

The Challenge

Five regional conversations today:

- *New Economy*: how to succeed in the new economy and ensure that everyone participates.
- *Livable Community*: how to create communities where people want to live.
- *Bridging “Divides”*: how to ensure inclusive and equitable communities
- *Governance Reform*: how to reform government to make it more responsive and fiscally sound.
- *Leadership*: how to ensure strategic and sustained civic effort.

Through public engagement, higher education can help connect the dots.

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Defining Public Engagement

In the AASCU study, community engagement was defined as follows:

The publicly engaged institution is fully committed to direct, two-way interaction with communities and other external constituencies through the development, exchange, and application of knowledge, information, and expertise for mutual benefit.

Examples of Public Engagement:

Applied research designed to help increase understanding of a problem or test solutions for that problem.

Technical assistance involving the direct application of faculty and student expertise to design strategies for problem resolution.

Demonstration projects designed to test new models and approaches or apply “best practice” to issues within community settings.

Impact assessment designed to measure the effect of programs and services with reference to their intended outcomes.

Policy analysis directed at framing new policy approaches or assessing the impact of current policy initiatives.

Seminars, lectures, courses, and essays designed to address issues of public concern.

Civic convener for public discourse.

Questions for Campus Leaders:

- 1. To what extent is community engagement part of the campus mission/vision statement? How about the mission statements of the colleges and departments? Can you find in the strategic priorities of the campus explicit reference to priorities related to community engagement? Is community engagement defined clearly as a scholarly activity? Is it guided by a coherent philosophy?**

- 2. Is campus and community interaction institutionalized? Are campus leaders active and visible in community educational, civic, and cultural life? Does the campus involve the community in its strategic planning and its selection of key academic leaders? How about involvement in program review?**

Questions for Campus Leaders:

3. Is the ability to lead in the community engagement arena a criteria for the selection and evaluation of key campus leaders including the president, provost, deans, and chairs?

4. Does the campus have adequate infrastructure to support the community engagement mission? Are there “boundary spanning” units that help link campus with community? Is there a campus “front door” that allows the public to conveniently access campus resources?

Questions for Campus Leaders:

5. Do campus policies and procedures serve to either enhance or inhibit faculty involvement in community engagement efforts? (A good way to answer this question is to ask faculty.)

6. Do faculty and unit-level incentives and rewards support community engagement? Is this work an important criteria for annual salary increases, promotion, and tenure? Are there clearly understood criteria for evaluating the quality of a faculty member's community engagement activities? Are there incentives and rewards for academic units that make a commitment to engagement as a core unit mission? Are there revenue streams that act as incentives for faculty as well as academic units to support engagement activities?

Questions for Campus Leaders:

7. Is there a clear expectation that each academic unit is responsible for serving the full breadth of the teaching, research, and engagement mission? Are units expected to set goals for community engagement and are they measured against those goals? Do campus information and reporting systems provide for the reporting of engagement activities?

8. Does the process of faculty recruitment, orientation, and on-going professional development make clear that community engagement is an important element of the overall academic mission? In particular, are faculty members provided the opportunity to deepen their understanding of how to work effectively with communities and other external constituents?

Questions for Campus Leaders:

9. Does the campus planning and budgeting process reflect the importance of the community engagement process? Is there opportunity for budget allocations to support engagement efforts? What percentage of the overall campus budget is associated with the community engagement mission?

10. Is community engagement built into the curriculum? Are there opportunities for students to gain experience in community engagement through service-learning and other forms of community-based learning?

Questions for Campus Leaders:

11. Do campus communications and key communicators reflect the importance of community engagement? How about campus rituals, ceremonies, and awards? Is community engagement prominent in the public remarks of the trustees, the president, the provost, and other key campus leaders?

12. Are campus facilities and environment designed to welcome community involvement? Is campus signage and parking reflective of an environment that welcomes the public?

Questions for SYSTEM BOARDS:

- 1. Is community engagement prominent in our system-wide planning and priority setting? Have we established state-wide priorities for campus community engagement? (P-12 enhancement, economic development, etc.)**
- 2. Have we created a clear expectation that our campuses should be involved in community engagement activities?**
- 3. Have we made community engagement (as well as enrollment growth and research) a priority in our political advocacy at both the state and federal level?**
- 4. Have we established measures that can be used to assess productivity in the community engagement domain?**

Questions for STATE POLICY MAKERS:

- 1. Does the state have a “public agenda” focused on the needs of its population?**
- 2. Are institutions held accountable for addressing the public agenda through engagement efforts?**
- 3. Have we articulated the importance of public engagement in both rhetorical and financial terms?**
- 4. Have we developed criteria that allow us to measure the quantity and quality of campus public engagement activity?**
- 5. Have we created resource streams to support community engagement efforts? If so, are those resource streams focused on our most important state and local challenges? (Cost v. revenue center)**

Five Cautions Related to Community Engagement

- 1. Be careful to define who owns the problem.**
- 2. Be sure that faculty are prepared for engagement.**
- 3. Clearly define project scope, duration, and outcomes as well as the contribution that each partner will make.**
- 4. Beware of political alignment.**
- 5. Have a disengagement strategy.**