

Community college panel announced

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Stephanie Cook of the Idaho National Laboratory presents a research donation to Idaho Falls Mayor Rebecca Casper during a news conference announcing the city's community college citizen study panel.

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Idaho Falls Mayor Rebecca Casper announced Tuesday who will serve on the city's community college citizen study panel.

The panel was created to gauge Bonneville County's need for a community college, what steps would be needed to convert Eastern Idaho Technical College into a community college and how much the project would cost.

"This topic is not one that can be boiled down to a soundbite," Casper said during a news conference. "It's a conversation that needs to happen with a lot of meaningful inputs. This is why we, the leaders of all of our respective communities from business, government and education, have decided that the best way to approach this was to involve a panel of Bonneville County residents."

The panel of 11, as follows, is formatted to represent different interests within the community by including student, parent, employer, activist and legislative perspectives, among others.

- Nicole Christensen, parent and advocate of education innovation.
- Doug Crabtree, CEO, Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center.
- Marisa Hoover, senior class president, Hillcrest High School.

- Amy Lientz, Idaho National Laboratory.
- Dave Lent, Idaho Falls School District 91 Trustee.
- Stephanie Mickelsen, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.
- Sheila Olsen, community activist.
- Park Price, Bank of Idaho.
- Oscar Rojas, media consultant, KIFI.
- Ann Rydalch, former legislator, energy advocate, Bonneville County Heritage Association.
- Ken Taylor, certified public accountant, small business owner.

“We did not pick people in favor of this, we picked people that are in favor of our community,” Casper said. “I’m confident that will translate to some good strong recommendations that are made with integrity, not with an eye toward trying to hedge a bet for one outcome or the other.”

The panel will gather and review data from February to late May, and then will present a preliminary status report May 19 before releasing a final report July 30.

The research will be funded in part by \$25,000 and \$20,000 donations from the REDI Foundation and Idaho National Laboratory, respectively.

Sometime after the panel’s report is released, 1,000 signatures will need to be gathered before the proposal can make it to ballot.

Casper doesn’t expect the community college conversion to make ballot until after next fall.

In contrast to EITC’s current course offerings, a community college would place a greater emphasis on transfer degrees. Practically, that would mean more general education and remedial courses, intended to better prepare students for four-year universities.

“A community college education is a linchpin education; it’s a connecting kind of education,” Casper said. “It can be meaningful for individuals in our community, and you cannot transform a community and make it a better place unless you do it one person at a time.”