Introduction to Community Engagement
What is community engagement? While there are many definitions, in its simplest terms, community engagement at Oklahoma State University seeks to build long-term partnerships between OSU and community organizations and individuals. These collaborations focus on achieving long-term sustainable outcomes and relationships that benefit all partners involved.

More specifically, OSU endorses the following definition of community engagement from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching:

“The collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in the context of partnership and reciprocity. It can involve partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems and serve as catalysts for initiating and/or changing policies, programs, and practices.”

Serving the public by engaging in community engaged projects for the greater good is one of the tenets of Oklahoma State University’s historic land-grant mission. OSU Extension, community engagement and outreach efforts take many forms and cross all disciplines. In all its forms, Oklahoma State University takes seriously its calling to engage and partner with individuals across Oklahoma and the world.

Community engagement is generally considered a framework of principles, strategies, and values. This framework includes the following points:

• Respect for the right of all community members to be informed, consulted, involved, and empowered in decisions and actions that affect their lives.
• Acknowledgement of every university’s responsibility to improve lives, especially in the communities in which the university resides.
• Recognition that universities and off-campus communities frequently share many goals, but often have distinctly different resources and knowledge to achieve them with.
• Understanding of the value of resources developed away from academic environments.
• Focus on efforts that build on each partner’s unique resources to accomplish ends neither can on their own.
• Commitment to trust as a critical element of long-term, sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships.

The community engagement framework described here may be broadly applied across disciplinary, institutional, and geographic settings. As used here, for example, “community” refers to groups of people that share a common characteristic such as an interest, experience, goal, or geographic location. A community
partner may therefore be defined by its geographic location (community of place), main interest (community of practice), goal (community of action), or demographic characteristics (community of identity).

Community engagement is therefore a strategic, intentional process focused on working with groups of individuals to identify and address issues affecting their well-being. Adding the term “community” to “engagement” broadens the scope of university partnerships, demonstrating a commitment to inclusiveness and a recognition of the impact that university research can and should have on residents’ lives.

In practice, community engagement is a blend of science and art. Engaged projects are based in the science of the technical knowledge and skills of university and other partners. These skills may be based in chemistry, child development, public policy, hospitality, nutrition, building and interior design, political science, business, cultural anthropology, organizational development, or many other disciplines. Further, successful engaged projects are generally based in the science of organizing concepts drawn from the literature on community participation, community development, constituency building, and community psychology. Engaged projects pair the expertise of science with the art of understanding, skill, and sensitivity used to apply and adapt technical knowledge and skill in ways that fit the community and the purposes of specific engagement efforts. The results of these efforts may be defined differently and can encompass a broad range of structures (e.g., coalitions, partnerships, collaborations), but can be grouped under a general rubric of community engagement.

Projects based in the community engaged framework and principles described above have been frequently examined in published research literature. These studies have found a variety of benefits often found in community engaged activities, including the following:

**Student Benefits of Community Engagement**

*Learning Outcomes*
- Positive impact on students’ academic learning
- Improves students’ ability to apply what they have learned in “the real world”
- Positive impact on academic outcomes such as demonstrated complexity of understanding, problem analysis, problem-solving, critical thinking, and cognitive development
- Improved ability to understand complexity and ambiguity

*Personal Outcomes*
- Greater sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development
- Greater interpersonal development, particularly the ability to work well with others, and build leadership and communication skills
Social Outcomes

• Reduced stereotypes and greater inter-cultural understanding
• Improved social responsibility and citizenship skills
• Greater involvement in community service after graduation

Career Development

• Connections with professionals and community members for learning and career opportunities
• Greater academic learning, leadership skills, and personal efficacy can lead to greater opportunity

Relationship with the Institution

• Stronger relationships with faculty
• Greater satisfaction with college
• Improved graduation rates

Faculty Benefits of Community Engagement

• Satisfaction with the quality of student learning
• New avenues for research and publication via new relationships between faculty and community
• Providing networking opportunities with engaged faculty in other disciplines or institutions
• A stronger commitment to one’s research

College and University Benefits of Community Engagement

• Improved institutional commitment to the curriculum
• Improved student retention

Enhanced community relations Community Benefits of Community Engagement

• Satisfaction with student participation
• Valuable human resources needed to achieve community goals
• New energy, enthusiasm and perspectives applied to community work
• Enhanced community-university relations

Finally, note too that while many pedagogies and methodologies include one or more elements of the community engagement framework without fully qualifying as community engagement. While these, more limited programs may not produce the same range or type of benefits often associated with community engaged projects, they recognize at least in part the value and importance of collaborating with off-campus communities. The following table reviews and compares four pedagogical and research models that include some type of community involvement or experience.
# Examples of Forms of Engaged Pedagogy and Scholarship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Framework</th>
<th>Experiential Education</th>
<th>Professional Preparation</th>
<th>Community Involvement</th>
<th>Civic/Community Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who</strong></td>
<td>Undergraduate students</td>
<td>Preprofessionals (teachers, social workers, counselors, health care providers)</td>
<td>Students, faculty, and community partners</td>
<td>Citizen-students, citizen-scholars, and community partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What</strong></td>
<td>Student-centered learning</td>
<td>Student-centered assimilating and demonstrating mastery of specific skills</td>
<td>Working to address community issues while learning and teaching</td>
<td>Empowering community, educating students, and contributing new knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Where</strong></td>
<td>Labs and authentic settings</td>
<td>Clinical and authentic settings</td>
<td>Community settings and anchor institutions</td>
<td>Community settings and anchor institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When</strong></td>
<td>Semester(s)</td>
<td>Semesters throughout academic year</td>
<td>Academic year or summer</td>
<td>Academic year or summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why</strong></td>
<td>Earn a degree</td>
<td>Earn a license, certificate, or credential and a degree</td>
<td>Promote common good while meeting educational goals and earn a degree</td>
<td>Promote agency, develop citizen professionals, create, earn a degree, and disseminate new knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How</strong></td>
<td>Curriculum or objectives defined and outlined by expert faculty for students to experience</td>
<td>Supervised practicums/clinicals in authentic settings and internships for students to practice professional skills</td>
<td>Service-learning, community-engaged research, immersion experiences, and internships through place-based education</td>
<td>Democratic co-creation of goals, content, process based on sound theory; community organizing; knowledge base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ADAPTED FROM:**


