



COMMON THEMES AND BEST PRACTICES:

Results from the 2016-2018 AIM Program Site Visits

EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

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An aligned, integrated academic health center has programs in place for optimal engagement with local communities, governments, and potential external partners

SELECTED SITE VISIT OBSERVATIONS:

“There is a need to strategically demonstrate the value added within this rich academic and clinical environment to both internal and external stakeholders.”

“There is an opportunity to enhance these relationships further and utilize community perspectives and concerns to help shape education and research needs in support of clinical activities. A real opportunity exists to work in partnership with the local community to identify the issues that are of utmost importance and interest to the population being served.”

“The academic health center should enhance strategic partnerships and partner with other institutions that specialize in the target areas.”

Key Points for Alignment and Integrative Strategies

- Identify gaps in what the community and community leaders know about your institution
 - > Strategically demonstrate academic health center value
- Develop pathways to bring in collaborative partnerships and programs that meet community needs (e.g., education pipelines)
- Focus on disseminating new knowledge resulting from research and clinical science to community-level and national-level concerns and meaningfulness
- Seek out community concerns to identify joint programs that can integrate and align institutional functions
 - > Use local care-delivery operations to inform the education and research missions

- Build strategic partnerships to develop pipelines, larger networks, funding opportunities, and shared goals

Discussion Focus

Build enhanced relationships with external stakeholders

While the AIM program encountered many examples of best practices for external communication and partnering, it appeared that broadening the academic health center's perspective to include multiple outside perspectives and potential remained a relatively nascent priority for many if not most academic health centers.

The AIM site visits presented excellent opportunities for fresh sets of eyes to see potential collaborations to benefit programs, budgets, and strategic planning for the academic health center.

The consultants often found that institutions were not as optimally engaged as they might be with external stakeholders, including their local

communities, state governments, and potential external partners; extensive discussions during AIM visits led to insights regarding how better engagement with such entities could help advance alignment. Academic health centers will likely benefit from external relationships from the perspective of availability of teaching sites, recruitment of patients, potential for philanthropic growth, and opportunities to address the social determinants of health.

SDOH and Community Outreach

As addressing the social determinants of health continues to increase in importance for the missions of academic health centers, the need to step outside the “ivory walls” becomes paramount. Identifying measures that might improve health and healthy living in an effort to reduce need for utilization of healthcare is a common intellectual activity for academic health centers. However, taking action to implement those measures is a more recent phenomenon. Add to that the value—both in healthcare savings and in interface with the health of the community—of realizing and acting upon the knowledge that the follow-on care and activities of patients is a major influencer in terms of cost of episodes of care, need to consider readmission to hospital, and outcomes in chronic disease. However, meaningful pre-care and post-care often requires interface with the community outside of the academic health center. Thus, relationships with physicians, other providers and systems, and community organizations are often important to academic health centers achieving best possible outcomes and effectively addressing the social determinants of health.

Importance of ‘Telling Your Story’

One of the pervasive reasons for external communication and partnering is universal need for academic health centers to ensure that funders, potential program partners, and future students know the good things the health center is doing. As one AIM participant noted, “...the academic health center has substantial opportunities to do more to ‘tell its story’ and share knowledge about its accomplishments with key local, state, national, and international stakeholders...improved community programs will be dependent upon enhanced communication and developing a sense of shared goals between the academic health

center and community organizations.” Whether an academic health center is telling the legislature about the excellent use of state funds or relating to a corporation about how the health of its workforce would be benefitted by partnering with the academic health center, external communication is important.

Engage Stakeholders in Your Vision

Besides waving the flag as a means of seeking ongoing funding, external communications enhance the possibility of identifying new stakeholders or new opportunities for existing stakeholders to take part in new academic health center programs. Following another site visit, AIM consultants noted “There is an opportunity to enhance these relationships further and utilize community perspectives and concerns to help shape education and research needs in support of clinical activities. A real opportunity exists to work in partnership with the local community to identify the issues that are of utmost importance and interest to the population being served.” This broader participation in strategic planning, programmatic growth, and fundraising enriches the vision of the academic health center and garners more spokespersons to share the vision and encourage forward progress.

Alignment is perhaps easiest to discuss and evaluate within a team that works together daily and discusses the vision for moving forward in a myriad of regular meetings, etc. However, expanding the perspective of the academic health center allows for collaborative planning, developing wider networks for teaching and clinical activities, and the development of programs to address local concerns and state or regional priorities within the strategic planning process of the academic center. This important aspect of the AIM visit assists academic health centers to discuss value added, determine possible partners, and emphasize the impacts they have on a broad swath of their state and region.