Rich Gross Solutions during the period of June 22-27, 2014, conducted a feasibility study to seek the counsel of business, industry and community leaders to determine if Central Community College should launch a major gifts campaign in Kearney and the surrounding area, and, if so, which initiatives would best serve the needs of the region. RGS interviewed 53 community leaders for the study and 14 individuals participated in community summits.

**Economic and Workforce Concerns**

Three major economic and workforce concerns in the community were identified:

- Ensuring a skilled, trained and educated workforce that supports/meets the needs of local business/industry.
- Attracting and retaining enough people, particularly those interested in the area’s business and industry; it is difficult to find employees without having to recruit from outside the region.
- Addressing wages, worker’s compensation and affordable housing.

**Economic Opportunities**

Study participants also identified economic opportunities for Kearney, with the following three items emerging as most important:

- Expansion of the health care industry, particularly in conjunction with the new veterans’ home and the new health education facility at the University of Nebraska-Kearney.
- Strategic growth as it drives and diversifies the economy, positioning Kearney as a progressive, attractive and well-rounded community providing quality of life to its residents.
- Agriculture has and will continue to impact the community providing opportunities, especially as it embraces and optimizes technology.
Feasibility Study

Findings of the Feasibility Study

The study found that a significant majority of participants believe Central Community College is worthy of a private-sector support:
- 98% of respondents are favorable toward CCC.
- 93% of respondents are favorable toward the college administration.
- 98% are favorable toward the foundation board of directors.
- 88% are favorable toward the proposed major gifts campaign.
- 94% indicated they are or might be willing to contribute to a campaign on behalf of CCC.
- Nearly three-fourths indicated they are or might be willing to participate in a campaign on behalf of CCC.
- Nearly three-fourths place the needs of CCC as a high or medium priority compared to their other philanthropic priorities.
- 76% believe the proposed goal of raising $11.5 million through a major gifts campaign is attainable.
- More than three-fourths believe the proposed campaign schedule is well-advised.

Challenges

The study identified the following challenges for the college in Kearney:
- Obtaining the financial support needed if CCC is to remain responsive to industry and community needs.
- Contending with limited space and out-of-date facilities while striving to provide the up-to-date programs and facilities students, universities and employers require.
- Increasing marketing efforts in order to attract students and educate the community regarding the value of CCC’s contributions to the region.
- Broadening outreach in order to respond to regional needs and provide access to CCC’s quality programs throughout the entire service area.
- Addressing perceptions about the value of technical and workforce training programs.

Strengths

Community members participating in the study identified these strengths for the college:
- Serves the needs of the community and provides students with opportunities to obtain access to quality educational programs that enable them to readily enter the workforce or transfer to other educational institutions.
- Works with area businesses to ascertain and provide the relevant training and qualified employees needed for industry success.
- Offers affordable and geographically-convenient access to quality programs that meet the needs of traditional and nontraditional students alike.
- Employs qualified, caring and student-centered leadership, faculty and staff.
- Develops and maintains partnerships with area educational institutions.

Campaign Management Initiatives

Participants are very positive toward the three initiatives proposed by the college for a major gifts campaign.
- 98% of respondents are overwhelmingly favorable toward the new Kearney Learning Center initiative. Respondents indicated that the facility is needed if the college is to continue responding to student needs.
- 96% are overwhelmingly favorable toward the scholarship initiative, believing that scholarships provide the extra assistance students need and often can’t obtain otherwise. Many believe scholarships can also serve as a valuable recruiting tool.
- 75% of interviewees are favorable toward the Small Business Institute initiative and only 2% were unfavorable, indicating that this initiative could be vital to the region’s economic development.
Recommendations

As a result of the overwhelmingly positive answers in the study, Rich Gross Solutions recommends that Central Community College initiate a three-phased, 18-month major gifts campaign, rather than the 24-month campaign originally proposed. Other recommendations are:
- Set a working goal of $10 million in cash and three- to five-year pledges, grants, contracts and planned gifts.
- Appoint a full-time campaign manager.
- Address interviewee concerns by enhancing visibility and awareness.
- Conduct a series of business and industry partnership forums.
- Enhance business and industry partnerships.
- Prepare a detailed plan of campaign.
- Conduct data-driven prospect research.
- Prepare a comprehensive case for support.
- Implement service committees and soliciting divisions.

Campaign Strategy

To further enhance CCC’s ability to achieve goals of a major gifts campaign, Rich Gross Solutions recommends that CCC address the following common interviewee concerns during the planning, awareness and solicitation phases of the campaign. Items are listed in order of frequency, with most often mentioned being first.
- Increase marketing efforts and broaden outreach in order to enhance awareness of the opportunities CCC offers the region and its students.
- Develop a strong case for private-sector support that demonstrates a solid return on donor investment.
- Strengthen the relationship with regional secondary and postsecondary educational institutions.
- Contend with issues surrounding property tax increases, anti-tax sentiments and the perceptions of high government spending.
- Cultivate strong campaign leadership representing a broad range of community and industry interests.
- Remain sensitive to fundraising competition and economic concerns.

Campaign Management

A critical factor in the success of a major gifts campaign is the campaign manager. This person must view the campaign as his or her highest work priority and devote full-time work effort and energy to assure a successful campaign. It is recommended that the president appoint a full-time campaign manager.

Summary

Central Community College’s long-time presence in Kearney has contributed to the growth and development of the community. However, respondents in this study appear to strongly agree with the college administration and Board of Governors that the current CCC-Kearney facility is no longer adequate to meet technical, workforce and other educational needs in Nebraska’s fastest-growing county and one of the state’s fastest growing communities.

While this study identifies challenges for CCC in Kearney, it indicates extremely strong support in the community for a new CCC facility in Kearney and for a major gifts campaign to help support the Kearney Center initiative as well as a scholarship funding initiative and a Small Business Institute.
Central Community College has played a key role in the growth of Kearney and Buffalo County. In 2012-13, CCC served 2,198 students from Buffalo County—80% in credit courses. We are committed to continuing as a partner in the community’s development, as demonstrated by the recent purchase of 32 acres of land at 11th Street and 30th Avenue for a new Kearney Center.