

Resources to Engage, Accomplish, Connect & Help (REACH) Proposal

“Resources to Engage, Accomplish, Connect & Help” (REACH) is a interdepartmental and university-wide program aimed at fostering professional relationships and networks among faculty and staff. By connecting Lehigh employees with each other and providing opportunities to learn about the university, REACH seeks to advance multiple goals of Lehigh’s strategic plan, including investing in faculty and staff, as well as the university’s core values and the aims of the Council on Equity and Community.

Like Learning the Institution, REACH will include presentations from different specific areas of the university (e.g., Alumni Relations, First-Year Experience, the Chaplain’s Office, the Council on Equity and Community) to give a sense for what each does and how it serves the Lehigh community. Each monthly session will also provide time for participants to discuss how the information they just learned could be relevant to their work and how they could envision collaborating with the presenters and with each other. While the first several presenters will be secured by ERAC and HR, REACH participants will then choose a list of speakers or university departments that reflect their own interests under the leadership of a coordinator chosen from the cohort itself.

REACH cohorts will meet once a month at designated times during the workday. Beginning with the fiscal calendar in September, cohorts will be in place for one year, at the end of which participants will be surveyed about their experiences. Monthly sessions will be held in October, November, January, February, March, and April. All of the cohorts will be brought together for a closing reception or luncheon. When REACH begins each September, the cohorts from previous year’s will be invited back to enhance and build upon the networking already in place.

REACH’s Goals, Lehigh’s Core Values and the Strategic Plan

Among REACH’s direct and principal goals are:

- to engage faculty and staff across campus, regardless of their position or time at Lehigh;
- to enhance relationships among staff across different stems, departments and positions;
- to create a broader community by fostering professional networks;
- to provide professional development and educational opportunities;
- to enable participants to learn more about Lehigh, its resources and history and the people who work here; and
- to empower Lehigh’s employees to collaborate with and learn from each other in new and creative ways.

These goals mesh well with Lehigh’s Core Values in the following ways:

- **Equitable community:** REACH strengthens Lehigh’s community by fostering cross-departmental/horizontal and interposition/vertical relationships.
- **Intellectual curiosity:** By providing venues for exploring Lehigh and gaining a deeper understanding of the people who work here, REACH creates a framework in which

- participants' intellectual curiosity is rewarded with learning and a better appreciation of how different areas of the university function and interact.
- Collaboration: Building and strengthening relationships across campus, as well as introducing faculty and staff to segments of the university they may currently be unaware of or not knowledgeable about, will provide fertile ground for collaboration across disciplines and areas.

In addition, Lehigh's strategic plan places a strong emphasis on investing in and retaining faculty and staff. As the plan recognizes, a key component of investment and retention is "the vibrancy of the community," which affects both individuals' length of time at Lehigh and their productivity while they are here. Accordingly, Lehigh seeks to "foster a campus culture that actively attracts and supports a diverse, inclusive, and intellectually vibrant community."

As mentioned above, REACH aims to strengthen Lehigh's sense of community across existing boundaries that may typically prevent individuals from interacting. By building bridging relationships that cut across various identities, stems and professional backgrounds, REACH maximizes the diversity that already exists here at Lehigh and will further the strategic plan's goal of faculty and staff recruitment, retention and investment. In this way, REACH will also advance the goals of the Council on Equity and Community, which seeks broadly to bring about a more inclusive community at Lehigh.