The Elective Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

CONSTRUCTING A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION FOR FIRST-TIME AND RECLASSIFICATION APPLICANTS

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CARNEGIE ELECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CLASSIFICATION

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

By the late 1990’s, community engagement in American higher education, by its many names1, had developed to the point where colleges and universities were attempting to more deeply embed it in practices across the campus. They pursued a process of institutionalization that meant attending to and aligning practices, structures, and policies across the campus. Institutions founded on the purpose of generating and disseminating knowledge in the context of education’s relationship to democracy thus enhanced the pursuit of their mission through engagement. Institutionalizing community engagement meant focusing on the ways in which 1) engagement impacted the educational experience of students, 2) engagement must be integrated into faculty scholarly experience --- teaching, research and creative activity, and service, and 3) engagement required budgets, professional staffing, and other infrastructure to be successful.

In the 1999 Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education (Campus Compact, 1999), the declaration called for “recognition of civic responsibility in accreditation procedures, Carnegie classifications, and national rankings, and to work with governors, state legislators, and state higher education offices on expectations for civic engagement in public systems.” One of the co-authors of the declaration was Thomas Ehrlich, a senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

The Carnegie Foundation has been classifying of institutions of higher education since the early 1970s. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has historically been committed to the improvement of undergraduate education in the US, and the Carnegie Classification (Basic Classification) was created to distinguish mission differentiation, degree level, and specialization. All accredited two and four-year colleges and universities have a Carnegie Classification. The rich heterogeneity of higher education institutions in the United States has been a hallmark of its innovation and excellence. In the early 2000s, the Foundation sought to design a new “elective classification for community engagement. The Elective Classification differs from the “Basic Classification” in that the basic classification reports descriptive characteristics of the institution gathered through publicly available data sets without any assessment of those characteristics. The Elective Classification gathers data specifically provided by the campus that is not available through other means, and was intended to assist in a process of institutional change through self-assessment and national review to improve the educational effectiveness of the campus. With this elective classification depending on voluntary participation by institutions, the Foundation created a “special-purpose classification” that would “open the possibility for involving only those institutions with special commitments in the area of community engagement” (McCormick and Zhao, 2005, p. 56).

Amy Driscoll, a scholar with deep experience in community engagement and assessment at both Portland State University and CSU Monterey Bay, joined the Foundation to guide the development of the framework and drew from earlier institutionalization rubrics for service learning and community engagement (Furco, 1999; Holland, 2000; Hollander, Saltmarsh, & Zlotkowski, 2001; Kecskes and Muylleart, 1997) as well as the input of leading scholars. She worked with representatives from 13 campuses to pilot the framework in 2005.

1 Service Learning, Community Service, Public Service, Engaged Scholarship, etc.)
The creation of the community engagement classification was seen by some as emblematic of a much broader “counterbalancing” shift in higher education. Gary Rhoades, general secretary of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), wrote that “if the effect of Carnegie’s efforts (and those of Dupont Circle and AAUP) in the first three quarters of the 20th century was to inscribe in academic structures and in the consciousness of faculty a national [and cosmopolitan] orientation, those organizations are increasingly emphasizing the value of the local” (2009, p. 12).

As a classification of institutional (not program or unit) engagement, the classification’s framework focuses on three major areas: foundational indicators such as institutional commitment and institutional identity and culture, curricular engagement, and outreach and partnerships. Following the pilot, the first cycle of classification occurred in 2006, followed by a second round in 2008, and a third in 2010. Following the 2010 cycle, the classification shifted to a five-year cycle for classification and re-classification, with campuses receiving the classification retaining it for 10 years. The classification was designed to respect the diversity of institutions and their approach to community engagement, encourage institutions to undertake a process of inquiry, reflection, and self-assessment, and to honor an institution’s achievements while promoting ongoing development of their programs (Driscoll, 2008). The classification is not designed as a ranking tool, but is evaluative in that campuses are either classified or not. There is no hierarchy or levels of classification. While successful campuses are announced publicly but the Foundation, the results of the process are not released for campuses that are not successful with the classification.

**DEFINING ENGAGEMENT**

Community engagement describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.

The way in which the Carnegie Foundation defines community engagement has two parts: the first focuses on the processes of engagement and the second on the purposes. Central to the standards of the classification is that the partnership relationships between the campus and the community are characterized by collaboration, reciprocity, and mutuality. Community engagement as defined in the classification, “requires going beyond the expert model that often gets in the way of constructive university-community collaboration…calls on faculty to move beyond ‘outreach,’…asks scholars to go beyond ‘service,’ with its overtones of noblesse oblige. What it emphasizes is genuine *collaboration*: that the learning and teaching be multidirectional and the expertise shared. It represents a basic reconceptualization of…community-based work” (O’Meara and Rice, Faculty Priorities Reconsidered, 2005).

Framed in this way, community engagement is not an umbrella concept meant to

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2 In 2006 and 2008, the process allowed for campuses to classify under curricular engagement, outreach and partnerships, or both. By the 2010 cycle, there was no longer a choice of areas—to be classified as a community engaged campus, evidence had to be provided in both areas.

3 In 2009, the administration of the classification was hosted at the New England Resource Center for Higher Education at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. In 2017, the host site of the classification moved to the Swearer Center at Brown University.
capture any activity associated with civic education, experiential education, or involvement of campuses with local, regional, national, or global communities. These are valuable educational activities, some of which, depending on how they are designed, could be community engaged. Nor is community engagement intended as institutional commitments ranging from investments to procurements, employment, outreach, and economic development. All of these are important activities that can raise the campus’s engagement profile, but are not a substitute for, nor are they synonymous with, academic and scholarly engagement. Further, non-scholarly forms of engagement require little in terms of organizational change and have little impact on the educational experiences of students or the core academic and scholarly work of faculty.

What the Community Engagement Classification recognizes is relationships between those in the university and those outside the university that are grounded in the qualities of reciprocity, mutual respect, shared authority, and co-creation of goals and outcomes. Such relationships are by their very nature trans-disciplinary (knowledge transcending the disciplines and the college or university) and asset-based (where the strengths, skills, and knowledges of those in the community are validated and legitimized).

It is important to reiterate that many activities that take place off campus and involve community interactions are important and valuable. Yet, the Carnegie Foundation is classifying community engagement, not applied research, public scholarship, internships, economic development, or student volunteerism. It is classifying institutional commitment to activities across the campus that embody the characteristics of engagement and that directly impact the educational experiences of students, the scholarly work of faculty, and/or align with and reinforce both.

THE DOCUMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The application is constructed as a documentation framework for providing evidence of community engagement. It consists of three parts
1. Foundational Indicators
2. Curricular Engagement
3. Outreach and Partnerships

The Foundational indicators are divided into two sections, “Institutional Commitment” and “Institutional Identity and Culture.” The evidence requested in these sections are, as the heading suggests, ‘foundational’ to institutional community engagement. Under the area of institutional identity and culture, the questions pertain to mission and vision, recognition, assessment and data, marketing materials, and community engagement as a leadership priority. In the area of institutional commitment, the questions focus on infrastructure, budget and fundraising, tracking and documentation, assessment and data, professional development, community voice, faculty recruitment and promotion, student leadership, and the significance of community engagement in the strategic plan of the campus. At the end of the Foundational Indicators section, the applicants are instructed “to review the responses to Foundational Indicators…and determine whether Community Engagement is ‘institutionalized’--that is, “whether all or most of the Foundational Indicators have been documented with specificity. If so, applicants are encouraged to continue with the application. If not, applicants are encouraged to withdraw from the process and apply in the next round” of the classification. The purpose of applying this kind of filter to the process is because the foundational indicators are by definition, “foundational” to the institutionalization of curricular engagement and outreach and partnership activity. For many campuses, reaching this point in the application allows for a reflective pause to assess the campus’s engagement portfolio. In each cycle, nearly one-half of all campuses that request an application do not submit it for review. A survey of those campuses during the 2015 cycle indicated that the primary reason was that the applicants realized that they were not ready to submit a successful application. At the same time the framework of the application provides a
blueprint for campuses to determine where they have strengths and where they can direct their efforts to improve their community engagement across the campus.

Following the Foundational Indicators is the section on “Curricular Engagement,” which is defined in the framework as “the teaching, learning and scholarship that engages faculty, students, and community in mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration. Their interactions address community identified needs, deepen students’ civic and academic learning, enhance community well-being, and enrich the scholarship of the institution.” The focus in this section is on the extent to which community engagement is part of the central academic experience of the campus, and questions are aimed at the number of students impacted, the number of courses offered, the curriculum, learning outcomes, and community engagement outcomes assessment.

The final section is “Outreach and Partnerships,” described as “two different but related approaches to community engagement. The first focuses on the application and provision of institutional resources for community use. The latter focuses on collaborative interactions with community and related scholarship for the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, information, and resources (research, capacity building, economic development, etc. The distinction between these two centers on the concepts of reciprocity and mutual benefit which are explicitly explored and addressed in partnership activities.” Outreach questions focus on the programs and institutional resources provided for the community, which are not engagement but are an important compliments to engagement activities, and partnership questions focus on evidence of mutuality and reciprocity in partnership relations, and ask for examples of partnerships, provided in what is referred to as “the partnership grid,” which is intended to capture a sense of the institution’s depth and breadth of interactive partnerships that demonstrate reciprocity and mutual benefit.

Campuses are asked to provide partnership examples that are representative of the range of forms and topical foci of partnerships across a sampling of disciplines and units.

As with any assessment instrument, there are limitation to the documentation framework. As a benchmarking tool, it is largely descriptive, asking for self-reported data/documentation. Unlike an accreditation process, there is no site visit through which to gather evidence that can be triangulated with the documentation provided. Further, for the most part, the documentation framework does not assess the quality of practices: for example, reviewers may know that a certain number of service learning courses took place in a particular year, but the framework cannot get at the quality of the service learning in those courses and it does not assess quality of engagement practices.

RE-CLASSIFICATION

The Re-classification Documentation Framework follows the same structure as the First-Time framework. It is designed to allow campuses to gather evidence of current community engagement commitments and activities, but it also asks for evidence about how community engagement has advanced since the last application. The key to reclassification is the ability to provide evidence of how community engagement has become deeper, more pervasive, better integrated, and sustained. The focus is on depth and quality within a sustainable institutional context, not greater quantity per se.

As an evidence-based reflective process focusing on what has changed since receiving the classification, the Reclassification framework is structured to include narrative responses allowing for explanation of changes that have occurred since the previous classification. The narratives are designed to address (1) what currently exists, (2) changes since the last classification, and (3) relevant supporting evidence.

The Reclassification framework also differs from the First-Time Framework in that it selectively requests links to relevant campus
web resources in addition to evidence provided in the application (the First-Time framework does not allow for links). Reviewers may want to examine websites to provide additional clarification of the responses in the application. Reviewers also may ask for a telephone conversation to clarify evidence provided. The Reclassification Framework provides campuses with an opportunity to tell their story of engagement over the long term and to indicate its trajectory for the future, looking ahead to reclassification in another ten years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>83 First-time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>157 Re-classification</td>
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<td>240 Total</td>
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**MOTIVATIONS FOR CLASSIFICATION**

Campuses seek the Carnegie Classification for a number of reasons, and often for multiple reasons. The most prevalent is to undergo a structured process of institutional self-assessment and self-study. Putting together an application, gathering evidence and reflecting on it, and understanding the areas of strength and weakness of institutional engagement is a way of improving practice and advancing community engagement on campus. The application process is way to bring the disparate parts of the campus together to advance a unified agenda. At the same time, it allows for the identification of promising practices that can be shared across the institution.

Campuses also seek the classification as a way of legitimizing community engagement work that may not have received public recognition and visibility. Additionally, the classification is used as a way to demonstrate accountability, that the institution is fulfilling its mission to serve the public good. The classification process can also serve as a catalyst for change, fostering institutional alignment for community-based teaching, learning and scholarship. The application can foster all of these, and it is further used to crystallize and institutional identity around community engagement. A campus may be a research university or a community college or a liberal arts college, but it also may be community engaged, creating distinction for the campus. For example, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro claimed this distinctiveness following reclassification in 2015, highlighting that it is one of only fifty campuses nationally to be classified by the Carnegie Foundation as both high research activity and community engaged. Campus seek the classification to clarify institutional identity and mission in a way that distinguishes the institution from peers.

From the Director of the Center for Community Engagement at a classified campus: “…this is one of the highest forms of recognition possible in our field… If you are at all interested in a process of self-assessment and quality improvement, applying for this Carnegie Classification is a fine way to achieve that goal…This opportunity allowed us to lift up elements of our institutional mission and distinctiveness that are not necessarily represented in the national data on colleges and universities, and it also helped us prepare for both re-accreditation and our current strategic planning process.”

**CREATING AN INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

For many, if not all campuses, committing to community engagement means undertaking a new set of practices, creating new structures, and revising policies – it is coincident with organizational change. In 1998, prior to the establishment of Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, Eckel, Hill, and Green conducted a national study examining institutional change, and in particular change that could be considered “transformational.” Campuses that were demonstrating transformational change exhibited change that...
(1) alters the culture of the institution by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes, and products; (2) is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; (3) is intentional; and (4) occurs over time” (p. 3). Changes that “alter the culture of the institution” are those which require “major shifts in an institution’s culture—the common set of beliefs and values that creates a shared interpretation and understanding of events and actions” (p. 3).

Their attention to deep and pervasive change focuses on “institution-wide patterns of perceiving, thinking, and feeling; shared understandings; collective assumptions; and common interpretive frameworks are the ingredients of this ‘invisible glue’ called institutional culture.” It is precisely these elements of institutional culture that constitute the “Foundational Indicators” of the Community Engagement Framework.

Eckel, Hill, and Green concluded that efforts being made in higher education around “connecting institutions to their communities” offered the potential for transformational change. This could occur, they write, because

...these connections can contribute to the reshaping of institutional practices and purposes...they may cause researchers to rethink the types of grants they seek, the ways they disseminate their findings, and the range and types of audiences for their findings...They may reconsider the types of service rewarded through merit pay and promotion and tenure policies, and they may adopt wider definitions of scholarship that include application and integration (Boyer, 1990)...Faculty may incorporate service and outreach in their classes and curricula, and students may participate in co-curricular activities (such as internships or service learning) that place them in the community where they can apply their learning to solving real-world problems (p. 7).

Transformational change occurs when shifts in the institution’s culture have developed to the point where they are both pervasive across the institution and deeply embedded in practices throughout the institution (p. 5) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Transformational Change

The construct of deep and pervasive is a useful lens through which to view the Carnegie Community Engagement documentation framework. It is likely that campuses that are in quadrants 1 and 2, based on their community engagement efforts, either do not apply for the classification, begin the process of applying and stop after realizing that there is not enough evidence to satisfy the criteria of the Foundational Indicators, or they are not successful with their application. Campuses that are successful with the classification are able to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that they are in quadrant 3 or are somewhere between 3 and 4. These are campuses where community engagement is deep and pervasive, where changes in practices, structures, and policies have created an institutional culture of community engagement.
According to the Eckel, Hill, and Green model, depth is a key element of transformation, but it is not enough. As they point out “A deep change is not necessarily broad...it is possible for deep changes to occur within specific units or academic departments without being widespread throughout the institution.” (p. 4) There could be a few faculty in a few departments, all doing quality community engagement in their courses and in their research, but the practice is not widespread across the institution, so that there is not organizational transformation occurring.

Pervasiveness, according to Eckel, Hill, and Green, “refers to the extent to which the change is far-reaching within the institution. The more pervasive the change, the more it crosses unit boundaries and touches different parts of the institution.” (p. 4) One way that the dimension of pervasiveness has been expressed is through institution-wide coordinating infrastructure that facilitates deep community engagement across the campus. These central offices develop depth across the institution, creating and maintaining an inventory of the services, activities and relationships of its institutional members, identifying and aligning key areas of strength and priority for the university/college campus, and establishing and evaluating progress towards those priorities. In this role, there is a focus on greater attention towards and ability to track community engagement activities and outcomes across the institution. There is also a focus on intentionality - the intention to be aware of, and to the extent it makes sense to do so, to coordinate and collaborate together in areas of shared interest. And there is attention to the role of the center in communicating and convening faculty, staff and students together and with community partners to understand where there are opportunities to coordinate and leverage existing or future activities toward complementary and common goals. Robust infrastructure functions in ways that create greater depth and that facilitate deep engagement across the campus to create institutional transformation.

COMMON CHALLENGES

When campuses are notified of their successful classification, they received a letter of congratulations from the Carnegie Foundation and some feedback as they continue to advance community engagement on campus. The 2015 letter noted that “even among the most effective applications, there are areas of practice in need of continued development. As a way of improving your institutional practices and to position your campus for successful re-classification in the future,” classified campuses were encouraged “to attend to the areas of (1) assessment, (2) reciprocal partnerships, (3) faculty rewards, and (4) integration and alignment with other institutional initiatives.” These four areas represent common challenges campuses face as they work to institutionalize community engagement.

Assessment
Applications should demonstrate systematic assessment of community engagement that meet a broad range of purposes. Assessment is essential for understanding impact and for continuous improvement, and it is built into the framework throughout: assessing community perceptions of institutional engagement; tracking and recording of institution-wide engagement data; assessment of the impact of community engagement on students, faculty, community, and institution; identification and assessment of student learning outcomes in curricular engagement; and ongoing feedback mechanisms for partnerships.

Reciprocity
Partnerships require a high level of understanding of and intentional practices specifically directed to reciprocity and mutuality. Campuses are encouraged to attend to processes of initiating and nurturing collaborative, two-way partnerships, and developing strategies for systematic communication. Maintaining authentically collaborative, mutually beneficial partnerships takes ongoing commitment and attention to this critical aspect of community engagement.

Faculty Rewards
With regard to faculty rewards for roles in community engagement, it is difficult to create a campus culture of community engagement when
there are not clearly articulated incentives for faculty to prioritize this work. Campuses should provide evidence of clear policies for recognizing community engagement in teaching and learning, and in research and creative activity, along with criteria that validate appropriate methodologies and scholarly artifacts. Campuses are encouraged to initiate study, dialogue, and reflection to promote and reward the scholarship of engagement more fully.

Integration with other Priorities

Finally, campuses that are institutionalizing community engagement should consider how community engagement can be integrated with other Institutional Initiatives. Community engagement offers often-untapped possibilities for alignment with other campus priorities and initiatives to achieve greater impact—for example, first-year programs that include community engagement; learning communities in which community engagement is integrated into the design; or diversity initiatives that explicitly link active and collaborative community-based teaching and learning with the academic success of underrepresented students.

Strategies for Effective Applications

The First-Time Classification Framework is available on the Swearer Center website (https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/swearer/carnegie-community-engagement-classification) with an embedded “guide” for applicants. It is advisable for applicants undertaking the Re-Classification Framework to consult the First-Time Classification for information from the “guide.” Because this is an institutional classification, evidence for community engagement often comes from many parts of the campus as well as from community partners. Campuses that have been successful in achieving the classification report that it has been highly beneficial to form a cross-institutional team with community representation to work on the application.

While it is understandable that applicants will want to tell everything about their campus’s community engagement activity, it is necessary to be judicious in selecting the most important and compelling evidence for the application. Each section of the application has word limits.

In constructing an application, look for alignment across the sections of the application and analyze whether the evidence triangulates (e.g., if the President’s statements say that community engagement is a strategic priority, but the question about the strategic plan does not indicate that community engagement is a strategic priority, there is not alignment). Also, tell the whole story: An authentic understanding of community engagement is enhanced when a campus describes successes as well as activities that didn't go as planned. The latter provide opportunities for learning and improvement and can be described accordingly.

When crafting an application, it is important to convey a coherent narrative. Also, don’t leave blanks. If there is not evidence for a particular area, explain why and what you are doing about it. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that campuses are classified for engagement that has been implemented, not aspired to. Many applications provide answers about what the campus will do or what is in their plan to accomplish. These may be important activities and directions, but the classification is seeking evidence of implementation.

Leveraging the Classification

We encourage campuses not to just earn the classification, but to use it to further advance their efforts and to envision a 10-year plan that will sustain, deepen, and expand community engagement, providing evidence for reclassification. As one example of how a campus used the classification, the campus reported that “the classification has been leveraged to great results in four ways.

1. First, the information compiled for our application greatly assisted us in preparing the university’s documentation related to engagement for our SACS reaffirmation presentation the following year. The receipt of the Carnegie designation itself provided de facto evidence that the university was
continually assessing and improving its engagement enterprise.

2. Second, the Carnegie designation provided the framework for development of engagement priorities in the new university strategic plan last year.

3. Third, we have incorporated the Carnegie classification, and models of engagement at fellow Carnegie CE institutions into our faculty development programs. The classification has also provided an impetus to reexamine and improve our faculty engagement grants and other related programs.

4. Finally, the Carnegie CE classification has provided the university with a branding opportunity. We have seen much more promotion of our engagement programs and overall outreach mission by the central administration and marketing department since receipt of the CE.”

A common refrain is that the most valuable part of the classification is the process of self-study, which is why the Foundation encourages campuses to participate in the classification even if they are unsure as to whether they have enough evidence to be successful. If unsuccessful, the campus will have brought together a range of stakeholders for common conversation and self-assessment, and used the documentation framework as a blueprint for constructing an institutional architecture of engagement on the campus. For any campus that is unsuccessful, they will be offered an opportunity for specific feedback following the review process. Many campuses that go through the process and are unsuccessful learn from the process and get feedback, and return in the next cycle with a successful application.

For campuses that are successful, use the classification to make the most of your success. Use the classification process and the data gathered for the application to strategically plan for advancing the community engagement work of the campus, and envision where the campus will be in ten years having furthered an institutional culture of engagement – a narrative that can be told through an application for reclassification.

What the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification process has revealed are specific areas that, for many campuses, need greater attention in order to fully realize engagement. Depending on the unique culture and context of the campus, certain areas of change may be more challenging than others. As campuses move forward with advancing their engagement agendas, it will be important to consider the importance of creating an institutional environment that values engagement for a new generation of scholars coming into the academy, a generation of faculty

References


