



Campus Compact

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# Campus Action Planning for Civic & Community Engagement Framework



# Campus Action Plan for Civic & Community Engagement

Higher education is at an inflection point. Public trust in colleges and universities is being tested. Communities are grappling with complex, interconnected challenges—economic inequality, democratic disengagement, environmental vulnerability—that no single institution or sector can address alone. At the same time, higher education possesses extraordinary assets: research capacity, intellectual expertise, community relationships, economic influence, and the ability to shape the next generation of leaders.

The question is not whether our institutions have a role to play in addressing these challenges. The question is whether we are organized, committed, and strategic enough to take full advantage of the impact we are positioned to make.

Campus Action Planning for Civic & Community Engagement (CAP) reaffirms higher education’s public purpose by enabling institutions to leverage institutional power and resources holistically, promoting equity, justice, and a thriving democracy. This initiative supports colleges and universities by centering strategic planning, action-oriented decision-making, and accountability, ultimately maximizing their capacity to generate social impact.

The CAP Framework supports colleges and universities in their action-planning efforts to integrate civic and community engagement across their institutions. The Framework provides a pathway for campus teams to follow as they pursue community impact by mobilizing the full range of campus assets—from research and teaching to operations and economic influence—to address complex social challenges.

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## Introduction

Higher education's highest calling is to serve the common good by preparing students for active citizenship, fostering inclusive learning environments, and driving meaningful social and economic progress. Campus Action Planning for Civic & Community Engagement (CAP) reaffirms this public purpose by providing a strategic framework that helps colleges and universities leverage their full institutional power and resources to promote social and economic impact, justice, and a thriving democracy.

Campus Compact, a national nonprofit association dedicated to advancing the public purpose of higher education, developed CAP to help institutions embed civic and community engagement across all institutional functions, from research and teaching to operations and economic influence. Rather than treating civic engagement as a peripheral activity, CAP encourages institutions to align their academic mission with the practical needs of their communities, prioritize reciprocal partnerships, and establish mechanisms for shared accountability and measurable impact.

*The Carnegie Foundation defines "community engagement" as "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity." While Carnegie's definition intends to broadly encompass "civic engagement," Thomas Erlich more specifically defines civic engagement as "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes." Campus Compact encourages campuses to refer to these credible definitions as a way to distinguish community and civic engagement. However, we also acknowledge that many institutions will find it preferable to reference definitions they have developed within the context of their campuses and communities.*

This Campus Action Plan for Civic & Community Engagement Framework and accompanying deep dive guides focus on key areas that offer guidance for ways institutions can embed and scale civic and community engagement across the institution.

### This action plan calls institutions to:

- **Leverage institutional resources:** Act as a community anchor by aligning the academic mission with the real and evolving needs of neighboring communities, including past harms caused by academic institutions.
- **Co-produce action-oriented solutions:** Focus research, teaching, and scholarship on measurable responses to pressing societal challenges, engaging the public as transdisciplinary partners in knowledge and expertise by emphasizing trust and healing.
- **Empower student agency:** Prepare students to be thoughtful, engaged leaders capable of confronting complex challenges and driving positive change throughout their lives.

#### Call to Action

Integration of civic & community engagement across the institution to engage in public problem-solving that mobilizes all campus assets.

#### Process Tools & Resources

Adaptive & customizable tools & approaches for institutional planning



#### Planning Domains

Action planning process organized around civic & community engagement domains



#### Implementation Tools & Resources

Tools & resources to support operationalizing action planning

#### Guiding Principles & Imperatives

To support locally relevant, globally responsive, and future-focused impact.

## Campus Action Planning Overview

Campus Compact has developed the Campus Action Planning (CAP) process to help institutions reassert their individual and collective commitments to higher education's public purpose. CAP is designed to complement existing institutional planning processes, not replace them, by prompting critical review and aspirational thinking about civic and community engagement strategy, and supporting the development of an actionable plan to address complex social challenges.

Recognizing the diverse character and context of colleges and universities, CAP is highly customizable. It is built on three guiding principles:

- **Focus on institutional values, culture, and context:** CAP begins by identifying and articulating each institution's foundational values, then guides planning teams through a process derived from those institutional guideposts.
- **Community-campus engagement oriented toward collective flourishing:** CAP promotes flourishing, community healing, and resilience through intentional efforts to deepen community connections that span generations, economic status, race, and ethnicity, strengthening institutional capacity for ethical, inclusive, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial engagement.
- **Adaptable and agile planning:** By treating planning as an iterative, continuous process, CAP positions institutions to remain responsive to rapidly evolving political, social, and technological environments while holding true to core commitments.

Applying these principles requires attention to six imperatives for effective civic and community engagement practice:

- **Asset-based:** Center community-led action focused on possibility, inclusion, healing, and mutual benefit
- **Systemic:** Identify and address root causes, structures, and harms underlying the issues the plan seeks to address
- **Interrogative:** Question how current cultural norms, policy, narratives, and practice affect civic and community engagement
- **Innovative:** Introduce new approaches by valuing creativity and imagination
- **Future-focused:** Build engagement capacity by understanding historical and current context
- **Transformative:** Pursue important and lasting change

## Timelines

There is no single best time to undertake campus action planning. We recommend avoiding redundancy by aligning the CAP with other institutional processes, such as strategic planning, regional accreditation self-studies, program reviews, curricular reform initiatives, institutional effectiveness plans, or the Carnegie Elective Community Engagement Classification. For example, completing a Carnegie application can build momentum that serves as a strong foundation for CAP development — and conversely, CAP can be useful preparation for a future Carnegie application.

In general, we recommend a robust initial planning effort to produce an overarching three-to-five year plan, though some institutions may be better served by a more focused, short-range plan in preparation for a full-scale effort. All CAP institutions should periodically revisit their plans to monitor progress and maintain ongoing relevance. Timeline development will be influenced by variables such as scope, resource availability, planning team size and authority, and the status of existing community engagement programs.

The table below provides general guidance on timeline development, offering approximations for time at each stage depending on institutional priorities and status. Variables like the scope of the plan, resource availability, the size and authority of the planning team, and status of existing community engagement programs will all influence the time at each stage.

		Abbreviated Timeline	Extended Timeline
Iterative four-stage process	Pre-Planning	<p><b>0-2 months</b></p> <p>For campuses that already have significant leadership &amp; grassroots support; substantial community engagement expertise &amp; experience and strong community partnerships need less time for pre-planning</p>	<p><b>2-9 months depending on scope</b></p> <p>For campuses that need to build planning buy-in and capacity. Those looking to conduct benchmarking or develop shared understanding</p>
	Self-assessment	<p><b>1 month</b></p> <p>For campuses that can build on a recent investment in a self-study, reporting, and identification of needs for civic and community engagement process</p>	<p><b>2-3 months depending on scope</b></p> <p>This step is essential to the success of the Campus Action Planning process. For campuses that need to collate documents and data from multiple sources, or that need to conduct inventories and assessments</p>
	Aspirational planning	<p><b>1-2 months, depending on scope</b></p> <p>Requires creative thinking, extensive dialogue, and consensus-building. Can move quickly, when focusing on a specific domain or strategy</p>	<p><b>2-4 months</b></p> <p>For campuses using the process to develop a comprehensive engagement strategy. Covers all five planning domains and involves more campus &amp; community partners. Requires a significant investment of time</p>
	Scoping & operationalizing	<p><b>1-2 months, depending on scope</b></p> <p>For campuses that are limiting the number of goals due to resource constraints, or intentionally narrowing the focus to require fewer action plans, next steps, and development time</p>	<p><b>2-4 months, depending on the # of action plans &amp; team structure</b></p> <p>For campuses that pursue a large number of goals and develop more action plans, requiring a significant investment of time from a broader network of partners</p>
	Implementation, monitoring & adaptation	<p><b>1-5 years, depending on the timeframe set by the institution</b></p> <p>Implementation is dependent on the nature of the action plan(s). Some work will be ongoing for the life of the programs developed during the planning process. Monitoring &amp; adaptation are meant to be iterative and should continue for the life of the Campus Action Plan.</p>	

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## Pre-Planning

Before formal planning begins, institutions should thoroughly assess their readiness. Readiness is shaped by the external environment, internal culture and context, senior leader and stakeholder support, receptivity to change, and willingness to sustain commitment through implementation. The CAP Readiness Tool is designed to guide campus and community leaders through this appraisal and to identify small actions that can enhance the odds of a successful planning process.

Institutions may also find it useful to build awareness and stimulate creative thinking before planning begins through:

- Learning communities and focused study groups: Shared readings of foundational or provocative scholarship can create collective understanding and serve as a launching pad for deep discussion about the future of community engagement on your campus.
- Campus events: Inviting a recognized scholar or practitioner to deliver a lecture or workshop can generate excitement and spur robust dialogue.
- Site visits and benchmarking: Virtual or in-person visits to aspirational or peer institutions accelerate innovation and help avoid costly delays or mistakes. Benchmarking exercises can also reveal how peers have built infrastructure, garnered resources, and designed policies that encourage broad participation.

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## Inclusive Team Formation

Forming an inclusive planning team is one of the most consequential pre-planning decisions. We recommend designating 1–2 convening chairs/facilitators plus 4–8 additional team members, with chairs responsible for agenda-setting, timelines, and administrative matters.

Compensation is an important consideration. Institutional stakeholders may need course releases, salary supplements, or administrative support to participate meaningfully. External partners should never be expected to contribute volunteer labor; stipends or reimbursements signal the value their expertise brings to the process.

Beyond the core team, broad stakeholder engagement strengthens outcomes and builds trust. Creative strategies — surveys, public forums, open feedback on drafts, and subcommittees focused on specific topical areas or planning stages — can address the tension between inclusive participation and practical constraints.

While team composition should reflect your institution's culture and aspirations, the most effective planning teams share distinct characteristics. Among those highly recommended are:

- Executive leadership: A senior leader or their official representative, or at minimum presidential/provostial endorsement, is essential for the plan's legitimacy and the team's authority
- Leaders from key campus constituencies: Faculty, administrators, staff, students, and alumni who contribute to community engagement, including representatives from faculty and staff senates, student governments, and alumni councils
- Representatives from Partner Communities: Leaders who hold the collective trust of a broad array of community members, such as representatives from neighborhood associations, nonprofit organizations, grassroots and civic organizations, and local government
- Community Engagement Experts: Faculty with records of community-engaged pedagogy or scholarship, and staff from co-curricular, extension, outreach, or economic and workforce development units

Other characteristics, while less essential, are encouraged. They are:

- Content experts: Specialists in budgeting, institutional effectiveness, assessment, accreditation, governmental affairs, or student services
- Disciplinary breadth: Representatives from undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, and units including student success, accessibility services, cultural centers, and residence life

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## The Four-Stage Planning Process

Once pre-planning is completed, institutions move through a four-stage process. CAP is best understood as cyclical rather than linear — a living framework that evolves alongside the institution. Treating the plan as a fixed document makes institutions more likely to abandon it when unexpected challenges arise. A cyclical approach keeps planning, implementation, evaluation, and adjustment in continuous dialogue, with the heaviest effort front-loaded in the initial planning phase and subsequent cycles focused primarily on implementation and monitoring.

The best plans are grounded in institutional values, honest about current realities, and anchored to a clear aspirational vision. As your team moves through each stage, revisit these questions at each meeting or milestone:

- Does our work align with our institution's core values? Does anything conflict with them?
- Have we articulated a long-term vision that strengthens engagement capacity and promotes justice, equity, and resilience?
- Have we developed this vision collaboratively with community partners, with attention to reciprocity, inclusion, truth-telling in consideration of harm, and mutual benefit?
- Have we developed goals and actions that, if successful, will move our institution and community toward that shared vision?
- Are the goals and actions feasible given our current context, climate, and resources? Is there a clear plan to address foreseeable barriers?

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## Stage I: Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is a period of structured reflection on your institution's past and current community engagement work, foundational documents and data, and the characteristics and priorities of the external communities you engage. It is a critical step. Moving forward without a clear understanding of the current state of engagement risks repeating past mistakes or deepening existing challenges. An evidence-based approach is strongly recommended to reduce reliance on assumptions or prevailing narratives.

As part of its self-assessment, it is highly recommended that institutions pay attention to several key areas of organizational insight:

- Core institutional values: Identify values and guiding principles already articulated by your institution that speak to its public purpose, and examine how they manifest in current civic and community engagement initiatives.
- Shared definitions: Establish a working set of definitions for key terms that will be used consistently throughout the CAP process, drawing from existing literature and adapting to your institutional context.

- Existing institutional documents and data: Leverage planning and reporting work already completed. Relevant sources include mission and strategic planning documents, accreditation self-studies, site visit reports, community engagement program reports, and Carnegie Classification applications. Supplement these with available data on community impact, faculty engagement, community-engaged courses, co-curricular programs, and student civic learning outcomes.

Several other types of analysis can be pursued when there is time and utility:

- Community engagement inventory and institutional analysis: A campus-wide inventory of partnerships, courses, scholarship, and outreach programs helps the team map the current landscape and identify opportunities for coordination and collaboration. Institutional analysis tools, such as SWOT, SCOT, SOAR, Asset Mapping, or Power Mapping, can help teams systematically identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities.
- Community-generated priorities and needs assessments: Hearing directly from community-based leaders and organizations deepens the planning team's understanding of partner community priorities. Relevant sources include city and regional comprehensive plans, quality of life surveys, collective impact frameworks, and reports from coalitions organized through United Way or local community foundations. Static documents should be supplemented by ongoing opportunities for community members to participate directly in the CAP process.
- External consultants: An outside expert can provide a more objective review of your engagement portfolio, organizational structures, policies, and practices. This can be especially valuable when campuses are navigating historical rifts, contested priorities, or resource allocation decisions that internal leaders may struggle to resolve objectively.

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## Stage II: Aspirational Planning

Building on the insights from self-assessment, the aspirational planning phase challenges teams to articulate a shared vision for community engagement and develop the goals and actions needed to pursue it. Before generating goals, teams should consolidate and categorize key insights from the self-assessment, capturing observations about opportunities, challenges, and needs to focus the work ahead. They should proactively consider actions that will repair community harms.

**Aspirational development** – The community engagement aspiration is a concise, far-reaching statement that describes the desired future of community engagement on your campus and in partnership with the community. It should be ambitious, inspirational, and specific to your institutional context and it should be legible enough that key stakeholders can readily see how their current or future work contributes to it. While there is no required time horizon, visions typically project 5–10 years into the future.

Think of the vision as a destination. While your mode of transportation (resources) and route (goals and strategies) may shift with changing conditions, the destination remains stable. The process for creating the vision should align with institutional values, draw on broad stakeholder input, and be informed by self-assessment findings. Because vision development can get derailed by debates over wording and structure, we recommend generating ideas and concepts collectively before asking a skilled writer to produce a working draft for group review.

**Goal development** – Goals are high-level statements that move the institution toward its community engagement vision on a shorter timeline. We recommend organizing goals within five planning domains that have proven essential for institutionalizing community engagement in higher education:

1. Institutional Identity and Core Values for Community Engagement
2. Community Partnerships and Collaboration
3. Faculty Engagement and Support
4. Student Engagement and Support
5. Institutional Infrastructure, Support, and Coordination

There is no recommended number of goals overall or within any domain. This will depend on your institution's current state relative to the vision. Institutions with limited capacity may choose to focus on a subset of domains or design a tiered implementation strategy that sequences goals across multiple years.

Effective goals are singular in focus, specific enough to show how they contribute to the vision, and broad enough to allow flexibility in the actions taken to achieve them. They should articulate what you are trying to accomplish, not how.

	Stronger	Weaker
Example 1	To create policies to support community engagement by faculty of all ranks and classifications	To modify promotion and tenure policies and develop a rewards and recognition program for all faculty ( <i>double-barreled</i> )
Example 2	To ensure every undergraduate student has access to at least one community-engaged learning course through their major	To integrate a mandatory service-learning course in the first year of every major ( <i>specific mechanism identified, restricts possible approach</i> )

## Stage III: Scoping and Operationalizing

**Prioritization** – Comprehensive plans can quickly become overwhelming. Most institutions have limited human and financial resources, and pursuing too many goals simultaneously risks making meaningful progress on none of them. Teams should establish priority levels for each goal based on factors such as potential impact, visibility, resource availability, feasibility, and sequencing. Goals can be ranked on a higher-to-lower priority scale, clustered by topic, or ordered to enable incremental progress. For campuses where early wins can help build momentum and garner future resources, pursuing high-reward, low-risk goals first is a sound strategy.

**Action Planning** – For each goal, the planning team should generate a broad set of potential actions, thinking creatively, systemically, and with attention to evidence-based practices and innovations from peer institutions. Once possibilities are identified, teams narrow to a final set of actions based on criteria relevant to their context: alignment with institutional priorities, community-identified needs, available expertise, and institutional values established during self-assessment.

Each goal should have one or more associated actions. Complex goals often require multiple actions. Actions selected for implementation require a fully developed implementation plan that includes a specific description of the action, preliminary resource estimates, a designated responsible role, and an impact-assessment plan with measures of success and targets. The CAP Action Planning Template is a useful tool for developing these plans.

Action planning often requires expertise beyond the core team. Institutions should engage key stakeholders – specific departments, roles, or external organizations – at this stage through subcommittees or existing advisory groups.

## Stage IV: Implementation, Monitoring, and Adaptation

**Action** – With vision, goals, and action plans established, implementation teams should develop detailed timelines and accountability assignments to keep each action on track. Early coordination with the following campus units can strengthen implementation:

- **Marketing and communications:** To build internal and external support, document progress, and use storytelling to highlight outcomes and impact
- **Advancement:** To identify opportunities for new or expanded financial support and compelling evidence for alumni and donors
- **Assessment and institutional effectiveness:** To leverage existing data collection mechanisms, automate periodic reporting, and minimize burden on faculty and staff
- **Curricular governance:** To navigate approval processes for credit-bearing experiences and identify alignment with other curricular initiatives

Because community partnerships are central to the action plan, establish contact with community partners early, seek their input and review, and ensure that the implementation plan centers best practices of respect, reciprocity, and mutual benefit. Campuses may wish to establish an inclusive community engagement review panel to monitor ethical and productive engagement.

**Assessment and Monitoring** – Ongoing monitoring generates an honest appraisal of the plan's effectiveness and supports continuous improvement. We recommend two levels of review:

- **Action plan-level reviews:** At least once per semester, and more frequently during early implementation. Implementation teams review available outcome data to ensure the plan is on track and troubleshoot issues as they emerge.
- **CAP-level reviews:** Conducted at least annually by the original planning team or its successor. Implementation teams submit brief, evidence-driven progress reports to inform this holistic review, which focuses on patterns across goals, resource reallocation needs, and recommendations for plan modifications.

As part of periodic review, campuses should celebrate, recognize, and reward accomplishments, including smaller milestones. Recognition keeps stakeholders informed, draws attention to the institution's civic and community engagement work, and strengthens the broader culture of engagement.

**Adaptation** – An immutable plan is far more likely to fail. Institutions are encouraged to adapt goals, action plans, outcome measures, and resource alignment as conditions change — but modifications should be grounded in evidence and healthy dialogue, not reflexive responses to external pressure. A stable vision provides an important touchstone during periods of rapid change.

Planning teams would be wise to identify conditions that warrant plan modifications before they occur. These might include high-level leadership transitions, financial restructuring, a public crisis that consumes institutional focus, or a dramatic shift in institutional or system policy. If an action is failing to meet targets and the monitoring team determines that adequate time and resources have been invested, charting a new course preserves the plan's relevance and advances progress toward the overall goal.

## Planning Domains

The five planning domains provide a comprehensive framework for institutionalizing civic and community engagement. Together, they address the full ecosystem of institutional life — from culture and identity to faculty and student support, community partnerships, and the administrative infrastructure that sustains it all. Institutions need not pursue all five domains simultaneously or with equal intensity; capacity, context, and priorities will shape the approach. What matters is that planning teams engage each domain thoughtfully and with attention to how progress in one area reinforces and enables progress in others.

### Domain I: Institutional Identity and Core Values

For civic and community engagement to be sustainable, it must be embedded in an institution's identity, not treated as a collection of optional programs but as a defining characteristic of campus culture. When civic responsibility is woven into core values, engagement becomes a natural expectation for students, faculty, and staff alike, shaping everything from curriculum design to resource allocation to community partnerships. Institutions that make this shift don't just produce graduates with civic skills; they build a legacy of engagement that shapes the communities they serve for generations.

#### Four areas to consider in developing or reshaping institutional identity and culture:

1. **Strategic Plan** - Establish a mission statement and strategic plan that explicitly prioritize civic and/or community engagement and communicate this commitment widely to faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners. Core values should serve as the foundation for policy formulation, program development, and decision-making across all institutional levels.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How can core values be formally incorporated into ongoing strategic planning cycles, such as annual reviews and budget allocations?
- What existing policies or programs might need revision to align more closely with defined core values?
- In what ways can the institution measure the impact of these values on academic and administrative decisions?

2. **Campus/Community Climate Inventory** - Understanding the current state of civic and community engagement—both inside the institution and in surrounding communities—is essential for ensuring that initiatives align with real needs. An honest assessment of campus climate reveals strengths and gaps, while attention to the social, political, and cultural realities of local communities enables leaders to design initiatives that are genuinely responsive and inclusive.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- Who are we currently partnering with in our surrounding community, and are we reaching the right populations?
- How do we ensure our engagement efforts account for diverse cultural, social, and political contexts — both on campus and off?
- What past harms has our institution, intentionally or unintentionally, committed against various communities with which it has engaged, and have we sought to repair them?
- Which resources or supports do we have in place for civic and community engagement, and where are the gaps?
- How do we measure the impact of our engagement activities, and how can we improve these metrics?

- In what ways can students, staff, faculty, and community be more actively involved in shaping and refining our approach?
3. **Leadership and Executive Buy-In** — The active commitment of institutional leadership and the executive cabinet is essential for advancing and sustaining civic and community engagement. Senior administrators play a critical role in championing these values, casting a clear vision, and ensuring accountability throughout the process.

*Reflective questions for campus–community teams:*

- What does visible executive support for your institution’s core values look like in practice?
  - What communication channels can leaders use to consistently reinforce these values?
  - Which metrics or indicators could be used to hold leadership accountable for embodying and promoting core values?
4. **Inclusive Stakeholder Reflection** — A dedicated committee or process for consulting faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners that gathers input through multiple channels, surveys, focus groups, and town halls will help ensure that core values reflect the full range of institutional and community perspectives.

*Reflective questions for campus–community teams:*

- Which campus and community groups need to be included in conversations about core values?
- How can existing platforms be adapted or expanded to encourage meaningful reflection?
- What strategies can ensure that underrepresented voices are actively heard and integrated into the values–setting, revising, or clarification process?

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## Domain II: Faculty and Staff Engagement and Support

Faculty and staff are essential to institutionalizing civic and community engagement. Their involvement transforms engagement from an institutional aspiration into lived practice — through the courses they teach, the research they conduct, the partnerships they build, and the students they mentor. They are witnesses to the impact, and in some cases the cause, of harm. Faculty and staff are well positioned to actively contribute to repairing community relationships; sustaining their involvement requires intentional investment in professional development, meaningful incentives, supportive structures, and a culture that recognizes engagement as a core professional responsibility rather than an add-on.

### Four areas to consider in developing or reshaping faculty and staff engagement and support:

1. **Leadership and Involvement** — Institutions should create tangible opportunities for faculty and staff to assume leadership roles in civic and community-focused initiatives, such as chairing committees, leading service-learning projects, or developing community partnerships. Formal structures for these roles signal that engagement is a core institutional value. Equally important is fostering a collaborative environment where faculty and staff share resources, ideas, and experiences across disciplines, building collective ownership over engagement efforts and reinforcing that civic and community involvement is an institutional responsibility, not an individual one.

*Reflective questions for campus–community teams:*

- How can we identify and empower faculty and staff to take on leadership roles in community engagement?
- In what ways can we foster collaboration to ensure shared responsibility across the institution?

- How can we promote leadership in community engagement as part of faculty and staff professional growth?
  - What systems can recognize and reward faculty and staff who take initiative in engagement?
2. **Development and Incentives** — Institutions should offer professional development opportunities—workshops, seminars, and training programs on community-engaged learning, community partnerships, and civic engagement strategies — that evolve as the institution matures in its engagement work. As engagement becomes more deeply institutionalized, tangible incentives become equally important: release time for developing engagement projects, financial support for community-based research, and recognition through awards, promotions, and tenure considerations. These incentives signal that civic and community engagement is a core element of academic and professional life, not a voluntary extra.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- What professional development programs can equip faculty and staff with skills for co-creating effective civic and community engagement in a manner that repairs and does not repeat past harms?
  - How can we ensure faculty and staff are appropriately incentivized for their contributions?
  - What types of rewards — funding, release time, recognition — would most effectively motivate involvement?
  - How can community and civic engagement be incorporated into performance reviews and promotion criteria for both faculty and staff?
3. **Recruitment and Retention** — Institutions should prioritize recruiting faculty and staff who are committed to civic and community engagement by making this commitment explicit in job descriptions and recruitment materials. Retention strategies are equally important: ongoing professional development, funding for community-based research, release time for civic and community professional learning, and integration of engagement into performance evaluations and tenure processes all reinforce the long-term value of this work and help sustain a culture of civic responsibility across departments.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How can recruitment strategies attract faculty and staff who value community engagement?
  - What retention strategies can support ongoing faculty and staff involvement over time?
  - How can community engagement be integrated into job descriptions to reflect its institutional importance?
  - What supports help faculty and staff committed to engagement maintain long-term involvement?
4. **Support Structures** — Effective support structures, including dedicated offices or staff positions that coordinate community partnerships, manage service-learning initiatives, and provide logistical assistance, allow faculty and staff to focus on their engagement work rather than administrative burdens. Access to funding through grants or stipends enables faculty and staff to design and implement impactful projects. Clear communication channels and regular opportunities for faculty, staff, and community partners to connect and collaborate are equally essential for sustaining and refining engagement efforts over time.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- What administrative structures can support faculty and staff involved in community and civic engagement?
- How can we ensure access to necessary resources and funding for civic and community engagement projects?
- What role can community partnership offices or dedicated staff play in facilitating staff and faculty engagement?
- How can we streamline communication and collaboration between faculty, staff, and community organizations?

## Domain III: Student Engagement and Support

Students who engage with their communities in ways that deliberately span generations, economic status, race, and ethnicity develop problem-solving skills, cross-cultural competencies, and a deeper understanding of real-world challenges—and they graduate better prepared not just for careers but for lives of informed civic and community participation. For this to happen at scale, engagement must be woven into the fabric of institutional life: embedded in curricula, supported by faculty and staff, connected to career development, and treated as an expectation rather than an optional activity.

### Four areas to consider in developing or reshaping student engagement and support:

1. **Awareness and Involvement** — Students are more likely to engage when they see a direct connection between engagement opportunities and their interests, goals, and values. Institutions can strengthen this connection by embedding civic and community engagement into coursework, supporting student-led initiatives, partnering with local organizations, and recognizing civic and community involvement through scholarships or certificates. Flexible opportunities that accommodate diverse schedules, inclusive programming that reflects diverse perspectives, and platforms for student leadership all increase participation. Digital tools and social media can further connect students to civic and community issues, making engagement feel less like an obligation and more like an opportunity for real impact.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How can we ensure that civic and community engagement opportunities align with students' academic and career interests?
- What barriers might prevent students from participating, and how can we remove them?
- How do we recognize and celebrate students who are actively involved in civic and community initiatives?
- In what ways can we foster long-term partnerships with local organizations, neighborhood groups, and social movements, both established and emerging, to provide sustained opportunities?

2. **Support and Incentives** — Financial incentives such as scholarships, stipends, or course credit lower participation barriers for students balancing competing demands. Leadership development programs, service-learning courses, and internship opportunities with nonprofit organizations integrate civic responsibility into academic and career pathways. Recognition programs — awards, graduation cords, certificates — celebrate student contributions and reinforce the value of engagement. Beyond formal incentives, campuses should expand student-led civic and community-serving organizations, offer flexible and remote engagement options, and create an environment where civic and community involvement is a natural part of student life.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- What financial or academic incentives could encourage greater student participation?
- How can we ensure engagement opportunities are accessible to students with different schedules and backgrounds?
- In what ways can we strengthen mentorship and leadership development programs for student civic and community involvement?
- How can we better recognize and celebrate students who make meaningful contributions to their communities?

3. **Curricular and Co-Curricular Integration** — Community-engaged courses, civic themes in assignments and research, first-year experience programs, and capstone projects ensure that engagement is embedded throughout the college journey rather than treated as an occasional activity. Courses that forthrightly address historic institutional harms of policy and practice equip students to act beyond false narratives, engage in critical inquiry, and pursue trusting community relationships. Academic credit for internships with nonprofits, government agencies, advocacy groups, public-minded industry and business partners further strengthens the connection between education and action. Beyond the classroom, structured pathways — civic leadership organizations, voter registration drives, alternative break programs, and student-led fellowships — reinforce curricular engagement and help build a sustained campus culture of civic and community involvement.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How can we strengthen the connection between coursework, real-world civic and community engagement, and understanding?
- What new partnerships can we develop with local organizations to create more hands-on learning experiences?
- How can we make engagement opportunities more visible and accessible across academic majors?
- In what ways can faculty, student affairs staff, and other departments collaborate to integrate civic and community learning inside and outside the classroom?

4. **Civic Identity and Career Integration** — When students understand that civic and community engagement builds leadership, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork skills, they begin to see engagement not as separate from career preparation but as central to it. Career services offices can highlight how civic and community involvement strengthens resumes and provides networking opportunities. Partnerships with employers who prioritize social impact, mentorship programs connecting students with civic and community-minded professionals, alumni panels, and fellowships supporting community-based projects all reinforce the message that civic identity and professional success are complementary paths.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How can we better integrate civic and community engagement into career services and advising?
- What partnerships can we develop with employers who value civic-minded leadership?
- How can we help students recognize the career benefits of civic and community engagement across different industries?
- In what ways can alumni and community partners support students in connecting civic and community experience to professional development?

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## Domain IV: Community Partnerships and Collaboration

Sustainable civic and community engagement is built on genuine partnerships and relationships that are grounded in shared goals, mutual respect, and long-term commitment. Effective campus-community partnerships go beyond one-time collaborations or transactional interactions; they tell hard truths about past wrongs and present consequences and create reciprocal opportunities that benefit students, strengthen communities, and reinforce the institution's role as a community anchor. Nurturing these relationships over time requires continuous communication, equitable decision-making, and a shared commitment to impact.

## Five areas to consider in developing or reshaping community partnerships and collaboration:

1. **Partnership Development** — Strong partnerships begin with acknowledging and addressing past harms while also identifying shared goals and values that align institutional priorities with community needs. Establishing advisory boards or working groups that include both campus and community stakeholders ensures ongoing dialogue, transparency, and co-creation. Integrating community engagement into strategic planning, supported by dedicated funding, staff, and formal partnership agreements, elevates partnerships from occasional projects to long-term commitments. Faculty should be encouraged to develop community-engaged courses, and students should have structured opportunities to engage directly with community initiatives. Regular assessment and reflection, including feedback from community partners, are essential for ensuring that partnerships remain equitable and mutually beneficial.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How well do our current partnerships align with the needs of both our students and the community?
- Have we honestly interrogated the consequences of past harms and considered how to address them and avoid them going forward?
- What structures or resources do we have in place to support long-term, sustainable engagement?
- How do we ensure that community expertise and authority are genuinely included in decision-making processes in a manner that aligns to partners' desired levels of participation?
- What metrics or feedback mechanisms do we use to assess the impact of our partnerships?

2. **Mutual Benefit and Reciprocity** — Effective partnerships require treating community organizations as equal partners rather than passive beneficiaries. This means engaging in open dialogue to understand harms, community priorities, collaboratively designing initiatives that serve both student learning and local needs, and acknowledging and compensating community partners for their time and expertise. Sustaining reciprocity requires moving beyond transactional engagement through co-produced research, co-hosted events, shared funding opportunities, and regular feedback loops where community voices shape program improvements and long-term strategy.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How do we ensure that our partnerships are built on mutual respect and not one-sided institutional priorities?
- What mechanisms do we have to regularly assess and address the needs of our community partners?
- Are we adequately recognizing and compensating community partners for their contributions?
- How can we better integrate community voices into institutional decision-making and long-term planning?

3. **Collaboration and Feedback** — Institutions should establish both formal and informal spaces—advisory boards, roundtable discussions, joint planning sessions—where community organizations actively contribute to program design, decision-making, and implementation. Structured yet flexible feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, listening sessions, and collaborative assessment reports, should be treated as actionable tools rather than formalities. Transparency about how community input shapes policies, programming, and resource allocation builds trust, and recognizing successful partnerships through public acknowledgment and shared storytelling deepens engagement over time. Broad stakeholder engagement fosters shared ownership, strengthens accountability, and ensures that engagement efforts remain relevant and responsive over time.

*Reflective questions for campus–community teams:*

- How often do we engage our community partners in meaningful conversations about shared goals?
- Do we have structured systems to collect and act on feedback from community partners?
- Do we proactively revisit difficult challenges from the past to determine whether we are moving beyond them or repeating them?
- How do we ensure that community voices actively shape institutional decisions and initiatives?
- What steps can we take to strengthen transparency and trust in our campus–community partnerships?

4. **Transdisciplinary and Interinstitutional Work** — Complex social challenges, such as public health, economic development, and environmental sustainability, require expertise from multiple fields and sectors. Institutions should support cross–departmental collaboration through incentives for faculty to develop joint initiatives and interdisciplinary courses that incorporate community–engaged learning. Expanding impact through partnerships with other institutions enables larger–scale projects, increased funding opportunities, and a broader range of expertise. Shared governance, open communication, and long–term relationship–building are essential for keeping these partnerships meaningful and effective.

*Reflective questions for campus–community teams:*

- How can we break down silos within our institution to promote interdisciplinary collaboration?
- What existing transdisciplinary partnerships with other institutions could be strengthened or expanded?
- What existing community partnerships with your institution are successfully engaging complex transdisciplinary challenges, and which disciplines are involved?
- How can faculty and students from different disciplines work together more effectively, alongside community partners, on complex social challenges?
- What incentives or support structures can encourage long–term transdisciplinary and interinstitutional partnerships?
- What fiscal, political, or organizational barriers make transdisciplinary and interinstitutional collaboration difficult at your institution, and what low–hanging fruit could help mitigate or overcome those barriers?

5. **Community Access** — Institutions can strengthen their role as community anchors by intentionally opening campus resources, such as libraries, technology centers, meeting spaces, transportation systems, and athletic facilities, to local residents and organizations. Partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and small businesses create pathways for community members to access educational workshops, job training, and cultural events. Reduced or free access ensures that financial barriers don't limit participation. Beyond physical access, institutions should design programs that meet real community priorities, including college readiness initiatives, pro bono services, and mentorship programs, and maintain proactive communication with community leaders to ensure responsiveness over time.

*Reflective questions for campus–community teams:*

- How accessible are our campus resources, and what barriers might prevent community members from utilizing them?
- What partnerships can we establish or strengthen to expand community access to educational and professional development opportunities?
- Are we proactively engaging local residents and organizations to understand their priorities?
- How can we ensure that our efforts to increase community access are sustainable rather than one–time initiatives?

## Domain V: Institutional Infrastructure, Support, and Coordination

Meaningful and sustained civic and community engagement cannot depend on the efforts of committed individuals alone. It requires deliberate institutional investment in the structures, policies, and systems that make engagement possible at scale. This domain addresses the operational backbone of a campus engagement strategy: the offices, funding mechanisms, assessment practices, ethical protocols, and coordination structures that ensure engagement efforts are organized, accountable, and built to last.

### Six areas to consider in developing or reshaping institutional infrastructure, support, and coordination:

1. **Policy and Funding** — Sustainable engagement requires clear policies and dedicated funding streams. Institutions should audit existing frameworks to identify gaps, align strategic goals with community expectations, and establish cross-functional committees, including students, faculty, and community representatives, to jointly steer initiatives and allocate resources. Leveraging external grants, public-private partnerships, and dedicated internal funding builds a more resilient financial foundation and creates lasting mechanisms for accountability and growth.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How does our current policy framework promote sustainable civic and community engagement?
- What additional funding sources can we pursue and secure, if any, to expand community impact?
- In what ways are we incorporating community feedback into strategic and financial planning?
- How can we measure the long-term outcomes of engagement initiatives to justify continued funding?

2. **Publications, Recognition, and Dissemination** — Documenting and sharing engagement work is essential for sustaining momentum and building institutional reputation. Dedicated platforms — journals, newsletters, digital repositories, annual reports — ensure that faculty, student, and community partner contributions are recognized and that best practices are shared widely. Integrating engagement-related publications into faculty reward structures, tenure criteria, and student recognition programs sustains investment in the work. Partnerships with academic publishers, media outlets, and professional organizations, along with strategic use of social media and digital storytelling, extend the reach and visibility of engagement efforts beyond campus.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How can we develop a structured approach to documenting and sharing civic and community engagement initiatives?
- What recognition mechanisms can support faculty, students, and community partners involved in engagement?
- How can we integrate civic and community engagement publications into faculty evaluation and student achievement frameworks?
- What external partnerships or platforms can help broaden the reach of our engagement-related work?

3. **Coordinating Structures and Administrative Support** — Central coordination, whether a dedicated office, civic and/or community engagement director, faculty advisory board, or a cross-campus coalition, has proven to be an effective mechanism in many institutions for ensuring that engagement efforts are aligned rather than fragmented. Clear leadership roles, dedicated staff positions, streamlined reporting mechanisms, and long-term funding for engagement initiatives create a sustainable framework. Technology that tracks partnerships, measures impact, and facilitates communication among stakeholders further strengthens coordination across departments and with community partners.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- What administrative structures are currently in place to support civic and community engagement, and where are the gaps?
- How can we ensure engagement efforts are well-coordinated across departments and programs?
- What staffing, funding, or technological resources are needed to strengthen administrative support?
- How can we create long-term sustainability for engagement initiatives beyond short-term projects or grant cycles?

4. **Internal Partnerships Across Campus** — Civic and/or community engagement offices and other campus units, including government relations, academic affairs, student affairs, and institutional effectiveness, have more to gain from collaboration than from operating in silos. Connecting civic and community engagement work such as voter outreach, service initiatives, and community-based research with the advocacy and policy efforts of government relations can amplify institutional voice on public matters. Practical starting points include co-hosting events, developing joint reports, and identifying shared external stakeholders. As collaboration deepens, government relations staff can elevate civic and community engagement stories in legislative conversations, while civic and community engagement offices can generate grassroots support for campus-led advocacy efforts.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- How can we create intentional pathways for collaboration between civic and community engagement and other campus offices?
- What shared goals or external partnerships could we jointly pursue to strengthen community impact?
- How might government relations help advocate for policies that support our civic and community engagement programs?
- Are we leveraging the full potential of our civic and community engagement data and stories in policy and public affairs conversations?

5. **Assessment and Evaluation** — A rigorous assessment strategy is essential for ensuring that engagement efforts remain meaningful, responsive to community needs, and aligned with institutional priorities. Institutions should define clear goals and measurable outcomes, and develop standardized tools that include surveys, focus groups, and impact reports to gather feedback from students, faculty, and community partners. Expanding assessment to include both qualitative and quantitative measures and developing long-term tracking mechanisms such as alumni surveys or longitudinal studies provides a more comprehensive view of engagement outcomes. Sharing results through public dashboards or reports builds transparency and accountability.

*Reflective questions for campus-community teams:*

- What key outcomes should we measure to determine the effectiveness of our engagement initiatives?
- How can we collect meaningful feedback from students, faculty, and community partners?
- What tools and methods can we use to assess both short-term impact and long-term success?

- How can we use evaluation data to improve engagement efforts and secure institutional support?
6. **Ethical Action and Risk Management** — Partnerships built on trust, transparency, and mutual benefit require clear ethical guidelines from the outset. Institutions should establish responsible engagement practices, ensure informed consent in research and service projects, address power dynamics between the institution and community partners, and create structured approval processes, including risk assessments and ethics reviews, for engagement initiatives. Particular attention should be paid to addressing community harms that emerge through the action planning process. Training on cultural sensitivity, confidentiality, and responsible resource allocation helps faculty, staff, and students navigate ethical challenges. Transparent reporting systems that allow community members to voice concerns or report ethical breaches, and proactive communication that involves community stakeholders in policy development, are essential for maintaining trust and accountability over time.

*Reflective questions for campus–community teams:*

- How do we ensure that our engagement practices uphold ethical standards and build community trust?
- What risk assessment tools can we implement to prevent unintended harm in campus–community partnerships?
- How do we provide ongoing training and support for faculty, staff, and students in ethical community engagement built on trust?
- What mechanisms can community members use to provide feedback or raise concerns about ethical issues or unintended harm?

## Conclusion

The Campus Action Plan for Civic & Community Engagement is, at its heart, a commitment to students, to communities, and to higher education's highest calling. This guide has offered a practical, adaptable framework for institutions ready to move from aspiration to action: from clarifying core values and building an inclusive planning team to developing a shared vision, scoping achievable goals, and establishing the infrastructure to sustain the work over time.

No two institutions will follow the same path. Capacity, context, and community will shape every decision along the way. But the CAP process is designed with that reality in mind. It is customizable enough to meet institutions where they are, and structured enough to move them toward where they want to be. When the planning process is grounded in institutional values, guided by community voices, and supported by leadership at every level, the result is more than a document. It is a living expression of what colleges and universities can be when they fully embrace their role as community anchors and engines of social change.

The work ahead will require persistence, humility, and a willingness to adapt. It will also require the kind of reciprocal partnerships and shared accountability that transform transactional relationships into collective flourishing. This guide exists to support that effort by helping campuses build not just a plan, but the vision, buy-in, and capacity to see it through, together with the communities they serve

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## Campus Action Planning for Civic & Community Engagement

Campus Action Planning (CAP) is a national initiative and comprehensive framework designed to empower colleges and universities to advance civic and community engagement as an institutional priority.

Through convenings, cohorts, learning communities, and technical support, Campus Action Planning increases the capacity of higher education to embrace its public purpose, cultivate collective flourishing, and help build a just democracy.

learn more at [compact.org/cap](https://compact.org/cap).



Campus Compact

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