



Florida SUS Board of Governors

University Collaborative Engagement in the Community: An Assessment

FCRC Consensus Solutions

Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium

Florida State University/University of Central Florida

“Consensus Solutions, collaborative action”

What We Did

1. Conducted an system-wide assessment of the strategic role of community engagement for public universities in the Florida State system.
2. Made site visits to the 11 State University campuses in the Florida SUS.
3. Met and interviewed 9 presidents, 14 provosts and vice presidents, over 50 university center and institute directors, community service and service learning staff.

What We Have Found

1. Collaborative Governance is difficult to use in talking with academic leaders. It requires lots of explanation that involve nuances.
2. University leaders more readily understand the concepts of “community partnerships” and “community engagement.”

What We Have Found

3. It has been helpful to explain that university “collaborative governance” is a form of “community engagement” – a term that has currency among academic leaders. It represents a more intensive level of “community engagement” and involves such activities as serving as a convenor, facilitator, or partner in community problem-solving –

What We Have Found

4. University presidents are sensitive to two down-sides to strong community engagement. One is that the community may have unrealistic expectations about what and how much the university can contribute. The other concern is that some faculty may act as experts in a manner that does not help bring people together around controversial issues.
5. Therefore, who represents the University and what skills sets they have is important.

What We Have Found

6. All universities and the BOG have a stated commitment to community engagement in their strategic plans and in various policy statements.
7. The amount of community engagement is considerable and the range is wide. Activities range from student and faculty volunteering and philanthropy, faculty research, service learning, faculty consultation and technical assistance, partnerships, convening and facilitating events and groups, sharing facilities, and leadership within community organizations. In dollar terms the value annually of these services at each university is in the \$\$ millions.

What We Have Found

8. Courses that provide service learning opportunities, or “engaged learning” as some term it, is a growing phenomenon in higher education that growth is likely to continue.

9. University presidents and provosts express strong interest in and commitment to community engagement. However, the actual funding support for it is thin and vulnerable.

What We Have Found

10. University community engagement is highly distributed and poorly coordinated. Within universities there is limited awareness of who is doing what in regard to community engagement and there is little communication among those who are involved.

What We Have Found

11. It is rare for a university to have documented community engagement activities and undertakings. Recently, and at present, a number of Florida SUS universities have applied or are applying for a Carnegie Foundation designation for their community engagement efforts, and this is forcing them to identify and document such efforts.
12. There is little to no analysis or evaluation of community engagement.

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What We Have Found

13. A significant difficulty in advancing university community engagement is that most community leaders are unaware of what resources are available from universities and how to access them. There is interest among university administrators in developing appropriate outreach programs and portals through which greater communication and engagement can be achieved.

What We Have Found

14. Most universities do not have adequate promotion and tenure policies to encourage and reward faculty community engagement; however, we have found that all universities are aware of these challenges and a majority are seeking to address it.

What We Are Doing Next

- Surveying Communities and Regions on Perceptions and the Reality of University Engagement and Collaboration.
- Developing some recommendations on strategies for consideration by the Board of Governors and the Universities based on the findings.