

Interactive Activity: Identifying Promising Pathways Forward and Addressing Key Tensions in the System

On Day 1 of the workshop, participants engaged in an interactive session to share their ideas. In person participants responded to the following 3 questions on sticky notes and grouped them into categories listed in the Activity Framework. Online participants completed a similar activity using the online tool, Jamboard. Participants could contribute as many ideas as they desired. After the meeting, members of the planning committee grouped these ideas within each level by theme. This document presents the ideas that participants generated grouped by the themes.

- In what ways do tensions or barriers to engaged research show up in your context?
- What innovations or promising efforts to facilitate engaged research would you share with the group?
- What tensions, actions or opportunities are missing?

Activity Framework

Level 1: Equip research and community partners with skills, resources, and knowledge bases to engage ethically, effectively, and equitably

1. Build **capacity** of researchers (researcher/faculty, staff, students) & public / community partners to support effective, actionable partnerships

Level 2: Organize research institutions to create facilitative, supportive environments

1. Amplify societally-impactful scholarship as part of institutional **identity**
2. Equip committed institutional **leaders**
3. Invest in institutional **structures and networks**, including by actions that: Reduce legal, regulatory, procedural, bureaucratic, and social barriers
4. Strengthen within and cross-campus/organization networks and programs to accelerate innovation and impact
5. Launch & maintain catalytic **funding** programs and sustained institutional investments
6. Develop **awards** and other mechanisms to recognize and celebrate work
7. Formalize curricular training and professional development opportunities for **students**
8. Reform appointment, retention, tenure, and **promotion** practices

Level 3: Energize the meta-network to shape the broader disciplinary and funding ecosystems to prioritize and support societally-impactful research

1. Build societally-impactful scholarship into institutional **identity**
2. Provide **funding** support to accommodate the time-intensive nature of partnered scholarship
3. Elevate **visibility** for societally-impactful scholarship

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4. Align **assessment practices** to evaluate impacts of engaged research

Participants' Ideas

Level 1: Capacity of Individuals/Partners

Tensions

- Deficit framing
 - Deficit-based framing
 - Rethink what we define as a resource – need for an asset-based approach
- Inauthentic relationships
 - Inauthentic relationships – move at the speed of trust – stay the course
- Cultural insensitivity
 - Language and cultural insensitivity and lack of representation
- Need for funding on the ground
 - Flexible funding for community partners and unexpected challenges
 - There is a notion that institutions should not only give startup money but also fund engaged research long-term to ensure sustainability – with what money? We can't afford to fund all the impactful projects in perpetuity; Also, the faculty didn't ask the institution if they could do this work in the 1st place (autonomy), but turns around and expects funding long-term, which doesn't make sense
- Physical inaccessibility
 - Parking/spatial inclusivity at the academy of only engaging at the Academy
- Competing faculty goals
 - Tension between building a field or cosmopolitan career vs local relationship building career – the two could be irrelevant to each other
 - Difficult to grow research interests if hyper locally focused
 - Faculty disincentives – tenure, promotion, advice to “wait until you get tenure”
- The researchers engaging are not always those best placed (expertise) to answer the questions that are important to the community, yet feel pressured to work on them
- Researchers need to be willing to be held accountable by communities in addition to funders, universities, etc. How can they be supported in that additional layer of responsibility?

Promising practices

- Match timelines and priorities
 - Establish a baseline commitment/timescale for partnerships
- Amplify community expertise
 - Elevating community expertise
 - Bring community members to be valued members of the research team

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- Engage community in defining deliverables and criteria for success rather than having those decisions made solely by funders and researchers
 - Build supportive network of community members who have experience as partners on engaged research projects
- Training/Fellowships for faculty
 - Research internships at companies
 - University of Michigan's Public Engagement Faculty Fellowship
 - Provide technical assistance and other career development support to early faculty researchers to be better prepared
- Focus on relationships/trust
 - Relationship building – importance of personal touch; keeping the relationship-building at the forefront
 - Opportunity to name/value trustworthiness
 - Work with community members to develop the values they want to drive engaged research
- Find funds for community
 - NIH COMpass funding
 - Use our institutional expertise and knowledge to bolster and translate community funds of knowledge to funders, so partners can lead
 - Fund community partners/members for their input; when possible have them in ongoing positions within the agency/research team
- Provide training for community members/organizations
 - Train community partners to be part of the research team
- Engage community in publications
 - Journal peer review: incorporate community members into review process
 - Co-authorship and publications beyond the PhDs
- Leverage community organizations
 - Centering community organizations
 - Organizations that bridge between patient data and companies
 - Entrepreneurial engagement is parallel to community engagement; work with invention/entrepreneurial groups
 - Associations have created comprehensive engaged research workshops, programs, online resources, and more for community science, science communication, science policy, DEI, open science, data management and more
- The Thriving Earth Exchange centers communities to develop research priorities and then matches scientists with the communities. The program also trains fellows to serve as the connective tissue and foster the collaborations
- Three-partner model: researcher, community partner, boundary spanner
- Use a consulting model to build organizational capacity. Have a corps of people available to serve as facilitators or project directors on engaged research projects

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Level 2: Research Institutional Identity

Tensions:

- Community research not valued
 - Community outreach not as valuable; community extramurally funded research
 - Grassroots activity does always result in identity of university
 - Systemic disincentives to local focus (e.g., land-grant has state commitment)
- Innovation requires “being alone”
 - Fear of changing first and being out alone – change is hard
- Community partners don’t have access to the university
 - Access and inclusivity for community partners at the research institution
- Including minority minorities, including native indigenous peoples, with all of the historical injustices that will need to be acknowledged
- Significant Latina/o population underserved

Promising Practices

- Establish boundaries that benefit the work
 - Framing and recognizing institutional boundaries – when community is part of institution and when it’s better that they are not
- Use behavioral change methods for cultural change
 - Looking at/using cultural methods to change cultural practices – how to transform
- Transparently document the promotion and tenure process
 - There is a need for transparent documentation in the promotion/tenure process and evaluation to inform the P&T process

Level 2: Research Institution Leaders

Tensions

- Turnover
 - Leadership turnover
 - Challenges in sustaining policy and practice change at the institutional level in the face of transitions of staff and leaders and the resulting changes in institutional focus
 - Engaged research is based on passion and purpose, but can lead to potential burnout
- Timely payment
 - Timely payment/compensation of community partners vs trust developed between community-campus partners
- Federal position descriptions have disincentives for engaged research

Promising Practices

- Balance in funding, structure, relationship across community and academic institution
 - Designate a university leader/office to spearhead this work
 - 50% community, 50% academic institution (award, funding, structure, and network leaders)

Level 2: Research Institution Promotion and Tenure

Tensions

- Structures need to change
 - Adequate credit at P&T for community engagement projects
 - Recognition systems for publishing outlets; valued by colleagues; community engagement largely for tenured faculty and too risky for untenured faculty
 - Promotion and tenure/annual evaluation/hiring
 - Acknowledgement of faculty tensions around tenure, research timeline, and publications
- Resistance
 - Challenges and resistance at the faculty-to-faculty level - mentoring and misalignment between leadership/institutional values and what's enacted
 - Three partner model (researcher, community partner, boundary spanner) struggles to get institutional recognition and support for the boundary spanners
- Individual vs collective impact
 - Individual contributions versus collective responsibilities of academic units at campuses

Promising Practices

- Shifts to evaluation process
 - Include community member on P&T committee if community engagement is part of portfolio
 - Change P&T standards
- Recognize collective impact
 - Recognize not just individual performance but also collective performance of unit they belong to
- PTIE
 - PTIE super structure
- Funding from NGOs can increase legitimacy, raise participation, builds participatory network

Level 2: Research Institutional Structures and Networks

Tensions

- Different communities and roles/positions speak with different languages and not to one another

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- Gap between levels of higher ed – provost, faculty, project
- Each outcome area has its own ecosystem of funders, researchers, decision-makers and communities
- Tension between tenure-stream and contract faculty of what is community engaged work
- Community-centeredness requires change to existing systems
 - A community can/must have the right to say no to participation – then what?
 - Long timeline – needs don’t match funders and leadership commitments
 - Science seeks to solve problems; engagement seeks to create thriving; problem-free does not equal thriving)
 - Unpacking how the current systems we are trying to fix – actually serve some purposes and goals? What are those goals/interests?
 - Inefficiencies in system cause added cost, missed opportunities and erode trust
 - The values of engagement run counter to capitalism. Research institutions exist within capitalist structures and incentives

Promising Practices

- Coalition-based/network action
 - Regional networks to share resources – see UK Innovate or NSF “GRANTED” program
 - Work in networks to shift strategy to FOMO for institutions
 - Intra-discipline, cross universities programs and networks for like-minded faculty and graduate students
- Community boards
 - Institutional level community advisory boards that set research priorities, not just participate in research projects (+1)
 - Community Review Board (analogous to IRB)
- Institutionalize central engagement and support
 - Basic sciences to community engagement
 - Having offices of engagement work with students and scholars
 - Reposition extension work/community boards for engagement
 - Engaged research as critical to professional development of student and early career researchers
 - Students as pathway for engaged research as drivers, future researchers

Level 2: Research Institution Funding

Tensions

- Appeal of community priorities
 - Community-oriented research questions typically are not “sexy” science – less theoretical, less “leading edge”

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- Funding practice
 - Funding the long process of trust building in communities
 - It takes time (5-10 yrs?) to build trust. Will funders have the patience necessary?
 - Sustainable funding for community engagement
 - Criteria in grant solicitations – clarity needed that PIs take seriously and reviewers follow
 - Federal funding for engaged research is deficient in terms of funding cycles, compensating communities, pre-work needed for community/research collaboration, etc
 - Transfer of funds between university and partners and navigation of accounting, taxes, bureaucracies – missing infrastructure

Promising Practices

- Practices to enable more direct funding to community
 - Give up our prestige and funding to center partners and allow them to determine the nature and mechanisms for funding
 - Develop programs to build capacity of community orgs to become fiscal agents (e.g., University of Arizona)
 - Simplify grant application process so it is accessible to more than just large institutions
 - Find creative partnerships to distribute funds directly and quickly
- Staged/phased proposals
 - Incorporate funding for planning period where funding is shared between partners
 - Time to develop proposal can be too short to do all the items needed for engaged-research effort
 - Planning grants
 - Two-stage proposals – stage 1: 6-12 months for proposal development and then down-select for Stage 2 – pick a subset for more funding and a longer term

Level 2: Research Institutions – Awards

Tensions

- Incentives and motives
 - Dynamic where need to publish conflicts with respecting and upholding community concerns
 - Culture/structures reinforces norm of “credit before impact”
 - Incentivize funding collaboration not competition
 - Short-term measurement and outcomes and not assessing relationships, processes, and long-term impact

Promising Practices

- Approaches to incentivize more engagement
 - Training and capacity building of research staff

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- Making the collective responsibilities of academic units part of the recognition/reward system at universities – could encourage more community engagement projects
- Can funding of projects be tied to DoD funding?
- University of Michigan’s President’s Awards for Public Impact

Level 2: Students

Tensions

- Institutions and departments with engaged research programs are still the exception rather than the rule and many actively stand in the way of students and early career folk who want to engage
- How can students do CE research, recognizing that for many, they will move on after 2, 3, 5 years?

Promising Practices

- Provide pathways for early age learners (build their pathway)
- Where are boundary spanning roles outside of academia?

Level 3: Meta-Network – Assessment Practices

Tensions

- Standards for assessment
 - Peer reviewers for grants and publications are lacking in understanding and training of what is valuable or “cutting edge” in engaged research
 - Need for standards-setting

Promising Practices

- Useful resources
 - Build capacity in monitoring, evaluation, research, learning community, partners
 - PTIE coalition recommendations
 - Public impact toolbox
- Innovation
 - Rethink the genre of the academic article and value concrete, place-based, specific findings
- Institutions’ pursuit of Carnegie Engaged Classification

Level 3: Meta-Network - Identity

Tensions

- Change perceptions of value
 - The scientific culture writ large still does not value engaged research
 - Breaking eliteness (e.g., new fellowships for community college scholars and community members)
 - What is public good vs private good? Private sector can play a role, but what is it?
 - How to reach beyond the usual suspects? – the not-for-profit bubble”
- Value people
 - Academia intentionally or (maybe not) overshadows community partners

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- Honor capacity of researcher, community, and partners
- Definition work
 - Definition of community
 - Who is the public? Who represents them? What are their motivations?
How do the groups that represent the public affect the research?

Promising Practices

- Shift language – words have weight – e.g., “project” (time-bound) vs experience (lasting)
- Institutions’ pursuit of Carnegie Engaged Classification
- Sustaining existing programs at scale
- UrbanCORE (UNC Charlotte) – the hub of our engaged scholarship ecosystem
- Leveraging the ranking and successes for new funding. Building excellence and capacity
- Align promotion and tenure incentives with scholarly activities that include community engaged research (external partnerships) and research collaboration (internal)
- National/international rating of universities based on the degree to which their research has contributed to real positive change in the community/world

Level 3: Meta-Network – Visibility

Tensions

- Shifting agendas
 - People in power with different agendas and objectives; having to navigate politics
 - Ignorance of field in general
- Relationships with funders
 - Academia maintain the key relations with funders; no identity/visibility of community partners
 - Including community colleges
 - There is a lack of connection between those who have training resources and programs and those who could benefit from them

Promising Practices

- Community governance
 - Messaging outward to educate the academy and society of the positive work
 - Value in multiple methods of research in community-engaged scholarship
 - Community governance structures for research and other academic pillars
- Honor and uplift MSIs

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- Knowledge and practice that is grounded in minority serving institutions

Level 3: Meta-Network Funding

Tensions

- Timeline impacting relationships
 - Funding to stand up a full system is prohibitive for many
 - It often takes more time and facilitation to build trust between communities and researchers than there is funding for
 - The meta network needs to figure out how to help institutions fund high-impact projects long-term; UK has government funding available and South Africa has government earmarks available
 - Cost reimbursable grants – who can afford to do the work with no funding up front?
 - How to balance short vs long-term
 - Publishing timelines
- Competition for scarce resources
 - Competition across institutions at the meta level
 - Within-university competition for scarce resources dedicated to institutional priorities
 - Funders are uncomfortable in directly funding community partners
 - Missed: bring policymakers from the beginning

Promising Practices

- Non-traditional funding opportunities
 - Funding pooled resources across universities that coordinate in development and delivery of training and related programs
 - NSF GRANTED program x 2
 - Industry-based organizations that bridge university and private companies (e.g., Fraunhofer Institute)
 - Participator policymaking, grant-making, and budgeting
 - WT Grant Institutional Challenge Grants
 - Networks of funders focused on engaged research and public good
 - Community bank to provide grant AND act as a fiscal sponsor

What Did We Miss?

- Funders identify what types of engagement infrastructure they want to support collectively and then support it
- Funding decisions – more money, new ways to support, institutional mechanisms
- The pre-k-12 STEM ed space has been excluded from this conversation but is central to cultural transitions and talent development
- K-12 Ed

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- Money – how to find funding for public impact research or use existing funds for such research
- Challenge of community interest vs research interest vs NIH interest
- STEM focused R&D funding and not just social scientists, but community engagement scholarship and practice
- Leverage collective power of national organizations and funders to shape policies and funding
- Virtual/online communities
- Role of partnerships/think tanks to convene, communicate, and converge
- The right length of time. The institution may expect to complete work sooner than the community would want or expect.
- Insider/outsider tensions
- “Language” barriers when we are talking about the same thing but from a different frame or paradigm
- Assuring the community has say in how the knowledge gained will be used. Research findings have been used in ways that have harmed marginalized communities.