

Focus Groups Findings

24/26 CE Elective
Classification Participants
May 2026



01 Overview

GOALS

The Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement is currently undergoing a major revision aimed at improving accessibility, clarity, and institutional relevance. Key goals include:



1. Increase accessibility across diverse institutional contexts



2. Reduce redundancy and repetition in the application



3. Expand representation (currently limited diversity across classified institutions, including only a small number of HBCUs and HSIs)



4. Improve clarity and usability for applicants and reviewers

TIMELINE

2026:
Listen and
Revise

2027:
New
framework
released

2029:
First
application
using revised
framework

2031:
Next
application
opportunity

Note: Classification designation remains valid for 6 years

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Value of the Classification Process

Across institutions, the classification process is consistently described as highly valuable beyond the designation itself.

Key Benefits

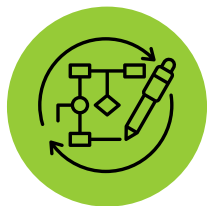
- Institutional self-study that surfaces gaps and strengths
- Cross-campus collaboration, often bringing together units that rarely interact
- Strategic alignment tool, serving as a shared framework or “north star” for engagement
- Catalyst for institutional change, leveraging the Carnegie name for legitimacy
- As one participant reflected, the process itself often becomes “the prize,” supporting long-term institutionalization of engagement practices.



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Major Challenges Identified

Despite its value, institutions reported consistent and significant barriers.



Application Design Issues

- Redundant questions across sections
- Unclear distinctions (e.g., civic learning vs co-curricular engagement)
- Disjointed storytelling across sections
- Difficulty representing complex or decentralized institutions



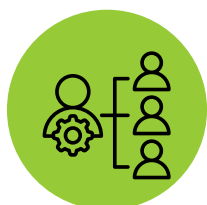
Data Collection Burden

- Lack of centralized systems for tracking engagement
- Course tagging and activity tracking are highly labor-intensive
- Inconsistent data definitions across institutions
- In some cases, collected data was not ultimately usable by reviewers



Time and Workload

- 6–8 months of intensive work for many institutions
- In extreme cases, up to 75% of a director's time over multiple years
- Often requires parallel systems and manual data collection



Structural Challenges

- Decentralized institutions struggle with coordination and narrative coherence
- Difficulty accessing data from faculty and departments
- Limited ability to communicate institutional context to reviewers



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Resource and Staffing Constraints



Human Resources

- Most institutions rely heavily on faculty with teaching loads
- Work is often treated as an “additional duty” rather than a dedicated role
- Smaller institutions face disproportionate burden due to limited infrastructure

Recommended Staffing Model

- Primary responsibility housed in staff/administrative roles
- Dedicated assignment rather than distributed responsibility
- Support from:
 - Graduate students (data collection)
 - Institutional research teams
 - Advancement/communications teams

Successful Strategies

- Hiring consultants for cohesion and external perspective
- Using alumni or external writers for consistent narrative voice
- Building strong cross-campus relationships for data access

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Host Institution Support Needs

Institutions identified several areas where additional support would significantly improve participation and success.



Communities of Practice

- Peer learning networks across institutions
- HBCU-specific and regional collaborations
- System-wide coordination for multi-campus institutions



Technical Assistance

- Application guidance and readiness tools
- Best practices for data collection and assessment
- Monthly or phased support during application preparation



Communication & Storytelling Support

- Guidance on articulating institutional impact
- Tools for internal and external communication
- Strategies to increase visibility and recognition



Leadership Engagement

- Clear prioritization from provost/president
- Use of classification as a strategic and reputational asset
- Alignment with broader civic and political context

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Review Process and Feedback



Strengths

- Increased transparency compared to previous cycles
- Reviewer roles provide valuable professional development
- Feedback now more structured than earlier iterations

Ongoing Challenges

- Feedback often perceived as too generic
- Inconsistent reviewer familiarity with institutional contexts
- Need for stronger reviewer training

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Consultant and Reviewer Opportunities

Consultant Support

Available services include:

- External perspective and strategic advising
- Gap analysis and readiness assessment
- Section-level review and feedback
- Resource sharing and best practices

Reviewer Opportunities

- Paid professional development
- Multiple tiers based on experience
- Call for reviewers expected annually



08 Key Themes for Future Framework Design

Based on stakeholder feedback, several priorities are emerging for the revised framework:

Reduce Burden While Maintaining Rigor

- Shorten application length
- Eliminate redundancy
- Clarify section distinctions

Improve Accessibility Across Institutional Types

- Better support for decentralized and under resourced institutions
- More flexibility in defining community engagement
- Recognition of diverse engagement forms (including workforce and industry partnerships)

Elevate Storytelling and Institutional Context

- Stronger emphasis on narrative coherence
- Improved guidance for communicating impact
- Greater recognition of institutional uniqueness

Better Capture Relationship-Based Work

- Acknowledge long-term, relational engagement
- Move beyond purely quantitative metrics
- Value process-oriented and trust-building work

Expand Field-Building and Networks

- Increase peer learning opportunities
- Provide case studies and exemplars
- Support cross-institution collaboration

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Next Steps and Resources



Current and Upcoming Developments

- Feedback reports currently being distributed on a rolling basis
- Website transition to the University of San Diego School of Leadership and Education Sciences (June launch)
- Research publications from the most recent cycle forthcoming

Platforms and Tools

- GivePulse will host:
 - Application materials
 - Partner survey feedback
 - Serve as CRM
 - Data repository

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Final Takeaways

The Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement remains a highly valued strategic framework and institutional catalyst, even among non-applicants. However, participation is often constrained by:

- Institutional complexity
- Resource limitations
- Data infrastructure challenges

The forthcoming revisions represent a significant opportunity to reduce barriers, improve clarity, and expand access, while preserving the framework's role as a unifying force across higher education.

