



Southern Illinois University System

ONE SYSTEM | MANY LOCATIONS | STATEWIDE IMPACT

SIU System's Office of Community Engagement's 2025-2026 Roadmap

Background

The SIU System Office of Community Engagement (OCE) harnesses university resources, faculty expertise, and student innovation to optimize community voices and to create transformative change through community-identified projects, addressing critical community issues and priorities and contributing to the public good. OCE's mission is to leverage System resources to strengthen and expand mutually beneficial, community-university relationships in Central and Southern Illinois.

About the Roadmap

Inspired by the [University of Minnesota Twin Cities Public Engagement Action Plan](#), this roadmap was developed by the OCE director in January 2025 and draws on ongoing strategic plan implementation process and other initiatives. The Map provides an ambitious but feasible framework for calendar years 2025-2026.

OCE VALUES

Inclusive and accessible

Committed to ensuring equitable opportunities and access to resources, knowledge and expertise for all Southern Illinois communities. The SIU OCE will remove barriers to participation, ensure diverse populations and identities have access to programming and resources, and work to foster a sense of belonging and social connectedness for all.

Ethical and transparent

Acting with integrity and guided by a genuine commitment to the well-being of the community, the SIU OCE is focused on fostering trust and approaching program solving ethically and openly, acknowledging that our community partners should be accorded primacy in making decisions and be fully involved in shared ownership of projects, outcomes and physical and intellectual resources.

Collaborative and participatory

Through a beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of genuine partnership and reciprocity, the SIU OCE is committed to serving the community through a mutually respectful partnership, rooted in dialogue and guided by a commonly agreed upon approach to solving evolving community issues.

THE MAP

OCE's Roadmap for 2025-2026 centers on nine priority themes. Each includes a brief description, vision statement, and set of action steps.

Strategic Integration

Community engagement can be a strategy for reaching other System and campus-specific goals (e.g. academic innovation and student success; anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion; research, creative activity, and partnerships; support for faculty and staff; maintenance of a sustainable infrastructure).

Vision Statement: Community engagement practices are integrated into key institutional policies and priorities within and across programs and units.

Action Steps:

- Deepen the use of community engagement as a critical strategy for employing transdisciplinary approaches to addressing community-identified challenges.
- Collaborate with the EPIC Network to discuss innovative approaches to infusing community engagement into research, teaching, and service, as well as System operations.

Scholarly Value of Engagement

Community engagement provides a pathway for staff, faculty, and students to contribute to community-based disciplinary and transdisciplinary scholarship.

Vision Statement: Community engagement is valued as essential to advancing research agendas across SIU campuses.

Action Steps:

- Create student, staff, and faculty development opportunities to enhance capacity to incorporate community engagement into scholarly work.
- Provide sample language for Tenure and Promotion documents to strengthen capacity to include and assess community engagement scholarship.

Student Experiences and Development

Community engagement provides a rich context for learning and development of students (undergraduate, graduate, and professional).

Vision Statement: OCE offers rich opportunities for students to participate in and co-create academically based community engaged learning experiences that strengthens their ability to be involved, civic-minded community members, professionals, and scholars.

Action Steps:

- Secure funding for students, especially underrepresented students from Southern Illinois, to have access to quality and impactful community-engaged learning experiences.
- Provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to ensure instructors are prepared to integrate high quality community engagement into their courses.

Community Connections

Community engagement is made possible through strong relationships with external stakeholders, including local communities, non-profit and grassroots organizations, business, industry, governmental agencies, and other educational institutions.

Vision Statement: OCE develops and maintains equitable, sustainable, and mutually beneficial relationships and collaborations that are co-created with local communities, non-profit and grassroots organizations, business, industry, governmental agencies, and other educational institutions at local, state, and regional levels.

Action Steps:

- Develop clear processes and procedures for how entities are identified and prioritized for partnership, using metrics such as Justice40, congressional districts, economic development regions, combination of race and household income.
- Assess OCE's capacity to meet community needs.
- Secure funding to support community liaison positions, provide small seed grants, cover conference travel and registration fees, etc.
- Allocate a percentage of ICR to funding professional development opportunities for community members.
- Host a conversation with community partners and faculty, staff, and students to explore strategies for facilitating high quality reciprocal engagement.
- Engage the Applied Research Consortium to study the extent of collaboration with communities across the SIU System, including identification of barriers and facilitators and collaboration-minded individuals to inform how to best foster and support collaborations via programming, resources, and skill-building.
- Develop criteria for membership and seat an External Advisory Board.
- Become a resource for state leaders who are developing data-informed policies.
- Hire a project coordinator to increase capacity to work with Southern Illinois communities.

Cultivating and Supporting Campus Leaders

Investments in community engagement, including supporting campus leaders who have responsibility for advancing and furthering community engagement programming (e.g., directors of teaching and learning centers, academic and career advisement, student organization leaders, etc.) contribute to a culture of community engagement and, consequently, set the SIU System apart from other higher education systems.

Vision Statement: Staff, students, and faculty who lead the advancement of community engagement across the SIU System are supported and celebrated.

Action Steps:

- Enhance community engagement leaders' knowledge, competency, and skills for leading community engagement through release time, funding opportunities, and professional development (e.g., Strategic Doing Practitioner certification, OCE Fellows, etc.).
- Recognize and celebrate community-engaged leaders through OCE communications, letters of support for tenure and promotion, annual reviews, etc.

Visibility and Value

Community engagement activities allow for showcasing the range and scope of the SIU System's expertise.

Vision Statement: Stakeholders (e.g., students, staff, faculty, community members, state and local leaders, etc.) value and seek out community engagement opportunities to strengthen teaching and learning, research and creative activities, and service.

Action Steps:

- Highlight community partners' contributions to research in OCE communications.
- Purchase 3 Canva Teams licenses to support the SIU System Executive Director of Marketing and Communications' capacity to bring visibility to OCE's work.
- Support students, staff, faculty, and community partners' involvement and participation in local and national conferences to present their community engagement efforts.
- Engage all stakeholders in sharing and spotlighting the impacts of OCE partnerships.
- Leverage existing SIU System presence across the state to raise visibility and showcase the value of community engagement.
- Ensure that OCE messages incorporate media and language that are accessible to all audiences.

Accounting and Assessment

Systematic assessment of the scale, scope, and impact of OCE is necessary for continuous improvement, for telling OCE's story, and for leveraging resources.

Vision Statement: An assessment framework and plan accounts for and assesses the impact of OCE on students, staff, faculty, and community partners.

Action Steps:

- Compile and update annually a partnership map that shows the geographic spread of OCE partners.
- Establish a system to elicit ongoing feedback from communities on OCE's initiatives, policies, and other matters in which they have a strong stake or interest.

Leveraging External Resources

OCE will secure and leverage external funding, resources, and other support for community engagement efforts.

Vision Statement: OCE has proactive, coordinated leadership, and aligned resources that advance bold initiatives that inspire funders and enhance OCE's capacity to work with Southern Illinois communities.

Action Steps:

- Create an "Initiatives/Data and Technical Assistance" section of the OCE website to communicate, among other things, funding opportunities for community-identified needs and interests.
- Participate in forums such as the Midwest Climate Collaborative's Federal Funding Fridays to explore and identify funding options that support mutually beneficial community engagement partnerships.
- Create and sustain student, faculty, and staff development programs designed to increase capacity to attract external funding for community engagement work.
- Secure funding that seeds and supports the development of community engagement activities.
- Hire a grant writer to increase external funds leveraged for OCE and community partner initiatives.
- Allocate all Lightcast Data licenses to support workforce development initiatives.

Local, State, and Regional Networking

OCE will be engaged in local, regional, and national networks that provide the advancement of community engagement in higher education.

Vision Statement: OCE connections to the community engagement field are broad and deep.

Action Steps:

- Identify and coordinate available local, regional, and national opportunities that recognize community engagement activities (e.g., EPIC-N Partnership of the Year award and Outstanding Faculty Partner).
- Encourage, support, and promote involvement in local, regional, and national engagement networks and conferences, such as the Illinois Innovation Network and the Midwest Climate Collaborative.
- Encourage and support community-engaged staff, students, and partners to disseminate their engagement work through publications and other dissemination venues (e.g. conference presentations, keynotes, etc.).