



CREATING THE FUTURE

UCLA Strategic Plan 2023-28



UCLA's Social Impact Collaborative Initiative

Big 10 Community Engagement Gathering, 12/9/2025

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& Executive Director

UCLA Center for Community Engagement

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Session goals

- *Provide an overview of a funding initiative in support of community-engaged research at UCLA*
 - *What we've done*
 - *What we've learned*
- *Stimulate conversation among session attendees about efforts to stimulate and/or support community-engaged research at your campuses*

Strategic Plan Goal 1: Deepen UCLA's Engagement with Los Angeles—partner for social impact

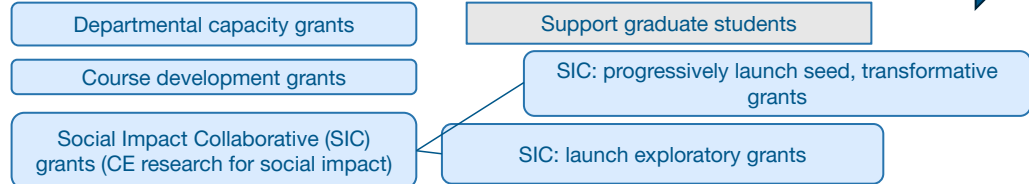
- “To meaningfully impact the lives of Angelenos, tap into the contributions and expertise of our region’s communities, and partner with those communities to improve quality of life in the city.”
- Commitment to measure and report on impact:
 - “Identify, collect and report on metrics that track the quality of the partnerships and impact of community-engaged research and creative activity, with community partner input in the development of those metrics.”

Strategic Plan Goal 1: Deepen UCLA's Engagement with Los Angeles—partner for social impact

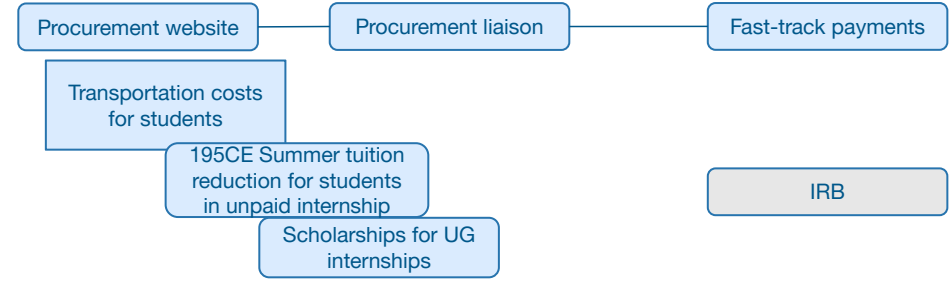
- *Establish UCLA Downtown as a hub for community-engaged research, teaching/learning, and outreach*
- *Build organizational infrastructure and drive culture change to recognize and support community-engaged research and teaching, and remove barriers*
- *Stimulate new community-engaged teaching and new opportunities to integrate community-engaged learning in undergraduate, graduate, and professional school curricula*
- *Stimulate community-engaged research for social impact*
- *Develop metrics to better understand how UCLA's community-engaged scholarship creates meaningful impact*



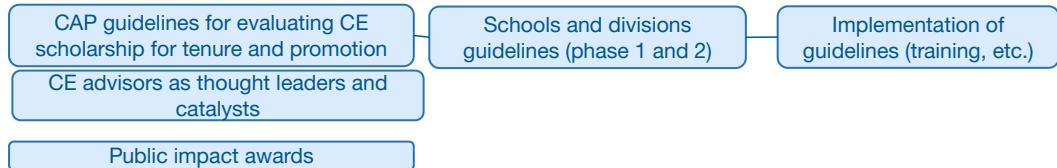
Workstream 1:
Stimulate
CE-scholarship
through **incentives**



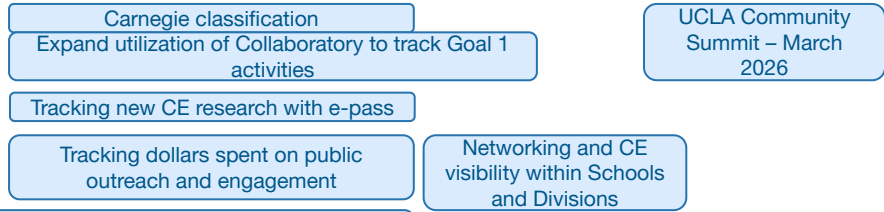
Workstream 2:
Reduce **barriers** to CE scholarship



Workstream 3: Shift the academic **culture** to value CE scholarship



Workstream 4: Elevate **awareness and visibility** of CE scholarship



Pre-conditions: Special Advisor to EVCP appointment, UCLA LA CE Council established, CE Advisors Network created, UCLA Downtown

Outcome 1: UCLA expands equitable, mutually beneficial relationships with community partners

Outcome 2: Faculty are engaged and motivated to pursue CE scholarship

Outcome 3: Systems and structures facilitate the partnerships necessary for impactful CE scholarship

Outcome 4: Students contribute to and benefit from CE learning and research opportunities



Impact: UCLA faculty, staff, and students effectively collaborate with LA community partners to co-create knowledge that is impactful for residents of Los Angeles

Multiple Opportunities for Enhancing CE

- **The Community-Engaged Course Development Program** offers up to ten \$5,000 awards to support UCLA instructors to develop new community-engaged courses at the undergraduate, graduate, and/or professional level.
- **The Building Departmental Capacity for Community-Engaged Teaching Program** enables academic departments to support and sustain community partnerships for impactful community-engaged teaching/learning.
- **Community-Engaged Research Funding – Social Impact Collaboratives:** mechanisms for supporting interdisciplinary community-engaged research and creative activities for Senate faculty.

Social Impact Collaboratives

- New mechanisms for supporting *interdisciplinary community-engaged* research and creative activities with a focus on working with Los Angeles partners.
- Social Impact Collaboratives: co-create knowledge and collaborate on the dissemination and application of research and creative activities to further *equity-achieving social impact in Los Angeles*

Required elements of a Social Impact Collaborative

- **Interdisciplinary**
 - 2 or more departments, schools, and/or units; PIs must be UCLA Senate Faculty
- **Place-Based and Justice Focused**
 - Social equity issue in Los Angeles (City or County)
- **Community-Engaged Research & Creative Activities**
 - Community partner(s)
 - Mutually constructed
 - Beneficial both for the UCLA researchers and community partners
- **Co-PI Participation in quarterly “community of practice” gatherings**

Exploratory Grants (up to \$10,000) (AY 2024-25, 2025-26)

- Initial relationship building for starting a new collaborative team:
 - Exploring potential collaboration with internal (UCLA) and an external community partner(s)
 - Convening to determine common interests
 - Identifying the equity issue impacting Los Angeles
 - Outlining a scope of work (including research questions) that identifies mutually beneficial goals
 - Articulating a theory of change that guides the work
 - Making a mutual decision to proceed to form a Social Impact Collaborative for research and/or creative activity.

Seed Grants (up to \$50,000) (AY 2025-26)

- Supports an existing interdisciplinary group working with a Los Angeles community partner(s) on an equity-advancing topic **to conduct early-stage research and/or creative activity.**
- Applicants should be able to show evidence of a developed and equitable research partnership in which the partner's work advancing social equity has shaped the research or creative activity.
- Seed grants provide **an opportunity to test how the research/creative activity collaboration contributes to a theory of change to address the equity issue.**

Transformative Grants (up to \$250,000 over 2 years) (AY 2025-26)

- Applicants must have successfully completed one or more research projects or creative activities together
- Supports work that is *transformative* both in equity-advancing outcomes and for knowledge-making (research, scholarship, creative activity).
- Applicants must be able to articulate not only how the research/creative activity collaboration contributes to a theory of change to address the equity issue, but also that the collaborative's theory of change has evidence of preliminary outcomes.

AY 2024-25

AY 2025-26

Exploratory

Exploratory (3)

Funded: 3

Unfunded: 2

Funded
(n.23)

9 Applicants (4 Funded)

Seed (9)

Funded: 5

Unfunded: 12

3 Applicants (2 Funded)

Transformative (3)

Funded: 1

Unfunded: 7

Unfunded
(n.24)

11

- Work ongoing
- Work delayed
- Work transforming

5

17

8

**New
Proposals**



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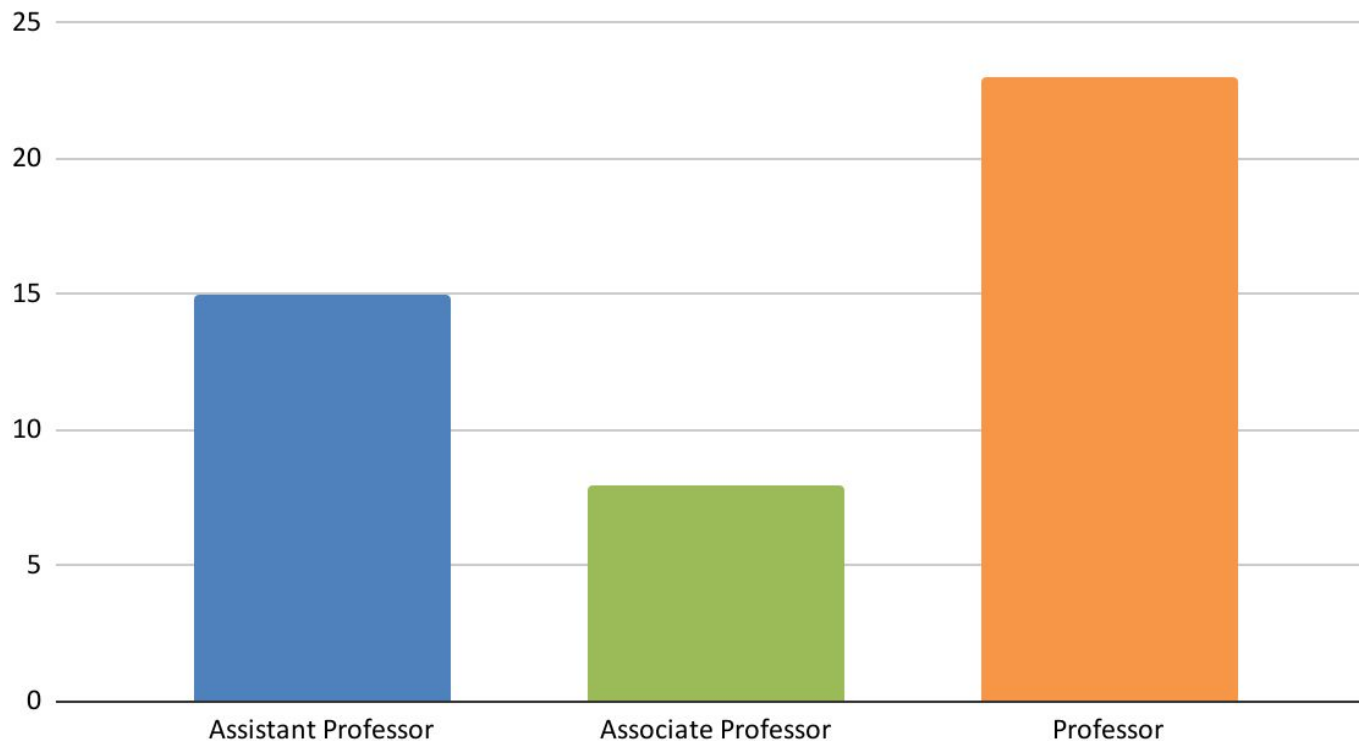
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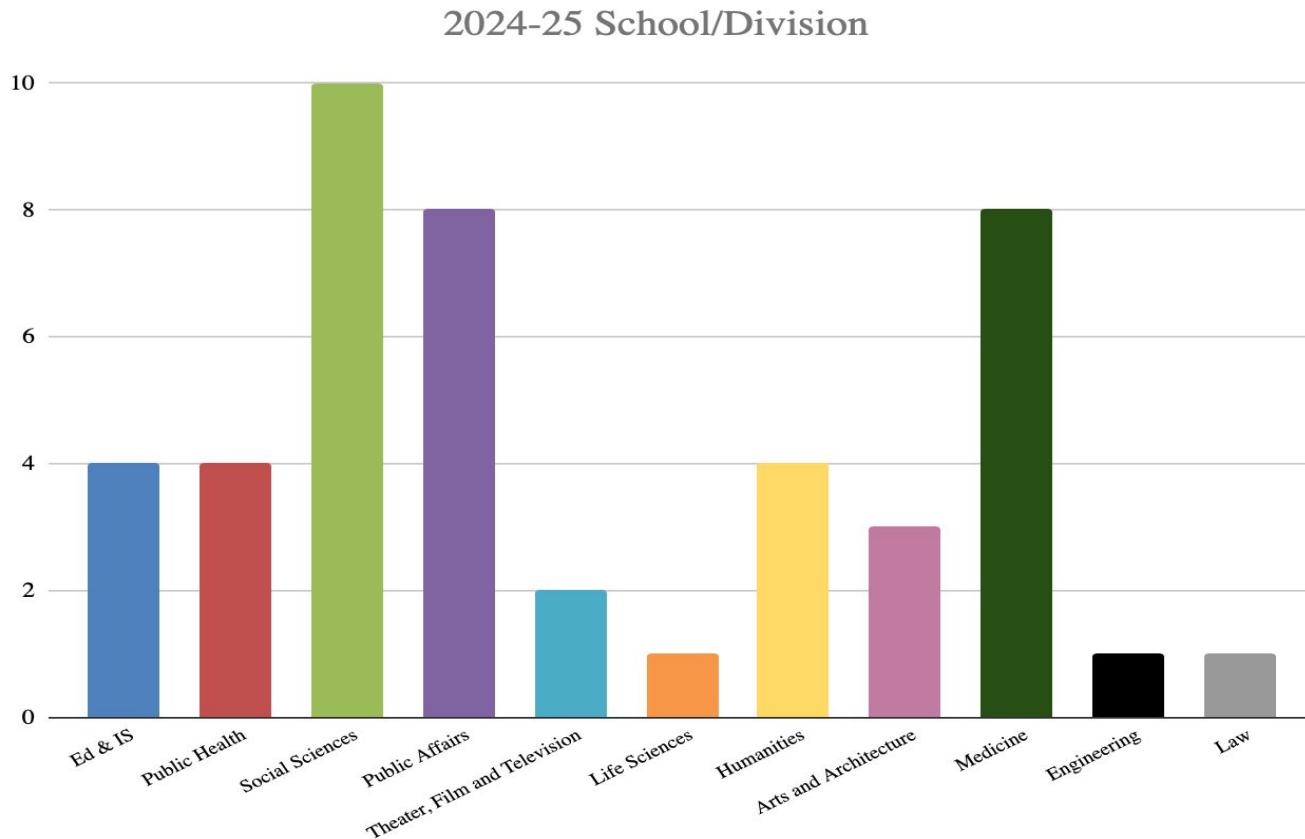


Profile of Grantees/ Projects AY 2024-25

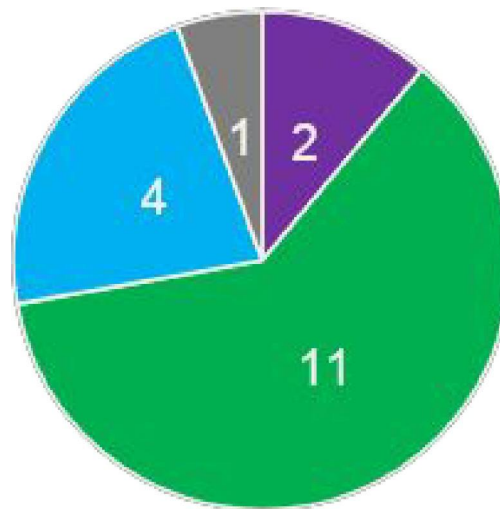


2024-25 Co-PI Primary Appointment





What is the amount of your scholarly work that is community engaged?



■ All ■ Most ■ Some ■ None

Key Words for Areas of Focus





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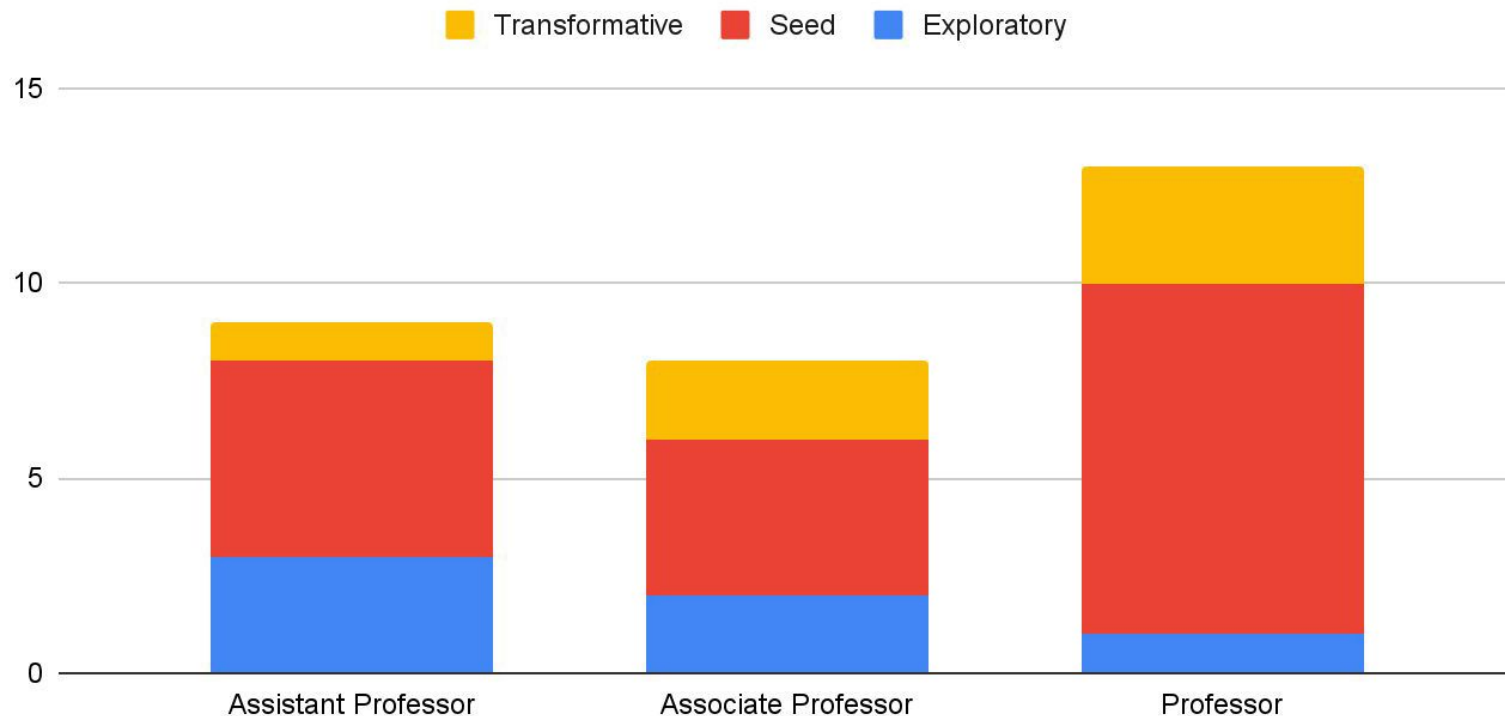
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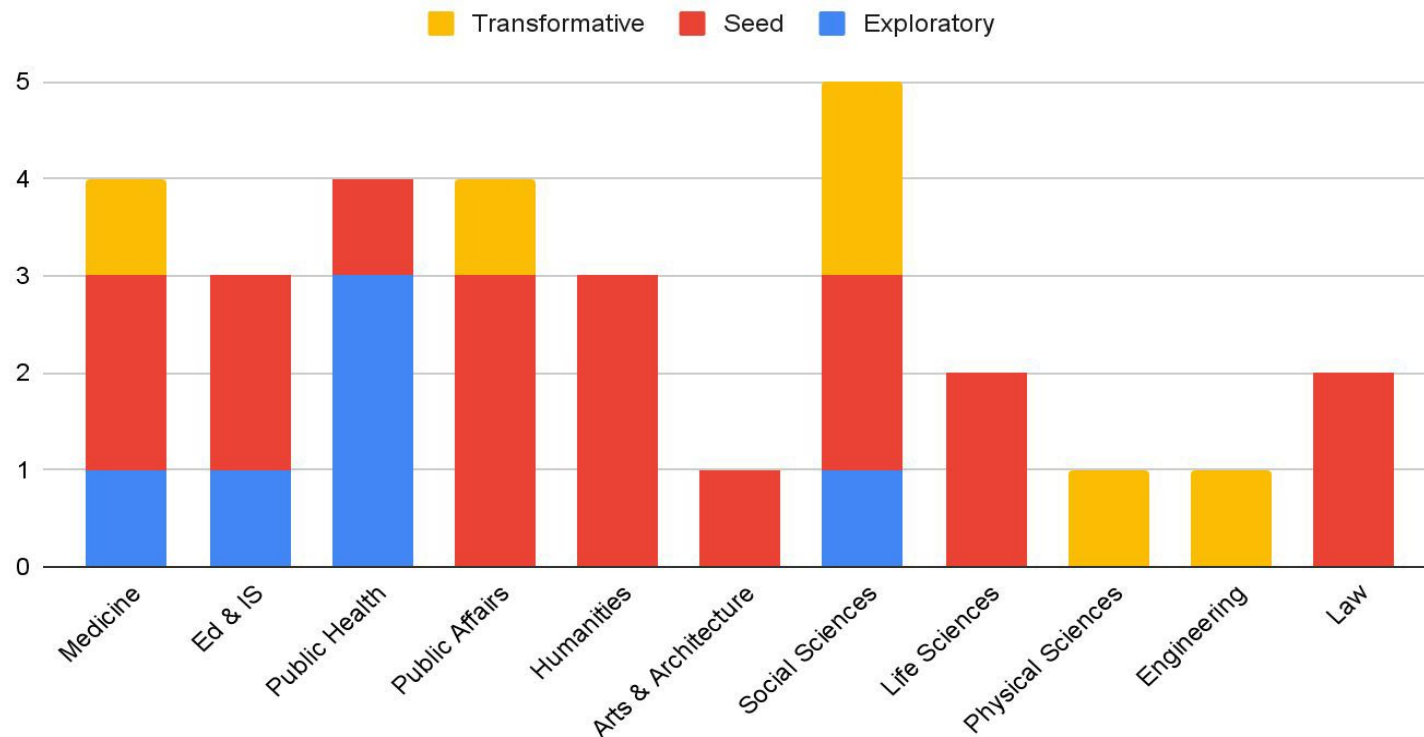
Profiles of Grantees/Projects AY 2025-26



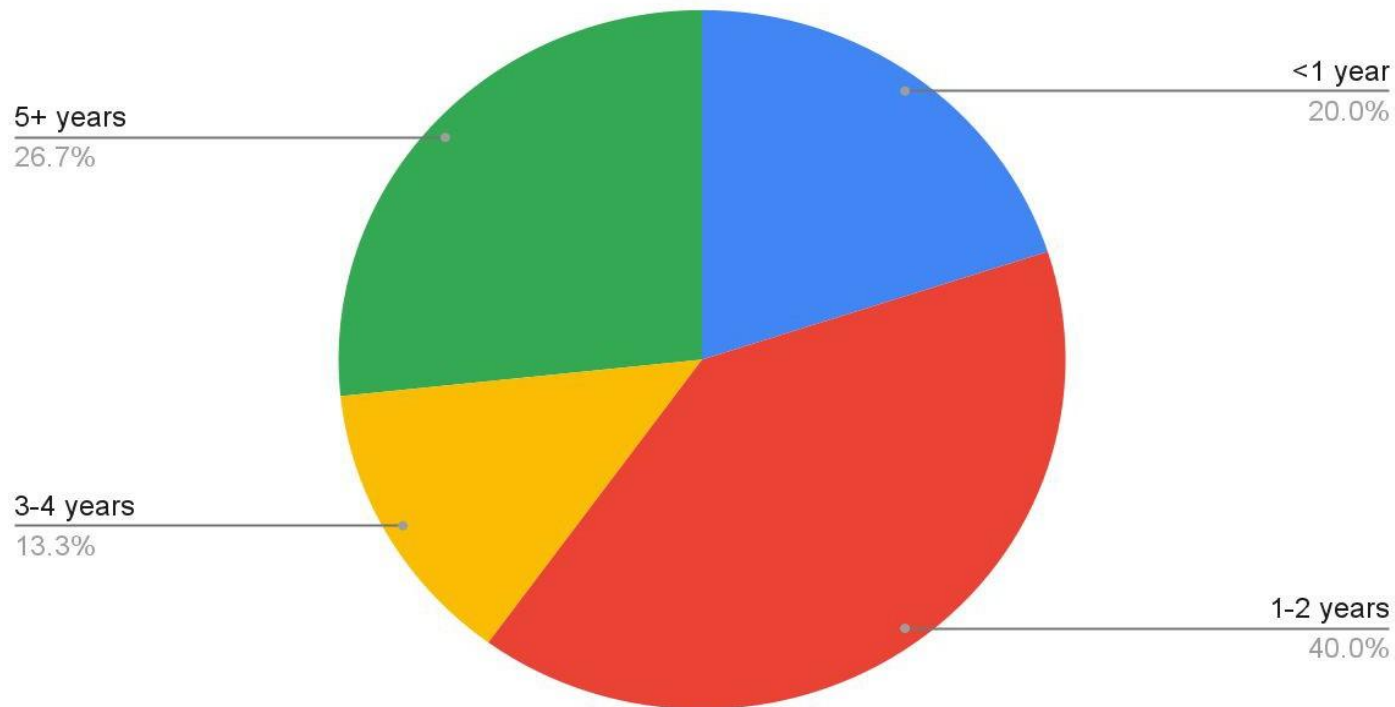
Primary Appointment



School/Division



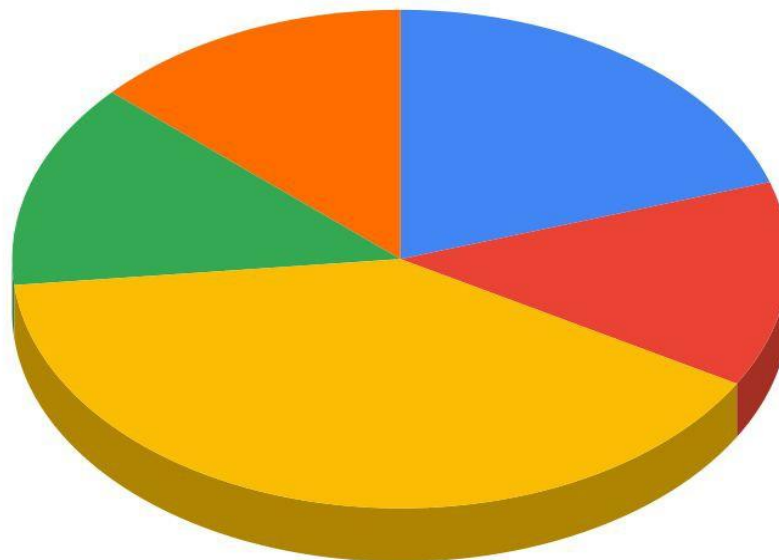
Collaboration History



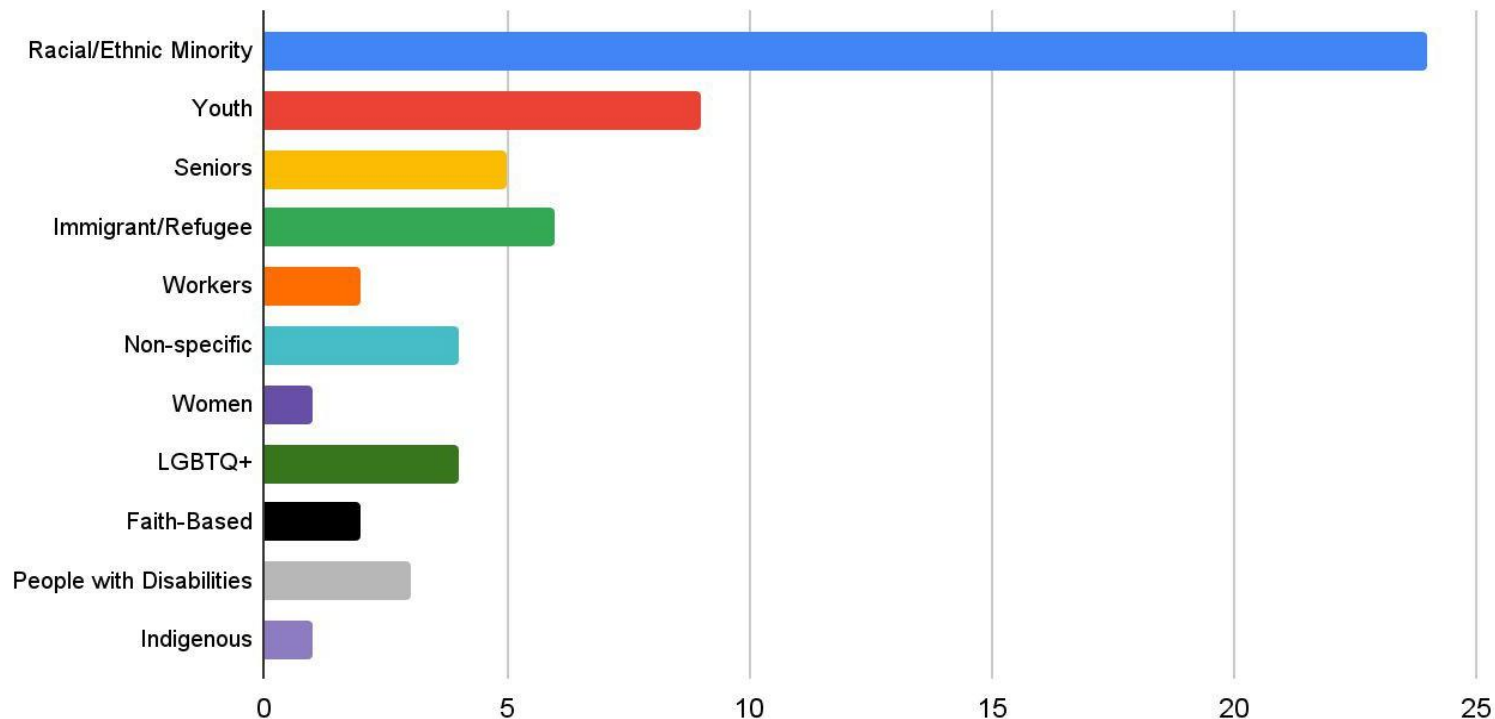


Priority Funding

- Fire recovery
- Public safety and restorative justice
- Community health and wellbeing
- Housing and homelessness
- Climate Change



Partner Organizations by Principal Constituency



Keywords for Areas of Focus





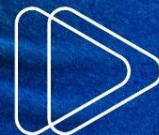
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Metrics of Success— AY-2024-25

How did we do and how do we know.



**SIC
Exploratory
Grants:
By the
Numbers...**

Approx. 770

Total # of community individuals directly impacted
across SIC exploratory projects

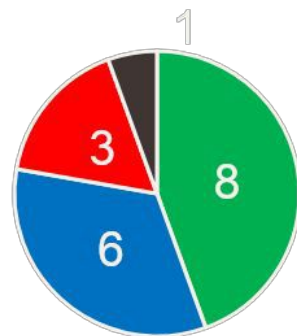
89%

15 out of 16 PIs have plans for future
collaboration with their community partner

4.7 out of 6

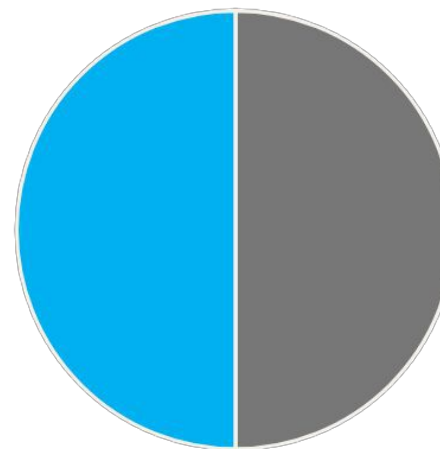
Average rating of the success of the collaborative on
0-6 scale (0=Not at all successful, 6=Extremely
successful)

Was the work plan completed as intended?



- Fully
- Mostly
- Partially
- Not at all

Were products created as a result of efforts?*



■ Yes ■ No

*Note: Work products were not required for the Exploratory stage of work.

Most Common Project Activities Undertaken During Grant Period

- Community engagement & relationship-building
- Education, mentorship, & training
- Research activities
- Analysis & publication
- Creative, arts-based, & cultural programming
- Convenings and events
- Grant writing and infrastructure development

Metrics of Success

Events

Convenings,
workshops,
performances.

1

Outputs

Created artifacts
to visualize and
capture efforts.

3

Recognition

Efforts were
adopted, received
positively.

5

Attendance

Strong turnout,
increases across
events.

2

Partnerships

Strong spirit of
collaboration and
engagement.

4

Funding

Additional funding
sought, completed
scope of work.

6





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Lessons Learned for Collaboration

Across disciplines and with
community partners.



How likely are you to work with in the future:

Avg.=3.5

Internal UCLA
Colleagues

Avg.=3.6

External
Community
Partners

Scale: 0-4,
0=Not at all,
4=Very Likely

Key Enablers and Challenges for **Interdisciplinary** Collaboration

ENABLERS	CHALLENGES
Shared Purpose and Interests – Common research interests, social commitments, and community-centered goals.	Administrative & Logistical Barriers – Slow purchasing/payment systems, delays in fund disbursement, facility access issues, shortage of logistical staff.
Pre-existing Relationships and Trust – Prior collaborations and institutional/community ties.	Time & Capacity Constraints – Busy schedules, leadership or membership changes, limited labor, overambitious scopes, competing commitments.
Complementary Expertise and Clear Roles – Diverse disciplinary strengths leveraged through defined responsibilities.	Interdisciplinary & Cross-Sector Communication – Differences in language, framing, expectations across disciplines and with community partners.
Strong Communication and Coordination – Regular, structured meetings, transparent communication, designated point persons.	Relationship-Building Demands – Time-intensive trust building, balancing structured outputs with flexibility, aligning expectations with partners.
Flexibility and Institutional Support – Adaptability to change, access to institutional resources, and community partnerships.	External and Structural Factors – Shifts in funding priorities, socio-political and economic constraints, technical barriers (e.g., software access).

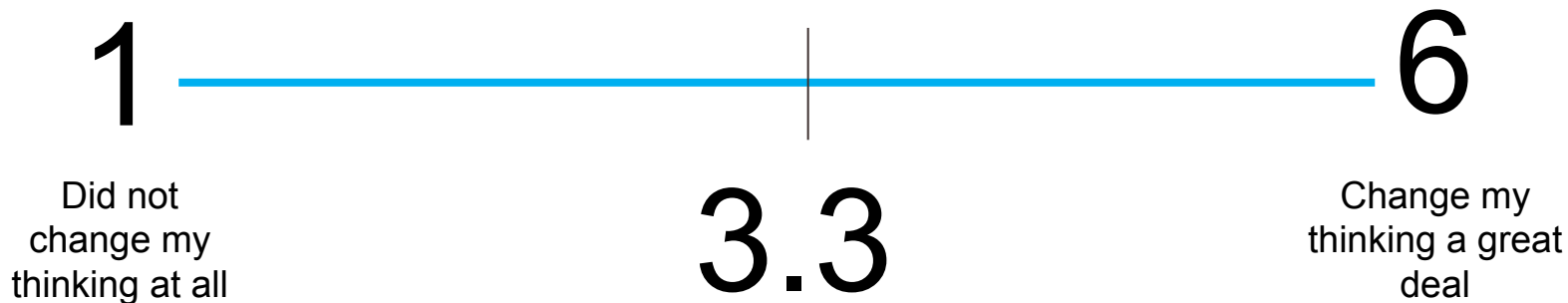
Key Enablers and Challenges for **Community** Collaboration

ENABLERS
Shared purpose
Trust
Open communication
Partner leadership
Tangible support
In-person relationship-building

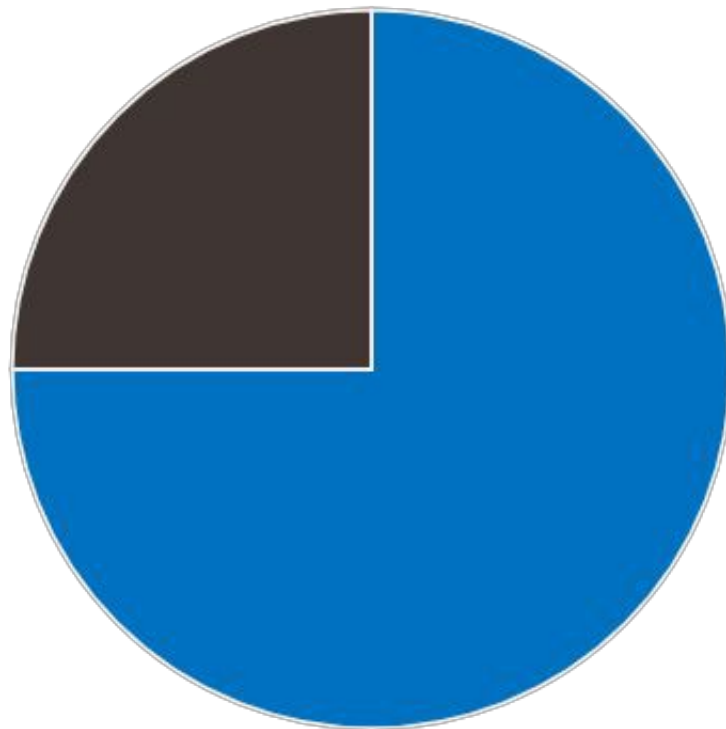
Challenges, Lessons & Recommendations for Community Collaboration

CHALLENGES	LESSON	RECOMMENDATION
Communication and Coordination	Need clear, consistent, and accessible communication channels.	Establish primary pts. of contact early, set expectations for responsiveness, use shared tools (e.g., calendars, group chats, project trackers) to streamline communication.
Logistical and Structural Barriers	Geography, scheduling, and institutional constraints can derail momentum if not addressed up front.	Budget for travel and virtual convenings, secure flexible and accessible meeting spaces, plan timelines that allow for iterative progress rather than compressed decision-making.
Financial and Administrative Challenges	Delays in payment and short-term funding cycles undermine trust and strain community partners.	Advocate for multi-year funding, simplify reimbursement/payment processes, ensure compensation reflects labor and expertise of community partners.
Philosophical and Strategic Differences	Partners may have different missions, pedagogical approaches, or frameworks change.	Spend time at the beginning aligning values and goals, allow for flexibility in program design, and negotiate shared frameworks for that respect multiple knowledge systems (e.g., recognizing Indigenous and creative practices as legitimate theories of change).
Trust, Relationships, and External Context	Trust-building takes time, especially when histories of extraction, instability, or political pressures shape the partnership context.	Prioritize relationship-building as a core activity (not an add-on), acknowledge external realities affecting communities, and co-create agreements that center reciprocity, equity, and sustainability.

To what degree did your experience with the Collaborative change the way you think about collaboration (i.e., interdisciplinary research or university-community collaboration)?



Has your SIC
given you ideas for
working with other
partners?



■ YES ■ Haven't had enough time to consider

Common Challenges of Collaboration

Interdisciplinary Partners	Community Partners
Administrative & Logistical Barriers	Financial and administrative challenges
Time & Capacity Constraints	—————
Interdisciplinary & Cross-Sector Communication	Communication and coordination
Relationship-Building Demands	Trust, relationships and external context
External and Structural Factors	Logistical and structural barriers
	Philosophical and strategic differences

Ways SIC Partnerships Shaped Scholarly/ Creative Work



Shaped Research Agendas and Outputs

Generated new research directions, clarified agendas, and produced tangible scholarly products (policy briefs, publications, training materials, creative works).



Expanded Interdisciplinary and Professional Networks

For faculty and students, across disciplines and sectors, expanded professional relationships and laying foundations for ongoing collaboration.



Deepened Community-Engaged Scholarship

Provided access to hard-to-reach populations, reinforced importance of centering community voices, ensured scholarship aligned with community needs.



Reminder to Balance Labor and Reflection

Administrative and organizational demands of partnerships can limit time for scholarly reflection.



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Theory of Change

Lessons learned for development and collaboration.



Theory of Change as a tool for measuring impact

- “A clear theory of change serves as the **basis for meaningful measurement** — whether in assessing progress or in supporting strategy refinement.”
- “**Clarifying interim outcomes and expected pathways to an end goal** enables groups to expand their understanding of success beyond a sole focus on end goals, making it easier to design and deploy more focused measurement that better positions them to document and learn about progress.”
- “When actions, interim outcomes and assumptions are clear, teams can better **assess whether assumptions about change are holding up and whether the outcomes most critical to goal advancement are evident.**”

Theory of Change as a tool for equity

- To what extent are the proposed strategies and outcomes developed by the community partners and reflect their understanding of the issues/inequalities their communities face?
- To what extent are the research teams contributing additional perspectives yet mitigating the historic/ongoing power inequalities and history of extractive research practices?

Theory of Change applied to SIC

- Do you and your community partner(s) have a shared understanding of the **social impact goal** of your Collaborative?
- In what way will the planned **research/creative activity contribute** to the expected/desired changes in the near and longer term?
- What **other strategies and actions** will be undertaken to achieve the goal?
- What **interim changes or new conditions are expected** to occur as a result of those actions in the near term and in the longer term?
- What are the **assumptions** underlying the connections between your research/creative activity and the expected changes toward your Collaborative's identified social impact goal?

Collaboration on Theory of Change with Community Partners

What works:

1. Start with existing frameworks
2. Build trust and relationships
3. Engage in collaborative reflection,
4. Map strategies and outcomes
5. Ground the change process in community realities
6. Treat the “Theory of Change” as a “living” framework that is open to iteration

What are the challenges:

1. Framework clarity
2. Time
3. Terminology
4. Trust
5. Mismatched institutional vs. community expectations
6. Political climate pressures
7. Diverging goals
8. Complexity of multiple partners.

1

Center Community Priorities

Ground the ToC in partners' missions, values, and lived experiences, ensuring their voices lead decision-making.

2

Make the process accessible

Use clear templates, guided workshops, and plain language to support understanding and meaningful participation.

3

Engage iteratively and reflectively

Build in cycles of dialogue, regular meetings, and shared reflection to co-develop and refine goals.

4

Co-create and build capacity

Involve partners in drafting work products, designing activities, and developing skills that strengthen long-term impact.

5

Be flexible and responsive

Adapt to community feedback, honor cultural practices, and shape the ToC as a living framework that evolves with the partnership.



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Recommendations for Improvement (Faculty perspectives)



Top 5 Recommendations

Clarify & Prioritize Early

Introduce Theory of Change at application stage; Provide structured orientation meetings early.

Streamline Admin Processes

Pre-drafted agreements & boilerplate language; Standardize terms (stipend vs. honorarium); Simplify compensation & vendor approvals.

Strengthen Communication

Acknowledge grantee invitations. Peer problem-solving spaces (listservs, Zoom); Share case studies from past cohorts.

Build Researcher Capacity

Training on public/science communication; Mentorship from experienced scholars; Highlight diverse models of engagement.

Enhance Funding Flexibility

Rolling deadlines & longer cycles; Include community partners as co-PIs; Support faculty with multiple partnerships.



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Perspectives of Community Partners



1. Respect & Appreciation

Expertise, Compensation, Power Balance

20 out of 21 (avg. 3.9 out of 4)

Strongly agreed that: The **knowledge and expertise** I brought to the research/creative activity of the Social Impact Collaborative was **valued and respected**.

19 out of 21 (avg. 3.9 out of 4)

Strongly agreed that: I felt **my expertise was utilized** in helping to shape the direction and/or focus for the research/creative activity undertaken in the Social Impact Collaborative.

20 out of 21 (3.7 out of 4)

Very/somewhat Effective: How would you rate the **effectiveness of the communication** between you and your UCLA partners?

ALL

community partners who responded indicated that the compensation they received was fair.

Within your SIC, how would you rate the distribution of power between yourself and your UCLA partners with regard to establishing agendas, determining project focus or direction, decision-making, etc.



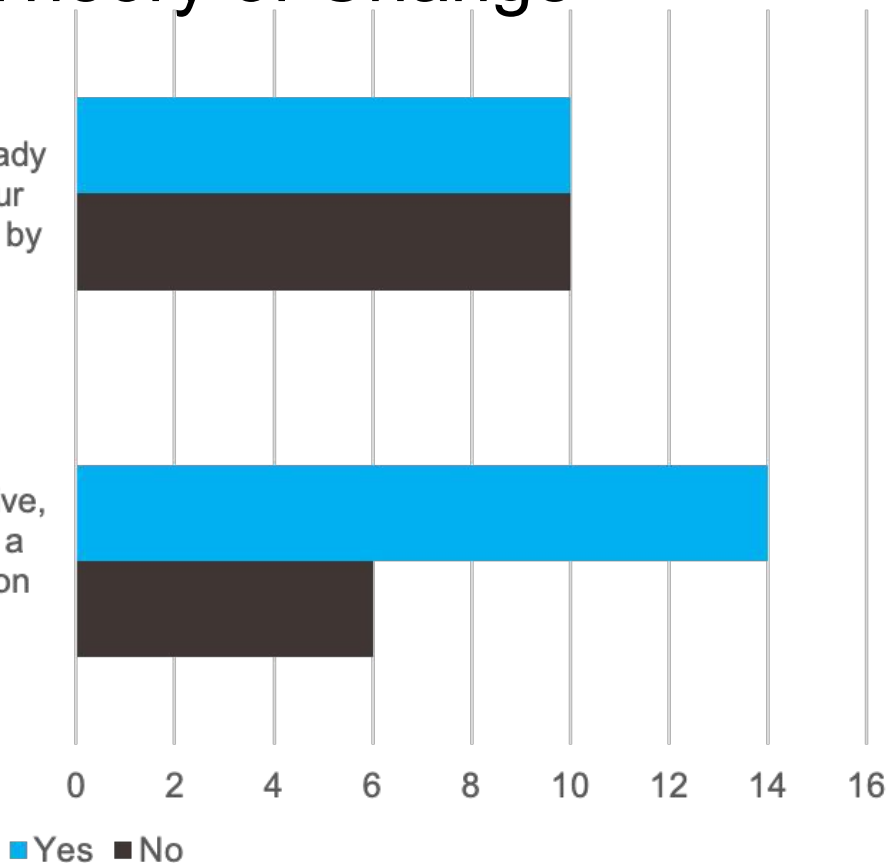
2. Theory of Change

Input and Relevance

Collaborating on a Theory of Change

Before engaging in your Social Impact Collaborative had you or your organization already established a “theory of change” regarding your strategies to impact the social issue addressed by your organization’s work?

At any point in your Social Impact Collaborative, did you engage with your UCLA partners in a discussion to develop a mutually agreed upon “theory of change”?



Regardless of whether you engaged in a discussion about a theory of change or not, how much influence would you say this had on the success of your project?



4 Ways to Make Theory of Change Discussions More Valuable

1

Include lived experience early

Engage people with lived experience from the start, not just as advisors later

2

Acknowledge Constraints

Recognize limitations while building confidence that groundwork will lead to funded outcomes

3

Clarify and apply Theory of Change

Make language and examples accessible, Revisit in meetings, emphasize practicality over abstraction

4

Lead impactful discussions

Use directed conversations, share past experiences, and connect work to current events and community impact

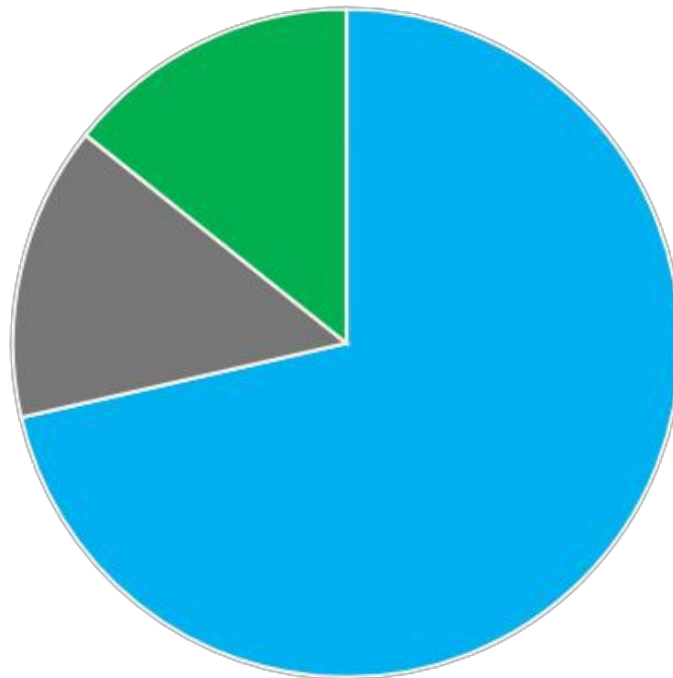
3. Future Collaboration

Plans for Engagement and Why It's Worth It

ALL

community partners who responded indicated that that they were **VERY LIKELY** to pursue further projects with UCLA partners.

Immediate Plans to Collaborate



■ Yes ■ No ■ Maybe

18 out of 21

Indicated that their experience *positively* changed how they think about engaging in collaborative research or creative activities with university partners in the future.

1. Trust and Respect

Faculty are respectful, supportive & its important to build and maintain trust.

2. Equity and Inclusion

Recognition, inclusion, equitable co-design from the start leads to more meaningful outcomes.

3. Universities as Conveners and Contributors

Universities bring unique strengths to connect theory & practice, convene diverse groups, produce data that supports community needs.

4. Inspiration and Motivation

Openness of faculty & success of collaboration shows effective partnership is possible.

5. Creative and Future-Oriented Solutions

Potential for innovative problem-solving & generated excitement for new projects & sustaining partnerships.



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Thank you!

