EQUITY
AVENGERS

2023-2028

Equity Avengers

Strategic Plan

2023-2028

Strategic Plan

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Executive Summary

The *Equity Avengers Five-Year Strategic Plan* defines Equity Avengers' mission and vision and establishes the goals and objectives necessary for expanding its current initiatives and the building of effective partnerships, which will ultimately help close the outcome gaps of minority students, address students' basic needs, and reduce many of the barriers that students face. The key components of this initial organizational plan include:

- the story of Equity Avengers' founding, the divergent backgrounds and common passions of its originators, Dr. Keith Curry and Dr. Pamela Luster, for student equity, and their focused efforts to close the outcome gaps of minority students;
- Equity Avengers' mission and vision;
- a description of the planning process, which was grounded in a thorough environmental scan;
- an explanation of the key themes from the environmental scan and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, which inform the plan goals and objective;
- the delineation of the plan goals, objectives, key actions, and outcomes; and,
- a plan implementation and assessment protocol.

A Five-Year Strategic Planning Grid, which is located in the Appendix, provides a crosswalk tool that illustrates the alignment of goals, objectives, key actions, and plan timeline.

Chapter 1: Plan Background and Purpose

The Equity Avengers are Compton College President, Dr. Keith Curry, and San Diego Mesa College President, Dr. Pamela Luster, both of whom are well-known for their advocacy for greater racial equity in higher education, and particularly in their support of underrepresented students and improving achievement gaps.

In the summer of 2019, Dr. Keith Curry and Dr. Pamela Luster established the Equity Avengers to recognize their united work together – addressing community college students' needs. Over the years, Dr. Curry and Dr. Luster have presented at national and state conferences on the following topics: community college athletics, basic needs of college students, dual enrollment, diversity, equity and inclusion, community college CEO leadership, student completion, and guided pathways.

The Equity Avengers are working together to impact equity in California Community Colleges and also nationally. They are focused on closing the outcome gaps of minority students. Through an equity lens, the Equity Avengers promote the use of state and federal legislation to successfully implement changes to address community college students' basic needs and reduce barriers for all students. The team is working both within and beyond the California Community College system to create synergy for change, leading to large-scale change.

Dr. Curry is the president/CEO of Compton College and the Compton Community College District (CCCD). Compton College is the 114th California Community College, achieving initial accreditation status on June 7, 2017. In June 2020, Dr. Curry was invited by Governor Newsom's Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, Dr. Lande Ajose, to serve on the California Higher Education Recovery with Equity Taskforce. Dr. Luster is in her tenth year as the president of San Diego Mesa College. In her long career in California community colleges, Dr. Luster has served as a Disability and Educational Support Program faculty member/coordinator, Vice President of Student Services, interim Vice President of Instruction, Dean of Academic Services, and Dean of Career Education and Workforce Development. While Dr. Curry and Dr. Luster are uncommon allies (e.g., divergent backgrounds, different career paths, leaders of institutions in dissimilar cities and regions) they share common ground in their passion for the work that has been the driving force in their careers: equitable outcomes for all students, and in particular, racial equity.

These two action-oriented leaders have partnered over the years on a variety of initiatives to address the needs of community college students, including community college athletics, basic needs of college students, dual enrollment, diversity, equity, and inclusion, community college CEO leadership, student completion, and guided pathways. By the summer of 2019, Dr. Curry and Dr. Luster had established the Equity Avengers to recognize their united work as equity warriors.

To formalize their vision, expand their work with the education community, and build Equity Avengers' organizational capacity, while also successfully operating their colleges, Dr. Curry and Dr. Luster applied for and were awarded a grant from the College Futures Foundation, a California non-profit that aims to increase the number of people of color completing a bachelor's degree. This grant has enabled Curry and Luster to hire a project manager (Carmel Malixi) to oversee and coordinate Equity Avengers activities and procure the services of both a strategic planning firm (Integrated Academic Solutions, LLC) to develop this five-year strategic plan, and a higher education marketing and public relations firm (25th Hour Communications), to formalize and implement the Equity Avengers brand and marketing plan.

In addition, Dr. Curry and Dr. Luster invited Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson to partner with them as the third Equity Avenger, supporting in their mission to lead the charge for a more racially-equitable higher

education landscape. Dr. Gilkerson is the president of Evergreen Valley College and a leader in a number of statewide efforts to find solutions that address students' basic needs, support undocumented and mixed-status students, and improve the quality and delivery of distance education.

Consequently, the overarching purpose of this five-year strategic plan is to establish the goals and objectives for the expanding of Equity Avengers current initiatives and the building of effective partnerships which will ultimately help close the outcome gaps of minority students, address students' basic needs, and reduce many of the barriers that students face. The Equity Avengers understand that their work will be challenging, as an array of complex factors impact student success and completion. However, this strategic plan, with both actionable goals and an implementation protocol, will position the Equity Avengers community to close opportunity and outcomes gaps for students across the state, and ultimately, the nation.

Chapter 2: Equity Avengers Mission and Vision

Mission:

Our mission is to engage, educate, and empower higher education organizations and individuals to eliminate student opportunity and outcome gaps by cultivating partnerships and resources necessary to embed racial equity, critical humility, and learning across our systems.

Vision:

Our vision is to build a higher education community focused on eliminating racial equity gaps by developing and supporting leaders who act and drive large-scale change, resulting in equitable student outcomes.

Chapter 3: Planning Process

The *Equity Avengers Five-Year Strategic Plan* is the result of a six-month-long planning process, which is grounded in a thorough environmental scan and engagement with an array of California community college system leaders. Described in the table below are the key planning milestones, supporting activities, and project timeline.

Timeline Dates	Milestones	Activities
June-July 2021	Identify potential partners that provide resources to Community College CEOs and potential members of the Equity Avengers Community (i.e., non-California Community Colleges CEOs). These potential partners would assist the Equity Avengers as they build capacity and provide input into the 5-year strategic plan development.	Confer with current and emeritus community college leaders to develop a complete contact list of potential Equity Avengers partners both inside and outside of the California community college system.
		Create comprehensive contact lists.
August-September 2021	Develop mission and vision statements to delineate Equity Avengers' central organizational purpose and what it intends to achieve.	Draft mission and vision statements, which define the unique purpose and focus of Equity Avengers and the needs it intends to address.
		Vet mission and vision statements via survey of community college leaders (September 2021).
		Review survey feedback on mission and vision statements and finalize.
September-November 2021	Conduct an environmental scan via surveys, focus groups, and interviews with experts from the field to help identify main challenges and how the Equity Avengers could support community college CEO's and the greater Equity Avengers community members at-large.	Develop and distribute survey to community college CEO's and Equity Avengers community members at-large.
		Analyze survey results and identify key themes to inform focus group questions.
		Conduct focus groups and analyze key themes to inform one-on-one interviews with community college leaders and potential partners.
		Conduct in-depth, one-on-one interviews with community college leaders and potential partners to deepen and contextualize understanding of issues, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.
		Synthesize findings from all environmental scan information and identify common themes.
December 2021-February 2022	Complete the 5-year strategic plan based on information from the environmental scan, California Community College CEO's survey results, and potential partners' meetings.	Develop goals, objectives, key actions, and implementation protocol.
		Integrate and align branding and public relations plan goals with strategic plan goals.
		Develop outline and plan table of contents.
		Draft Five-Year Strategic Plan manuscript, edit, and finalize document.

Chapter 4: Environmental Scan, SWOT Analysis, and Planning Implications

Section 1 Environmental Scan and Key Themes

Surveys

The primary survey of community college CEOs and trustees was framed around two areas of inquiry: 1) identifying the institutional challenges and barriers to racial equity, for which community college leaders need support in order to address; and 2) seeking input about how Equity Avengers can support community college leaders in their efforts to advance student equity and ways that potential partners can support Equity Avengers. Specific topic areas included:

- Policy, Procedures, Institutional Culture
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Supporting The Student Experience
- Interest in Activities to Support Equity Avengers' Organizational Capacity
- Interest in Activities to Support Equity Avengers' Potential Initiatives

The survey also provided respondents with an opportunity to add comments and indicate their willingness to participate in a focus group to discuss potential partnership activities to support Equity Avengers, Community College CEOs, and the greater Equity Avengers community members at-large.

Approximately 580 surveys were distributed and 43 responded – a 7.4% return rate. Results of this query yielded vital information; specifically, the need for a "great deal" or "moderate" levels of support in areas related to:

- Institutional Culture (i.e., moving beyond symbolic supports for equity, addressing hetero, white normative ideas, language, and social constructs, and developing racial and equity literacy across the institution);
- Institutional Policies and Practices (i.e., incorporating incentives and interventions into accountability systems at the college and district levels to ensure that opportunity gaps and professional gaps are closed, recruiting and retaining equity-minded, effective faculty (both adjunct and full-time), staff, and administrators, providing training on how to recognize various student needs, and ensuring that students of color are aware of and receive relevant, timely support; and,
- Curriculum and Instruction (i.e., decolonizing the curriculum, confronting inherent biases in hierarchies of program value, and incorporating discussions of race into all programs of study).

Additionally, respondents indicated the greatest level of interest in helping Equity Avengers build organizational capacity in areas related to:

- providing equity training, seminars, etc.;
- helping with projects aimed at supporting students' basic needs; and,
- collaborating on projects or campaigns to support students' needs for books, supplies, technology, etc.

Focus Groups

To explore in more depth the survey findings and identify ways that Equity Avengers, community college leaders, and the Equity Avengers community at-large can effectively collaborate to create equity-minded leaders and build a broad community (inside and beyond the California Community College system) and generate synergy for large-scale changes, the environmental scan also included several focus groups with California Community College trustees and CEOs. While focus group sessions were intentionally designed as opportunities for open inquiry and dialogue, several central questions provided a general framework for these sessions, notably:

- the degree to which equity is treated as an urgent matter at the local level as well as system-wide;
- institutional impediments to eliminating equity gaps and ways that Equity Avengers can work with community college leaders to address these obstacles;
- effective support strategies for helping colleges move beyond symbolic supports for equity and develop racial and equity literacy across the institution;
- ways that Equity Avengers can help leaders create opportunities for courageous conversations; and,
- their ideas for specific kinds of collaborative efforts, which Equity Avengers could undertake in partnership with community college leaders.

Key takeaways from these focus groups include the points delineated below.

- Challenges
  - While equity is seen as urgent institutionally and system-wide there is a lack of coherence because the resources needed to address equity have not followed the mandate; colleges need help from CCCCO to implement the equity mandate – infrastructure and resources. Moreover, rural campuses with less diverse populations do not see equity in the same way that urban or suburban colleges do and have different perceptions and awareness regarding equity.
  - External factors continue to be major impediments to equity. For example, the Student-Centered Funding Formula (SCFF), which hinders community colleges' abilities to focus on advancing equity initiatives while enrollment and financial crises are exacerbated by SCFF. Additionally, the transfer institutions (California State University and University of California) are not held to the same equity focus, which results in a lack of curriculum alignment (e.g., proscriptive science transfer curriculum that does not allow for any variations in content) and student preparation levels, which requires support for effective partnerships with K12 to effectively address ways to close gaps between different student populations.
  - Political dynamic of ethnic competition in cities/counties - tension around prioritizing populations disproportionately impacted receiving more support.
  - Title 5 (i.e., the California Administrative Code establishing Academic Senate roles in making recommendations regarding academic and professional matters, including areas such as curriculum, policies and processes - commonly known as "10+1") and collective bargaining has resulted in less accountability across the institution. Additionally, resistance to change from faculty unions and Academic Senates, as well as the routine demonization of administrative leaders make it difficult for CEOs and their management teams to challenge the status quo or make needed, urgent changes in policies and practices in support of equity.
  - Hiring policies and practices at colleges are not distinctly racist but do support those in power.

- Suggestions
  - o Narrow the focus of Equity Avengers. Conduct a gap analysis to determine the needs that are not currently being filled by other organizations.
  - o Help create a safe space for DEI conversations.
  - o Develop ways to address diversity and equity in non-urban, non-suburban districts
  - o Help trustees understand diversity, equity, and inclusion so that they can better support CEOs.
- Tailor training and resources around the needs of faculty and front-line services staff.
- Invest in strategies and resources around curriculum content areas where equity is difficult (e.g., sciences).
- Address issues with CCCCO, legislature, and four-year colleges and universities.
- Acknowledge the small work that is being done in many places, which serves as inspiration and motivation to continue the work.

Interviews

In addition to the survey and focus groups, one-on-one interviews with several community college trustees and CEO's provided additional details about institutional barriers to equity and approaches to confronting and overcoming those obstacles. Results from these interviews revealed the following high-priority areas:

- colleges' needs for equity specialists to assess the institutional environments, diagnose urgent issues, and provide training or interventions that are tailored to the unique culture and conditions of each institution;
- a pressing need for the assessment of racial and equity literacy at community colleges and scaffolded training;
- desire for greater support for college leadership (e.g., helping trustees and CEO's find the resources they need for their institutions);
- supporting colleges' needs to infuse equity into hiring policies and practices; and,
- the critical need for data support (e.g., human capacity, technology, skill building, student experience data gathering techniques and approaches) so that data can be used effectively for full accountability for institutional performance in terms of student outcomes and infused into all institutional plans (not just student equity plans).

Section 1 Environmental Scan and Key Themes

As part of its environmental assessment for the development of the Equity Avengers's public relations and engagement plan, *25th Hour* conducted a survey and set of interviews with previous #EquityChat guests, which informed the development of a SWOT analysis. Notably, the elements identified in this analysis align with the key themes and findings from surveys, focus groups, and interviews completed as part of this strategic plan. Thus, these congruent results from all of the environmental assessment activities provide a strong foundation for the strategic goals and objectives, which are delineated in Chapter 5.

STRENGTHS

- Passion and commitment from the leaders.
- Seed group of Avengers already exists to launch movement.
- Already well-known and established as thought leaders, with an established audience.

- Environment is ripe for a grassroots movement led by those in the field.
- Alignment of strategic plan and marketing plan will position Equity Avengers for success.

WEAKNESSES

- Limited bandwidth from Drs. Curry and Luster could lead to their personal and professional burnout.
- White noise on the state and national level could limit ability to break through and sustain messaging and activities.
- Need to sharpen focus among leadership and create a fluid path for continued growth and investment.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Create an influencer program across the country to strengthen the Equity Avengers movement.
- Identify key areas where projects can be created and implemented, leading to more opportunities for additional grant funding.
- Scale the trajectory of the #EA movement - start small and grow.
- Expand upon speaking requests with public relations.
- Opportunities to develop relationships/partnerships with other diversity, equity, inclusion-focused groups.

THREATS

- California community college staff expect the movement to make rapid changes in processes.
- Large organizations may seek to assume the Equity Avengers into their infrastructure so maintaining independence will take a concerted effort.
- The terms Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are oversaturating the academic market oftentimes without clear definition or direction.
- Some may be resistant to their message of equity in education and see it as a polarizing or political issue.
- Research shows most people learn about racial equity through reading.

Section 3 Planning Implications

The results of the environmental scan activities help establish a set of aligned focal points for the Five-Year Strategic Plan - most notably, needs and opportunities that include the following:

- creating a clearly defined focus for Equity Avengers' mission, objectives, activities, and distinctive brand;
- developing the organizational infrastructure that Equity Avengers, which is critical to operationalizing it as an established body;
- strategically scaling the direction and goals of the Equity Avengers movement, periodically evaluating outcomes and adjust plans as needed;
- prioritizing colleges' needs around assessments of their environments and racial/equity literacy and providing colleges with scaffolded trainings and/or interventions that are tailored to the distinctive challenges each institution;

- developing and leveraging formal relationships/partnerships with other diversity, equity, inclusion-focused groups and existing supporters who are passionate about equity and eager to engage on behalf of and with Equity Avengers; and,
- addressing issues with California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), the California legislature, four-year colleges and universities, and faculty professional organizations.

Chapter 5: Strategic Goals, Objectives, Key Actions, and Outcomes

The strategic goals, objectives, and key actions delineated here provide the overarching framework for the Five-Year Strategic Plan. A full planning grid, which includes the activities timeline and outcomes can be found in the appendix.

Goal 1 Leadership Support: Provide CC Leadership (e.g., trustees and CEO's) with the tools and expertise needed to assess equity at their colleges and identify specific, urgent institutional barriers/challenges.

> ***Objective 1.1:*** Assist CC leaders in assessing and identifying specific equity barriers in their Districts and developing strategies for addressing barriers.

>> ***Actions:***

>> - Develop and organize Equity Avengers intervention teams to assist districts with urgent, immediate equity challenges, such as:
>>   - equity scans or audits to assess institutional needs for support and guidance;
>>   - support and guidance needed to address immediate, acute institutional exigent circumstances;
>>   - planning and implementing racial/equity literacy training modules or sessions that are scaffolded and tailored to the college community and specific needs or gaps; and,
>>   - assessing and updating Student Equity Plans.
>> - Plan and implement training for Equity Avengers intervention/support teams.
>> - Conduct outreach efforts to publish/advertise intervention/support teams and services to community college leaders.
>> - Coordinate the delivery of intervention/support services to community college leaders.
>> - Assess the effectiveness of intervention/support services and revise trainings, strategies, and/or materials for Equity Avengers intervention/support team members.

> ***Objective 1.2:*** Help community college leaders identify and access the resources and support they need to address barriers and challenges.

>> ***Actions:***

>> - Provide community college leaders with equity-related assessment resources (e.g., printed materials, websites, contact information for equity consultants).

> ***Objective 1.3:*** Help community college leaders infuse equity into policies, procedures, planning, and practices through assessment and revision processes.

>> ***Actions:***

>> - Provide community college leaders with equity-related assessment resources (e.g., printed materials, websites, contact information for consultants with expertise related to equity, policy and procedure development, planning).

> ***Objective 1.4:*** Help community college leaders with equity data support needs (e.g., human capacity, knowledge and skills, understanding/interpreting data, using data to build accountability for institutional performance and how to tie performance to student outcomes).

Actions:

- Conduct outreach efforts to recruit institutional effectiveness/data experts to help community college leaders with equity data support needs.
- Publish/advertise institutional effectiveness/data support network and services to community college leaders.
- Coordinate linking of institutional effectiveness/data experts and community college leaders' support requests.
- Assess the effectiveness of institutional effectiveness/data experts; revise strategies and/or approaches as informed by assessment results.

Goal 2 Leadership education: Provide scaffolded, tailored, sustained (ongoing) professional learning opportunities for trustees and CEO's regarding racial and equity literacy and their roles in fostering equity.

Objective 2.1: Institutional Culture Focused Initiatives – Engage community college leaders to:
a) move beyond symbolic supports for equity;
b) develop racial and equity literacy across the institution; and,
c) develop an understanding of their role in creating the culture, establish entry points for different leaders, and create cultures that enable inclusive experiences and belonging.

Actions:
- Recruit and train Equity Avengers teams to develop racial and equity literacy training modules.
- Develop training modules.
- Develop and implement outreach/advertising plan for racial and equity literacy training modules.
- Deliver and assess training modules.
- Review assessments of training modules; revisions of training modules as needed.

Objective 2.2: Institutional Policies and Practices Focused Initiatives – Engage community college leaders address to directly address equity barriers by:
a) supporting the development and integration of DEI curriculum for the Community College League of California's Strategic Leadership Program;
b) helping community college districts incorporate accountability systems at the college and district levels to ensure that opportunity gaps and professional gaps are closed; and,
c) helping community college districts' efforts to recruit and retain equity-minded, effective faculty (both adjunct and full-time), staff, and administrators.

Actions:
- Develop curriculum, training and engagement modules, and archive of resources
- Develop and implement outreach/advertising plan.
- Deliver and assess training or engagement modules.
- Review assessments of training or engagement modules; revisions of training or engagement modules as needed.

Objective 2.3: Curriculum and Instruction Focused Initiatives - – Engage community college leaders address to directly address equity barriers by:

a) decolonizing the curriculum;
b) confronting inherent biases in hierarchies of program value; and,
c) incorporating discussions of race into all programs of study.

Actions:
- Recruit and train Equity Avengers teams to develop training or engagement modules and archive of resources
- Develop training or engagement modules.
- Develop and implement outreach/advertising plan for training or engagement modules.
- Deliver and assess training or engagement modules.
- Review assessments of training or engagement modules; revisions of training or engagement modules as needed.

Goal 3 Develop Equity Avengers organizational infrastructure.

Objective 3.1: Create and implement formal legal structure.

Actions:

- Procure services of attorney and/or accountant with direct experience working with nonprofits (tax-exempt) organizations; complete necessary legal and tax filings.

Objective 3.2: Create organizational and operational framework for Equity Avenger and identify funding sources.

Actions:

- Develop detailed business plan to address strategic and operational issues for Equity Avengers, including definition of program and services, the organizational structure and roles, sources of funding and organizational budget, board, staff, volunteers, location.

Objective 3.3: Implement short-term short and long-term public relations and engagement plan.

Actions:

- Complete website design and development as a hub for all Equity Avengers information, content, and resources.
- Implement Short-term Public Relations Plan.
- Draft long-term public relations and engagement plan.
- Launch Equity Avengers podcast.

Goal 4 Explore and create partnerships with key faculty organizations (e.g., FACCC, AFT, CCA/CTA) to focus on equity.

Objective 4.1: Collaborate with four-year colleges/universities to align equity initiatives and support decolonization of the transfer curriculum.

Actions:

- Work with CCCCO leadership to initiate exploratory discussions with four-year college and university leaders.

- Conduct exploratory discussions with four-year college and university leaders.

Objective 4.2: Engage state-level FACCC faculty senate and unions (CTA/CCA, AFT) to support professional development related to equity, engage white leadership regarding their role in creating the culture.

Actions:

- Work with CCCCO leadership to initiate exploratory discussions with state-level FACCC faculty senate and unions (CTA/CCA, AFT).
- Conduct exploratory discussions with state-level FACCC faculty senate and unions (CTA/CCA, AFT).

Goal 5 Provide DEI-focused professional development and skill-building services to private organizations seeking to implement equity-driven initiatives.

Objective 5.1: Build brand awareness for Equity Avengers' expertise, resources, and skills on a statewide, regional, and national platform.

Actions:

- Implement strategic tactics identified in the public relations and engagement plan (e.g., introduce the Equity Avengers using projects, cultural celebrations, speaking engagements, conference events, press releases, blogs, digital content).

Objective 5.2: Provide DEI training and workshops to employer services organizations, higher education partner organizations, and private businesses.

Actions:

- Develop training modules.
- Schedule and deliver 3-4 trainings/workshops to employer services organizations, higher education partner organizations, and/or private businesses
- Assess completed trainings and modify curriculum as needed.

Chapter 6: Plan Implementation and Assessment Protocol

An implementation and assessment protocol is critical to ensuring the Five-Year Strategic Plan is translated into definitive and documented actions. Consequently, the protocol outlined below provides the basic framework and approach for the implementation and evaluation of this strategic plan.

On a biennial basis, the Equity Avengers will:

1. Review the plan goals, objectives, and actions to determine the status of each (e.g., completed, in-progress/ongoing, deleted/suspended) and evaluate the goal outcomes.

2. After reviewing the status of the plan goals, objectives, actions, and outcomes, specific project tasks, responsibilities, necessary resources and budgets needed for the completion of ongoing and new tasks, and a timeline for completion of each task over the subsequent six-month timeframe will be established.

Additionally, at the end of each calendar year a full review of the plan goals, objectives, activities, and outcomes will be conducted and activities and budgets for the next calendar year will be determined.