

Structuring to maximize external engagement

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Brief overview

Universities face significant opportunities and challenges in how they internally structure themselves and invest in their limited resources to maximize external engagement and advance their missions. More often than not, there are multiple organizations within a university that have responsibility for engaging with industry and the private sector. These can include corporate and foundation relations in development, an office of industrial partnerships in research, a university-wide career services office, and possibly others. In order to optimize relationship building with companies and drive a holistic model of engagement, universities should look at an integrated internal structure with one front door and a single corporate engagement team.

Use in U-I engagements outside of major metropolitan areas

Universities outside of major metropolitan areas have a challenge when it comes to corporate engagement and building strong university-industry partnerships. This stems from the fact that the density of corporations in the immediate vicinity is much lower than it would be in metro areas and, therefore, more work needs to be done to build connections to the corporate world/private sector. Given this challenge, it is important to look at how to build a strategy that allows for maximizing the impact of the university resources and that includes alignment of internal industry engagement teams. A model now becoming more popular is creation of one corporate engagement center within the university where development, research, and other offices—such as career services—collaborate and create one front door to build holistic university-industry partnerships.

Key features

- **One corporate engagement team** created to act as the front door to the university and take the lead on building holistic partnerships with the private sector. This team works with the corporation to determine its needs, matches them to the internal capabilities and builds a long-term strategy in partnership with others across the university. This strategy should align both with the corporate partner's needs and with the university's strengths and strategic plan.
- **Clear communication and understanding** of the function of this corporate engagement team, which allows for a company to get connected to the corporate engagement center no matter what its first point of contact is with the university. If it is looking to connect to the university's resources (research, talent, workforce development, intellectual property), it would be directed to the corporate engagement team for an assessment of needs. The assessment determines if the opportunity is broad enough to be handled by the corporate engagement center or, if not, it would be handed off to the correct unit.
- **All corporate partners have one point of contact** to the university and can access all the university has to offer without significant time wasted navigating the university's individual services. This provides significant value to the company and also to the university's units by representing them and all that they have to offer the private sector.

Key takeaways for success

- **Support from the top:** University leadership must embrace and support the approach to bring teams together to form one office/center to serve as the front door for corporate engagement. Development and research leadership must agree that this approach is the best way to move forward, and they must show that support in words and with actions

This toolkit is a product of the May 21-23, 2019 event hosted by UIDP and the University of Arkansas, "University-Industry Engagement Outside Major Metropolitan Areas and Megacities: Identifying Issues and Finding Solutions."



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- **Communication:** Communication protocols must be established to keep all relevant parties up to speed on the relationships with which they are involved. Strategy building and execution is led by the center, but it takes all of the relevant parties (resources from colleges, institutes, careers services, etc.) working together to put the right plan in place and support the development of a deep, long-lived and win-win relationship.
- **Roles and responsibilities and internal relationships:** In a model like this that requires collaboration of individuals across the university, it is very important to have clarity in the roles and responsibilities of all participants/partners, in particular the “embedded” industry liaisons that often support a college, unit, or center. Understanding of the processes and procedures, who takes the lead and when, how to track engagement activity, and knowledge of the up-to-date status of the relationship are all important aspects of building a strong internal organization that can be effective in also building the external relationships.

Resources required to implement this tool

- **Customer relationship management (CRM) tools:** A well-developed CRM is required to keep everyone across the university apprised of a given relationship. The ability for every-one relevant to a relationship to have access to historical and current data about it is essential for a well-developed and executed plan. Identifying the right tool with the right capabilities will take some work and investment, but it is a critical element for success.
- **Staff:** A full team of staff is required, either directly in the organization or provided by another organization as support. The core staffing required, beyond a fearless and vision-ary leader, includes a group of liaisons or relationship managers that will be assigned as the lead for the corporation, research staff, communications/marketing support, event and travel management, and general administrative support. In addition, the university will need strong and dedicated support from the contracting group in the research office and the proposal preparation team in the development organization.

Best practice examples

University of Michigan’s Business Engagement Center, as a general benchmark and best practice, established a single front door for its corporate partnerships more than 10 years ago. The development and research corporate engagement teams combined to form one team for the university. It has seen a significant increase in overall corporate engagement since launching this model and has demonstrated that it can be successfully implemented.

UIDP’s guide, *Comparing Internal Structures to Promote U-I Collaboration: How Universities are Structured to Work with Industry*, provides UIDP members additional insight on a range of approaches for engaging with industry.