

2026 CARNEGIE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CLASSIFICATION

Executive Summary



UtahStateUniversity

The 2026 Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement application was prepared under the direction of Provost Laurens Smith by :

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A National Recognition of Community Engagement

In January 2026, Utah State University (USU) was reclassified with the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. Awarded by the American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the classification is the highest national recognition for community engagement in U.S. higher education. The classification recognizes institutions that demonstrate meaningful and sustained collaboration with communities through partnerships grounded in reciprocity and mutually beneficial exchange. USU is one of 279 institutions nationwide to hold the classification.

USU was first classified as a Carnegie community-engaged institution in 2020. The 2026 reclassification affirms that community engagement is a defining expression of the university's land-grant mission and a sustained institutional commitment. It is a significant institutional achievement and reflects the collective work of faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community partners across the university.

Earning the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification for a second consecutive cycle demonstrates how deeply USU values our connection to communities across the state and our commitment to moving forward for a better Utah.

— Brad Mortensen, President, Utah State University

A Land-Grant Commitment to Communities Across Utah

Community engagement is central to USU's identity as Utah's land-grant university and to its mission to serve the public through learning, discovery, and engagement. Across the state, USU connects statewide education, Extension, applied research, public scholarship, and community partnerships with the needs, assets, and priorities of Utah communities.

This work includes rural and urban communities, tribal communities, agricultural and natural resource communities, public and nonprofit organizations, education and health partners, government agencies, industry partners, students, and families. Grounded in Utah's varied regional, economic, cultural, environmental, and social contexts, USU's community engagement reflects a land-grant responsibility to work with communities in ways that respond to local needs.



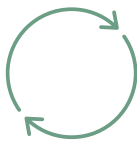
Community Engagement Through Partnership and Mutual Benefit

USU defines community engagement using the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching definition, which emphasizes collaboration between higher education and local, regional, national, and global communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources. This definition centers three areas of high-quality community engagement: partnership, reciprocity, and mutual benefit.



Partnership

Community and university partners work together to define priorities and co-create goals and outcomes.



Reciprocity

Community partners' knowledge, perspectives, and resources are recognized and valued.



Mutual Benefit

Engagement is designed to create value for both community partners and the university.

Across USU, these principles are carried forward through practices that support partner voices and shared responsibility. Community partner surveys, one-on-one meetings, advisory structures, community-based councils and coalitions, regional advisory groups, and partner presentations help community priorities inform planning, teaching, research, service, and student learning. These practices help ensure that community partners are active contributors to the goals, design, and direction of community-engaged work.

83%

of faculty and staff agree that USU's community engagement is reciprocal and mutually beneficial

*2024 Community Engagement Impact Assessment (n=840)





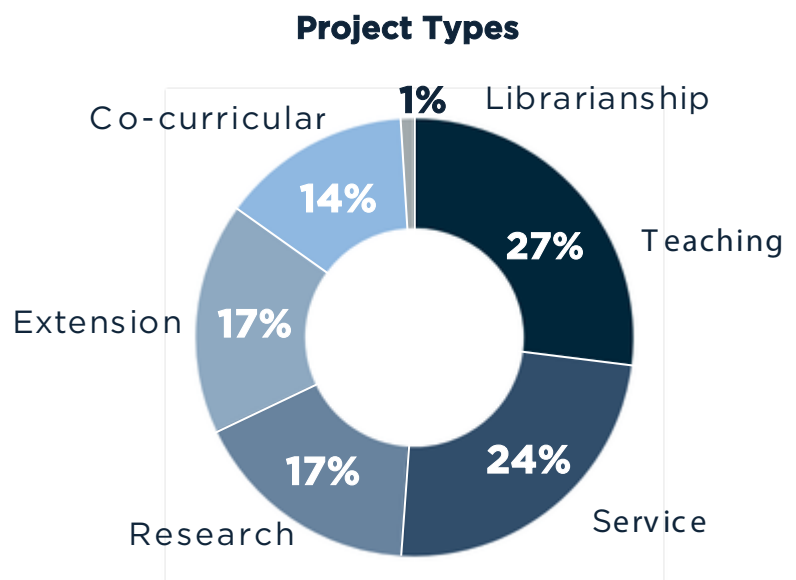
Community Engagement Across the USU Experience

Community engagement at USU takes many forms across academic, student, scholarly, and public-facing work. It is carried out through community engaged courses and degree pathways, student leadership and service experiences, civic learning, research and creative activity, public scholarship, Extension and statewide outreach, public and professional service, and long-term community partnerships. This work takes shape in classrooms, laboratories, field sites, student organizations, community settings, and partnerships across Utah and beyond.

Faculty and Staff Community Engagement

2024 Community Engagement Impact Assessment Results (n=840)

65%
of faculty and
staff are
involved in
community
engagement





Student Community Engagement

2020 -2021 through 2024-2025 Academic Years



595

Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) courses offered



6,962

students enrolled in Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) courses



74

Christensen Community-Engaged Scholar graduates

to control plants.

Invasive Plants in Bear Lake

Bear Lake is a popular tourist destination straddling the Utah-Idaho border. It generates millions of dollars in revenue annually through tourism is thus a major part of the economy of both Northern Utah and Southern Idaho. Unfortunately, Bear Lake has been impacted by the introduction of invasive plant species like Eurasian watermilfoil.

Invasive plant species like EWM can impede recreation, detract from the aesthetic appearance of the lake, impact native lake ecology and reduce the revenue the lake brings in. Controlling these invasive populations is complicated by the active currents within the lake.

This study focused on measuring how water currents change throughout the day, to determine the ideal time for herbicide treatments. It also sheds light on Bear Lake's general hydrology.

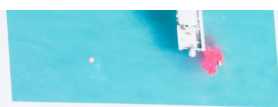
Testing Lake Currents

This study employed two different methods:

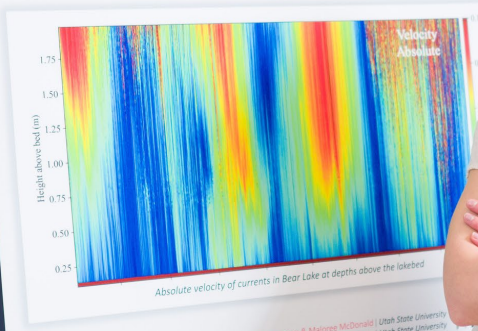
- Rhodamine water tracer, a red dye, was applied at five different locations in Bear Lake to mimic an herbicide treatment. Movement of the dye was measured at multiple depths in the hours after treatment.
- Current movement was measured using an Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler, which uses sound waves bouncing off water particles to measure speed.



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Water currents in Bear Lake were inconsistent as the depth and time of day changed, indicating that herbicide mixing may not occur uniformly. Additionally, high velocities at the top of the water column suggest that herbicides may not remain at the lakebed long enough to control plants.



Tia Lawrence & Maloree McDonald | Utah State University
Dr. Jeff Newton & Minella Ortiz | Utah State University



Strengthening Infrastructure for Community Engagement

Since its initial Carnegie classification, USU has strengthened the leadership, systems, and shared practices that support community engagement as a sustained institutional commitment. These developments have expanded USU's capacity to coordinate engagement, support faculty and staff, connect students and community partners, and further embed community engagement within the university's academic and institutional culture.

Leadership and Coordination

USU created the Associate Vice Provost for Community Engagement position to provide university-level leadership for community engagement and the Carnegie reclassification process. The Associate Vice Provost for Community Engagement also chairs the Provost's Advisory Committee on Community Engagement, which brings together leaders in community-engaged learning, research, and co-curricular engagement to support a more unified approach across the university.

The Center for Community Engagement continues to serve as USU's central hub for community-engaged learning, co-curricular engagement, student pathways, faculty support, and community partnerships, with an expanding role in coordinating engagement across the statewide university system.

Faculty and Staff Development

USU established Faculty Fellowships in Community Engagement to support faculty leadership development, professional development, mentoring, and community learning across colleges and departments. USU launched the Community-Engaged Scholars Network to connect faculty and staff with learning communities, professional development, networking opportunities, and partnership-building resources for community-engaged teaching, research, and service.



Documentation, Tracking, and Assessment

USU has strengthened options for documenting community-engaged teaching, research, and service in ways that support faculty review, recognition, and promotion and tenure processes.

The AggiePulse website connects students, faculty, and community partners with engagement opportunities and continues to be strengthened as a tool for coordination and tracking.

USU also conducts a university-wide Community Engagement Impact Assessment to understand faculty and staff involvement, perceptions of community engagement, institutional strengths, and areas for continued improvement.

Department and College Recognition

USU has continued to grow Community-Engaged Department Designations, which recognize departments that have formally embedded engagement into their missions, expectations, and student experiences.

Building on this department-level work, USU is also working toward broader recognition of community engagement at the college level, creating additional pathways for colleges to identify, support, and elevate community-engaged teaching, scholarships, services, and partnerships.





Community Engagement in Response to Today's Challenges

USU's community-engaged work responds to complex challenges affecting communities in Utah and beyond. During the reclassification period, this work was evident in areas where communities faced disruption, rapid change, and long-term public needs.

Health, Well-being, and Basic Needs

USU works with communities on priorities that affect quality of life across Utah, including public health response during emergencies, mental health, suicide prevention, substance use, food security, housing support, disability, family well-being, rural health, and community resilience. This work includes community-informed research, outreach, education, assessment, and local collaboration focused on the needs of individuals, families, and communities.

Land, Water, Air, Agriculture, and Environmental Stewardship

Utah communities face persistent challenges related to land use, water, air quality, agriculture, drought, natural resources, and environmental change. USU brings applied research, Extension, field-based learning, and community expertise to work with producers, agencies, land managers, and local communities on stewardship, planning, and practical response.

Education and Youth Development

USU works with schools, families, and community organizations to support youth development, academic success, mentoring, college readiness, and pathways to higher education. These partnerships connect children and youth with academic and social support and provide USU students with applied learning experiences in community settings.

Workforce, Economic Mobility, and Rural Opportunity

USU's statewide engagement supports workforce development, economic mobility, and access to education and training in communities navigating growth, transition, and regional change. This work includes partnerships connected to local industry priorities, rural and frontier access, community development, and educational pathways aligned with local and regional needs.

Civic Learning, Dialogue, and Public Problem-solving

USU supports civic learning, civil dialogue, free speech education, public forums, community-engaged courses, and co-curricular experiences. These efforts create opportunities for students and community members to engage with public issues, work across differences, and participate in shared problem-solving.





Carrying Community Engagement Forward

USU continues to strengthen the pathways that connect students, faculty, staff, and communities through sustained, mutually beneficial work. Current priorities include:

Broadening Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) course designations across disciplines

Expanding the Faculty Fellows in Community Engagement program to support opportunities across colleges and disciplines

Further embedding community-engaged learning within Empowering Teaching Excellence instructor development offerings

Strengthening AggiePulse as a tool for coordination, tracking, and connection to community partners

Extending community engagement efforts in and through statewide campuses

Advancing university-wide efforts to identify, document, and celebrate the full range of community-engaged work taking place across USU

Together, these priorities build on the foundation recognized through the 2026 Carnegie reclassification and reinforce community engagement as a defining part of how USU advances student learning, research and discovery, civic responsibility, and service to communities across Utah.



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