



**EDUCATING CITIZENS AND
BUILDING COMMUNITIES:**

*A Collective Report of Civic
and Community Engagement
at Colleges and Universities in
Rhode Island*



INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1985, Campus Compact has fostered a proud tradition of promoting the public purpose of higher education through colleges and universities across the country. Through a network of engaged practitioners, leadership opportunities for students, robust AmeriCorps programs, engaged faculty networks, and a PK-16 partnerships initiative, Rhode Island Campus Compact (RICC) works alongside students, faculty, staff and the eleven member Presidents to further the mission of RICC—to strengthen the collective commitment and capacity of colleges and universities to advance civic and community engagement in order to fulfill the public purpose of higher education.

Reflecting on over fifteen years of work as a state affiliate, RICC initiated a strategic review process of its mission and goals, alongside national Campus Compact in the spring of 2013. This process began in order to evaluate the current state of civic and community engagement in higher education in Rhode Island and to determine how the organization may better serve member institutions and the field of civic and community engagement as a whole.

Rhode Island Campus Compact strengthens the collective commitment and capacity of colleges and universities to advance civic and community engagement in order to fulfill the public purpose of higher education.

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As part of this process, RICC conducted a community-mapping project to chronicle the work being done by institutions of higher education in Rhode Island and to inform a new organizational strategic plan. The following report provides an overview of themes identified across institutions that reflect campus successes as well as opportunities for continued growth. RICC presents this summary with the hope that institutions use it to reflect and work collectively as members of RICC to continue to strengthen engagement programs and initiatives. In telling our shared story of engagement our intent is to highlight civic engagement practices at member campuses, assess common challenges between campuses and share findings for resource and best-practice sharing, including increased cross-campus collaboration.

METHODOLOGY

This community-mapping project utilized a quantitative and qualitative approach to better understand civic and community engagement practices at RICC member institutions. Four sequential phases were employed: data collection through institutional websites and accessible documents, individual interviews with community service directors, a survey questionnaire and a focus group comprised of civic engagement directors to debrief preliminary results. The combination of the four phases helped to triangulate the data and validate the findings. To ensure consistency in speaking with each campus, an interview questionnaire was developed that derived from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education's Community Engagement Classification; a widely accepted certification process from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The survey questionnaire was developed post interviews as a way to gather more detailed information about civic engagement practices. All interviews, focus groups and questionnaires were transcribed and analyzed.

CONTEXT

As members of Rhode Island Campus Compact, each higher education institution demonstrates a commitment to the public purpose of higher education. Member institutions publicly communicate this commitment through various written sources. Following are some excerpts from institutional documents referencing civic and community engagement:

Brown University

The mission of Brown University is to serve the community, the nation and the world by discovering, communicating and preserving knowledge and understanding in a spirit of free inquiry, and by educating and preparing students to discharge the offices of life with usefulness and reputation. We do this through a partnership of students and teachers in a unified community known as a university-college.

Bryant University

The College fosters commitment to social responsibility. The faculty encourage academic excellence both by serving as role models in the best teacher/scholar tradition, and by sharing with students a commitment to diversity and an engagement in civic and professional service.

Community College of Rhode Island

We set high academic standards necessary for transfer and career success, champion diversity, respond to community needs and contribute to our state's economic development and the region's workforce.

Johnson & Wales University

Global and Community Citizenship: Graduates will demonstrate the necessary skills, including an awareness of ethical responsibility and cultural/global diversity, to live and work collaboratively as contributing members of society... To deepen engagement, the university will strengthen tradition, community spirit and affinity and enhance opportunities for local, national and international citizenship.

New England Institute of Technology

Provide a campus climate where students are encouraged to respect the value of all people and to deal with the social problems and responsibilities they face as members of society.

Providence College

Providence College promotes the common good, the human flourishing of each member of the campus community and service of neighbors near and far.

Rhode Island College

Students here are members of a caring community that respects diversity and values academic excellence informed by cultural inquiry, civic engagement and co-curricular activity.

Rhode Island School of Design

The mission is to educate its students and the public in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design, to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation.

Roger Williams University

At the foundation of the institution is a set of core values that play a central role in guiding a respectful, diverse and intellectually vibrant university community [including a] commitment to community through service and sustainability.

Salve Regina University

Salve Regina considers participation in community service a visible way to live the mission of the University... it seeks to prepare students to become lifelong learners and responsible, contributing citizens of both their local community and the world.

University of Rhode Island

Our undergraduate, graduate and professional education, research and outreach serve Rhode Island and beyond. [We value] engaged Learning and Civic Involvement.

FINDINGS

Through the community mapping effort, four major themes emerged: community partnerships, student development and leadership, institutional culture and impact assessment. Each of these themes represents areas of critical importance and future focus for the institutions. These findings demonstrate some of the successes of RICC member institutions, opportunities for growth and shared challenges in community and civic engagement work.

The theme of community partnerships refers to the extensive network of nonprofit organizations that colleges and universities work alongside. The mapping examined how these relationships are formed, developed and maintained in order to identify best practices and shared struggles in forming meaningful and impactful community partnerships. Student development and leadership also emerged as a critical component to civic and community engagement programs across the state. Many engagement programs depend on student leaders to aid in the facilitation of programming; how the institutions examined here support and develop the leadership skills of such students varies. Institutional culture stood out as a major component of the engaged campus, as the mapping explored how each member institution addresses and prioritizes civic and community engagement, be it through public statements, strategic plans and/or organizational structure. Finally, questions around the measurement of outcomes arose as part of a broader, national dialogue on assessing the impact of civic and community engagement. Though all institutions struggle to find ways of doing so, asking how the conversations have evolved on each campus provided insight into shared challenges and reflected opportunities for collaboration across campuses and communities.

THEME ONE

Community Partnerships

Rhode Island colleges and universities rely on strong relationships with community organizations, though more clearly defined structures and language are needed to further articulate what campus-community partnerships entail.

Rhode Island's colleges and universities with sustained civic and community engagement programs credit much of their success to strong relationships with community organizations. These partnerships look different for each unique institution of higher education, yet all revolve around the central tenants of reciprocity, student learning and capacity building. Despite emphasis on community relationships, many partnerships lack a common definition or a formalized process by which their relationship with the college or university is defined.

Community-campus partnerships primarily depend on how community organizations interact with and integrate students into their programming and operations. For many campuses, some partnerships are more clearly defined than others, with variance in structure, alignment and mutually beneficial outcomes. Sites serving as hosts to community work-study students [a program wherein students with demonstrated financial need can work at nonprofit organizations throughout the community and receive

pay through the federal government] are examples of a more structured community partnership program. This type of community partnership allows students to support organizations by building capacity as additional staff members without the additional payroll burden on the organization. For students, such work provides an opportunity to gain meaningful, real world experience related to their interests while simultaneously creating an impact in the community. These partnerships, by nature, are more clearly defined than others since they include the federal government as a grant-giving third party and often also have an institutional staff person that provides daily oversight. Similarly, students interning at nonprofit organizations without fiscal compensation also serve in this clearly defined manner. While internship restrictions are not as intricate as those of federal work-study, they reflect a similar structure in the student-community organization relationship.

Outside of the community work-study and internship models, partnerships between community organizations and campuses often function with far less structure. Frequently, nonprofits turn to colleges and universities for access to students to facilitate both short and long-term volunteer projects. College students serve in a wide variety of roles to complete projects and assist in the nonprofit organization's mission. This more ad-hoc relationship, based on an organization's needs, represents the traditional understanding of how students may serve their communities through their own initiative and with the assistance of their campuses. For every college and university in Rhode Island, these relationships exist in multiple departments and offices including athletics, campus ministry, student organizations, civic engagement offices and academic departments.

For the purpose of this mapping, Rhode Island Campus Compact focused on dedicated campus community service, service learning and/or experiential education offices. Out of the 11 member colleges and universities, 6 members have institution or department-wide community engagement offices or centers, while the 5 other members have a faculty or staff member on campus who supports civic and community engagement in varying degrees of capacity. These offices or individuals facilitate more than just transactional service opportunities, and often have the capacity to develop deeper, more significant community partnerships committed to student learning and community organizations' growth and sustainability. As these community-campus partnerships evolve, they reflect the unique missions and student bodies of the stakeholders involved.

Campuses that support service-learning courses build these community partnerships through continued curricular inclusion of service. Service-learning courses provide the opportunity for students to connect their coursework with community-based experiences. In this context, community partners take on an important role in facilitating student learning and, in exchange, receive a committed cohort of students engaged in the larger context of the organization. Though these partnerships are dependent upon student scheduling and the academic calendar, they empower the community partnership sites to work alongside higher education institutions in aligning the institutions' respective missions of student learning with the mission and purpose of the correlative partner organizations.

Beyond a foundation of engaging an institution's students, the nature of community partnerships is often personal. The scope of campus-community networks within Rhode Island provides for a close-knit community wherein partnerships spring up organically through networks and references. When community service and service learning directors were asked how connections between their office and local organizations are made, a frequent refrain of "It's Rhode Island" was heard—referencing the interconnected nature of professional and personal networks within the state. This personal element is greatly beneficial for both community organizations and campuses alike as it provides a unique level of mutual trust at the very outset of these relationships

As these relationships continue to build, their sustainability is often dependent on the more practical realities of the partnership. Reliable communication, the ease of transportation to community sites and staff availability to train and support students comprise a few of the criteria several campuses listed in strong partners. Universally, campuses stated that they seek out organizations that are able and willing to facilitate student learning first and foremost. However, practical realities weighed heavily on a partnership's ability to do just that. While many of these pragmatic components appear essential to the formation and evaluation of partnerships, they remain undefined and leave the expectations of the relationship unclear.

It is clear, however, that lasting community partnerships are often unable to endure without consistent, critical assessment. Partnership assessment typically involves end of term surveys of students, partners and staff in order to gather feedback on the year's partnership activity. Generally, this information rarely leaves pages and spreadsheets, as offices predominantly lack the capacity to critically review each site every year. Though this lends itself to the larger question of assessment that we later address, one change that would help resolve these difficulties would be the adoption of a common definition of a community-campus partnership. While still allowing for the unique variations of partnerships, this definition would aid in establishing set criteria for evaluating potential partnerships and assist in the evaluation of emerging partnerships, even as the specific outputs remain fluid.

As the mission of higher education institutions fixates on student learning, when students' engagement with a community organization provides an experience that prompts student growth, the partnership can be labeled beneficial in promoting the institution's main mission of education. Community organizations' missions are not as fixed as those of colleges and universities, making it more difficult to track indicators of success in partnerships. Without defining relationships, reciprocity becomes more difficult to ensure and community partners more often than not are the ones that suffer.

THEME TWO
*Student Development
and Leadership*

The primary programmatic focus in centers of community engagement was found to be student development and leadership, where college student growth is seen as the most important outcome of community-based work and is often seen as the greatest institutional asset for community partners.

While community-campus partnerships across the state are as unique as each of Rhode Island's colleges and universities, a common agreement was found to be that the largest resource that higher education institutions have to offer community organizations is their students. These students not only serve as bodies to complete a task, but as dedicated volunteers and partners that develop programs, produce products, conduct fundraisers, employ areas of expertise and learned skills and effectively serve as auxiliary staff. Though the focus each institution places on leadership development through community engagement varies, students inevitably experience personal growth and often emerge as leaders and content experts through community engagement experiences.

Student leadership through engagement predominantly derives from students organizing and managing fellow students at community partner sites; the degree to which such leadership exercises are structured and defined by the community service, service learning and student life offices involve a range of support programming. In many offices, students aid in sustaining long-standing programs with partner sites, picking up where previous students left off and working alongside campus and community staff to ensure continued success. This reliance on student leadership to enable greater engagement opportunities is seen throughout the state, and not just tied to academic service learning courses.

Students often initiate the service experience or community partnership. Through personal initiative, students display leadership by creating engagement opportunities for other students. Many campuses cited student organizations that sought out relationships with community partners independently, working hand-in-hand with staff to run donation drives, tutor students and assist in fundraising. Beyond student clubs and organizations, professional development programs also integrate student leadership through project-based and academically linked service experiences. For these experiences, often lead by faculty members, students use their academic skills and areas of expertise to offer products and concrete outcomes to area non-profits that are seeking assistance.

Challenges were often cited in the area of student development and leadership. Campuses had consistent concerns about unsustainable community partnerships when students were leading the programs. Institutions also discussed the limitations of having too much of a focus on student development, citing lack of faculty and administrative commitment in other areas that were assets to the community beyond student bodies. Finally, focusing too much on student impact can often impede other outcomes of community engagement, such as community growth and health, institutional and policy change and commitment to larger democratic ideals. Seeking a balance between student development and other community engagement outcomes is a continued challenge for college and universities as they explore the future of civic engagement in higher education.

THEME THREE
*Institutional
Culture*

The degree to which an institution sees its commitment to the public purpose of higher education is reliant upon a campus culture that supports community and civic engagement. This culture plays a critical role in impacting the relationships, resources, personnel and policies that support engaged scholarship, community-campus partnerships and campus commitments to solving critical issues in the state of Rhode Island.

Despite well-designed programs and strong community partnerships, civic and community engagement work in higher education is untenable if the campus culture does not support or value this work. In examining institutional culture, RICC sought to determine how each member campus supports and prioritizes civic and community engagement as an institution, beyond their membership in the Compact. In order to accomplish this, an examination of indicators of institutional culture was performed. These indicators consisted of public statements made by executive leadership, public strategic plans and the organizational structures that support civic and community engagement offices.

The organizational structures that support civic and community engagement work on campus reflect how the institution views the role of engagement within higher education. The biggest difference seen across campuses in Rhode Island was the split between programs housed in academic affairs versus student affairs. While many of these offices started as an affiliate of student life programming, many campuses have made the shift from academic affairs or some other hybrid. Though community service is still very much a component of student organizations and activities, a dedicated office to student engagement through service outside of student affairs reflects a commitment to practicing deep and meaningful civic and community engagement by providing the staff and resources to facilitate it. A new trend is integrating the broader field of experiential education with community-based learning and service practices. Recently, civic and community engagement offices have increasingly been partnered with career education. In pairing these offices, institutions are aligning professional development with civic education and outcomes. Institutions also demonstrate commitment to civic and community engagement by supporting the inclusion of service in their curriculum. Several Rhode Island secondary education institutions require a community service experience as a prerequisite to graduation, with the goal of fostering a student body that identifies with and supports their local communities. Days of service and orientation service programs have been gaining in popularity, providing banner days for campus and community unity. These notable service events aim to expose students to the community beyond campus and nurture a sense of civic responsibility. In return, community organizations are offered a large, energetic workforce for a day and the potential of continued partnerships with campus offices and their students.

Beyond these co-curricular campus-wide service requirements, many other Rhode Island colleges and universities have academic departments that integrate service into coursework and research projects. Through service-learning courses, faculty combine classroom instruction with community service experiences to both provide a context for

and enrich an academic curriculum. This pedagogy has been growing consistently, yet is difficult to quantify since so few colleges and universities have a shared definition of what constitutes a service-learning or community-based course. When civic and community engagement offices were asked about the proliferation of faculty utilizing service-learning in their courses, many could respond enthusiastically on an anecdotal level of the noticeable rise, but lacked the means of comprehensively tracking which faculty are using it and where in the community their service-learning students are working. This handicap in tracking not only makes quantifying the growth of service-learning courses difficult; it also inhibits the institution's abilities to support and encourage this form of academically grounded civic and community engagement.

Through the mapping analysis, all 11 college and universities in Rhode Island explicitly mention in their guiding documents that civic and community engagement is important to their institutional identity. Additionally, many name community partnerships, engagement or outreach as a key goal or method in their strategic plans. Areas that campuses identified within institutional culture as those that needed attention or improvement included faculty promotion and tenure policies that support engaged scholarship, budget assessments on how resources align with institutional priorities of community engagement, support structures, campus-wide coordination of community-based activities, community voice and administrative and academic leadership support for civic engagement. These areas were identified with commonality throughout the state, providing an opportunity for RICC to seek solutions through cross-campus collaboration.

THEME FOUR
*Impact
Assessment*

With a growing need to quantify the impact of civic and community engagement programs, the question of how to effectively measure these outcomes is shared across the state. A focus on impact assessment also has created an opportunity for collaborative problem solving, community and student storytelling and a focus on creative ways to measure the diverse array of civic and community engagement activities on campuses.

Through the RICC membership, it is evident that all member campuses are involved in community and civic engagement in various ways across campuses, yet there is also a collective challenge in articulating the impact of this engagement. This struggle is part of a larger, national dialogue on how to quantify service, community-based learning and research and campus-community partnerships. Though it is difficult and ever evolving, efforts in assessment are critical for sustainability, effective programming and an important piece in telling the shared story of higher education's engagement and collective commitment to communities.

Most campuses, to the best of their ability, produce a yearly tally of how many hours their students served over the previous year. This metric is often used as a campus indicator of success for the year, as well as in university publications. Across campuses, this data is difficult to report accurately. Outside of service-learning courses and graduation

requirements, service experiences for students are not always precisely tracked, nor do all students, faculty and staff self-report. Furthermore, it is uncertain how accurate numbers of service hours can show true student and community impact. Many campuses also hesitate to place too much importance on counting hours; served in fear it would appear to reduce relationships and long-term commitments to meaningless data. Beyond the logistical and theoretical challenges in this type of data collection, it is unclear as to what exactly needs to be measured and what will be done with the information.

One way in which this information is useful to higher education institutions is in demonstrating the positive impact students make in Rhode Island communities and leveraging this impact for favorable public policies and tax relief. As nonprofit institutions, colleges and universities in Rhode are exempt from paying many taxes, despite their vast and valuable real estate holdings. Admittedly, this is an intricate debate deserving further detail than this project provides. Still, it is important to mention how this debate weighs into the greater question of what is the public role of higher education and how assessing the impact of engagement is important to Rhode Island public policy.

One strong correlation that arises where institutions can assess the impact of engagement is the connection between student engagement in the community and student retention. Students who feel connected to their school and the greater community are more likely to remain enrolled and graduate than students who do not. This data makes a strong case for colleges to both continue and broaden their investment in civic and community engagement offices so that they may reach more students and continue to produce a high return on investment for the institution.

CONCLUSION

The four themes of community partnerships, student leadership and development, institutional culture and impact assessment represent the overall state of our collective story of engagement in Rhode Island. Though each campus undoubtedly has many more areas of successes and challenges, these select themes reflect important aspects to civic and community engagement no matter which school is examined. Now we are challenged to come together to help address some of our common struggles reported here and work more collaboratively to effectively communicate how Rhode Island's colleges and universities are committed to the public purpose of higher education.

Moving forward, Rhode Island Campus Compact will continue to support member campuses in their common challenges and celebrate areas of achievement and exemplary programs. In particular, RICC will work to elevate the impact and outcomes of the civic and community engagement in higher education, help solve critical social issues facing member institutions and their communities by catalyzing, promoting and amplifying civic engagement innovation and maximize our collective potential as a higher education network to strengthen community-campus partnerships and foster students as active citizens. This will entail producing a yearly impact report highlighting member campuses' efforts and increase communication of civic and community engagement impact and

outcomes and help to inform institutional culture around the accomplishments and critical value of this work. RICC will further assist members in the continuing exploration of impact assessment mechanisms and convene a yearly statewide membership meeting to share innovative practices and build collaborative efforts between institutions and partners, and be a vital source of tools, resources, best practices and new ideas for civic engagement scholarship and practice with the help of our national network.

Rhode Island Campus Compact will leverage our network and continue to be a leader in the state to promote PK-16 partnerships that impact college access, retention and positive student and community outcomes. As a convening body, RICC will gather member campuses and their communities to solve these critical social issues and increase collaboration. Furthermore, RICC will aid in increasing the capacity of each member institution for this work by supporting engaged faculty through a faculty fellowship program, campus-based workshops and an on-line resource database.

In light of this report, RICC will also enhance our work to increase meaningful, reciprocal, community-campus partnerships and promote student leadership. Through the National Newman Award, Raise Your Voice grants and an annual statewide conference of engaged student leaders, RICC will provide opportunities to highlight exceptional students and further grant them a platform to be agents of effective change in their communities. As demonstrated in this summary, community partnerships will continue to be critical moving forward and RICC will build resources, convene partners and create better access points between institutions and community organizations.

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Funding for this project was provided by
Serve Rhode Island through the RICC
AmeriCorps Planning grant.

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