According to the Carnegie Foundation, community engagement is defined as collaboration between the university and communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The term engagement contrasts with that of outreach which typically refers to one-way dissemination and communication to the public. The University of Alberta’s communities are local, provincial, national and global and our partnerships and initiatives involve a myriad of stakeholders including public and private sector organizations, a variety of sectors and industries, academic and professional networks and others.

The Office of Government and Community Relations (GCR) within University Relations has been working on identifying issues and opportunities related to how the university engages with communities within the context of the university’s institutional strategic plan, For the Public Good. This work includes establishing connections with other organizations and groups, identifying key internal and external stakeholders and engaging a wider cross section of the university community in discussions about engagement. The next step is to ask questions and to gather input regarding institutional community engagement through a meaningful consultation process with both internal and external stakeholders.

The goal is to develop an institutional community engagement plan grounded in a community conversation about the role of the University of Alberta (U of A) with its community partners. What we hear will directly inform this plan and guide how the U of A delivers on the engagement goals of For the Public Good over the coming years.

CONTEXT

For the Public Good

After an extensive consultation process, on June 17, 2016 the Board of Governors unanimously approved For the Public Good and it was launched with five strategic themes: BUILD, EXPERIENCE, EXCEL, ENGAGE and SUSTAIN. The following is an excerpt of the ENGAGE section:

Goal

Engage communities across our campuses, city and region, province, nation, and the world to create reciprocal, mutually beneficial learning experiences, research projects, partnerships and collaborations.

To serve the public well, the University of Alberta will excel at listening, connecting, and collaborating with key partners across all sectors of society. We will strive to be relevant as well as excellent and actively disseminate what we learn and discover for the benefit of the public good. We will engage across disciplines, campuses, faculties, and units to create interdisciplinary learning experiences for our students that prepare them to face the complex nature of today’s challenges and workplaces. We will continue to build and deepen mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnerships with local, provincial, national, and international communities, agencies, industries, businesses, and organizations. In doing so, we will expand and sustain the University of Alberta’s leadership in major national and international initiatives and networks that increase our reach and influence as one of Canada’s leading research universities.
16. Objective
Enhance, increase, and sustain reciprocal, mutually beneficial community relations, community engagement, and community-engaged research and scholarship that will extend the reach, effectiveness, benefit, and value of our university-community connections.

17. Objective
Facilitate, build, and support interdisciplinary, cross-faculty, and cross unit engagement and collaboration.

18. Objective
Seek, build, strengthen, and sustain partnerships with local, national, or international research agencies, governments, government ministries and agencies, universities, Indigenous communities, libraries, not-for-profits, industry, business, and community organizations.

CURRENT STATE

GCR undertook an extensive scan of community engagement at the University of Alberta. This scan was completed in August 2018.

Methodology
From April through August 2018, GCR gathered input from each faculty and central administrative department. Information was collected from in-person meetings (with individuals and/or teams), phone conversations, written correspondence and website scans. Respondents included deans, associate/assistant deans, communications directors/managers and other delegates as appointed by the faculty and/or central administrative department. Respondents were asked about community engagement initiatives (programs, events, and community engaged research) focusing on the previous and upcoming 12 months, and where appropriate, to identify their top five most impactful initiatives and/or relationships that advance their community engagement efforts.

Observations
The information gathered suggests that U of A faculty, staff and students recognize that community engagement is a shared responsibility and that each engages with diverse communities uniquely. Many indicated that teaching or research projects were the foundation for the initial relationship, and the shared outcomes in research and community impacts further strengthen the relationship. Many noted that naming every research project is too extensive; many said that everything the university does is about community engagement. As such, the data captures the U of A’s community engagement as a snapshot in time and is reflective of the scope and reach of the university’s work with/in the community.

What We Heard
• Many respondents shared that their work is rooted in community engagement and is motivated by serving the public good. Every respondent saw value in engagement with the external community and with faculty peers on interdisciplinary work, as appropriate.
• The initiatives and activities are varied and the one common thread identified is that relationships are immensely valued. They emphasized relationships were of greatest importance over the projects or initiatives to advance shared impact for all partners.
• Each faculty discussed significant partners and stakeholders that advanced their research and/or benefitted their students in learning and placements. Relationships are and should be of mutual benefit – to help students succeed, to advance research and to serve community.
• Relationships are essential in order to fulfill research and teaching mandates. Long-term and trusting relationships form the reputational backbone for future projects, student placements, research and expansion of new networks and relationships.
NEXT STEPS

Working with an Advisory Committee, is leading a public consultation with both the university community and external stakeholders to seek input on the topic of community engagement. The work began in September 2018 and will take approximately 12 months to complete.

The Advisory Committee will provide guidance and insight on the consultation plan, help formulate the consultation questions and messages, ensure the consultation remains focused on the goals of For the Public Good, provide advice and recommendations and ensure the perspectives of the stakeholder group they represent remain part of the dialogue throughout the project.

In addition, the Advisory Committee will assist – at the end of the consultation – in developing an institutional community engagement plan grounded in a community conversation about the role of the U of A with its community partners. The community conversation and information gathered will directly inform this plan and guide how the U of A delivers on the engagement goals of For the Public Good over the next three years.

THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

There are a series of milestones within this process. In addition to what is outlined below, GCR will be reaching out to a large and diverse group of both internal and external stakeholders to host individual consultation sessions.

![Diagram of consultation process]

At each engagement opportunity, invited stakeholders will be asked to:

- Provide opinions.
- Share ideas.
- Share expertise or experiences.
- Identify concerns.
- Help to explore, develop, and/or provide feedback on solutions.

References

1. This definition is used by the Carnegie Foundation, an organization that provides a community engagement classification service for US institutions. For a review of the various terminology used in practice, see [http://www.mun.ca/engagement/defining.php](http://www.mun.ca/engagement/defining.php)
2. For the Public Good, University of Alberta, 2016, [https://www.ualberta.ca/strategic-plan](https://www.ualberta.ca/strategic-plan)