

McConnell Foundation Community Dialogue:

Harnessing Brock's Role as Change Agent



Executive Summary

Located in historic Brock is a community-engaged university with a rich history of involvement in the Niagara region committed to enhancing social, economic and community development. While for decades Brock had carried out this role as a change agent to promote positive impacts locally and regionally, the University decided to formalize this commitment in its 2018 institutional strategic plan. Following this commitment, the University devised a new framework for community engagement based on a model as a regional community builder. Recognizing Brock's intrinsic links to the community, the new model established guiding principles and priorities for Brock's community engagement to pursue and expand mutually beneficial partnerships that support the social, cultural, and economic well-being of Niagara.

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brock's vital role to the community became even more important in responding to the crisis and building an equitable recovery. In 2021, Brock held a community consultation in partnership with the McConnell Foundation to better understand and receive feedback on our role in the community and what the University can work towards in the future. The community consultation reaffirmed the importance of Brock's role as a positive change agent and provided key recommendations that highlighted a central theme for Brock to focus on through its community engagement – diversification. With this feedback in mind, Brock has assessed its current state in supporting the recommendations of the community and what we can do to better support them in the future. This community consultation served as an important guide to informing Brock's strategic direction to community engagement and our vision of a collaborative, engaged, and thriving Niagara.

Introduction

Brock has had an ongoing and rich history of community involvement since its inception in 1964. In fact, the creation of Brock University was due to grassroots community efforts led by the Allanburg Women’s Institute beginning in the late 1950s to establish a local university and provide regional youth with quality education in Niagara. Soon after it was established, Brock recognized that its role in society exists to shape the future, and not just respond to it. Brock not only provided an opportunity for local students to stay in Niagara to be educated, but it also presented a capacity for and responsibility to impact positive change in the Niagara region. Over the decades Brock has sought out opportunities to utilize its people, research, resources, and relationships to deepen its support and collaboration with the local community. Through participation, consultation, and collaboration across Niagara, Brock is a robust partner that leverages its university expertise, knowledge, and service to community needs to continue building and supporting a better society at home and beyond.

Prior to the onset of the global pandemic in 2020, Brock had been in the midst of implementing strategic directions outlined in the 2018 institutional strategic plan **Niagara Roots – Global Reach**. While the university has a long history of community partnership, the strategic plan provided a new mandate and direction for enhancing the student experience, research, scholarly and creative activities. This mandate also led to the development of a new **Community Engagement Strategic Plan: Regional Community Builder** to guide the university’s role in the region and the strategic partnerships it develops. The new model would usher in a new phase for Brock’s community engagement that formally established our mission to bring the University and community together for mutual advantage that serves the social, cultural, and economic well-being of Niagara. This plan has five goals that shape the way Brock intends to engage with community partners:

- Foster a culture of meaningful community engagement
- Support knowledge mobilization
- An open and accessible community resource
- Communicate and connect with the community
- Support experiential learning and educational pathways

Brock recognizes it is intrinsically linked to our community, and that this connection is fundamental to enhancing the quality of living and well-being of the region. Understanding the importance of the symbiotic relationships between Brock and local agencies, industries and governments, the university has built, nurtured, and developed partnerships from nascency through to the establishment of Memorandums of Understanding (MOU). Through these agreements, Brock and community partners work in concert with one another in a mutually beneficial way to solve community issues and meet societal needs.

While COVID-19 has impacted all aspects of the university’s operations, it has not deterred or shifted its course in terms of the university’s commitment to achieving the goals outlined in both Brock’s Institutional Strategic Plan, and the Community Engagement Strategic Plan. In fact, the importance of Brock’s role as change agent is more important than ever as we navigate our new realities. The pandemic quickly highlighted Brock’s vital role in mobilizing research, resources, and relationships quickly to address large and pressing issues as well as Brock’s responsibility in responding to the crisis and building an equitable recovery. The pandemic also brought to the forefront Brock’s role and ability to enhance our community-building role through educational, research, financial, relational, and physical resources which can be used for greater societal impact and prepare us better for the future.

Building on Brock’s history of engagement and collaboration with community partners and recognizing our role as a change agent, the University facilitated a community-university dialogue, in partnership with the **McConnell Foundation**, on how we can continue to contribute to and support our shared economic recovery and the future competitiveness of the region. The McConnell Foundation is a Canadian foundation that contributes to diverse and innovative approaches to address community resilience, reconciliation, and climate change. Dialogue participants included more than 20 community members across various sectors including local government, Indigenous communities, health care, economic development, agriculture, tourism, and social services. The dialogue was based on two key questions: 1) How can Brock best play a role as an economic driver in our region?; and 2) What cultural/social role should Brock play and how can we measure that? Feedback raised by community members reaffirmed Brock’s current contributions to the Niagara community, while also highlighting the leading role we can play in national COVID-19 recovery efforts, community resilience, and the overall well-being and vitality of the region. Guided and supported by the community consultation, Brock has been able to use it as a springboard to ensure our priorities continue serving community needs while advancing future economic, social, and cultural developments of the region.

The purpose of this document is to lay out Brock’s learnings from this community dialogue and next steps on harnessing our role as a change agent in support of our community. Brock’s capacity as an economic, social, and cultural driver in the community is an important responsibility and opportunity for the university to not only help our community recover from the global pandemic, but also flourish after this COVID-19 era. Together with our community, ongoing dialogue and collaboration will help Brock evaluate its current efforts and prepare for future initiatives to continue supporting Niagara’s well-being and vitality.



Consultation Key Takeaways

Overall, the feedback received from community partners and stakeholders validated the strategic direction and objectives in Brock's Institutional Strategic Plan. Despite the unplanned disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brock has continued collaborating and engaging with individuals, businesses, and organizations throughout the Niagara region towards shared economic recovery and future competitiveness.

During the dialogue, the key takeaways were all tied together with an overarching theme of diversification. Community members around the virtual table highlighted the need to diversify programming and resources available at Brock and those in positions of leadership and across the Brock community to improve the cultural, economic, and social viability of the region.

Brock is already recognized as a major driver of economic growth and prosperity in Niagara by attracting domestic and international students to the region, being a leading regional employer with direct and indirect impacts on local businesses, research and services, and partnerships with businesses. Participants highlighted ways that Brock can strengthen its role to improve the economic viability of the region in the short-, mid-, and long-term.

Similarly, while Brock is seen as a cultural and social hub in Niagara, participants highlighted ways to deepen and strengthen Brock's role in the social, cultural, and economic well-being of the region, which serves to enrich the vitality the local community.

Each key takeaway raised by participants is highlighted along with Brock's current state and plans for the future.

1. Brock has an opportunity to lead the recovery and future-proof the region by aligning education, research, and programming to future community and workforce needs.

Current state

Brock recognizes its role in helping move Niagara forward and has always played a role in responding to community needs even before the pandemic. Brock has been identifying opportunities and supported community needs over time in a myriad of ways.

For instance, after extensive consultations with government, industry and local community leaders, Brock heard that the lack of engineering capacity in the region was causing concern as the average age of employed engineers in Niagara was approaching retirement. As a response to this demand, Brock created a new **Department of Engineering** that supports the employability of students and the economic vitality of the region. Brock's engineering is different than what has been traditionally offered. By teaching integrated engineering, students take key concepts from traditional engineering fields – such as mechanical, civil, and electrical – and brings them together into a single coherent program. Brock is providing opportunities for students to learn about each field and the connections between them, to produce graduates who are skilled in communication, collaborative, and inherently transdisciplinary in their approach to problemsolving that will advance the technical base of Niagara's workforce. Brock's program also provides extensive opportunities for students to participate in work integrated learning, where they spend time with Niagara companies bringing their theoretical studies to real world applications. Although an engineering program was in development prior to the pandemic, there has been an emphasis to get it up and running. We understand that new integrated innovative technologies and problem-solving will be critical to Niagara's growth in a post-COVID recovery.

Another way Brock supports community needs is through our dedication to offering **co-op and experiential placements** to community organizations and employers across the region for mutual benefits. Brock is improving employer access to talented students for immediate and future hiring needs. We are also working with employers to provide students with opportunities to gain practical and industry experience where

students can implement the latest conceptual ideas and innovations. As a response to the pandemic, we have also created short- and mid-term employment opportunities to assist businesses in need. Through increased opportunities for students to learn and work with employers in the community, we are fostering stronger relationships for the University and responding to community needs.

Brock has also taken steps to alleviate challenges on local infrastructure. As a response to community demand for more on-campus housing from students and alleviating pressures on the regional housing supply, Brock has created more student residence options to reduce pressure on an already limited supply of affordable housing in the region and reduce the negative impact of real estate markets driving up sale and rent prices. Brock's Residence 8 is the first Brockowned housing complex to be built on campus since 2003. Brock is also exploring opportunities to partner with private developers to increase student housing options by building residences close to campus, away from residential neighbourhoods, or in downtown St. Catharines. And Brock is also increasing access to better public transit connections by opening Brock's campus up as a connection hub for **Metrolinx's new GO Bus service** and local transit that will enhance community accessibility through new means to travel to and throughout the region. Overall, Brock is working towards to expanding infrastructure options for students and community alike that alleviates demand and pressures on local infrastructure.

In research, Brock has always been committed to knowledge mobilization. Our researchers and scholars work alongside local industries, governments, and agencies to seek ways to improve our social, cultural, and economic health by conducting meaningful research with, for, and on behalf of community partners to address local needs and facilitate societal changes. Brock also prides itself on its ability to share its research with and support local industry in ways that further their technological and economic objectives. This work includes fostering excellence in transdisciplinary research by establishing institutes and research centres that bridge disciplines to solve complex problems, integrate methods and theoretical approaches to better tackle pressing contemporary issues, and generate knowledge breakthroughs for our increasingly complex 21st century reality.

For instance, **Brock's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI)** supports the local grape and wine industry through analytical services and professional development programming. CCOVI has an annual impact of more than \$91-million and the equivalent of 307 to Ontario's economy revealing significant economic benefits because of Brock's research. The **Environmental Sustainability Research Centre (ESRC)** enables educational and research opportunities focused on environmental responsibility. ESRC also engages in knowledge mobilization ensuring research findings benefit the Niagara community. Co-operative

education opportunities through ESRC allow students to utilize their skills and knowledge to increase environmental sustainability within community organizations and businesses. The Niagara Adapts Partnership is an example of ESRC's work having a meaningful and significant impact. This partnership brings together seven municipalities in Niagara with ESRC to work together towards climate change adaptation through planning and building innovative solutions.

The **Institute for Lifespan Development Research** is a multidisciplinary collaborative effort dedicated to studying human development across the lifespan, that works closely with over 40 community agencies. A critically important aspect of their work is knowledge mobilization through sharing research regularly with the community through community engagement committees, workshops, events, and webinars and through partner-specific training sessions. For example, the Brock Healthy Youth Project studies adolescent brain development and its links to health-risk behaviours and mental health problems and substance abuse disorders. This research is used in developing prevention/intervention programs, policies, and educational materials for the local community and beyond.

The **Niagara Community Observatory** is a public-policy think-tank working in partnership with the Niagara community to foster, produce, and disseminate research on current and emerging issues as well as local needs. Knowledge is co-created in partnership with community organizations, governments and businesses and shared widely across the community ensuring everyone benefits from localized research and public-policy development and changes.

The **Social Justice Research Institute (SJRI)** creates and mobilizes knowledge that addresses contemporary social problems, supports community partnerships through Community Engagement Grants and coordinates connections between members, students, and community activists. SJRI also provides local support for project facilitation, relationship building, workshop opportunities and more.

Furthermore, Brock is developing innovation and entrepreneurial hubs that will meet the demands of the future of work by supporting skills development, advancing research, and turning problems into solutions. The **Brock LINC** is a 41,000 square foot facility dedicated to providing entrepreneurial and leadership programs, mentorship, paths to venture funding, and the delivery of employment skills and training. By establishing this space Brock can partner with local start-ups and entrepreneurs committed to solving the challenges of our community, country, and world including support for innovative projects in the community in the affordable housing innovation and sustainable community development spaces. The **Validation, Prototyping and Manufacturing Institute (VPMI)** is a collaborative hub connecting Brock researchers and students with industry

partners. By facilitating collaborations between Brock University researchers and industry, the VPMI creates experiential learning opportunities for students and industry personnel involved in collaborative projects. These collaborations provide real-world experience for students and offer learnings to local industry that can strengthen their economic presence in the Niagara region.

Future state

As we emerge from the pandemic and to support the future competitiveness of the region, Brock has plans to increase the ways it supports the community. Firstly, Brock will continue to consult with local and regional economic stakeholders and businesses on skills gaps and potential programming that could better support Niagara's needs. Brock will also continue to engage with the community on how the University can support economic recovery from the pandemic. Developing a new **Professional and Continuing Studies** operation will also support lifelong learning through multiple continuing studies pathways to upgrade, up-skill, and re-skill for a stronger regional workforce. This is particularly relevant and important as feedback received from the consultation was that Brock needs to diversify and expand program offerings along with more flexible options that meet the needs of employers and the local community.

Brock is also growing its nursing program from 60-80 graduates per year to 170-200 to support increased demand from our local health care sector and aging community. This will support demands placed on the health care system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and address future needs of Niagara's aging population. Brock is also seeking to grow our teachers' education program to support increased demand from our local and regional schools and particularly technology educators who can expose young children to STEM at an earlier age preparing them for the jobs of the future. Brock is also seeking to expanding the Brock LINC and VPMI's capacity, resources, and offerings to continue turning community-identified problems into solutions, and solutions into action to support development and growth. And lastly, Brock will be building new academic programming related to engineering, including a one-year Professional Master of Engineering, Integrated Engineering, an accredited four-year Bachelor of Engineering, Integrated Engineering, and research-based Master's and Doctoral programs in Engineering to support future economic growth and recovery in Niagara in the post-COVID era.

In research, the pandemic has highlighted the significant need to enhance knowledge mobilization and leverage research for social change. Brock will continue to look for opportunities to co-create research with community partners, and to apply for funding opportunities to support collaborative research that will address community issues and needs.

2. Brock has an opportunity to continue leading the bridging, development and strengthening of community partnerships to support the well-being and vitality of the region.

Current state

Connecting, communicating, and engaging with the community has always been part of Brock's history, and is a critical part of Brock's strategic priorities to enhance the well-being and vitality

of our region. To date, we have signed **14 institutional Memorandums of Understanding partnerships** with community partners in the health care, education, environmental, social services, government, and transportation sectors. With a strategic imperative to build a stronger and more vibrant Niagara, we continue to engage and partner with key allies in the region to better serve community needs through reciprocal partnerships.

Some of this work includes working with local health care partners at Niagara Region Public Health, the Niagara Health System, and Pathstone Mental Health to advance physical and mental health outcomes for Niagara residents. Positive and immediate impacts have already been achieved through experiential learning opportunities for students that have supported short-term hiring needs, collaborative research in areas of mutual interest to advance findings and solutions on critical health care issues, and knowledge mobilization that allows researchers at Brock University to apply their findings in a way that benefits the Niagara community.

Brock also recognizes the importance of supporting and growing local industry through partnerships with key stakeholders like the Hamilton-Oshawa Port Authority (HOPA Ports). This partnership has supported marine, supply-chain, and transportation industry issues, demands, and needs in several ways. It has leveraged Brock's research expertise and facilitated experiential learning opportunities, including co-op placements, for students and researchers to contribute to the development of HOPA Ports' multi-modal transportation hub that supports Ontario's marine and transportation industries, facilitates trade, and builds prosperous working waterfronts. In turn, the partnership with a key industry stakeholder has supported the development of Brock Engineering programs by providing community guidance and support.

To also help our community recover from the global pandemic as well as flourish beyond this COVID-19 era, Brock has partnered with key stakeholders in the region like the Niagara Workforce Planning Board (NWPB). Brock has collaborated with the NWPB to help build and nurture a prosperous Niagara community comprised of a diverse and talented workforce, through research, data collection, and student experiential learning opportunities to understand economic influences within the Niagara region, what role the university plays in economic development, and how Brock can support the future of work both as an academic institution and as a large employer in the region.

Future state

The importance of enhancing the well-being and vitality of our community has only grown since the pandemic. Brock will continue to engage and partner with key partners, stakeholders, and allies in the Niagara region and beyond to contribute to the well-being and vitality of the region and build capacity by aligning Brock's resources with community needs.

As Brock evolves from a city builder model to a regional community builder and resource, the university is strengthening and expanding its efforts moving from ad hoc individualized collaborations to well-defined, outcome-driven partnerships. Recognizing this, Brock is committed to continue exploring new opportunities for partnership with community organizations, local industry partners, and local governments. By creating opportunities for the two-way exchange of ideas, knowledge, skills, and expertise, and by communicating the mutual benefits, Brock University aims to position itself as a public resource that supports the social and economic well-being of the community.

Robust and meaningful relationships will be particularly important as Brock participates in the Canada Summer Games 2022 and looks to relocate its satellite campus to Burlington to increase connections with the growing Golden Horseshoe community. By bringing Brock to new communities, and the community to Brock, it demonstrates that there is a continued demand to increase Brock's connections with community to accomplish shared priorities together.



3. Brock is seen as a thought leader, and has an opportunity to continue advocating, developing, and implementing Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) calls to action and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives to help achieve a more equitable and just society.

Current state

During the consultation process, the importance of Brock leading the region to continue leading and supporting the development of a more equitable and just society. Brock recognizes the importance in fully acknowledging and learning from injustices of the past and committing to substantive change going forward. Steps continue to be taken and implemented to support the development of more diverse and inclusive programming, services, research, and community engagement throughout Brock.

Brock understands access to and representation in post-secondary learning for Indigenous students has been a barrier. As such, the University has expanded Indigenous programming and resources, including establishing a new teaching lodge to provide safe space for Indigenous ways of knowing, and establishing four new Indigenous faculty positions to strengthen Brock's commitment to Indigenous views that inform teaching and research across the University. Brock has also created an Indigenous Research Grant to support research developed in conjunction with and contribute in reciprocal ways to Indigenous Peoples, including a partnership with the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre to research Indigenous caregiver experiences and with Plenty Canada to study Indigenous plants along the Laura Secord Legacy Trail.

In addition to programming and resources, Brock has also established new scholarships, grants, and awards to support Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC), and other underrepresented and marginalized groups in surpassing financial barriers in accessing postsecondary education. These include the Horizon Graduate Scholarship, eligible to

incoming research-based students who identify as BIPOC or as a member of another under-represented group, and three new scholarships for Indigenous students pursuing programs in the Faculty of Mathematics and Science to ensure that Brock continues to attract stellar researchers and students from various fields while building a diverse and inclusive university community representative of our region.

Brock has also been an active community participant in advocating for and amplifying calls for meaningful societal change. The University has leveraged our campus as a hub up to host community events discussing anti-Black and anti-Asian racism, Indigenization, and decolonization. The three-day **1834 Fellowship forum**, coordinated in partnership with Operation Black Vote Canada, brought 40 fellows from Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta together to discuss the importance and impact of electing Black people to public office. A Decolonization Symposium - jointly hosted by the Decolonization Working Group of the **President's Advisory Committee on Human Rights, Equity and Decolonization (PACHRED)**, **Human Rights and Equity**, and **Aboriginal Student Services** - generated a space for more dialogue surrounding decolonization and what that might look like in post-secondary institutions as well as in society at large. Brock has also been actively engaged in the National Dialogues and Action for Inclusive Higher Education and Communities and subsequent signing of the **Scarborough Charter** alongside 50 other universities and colleges across Canada to identify key barriers to Black inclusion and approaches to identifying and responding to them.

Future state

Brock is committed to doing its part to contribute to a positive future but acknowledges there is much more work that remains to be done. Brock remains committed to creating an accessible, equitable, and inclusive environment both at Brock and in the wider region through a variety of initiatives. Developing, expanding, and strengthening meaningful relationships with marginalized and under-represented communities across all activities of the University remains a priority for Brock to effect meaningful and lasting societal change.

By enhancing community partnerships with marginalized and under-represented groups, Brock will be able to continue matching community needs, issues, and ideas to University expertise and resources, while working with community members on actionable solutions that will further advance the recommendations of the TRC and support EDI initiatives. For example, Brock is exploring additional ways to minimize barriers of entry for marginalized and under-represented groups by establishing a free tuition program that supports up to five former and/or current youth in foster care each year with an emphasis on providing support to Indigenous youth.

Brock will also continue to identify ways within the University to continue equipping students, faculty, and staff with support and resources to develop and promote engaged citizenship and a sense of responsibility, empathy, and compassion. From educating future leaders with values-based decision-making to increasing faculty diversity through a cluster hiring of Black scholars, Brock will continue to lead from action starting right at home.



4. Brock has an opportunity to support, engage, retain, and attract international students and newcomers to Canada through learning, outreach, and community involvement.

Current state

To proactively support the region's desired population and employment growth, Brock has recognized the need to support and engage international students and newcomers to Canada through pathways of learning, outreach, and community involvement. The Province has forecast a 2041 population increase in Niagara of 168,000 persons to 610,000, and an increase of 80,000 jobs to 265,000 jobs that the Niagara Region must proactively plan for. Together, growth in these areas will drive business development, new housing, infrastructure, research and innovation, and assessment growth.

To support international students, Brock has a suite of programming and services designed to help international students get the most of their academic studies and student experience, including immigration consulting, ESL services, and community engagement opportunities. In addition, Brock has established a new tuition structure that eliminates annual tuition increases for international students to ensure Brock continues to attract international talent to the region.

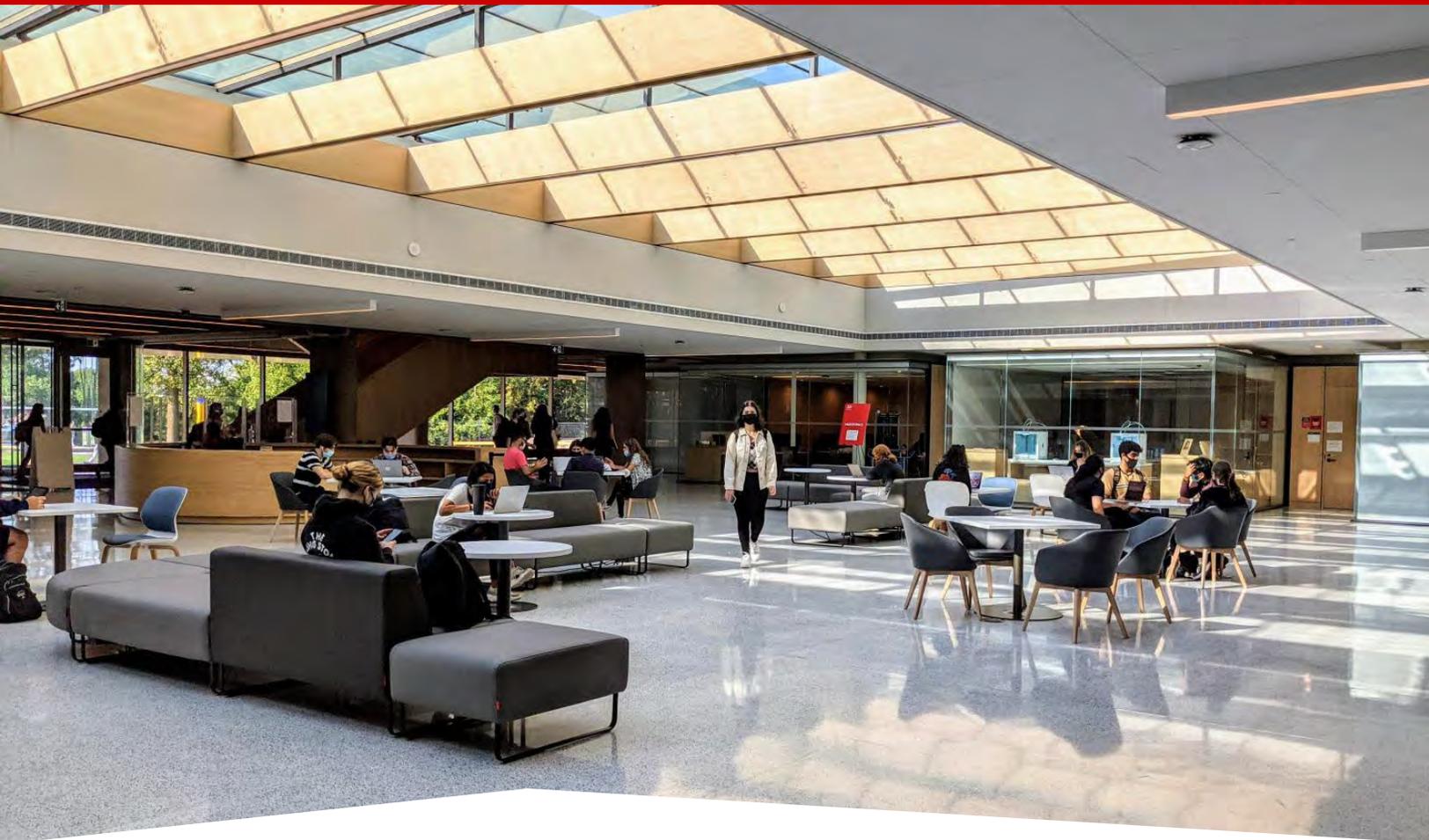
Brock has also partnered with community organizations with a mutual goal of helping international students and newcomers to Canada through research, outreach, and support services. The University has collaborated with the Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre on pressing needs and issues through a broad range of programs and services, ranging from supporting the Afghan resettlement effort in the region, to connecting international students with opportunities to engage and develop hands-on skills through work and learning. Brock has also partnered with the Niagara Workforce Planning Board on an Immigrant Mentorship Program as well as supporting virtual panel discussions on issues faced by newcomers. Another initiative has seen Brock collaborating with TOES Niagara on a Faculty of Nursing study on social exclusion of immigrant and racialized women in Niagara.

Future state

Brock recognizes its role in supporting international students and the newcomer community can be enhanced to ensure we are maximizing the skills and talent brought to the region, as well as assisting in developing new knowledge and skill sets that will enable individuals to become contributors to and champions of their new home. The University will continue to explore ways to leverage and mobilize our education, research, relationships, assets, resources, reach, and influence to support both the work at Brock and in the community of embracing and welcoming international students and newcomers in the region and beyond.

Some of the work Brock will be embarking on includes the development of an International Strategic Plan to further enhance Brock's international impact, better support the capacity of Brock faculty and students to engage internationally and reaffirm our commitment to serve our world and nurture global citizens. In addition, Brock will continue to identify and explore opportunities to attract and retain international students and talent to support community needs and future regional development.





Next steps

To continue harnessing Brock’s role as change agent and to support the actions and initiatives highlighted in this report, the University will continue to have conversations and engage in collaborations with community partners and stakeholders. This frequent dialogue between Brock and community will provide vital guidance and support in the shaping, implementation, and tracking of strategic initiatives and priorities across the institution.

Throughout our history, Brock has worked with our community to ensure our offerings and resources are guided by community feedback, and responsive to their needs. By responding to societal needs and supporting its growth and development, Brock has played a role in strengthening the life and vitality of our community. Engaging and collaborating with community to align community needs with our resources continues to be a cornerstone of Brock’s approach and direction to help solve pressing challenges in the region and beyond.

Brock’s role as a change agent to mobilize research, resources, and relationships quickly to address large and critical problems is more important than ever considering the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic has proven to be challenging in many ways, it has provided an opportunity for Brock to further conversations with community members on ways we can continue to co-create solutions and initiatives to not only meet immediate socioeconomic recovery needs arising from the pandemic, but also ways to future-proof our community resiliency. By working together with community partners and stakeholders, Brock will ensure its strategic direction is continuously aligned with the needs of our community to support the wellbeing and vitality of the region.

Progress from the actions and initiatives discussed in this report will be reviewed and monitored throughout the academic year, and an annual update will be prepared in May after the close of the year and shared both within the Brock community, and externally with our community partners via the Office of Government and Community Relations. This continued dialogue and collaboration with community partners will continue to help guide Brock’s strategic direction, and enhance Brock’s vision of a collaborative, engaged, and thriving Niagara.

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