

Executive Summary Communiversity Values in Action

2020 – 2021

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Overview

Supported by the Church Universities Fund, four Universities in the Cathedrals Group partnership each initiated new, or selected ongoing, community engagement / volunteering projects to evaluate. Drawing on our findings we formulated guidance to enhance community engagement activity. We gained ethical approval from the principal investigator’s Institutional ethics panel to investigate the successes and limitations of each community engagement project in our respective universities. Based on our findings (from analysis of qualitative narratives, questionnaire data from students, tutors and communities, and our scoring of each project) we co-designed an evaluation protocol, including a quantitative and qualitative scoring card, and formulated a set of accessible guidelines (dos and don’ts) to inform design, implementation and evaluation of current and future community engagement/ volunteering and knowledge exchange projects in our Cathedrals Group and other universities.

Reflections on aims and objectives

The project aims to:

Encourage and enable more of our students to enact their university’s founding Christian mission to authentically serve the vulnerable and marginalised, based on the community’s expressed priorities. The design and implementation of such missions will be made relevant to students and communities who are of Anglican, other Christian or Co-religionist faith or no faith, but with a strong moral ethos.

Our objectives for the ‘Communiversity: Values in Action’ project were to:

1. Understand the purpose of embedding collaborative and non-paternalistic community engagement within different channels;
2. Explore ways to increase participation in volunteering and community-building activities by demonstrating their deeper social and humanist values;
3. Collect evidence to demonstrate the relative levels of success of engendering and sustaining a spirit of civic vocation in our students; and
4. Provide transformative knowledge, formulated as an accessible protocol, for other universities to draw on when designing and evaluating projects involving communities through curriculum design, educational programmes, and direct engagement.

Objective 1 challenged us to understand the ways in which we can approach the idea of ‘community’. Some projects centred on university-level strategies to define how community interactions could be initiated and endure. Others put the local region at the heart of projects first, with the university playing a supporting role, and there were some which were interest centred based on researcher expertise and experiences.

Objective 2 allowed us to explore the sustainability of community engagement and the ‘reach’ of community projects. As a rule, the main areas where sustainability can gain momentum are through student-focussed initiatives including promoting a charitable and volunteering mindset, through community bodies looking ‘outside-in’ to the projects as gateways for development, and via the university itself as a platform for knowledge exchange and embedded innovation.

Objective 3 brings forth evidence and insights to levels of student engagement in the projects, eliciting their experiences of civic vocation and what those reflections mean in terms of their vision of community development. Human-through-spiritual connections were apparent in many students’ reflections of their undertakings, as well as building a deeper sense of self-worth and finding their sense of purpose in the community.

Objective 4 pushed us to rethink the evaluation of Community-based projects, beyond traditional income-based or economic metrics, to one which embodies the transformative ethos of contemporary initiatives through moral and ethical goals. This is presented in more detail in the next section.

Rethinking Community-based project evaluation – towards the GENE-CES protocol

The *Idea of the Communiversity* presents a lens which can support the macro-level transformation of universities, grounding them in the space, context and ethos of the community and addressing common themes through a shared journey of emergent ideas and understanding. This GENE process (Lessem et al, 2019) conforms with a Four worlds ‘integral model’ of relational perspectives within different world cultures and is mirrored in our foundational approach to local evaluation for Community-based project and enterprise evaluation,

The GENE model is supplemented by micro-principles of human development through the ‘Capabilities Approach’ (Sen, 1993), which is a normative way of thinking about Community-based welfare that looks past individual rights or opportunities, and instead focuses on whether individuals actually grow in their potential to achieve greater well-being. These ideas have been oriented in a hybrid evaluation protocol, ‘**GENE and Capabilities Evaluative Schema**’ (GENE-ECS), which is supplemented by a reflexive methodology for assessing the project through a critical diary. These form the three Pillars of GENE-CES: (i) Reflexive data collection methodology, (ii) Quantitative scoring of the GENE model, and (iii) Qualitative meaning-making through the Capabilities Approach.

Overview of Institutional Projects

1. Liverpool Hope University
 - a. **Hope Challenge Mentoring (HCM)** – promotes modern foreign language (MFL) collaboration between school and higher education professionals to work together in disadvantaged contexts and with disadvantaged children, primarily to promote educational and social advantage and remove barriers for pupils in disadvantaged communities
 - b. **A Children’s Tool Kit (ACT)** – enabling children in Liverpool to voice their opinion on the amenities available to children in the city
2. York St John University
 - a. **University Prison Partnership Project (PPP)** – merge university staff and students with female prisoners and staff, so that participants come together through arts engagement, to unearth and illuminate dialogues that explore perspectives and perceptions of women in the criminal justice system, beyond adopted media myth and society stigma [*embedded into university teaching module*]
3. University of Cumbria
 - a. **London Campus Phonics Intervention (LPI)** – first year university students working on a new community engagement project to dismantle disadvantage in schools where children from lower socio-economic backgrounds struggle with reading skills which preclude them from full participation in all curriculum areas in the primary school
 - b. **Volunteering and About Being (VAB)** – is a collaborative project with dance students and occupational therapy students working with stroke patients in the Carlisle community [*embedded into university teaching module*]
4. University of Roehampton
 - a. **Gardening and Gums (GAG)** – a community-based knowledge exchange focusing on children’s oral health care using gardening resources, a collaboration with university students, local community parents and children and dental experts.

Project Evaluations

The GENE scoring grid (Pillar II) incorporates 16 stages on a scale of 1-5, for a total possible score of 80. The final quantitative scores are below:

Table 1. Quantitative scorecard to evaluate community engagement projects.

	Steps/ Score	1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	9 10	11 12	13 14	15 16	Total Score
Project Code										
ACT		4, 4	4, 4	3, 4	4, 4	3, 4	4, 4	3, 3	4, 4	60
HCM		4, 4	4, 4	4, 3	4, 3	3, 4	3, 4	3, 3	3, 4	57
TWP		4, 4	4, 3	4, 4	3, 3	3, 3	4, 3	2, 3	3, 3	53
WHI		4, 3	3, 3	1, 2	3, 2	2, 3	2, 3	2, 4	3, 1	41
GAG		1, 2	4, 2	2, 2	4, 3	2, 1	4, 2	1, 3	1, 2	36
LPI		4, 3	3, 3	3, 2	2, 1	3, 2	3, 2	2, 2	2, 1	38
VAB		4, 3	3, 3	4, 2	3, 2	4, 3	4, 3	3, 4	3, 1	49
BCS		4, 4	3, 4	4, 3	3, 3	4, 2	2, 3	2, 2	2, 1	46
PPP		2, 3	3, 2	1, 3	3, 3	2, 2	3, 1	2, 3	1, 1	35

The Capabilities Approach has been adapted through a faith-based and moral connection framework that aligns with Universities' strategic goals and research agendas. These offer a translational evaluation system whereby '*meaning within*' certain goals and values is translated to '*freedoms*' for human development. An example of the Qualitative assessment with core strategies for the University of Roehampton (Gardening & Gums project) is shown in the figure below.

	-----> Promote Capabilities for								
	<i>Meaning within</i>				<i>Freedom of</i>				
HEI Strategies	Living / Existence	Ethics	Purpose	Relationships	Choice	Expression	Play	Participation	CoE / Faith-based Values
Discovery	oral care of child						unsusal gardening objects/instruments		Humanism
Knowledge			responsibility for selfcare			customise tools & schedules			Wisdom
Excellence	prioritising gum care	<i>environmentally resourceful & green (low research waste)</i>			make decisions about overall lifestyle + diet			<i>included in sustainability movement</i>	Virtue
Trust				dentists focus on gum disease for BME people				parents feel included by recognition of BME gum issues	Community
Enterprise				students building a network with other student volunteers				students motivated to serve other charitable programs	Common Good

Other possibilities for core values which we have discussed for the remaining Universities, and which can be used in alternative capabilities-based statements are:

- York St John University – generosity, curiosity, rigour, fairness, advocacy
- Liverpool Hope University – truth, beauty, hospitability, kindness, dedication, diligence
- University of Cumbria – connection, prosperity, enrichment, confidence, adaptability, innovation
- All – flourishing, leadership, loyalty

Vision of best practice

Through the analysis and evaluation stages of our Communiversities projects, having considered the reflexive diaries, scorings on the GENE model, and capabilities-based evaluation statement, we arrived at a series of dos and don'ts to aid future community engagement activity in both Cathedrals Group and other universities. These were drawn from a reflection on both the failings as well as the successes of our respective community engagement projects.

Table 2. Guidelines for Effective Community engagement activity (Dos and Don'ts)

Do	DON'T
1. Engage - Engage with the toolkit to align existing community engagement activity and inform the planning of new community engagement projects	Start projects without careful planning which are not rooted in the University's mission statement.
2. Reassure - the community from the outset, to work collaboratively and equitably with students and tutors	Design a tutor led project, or project which is solely reliant on one member of staff
3. Embed - community engagement/ volunteering projects partially or fully into modules, through validation documentation, to ensure sustainability and increase student participation.	Expect tutors and students to engage entirely outside their university module work - so that participation is predominantly from the students who have no family/ paid work/ other commitments; or students who have zero health issues; other barriers e.g. travel/ logistical issues etc
4. Manage - the student numbers to a realistic size to engage in effective community engagement activity which will be mutually beneficial – start small.	Involve large cohorts without sufficient accountability for success
5. Formalise - the student role to ensure efficient use of skills set. Negotiate agreed minimum expectations with opportunities to exceed this. Build in fit for purpose, collaboratively agreed evaluation mechanisms.	Expect too much or too little with no evaluative mechanisms.
6. Think ahead – about potential barriers <i>collaboratively</i> and build in sufficient time for planning, implementation, and reflection, to ensure reciprocal learning and mutual benefit.	Fail to <i>collaboratively</i> consider and pre-empt potential barriers – lack of time, student apathy or inability to engage owing to other commitments, tutor absence, community disengagement
7. Reflect - on whether funding is required for sustained community engagement activity and ensure its timely acquisition. Endeavour for self-	Stall at the start because funding is not forthcoming. Lose momentum because funding runs out.

sufficiency, or achievable regular income source.	
8. Evaluate - rigorously and develop changed practice to ensure sustained continuation of mutually beneficial community engagement activity.	Repeat the same mistakes and fail to learn from what did not work well, resulting in disillusionment and unsuccessful community engagement activity.

Taking the next steps

The principles learned from initiating, growing, and understanding the subprojects in this Community: Values in Action Project have allowed us to connect with the bigger picture of faith-based and moral agendas which can strengthen community enterprise, especially when driven by participatory research engagements. The GENE-CES protocol produced can be used as a template for other similar initiatives and organisations that seek to enrich the spiritual and human development connections of future work, for any system of core values for morality, meaning-making, community development and freedom of human agency.

References

- Lessem, R., Adodo, A. and Bradley, T. (2019) *The Idea of the Community: Releasing the Natural, Cultural, Technological and Economic GENE-ius of Societies*. Manchester, UK: Beacon Academic.
- Sen, A. (1993) 'Capability and well-being', in Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.) (1993) *The Quality of Life*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.