

The Pivotal Network

Overview

A professional development network of teachers supporting first-generation low-income (FGLI) students. I helped facilitate design sprints, manage our website, and lead research among FGLI students.

Problem and Approach

The Pivotal Network is an organization that seeks to expand equity in higher education. It does so by operating at the intersection of two powerful observations: college attainment is a networked process rather than an individual phenomenon, and educational capital is distributed unequally and flows unequally.

1. *Building and Strengthening Networks: Pivotal Educators, Pivotal Messengers, and Pivotal Professors*

The Pivotal Network's first goal was to expand thinking around success and achievement to be less of an individual story and more of a story about villages, systems, and networks. Students can reach college through enormous effort, unquestionable talent, and incredible resilience, but that's not the full story. The reality is that peers, teachers, professors, administrators and families form a web of support that is often instrumental in every student's success. If those networks of support are able to send individuals over insurmountable odds into college, then the Pivotal Network's first goal was to bolster and strengthen those networks.

2. *Establish Dual Flow of Educational Capital: Form lasting relationships with the schools and communities that send FGLI students to college.*

Secondly, existing initiatives around educational inequality focus on expanding access to quality education for students from low-income backgrounds, largely through fundraising and public policy. However, these initiatives ignore what happens to students from low-income backgrounds who matriculate to college. There is often a mismatch between the student and their new environment, and there is also a siphoning of talent from the original community from which the student came. The communities that supported the student and helped them into college don't receive any reciprocal flow from the college to repay them for their efforts. The Pivotal Network's second goal was to establish a reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationship between under-resourced communities and colleges.

My Contributions

Organizational Goal	My Contribution
1. Identify and recruit Pivotal Educators	Interviewed teachers about their experiences and to invite them into The Pivotal Network.
2. Co-design a network model	Facilitated co-design sprints with 50+ high school teachers at Title I Schools, piloting solutions for improving college attainment.
3. Establish a professional learning community	Coordinated teacher engagement on our digital professional network platform.
4. Conduct further research on inequity in higher education	Designed a qualitative research project with 20 first-generation low-income college students around challenges with belonging and the “hidden curriculum.”
Evergreen: Communicate Our Value	Designed the website, social media accounts, and newsletter using Canva and Wordpress.
Evergreen: Stay Organized and Communicative	Used Asana to coordinate a suite of simultaneous projects. Diligent note-taking and meeting scheduling

Reflection and Key Takeaways

- Organizations change and grow. Continuity is difficult
- Cultivating relationships is central to the work
- Building complexity is difficult. Coherent storytelling matters.
- Staying organized and adaptive in a startup environment