

UNIVERSITIES ENGAGING ALL OF US:
Committing to Trust, Purpose and Impact

**ENGAGEMENT AUSTRALIA
CONFERENCE 2026**

HOSTED BY: THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE



23-24 JULY, 2026

Melbourne Connect, The University of Melbourne Carlton VIC

PROGRAM

2026 CONFERENCE

Day 1 - Thursday 23rd July

9.30am - 10.00am	<i>Registrations</i>
10.00am - 10.10am	Acknowledgement of Country
10.10am-10.15am	<p>Welcome to Conference</p> <p>Professor Verity Firth, Vice-President Societal Impact, Equity and Engagement UNSW, Sydney / Director and Chair Engagement Australia</p>
10.15am - 10.45am	<p>Keynote Presentation</p> <p>The key note will explore the vital role of universities in strengthening democracy, fostering civic participation, and advancing social cohesion and inclusion. In the context of growing global uncertainty and division, the address will reflect on how higher education institutions can support informed public discourse, build trust, and create opportunities for diverse voices to be heard.</p>
10.45am - 11.10am	<i>Morning Tea</i>
11.10am - 12.10pm	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <p>Walking with Truth: First Nations Voices on Treaty and Education</p> <p>This panel centres First Nations truth-telling as a foundation for Treaty and meaningful engagement, elevating lived experiences, histories and voices too often unheard. It will explore how truth-telling challenges institutions to confront past and present injustices, and to reshape relationships grounded in honesty, accountability and respect. Participants are invited to listen deeply and consider their role in supporting processes that centre First Nations sovereignty, self-determination and enduring change.</p>
12.10pm - 1.15pm	<p>Panel Discussion and Workshop</p> <p>From Strategy to Practice: Implementing Engagement at Scale</p> <p>This session explores what it takes to develop and implement engagement strategies that are meaningful, sustainable and scalable across universities. Panellists will examine the challenges and opportunities of embedding engagement in practice, including culture change, leadership, resourcing and accountability. The session will also create space for participants to share their own experiences and insights, fostering a collective conversation on what works and what's needed to drive lasting impact.</p>
1.15pm - 2.00pm	<i>Lunch</i>

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2026 CONFERENCE

Day 1 Continued - Thursday 23rd July

2.00pm - 3.20pm	Paper Presentations - Concurrent Session
3.20pm - 3.45pm	<i>Afternoon Tea</i>
3.45pm - 4.45pm	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <p>Partnering for Good: A community Perspective</p> <p>This session brings together representatives from diverse communities who are responding to and actioning needs and issues that matter to people in our local neighbourhoods, towns, and cities. The panel will explore local priorities, perceptions, and understandings of universities and the role of civic universities, anchored in their local communities working in collaboration to foster equity, drive local innovation, and empower marginalised voices.</p>
4.45pm - 5.15pm	<p>Listening and Learning Session with Artist Lamine Sonko</p> <p>Experience exploring how tools for communication and meaningful engagement can be activated through traditional cultural practices of music and movement including body percussion and group interactions.</p>
5.30pm - 6.30pm	<p>Welcome Reception</p> <p>Great way to connect after the conclusion of day 1 Canapes and Drinks served Cultural Performances</p>

The program is subject to change, and additional speakers will be announced upon confirmation

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2026 CONFERENCE

Day 2 - Friday 24th July

8.45am - 9.00am	<i>Tea and Coffee on Arrival</i>
9.00am - 9.05am	<p>Introduction to Day 2</p> <p>Professor Verity Firth, Vice-President Societal Impact, Equity and Engagement UNSW, Sydney / Director and Chair Engagement Australia</p>
9.05am - 9.45am	<p>Conversation</p> <p>What comes next for Engagement</p> <p>This session will examine how evolving policy settings and sector reforms are shaping expectations for universities to deliver greater public value and impact. Participants will gain insight into the opportunities and challenges ahead, and what this means for embedding meaningful, outcomes-focused engagement across the sector.</p>
9.45am-10.45am	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <p>Building Trust: The Role of Universities in Uncertain Times</p> <p>In a shifting geopolitical landscape marked by polarisation, declining trust, and increasing pressure on higher education institutions, what role do universities play in strengthening social cohesion—both within society and within their own communities? This session explores how universities can foster inclusive dialogue, support evidence-informed decision-making, and build meaningful connections with diverse communities, while also cultivating cultures of trust, inclusion, and belonging internally among staff and students. Panellists will respond in real time to a series of real-world and hypothetical challenges, reflecting on how universities can navigate growing external pressures and internal tensions to rebuild trust, bridge divides, and sustain cohesive, resilient institutions in an uncertain world.</p>
10.45am - 11.10am	<i>Morning Tea</i>
11.10am - 12.30pm	Paper Presentations - Concurrent Session
12.30pm - 1.15pm	<i>Lunch</i>
1.15pm - 2.35pm	Paper Presentations - Concurrent Session
2.35pm - 2.50pm	<i>Afternoon Tea</i>

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2026 CONFERENCE

Day 2 Continued - Friday 24th July

2.50pm - 3.50pm	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <p>Shaping Engagement: Technology, AI and the Future</p> <p>This session explores how technology and AI are transforming engagement in higher education, creating new opportunities for connection, inclusion and impact. It will examine how universities can harness digital innovation responsibly while keeping relationships, trust and community priorities at the centre.</p>
3.50pm - 4.00pm	Conference Close

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