The PReP Framework for Public Engagement

The PReP Framework for Public Engagement is a descriptive framework that explains public engagement in higher education at a systems-level.The PReP Framework focuses on three areas of public engagement: **P**eople, **Re**lationships, and **P**athways. For the purposes of this framework, we define 'public engagement' broadly as:

the intentional and mutually beneficial interaction between members of an institution and external individuals or groups that results in positive societal change



People

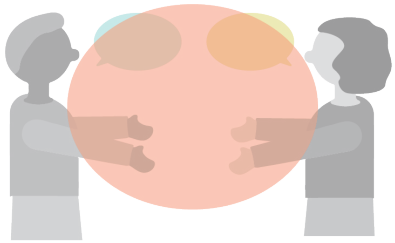
People are individuals or groups of individuals from both institutional and public spaces. At a minimum, there are always two people in an engaged relationship (someone from the institution and someone from the public).

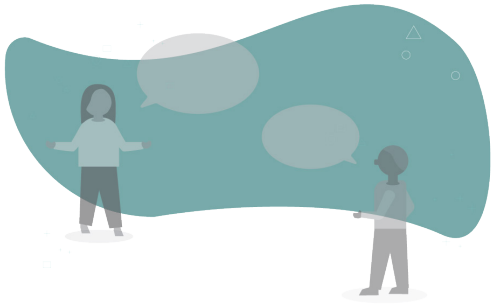
Each person has distinct and individual characteristics that shape the outcome of the engagement.

Relationships

The **relationship** refers to the connection, interaction, collaboration, or partnership that people from the institution and public form during engagement.

These relationships themselves have distinct characteristics that are either actively negotiated among or indirectly fashioned by those involved. These relational characteristics also shape the engagement outcome.





Pathways

The **pathway** refers to the larger context or environment in which the engagement is taking place. These pathways have distinct affordances, social practices, norms, and expectations that govern behavior in each space.

The people and relationships in an engagement operate within this broader context, and contextual factors further shape an engagement outcome.

Because public engagement outcomes are shaped by each of these dimensions individually and in concert, it is important to name and account for all characteristics relating to each dimension.

People: Public engagement fundamentally begins with people.

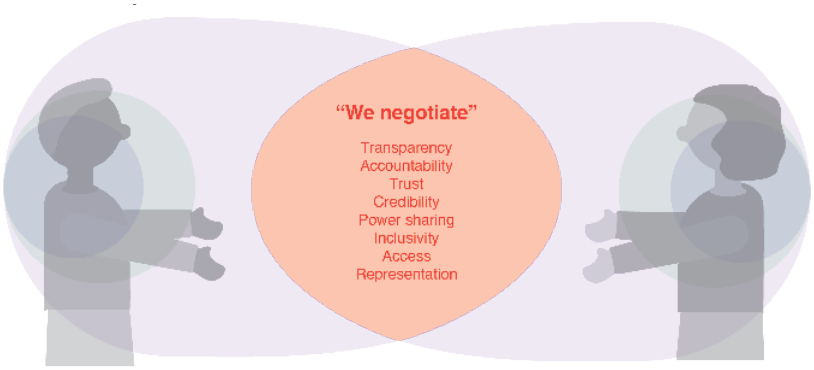
The People dimension includes individuals or groups of individuals from both institutional and public spaces. At a minimum, there are always two people in an engaged relationship: someone from the institution, such as faculty or staff, and someone from the public, such as a community partner, audience member, or policy-maker.

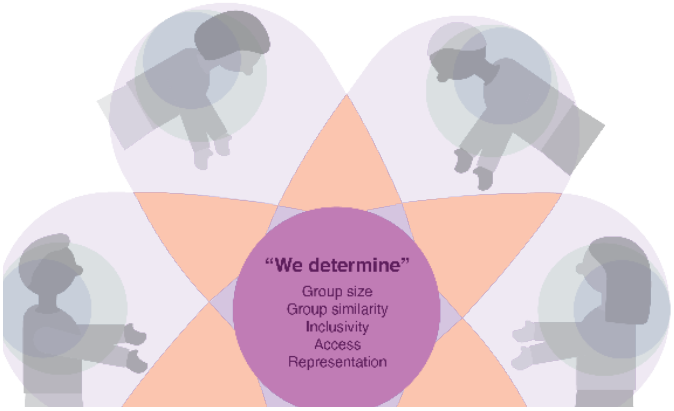


Every person comes to an engaged relationship with different identities, understandings, assets, and liabilities that influence their behaviors and actions in an engaged relationship. The characteristics of identity, understanding, assets, and liabilities are intricately connected with one another and build upon one another, as represented in the framework by the concentric circles that grow around an individual as each category is added.

Relationships: In public engagement, people form relationships with one another.

The Relationships dimension refers to the connections, interactions, collaborations, or partnerships that people from the institution and public form, ranging from 30-second interactions during a museum visit to a decades-long research partnership. The qualities of a relationship such as accountability, trust, and inclusivity are always present in a relationship whether or not they are actively fostered by those involved. At the same time, these qualities will manifest differently according to a relationship's context.





When there are larger groups of people coming together in an engagement, the complexity of the relationship dimension increases. Additional factors such as size and similarity of the group (including who is *not* included in the group) affect the outcomes of public engagement. In addition, inclusivity, access, and representation take on additional meanings with larger groups than in relationships involving smaller numbers of people.

Pathways: The relationships that people form in public engagement occur in different contexts.

The Pathways dimension refers to the various contexts of public engagement, including the different types of who, what, where, when, and why of engagement activities—from engagement with media professionals to community-engaged coursework. Pathways have different norms, goals, approaches, practices, opportunities, pitfalls, and impacts. At the same time, pathways are flexible, and the boundaries that separate them are rather permeable. Often any one specific engagement activity can fit along multiple pathways. Despite their differences, pathways do share many commonalities, and characteristics such as temporality, locality, and formality apply across pathways.

We have identified twelve pathways of public engagement reflecting current practices and professional communities.

Engagement Pathways

Alternative, Informal, and Lifelong Learning



connecting with free-choice learners of all ages in nontraditional educational settings to support exploration and learning

Ex: public speaker series, museums

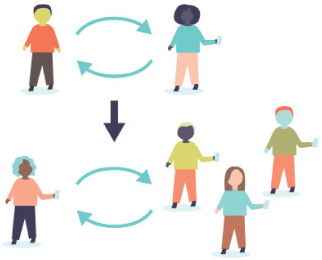
Applied Practice and Professional Consulting



offering professional services, often on a pro-bono basis or in practice-based educational contexts, to address basic needs or complex problems

Ex: community health clinics, consultations for small businesses

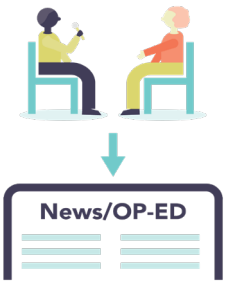
Capacity-Building and Training



providing or receiving training to develop relevant skills or capacities, and/or building resources such as support, funding, or infrastructure

Ex: workshops that prepare people to work together, leadership trainings

Communications and Media Engagement



sharing information related to scholarship or creative practice to enable broader understanding and application of that information

Ex: creating content for public consumption, discussing research on social media, connecting with media

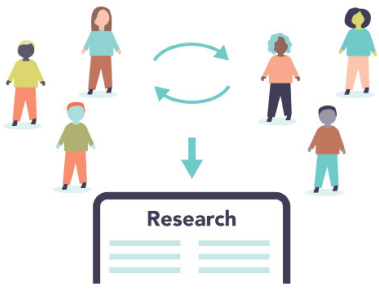
Community-Engaged Learning and/or Service



partnering with communities to address community-identified needs and expand the context of student learning

Ex: community-engaged coursework, student service organizations

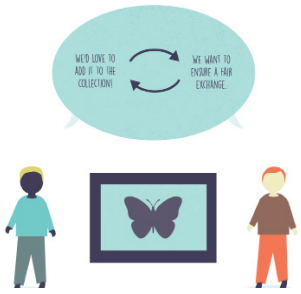
Community-Engaged Research



partnering with communities to advance scholarship and address community-identified issues

Ex: community-based participatory research, oral history projects originating from within a community

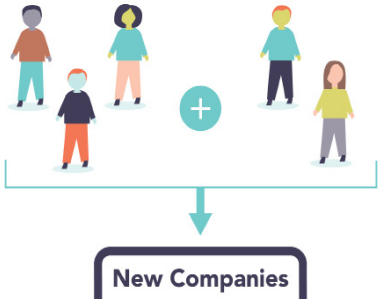
Holdings and Collections



ethically negotiating, aquiring, and sharing assets held by the institution - both tangible and digital - to expand knowledge

Ex: museum collections, botanical gardens collections, libraries

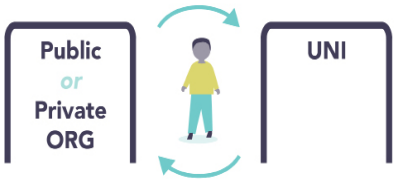
Industry Partnerships, Commercialization, and Entrepreneurship



connecting with industry or private-sector entities to advance product, technology, and/or service innovations

Ex: sharing resources for collaborative research, facilitating career pipelines, commercialization of ideas or technology

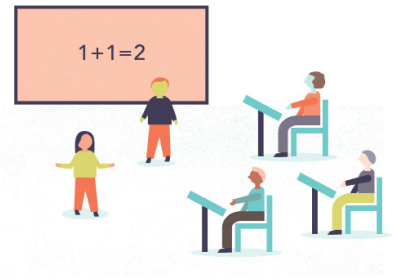
Internships and Residency Programs



embedding individuals temporarily within different spaces to contribute work and ideas in exchange for learning and growth

Ex: artist-in-residence programs, summer externships or work programs

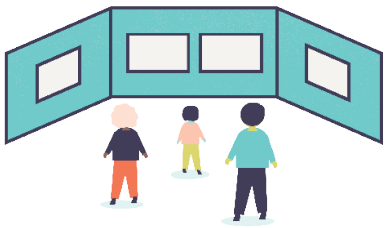
P-14 Education and Educational Outreach



supporting the P-14 educational system to address the educational and developmental needs of younger students

Ex: in-school presentations, partnering with teachers on curriculum development, summer or pipeline programs

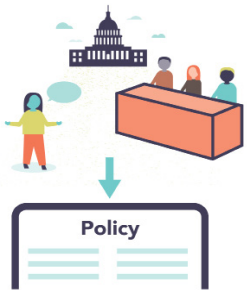
Performance, Exhibition, and Installation



creating public spaces, experiences, creative works, and/or displays to inspire personal meaning-making and understanding

Ex: co-creating artistic works with communities, public concerts or installations

Policy, Advocacy, and Government Relations



engaging with political decision-makers and members of various publics to support informed policy decisions

Ex: meeting with representatives or testifying before Congress, serving on national advisory boards, partnerships with city councils

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Aurbach, E. L., Parakkat, E. K., Sdvizhkov, H., Gentry, D., Taylor, M., Figueroa, D., & Niemer, R.K. (2024). "The PReP Framework for Public Engagement, Version 5.0"

This version includes a title change for the framework and updated language regarding the people and pathways dimensions. The previous version can be found here: https://bit.ly/mpef-4-0