

WEBSITE CASE STUDY

University of Washington Tacoma

Advancement and Communications Assessment and Staffing Structure Review

Project focus	Advancement and Communications Assessment and Staffing Structure Review
Service areas	Advancement assessment, communications assessment, staffing structure, brand positioning, alumni engagement, fundraising strategy

Overview

University of Washington Tacoma engaged The Ostara Group, in collaboration with C+C, during a period of institutional transition and growth. Under the leadership of Dr. Sheila Edwards Lange, UW Tacoma needed a clear assessment of its advancement and communications operations, staffing structure, internal alignment, and capacity for future philanthropic growth.

UW Tacoma is an urban-serving university rooted in access, community partnership, and the economic and social vitality of the South Sound. Its advancement program needed the strategy, structure, and staffing to support its role as a regional engine for opportunity.

The Need

The university needed a clear view of how advancement and communications should work together, what staffing structure would support growth, and what story UW Tacoma should tell students, supporters, and community members about its values and future.

Ostara's Work

- Conducted an advancement and communications assessment and strategy engagement in 2022.
- Examined advancement operations, communications, brand positioning, fundraising strategy, alumni engagement, staffing structure, dean engagement, internal collaboration, and UW Tacoma's position within the broader University of Washington advancement model.
- Completed document review, peer and stakeholder research, and 39 focus group discussions and interviews with 82 individuals.
- Engaged UW Tacoma leadership, advancement and communications staff, deans, faculty, UW internal partners, external stakeholders, media representatives, students, alumni, and donors.

Assessment Focus

Focus area	What Ostara assessed
Advancement engagement	How faculty and staff could support advancement and communications more effectively.
Staffing structure	What structure would support UW Tacoma's next stage of growth.
Integrated model	Where the integrated advancement and communications model showed strength and where it needed more focus.
Resource alignment	Whether advancement and communications had the right resources.
Institutional story	What story UW Tacoma should tell students, supporters, and community members about its values and future.

Recommendations

Ostara's recommendations gave UW Tacoma a direct roadmap for action. The report called for a stronger shared vision, clearer advancement planning, deeper collaboration with deans and faculty, a more active culture of philanthropy, stronger alumni giving, better annual giving and discovery work, sharper prospect strategy, expanded media relations capacity, and targeted staffing changes. The assessment also identified important opportunities in schools and programs with strong philanthropic potential, including the Milgard School of Business, the School of Engineering and Technology, and the School of Nursing.

Outcome

UW Tacoma instituted most of Ostara's recommendations. The university used the assessment to rework its advancement program, clarify roles, strengthen internal alignment, and better connect fundraising, alumni engagement, communications, and institutional priorities. The work helped UW Tacoma move from assessment to action. It gave leaders a practical structure for building a stronger advancement enterprise, elevating the role of philanthropy across campus, and aligning advancement and communications with the university's mission as an urban-serving institution.