents, this report examines how North Dakota's use of a roundtable not only initiated but also sustained a revitalized public agenda for more than seven years.[7] This agenda resulted in a significant shift in the relationship between the higher education, state government, and corporate/industry sectors. In fact, the Roundtable brought sweeping changes that permeated the entire state, ranging from a new public perception of the value of the higher education system to the revision of state policy hampering institutional effectiveness. The North Dakota Roundtable also steered the state toward policies and practices that enabled increased entrepreneurial activity on the campuses.

The implementation of a new public agenda not only helped to revitalize the state's higher education system but also altered the way in which the public viewed

the system and its role in the state's future (see the box for the six cornerstones guiding reform efforts). Now most initiatives related to higher education, from new university programs to proposed state legislation, are judged by the press according to the extent to which they achieve the goals of the agenda produced by the Roundtable. This is a significant change, given that before the Roundtable news coverage tended to focus on problems within the higher education system and conveyed a generally negative view of the system.

This report focuses on why the Roundtable led to change when previous attempts did not (a brief discussion of previous attempts can be found in Appendix B). Part 1 of this report provides an overview of the Roundtable. Part 2 explores how the Roundtable revised the nature of the compact between higher education, the state legislature, and business and industry. Part 3 assesses the primary factors that allowed for the Roundtable to help implement and sustain the public agenda. Part 4 details obstacles that have threatened to or could derail the Roundtable initiatives. Part 5 provides suggestions to help other states create sustainable public agendas.

The North Dakota Roundtable's Six Cornerstones

1. Economic Development Connection. Increase the direct connections and contributions of the university system to economic growth and social vitality of North Dakota.

2. Education Excellence. Provide high-quality education and skill development opportunities which prepare students to be personally and professionally successful, readily able to advance and change careers, be lifelong learners, good citizens, leaders, and knowledgeable contributing members of an increasingly global and multicultural society.

3. Flexible and Responsive System. Create a university system environment which is responsive to the needs of its various clients and is flexible, empowering, competitive, entrepreneurial, and rewarding.

4. Accessible System. Create a system which is proactively accessible to all areas of North Dakota and seeks students and customers from outside the state.

5. Funding and Rewards. Develop a system of funding, resource allocation and rewards which assures quality and is linked to the expressed high-priority needs and expectations of the university system.

6. Sustaining the Vision. Develop a structure and process which assures the system remains connected, understood, relevant, and accountable to the needs of the state and its citizens.

Source: A North Dakota University System for the 21st Century.

A number of different groups and constituencies may benefit from the lessons of the North Dakota experience in creating a new public agenda to guide the development of the state's higher education system, including:

- Officials in other states interested in creating and sustaining a public agenda (groups dealing with issues other than higher education may also benefit from this study's findings).
- Higher education officials and political leaders in North Dakota interested in understanding the Roundtable process.
- Students, faculty, staff, administrators, government officials, and members of the public interested in knowing more about the North Dakota Higher Education Roundtable.

The Roundtable: An Overview

North Dakota's Roundtable evolved from an initial desire from members of the 1999 (56th) Legislative Assembly to conduct a study of higher education in the state. However, what began out of concern for limited funding and a desire by legislators to ensure educational quality turned into a process for creating a new public agenda to guide the development of the higher education system, including decisions related to policy making, funding and accountability. Rather than relying on the standard method used in previous legislatively-initiated studies, where a small group of officials took testimony about the challenges and opportunities facing the higher education system, legislators decided that the study "should focus on the future of ND and how the university system fits into developing a stronger future and stronger economy for the state of ND, [as well as a] discussion of what are the appropriate things to be accountable for." [8]

Without a new format, some legislators were concerned that the study would merely review the same issues that had been raised in the past two decades – concerns specific to higher education itself and not higher education's relationship to the overall health of the state. In addition, legislators did not wish to rehash administrative minutia that had historically yielded little change. Instead, the legislative leadership of the Roundtable decided that the new study would focus on creating a shared vision for the state, defining the role of higher education in achieving that vision, and establishing methods to hold all stakeholders responsible for achieving that vision.

Basic Structure of the North Dakota Roundtable

- Legislatively supported (must be reauthorized each biennial session).
- There is a chair and co-chair; these individuals are typically selected from different chambers.
- The chair of interim legislative council appoints the leadership of the Roundtable.
- Members are selected by the chairs with input from the NDUS leaders.
  - 21 members mandated to be from the legislature.
  - 40 other members selected from higher education and the private sectors.
- The original membership was divided into subgroups (taskforces), designated to coordinate the six cornerstones of the Roundtable plan.
- Used a guided discussion to:
  - Examine national trends.
  - Review state and system data.
  - Create a vision.
  - Establish goals.
  - Develop indicators of success.
- Meetings are convened by the roundtable chair(s) as deemed necessary.

Leaders from the legislature and the North Dakota University System (hereinafter university system) collaborated to create a Roundtable that involved key stakeholders who could both envision a new future for the state and help achieve that vision. The Roundtable originated from a 1999 North Dakota Legislatively Assembly resolution calling for a study during the interim session of how the university system could help meet the "state's needs in the twenty-first century."[9] In April 1999, shortly following the conclusion of the session, a special interim committee convened the North Dakota Roundtable on Higher Education to complete the study. The chair and co-chair were the Senate Appropriations Committee chair and the leader of the majority party in the House, respectively. Because it was initiated by the legislature, the legislature wanted one member from each chamber to form the leadership team.

This Roundtable was composed of 61 members: 21 members were appointed by the legislature from their membership, and 40 additional members representing different segments of the state were selected by the Roundtable chairs in consultation with the NDUS leadership.[10] In selecting the members from the private sector, the chairs of the Roundtable requested various state and local business groups to submit names of leaders in the state who widely respected and would openly and candidly contribute to the Roundtable discussion.[11] More than 150 names were recommended; in deciding whom to appoint, consideration was given to multiple recommendations and geographic and demographic representation. As for the higher education sector, all members of the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education were included, as well as presidents of four institutions representing the various institutional types.[12] This collection of leaders from government, postsecondary education, and business and industry initially met during late 1999 and early 2000.

By the admission of 80 percent of the participants interviewed, the initial meeting began in a climate of skeptical optimism. As one participant stated, "It was clear that change was needed, and I know many of us were happy to participate, but we had all seen earlier attempts at reform fail to bring about change. I think we all were wondering if this process was going to be any different." But it was different. And an overwhelming consensus from participants suggests four primary reasons why: 1) strong leadership; 2) meaningful use of data; 3) a focus on the needs of the state; and 4) participation from business and industry.

The Roundtable followed a basic change model of presenting the current reality, establishing a vision for the future, and developing strategies to achieve that new vision. The first meeting of the Roundtable focused on the current reality facing the state of North Dakota. Invited experts provided members with information about state and national demographic shifts, economic predictions, social realities, university system challenges and opportunities, and workforce development trends. Once the group distilled the information, they were charged with envisioning a new future for the state, and developing expectations for all of the stakeholders, including the university system, legislative and executive branches of the government, and the private sector.

The development of the vision began with the initial discussion following this presentation. Using the data from this discussion, the leaders of the Roundtable divided the expressed concerns and expectations into six groups, which eventually developed into "the cornerstones." The Roundtable membership was divided into six task forces to further define and develop goals, action steps, and accountability measures for each cornerstone. The product from each of these task forces eventually became the foundation for the final report.

In June 2000 the Roundtable issued a report, *A North Dakota University System for a 21st Century*, to guide reform efforts and the implementation of a new public agenda for the state.[13] The report defined the role of higher education in achieving that public agenda, assigned responsibilities to the different stakeholders, and identified "a reasonable number of University System accountability measures to replace the extensive, and often conflicting, accountability measures currently being applied".[14]

During the first annual meeting of the Roundtable in 2001, the membership mostly divided into the original task forces to discuss progress and concerns. While this structure ensured that each cornerstone received appropriate review, there was no venue for the members of the Roundtable to engage in broader dialogue about the original vision or to solicit input from members of other taskforces. Following the suggestion of members of the private sector, subsequent annual meetings hosted panels of legislators and business and industry leaders to more broadly discuss the Roundtable vision and the progress being made toward its realization.

Redefining the Compact

An important aspect of creating a sustainable agenda proved to be redefining the compact between state government and higher education and then expanding that compact to include business and industry. During the initial meeting of the Roundtable in 1999, the co-chairs requested that "all parties to the relationship… change their behaviors and methods of doing business in important ways." From the outset, Senator David Nething, chair of the Interim Study Committee and the Roundtable, acknowledged that the members each represented different segments of the state but asked them to "discard any personal or special interest or agenda [they] may have had and come to [the Roundtable] with an open mind, uncluttered with any preconceived notions, examine the more important trends and forces, have meaningful discussions, and participate freely and openly as we set about to accomplish our mission".[15]

Nething's intent was to redefine the relationship among the sectors; to reorient the dialogue from what was wrong to what was possible. His was a deceptively simple request that fostered the mind shift necessary to create a truly new vision for the state. He further stressed that members of the Roundtable had a responsibility to consider and improve the future of the entire state and to help other leaders understand the value of the higher education sector in "promoting the expansion and diversification of the state's economy, and enhancing the quality of life of the citizens of the state."[16] A year later, when reflecting upon the meeting, then University System Vice-Chancellor of Strategic Planning Eddie Dunn, reported that Nething's charge to the members was, indeed, what actually happened: "The members of the group didn't start by talking about higher education. They talked about the needs of the state, the needs of the students, and so on. And then the conversation went to what is the role of the university system in addressing these challenges and opportunities?"[17]

This truly collaborative, state-focused tone-setting was important for the success of the Roundtable, particularly given the history of previous interactions between the state and the higher education sector. In a 1985 white paper, John Richardson, the Commissioner of Higher Education, summarized the nature of the ongoing debate between higher education and the legislature through the time of his writing and into the future, until the time of the Roundtable:

> We have come to recognize this very basic fact: North Dakota's past ways of tossing around higher education problems and solutions have not worked. For example, what typically happens when higher education complains, as we often do, about the problem of underfunding? Our critics cry, "Waste, inefficiency, too-high salaries," and other charges. We shout back about overwork, national markets for faculty and staff, deteriorating facilities, rising costs of equipment and books, and so on. What progress have we made?? [sic] The pattern of complaining, blaming, criticizing, denying, proposing, and defending have not made you, me, or our supporting publics much more comfortable with our higher education system…. It is time for a new kind of conversation and action.[18]

Indeed, the Roundtable report called on the university system to "cease thinking of itself as a ward of the state and to take greater responsibility for its own future." It suggested that the state government "free up and unleash the potential" of the system by giving the university greater flexibility in establishing budgets and allocating resources, including providing new financial support; and that the private sector create mutually beneficial partnerships to aid in the development of the "next generation of North Dakota's entrepreneurs."[19]

Resulting from this repositioning of the higher education-legislature relationship, one of the driving concepts of the Roundtable agenda was termed "flexibility with accountability." This phrase captured

the state government's willingness to grant the university more flexibility in how they managed their funds, and in return the system agreed to monitor and report regularly on 23 key performance indicators meant to measure progress in achieving the new agenda.

Roger Rierson, CEO of one of the state's major marketing firms (Flint Communications) and a member of the Roundtable, summarized the sentiments expressed by most of the participants interviewed as part of this study: "The Roundtable is more than the words in a report, it represents a shift in mindset in how the public views the role of the university system in the state's future and how the university system views its role in supporting the state's future."[20]

The Roundtable process was more than just another government exercise to design new accountability measures; the Roundtable altered the nature of the relationship between the higher education system, its institutions and the state government. The 2000 Roundtable report triggered a major shift in the state that affected many individuals, from faculty to private-sector leaders to the governor. The state agreed to give the higher education system more flexibility in how it dealt with its budget, including more control over tuition setting and carry-forward funds. The institutions began realigning their planning initiatives with the new goals of the Roundtable which resulted in enhanced educational excellence, as well as growth in the state economy.[21] Moreover, private-sector members increased their partnerships with the colleges and universities and many times came to the defense of higher education when state politicians questioned the value of the Roundtable agenda or the university system's contribution to the state.[22]

Factors for Creating and Sustaining the Vision

Merely creating and convening special meetings does not guarantee change. Numerous examples exist among state governments of special meetings, consultations, studies, and reports that exert very little influence on the higher education system, public policy, or governmental operations. In part, influence of such efforts is limited as many of these endeavors tend to provide an unsustainable call for change or are merely meant to present the allusion of "doing something" without any consideration for inducing real change. A problem is identified, a group convened, a report written, and there the momentum dies.

This is no less true in North Dakota's history, which over the two decades prior to the Roundtable had at least three special reports written by the Legislative Studies Council and two special studies funded by the Bush Foundation. Yet as many of the interview participants indicated, while some change had occurred in the past (such as the creation of the university system itself, a structural change that is less difficult than the change in mindset aimed for by the Roundtable), the relationship with the legislature remained antagonistic and the value of the higher education system continued to be questioned by legislators and the members of the general public.[23]

Sustainability Factors

- Use data, not anecdotes
- State-focused agenda
- Strong leadership
- Business-Industry engagement
- Diversify membership
- Simplify the message
- Engage the press
- Link the vision to planning
  - System
  - Institutional
  - Regional

In the Roundtable process, once the collaborative, results-oriented tone was set, charge given, and data presented, participants engaged in a discussion about what a positive vision for the state would look like and what could be done to support the higher education system's ability to provide a substantial contribution to that vision. Out of this discussion evolved the six cornerstones that would end up guiding the rest of the process and become the foundation of the vision. The Roundtable membership was divided into six taskforces to develop implementation plans.

Recognizing the difficulty that generally confronts any reform movement, the original Roundtable members made "sustainability" one of the six cornerstones – moving it from a support function to a measurable, primary objective. If true change was to occur, then not only would the members of the Roundtable need to embrace the change, but so would other elected officials, institutional administrators, faculty, staff, students, and members of the general public. The sustainability planning included such initiatives as having the cornerstones guide institutional and system planning; working with the media to keep them informed of the process and responding to their questions; and coordinating institutional efforts to inform the public about successes realized from the foundation laid by the Roundtable.

Factors Fostering a Successful Reform Effort

The following factors were identified as helping to initiate change.

Use of data (not anecdotes). As part of the process, two external consultants were hired to assist with the organization of the group and to facilitate the ensuing dialogue.[24] In addition, the consultants provided the members with an overview of national and state-level economic, educational, and demographic trends and predictions. The use of credible data helped move general beliefs and speculation about the state's possible future into a solid understanding of current trends and likely future reality and served as a "wake-up call" for many of the Roundtable's members. The presentation of this information helped create a policy agenda that responded to the state's needs as determined by data, not anecdotes.

State-focused agenda. From the outset, the co-chairs and the external consultants worked to focus the attention of the Roundtable on the needs and future of the state rather than the needs of the university system. In fact, the first meeting of the Roundtable barely discussed higher education. The Roundtable members were presented with state and national economic and demographic trends and then were asked to create a new vision for the state. Only after the group created a vision for the state did they begin to discuss the role of the higher education – and then the discussion focused on how the higher education sector could help achieve the vision for the state.

Strong leadership. From the outset, the leadership of the group made it clear that the Roundtable would be different from past legislatively mandated studies. The individuals selected to lead the Roundtable held great influence within the legislative chambers and throughout the state.[25] Because of this influence, not only were Roundtable leaders able to solicit assistance from a wide range of individuals representing varied interests throughout the state, but they also set the overall focus and tenor of the group. The Roundtable leadership was action-oriented. Whereas previous studies on higher education focused on identifying and trying to fix those things that were perceived as wrong or "broken" (such as funding), it was apparent from the outset that these issues would not be a part of the Roundtable's discussions. The Roundtable was literally creating a new public agenda for the state and gave higher education the flexibility it needed to aid in achieving that vision.

Business-Industry engagement. Participation by business and industry representatives was critical for success, particularly in the early days of the Roundtable, as it altered the very nature of the discussion and subsequent policy action. Business and industry, as a third party, was able to validate concerns and needs raised by both higher education and government leaders. For example, the business and industry members promoted the value of a high-quality higher education system – not just in terms of workforce development but also for making the state an attractive place for companies to locate and for people to live. Further, business-industry sector pushed the legislature to allow the system more flexibility in order to unleash its creative power and was able to cite the importance of such flexibility from their own experiences. However, the private sector also argued that, in return for the enhanced flexibility, the university system should be expected to account for their efforts in achieving the agenda laid out by the Roundtable. Had the conversation simply been between government and higher education officials, it is likely that the concerns and requests of the higher education officials would have been dismissed as self-interested. It is also likely that higher education would have continued to rebuke calls for accountability as an intrusion on institutional autonomy. Having a third sector involved allowed for a different type of conversation and balanced the concerns and expectations of the other two sectors. The involvement of the business and industry, which represented several segments of the general public, also aided in the acceptance of the Roundtable report as a "public" agenda, rather than an agenda driven principally by the state government and/or the university system.

Factors for Sustaining a Public Agenda

This study revealed a number of sustainability strategies that contributed to the fact that the Roundtable movement and its new public agenda continued to be embraced by individuals and institutions throughout the state. Sustainability strategies included the following.

Diversify membership. From the beginning, the organizers of the Roundtable recognized that having key decision makers from different sectors and public opinion leaders engaged in the process would impact the long-term viability of the initiative. As discussed above, membership included leaders in the government, business, industry, and postsecondary education sectors (including students). Three important nuances are worthy of note.

- *Commitment*. The people asked to participate in the Roundtable were viewed as credible leaders in their specific sectors and as individuals who would be interested in creating a vision for the state and would engage in the execution of the plan and not just in its creation.

- *Conflict*. The chairs of the Roundtable invited both critics and proponents of the higher education sector to be involved. Since this process was to be about defining a vision for the state, not just

the higher education sector, it was important to solicit input and eventually buy-in even from those most critical of the higher education sector. This engagement of varied viewpoints was successful because the leaders of the Roundtable were diligent in keeping members focused on creating a vision. At the same time, they provided an environment that was conducive to critical discussion and accepted disagreement as part of the process.

- *Widespread collaboration*. Broad representation of individuals from all areas of the state provided a wide variety of ideas and lent to the sense of local input into state goals. This inclusion of local input provided something that had been missing from previous attempts at improving higher education – broad support from all areas of the state. For example, the private-sector leaders remained active in educating government officials, the media, fellow business leaders, and the general public about the importance of the Roundtable. They could also "take it home," meaning that private-sector leaders, who are respected in their cities and towns, were able to translate the cornerstones and state goals into something meaningful back home. Many private-sector members also provided testimony during the legislative session and were not afraid to openly express concern about decisions made by state leaders when they believed those decisions ran contrary to the agreements put forth in the Roundtable plan.

Simplify the message. Several key messages and catch phrases were developed to summarize the essential nature of the new agenda. The Roundtable members were instructed to simplify their message so that it could be shared with neighbors "across the back fence."[26] The most prominent of these simplified messages, "flexibility with accountability," became synonymous with the Roundtable and is often used by the media, faculty, staff, and legislators. In fact, some of the legislation related to the new public agenda is entitled "Flexibility with Accountability" legislation. While such a point may appear to be of little note in the wider discussion of creating a new public agenda, this particular activity (and it is not even clear that it was initially purposeful) was critical for helping a wide range of stakeholders understand the nature of the plan, its impact on the state, and the benefit for its continuation.

Engage the press. From the outset, it was important to work with the media to keep them informed about the process, solicit feedback (through representation on the Roundtable), and address their questions and concerns about the report. To be most effective, members of the Roundtable with media experience had to consider their involvement (or role) not simply as an opportunity to obtain intimate details for reporting purposes; rather, the press's role was similar to that of other roundtable participants – to lend ideas and influence to the process for the betterment of the state, its citizens, and future prosperity. Simply put, Senator Nething's request to cast away preconceived ideas applied to Roundtable members from the press as much as it did any other members. But even members of the press who were not on the roundtable were willing to accept the premise.

In North Dakota, four major newspapers in the state wield great influence over public opinion, and their interest in the process turned out to be important for communicating the Roundtable's proposed initiatives to the wider public. In particular, the university system's Public Affairs Council[27] took responsibility for this cornerstone and developed an action plan, naming specific stakeholders who should be informed of the Roundtable's agenda and creating the key messages to communicate to those stakeholders. Some of the more significant aspects of this plan included meeting with the editorial boards of the four major newspapers in the state; having key members of the Roundtable (e.g., chancellor, board president, and private-sector leaders) write op-ed pieces to be published in the papers; and coordinating the messages being sent by the 11 campuses in the system.

This work proved important for garnering support, not just from the media but from the broader public. In fact, a review of media coverage revealed that while the press was quick to criticize the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education – which serves as both the governing and coordinating board for the state's public colleges and universities – as well as the higher education system prior to the Roundtable, the post-Roundtable press tends to defend the Roundtable and the higher education system. Prior to the Roundtable, it was not uncommon to see editorials with titles like "Basic Governance of Higher Education Needs an Overhaul," "Don't look for malice [in SBHE members] when stupidity will do," "Arrest the State Board of Higher Education," "[Governor] Schaefer to board: Change," or "State's higher ed climate part [of decision to leave], NDSU president says."[28] According to most of the individuals interviewed, since the Roundtable began, the media, while at times still critical about certain issues, has become much more positive and supportive of the Roundtable's efforts. Following the Roundtable, articles with titles like "Higher Ed Roundtable Got It Right," "Add 'College' to Basket of N.D. Goods," and "Town and University Connections Complement Each Other" have become more common.[29] As one long-time member of the North

Dakota press corps stated, "Following the Roundtable, there was a clear shift in how the universities related to the state, and the successes of the new flexible environment was clear – we saw it every week in our reporting."

In fact, when legislators began criticizing the Roundtable initiatives during the 2005 and 2007 legislative session, many opinion leaders in the state responded with written defenses of the Roundtable, labeling it one of the state's great successes. For example, in a March 13, 2005, *Grand Forks Herald* editorial called, "Legislature Threatens Higher Ed," the editorial board defended the Roundtable approach:

> Bullying could destroy the "roundtable" approach in favor of a discredited way to fund the state's colleges…. Leadership in the North Dakota House of Representatives has issued an ultimatum that threatens the state's higher education system…. This is such a misguided and dangerous notion that it will require restraint to discuss it. At the outset, however, it must be clear that…this…is a threat…to the entire university system.[30]

A year late, in defending criticism about the level of flexibility given the university system, a March 26, 2006, *Fargo Forum* editorial stated,

> Higher education in North Dakota is at a crossroads because of the unprecedented progress made in the last few years at the two big research universities…. Decisions made today about the future of higher education will determine if that progress will continue at a pace to keep North Dakota campuses competitive on the national scene.[31]

Link the vision to system and institutional planning. To align the system and the institutions with the new agenda, higher education leaders recognized that the agenda needed to be integrated into system and institutional planning. The Roundtable report recommended that the university system should have "intellectual capacity and programs aligned with the needs of the state."[32] To achieve this goal, the Roundtable recommended that "each institution within the NDUS systematically review its mission and strategic initiatives and take steps to align them with the vision and expectations agreed upon by the Roundtable participants. The vision and expectations should serve as a 'driving force' at each level of the university system."[33] The State Board of Higher Education and university system leaders accepted this premise and worked to move the Roundtable vision from the state level to the institution and department level. Shortly after the issuance of the Roundtable report, the university system began to revise reporting, planning, and budgeting systems to align with the goals of the Roundtable. Now, reporting requirements, such as annual reports, and even requests for new academic programs, are required to align with the cornerstones: if the English Department, for example, desires to add a new academic program, it must justify how that program helps achieve the agenda set forth by the Roundtable.

The oil-and-gas-industry programs at Williston State College and the bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship at the University of North Dakota are a direct response to the workforce development needs of the western part of the state, as well as an example of how the Roundtable conceived of the university system supporting the economic development efforts of the state – in these cases the development of workers for the oil industry and the enhancement of innovative business leaders, respectively.

In addition, the system office now requires each campus to maintain an alignment plan and submit annual updates for approval by the state board. According to the system office, "Campus alignment plans are intended to: 1) document and demonstrate the direct connection between the campuses and the six cornerstones outlined in the Report of the Roundtable; 2) provide a mechanism to help drive the desired changes expressed by the members of the Roundtable and the North Dakota Legislative Assembly; and 3) provide a means for determining and measuring progress toward expectations of the Roundtable and developing a university system that has intellectual capacity and programs aligned with the needs of the state." The purpose of these plans is to ensure that each institution's priorities and planning connect with the direction of the Roundtable. Further, while not mandated, some of the institutions use the alignment plans to guide department-level planning. For example, at the University of North Dakota, all departments are now required to submit their annual reports in a format that justifies how the department's achievements help fulfill the Roundtable cornerstones.

Link the vision to regional planning. While not mandated, one area of the state opted to create a regional roundtable after witnessing the success of the state-level roundtable. The creation of a regional roundtable allowed for the Valley City region to mirror the success of the Roundtable by uniting stakeholders from multiple sectors and tying their efforts to the specific needs of their region. According to its director, the Valley Development Group Roundtable was formed "to further grow [the region's] strategic partnership with Valley City State University…. The Roundtable…

addresses how [regional officials] and corporate leaders can capitalize on Valley City State University's strengths to forge exciting new business development strategies and services and work together for mutual benefit."[34] Creating a regional implementation of the broader state agenda helped to strengthen "the buy in of local city officials, business leaders, and state legislators," according to one interview participant. It also provided opportunity to create new and strengthen existing linkages between Valley City State University and regional government and business leaders. This effort was not a formal extension of the state-level roundtable but rather an outgrowth of and eventually a contributor to regional progress toward implementing the vision of the Roundtable. This is not to argue that the state roundtable should be regionalized – the power of the North Dakota roundtable was that it created and pursues a statewide vision; however, regional roundtables can translate the state vision into regional imperatives and create broader buy-in for the state vision.

Challenges to Sustaining the Agenda

The Roundtable and its agenda have continued for more than seven years. This is remarkable given that the Roundtable itself is a temporary creation that must be reauthorized each legislative session. In fact, the original Roundtable group was meant to be a study council designed to produce a report to advise future legislative action. As such, no provision was made in the chartering legislation for any continued role, neither for the Roundtable following the issuance of the initial report nor for the replacement of members. However, the widespread acceptance of the report, including by both the university system and the private sector has led to subsequent legislative reauthorizations of the use of the Roundtable.

More recently, some legislators have begun to question whether the need for the Roundtable still exists or if the Roundtable process might be employed more effectively. For example, there was legislative pressure to exclude business and industry representatives and higher education leaders from Interim Higher Education Study Committee during the 2007 session. In general, interview participants expressed four overarching concerns about the Roundtable. First, there is some question about whether the reauthorized Roundtables have produced any substantive new products (e.g., legislation, policies, or reports). It is true that the most significant products came from the first Roundtable, namely the Roundtable Report and the original flexibility with accountability legislation; however, the Roundtable's ongoing success seems to depend on perspective. As one interview participant stated, "Success depends on how you define the Roundtable. Has the Roundtable continued to produce new reports? Not really. But it helped foster a new environment that has allowed the university system to be more successful and productive than ever before. If success can be defined as working to sustain that new environment, then I would say it has been successful." Thus, the ongoing existence of the Roundtable has helped to ensure that the public agenda for higher education that it helped to define, and which the state has embraced, has remained the guiding force behind decision making, rather than allowing decision making to devolve into the sum of competing interests.

Further, even though the membership has evolved, primarily due to job turnover, the membership has been stable over the course of its existence. While such static membership has provided some stability to the structure, many interview participants also expressed concern that the lack of new ideas and new blood could be detrimental to long-term usefulness of the Roundtable and that systematic methods for bringing new members with new ideas onto the Roundtable should be considered.

Many interview participants suggested that, had they the opportunity to start the process again, they would make the Roundtable a permanent entity with a review and monitoring function, as well as create a set of guidelines for determining membership and bringing new members onto the Roundtable. As of the writing of this report, the Roundtable's original vision has continued to guide the higher education system and receive significant support from the private sector and the press. However, several structural and political obstacles may have diluted the influence of the Roundtable more recently, raising the question as to whether there is a need to revisit and revise the Roundtable's vision. A discussion of obstacles follows.

Loss of an historical understanding. One of the primary objectives of the originators of the Roundtable was to create a group inclusive of a diversity of opinions, backgrounds, and networks. Further, the Roundtable report clearly indicated the need for sustaining the vision and several successful initiatives were created to communicate the need and importance of the new public agenda to stakeholders throughout the state. As discussed above, there has been great effort to influence key opinion leaders and press coverage about the various institutional initiatives has been distributed to legislators. While sustainability efforts have focused on chronicling the enhanced productivity and innovation of the university system, little effort has been put toward reminding or educating people that these successes are only possible

in the environment of trust and common purpose fostered by the Roundtable vision.

As time has passed, there has been less and less focus on helping people understand the reason for the Roundtable and its role in creating change. What is it? Why was change needed? Why does it continue to be important? This leads new and some senior state leaders to question why the Roundtable and the agreements made as part of the Roundtable are needed to sustain the new results. Yet, every president who participated in the study and was working in the university system prior to the Roundtable indicated that the pre-Roundtable environment simply did not allow for innovation. As one university president stated, "It was a six-month process just to request moving money from the pen budget to the pencil budget. While we always had ideas for new projects, if the money was not allocated in the original biennium budget, the new ideas would die on the branch because it wasn't worth the effort to request a reallocation in the budget."

Structure. Being an annually reauthorized committee of the interim legislative council creates certain scenarios that can make it more difficult to sustain the agenda. For example, the Roundtable has tended to follow the prescribed legislative calendar and format. As noted by several of the interview participants in all sectors, regular meetings and ongoing involvement of Roundtable members is important to keep people energized and involved. In the current structure, meeting once a year may not produce the kind of regular contact and involvement that is needed.

Lack of membership guidelines. As the Roundtable was initially created for a one-time study of the higher education system, no provision was made for the selection, succession, renewal or replacement of members. The leaders of the initial Roundtable selected the original 61 members to represent various educational, governmental, and business segments within North Dakota. As successive legislatures continued the authorization of the Roundtable, the membership was sustained over time, with turnover being limited to people leaving and assuming new professional roles (e.g., NDUS chancellor or CEO of a private sector firm).

While the agenda changed very little over time, which testifies to the strength of the original set of recommendations, the lack of ongoing engagement of Roundtable members in the implementation of the agenda (other than an occasional informational meeting) led many members and other key leaders to question the long-term worth of the Roundtable. Two issues arose through the interviews. First, many respondents indicated that they believed the opportunity to engage new members or rotate out old members would have further aided in sustaining the agenda by helping new leaders gain an appreciation of the process and introducing new ideas into the process. Second, many people suggested that the size of the Roundtable presented the possibility of it becoming unwieldy. Yet the use of task forces within the Roundtable helped to focus the attention of the groups and provide opportunity for all members to contribute to the creation of the Roundtable report.

Control vs. accountability. One of the substantive issues of continuing debate is the amount of accountability that should be required of the university system and its institutions. As part of the Roundtable process, the legislature agreed to end a decades-old policy of strict financial control over institutional budgets. In return, the system was required to monitor and report on a series of accountability measures.[35] The interview participants divided into three groups.

- *Accountability is adequate*. All higher education representatives expressed a general happiness with the flexibility-accountability balance. University presidents, in particular those who had been in office prior to the Roundtable, greatly valued the financial flexibility received after the Roundtable and cited it as a fundamental reason for institutional successes achieved in the past seven years. In return, they had little concern about accounting for institutional efforts. There were also a number of legislators that believed the current system contained significant measures to ensure accountability.

- *Accountability is excessive*. The entire private sector expressed concern over the "excessive" reporting requirements that were a part of the Roundtable. They understood the value of the flexibility given institutions and acknowledged the need for accountability systems. Based on their experience in business, they believed it more effective to track a "handful of key indicators," rather than requiring institutions to exert time tracking a range of indicators that do not necessarily contribute to long-term performance.

- *Accountability is insufficient*. The elected state leaders were divided between those who believed the system to be an effective balance of flexibility and accountability and those that believed that too much flexibility had been given to the institutions. This latter group of individuals seemed concerned about the loss of control once held by the legislature and desired increased levels of accountability, even though it is the strategic realignment of accountability that has been cited by members of the Roundtable and others as the source of the Roundtable's success in achieving its vision of and the systems' ability to better respond to needs of the state.

- **Dealing with political and academic turnover**. The nature of both the political and academic environments is one of continual change in leadership. Politicians retire or fail to gain reelection. A new governor causes a significant turnover in the leadership of the bureaucracy. State board members change based on term of office and interest of the governor. Institutional presidents retire or take new jobs.

Overview of Leadership Turnover

The following summarizes the changes in academic and political leadership between the Roundtable's creation in 1999 and July 2008.

- All members of the N.D. State board of Education.
- There have been five chancellors since 2000.
- 9 of 22 NDUS institutions have new presidents.
- 1 of the 2 remaining presidents announced his retirement.
- 45% of the Senate and 49% of the House members left office between the 56th (1999) and 60th (2007) legislative sessions.
- Changes in majority party leadership in both chambers.

The issue of leadership turnover is less a stated concern than an observed reality. The Roundtable vision has been sustained through significant turnover in both the academic and political sectors. In part, the obstacles created by turnover were diminished because some key positions were filled by people who participated in and understood the Roundtable process. For example, just months after the issuance of the initial Roundtable report, a new governor was elected. In this case, the new governor, John Hoeven, had been a member of the Roundtable and continued his support via his new office. The immediate past system chancellor, Eddie Dunn, was charged with administrative responsibility for the Roundtable during its first five years of existence, while he served as vice chancellor for strategic planning. Further, prior to assuming his new role, the current Chancellor served as chief of staff for Governor Hoeven for six years. A list of other significant transitions can be found in the box on the left.

The turnover within the university system has not been as problematic as that outside of the system. As one senior system leader recalled, "Coming into the system, I was very excited about the Roundtable and the role it played in creating a new public agenda. It would have been hard not to embrace it. The system staff, institution heads, the board [of higher education], and the public all embraced the initiative, and it was clear that it was what was guiding system planning."

Suggestions for Sustaining a Public Agenda

While not all states face the same demographic and economic conditions as North Dakota, the creation of structures and processes similar to the Roundtable could benefit other states in engaging and sustaining reform efforts that create a public agenda for the state. Such structures can serve to protect reform initiatives from the forces associated with the turnover that is often prevalent in political and academic settings. The findings from this study suggest six key actions are foundational to sustaining reform efforts:

- Review, define, and renew the compact.
- Identify, engage, and renew key stakeholders.
- Create clarity and assign responsibility.
- Make the plan relevant and renewable.
- Communicate the agenda and its successes.
- Reinforce the agenda through integration.

These six actions and related implementation strategies are distilled from the wide range of documentary data and interviews collected as part of this study and are intended as general guidelines to aid states in creating structures to sustain reform efforts.

Review, define, and renew the compact. Understanding the current and historic relationship between the state government and higher education, as well as assessing how the general public regards the state's higher education sector is crucial for creating a report that is sustainable over time. In the case of North Dakota, the redefined compact between the state legislature, higher education, and business and industry served as the foundation on which the report was based and served to create positive forward momentum for implementing the public agenda.

After a couple of years, problems arose as some legislators pushed for a return of the previous relationship with the government, seeking more control over the universities. Part of the problem was that while provisions were made to sustain the agenda, no provisions were made to educate legislators and other leaders about what necessitated the new compact and how it allowed for the Roundtable to be successful.

Identify, engage, and renew stakeholders. The second component for creating a sustainable agenda is *engaging* stakeholders and renewing their interest – not merely listening to them. Creation of the Roundtable

provided the forum for stakeholders to inform and participate in the reform dialogue, which allowed them to "own" the vision and individually want to work to support it. Previous efforts allowed for stakeholders to provide testimony but not engage in discussion or form recommendations. As such, there was little support by external stakeholders. The forum used to initiate and derive the reform agenda should allow stakeholders to engage in discussion and be free to air disagreements and address concerns.

But, it is also important that mechanisms be established to continue member engagement and renew their interest in the new agenda. Even if the substance of the agenda remains fairly consistent over time, people need to be continually re-engaged with it, particularly those members outside of academe.

Create clarity and assign responsibility. The third component for sustaining reform is clearly defining the components of the plan, assigning responsibility for completion of those components, and defining appropriate accountability measures. Actors should be held accountable for achieving the vision but allowed the flexibility to determine how best to reach that achievement. In addition, the directives described in the plan can be used to demonstrate to the public the extent to which different sectors are fulfilling their assigned areas of responsibility.

- *Define the components of the agenda*. To guide the development of the reform effort, a document articulating its goals and required action steps should be produced.

- *Assign responsibility for completing the components*. In addition to defining the goals, the document should assign the responsibility for their completion to the appropriate individuals, associations, organizations, or sectors.

- *Hold multiple stakeholders responsible.* Responsibility for implementing and overseeing the reform efforts should be assigned to all sectors. Successful reform requires a partnership of government, business and industry, and higher education. Each partner needs to be aware that they are part of a larger effort and that they will benefit from and need to support the work of the other.

- *Allow flexibility, expect accountability*. The public expects its elected representatives to hold its public bureaucracies, including colleges and universities, accountable for helping to achieve state goals. The creation of a coherent public agenda makes this easier as it provides a definition of what the public should expect from its higher education institutions; however, accountability should not be viewed as synonymous with control. One of the crucial arguments made by the private sector during the Roundtable planning meetings was that organizations (whether they be public bureaucracies or private firms) hire professionals who have the requisite knowledge and skills to most effectively achieve organizational goals. Thus, the state government should allow the higher education system and its institutions appropriate flexibility to allow them to determine how best to achieve the goals put forth in the agenda, all the while requiring the system to measure key performance indicators to insure that the goals are being met.

- *Meet regularly*. Regular meetings (twice a year or more) keep members focused on the plan and can ensure that individuals are held accountable for its execution. Further, continuing the involvement of stakeholders allows for them to ensure that the reform efforts remain relevant to various sectors. These meetings can be composed of the entire group or subgroups organized by region, sector, or task. Indeed, many members of the private sector believed that regular meetings were important for demonstrating the state's commitment to the plan and expressed concern that as the Roundtable aged, meetings became more irregular and attention began to wane.

Make the plan relevant and renewable. The fourth component needed to sustain a reform effort is to ensure that the plan is relevant not only to the members of the Roundtable but also to higher education institutions and their faculty and staff, as well as to local communities and families. In order to garner widespread buy-in (and support), the people of the state need to believe the reform efforts affect them, their families, and their communities in positive ways.

Creating relevancy takes more than simply writing proposals focused on citizens. People need to understand how the agenda affects their lives. The following are suggestions for creating and communicating a relevant plan.

- *Focus on the future*. Attempts to confront the past can often impede planning for the future. Efforts should be taken to identify and remove from the table topics of major debate that dominated past discussions but did not result in progress. Instead, the focus of the planning should be to determine future needs, steps for addressing those needs, resources to achieve those steps, and methods for holding partners accountable.

- *Create a state agenda, not a higher education agenda*. The reform effort should start by considering the future of the postsecondary sector in the context of state needs and trends. Relevancy can come from focusing on creating policies and structures that foster and sustain economic prosperity and improved quality of life for the citizens of the state. Focusing on the state level shifted the discussion from how the state could support higher education, to how higher education could support the state. This helped legislators recognize the importance of the higher education sector to the state and made it easier for them to talk about funding because they could more readily see how an investment in higher education benefited the state.

- *Renew the agenda and revitalize membership*. Great effort was placed on sustaining the vision of the Roundtable by celebrating successes and communicating with stakeholders beyond the Roundtable membership. However, the same efforts were not given to maintaining the vibrancy of the report and revitalizing the interests and energy of the Roundtable's members. Over time, some of the members, particularly those not regularly engaged with accomplishing the agenda, began to question the ongoing need for the Roundtable, primarily as new "products" were not evident. To some of the members, it was not clear the extent to which the Roundtable report continued to influence activities within the NDUS or how the continuing existence of the Roundtable helped maintain the relevance and importance of the agenda. It is important not just to show the achievements due to the agenda, but to also demonstrate how the agenda helped yield those achievements. Further, Roundtable members should be occasionally reengaged to help assess the implementation of the agenda and determine what, if any, changes may be necessitated by changing environmental considerations.

Communicate the plan and its successes. The fifth component for sustaining the reform effort is to communicate to the public and the legislature the plan and the successes that emanate from its implementation. The importance of this step is often overlooked; but any statewide reform effort needs the buy-in and support of leaders from across the state and from a wide range of sectors. Merely producing a report will not achieve such support. It is important to note that the development of a communications plan is important for delivering the agenda defined by the leaders, not for "spinning" or political maneuvering. Sustaining any change, regardless of the size of the organization or system, requires a well-defined and well-executed communications plan.

While it is true that creating and sustaining change throughout an entire state can be more challenging than doing so within a single office or an institution of higher education, the three basic rules for effective organizational communication remain the same: create a simple message; repeat that message; and use multiple forms of communication.

- *Create simple messages*. The core of the plan needs to be distilled into three to five key messages that can be easily consumed by the public and incorporated into written and oral communications. For example, the Roundtable report was summarized with several simple messages, such as "flexibility with accountability," "unleashing the entrepreneurial spirit of the university system," and "contributing to the economic vitality of the state."

- *Repeat the messages*. Communicating these messages through a report, in testimony at a committee hearing, or in an open letter to the editor of a major newspaper may receive some attention, but it is not likely to elicit the widespread support to sustain the messages. The messages need to be repeated to the public, to legislators, and to members of the higher education community at every opportunity. Not only do these stakeholders need to understand the existence of the reform effort, but they must be able to summarize and talk about the primary components of that new agenda. And while the constant repetition may seem awkward, people need to hear messages multiple times before they fully embrace them.

- *Use multiple media forms to communicate*. When considering an entity as large, complex, and diffuse as an entire state, there is no way to reach all stakeholders without using multiple forms of communication. The report serves as a foundation for the entire agenda and may be of interest to individuals looking for more information; however, not many people are going to read the report without first recognizing its importance. The many ways to communicate the messages include but are not limited to: testimony at legislative hearings, writing letters to the editor, institutional or system press releases, institutional or system reports, speeches given by members of the roundtable to various internal and external groups, and so forth.

- *Engage the press*. One of the most important components to success, and one often overlooked and therefore worthy of further mention, is the engagement of the print media. Such outlets often hold a great deal of sway over public opinion and

can be very helpful in garnering widespread buy-in for any reform effort. Members of the initiative should consider meeting with editorial boards and other opinion leaders to discuss with them the purpose of the group and importance of the reform.

- *Communicate results*. Once the reforms are implemented and successes begin to occur, it is important to communicate those results to the stakeholders so that they know the worth of the reform. It cannot simply be assumed that stakeholders will take for granted that the new agenda will yield success. Without reinforcement, it is very possible that individuals will desire to return to the previous way of doing business. For example, while the North Dakota University System produced an annual accountability report that chronicled the progress made in the agreed-upon key performance indicators, great effort was also put into using media reports and other public information to tell the story of the Roundtable. Even with all of this effort, some legislators indicated they were not sure of what successes had materialized from the efforts of the Roundtable. Stakeholders want to see not just how well the system is performing, but also how the new initiative affects their region and its citizens.

Reinforce the agenda through integration. The sixth component, and the one that best ensures sustainability, is to integrate the plan into the academic and political systems. Each state will have its own set of systems in which the agenda will need to be integrated; however, such integration is paramount to ensure sustainability through political and academic leadership transitions.

- *Create a structure that can guide and monitor the agenda*. Sustainability requires the existence of a structure that can guide and monitor the reform efforts.[36] This entity should be a continuing group that is not attached to a particular governor or other political entity. The Roundtable has been fortunate to be reauthorized during each legislative session; however, there is no guarantee that this will continue. While the Roundtable's agenda has been integrated throughout several planning and organizational systems in the state, this integration would not have been possible had the Roundtable not had a continuous presence for at least four to five years. It should be noted that such a structure may not have to be exclusively focused on the higher education sector's role in achieving the public agenda. While it is beyond the scope of the data collected in this project, it is possible that pre-K-16 councils or economic development councils could also serve this structural role.

- *Engage and educate new leaders*. The strength of the Roundtable is that it is a formal structure that transcends the governor, legislators, political parties, and university presidents and can sustain itself over several years. This has proven true by the initiative's resilience, despite significant turnover in leadership positions. However, criticism continues to arise from individuals who were not a part of the Roundtable, particularly those who were not in leadership positions during its creation. While not all criticism can be calmed through discussion, it is important to keep the people informed about why the Roundtable was created and its role in creating the public agenda. This could include covering the topic during legislative and new employee orientation programs, creating easily digestible communications about the history and successes, and rotating roundtable membership to involve new and different perspectives.

- *Link the new agenda to system and institutional planning*. Make the agenda part of the planning process at both the institutional and system level. For example, new program requests must demonstrate value using the components of the agenda. Further, linking annual reporting requirements with expectations of the agenda provides a regular forum for institutions to evaluate the extent to which organizational goals align with the new vision. This reinforces the importance of the agenda and demonstrates to both internal and external stakeholders how it guides organizational decision making.

Link the agenda to regional planning. One of the key components of creating a new public agenda is making it a statewide vision, not a higher education vision. As such, this allows for integrating the agenda into systems that are not directly part of the higher education sector. For example, one area of North Dakota created its own Roundtable to develop a regional plan. Those associated with both Roundtables attested to the regional Roundtable's ability to create buy-in from local legislators, business leaders, and city government officials for the state Roundtable. Other states may consider the creation of regional roundtables to help implement the public agenda and foster wider support from stakeholders.

Summary

This report analyzes a case study of the North Dakota Higher Education Roundtable in order to understand the nature of its success and distill suggestions to guide other states seeking to implement a sustainable public agenda. The focus of the report centered on suggestions for sustainability; however, there are two other critical components that should also be mentioned. First, the Roundtable worked to redefine the public compact: that is, the nature of the relationship among higher education, the state legislature, and business and industry. Second, the Roundtable issued a written agenda to guide future decision-making processes that related to higher education.

The new compact and written agenda provided a solid foundation, but there were five other factors that states should consider when creating a sustainable agenda. First, the compact between the sectors (e.g., higher education, the legislature, and business and industry) should be reviewed, and the intended nature of the relationship between these sectors defined. Second, the stakeholders, particularly those from business and industry, need to be engaged in such a way that they feel ownership of the process and agenda. Third, the agenda needs to be clearly relevant to the lives of students, families, and other taxpayers. Fourth, the implementation plan should establish a clear set of goals and assign responsibility for their achievement to the appropriate stakeholders (and all stakeholders should be responsible for part of the agenda). Fifth, the agenda and its achievements need to be systematically communicated to everyone in the state. Sixth, the agenda should be integrated into planning and decision-making processes so that it is continually and systemically reinforced.

Due to the amount of effort required to create a state agenda, substantial consideration needs to be given also to how to sustain that agenda over time. The findings from this study provide states with suggestions to build their own sustainable public agenda in wide range of public policy arenas.

Epilogue: An Update on Recent Events Relating to North Dakota's Roundtable

Dennis Jones, President of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)

Since this case study was written, several more chapters of the North Dakota story have unfolded. The North Dakota University System's selection of a new Chancellor with substantial experience as a legislator and as chief of staff to two governors – along with the naming of new Board members – allowed the slow process of rebuilding legislative faith in the State Board of Higher Education to begin (faith that had been lost previously as a result of Board personnel actions and leading to a legislative session that was difficult for the North Dakota University System in 2007). The reconciliation process has not yet been completed, but the signs are positive.

Equally important was the convening of a legislative Higher Education Interim Committee subsequent to the conclusion of the 2007 legislative session. This committee was charged with:

> Study[ing] the means by which the North Dakota University System can further contribute to developing and attracting the human capital to meet North Dakota's economic and workforce needs, including ways to increase postsecondary access, improve the quality of education, contain costs and other means, including productivity, to maximize the usage of the University System in meeting the human capital needs of the state; including the mix of institutions, educational attainment gaps, degree production gaps, recruitment and retention of students, and workforce training needs; and including a review of the impact of the state's changing demographics on the University System long-term financing plan.

In fulfillment of that change, the Committee has addressed a wide array of topics. It has:

1. With the assistance of one of the consultants involved with the 1999 Roundtable, updated information about the economic, demographic, and educational landscape was reviewed. This review allowed the committee to build from a common base of knowledge and helped to explain to new members of the Committee why the initial Roundtable selected the goals that it did.

2. Revisited the goals established by the 1999 Roundtable. The goals have essentially been reaffirmed, but placed in a broader context; a goal calling for the education attainment level of the North Dakota workforce to be the best in the world has been added as the overarching goal. A goal calling for the North Dakota University System to function more as a *system* has also been added.

3. Reviewed the accountability measure associated with the original goals and subsequently placed in statute. It is likely that this review will lead to the addition of a few measures to reflect the added goals, though the overall list will be pared back. A concerted effort is being made to identify the measures that are of central importance to the legislature while recognizing a more extensive list that should remain within the purview of the State Board.

4. Discussed at great length the approach to funding the North Dakota University System. While no firm action has yet been taken, it appears that the approach to funding may be one that:

   - Sustains the viability of all institutions in the System.
   - Removes incentives for institutional growth.
   - Provides for targeted investments in the capacity of the System.
   - Includes a performance funding element.
   - Funds depreciation of the institutions' physical assets.

5. Addressed the topic of governance, a reflection of lingering frustration with actions of prior Boards. While no fundamental changes are currently being contemplated, there is interest in improving the process by which the pool of potential Board candidates is developed.

Importantly, the Committee has reasserted the value of the Roundtable mechanism. A meeting of the Roundtable will be held in early October; it will provide a forum for review of the Committee's work and receipt of recommendations for changes before the Committee's final report is prepared. Tentative plans call for two meetings of the Roundtable each year, one to review progress on achieving the stated goals and the other to review the Board's initiatives and strategies for moving forward.

Although the Committee's work has not been concluded, its impact is already being felt. The goals for 2009 adopted by the State Board explicitly address several of the issues that arose during the Committee's deliberations, for example:

- Reassessing institutional roles and missions to better align with System needs and North Dakota (demographics and economic) realities.
- Developing differential admissions criteria.
- Creating a common approach to determining placement into developmental education courses.

The actions over the course of the past year are serving to reinvigorate a process that had lost both focus and momentum. It is still too early to tell whether the broad commitment to goals established in 1999 and the willingness of each of the parties to contribute their necessary efforts to the common good will be achieved, though all the signs are positive.

As proven in North Dakota, sustaining attention to a public agenda requires continuous effort. Once put in place it must be nurtured at every turn. Without constant attention, the train will slip off the rails; getting it back on track turns out to be as hard as getting things started in the first place.

Appendix A

Study Methods

A two-stage small-n case study design assessed the implementation and possible impact of the North Dakota Roundtable. First, a comparative case analysis was conducted to study the impact of the Roundtable on North Dakota and its higher education system. Even though the focus is on the implementation of a single advisory body, cases are any spatially delimited phenomenon (unit) "bounded by space and time."[37] As such, I was able to divide the history of North Dakota higher education into two distinct temporal cases: 1) North Dakota higher education prior to the implementation of the Roundtable (1990-2000); and 2) North Dakota higher education following the implementation of the Roundtable (2000-2007).

Cases were constructed using data collected through in-depth interviews with key actors, observation of legislative meetings, and document analysis of such items as policy reports, memorandums, e-mails, legislation, media coverage, economic analysis, external reviews, consultant reports, and other relevant documents. Forty interviews were conducted with members of the Roundtable and other stakeholders, including CEOs of the largest companies in the state, a majority of public university and community college presidents, legislators, members of the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education, and university system officials.

Once the cases were constructed, comparative analysis was used to look at how the higher education system and the broader state environment had changed since the implementation of the Roundtable. The comparative case analysis is limited in that it only allows for the development of descriptive inferences – that is, the determination of how higher education changed following the implementation of the Roundtable. The descriptive inferences drawn from the comparative analysis were used in the second stage of the design to determine potential causation of the change (that is, did the implementation of the Roundtable cause the change, or was the observed change due to other conditions?). In the realm of social science, determination of causation is not absolute; however, through appropriate measures described below, probabilistic casual determination can be achieved.

The second stage of the design uses two process-tracing activities to investigate causation of the Roundtable's creation; and the change in higher education after the Roundtable was implemented (the "change" variable was determined using the first stage of the analysis). Process tracing is "a procedure for identifying steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given dependent variable in a particular historical context."[38] It is necessary to use two different process-tracing activities in order to not conflate causation. Even though the Roundtable was the pivotal point in the comparative analysis, it does not necessarily mean that it was the cause of any subsequent change. The use of the process-tracing step is critical, as this study is not simply interested in the impacts of the Roundtable as determined through descriptive inference but, more importantly, the causal mechanisms that allowed the Roundtable (or some other mechanisms) to create change in the state's higher education system.

As Gerring notes, the "hallmark of process tracing… is that multiple types of evidences are employed for verification of a single inference – bits and pieces of this study that embody different units of analysis."[39] The advantage of process tracing in this study is that it allows for the development of long causal chains. It is unlikely that any one person or event will be the critical causal mechanism; rather, as with most social phenomena, the sequence of sufficient and necessary causal mechanisms must be determined.[40]

Appendix B

North Dakota Higher Education Prior to the Roundtable

Some might say the Roundtable is like the phoenix that arose out of its own ashes. To refer to the status of higher education in the state prior to the Roundtable as "ashes" is extreme and a bit misleading; but there was certainly a sense of urgency and a desire for change. In the decade prior, some significant governance reforms had transpired and the system had undertaken significant planning initiatives to transform the system's 11 colleges and universities. Yet report after report and study after study from both external and internal stakeholders continued to paint a very similar and dire picture for both the state and the higher education system.[41] These reports, while differing in some of their details, were very consistent in their findings:

- The state has a long commitment to education.
- The higher education institutions are important for state and regional economic, workforce, and human capital development.
- The system (and its institutions) is not structured to respond quickly enough to the changing needs of the knowledge economy, and too much duplication exists in current programs.
- The system is underfunded and the state has not sustained previous levels of funding.
- The infrastructure is deteriorating faster than it is being repaired.
- Existing funding formulas either are inadequate or are inadequately funded.

Moreover, the complaints and concerns raised by critics such as political pundits, legislators, and the general public were similar for at least the 20 years preceding the Roundtable.

- Tuition is becoming too expensive.
- Out-of-state and international students are a drain on state resources.
- There are too many institutions of higher education (or least too many academic programs) for the state to support.
- The institutions are ill-managed, overpaying faculty and hoarding hidden pots of money.
- The higher education system is a drain on limited resources and needs to prove its worth to the state.

In a 1985 white paper, John Richardson laid out many of these issues in an attempt to leave behind the old ways and move the higher education sector forward in a positive direction:

> We have come to recognize this very basic fact: North Dakota's past ways of tossing around higher education problems and solutions have not worked. For example, what typically happens when higher education complains, as we often do, about the problem of underfunding? Our critics cry, "Waste, inefficiency, too-high salaries," and other charges. We shout back about overwork, national markets for faculty and staff, deteriorating facilities, rising costs of equipment and books, and so on. What progress have we made??
>
> The pattern of complaining, blaming, criticizing, denying, proposing, and defending have not made you, me, or our supporting publics much more comfortable with our higher education system…. It is time for a new kind of conversation and action."[42]

While Richardson's call to action did not bring forth a change in the "relationship," the white paper served as a call to arms. With financial assistance from the Bush Foundation, the first of the "Bush Reports" was issued. This report, *Partners for Quality: Plans and Priorities for the State Board of Higher Education*, initiated a significant planning process that continues to the current day.[43] A second Bush-report, *Partners for Progress* was published in 1997.[44]

Amidst the ongoing planning initiatives of the board, there remained a general level of discomfort with the system and the board, for which there appear to be three general reasons. First, in the early 1990s, the board transformed the higher education sector into a system of 11 institutions. The position of commissioner of higher education became chancellor. Under this new system, the presidents were to be no longer directly responsible to the board but to the chancellor; however, "the board still delegate[d] full authority to the institution presidents to administer their individual campuses."[45] Because the delegation of power and the role of the chancellor were never clearly articulated, great public and private debate occurred about power and responsibility. In some cases people wondered why there was a need for both a board and a chancellor. In other cases debate occurred about the power of the presidents versus the power of the chancellor. Simply put, few were comfortable with how the system had been created.

Immediately prior to the Roundtable, the presidents of the two major research universities left under distressing circumstances. The board became unhappy with Kendall Baker, president of the University of North Dakota, over a disagreement about fiscal management

decisions. The issue was not unknown to the public, yet four members of the board convened a meeting (possibly two) about the issue, which violated the open meeting laws of the state. The issue escalated to the point where Governor Ed Schaefer met with the board to express his general disappointment with their operations (columnists from across the state had been encouraging him to ask for the resignation of the entire board). About the same time, the president of North Dakota State University accepted a new presidency out of state. As he was leaving, he took the opportunity to publicly express his general disappointment with the system and his belief about the very poor future of the state of North Dakota.

Third, the existence of 11 public institutions of higher education (not including the private and tribal colleges) in a state with a modest population and limited financial resources often raised a question about the need or ability of the state to sustain all of the institutions. There existed a general consensus that at least one institution should be closed, but such a move was always politically unviable. Each institution was mentioned in the state's constitution, and the only way to eliminate an institution would be a constitutional amendment; such a move could not gain political footing.

Given the variety of factors influencing the relationships among the public, the state government, and the higher education system, the plan originally put forth by John Richardson 15 years earlier became the foundation for the Roundtable: *Forget about the past, focus on the future*.

The Roundtable report covered a wide range of issues, from educational excellence to economic development. At the heart of the new public agenda, however, was a concept that came to be known as "flexibility with accountability." Members from the private sector and higher education system argued that in order to "unleash the potential" of the university system, the state needed to allow the system and its institutions greater flexibility in financial and administrative decision making. Many members from the state government were concerned about how this impacted their responsibility to provide oversight of one of the state's most significant public bureaucracies. In the end, agreement was reached that the state would relinquish its control over funding in return for the system tracking and reporting progress along a set of key performance indicators.

While the flexibility-with-accountability discussion moves beyond the focus on process, it is an important element, helping stakeholders to fully understand the central conflict underlying the Roundtable effort.

Prior to the Roundtable, the state legislature provided line item appropriation, and any reallocation of funds required approval from the legislature or its interim committee. The allocation system was so strict that, as one president recalled, "We couldn't use salary savings to buy extra pencils without an act of the state." The consensus of higher education leaders was that it was easier to ignore maintenance concerns and stretch supplies than it was to seek permission to reallocate from the state government. Thus, many institutions returned money to the state at the end of the fiscal year, rather than address issues of deferred maintenance or investing in the development of new academic programs or other ventures.

Moving to block budgeting and allowing the system and institutions to allocate funds as they saw best enabled institutions to engage in new programs that responded to the economic and workforce development needs of the state. According to most members of the Roundtable, the new flexibility with accountability arrangement was what allowed for the institutions to work toward achieving the new agenda.

Appendix C

Media Relations Strategies

The sixth Roundtable cornerstone expressed the need for sustaining the new public agenda and called for:

> A structure and process which assured the University System for the 21st Century, as described by these cornerstones, remains connected, understood, relevant and accountable to the present and future research, education and public service needs of the state and its citizens – sustaining the vision.

The report made clear that a variety of stakeholders need be included in the process in order for sustainability to be achieved and placed leadership for fulfilling this cornerstone in the system office. As those in charge of this cornerstone relate, it took a significant amount of work and time to communicate the plan to stakeholders. The following strategies are compiled from a review of the communications plan, various communications products, and discussions with communications professionals at the system and institutional levels.

- Identify the stakeholders to whom the message needs to be directed. Be specific and inclusive. A new public agenda requires widespread buy-in, but different groups will have different needs and will focus on different aspects of the plan.
- Create key performance indicators (KPIs) to help measure the success of a communications plan. Different stakeholder groups will have different KPIs.
- Draft four to six key messages that can be woven as appropriate into campus and institutional communications. For example, "Flexibility with accountability has unleashed the tremendous capacity of the university system; strategic investments will be needed to further realize the system's full potential."

The following are examples of specific action steps:

- Draft a PowerPoint presentation that each campus can customize to its own audience and its plans for aligning with the new public agenda.
- Create a "results" document that uses press clippings to evidence campus, regional, and state-level impacts of the new agenda.
- Make planning, accountability, and other documents related to the initiative easily available on the Internet.
- Include representatives from the private sector in legislative briefings and hearings.
- Meet with the editorial boards and other opinion leaders throughout the state to inform them about the initiative and answer their questions.
- Solicit inclusion of guest columns and articles about the initiative in trade and other publications to increase the state and national profile.
- Have key leaders write op-ed pieces for the major news outlets.

Endnotes

[1] The National Collaborative for Higher Education Policy is composed of the Education Commission of the States, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.
[2] National Governors Association. (n.d.) *A Compact for Postsecondary Education*, p. 9.
[3] Kingdon, John.W. (2003). *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Pearson Education Publishers: Upper Saddle River, NJ.
[4] National Conference of State Legislatures. (2006). *Transforming Higher Education: National Imperative – State Responsibility*. Author: Washington, D.C.
[5] Tepper, S.J. (2004). Setting Agendas and Designing Alternatives: Policymaking and the Strategic Role of Meetings. *Review of Policy Research*, 21(4), 523-542.
[6] National Conference of State Legislatures. (2006). *Transforming Higher Education: National Imperative – State Responsibility*. Author: Washington, D.C. p. 7
[7] Forty interviews were conducted in the past two years with legislators, previous chancellors associated with the roundtable, higher education board members, state and local government executive officials, campus presidents, economic development directors, and CEOs of businesses and industries located throughout the state. Documents included reports, correspondence, legislation, internal-planning documents, meeting minutes, and so forth.
[8] Quote from an interview with a ND legislator and study participant.
[9] Roundtable for the North Dakota Legislative Council Interim Committee on Higher Education. (2000). *A North Dakota University System for the 21 Century*. North Dakota University System: Bismarck, ND. p. iii. For a discussion of the meeting, see also Minutes of the N.D. Legislative Council, Wednesday, June 30, 1999. Accessed from <http://www.legis.nd.gov/assembly/56-1999/interim-info/minutes/99-06-30.html>.
[10] While there has been some limited fluctuation in members, the actual membership has remained fairly stable over the years. Members are drawn from the state legislature, state government, North Dakota State Board of Higher Education, business and industry, and higher education institutions, including representation from students and private and tribal colleges.
[11] For the purposes of this report and using the vocabulary of the Roundtable, the private sector includes those members who are neither representatives of the state government or the higher education sector; typically, the members come from business, industry, and nongovernmental organizations.
[12] They selected the two presidents from the major research universities and a representative from the

two-year colleges and the four-year comprehensive universities.
[13] The report can be accessed at <http://www.ndus.nodak.edu/Upload/allfile.asp?id=332&tbl=MultiUse>.
[14] (Linking North Dakota and the University System, 2003).
[15] Roundtable for the North Dakota Legislative Council Interim Committee on Higher Education. (2000). *A North Dakota University System for the 21 Century*. North Dakota University System: Bismarck, ND., p. 1.
[16] Roundtable for the North Dakota Legislative Council Interim Committee on Higher Education. (2000). *A North Dakota University System for the 21 Century*. North Dakota University System: Bismarck, ND. p. i.
[17] Clewett, L. (2002, Nov). Building trust and consensus: a public/private partnership creates a new leadership model for higher education. *State Government News*. Accessed July 20, 2008 from <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_go2303/is_200211/ai_n7290064>.
[18] Richardson, J.A. (1985). Preparing for the Next Century: A White Paper". State Board of Higher Education: Bismarck, ND. p. 4.
[19] Roundtable for the North Dakota Legislative Council Interim Committee on Higher Education, p.6
[20] Presentation given to the Higher Learning Commission on April 3, 2006.
[21] For an analysis of the economic impact of the NDUS system and the Roundtable initiatives on the ND economy see Leistritz, F.L. and Coon, R.C. (2007). *Economic Impact of the North Dakota University System*. North Dakota State University: Fargo, ND.
[22] In many ways, this critical role of the private sector is only now being recognized by other states. During a 2007 gathering of business leaders convened by the Conference Board, a nonprofit group that conducts research about the business sector, participants were told that if they wanted education to provide better workers they need to stop blaming institutions and use their bully pulpit to lobby state and national lawmakers for reform on issues important to educators, not just those policies that directly impact business.
[23] Treadway, D.M. (1996). Restructuring That Works: North Dakota. In T.J. MacTaggart and C.L. Crist (Eds.). *Restructuring Higher Education: What Works and What Dosen't in Reorganizing Governing Systems*. Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco.
[24] The consultants were Dennis Jones, President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Boulder, Colorado, and Charles Schwahn, Schwahn Leadership Associates, Custer, South Dakota.
[25] As mentioned above, the cochairs were the Senate Appropriations Committee chair and the leader of the majority party in the House.

[26] Hart, S., Etemad, S., McCann, J., and Thigpen, D. (2002). The Roundtable on Higher Education: Creating a North Dakota System for the 21st Century. *Community College Journal*, 26(9), 701-707.
[27] The Public Affairs Council is comprised of the public relations officers from each of the NDUS institutions and representatives from the NDUS office.
[28] Titles come from the following sources, respectively: Strinden,E.S. (1998, Mar. 31). Basic Governance of higher education needs an overhaul. *Grand Forks Herald*, A5. Pantera, T. (1998, Mar. 15). Don't look for malice when stupidity will do. *The Fargo Forum*, A8. The Forum. (1996, Oct. 12). Arrest the state Board of Higher Education. *The Fargo Forum*, A4. Davis, D. (1998, Mar. 3). Schaefer to board: Change. *Bismarck Tribune*, A1. Pates, M. (1998, April 10). Plough finalist for college job: State's higher ed climate part of decision, NDSU president says. *The Fargo Forum*, A1.
[29] Titles come from the following sources, respectively: Editorial Board. (2002, Aug. 8). Higher ed roundtable go it right. *The Fargo Forum*. A2. Editorial Board. (2004, Oct. 15). Add 'College' to basket of N.D. goods. *Grand Forks Herald*. A4. Kelly, C. (2006, Aug. 29). Town and university connections complement each other. *Valley City Times-Record*, p. 4.
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[32] Roundtable for the North Dakota Legislative Council Interim Committee on Higher Education. (2000). *A North Dakota University System for the 21 Century*. North Dakota University System: Bismarck, ND. (p. 63).
[33] Roundtable for the North Dakota Legislative Council Interim Committee on Higher Education. (2000). *A North Dakota University System for the 21 Century*. North Dakota University System: Bismarck, ND. (p. 61).
[34] ND Legislative Council. (2003, Nov. 18-19). Minutes of the Higher Education Committee. Valley City, ND. p. 3.
[35] An example of the system's accountability report can be found at <http://www.ndus.edu/reports/default.asp?ID=355>.
[36] The Blue Ribbon report on Higher Education from the NCSL recommends the need for structures such as this.
[37] Yin, R. K. (1984). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousands Oak, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
[38] George, A.L. & Bennett, A. (2005). Case Studies and Theory Development in Social Sciences. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
[39] Gerring, J. (2006). Case Study Research: Principles and Practices. London: Cambridge University Press. p. 173.
[40] Goertz, G. (2006). Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
[41] These publications include ND Legislative Council. (2003, Nov. 18-19). Minutes of the Higher Education Committee. Valley City, ND; ND State Board of Higher Education. (1987). Partners for Quality: Plans and Priorities. Author; ND University System. (1990). Partners for Progress: Plan for 1990-1997. Author: Bismarck, ND; ND University System. (1996, February 25). Partners for Quality: What's Next?: A proposal to the Bush Foundation from the ND SBHE; Report of the North Dakota Legislative Council. Fiftieth Legislative Assembly. 1987; Report of the North Dakota Legislative Council. Fifty Second Legislative Assembly. 1991. Higher Education System Review Committee; Report of the North Dakota Legislative Council. Fifty Third Legislative Assembly. 1993; Report of the North Dakota Legislative Council. Fifty Third Legislative Assembly. 1993; Report of the North Dakota Legislative Council. Forty Eighth Legislative Assembly. 1983; Budget "A" Committee Richardson, J.A. (1985). Preparing for the Next Century: A White Paper". State Board of Higher Education: Bismarck, ND; Richardson, J.A. (1989, August 4). Testimony to LSC about Partners for Progress: A Plan for North Dakota's Future.
[42] John Richardson served as commissioner of higher education in the 1980s and then as the first chancellor when the board created the North Dakota University System. Richardson, J.A. (1985). Preparing for the Next Century: A White Paper". State Board of Higher Education: Bismarck, ND. p. 4.
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