



Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

Policy Title– Community Engagement and Outreach Policy, SUSL

Policy Number – Policy / SUSL / CE & OutR / No 1

Effective Date –23.10.2023

Revised Dates – NA

Approving Authority – The Council, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

Administrative Responsibility –Vice Chancellor, Council

Overview

Universities are part of the society and it is embedded in the society as an interdependent part. As public funding institutes, the universities have a greater responsibility of serving the community by sharing knowledge, skills with society. Engagement with society through outreach activities is mutually beneficial for the community as well as to the since knowledge and resources are exchanged. SUSL, with its mission, is progressing towards the center of excellence in higher education and it realizes that the community engagement and outreach is one of the top priority areas to be touched adequately. Through this Community Engagement and Outreach Policy, Sabaragamuwa University aspires to build strong and lasting relationships with the local community, contribute to social development, and create a positive impact that extends beyond the boundaries of the university.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy document is to streamline the community engagement and outreach activities between the university and outside communities. The Community Engagement and Outreach Policy aims to foster meaningful connections between Sabaragamuwa University and the local community

Scope

This policy aims to guide and regularize outreach activities and community engagement of SUSL as a core institutional function. This policy is for all the stakeholders of SUSL including employees, administrators, students and all other relevant parties. This will apply for all Faculties, Centers, Units, Cells, divisions of SUSL.

Legislative context: NA

Definitions : NA

Policy Statement

1. The University should enhance /encourage the outreach engagements of individuals in the University. Through multidisciplinary outreach activities conducted by different entities of the University shall provide training opportunities for students.
2. The University shall provide room for students to do outreach initiatives in addition to acquiring the professional qualifications. It shall enable transforming students to be socially responsible individuals.
3. University shall identify all the outreach activities and it shall enhance the range of outreach engagements and the university should identify the different needs for community engagement and outreach activities.
4. The University shall have agreements / MoUs between different parties in order to enhance the community services and outreach activities. It shall be signed before commencing the activities.
5. Each faculty shall have a separate coordination Unit for outreach activities depending on the necessity.
6. SUSL administration should have the commitment to provide community services / outreach activities and this has to be incorporated in to the Strategic Management Plan as well as to the action plan of the University
7. Information on community engagement and outreach activities should be gathered in a central location (Outreach Unit, SUSL). Information should be made available.
8. By actively involving the community, the university seeks to contribute positively to society and promote mutual learning and collaboration.
9. The Community Engagement and Outreach Policy at SUSL should reflect the institution's commitment to creating strong and meaningful connections with the local community. It should be recognized that the university has a social responsibility to actively engage with the community and contribute positively to society.
10. This policy shall serve as a guiding framework for the university's community engagement efforts, providing guidelines and procedures for conducting various outreach activities. It aims to facilitate collaboration, knowledge exchange, and mutual

learning between the university and the community (Annex 1, details of community engagement and outreach activities).

11. Through community engagement, SUSL shall seek to build trust, foster positive relationships, and address the needs and aspirations of the local community. By involving the community in its activities, the university shall recognize the valuable perspectives, expertise, and resources that community members bring to the table.
12. The policy encourages the university to go beyond its academic mission and actively contribute to social development, sustainable practices, and the overall well-being of the community. It recognizes that community engagement is a two-way process, benefitting both the university and the community through shared knowledge, skills, and resources.
13. By implementing this policy, SUSL shall enhance its public image, increase community awareness about its programs and services, and promote accessibility to educational opportunities. It strives to be recognized as a responsive, engaged, and socially responsible institution that values the voices and contributions of the community.
14. This policy aligns with the university's vision and mission, emphasizing the importance of community engagement and outreach as integral components of its overall strategy. It sets the foundation for establishing collaborative partnerships, implementing impactful projects, and fostering a culture of social responsibility within the university community.
15. SUSL shall take necessary steps to get the feedback of all the community engagement and outreach activities done by the university and the feedback should be used in upgrading, designing of activities.
16. The Community Engagement and Outreach Policy of the SUSL should be evaluated periodically (amendments shall be done when there is a need) and it can be amended with the recommendation of the Senate Standing Committee on QA and followed by the Senate and Council approval (See the Policy on formulating and regulating policies of SUSL, Policy / SUSL / Gov & Mgmt / 14)

Supporting Documents:

Annex 1: Community engagement and outreach activities, SUSL, procedure and guideline

Responsibility:

Vice chancellor

Promulgation:

This policy and related documents will be made available in the CQA webpage.

This will be circulated among all the employees of the University

Implementation:

This policy will be implemented by all the faculties, centers, units, divisions of the university where the community engagements & outreach activities are conducted.

******This has been approved at the 277th Senate held in 19.09.2023 and at the 301st Council held in 23.10.2023.***

**Centre for Quality Assurance,
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka,
July, 2023**

Annex 1

POLICY GUIDELINES ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES, SUSL

1. Objectives of Community engagement and outreach activities

- a. Foster positive relationships: Develop strong and positive relationships with the local community based on trust, respect, and open communication.
- b. Knowledge exchange: Facilitate the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and resources between the university and the community.
- c. Social impact: Address community needs and contribute to social development by organizing activities that address specific community challenges.
- d. Awareness and accessibility: Increase public awareness about the university's programs, services, and initiatives while promoting accessibility to educational opportunities.
- e. Collaborative partnerships: Establish sustainable partnerships with community organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders to maximize impact and reach.

2. Benefits of community engagement and outreach activities

a. Foster Positive Relationships:

Engage in regular and open communication with community members to build trust, understanding, and mutual respect.

Seek input from the community in decision-making processes and involve them in shaping the university's community engagement initiatives.

Collaborate with community leaders, organizations, and residents to identify shared goals and develop joint strategies to address community needs.

Celebrate and promote local culture, traditions, and diversity through inclusive events and activities that foster unity and social cohesion.

b. Knowledge Exchange:

Create platforms for knowledge sharing and collaboration between the university and the community.

Encourage faculty, staff, and students to engage in community-based research, projects, and internships that address community needs.

Facilitate workshops, seminars, and training programs where community members can benefit from the expertise and resources available at the university.

Provide opportunities for community members to share their knowledge, experiences, and traditional practices that contribute to the enrichment of academic and research activities.

3. Identifying the need of community engagement and outreach activities

Conduct need assessments and community consultations to identify key challenges and priorities within the community.

Develop and implement outreach activities and programs that directly address these community needs, such as healthcare initiatives, environmental sustainability projects, or educational support programs.

Collaborate with community partners to design and deliver interventions that promote social development, empowerment, and improved quality of life.

Evaluate the impact of community engagement activities to ensure they are effectively addressing identified needs and bringing about sustainable change.

4. Awareness and Accessibility of community engagement and outreach activities

Develop comprehensive communication strategies to increase public awareness about the university's programs, services, and initiatives.

Utilize various communication channels, including traditional media, social media, websites, and community events, to disseminate information about the university's offerings and opportunities.

Ensure that information is accessible to all community members, including those from marginalized or underrepresented groups.

Implement outreach programs and activities that specifically target individuals with limited access to educational opportunities, promoting inclusivity and diversity in higher education.

5. Collaborative Partnerships in of community engagement and outreach activities

Establish sustainable partnerships with community organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders to maximize the impact and reach of community engagement initiatives.

Foster long-term collaborations based on shared goals, mutual benefits, and accountability.

Engage in joint planning, resource-sharing, and decision-making processes with community partners to ensure collective ownership and commitment to shared objectives.

Regularly evaluate and review partnerships to assess their effectiveness and adapt strategies as necessary to enhance outcomes and impact.

By focusing on fostering positive relationships, facilitating knowledge exchange, addressing community needs, increasing awareness and accessibility, and building collaborative partnerships, Sabaragamuwa University can strengthen its community engagement efforts and contribute to sustainable social development. These objectives should be approached with a commitment to inclusivity, responsiveness, and continuous learning, ensuring that the university's activities align with the aspirations and priorities of the local community.

6. Identifying the community engagement and outreach activities

a. Community service projects: Engage in service-oriented initiatives that address community needs, such as volunteering, skill-building workshops, or providing resources.

b. Educational programs: Offer educational opportunities to the community, such as workshops, seminars, or guest lectures on various subjects and disciplines.

c. Health and well-being initiatives: Conduct health awareness campaigns, wellness programs, and health screening sessions to promote community well-being.

d. Environmental initiatives: Organize activities focused on environmental conservation, sustainable practices, and ecological awareness.

e. Cultural and artistic events: Collaborate with community groups to organize cultural festivals, art exhibitions, or performances that celebrate local traditions and talents.

f. Community partnerships: Establish partnerships with local organizations to jointly address community needs and develop sustainable initiatives.

g. Engagement through digital platforms: Utilize digital platforms, such as social media or online resources, to engage with the community, share information, and encourage participation in outreach activities.

h. Community service projects:

Engage in service-oriented initiatives that directly address community needs and provide practical solutions.

Organize volunteer programs where students, faculty, and staff actively contribute their time and skills to support community projects.

Conduct skill-building workshops or training sessions that empower community members with valuable knowledge and practical skills.

Provide resources or support to community organizations or individuals, such as donating educational materials, equipment, or funding for specific initiatives.

i. Educational programs:

Offer educational opportunities to the community through workshops, seminars, or guest lectures conducted by university faculty or subject matter experts.

Cover a wide range of subjects and disciplines to cater to diverse interests and educational needs of community members.

Focus on topics that are relevant and beneficial to the community, such as entrepreneurship, personal finance, sustainable agriculture, or digital literacy.

Encourage community participation and provide platforms for knowledge exchange and interactive learning.

j. Health and well-being initiatives:

Conduct health awareness campaigns to educate the community about preventive healthcare, healthy lifestyles, and disease management.

Organize wellness programs that promote physical fitness, mental well-being, stress management, and mindfulness techniques.

Offer health screening sessions to provide basic health checks, screenings, or consultations to community members.

Collaborate with healthcare professionals, local clinics, or hospitals to provide specialized health services or facilitate access to healthcare resources.

k. Environmental initiatives:

Organize activities that promote environmental conservation, sustainable practices, and ecological awareness within the community.

Conduct tree-planting campaigns, clean-up drives, or recycling initiatives to encourage environmental stewardship.

Offer workshops or educational sessions on topics such as waste management, energy conservation, or biodiversity conservation.

Advocate for sustainable practices and policies within the community, such as reducing plastic usage or promoting renewable energy.

l. Cultural and artistic events:

Collaborate with community groups, artists, and cultural organizations to organize festivals, exhibitions, or performances that celebrate local traditions, heritage, and artistic talents.

Provide platforms for community members to showcase their cultural expressions, talents, and creativity.

Promote intercultural dialogue, understanding, and appreciation within the community through diverse cultural events and activities.

Encourage community participation and engagement in these events, fostering a sense of pride and unity.

m. Community partnerships:

Establish partnerships with local organizations, community groups, and government agencies to collectively address community needs and develop sustainable initiatives.

Engage in joint planning, resource-sharing, and collaborative decision-making processes to ensure the effectiveness and long-term impact of community projects.

Leverage the strengths and expertise of each partner to maximize the outcomes and reach of community engagement initiatives.

Regularly evaluate and review partnerships to ensure they align with the evolving needs and aspirations of the community.

n. Engagement through digital platforms:

Utilize digital platforms, such as social media, websites, blogs, or online learning resources, to engage with the community and share information.

Provide regular updates about university initiatives, events, and opportunities through various digital channels.

Encourage community participation and interaction through online discussions, surveys, or feedback mechanisms.

Utilize digital platforms for virtual learning, webinars, or online workshops to ensure accessibility to educational resources and opportunities for community members.

These outreach activities are designed to actively involve the community, address their specific needs, and create positive impact. They promote knowledge sharing, community empowerment, social well-being, environmental consciousness, cultural appreciation, and collaborative partnerships. The university should regularly evaluate the impact of these activities, gather feedback from the community, and make adjustments to ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of its community engagement and outreach efforts

7. Stakeholder Engagement in community engagement and outreach activities

- a. Identify key stakeholders within the community, including community leaders, local organizations, government agencies, and residents.
- b. Maintain open channels of communication with stakeholders through regular meetings, forums, or feedback mechanisms.
- c. Actively seek input from stakeholders to ensure community needs and priorities are considered in the planning and implementation of outreach activities.

a. Identify key stakeholders within the community:

Community leaders: Recognize influential individuals or groups within the community who hold positions of leadership or have the ability to mobilize resources and support.

Local organizations: Identify nonprofit organizations, community-based groups, or grassroots initiatives that are actively involved in community development or addressing specific needs.

Government agencies: Engage with local government departments or agencies that have jurisdiction over the community or are responsible for providing public services.

Residents: Consider the perspectives and aspirations of community members, including individuals from different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, cultural identities, and geographic locations.

b. Maintain open channels of communication with stakeholders:

Schedule regular meetings or forums to provide opportunities for stakeholders to voice their opinions, share feedback, and contribute to decision-making processes.

Utilize various communication channels, such as emails, newsletters, social media platforms, or dedicated online forums, to ensure continuous and accessible communication.

Establish a dedicated contact point or liaison person who can facilitate communication and serve as a bridge between the university and stakeholders.

Actively seek input and encourage stakeholders to express their views, concerns, and suggestions related to community engagement and outreach activities.

c. Actively seek input from stakeholders:

Involve stakeholders in the planning and implementation of outreach activities by soliciting their input and feedback at different stages of the process.

Conduct needs assessments or surveys to gather information about community priorities, challenges, and aspirations.

Seek stakeholder input on the design, content, or format of specific outreach initiatives to ensure they are tailored to meet community needs effectively.

Encourage stakeholders to participate in focus groups, advisory committees, or workshops where they can provide insights, suggestions, or guidance on community engagement strategies.

Consider stakeholder perspectives when making decisions regarding resource allocation, project selection, or the allocation of outcomes from community engagement activities.

Effective stakeholder engagement ensures that community engagement and outreach activities are responsive, inclusive, and impactful. By involving key stakeholders in the planning and decision-making processes, the university can gain a deeper understanding of community needs, build trust, and foster collaboration. Regular communication and open channels of dialogue create opportunities for stakeholders to share their perspectives, contribute to program development, and actively participate in the university's community engagement initiatives.

8. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement of community engagement and outreach activities

a. Regularly assess the effectiveness and impact of community engagement and outreach activities through feedback collection, surveys, and data analysis.

b. Use evaluation findings to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to enhance the quality and relevance of outreach initiatives.

c. Foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement by sharing best practices, success stories, and lessons learned among university staff and community partners.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement of Community Engagement and Outreach Activities

a. Regularly assess the effectiveness and impact of community engagement and outreach activities

Collect feedback from community members, stakeholders, and participants involved in community engagement and outreach activities.

Utilize surveys, focus groups, interviews, or online feedback forms to gather qualitative and quantitative data about participants' experiences, satisfaction levels, and perceived impact.

Analyze data and evaluate the extent to which the activities have achieved their intended outcomes, addressed community needs, and made a positive impact.

Assess the reach and diversity of participation to ensure inclusivity and accessibility of outreach initiatives.

Consider external indicators or benchmarks to compare the impact of community engagement efforts with similar programs or initiatives.

b. Use evaluation findings for improvement:

Review evaluation findings and identify areas where improvements or adjustments can be made to enhance the quality and relevance of community engagement activities.

Consider both positive and negative feedback to understand strengths, weaknesses, and areas for growth.

Identify any gaps or shortcomings in program design, implementation, or outcomes and develop strategies to address them.

Modify activities, methodologies, or approaches based on evaluation findings to better align with community needs and aspirations.

Ensure that lessons learned from evaluations inform future planning and decision-making processes to continuously improve community engagement initiatives.

c. Foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement:

Share evaluation findings, best practices, success stories, and lessons learned with university staff, community partners, and other stakeholders.

Create platforms, such as workshops, seminars, or internal reports, to disseminate evaluation results and encourage discussions on how to improve community engagement efforts.

Encourage staff, faculty, and students involved in community engagement to reflect on their experiences, share insights, and collaborate on innovative solutions.

Engage in dialogue with community partners to exchange knowledge, lessons learned, and ideas for enhancing future collaboration and engagement.

Foster a supportive and learning-oriented environment that encourages experimentation, risk-taking, and the implementation of innovative ideas in community engagement initiatives.

By conducting regular evaluations, using feedback to drive improvements, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement, Sabaragamuwa University can enhance the effectiveness and impact of its community engagement and outreach activities. Evaluation serves as a valuable tool for evidence-based decision-making, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently, programs are tailored to community needs, and sustainable positive change is achieved in collaboration with the community.

9. Resources and Support for community engagement and outreach activities

a. Allocate appropriate resources, including personnel, funding, and facilities, to support community engagement and outreach activities.

b. Provide training, guidance, and support to university staff involved in community engagement to ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Resources and Support for Community Engagement and Outreach Activities

a. Allocate appropriate resources:

Allocate sufficient personnel, funding, and facilities to support community engagement and outreach activities effectively.

Ensure that dedicated staff members or teams are assigned to oversee and coordinate community engagement initiatives.

Provide budgetary allocations specifically designated for community engagement, including funding for projects, events, partnerships, and capacity-building activities.

Allocate physical spaces or facilities that can be utilized for community engagement activities, such as meeting rooms, event venues, or training facilities.

Regularly assess the resource needs of community engagement initiatives and adjust allocations accordingly to ensure their successful implementation.

b. Provide training, guidance, and support:

Offer training and capacity-building programs for university staff involved in community engagement to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Provide guidance and support to staff members, faculty, and students engaged in community outreach, ensuring they have access to necessary resources, tools, and materials.

Foster a learning environment that encourages staff to engage in professional development opportunities related to community engagement and outreach.

Facilitate workshops, seminars, or webinars on topics such as community engagement strategies, effective communication, cultural sensitivity, project management, and impact assessment.

Develop mentorship programs or peer-to-peer support networks to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among staff members engaged in community engagement.

By allocating appropriate resources and providing support to staff, Sabaragamuwa University can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of its community engagement and outreach activities. Adequate resources ensure that initiatives have the necessary funding, personnel, and facilities to be implemented successfully. Additionally, training and support empower staff members to effectively engage with the community, develop meaningful partnerships, and deliver impactful programs. This comprehensive support system helps build the capacity of the university's community engagement team, improves the quality of outreach activities, and fosters long-term success in creating positive change within the community.

10. Ethical Considerations in community engagement and outreach activities

a. Uphold ethical standards, including respect for cultural diversity, confidentiality, and the rights and dignity of community members.

b. Ensure transparency in all engagement activities, including accurate representation of the university and its objectives.

a. Uphold ethical standards:

Respect cultural diversity: Recognize and appreciate the cultural values, beliefs, and practices of the community members. Embrace diversity and ensure that engagement activities are inclusive and sensitive to different cultural backgrounds.

Confidentiality: Safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of community members by obtaining informed consent and ensuring that personal information is handled securely and appropriately.

Rights and dignity: Treat community members with dignity, respect, and fairness. Uphold their rights and ensure that their voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes.

Informed participation: Provide clear and accurate information about the nature, purpose, and potential impact of community engagement activities, enabling community members to make informed choices about their involvement.

Avoid harm: Take measures to minimize any potential harm or negative consequences that may arise from community engagement activities. Prioritize the well-being and safety of community members at all times.

b. Ensure transparency:

Accurate representation: Clearly communicate the objectives, values, and activities of the university's community engagement initiatives to ensure transparency and avoid misrepresentation.

Open communication: Foster open and honest communication with the community, ensuring that information is shared in a timely and accessible manner. Provide platforms for community members to ask questions, seek clarification, and provide feedback.

Accountability: Take responsibility for the commitments made to the community. Communicate progress, successes, and challenges encountered during community engagement initiatives. Acknowledge and learn from mistakes or shortcomings, and take appropriate actions to address them.

Mutual benefits: Strive to create mutually beneficial outcomes from community engagement activities. Ensure that the interests and needs of both the university

and the community are considered and balanced in project design and implementation.

Conflict of interest: Identify and manage any potential conflicts of interest that may arise during community engagement. Ensure that decisions and actions are guided by the best interests of the community and are free from personal or organizational biases.

By upholding ethical standards and ensuring transparency in community engagement and outreach activities, Sabaragamuwa University demonstrates its commitment to conducting activities with integrity, respect, and accountability. These considerations promote trust, foster positive relationships with the community, and contribute to the long-term success and sustainability of the university's community engagement initiatives.

This Community Engagement and Outreach Policy guideline reflects Sabaragamuwa University's commitment to actively engaging with the community and creating positive social impact. By following these guidelines, the university aims to build strong community partnerships, enhance community well-being, and contribute to sustainable development in the local area.

Note: The specific details and procedures for community engagement and outreach activities may be further outlined in separate guidelines or operational documents based on the university's specific requirements and community needs.

******This has been approved at the 277th Senate held in 19.09.2023 and at the 301st Council held in 23.10.2023.***

**Centre for Quality Assurance,
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka,
July, 2023**