

# Definitions of Outreach & Public Engagement

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## Library Outreach

“In academic librarianship, outreach is work carried out by library employees at institutions of higher education who design and implement a variety of methods of intervention to advance awareness, positive perceptions, and use of library services, spaces, collections, and issues (e.g. various literacies, scholarly communication, etc.). Implemented in and outside of the library, outreach efforts are typically implemented periodically throughout the year or as a single event. Methods are primarily targeted to current students and faculty, however, subsets of these groups, potential students, alumni, surrounding community members, and staff can be additional target audiences.” ([Diaz, 2019, p. 191](#))

Outreach activities are typically one-way communications that build awareness and facilitate the use of the Library’s collections and services, encourage life-long learning, and the creation and strengthening of relationships between the University and the communities that it serves. Some examples of library outreach activities include exhibits, presentations about the Library’s resources, and tours.

## Public Engagement

The [Office of the Provost](#) uses the [Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement](#) to define community/public engagement. The definition reads:

“Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.” ([Public Purpose Institute, 2020](#))

In the library context, this entails programs and activities that draw on the Library’s professional expertise, collections, and resources in a collaborative partnership with diverse user communities to explicitly include people not affiliated with the university to contribute to the public good. Some examples of library engagement activities include Small Press Fest, Chai Wai series, workshops held in collaboration with local public libraries, and many more.

## Quality Engagement

The committee contributed to the 2022 University Library's Engaged Unit Program (EUP) and developed the definition for "quality engagement" per its charge "to develop clear definitions of outreach and engagement" and direction from the 2023-24 Illinois Office of the Chancellor of Public Engagement to the 2022 cohort of EUPs. Review the OEC Quality Engagement Report, presented at the May 2025 Library Hangout, for more information.

"Within the library context, quality engagement expands the boundary of engagement by encouraging and providing communities (on-campus and off-campus) creative license to actively engage with services and resources in a mutually beneficial, sustainable manner and with goodwill for communities to be active collaborators and creators.

"Quality" community partnerships will include a combination of the following characteristics from this list: reciprocity\* (communication, time, effort for all involved); mutually understood goals and roles; identifying unique expertise; addressing community needs; robust communication and information sharing; enticing encouragement of sharing ideas between partnerships; sharing outcomes broadly; welldeveloped assessment plans; and options for sustainable and/or alternative financial support.

\*Reciprocity, or what is mutually beneficial, is decided within the context of the partnerships and adhere to contributing to the public good."

## Sources

- Public Purpose Institute. (n.d.). Community Engagement Classification (U.S.). The Public Purpose Institute in Partnership with the Carnegie Foundation. <https://public-purpose.org/initiatives/carnegie-elective-classifications/community-engagement-classification-u-s/>
- Diaz, S. A. (2019). *Outreach in academic librarianship: A concept analysis and definition*. The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 45(3), 184-194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2019.02.012>