Universities play a crucial role in addressing societal needs, from supporting social development at the local level to helping solve global societal challenges.

Community engagement refers to how universities address societal needs through mutually beneficial partnerships with their communities.

‘Communities’ include public authorities, businesses, schools, cultural institutions, civil society and others.

The TEFCE Toolbox for Community Engagement in Higher Education is an institutional self-reflection framework.

The TEFCE Toolbox provides tools for universities and communities to identify community engagement practices and reflect on their achievements and room for improvement.

It thus supports community engagement without using metrics, ranking or bureaucratic self-assessment questionnaires.

There have been attempts to measure community engagement through quantitative benchmarks.

But measuring community engagement is difficult. Community engagement takes different forms depending on the university, its communities and its external environment.

Comparing community engagement ‘performance’ between universities is thus unlikely to hold much value.
THE TEFCE TOOLBOX IS ORGANISED AROUND 7 DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

- I. Teaching and learning
- II. Research
- III. Service and knowledge exchange
- IV. Students
- V. Management (partnerships and openness)
- VI. Management (policies and support structures)
- VII. Supportive peers

Following the collection of community engagement practices from around the university, the TEFCE Toolbox encourages participative discussions that result in a heatmap indicating how developed is each dimension community engagement according to five criteria, as illustrated below:

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PROJECT FUNDING

Funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

PROJECT CO-FINANCING

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
Office for Cooperation with NGOs
### HOW TO APPLY THE TOOLBOX

**STAGE 1**  
**Month 1**  
**QUICK SCAN**  
Setting up university team and launching initial discussion.

**TOOL 1**  
**DIMENSIONS OF ENGAGEMENT**  
Classification of community engagement activities.

**STAGE 2**  
**Months 2-3**  
**EVIDENCE COLLECTION**  
Collecting practices of community engagement.

**STAGE 3**  
**Months 4-5**  
**MAPPING REPORT**  
Identifying good practices and assigning levels of community engagement.

**TOOL 2**  
**LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT**  
Rubric defining levels of engagement - from beginner to advanced.

**TOOL 3**  
**INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNITY-ENGAGEMENT HEATMAP**  
Colour-coded matrix to synthesise findings.

**STAGE 4**  
**Month 5**  
**PARTICIPATIVE DIALOGUE**  
Discussions among stakeholders on strengths and areas of improvement.

**TOOL 4**  
**‘SLIPDOT’ ANALYSIS**  
Customised ‘SWOT’ analysis for self-reflection discussions.

**STAGE 5**  
**Month 6**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REPORT**  
Report presenting mapping results, good practices and areas for improvement.

### BENEFITS OF APPLYING THE TOOLBOX

- Demonstrating the value that the university brings to its communities and the value that communities bring to the university.
- Increasing motivation of community-engaged staff, students and communities by acknowledging the value of their engagement.

The TEFCE Toolbox is freely available on the website [www.tefce.eu](http://www.tefce.eu).
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