FOUNDATIONAL NEEDS
Campus Crowdsourced

UMD’s Thriving Workplace Initiative hosted an open-invitation Campus Conversation on February 8, 2018, followed by a virtual session on March 5. This month’s conversations focused on the five elements of a thriving foundation—materials & tools, clear expectations, respect, fairness, and trust—that support all other aspects of a thriving environment.

We asked, you answered:

Altogether, the Campus Conversation sessions produced 232 ideas from faculty and staff on building thriving foundations. Below is a snapshot of what we heard from you:

MATERIALS & TOOLS
Literally “being equipped to do the job” empowers individuals to bring their best every day. What can supervisors do to make sure their team has the right materials? Here were some of the recurring ideas:

- Ask the obvious question: What do you need to do your job well? Don’t assume an employee will come to you. Ask the people “closest” to the job.
- Ask yourself, “Are workflows and processes working?” Ask your employees. Make necessary changes.

- Give employees opportunities to learn from each other and increase upward mobility through shadowing, mentorship, professional development, and apprenticeships.
- Make sure the workspace is safe and comfortable.
- Have regular check-ins with staff to ensure they have the tools they need.

Test out new materials and tools with the person using them every day!
• Create a budget that meets employees’ needs for materials; ask them to participate in making it. Set aside some money each year for “capital improvements,” such as new chairs, desks, lighting, or a conference table.
• Invest in your employees: set aside time and/or money for training and coursework that will complement their goals and skillset.
• **Materials go beyond “things”; information is a tool as well.** Make sure you’re communicating regularly, even if it feels excessive.
• Figure out what you can change and do it. Be open about what you can’t, and what you are doing to move in that direction.

**What can the University do?**

• Make clear and intentional changes to campus-wide systems.
• Offer free leadership development.
• Improve training for core systems and processes on campus.
• Consider needs of “non-office” working staff.
• More accessibility to materials (videos in multiple languages).
• “Help line”/FAQ: e.g., how do I use tuition remission?
• Offer a grant program to level the playing field for materials; create equity.
• Monitor efficiency and effectiveness of University systems and processes; make sure they are in alignment with operational needs.
• Think of the campus as a small city. What services can help your citizens (childcare, etc.)?
• Provide programs or funding for external training, development opportunities, with time built into work schedules.
• Invest in tech: better computers, etc.

**CLEAR EXPECTATIONS**
Clear expectations provide the instruction manual for success in the position. **How can a supervisor ensure clear expectations for their team members?** Here’s what you said:

• Communicate in different ways: everyone works differently. Use different media (e-mails, 1:1 conversations, etc.) and different venues (such as virtually for those not on campus).
• Focus beyond the what: communicate to employees the who, when, and in particular, WHY of job goals and purpose.

**Have the courage to stop when something is no longer working, even if it’s ‘how we’ve always done it.’**

• Keep policies and processes easily accessible, relevant, and digestible; consider offering in multiple formats.
• **Provide information in sips rather than gulps.**
• Set team expectations, but also “checkpoints,” to help people monitor their progress.
• Be transparent and clear about expectations and make sure the materials and support are in place to meet them.

**Don’t expect that your employees will accomplish their goals if they don’t have the right tools.**
• Start a “20-minute Monday” or similar venue for check-ins to share the week’s priorities.
• Ensure a clear onboarding process and follow-through: make sure job descriptions are up-to-date. Meet with individuals annually to ensure their work matches the job description.
• Leverage your communications assets to boost internal communications—use existing vehicles to highlight faculty and staff activities, provide shout-outs, and share news.

What can the University do?
• Initiate a clear, campus-wide on-boarding process/orientation to help new employees become part of the campus community.
• Mandate that each college, division, and department has a mission statement and standard operating procedures.

RESPECT
When your employees feel respected, they are happier and more productive, and feel that their work matters. What can supervisors do to foster respect in the workplace? You said:
• Enforce a work/life balance or blend: recognize people have a family and priorities outside of work.
• Let mistakes be learning opportunities, not simply mistakes.
• Lead by example – this includes taking time off yourself, having boundaries for work.
• Support and praise, especially in times of uncertainty and change.
• Recognize hard work and a job well done: silly awards, e-mails, one-to-one, length of service.
• Ask for input, but go beyond that—follow up with results and action.
• Encourage/invite University leadership to come visit and interact with your group—share their achievements up the ladder.

“Don’t send a ‘checking in’ e-mail in the middle of the night. Trust people will get the work done and check in at a more appropriate time.”

Hint: If you work best at night, add the Boomerang extension to your Gmail to schedule your e-mail delivery.

What can the University do?
• Be more visible—participate and observe what happens on campus.
• Be more inclusive in gathering feedback.
• Work on tone of e-mails to be more empathetic and less defensive.
• Soften the hierarchy—allow people to reach up, down, and across naturally. Employees need the opportunity to go multiple levels up with messages and ideas.
FAIRNESS
Do all members of your team feel recognized? Is the workload spread equally? Here are some ideas you had to promote fairness in the workplace:

- Notice, recognize, and compensate for crunch times. Create space for downtime and reflection; make time to re-charge.
- Give everyone a chance to shine. Make sure everyone has a chance to contribute in meetings and events; spread recognition beyond leadership.
- Create transparency with decision-making when possible; explanation can decrease the perception of unfairness.
- Communicate, even when the answer is “no”.
- Know the load. Have an understanding of your team members' workloads and ensure fair distribution.
- Don’t be afraid to have the tough conversations. If you are being “kind” to someone by trying to fit a square peg into a round hole, you are being “unkind” to your team.
- Endure problems alongside your team members.
- Don’t be afraid to treat people differently (but equitably); people need different flexibility, environments, and engagement to do well.
- When new responsibilities are taken on, the discussion about a salary increase should not be a non-starter. Initiate an open and honest conversation.

What can the University do?
- Revise the PRD process. Re-evaluate categories and assessment areas and examine if they are being implemented fairly across all levels.
- Have the courage to close things that are not working anymore.
- Apply more funding to organizations on campus already working on diversity.
- Offer “liberal” leave policy when public schools are closed in other counties.
- Recognize and develop strategies to address salary stagnation and the growing discrepancies between new hire and longtime employee salaries.

TRUST
Trust is the mortar that holds all the other elements together. What can supervisors do to instill a sense of trust at UMD? You said:

- Create an open-door policy—if possible keep physical proximity to your team.
- Look for opportunities for employees to grow beyond the current job description. Understand skill sets and discover places to grow. Look for stretch opportunities—encourage staff to try new things.
- Do you get lost in your own tasks and responsibilities? Create reminders in your calendar for interactions with team members and their work.
- Allow people flexibility and autonomy in time management; if they get the work done, the when and where isn’t as important.
• Meet in the employee’s workspaces—or other venues, like over a cup of coffee—not just on your own turf.
• Own your mistakes—show humility by taking responsibility for mistakes and trying to fix them.
• Empower your direct reports—spread the responsibility of oversight by creating tiers; you can’t do a good job overseeing everyone yourself.
• Lay off micromanaging. Give the team autonomy to make decisions and encourage them to communicate their progress.

“Get comfortable with not doing everything yourself—there might be another team member who can do it better!”

What can the University do?
• Provide more clarity about long-term growth plan, such as new buildings.
• Less “PR-style” communication; be more honest about missteps.
• Revisit campus flexibility and telework policies.

Participate in upcoming Campus Conversations to discuss dimensions of a thriving workplace and generate strategies for action. Find the 2018 schedule here.

Need more ideas? Have a specific challenge? Visit the TWI Resource Library for videos, strategies, and more.