The Global Engagement Transition Framework

MSU Residential College in the Arts and Humanities; Summer 2020

We are in a state of transition among multiple crises. Therefore, this framework is meant to guide community engagement through this period of uncertainty. Students, faculty, and community members from around the world participated virtually in a special summer 2020 Michigan State University Residential College in the Arts and Humanities course on global community engagement in the midst of multiple crises, including a global pandemic. We concluded that collaboration reflecting values related to reciprocal, sustained engagement is now most critical and already is taking a variety of forms. This framework, then, highlights effective values, knowledge(s), skills, and approaches for global collaboration and communication during crisis and global separation. It suggests ways universities and community partners can respond to the (un)expected changes associated with crises without perpetuating institutional harm or violence. As communication technologies continue to be of importance during this time, the authors acknowledge this framework does not address the possibility of a global crisis involving loss of access to communications and other technologies nor does it address the crisis of worldwide populations without access as a fact of daily life. Still, we recommend community-university partners consider this as one response to developing crises during a period of global and historical transition.

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Figure 1: Global Community Engagement Transition Framework

This graphic represents the multi-directional relationship between values and key community engagement elements. Our capacity for knowledge, the skills we possess, and the way we approach engagement are all impacted by our values. Below, specific aspects of each element – critical to effective global, virtual community engagement in times of transition – are identified and defined.
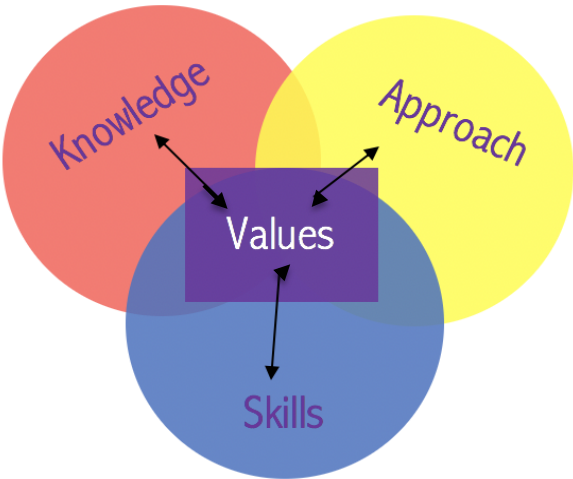
Values: *Beliefs seen as essential to the practice of global, virtual engagement, particularly during times of crisis.*

Adaptation (Adaptability): The ability to work through the complexity and find new solutions during crises; The use of constant creativity and communication when participants are unable to come together physically.

Collaboration (Adaptive/Improvised): Active community participation and a common understanding of one's responsibilities within the community, to one another, and community building objectives.

Co-generation: A commitment to co-creative, co-knowledge generative and co-experiential relationships that product community change.

Commitment/ Responsibility: The responsibility for all people involved in community engagement to communicate effectively and frequently; Participants should be consistent in their communication and follow through with partners; This develops trust.

Inclusivity/ Diversity: Ensuring engagement is open for all community members; Seeking equity for all involved.

Interdependence: The understanding that people are linked across communities and need one another even without physical connection.

Interdisciplinarity: A commitment to the use of multiple fields of knowledge to understand the diversity of perspectives and complexities in community change.

Mutual Reciprocity: The sharing, solidarity, boundaries, and respect that develop a sense of collaboration.

Respect for Public Health and Security: Understanding the environmental constraints of crises to engage in the most productive and safe ways.

Sustained/Cyclical: The commitment to long term engagement in which what is learned from community engagement from one crisis is considered and adapted for use with other ongoing challenges or when another crisis strikes.

True Generosity: The exploration of the root cause of a community challenge to ensure that the structures that create the need for engagement are not being perpetuated in the engagement itself.

Knowledge: *Information that assists participants in recognizing, understanding and effectively and proactively acting on a need for change.*

Awareness: An understanding of societal issues – on local to global scales – to make informed decisions using dialogue and reflection on our own sense of place.

Communication Methods: Ways of communicating among participants from diverse backgrounds and varying/intersectional identities in and outside of one's communities.

Culture: Understanding that exposes participants in community engagement projects to the various cultural backgrounds required for a more 'holistic' representation of a particular community.

Engagement Terminology/Theories: Terms and ideas used to understand processes that support or inhibit just and effective community engagement practice (i.e. False Generosity).

History: An understanding and acknowledgment of location, successes and failures of engagement methods throughout time to improve current and future communication and engagement practice.

Language: Essential verbal or nonverbal communications in community engagement practice that ensure participants feel understood and validated; can involve translation and interpretation.

Self-Knowledge: Use of vulnerability and self-reflection to recognize one's privilege and/or positionality relative to others.

Technology: The understanding of different media platforms essential for connection, communication, and understanding one another during times of crisis and uncertainty.

Skills: *New or developing practices, often involving technology, that support collaboration in virtual or non-virtual settings.*

Communication: The ability to check-in, actively listen, be flexible and open-minded, and to have the willingness to learn with the end goal of problem solving for lasting and sustainable change; efforts/systems that address language and cultural difference are also critical.

Community leadership: Community engagement is founded on and lead by community members as most critical and essential community engagement; These community member/leaders engage in active projects and on-the-ground practices ranging from mentoring to motivation that catalyze change even and especially when it is difficult for folks to come together in a physical space.

Curiosity: The capacity to be comfortable with a lack of information; the ability to embrace the unknown and ask questions.

Empathy: The use of vulnerability in engagement to form trust-based relationships; Participants need to use self-reflection, humility, and honesty to create connection.

Problem Solving: Collaboration with partners on the most efficient approaches to identifying, prescribing, implementing, and analyzing a problem and potential solution(s).

Organization: A structure for engaged partnerships to support project/program development, implementation, output, and outcomes to produce timely and lasting change; the ability to meet collaborative deadlines.

Technology Skills and Access: The ability to access and use mobile, remote communication, social media and learning technology such as such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Microsoft Teams, Desire2Learn and others to communicate outside of one's community when face-to-face engagement is difficult or impossible; access to technology is a privilege; it is important to recognize and discover ways individuals can still engage without technology in times of crises and isolation.

Approaches: *Techniques, often enhanced by arts and humanities-based co-learning, that develop and contextualize community knowledge for action and power; Allow participants to adapt to everchanging environments, virtual technology platforms, media and/or traditional communication methods.*

Acclimating to Different Approaches/Methods: Using conflict/crisis resolution models to understand previous change activities to adapt new ways of addressing community challenges.

(Virtual) Convening: Building habits of consistency, responsibility, commitment, and community when meeting physically or virtually through remote or virtual technology platforms.

Creativity: Using arts, music, poetry and other modalities to communicate "beyond words"; universal and innovative ways of communicating and understanding knowledge when engaging for change.

Dialogue: A process to ensures all voices are heard and respected when engaging with communities.

Intersectionality: Awareness of inclusivity, diversity, positionality, power, and privilege when engaging with communities and people often not be in the same position as oneself.

Intergenerational Sharing: Engaging with one's culture to understand past histories and transition to a future that considers the endearing presence of the past.

Oral History/Storytelling: The passing down of information, experiences, histories and values over time through word of mouth and via narrative to better understand a community.