The Elective Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

Constructing a Successful Application for First-Time and Re-Classification Applicants

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Chapter Eight

OUTREACH AND PARTNERSHIPS

Making the Juice Worth the Squeeze

Emily M. Janke

Introduction

Reflecting on my experience as the chair and lead writer of our campus's efforts to reclassify for the Elective Community Engagement Classification, I revisited some notes I'd made to myself about the process. The first note was dated 14 months before the application deadline. It read: "Who will be writing this? LOTS of time. Can I get a grad student to help?" I read that note now with a sense of astonishment at the opening question. Clearly, I was anxious and possibly hoping that the work of reclassifying wouldn't fall to my small office of me and one staff member. My note also suggests that I knew that this was my responsibility and that I felt I needed to get "A LOT" of help.

Thinking about it now, that seems like an absurd response. I had taken the positions of special assistant for community engagement and then as the director of the Institute for Community and Economic Engagement (reporting to the chief research officer) a few years previously, in part, but precisely, *to* collect data about community engagement across the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's (UNCG's) campus. Describing how we collected data for the Outreach and Partnerships section necessarily includes description of how we systematically collected data across the university for the Carnegie process.

The effort to collect data across the campus was named in the university's strategic plan implementation report in order to support community engagement. I had coauthored the report, and data collection had become a key focus of the institute that I directed. Not only did I *know* that applying for recertification would fall to my office, I *wanted* to lead this effort and had *planned* for it since I had first joined the vice chancellor's office three years prior.

Institutional Context

So my response was an emotional one; my head knew the strategic importance of the re-classification *process* to build understanding, buy-in, and connections across campus for community engagement, as well as the resulting (if successful) public recognition as a community-engaged institution. Yet I was anxious. My feeling of anxiety was likely stemming from my worry about faculty and staff members' responses to yet one more "ask" for data. The last few years had been especially heavy with regard to strategic planning, institutional accreditation, and various reports and requests for information about different aspects of the university. Many of these included community engagement and public service activities.

At the time in which the note to myself was written, we were three years into our campus strategic plan, in which faculty and staff were extensively involved. The implementation committee for the goal "support community-engaged scholarship" had spent considerable time drafting its plan and budget. Additionally, faculty and staff had just finished their contributions as part of the institutional reaccreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, which also required evidence of institutional effectiveness around "community/public service." Furthermore, as a University of North Carolina (UNC) system member campus, we were required to submit data on campus-wide community engagement and public service as part of an initiative to "make the residents of North Carolina fall back in love with its institutions of higher education" (Janke, 2014). Each of these efforts was consuming. And these were in addition to the numbers and stories required annually for the President's National Honor Roll for Community Service.

Although there was some overlap among items requested, each report requested a different piece of data as each was for a different purpose (e.g., planning, accreditation, recognition). As I skimmed over the items in the reapplication process and reviewed what UNCG had submitted for the first-time classification, it was clear to me that there was much more to collect across all areas of the documentation framework, and a different kind of writing was required for successful re-classification. This is because the re-classification application requires that institutions describe *what has changed* since the last application, providing evidence of these changes through a full audit of each dimension within the framework.

Devising a Plan

Critically, I did receive the help of a graduate assistant. This was an important resource. Working with the graduate assistant and a staff member, we created a table with four columns: the indicator named in the framework, who has or knows where to find relevant data, existing sources of data that we already know about or have already collected for other activities, and the name of the person or office that will take responsibility for collecting the data needed to write a complete response. In almost all cases, my office was the lead in data collection, although a number of reporting areas required faculty and staff from other units and offices to provide information, particularly in the curricular engagement section, such as undergraduate research and international programs.

As we developed this plan, I kept in mind a key question that guided the work of the UNC Metrics Taskforce (which I chaired): Is the juice worth the squeeze (Janke, 2014)? In other words, is the information that we collect valuable in some meaningful and strategic way that makes it worth the effort? Does the benefit outweigh the cost?

In this metaphor, the squeeze is the process—the time, the effort, and also the political cost of asking for information from faculty and staff who already have increasing administrative and reporting burdens. To make data collection as easy as possible for others, my office took the responsibility of writing the document, incorporating the components drafted by appointed writers.

Working Group

To ensure that we had the full information, as well as opportunity to stimulate conversation and provide education about what community engagement is, and also to get buy-in from offices across the institution, we created a list of people we needed to include in a working group. An invitation to the group was cosigned by the provost and me as director and included representatives from each academic unit and the graduate school, as well as key areas identified in the framework such as offices of leadership and service-learning, undergraduate research, planning and assessment, institutional research, international programs, learning communities, and first-year experience; the chairs of the undergraduate studies council and general education committees; and others who could contribute ideas about programs and data. At the start of the year, we convened approximately 20 representatives in a single meeting. At the meeting, we provided an introduction to the Carnegie application: what it is, expectations, roles, and timelines. We discussed the definition of *community engagement*, walked through various components of the documentation framework, and described the data that our office had already identified through existing reports and our own data collection efforts on community-engaged activities and partnerships. We also discussed the near-term goal of re-classification and how it aligned with and informed long-term goals of helping to identify, connect, promote, and sustain community engagement at UNCG.

Activity

Through the data collection process, we wanted to lessen the "squeeze" (the amount of effort individuals would experience in collecting and reporting data) by crowd-sourcing information among an informed group of campus representatives. In advance of the meeting, I had asked several individuals to take the lead role in collecting data and writing no more than 500 words for certain areas. At the meeting, we had two rounds of crowd-sourcing discussions structured similarly to a World Café format: one person (often the lead writer of a section) would facilitate 10-minute brainstorming sessions to capture sources of data or people to talk to about data related to the assigned topic. The first round focused on four areas of curricular areas of engagement: undergraduate research, internships and co-ops, scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL), and faculty development. Topics for the tables were chosen because they were either particularly difficult for our campus to track *as related to community engagement*, or we suspected that there were more people doing community engagement than reporting it (e.g., service-learning). Committee members circulated among each of the four tables until each lead writer had collected the wisdom of the group. By the end of the two rounds walk, we had surfaced important information about what was happening where, as well as how, if at all, data was being collected.

Systematic Data Collection

The meeting also helped us to be more intentional in our systematic collection of data. Coming together as a large committee helped to create a common language and understanding about community engagement before colleagues were sent off to talk with additional individuals across campus in their own data collection efforts. We also identified places where it might be possible to insert a few questions into surveys that we already collect, or hope to collect. For example, the director of undergraduate research included questions about community-engaged research into his campus-wide survey of undergraduate research. We discussed ways in which plans for an institutional cocurricular transcript could help track cocurricular engagement.

We also shared and discussed the database that UNCG had developed the year earlier and began using in place of an online form to collect data about community engagement activities and partnerships (see Janke & Medlin, 2015, for more description of the data collection strategy). This database collected information across campus about the basic details of faculty and staff members' partnerships—who was involved, a description of the engaged activity, where the activity occurs, the topic areas or foci of study, the roles of the partners, the ways in which students were involved, and outcomes expected and/or achieved. The database was developed to help UNCG identify the landscape of its activities in and with the community and to provide a foundation for more sophisticated research, assessment, and benchmarking strategies. Having a database of regularly collected data about community engagement activities meant that we had a systematic way of collecting information from faculty and staff throughout the year as well as inputting information that we discovered as a result of data collection across all areas of the Carnegie documentation framework.

Is It Outreach or Community Engagement?

As Marshall Welch wrote in chapter 7, language can be a tricky thing. The classification framework requires that campuses report on both outreach and community engagement. Outreach describes the services and offerings provided to or for communities and the public, whereas community engagement requires reciprocal partnerships that provide mutual benefit. Both forms, outreach and community engagement, are ways that institutions of higher education contribute to the health, safety, and vibrancy of communities. Therefore, in collecting information about outreach and community engagement partnerships, we had to create systems that collected both forms of contribution but also differentiated the two forms. Our campus had begun to systematically track information about activities that are done in partnership with communities, as well as those in which activities are provided to the community by the university, several years prior to the re-classification process.

At the time of re-classification, our campus was using a database developed by the institute director and a staff member to collect community engagement activities. We used a Qualtrics survey to collect information about public service (UNCG uses the term *public service* instead of *outreach*). (Note: These two forms have since been merged into the software that was subsequently licensed as the Collaboratory.) Established definitions were helpful, if not necessary, to our data collection efforts. Our university had established them several years prior as part of efforts to support community-engaged scholarship in promotion and tenure policies (see Janke, Medlin, & Holland, 2016). We created a website to explain our data collection efforts and posted frequently asked questions (FAQs).

For the most part, faculty, staff, and administrative leadership have supported tracking community engagement partnership efforts at UNCG because collecting the data is seen and used as a means to an end. Although our campus leader's desire to reclassify as a community-engaged institution helped to create a clear and pressing rationale for why data was needed and how it would be used, tracking was never really about reporting. It was about understanding our institutional engagement portrait and telling our institution's engagement story.

Completing the Application

Using the data collected in the database, we selected examples of outreach and community engagement partnerships for the "partnership grid" that is part of the application. The stories about many of the examples had been written in other reports, news stories, or public relations efforts. I, along with the staff member and graduate student, collected these stories, refined them for the application, and shared the narrative with the partners involved to ensure accuracy. We chose examples that illustrated UNCG's efforts since 2008 to foster regional, cross-sector, and interdisciplinary scholarship. During this time UNCG had focused resources toward initiatives that contributed to the social and cultural, as well as the economic, vibrancy of the region.

The re-classification application requires institutions to compare the completed partnership grid across application years. We worked with the Office of Leadership and Service-Learning to describe the actions taken to deepen, improve, and assess partnerships. Our narrative included descriptions of programs and support offered by the office, as well as new initiatives developed by the institute for community and economic engagement. These included the Referral Desk, a portal and point source for community inquiries (broadly defined) about services and resources provided by UNCG, as well as opportunities for mutually beneficial knowledge exchange partnerships.

The ongoing curation of community engagement partnerships in the database has allowed my office to respond to requests by convening experienced community-engaged faculty and staff with community members to explore developing a shared agenda on a community-identified priority. To that end, we chose partnerships from the database that represented the work of faculty, staff, students, and community partners across the seven schools and college that make up the university and that focused on institutional and community areas of strength and priority: school learning success; culture, arts, and design; healthy people and healthy communities; and entrepreneurial partnerships. Our message throughout our outreach and partnerships narrative was that UNCG had begun to establish strategies and structures to encourage and support a stance in which it is one of many partners in the community with a desire to address relevant community priorities along with community leaders and residents.

Anxiety Relieved

It has become easier to track community engagement and public service activities. The first year was the hardest, as we had to create a community organizing strategy of interacting with groups and individuals in meetings that we set up, responding to frequently asked questions, and creating and implementing an online mechanism (online form and then database) to collect the information across campus.

In fact, each year since our initial effort, we have had faculty members and administrative staff reach out to us to share stories or ask when the information about partnerships is due. Some have even *thanked* us for requesting this information. I believe this is because, in other instances of data collection, information has gone into a "black hole"—no one sees it other than the reviewer. We actively share the information we receive through updating the university website, posting on social media, and showcasing data in various university and alumni relations materials and media. Many times these become stories shared by the chancellor to describe what community engagement looks like at a high research activity, minority-serving institution.

The next time we re-classify, I hope I will feel eager, not anxious, because I have learned that this work is important and meaningful. Although I know that there will always be some faculty and staff resistance, or at least annoyance at receiving another request for information, there are also those who will know that, in reporting on their outreach and partnership activities regularly and through established and familiar mechanisms to collect data, their stories are being told, their stories are being recognized, and their stories matter.

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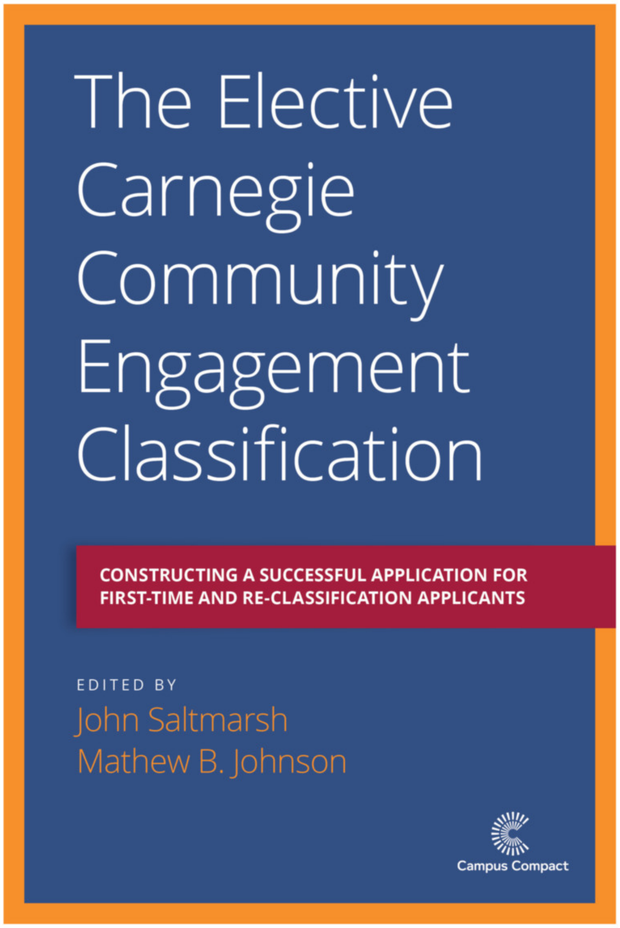

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"In *The Elective Carnegie Community Engagement Classification*, Saltmarsh and Johnson have brought together scholars and practitioners from a diverse array of institutions who provide thoughtful, practical advice and insights about community engagement efforts in higher education. These experts offer candid reflections on how the process of applying for (or renewing) the classification can benefit an institution's culture, commitment, self-assessment, strategic planning, and outreach. Institutions interested in pursuing this voluntary classification, as well as in enhancing their community engagement initiatives more broadly, will find this volume to be an extremely valuable resource." —***Jonathan Alger***, *President, James Madison University*

The Carnegie Engagement Classification is designed to be a form of evidence-based documentation that a campus meets the criteria to be recognized as a community engaged institution. Editors John Saltmarsh and Mathew B. Johnson use their extensive experience working with the Carnegie Engagement Classification to offer a collection of resources for institutions that are interested in making a first-time or reclassification application for this recognition. Contributors offer insight on approaches to collecting the materials needed for an application and strategies for creating a complete and successful application. Chapters include detailed descriptions of what happened on campuses that succeeded in their application attempts and even reflection from a campus that failed on their first application. Readers can make use of worksheets at the end of each chapter to organize their own classification efforts.

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