



Campus Compact

Alignment of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging with Community and Civic Engagement Functions in Higher Education

Drivers, Approaches & the Experiences



By Castel Sweet

Director of the Center for Community Engagement & Assistant Professor of Practice in Community Engagement, University of Mississippi

Castel Sweet is director of the Center for Community Engagement and Assistant Professor of Practice in Community Engagement at the University of Mississippi and served as Campus Compact's Strategy and Visioning Fellow for the 2022–2023 academic year. In this capacity, she led discussions and gathered information about the structural integration of DEI and civic and community engagement, resulting in this report.

Developed through my work as Campus Compact's [Strategy and Visioning Fellow](#) for the 2022– 2023 academic year, this report offers an environmental scan of Campus Compact members and the broader higher education community around the alignment and structural integration of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions on campuses. Considering the historic moments in which we find ourselves as waves of political actions and legislative decisions amplify echoes of longstanding conversations and considerations of how campuses fulfill the core values and mission of higher education, a deep dive into the alignment of such functions appears to be more relevant now than ever before. Therefore, this report is offered as a catalyst to an expanded understanding and exploration of ways to deepen alignments of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement through practices that enhance complementary and distinctive impacts of each functional area.

To gain an understanding existing alignment of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement at higher education institutions, a search of Campus Compact members was conducted to identify campuses with structural alignment. In considering institutions beyond Campus Compact's membership, an internet search was performed using a combination of key terms such as "civic engagement," "equity," "diversity," "community engagement," "inclusion," etc. Understanding the shortcomings of an internet search, Campus Compact distributed a survey soliciting input and references from its member network. As campuses were identified, their websites, reports, and publications were reviewed to identify how they integrate equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions. Interviews were also conducted with a select few individuals from campuses to better understand their individual and campus experiences with the alignment of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions.

In addition, preliminary observations from this report were shared with attendees at Campus Compact's 2023 annual meeting of [The Research University Civic Engagement Network](#) (TRUCEN), followed by small group conversations on the implications and considerations of such alignments. The strands of information gathered from internet searches, surveys, referrals, interviews, and conversations are collectively branded together through this report. While several campuses have transitioned to structures that align equity, diversity, and inclusion with community and civic engagement efforts at their institution, the models and approaches to that alignment vary among institutions and reflect the context and culture of each campus. Furthermore, looking deeper than structural alignment, functional alignment of equity, diversity, inclusions, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions is essential to realizing the full potential of alignment.

It is important to acknowledge that this report serves as a big-picture environmental scan of aligning equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions among higher education institutions. While every attempt was made to identify as many campuses as possible, likely, additional campuses and models of alignment are not reflected in the information included in this report. Accordingly, this report invites further conversation and exploration of how campuses align or seek to align equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions.

Drivers

Equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging embody measurable, tangible, and observable values instrumental to fulfilling the strategic missions of higher education institutions. Community and civic engagement serve as a tool and method through which institutions can embody those values while fulfilling the public mission of our institutions. Recognizing the complementary relationships between an institution's equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging functions and its community and civic engagement functions, conversations on how institutions should consider progress in these areas as intricately linked to one another have occurred among practitioners and scholars. Notable, in 2011, [Imaging America](#) released a white paper titled "[Full Participation: Building The Architecture For Diversity And Community Engagement In Higher Education](#)," that catalyzed existing conversation and incited action within the field. Since then, many higher education institutions have leveraged rare windows of opportunity to shift to the structural and operational alignment of the equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging functions with community and civic engagement work on their campus.

Considering the current political actions and institutional policy decisions on the local, state, and national level that impact diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in higher education, this conversation on aligning functions feel even more critical than before. In a co-authored op-ed titled "[Natural Allies: How Diversity Leaders and Community Engagement Leaders Build Democracy Together](#)," National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) president Paulette Granberry Russell and Campus Compact president Bobbie Laur articulated the gravity of strategic collaboration between diversity and community engagement efforts at this moment in time. They write:

"In this time of divisiveness and loss of social cohesion, collaborations between diversity leaders and those invested in community engagement are more important than ever. Leaders and practitioners of this work should seek out and prioritize these partnerships. The stakes are too high for our students and democracy to do otherwise."

To support our collective ability to do just that, understanding the current drivers, approaches, and experiences of existing efforts to align these functions would be advantageous.

Starting in fall 2022, a review of Campus Compact members and the broader higher education community around the structural and operational alignment of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions was conducted. Observing the variety of approaches used by campuses that reflected the identity of the respective institutions, it becomes evident that one a one-size-fits-all approach to aligning community and civic engagement functions with equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging is not a realistic solution. Alignment must be reflective of the existing campus structure and operation to be as authentic to the mission and goals of the institution. Therefore, to share the variety of ways campuses are aligning their campus structures and functions to support more equitable engagement practices, Campus Compact hosted a [webinar](#) where panelists shared about the department structures and cross-campus collaborations that position them to advance equitable engagement at their respective institutions.

Approaches

A total of 25 campuses have been identified as having some form of an aligned structure of equity, diversity, inclusions, and belonging with community and civic engagement. These 25 campuses represented various approaches to aligning these functions based on models reflecting the specific culture and identity of the institutions and communities they engage in. One structural alignment approach features individual centers or offices focused on community/civic engagement efforts and centers or offices focused on diversity, equity, or inclusion efforts cohoused in an integrated division or unit. The distinctive centers include directors and staff with concentrated roles distinct from those in the core division or office. Depending on the campus, the type of centers co-housed in integrated divisions and offices varied but included:

- Multicultural centers
- Volunteer centers
- Service-learning centers
- Gender and sexuality centers
- Outreach office
- Title IX office
- Disability support services

Some alignment approaches include offices and units with a mission and title that reflects an alignment of functions, with most of the positions and roles focused on equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with one or two community or civic engagement roles. Similarly, some campuses have roles focused on civic or community engagement housed in diversity, equity, or inclusion-centered departments.

In addition to the makeup and composition of aligned departments or offices, the reporting structure and where these offices are positioned on the institution's organization chart also varied. Some campuses with integrated units report to the campus president and provide administrative support to institutionalize diversity and engagement, while distinctive student-facing units under student affairs support student success and development. It is also worth noting that a few institutions have aligned positions or departments housed in a particular school or college within their respective institution. While the school or college varies from institution to institution, most of these units are embedded in medical or professional schools. A common focus of such instances is to support the students' and professional staff's competencies and ability to serve a diverse clientele and actively engage with the communities in which they practice their profession.

Another approach worth noting is the American Association of Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) [Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation \(TRHT\) Campus Center](#) embodiment of a distinctive model of aligning diversity and engagement. Applying the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's [Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation \(TRHT\) effort](#), the model aims for higher education institutions to develop autonomous, community-integrated centers working towards erasing barriers to equal treatment and opportunity on campuses and in our community. While there are over 60 university and college campuses with a TRHT Center, it is worth noting that one campus has been identified as having a TRHT Center housed in a structurally aligned unit at the institution.

Understanding that structural alignment is one approach, numerous campuses functionally advance such efforts through trans-unit collaborations. Examples include campuses with councils and committees representing various functional areas across campus, including equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging, and community and civic engagement, who meet regularly to work synergistically and strategically. Doing so provides for shared ownership of the alignment and allows for the impacted work to ideally saturate



University of Mississippi

Unit

[Division of Diversity and Community Engagement](#)

Leadership

Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Community Engagement

Alignment Approach

Features institutionalizing efforts in the core unit and co-houses a [Center for Community Engagement](#) and a [Center for Inclusion and Cross Cultural Engagement](#)



University of Louisville School of Medicine

Unit

[Office of Community Engagement and Diversity](#)

Leadership

Vice Dean, Community Engagement and Diversity

Alignment Approach

An integrated structure housed within the [School of Medicine](#)



Rutgers University - Camden

Unit

Division of Diversity, Inclusion,
and Community Engagement

Leadership

Senior Vice Chancellor
for Strategy, Diversity and
Community Engagement

Alignment Approach

Features a Truth, Racial Healing
and Transformation Center and
an Office of Civic Engagement

a broader scope of campus areas as represented by the committee or council composition while preserving distinctive operations of functional areas as needed. Considering such approaches brings to question the drivers behind taking one method over another and the difference between efforts to institutionalize the connections of diversity and engagement functions and efforts to integrate diversity and community engagement functions. While both serve as suitable motivations for alignment, each potentially lends itself to different methods applicable to achieve the desired outcome and impact.

Numerous community and civic engagement units promote a justice-centered approach to their programming and operations. Notably, the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and the subsequent racial uprising ignited conversations for higher education institutions to examine existing community-unity partnership practices in response to demands for racial justice. While a justice-centered approach was previously a deeply embedded approach to their community and civic engagement efforts due to the

justice being a reflection of institutions' mission and values, the impact of what is now commonly referred to as the Summer of Racial Reckoning reinforced for some and exposed for others the importance of considering the complementary relationship between equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging and community and civic engagement.

Similarly, there has been an increase in the adoption of place-based community engagement strategies within higher education. In this approach, institutions are engaging in a long-term commitment to partner with geographically bound neighboring communities as they incorporate considerations of how higher education institutions can use their resources, policies, and practices to address historical and current systems that disenfranchise communities of people based on race, gender, class, national origin, and many other personal and communal identifiers.

Experiences

The structures and ways of doing things at higher education institutions have traditionally remained unchanged. Campus structures and operations are also typically siloed in nature despite the interconnectedness and interdependence of



Maricopa Community Colleges

Unit

Center for Excellence in
Inclusive Democracy

Leadership

Associate Vice Chancellor
for the Center of Excellence
in Inclusive Democracy

Alignment Approach

Features a council comprised of
representation from functional
areas across the college system.

all the various units that make up our higher education system. Therefore, considering a shift to such an alignment of institutional structures and operations to support more collaboration can be challenging. A commonality shared among accounts of how campuses transitioned to aligned structures and functions is the window of opportunity that presented itself amongst other changes and transitions that were taking place at the institution, such as new leadership or the creation of new executive positions.

However, such windows of opportunity may feel few and far between, and the collaboration of the functions is more important in this time in history we are experiencing now more than ever. Cross-campus collaborations provide low-barrier opportunities for alignment that are adaptable and responsive to real-time needs. Even for campuses with an aligned structure, a few community engagement professionals held shared beliefs that there is still untapped potential for collaboration and partnership within the shared office or department. Particularly for campuses with distinctive centers and units within a shared division or office, the tendency to operate within separate siloes can stifle innovative ways of working together. Ultimately, aligning equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement requires a comprehensive approach beyond just implementing structures and standalone programs.

Regardless of the approach to alignment a campus has identified to adapt, the strategies and methods for implementing a transition to that alignment are just as significant as the alignment in and of itself. Community engagement professionals currently working in aligned units and positions emphasize the importance of identifying the drivers and values that anchor the alignment approach for that particular campus and developing a practice of referencing those anchors as guideposts to maintain progress and momentum amid unwarranted changes and transitions that will inevitably occur. Specifically, Deanna Villanueva-Saucedo of Maricopa Community Colleges insisted that we must remember how people defaulting to patterns or behaviors they are custom to necessitates regular resetting to develop a new culture of collaboration, partnership, and interdependence that is not typical of traditional higher education practices of siloed operations. To do so requires intentional communication and the cultivation of skills such as coalition building and facilitation that will support those engaged in the alignment to transcend their separateness and operate in a spirit of mutual understanding, respect, and adaptability as they work together to achieve shared goals and objectives.

To maximize the benefits of the reciprocal relationship between equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging and community and civic engagement, there has to be effective alignment in which there is a mutually beneficial exchange. The give and take needed to effectively engage in this level of collaboration and partnership is a delicate dance that is very much an art and not a science. When sharing experiences working within a structurally aligned department or unit, there are reoccurring sentiments among some community engagement professionals that diversity efforts are inclined to overshadow the contribution and value of the community and civic engagement work to advancing equity and justice. There were articulations of aligned structures tending to lean towards a diversity focus that often softens the recognition of community and civic engagement towards equitable engagement.

Conclusion

When considering the alignment of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions, some community engagement professionals contemplate the potential residual implications of community and civic engagement due to the ongoing political polarization of diversity work.

Such plausible concerns expose the delicate harmony needed to unlock the power that comes from an alignment that has the potential to transform people, communities, and institutions. An alignment should not minimize each distinctive area's unique value and contribution but should complement and enhance impact when applicable. Considering current efforts to respond to legislative decisions across the country, now is one of those times when higher education institutions and those we serve could greatly benefit from that complimentary alignment and intentional collaboration.

In response to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on using race in college admissions, Dr. Kimberly Griffin of the University of Maryland shared, "The goal of supporting students of color with access to higher education is the same. The decision simply removes a tool in our toolbox that helps us achieve that goal." Considering the remaining tools in our toolbox, how can we sharpen our community and civic engagement tools to contribute to our goal of providing access while also preparing students to be active and engaged citizens in a diverse democracy? In addition, as institutions begin to consider and move towards renaming and repositioning diversity positions in response to changes and decisions being made at the state level, it serves as a window of opportunity to thoughtfully consider how we can better align and collaborate across functional areas to truly institutionalize the work needed to fulfill the public service mission of higher education.

Acknowledging that such an alignment is a relatively new phenomenon in higher education, we must continue exploring the innovative and creative ways institutions can achieve and lean into the artful balance of engaging in deep collaboration while also reinforcing distinctive contributions of each functional area. Similar to apprentices, there is a lot we could learn from institutions that currently have aligned structures and those who are actively working with other units across their campus to deepen their efforts and impact. Through further exploration, exchange, and experience, we can grow into artisans capable of using our distinctive skills and proficiencies to collectively unlock the untapped potential of higher education's public purpose of contributing to a thriving, diverse democracy inclusive of all.

Table: colleges & universities identified for this report

To help identify existing structural alignment of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions on campuses, an internet search was conducted using a combination of key terms such as "civic engagement," "equity," "diversity," "community engagement," "inclusion," ".edu," etc. In addition, references were solicited from individuals working in or affiliated with the field of community engagement or diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The table on the following page includes the institutions that were identified through using this process. Information was gathered between December 2022 and February 2023. It is not intended to represent a comprehensive list of institutions working to structurally align diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging with community and civic engagement functions on their campus, but offers examples of ways this can be achieved.





Table: colleges & universities identified for this report

Institution	Unit	Leadership Position
Arkansas State University	<u>Office of the President</u>	Vice Chancellor for Community Engagement & Inclusion
Eastern Michigan University	<u>Department of Diversity and Community Involvement</u>	Director, Diversity and Community Involvement
Framingham State University	<u>Division of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement (DICE)</u>	Vice President for Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement
Maricopa Community Colleges	<u>Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy</u>	Associate Vice Chancellor for the Center of Excellence in Inclusive Democracy
Nevada State College	<u>Office of Community, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion</u>	Director, Office of Community, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
Rutgers University-Camden	<u>Division of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement</u>	Senior Vice Chancellor for Strategy, Diversity and Community Engagement
Rutgers University New Brunswick	<u>Division of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement</u>	Senior Vice President for Equity
Springfield College	<u>Division of Inclusion and Community Engagement</u>	Vice President for Inclusion and Community Engagement
Saint Louis University	<u>Division of Diversity and Innovative Community Engagement</u>	Vice President of the Division for Diversity and Innovative Community Engagement
Thomas Jefferson University	<u>Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement</u>	Executive Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer
University of Colorado Boulder	<u>Office of Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement</u>	Acting Vice Provost and Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
University of Hartford	<u>Office of the President</u>	Assistant Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement
University of Illinois Chicago	<u>Office of Diversity, Equity & Engagement</u>	Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity & Engagement
University of Mississippi	<u>Division of Diversity and Community Engagement</u>	Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Community Engagement
University of Richmond	<u>Equity & Community</u>	Senior Administrative Officer, Equity & Community
University of Tennessee Chattanooga	<u>Division of Diversity and Engagement</u>	Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement
University of Tennessee Knoxville	<u>Division of Diversity and Engagement</u>	Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement
University of Texas at Austin	<u>Division of Diversity and Community Engagement</u>	Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement
Colorado University Anschutz Medical Center	<u>Central Office of Equity, diversity, inclusion and Community Engagement</u>	Vice Chancellor of Equity, diversity, inclusion and Community Engagement
LSU College of Human Science & Education	<u>Office of Diversity, Inclusion & Civic Engagement</u>	Assistant Dean for Diversity, Inclusion & Civic Engagement
LSU Health New Orleans School of Medicine	<u>Office of Diversity and Community Engagement</u>	Associate Dean, Office of Diversity and Community Engagement
University of Louisville School of Medicine	<u>Office of Community Engagement and Diversity</u>	Vice Dean, Community Engagement and Diversity
University of Oklahoma College of Medicine	<u>Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement</u>	Assistant Dean of Diversity College of Medicine
University of Virginia	<u>Department of Medicine</u>	Vice-Chair of Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement