

**Heartland Community College**  
**“Political and Civic Engagement at the Community College: The Heartland Experience”**  
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The following list represents ten themes or possibly lessons learned about the creation and institutionalization of civil engagement on our campus. These themes are no doubt applicable to almost any type of campus programming such as an honors program or writing across the curriculum. I’m also sure they exist in some literature somewhere regarding organizational institutionalization processes.

**10 Themes or Lessons Learned from our Experiences with Political Engagement Programs at HCC**

1. **Penetration:** Audit and inventory existing programs on campus that might be connected to civil engagement in hopes of bringing them in to the fold.
2. **Adaptation:** Be willing to tweak and/or re-label existing programs to take advantage of resource allocation opportunities. Sometimes simply calling an existing program a political engagement program can open up grant and other funding sources.
3. **Co-optation and Infusion:** Tie your program to existing popular internal and external projects that already have funding. Become a division of Honors programming if that is strong on campus, or tie to leadership programs if they are strong.
4. **Legitimacy:** Find your champions for political engagement both internal and external. See if board members, VPs, your college President, local politicians, key faculty and the like have positive feelings about increasing political engagement on campus and take advantage of this support.
5. **Incrementalism:** Bypass, work around, and calm the naysayers. Sometimes calling something a “pilot program” can calm fears and give you time and resources in the short run. A pilot program is not typically seen as a threat. Be prepared to work slowly but steadily, program by program to attain your goals with respect to political engagement.

6. **Pluralism:** Stay multi-partisan and multi-ideological. Political engagement typically or at least stereotypically has a left wing slant to it. Remember engagement can be in support of rightist causes as well and those should be embraced equally. This will give your engagement programs even greater credibility and will prevent naysayers from marginalizing them as being not representative of the campus or community.
7. **Advertising:** Showcase activities, market programs, and publicize events. Get on existing campus calendars of the day, week, month or semester. Get on the agendas of key campus committees if even only for a routine update of activities. Take advantage of existing campus rituals such as becoming a part of “Campus Fest” every Fall, or the New Student Orientation programs every summer.
8. **Symbolic Benefits Matter:** Celebrate the successes in your working teams and share those successes with the campus. That’s code for throw a party. This provides motivational rewards for those working on the political engagement teams and also creates another advertising opportunity as outlined in #7 above.
9. **Assessment:** Assess the impact of your programs and activities. What are students learning? How are they behaving? How satisfied are they? What are they producing? Since surprisingly few programs really do assessment or do it well you might have leg up in budget decisions if you can show the programs are having an impact. If they are not showing a clear impact, you can still ask decision-makers to imagine what the impact might be if you had some additional or substantial resources with which to work.
10. **Look for Budget Synergies:** See who gets the resources on your campus, go to them and propose all sorts of partnerships in order to get some of that money. Offer to do some assessment activities for an Honors group, offer to help the career center set up some political internship opportunities, offer to help the cabinet showcase the program at a board retreat. You and your political engagement team may have to do some “grunt” work, at least at the start, to get the money or to be allowed into the partnership, but these partnerships should pay off in the long run with more resources for your programming.

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