

Article

Launch of the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

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COVID-19 comes alongside a set of pressing societal challenges that include environmental catastrophes such as the Australian droughts, bushfires and flooding, the impending and related crises of global warming, and unresolved 'wicked issues' that include debilitating poverty, racial inequality, inequalities of housing, income and health outcomes.

In this environment of turbulence and rupture, universities have an important role to play as anchor institutions that support communities in transition. At the same time, influenced by tightened budgets and competing priorities, there is pressure on universities to truly evidence the public value of the higher education sector - the recent National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund and the related focus on industry and community partnerships for public purpose being one indication of this.

Community engaged scholarship recognises that knowledge creation does not just happen within the Academy. It also arises in the context of practice. This means researchers and practitioners working alongside each other, as equals, to effect change



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through this generation of new knowledge. Rather than undertaking knowledge work on behalf of society, universities must undertake it in active collaboration with society. This offers the benefit of incorporating contextual knowledge and experience, thereby

together to pilot the US based Carnegie Community Engagement Classification in Australia. They were joined by a further seven universities who acted as 'observers' to the process.¹ Their job was to investigate whether the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

and independent warranting of their university's commitment to, and investment in, community engagement.

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The pilot has now ended, with its success giving way to the first iteration of the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. To coordinate Australia's classification process, the Network for Community Engagement and Carnegie Classification Australia was launched late 2021, auspiced through Engagement Australia.

enhancing the collective outcomes resulting from such partnerships. Great value can be generated when universities build reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships with the communities they serve.

In 2018, ten Australian universities came

was relevant and useful for Australian higher education as a mechanism for encouraging and supporting universities in their community engagement.

The benefits of the pilot process were evident to all who participated. Pilot universities undertook a rigorous

Each participating university was able to be part of a pilot community engaged in innovation, testing refinement and sharing best practices. At the national level the pilot provided a valuable, data-driven overview of the public benefit of the higher education sector in relation to



community engagement. It also allowed for the Australian cohort to participate in an extensive and expanding global

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program, providing capability building to support the growth of social outcomes resulting from reciprocal partnerships



community of like-minded institutions to learn from, with and through each other.

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The Network for Community Engagement and Carnegie Classification Australia brings together community members, third sector practitioners, professionals and academics who have an interest in partnered approaches to furthering public good. It coordinates a popular 'community of practice'

between community and the higher education sector.

In addition to this Community of Practice program, from June the Network will open its first round of applications for the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification - enabling higher education institutions

to demonstrate and evidence their commitment to engaged scholarship.

The first round of applications will be launched as part of Engagement Australia event at the 2022 Universities Australia.

What is the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification?

The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification allows universities to demonstrate their commitment to the communities they serve, and to innovate, test, refine and share good practices in the sector. The classification framework represents the best practices in the field of community engagement and encourages continuous improvement through periodic re-classification.

The classification was first offered in 2006 and has been the leading framework for institutional assessment and recognition of community engagement in US higher education since its inception. A total of 361 institutions in the US are currently classified as Carnegie Community Engaged Campuses. The American Council of Education (ACE) acts as the administrative, operational and research host institution for the classification.

The Australian version of the classification will be a critical asset to the sector, enabling us to demonstrate the impact of community engaged scholarship and practice and supporting universities to move down the path of continuous improvement in this area.

What is the is the definition of ‘community engagement’ in the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification?

At the heart of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification is the definition of community engagement.

One of the big changes made to the American version of the classification has been the need to accommodate a uniquely Australian approach to Indigenous sovereignty. In the Australian version it is acknowledged that all Australian higher education institutions are committed to the advancement and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and reconciliation of First Nation peoples with the wider Australian community. Consideration of this commitment, therefore, is foundational to Community Engagement in the Australian context. When the term community engagement is used, it is done so with consideration to this commitment.

The Carnegie Foundation defines community engagement as:

“the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial creation and exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The purpose of community engagement is the partnership (of knowledge and resources) between higher education institutions and 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”.

Community engagement, as defined above, describes activities that are undertaken with community members in reciprocal partnerships between higher education institutions and community organisations or defined community groups. Reciprocal partnerships are characterised by collaborative community and higher education institutions definitions of 1). problems, opportunities, and goals; 2). strategies and solutions; and 3). measures of success. In this way, community engagement requires recognition, respect, and value of the knowledge,



perspectives, and resources of community partners; that the purpose of the partnership is a public good, building the capacity of individuals, groups, and organisations involved to understand and collaboratively address issues of public concern and pursue public purpose goals.

Community engagement is only possible when relationships are grounded in the qualities of reciprocity, mutual respect, shared authority, co-creation of goals and outcomes. Such relationships are by their very nature trans-disciplinary (knowledge transcending the disciplines and the higher education institution) and asset-based (where the strengths, skills, and knowledges of those in the community are validated and legitimised) and transformational. Community engagement necessarily transforms the way an institution enacts its core missions of knowledge creation and dissemination by requiring institutions to rethink how research and scholarly activity can be done with community collaborators, and rethinking how teaching and learning

happens with community collaborators. Community engagement assists higher education institutions in fulfilling their civic purpose through socially useful knowledge creation and dissemination, and through the cultivation of democratic values, skills and habits - democratic practice.

The classification process, therefore, requires evidencing of reciprocity, mutual benefit, co-creation of knowledge and a deep commitment to community partnership. The Network's Community of Practice builds knowledge and capacity in support of engaged partnerships.

Member universities

Current members of the network include: Australian Catholic University, Australian National University, CQ University Australia, Flinders University, La Trobe University, The University of Melbourne, University of the Sunshine Coast, University of Queensland, University of Technology Sydney, Western Sydney University and Victoria University.

For more information about how your university or community organisation can become a member, or for more information regarding the process to apply for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, please go to: engagementaustralia.org.au/carnegie

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<sup>1</sup> The ten pilot universities were University of Technology Sydney, Charles Sturt University, Australian Catholic University, Flinders University, LaTrobe University, Western Sydney University, Central Queensland University, Curtin University (later withdrew), Southern Cross University and University of the Sunshine Coast. The observer institutions were Swinburne University of Technology, Federation University, University of Sydney, University of Tasmania, Deakin University, James Cook University, and University of Western Australia.