



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

GUIDELINES

Community Engagement Guidelines

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2. CONTEXT

As public universities across the world are funded largely by the public purse they are called upon to serve the public good through their scholarship. Serving the public is achieved primarily by providing higher education to students drawn, at least partly, from the communities in which the university is located. However, there are other ways that they can use their talented people and knowledge base to support their stakeholders in a mutually beneficial manner. Collectively these efforts are known as community engagement activities.

The South African Context

The South African context that shapes community engagement practice is characterised by the need to strengthen democracy and improve social cohesion. Indeed, in 1997 the then Department of Education published a white paper entitled “A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education” in which it regarded community engagement as a transformation imperative for all South African universities. (DOE, 1997)

The Wits Context

In the context of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Wits, or the University), community engagement is also seen as an imperative. It is embedded in the University’s strategic statement of purpose, which is to “make a positive impact on society through creating and advancing global knowledge and [by] fostering graduates to be leaders with integrity”. (Wits University, 2023)

The vision of the University is paraphrased as follows:

Wits “will strive to empower [its] graduates to be socially-responsive ...” and to “use [its] abundance of knowledge, talent, and innovation to find solutions to the challenges of the 21st Century” and finally to use the University’s “locale” in the Global South “to serve as a hub of knowledge on the continent to advance inclusive and sustainable futures for all”. (Wits University, 2023)

A convenient set of guiding principles that is used to implement these strategic aspirations is United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (Sustainable Development Goals, 2024)

The message is clear, the University strives to connect with its communities in a mutually beneficial manner through the co-production of knowledge, exchanging ideas, sharing solutions and being a force for good for our city, province, country, region and continent as guided by the SDGs.

3. PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

These guidelines seek to enable ethical and safe community engagement, so that the University can fulfil its strategic intention of making a “positive impact on society”. The purpose is not to override existing guidelines established by various organisational units within the University, but rather to provide a broad framework for the University as a whole.

As these guidelines need to remain relevant, contemporary and contextualized, suggestions for improvements are welcomed.

4. DEFINITIONS

Community engagement is a mutually responsive, reciprocal process involving the University and its communities. Participants invest their time and resources, as they can, into projects to achieve sustainable and mutual benefit. It takes place across all academic disciplines in the University and is always implemented in the interest of public good.

The University’s communities are broad, multiple and diverse and include civil society, government and industry located in rural, urban, and peri-urban settings that can be local (in the City of Johannesburg or in the Gauteng Province), national, continental or global. The internal community of University students and staff as well as alumni is included in this definition.

5. SCOPE

These guidelines are meant to influence all Wits staff (including joint appointees, honorary and visiting scholars), students (undergraduate, postgraduate and visiting students), Wits entities and associated / affiliated research groups (e.g., GCRO), and anyone conducting community engagement activities on behalf of the University.

6. PRINCIPLES

The What

Wits aims to achieve inspirational connections with its various communities – both inside and outside its boundaries – that are reciprocal and mutually beneficial. It will use the University’s resources, expertise and good reputation to reach out to these communities for the good of society.

This envisaged community engagement will be achieved through interaction, involvement and connection using partnerships and collaborations informed by the principles of mutual respect and fairness using acceptable ethical standards with the purpose of doing good and realizing societal upliftment.

The Why

The University has a long history of commitment to serving and contributing to impactful and innovative societal solutions. By explicitly expressing, guiding, and cohering its community engagement efforts, the University is showcasing, enabling and strengthening its mutually engaged networks and collaborations between its academic and non-academic communities through the translation of knowledge and expertise across its communities.

The How

The University and its communities seek to strengthen their connections through publicly engaged thought leadership, academic citizenship, volunteerism, community outreach projects, research and innovation, socially engaged scholarship, entrepreneurship, service learning and clinical services. In all cases this is achieved through mutual exchanges of expertise and resources.

There are four broad areas of community engagement including:

1. Engaged scholarship including research and innovation¹;
2. Engaged teaching and learning;
3. Outreach and community participation;
4. Public access to University facilities.

These four areas are described more fully in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of the four types of community engagement included in this document

1. Engaged scholarship including research and innovation	
Description	Examples
<p>Different forms of applied research and innovation that use participatory methods that encourage reciprocal, collaborative, inter- and trans-disciplinary knowledge production.</p> <p>The emphasis is on engaged research and innovation as they aim to address the challenges that are faced by the multiple and diverse communities in which the University is embedded. These research methods rely on the resources and expertise of both the University and communities to generate research findings that can either be non-income generating or income-generating. The projects can be sponsored either by the private or public sectors.</p>	<p>Participatory action research, community-based research, innovation projects that aim to benefit communities through sharing knowledge, non-profit funded research, and Government funded research.</p>
2. Engaged teaching and learning	
Description	Examples

¹ The University's definition of innovation is broad and extends beyond commercialisation of knowledge to include social impact

Variations of pedagogical and curriculum methods that combine the content knowledge that students learn from courses with real world experiences they derive from engaging with communities and multiple publics. These pedagogical and curriculum methods are characterised as experiential learning, credit bearing courses, strengthen students' civic responsibility and involves collaboration between students and communities, with the aim to solve issues facing communities that have been identified through needs assessments.	Community-based learning, service learning, and clinical service.
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3. Outreach and community participation	
Description	Examples
<p>Outreach consists of three different programmes, namely:</p> <p>(i) Programmes that are developed for the community's benefit;</p> <p>(ii) Programmes that use the University's resources and expertise to educate the public;</p> <p>(iii) Collaborations between the community and University for purposes of producing research. These research findings are generally used to improve the University's teaching and research.</p>	<p>Volunteering, community-campus-partnerships, school visits, etc.</p> <p>Public lectures, media interviews, etc.</p> <p>Policy briefs</p>
4. Public access to University facilities and academic collections	
Description	Examples
Programmes and resources that the University makes available to the communities without expecting partnerships, collaborations, or knowledge exchange.	Access to the University libraries' information resources, sport fields and academic and special collections, e.g., Wits Art Museum, the Origins Centre and the Digital Dome.

7. ETHICAL STANDARDS

"Ethical considerations are integral to the development of sustainable partnerships and relationships in community engagement". (Scheepers J., 2023) During the planning of community engagement projects, it is imperative that the ethical aspects of the engagement are considered against globally and nationally accepted ethical frameworks. These standards should at least consider:

- The "do no harm" principle for both the University staff and students but also all project participants by applying Beauchamp and Childress' "four principles" which are non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, and autonomy. (Beauchamp, 2001)
- The National Research Foundation (NRF) Engaged Research Framework. (NRF, 2023)
- The code of ethics provided by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) suggests that practitioners hold themselves "accountable for these principles and strive to hold all participants to the same standards". (IAP2, 2024)

It is recommended, if there is any doubt about the ethics of a proposed community engagement project, that the plan be considered by the Wits Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) before implementation.

Personal Information

When collecting personal or identifiable human information, it is important to consider the [Protection of Personal Information Act \(2019\)](#) (POPI Act). This includes any information that could potentially lead to the identification of community members. Such information may include any identifying number, symbol, email address, physical address, telephone number, location information, online identifier, or other assignment to the person.

The POPI Act provides a list of what can be considered personal information². Ensure that access to any such information is appropriately password-protected. Contact Wits ICT if you require a licence to a mail management system, if you process large volumes of personal contact information. If you wish to broadcast communication to persons in the public or industry that are not part of your School/Faculty mailing list contact the Schools Liaison office, Development and Fundraising Office (DFO) or Marketing to use University distribution channels. Do not share your mailing lists between Schools, projects, or in any way that breaks the original intended end-use of the list.

Children and Vulnerable Persons

Children and vulnerable individuals are afforded specific protection under the POPI Act (2019). Vulnerable persons, including children and young people under the age of 16, individuals in custody or care, those with additional support needs, and those who are mentally or physically ill (University of Edinburgh, 2022), must not have their personal information captured without the consent of their competent person. This prohibition extends to any form of personal identification, including pictures, names, social media handles, or phone numbers. When dealing with images of minors, faces must be obscured or blurred unless explicit permission is granted by their competent person for the image's use.

Public engagement initiatives targeting vulnerable persons should include clear safeguarding measures to ensure the health & safety, food security and privacy of these groups. These safeguarding measures can be considered by Wits Human Research Ethics Committee. This may not always be feasible on certain timelines for school tours, or unplanned visits. Should you need to host any of these groups without ethical clearance, never separate vulnerable individuals from their competent persons during public engagement activities. For guidance on engaging with differently-abled persons, consult the Wits Disability Rights Unit for support or guidance.

Academic Collections and Engagement

Academic collections, for example those displayed in the Origins Centre, often attract visitors. Although this is to be encouraged it is important that such project consider the Academic

² <https://popia.co.za/act/>

Collections Management policy and the ethical standards therein for community engagement, take precedence over this Community Engagement Policies. Therefore, items must be displayed with appropriate measures to ensure the safety of both the viewers and the items.

Should the specific collections management procedure document not specify protocols for community engagement, it is advisable to defer to national and international ethical standards. These may include the International Council for Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), the SANBI Natural Science Collections Facility (NSCF), the South African Museums Association (SAMA), and other discipline-appropriate ethical oversight bodies.

8. HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS

It is important when planning a community engagement or public event that the health and safety risks are identified, and the necessary mitigating steps are taken. To assist in this process a risk identification check list and other guidance is provided in Appendix 1 below. It is vital that this assessment is completed before the community engagement project is implemented and that the assessment is scrutinized and approved by the University's Occupation Health and Safety team.

9. DATABASE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

It is necessary for the University to keep track of all its current community engagement activities. This is important for three reasons, namely:

1. To coordinate activities that are implemented across the University and thereby maximize their impact,
2. To gather credible information that can be used by:
 - a. Individual academics that plan and implement these community engagements as evidence of their academic citizenship contribution when applying for promotion to the Faculty Staffing and Promotions (S&P) committees,
 - b. The University to report on these current activities to help grow its good reputation and to provide evidence of its performance against the expectations of a public University in South Africa. A summary of these activities should be reported in the University's statutory annual report.

The community engagement project leader or organizer must report on an annual basis the implementation of all such projects. To facilitate this a database of community engagements must be developed, maintained and used as a source of evidence for activity in this area. The type of data that should be collected is described in Table 2. Appendix 2 also provides guidance on implementation.

Table 2: Data to be collected for each community engagement activity on an annual basis

#	Description	Type of data	Format
1	Title of the community engagement activity	Alpha numeric	Short answer
2	Name of the community engagement project manager (the lead person)	Alpha numeric	Short answer
3	Names of all those who contributed significantly to the community engagement	Alpha numeric	Short answer - repeated
4	The organisational unit (e.g., School) which takes responsibility for the community engagement activity	Alpha numeric	Short answer
5	Type of community engagement	Alpha numeric	Pick from a list ³
6	Alignment with SDGs	Alpha numeric	Pick from a list ⁴
7	A brief description of the community engagement	Alpha numeric	Long answer
8	Duration of the community engagement activity: Start date; End date; Allow for periodical activities (e.g., repeated annually)	Date	Date picker, with repeat options
9	Cost of implementing the community engagement in the current financial year	Alpha numeric	Accounting with 2 decimal places
10	Estimated number of people reached	Alpha numeric	Whole number
11	A brief qualitative description of impact	Alpha numeric	Long answer

10. FUNDING OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Although the University is prepared to invest some of its own resources into community engagement projects, like many academic activities these works can be magnified using external funding streams. The following provides some advice on how to raise the necessary funding to enable community engagement activities.

Project Plan

The starting point is to prepare a detailed project plan describing the activities, the related costs, the cash flows (or the rate at which money will be spent), and revenues (mainly in the form of University contributions and external donations or grants).

The following headings make up a useful framework for the project plan.

- **Introduction** – the background, current context and need for the community engagement,
- **Description** – a brief description of the community engagement which could be a once off activity or multiple activities over a limited period or indeed over a period that may have no immediate end,

Top Tip: It is always good practice to include a Gantt chart⁵ as part of the description. This is a pictorial

³ Use headings used in Table 1

⁴ Use 17 SDGs

⁵ A pictorial representation of what (is to be done), when (it is to be done) and who (will do it). You can read more about Gantt charts here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gantt_chart

display of what will happen, when it will happen in the sense of scheduling events and who will be responsible for each activity.

- **Expected deliverables** – a brief description of the planned outcomes,
- **Budget** – what resources are needed to make the above happen.

There are multiple uses for the project plan. Firstly, it will help with the implementation, but, secondly and equally as importantly, it can be used to solicit financial support from sponsors.

Top Tip: Where possible and without making it contrived add a research component to the community engagement project. By doing so the funder pool is broadened.

Funding Landscape

Once a clear project plan has been developed the search for suitable sponsors can begin. There is never one set of sponsors for all community engagement projects as the pool of potential sponsors will depend on the nature of the specific project. It is also common that more than one sponsor will be needed to make a project viable. Below is a description of several types of potential sponsors with tips on how to approach them.

University, Faculty and School

The University may have resources to invest in the community engagement project. This often takes the form of seed funding used to get the project rolling. Co-funding is also an option and demonstrates to the main funder that the University is fully committed to the project.

People to speak to: Head of School, Dean

Corporate Sponsors

Depending on the nature of the community engagement project it may be possible to attract corporate sponsorship. Here success is determined by the ability to align the project with the corporate identity. Imagine, for example, the community engagement project is promoting good oral hygiene in the community. In this case the obvious corporate to approach would be a maker of tooth paste. However, care is required in selecting the corporate sponsor as the project may inherently if not overtly be critical of the sponsor's business processes.

Develop a list of potential corporate sponsors.

People to speak to: Before approaching them speak with the Development and Fund-raising Office (DFO). Ask them for the names and contact details of the people to approach in these corporates. Success often depends on who in the company you approach. The DFO will also advise you on how to pitch the project idea. The most obvious approach is to focus on what the corporate can gain out of the project.

Trust, Foundations and Charities

A few illustrative examples of trusts, foundations and charities are provided, but the

RESEARCHConnect⁶ funder database should be search for suitable external funders.

- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (<https://www.gatesfoundation.org/>),
- Ford Foundation (<https://www.fordfoundation.org/our-work-around-the-world/southern-africa/>),
- DG Murray Trust (<https://dgmt.co.za/>) and
- CANSA (<https://cansa.org.za/>).

In all cases they are established with a clear philanthropic purpose and therefore invest in projects that align with that purpose. It is important to choose the trust, foundation or charity with care being sure that the community engagement project falls within their sphere of interest.

People to speak to: The DFO will be able to steer you in the direction of the most appropriate trust foundation or charity.

Funding Agencies

Research funding agencies, like the National Research Foundation (NRF), may seem at first glance the least likely to invest in community engagement projects. This is probably true unless you were able to build into the project some sort of translational research. In these cases, the agency may fund the translational research and thereby enable the community engagement project.

When seeking the right funding agency again think about aligning the proposed project with the most suitable funder. Look for their mandates on their websites, which will help you with the section process.

People to speak to: The University Research Office (RO) will be able to steer you in the direction of the most appropriate funder.

Top Tip: The RESEARCHConnect⁷ funder database is a good tool to seek out agencies and indeed charities, etc that will fund research projects related to community engagement projects. Contact the RO to get registered to use the RESEARCHConnect funder database.

Closing Remarks on Fund Raising

It is important to remember that it may be necessary to approach many potential funders before having success. Persistence is important. It may also be necessary to have contributions from more than one sponsor to cover all the costs. This is quite normal and acceptable but do be aware having secured one sponsor may be a deterrent for the participation of another.

Top tip: Carefully plan the fundraising campaign before you make any approaches.

⁶ <https://search.myresearchconnect.com/> please contact the University Research Office to be registered.

⁷ Ibid

11. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This set of guidelines was developed by a task team including in alphabetical order:

- Bernadette Johnson – Director Transformation and Employment Equity Office
- Cameron Penn-Clarke – Senior researcher, Evolutionary Studies Institute
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- Gill Drennan – Head of School, School of Geoscience
- Karuna Singh – Senior Student Development Project Officer, Student Development and Leadership Unit
- Lisa Ware – Senior Researcher, Developmental Pathways for Health Research Unit
- Najma Aghardien – Team Leader: Curriculum Teaching, CLTD
- Noor Nieftagodien – Professor and Director of the History Research Group
- Robyn Symons – Collections Curator & Geo-communicator, School of Geoscience
- Robin Drennan – Director: Research Development

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13. APPENDIX 1: GUIDELINES FOR OHS&E

GUIDELINE: HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS WHEN PLANNING AND ATTENDING OUTREACH ACTIVITIES.

This OHS&E guideline is meant to help people planning a community engagement event. This set of guidelines is not exhaustive and where in doubt the advice of the OHS&E directorate should be sought.

The following OHS&E-related aspects should be considered when planning and attending community engagement activities:

- **List of implementers:** The organizer should have an updated list with names/contact details of all staff/students participating in the outreach activities. This list should be made available to the Director / Head of School or appointed section 16.2 assignee of the area before embarking on the trip.
- **Risk Assessment:** University staff and students and community members can be exposed to a wide range of risks. In view hereof, they need to identify the risks/hazards that may prevail at different stages and implement suitable risk mitigation measures. Before the date of event a risk assessment must be conducted while considering the full range of risks. The organiser can notify the Directorate: OHS&E to assist in carrying out the risk assessment.
- **First aiders:** It is advisable that as many participants should be trained in basic first aid Level 1.
- **First aid boxes** – Sufficient first aid boxes should be available. *Please notify your OHS&E Officer within the Directorate: OHS&E for assistance with setting up first aid provisions.*
- **Communication:** All participants must be provided with a daily briefing/discussion session before the event starts. This briefing session should communicate relevant/significant topical information, including an emphasis on relevant OHS&E aspects (i.e. weather issues, protection that may be required, any specific hazards/risks in the area, etc.).
- **Permission and authorizations:** Participants must obey the OHS&E rules of the owner of the premises on which they are conducting their activities or the area in which they are operating.
- **Adverse weather conditions:** Participants must be cautious during extreme hot/cold weather conditions and during stormy conditions where lightning and hail may pose a threat. The organizer and participants should monitor the daily weather report. Participants should take with them appropriate clothing and accessories that could

protect against the elements (i.e. sunscreen, sunglasses, hats, overalls as well as jerseys, blankets, etc. for extreme cold conditions). In very hot climates participants should have enough drinking water available to avoid dehydration/heatstroke.

- **City / Urban / Rural and Community work:** Participants in any city, urban area, rural area, or parts thereof must be aware of safety and security risks that may be prevalent in the area. Check relevant crime statistics and prevalent security trends. Contact Campus Protection Services for advice before embarking on the event.
- **Equipment:** All equipment used must be in good safe working condition and must be used safely.
- **Emergencies:** If an accident/injury occurs then it should be dealt with as follows:

Minor injury

- i). First aider to treat the injury as considered appropriate with the medical equipment in the first aid box.
- ii). Notify relevant Wits HoS/Director.
- iii) Notify family members / next of kin.

Serious injury

As necessary and appropriate;

- i). Call ER24 010 205 3106 and indicate that it is a corporate client calling from Wits University. on Request the local ambulance services/fire department to respond.
 - ii). Arrange to have the injured person(s) transported to the local hospital.
 - iii). If required, request the local SA Police Services to respond.
 - iv). Notify the relevant Wits University Senior Manager / Head of School.
 - v) Notify family members.
- **Emergency Numbers:** Before each event the organizer must ensure they have the telephone number of ER24 under the Wits Corporate line whether operating inside or outside Gauteng (ER24 will dispatch according to province). The emergency number contact list should include the following:

ER24: 010 205 3106 (Wits Corporate line) or 084 124 (General line)

SA Police Service: 10111

Ambulance Service: 10177

Local Fire / Rescue Service: Local number to be provided by organizer

Local Hospital/Clinic: Local number to be provided by organizer

Local Medical Practitioner: Name/number of local doctors to be provided by the organizer

Campus Control: +27 11 717 4444 / +27 11 717 6666

Head of School: Name/contact number to be provided by the organizer

14. APPENDIX 2: IMPLEMENTATION IMPERATIVES

The following actions are regarded as necessary for the successful implementation of the database of community engagements.

#	Activity	Reference in document	Responsibility
1	Develop an online database of community engagement activities that is easily updated	See Section 9 on page 8	Wits ICT
2	Communicate the availability of this database to the University community including staff and students	See Section 9 on page 8	Communications division of Advancement
3	Encourage the use of the Community Engagement database	See Section 5 on page 4 and Section 6 on page 4	SET
4	Continuous use of the Community Engagement database: a) Use the database to enrich the reporting on Community Engagement in the Annual Report, etc. b) Ensure that academic CV's put forward to the faculty Staffing and Promotion Committees should always include Community Engagement activities listed in the database	a) See Section 6 on page 4 b) See Section 9 on page 8	a) Communications division of Advancement b) Faculty Deans