

Advancing Belonging, Meaning, Wellbeing and Purpose (BMWP)

Six essential ingredients for success

BMWP in Action Series

April 2025

Aspen Forum for Community Solutions Belonging, Meaning, Wellbeing and Purpose (BMWP)

The BMWP in Action Series spotlights transformative work underway at seven colleges and universities across the country to center belonging, meaning, wellbeing and purpose (BMWP) approaches in service of their institutional goals to improve racial equity and student success.

The stories emerging from this diverse set of colleges are meant to provide leaders across the country – those working in higher education as well as other sectors – with examples of what it looks like to prioritize BMWP and how doing so can create a culture of thriving for all students, faculty and staff.

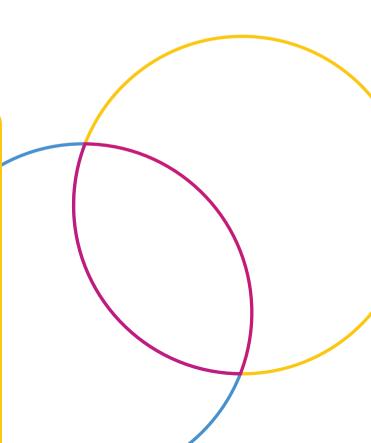
While the contexts and approaches of the seven case study institutions are different, these leaders point to six essential ingredients for advancing BMWP in postsecondary settings. BMWP can thrive when leaders (1) let students lead, (2) build in solidarity with like-minded efforts, (3) engage senior leaders so they can embed BMWP into college-wide priorities, (4) provide adequate resources, (5) support engagement of faculty and staff in the changes, and (6) establish clear feedback loops that can allow for course correction.

This document provides an overview of the BMWP constructs, the seven case study institutions and the six essential ingredients for success.

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions (AFCS) promotes collaborative, community-based efforts that build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity, and supports communities to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges.

Our next decade of work continues to focus on ending youth disconnection. We endeavor to transform systems and communities in ways that ensure that all youth can thrive. Belonging, Meaning, Wellbeing and Purpose (BMWP) is the emerging framework that is helping us to get there.

Learn more about AFCS and our work to advance BMWP at https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/bmwp



What is BMWP?

A growing base of evidence points to the importance of approaches that help young people belong, have space to engage in meaning-making activities, have strong overall wellbeing and cultivate a sense of purpose in college and life. The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions believes that leaders who prioritize BMWP approaches in their work with young people can improve the likelihood that those young people will achieve their goals.

Definitions for each of these constructs are emerging through practitioner knowledge and academic research.

Belonging	Having a meaningful voice and opportunity to participate in the design of political, social and cultural structures that shape one's life. ¹
Meaning	The ways in which people make sense of themselves, others and social situations. ²
Wellbeing	Having the support, confidence, and resources needed to thrive in contexts of secure and healthy relationships, realizing their full potential and rights. ³
Purpose	One's desire and intention to achieve something that is significant to one's life and of consequence to the world in which one lives. ⁴



Resource spotlight:

In addition to the BMWP case studies, The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions has released two resources that provide general guidance on BMWP.

The **BMWP Primer** provides a high-level overview of the BMWP framework along with key definitions and examples of how leading organizations are integrating BMWP approaches into their work.

The **BMWP Strategies** document outlines specific approaches to foster belonging, meaning, wellbeing and purpose in one or more settings.

BMWP in Action Series Page 3

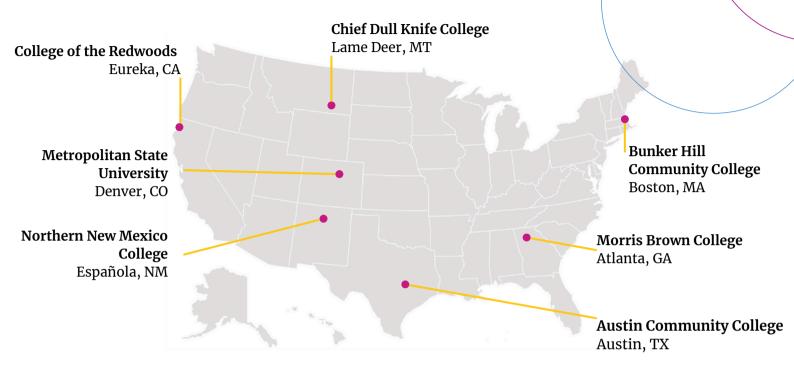
¹ This definition of belonging is informed by the work of john a. powell and colleagues at the Othering and Belonging Institute.

² Walton and Wilson (2018). <u>Wise interventions: Psychological remedies for social and personal problems.</u>

³ Ross et. al. (2020). Adolescent Well-Being: A Definition and Conceptual Framework.

⁴ Damon, Menon, & Bronk (2003). <u>The development of purpose during adolescence</u>. Applied Developmental Science, Vol. 7, No. 3 (119–128).

This series profiles BMWP approaches at seven institutions



College	Featured BMWP approach
Austin Community College	Love-centered, whole college transformation process
Bunker Hill Community College	Cohort-based learning and support for students who identify as Black, Latinx and Indigenous males
Chief Dull Knife College	Student success course focused on supporting positive Indigenous student identity
College of the Redwoods	Pelican Bay Scholars program providing educational services to incarcerated individuals
Metropolitan State University, Denver	Reorganizing student supports around a comprehensive student wellbeing strategic plan
Morris Brown College	Reducing cost of attendance and working towards debt free college
Northern New Mexico College	Creating new dual enrollment pathways for Indigenous students on the Jemez Pueblo

BMWP in Action Series Page 4

Six Essential Ingredients

The diversity of the seven case studies proves that there is no single BMWP program or model to adopt. Just as gardens have basic ingredients and infinite possibilities, institutions must find their own way to integrate BMWP approaches in an authentic way.

The case studies suggest BMWP thrives through the interaction of six essential ingredients.





Let students lead. Students must form the center of any meaningful BMWP approach. Student identities, experiences, dreams and desires are the core of the work. Everything else plays a supporting role.



Build in solidarity. In higher education, all work is interconnected and built on the foundation of predecessor initiatives. Leaders looking to advance BMWP must start by asking: where is BMWP (or adjacent concepts) already present? These spaces can provide resources, collaborators and other nutrients to help boost the effort.



Engage senior leaders. For BMWP to flourish, the framework needs to be firmly planted at the center of the college's strategic priorities. This requires support from leadership at the highest levels of the institution including the president and trustees.



Provide adequate resources. Just as gardens need water, BMWP efforts need resources. This includes money, staff time, materials, communications collateral and a physical location for BMWP-related efforts to live at the institution.



Support faculty and staff. BMWP efforts depend on passionate champions for students. Even when all other factors – students with clear dreams, a supportive context, committed leaders and real resources – are present, BMWP cannot move without committed faculty and staff who take on the day-to-day cultivation of the college's BMWP strategies.



Establish feedback loops. As plants grow, they need to be monitored to make sure they don't dry out or get overpowered by weeds and neighboring plants. In the same way, educators looking to advance BMWP practices need to establish systems that can help them understand if their efforts are leading to results and make course corrections where necessary.

BMWP in Action Series Page 5