

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:
SPANNING BOUNDARIES
BETWEEN UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Higher education serves public needs and influences society through teaching, research, and service, and an increasingly important component in fulfilling this mission has been community engagement. The boundary spanning theory was used to study the ways state colleges and universities engage with the larger community to influence the cultural and social development of the region. This was a qualitative design utilizing a multi-site case study approach to analyze perceptions of boundary spanners regarding the influence of community engagement on the region, how these institutions can become involved to further the cultural and social development of the region, and what policies and procedures are needed to encourage community engagement. Major findings included (1) universities influence social and cultural development of the region and communities influence university development in unique ways depending on regional characteristics and needs; (2) the most successful community engagement activities were based on relationships among individuals and were focused on student learning; (3) further community engagement addressing the needs of underserved populations was recommended in order to influence social and cultural development of the region; (4) university policies and procedures, particularly in hiring, promotion, tenure, and resource allocation, were needed to support and encourage involvement of administrators, faculty, and professional staff in community engagement activities; and (5) organizational structure and external interface should provide an easily accessible bridge between the university and the community to encourage and promote community engagement.