

IMPACT ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Boise State University | 2022



Photo by Allison Corona

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TOOLKIT INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEI: universities, 4-year colleges, art and design schools, community colleges, and technical colleges) anchor arts and cultural activity in their regions. However, many institutions face challenges in identifying, articulating, and sharing these intrinsic and extrinsic contributions. It is important that these economic and community development actors have evidence-based tools for doing so, given the pressures to articulate the value of their contributions to students, faculty, staff, community partners, and the broader regional economy, and to help them make strategic choices about investment.

The Impact Assessment Toolkit, a *Rapid* or *Expanded Data Assessment*, assists leaders in identifying and evaluating their institution's level of community engagement as an arts and cultural anchor, rooted in a strong belief in the value of the arts in communities. The *Toolkit* introduces the *Assessments*, related terms, and context.

We hope the *Toolkit* will help academic leaders learn more about the ways that universities contribute to arts and culture, to be able to share that with a range of audiences, and to champion investments in arts and culture. There is no single way to use this *Toolkit*; rather, we expect participants will harness their potential in different ways, generating meaningful narratives about their roles as anchors.

The *Impact Assessment Toolkit* is to help HEIs consider and communicate all the ways that they perform as an arts investor, innovator, builder, and catalyst. The *Toolkit* consists of a series of data-informed questions about key components of the HEI arts anchor.

The *Toolkit* acts as an accelerator because it highlights areas where the university can invest resources, including:

- » *Filling gaps in developing or established campus and local arts ecosystems*
- » *Forging deeper community connections aimed at advancing social good*
- » *Developing cultural and creative industries*
- » *Creating a vibrant creative workforce prepared to meet the challenges of twenty-first century em-*

ployment

There are many ways to compile the information necessary to answer the *Toolkit's* questions, and the process itself also provides insight on areas HEI leaders may want to develop to strengthen their role as a cultural anchor in their city's creative ecosystem.

DEFINITION OF "HEI AS CULTURAL ANCHOR INSTITUTION"

HEIs function as a cultural anchor institution in many important ways. HEIs build arts facilities, hire working artists as faculty, train and educate artist workers, invest in cultural industries and cultural entrepreneurs, support arts and cultural activity in communities, and do so much more. Often, this anchor work is hidden or more likely seen in other industries like STEM, but universities contribute to arts and culture in ways that grow regional economies and support communities.

HOW THE TOOLKIT WAS DEVELOPED

The *Toolkit* was developed by translating general anchor institution literature to arts and culture practices, drawing on comparative case studies of HEIs who approach arts and cultural support in a variety of ways, interviews with university arts entrepreneurs, and quantitative data assessment on university efforts by scholars and program evaluators. The *Toolkit* as an orientation to the evaluations is inspired by the work of health impact assessments (Forsyth *et al* 2011). See Ashley and Durham (2019) NEA working paper for more background.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT TARGET PARTICIPANTS

The *Toolkit* is designed for university leaders (Deans, Directors, Department Chairpersons, Program Leads) to help them identify the defining features of a university arts and cultural anchor so that they can communicate their value to relevant stakeholders and have conversations about how to align and amplify strategic planning goals. The *Toolkit* additionally serves leaders by identifying areas that could be strengthened and providing support for investments discussions and decision making.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOCUS AREAS

Using the *Toolkit*, participants identify and assess the use of cultural anchor building blocks—

including key skills, curriculum, investments and infrastructure, and University/Community connections—that help the HEI participants realize their institutions’ role as an arts and cultural anchor institution. By answering no, yes, and providing examples, you may learn where your strengths are and where your university may have some work to consider.

The questions are organized around four focus areas and sub-categories.

Focus I: Integrative Arts Training: Key Components and Skills

- a. Fundamentals of arts training
- b. Interdisciplinary exposure
- c. Applied learning
- d. Skills articulation

Focus II: Supporting and Extending the Integrative Arts Curriculum

- a. Admissions
- b. Arts experiences
- c. Advising
- d. Career services
- e. Alumni

Focus III: Investments and Infrastructure

- a. Facilities
- b. Advancement and fundraising
- c. Faculty
- d. Research
- e. Marketing and branding

Focus IV: University / Community Connections

- a. University expertise in the city
- b. City expertise at the university
- c. Economic impact of the Arts

THE BEST ASSESSMENT FOR ME & MY INSTITUTION

The *Toolkit* consist of two different series of assessments, one abbreviated and one more comprehensive, that can be answered by an individual or in groups.

1 | The Rapid Assessment is a short survey which provides a quick, big-picture analysis. The benefits of the Rapid Assessment are that it can be done quickly with little to no additional research. It provides a basic assessment that can help the

university leader articulate their strengths and weaknesses as a cultural anchor. The level of investment of time and resources is minimal.

2 | The Expanded Data Assessment is a comprehensive survey that probes more deeply into characteristics of a cultural anchor. It is an excellent process to go through prior to a strategic planning process to activate new ways of thinking about your institution. It can be done alone or would benefit from the inclusion of other university staff engaged with leadership in aspects such as faculty management, facilities development, admissions, advising, career services, alumni-relations, or research. It takes more time than the *Rapid Assessment* but it provides a greater level of detail and a more precise return.

All questions are answered with a simple yes, no, unsure or n/a. No specific examples need be provided, although it may be helpful for internal planning purposes to collect supporting examples as data, and we provide space for doing so. The university leader chooses which of the assessments to use to best meet their interests, needs, and resources. Or one can use the *Rapid Assessment* first to get a feel for the content being assessed, and then use the *Expanded Assessment* as an in-depth follow up.

HOW TO USE THE TOOL

There are three primary ways to collect information for these assessments; however, you may use a hybrid approach or come up with your own way that makes most sense for your institution.

Individually: You can use the assessment at your desktop, laptop or tablet, engaging your own expertise and knowledge to respond or doing a small amount of research to answer the questions.

Benefits: it’s easy; can be done anytime; no research can be done, or one can elect to research select questions.

Limitations: the perspective of only one person is provided; no cross-team dialogues are generated; information may not be as complete as it would be with a team.

Asynchronous Collaborative Approach: You can delegate questions to various faculty, staff, or students to collaboratively collect the answers

without a convening and then synthesize the collected information

Benefits: delegation of questions to others will generate answers that most accurately represent your university from multiple perspectives; doesn't require convening.

Limitations: requires time to collect the information from multiple people, synthesize, input, and return.

Synchronous Group Workshop: A group of stakeholders with various perspectives and areas of expertise can meet to draw out more in-depth responses through dialogue.

Benefits: multiple stakeholders with varying areas of expertise and interest provide input; answers will most accurately represent your university from multiple perspectives; discussion can prepare stakeholders for other activities such as strategic planning.

Limitations: requires time to research data, schedule the meeting, synthesize material from the workshop and fill out the report for return.

INFORMATION GATHERING TIPS

Gleaning information from what you already have

Much of what the *Toolkit* asks for may be found in your strategic planning documents, annual program assessment reports, datasets, and other existing documents at your program, department, school, or university level. Collecting these for reference is a good way to have some of the answers at your fingertips.

Connecting with people who may have useful information

If you decide to gather more comprehensive data, you may want to consider reaching out to stakeholders at the university and in the community that can provide insights into how the university anchors arts and culture. Some of these people may include. Ideally, they would represent a range of groups within and connected to the university.

- » **Deans**
- » **Associate Deans**
- » **Department Chairs**

- » **Leading Faculty**
- » **Career Counselors**
- » **Academic Advisors**
- » **Internship Coordinators**
- » **Recruitment & Admissions Staff**
- » **Gallery & Performance Space Staff**
- » **A facilitator, organizer or project manager**
- » **Administration staff members**
- » **Faculty member or members**
- » **Alumni-relationship staff**
- » **Career or guidance counselors**
- » **Facilities management representative**
- » **Advancement & fundraising**
- » **Student arts organizations**
- » **Municipal or regional arts organization and advocacy groups**
- » **Other (consider additional people that may make sense for your institution)**

COMPILING AND COMMUNICATING RESULTS

After you've completed using the *Toolkit*, it may be useful to talk to your faculty, marketing staff, and leadership team about how to best communicate and share the information to different audiences and in different formats (e.g. feature stories in university publications, social media outlets, podcasts, white papers, and more). It's also helpful if you share this accumulated information if others helped you compile this information. It's also possible that it may be useful for other strategic planning, program assessment, or fundraising efforts that you may undertake. Some information may need to come from short interviews of faculty, alumni, or community members to understand the user-perspective of the university. Who might you or the project manager talk to for answers pertaining to answers that won't show up in an annual report? Whoever is conducting the interviews needs to use the *Toolkit* questions as the prompts and either record and transcribe the interviews or take good notes to inform the process.

NEXT STEPS

We hope that you find this tool useful, and if you have any questions or suggestions about how to improve the toolkit, please let us know.

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