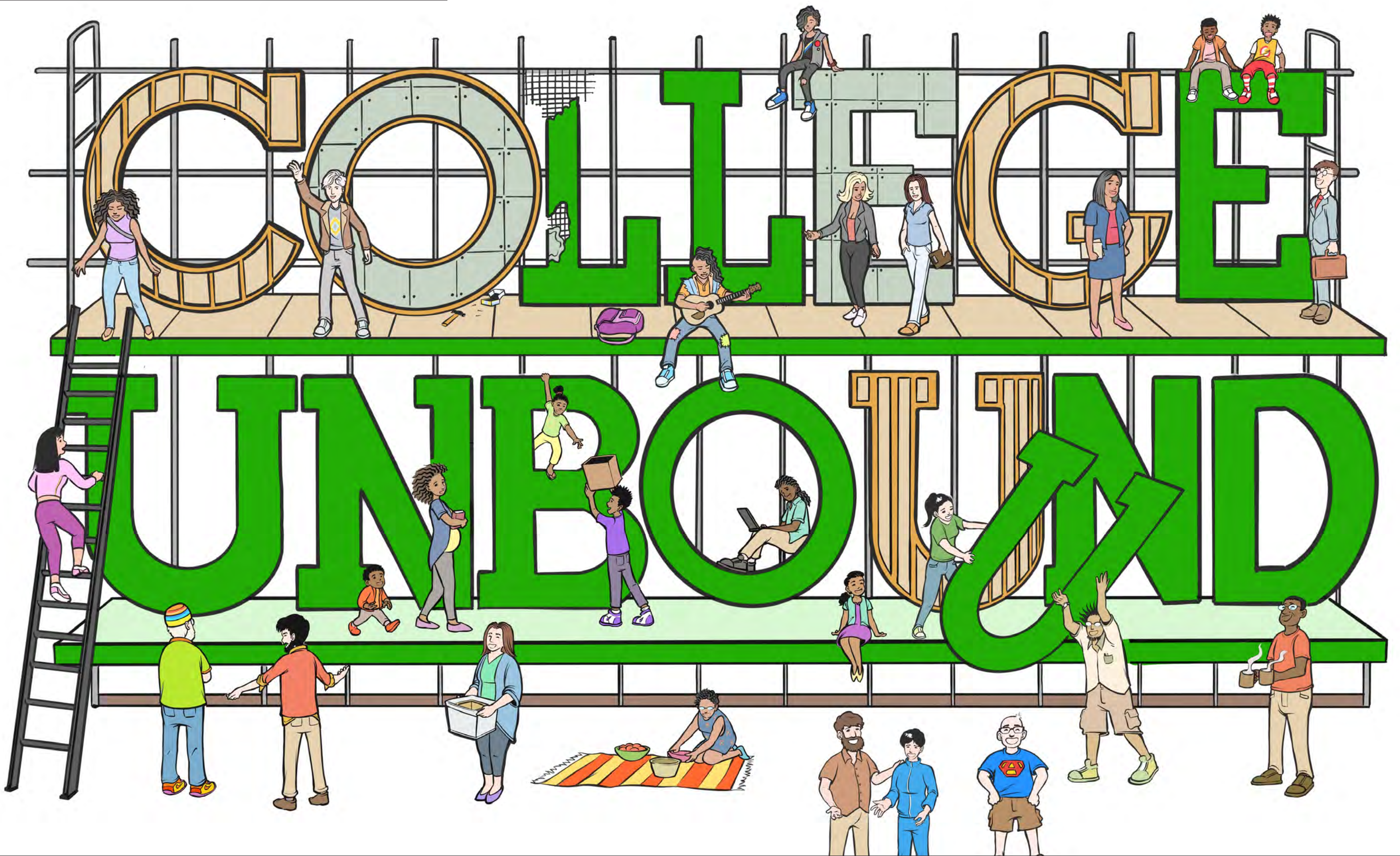


COLLEGE UNBOUND

2022– 2027

Strategic Plan

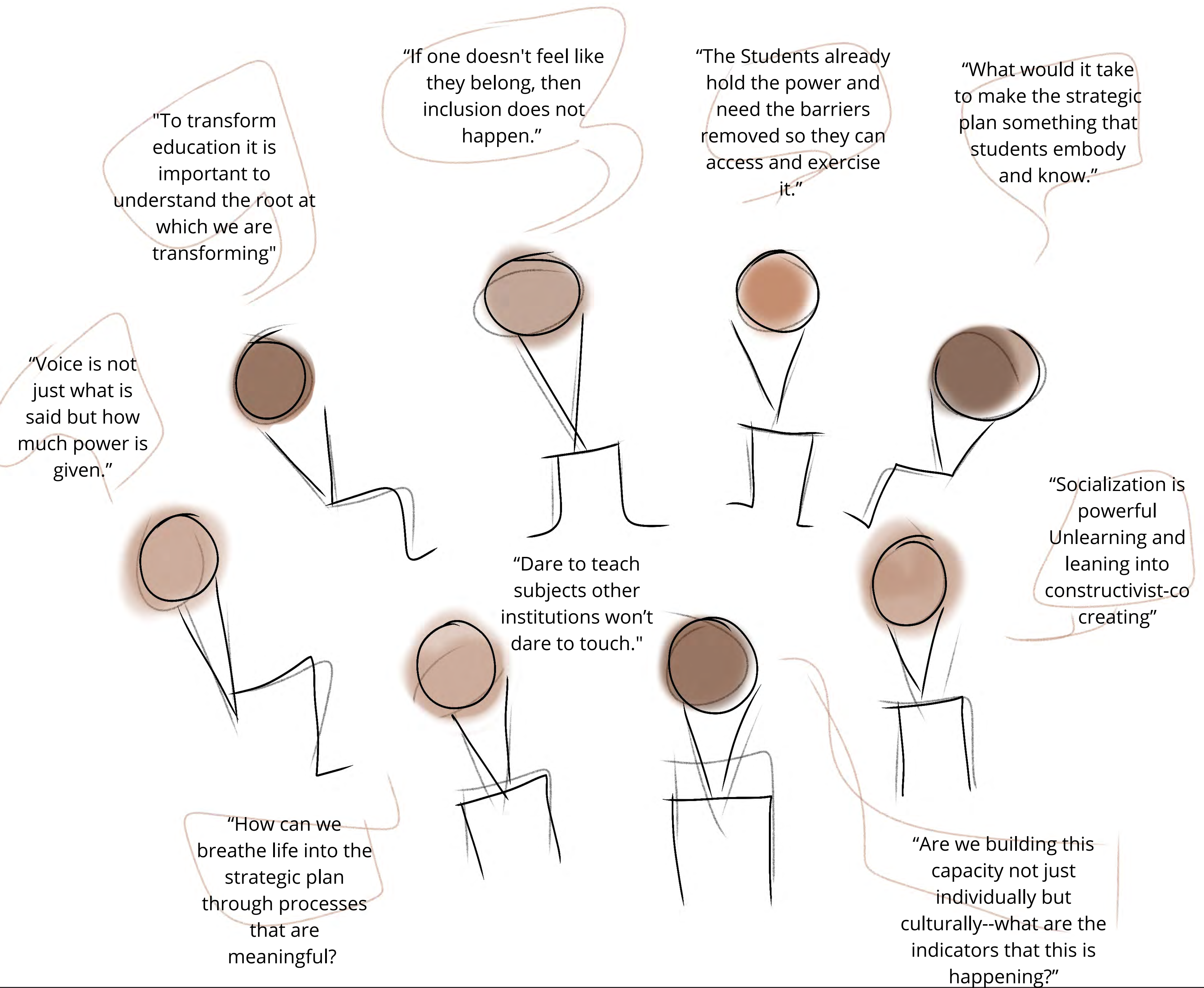


College Unbound models the possibilities of higher education for adults where **lifelong learning is valued and enables people to be fuller participants in creating the lives to which they aspire.**

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acknowledgments



Dedications can be such an outward facing gesture - from authors to those who influenced them. This Strategic Plan bucks that sentiment.

The collaborators of this document are also the ones affected by its design and implementation and they are the ones who influenced its design and direction. This is an "unbounded" dedication.

The word bubbles and quotes across this page are sentiments and insistences that were shared throughout the design process that, in turn, influenced the design and writing of the document.

Additionally, in lieu of a traditional dedication, offered here is an excerpt of the poem Paul Robeson by Gwendolyn Brooks which speaks to the mutuality of this project and this process:

**we are each other's
harvest:**

**we are each other's
business:**

**we are each other's
magnitude and bond.**

Shared below is a non-exhaustive list of many of the stakeholders and collaborators who co-authored this document and carried it into existence.

- The Equity Subcommittee formed early in the Strategic Plan design process to ensure that there was a common language and framing to enter fully into a plan committed to equity and social justice. This group has grown together and looks to evolve into the Equity and Strategic Efficacy Committee to follow this work over the years ahead. Its members include Amanda Esons, Anjel Newmann, MeEsh Fontes, Michael Walker, Michael Reaves, Sonia Thomas, Sylvia Spears, John Saltmarsh, Adam Bush, Jennifer Davis Allison, and Silas Pinto.
- The Executive Committee of the Board of College Unbound oversaw the development and authorship of the four strategic goals that inform this document and were then workshopped and approved by the full Board of the College.
- CU's Core Staff met from Spring 2020-Spring 2022 to workshop goals and implementation.
- CU Faculty and CU Students have been and continue to be core partners in thinking through the implementation of the tactics and strategies discussed throughout this document.
- Anthony Vieira's illustrations of Fire, Water, Wind, Stars, and Roots brought a sense of epic beauty to this document. Ant made the words within feel everlasting and grounded all at once.
- Several colleagues from around the country guided workshops that surfaced many of the themes that are found within this strategic plan: Tim Eatman, Urmillah Venkatesh, Carol Bebelle, Lisa Lee and, Vickie Choitz.
- Anjel Newmann's ethic and aesthetic should be felt throughout this document. She has guided the Strategic Plan from notes to the finished product you see here. And it could only have happened so authentically from someone who knows CU so intimately as alumni, as faculty, and as a partner.

land acknowledgment

While virtual and spread over lots of spaces today-- we start our gathering at CU with a land acknowledgement co-written by CU students graduating today. We do this not only to acknowledge the historical legacy of colonialism and the legacies of damage that further exacerbated throughout higher education, but also to acknowledge multiple ways of knowing.

The spaces we reside, the land we are all on, are part of who we are and how we know the world.

In doing this today, we surface questions that are so embedded into both the the WHY and the WORK of College Unbound --We ask:

Whose knowledge gets to be named?

Who gets honored?

And with that too-- Whose knowledge gets erased?

These are Questions that drive the whole curriculum of CU

College Unbound's gathering places in Rhode Island stand on the ancestral and present lands of the Narragansett People. We pay respects to their elders past and present and through our work we also want to take time to consider the many legacies of violence, silencing, displacement, migration, and settlement that bring us here.

So when CU community gathers, we want to continue to be in dialogue about what it means to live, learn, and work together in solidarity.

Mission, Vision, Target Market

College Unbound's Vision and Mission have guided the creation of this Strategic Plan. But there is a tension inherent in the space between every Mission and Vision statement: one speaks to the world as it is and the other of the world we want to create. This document wrestles with that tension.

Vision

College Unbound models the possibilities of higher education for adults where lifelong learning is valued and enables people to be fuller participants in creating the lives to which they aspire.

Mission

College Unbound's mission is to reinvent the higher education experience for underserved adult learners, using a student-driven model of rigorous and engaged scholarship.

Target Market

College Unbound believes everyone has a right to postsecondary education. CU looks to serve adult learners who have not yet completed their degree and are able to participate fully in the curriculum with the necessary technology, language, writing, and other systemic supports. CU's program is designed for adults looking to advance in their current careers, move into new vocations, or spark change that improves the quality of life for themselves and others.

Who is this Strategic Plan for?

A Strategic Plan guides institutional fidelity towards its vision. Here, this Strategic Plan stands to show how College Unbound can better support a world where **“lifelong learning is valued and enables people to be fuller participants in creating the lives to which they aspire.”**

This is messy work that needs to bring all the stakeholders of the College together: Staff, Board, Leadership, Students, Alumni, Community Partners, Faculty, Extended Family and Community of Care.

This document exists to help stakeholders see themselves reflected within and in relationship to the institution.



College Unbound's **Institutional History**

In an historic and unanimous vote on May 20, 2015, the Rhode Island Council on Postsecondary Education welcomed College Unbound as a degree-granting postsecondary option in the state. It was standing room only as College Unbound supporters flooded the boardroom to hear the final verdict.

Rhode Island Commissioner of Postsecondary Education Dr. Jim Purcell praised the college, saying, "Education is all about bringing forth the capacity that exists within people, and College Unbound offers people the opportunity to expand their minds, finish their degrees, and build better lives." Dr. Purcell continued, saying, "These types of adult degree completion programs are transformative not just for the individuals and their families, but also for our community and workforce."

In the Spring of 2019, College Unbound received Federal Financial aid eligibility, enabling CU students to qualify for Pell grants and other financial aid options. In Fall 2019 College Unbound welcomed 100 new students, more than 75% of whom receive Pell grants.

In 2020, College Unbound was granted initial accreditation status by the New England Commission of Higher Education. Accreditation by the Commission indicates that the institution meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process.

In 2021, College Unbound was granted authorization from Rhode Island to work with students online outside of RI through the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA).

At the conclusion of College Unbound's original Strategic Plan which ends in 2021, we look back on the opening words of that document which spoke about CU's intent to establish a RI base in order to grow outside of the state.

We will operate in Rhode Island, becoming accredited and targeting the 110,600 adults with some college credit but no degree. We will focus on affinity groups including single mothers, Native American tribes, public employees, participants in low-income housing programs, the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated, and cohorts within businesses which offer tuition reimbursement programs. Building a strong foundation in Rhode Island allows us space to further refine the model and the systems that support it in preparation for expansion across the nation.

It is that history we take into this next strategic plan.

Strategic Plan Development Process

- In March 2020, CU Board Retreat introduced the Strategic Planning Process for the years 2022-2026. In that meeting the board shared a commitment to center an equity framework across the institution.
- When Covid-19 hit later that month it became clear that that commitment was needed to guide financial, curricular, staffing, and infrastructure decisions. Planned stakeholder engagement activities were postponed until after NECHE's visit.
- In December 2020 the Executive Committee of the Board began meeting monthly around a planning timeline and outlined four Strategic Questions.
- In January 2021 CU inaugurated a public strategic planning and community learning process built around three methodologies that each have a history of use within movements for social justice and equity: Storytelling, Power Mapping, and Outcomes Harvesting.
- In February 2021 CU leadership met with each board member about their connection and engagement with the Strategic Questions.
- In March the Strategic Planning Retreat reframed the questions into four Strategic Goals and approved an Equity Subcommittee to define and frame CU's commitment to a justice framework.
- Both the Equity SubCommittee and the Executive Committee have each met regularly to debrief and consult on the development of the Strategic Plan and the Fall 2021 meeting of the CU Board provided initial feedback on the criteria and outcomes within the four strategic goals.
- The Strategic Plan was approved in March 2022 and stands now as the public guide to the next years of College Unbound.

Who We Want To Become

We first set out to write an equity statement, but in doing so also needed to foreground an understanding that Higher Education has not traditionally been a site for equity. Too often we have found that equity statements come across as empty promises. Racial hierarchies and patriarchy are both embedded within and are exasperated by higher education. We work to center equity and justice in this Strategic Plan because we want to ensure we are better holding ourselves to account.

There is not a specific “Equity & Social Justice Strategic Goal” shared in this plan. An equity lens was applied in the crafting of each of the four goals and their criteria. This was hard, slow, and intentional work that required also looking inward at where and how College Unbound has not embodied this practice consistently over its initial five years. And, as this Strategic Planning process comes to a close, we want to assert that “equity” stands as a baseline for this work. We are interested in exploring and pushing new directions for College Unbound that look to transformation, justice, righteousness, and reparations..

Higher education was not designed for the student body College Unbound wishes to support. Instead, in this Strategic Plan, we co-sign here a statement of intent and purpose in both working towards a world we look to take an active hand in creating and in the methods (and contradictions) that we will use within our own institution as it continues to evolve.

The four goals on the page that follows hold within them the aspirations of a College we are working to become.

College Unbound's **New Strategic Goals**

Strategic Goal I

College Unbound will foster an environment of lifelong learning and capacity building for its extensive community of learners and collaborators.

Strategic Goal II

College Unbound will root its sustainability in a culture of equity and student success.

Strategic Goal III

College Unbound will capture evidence of transformational and equitable outcomes that result in the enhanced well-being of our students, their families, and their communities.

Strategic Goal IV

College Unbound will grow, adapt, and innovate with a commitment to equity, place, and purpose.



How We Look to Work with this Strategic Plan?



The Four Strategic Goals and their Criteria will guide an annual assessment program at all levels of the institution including:

- A Dashboard to be shared with Board quarterly.
- Internal staff self evaluations guided by the Goals of this plan.
- Criteria to develop partnerships and sites for expansion.
- Fundraising and development strategies aligned with these Goals.
- An evolving glossary as our language and context continues to shift.
- Updated tactics for each goal and documentation of new outcomes annually.
- Public workshops and exercises that build and support the institutional capacities to implement this plan and guide institutional accountability.

COLLEGE UNBOUND

shifting winds glossary



**a glossary that reveals the way we hope
to shift, change and grow.**

Why a Glossary?

College Unbound has a distinct educational mission and model that values student experience, community, equity, and innovation. In order to advance our work, we are committed to praxis - ongoing cycles of reflection and action. We understand that a commitment to reflection requires a willingness to engage in continued interrogation of our existing values, ways of being, and educational practices. This ethic of inquiry is not intended to be critique for the sake of critique but rather to lead us forward in continuing to manifest the type of educational environment that we believe all students deserve. We, further, recognize that praxis is necessary to ensure that we are not unintentionally replicating structures of harm that are so often embedded but invisible in traditional higher education settings. We hope through this Strategic Plan to deepen our existing work and to demonstrate over time what is possible in higher education; the shifting winds that will make degree attainment more accessible, socially just, and liberatory.

As we advance this work, we seek to move with clarity, focus, and intentionality. In an effort to ensure that readers of the Strategic Plan have a shared understanding of key terms, we are offering a glossary. Not only is this a good practice in the context of strategic planning, but it also allows us to be clear about the current positionality of the College as well as the ways in which we hope to deepen our collective work. This glossary serves as a bridge between where we are now and where we hope to be in the future related to some of CU's core values and assumptions. We recognize that the terms in this glossary sit in relationship to one another, are best explored in conversation with one another, and reflect both institutional practices as well as the desired outcome of such practices. We hope this glossary will support the development of common understandings that we will continue to iterate over time as well as a collective vision for how the College Unbound will exist as a community in the future.

We see this glossary as a part of the Strategic Plan that will be updated and continue to evolve with new examples of CU's commitment toward the institution we want to become. One with the winds at our back.

Community

Our community holds our norms, values, customs, and shared identity. In both shared place and virtual space we have a sense of connectedness or fellowships with others.

College Unbound's curriculum is based around the cohort– where 10 students and their Lab Faculty gather weekly to learn with one another. In addition:

- We eat together..
- We build cohorts that recognize prior relationships.
- We utilize libraries and other public spaces of shared learning.
- We recognize and honor intergenerational learning through our curriculum and support services.

Collective

- To deepen opportunities for people to learn within collective spaces like affinity groups and collaborative working groups across the institution.
- Better provide for students (even as CU grows outside of Providence) to visit one another and have time to collaborate outside the bounds of any academic calendar.

Diversity, Accessibility, Inclusion, Equity

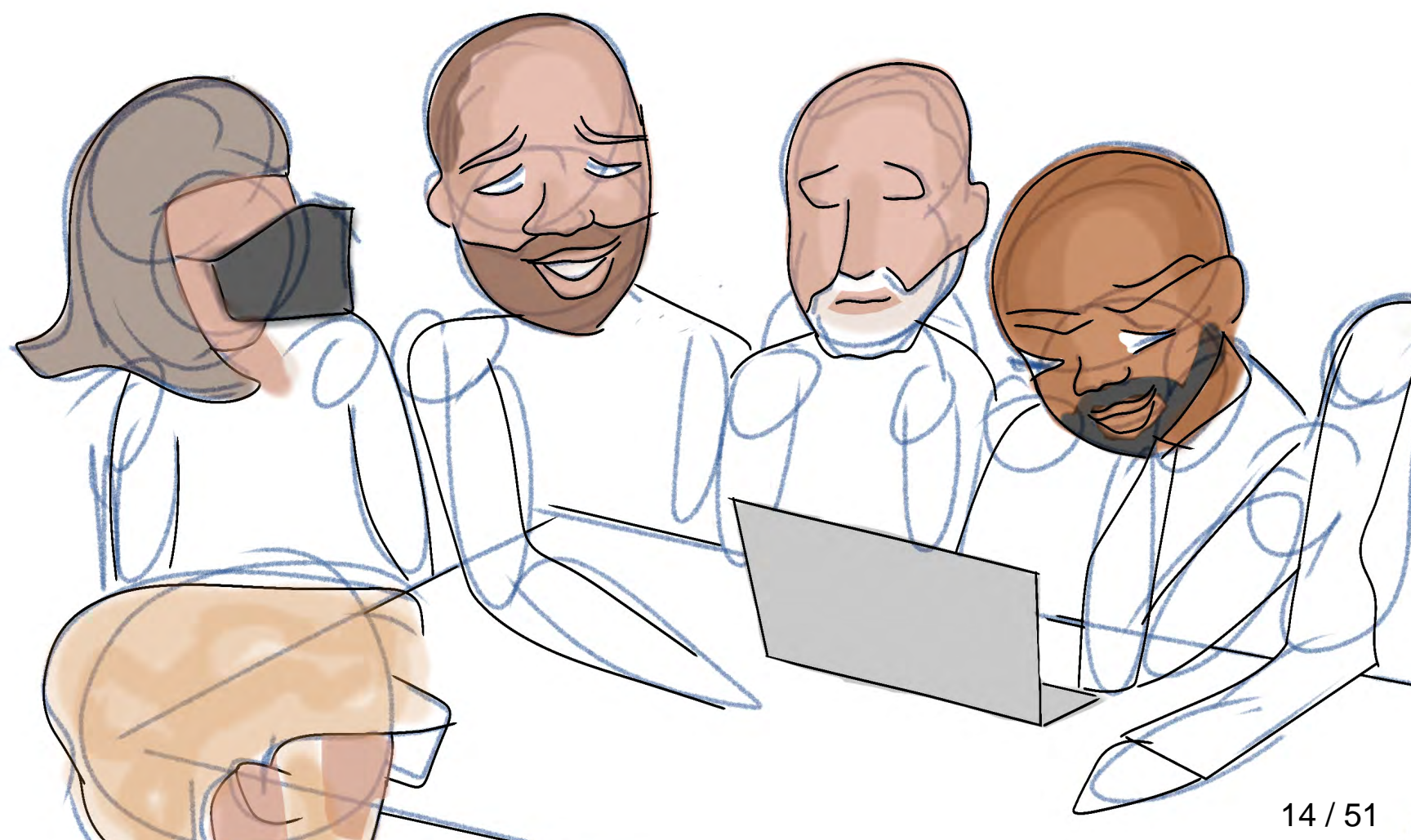
Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion are the underpinnings for a world that recognizes, values, and works to support differences of perspective, knowledge, and ability.

At CU, we try to use that framing to create an intentional culture across our student body, our faculty, and our staff that requires commitment to shared resources and ongoing action towards and assessment of progress.

Representation, Belonging, Accountability, Justice, & Anti-racism

Take a larger role in insisting on both reckonings with injustices throughout higher education's history and in pushing for policy changes that support adult learners in the current higher education moment.

Build a faculty and staff retention model that shows lasting investment and care in our CU community of collaborators. Fund and staff the CU Center for Racial Equity and Restorative Justice as an organizing hub for work throughout the institution.



Student Voice

At College Unbound, student voice refers to the thoughts, views and opinions of students on their educational journey.

In its most expansive form, student voice is participatory in nature and embedded in every aspect of a learning environment, which in turn supports student investment in learning and increases persistence.

College Unbound works to center student voice through its:

- Curriculum design process.
- Student driven projects that drive each learner's degree plan.
- Cohorts supported by an Alumni Mentor whose speaks to their own journey.
- Monthly open-agenda Town Hall meetings for students.
- Student representative on the governing Board of the College.

Growth

College Unbound's use of Growth refers to student growth, faculty and staff professional development, and institutional growth in its student enrollment, cohort sites, and spread and influence.

College Unbound's Growth can be seen on several levels:

- Student growth is best understood through CU's commitment to the Big 10 graduation requirement which asks each student to compile portfolios demonstrating their growth over time in the Leadership & Change practices.
- Faculty and staff professional development is supported through honorariums.
- Institutional growth reflected in CU's expansion into supporting students online and in Philadelphia and Chicago in both place and affinity-based cohorts.

Sovereignty

Build richer opportunities for engagement and representation where students feel ownership over their stories and where there is a culture of shared student control over decision making.

In doing so, move from an institution-to-student conversation to a student-driven communication culture where the means of sharing are held by students and supported by the institution.

Adaptation, Evolution, & Depth

CU's institutional growth can hold humility within it and an assumption that CU will look and feel different depending on where it is located and with whom it partners. This means clarity around curricular change, around localized student success supports, and around cohort-based student culture initiatives.

This model of growth also signals an understanding that expansion as well as constriction may both be measures of a job well done.

COLLEGE UNBOUND

shifting winds
glossary

Embeddedness & Relationality

Deepen place-based possibility by investing in a permanent administrative home for CU that may also hold dual purposes as a site for the College and a site to recognize and celebrate community-based learning.

Develop cohorts both in-place and through virtual spaces where student work has lasting impact on enhancing equity and justice.

Grow a curricular practice of acknowledgement and research of decolonization practices that guides each cohort, wherever they gather at CU, to understand the histories of where they stand and to know ways to be involved in local efforts for environmental, racial, gender, and economic justice.

Sustainability

College Unbound's sustainability is about the daily maintenance and capacity building needed to meet the needs of the present moment without compromising the ability to address our future, yet unknown, needs.

CU's practice of sustainability also recognizes that environmental health, social equity, and economic vitality are interconnected and necessary in order to create thriving, healthy, diverse and resilient communities for this generation of CU students, staff, and faculty as well as generations that we hope will follow.

CU's practice of sustainability can be seen in

- The bi-weekly staff meetings centered on equity and workplace culture.
- Students gathering in Lab's each week sharing a meal.
- An institutional growth model not built around building a campus but, instead, engaging with under-utilized spaces of community learning.

Place & Purpose

CU thinks about the connection between Place and Purpose where we are grounded in our homes, our communities, and our cities and through that are able to create meaning and a sense of direction.

CU's commitment to the intersection of Place and Purpose is felt through its

- administrative and classroom activities that take place in under-utilized such as libraries and high school spaces it rents for College activities allowing for a nimble presence in spaces of community learning
- A land acknowledgment practice that recognizes legacies of violence and displacement in the spaces CU gathers.

Responsibility, Stewardship, Accountability, & Repair

While sustaining conveys a type of maintenance, CU looks to grow into embracing a commitment to renewal, care, and reparations where it acknowledges past institutional harms and works to be an institution that is an active force for a new, more just, higher education.



Lifelong-Learning & Inquiry

Lifelong learning insists that it is not possible to provide learners in formal educational settings with all the knowledge and skills they will need or desire throughout their lifetimes.

College Unbound's curriculum stands as an advocate for lifelong learning and the incremental, adaptive, and transformational change that it facilitates.

A commitment to lifelong learning runs through the institution but is perhaps most felt in CU's commitment to its students:

- College Unbound students are able to earn credit for prior learning, for concurrent learning outside of a classroom space, and relational learning within the collaborative structure of their World and Workplace Lab seminar.
- College Unbound alumni maintain relationships to the school as faculty, as mentors, and as next generation staff guiding the direction of the institution.

Transparency

Transparency stands as an ethic of practice across the organization that centers sharing of information for input and engagement.

College Unbound commits to a culture of transparency through its:

- Weekly core staff meetings.
- TGIF staff reflections and Faculty Newsletter.
- A planning and assessment structure that shares information between Board Committees and Staff Committees.
- Open forums for students (monthly Town Halls), Faculty & Staff (Quarterly All-College Meetings), and Board.

Full Participation

An affirmative value focused on creating settings and institutions that enables people, whatever their identity, background, or institutional position, to thrive, realize their capabilities, engage meaningfully in institutional and public life, and contribute to the flourishing of others.

For CU, this signals a commitment to a more expansive definition of who the institution is responsible to and in what way. A dedication to Full Participation insists on an institutional commitment to a broader public, and in that commitment, an adherence to equity and social justice as driving central ethics and practices.

Shared Ownership

A shift to practices of shared decision-making where responsibility for facilitation is shared and equity and social justice work is embedded into weekly staff meetings.

Additional practices such as participatory budgeting and increased scholarship decisions run by faculty and alumni.

Responsiveness

In higher education, being able to react quickly refers to the urgency in which an institution can respond to its students' needs.

At College Unbound we demonstrate our responsiveness to student needs by:

- Weekly collaborative "co-lab" space for cross college problem solving to facilitate communication between academic affairs and student services.
- Student emergency response committee that provides financial support within 24 hours to any student in need
- Childcare, writing, and technology supports individualized for students.

Collective, Experimentation & Radical Joy

- Co-create a work culture that is soul-affirming and lifts up staff commitments beyond the workweek .
- Fund faculty & staff tackling equity and social justice projects.
- Explore new models for office engagement and staff culture.
- Recognize that joy and rest are essential parts of learning and collaboration and renewal.

COLLEGE UNBOUND

Strategic Plan 2022– 2027
Strategic Goal I



**College Unbound will foster an environment of
lifelong learning and capacity building for its
extensive community of learners and
collaborators.**

Over the next 5 years, College Unbound will work to be a physical, virtual, and emotional touchpoint for individuals and organizations to tackle cultural change and collective learning.



Strategic Goal I | Core Strategies

1. A Publicly Engaged Curriculum with Value

2. Professional Development

3. Family and Community Engagement

“No one is born fully-formed: it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are.”

- Paulo Freire

A Publicly Engaged Curriculum with Value

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

College Unbound's commitment to rigorous, engaged scholarship that draws from and informs the lived experiences of CU students.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

A curriculum built out of transdisciplinary and intersectional approaches to collaborative problem solving that provides students with the tools to affect personal, professional, and community change towards a more just world.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- A unique curriculum built around valuing neighbors and colleagues as co-learners.
- The College's "Big10" learning outcomes that are grounded in personal, professional, and community engagement.
- A process for credentialing community based and lived experiences.

81%

of students say their CU project has had an impact on their life, community, and workplace.

Build a Student-Led Curriculum Audit Across the Three Ways of Earning Credit

Implement a Delivery and Assessment Feedback Audit to define and understand "value"

Develop a Coherent Strategy of Course/Credit Leading to Enhanced Value for Student, Family, & Community

**where do we
want to be?**

Professional Development



Cultivate a Faculty and Staff Culture that Facilitates Full Participation

Support Peer Mentorship Opportunities for Faculty & Staff

Develop An Onboarding, Training, and Programming Plan that Integrates CU Culture and Pedagogy

where do we want to be?

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

College Unbound bears a responsibility to its staff through and beyond CU.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

A faculty and staff culture that has embedded within it funded mentorship and growth opportunities to enable full participation.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- Weekly whole staff meetings and collaboratory opportunities to workshop institutional questions.
- A faculty culture built around peer-to-peer learning.
- Funds to support faculty and staff writing, reflection, and experimentation.

insight

A faculty fund to support professional development and mentorship opportunities for all core, mentor, and lab faculty.

GOAL I STRATEGY III

Family and Community Engagement

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

Tools for the extended community of College Unbound to engage in peer-based and credit-bearing learning experiences that are accessible and meaningful.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- Community scholarships for families and collaborators to enroll in courses for free.
- Weekly cohort-based learning that includes shared dinner and childcare stipends for all enrolled students.
- Credit-Bearing Community Learning Circles in libraries around the country.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

College Unbound's mission extends far beyond tuition-paying students and is concerned with higher education creating access for relevant learning experiences for all.

where do we want to be?

Become a National Leader in Curriculum that Honors the Work of Learning & Caregiving

Create Wrap-Around Support for Parenting and Formerly Incarcerated Students

Initiate Admissions & Enrollment Policy Changes to Encourage Multigenerational Engagement with CU

insight

Holistic student supports such as childcare stipends provided to all parenting students throughout their CU experience.

FRAMING THE WORK

Flames of Change

Fire is a life-altering element that has the ability to change the condition of all that it touches. Engaging with fire often leads to a radical shift in perspective and ways of being.



Lifelong Learning is the eternal flame which gives us the **capacity** to shape and sculpt our lives over time. For this goal, we commit to the following values:

- **Inquiry** - asking questions, making discoveries, and testing those discoveries in the search for new understanding.
- **Purpose** - supporting the creation of meaning and a sense of direction at the individual, organizational or collective level.
- **Sovereignty** - centering individuals and communities as self-determinate.

What are our **Driving Questions** for Strategic Goal I?

question I

In what ways are alumni engaged in College Unbound? How are we providing space for alumni to shape what these post-graduation engagements look and feel like?

question III

How do we define “community”? How are the various facets of our community impacted by our work? How are they helping to shape the work?

question II

Within our College Unbound environment, what elements must be present so that the concepts of “lifelong learning” and “capacity building” can be fully explored and made possible?

question IV

How do we back students, faculty, and staff in their roles of knowledge creators?

COLLEGE UNBOUND

Strategic Plan 2022– 2027

Strategic Goal II



College Unbound will root its sustainability in a culture of equity and student success.

Over the next 5 years College Unbound will continue to build and maintain its financial, enrollment, business, curricular, leadership, and governance structures that support a sustainable, accredited college.



Strategic Goal II Core Strategies

1. Financial Model that Responds to Evolving Student and National Conditions

2. Succession Planning for Board and Senior Leadership

3. Faculty and Alumni Pathways to and through the Institution

***"Can we embrace an ethos of sustainability that is not solely about the appropriate care of the world's resources, but is also about the creation of meaning -- the making of lives that we feel are worth living?"
-- Belonging, bell hooks***

Financial Model that Responds to Evolving Student and National Conditions

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

Revenue to support enrollment through the administration of Title IV, partnerships, as well as the diversification of its funding sources that center integrity and justice.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

College Unbound's serious commitment to the possible debt burden connected to returning to school.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- An Emergency Grant Program, a Childcare Grant Program, a Technology Grant program, and Financial Fitness supports to relieve financial strain.
- A WorkStudy program for adults to earn while they learn.
- An Institutional Aid program that works to limit student debt.

55%

of CU's alumni have graduated debt free.

Develop a Diversified Revenue Model

A part-time model designed for true and lasting relationships between faculty and institution

Reduce financial risk for students; protecting those who do not complete and limiting debt for those who finish their degree

where do we want to be?

Succession Planning for Board and Senior Leadership

Develop a Public Transition Plan for Senior Leadership of the College and for the Institution's Evolution

Implement a Fellowship Program to Support Future Leaders of Higher Education and CU Specifically

Build Pathways for Board and Senior Leadership of the College to be Composed of CU Alumni and Those who Share their Experiences

where do we want to be?

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

Clear pathways for leadership development and recruitment to ensure stability throughout the organization.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

College Unbound's need to train, guide, and recruit new generations of leadership throughout the college.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- Leadership transition process that is built around the recruitment, retention and development faculty & leadership of color.
- An explicit commitment and budget devoted to pay equity and comparable salaries to peer institutions and organization.

1/3

of the current CU board were members of the founding board in 2015

Faculty and Alumni Pathways to and through the Institution

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

Asset-based faculty and alumni development to support growth into fields of study, teaching, and consistent engagement that, in turn, support the institutional model.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- A pipeline for alumni into faculty and leadership positions.
- 25% of full time staff are now CU alumni.
- Mentor and Core Faculty promotion pathways to ensure working relationships with part time faculty that are equitable and long term.

25%

of full time staff
are CU alumni.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

Faculty and staff at College Unbound have wrap-around supports that mirror the institution's student body.

**where do we
want to be?**

**Facilitate
Successful
Movement from
Student to
Alumni to
Faculty**

**Publish Case Studies
that Demonstrate
Our Definitions of
High Performance
and Reward**

**Develop a mentorship and
professional development
model for faculty and staff
that positions them for
roles outside of the
institution**

FRAMING THE WORK

Roots of Sustainability

A tree can only grow as big and as strong as its roots below the surface. As College Unbound begins to expand its reach, it is critical to nurture our depth just as much as our breadth and to care for the internal structures that ground us in who we are.



For for the goal of a **sustainable institution with systems that foster equity and student success**, we offer a tree and commit to the following values:

- **Relationality** - learning and growing in the context of kinship and community
- **Social Justice** - advancing human rights, access, participation, and equity
- **Accountability** - holding ourselves responsible for understanding and transforming behaviors that do not advance individual and community well-being.

What are our **Driving Questions** for Strategic Goal II?

question I

What resources do we need to be a sustainable institution? How do we garner resources from entities who are aligned with our values?

question III

How do we work with students, alum, and community collaborators to better understand what “equity” and “student success” look like over time?

question II

Which funding partnerships advance equity and which inadvertently perpetuate inequity?

question IV

If we see “people” as resources, how do our notions of “sustainability” shift? What does intersectional investment in people look like?

COLLEGE UNBOUND

Strategic Plan 2022– 2027 Strategic Goal III



College Unbound will capture evidence of **transformational and **equitable outcomes** that results in the enhanced well-being of our students, their families, and their communities.**

Over the next 5 years College Unbound will have a consistent practice of sharing institutional impact with stakeholders and potential students.



Strategic Goal III Core Strategies

1. Systemic & Iterative Assessment

2. Action Research

3. Advocacy

“Maybe stories are just data with a soul”-- Brene Brown

Systemic & Iterative Assessment

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

Through participatory assessment practices, use qualitative and quantitative approaches, assess student success through admissions, curriculum, and alumni engagement and work with the findings for institutional improvement.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

Systematic assessment measures that produce ongoing data on the

1. pedagogical and curricular practices that enhance student engagement in learning.
2. extent to which students perceive their knowledge assets to be valued.
3. degree to which students are able to apply what they learn to social issues in their communities.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- Accredited by NECHE with annual reporting processes in place
- Staff, Board, and Student-driven committees that report out in All-College meetings quarterly
- Student led monthly Town Hall meetings

Implement Student Driven Measures of Individual, Family, and Community Transformation

Build Staff and Faculty Capacity for Iterative Assessment & Codify Storytelling for Institutional Memory and Evolution of Processes

Develop Continuous Improvement System Based on Student Outcomes

where do we want to be?

Action Research



**Ensure a Commitment to
Students and Alumni Being
Involved in Action
Research Projects Across
the Institution**

**Develop an Artist in Residence
and Scholar in Residence
Program to Develop Storytelling
and Documentation Practices of
Adult Learners**

**Publish and Present Findings
in Our Communities & Beyond**

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

Rigorous and practice-informed action research and storytelling practices that explore poorly understood problems affecting students and examine the efficacy of interventions to support them.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

Based on data gathered through systematic and iterative assessment measures, provide collaborative analysis to understand what needs to change to improve student success outcomes.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- Storytelling and Participatory Action Research practices embedded into the curriculum from Day 1.
- A student services committee that tackles issues at the forefront of students' minds and needs as they navigate their degree.

**where do we
want to be?**

**A dynamic Director of Action
and Institutional Research
empowered to make change**

Advocacy

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

Fight for resources and supports that help students succeed, instigate, and support campaigns for systemic change and inform state and federal policy.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- Every student tackles projects through their degree that connect to their life.
- Affinity groups across the college that raise collective issues facing CU students.
- Institutionally pushing national, state, and local initiatives informed by the lived experience of CU students such as pell funding in prisons and childcare support for adult learners.
- Partnership with the Equity Institute to train and support the next generation of classroom teachers in Rhode Island while also advocating for most just praxis and a teacher population that reflects its student body.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

Based on the analysis of the data, the administration of the college uses the results to advocate for internal changes at the college and advocates externally where needed to influence policy changes and garner resources that will enhance student success.

where we
want to be

Raise Up and Nurture Public Advocacy Initiatives Led by CU Students

Develop the Center for Equity & Restorative Justice to Support and Challenge the Institution's Action Research Agenda through Public Programming

Build Relationships with State and Federal Orgs around Higher Education Opportunities

insight

Student learning that is actively connected to national, state, and local organizing

FRAMING THE WORK

Ripples of Possibility

One rain drop can have a staggering impact on the water and life around it. At College Unbound, we understand that "our" work is not ours alone. We have been and continue to be influenced by the currents made by so many before us, and we hope to contribute our own ripples of possibility as well.



For the goal of **capturing evidence of transformational and equitable outcomes**, we offer "water ripples" as evidence of impact for individual, family, and community & commit to the following values:

- **Voice/Story** - creating pathways for individual story, collective meaning making, and the construction of community knowledge.
- **Embeddedness** - Fostering connectedness, deep belonging and sense of community and place.
- **Representation** - ensuring individuals and communities are seen and valued through all aspects of our work.

What are our **Driving Questions** for Strategic Goal III?

question I

What CU practices maximize student transformation and learning outcomes?
How do these practices enhance the well-being of our students, their families, and their communities?

question III

What is the trend in operational expenses per FTE, and what organizational decisions explain the trend?

question II

How does the college's commitment to intentional reflection, on both the student and institutional level, enable us to better capture evidence of transformational and equitable outcomes?

question IV

How do we co-create a non-exploitative approach to sharing what we learn from students?

COLLEGE UNBOUND

Strategic Plan 2022– 2027

Strategic Goal IV



College Unbound will grow, adapt, and innovate with a commitment to equity, place, and purpose.

In 5 years College Unbound will have helped form new, and honor existing, learning communities around the country where higher education is a means for a broader commitment to equity and justice in the world.

Strategic Goal IV

Core Strategies

1. Steady and sustainable growth plan
2. Institutional model that adapts to local needs and characters.
3. Innovative practices to support, inform, and imagine a changing world.

"I am talking about the combination of adaptation with intention, wherein the orientation and movement towards life, towards longing, is made graceful in the act of adaptation. this is the process of changing while staying in touch with our deeper purpose and longing"
(adrienne marie brown, 2017)

GOAL IV STRATEGY I

Steady and Sustainable Growth Plan

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

College Unbound's internal growth and hiring practices need to be in concert with its student body so that students consistently receive the institutional supports at the heart of their degree pathway.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

College Unbound will continue to develop sufficient capacity and necessary infrastructure to accommodate steady enrollment growth in Rhode Island and in other locations that need the types of educational opportunities CU is prepared to provide as well as hire and train a national faculty to support extensive teaching and learning online.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- A national growth model that recognizes CU's need to have a robust centralized office in RI.

82%

6 year retention and
graduation rate

**Develop an Operating Plan that
Defines Technology, Staffing,
Capacity Building & Relationship
Needs for Thousands of
Students**

**Invest in Learning Management,
Student Information Systems,
and HR Capabilities to Support
Growth for Thousands of
Students**

**Research and Support the Future
Needs of our Growing Student
Body**

**where do we
want to be?**

Institutional Model that Adapts to Local Needs and Characters

Assess PA expansion cost model and outcomes towards a simplified startup process for 3-5 new sites.

Adapt the CU Model based on the Challenges & Successes of Localized Partnerships in-person and online

Continue to Develop a Purposeful & Place-Based Presence in Providence, RI

where do we want to be?

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

College Unbound's growth strategy is not merely about more student enrollment-- but about a curriculum and degree of meaning and impact that responds to the lives of its students.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

College Unbound will work expansively with partners in & outside of RI to embed cohorts within place-specific & affinity-based sites. Through this, these cohorts may develop distinguishing methods of student care, which will enhance degree completion embedded into communities of practice.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- National grants to support the design of infrastructure for CU's continual work within carceral spaces.
- Scholarships to support partnerships, operations, and recruitment in CU's local sites outside of Providence.
- A Coordinator in Philadelphia working to design partnerships and funding streams for new local growth as CU begins to expand outside RI.

insight

Over \$300K in scholarships to support partnerships, operations, & recruitment in Newport

Innovative Practices to Support, Inform, and Imagine a Changing World

WHAT DO WE CARE ABOUT?

As the institution evolves, work to develop capabilities to offer support, training, & technical assistance to institutions, faculty, staff, students, policymakers, journalists, community organizations, philanthropists, and advocates to build and implement strategies to provide students a transformative higher education landscape.

WHAT STRENGTHS DO WE BUILD ON?

- Consultancies with higher education institutions across the country.
- CU national leadership and boards in higher education and orgs like the Higher Education Reparations Engagement Initiative, the Great Colleges for the New Majority, and the Yes We Must Coalition.

HOW WILL WE SHOW IT?

- Consultancies with higher education institutions across the country
- CU Leadership on the steering committees of orgs like the Higher Education Reparations Engagement Initiative, the Great Colleges for the New Majority, and the Yes We Must Coalition.

where do we
want to be?

Support Avenues
for Influence
Outside of
Higher Education

Provide Formal and
Informal Coaching for
Postsecondary
Institutions

Deepen
Collaborations
with National
Postsecondary
Orgs

insight

ACE Case Study that
highlights CU's accreditation
journey

FRAMING THE WORK

Constellations of Change

When we zoom out, we remember that we are one of many stars in the night sky. Like CU, entities throughout the world are engaging in this life shifting work, each bringing its on unique light and perspective to the conversation.



For the goal of **growing, adapting, and innovating**, we offer "constellations" and commit to the following values:

- **Transformation** - Moving beyond the push for an improved state to a transformed way of being and doing.
- **Adaption** - Being responsive to an ever changing environment.
- **Creativity** - Using the imagination to generate ideas, alternatives, and possibilities that support transformation.

What are our **Driving Questions** questions for Strategic Goal IV?

question I

How can College Unbound become a model of growth that challenges the notion that more is always better? What methods do we employ to grow responsibly and in alignment with the communities most impacted by this work?

question III

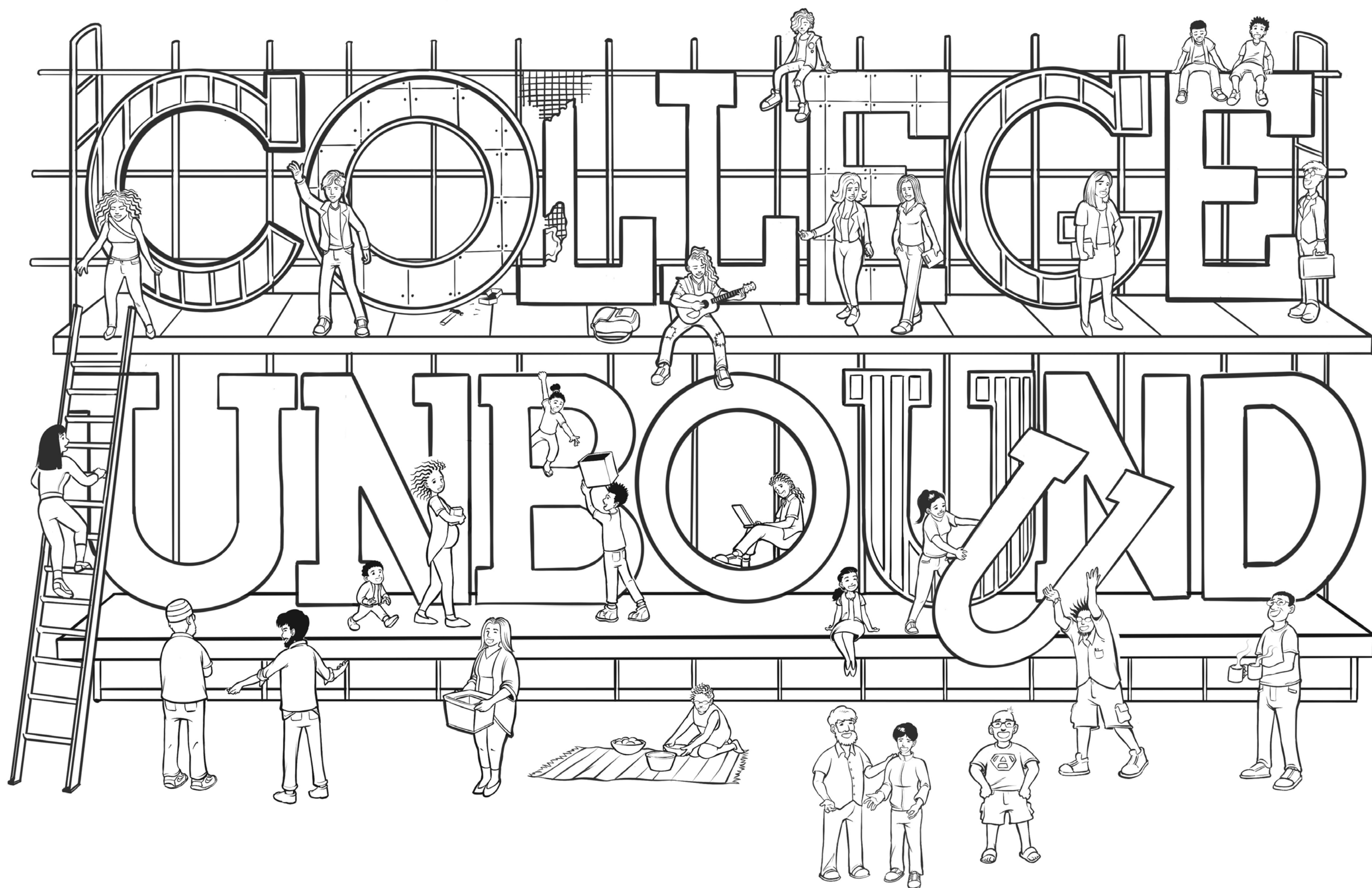
What does reciprocity within our community context look like? How do we complement existing resources?

question II

How will we assess the impact of our growth and center community voice in the process?

question IV

How do we know when it is time to grow, adapt and innovate? How do we do this in a way that always centers on community voice, desire, and imagination?



student portraits

Storytelling is a central practice at College Unbound. It is through oral tradition that we learn ourselves, remember our histories and dream forward in ways that honor our collective humanity.

- Anjel + Amber
- Co-Lab Participants
- Mike + Lucero
- Jacinta + Vera



how did we get here?
first gen. college grads,
both leading change
work... always knew we
would could do it, but was
not sure how... i'm so
grateful...

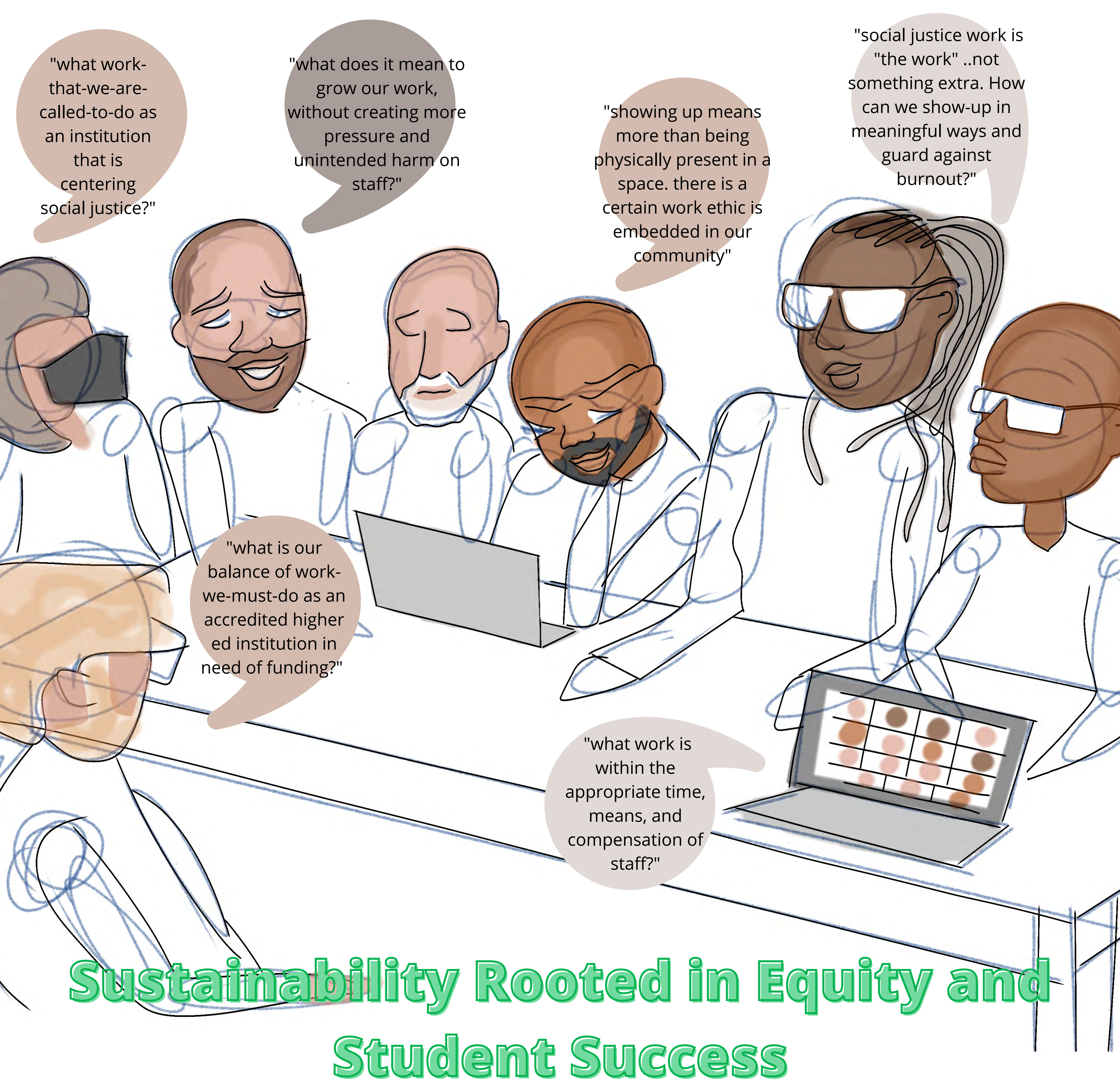
u don't have to. Start
teaching @ CU like me. Or
u can be an alumni
mentor or w.e u want
tbh..juss talk to adam

nah for real! I'm excited
to graduate but I don't
want to leave my CU fam
:/

that's true. I love
that we can stay
connected even
after graudation

Lifelong Learning and Capacity Building

Amber (CU '22) and Anjel (CU '19) Newmann are two sisters, community designers and CU graduates. Juggling work and school has always been their reality, so after high school, they naturally jumped into the non-profit sector and began careers in art & wellness. CU's degree advocated for and honored their community learning as credit bearing which sped up their time to completion. Because courses connected to their work, community, and family commitments, they were able to enroll full time. And because they were a part of a community of learners in a cohort, even when they struggled they knew they could turn to their extended community of care– as well as to one another. That's what's reflected here– Amber and Anjel leaning on one another at the end of the day. It's not unusual for siblings, parents, or friends to enroll at CU together. Anjel is now Core Faculty of the College and Amber will step into a role as an Alumni Mentor for a new cohort of students. Being among the first in their family to receive bachelors' degrees, Amber & Anjel value College Unbound's commitment to **Lifelong Learning and Capacity Building** because it has given them the space to get an education while also pursuing their passions in art, community design and wellness.



"what work-
that-we-are-
called-to-do as
an institution
that is
centering
social justice?"

"what does it mean to
grow our work,
without creating more
pressure and
unintended harm on
staff?"

"showing up means
more than being
physically present in a
space. there is a
certain work ethic is
embedded in our
community"

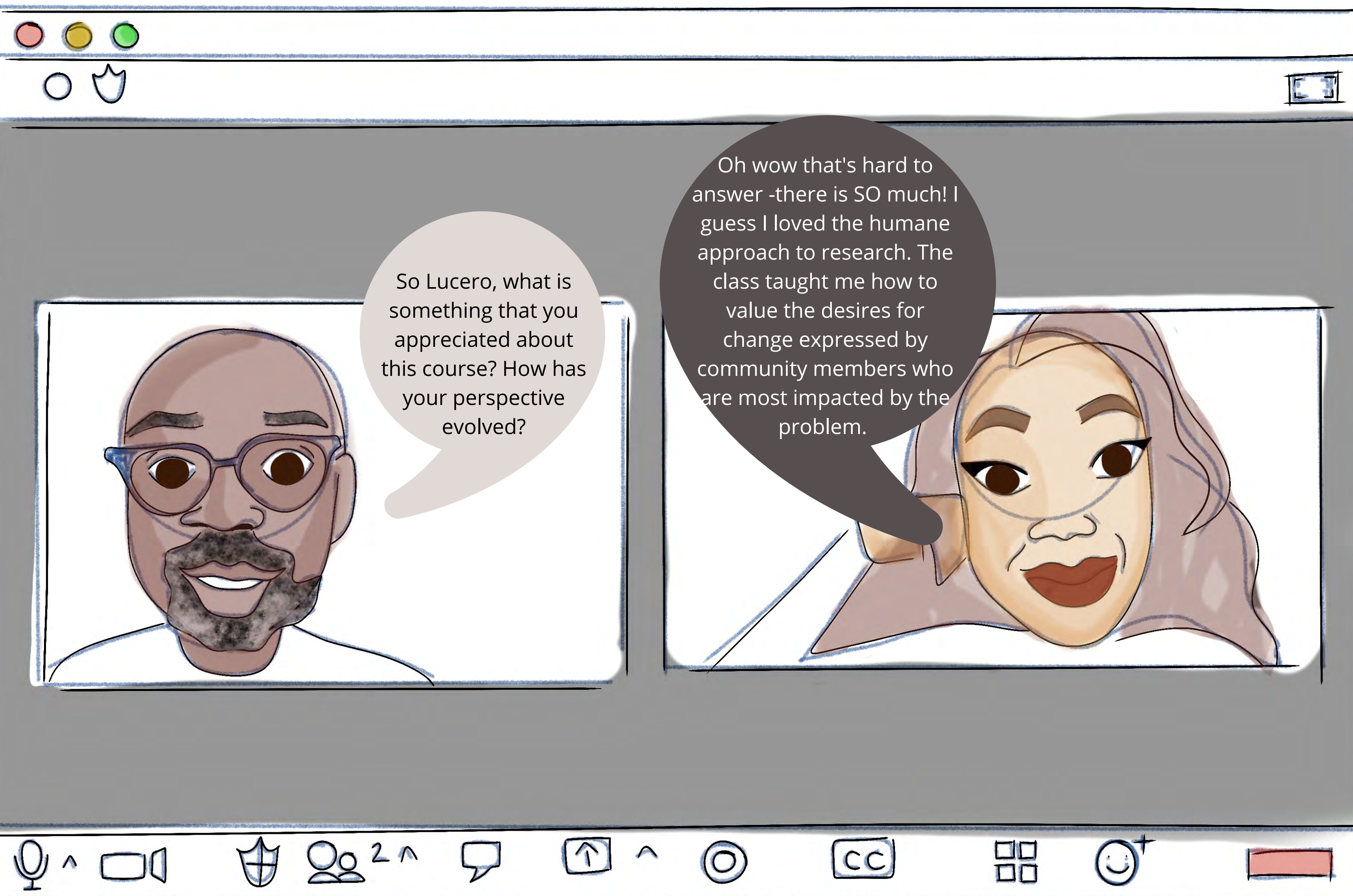
"social justice work is
"the work" ..not
something extra. How
can we show-up in
meaningful ways and
guard against
burnout?"

"what is our
balance of work-
we-must-do as an
accredited higher
ed institution in
need of funding?"

"what work is
within the
appropriate time,
means, and
compensation of
staff?"

Sustainability Rooted in Equity and Student Success

CU core staff meet weekly in a "Co-Lab" to workshop and problem-solve around important issues that affect the student experience; From attendance taking policies to critical intervention supports. Student facing work can't happen without CU staff also addressing their own internal communication, systems implementation, and mutual support for one another. That's what's happening in the hybrid meeting pictured here. CU staff are gathering in their weekly meeting this week to discuss burnout, workload, **rooted sustainability**, and their shared commitment to building a culture of critical care and full participation as they begin to share aspirations and expectations for the year ahead.



Evidence of Transformational and Equitable Outcomes

Classes like Research Justice ask students, like **Lucero Ceballos**, to co-design research tools for social change. Taught fully on Zoom, in this Spring '22 by **Mike Walker**, CU's Director of Institutional and Action Research, this section of the course asked CU parenting-students to create a survey tool and focus group process to engage with parenting-learners across Rhode Island. To understand the solution, you have to work with those who are affected by the problem. And so here CU students work to get the **Evidence of Transformational and Equitable Outcomes** to ensure that College Unbound, as well as every higher education institution, is properly addressing the needs of its students. Across the curriculum, CU students tackle projects of meaning and impact. Action Research toolkits like this one help ensure there is an ethic of shared ownership and storytelling in students' projects as they grow and that there is an institutional commitment to iterative assessment.



Grow, Adapt, and Innovate with a Commitment to Equity, Place, and Purpose

College Unbound inaugurated its first cohorts outside of Rhode Island in Spring of 2022.

Vera Epps and Jacinta Puckett, pictured here, are two of the founding students in a cohort of adult learners who all hail from Philadelphia. Together they support one another through their BA degree in Organizational Leadership and Change, but they also talk about their relationship to the city they call home. **CU will continue to Grow, Adapt, and Innovate** new cohorts around shared connections of either place or affinity. Over the years ahead, CU will open cohorts in Philadelphia with shared experiences in Public Housing (for employers of Housing Authorities as well as residents), for teacher assistants in elementary schools, and for artists and organizers

artifacts



These pages hold artifacts that capture a portion of the work that this community has been doing over this first year of strategic planning and organizing. As we move through further implementation of plan in the years ahead we will continue to add more artifacts to this archive.

Artifact that demonstrates College Unbound's centering of Strategic Goal I: Life-Long Learning and Capacity Building

OUTCOME HARVESTING

What is our social actor?

How did CU influence this?

Don't	Do
Describe an outcome as an activity or output.	An Outcome is not a description of what you did, but about who changed because of what you did:
Avoid describing unobservable changes: e.g., 'increased knowledge', 'enhanced awareness', 'strengthened commitment'	Instead, describe what the actor you've influenced to change is doing differently now compared to before that demonstrates the actor has more knowledge or awareness or commitment.
Force yourself to find immediate, direct relationships between an outcome and your activity or output.	Outcomes take time to emerge. You might have done an activity last year or the year before but the outcome may only become visible this year. Equally important, some things that you do may never lead to outcomes. Similarly, outcomes may be only indirectly influenced by what you did and they can also be surprises , unintentional or even negative .
Use words that embellish and make too much of a value statement.	Instead, explain and exemplify why the outcome is valuable, worthy, successful or otherwise meritorious.

WHO ARE THE SOCIAL ACTORS FOR COLLEGE UNBOUND

future employers of students

employers of students

leadership in RI (understanding of, practices,)

community development initiatives

students

parole and probation officers

US ED - FSA

families of employees

Classmates / cohorts

Other local colleges in RI

CBOs in the neighborhood

community partners

families of students

Graduate Schools admitting CU grads

employers of students

The student themselves

employees

non-teaching staff

Children of students

Those who have been impacted by student projects

NECHE

accreditation agencies (educational)

Alumni leaders that can influence Policy

co-workers

CCR right

The community

Local government

higher education colleagues

The surrounding community

other colleges / universities in RI

Other Institutions of higher education

Community Based organizations doing business with CU

RI Higher Education Finance Authority

Neighborhood residents

Elementary, Middle school and high school TAs

Brothers and Sisters of students

Funders

The staff of CU

Department of Corrections

Artifact that demonstrates College Unbound's centering of Strategic Goal II: Rooted Sustainability in a Culture of Equity and Student Success

What are the most important takeaways from the Social Justice Workshop series?

"Plant your feet and find your seat" as a way of dealing with difficult conversations

all hands on deck

That it is a constant process.

Constant analysis of our assumptions is necessary.

we need to keep thinking about who is not in the room (every room!)

how does this work sit at the center of what we do rather than a workshop series on the side?

the ways our own impulses to tell "hero narratives" blind us to destructive exercises of power

questioning and critique is fundamental and necessary-- that's what motivates change. That's what moves us forward

SHOW UP. +1

Build up from here, put heart and mind into action

Sustainability, build out policies/systems that protect the hard work we have done

That there is an opportunity to think about this and act on it in every interaction with students.

Be true to self and others, the more open we are the less static will be in the air. Thoughts and feeling are alive also

Don't exploit yourself.

walk our talk. +1

Trauma is Physical- It is the body's response. It lives inside us. (+1)

we are just getting started

The need to continue to make this a priority

Matthew's call to action -- what are we now going to do? And, how do we center students and all of their lived experience in that doing?

This work should be embedded in all of our work not a separate category of work

Becoming more aware of other's experiences in life

this can/should be uncomfortable

having a space for deep and thoughtful and **HONEST** conversation

The deep reflective process that's required throughout our work.

be present

Don't be silent. Use our voices.

this work is ongoing and while we can make progress we cannot get complacent

The importance of having social justice work inform everything we do, instead of just being another bucket of work among many

Self-Reflection and Mindfulness

That we did this work together

Speak your truth in a compassionate way

Being able to speak as freely as needed

Systems need to be disrupted and transformed

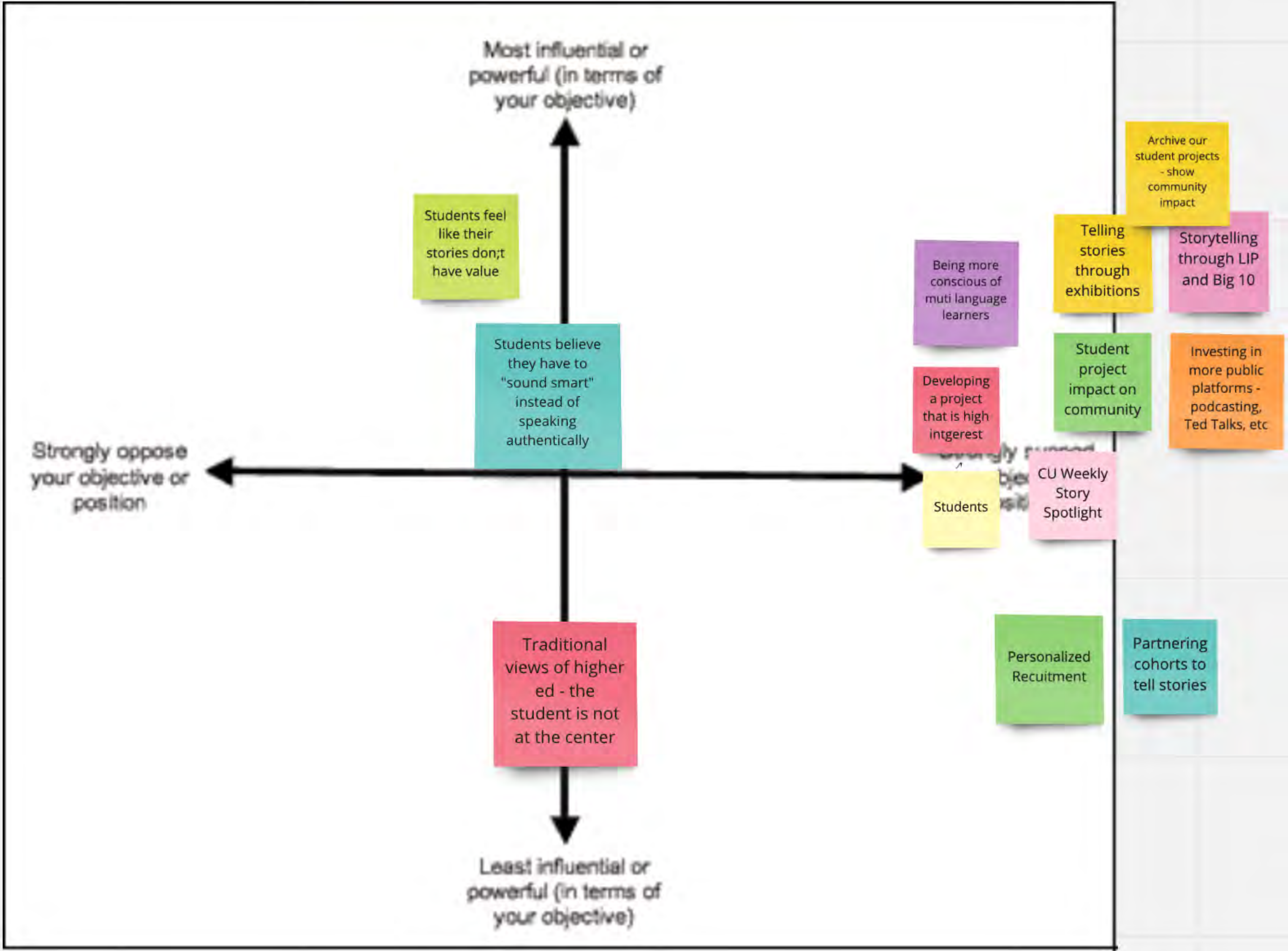
All situations have power embedded in them and if we can't see it, then we might be part of the problem +1

Having a regular, intentional space for this collective work-- not just in crisis mode-- was really helpful (+1)

Difference between Equality and Equity

Artifact that demonstrates College Unbound's centering of Strategic Goal III: Evidence of Transformational and Equitable Outcomes

Creating a culture of inviting authentic stories



Artifact that demonstrates College Unbound's centering of Strategic Goal IV:

Grow, Adapt, and Innovate with a commitment to equity, place, and purpose

Growth: Vision

By 2027, CU will be bigger, stronger, broader, deeper:

Impact Targets

- More CU grads nationwide
- Systems change: higher ed influence

Scope/size

- Strategically expand to 12 sites, 100 – 450 students/site, 1,500 students total
- Pace the expansion sustainably, incrementally

Breadth

- Maintain focus: degree completion
- Continue to experiment with unbundled certificates, consulting services

Capacity

- RI HQ, with a portfolio of place-based and remote cohorts
- Innovation center: early-stage experimentation, growth, advocacy

Influence

- Key partnerships powering uptake of tools, techniques, policies
- Influence radiating through cities, alumni, partners

Resources

- Anchor funders, array of place-based partners; reserve fund;
- 75% tuition/fees, 25% philanthropy

Culture

- Expanded equity, teaching/learning and managerial systems
- Relentless commitment to depth, community, innovation