2012 Review of UWS Community and Regional Engagement

Focus groups with community and government organisations in Greater Western Sydney

Dr Beatriz Cardona

Purpose of the Focus groups

- To gather the views of community, businesses and government organisations on the manner in which the university interacts with external stakeholders including:
  - processes in place to facilitate collaborations between the University and local and regional organisations
  - the quality of the collaborations
  - Responsiveness to local issues and agendas
  - outcomes of the collaborations

The focus group sessions were designed to provide external stakeholders with an opportunity to explore their views on the University and its role in the community. Specific experiences in developing or seeking to develop collaborations with the University were also explored to ascertain the quality and outcomes of these interactions.

A set of open ended questions were used by the facilitator, allowing participants to dwell on the issues that matter the most to them. A professional and independent facilitator was employed by the University to conduct the sessions.

A total of 5 focus groups were conducted with community and government organisations in Greater Western Sydney. The sessions lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and involved small group work, brainstorming and group discussions. Some of the participants had existing or past collaborations with the University while others did not providing thus a diverse range of views on what the University was doing and what it should or could do for local communities in GWS.
FOCUS GROUP ON UWS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT –

Facilitator: Phil Vosey

UWS Project Officer: Dr Beatriz Cardona

AIM

To review the community engagement practice of UWS with respect to existing and potential partner organisations.

PROCESS

Divide participants into two groups: existing partners and potential partners. Each group to discuss questions, document on flipchart paper and report back to the whole group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Beatriz</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductions and setting up of focus groups</td>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus group discussions</td>
<td>Phil/Beatriz</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group feedback</td>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>35 mins</td>
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Introduction:

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) is conducting a review of its relationships with the community sector, businesses and government organisations in the local and regional area. The purpose of the review is to ensure the University remains in a position to make the strongest possible contribution to the development of Greater Western Sydney, in conjunction with our regional partners and stakeholders.

For this reason we are keen to learn more about your views, experiences and suggestions in regards to the manner in which the University engages with organisations in Greater Western Sydney (GWS).
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Existing partners

Relationship with UWS

- How did the relationship with UWS come about?
- How would you describe your current relationship with UWS?

Projects with UWS

Describe any projects where you have worked in partnership with UWS?

- the type of project
- the role of your organisation in the partnership
- the outcomes (for your project – for the community)

Benefits and difficulties

What benefits did your organisation gain from the partnership with UWS?

Were there any barriers to your organisation developing the partnership with UWS?

Did you experience any difficulties working with UWS? What were they?

Future role of UWS

What do you think the university needs to do to develop better links with the community?

What specific types of community projects would you like to see UWS being involved in the future? And in what capacity would you like to see the university involved?

Potential partners

Developing a relationship

Is your organisation interested in developing a relationship with UWS? Why or why not?

Are there any barriers to your organisation developing a relationship? How could these be overcome?

Benefits and challenges of working with UWS?

What could your organisation gain from a relationship with UWS?

What do you imagine some of the challenges might be?
UWS role in community engagement?

In general, what do you think universities have to offer communities and community organisations?

Can you think of any specific projects where UWS could have a role?

RESOURCES NEEDED

• 1 flipchart
• 6 marker pens
• Question sheets for each group
• Sticky name tags
Main themes and issues identified in the focus groups

Access and Equity Issues:

- Lack of outreach programs targeting migrant and refugee communities
- "We need to have UWS people attending our meetings, learning about access and equity issues and taking them back to the university"
- No awareness of how the university can help them gain access to tertiary education
- There is a need for information on the various pathways to get into university. A liaison officer or engagement person could regularly update the community on these issues.
- Lack of collaboration with community services to help students and their families struggling with academic demands
- Community sector has a great relationship with TAFE through Liaison Officer who attends meetings. This facilitates access to information, resources and support to get students into TAFE.
- Tafe also offer the community practical assistance such as: Outreach courses on areas of need (English classes, literacy and numeracy) The university does not provide this practical level of support for the community.
- Need for intensive English language classes more easily available for UWS students and prospective students. They could be delivered at community organisations that have many youth clients.

Sustaining relationships:

- Lack of consistency and continuity
  "The University walks away from MOUs and partnerships without explanation or other contingency arrangements. This is a serious communication problem the university needs to address"
- The Office of Engagement stopped operating as a link between the University and the community. No explanation provided and projects left unfinished.
- Collaborations often cease when staff leaves or takes new positions. Lack of institutional back up for projects

Leadership in Community Engagement in GWS:

- There is a perception that UTS is leading the engagement drive in Western Sydney. UTS sends people to meetings to talk about their engagement opportunities and to promote the ‘Shop Front’ model.
- UWS needs to take a more active role and position itself as the leader in engagement in greater Western Sydney.
- UWS does not longer liaises directly with the community and is lagging behind UTS.
Ad hoc community engagement strategy:

- Student placements organised by Schools such as the School of Nursing and Education have been very positive and the engagement relationship has been of mutual benefits.
- Other engagement relationships have not been positive mainly because the university is not good at communicating changes. For instance courses and programs have been closed including the Social Ecology programs.
- The community sector had great relationships with them and many projects were being planned. All this came to an end suddenly and without explanation. The same took place with the Office of Engagement. Various projects were being developed with the engagement facilitators and nothing was followed up till we found out they did not exist anymore. The University makes choices and implement changes without any regard for the impact on the communities.

Having a single point of contact:

- Contact information in the website is not updated (Office of Engagement- Contact us) - Frustration and waste of time trying to locate the right person.
- Website needs to be more user friendly - "Engage with us" contact in more prominent position
- The community sector has many needs in relation to research, documenting projects and evaluating activities. But finding the right person is a time consuming tasks. The university is too big to know where to go. “We are expected to be able to find the right information in the website but there are no clear links to engagement and the people are not longer there”.
- Collaborations often cease when staff leaves or takes new positions. Lack of institutional back up for projects
- UWS needs a model similar to the UTS "Shop Front" - successful in linking the community to the university

Engaged research:

- A need more knowledge based practice : Research that looks at current issues in Western Sydney and listens to the ideas and concerns of various communities and organisations. "It feels like there is a concern at the University with innovation and creativity but not with what is going on in their own backyards".
- Community workers would greatly benefit from having a relationship with academics with expertise in their area so they can be mentors and become aware of the various activities and programs happening in the local and regional areas.
- Community organisations have great expertise and knowledge about local issues and areas of priority for research and policy intervention. The University needs to be more receptive and acknowledge this expertise.

Mutually beneficial collaborations:

- The university has been active in engaging with community organisations to organize their service learning activities. The community sector is treated like a laboratory for academics and students to test programs and projects. There is little reciprocity in terms of the
university coming to the community with an open mind and ready to listen to the needs in the community.

- Service learning opportunities and volunteering by students is not always helpful to the community. It is usually short terms and it requires supervision and training by community workers. The benefits are not always forthcoming.
- There is a need to have students and volunteers coming to work on projects that are relevant to the community sector. UWS should have a model for recruiting volunteers similar to UTS “Shop Front’ This model allows the community sector to advertise their projects where students are needed.

**Recommendations:**

- A University Engagement or liaison officer attending community meetings and service interagencies - providing information, training and resources and facilitating links for engaged research and engaged learning.
- Engagement Newsletter for the community sector/external stakeholder
- Better programs to welcome migrant families to the university; Open Day for families; translated information into key languages and bringing community organisations to the university.
- A ’shop front’ model for volunteering and service learning.
- Input from external services and community organisations in the university CE strategy. The strategy needs to be given to the community for discussion and feedback.
- Greater emphasis on projects that inspire young people to attend university.
- An Engagement website that lists major engagement activities by the University, engaged research and engagement opportunities.
- Systems in place to monitor, evaluate and promote the vast range of community engagement activities taking place at the University.
### Participating Organisations

#### Focus Group #1

**Number of Participants**: 17  
**Local Council Area**: Penrith

**Participating Organisations**

1. Home and Community Care  
2. Department of Human Services (Centrelink)  
3. Western Sydney Area Health Services  
4. St Anthony’s Family Care  
5. St Clair Youth and Neighbourhood Team  
6. After Care Penrith  
7. Penrith Women Health Centre  
8. Penrith City Council  
9. TAFE  
10. Department of Housing  
11. Nepean Migrant Access  
12. Bridging the Gap  
13. St Mary Police  
14. Home and Community Care Services  
15. Wesley Mission

#### Focus Group #2

**Number of Participants**: 12  
**Local Council Area**: Hawkesbury

**Participating Organisations**

1. TRI Community Exchange  
2. Hawkesbury City Council, Community Services  
3. Hawkesbury City Council  
4. Penrith Family Relations Centre, RA  
5. Centrelink Windsor  
6. St John of God Hospital  
7. Nova Employment, Richmond  
8. CRS Australia  
9. Richmond Community Services  
10. Nureen Women’s Housing  
11. Richmond Women’s Cottage  
12. Richmond TAFE Outreach
### Focus Group #3

**Number of Participants**: 18  
**Local Council Area**: Canberra

**Participating Organisations**
1. Centrelink  
2. Metro MRC  
3. WSCF  
4. Macedonian Australian Association of Sydney  
5. ADHC  
6. Bankstown Multicultural Health Service  
7. OSTARA PRA (Disability Employment Service)  
8. BSC LifeCare Relationship Services  
9. SDN Brighter Futures  
10. AMEP – Campsie  
11. Mary’s Place  
12. Manager Access – Burwood Community Support Team  
13. Aftercare  
15. ADHC Fairfield  
16. Carer Advocate  
17. SWSI TAFE (Bankstown College)

### Focus Group #4

**Number of Participants**: 15  
**Local Council Area**: Blacktown

**Participating Organisations**
1. Red Cross  
2. Community Resources Network  
3. Mission Australia  
4. United Care Burnside  
5. WISE Employment  
6. Blacktown City Council  
7. BREED Community Partnerships  
8. Gambling Help  
9. WentWest  
10. Relationship Australia  
11. Afford  
12. Mt Druitt Family Referral Services  
13. Brighter Futures  
14. Centrelink
Focus Group #5

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<tr>
<td>Participating Organisations</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Barnardos Auburn</td>
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<td>2 Bhanin Association</td>
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<td>3 Sydney Gambling Treatment</td>
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<td>4 Wesley Mission</td>
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<td>5 Guildford Community Centre</td>
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<td>6 Anglicare</td>
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<td>7 LifeLine</td>
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<td>8 NSW Fair Trading</td>
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<td>9 Family and Community Services</td>
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<td>10 Department of Immigration and Citizenship</td>
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<td>11 Auburn Hospital Multicultural Team</td>
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<td>12 Family Planning NSW</td>
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<td>13 ADHC</td>
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