

Communicating Effectively about Community Engagement in Higher Education

Toolkit



Campus Compact

Minnesota

Communicating Effectively about Community Engagement in Higher Education

Minnesota Campus Compact's 2017-18 Communication Task Force developed this document to support presidents, communication and community engagement staff, and other leaders at colleges and universities in articulating the value of higher education community engagement to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders.

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More information is available at mncampuscompact.org.

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WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

The civic mission

Colleges and universities often use different terms when referring to teaching, learning, and research activities that address a public issue and involve some work in relationship with community organizations or members; common terms include civic engagement, community engagement, public engagement, service-learning, community-based research, community-engaged teaching and research, participatory action research, engaged scholarship, and more.

When discussing broader institutional commitments and actions intended to benefit communities, they tend to talk about campus-community partnerships, stewardship of place, or being an engaged campus or anchor institution.

This document is meant to provide some general suggestions that could be applicable to a wide array of community engagement and communication efforts.



Action Statement

Minnesota Campus Compact encourages institutions to use the terms that resonate best for them. Each college or university lives out its public purposes in distinctive ways shaped by its community context as well as its institutional identity, mission, resources, and programs. Most members have also signed [Campus Compact's 30th Anniversary Action Statement](#) outlining the following overall goals:

- We empower our students, faculty, staff, and community partners to co-create mutually respectful partnerships in pursuit of a just, equitable, and sustainable future for communities beyond the campus—nearby and around the world.
- We prepare our students for lives of engaged citizenship, with the motivation and capacity to deliberate, act, and lead in pursuit of the public good.
- We embrace our responsibilities as place-based institutions, contributing to the health and strength of our communities—economically, socially, environmentally, educationally, and politically.
- We harness the capacity of our institutions—through research, teaching, partnerships, and institutional practice—to challenge the prevailing social and economic inequalities that threaten our democratic future.
- We foster an environment that consistently affirms the centrality of the public purposes of higher education by setting high expectations for members of the campus community to contribute to their achievement.



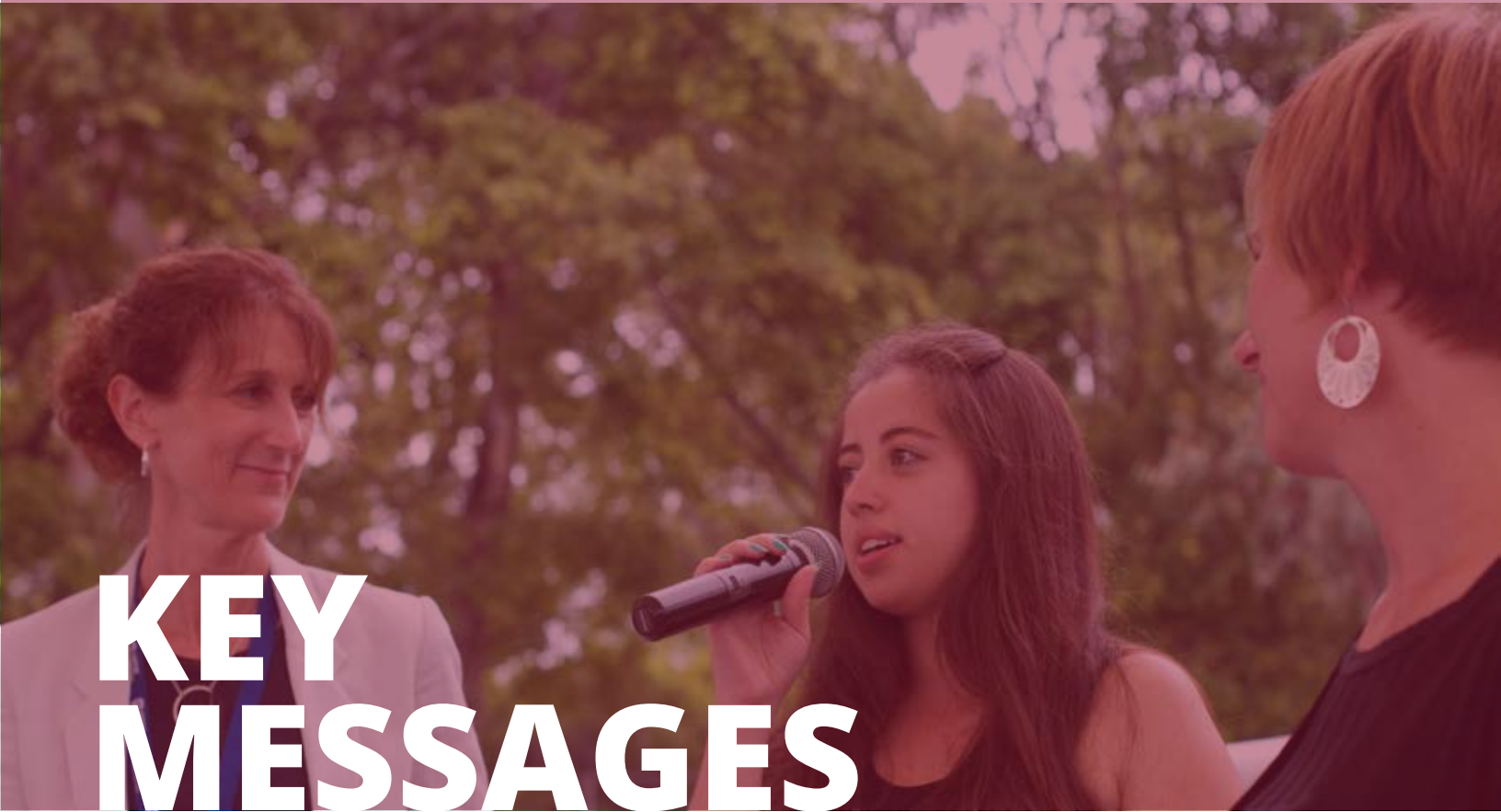
WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

“Freedom can exist only in the society of knowledge. Without learning, [people] are incapable of knowing their rights, and where learning is confined to a few people, liberty can be neither equal nor universal.”

Benjamin Rush

Education is crucial to our democracy. The skills critical to participation in public life—communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, working in diverse teams, etc.—are also fundamental professional skills. Community engagement develops those skills and knowledge through active, hands-on learning, while also increasing college access and success and contributing to inclusive and equitable campus climates.

Neighbors often see colleges and universities not just as teaching institutions, but as major public or nonprofit anchors with a responsibility to use their resources in ways that benefit their communities. Engagement supports that goal too.



KEY MESSAGES

- 1** Reaching out beyond campus is something Minnesota colleges and universities and their students do every day.
- 2** Hands-on community engagement enhances students' learning and prepares them for work, life and citizenship.
- 3** Community engagement work requires deep and mutually beneficial partnerships.
- 4** Colleges and universities play a vital role in strengthening communities – and our democracy.



1 Reaching out beyond campus is something Minnesota colleges and universities and their students do every day.

- Community engagement is an important part of what Minnesota colleges and universities do—it is part of their core mission and commitment to the common good. That’s true for public and private nonprofit institutions awarding all kinds of certificates and degrees, from community colleges to research universities.
- Students are most often engaged through volunteer groups, classes that incorporate community-based service or research, internships, or community-based work-study (where students receiving financial aid are paid to work in a school or community organization).
- Campus-community partnerships also take many forms, including collaborative research, shared facilities, and joint initiatives around issues such as economic development, environmental sustainability, and college and career readiness.
- For the 34 institutional presidents and chancellors that are members of Minnesota Campus Compact, the work of community engagement is a particularly high priority. The Campus Compact network provides professional development, resources, recognition, and support for many leaders at participating campuses and their partners.



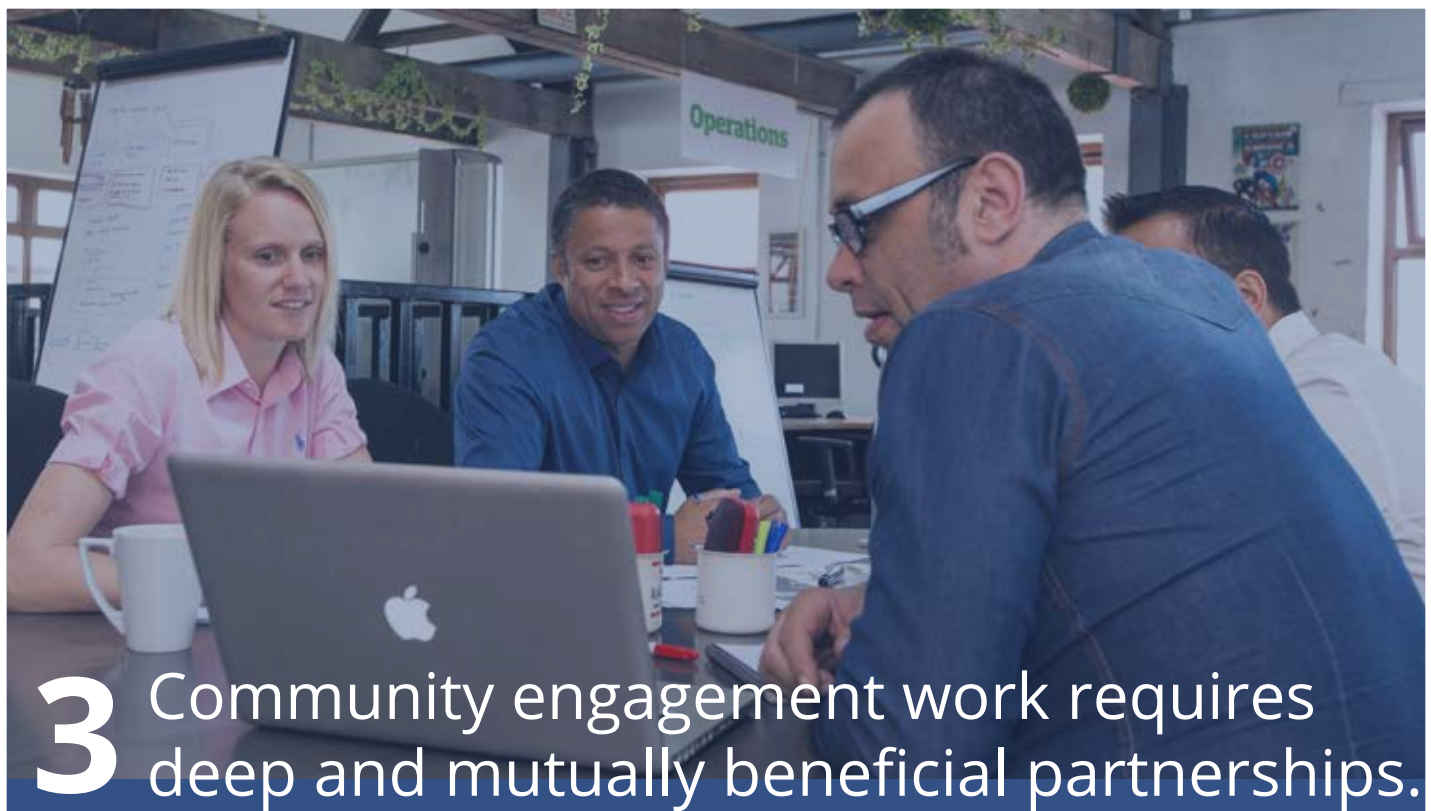
2 Hands-on community engagement enhances students' learning and prepares them for work, life and citizenship.

- Community engagement increases the odds that students will succeed in college. There is growing research evidence that engaged courses enhance students' academic engagement, sense of belonging, and motivation for learning, and taking those courses has a positive relationship with students' GPA, retention, and graduation rates.ⁱⁱ
- Community engagement allows students to test and strengthen a host of skills including communication, teamwork, working across difference, and problem solving. This work outside the classroom sets them up for professional success.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Employers consider internships and community-based projects the best way for students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. On a national survey, 96% agreed that all college students should have experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different than their own.^{iv}

ⁱⁱ Bringle, R. G., Hatcher, J. A., & Muthiah, R. N. (2010). "The Role of Service-Learning on the Retention of First-Year Students to Second year." Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 16(2), 38- 49. Retrieved from <http://ginsberg.umich.edu/mjcs/>

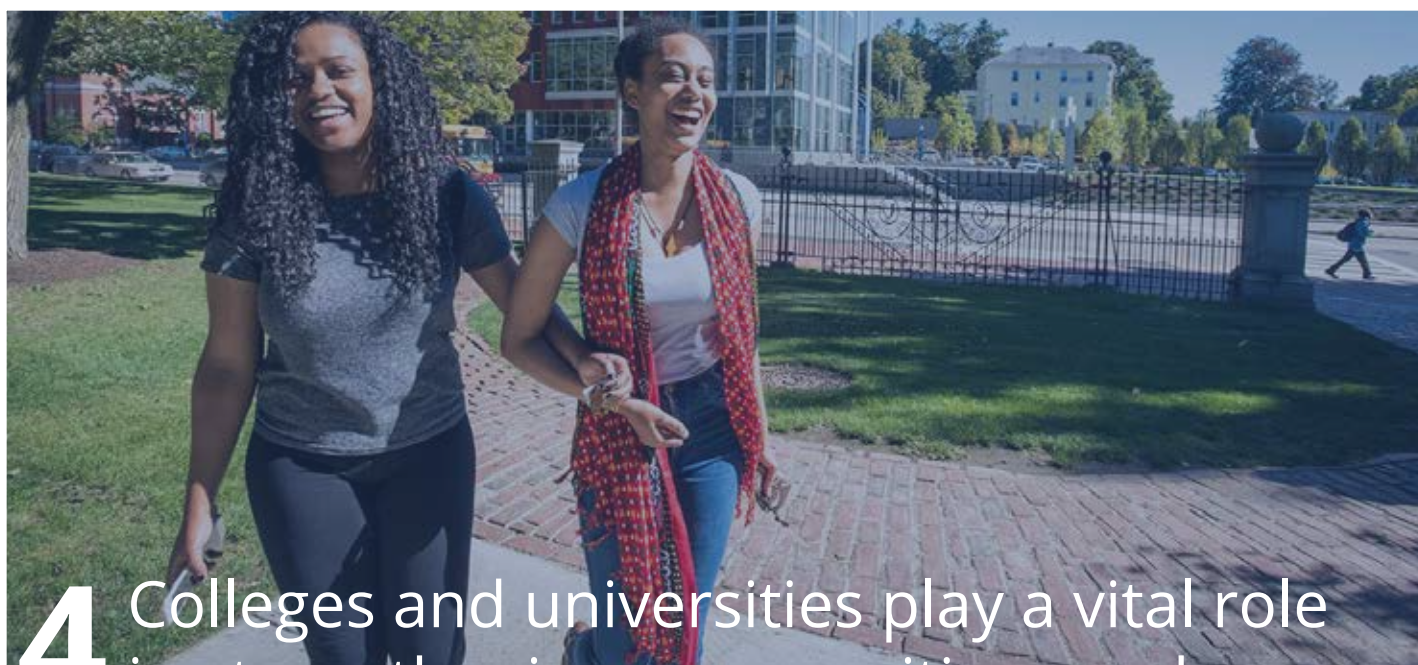
ⁱⁱⁱ Eyler, J., Giles, D., Stenson, C., Gray, C. (2001). "At a Glance: What We Know about the Effects of Service-Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions and Communities, 1993-2000: Third Edition." Vanderbilt University. Retrieved from: <http://www.mnsu.edu/cetl/academic-service-learning/Service-Learning.pdf>

^{iv} Hart Research Associates. 2015. Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities. <https://www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research/2015-employer-priorities>



3 Community engagement work requires deep and mutually beneficial partnerships.

- Colleges and universities seek to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with K-12 schools, nonprofits, businesses, government agencies, and other types of community-based organizations that see an opportunity to create shared value. Partners are understood to be co-educators and co-creators by knowledge, defining collaborative goals together, then assessing results to inform continuous improvement.
- Higher education institutions show their commitment by engaging their people (students, faculty, staff, alumni, etc.), but also by the ways they operate. Everything from how facilities are managed to how goods and services are purchased to how employees are hired and trained has an impact on economic opportunity and vitality in their region.
- In a time when trust in institutions is declining, campuses are intentionally investing in developing their capacity to do this work well, to build trust with external stakeholders, and to demonstrate a consistent commitment to the public purposes and values they declare.



4 Colleges and universities play a vital role in strengthening communities - and our democracy.

- Colleges and universities can contribute to civil dialogue around our state, at a time when divisions by political affiliation, race, religion, economics, seem so high.
- Research shows that community engagement has positive effects on students' social, personal, civic, and professional development, preparing them for full participation in our communities and public life.^v
- Disparities in educational attainment have led to widespread concern about Minnesota's future workforce development. Community engagement fosters a more collaborative culture on campus, which aligns better with low-income and first-generation college students' goals and encourages more people to see themselves as belonging on campus. In the long run, more degrees will lead to more prosperous communities.^{vi}

^v Busted, B. (2015) "Is College Worth It? That Depends." Gallup. Retrieved from: <http://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/182312/college-worth-depends.aspx>

^{vi} Williams-Wyche, S.; Fergus, M.; Djurovich, A. (2016) Educating for the Future 2016. Minnesota Office of Higher Education. Retrieved from: https://mn.gov/admin/assets/educating-for-the-future-2016-policy-guide-ohe-msdc-jan2017_tcm36-281502.pdf





HOW TO TALK ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To convey the value of community engagement *clearly*:

Tell a story.

People are much more likely to be moved by - and remember - a story that is vivid and specific, rather than a general description. Your campus' communication and community engagement professionals could create a repository of stories for anyone to draw on.

(MNCC has also [compiled sample stories](#)^{vii} and [tips for crafting powerful stories](#).^{viii})

Cite at least one compelling statistic.

People don't necessarily assume one story will hold true on a larger scale. The statistic could come from your institution's assessment efforts or broader research (such as the resources cited in the key messages above).

Focus on issues of concern to your audience.

Prospective students, parents, employers, legislators, school and nonprofit leaders, neighbors, and others will have different interests and priorities. Consider not only what drives your individual and institutional commitment to community engagement, but also what your audience cares about most. While they might not be passionate about community engagement, they might care about homelessness, etc.

vii. Minnesota Campus Compact. (2014) Looking Back, Moving Forward: 20th Anniversary Stories and Priorities. Retrieved from: <http://mncampuscompact.org/what-we-do/publications/looking-back-moving-forward-20th-anniversary-stories-and-priorities-emagazine/>

viii. <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/organizational-effectiveness/how-to-create-nonprofit-stories-that-inspire> and https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/writing/MDM_Part1_English.pdf

USE THESE FRAMES

Developing students' skills

We're developing skills—communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, working across difference—that employers say are essential for professional success, as well as full participation in community and civic life.

Inter-dependence

Campuses and communities will thrive when they understand and respect each other, seek shared prosperity, community vitality, and support neighbors' aspirations to pursue education beyond high school.

Reciprocity

Community organizations and leaders are partners and co-educators; both the campus and the community benefit from collaborating.

Humility

Show you are listening to others' voices, co-creating knowledge, and advancing shared goals together, not assuming your institution brings all the expertise and resources to the table.

Inclusion

We engage students, faculty, staff, and community members from a wide array of backgrounds and perspectives in dialogue and action, which does not always lead to agreement but does lead to deeper understanding and capacity for collaboration in diverse communities.

Relevance

Both student learning and faculty research are relevant, applicable, and useful beyond the academy.

Institutional commitment

Connect engagement to your institution's mission, vision, values, learning objectives, and/or strategic priorities. Note how the institution lives out its civic commitment beyond student engagement (e.g., local purchasing, shared facilities, participation in community boards and events).



TERMS TO **AVOID**

+ suggested alternatives

TRY | not THIS | that

Addressing community priorities

Advancing shared goals

Fulfilling our responsibility to our community

Meeting community needs

Working together

Collaborating

Learning from/with

Helping

Doing with | Doing for

Jointly defining problems and creating solutions | Fixing problems

Real world

Hands on learning

Service-learning

Preparing students for work, life, and citizenship



WHEN TO WEAVE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is usually relevant! Whether your audience is concerned about how your institution benefits the local community, prepares students for careers, contributes to knowledge, makes higher education accessible to low-income or first-generation college students, improves K-12 schools, informs public policy, or anything else, your campus is likely doing something to advance that goal. Creating a campus-specific collection of examples and stories can help many people on campus convey the value of community engagement.

Creating a campus-specific collection of examples and stories can help many people on campus convey the value of community engagement.

When appropriate, we'd also encourage you to consider noting your institution's involvement in Minnesota Campus Compact (e.g., tag us in tweets with @MNCompact, or mention at the end of a story that you belong to this coalition). State legislators, for instance, appreciate our members' shared community-oriented commitments, in contrast to the competition for funding among sectors. Public opinion polls have also shown more positive perceptions of higher education when it's understood as including a wide range of postsecondary certificates and two-year, four-year, and graduate degrees.

THE ROLE OF MINNESOTA CAMPUS COMPACT

we're here to help



Campus Compact
Minnesota

Minnesota Campus Compact advances the public purposes of higher education through its work with two-year and four-year, public and private, rural, urban, and suburban colleges and universities across the state ([See current members list](#)^{ix}). Presidents and chancellors officially join the Compact on behalf of their institution, and they make up the majority of our governing board.

Our daily work, however, involves a wide range of campus-based leaders—most often dedicated community engagement professionals, other academic and student affairs administrators or faculty with particular responsibility or passion for community engagement—as well as community-based coalitions, affiliates, and partners.

In addition to providing customized training, resources, and support for key leaders at individual campuses, Minnesota Campus Compact brings people together across institutions, sectors, roles, regions, etc. to reflect, strategize, collaborate, and celebrate.

Learn more at mncampuscompact.org or info@mncampuscompact.org

ix. <http://mncampuscompact.org/who-we-are/member-campuses/current-members/>

partner with us

Our staff would very much welcome your content, which we can share through Minnesota Campus Compact's website, newsletter, social media, and other publications.

Feel free to:

- Email info@mncampuscompact.org subscribe to lists receiving newsletters, press releases, etc.
- Mail hard copies of alumni magazines or other materials to Minnesota Campus Compact, 2211 Riverside Ave. S., Campus Box 48, Minneapolis, MN 55454
- Email relevant news or magazine stories, blog posts, public events, or other items to info@mncampuscompact.org.
- Contact us with any suggestions for enhancing the organization's communications or any questions about its interests and initiatives

Minnesota Campus Compact

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- ix. <http://mncampuscompact.org/who-we-are/member-campuses/current-members/>