



# 2024 Community Engagement Study: Approaches & Actions

This document provides a brief list of opportunities and ideas that emerged from the study with broad consensus. These ideas represent broad approaches to community engagement and specific actions to improve Texas A&M's engagement with the community. Focus group sessions generated most of the ideas. In fact, most ideas in this section were discussed in multiple focus groups and further discussed by the study's advisory committees. Others emerged from other discussions of community engagement throughout the year and the core team's reflection and interpretation of results.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Community engagement at Texas A&M has long been decentralized. Decentralization allows engagement programs to meet the unique needs of disciplines, community partners, students and specific research or teaching projects. Faculty and staff support retaining decentralized engagement, but both internal and external stakeholders stated the need for centralized support of engagement resources, metrics, communication, and networking.

## PROPOSED APPROACHES AND ACTIONS

Many community-engaged projects blend components of teaching and research. Some elements and best practices differ and may be addressed in separate discussion groups.

*Sign up to help guide one of the action items below or propose other action items.*

## SCHOLARSHIP (TEACHING AND RESEARCH)

- **Host a community engaged learning workshop for faculty and staff to discuss best practices in securing and collaborating with community partners in a reciprocal relationship.** Include community (especially nonprofit) partners as experts sharing their perspectives. Provide opportunities for networking as part of this event.
- **Catalyze discussion groups to discuss common best practices, share ideas, and create community around community engagement.** These groups could be new standing groups but could potentially operate with existing structures like Faculty Café. Groups might form around



community engaged teaching, community engaged research, volunteerism and service, or other topics.

- **Establish common best practices or a pool of practices**, recognizing that different types of engagement may require different practices. Identification of best practices should be led by those doing the work.
- **Create toolkits to help faculty and staff start engagement programs.** Most faculty and staff do not receive training in community engagement as part of their graduate studies. In their first years at Texas A&M, they are often launching programs that will set the trajectory of their careers. Toolkits and similar resources for various types of community engaged learning and community engaged research will help them more efficiently create effective programs while avoiding pitfalls, maintaining public trust, and building strong professional portfolios.

#### COORDINATION AND CENTRALIZED SUPPORT

- **Build a front door to Texas A&M. Establish a network of faculty and staff committed to community engagement and to helping external partners navigate the university.** External stakeholders noted Texas A&M is a large university, and they need help finding the right person/group to answer a questions or form collaborations. Some faculty and staff receive calls or emails and don't know how to respond to external partners if a question is not aligned with their work. A community engagement network anchored by a central office would help ensure that community stakeholders receive responses to inquiries and identify relevant campus partners.
- **Invest in a repository of opportunities and centralized support.** The university needs a central tool to help connect volunteers with community opportunities and community engaged learning courses with community partners. Such a tool or the surrounding web resources could also provide resources such as trainings and information about best practices. Following focus groups' identification of a clear need, the Office of Community Engagement is purchasing GivePulse software, which has these capabilities and also allows community members not affiliated with the university to sign up as volunteers. Several non-profit leaders and faculty members have expressed interest in the resource. The office will need stakeholder support in populating the software with profiles and activities and in providing or recommending trainings and other support resources.
- **Create toolkits to help faculty and staff start engagement programs.** Most faculty and staff do not receive training in community engagement as part of their graduate studies. In their first years at Texas A&M, they are often launching programs that will set the trajectory of their careers. Toolkits and similar resources for various types of community engaged



learning and community engaged research will help them more efficiently create effective programs while avoiding pitfalls, maintaining public trust, and building strong professional portfolios.

#### COMMUNICATION

- **Launch a newsletter** and/or other communications vehicles to provide timely updates about community engagement opportunities, highlight program successes, and build community around community engagement. Faculty, staff, student, and community member submission of materials will be critical.
- **Institute an annual community engagement report** to communicate important metrics and milestones, showcase successful engagement programs, and underscore the role of community engagement programs in fulfilling Texas A&M's land-grant mission.

#### INTERNAL PROCESSES

- **Initiate incentives for faculty/staff/student engagement.** While Aggies are excited about community engagement, they also desire clear guidelines and incentives. Examples include clear and consistent guidelines regarding community engagement activities in promotion and tenure packets and decisions, HR directives regarding staff participation in volunteerism and other community engagement activities, volunteer leave time, awards, and student cords at graduation or transcript marks for exemplar service experiences.
- **Establish common metrics** or, more likely, a menu of common metrics that faculty and staff can use to report results that can be aggregated across the university. These metrics should be related to best practices and commonalities identified by internal and external stakeholders. Metric identification requires the input and buy-in of those stakeholders.