

Wisconsin's Technical Colleges **Advocacy Message Tool Kit**

Messages for key public policy issues facing
Wisconsin's Technical Colleges



December 2005

Introduction

This tool kit is a resource for advocates of the technical colleges designed to help inoculate against unnecessary legislation and messages that may be harmful to Wisconsin's Technical Colleges. The messages in this tool kit work in concert with the ongoing Statewide Marketing advocacy campaign, "Where Communities Turn – First." Like the campaign, it can be used for communicating succinct and relevant messages to elevate our perceived value and encourage more investment in the colleges. It's called a "tool kit" because you can pick and choose which messages (tools) are appropriate for any given situation. Keep this tool kit handy whenever responding to or initiating a message to the general public, legislators, or other stakeholders.

Key issues and strategies facing Wisconsin's Technical Colleges

Rebuilding the State's investment in the colleges

- Show investment is essential in "bad" times to preserve access/flexibility/responsiveness.
- Show investment is essential in "good" times for economic growth/competitiveness.
- Demonstrate excellent track record of responsiveness and fiscal accountability.
- Build state-level understanding of threatened/stagnant federal support.

Strengthening the understanding of colleges' value and role in economic development

- Promote the college's role in the state's cohesive economic development strategy.
- Reinforce the value of career and technical education/training.
- Strengthen local, regional, and statewide partnerships with business and industry, associations, etc.
- Generate entrepreneurship, new businesses and innovation through the colleges.

Promoting how accessible the colleges are ("front door" access for all learners)

- Promote individual achievement/community/quality of life.
- Emphasize the "front door" access for ALL learners.
- Promote role in the state's "brain gain."

Preserving governance/authority and strengthening the link between governance/authority to outcomes/responsiveness

- Preserve local revenue authority (in the face of tax freezes, TABOR, etc.)
- Promote that capacity for responsiveness and innovation is dependent upon autonomy for governance/authority.
- Address legislative tendencies to exert greater control over system/districts.
- Preserve the non-political and non-partisan nature of WTCS governance and issues.
- Communicate cost-saving strategies and new revenue resources.

**Core theme:
“We provide a strong ROI”**

Message:		How it will be communicated:	To be used by:
A	Technical Colleges are continually doing more with less.	Meetings with legislators; community briefings; news releases; editorial board meetings; web pages.	College presidents; District Board members.
B	State investment (which is declining) directly affects local investment (which continues to increase)	Meetings with legislators; community briefings; news releases; editorial board meetings; web pages.	College presidents; District Board members.
C	We produce taxpayers who will contribute more to the tax base and tax revenues than the investment cost.	Op/Ed articles from college and system president.	College presidents; College PR staff; System president; Statewide Marketing staff; System staff.
D	We are a valuable asset to Wisconsin’s economic development portfolio.	Feature news releases illustrating economic development success stories.	College PR representatives.
E	Tech colleges are not an expenditure, they are a “low load” investment with a very high rate of return.	Op/Ed articles from college and system presidents.	College presidents; college PR staff; college ambassadors; System president; Statewide Marketing staff; System staff.
F	What you do for us is good for you and your constituents (quality of life, skilled workers, state tax revenue).	Personal phone calls to legislators; letters to legislators, one-to-one visits.	College presidents; District Board members; employers.
G	Our close relationship with business and industry helps us be proactive, efficient, and effective.	News releases; letters to the editor by deans/advisory committee members; legislative breakfasts; community briefings; economic dev. events.	College presidents; District Board members; college leadership (leverage Advisory Committees); System president.
H	Challenge legislators to find a better rate of return for <i>local public investments</i> . Short-term investment with long term results.	Op/Ed articles; personal letters to legislators; editorial board visits.	College presidents; college PR staff.
I	It is Wisconsin’s fiscal responsibility to invest in workforce development and education to advance the state economically.	Public speaking; Op/Ed articles; letters to the editors; association articles.	Commerce and Workforce Development secretaries; college presidents; System president; System board members; Statewide Marketing staff; System staff.
J	Investing in the tech colleges means you’re investing in our communities’ critical occupations (e.g. nursing, fire, police, etc.)	Provide talking points to key community & industry leaders and encourage them to become local advocates (mutually beneficial) in public events (speaking).	College presidents; college PR staff.

**Key issue:
Rebuilding the State’s investment in the colleges**

Core theme:
“We are critical to our economy.”

Message:		How it will be communicated:	To be used by:
A	Thousands of businesses rely on the technical colleges for skilled workers and advanced/customized training needs.	“Communities – First” Advocacy brochure (insert would include testimonials from business and industry; links to key web pages.)	College presidents; District Board members. (Meet with business/municipal leaders to request assistance in advocating for the technical colleges.)
B	Maintaining flexibility to respond to retraining displaced workers is key to economic development success.	“Communities – First” Advocacy brochure (insert would include testimonials or personal stories from students.)	College presidents; District Board members.
C	Primary provider of education and training for workforce development.	Series of articles to associations and local chambers of commerce for newsletter placement; Q & A forums or articles between presidents and state or business leaders.	College PR representatives; college presidents.
D	We improve the competitiveness of our local business through training.	Face to face meetings with legislators; emails to legislators. Use testimonials of grads and their employers from unique programs.	College presidents; District Board members. Local business leaders can be recruited to assist.
E	We provide entrepreneurs with the tools to succeed, grow, expand, etc.	Feature news story by each college, highlighting success story/case study/testimonials.	College PR staff (Consider using Wisconsin Entrepreneurs Network and Wisconsin Technology Council).
F	The technical colleges are the economic engine and local business and industry direct us on training needs through program advisory committees.	Letter or email to all advisory committee members to reinforce the value of the technical colleges and request future assistance.	College presidents to lay foundation with advisory committees. Program Deans to assist.
G	Wisconsin’s businesses are relying heavily upon the technical colleges to provide skilled workers so they can remain competitive.	Request letters from association executive directors and business leaders to legislators (health care, biotech, advanced manufacturing, etc.).	College presidents.
H	For every \$1 invested in our local technical college.....(local payback).	News articles; Op/Ed articles; newsletters from updated Socio-economic study.	College presidents; college PR staff; Statewide Marketing staff; System staff.

Key Issue:
Strengthening the understanding of colleges’ value and role in economic development

Core theme:

“We are the front door of higher education for ALL.”

Message:		How it will be communicated:	To be used by:
A	Every community is dramatically improved as a result of its technical college (customized to meet local needs).	Printed pieces to the public, such as annual reports, newsletters, course listings, etc.	College PR/Marketing staff.
B	We help individuals and communities realize their full potential; we grow communities; we turn lives around.	Printed pieces to the public, such as annual reports, newsletters, course listings, etc.	College PR/Marketing staff.
C	We strengthen communities by raising the level of education for those who would otherwise not receive it.	Op/Ed and feature news articles with testimonials of heart-warming success stories.	College PR representatives.
D	Investing in technical colleges is the best way to fight brain drain (graduates raise their earning power and overwhelmingly stay in Wisconsin).	Op/Ed articles, news releases and newsletters with the latest graduate statistics.	College PR staff; Statewide Marketing staff; System staff.
F	Where would students turn without our locally based technical colleges?	Op/Ed articles and feature news releases with student testimonials and success stories.	College PR staff; Statewide Marketing staff; System staff.
G	Our technical colleges are an antidote for a high demand of public and social services.	Op/Ed articles citing socio-economic statistics and turn-around-your-lives success stories.	College PR staff; Statewide Marketing staff; System staff.

Key Issue:

Promoting how accessible the colleges are (“front door” access for all learners)

Core theme:
**“Our longstanding governing authority drives
our flexibility and responsiveness.”**

Message:		How it will be communicated:	To be used by:
A	The technical college boards model is designed to represent the world of <i>work</i> and is a big part of making the colleges responsive and successful.	Position papers; One-to-one contacts.	College presidents; system president.
B	The loss of local control means additional bureaucracy and will thwart progress, flexibility and responsiveness of the colleges; will diminish the ability to make decisions locally; need to remain nimble.	Letters to legislators; One-on-one communications.	College presidents; system president.
C	Our boards are like effective corporate boards, representing district needs through employer, employee, school, and public official representatives.	Board bios included in annual reports or any other communications to stakeholders; One-to-one contacts; graph/outline showing who our board members are.	College communications/marketing representatives; presidents.
D	Our current flexibility allows us to constantly shift and amend our program mix to meet the needs of our community in a cost-effective manner.	Letters of support from employers and community leaders to legislators.	College PR staff; presidents; advisory groups.
E	Preserving local taxing authority will preserve responsiveness and flexibility to local business and industry needs.	Letters to legislators; One-to-one communications; Op-Ed article by system president.	College presidents; college PR staff; System president; System staff; Statewide Marketing staff.
F	District Boards are accountable and representative. Candidates <i>apply, interview</i> , and are appointed by <i>elected officials in a public process reviewed and approved by the state WTCS Board.</i> , Boards operate publicly and are <i>very accessible</i> .	Letters to legislators; One-to-one communications; Op-Ed article by system president.	College presidents; System president; College PR staff.
G	The diversity of our boards provides for more insight into the variety of needs of our communities; balanced perspective.	Student/employer testimonial letters of support to legislators.	College PR staff; college presidents.
H	Rapidly changing demographics in the state requires responsive, flexible training options, including ESL.	Included in Op/Ed pieces and letters to legislators.	College presidents; college PR staff.

Key issue:
**Preserving governance/authority and strengthening the link between
governance/authority to outcomes/responsiveness**

Other strategies

In addition to the specific message points illustrated above, there are other strategies the colleges and system may want to consider in its advocacy efforts. Suggestions include:

- ✧ Begin a statewide network of program advisory committee members to use as advocates.
- ✧ Make a partnership request to secretaries of Commerce and Workforce Development to infuse the value of the technical colleges into their speeches (similar to what the Governor does).
- ✧ V.I.P. events for business and industry leaders.
- ✧ Board members to become more visible at community and college events.
- ✧ Board members assigned to shadow their legislators to keep them informed.
- ✧ Build alumni capacity to assist the advocacy efforts of the colleges.
- ✧ Request that colleges ask all their local business contacts a question about what their technical college means to them and build a data base with hundreds of business testimonials from around the state.

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