



# Carlow University and the City of Pittsburgh: Town & Gown Relationship

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## Executive Summary

Carlow University, a small private Catholic institution, is facing challenges centered on enrollment, evolving student needs, and long-term financial viability. Located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Carlow competes in a state saturated with institutions of higher education and a city that contains 14 of those. Carlow's campus is in Pittsburgh's Oakland Corridor, a fast-growing economic hub that also includes the renowned University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University. As a strategy to differentiate itself in this crowded higher education marketplace, Carlow plans to redevelop part of its campus into an education complex to meet both institutional and community needs. Because Carlow's relationship with the city is critical to this project's viability and potential revenue generation, we examined the town-and-gown relationship between Carlow and the city of Pittsburgh.

We conducted a literature review of three main topical areas: strategic planning and revenue generation, university stakeholder relationships, and town-gown relationships. We discovered that for urban universities like Carlow, the role of the city itself—that is, city leadership, city planners, and the city bureaucracy—is a critical part of the “town” in the town-gown relationship.

From the literature review we created a list of best practices for town-gown relationships. We then segmented these best practices into four categories: purposeful communication, participatory engagement, collaborative planning, and shared resources. This framework is used to inform the project design and help guide the data collection and analysis in order to describe the relationship between Carlow University and the city of Pittsburgh. The conceptual framework also is used to investigate and assess specific opportunities and challenges related to the Carlow educational complex initiative.

Synthesizing the organizational context, the problem of practice, the literature review, and the conceptual framework, we identified two research questions:

- What is the nature of engagement between Carlow University and the city of Pittsburgh?
- What opportunities and challenges exist for partnership between Carlow and the city of Pittsburgh, particularly in the context of the educational complex?

Because this capstone project is designed to provide Carlow University with clear recommendations based on a comprehensive assessment involving many voices and sources, we used a three-pronged qualitative approach, specifically interviews, document analysis, and social media reviews. We sought interviews with both university leaders and city officials to hear their thoughts on the nature of their interactions. We also sought perspectives from Pittsburgh university leaders outside of Carlow to better understand how their universities negotiate the town-gown relationship. To understand and assess Carlow's views, we conducted interviews with Carlow leadership, reviewed Carlow documents for strategic planning and marketing, and reviewed a year's worth of social media to see how and where Carlow was communicating about town-gown-related activities.

During the analysis of our data, triangulation occurred as qualitative data from interviews was analyzed alongside the results from the document analysis and compared to the

best practices gleaned from the literature review. Synthesizing across all sources allowed us to test the conceptual framework and provided a foundation for the following findings.

Concerning the first question—the nature of engagement in this particular town-and-gown relationship—we found that communication between Carlow and the city was limited and uneven and that the university's involvement with the Oakland Corridor planning project was inconsistent. We also found that city officials think highly of Carlow, and these viewpoints were primarily derived from the institution's history of supporting underserved populations.

Regarding opportunities for and challenges to partnering with the city, we found that city leadership sees value for Pittsburgh in the education complex and would like Carlow to be more involved in the ongoing Oakland plan. Carlow's communications with the city about the education complex have been hindered by university leadership not yet articulating a shared vision for the project. Finally, we found that Carlow's president, Dr. Kathy Humphrey, is a major asset to both the university and this project, as city and higher education leaders voiced confidence in and excitement about her leadership.

Given these findings, we recommend that Carlow:

- schedule regular meetings with city planners and mayoral staff members,
- cultivate strong relationships between Carlow leadership team members and key city leaders,
- commit to a consistent presence at Oakland Corridor planning meetings,
- align the education complex initiative with broader development plans, especially those that build on the strengths and interests of the institution such as early childhood education,
- ensure that Carlow representatives have key talking points to communicate this alignment,
- continue to showcase President Humphrey and become more strategic about how her time is spent with city leaders, and
- utilize the intuition's history as a core asset by framing the vision for this project within the larger story of Carlow, an institution that consistently seeks to address the needs of underserved populations and create a more just and merciful world.

# Carlow University and the City of Pittsburgh: Town & Gown Relationship

## Introduction

Located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Carlow University is at a crossroads, both figuratively and literally. Like many small institutes of higher learning, Carlow is facing myriad challenges, including a predicted demographic cliff for enrollments, the erosion of tuition revenue, and fast-evolving student needs (Marcy, 2023). As Carlow ponders how to handle these challenges, it also faces opportunities and threats due to its geographic location. The university sits at a junction point within the Pittsburgh Oakland Corridor, a fast-developing hub of industry, education, commerce, and transportation. Carlow adjoins the University of Pittsburgh and is very close to Duquesne and Carnegie Mellon universities. As part of its strategic approach to these existential and geographic challenges, Carlow is considering redeveloping a parcel of land and its buildings into a new educational complex. The goals for the complex are to grow enrollment in education majors and programs and serve the needs of the local community and the city of Pittsburgh by expanding the current childcare center and Campus K-8 School. This strategic move comes as the city is launching its plan to revitalize the Oakland Corridor, presenting Carlow with a unique opportunity for collaboration with the city. This capstone project explores the relationship between Carlow University and the city of Pittsburgh and analyzes it using a framework based on best practices for town-and-gown collaboration.

## Organizational Context

### *Carlow University*

Founded in 1929 as Mount Mercy College, Carlow University is a small private Catholic university in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As of 2021, currently enrolled students numbered 1,984, including full-time, part-time, and online students in undergraduate and graduate programs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). The student body is predominantly white (73%) and female (86%).

Carlow was conceived by the Sisters of Mercy to open higher education to Catholic women, a group who could not access higher education in Pittsburgh at that time. It continues today to provide opportunities to those who otherwise could not obtain post-secondary education. Nearly 76% of students are first-generation, carving pathways for their futures in fields such as nursing, education, and social work.

This agility—the ability to change to meet current community and societal needs—is not uncommon at Carlow. Sister Sheila Carney, a key figure in Carlow’s heritage, said that Carlow is always looking for “who is not being served and what do we have to bring to that?” (S. Carney, personal communication, August 8, 2023).

The school navigated transformational periods at other points during its 94-year history, including admitting males for the first time in the 1940s, developing professional programs such as nursing and business in the 1940s–1960s, and creating accelerated programs for adults in the 1970s and 1980s (Nicola, 1996). Much of this change represented balancing a liberal arts tradition with more career-focused professional education. Throughout these changes, Carlow

reimagined its immediate purpose in response to external forces while remaining true to a mission of empowering students to be leaders who will contribute to a “just and merciful world” (Carlow University, 2023).

More recently, Carlow has been known primarily for its nursing program, as well as support for underserved student constituencies including first-generation students, students who are single-parent scholars, and Pell-eligible students. Currently, 44% of Carlow undergraduate students are Pell-eligible.

Leadership is key to Carlow’s current development as an institution, as well as its future trajectory. The vision and values of the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, such as caring for the poor and underserved and creating opportunities for women, shine through even today. The Sisters of Mercy remain a physical presence on Carlow’s campus and in the Pittsburgh community. Their ethos of service and justice informs Carlow’s major strategic considerations and decisions.

A throughline exists from Catherine McAuley to the current president, Dr. Kathy Humphrey. Dr. Humphrey is widely regarded as a champion of diversity and equity and for creating access to educational opportunities (Meet Dr. Humphrey, n.d.). As a first-generation college student herself, Dr. Humphrey is committed to opening the higher education door to all. Dr. Humphrey is firmly rooted in social justice values, personally and professionally. Dr. Humphrey manifests the historical vision of Carlow through current leadership priorities of serving others through transformational educational experiences, with specific attention to Carlow’s direct neighbors who have been traditionally underserved.

### **Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania**

Among other distinctions, Pittsburgh is known as a city of “eds and meds” (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.) The educational and medical sectors provide employment and drive economic development. Locally, Carlow operates in this crowded marketplace but also faces increasing financial and operational headwinds nationally.

There are 14 institutions of higher education within Pittsburgh city limits (2- and 4-year, public and private) and over 40 within a 50-mile radius. Centering more closely on Carlow’s location, from downtown Pittsburgh along the Fifth Avenue corridor, there are four other universities (Duquesne University, Chatham University, University of Pittsburgh, and Carnegie Mellon University), the latter two with national reputations and reach. For any post-secondary institution, this ecosystem presents a challenge, and given Carlow’s size and positioning, even more so.

Zooming out to the state of Pennsylvania, we find another saturated higher education marketplace. According to a recent piece in *Inside Higher Ed*, Pennsylvania faces a dwindling pool of in-state applicants while maintaining one of the highest ratios in the country of institutions-to-students (Knox, 2023). Quite simply, multiple public and private higher education institutions in Pennsylvania will not survive the “enrollment cliff” of the next decade (Campion, 2020).

### ***Fiscal Challenges of Small Private Universities***

Small private universities occupy a precarious position in the higher education landscape. Enrollment realities limit the tuition growth they can expect in the coming years. Because of this, many are looking to alternative sources of revenue, such as strategic partnerships with private entities, selling services such as training, consolidating programs internally, or merging with other educational institutions (Hanover, 2020). These tactics are becoming common as colleges and universities seek to drive revenue.

Additionally, institutions face increasing financial and operational headwinds. With public opinion of higher education trending negatively and a demographic enrollment cliff on the near horizon, institutions must think strategically and creatively to remain financially sound. Dearie (2018) writes in the *National Catholic Reporter* that small Catholic colleges are confronting these trends as well as other challenges, such as competition for students, rapid technological advances, and shifting student expectations.

Private colleges of all sorts, not just religiously based or small ones, have taken on risky financial practices, such as student tuition discounting. This is when the university provides students with institutional aid in order to lower the student's tuition cost and increase the likelihood that they will enroll. Though common in the private higher education marketplace, there are many downsides to the strategy both from an enrollment perspective and a financial one. Institutions reach a point where this practice no longer works as a lever to generate revenue (Behaunek & Gansemer-Topf, 2018).

Carlow University is one of hundreds of small private institutions navigating this challenging landscape. Historically Carlow focused on its healthcare offerings, particularly its nursing programs, offering multiple pathways from certificates to a doctorate through in-person and online settings. Given the academic strength of other Pittsburgh universities in the health sciences, Carlow believes its future focus is not the medical sector (K. Humphrey, personal communication, May 22, 2023). Instead, leadership believes the university can provide unique value in education—particularly early childhood education—where the university has received significant philanthropic investments to develop teacher preparation programs. Carlow currently operates a thriving early learning center for children ages six weeks to three, as well as a pre-K through 8th-grade lab school on campus.

Carlow is considering a significant building project that could generate revenue for the university, bring considerable value to the local community, and contribute to workforce and economic development, as well as align with Carlow's values of justice and mercy. The university is examining the best uses of campus facilities with the goal of creating an educational complex that houses multiple programs, services, and academic research initiatives. Also featured in this plan are green spaces to promote environmental stewardship and a multipurpose athletic center designed to house Carlow University's athletic programs. The green spaces and athletic center would be open to the community as a shared amenity for use. Carlow's vision is that this development project would:

- define a new, innovative pathway for how education is approached and delivered,
- expand the early learning center to meet the demand for childcare in Pittsburgh,
- create new jobs to meet the demand for childcare and campus school growth,
- expand the Campus Laboratory School,

- house the Department of Education and provide invigorating opportunities for hands-on learning and research,
- promote both campus and community health via the athletic facility and green spaces, and
- create and nurture community partnerships and serve as a physical and programmatic asset to neighbors (Carlow leadership team, personal communication, August 25, 2023).

### ***Neighborhood Redevelopment Surrounding Carlow***

Carlow is uniquely positioned to access and leverage entrepreneurial partnerships as part of the redevelopment of the Oakland neighborhood, where the university is located. After years of planning, the city is starting a multiyear implementation phase that includes significant infrastructure, transportation, business, and community elements. Of note, the plan includes “Community Service Hubs” that would combine childcare with other services and resources. This is similar to one piece of the current vision at Carlow, as described earlier.

### **Problem of Practice**

Given the stated challenges of a saturated university market in both Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania, small private institutions of higher education facing increased financial and operational headwinds, and Carlow University seeking to transform its programs for both their students and the neighborhood in which they physically reside, our research team sought to focus on a defined angle of strategic planning for Carlow University. Our goal was to better understand the possibilities for Carlow’s evolution to survive the immediate demographic cliff and provide stakeholder evidence regarding the university’s strategic direction and vision for the future.

Carlow also views itself as being at an inflection point. Institutional leadership is pursuing the goal of making the university a local leader in the education space, one that encourages the success of children, families, and neighbors in the community. To operationalize this goal, Carlow is planning to build a new educational complex that would house multiple programs, initiatives, and services. Part of the university leadership’s vision is for the complex to be a place of community development and connection. Such a vision needs the positive involvement of city leadership, staff, and influencers. Without it, Carlow risks missing opportunities to enhance its success.

The purpose of this capstone is to assist the president and leadership team, including the VP of Marketing and Communications, the VP of University Advancement, Special Assistant to the President for Mercy Heritage, and the board of directors of Carlow University, as they pursue a revenue-generation strategy of building a new education complex. Because this type of development planning is more successful with city support and partnerships, our main role was to help inform Carlow of what city planners and leaders think and how they view the project plan, including where they see opportunities for collaboration.

Our research team was also interested in how city planners and leaders conceptualize and identify Carlow University’s brand reputation, assets, and value to the city. We think focusing on gathering information and qualitative data from key stakeholders will assist the

Carlow leadership team with executing its immediate vision for an education complex, as well as long-term strategic planning overall.

## Synthesis of Evidence—The Literature Review

In this literature review, we are guided by Carlow University's strategic focus on the future and the potential embodied in its new educational center. This initially led us to explore the literature on university strategic planning. This then prompted us to explore the concept of university stakeholders<sup>1</sup>, especially those associated with development projects. The literature pointed us in the direction of a specific type of relationship—that between a municipality (e.g., “town”) and a university (the “gown”). We examine the many different facets of the town-gown relationship, especially as it relates to universities in an urban setting, like Carlow University. We then draw upon this body of evidence to build a conceptual framework to ground this project and help assess the nature of the relationship between Carlow University and the city of Pittsburgh.

### *Strategic Planning & Revenue Generation*

The higher education strategic landscape is changing. Universities' strategic planning must grapple with diminished enrollments (Campion, 2020), shifting cultural norms (Chang et al., 2020), diversified revenue sources (Hanover, 2020), community engagement (Cottafava & Corazza, 2021; Lovell et al., 2019), campus upgrades (Donadel, 2023), and myriad other challenges. Because of this increasing complexity, collaboration figures prominently in strategic planning, hence opening doors for greater stakeholder involvement in the process (Edmondson & Reynolds, 2016; Fullan & Scott, 2009). For example, Edmonson and Reynolds's (2016) research demonstrates the importance of “big teaming,” which requires intense collaboration among a multitude of stakeholders, ranging from software entrepreneurs to city government officials. Moreover, strategic planning that seeks innovative change also requires a “big vision” (Edmonson & Reynolds, 2016).

University-based strategic planning encompasses new sources of revenue, among other things, and both private and public institutes of higher learning are leaning toward strategic funding sources other than tuition to support their missions. Indeed, Australia instituted a nationwide program to replace traditional academic planning with commercially focused strategic planning at its universities, a move that engendered some controversy (Howes, 2018). For example, the study shows that 30 years after commercially-focused strategic planning replaced more traditional academic-focused strategic planning, Australian universities contest whether this should be a core managerial function for university leaders. From a macro perspective, universities are strategically pursuing revenue streams from continuing education,

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<sup>1</sup> We recognize that “stakeholder” is a term that some find offensive because it can reflect an imbalance in power among groups, especially when viewed in the historical context of settlers in American territories who claimed land using stakes to mark their territory despite being occupied by indigenous peoples. We use the term here because of its pervasiveness in the literature and within the context of stakeholders being representative of a broad swath of groups and individuals who have an interest in an organization’s outcomes.

credentialing programs for both credit and noncredit certificates, and branch campuses (Alstete, 2014). Universities have always pursued research grants and worked with professors to commercialize the result, but some colleges are taking this a step further. For example, Duke University launched a business development initiative that encouraged faculty to be entrepreneurial and generate shared revenues (Broome et al., 2018).

As universities craft and navigate strategies that support new sources of revenue, sustain enrollments, or expand research opportunities, the importance of engaging stakeholders and building relationships is paramount (Edmondson & Reynolds, 2016; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Hanover Research, 2020). Some universities are establishing new organizational units to support revenue generation initiatives, such as the Office of Community Engagement or an Office of Corporate Engagement and Partnerships as part of their five-year strategic plans (Lovell et al., 2019). Indeed, urban universities are launching programs specifically to communicate and demonstrate the value they bring to their home cities and incorporating public-private partnerships as strategic initiatives in their longer-term planning (Wiewel & Detweiler-Bedell, 2019). As such, the literature points to the need for Carlow University to deeply understand the role of critical stakeholders—especially city officials and planners—as it pursues its long-term strategy and vision for an education complex. Our discussions with the Carlow leadership have led us to this conclusion, too, and it drives this problem of practice.

### *University Stakeholder Relationships—The Heart of Town and Gown*

The concept of organizational stakeholders can best be described as those individuals, groups, and associations that can affect the outcome of an organization (Freeman et al., 1984). The relationship between an organization and a stakeholder can be transactional or transformational, depending upon the levels of involvement, interest, and investment. Recent research indicates that the organization-stakeholder relationship is critical to an organization's mission; the most successful relationships are cooperative ones that are built on "trust, predictability, attraction/exchange, and communication" (Bundy et al., 2017, p. 476).

The types of stakeholders that universities must deal with are complex, overlapping, challenging, and not always well understood. Many scholars point to the importance for a university in identifying and engaging with its stakeholders as part of a larger stakeholder strategy (Cottafava & Corazza, 2021; Sarhadi et al., 2021; Seki et al., 2022). Yet, institutes of higher education do not always recognize this step in their strategic planning (Sarhadi et al., 2021). The literature points to the need for understanding the power dynamics among stakeholder relationships, as these can be critical in successfully achieving the university's goals in a complex ecosystem. This is especially true for university projects that involve potential public funding or support (Sarhadi et al.). One such method involves participatory engagement, in which key stakeholders are brought into a university's planning process as early as possible to help with the design, execution, and evaluation of critical projects that potentially involve the greater community (Sarhadi et al.). Hence, a university's ability to identify, map, and strategically engage with its stakeholders is critically important to its future (Chazdon et al., 2017).

This is particularly true for projects involving the construction of new or refurbishment of old structures on campuses. As Seki et al. (2022) point out, end-user engagement—including

those in the community—is a key factor in a successful outcome for building refurbishment projects. The authors' analysis of 21 interviews with design team stakeholders shows that higher education context, early design, user engagement in the design process, and post-design phases are the core themes associated with building successful bridges to the community during construction projects. Moreover, the authors point to the importance of identifying the values of specific stakeholders, understanding their unique needs, and communicating effectively with these stakeholders to integrate stakeholder ideas and inputs.

Of note for urban universities like Carlow is the role of the city itself; that is, city leadership, city planners, and the city bureaucracy who compose a significant part of the "town" in the town-gown relationship. This can be particularly true for universities that are working in or with historically marginalized communities (Jackson et al., 2020). As universities pursue their missions, it behooves them to study and understand the city planning apparatus and urban design process to effectively navigate engagement and build bridges to the community (Jackson et al., 2020). The town-gown relationship has evolved from one in which the university viewed the community as something to research and study to a new relationship where universities are active participants in problem solving, community engagement, and capacity building (Bunnell & Lawson, 2006). This can be particularly true when cities are undergoing urban renewal projects, where a university is adjacent to or part of the project (Bunnell & Lawson, 2006).

### *Town-Gown Relationship*

With this in mind, we explore various best practices for building the town-gown relationship. We have segmented the key concepts into four categories that include purposeful communication, participatory engagement, collaborative planning, and shared resources.

#### **Purposeful Communication**

A common theme that emerged from a review of the articles focused on the town-gown relationship was that of purposeful communication (Dalton et al., 2018; Harasta, 2022; Lawrence-Hughes, 2014). Not surprisingly, many authors view communication as more than one-way broadcasting and point to the importance of two-way connections to identify the most effective means for building town-gown relationships (Harasta, 2022; Kemp, 2013; Lawrence-Hughes, 2014). It revolves around relationship building.

Within this context, purposeful communication is multifaceted. For example, it involves seeking outside perspectives. Both Harasta (2022) and Lawrence-Hughes (2014) emphasize the need to engage with stakeholders outside the university to better understand their needs within a community context. By doing so, the university can tailor its strategy and communications to effectively work with local and state governments to achieve its goals in a mutually beneficial manner. Seeking outside perspectives helps to reduce risk by creating a shared vision.

Purposeful communication also involves communicating frequently and reinforcing positive messages. Dalton et al. (2018), Harasta (2022), and Steinkamp (1998) all emphasize the need for universities to communicate often with stakeholders and use these touch points to reinforce positive impressions of the university. In doing so, universities can build trust by keeping stakeholders in the communication loop and eliminating surprises. Moreover, frequent communication provides a platform for sharing good news; that is, information that is positive

and builds favorable viewpoints among stakeholders will flow naturally from well-designed, well-timed communications.

All organizations, including universities, benefit from conducting stakeholder analyses that include municipalities and local authorities. Like businesses, universities need these analyses to help identify, understand, and communicate with city stakeholders in particular (Lawrence-Hughes, 2014). Merely communicating with the city as a monolith and using one-way techniques (referred to as “broadcasting” in marketing) is ineffective. It is imperative to understand which stakeholders can influence processes and bring positive outcomes for the university. Once these stakeholders are identified, a university can tailor the communications to ensure the correct methods, content, and pacing.

Finally, it is important to raise awareness of the university’s mission. Harasta’s (2022) research indicates that city leaders often are unaware of a university’s mission and role in the community. As such, the university needs to effectively craft and communicate a narrative about how it serves the needs of the city and ensure that this narrative is woven into its engagement with city stakeholders.

### ***Participatory Engagement***

The theme of participatory engagement reflects a more active and personal level of involvement on the part of a university when compared with purposeful communication. For example, the university takes action to designate specific individuals to interact with key stakeholders. Kemp (2013) recommends that universities include a university representative to engage the city council. By doing so, the university has a seat at the table, can identify and assess key city plans and actions, and is better prepared to influence the outcome of city deliberations. Gavazzi (2018) and Weill (2009) both advocate for university presidents to take a direct and personal role in town-and-gown relations. A likely counterpart would be the city manager (Gavazzi, 2018; Weill, 2009). University presidents could develop a peer-like relationship and open lines of communication that go deeper than emails or newsletters to effect positive change. Lawrence-Hughes (2014) recommends that universities in general, and university presidents, in particular, cultivate political relationships to best position the university in the city’s eyes. Ideas include hosting public hearings and community meetings on campus to generate a deeper understanding of the university’s goals and foster two-way, real-time communication. Such hearings or meetings should be spearheaded by university leadership to signal a high level of commitment.

### ***Collaborative Planning***

Another theme that emerged from the literature review—collaborative planning—could be of great interest to Carlow given the university’s plans to build a new education complex. Key actions and initiatives under this theme necessitate including the city in planning processes. By including city planners early in the planning process for building construction, refurbishment, and expansion, universities can better satisfy the local community’s needs (Kemp, 2013; Seki et al., 2022). By doing so, the university also can use such initiatives to build trust with the city and deepen town-gown relationships. This step is particularly important for new campus plans (Dalton et al., 2018; Kemp, 2013).

Working with the city on neighborhood plans is another important element. To ensure that they are a valued part of the local ecosystem, universities should participate in the city's development of district and neighborhood plans (Dalton et al., 2018; Kemp, 2013; O'Mara, 2010). By working closely with the city, universities can learn about and avail themselves of opportunities linked to corporate involvement in city planning (Svensson et al., 2021) and potentially help shape the economic future of a neighborhood (Bank & Sibanda, 2018). This includes linking university planning to city transit plans. Especially in urban environments, transit capabilities play an important role in the success of development efforts. This is true for university projects, as well, that benefit from specifically linking university planning to the city's transit planning (Kemp, 2013).

### ***Shared Resources***

A final theme that emerged from the literature review involves the concept of shared resources, where universities collaborate with the local community and engage in partnerships that involve access to campus assets. Research shows that universities that organize and hold events on their campuses for community members and city leaders develop stronger town-gown relationships (Bruning et al., 2006). Such events help expose the surrounding community to the university's capabilities and strengths and deepen city leaders' understanding of the university's mission.

Sharing or linking university resources—such as library holdings or research projects—to city resources also serves to strengthen university ties to the community while deepening city support for the university (Graham, 2005; Halverson & Plotas, 2006; Lovell et al., 2019). For example, Jacksonville State University surveyed local public libraries to determine how its Houston Cole Library could better serve the community (Graham, 2005). Through this outreach initiative, the library discovered a need that it could fulfill in continuing education in the community. Keene State College launched a similar initiative in which the college established a partnership with the local Keene Public Library, which met local needs and strengthened the town-gown relationship (Halverson & Plotas, 2006).

Sharing campus resources with the surrounding community and eliciting city support has been shown to help the economic development of the city and the larger municipal region (Sarhadi et al., 2021; Seki et al., 2022). Moreover, a study of universities in London and New York shows the importance of linking universities' resources to urban planning and the governance of urban processes (Addie, 2019). By engaging the city and community stakeholders early in the planning process, universities can better design spaces and refurbish buildings with an eye toward sharing these resources beyond students, faculty, and staff. Research also shows that stakeholder analysis and engagement aid a university in addressing standing power imbalances and better pursuing sharing agreements rooted in social justice (Sarhadi et al., 2021).

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the best practices identified in the previous literature review (see Figure 1). Four themes are at the heart of the framework—purposeful communication, participatory engagement, collaborative planning, and shared resources—and help to inform university actions to build town-gown relationships. While some

of the best practices also relate to community engagement, these themes and best practices focus on the relationship between an urban university and its surrounding city.

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework Based on Best Practices for Effective Town-Gown Relationships*



This framework is used to inform the project design and help guide the data collection and analysis in order to describe the relationship between Carlow University and the city of Pittsburgh. The conceptual framework also is used to investigate and assess specific opportunities and challenges related to the Carlow Educational Complex initiative.

## Project Questions

When we synthesized the organizational context, the problem of practice, the literature review, and the resulting conceptual framework, two project questions became pivotal for our capstone project:

1. What is the nature of engagement between Carlow University and the city of Pittsburgh?
2. What opportunities and challenges exist for partnership between Carlow and the city of Pittsburgh, particularly in the context of the educational complex?

The literature review demonstrates the importance of strategic planning for universities and, within this, the critical role of key stakeholders. When analyzing the role of these stakeholders through the lens of Carlow's vision for its educational complex, city officials—e.g.,

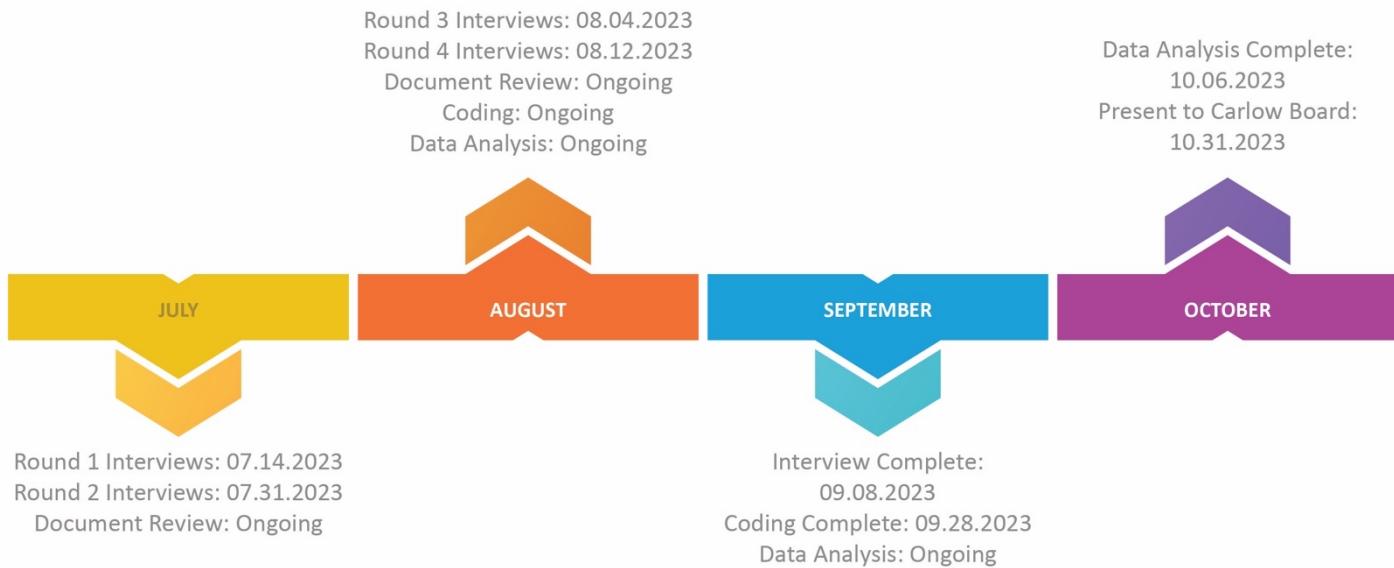
elected officers, planners, and other staff—emerge as pivotal players in university development efforts, especially related to campus initiatives. The importance of the town-gown relationship materializes as a top priority and hence, the project questions are tailored to Carlow University's specific situation. The following sections focus on these two core questions.

## Project Design

This project is designed to determine the nature of the relationship between Carlow University and the city of Pittsburgh and what opportunities exist between the entities. Our research points to the significance of the town-gown relationship, especially for urban universities (Jackson et al., 2020). Moreover, Seki et al. (2022) raise the importance of engaging city leaders and stakeholders in major construction projects. Because this capstone project is designed to provide Carlow University with clear recommendations based on a comprehensive assessment involving many voices and sources, we use a three-pronged approach centered on qualitative methods, specifically interviews and reviews of city documents and social media posts. Based on this approach, our team mapped out a data collection strategy—see Figure 2 for the project's data collection and analysis timeline.

Figure 2  
*Data Collection and Analysis Timeline*

### DATA AND DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: 2023 TIMELINE



First, we wanted to explore how often Carlow interacts with the city and with whom. To understand this better, we sought interviews with both university leaders and city officials to hear their thoughts on the nature of these interactions. We also sought perspectives from Pittsburgh university leaders outside of Carlow to better understand how their universities negotiate these relationships. We pursued these perspectives through interviews and reviewed city documents related to university planning to compare other universities' levels of city engagement to that of Carlow's.

As part of our project plan, we further wanted to investigate how city leaders perceive Carlow and the building of the new education complex. Interviews with city officials were particularly important to best understand this. Also, we sought to understand how the new complex fits into the city's major redevelopment project, the Oakland Plan, where Carlow is physically located. In addition to the aforementioned interviews, we explored documents at city websites that provided insights into project meetings and planning.

Our team wanted to understand the key ideas, terms, and phenomena related to Carlow's understanding of stakeholder perspectives, specifically as they relate to campus development efforts, strategic planning in general, and capital projects. To understand and assess Carlow's views, we conducted interviews with Carlow leadership, reviewed Carlow documents for strategic planning and marketing, and reviewed a year's worth of social media to see how and where Carlow was communicating about town-gown-related activities. See Appendix 2 for the full data collection plan.

## Interviews: Data Collection and Analysis

### ***Study Participants***

Given the project questions, talking with key stakeholders in Pittsburgh was essential. As such, we drew our research participants from the following constituencies: Carlow University leadership, other leaders at nearby higher education institutions, the city of Pittsburgh Mayor's office, and the city's Department of Planning. For the purposes of this study and the interviews, we defined Carlow University leadership as the President and members of her cabinet. We defined "other institutions of higher education in Pittsburgh" as Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh. We merged Pittsburgh's Department of City Planning with the city of Pittsburgh Mayor's office into one category defined as the "City."

Our recruitment of participants was informed by the nature of the research questions and by recommendations of university leadership. Participants were selected using a purposive sample, where we started with Carlow University leaders and city officials in the planning office and the mayor's office, as these are most directly associated with the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To reach additional stakeholders, the team employed a snowballing technique and asked each interviewee to further identify other sources. The positionality of one member of the research team also informed participant recruitment, as she has relationships with both city and university leaders.

We conducted Zoom interviews with the following participants (provided in chronological order of the interview dates):

1. Dr. Kathy Humphrey, President, Carlow University
2. Cara Kassabov, VP, University Advancement and Alumni Engagement, Carlow University
3. Planner, Pittsburgh City Planning
4. Planner, Pittsburgh City Planning
5. Leadership Team Member, Duquesne University
6. Leadership Team Member, University of Pittsburgh
7. Cabinet Member, City of Pittsburgh
8. Marisol Valentin, Carlow University, Philanthropy Partner
9. Sr. Sheila Carney, Special Assistant to the President, Carlow University
10. Cabinet Member, City of Pittsburgh
11. Cabinet Member, City of Pittsburgh
12. John Cardone, Vice President of Marketing, Communications & Government Relations, Carlow University

The initial step in recruitment was an email request to participate in an interview. The email request asked if the participant would be willing to help with the capstone project, sharing that the project was working with the president of Carlow University and focused on “town-gown” relationships. The team member ensured the participants that the interview would be no more than 60 minutes. All potential interviewees whom the team contacted agreed to participate in the interviews, a 100% participation rate.

### ***Interview Protocol Development***

We designed an interview protocol using the conceptual framework, the literature review, and research on interview theory and the gathering of qualitative data (Hunter, 2012). Hunter (2012) describes a technique in which researchers develop interview protocols based on the exploration of the research questions to provide consistency across interviews but also allows for flexibility to ensure that respondents may elaborate and provide a unique perspective based on their experiences or the positions they hold. We applied Hunter’s techniques to our protocol, which contains 11 questions (see Appendix 1), with a final open-ended question for interviewees to share additional thoughts. For example, we wanted to hear participants’ thoughts regarding their personal interactions with Carlow or its president, their level of awareness concerning Carlow’s activities in the neighborhood, their impressions of collaboration between and among universities and the city, as well as any other thoughts that come to mind about Carlow in general and the educational complex specifically. We also were listening for comments related to funding campus projects and the future of higher education in the next five years. Responses to the open-ended questions helped to frame context for universities operating in Pittsburgh at this moment in time.

## ***Data Collection & Analysis***

The interviews were conducted via Zoom, with all calendar invites sent by the team members. The team recorded the interviews with each participant's permission. The interviews were saved to the "cloud" and then downloaded into Rev.com for transcription. These transcripts were stored in a digitally secure online "box" within the Vanderbilt University system.

After each Zoom interview, the research team held dialogic engagement sessions and completed individual interview summary documents. We talked about the participants' answers, perceptions, and experiences with Carlow. We discussed our impressions of the interview, with our local team member providing context for the Pittsburgh region when able. We discussed the "snowball" recommendations by the participants and determined if we would contact the person for an interview. The team did interview all five of the "snowball" recommendations."

All research team members either participated live in the Zoom interviews or watched the recordings afterward for an initial intake of data. This step is important as team members could observe nonverbal communication and make note of emotive language, inflection, or gestures. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Two research team members also took high-level notes during the interviews to capture atmospherics and impressions.

We independently reviewed the transcripts and coded the information using a deductive process based on the four themes from the conceptual framework: purposeful communication, participatory engagement, collaborative planning, and shared resources. We also highlighted direct quotes that we identified as aligning with the quadrants in the conceptual framework. To achieve interrater reliability, each team member reviewed the transcripts independently and only shared findings upon completion. Two researchers printed all transcripts and highlighted quotes related to the themes, while one researcher viewed electronic copies of transcripts and electronically highlighted them. The evidence was compiled into one after-interview summary document for each interviewee.

We then compared our findings to identify areas of agreement and divergence. We identified key themes represented by the amalgamation of the coding and our highlighted quotes. These started to take shape as key findings, as we could "see" a broader narrative in which Carlow's reputation was strong and positive, but specific communication and actions related to the city were noticeably absent. We also started to identify a desire on the part of the city for more frequent and meaningful communication with Carlow. As we progressed with the other two forms of data analysis, these broader narratives became sharper, and we discuss them at length in the findings section of this paper.

Of note, possible sources of bias during the interviews are related to positionality. One team member has personal and professional connections to all interviewees, which, in a city that is known for tight connections, could have influenced her responses. We acknowledge that our team member's previous interactions with certain interviewees may have helped gain access to participants. These relationships also may have affected how the participants answered the interview questions and believe that the established relationships helped put the

interviewees at ease. We also note that two team members have no personal or professional connections to the interviewees and served as a balance.

A second source of bias is the positionality of interviewees to each other. While each participant provided affirmative permission to record the interview, they were aware of the project's client and may have tailored their responses because of this awareness and the need to maintain positive relationships among city and academic institutions.

## Documents: Data Collection & Analysis

### ***Document Research***

To assess university involvement more fully in Pittsburgh city planning and initiatives, the team reviewed a number of document sources from the city and Carlow University. When the team asked a city planner to identify specific city artifacts that could help inform the team's research, we were directed to:

- Transcripts from the City of Pittsburgh Department of Planning meetings
- City of Pittsburgh Council meeting minutes
- The city's Oakland Plan
- The Oakland Plan meeting minutes
- The Pittsburgh Neighborhood Plan Guide
- The city's Institutional Master Plans

The team also asked Carlow's leadership for key documents. Carlow University provided us with a strategic planning document that lays out high-level goals, drawings and renderings of the education complex, and a marketing strategy.

### ***Document Analysis***

The goal of our document review is to identify and assess other sources that may provide information about town-gown relationships. Moreover, city and university documents provide additional insights through the actual language that is used (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Starting with the city's documents, the team assessed:

- The level of Pittsburgh university participation in general in city meetings or requests for information, and
- The level of Carlow's participation in city meetings or requests for information.

With this in mind, we paid particular attention to the frequency and nature of participation, documenting each from the city documents. We initially scoured the City of Pittsburgh website for significant touch points for the town-gown relation and researched specific webpages that were recommended by a Pittsburgh city planner in one of our interviews.

We started our review at the macro level by searching Pittsburgh's City Planning Commission archive for references to universities in general and Carlow in particular. We found a link to the city's page for District 8 landmarks and attractions that lists Carlow University. We also found the link to the city's press releases and the City Planning Commission archive. Our next step was to search the Oakland Planning and Development Corporation's website and locate and examine documents supporting the Oakland Plan, Pittsburgh's master plan for the

Oakland neighborhood, where Carlow is situated. We also reviewed webpages with links to documents related to the Oakland Plan's strategy themes. Finally, we searched the city's many web pages for Pittsburgh campus master plans.

During our initial searches, we discovered that within the last five years, Carlow University has been mentioned in five city press releases, the most recent from June 2023 about the university mascot. When we searched the City Planning Commission archive, we did not find any evidence of posts and links to Carlow University. We did, however, find references to Chatham University, Duquesne University, and the University of Pittsburgh. These were focused on the universities' Institutional Master Plans (IMP) or the demolition of campus buildings and the construction of new ones.

When searching for Carlow University's IMP on the city's website, we found what we believe to be the current IMP, which is dated 2017, at the Oakland Planning and Development Corporation's website. We noted updates to the IMP in 2019, as well as a series of Oakland neighborhood meetings in 2020 and 2021. These largely focused on the development of the land where the St. Agnes Center and the St. Agnes School are located (see Appendix 3 for photos of these buildings) and were presented by the former Director of Capital Planning. When we visited Pittsburgh's webpage for IMPs, we saw links to a number of university IMPs, including Carnegie Mellon, Community College of Allegheny County, Duquesne, and the University of Pittsburgh. Carlow's IMP was noticeably absent.

When searching for campus master plans, we found a website that featured three—the University of Pittsburgh, Carlow University, and Carnegie Mellon University. We found that the University of Pittsburgh had an active link to a campus master plan. Carnegie Mellon had a link to its IMP. Carlow University's verbiage on this page describes its vision and includes a dead link to its strategic plan. This writeup did not mention either the IMP or a campus master plan; Carlow did not have a campus master plan listed online.

On the city's website for the Oakland Plan, we saw that one of the engagement reports documented that Carlow had three representatives on the Steering Committee. The University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon also had representatives on this committee. Another engagement report showed that Carlow was active on the Arts, Culture, and Design Technical Committee, along with the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon. Unlike its counterparts, Carlow University did not participate in the Equity Technical Advisory Group, the Housing Focus Group, the Equitable Development Focus Group, or related advocacy groups.

As part of the Oakland Plan's web pages, we found two that were particularly relevant to this research: the web page for the Oakland Plan Community Service Hub and the web page for the Oakland Plan Scale Up Childcare Services. We noted that on the website for the Community Service Hub, the University of Pittsburgh expressed interest in identifying locations for collaborative educational programming for Oakland residents and resident students. We also saw that under the Scale Up Childcare Services website, the University of Pittsburgh stated that it is planning to develop housing so more employees could live and work in Oakland. Most of the comments related to childcare on this web page affirm Carlow University's strategic

concerns that there is a dearth of childcare facilities in Oakland. However, Carlow University does not show up on either of these web pages as an active participant in this planning.

## Social Media: Data Collection & Analysis

### ***Social Media Research***

To determine the level of engagement through social media, the team assessed one year of Carlow University posts for evidence of university-city outreach and engagement. We reviewed and documented posts from 1 September 2022 through 31 August 2023 on the University's Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and YouTube accounts. Because of the paucity of university posts on TikTok, we did not include this platform in our data collection. While documenting the university's social media activities, our team detected that all posts were driven by Carlow's Facebook posts. In other words, it appeared that posts were initially designed for Facebook and then reposted on Carlow's other social media platforms. As such, we use Facebook as the foundation for our observations and started by documenting all the Facebook posts first and followed with the others.

As we reviewed all the posts on each platform, we recorded the results in a spreadsheet. We documented the date of the post, the theme, and whether there was a reference to the city or a campus facility. For LinkedIn, we also noted if the post was reposted and shared by others. We then reviewed the posts to assess if they aligned with any of the four quadrants in the conceptual framework.

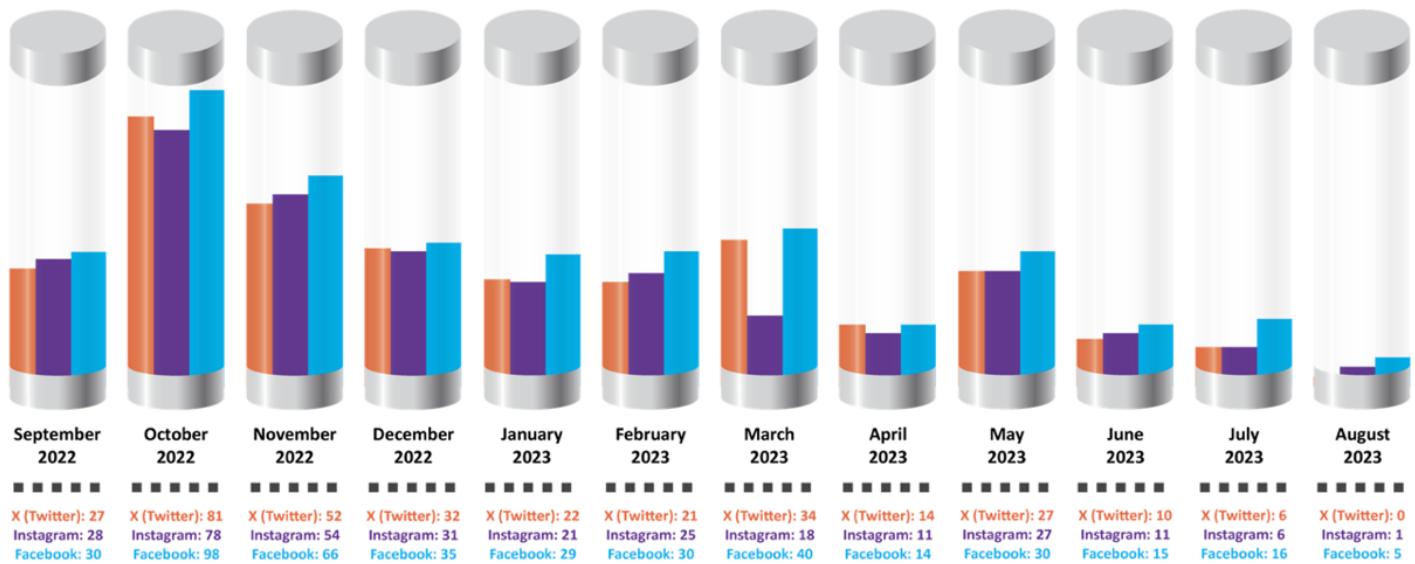
### ***Social Media Analysis***

We started our analysis by assessing the content to determine if it relates to the town-gown relationship and, if so, how it fits with the conceptual framework. We observed that 28 of 407 posts over 12 months mentioned a connection to the city. We also noted that Carlow mentioned other Pittsburgh organizations in 57 of its 407 Facebook posts. These posts highlighted university connections to these organizations, such as teaming with the Greater Community Food Bank. Another post featuring Sister Sheila Carney discussed her recognition by the *Pittsburgh Business Times Journal* as a Woman of Influence. In summation, approximately 7% were evaluated as having a city connection, and 14% showed a strong connection to a Pittsburgh organization.

We also were interested in specific mentions of campus facilities, to determine if they specifically aligned with the Shared Resources quadrant of the conceptual framework. On Facebook, 16% mentioned campus facilities, primarily as a location where an event was occurring. The facilities themselves were not featured in the posts.

We next assessed the frequency of Carlow's posts. We noted that the periodicity of social media posts varied greatly, with a Facebook high of 98 posts in October 2022 and a low of 5 in August 2023 (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
*Frequency of social media posts on Facebook, Instagram, and X*



Because we categorized the theme for each post when collecting our data, we could easily sort it according to individual themes. We identified approximately 160 different themes across all the posts. In general, these represented events on campus, including major happenings such as the speaker's series, graduation, and homecoming. The posts highlighting specific academic programs were tied to recruitment, and Carlow is sharing positive information about the programs' achievements, innovations, and successes.

The theme with the greatest number of mentions was a series of 20 posts on the power of poetry that advertised an annual speaker's series. At the other end of the top 10 themes were posts on Carlow's creative writing program and its education program (both themes had 9 posts over the 12-month period). Of note, Carlow's new branding tagline—Devoted to the Future of You—has already garnered 11 posts. Four academic programs were in the top 10 themes, including nursing, physical therapy, creative writing, and education programs. Of note, the wording of the posts was sometimes confusing, and it was unclear whether certain posts were actually part of a larger theme. See Figure 4 for a complete picture.

Figure 4  
*Top 10 Themes in Carlow's Social Media Posts*



Regarding YouTube, Carlow posted a total of 15 videos in the 12-month period ranging in length from 30 seconds to over 2 hours. Of note, the 30-second video received the greatest number of views at 1,610, and its theme is “the future of you.” Carlow’s welcome video from August 2022 highlights facility renovations and rider passes for regional public transit, one of the very rare posts that relates to the greater Pittsburgh ecosystem and city resources.

Regarding LinkedIn, we noted that like the other social media platforms, Carlow tends to repost a subset of its Facebook posts on this platform. Given limited university resources, we were not surprised to see Carlow repurposing its content across its social media platforms. What was surprising, however, was that Carlow rarely reposted information from others on LinkedIn. This is a missed opportunity, especially if Carlow is seeking to deepen relationships across the Pittsburgh community and with city officials.

Carlow’s social media themes in general provide a tempo for posting and reflect the academic year. The posts highlighting specific academic programs could also be viewed within the context of recruitment, as Carlow is sharing positive information about the programs’ achievements, innovations, and successes.

Our analysis further shows that Carlow rarely anchors its social media in the larger urban setting and doesn’t interact with the greater Pittsburgh ecosystem. Even when Carlow mentions another Pittsburgh organization, none of these city-related posts mention the city government. Indeed, we did not record a single post that connected to the city government.

We understand from our interview with John Cardone, Carlow’s Vice President of Marketing and Communication, that the university is substantially changing its social media strategy as part of its current rebranding effort. As such, the significant dropoff in social media posts over the summer of 2023 likely reflects a deliberate pause. Overall, the social media posts

were very event-driven and most often shared a photo after the fact. The key exceptions to this include posts about upcoming art exhibits or Carlow's Power of Poetry speaker's events. Aligned with this finding is the fact that mentions of campus facilities corresponded with the events; that is, Carlow would include a campus location to show where an event was taking place. Campus locations were not featured, nor did this emerge as a theme. The one exception is the YouTube video from August 2022 that places a spotlight on facility renovations and greater student access to public transportation.

### ***Triangulation of Data Sources***

The data collection and analysis phase was an iterative process that helped inform our understanding of the problem of practice as we proceeded and sought to bridge the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological components of our research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Because our project consists of two main qualitative sources of data—interviews and the reviews of documents and social media—we used these to ensure data triangulation throughout our analysis process. All three team members participated in almost every interview and hence could provide consistency checks on what was heard and interpreted. The research team held multiple sessions of dialogic engagement directly after our interviews to discuss initial observations and learnings, articulate new or lingering questions, and share any experiences of reactivity. These sessions led to multiple iterations within the project including our efforts to refine the research questions, determine new sources of data (whether interviews or documents), and identify gaps in and narrow the literature review.

During analysis, triangulation occurred as qualitative data from interviews was analyzed alongside the results from the document analysis and compared to the best practices gleaned from the literature review. This comprehensive look across all the data allowed us to test the conceptual framework and provide a grounding from which findings began to emerge. Finally, given the importance of geography to this project, the team also conducted site visits and transect walks to triangulate physical evidence with community maps, and drawings and renderings of the education complex (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Photos from these visits are included in Appendix 3.

### **Limitations**

We recognize that while the conceptual framework we developed is based on multiple peer-reviewed articles and specific, real-world examples, the findings that follow are specific to Carlow University, its location, and its vision for an education complex. As such, our findings are not generalizable, *per se*, to other urban universities. We also recognize that 12 interviews are somewhat limiting and this study could be expanded to include more city officials and other university leaders.

We do believe, however, that the conceptual framework offers a blueprint for similar town-gown research, and our approach of combining the voices from interviews with the analysis of documents and social media provides a path for others to follow.

## Findings & Recommendations

In this section, we provide our key findings as they align with our two research questions. These findings are grounded in the interview responses, our analysis of city documents and websites, our review of Carlow's social media, and relevant scholarship from the literature review.

When we developed recommendations for each of the findings, we divided them into two categories. Understanding that Carlow is a small institution with limited resources, we paid close attention to personnel constraints in particular. Recommendations are therefore "foundational" or "advanced." We view foundational recommendations as essential to improve current communication with the city and move the educational complex project forward. Advanced recommendations lean more toward aspirational. Not all can be accomplished, but all are worth considering and prioritizing.

### ***Research Question 1***

Findings 1-3 relate to the first research question: What is the nature of engagement between Carlow University and the city of Pittsburgh?

#### ***Finding 1: Communication between Carlow University and city leaders and planners has been limited and uneven.***

This finding directly aligns with the Purposeful Communication quadrant of our conceptual framework, as there appears to be a lack of proactive communication by Carlow to reach out to city officials. As our team pursued our analysis, we were struck by how little city officials and Carlow leadership team members spoke about each other, with a few exceptions. In one interview, a city planner expressed very favorable impressions of the university but did not recall the last time they had interacted directly with someone from Carlow. Another city official recalled engaging with President Humphrey in June 2022, a meeting that included a discussion of the university's master plan. One city official opined "So there's no proactive communication about the role that they want to play or their vision that they want to play. There's no real interaction between us and them." Another city official commented that the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University communicate with a "regular cadence" but that they hear from Carlow and other universities "sparingly."

City officials emphasized that increased engagement would be welcome but that such engagement needed to be relevant and communicated at the right level. For example, the city has a process for reviewing proposed changes to a university campus, and navigating this process would be critical to Carlow's pursuit of an educational complex. Moreover, the officials would favor seeing Carlow engage regarding specific changes to its IMP. These officials noted that the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon both were active in updating their IMPs.

There was some lamenting by these officials that most organizations that want to engage with City Hall seek time with the mayor directly. They reported this wasn't always

necessary or effective. They recommended that Carlow determine their requirements ahead of time and engage strategically at various levels of city government.

Uneven communication directed toward the city is also reflected in Carlow's social media activities. For example, social media themes largely are internally focused and place the university's relationship with the students at the center of Carlow's social media editorial calendar. This mostly aligns with Carlow's view of its stakeholders, as represented in a graphic that was shared with us by Mr. Cardone, Carlow's Vice President of Marketing and Communications (see Figure 5). In this figure, we can see that Carlow places an emphasis on its faculty, staff, and students as represented by their center position in the bull's eye.

Figure 5  
*Carlow's View of Its Target Markets (e.g., stakeholders)*



When examined through the lens of best practices for town-gown relationships, however, there is a missing category of communication that either targets or seeks to engage city officials, planners, and bureaucrats. While Carlow's social media understandably is not intended to primarily serve this stakeholder group, it does open up the possibility of extending Carlow's reach via purposeful communication and possibly shared resources. For example, Carlow could repost, like, and amplify messages from the city's social media feeds as a good-faith effort to deepen the university's relationship with the city.

Returning to Figure 5, we note that Carlow does not specifically call out city relations in its target market hierarchy. However, we do acknowledge that the accompanying description of the target markets includes "political leaders," but Carlow's leadership discussed this type of engagement at the state level in their interviews, not the city level. During the interviews with Carlow's leadership, we heard that in the late 2010s, Carlow was more engaged with the city as the university was rolling out a previous plan to redevelop the St. Agnes Center. We were made aware through the interviews that one person on the Carlow leadership team was the

designated point of contact for city engagement. This person later left this position, and Carlow has yet to fill it.

The interest on the part of the city for an ongoing, regular dialogue came through in our interviews. There appear to be regular interactions between the city and other institutes of higher learning, as captured in this quote by a key city leader:

...Pitt has an ongoing (relationship), every two weeks I sit with Pitt's government relations people and they go through a series of things that are important to them. And we talk through whatever the things are...With the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), because of our workforce stuff, we are talking to them constantly...

When asked to describe Carlow University using just three words, we believe one interviewee summed up this finding when they responded: "Great but silent."

### ***Recommendations***

**Foundational:** Schedule meetings with regular cadences with 1) a point person in the mayor's office and 2) the Department of City Planning to share updates about Carlow with key city officials and keep the Carlow leadership team updated on city happenings.

The aim of this recommendation is to move from sporadic communication to more consistent, purposeful communication. As the findings show, there was a strong desire by city officials for increased direct communication with the university. We recommend that Carlow prioritize these two offices, establish key points of contact on the Carlow leadership team to engage with appropriate counterparts in city government, and employ a regular meeting cadence as a support structure in order to execute consistently. The literature shows the importance of building relationships with city officials, especially in an urban setting, and further demonstrates the critical role of a communication strategy in organizing and implementing such communication (Bunnell & Lawson, 2006; Dalton et al., 2018; Harasta, 2022; Steinkamp, 1998).

Given that Carlow's top marketing goal is to raise awareness of the university, we see an opportunity here. For example, Carlow might consider adding city officials to its key target markets at a time when the role of the city figures prominently in the development and execution of the education complex. As Carlow moves forward with its education complex project, social media could present an opportunity to inform city officials, shape opinions favorably, and provide an opportunity to deliver strategic messaging that supports Carlow's vision for its education complex.

**Advanced:** Use the Carlow leadership team to cultivate relationships with city leaders, as opposed to outsourcing this function.

Our literature review signaled the importance of building direct relationships with city counterparts (Gavazzi, 2018; Weill, 2009). However, during our interviews, we learned that Carlow employs an external firm to handle government relations. We recommend focusing the firm's time at the state level where it has demonstrated success and lessening Carlow's reliance on the firm within the city ecosystem.

Because of one researcher's positionality as a key leader in the Pittsburgh philanthropic community, we were able to see first-hand the power of personal relationships within the city, a point that was affirmed in multiple interviews. Moreover, our research shows that direct connections between university and city leaders facilitate a deeper understanding of city intentions and possibly lead to opportunities to tap corporate resources (Svensson et al., 2021). Whether because of geographic proximity or the culture of the city, personal connections are paramount in Pittsburgh, and we believe that Carlow leadership's investment in cultivating relationships with city officials will yield greater results than outsourcing this critical function, especially at this junction in the educational complex's planning.

***Finding 2: Institutional involvement with the Oakland development project is inconsistent.***

Finding 2 is deeply rooted in the Collaborative Planning quadrant of the conceptual framework, which emphasizes the co-development of both city and university plans for facilities and transportation. Our analysis of the city's websites and documents shows that, historically, Carlow University has been an active participant in city planning, but inconsistently so. For example, a review of city documents shows that Carlow participated on the Oakland Planning Commission and presented updates to its IMP that included the destruction of the St. Agnes complex. However, after a number of hearings, we did not observe further participation on Carlow's part in any capacity. On the website that provides links to campus master plans, Carlow University is represented with language from its strategic planning document, but there is no evidence supporting recent involvement with the city, there is no link to updated planning documents, and there is an absence of information on Carlow's campus and any recent improvements.

It also appears that Carlow's level of participation is not as high as other universities. Carlow's IMP is absent from the city's web page, but we did observe IMPs for other Pittsburgh universities. There are very few city press releases that reference Carlow University, while other universities receive more attention. The city website for the Oakland Plan provides planning information related to childcare and Community Service Hubs and displays comments by the University of Pittsburgh, but none by Carlow. Moreover, Chatham University, Duquesne University, and the University of Pittsburgh are all represented on the city's website for the City Planning Commission Archive, but, again, Carlow was absent.

Comments from both Carlow and city interviewees align with this analysis of the city websites and documents. For example, two city officials stated a desire for Carlow to play a role in the redevelopment of the Oakland Corridor, filling an important role of being able to engage with the immediate neighborhood. These officials circled back to the IMP and encouraged Carlow to update its IMP, align its efforts with the Oakland Plan, and figure out how to "fit in"

according to one city official. Moreover, these officials saw a significant opportunity for Carlow to engage with city planning around childcare and the Community Service Hubs that are featured as part of the Plan.

One city official stated that Carlow is in a good position to influence the Oakland Plan, as the university is situated on prime real estate in the Oakland Corridor. To date, growth in the area has centered on the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University, but this official stated that Carlow could benefit from the city's redevelopment efforts. The social services nature of Carlow's educational complex likely will resonate with the immediate neighborhood and beyond and could provide opportunities for more expansive fundraising, especially if Carlow can demonstrate how its vision for an educational complex could serve citizens in adjacent neighborhoods, like West Oakland.

There is recognition among Carlow leadership that participating in the Oakland Plan is important to both the university and the city's future. One interviewee on Carlow's leadership team put it this way:

...once they learn more about Carlow, I don't see how they couldn't find a way to fit us into this overall development plan.

This sentiment is echoed by city officials, one of whom stated the need for consistent, ongoing dialogue about Carlow's vision for the education complex and the city's vision for the Oakland Corridor. There was a strong feeling that, according to one city official,

And so there should be some constant conversation and making sure we are going down the same road and path together.

There also appears to be a pent-up desire on the part of the city for Carlow to take on a larger role in the Oakland Plan. City officials expressed great support for Carlow's involvement, especially given the needs of the Oakland community and Carlow's mission-driven philosophy. One city official articulated the potential behind a larger role for Carlow this way:

I mean there's great synergy...when you look at, say, sort of the social service nature of what Carlow's looking to do, that is something that resonates with folks, and the fact that this is something that will actually benefit the community.

### ***Recommendations***

**Foundational:** Identify one leadership team member to attend monthly Oakland Task Force meetings.

This is a specific, actionable recommendation brought forth by two city planners. As the document review shows, the development of the Oakland Plan has been a yearslong process, and the implementation phase is expected to last over a decade. City planners maintained that

the most important meeting for Carlow representatives to attend consistently is the monthly Oakland Task Force Meeting.

**Advanced:** Strategically align the planning, programming, and occupants of the education complex with the Oakland Plan.

Within the literature on higher education revenue, strategic external partnerships are discussed as a viable strategy (Hanover, 2020; Ruch, 2021). The planned site for Carlow's education complex opens an avenue of strategic collaboration with the city. Intentional alignment of education complex project elements with the Oakland Plan could bring multiple benefits to Carlow, including new revenue streams. For example, one city leader mentioned possibilities of ground floor retail given the project's prime location. Multiple city interviewees discussed workforce challenges in the neighborhood adjacent to Carlow. Programming in the building could include an entry point for neighborhood residents to get connected to Carlow but also to other learning and employment opportunities within the city.

***Finding 3: Amongst city leaders and planners, Carlow has a positive reputation centered around its history of focusing on underserved populations.***

Finding 3 is most heavily associated with the Participatory Engagement quadrant of the conceptual framework, where personal connections are critical to building positive reputations. Throughout our interviews, we observed a deep respect for Carlow's mission and dedication to supporting underserved populations in Pittsburgh. One interviewee stated "I think Carlow has just done an incredible job of really putting that stake in the ground in terms of working with populations that need untraditional or nontraditional support. And they've just done an incredible job of working with those students." Carlow's history, as observed on its website, reinforces this reputation with statements about a strong commitment to social justice and the desire to create a "just and merciful world" (Carlow, 2023).

Carlow's website describes how the university was founded by the Sisters of Mercy, who came to America from Carlow, Ireland, in the mid-1800s (Carlow, 2023). There still is a physical presence on campus, as many sisters live at a convent on the university's grounds (see Photo 8, Appendix 3). Today, the Sisters of Mercy's influence is as significant as ever, as stated by one interview participant:

Sisters of Mercy are just incredible, and the Sisters of Mercy, it's really sort of the guiding force of Carlow.

This strong, positive sentiment toward the Sisters was observed across a majority of the interviewees, and the ongoing support of their mission is clear.

Evidence of continued support emerged, too, from the interviews, as seen in this comment:

And we need to keep hearing that voice and that authentic social justice voice.

While the close association of the Sisters of Mercy and Carlow's mission benefits the university's standing in the community, we did not observe specific actions by Carlow to leverage this strong reputation vis-a-vis its relationship with the city. For example, there does not appear to be a corresponding effort to participate, engage, and collaborate with the city on social issues. As such, Carlow may be missing an opportunity, as stated by one interviewee:

They're a great institution up there. There's some wonderful people who are doing, but I don't think people really see them as the power, power that they can be in this space.

Focusing on the community or engaging with the city is not a zero-sum game; the university can do both. There is a strong reputation for supporting Pittsburgh's underserved population, grounded in the Sisters of Mercy philosophy; Carlow has an opportunity to build on this reputation and multiply the positive effects of community outreach by potentially aligning its community actions with greater engagement with the city and its plans.

### ***Recommendations***

**Foundational:** Lean into the heritage of Carlow when talking about the educational complex project.

Carlow has a strategic advantage by situating its communications within the larger story of its institutional ethos. As evidenced in the interviews, the history and values of Carlow elicit positive reactions from city and higher education leaders. As our analysis shows, Carlow's social media also references this strong heritage, albeit not consistently. This cultural heritage can be utilized as a core asset, and institutional strategies involving core assets have been shown to be more successful for universities (Ladd & Lundy, 2018).

This advantage is even more pronounced given Carlow's proximity to the University of Pittsburgh. Our interviews revealed that although a world-class institution, the University of Pittsburgh has engendered some negative feelings within the city due to its rapid and extensive growth. Our interviewees shared that with its compact physical footprint and lived values of justice and mercy, Carlow hasn't contributed to these same types of community tensions. This mirrors our literature review findings that show that when university growth aligns with city objectives, it is positive in regard to town-gown relations (Clavelle, 2001; Lawrence-Hughes, 2014; Sitler et al., 2006)

**Advanced:** Showcase the history of Carlow physically in the education complex, through visual historical displays, including photographs, artwork, and other artifacts.

This advanced recommendation is the visible manifestation of the previous recommendation. Carlow has the opportunity to share its institutional story with visitors—e.g., prospective students, neighborhood residents, etc.—via this new building. Research indicates that community members who use campus resources or attend events on campus are more likely to have a positive impression of the institution (Bruning et al., 2006; Fernández-Esquinas, 2014). Moreover, Carlow’s use of social media to showcase artists, as evidenced in its Power of Poetry theme, directly aligns with this recommendation. Leaders should consider the benefits of the new space for marketing, community relations, and placemaking.

Design and use of public space are concepts that are incorporated in both the education complex and the Oakland plans. This shared goal provides additional opportunities for Carlow to engage in collaborative planning with the city and build on the concept of shared resources, both best practices identified through the literature review. This advanced recommendation also provides the opportunity to creatively engage with other interest groups in the community, including local artists, historical societies, and neighborhood groups.

## **Research Question 2**

Findings 4-6 relate to research question 2: What opportunities and challenges exist for partnership between Carlow and the city of Pittsburgh, particularly in the context of the educational complex?

### ***Finding 4: City leaders and higher education leaders in Pittsburgh view President Humphrey positively and as an asset to Carlow and its future.***

Finding 4 is tied closely to the Participatory Engagement quadrant in the conceptual framework, which emphasizes a high-touch, person-to-person approach to engagement. Throughout our interviews, we heard many positive statements about Carlow’s president, Dr. Humphrey. Many of our interviewees volunteered great support for Dr. Humphrey, and some offered deep admiration, as evidenced by these city officials’ statements:

I think the new leader has some wonderful fire. She has some wonderful energy. I think people love her. She has some cache to go with really. And I think she can position herself in a way that Carlow is positioned in a way to be just as influential more so than a Pitt or a CMU because I think they come with a uniqueness and with a history.

Dr. Humphrey taking over the helm at Carlow, being a black woman, historic leadership... and the work that Carlow does as an institution, as a university, what greater opportunity than to partner to reach out to her and work with a team of women at Carlow, a diverse team of women at Carlow to be our partner...

Many of our interviewees had worked with Dr. Humphrey at some point in their careers, and all of our participants had at least met her in person. Among our interviewees, there's a palpable feeling of anticipation for what Dr. Humphrey will do with Carlow and strong feelings of support, best captured in these quotes:

So, I'm a big fan of Carlow and the work that the Sisters of Mercy do, big fan of their president, Dr. Humphrey. And so excited about her leadership and the potential that that can happen with all that Carlow has to offer.

Well, I think if I had a formal name on my relationship with Kathy, it would be fan girl admirer, total observer of her excellence. I think she's just fantastic...

Well, I think that their [Carlow's] communication changed a lot when Dr. Humphrey became their president. I think that for a very long time, they were not as visible in the civic sector of Pittsburgh and Southwestern Pennsylvania. And I think that has changed dramatically since Kathy has been in a leadership role...

Our analysis of social media shows that Dr. Humphrey is active on LinkedIn, and her posts demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting underserved populations and outreach to other Pittsburgh organizations. She also is adept at reposting Carlow's LinkedIn posts, which is a strong technique for amplifying a message. What we did not observe, however, were posts that showed clear and strong connections with the city of Pittsburgh and city-sponsored initiatives.

We believe this evidence points to an opportunity to build on Dr. Humphrey's citywide connections and strong reputation as a leader in Pittsburgh and higher education. Ideally, such engagement would include strategically placing Dr. Humphrey on key city forums, such as the city council, or creating other occasions where she can use her social capital to cultivate political relationships across the city. Such engagements could be featured in Carlow's social media to show city support of the university. By pursuing or orchestrating such engagements, Carlow could use these communication channels to build support for the new education complex. As one Carlow cabinet member said of Dr. Humphrey,

... What my hope is that we're going to start to reposition Carlow as a true player. I think Kathy [Humphrey] she's my tip of the spear. I think she positioned better to bring the community together...We as cabinet members and the trustees need to give her that foundational support...

### ***Recommendations***

**Foundational:** Amongst cabinet and board, distribute the leadership-building and sharing the story of Carlow, while incorporating President Humphrey in key conversations, meetings, and events.

Building upon both the city and higher education leaders' positive perceptions of President Humphrey, we recommend strategically leveraging her leadership strengths to enhance Carlow's visibility and influence, while also spreading the city relationship-building responsibilities among others on the leadership team. While the interview findings indicate a strong respect for Dr. Humphrey, we would discourage overloading her schedule and risking task saturation. As such, it will be important for the board to view Dr. Humphrey's activities strategically and assign specific leadership responsibilities to her within the cabinet and board. This may involve her taking the lead on initiatives related to community engagement, partnerships, and city collaborations. Additionally, the board should strategically position President Humphrey in key city forums, such as the city council or other relevant civic events. This will allow her to use her social capital to foster political relationships that benefit Carlow. The board should facilitate open communication channels between President Humphrey and the cabinet members and trustees to maintain a unified and supportive leadership front.

We also recommend that the board consider how other Carlow leaders can build on President Humphrey's ability to open doors and start dialogues. The literature review shows that universities need to communicate often with stakeholders to build trust, a task that requires many participants (Dalton et al., 2018; Harasta, 2022; Steinkamp, 1998). By spreading responsibility for strategic communications among the Carlow leadership, the university can increase the number of touchpoints with the city and strengthen and deepen the town-gown relationship.

**Advanced:** Leverage city and higher education leaders on Carlow's board to advance the education complex strategy.

Leveraging external champions on Carlow's board is a strategic step in sharing Dr. Humphrey's vision and socializing Carlow's plan for the education complex. Cultivating political relationships is an important action for universities, and Carlow is no exception (Lawrence-Hughes, 2014). As the interviews indicate, Dr. Humphrey's social capital is high among city and education leaders, and this recommendation builds on the best practices regarding participatory engagement and collaborative planning from the literature review.

Specifically, our team recommends working more closely with the representative from the mayor's office who is on Carlow's board. This person could act as a liaison between Carlow University and the city government. This individual could apply their strong understanding of local governance and connections within the city administration. This person could facilitate communication between Carlow University and the mayor's office, allowing for insights into local policies, initiatives, and developments that may impact the university. Additionally, this appointee can regularly update the board on city-related matters and gather feedback.

We also recommend that the Carlow board identify a prominent figure in the higher education sector in Pittsburgh who can bring valuable insights, collaborations, and partnerships to Carlow University. A common theme in our interviews was collaboration; this was especially true among the education leaders that we interviewed. Given that the document review indicated greater city participation and involvement by other universities, Carlow could use this relationship to improve its activities vis-a-vis the city. This appointee could act as a bridge

between Carlow and other higher education institutions in Pittsburgh; share best practices, innovations, and trends in higher education; and explore opportunities for collaborative programs and initiatives.

***Finding 5: Carlow's leadership does not articulate a shared vision or goals around the education complex.***

Finding 5 is grounded in the Purposeful Communication quadrant of the conceptual framework, which emphasizes consistent messaging and messages that are tailored to specific stakeholder groups, such as city officials. Starting with an analysis of city documents, we did not find evidence of a shared vision for the educational complex among interviewees. A preliminary design study of the new complex includes the college of education, the campus school, an early learning center, and an athletic center. What was missing, however, was a strategic vision statement for the education complex that captures the whole of the project and can be easily shared with others.

Our review of the city documents revealed that Carlow was very active in communicating a vision for a previous plan involving the St. Agnes buildings, including an IMP that was submitted to the city. Carlow representatives were active in city and community meetings, as well. This initial concept from the late 2010s was abandoned and replaced with the current concept of an education complex. We did not find any evidence of supporting documents for the education complex among the city's formal plans or meeting minutes. Regarding social media, there is no mention of plans for the St. Agnes parcel, which aligns with the university's pattern of not featuring places on campus in social media posts.

In our interviews, we did not hear any of the interviewees articulate the vision for the education complex. City officials indicated that they were aware that Carlow had pivoted to a new direction but that their understanding of the concept was at a very high level. There appears to be a lack of communication between Carlow and city officials as to the key elements for the complex and Carlow's goals for this endeavor. There also is a thirst for more information on the part of city officials and a desire to help Carlow move forward (the "her" in this quote refers to Dr. Humphrey):

I think it's important for her as the head to communicate to our head ways that we can be more helpful to her from either process, vision, alignment, so on and so forth.

Our city participants are encouraging Carlow leadership to be more purposeful around the communication for the educational complex, as indicated here:

I think with that is any work that Carlow, if they're not finding direct alignment with a specific project or program, I think we would encourage them to look to those higher-level elements to see how they can fit in.

There is a desire by city officials to help Carlow; the educational complex idea was viewed positively by 100% of both city leaders and higher education leaders that we interviewed. Without a clear vision for the complex, however, these stakeholders may be at a loss as to how they can help Carlow along its journey. One leader in higher education that we interviewed expressed enthusiasm for collaborating with Carlow, which offers a unique opportunity, as well.

Internally, we did not hear a vision for the education complex from the individuals we spoke with at the university. We heard about preparations for launching a fundraising effort; a strategic hire for someone with experience in working with different city entities regarding permitting; relying on a law firm for government relations; and a new branding effort for the entire university. What we did not hear, however, was a discussion around the vision for the complex or a plan for how best to communicate this vision to city officials. There was discussion around the law firm's ability to open doors at the state level, but none at the city level.

Within this context, one comment was very telling: "we can rely on our partners at BIR [Buchanan, Ingersoll, & Rooney] to help jumpstart any conversations we might need." This statement was at the heart of what we observed as a "reactive" strategy to sharing the vision beyond potential donors. We learned that Carlow used to have staffers who focused on capital planning, but, when they left the university, these positions were left vacant. We also heard that no one on Carlow's staff fills a community relations type of role. One interviewee opined that Carlow's cabinet needs to discuss how to identify and manage strategic relationships, including those with city officials.

We see opportunity here to turn from a reactive strategy or "other duties as assigned" to one of purposeful communication around a vision for the educational complex. Carlow's marketing strategy is moving from one based on transactional communications to one that is building an emotional connection to the Carlow brand. The timing is perfect, as Carlow can refine its vision for the education complex along these lines, bringing its history and mission to the fore and crafting a powerful story that conveys a compelling vision. The challenge will be aligning Carlow's leadership internally and crafting a shared vision together.

### ***Recommendations***

**Foundational:** Clarify the messaging and objectives of the building project and provide key talking points the cabinet and board members can share.

Our team recommends creating a detailed communication framework that clearly outlines the objectives, purpose, and benefits of the educational complex. As the literature review shows, tailoring messages for key stakeholders is important for raising awareness of the university's mission, influencing processes, and generating positive outcomes (Harasta, 2022; Lawrence-Hughes, 2014). The recommended framework could be a pillar in the larger Carlow marketing strategy that currently is being developed, according to one interviewee, as well as serve as a guide for consistent communication across all channels.

Specifically, the framework could cover the interests of the university's various stakeholders and emphasize the positive impact of the complex on the university, community,

and broader educational landscape. Given our findings that show the strength of Carlow's overall mission and values—elements that resonated strongly with city officials in their interviews—we suggest that Carlow carefully weave these elements into the messaging around the education complex. This would reinforce the university's overall communications strategy that centers on a commitment to education, community engagement, and positive social impact and could highlight how the complex contributes to these broader goals.

There are a number of tactical components to this recommendation, as well. For example, we suggest that cabinet and board members be equipped with key talking points that describe and explain the vision and objectives of the educational complex. Visuals associated with the planning, drawings, and construction of the complex could be incorporated into an overarching social media theme to generate greater interest and support and highlight collaboration with the city. These efforts could contribute to the university's rebranding effort and bolster the new social media strategy, as described by one interviewee.

**Advanced:** Cabinet and board gain detailed understanding of previous development efforts as well as neighborhood reactions.

It is important to provide the cabinet and board with information and context to effectively communicate the university's goals and address questions or concerns that may arise. In our review of city documents, we noted that Carlow's original plans were to demolish the St. Agnes Church. Today, however, the church is the cornerstone of the educational complex. We observed in the city documents that during the city's review process, community members objected to the demolition of the church, reflecting the importance of collaborative planning and the role of community stakeholders in city processes involving new campus initiatives (Dalton et al., 2018; Kemp, 2013).

Ensuring the cabinet and the board deeply understand the value of the church to the community could facilitate and promote emotional buy-in and support. We recommend a detailed review of past development efforts—particularly the abandoned plan involving the St. Agnes buildings—to develop key messaging and talking points that incorporate the story of how Carlow listened to the community and adjusted its plans. These actions exemplify best practices aligned with developing trust with the community and deepening the town-gown relationship (Kemp, 2013; Seki et al., 2022).

While a change in plans could be viewed as a weakness, we believe this is an opportunity to align the messaging with the city's community engagement efforts around the Oakland plan. It is important to analyze community reactions to previous initiatives to anticipate potential challenges or concerns that may arise with the current educational complex proposal. As part of this recommendation, the university could consider hiring or designating a staff member specifically responsible for community relations. This individual can serve as a liaison between the university and the community, proactively addressing concerns and maintaining open lines of communication. This role is crucial for building trust and fostering a positive relationship with the community.

***Finding 6: The educational complex idea holds multiple angles of value to the city.***

Our team views this finding as both an opportunity and a challenge, particularly as it relates to the Shared Resources quadrant of the conceptual framework, which emphasizes planning for joint events or the integration of resources and facilities. Once the vision for the complex is honed (see Finding 5), Carlow has a unique opportunity to show how it reinforces the city's goals for the Oakland Development Project, especially those related to community hubs focused on early childcare and education. Our review of city documents shows that while the University of Pittsburgh was very active concerning the Oakland Plan Community Service Hub and the Oakland Plan Scale Up Childcare Services components of the overall Oakland Plan, Carlow was noticeably absent. There is, however, an opportunity here, as expressed by one interviewee:

The interest in early childhood care center there to me makes all the sense in the world.

While another interviewee shared with us these thoughts:

We know that there's a, there's childcare crisis. So, if that could be figured out in terms of the workers and who, who's going to staff that, I think that's brilliant.

Despite Carlow's lack of city engagement to this point, it appears that the door is wide open to participate in meaningful ways, especially as it relates to shared resources around child care and early education. This also presents an opportunity to collaborate with the city—as well as other institutes of higher learning—to meet community needs. City officials see the value in this collaboration but are seeking a more organized, strategic approach to how Carlow presents and operationalizes its vision, as evidenced by these quotes:

But I think just in thinking about Carlow's role in West Oakland, not only as we think about what their footprint presently is or could be in the future, but also what amenities and services are on campus, especially as that relationship happens between kind of campus and neighborhood, that there's definitely a role that we would want them to play with us and being able to be thinking through that together...

... Being here at the city, we see Carlow and other higher ed institutions as vital to our future of making the city safe, welcoming and providing thriving opportunities. ...They're very much a link in our plans...

We believe based on the interviews and documentary evidence that the right set of circumstances are aligned for Carlow to engage with the city, demonstrate the value of the educational complex, and garner support. The challenge will be finding internal resources to make it happen. Although the city is starting to implement its Oakland Plan, there still is room to influence how it unfolds. According to this city official, the plan is:

...still open-ended enough that I think the institutions can find their way and pave the path forward. And I think, so one thing with the Child Service childcare services is that the plan also identifies the possibility that these services could be in Community Service Hubs, which are kind of small hubs in different geographies of the neighborhood...

By centering the new complex on education and developing teachers, Carlow also could help the city with its desire to keep university graduates in Pittsburgh, a concern expressed by the city officials we interviewed. We have not seen this goal elevated in the discussions around the educational complex but believe it could contribute to the overall view of the value the new complex could bring to the city. One cabinet leader shared this perspective about shifting the focus on campus development from investing in health sciences to one focused on education and the new complex:

...making the decision to invest in education here at Carlow made a lot of sense for a variety of different reasons. One, it is one of the foundational pieces that the university was founded on... Our incoming freshman class is fantastic, but knowing that our job is to educate and to help others, taking that approach of investing in education was one that we felt was really important for not only the growth of the university, but also to bring more opportunities to the communities in which we live and operate in...that is kind of how we came to the conclusion of we need to move forward with this education complex...

Our findings support the view that Carlow is positioned to play a larger role in supporting the city's desire to develop and retain an educated workforce.

### ***Recommendations***

**Foundational:** Focus on the childcare center and tie messaging to the specific Oakland plan strategy theme of "Scale Up Childcare Services."

Carlow's educational complex meets many needs—those of the neighborhood, the city, and the university's academic programming. The university's plans to build an education complex directly align with the city's goals for Oakland, especially supporting child services. City officials are very concerned about a childcare crisis in the city, according to our findings, and strongly advocate for scaling up child services in their Oakland Plan. City documents show, however, that Carlow has not demonstrated its interest in being part of the solution, at least not through the city's formal channels for participation. This situation can easily be corrected by purposefully engaging with the city as Carlow develops its plans for the complex. Carlow's messaging around the complex could highlight how new facilities will help alleviate the city's childcare crisis, provide new jobs, and contribute to building tomorrow's workforce.

Our literature review further supports this recommendation. Other universities have successfully linked their campus resources to city resources, including facilities and buildings (Seki et al., 2022), and bridged university planning to city planning (Jackson et al., 2020). Moreover, universities have supported the economic development of the city and the larger municipal region through shared resources (Sarhadi et al., 2021; Seki et al., 2022). Another discovery from the literature review shows that this type of engagement with the city facilitates a university's efforts to address power imbalances and social justice, which could bolster Carlow's mission (Sarhadi et al., 2021). Perhaps most helpful to Carlow, the literature review also reveals that universities that carried out these actions garnered greater city support for their initiatives (Graham, 2005; Halverson & Plotas, 2006; Lovell et al., 2019).

This opportunity comes at an auspicious time, as a recent report from the Pennsylvania Economic Development Association and Strong Nation (Bishop & Doster, 2023) indicates that a lack of accessible and affordable childcare is hampering a company's ability to hire workers who can neither find nor afford childcare. This sentiment was echoed in our interviews with city officials, as well. We believe, therefore, that the evidence from the findings and literature review strongly points toward working with the city on planning the childcare-related aspects of the complex and promoting the concept within and throughout the city.

**Advanced:** Explore avenues for workforce development and/or other priorities of the Oakland Plan within the educational complex, in collaboration with city planners.

Our advanced recommendation centers on a higher-level city goal: workforce development. Our city participants reinforced the top theme in the Oakland Plan, that of growing job opportunities (The City of Pittsburgh, 2023), throughout their interviews, even pointing to other universities' support of the EcoInnovation District adjacent to the Oakland Corridor. Conversely, workforce development rarely came up in our interviews with Carlow leadership. As one city interviewee put it, the complex provides Carlow with the opportunity to be on the cutting edge of education. We couldn't agree more and view this as an opportunity to build out the next education-focused workforce, whose positive Pittsburgh experiences will keep them in the city for their post-graduate career.

According to our literature review, campus initiatives that are jointly planned with the city are shown to have a positive impact on both city and regional development, including job growth (Sarhadi et al., 2021; Seki et al., 2022). In a city of techs and meds, a bold move into education could boost Carlow's visibility and meet the city's need for workforce development; this would complement and not compete with other universities' strengths.

Our recommendation encourages Carlow to proactively engage with the city to explore the multifaceted opportunities associated with the education complex to both provide job opportunities immediately through childcare education and services, as well as produce top-notch graduates who could transition into the city's workforce, especially if the university and city worked together to facilitate such transitions. While the realization of the finished complex is well into the future, we believe the present is a good time for the Carlow leadership to begin exploring these concepts and chart a path.

## Conclusion

As a final step in our interviews, we asked each participant to describe Carlow using just a few words. We did this as one final check on acceptance bias. By asking this question and leaving very little time to respond, we expected that our participants would give us honest, straightforward answers that were unfiltered. We then assessed whether this feedback aligned with earlier responses and as a check on findings 5 and 6, as well.

We are including these words as our conclusion because, when we looked at the completed list, we were struck by the honesty and beauty captured here. The responses are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6  
*Stakeholders' views of Carlow in only three words*



These responses are evocative of a strong and enduring heritage grounded in servant leadership, faith, and social justice. We also see the seeds of change that represent the future of the institution. It is our deep desire that by conducting this research, sharing our findings, and providing actionable recommendations, we, too, are contributing to Carlow University and its vision for the educational complex in some small way.

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## Appendix 1- Interview Protocol—City and Higher Education Leaders

This transcript represents the team's interview protocol they followed during every interview.

In the first few minutes of the interview, we will introduce ourselves and briefly summarize the purpose of our project. If on Zoom, ask permission to record. Note that we can turn off the recording at any time. Share that interview sources will not be shared by name, but rather by stakeholder category. Data will be stored in Vanderbilt Box, a secure filing system. Information will be confidential but may not be fully anonymous.

We are scheduled for 30 minutes, does that still work?

1. Briefly, how long have you lived and/or worked in Pittsburgh? (pause) Can you describe your professional role?
2. In what ways, if any, have you engaged with Carlow University? (pause for answer)  
(If they said yes but kept the answer short...) What was that experience like? Positive, negative, or something in between? At what level was the engagement?
3. What is Carlow known for, in your world? (pause for answer) What does it bring to the Oakland neighborhood? How about to the city of Pittsburgh?  
(Possible follow up...) Do you view Carlow as a contributor to the community? If so how?
4. In what ways do you see that Carlow has differentiated itself from a crowded marketplace of colleges and universities in Pittsburgh? (pause for answer) In what ways do you think it could build on strengths moving forward?
5. How do you view the frequency and content of communications from Carlow? Are there aspects of your role where it would be helpful to be in more frequent communication?  
Do you feel you're communicating at the right level within the university? From your perspective, describe what ideal communication with the university would look like.
6. Carlow is considering building an Educational Complex that would potentially house the College of Education, early learning/childcare center, and other initiatives and programs.  
Tell us your thoughts on this... (pause for answer)  
(Follow up as needed...) What do you see as opportunities and challenges of such a project?
7. How familiar are you with the “Oakland Plan” development that is now in the implementation stage? (pause for answer) With that plan in mind and knowing where

Carlow is geographically, what alignment do you see? What goals of the plan, if any, could Carlow help to meet?

8. For Higher Ed Leaders:

Have you had any interactions with city leaders/planners in your role and can you share some about those? (probe on frequency, probe on goals of interaction)

For City Leaders:

Have you had interactions with higher-ed leaders in your role and can you share some about those? (probe on frequency, probe on goals of interactions)

9. Thank you so much for sharing your perspective, and all of this helpful information. One last question before we have a few wrap up items. Describe Carlow University in just three words.

10. Who else would you recommend that we speak with to better understand the relationship between Carlow and the city of Pittsburgh? (or between Carlow and the Oakland Plan)

11. Do you have any additional comments or feedback for us?

CLOSE: Thank the interviewee for their time and ask permission to re-contact them with any questions. Also, state that if they think of something after the interview, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

## Appendix 2- Data Collection Plan

Project Questions	Data source(s)	Data Collection Method(s)
As Carlow proceeds with its plans to create an education center, to what degree does Carlow engage with the city of Pittsburgh? How often and with whom does Carlow engage?	<p>Interviews with Carlow University leadership: Dr. Humphrey, President Caralynn Kassabov, VP John Cardone, VP of Marketing, Communications &amp; Government Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Literature review</li> <li>- Carlow social media posts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interviews</li> <li>- Documents provided by the Carlow leadership</li> <li>- Scraped streams from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and the Carlow blog</li> </ul>
What are city hall's perceptions of Carlow in general and the education center specifically? Based on Carlow and the city's views, how does the education center fit into the Oakland corridor revitalization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- City executive leadership team, city planners, and staff</li> <li>City planning documents, e.g., The Oakland Plan, Oakland Plan Steering Committee</li> <li>Meeting Minutes, Pittsburgh Neighborhood Plan Guide, registered Institutional Master Plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interviews (and snowballing – asking “Who else should we be talking to?”)</li> <li>- City documents accessed online at the city’s website</li> </ul>
What are the key ideas, terms, and phenomena related to understanding stakeholder perspectives? How do these relate specifically to campus development efforts? What is the role of stakeholder perspectives in strategic planning in general and project development specifically?	Literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Survey of the literature as published in peer-reviewed journals</li> </ul>

<p>How do other Pittsburgh universities navigate the town-gown relationship, especially within the Oakland area?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interviews with other Pittsburgh universities, as they have significantly expanded facilities footprint in recent years in same neighborhood</li> <li>- Interviews with other Pittsburgh universities that have expanded facility footprint.</li> <li>- Review of city documents, e.g., Institutional Master Plans</li> </ul>	<p>Identify and reach out to key people, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jamie Ducar, VP for Community Engagement at U of Pittsburgh</li> <li>- William Generett, Senior Vice President of Civic Engagement and External Relations</li> </ul>
<p>What are factors that impact the success of campus project planning and implementation? How are these related, or not, to city-specific stakeholder responses?</p>	<p>Universities that conducted campus projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review of Pittsburgh policies on campus development, requirements for building projects, etc.</li> <li>- Interviews with university counterparts</li> </ul>

## Appendix 3- Photos of Carlow University Gathered from Site Visit

These photos were taken during a site visit to Carlow University. Photos 2-7 show the campus area that will be redeveloped for the new education complex.



Photo 1. Map of campus



Photo 2. Center for Leadership and Management



Photo 3. Looking toward the St. Agnes Center



Photo 4. St. Agnes Center



Photo 5. Side view of St. Agnes Center



Photo 6. View toward St. Agnes School



Photo 7. St Agnes School



Photo 8. Sisters of Mercy Convent

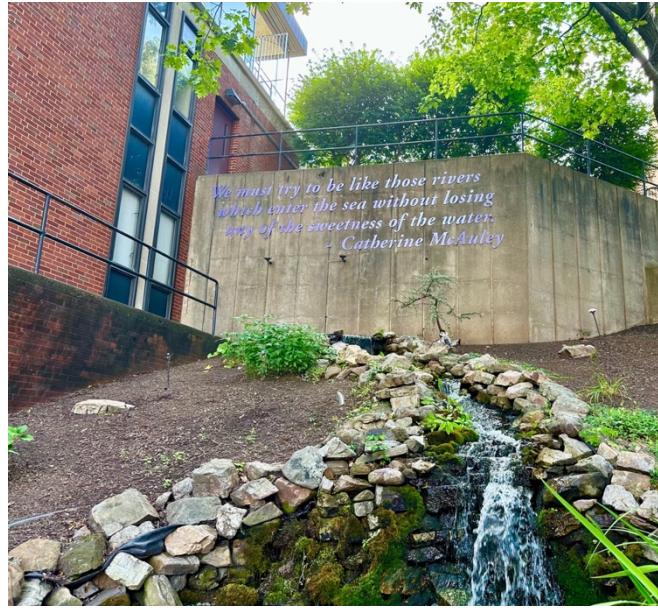


Photo 9. A view from the commons



Photo 10. St. Joseph Gymnasium