# EVOLVE

Smart Goals

As HLC began to create the next strategic plan, the evaluation of trends in higher education resulted in six focus areas: Equity, Vision, Outcomes, Leadership, Value and Engagement. The plan to take HLC from 2020 to 2025 will concentrate on EVOLVE.

HLC staff worked to develop potential smart goals for Board of Trustees consideration. For this purpose, SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-based.
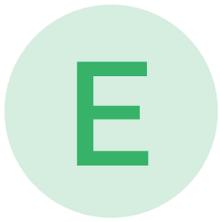
E Equity

The role of equity in accreditation and quality assurance is critical. An equity framework should permeate all levels of institutions and their accreditors, including students, staff, faculty and governing boards. These goals will focus on that role as well as equity in the Peer Corps and the review process. HLC is committed to modeling fairness, quality and access for all learners. Strategic directions also address the importance of all students having an equitable access to higher education.

1 HLC will ensure that concepts of equity, diversity, access and inclusion are addressed in its mission and other foundational statements.

S Develop HLC definitions of equity, diversity, access and inclusion.

M Test the definition against HLC's mission, vision and values. Assure consistency of interpretation by all staff and peer reviewers.

A Review HLC's mission for equity, diversity, access and inclusion. Review Principles of Operations Framework to assure they address equity, diversity, access and inclusion.

R Serve the Common Good.

T June 1, 2020.

2 HLC will actively promote an understanding of and sensitivity to equity principles in its evaluations of institutions.

S Identify potential trends regarding inequities relative to accreditation policies and processes.

M Disaggregate and analyze evaluation data to identify potential trends (i.e., identification of institutional types that flag consistently on particular Core Components, sanctions or Show Cause Orders).

A Work with the Peer Corps Diversity Committee to provide additional training to peer reviewers on diversity, equity, access and inclusion.

R Strengthen evaluations and improve interactions among peer review team members.

T Review (and if necessary, revise) the Criteria for Accreditation to include equity principles. 2022 - 2025.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based
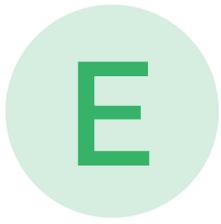
E Equity (cont.)

3 **HLC will contemplate equity in relation to its operational policies, and related processes and procedures.**

S Develop a process and schedule to review alignment to equity of current internal operating policies and related procedures.

M Evaluate the developed process one year after implementation.

A Work with the Internal Policy, Procedure and Practice Workgroup to document process and communicate to all staff.

R Owning HLC's responsibility to practice its values.

T Collect, review, and share Equal Employment Opportunity information with HLC employees. September 1, 2021.

Provide annual training to all internal stakeholders, including the HLC Board of Trustees, regarding understanding of and sensitivity to equity. January 1, 2023.

4 **HLC will provide information to the public regarding issues impacting equity, for example educational attainment and high-quality credentials.**

S Determine specific external events or organizations with whom to partner in order to provide information on quality credentials to fit student needs and expectations.

M Create a Student Resources web page.

A Work as a convener to develop resources for the public.

R Serve the Common Good.

T Host an event for state and local officials, education administrators, and advocates to discuss the landscape in which education intersects with governmental policies and social/economic dynamics related to equity. June 1, 2024.

S Specific   **M** Measurable   **A** Attainable   **R** Relevant   **T** Time-Based

V Vision

Vision goals address the future of HLC, regional accreditation and higher education. The preliminary focus is on the vision for HLC, with a review of the current mission statement and development of a vision statement. The vision goals will need to address members' ongoing interest in HLC's role as a thought leader for higher education.

1 Mission

S Review and update HLC's mission.

M Ensure that the mission statement encompasses the goals developed for the EVOLVE strategic plan.

A Review feedback from the membership and staff surveys on the mission. Work with the Board of Trustees to develop and finalize any changes to the mission statement.

R Serve the Common Good.

T Mission to be updated at the time the EVOLVE Strategic Plan is finalized. November 2020.

2 Vision

S Review and update HLC's vision statement.

M Ensure that the vision statement encompasses the goals developed for the EVOLVE strategic plan.

A Review feedback from the membership and staff surveys on HLC's vision. Work with the Board of Trustees to develop and finalize any changes to the vision statement.

R Serve the Common Good.

T Vision statement to be updated at the time the EVOLVE Strategic Plan is finalized. November 2020.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based
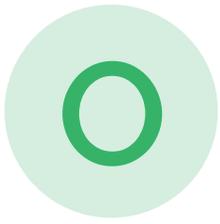
O Outcomes

Outcome goals address the strategic directions for measuring quality and student success.

1 **Expand and strengthen collaboration with the Triad, K-12, associations and C-RAC to more strategically support improved equity in access and attainment in HLC's region.**

S Convene and support communication among stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the issues and coordinate a response.

M Capitalize on the quantity (number, reach) and quality (regular, sustained, mutually beneficial) of relationships.

A Develop/expand connections to support inter-agency collaborations; capitalize on knowledge and relationships of HLC staff.

R HLC has heard the need for outreach and can work toward more coordination to mitigate expectations that burden institutions as well as find opportunities for sharing expertise and reducing capacity issues.

T Identify contacts to connect with and implement a regular schedule of convenings. January 2021.

2 **Develop and implement standard definitions of learning outcomes/student success as well as an evaluative framework that links quality assurance and student success.**

S Draw on collaborations to internally develop HLC's own framework, reflective of diversity of students and outcomes (disaggregation of student data).

M Adopt definitions to be utilized within the framework of the Criteria for Accreditation. This will include identifying metrics from which institutions may choose according to their mission and students (aligned with any changes in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act).

A Continue the process already in place for Core Component 4.C. to be modified and adopted by the HLC Board of Trustees as an addendum to the revised Criteria.

R Align with mission; continue the work of VISTA; improve efficiency and effectiveness in operations; reflect the changing role of higher education and learner intent call for greater transparency and accountability.

T Modify Core Component 4.C. November 2021. A subsequent framework will be adopted and implemented. June 2023.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based
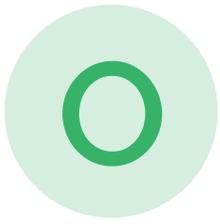
Outcomes (cont.)

3 **Provide support to institutions in exploring alternative ways of measuring and advancing student success appropriate to their institutional context.**

S Build on HLC's definitions and framework, provide support and encourage participation of alternative pathways and credentials.

M Provide greater representation of various institutional types taking part in the opportunities provided by HLC that aim to support advancement.

A Seek external funding to support the technology advances needed to assure effective outcomes measurements and reporting.

R Changing nature of accreditation and societal expectations around the value of education; emerging credentials; need for greater data exchange to be able to more accurately track success.

T Put in place by January 2024.

4 **Focus on equity in service to HLC's institutions to ensure all member institutions have access to resources and support from HLC.**

S Develop reliable and reputable resources to support institutions as they develop or expand their efforts to improve and provide evidence of equitable outcomes for learners.

M Assure accuracy, consistency, clarity and completeness of information available to institutions through multiple modalities (online, conferences, workshops, etc.).

A Expand existing publications, communications and events.

R Support the advancement of quality of education and in helping institutions meet the Criteria for Accreditation.

T Ongoing.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based
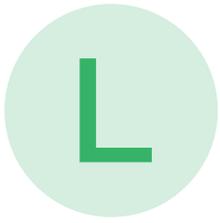
L Leadership

Leadership strengths are critically important to the success of HLC's member institutions, including boards and chief executive officers (CEOs). It also includes the goals of HLC's Board of Trustees and the organization's leaders. Goals include the thought leadership role of HLC in higher education and all related processes: accreditation, student borrowing, student success, state support etc., all of which are currently undergoing an unprecedented level of public scrutiny. The enhancement of leadership at education-related institutions and organizations must become an organizational priority to successfully address these challenges.

1 Convene a task force to research, design, publish and distribute research for institutional leaders and others that leverages HLC unique position within higher education.

S Appoint the design group. Research and identify issues of importance to member institutions. Decide on the appropriate form and frequency for this communication. Develop, design and distribute.

M Document all meetings, develop ideas and strategies and collect research in the field of leadership.

A Review the HLC organization capacity needs to meet this goal related to communications, collection and dissemination of information, training, etc.

R Relate to HLC's engagement focus.

T Determine timing based on HLC capacity.

2 Evaluate HLC's professional development of staff to assure that it includes and addresses timely critical knowledge related to the development of policies, thought leadership and advocacy.

S Identify a program specifically appropriate to each employee's work responsibilities.

M Evaluate results of professional development programs.

A Build a strong and sustainable professional program for the agency which aligns with the changing marketplace of higher education.

R Continuously improves performance in current or future positions at HLC, and acts as a strong recruitment tool for lifelong learning.

T Integrate funding in budget. Adopt objectives and goals to align with budget and HLC's strategic directions. Implement consistency with HLC process schedules. September 2022, review annually.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based

L Leadership (cont.)

3 **Conduct a feasibility study on offering a mid-and/or executive-level leadership development program for institutional leaders.**

S Design, market and execute leadership programs if supported by feasibility study results.

M Confer with internal and external constituencies on the feasibility of this activity for HLC.

A Refer to previously conducted HLC feasibility studies on elective programming.

R Explore HLC's potential to expand HLC's elective programming.

T Determine based on feasibility study.

4 **Develop and an annual process for publishing professional presentations by HLC staff designed to highlight HLC's commitment to thought leadership and advocacy.**

S Create an annual process.

M Evaluate the annual process.

A Collect presentations that HLC staff members are currently providing.

R Repurpose content for a wider audience.

T Start (est.) fall 2022, with annual improvements and evaluation.

5 **Plan and execute a regularized plan for process improvements with an eye toward streamlining critical HLC processes (for example, providing more automated "self-serve" processes where feasible). This goal supports HLC's strong leadership and value to members.**

S Convene conversations with member institutions and others, such as state agencies, to identify potential opportunities for process improvements. Establish "Process Improvements" as an area of focus in HLC's regular communications with member institutions.

M Periodically publish details of HLC process improvements and their effective dates.

A Through continuous improvement, HLC evaluates its processes regularly.

R Advance through continuous improvement.

T Ongoing.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based

V Value

HLC will continue to strengthen its value to members, assuring the importance of accreditation and quality assurance. It will also address HLC's role in impacting public perception about the value of higher education and its lifelong return on investment (ROI).

1 **Reconcile and address gaps between the diversity of HLC member institutions and existing HLC policies and processes intended to serve them.**

S Evaluate how the Pathway model meets the needs of institutions assigned to each Pathway. Review and update the rubric to "place" institutions in the Pathway matching the characteristics of the institution. Develop an expanded Pathways model to ensure most at-risk and least at-risk institutions are being appropriately reviewed. This may include analyzing the role of differential accreditation reviews by sector type.

M Conduct an inventory of all of the data HLC is collecting from member institutions, identify gaps and redundancies, and determine how best to aggregate the data in order to engage in data-informed organizational decision-making.

A Utilize HLC's emerging institutional research capacity, provide trend analysis and other comparative data to institutions to aid in the quality assurance process.

R Identify and implement options (e.g., scholarships, financial assistance, locations) for helping resource-strapped institutions participate in HLC professional development opportunities.

T Target for August 2023.

2 **Foster an infrastructure and ethos that serves member institutions by emphasizing the transparency of information, providing self-service features linked to HLC processes, and providing consistent and timely responses in all member institution interactions.**

S Create a dashboard for members and other outputs highlighting HLC's volume and breadth of work. Research, vet and publish a resource list for institutions of reputable associations serving higher education with a disclaimer about not "endorsing" them. Continue to develop ALOs and better define their role and create an ALO resource center.

M Formalize the cycle of routine evaluation of internal processes, policies and practices.

A Implement new technology to streamline processes and better serve institutions.

R Develop processes that enable institutions to receive needed information quickly and establish internal expectations for institutional service and responsiveness.

T Work with other higher education agencies to identify gaps that may exist in what they offer and what HLC offers to assist institutions in various areas. Fold any identified gaps into additional focus for the next strategic plan. Ongoing.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based

V Value (cont.)

3 **Increase coordination with the Triad and other relevant agencies to reduce the burden to, and contradictory expectations of, member institutions by synchronizing expectations and processes.**

S Work with states to identify overlaps between HLC and state approval efforts; work with the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that student success is a goal that we hold equally; work with higher education agencies to identify gaps that may exist to assist institutions in various areas.

M Develop language that defines and legitimizes the various types of student success.

A Continue working as a partner within the Triad.

R Clearly identify and communicate HLC's role in the higher education ecosystem.

T Fold any identified gaps into the additional focus for the next strategic plan. May 2024.

4 **Foster a more complete understanding of student success (particularly from a learner perspective) through dialogue, whitepapers, and initiatives designed to focus all parties on the workforce, civic, social, and other benefits of higher education.**

S Look after students' interests through HLC's consumer protection policies and ongoing interactions with institutions (student guide, student opinion survey, complaints, etc.).

M Embed learner intent in discussions of student success and retention methodologies.

A Look for opportunities to communicate this message through current outreach such as *Leaflet*.

R Serve the Common Good.

T Communicate an understanding of HLC's focus on student learning and achievement. December 2021.

5 **Reinforce the value of higher education by upholding, safeguarding, and promoting widespread understanding about the role of accreditation in measuring quality and encouraging institutional improvement.**

**S** Ensure rigor and consistency in Peer Review.

M Foster the ability to create and support various communities of practice.

A Create informational materials, hard copy and online, that help the general public understand in layperson terms, what the Criteria for Accreditation require.

R Make more understandable what "quality" in higher education means and how accreditation benefits students.

T Ongoing.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based
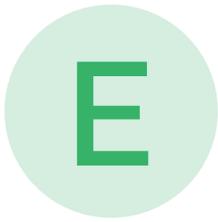
E Engagement

As an active member of the higher education ecosystem, HLC sees opportunities for engagement with member institutions, like organizations, governmental bodies and students. Engagement includes outreach efforts, advocacy and civic engagement.

OUTREACH

1 Tell HLC's story: provide a narrative about accreditation.

S   Share the Students Right Guide with all relevant organizations (e.g., K-12 school counselor organizations).

M   Survey organizations to determine use of the guide.

A   Complete the guide and develop ongoing relationships with these organizations. Become active in engagement with a yearly plan for implementation.

R   Serve the Common Good.

T   Provide presentations and attend the relevant organizational conferences. Yearly plans will be incorporated in HLC's budget. September 2021.

2 Invite the membership to include HLC as one avenue for telling their stories.

S   Spotlight Institutional stories in *Leaflet*.

M   After a year analyze web traffic and feedback.

A   Have tools and access to the institutions through the staff members.

R   Reinforce advancing quality.

T   Publish in *Leaflet* six times per year. January 2021.

S Specific   **M** Measurable   **A** Attainable   **R** Relevant   **T** Time-Based
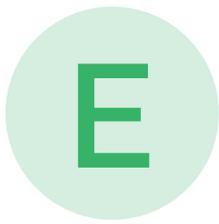
E Engagement (cont.)

ADVOCACY

3 **Complete one or more Triad thought paper projects with the states and U.S. Department of Education.**

S Invite and engage a willing coalition of states and U.S. Department of Education representatives to review and choose at least one of six projects or subprojects from *the Relationship to the Triad* & Beyond recommendations for planning, implementation and review.

M Review chosen project deliverables with external audiences to assess its outcomes and results. Enhance current relationships and regular communications.

A Position thought paper recommendations as a direct result of external stakeholders looking to enhance collaboration across the Triad.

R Invite states and U.S. Department of Education representatives to be part of pilot implementation group. May 2021.

T Begin quarterly convenings to develop project plan and implementation schedule. September 2021 through the years covered by EVOLVE 2025. Assess the deliverable/s annually beginning in September 2022.

4 **Develop resources to champion accreditation to states and Congress.**

S Invite up to 25 presidents, ALOs, state higher education officials and elected officials or staff to promote accreditation to elected officials.

M Evaluate the meetings that occurred with the elected officials.

A Develop these resources through HLC staff.

R Expand the understanding of HLC as a leading quality assurance organization for the colleges and universities within its membership, dedicated to providing important validations for all higher education stakeholders.

T Develop invite list. February 2021. Convene invitees via webinar or phone to discuss ideas and next steps. September 2021. Finish development of resources. May 2022. Update on an annual basis.

5 **Enhance communications with specialized accreditors to better inform HLC's evaluations.**

S Continue to attend Chicago Area Accreditors Meetings.

M Survey area accreditors on their familiarity with HLC.

A Continue as part of HLC's work.

R Build relationships within the higher education ecosystem.

T Conduct twice annually.

**S** Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based
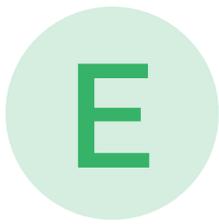
E Engagement (cont.)

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

6 **Examine how Core Component 1.C is being implemented by institutions and reviewed by peer reviewers in evaluating team reports and assurance arguments against a rubric, then analyzing results and reporting findings to HLC leaders.**

S Examine how Core Component 1.C is implemented by institutions and reviewed by peer reviewers.

M Develop a rubric for evaluating team reports and assurance arguments for 1.C. Using a statistically valid sample set of team reports and assurance arguments from the approximately 200 comprehensive evaluations during the 2020-21 academic year, score institutions' and peer reviewers' writing to 1.C. Develop a final report for review.

A HLC has resources to accomplish this goal internally, using peer reviewers, staff time to evaluate reports, analyze findings, write a report and submit recommendations.

R Emphasize that civic engagement is directly relevant to "ensuring quality for the public good" of HLC's mission. All institutions must write to the Criteria for Accreditation during their reviews.

T Develop an evaluation rubric, based on early feedback from staff liaisons reading team reports; identify a "sample" for evaluation. May 2021. Score sample of fall reports. November 2021. Score sample of spring reports. July 2021. Analyze findings; write a report/ submit recommendations. September 2021.

7 **Using findings from the 1.C evaluation, provide additional training (webinar, conference) for institutions and peer reviewers, and work toward adjusting the language in the Criteria for Accreditation, as necessary.**

S Shift language in the next Criteria for Accreditation revision, based on feedback.

M Evaluate webinars and conference sessions using satisfaction surveys.

A Execute goal through HLC resources internally (staff members).

R Relate civic engagement as directly relevant to "ensuring quality for the public good" of HLC's mission. Further, all institutions must write to the Criteria for Accreditation during their reviews.

T Offer new webinar trainings. September 2021: Draft new 1.C language for Board of Trustees. February 2021. Offer Annual Conference sessions. April 2021. Second reading of Board of Trustees. June 2021.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based
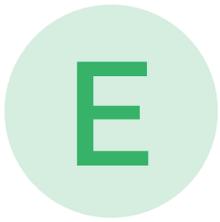
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (cont.)

8 **For the next three academic years, EVOLVE committee members will attend national conferences and speak about HLC's civic engagement approach and write at least one white paper on the topic.**

S Participate in the public dialog about civic engagement by speaking at national conferences and writing white papers on the topic. Need to identify specific events, speakers and timeline.

M Measurable by counting the activities against stated goals.

A HLC will execute this activity using HLC staff and potentially peer reviewers and other organizational partners to execute sessions, panels.

R Civic engagement is directly relevant to "ensuring quality for the public good" of HLC's mission. Further, all institutions must write to the Criteria for Accreditation during their reviews.

T Identify specific events and create a timeline.

S Specific **M** Measurable **A** Attainable **R** Relevant **T** Time-Based