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# Building a Two-Way Street: Challenges and Opportunities for Community Engagement at Research Universities

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During the last decade, a national movement has emerged to renew the civic mission of U.S. colleges and universities. Major professional organizations, including the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the American Association of Community Colleges, have developed significant initiatives to promote a civic-oriented agenda among campus presidents, faculty, staff, and students with community stakeholders and partners. Foundational works such as *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Boyer, 1990), *Scholarship Assessed* (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997) and *Making the Case for Professional Service* (Lynton, 1995)

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have also paved the way for supporting faculty work focused on serving broad public interests (Knox, 2001).

Due to these influences and growing accountability demands among legislators, the 1990s also introduced a new terminology to describe how institutions might reform their service activities to better meet public needs. While traditional conceptualizations of public service and outreach emphasized a “one-way” approach to delivering knowledge and service to the public, higher education leaders began using the term *engagement* to describe a “two-way” approach to interacting with community partners to address societal needs (Boyer, 1996; Kellogg Commission, 1999). The new philosophy emphasizes a shift away from an expert model of delivering university knowledge to the public and toward a more collaborative model in which community partners play a significant role in creating and sharing knowledge to the mutual benefit of institutions and society. Significant national levers have emerged to facilitate institutional shifts toward engagement. For example, in 2006, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching developed a new classification to recognize a category of community-engaged institutions that define themselves by their commitment to the ideals of public engagement. The Carnegie Foundation defines community engagement as the “collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (Carnegie, 2006). In addition to the Carnegie Foundation’s support for engagement, the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities has begun to include engagement as a key measure of institutional quality (Higher Education Learning Commission, 2006). The efforts of these national organizations has legitimized the public engagement movement across the country. Thirty-eight national organizations have developed a federation for action around these activities (Sandmann & Weerts, 2006).

### PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, we examine how public research universities are adopting a two-way interactive model of engagement on their campuses. In so doing, we explore barriers and enablers that either inhibit or promote engagement at research-intensive institutions. Second, our analysis explores how institutional mission, history, setting, and role within a state system of higher education influence institutional approaches to engagement. Third, we investigate how external stakeholders understand and evaluate institutional efforts to become more engaged with the communities they serve.

The primary research questions driving this study are: (a) What practices and strategies do leaders of public research universities employ to advance a two-way interactive model of engagement on their campuses? (b) What factors promote or impede the progress of institutions seeking to define themselves by the characteristics of engagement? (c) How do institutional mission, history, and role in a state higher education system shape campus efforts to adopt an engagement agenda? and (d) How do community partners understand and evaluate institutional efforts to establish a two-way interactive partnership with their communities?

Our study is significant for three reasons. First, the rhetoric surrounding engagement is momentous, yet few conceptual models exist for understanding institutional efforts to transition from a unidirectional model of outreach toward a two-way model engagement (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004). Our study aims to address this gap in the literature. Second, beyond Holland's (2005) work, little research has been conducted to shed light on the impact of mission and context on an institution's ability and inclination to accommodate an engagement approach to public service and outreach. We provide additional perspective on this issue by studying how state universities find their unique engagement niche among colleague research institutions in a state. Third, few studies have drawn on perspectives of community partners to further understandings of engagement practices at colleges and universities. The perspectives of these partners are critical because they inform researchers and institutional leaders about how external partners evaluate and understand engagement efforts. Our inclusion of community perspectives aims to add depth to the literature on engagement.

## LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our literature review begins with a brief historical overview about the shift from the expert model of outreach to today's two-way focus on engagement. In their article "A History of Change in the Third Mission of Higher Education: The Evolution of One-Way Service to Interactive Engagement," Roper and Hirth (2005) conclude that, over the last 150 years, higher education's "third mission" (public service, outreach, and engagement) has evolved and changed in response to developments in societal needs and expectations of higher education.

In the late 1800s, for example, university outreach was largely one-way, and took the form of short courses, extension programs, and faculty consultation with business and agriculture. During this period, knowledge generated in the academy was viewed as vital to developing the country's fledgling economy and facilitating western expansion. As the nation's economy transitioned from rural to industrial, university outreach shifted its focus

from serving the individual or farm to improving business and government organizations. Public service and outreach during this period were largely focused on knowledge application (Roper & Hirth, 2005). While land-grant institutions will be forever linked to the ideal of practical education for the masses, it should be noted that practical education and outreach were afterthoughts in their creation. Instead, these institutions were merely viewed as safe mechanisms to establish in relatively unsettled regions of the country. In the eyes of the federal government, giving land to higher education was preferable to commercial exploitation (Thelin, 2004).

As basic and applied research gained prominence through the 20th century, products from university technology transfer were freely disseminated to the public. A university innovation through technology transfer was viewed as a “gift” to the public and as part of an institution’s service mission (Roper & Hirth, 2005). However, this view of higher education’s service to society changed as a business model of outreach expanded. During the 1980s, university technology became a profit-generating activity in partnership with the corporate sector; and faculty began to view their work as “distributing discoveries to society” (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997, p. 183). Despite the emerging focus on revenue and profits, these partnerships provided evidence, in an age of increasing accountability, that universities were playing an important role in developing a strong workforce and in growing healthy businesses. Moreover, the development of corporate partnerships during the 1980s marked a transition toward a more two-way relationship with entities outside the academy (Roper & Hirth, 2005).

During the 1990s, the movement toward engagement gained steam as two-way university-business partnerships continued to foster collaborative efforts to build regional economic development (Walshok, 1995). In addition, university resources were increasingly used to address community needs. Organizations such as Campus Compact, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting community service, civic engagement, and service-learning in higher education, expanded its efforts to promote service to community. Also during this period, Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation, introduced the term *engagement* as a substitute for service, extension, and outreach (Roper & Hirth, 2005).

In sum, Roper & Hirth’s (2005) work suggests that higher education’s third mission has evolved alongside societal needs and expectations of higher education. In addition, these changes were fueled, in part, to ensure the health and survival of higher education, both politically and financially. Consequently, understandings of public service, outreach, and engagement have shifted over the past 150 years and have ranged from “serving the community, to extending and reaching out to it, to engaging it in bidirectional relationships and interactions” (Roper & Hirth, 2005, p. 16).

### OUTREACH, ENGAGEMENT, AND THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE UTILIZATION

Roper and Hirth's historical overview of outreach and engagement is instructive to our study because it illustrates how institutions have evolved in their roles as knowledge creators, disseminators, and brokers. In this study, we suggest that institutional approaches to outreach and engagement are ultimately anchored in concepts about the origins of knowledge: how knowledge is produced, where knowledge is "found," and how knowledge flows and is distributed. For this reason, knowledge-flow theory is a compelling theoretical construct to examine in light of our research questions. In essence, knowledge-flow theory examines the transfer of knowledge within and across settings with the assumption that knowledge will result in learning, exchange of information or perspectives, acquisition of new perspectives and attitudes, or increased ability to make informed choices among alternatives (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993).

Knowledge-flow theory as a conceptual framework has been employed in previous studies of engagement as a way to distinguish between one-way and two-way approaches to university service and outreach. For example, one study used knowledge-flow theory to understand struggles in developing reciprocal relationships between universities and K-12 schools (Weerts, 2007a). Another study drew on knowledge-flow concepts to conceptualize how institutional advancement strategies (fund raising) might be transformed in the emerging context of engagement (Weerts, 2007b).

Similar to these past studies, our analysis of knowledge flow in this article draws on three comprehensive literature reviews that outline the history, evolution, and contemporary models of knowledge utilization theory (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993; Hood, 2002; National Center, 1996.) This body of work fits neatly into our current study as it informs ways in which colleges and universities are seeking to transition from a linear, unidirectional model of knowledge transfer to a two-way constructivist paradigm of systemic change.

As Roper and Hirth (2005) suggest, early conceptualizations of service and outreach were founded on the idea that knowledge was produced by the university and disseminated to the public. This unidirectional model of knowledge flow operates under some key assumptions. First, knowledge itself is viewed from an objectivist epistemology emphasizing logical thinking rather than understandings. Knowledge is viewed as value neutral, detached, and existing on its own. Viewed from this perspective, knowledge is a commodity that can be transferred from a knowledge producer to a user. The metaphors of the "blank slate" or "bucket" are used to explain this approach to flow, with the brain waiting passively to receive knowledge (National Center, 1996).

Dissemination strategies in the unidirectional approach can be characterized as “spread” and “choice” (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993). “Spread” refers to a one-way broadcasting of knowledge from researcher to user without regard to how the recipient accepts and uses this knowledge. “Choice” is also a one-way dissemination approach but involves producing alternatives for users to compare strategies for implementation. In both strategies, boundary spanners play a role in delivering knowledge from producer to user.

The unidirectional approach is best understood in the context of the agricultural or cooperative extension movement associated with land-grant colleges. Agricultural or cooperative extension was developed as a one-way process by which university researchers transferred new agricultural technologies to farmers. Extension field agents had the tasks of translating research findings into terms understandable by farmers and convincing them to use the new knowledge (Mundy, 1992). As Roper and Hirth (2005) conclude, the unidirectional model was successful during this period because it emphasized applying knowledge to enhance a key economic sector of the U.S. economy—agriculture.

Over time, however, the unidirectional model of outreach increasingly drew critics, especially in social science fields. Researchers acknowledged that complex social problems like poverty and racism were not easily addressed through a linear paradigm of knowledge dissemination. In school settings, for example, the unidirectional model was increasingly shown as ineffective since it failed to take into account the intended recipients’ motivations and contexts (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). Specifically, researchers learned that top-down programs were ineffective in institutionalizing ideas as part of local schools’ curricula. Their analysis led them to reject the assumption that one can simply pass on information to a set of users and expect learning to result (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993). As such, social science researchers adopted the perspective that knowledge must be “grafted into prior understandings, and individuals must have ample opportunity to experience the new information and develop their understanding of its meaning” (p. 10).

Due to the limitations of the one-way model stated above, during the mid-1970s, theorists began to adopt a more inclusive, two-way approach to knowledge flow. The transition to a two-way approach was accompanied by an epistemological shift that moved from a rational or objectivist worldview to a constructivist worldview (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993). Constructivism suggests that knowledge process is local, complex, and dynamic. In this paradigm, learning takes place in the context and place in which knowledge is applied (Hood, 2002). This constructivist model replaces the “empty vessel” metaphor with a “community of learners” metaphor (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993).



In a constructivist paradigm, dissemination strategies vary considerably from the unidirectional model. Instead of broadcasting knowledge and offering alternatives to users, boundary spanners act as conveners, problem solvers, and change agents who negotiate the wants and needs of parties involved in the process of creating and disseminating knowledge (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993). The one-way dissemination strategies of spread and choice are replaced by two-way interactive strategies of exchange and implementation. Through exchange and implementation, researchers and users develop shared solutions to problems of mutual interest (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993).

Constructivism, like the unidirectional model of outreach, has also been scrutinized by social scientists. In his critique of school reform movements, Elkind (2004) argues that constructivism has failed due to lack of teacher, curricular, and societal readiness to take on this new form of interactive learning. Specifically, he suggests that many teachers are not adequately prepared to take on this work since their training in colleges of education typically reflect more theoretical than practical understandings of teaching. In addition, constructivism requires an alignment between a learner's abilities and the content to be taught, and to date, there is not enough research on this alignment to understand constructivism's role in maximum learning gains. Finally, Elkind (2004) argues that constructivism lacks both a broad societal consensus to support it and energy to implement it. Elkind's ideas are important to consider in the context of higher education engagement and will be addressed later in this paper.

Overall, our review of literature suggests that both one-way and two-way approaches to knowledge flow have their merits and drawbacks. Our purpose is not to advocate one approach over another but to understand how engagement has emerged out of competing understandings about knowledge flow and utilization. Table 1, adapted from Weerts (2007a, 2007b), illustrates key aspects of the knowledge-flow framework and animates core differences between one-way and two-way models in the context of university outreach and engagement.

### **A TWO-WAY KNOWLEDGE FLOW: BARRIERS AND ENABLERS**

The preceding section provided a conceptual map for understanding and comparing attributes of traditional forms of outreach (the one-way model) to emerging practices of engagement (the two-way model). This section presents core elements of our conceptual framework—the barriers and enablers that promote or inhibit a shift toward engagement at research universities. These elements include institutional mission, location, leadership, culture, structure, governance, and faculty roles and rewards. Reviewing these ele-



**TABLE 1**  
**ENGAGEMENT AND MODELS OF KNOWLEDGE FLOW**  
 (adapted from Weerts 2007a, 2007b)

	<i>Linear, Unidirectional Model (One-Way Approach)</i>	<i>Constructivist, Integrative Model (Two-Way Approach)</i>
Epistemology	<i>Positivist:</i> knowledge is value neutral, detached, and “exists on its own.” Logical, rational perspective.	<i>Constructivist:</i> knowledge is developmental, internally constructed, and socially and culturally mediated by partners (researchers and community partners).
Role of higher education institution and community partners	University produces knowledge through traditional research methodology (labs, controlled experiments, etc). Roles and functions of labor, evaluation, dissemination, planning separated from researcher and community. Community partners have little input into the research design.	Learning takes place within context in which knowledge is applied (community). Knowledge process is local, complex, and dynamic and lies outside the boundaries of the institution. Knowledge is embedded in a group of learners (community and institution).
Boundary-spanning roles	Field agents deliver and interpret knowledge to be used by community members.	Field agents interact with community partners at all stages: planning, design, analysis, implementation
Dissemination philosophy and strategies (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993)	Dissemination paradigm: <i>Spread:</i> One-way broadcast of new knowledge from university to community <i>Choice:</i> University produces alternatives for users to choose	Systemic change paradigm: <i>Exchange:</i> Institutions and community partners exchange perspectives, materials, resources <i>Implementation:</i> Interactive process of institutionalizing ideas
Metaphors	Community partners as empty vessel to be filled. Knowledge is a commodity to be transferred to community partners.	Community and university are equal partners in a “community of learners.” Universities become learning organizations.
Problems and concerns	Little attention to users, does not take into account motivations and contexts of intended recipients.	Power struggles between community and institution—consensus through negotiation and strife. Lack of readiness to implement (faculty, curricular, societal)
Beneficiaries	Public, consumers	Public, stakeholders, institutional learning

ments provides the foundation for addressing our research questions and interview protocol (discussed in the Methods section).

Researchers of knowledge utilization and university engagement have identified similar themes associated with barriers or facilitators to a two-way flow of knowledge. In any organization, adopting a constructivist approach requires a significant cultural shift. At colleges and universities, compatibility with faculty culture is a key barrier to engagement. In her study on promotion and tenure, KerryAnn O'Meara (2005) learned that "many faculty hold values and beliefs about service scholarship that doubt and devalue its scholarly purpose, nature, and products" (p. 76). It has long been known that traditional views of scholarship advance restrictive definitions of research and promotion that inhibit community-based work (Dickson, Gallacher, Longden, & Bartlett, 1985).

Similar to Elkind's (2004) analysis of constructivism and teacher preparation, university faculty are typically not prepared to practice engagement in their teaching, research, and service roles. For example, a two-way interaction as proposed by leaders of engagement initiatives is often hampered because university research is designed narrowly, with community partners acting as passive participants, not partners in discovery (Corrigan, 2000). In the world of academe, knowledge is often viewed as residing with individuals rather than being embedded in a group or community. Faculty who are enculturated in this worldview play a gatekeeper role, protecting and disseminating knowledge. "Researcher as his or her own culture" is consistently rewarded by the academy; and as a result, researchers tend to align themselves with particular sources of revenue, disciplines, professions, or scholarly societies (Hood, 2002).

Imbalances in power between faculty and community also inhibit movement toward engagement. Dantnow (1998) suggests that the uneven distribution and application of power can result in reforms and implementation strategies that may not be shared. Specifically, she argues that disagreement may occur over the meaning of events if reform does not flow from a shared culture. For these reasons, it is important to understand the context in which new knowledge is presented and imposed. Consensus between partners must be achieved through negotiation and strife (Dantnow, 1998).

Underlying these cultural issues are many structural barriers that impede engagement. For example, engagement requires cooperation among a variety of disciplinary fields to address societal problems. Breaking down academic barriers requires significant attention to organizational structures, management, and budgeting (Amey, Brown, & Sandmann, 2002). In addition, rigid structures of academic departments can thwart outreach and engagement because they often place intense fiscal and structural constraints on faculty who seek to undertake these activities (Ewell, 1998). These organizational

issues are significant because a strong core of committed faculty and staff is essential to institutionalizing values of service (Zlotkowski, 1998).

So far we have outlined the many barriers that campuses face when trying to adopt a two-way model of engagement on their campuses. However, Hutchinson and Huberman (1993) also outline a number of factors that promote a two-way flow of knowledge between organizations. First, strong interpersonal relationships between university and external partners are essential to creating effective two-way flows of knowledge. Successful partnerships feature rich interpersonal exchanges, support, and sustained face-to-face contact over long periods of time (Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993). There is a wealth of university-community engagement literature suggesting that leadership, trust, and sustained relationships among institutions and external stakeholders are essential to building effective two-way relationships with community partners (e.g., Maurrasse, 2001; Sandmann & Simon, 1999; Votruba, 1996; Walshok, 1999; Ward, 1996; Zlotkowski, 1998).

Trust and power sharing can be developed through building flexible governance structures and porous structures that enable meaningful university-community exchanges to take place. In effective university-community partnerships, the partners continually negotiate and restructure community participation in shared governance, shared staff positions, and committee work (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000). Evaluation of these partnerships is critical in establishing a sense of ongoing commitment to engagement among participants (Walshok, 1999).

According to Hutchinson and Huberman (1993), effective knowledge organizations possess accessibility, availability, and adaptability. They adopt flexible structures to give users maximum opportunity to access knowledge resources. Their conclusions support the national dialogue suggesting the need for porous institutional structures and flexible governance models in promoting university-community engagement (Kellogg Commission, 1999; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000).

Leadership is another key variable that may enhance the institution's ability to move toward engagement. Leadership has been identified in many studies as a key factor promoting institutional commitment to engagement (e.g., Maurrasse, 2001; Walshok, 1999; Ward, 1996; Votruba, 1996; Zlotkowski, 1998). For example, it is known that presidential leaders are critical to legitimizing service activities (Ward, 1996) and that the intellectual and political support of charismatic leaders is important to sustaining institutional commitment to service (Walshok, 1999).

Finally, institutional cultures and mission may either promote or stand in the way of implementing engagement. For example, institutions that are most likely to adopt an engagement agenda emphasize teaching and learning more than research, enroll large numbers of local students, and are placed

in economic hubs with significant regional challenges and opportunities (Holland, 2005). Similarly, in his study of innovation in higher education, Hefferlin (1969) suggested that mission and place were important predictors of whether an institution had the capacity to implement change. Flexible campuses are likely to be urban institutions versus traditional research institutions with heavy emphasis on graduate education (Hefferlin, 1969). Similarly, we suggest that successes and failures in adopting engagement may also reflect differences in institutional missions and characteristics.

In conclusion, the ability of an institution to adopt an engagement approach to public service and outreach is influenced by a number of complex factors including institutional mission, culture, organizational structure, leadership, faculty involvement, governance, and power. We conclude that examining these factors is essential to addressing our research questions: understanding engagement practices and strategies, barriers and enablers to engagement, and how community partners evaluate institutional efforts to adopt engagement. The following section outlines our methodology for addressing these questions.

## METHODOLOGY

We selected a multi-case study design, as articulated by Yin (2001), to address our research questions. Case study methodology is appropriate in this study because it allows us to compare patterns of engagement as they emerge across research-oriented institutions. Specifically, qualitative methods help us identify and understand themes related to how engagement is unfolding at research universities.

We selected three land-grant and three urban public research institutions for case study analysis. We selected these groups for two reasons. First, our study recognizes that institutions vary in their capacity and inclination for engagement. As Holland's (2005) work suggests, institutions demonstrate commitment to engagement by "adopting the notions of civic engagement and engaged scholarship according to the relevance of those concepts to their particular institutional mission and capacity" (p. 242). By focusing on land-grant and urban research universities, we were able to do an "apples to apples" comparison of the public engagement agenda as it unfolded at research-oriented institutions. At the same time, examining two types of research institutions (urban and land-grant) allowed us to examine the impact of "place" and other factors that differentiate various forms of engagement. Second, to generalize our findings across research-oriented institutions, we required representative institutions to examine. We decided that six cases was a number that was manageable and that also achieved our goal of providing a robust set of data from which to formulate conclusions across institutions.

We used two criteria to select our six case study sites. First, since our study focused on institutions that are positioning themselves to reflect a two-way interactive model of engagement, we selected institutions that had an established reputation for supporting both traditional outreach and emerging forms of engagement. Selecting institutions that are explicitly working toward engagement or that explicitly espouse engagement ensured richness of perspectives in response to our research questions. To identify these sites, we held informal discussions with national engagement leaders to get their perspectives on research institutions that fit into this category. Subsequently, we analyzed websites, presidential speeches, and engagement activities on these campuses to verify the appropriateness of these sites for our study.

A second criterion for site selection was the need for institutions that represented differing missions, histories, stakeholder groups, and contexts where engagement occurs. This criterion was guided by our second research question inquiring about how campus engagement activities were shaped by the impact of mission, history, context, and institutional roles in a state system of higher education. Because we were interested in how institutions differentiate themselves (in the context of engagement) from their counterpart campuses, we purposefully paired and examined land-grant and research universities located in the same state (three land-grant institutions and three urban institutions in three states).

The six institutions examined in our study are located in a southern state, a Great Lakes state, and a Midwestern state. The land-grant institutions in this study were established in the 18th and 19th centuries. The urban universities were established in the 20th century, one as recently as the 1980s. Total student enrollments across all institutions range from 25,000 students to more than 40,000. The number of fulltime faculty members at these institutions varies from 750 to 3,000. Additionally, the research expenditures reported in 2005 by these institutions span from \$45 million to nearly \$700 million. Urban research institutions in this study fit the Carnegie classifications for research-intensive or -extensive universities located in the heart of cities with surrounding metropolitan areas exceeding 1 million people.

Two of the land-grant institutions in our sample are located in rural areas with surrounding populations of less than 150,000. The third institution is in a medium-size city with a regional population of less than 250,000.

Finally, we must acknowledge important limitations of selecting a sample of “engaged” institutions in our study. In loosely coupled organizations like research universities (Birnbaum, 1988; Weick, 1976) groups of campus actors may forge two-way relationships with communities independent of campus executives’ knowledge and support. As a result, aspects of the institution may be engaged even though the institution has not taken formal steps toward

engagement. Similarly, institutions themselves may take strategic and symbolic steps toward engagement while a collection of campus units remain disengaged. Therefore, while our research interest is in institutions that are strategically or symbolically moving toward engagement, we recognize the limitations of making broad statements about engagement in loosely coupled organizations.

### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Interviews and document review were the primary methods we used in three distinct phases of data collection. In Phase 1, we interviewed the campus provost and chief officers overseeing engagement programs (e.g., vice presidents) to get a sense of how outreach and engagement were conceptualized and practiced on their campuses. These interviewees shed light on efforts that typified their institution's work with community partners. Using the snowball sampling technique (Merriam, 1998), we asked these leaders to provide names of campus engagement leaders to interview in Phase 2.

In Phase 2, we interviewed leaders of campus engagement initiatives (center directors, program directors, faculty, and staff leaders) for their perspectives on how knowledge is exchanged with their targeted constituencies. Again, using snowball sampling, we asked these campus leaders to provide names and contact information for three to six community partners to interview in Phase 3. In that phase, we interviewed community partners involved with engagement initiatives to gain their perspective on issues of engagement. In this study, "community partners" refers to a local group of stakeholders who have a vested interest in improving some economic or social aspect in their regions (e.g., improving schools, addressing poverty). These individuals are called partners since they work in collaboration with higher education institutions to bring about changes in their communities. Specifically, the community partners interviewed for this study had some leadership, activist, or representative role in an organized group. They were typically heads of nonprofit organizations, governmental agencies, and industry or neighborhood associations. They were both male and female, usually mid-career, and in some cases were alumni of the university with which they partnered.

Finally, we collected relevant documents such as mission statements, institutional reports, and newsletters, and reviewed websites to inform our study of engagement at each site. This triangulation of data assisted our overall interpretation of findings.

The coding measures we used are guided by Bogdan and Bicklen (1992). First, we searched through our initial data for regularities, patterns, and recurrent general topics. Second, we recorded words and phrases to repre-

sent these topics and patterns. Third, we recorded these phrases or codes as they emerged during data collection. Fourth, we created indicators to match related data in our field notes. We used the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) to analyze themes in and across cases and case types.

Finally, to ensure the confidentiality of respondents, we assigned pseudonyms to the six campuses. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the number of interviews by institution and stakeholder group. The interview protocol for all three phases of our data collection was informed by our research questions and conceptual framework. (See Appendix.)

## THEMES

In this section, we discuss themes that emerged from our study and their relations to our conceptual framework. Overall, our data suggest that research universities adopt an engagement agenda through deliberate attention to language, leadership behaviors, organizational structures, and the development of boundary spanners who act as knowledge and power brokers between university and external partners. The institution's history and mission, and the context where engagement takes place influence challenges and opportunities for adopting engagement.

### *Epistemology, Mission, and Context*

Our knowledge-flow framework suggests that institutional transitions to engagement can be examined through the lens of competing epistemologies. Our case studies provide evidence that campuses are wrestling with ongoing epistemological battles that impede or promote progress toward a two-way flow of knowledge with community partners. These battles are evident through differences in the language used by institutional leaders and are embedded in campus documents that describe campus relationships with the public.

Our data suggest that land-grant universities struggle more than their urban counterparts to institutionalize engagement language and practices across their campuses. Like most land-grant universities, the land-grant institutions examined in this study—Southern State University (SSU), Midwest State University (MSU) and Great Lakes State University (GLSU)—share similar histories as major research universities that are defined by their agrarian heritage and affiliation with cooperative extension. Public service was a core principle in the establishment of these institutions.

Through our analysis, we learned that the mission statements of the three institutions articulated their commitment to public service and outreach mostly through “delivery”-type language. That is, these statements often espoused an extension approach in which the institutions viewed themselves as transferring technology and knowledge to the people of their states, or as



**TABLE 2**  
**INTERVIEWEES BY CAMPUS AND STAKEHOLDER GROUP**  
 N = 80

	<i>Phase 1: Campus executives (provost, senior outreach executives)</i>	<i>Phase 2: Faculty and staff leaders of engagement initiatives</i>	<i>Phase 3: Community partners affiliated with engagement initiatives</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Land-Grant Institutions</b>				
Southern State University (SSU)	3	4	8	15
Great Lakes State University (GLSU)	3	6	9	18
Midwest State University (MSU)	2	5	7	14
<b>Urban Research Institutions</b>				
Southern Urban University (SUU)	3	2	4	9
Lake City University (LCU)	2	3	6	11
Midwest Metro University (MMU)	2	4	7	13

one land-grant campus interviewee put it, to “bring resources in the form of professional knowledge to improve quality of life.”

At the same time, however, two of the land-grant institutions in our study had begun to deliberately include language of engagement. Interviewees at these institutions explained that they had been strongly influenced by the emphasis of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities on engagement and its relevance to the land-grant mission. The language of engagement, however, is typically confined to campus offices specifically designed to promote engagement and is championed by leaders who are advocates of two-way interaction with communities.

Overall, the concept of engagement is still emerging and is not uniformly understood among members of land-grant campus communities in our sample. For example, one land-grant provost articulated his view of outreach

and engagement on his campus: “The original articulation of the land-grant mission is to bring the knowledge of the university to the state. Now we extend this idea nationally and internationally, literally reaching out to anyone with our products of scholarly and creative work.” This quotation reveals a unidirectional understanding of outreach and engagement, illustrating that campus actors hold multiple views about outreach and engagement on their campuses. Interviewees at land-grant campuses explained that, throughout their institutions, many faculty and administrators still see public service as service to the profession and not to the community or region.

Conversely, we found that the urban research institutions in our sample more easily adopted the language and understanding of a two-way approach to engagement. As latecomers to the field of higher education, Southern Urban University (SUU), Lake City University (LCU), and Midwest Metro University (MMU) had to differentiate themselves from their older colleague flagship universities. Employing the language of engagement was one way to make this distinction. For example, campus executives in our study were very intentional and precise in their use of language related to engagement. As one leader of engagement at MMU said, “Extension and outreach [are] old thinking. . . . [I]t is land-grant language. They represent an imperial, uneven relationship with community. We use the language of partnership that represents commitment and contract.”

Urban institutions further distinguished themselves from their land-grant counterparts by embedding themselves in their cities. While these institutions previously suffered from mission drift, leaders on these campuses today have capitalized on their metropolitan location to become a multi-directional or “two-way” learning laboratory and have positioned their universities as their city’s intellectual resource. In each case we examined, interviewees did not see engagement as a distinct function, but rather as an expression and expectation of research, teaching, and service.

Two of the three urban institutions that we examined have branded their engagement efforts as a shortcut to communicate a set of values and expectations internally and externally. This branding strategy has legitimized a constructivist philosophy and two-way flow of knowledge on campus and in the community. For example, SUU is explicit about its role to provide “lessons in the real world” through its real-world education, collaborative problem-solving research, and strong focus on community service. SUU’s curriculum is highly focused on the community, and SUU’s policy school is viewed as *the* policy center for the state legislature. Local foundations and city and state government have invested heavily in these partnerships.

Overall, our data suggest that institutional history and context constitute important influences on institutional transitions from a one-way emphasis on outreach to a two-way engagement approach. On the one hand, land-

grant universities are more entrenched in traditional understandings of outreach and consequently have a more difficult time in institutionalizing a constructivist philosophy throughout the campus. This positioning is due in part, to their history and traditional missions as transmitters of knowledge. On the other hand, urban institutions have used engagement to differentiate themselves from the traditional outreach roles typically articulated by their land-grant counterparts. The language and values of engagement are more easily institutionalized due, in part, to the institutions' youth and embeddedness in their cities.

### LEADERSHIP

At both urban and land-grant campuses, leadership emerged as a critical lever to facilitate institutional movement toward engagement. Leadership was important to promoting engagement in two domains: (a) communicating the value of engagement internally and externally, and (b) aligning administrative resources and structures to promote engagement.

Among the land-grant campuses, the chancellor of Midwest State University was the most active chief executive in the area of engagement and promoted it frequently in speeches, published articles, and vision points on her webpage. One MSU interviewee articulated how the chancellor deliberately sought to move the institution toward a two-way orientation with communities declaring, "The chancellor is committed to the concept of engagement—the concept of shared decision-making versus the expert model."

At the three urban institutions, executive leadership was equally prominent and played a highly significant role in positioning these institutions as engaged with their respective cities and beyond. For example, at Lake City University, the chancellor personified engagement efforts by leading community forums and lobbying for resources to support engagement. Though not having a specific branded effort, the longevity of Southern Urban University's leadership team—president and provost—has created stability and sustained focus on engagement on that campus.

The visibility of campus executives involved in engagement sends an important signal to external partners about the institution's commitment to this work. One community partner with MSU explained, "Support is evidenced all the way up the ladder" with the chancellor "bringing people in to show off the clinic and center, being on the center's capital campaign cabinet, and hosting events at her home." Similarly, a principal at a high school near MSU talked about the impact of the chancellor's leadership as a signal of commitment to engagement, "The chancellor started a movement to pull MSU back to its land-grant roots and this has filtered down to the troops. It has made them [faculty and staff] more willing to talk to us."

In addition to executive-level leadership, leadership was also important at intermediate levels of the institution, especially among deans. Again, the impact of intermediate leadership on engagement did not go unnoticed by members of the community. One community partner associated with Southern State University commented, “They [faculty] always said that they did public service, but it was really that they got a grant and were looking for guinea pigs to test. It took the dean’s . . . leadership to change the culture—the feeling that they were doing service work despite their real duties of research.”

### ***Organizational Structure***

Campus leaders also played important roles in aligning administrative resources and structures to promote a two-way relationship with communities. At land-grant universities, special units or centers affiliated with various schools, colleges, and institutes across the university carried out the outreach and engagement activities. These programs were typically enclaved and isolated from the traditional research and teaching functions of the campuses. What differed between institutions was whether a central office existed to act as a resource or clearinghouse for engagement activities.

For example, at Southern State University and Midwest State University, offices of outreach and engagement led by vice presidents/chancellors provided avenues to formally advance engagement goals. These offices functioned as engagement clearinghouses and support structures. Unlike SSU and MSU, Great Lakes State University did not have a centralized office to support outreach and engagement. Instead, this function was the responsibility of a separate extension campus established specifically to promote outreach and engagement across the state system of higher education.

Significantly, community partner interviewees suggested that centralized structures led by staff at the vice chancellor level are important in facilitating community access to the institution. For example, one community partner interviewee commented that access to MSU became easier when a formal office of engagement was created. “We tried for two years for people to work with us and nobody would even talk to us. Our opportunities expanded when the Vice Chancellor [for Public Engagement] got involved.”

At the other end of the spectrum, community partners expressed frustration with the decentralized nature of outreach and engagement at Great Lakes State University. One interviewee remarked, “It is hard to get to know a place as complex as GLSU. We often don’t know what is available on campus to even ask for help. Our council is still trying to figure out how we can access the university as a resource, and this is difficult given the complexity of the institution.” Another community member shared similar frustrations: “I felt like I was sent through this maze to the point that I almost lost interest [in participating in the program]. It [the university] is overwhelming in size, and we didn’t know who to talk to first.”

Organizational structure at urban research institutions took a form different from their land-grant counterparts. While urban institutions also often housed formal offices of engagement, the boundaries between engagement leadership and practice were less clear. For example, urban institutions were less likely than land-grant institutions to operate stand-alone units with primary responsibilities for engagement-type activities. Rather, because engagement is so integrated into the curriculum and research at urban universities, deans and senior faculty members play important leadership roles. Related to their mission and engagement brands, deans or directors of professional schools or public policy and research centers are often at the forefront of major engagement initiatives. As such, these partnerships had more porous boundaries, and participants moved in and out according to their self-interest.

Overall, engagement at urban institutions is more diffused throughout layers of the organization. Instead of operating as isolated units separate from teaching and research, these functions were more likely to be integrated. For example, Lake City University has organized its university-wide engagement initiatives as cross-unit, cross-disciplinary efforts. Engagement at LCU is structured around seven themes characterized as innovative initiatives developed in partnership with the community to address challenges in education, health, the environment, and economic development. These initiatives are addressed by interdisciplinary teams. Providing oversight are a subset of the dean's council and a lead dean with sign-off responsibility. Coordinating these initiatives is provided by an administrator in the office of the chancellor.

Finally, while organizational structures is important in helping community partners gain access to the institution, our interview data suggest that access is less important to them than developing high-quality relationships with campus faculty and staff. As we discuss below, community partners evaluated the effectiveness of institutional engagement through their relationship with boundary spanners.

### ***Faculty Roles and Rewards***

At each of the six institutions we examined, engagement work was typically led by academic staff, not traditional tenure-track faculty. Instead, faculty were more likely to assume the role of content expert or researcher alongside the academic staff who were facilitating the engagement projects. This division of labor illustrates the strength of traditional faculty cultures that persist at research institutions, regardless of mission, location, or brand identity.

As we discussed in our literature review and conceptual framework, promotion and tenure policies were the strongest barrier to faculty engagement with the community, especially at the land-grant universities. One

interviewee at MSU explained that an assistant professor had to abandon his work in community engagement for fear of losing his job. "If you are an untenured faculty member, it is dangerous to be involved with this work," said one interviewee. Another MSU professor lamented, "Engagement is seen as rhetorically correct; but inside the tenure committee, nobody cares about it. It's business as usual. I'm wrestling with the contradiction between the rhetoric and reality of outreach on this campus."

In most cases, faculty got involved with engagement projects if doing so yielded monetary rewards and special recognition or if it enhanced their teaching or research. For example, SSU has service awards that provide recognition and support for faculty who are engaged in outreach. Similarly, the GLSU chancellor hosts an event at his home to recognize those involved with service activities. However, faculty were most likely to participate in engagement to the extent that it could enhance their research or teaching. One urban and regional planning professor at a land-grant university embodies this attitude: "The partnership with the community really benefits my teaching. Graduate students get a great experience in designing community workshops to study these issues. The community is a perfect laboratory for my students to learn." However, this quote illuminates the challenge of understanding whether student learning experiences are designed within the principles of engagement in mind (two-way interactions with the community) or merely as experiment stations to test preconceived theories learned in the classroom.

In all cases, it was clear that traditional faculty would not be hired for the quality of their service. Still there is increasing support for engagement scholarship in some pockets of land-grant universities. The challenge for all the institutions is that faculty have difficulty knowing how to evaluate this work and, thus, difficulty in giving it real consideration in promotion and tenure decisions. Still, tenure guidelines are being updated to "unpack and differentiate" outreach scholarship, as one campus executive put it, so that engagement work gains legitimacy among faculty throughout the institution. A challenge in assessing outreach and engagement is that it has many meanings at land-grant institutions and can often be defined as almost anything outside teaching and research.

While we have shown evidence that urban institutions are more inclined to embrace engagement than land-grant universities, urban institutions struggled with similar challenges in the formal promotion and tenure processes. Urban institution interviewees indicated that faculty are rewarded for their benefit to the public good, scholarship, community engagement, and student learning. However, there is also the perception that practice lags behind tradition. Promotion and tenure guidelines vary extensively by school and discipline; in general, professional schools, more than others, appreciate varied ways of documenting engaged scholarship. Even when

promotion and tenure guidelines have been formally examined and revised, questions persist on whether or how to reward the work.

An important difference between land-grant and urban institutions, however, is that leaders of urban universities were more deliberate about recruiting faculty with an affinity for an external dimension of their work. As one director at SUU said, "We hire faculty who want to see their work and names in the local paper. We look for faculty who want to be highly involved in the businesses of this city." By this phrase, the director is not referring to the city's corporate sector but, more broadly, to overall engagement in city affairs. Similarly, leaders at Lake City University indicated that new faculty sought out their institution because its brand communicated the importance of engagement on campus.

### ***Boundary-Spanning Roles: Academic and Professional Staff***

As discussed in the previous section, at each of the six institutions in our study, engagement work was typically done by boundary spanners in academic staff positions, not by traditional tenure-track faculty. These boundary spanners often came from community organizing, practitioner, or nonprofit advocacy roles. Our case studies indicate that the background, roles, and attitudes of boundary spanners are central to understanding institutional progress in developing a two-way relationship with community partners. Our data suggest four key attributes that differentiate successful from unsuccessful boundary spanners as they seek to move institutions toward engagement with community partners: (a) listening skills, (b) a service ethic, (c) the competent management of power, and (d) neutrality.

First, community partners indicated that the boundary spanners' ability to listen was key in creating a two-way flow of knowledge between institutions and communities. One community partner described her interaction with one effective spanner who was intent on listening to the needs of the community, "Mary just hung around and was committed to finding out how she fit in with our efforts. She didn't come in knowing it; instead, she listened carefully, took the time to get to know us and our needs, and really came to understand our trials and tribulations." On the other hand, one community partner vented his frustration at what he saw as his institutional partner's lack of listening: "The university must do what they say they are doing. If this is an initiative of equals, act like equals. Turn off your cell phone. Don't take the call in front of all of us. If you are that important, have someone else join us." In short, listening was a signal of respect to partners, symbolizing legitimate interest in creating a mutually beneficial relationship.

Second, effective spanners shared a service ethic and behaved with humility. One fishing boat captain affiliated with a GLSU lakes improvement program explained, "Ed [staff] is one of the nicest people I've ever worked with. I have the highest respect for him." Similarly, a high school teacher



working with a MSU College of Education outreach program said, “They [staff] are good people who got into education for the right reasons. The partnership with the university works because they [staff] care about being successful for the kids versus protecting their own curriculum.” Compared to their colleagues on the academic staff, traditional faculty fared less well in assessments by community partners, especially at the land-grant universities.

Third, successful spanners effectively managed power relationships and struggles between institutional and community partners. In many cases, these struggles were best understood by the composition of governance structures and by who controlled the agenda during meetings. In cases where boundary spanners were sensitive to issues of power, leaders were careful to ensure that partnerships with community were not heavily weighted with university faculty and staff. Instead, they sought to place university personnel in the background of activity. In less mature partnerships, governance and power relationships were uneven and continually negotiated. For example, meeting times were set up during hours that were most convenient for the university partners, and faculty members used academic language that was often intimidating or confusing to community partners.

An interesting theme that emerged from our analysis of power is the mixed expectations that community partners have regarding the role of university partners. In many cases, community partners expected to have a level playing field in regard to governance and management of the partnerships. At the same time, they expected the university to bring their intellectual and fiscal resources to the table. In other words, community partners wanted partnerships to be “equitable but not equal” as one partner put it. This finding is interesting in the context of our conceptual framework. In some of our cases, community partners reinforced a dissemination paradigm and transfer of university knowledge through broadcast and choice. Contrary to the prevailing engagement paradigm, community partners were very comfortable with assigning to the university the role of “producing knowledge and providing neutral alternatives for users to choose.” The issue, instead, was on how the university produced and delivered this knowledge. That is, boundary spanners had to be perceived as trustworthy and respectful of community partners to earn the right of providing these alternatives.

Fourth, the “equitable but not equal” concept is anchored in an assumption that institutional partners are neutral. Both community and institutional leaders discussed the political nature of issues addressed by partnerships and the difficulty of maintaining objectivity. Examples surfaced in our case studies in which institutions were perceived as taking sides on an issue. In these cases, community partners concluded that institutions should not be seen as policymakers but rather as working with community-based groups

that were able to make policy changes. Their suggestions mirrored a systemic change paradigm suggesting that institutions should move from advocating policy alternatives to creating an interactive process in which stakeholders collectively solve problems.

### ***Presence of Engagement Motivators***

Finally, we learned that a two-way flow of knowledge is facilitated by the presence of motivators at the institutional level. In our case studies, institutions were motivated to become engaged with communities when such engagement contributed to their brand and enhanced the physical surroundings of the campus. Again, branding was especially evident at the urban research institutions. One urban research university dean explained, "We want the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in this state to think of us as their personal think tank on key policy issues of the day."

In other cases, engagement was profitable to the institution when it improved community conditions surrounding the campus. This factor was especially present at land-grant institutions. For example, school partnerships at SSU emerged in response to an epidemic of failing schools in the area. At GLSU, crime and poverty near the campus caught the attention of administrators who sought to improve the campus's "front door." In general, our cases suggest that engagement is fueled by opportunities to shape institutional identity or by external factors that motivate campuses to play a larger role in their communities or regions.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

For this study, we posed a series of research questions to understand how public research institutions advance an engagement agenda on their campuses. Specifically, we inquired about practices and strategies that leaders of public research universities employ to forward engagement, factors that either promote or impede progress toward engagement, and how institutional mission, history, and role in a state higher education system shape engagement on a campus. Finally, we investigated how community partners understand and evaluate institutional efforts to establish a two-way interactive partnership with their communities.

Reviewing these issues through the key elements of our conceptual framework (institutional mission, location, leadership, culture, structure, governance, and faculty roles and rewards), we suggest that this study contributes to the literature in two important ways. First, our study shows that approaches to engagement at research-oriented campus are not a "one size fits all" phenomenon. While there are similarities in pursuing engagement among research institutions, our study illustrates that there are also many differences that merit discussion. Our study breaks ground in understanding

how context and other factors influence institutional adoption of engagement. Second, our study gives voice to community leaders who provide important perspectives on engagement but are seldom heard in the literature. Their inclusion in our study strengthens the literature on how to build two-way partnerships with external partners.

These two contributions are best understood at two levels: institutional and interpersonal. At the institutional level, urban research universities clearly have an easier time adopting a two-way interactive model of engagement than their land-grant counterparts. As Roper and Hirth (2005) suggest, the outreach mission of public universities in the late 1800s largely used a paradigm of applying knowledge developed in the academy. Land-grant institutions had a unidirectional orientation; thus, the one-way extension model is still deeply engrained in their institutional psyches. Momentum for engagement at land-grant universities is the result of strong institutional leaders who have championed these ideas on their campus. Such leaders are essential in keeping engagement on the table before many competing campus interests.

Conversely, urban research institutions, generally younger than their land-grant counterparts, have used their status and location as a lever for engagement. In these cases, engagement has become a competitive strategy to differentiate themselves from their land-grant counterparts. Hiring practices, structures, and rewards have emerged to enhance their brand identity. As a result, partnership language (constructivist language) is very intentional, deliberately employed to communicate the institution's brand internally and externally. At these institutions, a culture of engagement has emerged more easily. On these campuses, presidents, vice presidents, and deans received more buy-in from faculty and staff who saw an alignment between the institutional strategy and their own work. These leaders played critical roles in formally and informally communicating the philosophy of engagement to university and community partners.

Corresponding to campus rhetoric, organizational structures reflected institutional attempts to codify their work in engagement. Again, this effort was more intentional at urban institutions that were more deliberate about creating flexible structures open to campus and community partners. On the other hand, structures at land-grant institutions were more likely to be isolated and to operate as enclaved units in a large academic enterprise.

At both land-grant and urban institutions, community partners cited the size and complexity of institutions as barriers to engagement. However, ease of access to these institutions varied by important structural factors. Community partners had more positive perceptions of institutional engagement efforts on campuses that operate centralized offices of engagement compared to decentralized systems lacking a clearinghouse function for engagement activities.

At both land-grant and urban research institutions, leadership emerged as critical to moving institutions toward engagement. As managers of campus culture, institutional leaders played an important role in recasting their institutions as places that value reciprocal relationships with community partnerships. These values are understood by monitoring what leaders pay attention to, how they use scarce resources, how they allocate rewards, and how they recruit and promote faculty and other campus personnel. Just as important, community partners informed us that leaders played critical roles in signaling whether engagement is valued. Visibility, communication, and rewards provided by leaders provided evidence to community partners of an institution's commitment to engagement. For all of these reasons, campus leaders were essential in tipping institutions toward engagement and served as key leverage points to move research institutions toward a two-way interactive philosophy.

While organizational elements of "architecture" (e.g., leadership, structure, and rewards) are important in creating engaged research institutions, our study suggests that they are functionally on the periphery of facilitating a two-way flow of knowledge. Although institutions create levers for engagement activity through branding exercises, leadership, and organizational structures, community partners made it clear that engagement is best understood where "the rubber meets the road." In other words, we suggest that boundary spanners are the pivotal point of examination when studying institutional pathways to engagement. The personal traits of boundary spanners, regardless of the institutional setting, were essential to understanding facilitators and inhibitors of engagement.

At both land-grant and urban research universities, successful spanners were good listeners, effectively managed power, and maintained neutrality with community partners. In addition, they possessed a service ethic characterized by respect and a "community first" attitude. The perception of these spanners in the community was critical to understanding whether engagement was "for real" at these institutions. While their institutions were often seen as untrustworthy, effective spanners were viewed as being on the community's side and were seen as brokering mutually beneficial relationships. Ineffective spanners, on the other hand, reflected an orientation in which the institution dominated the agenda based on its own interests. Overall, we learned that spanners are ambassadors of engagement, reflecting institutional epistemologies that lean either toward or away from a two-way conceptualization of knowledge flow.

Our study also suggests that reciprocal knowledge flow occurs through a long-term institutional socialization process that reshapes power relationships with communities. With support from institutional leaders and the presence of appropriate rewards and structures, boundary spanners carry the burden of facilitating engagement. Table 3 illustrates the barriers and facilitators to engagement outlined in our study.

**TABLE 3**  
**ENGAGEMENT BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS AT RESEARCH**  
**UNIVERSITIES**

	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Barriers</i>	<i>Facilitators</i>
Institutional level	History, mission, and place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agrarian heritage, one-way model remains dominant paradigm (land-grant institutions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth and embeddedness in city provides “head start” toward engagement. (urban institutions)</li> </ul>
	Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language unidirectional (more typical of land-grant institutions).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement language intentional, used as branding strategy (more typical of urban institutions)</li> </ul>
	Institutional complexity, boundaries, and rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complexity, size of institution</li> <li>• Inaccessible structures, rigid boundaries of structures (more typical of land-grant institutions).</li> <li>• <i>Engagement de-motivators</i>: activity not recognized by promotion and tenure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Porous boundaries of partnerships facilitate engagement (more typical of urban institutions)</li> <li>• <i>Engagement motivators</i>: aligned with teaching and research roles, recruiting faculty to support engagement</li> </ul>
	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• View community partners as consumers, knowledge as commodity.</li> <li>• Removed from community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support engagement (symbolic and operational)</li> <li>• View community partners as stakeholders, learning partners.</li> </ul>
Interpersonal level	Boundary-spanning roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spanners not socialized in values of reciprocity and mutual benefit (typically faculty).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good listeners</li> <li>• Model a service ethic</li> <li>• Effectively manage power, “equitable, but not equal”</li> <li>• Maintain neutrality (typically outreach staff)</li> </ul>

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has important implications for practice and future research. First, just as institutions across the country have developed teaching and learning academies to improve teaching on campus, we suggest that *engagement academies* might be developed to train and socialize boundary spanners to take on this work. We make this recommendation based on our findings that community partners carefully scrutinize the behaviors of boundary spanners when they evaluate an institution's commitment to engagement. As ambassadors of engagement, spanners must be well prepared to act as knowledge brokers between institutional actors and community partners.

We also endorse the creation of centralized structures to provide a clearinghouse of information and resources to facilitate community partner access to the institution. This recommendation is founded on our findings that centralized structures are more effective than decentralized systems in facilitating engagement opportunities for community partners. Furthermore, because executive leadership is also critical to legitimizing engagement externally, we support past literature citing the significance of leader visibility in symbolizing commitment to engagement.

These implications lead to an important discussion about the limitations of our study and future research on engagement. Our study focused on how the institutions in our study are transitioning from a one-way outreach model to two-way model of interactive engagement. However, it does not address the important issue about whether engagement is more effective than the one-way traditional model in bringing about societal changes. While some social science literature has made this case (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978), more research is needed to make this argument in the context of higher education. One could argue that the United States has benefited both economically and socially from higher education's one-way approach to outreach. Because of this unanswered question, it is imperative that future studies address the issue of effectiveness. Is the two-way model of engagement more effective than the one-way model in bringing about important societal changes? Might these approaches coexist and be complementary? Are there some issues in which the one-way model might be more effective than the two-way model (and vice versa) in addressing key societal issues? A group of national engagement leaders recently concluded that more research is needed to understand the outcomes associated with engagement. Specifically, they called for improved assessment measures to track changes made in communities as the result of engagement (Sandmann & Weerts, 2006; Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Finally, this observation about engagement outcomes inspires a more provocative question. If little research exists about the effectiveness of engagement in higher education, might engagement be more symbolic than

substantive? In other words, it is possible that institutions are using engagement as a public relations tag line to garner public and private support for their programs? This possibility is important in light of the observation in the AACSC's (2002) that many campuses claim to be "doing engagement" but in reality, "there is more smoke than fire" (p. 8). Our position is that engagement as a political strategy is working. This assertion is based, not only on the evidence presented here, but also a recent study showing that institutional commitment to outreach and engagement was associated with increased levels of state appropriations for public research universities during the 1990s (Weerts & Ronca, 2006; see also Sandmann & Weerts, 2008).

We suggest that this issue could be examined through institutional theory. In essence, institutional theory professes that organizational structures have meaning and importance, regardless of whether they affect the behaviors of performers in the technical core, because they effectively symbolize meaning and order (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Applied to engagement, institutional theory suggests that engagement structures may exist simply to communicate a set of values about the importance of community and that the structures themselves may be more important than the outcomes. This theory forces us to confront the practice of institutional branding. That is, to what extent do institutional engagement brands match the reality of engagement practice? What are the consequences of a disconnect between practice and reality? Overall, an analysis of engagement through institutional theory would make a valuable contribution to the literature.

In the end, many questions remain about engagement as a strategy to transform communities and society at large. Nevertheless, engagement has emerged as an important strategic initiative in higher education across the country; and for that reason, more research is needed to understand engagement and its role in transforming institutions and society.



## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### PHASE 1

*Interviewees:* Campus executives overseeing outreach and engagement (provosts, vice chancellors, etc.)

#### *Interview Questions*

Institutional history, mission, context (practices, engagement barriers and facilitators)

- How do you and your institution define and frame outreach and engagement on this campus?
- How does institutional history shape the current role of outreach and engagement on your campus?
- In what ways is this institution connected and responsive to or influenced by its community—community partners or the communities, cities and towns it serves?
- Describe your campus culture as it relates to outreach and engagement activities.
- How and to what extent are the values of outreach and engagement reflected in your institutional mission statement and/or strategic plan?

Leadership (practices, engagement barriers and facilitators)

- Describe two or three examples that characterize leadership practices or strategies to advance outreach and engagement on your campus.
- Where is the formal and informal leadership for outreach and engagement housed in your institution? What has been the impact of formal and informal leadership on engagement?
- Who are leaders in outreach and engagement who are not formally charged but who are highly visible advocates? What has been their impact on advancing engagement on your campus?

Faculty roles and incentives (practices, engagement barriers and facilitators)

- What are typical faculty roles in supporting outreach and engagement activities on your campus?
- What proportion of faculty are involved in outreach and engagement and how would you describe their characteristics (status, disciplinary affiliation, etc.)
- How and to what extent are the values of outreach and engagement reflected in promotion, tenure, and hiring decisions at your institution?

Organization and structure (practices, engagement barriers, and facilitators)

- How is your institution organized to carry out its goals for outreach and engagement?
- In what ways do your institution's structure, governance, and curriculum reflect its outreach and engagement agenda?
- Snowball sampling probe: Please name the three to five most prominent examples of engagement initiatives on your campus. Could you provide me

with background/descriptive materials including contact information of those directing these initiatives?

## PHASE 2

*Interviewees:* Campus leaders of engagement initiatives (leaders of selected engagement initiatives, i.e., directors, faculty, staff, etc.)

### Interview Questions

- History, mission, and background
- Describe the evolution of your unit's partnership with agency X.
- What are the issues or community problems that drive the partnership between your unit and agency X (goals/objectives)?
- What are your academic/intellectual goals for or interests in this partnership?
- How and to what extent are the values of outreach and engagement reflected in your unit's mission statement and strategic plan?

### Governance, structure, power relationships

- How is your unit organized to carry out its goals for this engagement initiative?
- What was the process for creating the partnership with the community?
- What is the structure of the partnership or initiative (roles, decision-making, accountability)?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of your unit and those of the community partners?
- Why do you and your unit want to work with the community? What motives for engagement do you ascribe to the community partner? How did you come to understand the community's expectations and goals?
- What do you perceive to be your impact or influence on the community? What is your sense of inclusion, respect, and mutual trust?

### Faculty involvement

- What is the faculty role in supporting the engagement initiative?
- In what ways is this work conceptualized and represented as scholarship?
- What institutional structure, policies, and/or practices support or hinder outreach and engagement activities?
- How and to what extent are the goals of your engagement initiative reflected in promotion, tenure, and hiring decisions within your unit?

### Leadership

- Describe two or three examples that characterize leadership practices and strategies to achieve the goals of your engagement initiative.
- Where is the leadership for this initiative located in the university and why? What are the pros and cons of this organizational location?
- What are the leadership roles of the community? Who are the primary community leaders charged with facilitating this engagement initiative? What has been their impact on the partnership?

- Snowball sampling question: Could you please provide the names of two or three key community partners that I might contact to discuss the initiative?

### PHASE 3

*Interviewees:* Community partners (external partners representing government, non-profit, other entities collaborating on engagement initiative).

#### Interview Questions

History, background of the partnership

Describe the engagement initiative or partnership from your perspective.

What is the problem/issue the partnership is trying to address?

#### Governance, structure, power relationships

- What was the process for creating the partnership?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the campus and community partners?
- What is the structure of the partnership or initiative (in addition to roles, decision-making, accountability)?
- What do you perceive to be your impact or influence on the university? What is your sense of inclusion, respect, and mutual trust?
- Why do you want to work with the university? What motives for engagement do you ascribe to the university? Do you understand the university's expectations and goals?

#### Leadership

- Who are the community leaders of the initiative? What are their backgrounds?
- Who do you perceive to be the campus leaders of the initiative?
- Describe two or three examples that characterize leadership (campus/community) to achieve the goals of your partnership.

#### Outcome and impact

- What are the indicators of this initiative's success? Who and by what methods will this initiative be assessed (or by which it has already been assessed)?
  - What are the outcomes of this initiative (capacity built, community outcomes, community change, development or exchange of information and knowledge, institutional change, student learning, faculty scholarship)?
  - What criteria do you use to evaluate the effectiveness of working with institution X on your community initiative?
-

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