

College of Charleston SLT Working Retreat, 21-22 July 2026 Your Shared Thinking

Table of Contents

Why the College of Charleston Matters: Why We Care.....	1
<i>Potential Shared Values.....</i>	<i>3</i>
Our Vision of Innovation	4
<i>Pillar 1: Student Experience & Success as a Model of Innovation.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Pillar 2: Academic Distinction as a Model of Innovation</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Pillar 3: Employee Experience & Success as a Model of Innovation</i>	<i>6</i>
Our Stories of Leading in Our Lives	8
<i>Insights for Ongoing Development</i>	<i>8</i>
Innovation Capabilities.....	9
<i>Top 10 Capabilities</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Capability Definitions.....</i>	<i>9</i>

Why the College of Charleston Matters: Why We Care

Key themes from our personal experiences:

1. We transform lives by unlocking human potential.

Again and again, we described the College as a place where lives are changed. We talked about seeing students grow in confidence, discover abilities they didn't know they had, and become people who are prepared to pursue futures they once thought were out of reach. We spoke about the privilege of watching that transformation happen over time and about how it is one of the most rewarding parts of being here.

"Changing lives."

"To see the transformation that happens between year one and year four... is really amazing."

"They have so much potential... but they don't know that they have it... and then you watch this amazing transformation happen."

"Every one of us... zeroed in on the transformative power. Transformation's in our mission statement."

"The college still changed my life too. So, it changes lives of everybody."

2. We create opportunities that change futures.

We repeatedly described the College as a place that opens doors. We shared stories about scholarships, faculty making room for students, admissions decisions that gave someone a chance, and the many ways we help students pursue dreams they weren't yet sure they could achieve. We talked about being large enough to offer meaningful opportunities, but small enough that students don't get lost.

"Giving the students the opportunities but also giving students the belief that they can follow their dreams when they're not sure that they're there yet."

"To see the opportunities that open up to them... we're big enough to offer those opportunities, but not so big that students get lost."

"The history faculty circled the wagons... gave her that chance... that would not have happened at a big powerhouse R1."

"We can create an opportunity for them... We gave that student an opportunity where they might not have gotten it somewhere else."

"That going the extra mile... we have a lot of stories like that."

3. Our impact extends far beyond the individual.

Our stories rarely stopped with one student. We described how the impact of the College continues through families, future generations, professions, and the Charleston community. We talked about alumni whose education changed the course of their families, about graduates who create opportunities for others, and about the College's ability to bring people together and strengthen the community.

"The impact on students... on the future."

"His education not only changed his life, but it changed his daughter's life, and it was now changing his grandkids' life. So, it's a generational change."

"The family web that exists... all from crossing the Cistern, that is special."

"Our university kind of served as the glue for healing of the community... we're a centerpiece of Charleston."

"What is possible when you... engage a community... shows the power that the college can have in this community and beyond."

4. We are a community where people are genuinely known and supported.

Across our stories, we described relationships as one of the things that makes the College unique. We talked about knowing students personally, supporting one another, staying connected across generations, and creating a place where people feel they belong. We described a culture where people go the extra mile because they genuinely care about one another and about students.

"I found my people."

"What makes the College of Charleston special is those relationships we create that we find our people."

"We're just sizable enough to be credible, but small enough to actually get to know a lot of those relationships."

"The fact that this room of people has connections to individual students... is one of the things that makes the college... really unique."

"The community that you have created where folks care about each other and support each other."

Potential Shared Values

When Wisdom Works used AI to do a thematic analysis of our personal stories, these shared values seemed to emerge:

1. **Transforming people's lives.** We value helping people become who they are capable of becoming. We celebrate growth in confidence, opportunity, purpose, and life trajectory, suggesting a shared belief that every person has the capacity to grow when given the right support. Success was rarely defined by credentials alone, but by lives changed.
2. **Expanding opportunity.** We place a high value on opening doors for people who might not otherwise have them. Our stories centered on giving someone a chance, recognizing potential before others did, removing barriers, and helping students pursue aspirations they didn't yet believe were possible. We view opportunity not simply as access, but as a catalyst that enables people to grow, thrive, and create new possibilities for themselves and others.
3. **Investing deeply in people.** We consistently valued personal relationships over transactional ones, describing taking time to know students, supporting colleagues, staying connected with alumni, and going "the extra mile." Our stories suggest we believe people flourish when they are genuinely seen, supported, and encouraged, and that meaningful transformation happens through these relationships.
4. **Creating impact that extends beyond the College.** We value the multiplier effect of our work. Many stories naturally expanded from one student to families, professions, future students, Charleston, or society. Success was measured not only by what happens during a student's time at the College, but by the positive impact graduates create in the lives of others, reflecting a belief that individual growth strengthens communities and generations to come.
5. **Stewarding something larger than ourselves.** We expressed a deep sense of responsibility for carrying the College's legacy forward. We spoke about preserving what makes the institution special, strengthening its future, and contributing to Charleston and generations of students. Underlying these stories is a belief that leadership is about stewarding an institution and community so that others can flourish long after we are gone.

Our Vision of Innovation

Pillar 1: Student Experience & Success as a Model of Innovation

Students would be "workforce prepared with their experience and readiness," and would have a skill set focused on the concepts of "design your life," whether on campus or through global experiences.

Students would have a holistic health approach, where we would be "proactive in meeting their needs before they arrive" to connect them to wellbeing and other resources. We described a "concierge approach to the individual students" with more personalized services, and more integrated knowledge among our employees about the full college experience, so employees are well prepared to help students navigate these resources.

Students would be able to find "multiple groups of their people" and there would be "minimal friction" in helping students navigate our processes and systems. It would "feel like the Amazon experience, that you wouldn't have to click through multiple things or go multiple places to get issues resolved."

We would clearly demonstrate our connections to corporate and community partners in multiple, visible ways. Students would have the opportunity to do multiple high-impact practices and experiences, with flexibility to meet any barriers, whether time or money. Students would be able to combine their skills and know how to articulate the life skills they've learned—one example was pre-med students being able to learn Spanish for working in the medical profession.

Students would enjoy a fluidity of in-class and out-of-class experiences, modern facilities with intentional design to foster connection, and the idea that "the city is a lab"—every major would have some type of lab connection to the city, and students would know unique things about the city and have a certain number of experiences there, whether a water sport or an internship. There would be more fostered integration among students, faculty, and staff, and an ease of transportation between all our different sites.

A number of these student innovations are happening in pockets, but they're not comprehensive to the campus, and there are things happening that other people don't know about. So, we don't know how to connect students to those things. We have some foundation in place for some of these, but we may not know about all of them.

Written Notes:

- Greater integration between students, faculty, staff
- Integrated transportation
- Workforce prepared
- "The Amazon experience"
- Skilled: designing their lives -> articulate life skills
- Holistic health -> Wellbeing
- Personalized services
- Integrated knowledge of employees
- Minimal friction in navigating processes
- Connections to corporations and community
- Financial literacy

- Able to meet barriers
- Fluidity in/out classes
- "City as a Lab"

Pillar 2: Academic Distinction as a Model of Innovation

Stakeholders would notice a new culture of pride, with visible recognition and reward for academic achievements; new or accentuated campus-wide initiatives like Life Design for students, faculty, and staff; and thoughtful AI integration through our QEP across campus. They would notice enhanced infrastructure to support innovation, for example through interdisciplinary collaborations and research centers; new and stronger partnerships with industry and other institutions in the area, like MUSC; and increased name recognition for the College of Charleston nationwide.

We noted many of these innovations are already happening, "but not always in a way that the broader community knows enough about it". As examples, we've become a Phi Beta Kappa campus; we're a leading institution in Fulbright Scholarships and other nationally competitive awards; we've made our salary structures much more attractive to getting and keeping top talent; we've built new professional programs in fields like engineering and health sciences; we have record admissions and record advancement results; and faculty have recognized success in getting major grants and publishing research. "There's a lot to celebrate" and now is an opportunity to take our leadership to the next level—getting the word out so that people across the country and throughout the region know what we're doing.

Others would be coming here to learn what we're doing—which is already happening, as Georgia College and State University came here—yet, we would have a more concerted, targeted strategy related to that.

We would become the go-to institution in the region for the media or industry. For example, if they had a question about something like Coastal Resiliency or pandemics, their first thought would be to "pick up the phone and call an expert at the College of Charleston." Alongside that, we would host people to come and talk about topics, being the place that generates more innovation broadly.

We discussed that "we're not going to compete with the R1s," but "you can be a convener, even if you don't have all of the expertise in the classroom." We've done this with Coastal Resiliency and a Food Summit, and we hosted the entire state on student success with a couple of hundred people. We said we can do this better and easier than some larger schools since "all of our disciplines are more tightly connected because of the size of the school," and we're a more desirable location. The convening topic could be filled in interchangeably with any discipline, whether sports, entertainment, or politics.

**Wisdom Works team reflected that the College of Charleston has already accomplished a great deal. What was being described was "a more conscious and integrated effort," building on what's been done and not to underestimate the power of convening and modeling what collaboration can look like within a particular area.*

Written Notes:

- A new culture of pride
- Recognition and reward for achievements
- Campus wide initiatives
- Thoughtful AI integration
- Enhanced, interdisciplinary collaboration and research centers
- Stronger partnerships with industry
- Increased name recognition nation-wide
- Other institutions want to learn from us
- "Go to" university for Sports, coastal resilience, etc.
- We host topics on [fill in the blank] to generate innovation in the industry = conversations

Pillar 3: Employee Experience & Success as a Model of Innovation

We opened this conversation with the Richard Branson quote: "Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your clients."

Our top current metric is participation in Great Colleges to Work For, a survey every three years with a battery of questions on attitudes toward management, compensation, trust in leadership, communication, and benefit structure. People would know we are innovative if we see obvious gains there; over the past six years we have made great strides, but "we're still a ways away from being at a level that we would all be satisfied."

Modeling employee innovation would manifest through: retention of employees; employees growing within the organization into additional responsibility, managerial roles, and eventually leadership roles; pride in institution (i.e., employees at the weekend barbecue talking about how great it is to work at the College of Charleston rather than complaining) which begins to change the overall community narrative; and continued gains in both size and talent of applicant pools.

People would know we were innovative "if the culture is more accountable." Very high-achieving employees become disenfranchised and dissatisfied when they don't think there is accountability for folks who aren't pulling their weight.

On what we already see happening: better accountability across the institution; fewer grievances and fewer difficult employee situations requiring buyouts or separations; more and higher-quality applicants; some gains in campus pride, with people coming to athletic and arts events. A university setting is naturally built for a "rah rah attitude" (there's already a mascot, colors, and gear, more so than at a place like Blackbaud.) We also have offerings that are valuable to employees but aren't strictly compensation, like employee tuition assistance, which more people are taking advantage of, and which continues to get more budgetary resources.

Post-COVID, we want to re-engage people (mostly faculty) to be present and on campus, noting that on a given Tuesday there's hardly anybody around where 10 years ago faculty were in their offices, having coffee, and talking to students. This is a challenge businesses and corporations are dealing with, too. It can also be challenging being an urban campus versus a rural campus: it's harder to get people back on a weekend or for a game, and roughly two-

thirds of employees may have a 30–45 minute commute. We want to find ways to incentivize faculty and staff to attend weekday home games or campus speakers.

We often demonstrate innovative ways to support employee wellbeing, "but I don't know that they're broad." Is there an opportunity in the future to look at employee housing for employees who make a certain level of pay, housing that is more accessible or affordable? Is there an opportunity for a faculty/staff space to get an early workout and a shower, referencing BlackRock's gyms as an example, to help people juggle the personal side with being here and accountable?

**Wisdom Works team added that there's great research on employee wellbeing. One of the most important questions Gallup asks, often the highest-performing question in an organization, is whether the "organization cares about my wellbeing," and when employees score high on that question, they're more engaged and productive at work.*

Written Notes:

- Gains in Great Colleges to Work For
- Retention
- Growth in roles
- Pride in institution
- Gains in size/talent of applicant pool
- Accountability culture
- Increase presence and engagement at work
- People wellbeing
- People housing/facilities (gym)

Our Stories of Leading in Our Lives

When Wisdom Works used AI to do a thematic analysis of our personal stories about when we've been leaders in our lives (before we knew what "leadership" was), these themes emerged:

Leadership begins before we choose it

Leadership showed up in our lives before we named it. We were thrown into it, we were doing it, but we didn't really connect the dots that we were intentionally there to make a difference or move somebody. The leading came first; the awareness came later.

We stepped up when it was needed

A repeated thread: stepping up when the moment called for it. When a coach wouldn't run practice, one of us picked out drills—somebody had to act. Another organized open gyms when coaches couldn't interact with the team—somebody had to take control. When the leader of a campus vigil was sick, one of us walked out in front of 500-plus students to open the event with a prayer—somebody had to lead.

We led through action, not title

None of us held a formal role in our past stories of leadership—we led by doing. We led more through actions, not necessarily words, not afraid to be the first to go figure out how to build something or come up with a game. We got to lead by default because we liked to plan and organize and know what was coming up.

We led before it felt earned

Several of us stepped forward before others thought we'd earned it. From playing varsity as a freshman to always being the youngest to taking a risk on a project as a sophomore. Leading before it feels earned doesn't always work but we stepped forward anyway.

Insights for Ongoing Development

Based on the personal leadership stories of this SLT, Wisdom Works shared these ideas for ongoing development:

- **Everyone has a leadership story.** Every person you work with has a leadership story as a human being, regardless of title, role, or position. Either a time they were thrown into a sink-or-swim situation and decided to swim, or a time they stepped up with choice.
- **Storytelling shifts your state.** The act of telling your leadership story does something to you physically, emotionally, and mentally. It shifts you into a state of coherence and strength—a place of thriving.
- **Use this exercise with your team.** Invite others to tell their leadership story, potentially at your next team meeting (our activity only took 20 minutes). This is a great way to build leaders throughout the College.
- **Reframing leadership development:** This is not about "learning leadership." It's "drawing from what you already are and pulling it forward." Transformative leadership development is about tapping into your existing wisdom as much as it is learning something new.

Innovation Capabilities

Imagining ourselves five years out as one of the most innovative universities in the country, we asked what people would notice about how we lead. We then translated this exploration into the capabilities we as the Senior Leadership Team need to lead thriving and innovation sustainably.

Top 10 Capabilities

We determined the top ten capabilities and rated each on their level of importance and our current demonstration of that capability on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Listed alphabetically.

Capability	Importance	Current Demonstration	Gap
Ability to build trust and relationships.	4.4	3.5	0.9
Ability to collaborate across silos	4.8	3.8	1.1
Ability to execute & stay on track (accountability, resolve, resilience)	4.6	2.7	1.9
Ability to foster and maintain a competitive mindset	4.0	2.7	1.3
Ability to gain alignment through the organization	4.7	3.4	1.3
Ability to invest in our teams	4.4	3.7	0.7
Ability to maintain positivity and engagement	4.6	3.5	1.1
Ability to take calculated risks	4.0	2.4	1.6
Ability to think strategically using data informed decisions	4.4	2.9	1.5
Ability to recognize and evaluate expertise	3.7	2.9	0.8

Capability Definitions

We developed definitions for five of the ten capabilities.

Ability to collaborate across silos

- Seek input and feedback across institutional units.
- Be intentional in the creation of different opportunities to hear different perspectives.
- Rewarding and celebrating interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation.
- Identify and reduce structural obstacles to collaboration.
- Share workload, responsibilities, and resources.

Ability to invest in our teams

- Compensation: money, perks, food services, tuition assistance, child care
- Facilities: clean, well lit, comfortable
- Training: development, credentials
- Fitness/Wellness: gym, pool, classes, training, flexible work
- Social Events: athletics, ice cream

Ability to execute and stay on track

- Accountability, Resolve, Resilience are enablers of execution
- What are priority goals currently?
- Dashboard with regular reference of goals we are focused on
- Don't let obstacles stop progress toward goal—use all tools to execute
- Other capabilities feed into this one
- We are agile to adapt when needed
- System to review and reevaluate -> regularly, close the loop, accountability (expertise/experience is valued)
- We say “no” or “not yet”—balance

Ability to gain alignment through the organization

- Clear understanding of the university's priorities and direction.
- Example: We can all state it clearly and directly and energetically embrace it!

Ability to maintain positivity and engagement

- Enthusiastically communicate CofC's vision/goals
- Explain in context each unit/employee's role in achieving vision
- Enhance transparency and communication with entire campus community

Students • integ students, faculty, staff
• integ transportation

• wkfc prepared • "The Amazon" experience
• skilled: designing their lives $\Rightarrow$ articulate life skills
• financial literacy • holistic hth $\Rightarrow$ WB
• ~~con~~ - persisted svcs -

• integrated knowledge of emps

• min. friction in nav'g processes

• connections to corp / comm'y

• able to meet barriers

• fluidity in /out classes

• City as a lab

Employees

- Great Colleges to wk For - Gains
- retention
- growth in roles
- pride in institution
- gains in size/talent of applicant pool
- accountability culture
- ↑ presence + engmt @ wk
- people w/ B
- people housing / facilities (gym)

Academic Distinction

- a new culture of pride, recog + reward for achievements
- campus wide initiatives
- thoughtful AI integ
- enhanced, interdisc collab / research ctrs
- Stronger partnerships w/ industry
- A'd name recog Nat-wide
- Other instit want to ln from us
- "go-to" univ for Sports
coastal research
etc.
- we host topics on innov in the industry to generate conver

Ability to maintain positivity + energy.

+ structures
event

② Ability to create a culture of innov.

Ability to collaborate across silos

① Ability to execute decns (ACCOUNTABILITY)
(RESOLVE)
(RESILIENCE)

③ Ability to think strategically

③ Ability to take ^{calculated} risks

Ability to create alignment thru the org

① Ability to ^{stay} stay on track (ON MISSION)

Ability to invest in our teams

③ Ability to let go

Ability to recognize + elevate expertise

Ability to foster + maintain a competitive mindset

③ Ability to make data-informed decns

Ability to build trust + ships

Ability to Collaborate across silos

#	Importance	Demonstration
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		

Definition of Ability to Collaborate across silos

- Seek input and feedback across institutional units.
- Be intentional in the creation of different opportunities to hear different perspectives.
- Rewarding ^{celebrate} interdisciplinary collaboration + innovation.
- Identify + reduce structural obstacles to collaboration.
- Share workload, responsibilities, + resources

Ability to maintain positivity & engagement

High	Importance?	Demonstration?
5	 	
4	 	
3		
2		
1		

Definition

- ENTHUSIASTICALLY COMMUNICATE COFC'S VISION/GOALS
- EXPLAIN IN CONTEXT OF EACH UNIT/EMPLOYEE'S ROLE IN ACHIEVING VISION
- ENHANCE TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION WITH ENTIRE CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Ability to
sain

Alignment through the org

	IMPORTANCE?	DEMONSTRATION?
HIGH		
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		

Definition Clear understanding
of the university's priorities
and direction.

Example: ^{ALL} Can state it
clearly & directly AND
 Energetically
Embrace it!

Ability to invest in our teams

	Importance?	Demonstration?
HIGH 5	 	
4	+ 	+ +
3		 +
2		
1		

Definition

- Compensation
(\$, perks, Food Services, Tuition Assistance, Child Care)
- Facilities
(Clean, well lit, comfortable,
- Training
(Development, Credentials,
- Fitness/Wellness
(Gym, pool, classes, training, flexible work
- Social Events
(Athletics, Ice Cream,

When we are at our best...

Ability to execute & stay on track

Accountability, Resolve, Resilience

HIGH	IMPORTANCE?	DEMONSTRATION?
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		
LOW		

Definition

Accountability, Resolve, Resilience

are enablers of execution

- ① what are priority goals currently
- ② dashboard w/ Regular Reference
 - goals we are focused on
- ③ don't let obstacles stop progress toward goal -
 - Use all tools to execute
- ④ other capabilities feed into this
 - we are agile to adapt when needed
- ⑤ system to review & re-evaluate
 - regularly
 - close the loop
 - accountability (expertise/experience involved)
- ⑥ we say "no" or "not yet"

Balance

Ability to foster and maintain a
competitive environment

	IMPORTANCE?	DEMONSTRATION?
HIGH 5		
4		
3		
2		
1 LOW		

Ability to assess and evaluate

Ability to recognize and evaluate expertise

HIGH	IMPORTANCE?	DEMONSTRATION?
5		
4	 	
3	 	
2		
1		
Low		

Ability to take calculated RISKS

High	Importance ?	Demonstration ?
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		

Ability build trust? relationships

HIGH	IMPORTANCE?	DEMONSTRATION?
5	 	
4	()	
3		
2		
1		
low		

Ability to think STRATEGICLY
using data informed decisions

HIGH	IMPORTANCE?	DEMONSTRATION?
5	 	
4	 	
3		
2		
1		
Low		