



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WORK GROUP REPORT

March 2013

INTRODUCTION

Public engagement is in Northern Kentucky University's DNA. It is a defining quality of our academic and co-curricular experiences. Our commitment has been recognized nationally. For the sixth consecutive year, NKU is recognized on the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll ¹ and was among the inaugural universities to receive the Carnegie designation in both public engagement and outreach. NKU's national reputation extends to professional publications, and texts on designing and implementing successful public engagement programs.

Public engagement is woven throughout the student experience as well as the applied expertise of faculty and staff. A sampling of this work includes nursing care for the underprivileged in the inner-city, remedial math strategies for public schools, applied research for protection of the Ohio river, thousands of dollars raised and awarded to nonprofits, historical exhibits at community museums, lectures and public forums that deliver on NKU's all-important role as a public intellectual, and outreach that brings music, visual arts, and theater to the region and its schools.

The Public Engagement Work Group's task has been to determine the form and extent of public engagement at NKU, assess the adequacy of resources, including financial, intellectual, and administrative devoted to public engagement, to evaluate the return on investment from the current array of activities, and to consider the feasibility of the current scope of public engagement, in light of ongoing fiscal retrenchment.

METHODOLOGY

PROCESS: The Public Engagement Work Group began work on Jan. 25th. We approached our task collaboratively, meeting once to twice a week through mid-March. Dr. Jan Hillard guided the dialogue, as well as facilitated a structured, discovery and planning process. The process included the following steps:

1. Reviewing national definitions of public engagement for commonalities and comparisons to NKU.
2. Enumerating the current scope and stakeholders associated with public engagement activities.
3. Completing a thorough SPOT analysis
4. Delineating action recommendations going forward, derived from the SPOT analysis
5. Considering centralized, decentralized, and hybrid models for defining the scope of public engagement

EXPERTS: The depth and breadth of experience and expertise on our work group is considerable, so our first expert resource was the work group membership. Our work group included administrators, faculty members, directors of centers and institutes and a student. Both academic and co-curricular interests were represented.

APPROACH: We discussed whether to divide into sub-groups to each focus on specific areas, but the consensus of the work group was that we were most productive when working as a committee of the whole, with the collective wisdom and experience of all members present.

Our work group also helped with the planning for an open forum on campus facilitated by President Mearns, including suggesting closed and open-ended questions. Our members attended and contributed to that forum – learning from it and incorporating its themes into this report.

DATA & REFERENCES: We examined some data sets, including NKU's NSSE data, which benchmarks our students' public engagement activities. And we consulted a wide range of references, both internal and external, to inform us on public engagement and its place at the university. A more complete description of these appears in Appendix 2.

FINDINGS

NKU's commitment to public engagement is demonstrated at the institutional level, beginning with the mission statement. The Public Engagement Work Group has taken a look at this commitment with the goal of finding its strengths, weaknesses, problems and opportunities. What we have found is that NKU's commitment to public engagement is dynamic and deep. No one department "owns" it. No single program defines it. No description of it today will adequately capture it tomorrow, because new dimensions are always being constructed by NKU's resourceful and creative students, faculty and staff.

The Public Engagement Work Group identified these overall strengths:

- Our university is a national model in public engagement, with a track record of effective performance. Our programs have served as models for other universities, and our faculty and administrators are leaders in the public engagement movement nationally.
- We offer a broad range of opportunities for students, including an extensive list of service learning classes, access to undergraduate and graduate research and significant co-curricular activities with service components.

- Nationally, academic-based public engagement supports higher student retention rates.
- We have entrepreneurial spirit that fosters creative application of public engagement by faculty, students and staff.
- Public engagement is built into our academic Quality Enhancement Plan for accreditation, which calls for engaged learning.
- It is supported in the NKU budget, internally and externally (endowments, grants and gifts).
- We are in a region receptive to public engagement where multiple, long-standing collaborations are the norm, including NKU's deep relationship with Vision 2015.
- Public engagement is embedded at NKU as part our retention, promotion and tenure (RPT) process.

Just as there are strengths, there are also problems, including:

- To achieve even greater value given scarce resources, we should vet our public engagement activities in terms of their positive impact on students, the extent to which they facilitate faculty, applied research, and the defined good they provide the region.
- Communication of what's happening on campus could and should be improved.
- It is not clear how engagement and service count in performance review, promotion and hiring, especially for NKU staff.
- Workload pressure can make public engagement challenging for faculty and staff.
- Some concern exists about whether our focus is too broad – and whether we are able to say “no” sometimes in the interest of consolidating effort around priority engagements.

This last point bears some further comment. The question is not whether NKU will continue its commitment to public engagement but how and with what focus? Our work group, informed by our own experience and by what we heard at open forums during this process, believes a “Hybrid” model of scope of activities works best. This model offers the opportunity to designate 1-3 areas of focus so as to better align public engagement efforts and go deeper into those areas, and at the same time does not seek to limit the numerous activities that have become embedded in academic and co-curricular and which offer ongoing return on investment (i.e. service learning courses).

Historically, the “Hybrid” model at NKU has included designating 1-2 areas of engagement focus. Most recently, P-12 and economic development were selected. The special focus within P-12 was on college readiness. This focus aligned with several comprehensive state and regional programs, as well as substantial, cross-disciplinary strength at NKU. The focus on economic development targeted technology start up business development. This focus again matched with regional initiatives and brought together expertise from several Colleges and Centers.

Our work group did not dwell on threats, although the two most clearly evident are:

- Funding, internal and external.
- Communicating the value of public engagement to all audiences, internal and external.

For obvious reasons, these threats – and the opportunities they suggest – are related. If the value of public engagement to the community and to student success is not well-communicated to audiences with the power of the purse, then funding will not follow. NKU has a history of funding success externally (for example, some Council on Postsecondary Education earmarked funding for public engagement) and internally (for example, a significant pool of funding for University-Community Partnership Grants for faculty research

and service learning). Both of these are diminished yet both were vital and need to be replenished or replaced if NKU is to have a robust, effective public engagement portfolio.

We also found that some consideration should be given to smaller-scale financial needs for public engagement. A Development Office focused on bigger gifts, for example, is not always user friendly for faculty and staff who may need a few hundred dollars or even a few thousand. This isn't to diminish the need for the pursuit of large gifts for buildings and the like; it is to emphasize that the lifeblood of a university includes smaller programming needs, too. Perhaps donors could contribute to a pool of funds available for smaller-scale projects – “the public engagement fund.” Those funds would be administered in some way to parcel them out to smaller-scale public engagement opportunities, where so much effective, grassroots work occurs.

WHAT IS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ... AND WHY DO IT?

“Tell me and I forget,” Benjamin Franklin said. “Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” Public engagement’s underpinnings are nicely captured in that aphorism because, whether practiced on the academic or co-curricular side, public engagement is foremost a strategy to involve students in their own learning. By doing so, students are more likely to remain enrolled, more likely to perform well in class and more likely to graduate. They are, in short, more likely to succeed. No reason trumps this one as a reason for Northern Kentucky University to continue its strong and sustained commitment to public engagement.

But student success is not the sole reason for the university to commit to public engagement. The public has an expectation about public engagement. Our former president, James Votruba, articulated this well in a 2006 letter to the faculty, which read in part:

“The lesson to be learned from the history of American higher education is this: The more universities are seen as contributing to the economic, civic and social progress of our nation, state and local regions, the more likely we are to receive strong public support.”

When practiced well, public engagement delivers something of value to the community, whether that something is service, research or a work product. There also is the important role of the university as the community’s public intellectual. This role dates to founding of the nation, and the understanding from the start that only a well-informed public can truly be trusted with self-government. With this in mind, we can use applied research to help a community better understand a challenge it confronts. We can provide technical assistance in identifying and implementing best practice. In short, we can leverage our students, faculty and staff to help assure that decision-making in our community is well-informed, whether the information required is economic, scientific, legal or from any other of the many spheres of knowledge that reside in our university.

Guided by those principles (student success and community benefit), the logical question that follows is what is meant by public engagement. In the 2006 report, “Aligning for Public Engagement: Laying the Foundation,” an NKU committee known as SHAPE (Strategically Helping to Align for Public Engagement) offered a definition of public engagement:

“Public engagement involves a partnership in which there is a mutually beneficial, two-way interaction between the university and some entity within the metropolitan region or the commonwealth. Both outreach and public engagement contributes to stewardship of place either

by taking resources and expertise to off-campus locations or by bringing the public or subsets of the public onto the campus.”

That definition contains some elements we consider crucial to any understanding of public engagement, including:

- Public engagement must be reciprocal; there needs to be benefit for both the community partners and for the university.
- It must involve the knowledge and expertise of the university (faculty, students and staff).
- The common good should be served.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AT NKU TODAY

NKU and its faculty, staff and students also are committed to public engagement because of a deep-seated sense of duty to the community.

- Our students, faculty and staff volunteer in the community.
- Our service learning classes deliver projects of immediate value to their nonprofit partners –120 deliverables per academic year from this source alone.
- Our applied research, whether by faculty, students, staff or a combination of all, delivers knowledge and know-how.
- Our faculty, students and staff serve on nonprofit and other community boards.
- Our centers and institutes (some 35) all operate with public engagement as part of their mission.

While the direct work products of public engagement are an important asset, our work group would like to emphasize the importance of NKU’s institutional commitment, which creates a campus culture where public engagement is valued. To that point: What’s measured is what’s done, goes a familiar maxim. And at NKU public engagement is part of the measurement for faculty retention, promotion and tenure. This is expressly covered in the faculty handbook. Here is a key passage:

“Multidimensional excellence is required to achieve NKU’s strategic priority to ‘Advance the Full Mission of a Metropolitan University.’ Each academic unit is expected to serve the full breadth of the university’s teaching, research, service, and public engagement missions in a manner that is consistent with the unit’s expertise and disciplinary focus.”

This inclusion in the faculty handbook has been crucial to institutionalizing public engagement at NKU and importantly, to promoting the alignment of teaching, scholarship, and service. The promotion and reward standards that have been articulated for faculty are less clear for staff. A common question heard at the working group sessions was: “How can staff get credit for all the public engagement work they do” and “How is our work valued or even counted?” The group noted that public engagement may not be a required or even appropriate element of every staff person’s workload. The staff represented suggested a larger conversation on the recognition of public engagement in a variety of staff positions.

ACADEMIC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement at the university can and does occur outside the academic structure, but the Public Engagement Work Group believes NKU’s sustained support of academic public engagement is especially crucial to the university mission “to educate students to succeed in their chosen life roles.” Service learning and applied research are the two areas of academic public engagement where this most occurs at NKU.

Service learning: Service learning is a proven pedagogy for engaging students in their classroom learning. NKU as an institution advocates and supports service learning, and has done so aggressively for a decade or more. Some 2,200-plus students take service learning classes at NKU each academic year.

By service learning at NKU, we mean:

“Service learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets a community need, and (b) reflect upon their service activity as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, an enhanced sense of civic responsibility, and/or a greater interest in and understanding of community life.”

This definition, in place at NKU since 2006, allows us to be clear that service learning must be linked to what’s being taught in a particular course; it cannot be service for the sake of service only but must also have a demonstrable academic benefit. Our work group finds this definition especially important in setting a standard at NKU.

We have between 100 and 120 service learning classes per semester, a count that benchmarks high by regional, state and national standards. UC, for example, has more classes (about 200) but also has three times as many students.

Along with our accepted definition of service learning – which standardizes what’s meant by the term, an important first step – NKU has some other service learning assets, including:

- The ability to track service learning’s use in the classroom via SAP and Digital Measures.
- A group of faculty mentors who are on call for peer-to-peer discussion about how to incorporate service learning into a classroom.
- A 13-year-old student philanthropy program employs service learning pedagogy in a new and effective way.

These assets, as wonderful as they are, do not mean that NKU’s support of service learning is perfect. The work group found that reporting via SAP and Digital Measures is lacking, as the result of spotty compliance.

We also see opportunities that could be seized, including consideration of a certificate of public engagement upon graduation that would have, built into it, some requirement that a student complete a specified number of service learning classes. As one member of our work group put it, “I really like the focus on students earning credit and possibly certificates of recognition/honor for their stewardship and public engagement. Their work in this area should influence their classroom experience and vice versa.”

Undergraduate research: The Public Engagement Work Group was impressed by NKU’s growing commitment to undergraduate research. This commitment is particularly pertinent to public engagement because much of the research is applied research accomplished in partnership with a community nonprofit, school or government agency.

Like service learning, applied research for a community partner engages students simultaneously in learning and community service with advantages to the students, who learn more deeply, and the community, which receives the benefit of the students’ findings. In addition, such research is very often faculty mentored; that

relationship between professor and student is strengthened with the inevitable result that student success is more likely.

To better communicate and foster internal collaboration around public engagement, the work group suggests establishing a Public Engagement Council. The Council would meet routinely with the purpose of information sharing as well as initiative development and evaluation. The forum would also sponsor professional development workshops in response to identified topics of interest.

NOTE: For a sampler of public engagement at NKU, see Appendix Four.

CONCLUSIONS

As we said at the beginning of this report, public engagement is part of our university's DNA. NKU has distinguished itself nationally in this field. Indeed, new faculty and staff members often "self-select" NKU because of its reputation; they want to be part of an institution where public engagement is valued and supported. They are drawn to NKU. That, in turn, strengthens our university's embrace of public engagement, as new and energized employees join the team and elevate our commitment.

We cannot imagine disengaging from engagement. With that in mind, here are our conclusions that we hope can guide the Strategic Planning Committee:

- Public engagement must remain part of NKU's core mission.
- Public engagement has an untapped potential to be a recruitment tool for students.
- Our model should be a "Hybrid" that targets some key areas but leaves room for other work as well.
- New institutional commitments to public engagement should be sought, including such possibilities as scholarships with an ongoing service commitment and a civic engagement certification available upon graduation
- The connection between public engagement and student success is known and demonstrable; we should better document and leverage that connection to maximize our students' academic performance, their retention and graduation.
- We should leverage the connection between public engagement and a student's professional and career development.
- To effectively address community needs, we must say yes but even more importantly say no. We cannot be all things to all regional groups. We must not overpromise or commit or under deliver. We must carry the message to the community that we focus on student success generally and have demonstrated success in selected areas of applied expertise.
- Public engagement is strengthened by ongoing professional development and evaluation of its impact. Setting the table for success means regular professional development, mentors, and templates for evaluating the impact on students and community stakeholders.

POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS

The Public Engagement Work Group, as part of its final sessions, developed some action items for the Strategic Planning Committee as it considers the mission, visions and values of NKU. Here is our summary of those action items:

Establish key criteria of public engagement that will guide vetting, resourcing, and developing of engagement activities. Ideally, these vetting criteria would be endorsed and communicated by the

President and Provost. The Associate Provost for Research, Graduate Studies and Regional Stewardship would support the implementation of these criteria, as well as the development and evaluation of activities that flow from this process.

Determine how to improve the tracking of public engagement activities by students, faculty and staff.

If we want to better capture public engagement activity at all levels we need to determine how to achieve greater user compliance. We have invested in data collection systems but not leveraged their potential.

Form a Public Engagement Council that would meet every other month. The council would be a vehicle on campus to share what is happening and what is planned. It might also be the entity that fosters professional development (see next action step) in order to assure that our public engagement is of the highest standard.

Design and put in place professional development activities. Topics might include an introduction to public engagement or the scholarship of engagement. The frequency of these should be considered. Once a month perhaps – or maybe these are best delivered via online teaching tools. At a minimum, it is important to keep public engagement as a key faculty development topic at the annual faculty workshop known as Meet, Greet, Take a Seat.

Clarify performance criteria related to public engagement especially for staff. A strength of NKU is the incorporation of public engagement in the faculty handbook however staff report frustration and confusion in terms of how their substantial public engagement activities are counted.

Be mindful of the effectiveness of institutional activities such as service learning, and then implement a continuous improvement strategy. Some institutions are using a standardized survey to measure service learning outcomes. Is that a fit for us? Might we make wider use of NSSE? Should there be an alumni survey? Can we track students who are most deeply exposed to public engagement, and see whether their academic success is above those who do not?

Continue to learn from national models of public engagement with special attention to innovative practices, supporting resources and effectiveness measures. This ongoing scanning may reveal new approaches, methods for achieving greater cost-effectiveness, sources of external funding, collaborative working groups (i.e. Campus Compact, Carnegie Foundation), and methods of impact evaluation.

Evaluate the feasibility of a certificate in public engagement that would be included on a student's transcript and recognized at graduation. Recommending what sort of requirements should be involved – such as participation in a leadership program, a specified service and/or service learning requirement; and a public presentation component are important to this effort.

Determine how to routinely assess external stakeholders' experiences and satisfaction with NKU's public engagement activities. This might involve sampling of different sectors in the community and their leaders (P-12, Business, and Nonprofits).

We need customer-friendly public engagement. This should begin with easy navigation by external stakeholders of our public engagement offerings and how to access them. We should consider best-practice models that have been effective at peer institutions.

Our home page should feature public engagement as a core strength. This would help both with the front door issue, but might also attract students for whom public engagement is already valued. Other places

to feature public engagement as a core strength might include departmental home pages and in student recruitment literature.

Build better internal communication around public engagement. A Public Engagement Council under the leadership of the Associate Provost for Research, Graduate Studies and Regional Stewardship would support more frequent information sharing and support.

Determine the feasibility of more deeply involving NKU alumni into public engagement. What are some national models for this work? We've seen one from Yale built around the idea of a "day of service" held by alumni associations around the nation. Is there a "crowd-sourcing" model for engaging our alumni in service?

Explore the expanded use of federal work study and co-ops as ways to connect students to community-based learning. Other universities (Berea, for example) make good use of work study and others of co-ops (UC); what opportunities are suggested by their experiences for NKU?

IN SUMMARY

The Public Engagement Work Group decided up front, that our public engagement should be guided by a commitment to student success, including retention, academic performance, graduation and career placement. Because research shows that high quality public engagement will produce these results, we believe NKU is on the right track and should make a strong commitment to public engagement, including occupying a central place in the mission statement and strategic goals.

APPENDIX ONE: WORK GROUP MEMBERS

Our work group's members included 20 people from 20 different campus units. Dr. Jan Hillard, associate provost of research, graduate studies and regional stewardship, led us. Here is our team:

NAME	TITLE	DEPARTMENT
Shamima Ahmed	Chair	Political Science, Criminal Justice & Organizational Leadership
Sarah Aikman	Director	Student Union Administration
Kerri Beach	Analyst	Office of Planning & Performance
Richard Boyce	Professor	Biological Sciences
Lisa Brinkman	Director	Educational Talent Search
Melanie Caldwell	Director	Early Childhood Center
Karen Campbell	Director	Wellness Center
Chaz Edwards	Student	Junior, Communications Studies
Deidra Fajack	Director	Alumni Programs
Tim Ferguson	Associate Provost	Information Technology
Cindy Foster	Assistant Professor	Advanced Nursing Studies
Brian Hackett	Assistant Professor	Department of History & Geography
Matt Hackett	Director	Campus Recreation
Dana Harley	Assistant Professor	Counseling, Social Work & Leadership
Jan Hillard	Associate Provost	Research, Graduate Studies & Regional Stewardship
Mark Neikirk	Executive Director	Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement
Kathy Steffen	Associate Director	Intercollegiate Athletics
Kim Vance	Assistant Director	Student Life
Rebecca Volpe	Director	Small Business Development Center
Joe Wind	Vice President	Governmental & Community Relations

APPENDIX TWO: DATA & REFERENCES

DATA

We examined some data sets, including NKU's NSSE data, which benchmarks our students' public engagement activities. The data suggests that NKU's commitment to public engagement is detectable among students in their senior year: in 2012, 37% of freshmen "frequently participated in a community-based project as part of a course" while at the senior level that rose to 45 percent, and volunteer rates also rose, from 42% to 47%. But the data also suggests NKU has room to improve, since other universities are recording even higher percentages. (NSSE data, our work group found, has real limitations in evaluating the university's public engagement efforts, as it doesn't dig deeply into the student experience with public engagement).

REFERENCES

We reviewed the following key references:

[A Promising Connection: Increasing College Access and Success through Civic Engagement](#)

This 33-page booklet published in 2010 by the national Campus Compact provides an evidence-based argument for support and growth of public engagement at a university because connecting the classroom to the community is an effective pedagogical strategy. "College students who participate in civic engagement learning activities not only earn higher grade-point averages but also have higher retention rates and are more likely to complete their college degree," the report found.

[A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future](#)

This 2012 report by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement was published and distributed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and calls on higher education to "reclaim and reinvest" in its "fundamental civic and democratic mission." This report is a call to action for higher ed in the realm of public and civic engagement in the interest of democracy and its tenants, which from the nation's founding has relied on an educated and engaged electorate.

Becoming an Engaged Campus: A Practical Guide for Institutionalizing Public Engagement

This 2011 book was written by NKU's Dr. James Votruba, Dr. Gail Wells and Dr. Carole Beere, and was published by Jossey-Bass. It offers a step-by-step best practice guide to incorporating outreach and public engagement into a university's culture and institutional structure. The book answers such key questions as: How does the university institutionalize public engagement so it is no longer at the periphery and no longer so person dependent? How does the campus structure the elements that support public engagement? How can the institution weave public engagement into the fabric of the campus at every level?

[Public Engagement: The Community is Our Classroom](#)

This 28-page booklet produced in 2012 by the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement captures 101 examples of public engagement at NKU, including examples of service learning, co-curricular service, applied research by students and faculty and engagement-focused centers and institutes. It also describes the history of public engagement at NKU and the focus areas.

[Aligning for Public Engagement: Laying the Foundation](#)

This 35-page booklet is the work product of the SHAPE (Strategically Helping to Align for Public Engagement) Committee, which reported to the university community in 2006. The report outlined a plan to institutionalize outreach and public engagement at NKU, and offered a rationale for doing so. Among other things, this report heralded the incorporation of promotion, retention and tenure standards in the faculty handbook that would value public engagement.

[Does Student Philanthropy Work? A Study of Long-term Effects of the “Learning by Giving” Approach](#)

This 2012 article by NKU’s Dr. Julie Olberding reports on her research findings that student philanthropy classes improve the likelihood that college students will remain more active as community stewards after graduation if they take a student philanthropy class while in college. NKU has incorporated student philanthropy into over 140 classes since the Fall 2000 semester.

[CINSAM: 2011-2012 Annual Report](#)

This recently released report captures the outreach and public engagement of one NKU’s premier efforts in public engagement, the Center for Integrative Natural Sciences and Mathematics, or CINSAM. This campus office has supported student research and scholarship, and demonstrated the value of connecting those to public engagement. CINSAM scholars have a 90 percent graduation rate. With summer camps for area primary, middle and high school students and “alliances” that offer educational sessions in environment science, math, physics and other STEM disciplines, CINSAM is modeling NKU’s commitment to P-12 public engagement.

[CAI: 2012 Annual Report](#)

This center in the College of Informatics engages students in real-world design of smart phone apps, web pages and other online products, and as such has become a model for a revenue-based enterprise that simultaneously combines the university mission to educate with the mission to supply the community with expertise. With a “virtual co-op” model, the Center for Applied Informatics “has entered a new era of community engagement and student excellence through informatics.” This report captures a myriad of examples of this innovative approach to public engagement.

[DISCOVER](#)

This magazine is released each year by the Office Research, Graduate Studies & Regional Stewardship, and features stories about research by NKU faculty members and students. Because so much of NKU’s research is applied research done in partnership with community agencies, the magazine is good source for understanding this aspect of NKU’s public engagement.

[The Engaged Community: Maximizing Community Impact](#)

This online report from the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse places an emphasis on assuring that universities recognize that, while public engagement has an internal value for the institution (improved student learning, improved student stewardship) it also should have value to the community, and in shaping public engagement universities should make a point of listening to community partners about their needs and whether they are being met – and do so in a structured way. The best public engagement partnerships are two-way, with a “win” for all partners.

[Engaged Learning Economies: Aligning Civic Engagement and Economic Development in Community-Campus Partnerships](#)

This 2012 report by the national Campus Compact postulated a direct link between public engagement and economic development, and calls on higher ed to strengthen this link with new partnerships, improved assessment and additional research.

APPENDIX THREE: SPOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- National model
- Established track record
- Receptive region
- Institutionalized at NKU (mission, culture)
- Embedded in faculty RPT
- Extensive opportunities for students to be engaged (academically, co-curricular)
- Numerous nonprofit and governmental partners and collaborators
- Source of students' career and professional development
- Supports student retention
- Strong cross-disciplinary presence and commitment
- Administrative recognition and support offices

Problems

- Workload pressures
- Time to cultivate external partners
- Uneven application of University policies and processes to establish MOUs, contracts for deliverables, mechanisms for assuring adherence with funders' requirements
- Internal communication issues that can lead to multiple contacts with one external stakeholder resulting in confusion and frustration both internally and externally
- Spotty use of data systems used to capture public engagement activities and service learning
- Spotty use of impact evaluation to assess impact on students and external stakeholders

Opportunities

- Foster compliance with engagement data tracking systems already in place (i.e. SAP, DM)
- Establish a Public Engagement Council to support communication and collaboration
- Fully leverage public engagement for student recruitment, connection to alums, case for giving
- Clarify relevancy of public engagement to staff hiring, promotion and evaluation
- Rethink "Community and Business" section of the home page to facilitate external navigation to NKU public engagement resources and Centers
- Explore greater use of federal work study students in public engagement
- Establish clear vetting criteria for institutional support of significant public engagement activities

Threats

- Trying to be all things to all people
- Failing to meet external partner expectations (promising more than we can deliver)

- Limited sources of financial and administrative support for public engagement

APPENDIX FOUR: A PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SAMPLER

Despite the challenges of cataloguing public engagement in its entirety at NKU, there is a significant known inventory that includes:

- 35 centers and institutes, beginning with one committed primarily to this work, the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement, which is staffed by the university and funded for programming by grants and an endowment.
- Several centers and institutes have a direct connection to business, including the Small Business Development Center, UpTech, the Small Business & Nonprofit Law Clinic, the Career Development Center, the METS Center for Corporate Learning, the Center for Applied Informatics and the Center for Economic Analysis and Development (CEAD).
- Several centers and institutes have a direct connection to P-12 education, including the Center for Educator Excellence, the Center for Environmental Education, the Center for Economic Education, the Institute for Talent Development and Gifted Students, the Haile Digital Planetarium, the Early Childhood Centers and CINSAM.
- An NKU Newspaper Readership Program that is funded jointly by 25 units on campus and designed to create a climate of inquiry around public affairs. The program involves the distribution of the New York Times, USA Today and, online, the Associated Press, and it is paired with programming that includes about 20 faculty-facilitated dialogues per year with students around current events and public policy.
- The Northern Kentucky Forum, a partnership of the Scripps Howard Center with two community entities, Vision 2015 and Legacy, hosts about ten free public “town hall” meetings per year to examine public issues and current events.
- NKU’s popular Six@Six Lecture Series brings our faculty to three community venues, the Behringer Crawford Museum, the Carnegie Center for the Visual and Performing Arts and the Mercantile Library, covering topics from particle physics to President Lincoln.
- Project Hope/The 505 Initiative Launched in Spring 2013 to direct service learning and other public engagement to one inner-city neighborhood, the Westside of Newport. In its first semester, more than 20 faculty members have engaged their classrooms or plan to do so in the coming year.
- This Side Up Improvisation Troupe travels to various community venues to perform skits and sketches for schools and other audiences – thus sharing NKU’s theater students’ tremendous talent with the community.
- A robust assortment of public engagement is centered around health and wellness and involves students in direct service with community partners: Health & Wellness helped create the [YourHealthMatters](#) website to empower healthcare consumerism; the Northern Kentucky Nursing Research Collaborative conducts and disseminates nursing research in concert with St. Elizabeth Healthcare and the Northern Kentucky Independent Health District; and the Nurse Advocacy

Center for the Underserved works with eight community partners to bring access to healthcare for the underserved.

- NKU's annual Veterans Day events provide tribute to our community's veterans.
- Our St. Anne Wetlands Research and Education Center on the grounds of the Sisters of Divine Providence Convent in Melbourne provides an learning center and field research station for our students as well as P-12 students.
- 100 to 120 service learning classes per year deliver projects and services to at least that many nonprofits.
- An array of applied research projects by undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty provide information to dozens of community partners.
- Two annual volunteer fairs, Service on Saturday in the fall and Spring into Service in the spring, provide more than 1,000 hours of volunteer time to area nonprofits and to the City of Highland Heights.
- NKU frequently hosts or co-hosts events with a clear public engagement component. For example, this semester we are playing that role with a service learning workshop for primary and secondary students in partnership with Children Inc. and again with a citizen scientist summit in partnership with the EPA and the Green Umbrella environmental coalition.
- NKU frequently joins in partnerships (e.g., Vision 2015, Strive and United Way) with leading community institutions to foster the public good around some significant community need (jobs, education, social welfare, etc.)
- Housing on campus the offices of the Greater Cincinnati World Affairs Council (new this year).
- Housing on campus the offices of the Kentucky Campus Compact.

¹ *The Honor Roll is a designation from the White House designed to highlight "the role colleges and universities play in solving community problems and placing more students on a lifelong path of civic engagement by recognizing institutions that achieve meaningful, measureable outcomes in the communities they serve."*