



GLOBAL YOUTH STRATEGIC PLANNING: A CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATION

Report on the Elephant Initiative – a partnership between the Mastercard Foundation
and the Talloires Network



Acknowledgments

The Talloires Network offers special thanks to the Mastercard Foundation for their support of the Elephant Initiative, a global strategic planning initiative. The Elephant Initiative is part of the Youth Economic Participation Initiative (YEPI), a multi-year demonstration grant designed to change the way universities prepare students for work and life. YEPI learnings directly influenced the development of the Elephant Initiative by providing opportunities and support for student leadership.

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Talloires Network acknowledges secretariat staff who contributed to the Elephant Initiative program and this report:

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Importantly, the Talloires Network thanks Elephant Initiative Fellows and Mentors for their dedication, leadership, and creativity. Each of them made it possible to collect testimony from students and other higher education stakeholders around the world and imagine new paths forward for engaged universities.

Many students contributed both directly and indirectly to shaping the ideas and strategies presented in this report. The Talloires Network recognizes its Student Representatives to the Steering Committee, Mapendo Mindje of University of Rwanda and Abigail Gómez of Universidad Veracruzana, and the key contributions of the Student Delegates to TNLC2017. Their leadership in the Network led directly to the development of the Elephant Initiative and the vision for engaged universities presented in this report.

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Executive Summary

In partnership with The Mastercard Foundation, the Talloires Network collaborated with Network member university Universidad Veracruzana to develop the Elephant Initiative, a fellowship program that engaged global youth in a participatory strategic planning process. The Elephant Initiative used the Talloires Network Leaders' Conference (TNLC2017) as a platform for students to 1) develop and present their perspectives on strategic priorities for the Talloires Network, and 2) to practice leadership skills that are critical to economic and civic participation.

Six university students from Talloires Network member institutions across 6 countries, a majority of which were from the Global South, were accepted into the Student Fellow program. Fellows participated in 10 weeks of e-learning, conducted 219 informal stakeholder interviews, received 3 trainings and an average of 2 hours per week of mentorship from higher education leaders. This experience culminated in a dynamic and interactive Fellow-led TNLC2017 plenary presentation.

This report:

1. Shares insights from Fellows' inquiry processes and presents student-designed strategies for advancing the movement of engaged higher education institutions.
2. Makes preliminary assessments of the Elephant Initiative as an educational model that is focused on leadership and directly involves students in the strategic planning process of a higher education network whose activities impact their daily lives.

Fellows' insights articulate a vision for higher education that supports students' connections to the world outside the university. Specifically, they call for:

- Support in navigation and reduction of financial barriers to college access
- Comprehensive support for student leadership development
- Opportunities to learn from faculty, program staff, and others who lead by example and can practice what they teach
- Platforms to collaborate with like-minded peers
- Higher education that is contextualized in professional realities and prepares them for life after graduation

The outcomes of the program illustrate that involving students directly in institutional strategy-making is a twofold opportunity. Engaged universities can benefit from students' experiential insights into the realities of university life around the world; these insight help institutions to better understand the needs of their students and can inspire innovative approaches to their work. Additionally, students can gain direct exposure to the realities of higher education leadership, and to the skills and mindsets needed to problem-solve effectively.



HOW CAN UNIVERSITIES ENGAGE THEIR STUDENTS IN INCREASING HIGHER EDUCATION'S IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD?

Introduction

The Mastercard Foundation and the Talloires Network share a strong belief in the potential of young people to change their communities for the better, and a vision for education that enables them to do so. In executing this vision it is critical that we are:

- **Rooted in awareness of barriers that young people face** in accessing the resources they need to thrive, both throughout their tenure in the university and once they graduate.
- **Student-centered**, aiming to activate students' agency by making meaning of their experiences and rigorously engaging in problem-solving.
- **Responsive** to the demands of 21st century job markets and to the pressing challenges facing communities around the world.

As a global network of 368 engaged universities in 77 countries with a combined student enrollment of more than 6 million, the Talloires Network represents the potential impact of engaged universities, which provide an education that prepares students for the realities of economic and civic life. This work is especially vital as communities around the world confront persistent challenges like poverty, illiteracy, hunger, conflict, and the effects of a rapidly changing climate.

Through the Talloires Network's Youth Economic Participation Initiative (YEPI), the Network has highlighted the work of 8 innovative university programs in the Global South¹ that practice the kind of education that prepares students for these realities. YEPI programs are transformative entrepreneurship education programs taking high-impact approaches to engaged higher education.

Youth leadership development that puts students' experiences at the center of the process is thus central to the goal of giving young people opportunities to maximize their potential, and to transform their communities. The Elephant Initiative is a manifestation of the Talloires Network's investment in youth leadership development as a key strategy for making higher education more accessible, applicable, and relevant and, simultaneously, to provide young people the support they need to make contributions to society.

¹ 2iE Institute, Burkina Faso; Universidad Austral, Chile; Universiti Kebangsaan, Malaysia; Universidad Veracruzana; Mexico; Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan; Solve the Equation East Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania; University of Cape Town, South Africa; and paNhari, Zimbabwe

Youth Leadership

The Elephant Initiative's philosophy of leadership is deeply influenced by a set of critical assumptions, formed through awareness of the context for youth leadership in the 21st century. These five assumptions directly informed the program's development and design.

1. The time to invest in youth leadership is now.

According to the United Nations (UN), there are currently 1.2 billion young people around the world between the ages of 15 and 24 — a number that represents the largest youth population in history. The ability of countries to harness the potential of their human capital depends critically on the investments they make in young people, who are poised to enter the labour force and whose productivity, entrepreneurship, and innovation will shape the future of society.

2. The world needs leaders who are self-aware, community-minded, and globally conscious.

We live in a time of increased awareness of our communities' interconnectivity and diversity; at the same time, societies grapple with fragmentation and persistent inequality. To lead adeptly in this context, young people should be supported to become skilled communicators, empathizers, and critical thinkers; to take in the diverse perspectives of the people around them, and consider them in decision-making; to understand the impact of those decisions on local and global communities.

3. The world needs more female leaders.

In so many parts of the world, women still do not have the same education and training opportunities as their male peers. Increasing access to education and leadership development opportunities for girls and women is essential for sustainable development and it is a moral imperative of our time.

4. Developing 21st century leaders requires universities to educate differently.

Today's students are coming of age in a hyperconnected world in which information changes by the minute, yet many universities still rely heavily on the lecture tradition — a model of passive learning and static knowledge transmission that is out of sync with the fast paced and highly complex nature of students' realities. To educate students in a way that prepares them for life, we should not only lecture but also engage them in real-world experiences such as interdisciplinary collaboration and problem solving.

5. Young people are essential to institutional reform.

Non-profit organizations around the world are launching youth leadership initiatives with the understanding that *“youth leadership can serve as a vehicle for tackling pressing social challenges and catalysing positive social change (Kanh, Hewes, and Ali, 2009).”* They know that the leadership development process is not only beneficial for students' own livelihoods but can

activate students' potential to take on issues they care about. Universities benefit from doing the same.

Fellow Profiles

Elephant Initiative Fellows are leaders in their universities and communities. They demonstrate commitment to a vision for higher education that equips students to make meaningful contributions to society. We are pleased to introduce them here.



Daniela Acosta De Anda

Mexico

Tecnológico de Monterrey
Architecture

Daniela is the Social Development Coordinator of the Chihuahua Student Association, through which she develops and supports social impact projects. She sees architecture as a discipline with huge potential for social impact — for example, through the design of schools or community buildings that promote cohesion.



Faizan Rashid

Pakistan

National University of Science and Technology
Mechanical Engineering

Faizan is an active member and team leader in NUST's Community Services Club, and has worked on projects focused on gender equity, educational access, and others. His mission is to lead by example and inspire others to take up the responsibility of service in every facet of society — especially children and the underprivileged.



Kimberly Tapiwa Kujinga

Zimbabwe

University of Zimbabwe

Medicine

Kim is a past president of the Rotaract Club, a graduate of the paNhari life skills development program and now the paNhari Campus Coordinator, and a 2014 Talloires Network Student Leader and entrepreneur. Her mission is to challenge the status quo. By pursuing her passions for entrepreneurship and leadership, she believes she can change her own life and the lives of those around her in a positive and sustainable way.



Seyma Seyvik

Turkey

Anadolu University

Creative Drama in Education

Seyma is a first-year graduate student of Creative Drama in Education. She is a member of the Contemporary Drama Association, through which she organizes drama workshops for people of all ages. She is involved in many social responsibility projects involving creative drama, as she sees it as a way to take people's natural world, creative play, and develop it further by using theater techniques to create learning experiences.



Poonnapa Zheng

Thailand

Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Chemical Technology

Poonnapa was born and raised in Thailand but decided to continue her studies abroad. Due to her service learning work in Cambodia, she was nominated to represent Hong Kong Polytechnic University at the University Social Responsibility Summit (USR). The student-sharing sessions at USR enabled her to tap into the ideas of other students, and this summer she will return to Cambodia to implement a new project as a result.

Poonnapa believes that it is every citizen's responsibility to commit to helping society.



Stephen Wamembo

Uganda

Livingstone International University
Business Administration

Stephen's four years at Livingstone have been years of self-discovery, commitment, and purpose. He has served as a minister for academics and discipline, the President of the Students' Guild, and as a member of numerous student associations and clubs. At church, he has served as youth chairperson of the parish; at the local government level he was the General Secretary for youth in political leadership of the town council. Stephen would like to gear his efforts toward mentoring young people who have leadership potential, but are limited by circumstances.

Methodology



Fellows and Mentors collaborate during the first of three TNLC Elephant-Initiative trainings.

The Talloires Network strongly believes in the value of supporting students in leadership roles and bringing their voices into strategic conversations.

The Elephant Initiative acted on this belief in two ways:

1. Student Fellows were given a leadership role at TNLC2017 in the form of a youth-led Plenary Session.
2. Student Fellows were given the tools to represent the perspectives of other students in their analyses and strategy-making.

Leadership Philosophy



“A leader does not have to be someone who [always] speaks or leads the group. Good leaders must be able to both speak and listen to other opinions.”

*Poonnapa Zheng
Elephant Initiative Student Fellow, Hong Kong*

The Elephant Initiative represents a leadership philosophy. Elephant leaders are socially connected and community-minded. In making critical decisions, they stay open to the

suggestions of others, including youngest members of the herd. Organization of the elephant's herd represents a model for mentorship; experiences and learnings are transmitted from the oldest to the youngest to develop the next generation of leaders and prepare them for the future. The Elephant Initiative philosophy of leadership translates to an effort that strives to empower students to tackle societal issues by developing their capacities to successfully address challenges, and to inspire the people around them to do the same.

Fellowship

Elephant Initiative Fellows were recruited through the Talloires Network membership using the following criteria:

- Currently enrolled as a student of a Talloires Network member institution (*preference given to undergraduate students or students in their first year of graduate studies*)
- Actively involved in his/her community; demonstrated community engagement experience
- Demonstrated communication skills, creativity, and leadership potential
- Globally and entrepreneurially minded
- Collaborative and flexible; able to use online platforms and applications to communicate

Elephant Initiative Fellows were selected from a pool of 31 university student applicants from Talloires Network member universities on 5 continents. The fellowship cohort included 6 students - 4 female and 2 male, representing 6 countries and 6 different academic disciplines with a shared demonstrated dedication to civic engagement and willingness to collaborate internationally.

Mentorship

The selection committee also recruited a group of 7 mentors² across 6 countries whose leadership experience and familiarity with Talloires Network programs would provide support to Fellows, in both the virtual and in-person phases of the program.

Elephant Initiative mentoring was a co-creative process designed to support Fellows in completing program challenges, preparing their plenary, and generally developing their leadership capacities and skills. One-to-one Mentor-Fellow pairs were assigned for weekly challenges to provide formalized curriculum support. Mentors also co-facilitated in-person

² Based on the Elephant Initiative's philosophy of leadership and modeling the multi-generational leadership of an elephant herd, the group of mentors included 4 young higher education professionals previously involved in Talloires Network student programming and 3 older, more experienced mentors. All 7 are leaders in civic engagement. The mix served to model leadership at multiple stages and ages and to provide a variety of perspectives on the movement of engaged universities and students' potential roles in driving it forward.

trainings during the TNLC2017 week-long intensive, gave programmatic input, and mentored Fellows informally.

<i>Mentor</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Talloires Network Program Affiliation</i>
Andrés Paraguirre	Thailand	Talloires Network University Volunteer Program
Sarah Oliver	South Africa	TNLC2014 Student Leader
Geoffrey Ajiki	Kenya	TNLC2014 Student Leader
Eriko Lau	Hong Kong	Talloires Network University Volunteer Program
Cliona Maher	Ireland	YEPI staff, former Universidad Veracruzana staff
Phil Mlanda	Zimbabwe	YEPI staff
Donald Bodzo	Zimbabwe	YEPI staff

Syllabus

The core function of the fellowship syllabus was to engage Fellows in self-designed inquiry processes centered around the Calls to Action, the 3 main strategic priorities for global action planning at TNLC2017, which also represented major aspects of students' higher education experience:

ACCESS: The right to education and the responsibility to be socially inclusive and to promote quality education for all.

LEADERSHIP: The right to leadership opportunities and economic mobility and the responsibility to create prosperous communities and societies.

LIVELIHOODS: The right to a livelihood, the responsibility to prepare for employment and/or entrepreneurship, and to contribute to economic development.

Disruptive Pedagogy and E-Learning

Disruptive pedagogy was a primary methodology used in the Elephant Initiative process. In this case, "disruption" entailed:

- Engaging Fellows in activities or challenges that required creativity and digital literacy.
- Innovative use of technology for virtual collaboration.

- The use of Human Centered Design (HCD), an approach to problem-solving based on empathy.

In-Person Exchange

The Talloires Network Leaders' Conference (TNLC2017), hosted by Universidad Veracruzana in Xalapa, Mexico, served as a platform to bring students voices to the center of strategic discussions in higher education. Throughout TNLC2017, Fellows were actively involved in trainings, conference sessions, and networking events that offered them the opportunity to exchange ideas with other student delegates, higher education leaders, faculty, program staff, and entrepreneurs.



Fellows and Mentors with keynote speaker Yensi Flores, PhD student and entrepreneur, after their Plenary presentation

Programmatic Outcomes



219

Higher Education
Stakeholder
Interviews & Surveys



121

Commitments to
Action



10

Weeks of E-learning



3

Elephant Initiative
Specific Trainings
with Direct
Mentorship



HOW CAN UNIVERSITIES BEST SUPPORT STUDENTS IN CONTINUING TO REALIZE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL?

Insights

Insights from the Elephant Initiative emerge from the findings of the Fellows' Call to Action interviews, surveys, proposed strategies, and post-TNLC2017 evaluations. They are organized in this section by Call to Action, as follows:

ACCESS

- Students see financial challenges as prohibitive, pervasive, and structural barriers to the educational experiences they need in order to thrive.

LEADERSHIP

- Students are looking to their institutions to provide more comprehensive institutional support for student leadership development.
- Leaders, faculty, and program staff who lead by example are a crucial ingredient to successful student leadership development.
- Student leaders are seeking opportunities to collaborate with like-minded peers, and can inspire each other to act when they are given a platform to do so.

LIVELIHOODS

Students feel higher education best prepares them for the job market – and for the rest of their lives – when it is contextualized in the realities of life outside the classroom.

Elephant Initiative insights paint a picture of the challenges facing universities that strive to fulfill their civic roles and social responsibilities, especially from the student perspective; they illuminate how universities around the world might leverage the potential of their student bodies to make a positive impact on the communities around them.

Some of the challenges and opportunities identified by Fellows were particular to their institutional and national contexts, but others were manifest across contexts. The insights in this section reflect Fellows' work to synthesize their self-designed, context-based explorations of Access, Leadership, and/or Livelihoods into a cohesive global perspective on the challenges related to each.

ACCESS

Students see financial challenges as prohibitive, pervasive, and structural barriers to the educational experiences they need to thrive.

Taken comprehensively, students' testimony suggests not only that students recognize the financial challenges institutions face to provide access to education programs, but also that they themselves feel ill-equipped to confront the financial realities of life as university students. Addressing financial challenges means increasing access to funding and also inculcating the mindsets, skills, and behaviors students need to effectively manage financial constraints.

LEADERSHIP

Students are looking to universities to provide more comprehensive institutional support for student leadership development.

Fellows' collective work in this area illustrates that students contextualize the question of how engaged universities can provide adequate leadership opportunities in the broader context of our society's most complex problems. Fellows identified poverty, racism, social pressures and norms as primary barriers to leadership development among their peers.

While Fellows and the students they interviewed recognize these factors as complex challenges that directly affect the success of leadership training, they still seek approaches to leadership development that are structurally supported, sustainable, and accessible. In Zimbabwe, for example, interviewed students proposed a required leadership course for all enrolled university students.

Fellows' work in this area suggests that students perceive existing institutional support for student leadership development to be marginal compared to what it could and should be. Students understand leadership development to be central to their education and propose leadership opportunities that are embedded in their coursework and social experiences.

Leaders, faculty, and program staff who lead by example are a crucial ingredient to successful student leadership development.



“[I hoped that] my participation in the Elephant Initiative would help me...get wider knowledge and understanding from the model leaders of our time.”

*— Elephant Initiative Fellow Stephen Wamembo
Uganda*

Students proposed modeling of leadership skills and mindsets as a potential platform for leadership development — they desired to learn from someone who can impart information and also practice what they preach. The importance of modeling leadership was implicitly echoed by students in Uganda, where Stephen explored unethical leadership and found students seeking living examples of ethical leadership in their communities.

Student leaders are seeking opportunities to collaborate with like-minded peers, and can inspire each other to act when they are given a platform to do so.



“Friendship earned from [civic engagement work] motivates students to further join.”

— Elephant Initiative Fellow Poonnapa Zheng, Hong Kong

Both the students that Fellows interviewed and the Fellows themselves spoke to the vital role peers can play in catalyzing civic participation and encouraging one another to lead.

Poonnapa noted that at her home university Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), it was students who effectively introduced service learning opportunities to other students. When PolyU students were given a platform to share their service learning experiences, they encouraged peers to participate in existing programs and also catalyzed the development of a student-designed program, Tech4D (Technology For Development).³

Supporting peer-to-peer collaboration among students has the potential to encourage further collaboration, participation, and ultimately, innovative approaches to problem-solving that are beneficial for student communities.

³ Tech4D enables students to apply their technological skills to underserved rural areas in developing countries, and, Poonnapa notes, is supported by students, postgraduates, alumni, and service-learning staff.

LIVELIHOODS

Students feel higher education best prepares them for the job market – and for the rest of their lives – when it is contextualized in the realities of life outside the classroom.

Students crave practice-based education that enables them to confront daily-life challenges — both those they face now and those they will later face in joining the labor market.

Other students' suggestions, which emerged from exploration of all three Calls to Action, included:

- Sourcing investors to support student-led programs and businesses as a potential pathway to teaching students about the realities of entrepreneurship
- Engaging in more web-based learning to prepare students for the modern workplace
- Partnering with businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations that give students more immediate exposure to the labor market during their university experience, and with built-in reflection so they can learn from them
- Including job interview simulations and other experience-based activities in the curriculum to prepare for entering the labor market



“One of the major findings was that a lot of graduates from university have real struggle with landing jobs, because most companies ask them for experience. I think this is a subject that needs realistic focus.”

*— Elephant Initiative Fellow Daniela Acosta De Anda
Mexico*

Elephant Initiative testimony suggests that students understand the realities of 21st century life as complex and requiring significant problem-solving skills. University students think they are best prepared when they have access to learning opportunities that enable them to experience those realities first-hand, and time to receive the necessary support to develop the mindsets, skills, and approaches that will help them navigate effectively.

Student-Designed Strategies



Pakistani Fellow Faizan Rashid (center) shares ideas with Mentor Sarah Oliver (back right), Hong Kong Fellow Poonnapa Zheng (front left), and Universidad Veracruzana program staff Mariana Alejandrina Pérez Rivera (front right).

During in-person TNLC2017 intensives, Fellows brainstormed strategies and solutions around the Calls to Action based on their synthesized perspectives on the challenges identified by students around the world. After TNLC2017, Fellows convened virtually once more to reflect on their program experiences and identify the strategies with the highest potential for advancing the vision for higher education articulated by the Calls to Action.

The strategies below are summarized and synthesized versions of the most promising strategies put forth by Elephant Initiative Fellows to maintain the program’s momentum in creating leadership opportunities for students, and to respond to the challenges facing engaged higher education institutions in advancing their strategic priorities.

Strategy 1: Civic Engagement U



Zimbabwe Fellow Kim Kujinga (front left) and Student Representative the the Talloires Network Steering Committee Mapendo Mindje (front right) exchange ideas with Tufts University president Tony Monaco and other higher education leaders during the Dialogue Session at TNLC2017.

Students Imagine:

A global platform that functions as an online learning space. The platform would facilitate horizontal dialogues about advancing civic engagement at the tertiary level that also serve as a crowdfunding platform for initiatives and projects.

In-person interactions with higher education leaders and faculty during TNLC2017 prompted Fellows to identify a Network-wide appetite for ongoing learning and collaboration opportunities in between in-person convenings, that are structured and provide incentives to encourage participation. Responding to students' calls for learning in the context of life, mentorship, and access to funding as a pathway to accessing education, Fellows imagined a vibrant online platform that included space for a multi-generational community of learning for civic engagement practitioners, and opportunities to acquire funding for new program ideas.

Strategy 2: Talloires Network Student Leaders' Corps

Daniela Acosta de Anda brainstorms values and qualities of potential solutions with mentors Sarah Oliver and Cliona Maher.

Students imagine:

A Talloires Network-elected student leader in each member university, supported to spearhead student leadership development activities and global collaboration on campus and to convene virtually and in person with other leaders.

Using input collected from other student delegates at TNLC2017 and feedback from the current Talloires Network Student Representatives to the Steering Committee, Fellows Abigail Gómez (Universidad Veracruzana) and Mapendo Mindje (University of Rwanda) imagine a supported network of student leaders representing Talloires Network values of civic engagement and working with peers to advance the Calls to Action on their campuses.

Strategy 3: Employment Co-Lab Course



Keynote speaker, PhD student, and entrepreneur Yensi Flores (far right) shares experiences, presentation tips and tricks with Fellows and Mentors during the TNLC2017, in-person intensive.

Students Imagine:

A one-year internship program, embedded into curricula of Talloires Network member institutions, for students to gain experience and prepare them for real life. This internship would take a more expansive understanding of the classroom, and provide space — physical or otherwise — for employers to co-teach, for students to engage in internships and site visits as a significant portion of their classroom hours, and for students to reflect on their real-world learning and problem solving and receive feedback relevant to their professional goals.

Implications & Conclusion

The 3 strategies above are only some of Fellows' proposed ideas for further advancing the Network's three Calls to Action. Others included:

- Building a purposeful network of Talloires Network student alumni to support future Network student leadership initiatives and serve as resources for project funding.
- Creating a managed fund for student-led social impact initiatives and awarding grants each year to the initiatives with the greatest potential impact.
- Developing a clear civic engagement ranking system that would enable students to choose to attend institutions that act on their visions for civic engagement and social responsibility.

These student-designed strategies were proposed by Fellows as pathways to advancing the three Calls to Action, but they also reveal that students themselves are calling universities to action to transform the ways they teach and learn. As a collective, the university students involved in the Elephant Initiative — the Fellows themselves, the students they interviewed and surveyed, and the TNLC2017 student delegates — articulated a vision for higher education in which students can:

- Access the educational resources they need to grow as leaders and professionals.
- Build relationships with mentors and leaders.
- Contribute to the development of new teaching and learning practices on campuses, both inside and outside the classroom.
- Inspire one another to make positive impacts in their communities and receive university support to act on their visions for doing so.
- Experience education that integrates their daily realities into their work as students.
- Take advantage of university-supported professional development and entrepreneurship training while they are enrolled so they can contribute to economic development after they graduate.

All Elephant Initiative evaluations from Fellows identified the opportunity to present at TNLC2017 as an aspect of the program that had the greatest impact on their own leadership development. As Poonnappa wrote, "For me, [it was] the chance for us to show the power of students, to share what we (as students) have been thinking...and the problems of current situations [from] student perspectives."

By giving Fellows a platform to give voice to the student perspective on the Network's strategic priorities, the Elephant Initiative created a learning opportunity for students that solidified the importance of their voices in shaping the future of higher education institutions and the communities of which they are a part.

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