Strategic Plan | 2022

SWEARER CENTER
BROWN UNIVERSITY

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Overview

THE SWEARER CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE at Brown University engaged more than 200 campus and community stakeholders to develop a strategic plan that reaffirms our organizational purpose and values and builds on our strengths, while anticipating and seeking to leverage future opportunities and challenges. We embarked on this broadly inclusive process to uphold and accelerate our commitments to community-engaged scholarship, teaching, research, and service, and to deepen our commitment to engaging with community partners with fairness and mutuality.

We have been thinking deeply and critically on both the process and outcome of creating mutually beneficial partnerships that advance the work of social justice in Providence, Rhode Island, and beyond. Developed amidst an escalating climate crisis, enduring racial and social injustice, and weakened democracy globally, this plan provides a framework for identifying opportunities for collaboration both on- and off-campus to leverage our collective assets and expertise in order to build a more just and sustainable world.

Strategic Priorities

We have identified the four interconnected strategic priorities that reflect the Swearer Center's values with a focus on our past, present and future work. **We will:**

SP1

Engage Based on Community- Identified Priorities

SP2

Foster Student Reflection, Learning, & Civic Commitment

SP3

Advance Community- Engaged Teaching & Research

SP4

Build Capacity for Just & Sustained Community Engagement

Strategic Goals and Actions

We have created a set of strategic goals and select activities that will enable us to achieve and evaluate progress toward our four priorities. They emphasize collaboration and partnership, and move beyond narrow programs and boundaries — within and beyond the Swearer Center — to devote resources to a more holistic, systemic, and strategic effect. Additionally, We have begun to scaffold each strategic priority area with a corresponding detailed operational plan to actualize these strategies through more integrated and connected work moving forward.

"

Ours is not the struggle of one day, one week, or one year. Ours is not the struggle of one judicial appointment or presidential term. Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part."

– John Lewis

Acknowledgments

We want to thank the many alumni, community partners, faculty, staff, and students who generously and graciously offered their insights, ideas, and candid feedback to inform and shape this strategic plan.

This strategic plan includes much of the important work ahead for the Swearer Center; much more will emerge through partnership and practice as we go. We are committed to continuous learning and innovation, necessary to fulfill our commitment to struggle toward justice. This plan will serve to guide the Center's work with renewed energy, purpose, and urgency. We hope you will also consider it an invitation to explore together how we can engage in transformative and emergent work to advance justice during this defining period in our history and our shared future. We thank you in advance for your partnership and collaboration.

The Work Ahead

Key Takeaways

✓ We will be more broadly connected and responsive to **Community Partners,** listening for priorities, ideas, and needs that are important to them; based on these community-identified interests, we'll work to engage students, faculty, staff, and alumni to engage.

✓ We will provide clearer points of entry for **undergraduate and graduate students** to engage in civic learning and action, prioritizing five pathways: direct service and social sector capacity-building; organizing, activism, and advocacy; social innovation; community engaged research; and community-engaged teaching and learning. Activities within these pathways are guided by intentional learning goals.

✓ We will contribute to Brown's academic excellence by **supporting faculty, instructors and graduate students** to design and teach CBLR courses and to conduct and apply community-engaged research, addressing community-identified priorities.

✓ In all of our work, we will **collaborate with units, departments and schools** across campus, strengthening an enduring engagement infrastructure that increases the interconnectedness and collective impact of Brown University's research and teaching engagements with community partners and people most affected by social inequality and injustice.

Our History

With the creation of the Center for Public Service in 1986, Brown University became one of the first campuses in the nation to establish a formal center of its kind. Its founder, President Howard Swearer, believed that community engagement should be a powerful and formative part of a Brown education. The university remains committed to that vision set in motion 35 years ago; the college's liberal learning goals include "engage with your communities" and related goals ("collaborate fully," "embrace diversity"), and the Swearer Center plays a distinctive role in advancing these goals.

The Swearer Center's work is intended to catalyze student learning and commitment to lifelong civic engagement and responsibility in order to advance social justice. The Center is an important agent of Brown's intent and obligation to ensure that the University makes meaningful, positive, and sustainable contributions to the public good. The Swearer Center seeks to live up to our purpose through intentional engagement of our key stakeholder groups in the following ways:

- We **partner with community organizations,** providing opportunities for students and other university constituencies to engage with the public and social sectors through K-12 schools, non-profit organizations, governmental agencies, and other community-based groups in Providence, Rhode Island, and beyond. We seek to ensure that, as co-educators and places of crucial learning, our community partners have power to shape/inform Center programming and derive benefit from their engagement with the Center.

> "
> *We want Brown to be a community of compassionate people, involved in serious intellectual pursuits, but never divorced from one of the principal purposes of education: to prepare young people for responsible citizenship."*
>
> **– Howard R. Swearer**

- We catalyze learning for **students,** facilitating and supporting courses, fellowships, and other opportunities in which they can develop the civic knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to create a more socially just and sustainable world. Students engage in short- and longer-term commitments, supporting direct service or capacity-building projects, conducting community-engaged research, enrolling in community-engaged courses, advocating for policy changes, exploring socially innovative solutions, partnering with faculty on curriculum design and implementation, organizing and advising their peers, and more.

- We build capacity, visibility, and support among **faculty, graduate students, and staff** interested in community-engaged teaching and research. We accomplish this through working groups and communities of practice, consultations on topics ranging from good pedagogical practices, to making connections to local partners, to funding, and through programming collaborations with other units on campus.

Our Current Charge

As we build on our past work and contribute to Brown's mission of service to the community, nation, and the world, Swearer Center's work must be undertaken with transparency about the complicated history of Brown, higher education, and the practice of community-engaged learning.

As a Center for public service, we must reflect the contemporary context for what is needed and meant by "public service", particularly within higher education. Traditionally understood to be work focused on the provision of services to marginalized individuals or groups within communities external to campus, we recognize the many ways to be in service to the public, especially including working to change the conditions that create the need for services that are symptomatic of societal injustice. We therefore employ a more expansive frame for public service, to include direct service, and also advocacy, organizing, and activism, research, and social innovation, all aimed at working in partnership with campus and community stakeholders to create more just and thriving communities.

We must also be responsive to a continuously changing context. The growing climate crisis, increasing threats to pluralist democracy, an imperative to actualize racial justice in the face of ongoing white supremacy, violent conflict globally, and continued calls for higher education's relevance and accountability all compel us to more fully align our work with a strategy that is clear, effective, equitable, and sustainable as we engage with students, faculty and staff, and communities beyond campus. While acknowledging that the Swearer Center plays a limited role in achieving equity and social justice for all beyond our walls, we nonetheless seek to more fully live up to our important role as set forth in Howard Swearer's founding vision, in the context of this time and place, and in partnership with many others.

Our Values & Commitments for the Future

We undertook this broadly inclusive strategic planning process to build on the assets and strengths of the Swearer Center and lay the groundwork for more transformative and anti-racist engagement with our students and colleagues across campus and communities beyond Brown University. In sharing this updated set of strategic priorities, we commit to making our highest contribution as a part of Brown University, contributing to a culture of truth, learning, healing, respect, and just action.

We acknowledge that Brown University is located in Providence, Rhode Island, on lands that are within the ancestral homelands of the Narragansett Indian Tribe. The Narragansett Indian Tribe, whose ancestors stewarded these lands with great care, continues as a sovereign nation today. We further acknowledge that Brown University, and by extension the Swearer Center, has benefited from Brown's historical connection to slavery and exploitation of enslaved peoples; and that these injustices are not simply history but continue to have significant lasting consequences. As a Center, we also recognize that our intent has not always matched our impact, and we must not only declare our values but must live them out and learn from our mistakes and failures. We commit to working together to honor our past and build our future with truth.

We strive to work towards social justice by recognizing community agency, developing civic responsibility, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, and anti-racism guided by the following prioritized values:

1. **Collaboration:** We work together and prioritize participatory processes in our planning, decision-making, and assessment to advance shared goals.

2. **Critical Reflection:** We inquire, listen, and learn to deepen our understanding of ourselves, our contexts, and our work.

3. **Change:** We focus on continuous improvement in pursuit of sustainable results, redressing systemic inequities to foster a socially just future.

4. **Care:** We recognize our interdependence and nurture relationships to promote our collective well-being through inclusivity, kindness, and fun.
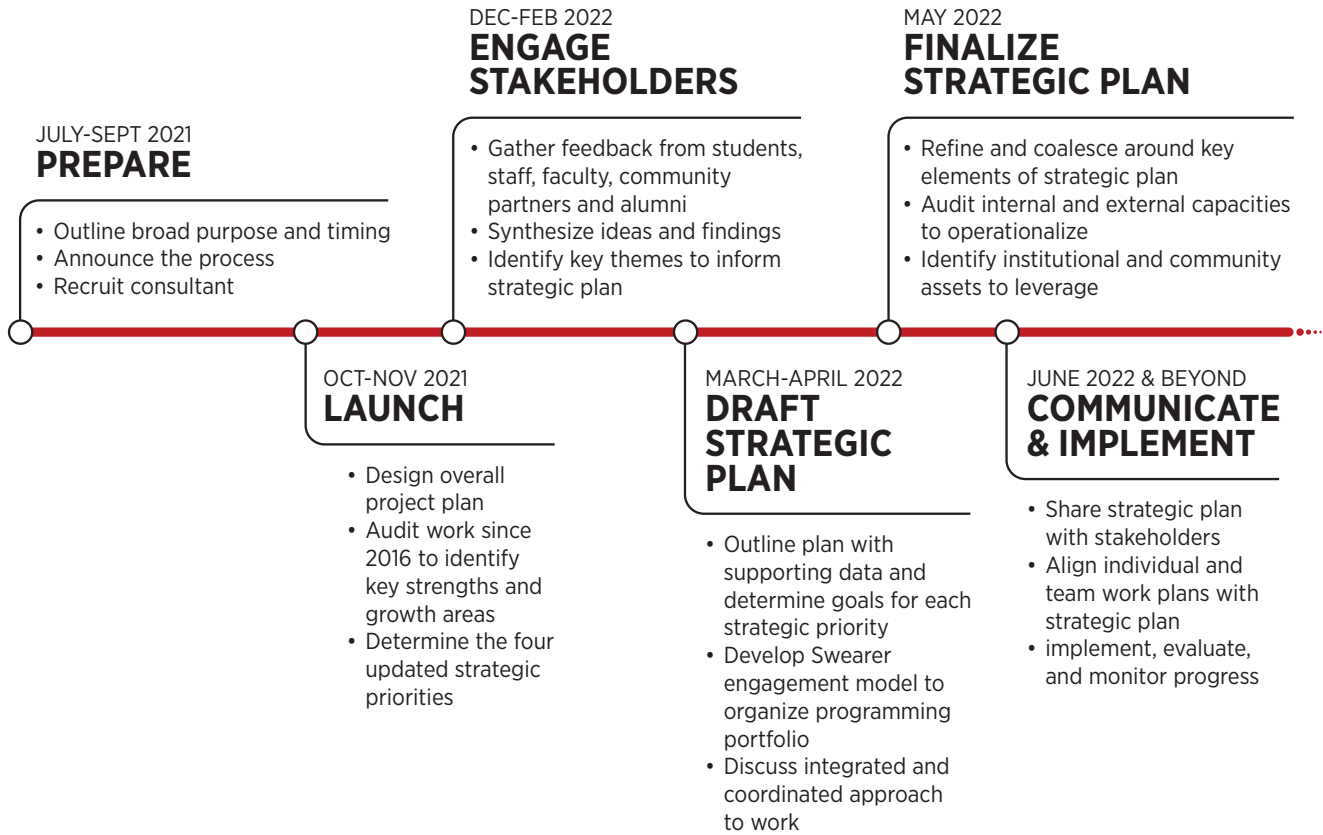
Strategic Planning Process & Themes from Stakeholder Feedback

The Swearer Center embarked on an extensive and broadly inclusive strategic planning process from July 2021 to April 2022. More than 200 stakeholders generously offered their feedback and observations from their respective engagement with and aspirations for the Swearer Center. Through interviews, focus groups, and a survey, community partners, students, faculty, staff, alumni, and supporters shared appreciations, ideas, and advice as well as critiques about the Center's past, present, and future. In order to communicate clearly and invite discussion of represented frameworks and assumptions in the Swearer Center's work, we offer definitions of some key terms; see Appendix A.

We heard some common — and important — themes across the multitude of voices and stakeholder groups with whom we engaged. These themes have figured prominently in the development of this strategic plan, and included the following:

1. The importance of focusing on and expanding **ACCESS** by designing and implementing processes that:

    a. lower barriers for entry & engagement for community partners

    b. clarify Swearer's role as a University-wide resource for faculty, staff, and students — including both undergraduate and graduate students

    c. highlight civic engagement avenues for students to effect social change

2. The imperative to **COLLABORATE** for deeper and broader positive community impact through:

    a. convening and connecting across and beyond campus

    b. establishing and expanding partnerships with shared interests & goals

    c. offering expertise and resources to build campus engagement capacity

3. Identify activities, strategies and systems in order to **SUSTAIN** positive community impact by:

    a. integrating and institutionalizing partnerships and engagement processes

    b. further integrating and supporting engaged scholarship

    c. creating accountability measures and understanding impact for community partners and community members more broadly

Strategic Planning Process

JULY-SEPT 2021
PREPARE
- Outline broad purpose and timing
- Announce the process
- Recruit consultant

OCT-NOV 2021
LAUNCH
- Design overall project plan
- Audit work since 2016 to identify key strengths and growth areas
- Determine the four updated strategic priorities

DEC-FEB 2022
ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS
- Gather feedback from students, staff, faculty, community partners and alumni
- Synthesize ideas and findings
- Identify key themes to inform strategic plan

MARCH-APRIL 2022
DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN
- Outline plan with supporting data and determine goals for each strategic priority
- Develop Swearer engagement model to organize programming portfolio
- Discuss integrated and coordinated approach to work

MAY 2022
FINALIZE STRATEGIC PLAN
- Refine and coalesce around key elements of strategic plan
- Audit internal and external capacities to operationalize
- Identify institutional and community assets to leverage

JUNE 2022 & BEYOND
COMMUNICATE & IMPLEMENT
- Share strategic plan with stakeholders
- Align individual and team work plans with strategic plan
- implement, evaluate, and monitor progress

As a result of this process, the four 2016 Swearer Center strategic goals (1. Transform the Brown Student Experience, 2. Transform Brown's Impact in the World, 3. Integrate Academic Excellence, 4. Strengthen Community Engagement Infrastructure) that have guided the Center's work over the past six years have been updated in order to reflect, more closely, our values and current context. There is a through-line from where we have been to where we are going, and we are excited to build on and expand the work that has been accomplished collectively. See Appendix B for major accomplishments since 2016.

Strategic Priorities to Guide the Center

Below are Swearer's four strategic priorities as we move forward. They begin, intentionally, with community.

1. **Engage Based on Community-Identified Priorities**

    Ensure that expertise, ideas, priorities, and data gathered directly from a diverse cross-section of community partners inform where and how the Swearer Center connects and devotes resources. An emphasis will be placed on community partners that are led by and/or working with people most impacted by social injustice.

2. **Foster Student Reflection, Learning, & Civic Commitment**

    Foster students' demonstrated commitment and action towards a more inclusive, just, and sustainable world. Ensure that Swearer Center teaching, educational programming, and advising advance Brown University's educational goals and are clearly aligned with community-identified priorities and Center-wide learning outcomes (for example, critical thinking, justice related to origin and value of knowledge, systemic analysis, ethical practice, and personal and collective responsibility).

3. **Advance Community-Engaged Teaching & Research**

    Critical to Brown's academic excellence, community-engaged teaching and research ensures powerful experiential learning for students, and high-impact knowledge creation, application, and translation opportunities for faculty and other scholars. The Swearer Center will create and maintain resources and support for faculty, staff, and students to advance the design, implementation, and sustainability of teaching and research that addresses community-identified priorities.

4. **Build Capacity for Just & Sustained Community Engagement**

    Contribute to a strong and reliable community engagement infrastructure. That is, deepen, leverage, and sustain Brown University's investments in people, relationships, systems, and tools, and align programs and processes on- and off-campus to advance social justice. Collaborate to advance and enhance Brown University's policies and practices that honor and are informed by community input and interests.
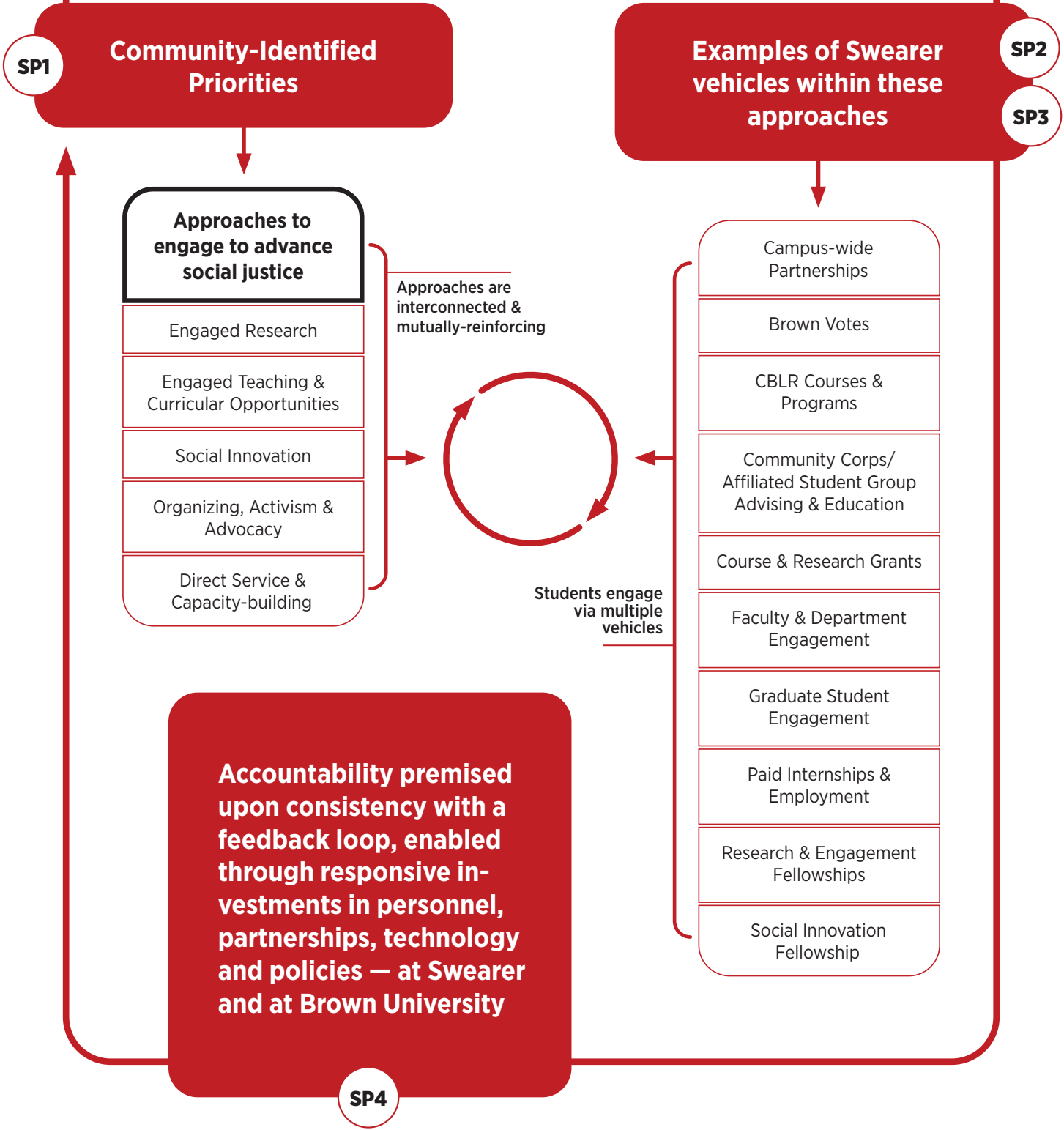
Swearer Center's Engagement Model

We have refined our approach to advance our progress in each of the four strategic priorities, represented in the engagement model below.

There are many ways to advance social justice ranging from individual reflection and change, to interpersonal and intergroup relations and mutual aid, to broader scale social movements. We plan to focus our organizational resources on five engagement approaches critical to advancing social justice: 1. direct service and capacity-building; 2. organizing, advocacy, and activism; 3. social innovation; 4. community-engaged teaching and curricular opportunities; and 5. community-engaged research (see Appendix A for definitions).

These approaches represent areas in which the Swearer Center can build on existing capacity internally and via campus and community partnerships. Additionally, there is strong student interest and institutional momentum within and across these approaches.

In brief, this model begins with community-identified interests, which inform engaged educational activities that align with one or more of the approaches to advance social justice. Lastly, and of critical importance, the model includes investments in mechanisms that enable a robust feedback loop, and build capacity to reliably integrate community interests into Brown's teaching, research, and operations as an anchor institution.

Swearer Center's Framework for Engagement

SP1

Community-Identified Priorities

SP2

SP3

Examples of Swearer vehicles within these approaches

Approaches to engage to advance social justice

Engaged Research

Engaged Teaching & Curricular Opportunities

Social Innovation

Organizing, Activism & Advocacy

Direct Service & Capacity-building

Approaches are interconnected & mutually-reinforcing

Students engage via multiple vehicles

Campus-wide Partnerships

Brown Votes

CBLR Courses & Programs

Community Corps/ Affiliated Student Group Advising & Education

Course & Research Grants

Faculty & Department Engagement

Graduate Student Engagement

Paid Internships & Employment

Research & Engagement Fellowships

Social Innovation Fellowship

Accountability premised upon consistency with a feedback loop, enabled through responsive in-vestments in personnel, partnerships, technology and policies — at Swearer and at Brown University

SP4

Strategic Priority 1

Engage Based on Community-Identified Priorities

Our working definition

Ensure that expertise, ideas, priorities, and data gathered directly from a diverse cross-section of community partners inform where and how the Swearer Center connects and devotes resources. An emphasis will be placed on community partners that are led by and/or working with people most impacted by social injustice.

Rationale

In the midst of social, economic, and health inequities, engaging based on community-identified priorities maximizes the Swearer Center's contribution to Brown University's educational mission and commitment "to serve the community, the nation and the world." The Swearer Center has longstanding partnerships with community organizations, groups, and institutions who are working with people most impacted by injustices, with an aim of uplifting and supporting their work to address complex social issues. The Center is well-positioned to build on our deep existing capacity to listen intently to these partners, as well as others, and engage institutional teaching, research,

service, and other resources to demonstrate our commitment to disrupting white supremacy and addressing community priorities and issues of concern. Further, with a focus on engaging based on community-identified priorities and interests in Providence and the Rhode Island region, we can align our efforts with others at Brown University and earn community trust, begin to repair past harms, and build a more just, healthy, and sustainable community.

Synthesized Feedback from Stakeholders

•   There is the potential to understand the priorities of the community and more effectively foster relationships between Brown University and community partners.

•   There is an opportunity and growing interest in maximizing experiential learning opportunities for students through engagement beyond campus, especially in ways informed by community partners.

•   There is the potential for finding new and more reliable ways to include community partners' and members' expertise in the teaching and research mission of Brown University.

Select Supporting Quotes from Stakeholders

"The starting point should be the community, the organization, and their goals and parameters. Having them create guidelines for any kind of Brown partnership." – Community Partner

"I'd want to see some evidence of power parity so community partners are actually in the higher up power position, and they're the authorities." – Community Partner

"Students need to feel free to take risks, without risking the benefit to our partners in the community." – Brown Alum

"I'm excited for the opportunity to meaningfully collaborate with community stakeholders on issues they care about and that we can move the needle on together." – Brown Staff Member

Tensions and Considerations Offered by Stakeholders

- There are literally thousands of community partners with which Swearer Center could engage, but our resources to steward these partnerships are limited, and people will sometimes disagree on priorities. It will be important to communicate criteria for how and where we engage, based on geography, specific populations or pressing issues, or other dimensions.

- While we will collaborate with organizations, it will be important to maximize the extent to which organizational partners represent the interests of community members more broadly.

- While our efforts seek to add coherence and positive impact to Brown University's engagement with external communities and partners, effectively measuring impact or understanding sufficiency in how we engage is extremely challenging.

Goals for Strategic Priority 1

✓ Cultivate and sustain equitable, culturally responsive, reciprocal partnerships with community organizations, with a reliable feedback loop between the Swearer Center and community partners.

✓ Increase access for community partners to Swearer Center and Brown University resources to contribute to addressing symptoms and causes of social injustice.

✓ Influence institutional understanding and practice of respectful, ethical, community-informed engagement through campus partnerships, knowledge sharing, and network-building between and among the Swearer Center and the broader institution.

✓ Increase integration of community partner priorities, knowledge, and expertise in the design, development, and/or deployment of teaching, research, service, and related resources within Swearer Center and across Brown (for example, data and evaluation support, students to deliver programming to local children, issue-based research, technology tools and support).

Strategic Priority 2

Foster Student Reflection, Learning and Civic Commitment

Our working definition

Foster students' demonstrated commitment and action towards a more inclusive, just, and sustainable world. Ensure that Swearer Center teaching, educational programming, and advising advance Brown University's liberal learning goals and are clearly aligned with Center-wide learning priorities (including, critical thinking, justice related to origin and value of knowledge, understanding systems, engaging in ethical practice, and practicing personal and collective responsibility).

Rationale

Engagement is a high-impact educational practice that, when done well, deepens learning, enhances students' sense of belonging, and ultimately contributes to Brown University being an inclusive place. By developing civic knowledge, skills, commitment, and habits, students build a foundation to become informed and engaged members of society, and courageous, ethical leaders. Building on Swearer Center's strength in this area, the Center is poised to have a deeper and broader impact by more intentionally illuminating avenues for scholarship, reflection, and action at Swearer Center and across campus, through which students can contribute to community change locally, nationally, and globally.

Synthesized Feedback from Stakeholders

- There is an opportunity to foster community-engaged application and practice opportunities as a part of the Brown curriculum and co-curriculum in service to graduating ethical and engaged citizens (broadly conceptualized).

- Foster student awareness and exposure to see Brown as a community within many others, interwoven, and find ways to prioritize civic engagement and learning within each of these communities.

- Beginning and ending with the why (community, pressing social concerns, quality of life) helps to ensure that students are actually learning things that impact society.

Select Supporting Quotes from Stakeholders

"I'm excited that this (plan) will create more structure to develop more informed students to discover their own interests within Swearer." – Brown Student

"Make sure more students are aware of the Swearer Center. Do a better job of engaging students in more aspects of the work, including helping to keep community partnerships strong." – Brown Student

"History between Brown and the community needs to be something taught to all students, often!" – Brown Student

"We need to learn more about community partners, and I want their voices more involved in both Swearer Center training and courses." – Brown Student

Tensions and Considerations Offered by Stakeholders

- Many students come to Brown because they care deeply about making a positive impact in the world. It is crucial that we scaffold student learning so that they can reliably align their intentions with their impact; balancing students' agency — especially as an underlying premise of Brown's Open Curriculum — with community agency and expertise.

- Students' presence at Brown University is transitory. Given this, we have an imperative to provide engagement infrastructure and education that prepares students to enter, engage, and exit communities in ways that honor the ongoing work and life of community partners and residents.

- Students bring diverse perspectives, lived experiences, interests, and prior learning, and their timelines and types of engagement vary, so general goals must be operationalized through flexible, scaffolded learning opportunities.

Goals for Strategic Priority 2

✓ Clarify and highlight pathways that encourage students to gain experience in multiple modes of social change, supporting a range of interests and issue areas at Swearer Center and across campus. These pathways include **direct service and capacity-building; engaged research; engaged teaching and curricular opportunities; social innovation;** and, **organizing, activism, and advocacy.**

✓ Strengthen Swearer Center's educational programming and advising to maximize consistency, access, and student learning, including workshops, course modules, and signature experiences for students across campus.

✓ Develop — within Swearer and through partnerships — skill-based (e.g. data/evaluation, storytelling/communication) and/or issue-based (e.g. housing affordability, climate change) initiatives to respond to community partner priorities.

✓ Increase engagement opportunities for graduate students, including opportunities to explore alternative academic careers (in higher education and beyond).

✓ Increase and assess Swearer Center's impact on students' civic learning and commitment.
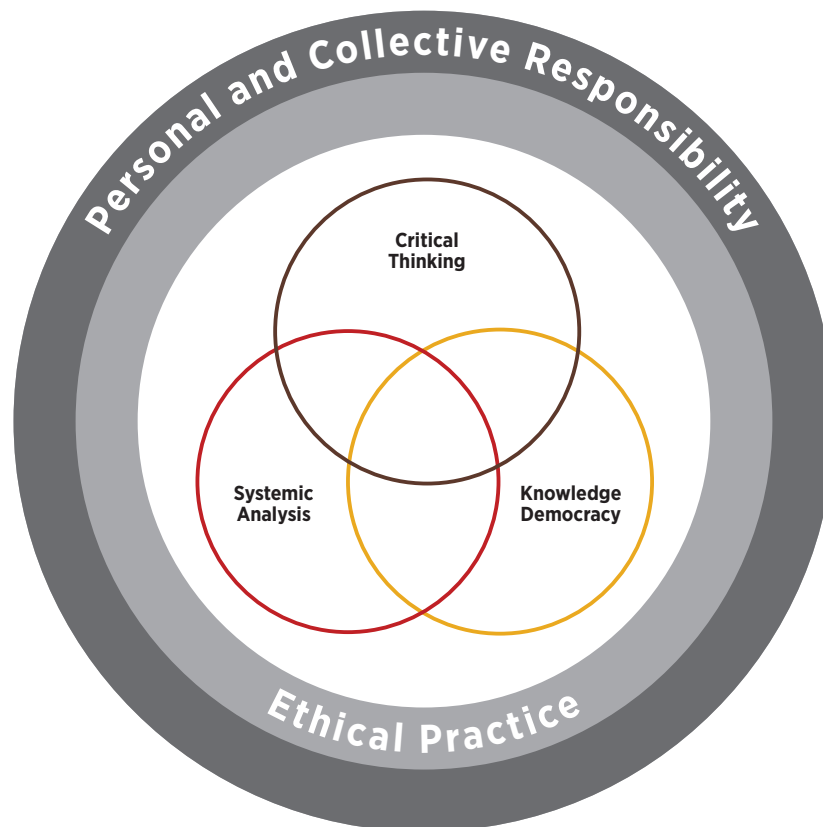
Strategic Priority 3

Advance Community-Engaged Teaching and Research

Our working definition

Critical to Brown's academic excellence, community-engaged teaching and research ensures powerful experiential learning for students, and high-impact knowledge creation, application, and translation opportunities for faculty and other scholars. The Swearer Center will create and maintain resources and support for faculty, staff, and students to advance the design, implementation, and sustainability of teaching and research that addresses community-identified priorities.

Rationale

Many faculty, staff, and students from across Brown University already connect their teaching, learning, and research to pressing issues society faces. Swearer has built significant capacity to highlight and support these efforts by faculty and between faculty and students. We are excited to further advance Brown University's engaged teaching and research to honor and uplift the assets and expertise of both faculty and community partners, expand disciplinary understanding and practice, and create opportunities for inclusive knowledge production to address complex problems in Providence, Rhode Island, and beyond.

Synthesized Feedback from Stakeholders

- We need to foster more collaborations with academic centers, departments, initiatives, institutes, and schools to develop the research capability of community partners.

- Faculty are critical in helping shift practice with community partners as well as student learning/experience and are tied to the larger institution in terms of what kinds of activities/ research lend validity/value to their work. Swearer can offer project and issue opportunities, support and technical assistance, and a community of practice for faculty who want to pursue community-engaged teaching and research.

Select Supporting Quotes from Stakeholders

"We need more classes similar to CBLR courses (or more CBLR courses in general); relating relevant, contemporary issues with the academic curriculum." – Brown Student

"These strategic areas involving research, teaching, and community, have greatly helped to increase recognition that community-engaged research is critical and community-university partnerships are just." – Brown Faculty Member

"I'm excited that this will create a more interdisciplinary approach to academics in service to communities." – Brown Student

Tensions and Considerations Offered by Stakeholders

- There is commitment across Brown University to deepen engagement with Providence and Rhode Island. Despite this commitment, community-engaged teaching and research are not consistently integrated or acknowledged beyond "service" within faculty reward and promotion.

- CBLR courses that incorporate community priorities create important educational outcomes for students. However, a significant majority of CBLR courses are taught by individual (often-times non-tenure track) faculty rather than reflecting long-term departmental commitments to offering these courses in the curriculum. Recent reductions to tenure-track faculty teach-ing loads increase the possibility that fewer CBLR courses will be integrated into depart-mental curriculum by individual tenure-track faculty, calling for more intentional planning in departmental curricula to sustaining and expanding community-engaged courses aligned with community-identified priorities.

Goals for Strategic Priority 3

✓ Advance academic excellence through expanded support for integrating and sustaining community-engaged teaching and research in academic units (i.e., schools, institutes, departments, and centers).

✓ Create more interdisciplinary opportunities for faculty to reflect, collaborate and strategize with community partners, staff, and students to address community priorities.

✓ Directly and through partnerships, expand the Center's research, assessment, and teaching capacity (in response to community-identified priorities).

✓ Increase preparation for the next generation of scholars, including both undergraduate and graduate students, for community-engaged work in teaching, research, and practice.

Strategic Priority 4

Build Capacity for Just and Sustained Community Engagement

Our working definition

Contribute to a strong and reliable community engagement infrastructure. That is, deepen, leverage, and sustain Brown University's investments in people, relationships, systems, and tools, and align programs and processes on- and off-campus to advance social justice. Collaborate to advance and enhance Brown University's policies and practices that honor and are informed by community input and interests.

Rationale

We manifest our values of collaboration, critical reflection, change, and care through our commitments and actions, sustained over time. To ensure that our work aligns with these values, the Swearer Center will continue to build reliable, fair, and sustainable processes and practices to institutionalize our capacity to be maximally responsive to community-identified priorities. Because we already work with partners across and beyond Brown University, we are able to connect people, programs, and initiatives to one another, in service to greater coherence and positive impact. As we implement this new strategic plan, we will invest even more in relationships, people, and technology to cultivate and nurture justice-oriented partnerships on and off-campus.

Synthesized Feedback from Stakeholders

- Focus more on integration and alignment and less on new and discrete programs (align professional and student staffing and budgeting accordingly).

- Swearer Center can use and increase its capacity for equitable partnership and community engagement infrastructure to influence other units and departments at Brown University.

Select Supporting Quotes from Stakeholders

"I value all four priority areas and feel they reflect the central work of the Center well. The fourth strategic priority is the most intriguing to me to think about operationalizing, but this is the space that Swearer staff excel." – Brown Staff Member

"Continue expanding data collection and data use for strategic purposes. This can be to improve partnerships, evaluate programs, and for continued growth." – Brown Alum

"We need more calls for partnership with the Swearer Center and opportunities to support staff's growth, talents and connections." – Brown Staff Member

Tensions and Considerations Offered by Stakeholders

- The Swearer Center seeks to steward fair, respectful, and longstanding partnerships that are responsive to community-identified interests. Maintaining these partnerships will sometimes mean guiding campus-based stakeholder engagements within a highly autonomous culture.

- As one unit among hundreds, Swearer has limited influence on institutional policies and practices that fully reflect higher education as a public good, not a private commodity.

- Reliable and consistent processes to support socially just community engagement — the glue and grease of an enabling infrastructure — is typically less valued than new or high-profile programs and initiatives.

Goals for Strategic Priority 4

✓ Ensure Swearer Center's professional and student staffing model aligns our capacity to execute these strategic priorities.

✓ Bolster connectivity — through people and technology — that increase knowledge and communications across campus to more intentionally respond to community-identified priorities, including participating in and/or convening working groups/committees.

✓ Expand investments in coordinated research and assessment including data collection systems, research design, analysis, and dissemination to improve our understanding of our work, its impact on students, community partners, faculty, and our institution.

✓ Influence institutional policies and procedures in service to facilitating equitable community-engagement and supporting a sustainable partnership infrastructure.

Strategic Priorities

SP1

Engage Based on Community-Identified Priorities

SP2

Foster Student Reflection, Learning, & Civic Commitment

SP3

Advance Community-Engaged Teaching & Research

SP4

Build Capacity for Just & Sustained Community Engagement

Key Actions to Support Strategic Priorities

	SP1	SP2	SP3	SP4
Collaborate to convene community partners, faculty, staff, and students with shared interests in addressing community challenges to catalyze projects that span disciplinary and institutional boundaries.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Identify resources that are important to community partners (e.g., data analysis, professional development, research, student engagement) that Brown could offer.	✓	✓	✓	
Collaborate with institutional partners (e.g., BE[3] Brown, CareerLAB, DOF, Nelson Center, OIED, OVPR, Sheridan Center, University Library) to further goals for academic excellence and DIAP through engaged scholarship.	✓		✓	✓
Work with faculty across the institution to enhance/expand opportunities for both undergraduate and graduate students to develop as engaged scholars.		✓	✓	
Collaborate with the Sheridan Center, OVPR, and others to expand support for integrating and sustaining community-engaged teaching and research in academic units (i.e., centers, departments, institutes, and schools).			✓	✓
Clarify and highlight pathways that encourage students to gain experience in multiple modes of social change, supporting a range of interests at Swearer Center and across campus.		✓	✓	
Develop and/or adopt tools and processes to assess Swearer Center's impact on students' civic learning and commitment.		✓	✓	
Continue to develop and offer training and workshops in areas that equip and empower students, staff, and faculty across Brown to be more effective in their community engagement.		✓		✓
Invest in constituency relationship management technology to facilitate and scale matchmaking and stewardship (connecting community and campus).	✓			✓
Target Swearer Center financial support (e.g., grants and awards) to teaching, research, and service that are responsive to community-identified priorities.	✓		✓	✓
Support and build on institutional policies by sharing Swearer Center's compensation procedures for community partners/members who contribute as guest speakers, workshop/training facilitators, panelists, and similar educator roles.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increase Swearer's engagement with alumni in partnership with Alumni Relations and BrownConnect to advance opportunities and goals across strategic priorities.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Conclusion & Next Steps

We have embarked on this new plan for the Swearer Center at a time of seemingly intractable and increasing challenges playing out locally, nationally, and globally. This high-stakes reality compels all of us to embrace this moment as an inflection point. In this strategic plan, the Swearer Center seeks to do just that by more fully centering community interests in our work.

We recognize that the Swearer Center operates within the larger ecosystem of Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, and beyond. We will need to closely examine and communicate the ways in which the four strategic priorities can support Brown University's mission and align with community interests. The dynamics are complex and nuanced, and it will require time to rethink/redesign how systems and structures can better center communities that have been marginalized and oppressed. We will continue to be aspirational in our aims and also be sensitive to our power, privileges, and positionality in order for us to play a critical role as a Center among many key stakeholders in driving systems change and positive community impact. We understand that institutions will outlast any of us as individuals, but we believe by effectively activating and leveraging our collective expertise and assets that we can create a more just and sustainable world. We invite you to join us in this work.

Operational Plan

In order to actualize the strategic priorities included in this plan, we have begun to develop a corresponding operational plan to outline how our work will be more integrated and connected moving forward. With the benefit of critical reflection and dialogue informed by stakeholder feedback, we have begun to concretize some of what and how we can do more of, less of, differently. We are considering the four strategic priorities and how to allocate our resources, both human and budgetary, to make continued and sustained progress on each. We will establish goals and objectives, identify milestones, and monitor and communicate the implementation. We will continue to focus on what is within our scope of work so we can be proactive and also creatively problem-solve on how we could make incremental progress on meeting our shared interests and aspirations to drive systems change while working within existing infrastructures.

Communications

As we identify the various ways that we will operationalize and evaluate our strategic plan, we will communicate this to our stakeholders to invite new and strengthened partnerships and engagement with us as we continue to build trustworthiness in our relationships, processes, and systems in service to our collective work and shared future.

Evaluation

As we operationalize this plan, we will continue to upgrade our data collection and tracking infrastructure, refine our learning priorities and educational offerings, determine measurable goals, and engage our constituents in identifying metrics that represent meaningful progress towards our intended outcomes. Further, we will integrate our assessment strategy with our DIAP goals to ensure that our data is collected, analyzed, and viewed with equity and anti-racist practices and methodologies. We will be adaptive to respond to emerging needs and changing conditions to continue to align our work with community-identified priorities.

Invitation to Partner

The strategies and actions included in our work ahead are premised on collaboration, partnership, and collective approaches to complex challenges that define this period in history. We invite our campus and community colleagues to join us and explore together how we can engage in transformative and emergent ways that result in human thriving, social justice, and sustainability.

Appendix A
Key Terms and Definitions

Activism A form of direct social action used in reference to any number of activities that endeavor to bring about social, cultural and political change (for example, staging direct actions, organizing demonstrations and protests, letter-writing and petition campaigns, and others).

Advocacy A form of indirect social action that typically involves acting or speaking on behalf of other people — often under the presumption that they are unable to speak for themselves.[1] Within this broad definition, this can take specific forms, such as 1) an individual or group negotiating for their own interests; 2) a person or group focused on others; targeting local, state, and/or national agencies to change policies, rules, laws that impact people's lives.[2] Public education, policy research and enactment, organizing and mobilizing people, public interest journalism, and political activities are all examples of advocacy.

Anchor Institutions are large, typically nonprofit or public sector organizations "anchored" to the communities in which they are physically located, for example, universities, health systems, or local government entities. These institutions have significant economic and social impact on their communities through their land use, hiring and employment practices, procurement, and other core operations and policies.

Anti-racist/Anti-racism The practice of actively identifying and opposing racism, which includes behaviors and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions, in addition to structural forms of oppression that uphold white supremacy.

Capacity-building Developing and strengthening the skills, processes, and resources in order to support organizations and communities to function, thrive, and adapt in a rapidly changing world.

Civic engagement Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference.

Community-engaged research The process of working collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations with respect to issues affecting their well-being.

---

1   Beckwith, Dave and Cristina Lopez. 1997. "Community Organizing: People Power from the Grassroots." Comm-ORG Papers Collection 3. https://comm-org.wisc.edu/papers97/beckwith.htm.

2   2022. West Virginia Center for Excellence in Disabilities. "Types of Advocacy." https://cedwvu.org/resources/types-of-advocacy/

Community-engaged teaching and curricular opportunities Structured learning experiences that may take place in multiple contexts (e.g., credit-bearing courses, capstones, non-credit-bearing programs) and are connected to issues and/or activities in the community.

Community engagement 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 the context of partnership and reciprocity.[3]

Community organizing A process or strategy for building power among a constituency of people who share common problems and come together to identify solutions as well a strategy for realizing them.[4]

Direct service A form of social action where people work to address the immediate needs of individuals or a community, often involving contact with the people or places being served.[5]

Engaged scholarship A form of scholarship (teaching, research, service) in which faculty and students partner with organizations and individuals outside the academy to address public issues, thereby co-creating knowledge.

Public Service The definition of the term "public service" in higher education has expanded significantly since the founding of the Swearer Center. Traditionally understood to be work focused on the provision of services to marginalized individuals or groups within communities external to campus, the Swearer Center–and many of our peers across higher education–has made an intentional shift to broaden our understanding of what it means to be in service to the public. Beyond the provision of direct services, we recognize the many ways to be in service to the public, especially including working to change the conditions that create the need for direct services that are symptomatic of injustice. Therefore, the Swearer Center employs a more expansive frame for public service, to include direct service, and also advocacy and activism, research, and social innovation, all aimed at working in partnership with community stakeholders and contributing capacity to create more just and thriving communities.

Social innovation An approach to change-making that emphasizes design thinking and entrepreneurship in addressing pressing social needs, whether within existing organizations or through the creation of new ventures.

---

3   https://carnegieelectiveclassifications.org/the-2024-elective-classification-for-community-engagement/

4   Beckwith, Dave and Cristina Lopez. 1997. "Community Organizing: People Power from the Grassroots." *Comm-ORG Papers Collection 3*. https://comm-org.wisc.edu/papers97/beckwith.htm.

    Kaba, Mariame. 2021. *We Do This 'Til We Free Us.* Chicago: Haymarket Books.

5   Haas Center for Public Service, Stanford University

Social justice Social justice is a communal effort dedicated to creating and sustaining a fair and equal society in which each person and all groups are valued and affirmed. It encompasses efforts to end systemic violence and racism and all systems that devalue the dignity and humanity of any person. It recognizes that the legacy of past injustices remains all around us, so therefore promotes efforts to empower individual and communal action in support of restorative justice and the full implementation of human and civil rights.

Social justice imperatives also push us to create a civic space defined by universal education and reason and dedicated to increasing democratic participation.[6]

White Supremacy remains prevalent in the United States as "a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties" [for White people] (Mills, 1997, p. 3).[7]

---

6   https://www.ccsu.edu/johnlewisinstitute/terminology.html

7   Mills, C. (1997). *The Racial Contract.* Cornel University Press.

Appendix B

Major Accomplishments Since 2016

2020-2021

- Launched the **Engaged Scholarship Certificate** for students to explore a social issue of their choice through a combination of classes and community engagement. This replaces the Engaged Scholars Program, building on the previous model's strengths while expanding access to undergraduates in any concentration.

- **Completed a project to build an accessible entrance** for the first floor of our building on 2 Stimson Avenue, which enables 2 university classrooms, 2 lounges, and several meeting rooms to be accessible for our staff and visitors.

2019-2020

- On January 31, 2020, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching named Brown a recipient of the **Carnegie Community Engagement Classification,** an elective designation recognizing institution-wide commitment to community engagement. Swearer helped to steward the application process in collaboration with staff and faculty across the institution and with community partners.

- Adapted to **all-remote community engagement,** offered strategy sessions for engaged faculty together with Digital Learning and Design staff.

- Supported a "program builder" team — including a Faculty Fellow, two community partners, and four undergraduate students — to develop and launch the **Community-Based Learning and Research (CBLR) Fellowship,** which supports faculty and students collaborating to design and/or implement engaged courses.

- Used research created from analyzing **departmental Diversity Inclusion Action Plans** to inform consultations with departments aimed at understanding how community engagement can connect to their diversity and inclusion initiatives.

- In close partnership with students, established Brown Votes, assisting thousands of Brown University students to register to vote and access key information about voting.

2018-2019

- Developed **multiple workshops** for the 1,500 Brown students who engaged with the Swearer Center to address issues of power, positionality, diversity and inclusion.

- Swearer Center staff and Faculty Fellows facilitated three **learning communities** on community-engaged teaching, research, and K-12 partnerships for faculty and others in instructional roles seeking to understand and address inequitable systems as well as outcomes. We also facilitated a **graduate student learning community for engaged scholarship** specific learning community.

- Moved into a new building at 2 Stimson Avenue.

- With support from the College Curriculum Council, launched the **Community-Based Learning and Research (CBLR)** curricular program to designate undergraduate courses that enrich the understanding of important social, civic, and ethical issues; foster inquiry outside the classroom; enable knowledge creation in partnership with community agencies; and build skills valuable for life after Brown.

2017-2018

- Created the **Community Advisory Board** comprised of community stakeholders representing a variety of partner organizations, backgrounds, communities, and issue areas to advise on Swearer programming and to hold the Center accountable to its values of community agency and reciprocity.

- Expanded our **Practitioners in Residence program,** which offers community engagement practitioners who live in the Greater Providence area a semester-long opportunity aimed at enhancing our engagement programs to respond to evolving community priorities in the midst of the global health crisis and ongoing conversations about racial justice.

- Expanded the **Off-Campus Federal-Work Study program,** which Swearer now administers in conjunction with Financial Aid, to increase access so Brown students, regardless of their financial need, are able to participate in community engagement opportunities.

- Further expanded the **Engaged Scholars Program** by four concentrations including Archaeology and the Ancient World, Computer Science, History, and Latin American & Caribbean Studies — joined ESP.

- Launched the Swearer Center Graduate Proctorship in Community-Engaged Scholarship.

2016-2017

- Launched the **Bonner Community Fellows program,** a national network of Bonner programs that aims to combine a student's community engagement with their academic and career goals.

- Launched **Faculty Fellows** with support from the Davis Educational Foundation. Faculty Fellows contributed to the academic rigor, quality, and leadership of specific Swearer Center programs, including the Royce Fellowship, the Storytellers Fellowship, the Social Innovation Fellowship, and the Engaged Scholars Program, as well as the development of the CBLR Fellows Program and faculty learning communities. Additionally, Faculty Fellows developed and taught CBLR-designated courses and contributed towards the launch of the Engaged Scholarship Certificate.

- Launched **BrownEngage,** a community engagement platform that gives organizations the ability to connect directly with potential volunteers and with each other.

- Launched **Brown in Washington Fellowship** which offers students a semester in Washington, D.C. during their junior or senior year, where they intern with an agency in the public or nonprofit sector while completing a full course load that includes a two-credit practicum.

- Expanded the **Engaged Scholars Program** by seven concentrations and affiliated academic departments/programs including Business, Entrepreneurship, and Organizations (BEO), Contemplative Studies, Education Studies, Political Science, Sociology, Urban Studies, and Independent Concentrations.

Appendix C

List of Brown University Stakeholder Engagements

Interviews

Al Dahlberg
Assistant Vice President, Government and
Community Relations

Besenia Rodriguez
Deputy Dean of the College for Curriculum
and Co-Curriculum

Betsy Shimberg
Senior Associate Dean of the College for
Co-Curricular & Experiential Learning

Christina H. Paxson
President of Brown University and Professor of
Economics and Public Policy

Katie Silberman
Director of Community Relations

Leah VanWey
Dean of the School for Professional Studies
and Professor of Sociology

Marisa Quinn
Community Engagement Consultant
to President Paxson

Marguerite Joutz
Chief of Staff and Assistant to the President

Mary Wright
Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning,
Executive Director, Sheridan Center

Rashid Zia
Dean of the College and Professor of
Engineering and Physics

Richard Locke
Provost and Professor of Political Science and
International and Public Affairs

Susanna Loeb
Director, Annenberg Institute and Professor of
Education and International and Public Affairs

Focus Groups & Group Sessions

Bonner Fellows

Community Advisory Board

Community Corps Students
and Site Leaders

Community Partner Network

Student Advisory Committee

Swearer Center Supporters

Swearer Center Staff

SWEARER CENTER
BROWN UNIVERSITY

2 Stimson Avenue
Box 1974
Providence, R.I. 02912
401-863-2338
Swearer Center

community. scholarship. action.