CampusEngage

Community and Civic Engagement

Do you work in a higher education institution?

**Are you keen to connect your students
learning experience with the needs
of civic society?**

What is Community and Civic Engagement?

There are numerous ways of engaging the broader community in higher education including activities such as:

- community-based research
- community-based learning
- student volunteering.

Community-based learning (CBL) and community-based research (CBR) are two pedagogic approaches that can provide research and experiential learning opportunities for students. Typically, they are coordinated by higher education institution (HEI) staff in collaboration with community partners, and have academic credit associated with them. Volunteering, in contrast, tends to be external to the curriculum and is often coordinated by student and external volunteer organisations.

Community engagement is described as "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Carnegie, 2006). In such a collaboration, there is a need to develop a genuine partnership between the staff and students of a HEI and a community group, to recognise that academic goals (learning and research) and community goals (capacity-building for change and improvement) are beneficial to both, and to found these partnerships on a reciprocal exchange of information with mutual respect for the expertise and knowledge that all parties bring.

What are the benefits to staff and students?

The benefits to academic staff and students of engaging in CBL and CBR are presented in the table below.

Benefits to Staff	Benefits to Students
Increased awareness of community issues related to a discipline and opportunities to connect teaching and research.	Application of academic knowledge and skills to the complexity of a real-world situation.
New perspectives and understanding of how learning takes place.	Exploration of future role as a professional and how they can contribute to the community.
Facilitates multidisciplinary projects and networking with colleagues in other subject areas.	Development of collaboration, critical-thinking, organisation and communication skills.
Opportunities for scholarship and publication.	Improved self-confidence and self-efficacy.
Opportunities for learning (from community partners, peers and mentoring of students), sharing knowledge and ideas, and personal growth.	Opportunities for learning (from community partners, peers, academic staff and own reflections), sharing knowledge and ideas and personal growth.
The identification of new research streams and highlighting the societal benefit of research.	Opportunities for engagement in authentic research projects addressing real world problems and developing research skills.
No need to try to find time outside of work or college studies for civic engagement and meaningful involvement with communities.	
The positive effects on student learning and retention associated with CBL and CBR contribute to greater satisfaction among staff and students.	
Involvement in a more engaging and interesting learning experience for staff and students and reinvigoration of the curricula.	
Working towards a common goal means that interactions between students and staff (and among students) are generally positive and an effective rapport develops.	
Better understanding of social and civic responsibility.	

Where Should I Start?

If possible, identify a peer who has already implemented a similar community engagement project and ask if you can seek advice as needed. The stages in the diagram below are representative of many CBL or CBR projects.

Preparation → Implementation → Dissemination & Evaluation → (cycle back to Preparation)
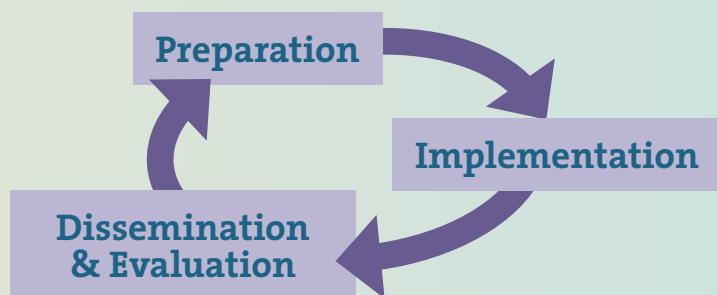
1. Preparation

Curriculum modification: Consider assessment methods, opportunities for reflection, whether the activity is optional or compulsory, is it a modified or new activity, is the activity the only element in a module - or a component, and is it multidisciplinary or not (Boland, 2013).

Interaction with community partner: Once a community partner is identified, ensure expectations are realistic and any restrictions due to academic calendar and knowledge and skills level of students are clear. Implementing a project over several years may be appropriate to ensure outcomes will be useful.

Compliance with procedures and regulations: Check insurance cover as well as risk assessment requirements and consider other regulations that may apply, e.g. child protection, research ethics (please see Campus Engage website for related resources).

Design of student support materials: This is more important for CBL activities. The following are useful to include in the module handbook:

1. Definitions and examples. 2. Rationale for using CBL/CBR. 3. Expected benefits for students and community partners. 4. Learning outcomes and alignment with activities and assessment(s). 5. Assessment (formative and summative) details. 6. Targets, timelines and a reporting mechanism. 7. Guidelines and prompts for reflection. 8. List of useful resources.

2. Implementation

First meeting with students: Give overview of project and, if possible, invite previous student or community partner in to share their experience. Emphasise the opportunity to learn from community partners and that mutual respect is essential.

First contact between students and community partners: It is best to be present for the initial interaction (a three-way meeting is ideal). Students and community partners can usually work together without you afterwards.

Ongoing support: This involves checking that progress in being made, encouraging the integration of theory with practice, guiding students through structured reflective activities (CBL), and maintaining effective and regular communication with community partners and students.

3. Dissemination and Evaluation

Students usually present their work to community partners as well as to an academic audience. Consider mechanisms to publicise the work (e.g. student writing a press release). Your evaluation can include student and community partner feedback and a review of your reflections. Based on these, you can plan for changes and improvements for the next iteration.

Challenges When Implementing CBL and CBR

Some of the common issues include:

1. *Meeting community need* – Community groups may have different interests to students and academics and it can be hard to align them. Clear and honest communication is required to ensure these needs are addressed and students should be encouraged to reconsider projects that they may dismiss initially.

2. *Managing expectations (CBR)* – Community groups may be unaware of student project timelines, and the scope of what can be done during a project. The initial three-way meeting can help mitigate against unreal expectations.

3. *Supporting reflection (CBL)* – Students often find it difficult to reflect on their attitudes and personal experiences. Lecturers may not have experience of guiding students through this process and should seek training or consult an experienced colleague.

4. *Sustainability* – CBL and CBR often necessitate a significant time commitment. It is important to include measures to achieve sustainability, e.g. colleagues dedicate time on a rotational basis, allow past participants to act as teaching assistants (CBL) and develop CBR projects from initial CBL activities or vice versa.

An Introductory Guide for Higher Education Staff

CAMPUS ENGAGE is a network for the promotion of civic engagement activities in Irish Higher Education and is open to all higher education institutions staff, students, community organisations and local companies in Ireland.

The network aims to strengthen the relationship between higher education and wider society, through civic engagement activities including community-based research.....

References & further reading

Boland, J. (2013). Curriculum development for sustainable civic engagement in *Emerging Issues in Higher Education III: From capacity building to sustainability* (eds. C. O'Farrell and A. Farrell). EDIN, Athlone, pp. 210-224.

Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (2012). *Community-based participatory research: A guide to ethical principles and practice*. Durham, UK: NCCPE. Available online at: www.campusengage.ie/sites/default/files/resources/CBPREthicsGuidewebNovember20121.pdf

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2006). Community engagement classification. Palo Alto: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

About the authors

Catherine O'Mahony is Manager of the National Academy for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL) at UCC. She is a co-chair and founding member of Community-Academic Research Links. Contact her at *catherine.omahony@ucc.ie*

Claire McDonnell is a Lecturer in the School of Chemical and Pharmaceutical Sciences and is currently on secondment to the Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre at DIT. Contact her at *claire.mcdonnell@dit.ie*

For more information on Campus Engage and to access a database of case studies and resources go to:

www.campusengage.ie

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