RHODES UNIVERSITY
*Where leaders learn*

**Developing the Community Engagement Section of your Professional Portfolio or Tenure/Personal Promotions Application: A Brief Guide**

**1. Introduction**

In the changing landscape of higher education in South Africa (and globally), community engagement has increasingly become an important part of the professional portfolio for an academic when submitting an application for a post, tenure or promotion. Given the need to present a clear and well constructed section of your application around community engagement, this brief guide aims to provide some clear guidelines for documenting and reflecting on your community engagement practice as an academic. The process of developing this section of your professional portfolio will also provide space for you to reflect on your own personal development as a community engagement practitioner, which will hopefully allow you to grow and develop new ideas for the way you go about doing your community engagement work within your discipline.

It is important to note that when your community engagement section is being assessed the number of years that you have been involved in structured, strategic and planned community engagement activities will be taken into account. It is also important to note that while we applaud volunteer activities of academics, we however, would encourage these activities to be relevant to or inform teaching and/or research practices. Community Engagement at Rhodes is conceptualized both as a process and collection of activities at South African HEI's whereby the goals of research, teaching and learning and community engagement as core functions are integrated. This means that there might be considerable overlap between either your research (in the case of engaged research projects) or teaching (in the case of service-learning courses) sections of your professional portfolios or applications. While your reader will expect some overlap to occur between these sections it will still be important for you to tease out and relate these overlapping aspects to your identity as a community engagement practitioner and the specific strategies you employ in your community engagement activities which you will describe in the community engagement section of your portfolio or application.

One of the key things you need to do in the community engagement section is to give your reader a clear sense of yourself as a community engagement practitioner – what kind of community engagement activities  are you participating in, how you approach community engagement and why you do community engagement in the way you do it, that is, what is the philosophy that guides your practice. The headings below (2-5) should give you a guide for structuring the community engagement section of your portfolio or application, but it is not necessary for you to use these headings when writing the section up. Innovative and creative ways which showcase your work as a community engagement practitioner are encouraged, and, as with any assessment, it is imperative that you check your final document against the assessment criteria outlined in section 8.

**2. Community Engagement Practice: An explanation of what community engagement activities you do and how you do them**

This section of your portfolio or application could be structured in a number of different ways depending on the nature of your community engagement activities. You could present this information by listing your service-learning courses, engaged research projects or volunteerism activities and outlining the nature of your involvement in each of these activities. Alternatively you could structure this section around various thematic issues which you address as a community engagement practitioner, for example 'human rights', which run through a number of different engaged research, service-learning and volunteerism projects in which you are active.

Irrespective of how you choose to structure the section which outlines your roles and responsibilities in the community engagement projects which you are part of, you will need to explain to your reader the relationship between *what* community engagement activities you are active in and the *way* in which you approach those activities. Three things will be crucial for you to consider here. First, you should discuss the way you approach the mutually beneficial partnership established through the community engagement activities that you are involved in. What kind of

partnerships have you sought to establish with the communities/community members with whom you have worked, and how have these relationships shaped the nature of your community engagement practice? Second, you should discuss the way you approach the involvement of staff and or students in your community engagement activities. Finally, you should discuss the developmental and transformative or potentially transformative (if the engagement is relatively recent or ongoing) aspects of your community engagement practice. To what extent are the community engagement activities in which you are involved transformative for the staff/students/communities, and to what extent do the service activities lead to development for future community engagement/teaching/research work that you do?

In thinking about the way you do your community engagement activities the following questions might be helpful to consider:
- How do you approach linking your discipline specific knowledge to service in the community?
- How do you communicate with your community partners?
- How do you involve your community partners in the planning and execution of your activities?
- Do you conduct reflection or feedback sessions with your community partners?
- What training or support do you give to students or staff who work in the community engagement activities?
- Do you give your students the opportunity to occupy leadership roles in the community engagement activities?
- Do you conduct reflection sessions with your students?
- What kind of feedback do you provide to students on their reflections?

**This section should include:**

- A description of your community engagement activities
- A discussion of the strategies employed to relate your community engagement activities to your discipline
- A discussion of the mutually beneficial nature of your community engagement activities
- Evidence of a reciprocal relationship with a community partner
- Evidence of the transformative nature of your community engagement practice
- Evidence where appropriate that community engagement activities have been used to enhance the learning outcomes of your students

**3. Scholarship of Engagement: Why you do community engagement in the way you do it**

Underlying your explanation of how you do your community engagement activities is an implicit philosophy and theory of why you do your community engagement activities in the way you do them. Whether or not your philosophy of community engagement is rooted in research on development theory or in the community engagement literature, which it might well be, your community engagement section of your portfolio or application should give your reader a sense of why you have adopted the particular approach to community engagement which you have taken. The statement of your community engagement approach or philosophy will not necessarily be separate from the responsibilities in community engagement activities since in describing what you do and how you do it could lead naturally on from or in to the explanation of why you do it in the way that you do it.

If you have engaged in any research or formal training in community engagement or community development, participated in community engagement conferences/workshops/seminars/symposiums, or have been involved in the review of or publication of articles on community engagement you should discuss these activities. You are also encouraged to discuss the relevance of these to your current and future community engagement practice.

In thinking about why you do community engagement in the way you do the following questions might be helpful to consider:
- Is there a connection between the community engagement activity and your discipline, and to what extent does the activity that you undertake in your community engagement work lead you to reflect on the way you approach teaching/research in your discipline?
- Do your community engagement activities open up the opportunities for students to gain new learning's which would otherwise be impossible?
- Do your community engagement activities open up opportunities for the co-creation of knowledge which extend the boundaries of the traditional university space?

- Do your community engagement activities allow for interaction between theory and practice which might otherwise not be possible?

**This section should include:**

- A clearly articulated philosophy of community engagement
- Evidence of understanding how your view of community engagement impacts on your community engagement practice particularly in relation to teaching and research within your discipline
- Evidence that community engagement activities have contributed to the production and dissemination of knowledge
- Evidence of an understanding of the community engagement principles and Rhodes University Ethical Standards Guidelines

## 4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective monitoring and evaluation is crucial for the success of any community engagement initiative or project. Providing evidence of how you have implemented joint strategies of monitoring and evaluating your own community engagement initiatives will give your readers a clear sense of who you are as a community engagement practitioner, as well as the effectiveness of your community engagement initiatives in terms of the impact of your project, your partnership with the community and the sustainability of your project. The tools you have designed or chosen to implement for monitoring and evaluation are an important part of your community engagement practice and should be brought to the attention of your reader. Describe the methodology utilised for the community engagement activity\ies and how these influenced your evaluation and monitoring strategy.

**This section should include:**

- A clearly articulated discussion of your monitoring and evaluation strategies
- A discussion of the extent to which your community partners have -participated in the monitoring and evaluation processes
- A discussion of the extent to which the monitoring and evaluation process has informed the way your community engagement practice has been transformed and\or has progressed or developed
- A discussion of whether students have been involved in the monitoring and evaluation process (if appropriate) and to what extent their feedback has shaped or informed your community engagement practice
- Evidence of review of community engagement practice in response to monitoring and evaluation data

## 5. Leadership

This section will be heavily dependant on how far along you are in your development as a community engagement practitioner. If you are new to community engagement work you may not yet have taken up any significant leadership roles in community engagement. Leadership could be within your own community engagement project (such as being a project manager or coordinator); or own engaged research programs (such as the lead researcher in an engaged research project); or in your department (such as serving as a community engagement representative for your department or mentoring other members of staff in your department in engaged research projects or service learning-courses); or it could be in your faculty (such as serving as the community engagement representative for your faculty or serving on the community engagement management committee); or in your discipline or community space (such as serving on the board of an NGO or on a national community engagement body such as SAHECEF); or it could be in a leadership role in mentoring student lead volunteering projects.

**If appropriate to your context, this section should include:**

- Discussion of the relevant leadership roles you have occupied
- Discussion of feedback you have received on those roles and how you have responded to that feedback

## 6. Providing Evidence: How others experience your community engagement activities

In all of the above sections you will need to provide evidence for your discussion of your community engagement work and practice. Evidence for this can be gathered from a number of sources. Firstly, you might want to draw on the research that you have been doing into community engagement practice which informs the way you go about doing community engagement or you interaction with staff at the Community Engagement Division and NGO's or other community engagement practitioners. Secondly, you may want to draw on evidence you have gathered from your students or colleagues who have been involved in your community engagement projects such as engaged research work, service-learning courses or departmental volunteering projects. Finally, you will need to draw on your community partners for evidence of your engagement with them throughout your activities. What is most crucial in this section is that you should not only include, for example, a reference letter from a community partner thanking you for the work that you have done in your project *without* commenting on why you have included it. All the evidence that you include should be incorporated to showcase the developmental and mutually beneficial nature of the partnership. There should also be some evidence that feedback from your community partners has not only been given to you at the stage when you are now writing up your portfolio and have asked them for a reference letter – and here it is important to note that negative feedback from your community partner is only seen as problematic if it is something that you have not reflected on and something which has not informed your future practice and led to improvement. Evidence of ongoing contact with a community partner is more impactful for a reader than a once of reference from a community partner without any evidence of a genuine partnership having been formed through the process of engagement.

**This section should include:**

- Evidence of reflection on communication with community partners
- Evidence of reflection on feedback from peers and students
- Evidence of reflection on community engagement practice

**7. Resources and Support:**

The Community Engagement Division offers support for all stages of development of any community engagement project and portfolio or application preparation. Please contact the Director of the Community Engagement Division Ms. Diana Hornby at d.hornby@ru.ac.za or one of our academic staff members Dr. Sharli Anne Paphitis at s.paphitis@ru.ac.za for further information or assistance.

## 8. Criteria Used for Assessment:

As a university we are involved in knowledge generation and dissemination and we strive to place this knowledge and expertise at the service of our community for its benefit and the benefit of staff, students and the University as a whole.

Guidelines for the community engagement portfolio:

1. **Community engagement is a planned intervention.** Describe the planning undertaken for your community engagement initiative. Show how you negotiated the engagement with the community partner. To what extent were the outcomes and expectations agreed upon by or discussed with the community partner? What exit strategies were put in place, and how was the exit strategy negotiated with the community partner?
2. **Community engagement initiatives must include assessment strategies**. Describe the assessment strategies used in your community engagement initiative. To what extent were all parties involved in the initiative given the opportunity to reflect on the process and the assessment of the engagement? Was the initiative evaluated in terms of its impact and the agreed upon outcomes?
3. **Community engagement initiatives are mutually beneficial.** Explain how the initiative benefits: a) the university, and b) the community partners.
4. **'Engaged' refers to the building of relationships and active participation by those involved.** To what extent were the community partners involved in the initiative active participants?
5. **Community engagement initiatives are transformative – they promote social justice.** Describe the ways in which your initiative has been transformative. How has your initiative contributed to the goal of social justice?
6. **Ethical engagement is guided by Rhodes University community engagement, as well as human, animal and environmental ethics policies.** Have all policies and procedures for ethical clearance and community engagement been followed?

For Teaching and Learning/Engaged Learning community engagement portfolios please provide information under the following headings while referring to the above guidelines and the criteria grid:
- Leadership/co-ordination/involvement
- Community involvement in planning, executing and evaluation
- Embededness in the curriculum (Service-Learning Portfolios)
- Community benefit
- Student/staff benefit (including research benefits)
- Transformation
- Assessment
- Staff mentoring and embededness in department
- Duration and sustainability
- Post-graduate mentoring
- Ethics

For Engaged Research community engagement portfolios please provide information under the following headings while referring to the above guidelines and the criteria grid:
- Community involvement in planning, executing and evaluation
- Community benefit
- Research benefits (how has the research been impacted on by the engagement activities?)

- Knowledge dissemination
- Transformation
- Assessment
- Staff mentoring
- Duration and sustainability
- Post-graduate mentoring
- Ethics

**Performance is expected in one or more categories.   All criteria in any one category must be met.**

|  | Teaching and Learning (Service Learning- credit bearing) | Research | Community Engaged Learning (non-credit bearing) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Outstanding** | - Demonstrates *Outstanding Leadership* by designing, establishing and leading a SL course<br>- Has *embedded SL course into departmental*/discipline curriculum so that SL course is not dependent on the individual lecturer<br>- *Reciprocal*: This results in measureable growth of knowledge about area of work for the community partner and the discipline/ University<br>- Evidence of effective formal or informal *mentoring* of less experienced staff in SL | - Conducts engaged research.  This results in *reciprocal benefits*: Discipline knowledge and the knowledge amongst the community partner/s has been expanded (grown) through the research activities.<br>- That knowledge generated has been *appropriately disseminated* at the various levels<br>- Evidence of effective formal or informal *mentoring* of less experience staff or inclusion of them as an active member in the research team | - Demonstrates *Outstanding Leadership* by designing, establishing and leading a CE learning activity which is not dependent on an individual lecturer<br>- *Reciprocal benefits:* This results in measureable growth of knowledge about area of work for the community partner and the discipline/ University eg. Publication or evidence of shifting practice<br>- Evidence of effective formal or informal *mentoring* of less experienced staff in CE |
| **Very Good** | - *Demonstrates leadership* by establishing  (or reshaping) and leading a SL course within the department<br>- Involved in SL over at *least a two year* period<br>- Has *involved other staff* members in the initiative<br>- *Reciprocal:* Mutual benefits to both parties | - Conducts engaged research. This results in *reciprocal benefits*: Discipline knowledge and the knowledge amongst the community partner/s has been expanded (grown) through the research activities.<br>- That knowledge generated has been *appropriately disseminated* at the various levels<br>- Researcher is involved in an engaged research partnership that has grown *over at least a two year period*. | - *Demonstrate Leadership* by establishing (or reshaping) and leading a Community Engaged Learning initiative (discipline based) within the department<br>- Involved in Community Engagement Learning over at *least a two year period*<br>- Has *involved other staff* members in the initiative<br>- *Reciprocal:* Meaningful benefits to both parties |
| **Good** | - *Co-coordinator* of a SL course run in the Department aligned to all the principles of good practice listed above<br>- The SL initiative should have run for at least *one year*<br>- *Reciprocal:* Mutual benefits to both parties | - Conducts engaged research. This results in *reciprocal benefits:* Discipline knowledge and the knowledge amongst the community partner/s has been expanded (grown) through the research activities.<br>- That knowledge generated has been appropriately disseminated at the various levels | - *Co-ordinator* of a CEL initiative run in the Department adhering to all the Principles of good practice listed above<br>- Involved in this CE initiative for *at least one year*<br>- *Reciprocal:* meaningful benefits to both parties |

|  |  |  | Evidence of at *least one year's* commitment to engaged research practices, and although the results of working with a community partner may not be measurable, there is evidence of the researcher working towards a sustainable engaged research model. |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Satisfactory** | • *Participates* in a SL course run by the Department<br>• Involved in the SL initiative for at *least six months* | | • *Supervising at least one post-graduate student* who is utilizing engaged research models e.g. social learning groups<br>• That knowledge generated has been *appropriately disseminated* at the various levels (student or academic) | • *Participates* in a CEL initiative run by the department and is disciplined based<br>• Involved in the CEL initiative for *at least six months* |
| **Un-satisfactory** | • Only has an *adhoc participation* in related teaching and learning projects or programmes in the community e.g. speaker /judge | | • Top down extractive approach<br>• Only evidence of *ad hoc input* in workshops, radio interviews or publications<br>• *Offers advice* to organizations outside of the university, but does not follow up and has little to no evidence of how such knowledge was implemented. | • *Occasionally participates* in a departments volunteering activities but has no evidence of a continued sustained commitment to such activities.<br>• Involved in activities that are *not related to the lecturers field* and /or has no evidence reflecting sustained volunteering activities that benefit the lectures discipline or the Organization |