

## ***Northeastern University Campus Compact Civic Action Plan***

***Submitted by The Center of Community Service, a Department of City and Community Affairs***

Northeastern University is an active and long-term member of Massachusetts Campus Compact (now part of Campus Compact for Southern New England), and our public purpose has long been articulated. As an institution of higher education Northeastern is “unyielding in the advancement of knowledge, the successful education of future generations, and the positive resolution of the challenges of our time” ([Northeastern 2025](#)). Experiential education and community engagement are at the foundation of our institution. Northeastern’s leadership recognizes the importance of the principles put forward in the Campus Compact 30th Anniversary Action Statement, and through the leadership of the Center of Community Service (located within City & Community Affairs), we are ready to take action on increasing the depth and breadth of the work we do in partnership with our local and global neighbors.

### **History, Mission and Vision**

Founded in 1898 as a local neighborhood institution, Northeastern has grown into a global, experiential, research university built on a tradition of engagement with the world, creating a distinctive approach to education and research. Northeastern has been and remains deeply committed to engagement with our local community.

In addition, “Experiential learning, anchored by our renowned cooperative education program, lies at the heart of academic life at Northeastern. The integration of study with professional work, research, and service in 131 countries around the world gives students real-world opportunities and responsibilities. They explore their path, acquire a deeper grasp of their studies, and develop an understanding essential to lifelong achievement: how to learn and grow outside the comfort zone of the classroom.”

(<https://undergraduate.northeastern.edu/explore/experiential-learning/>)

Northeastern proudly counts itself as one of Boston’s most extensively civically engaged universities, having received the President’s Community Service Honor Roll designation for the last six years and earning the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification in 2015. We have also been recognized by US News and World Report as having one the top service-learning programs in the country for 8 consecutive years. Community engagement is carried out by faculty, staff, and students, individually and collectively, and is supported by the institution in a variety of ways, perhaps most prominently through our Center of Community Service.

### **Our Approach: Utilizing existing civic engagement infrastructure, resources and assets**

For more than a decade the [Center of Community Service \(CCS\)](#) has acted as a central resource; building campus-community partnerships and guiding faculty, staff, and students in addressing societal issues as a true partner both locally and globally. The Center is divided into three general areas: service-learning, co-curricular programming, and AmeriCorps programs. The Service-Learning program works with faculty across a variety of disciplines to integrate service and research opportunities into academic coursework. The co-curricular programs provide diverse opportunities for students to learn about and engage in service in local and global communities. This is done through volunteer fairs, days of service, week-long service activities like Alternative Spring Break, a team-based semester long commitment called the Husky Volunteer Team and two multi-year civic engagement programs; the Civic Engagement Program (CEP) and our new Alliance of Civically Engaged Students (NU|ACES) program. Finally, the Center houses two AmeriCorps programs, the Massachusetts Promise Fellowship, and the Northeastern Jumpstart program. Massachusetts Promise Fellowship offers a full-time postgraduate service opportunity to build capacity for local youth-serving organizations across the state, and Jumpstart trains and manages college students serving part-time at local preschools and Head Start Centers to support children of low-income backgrounds in developing the language and literacy skills necessary for kindergarten. In addition to working closely with faculty in service-learning, Center staff also collaborate with Enrollment Management, Admissions, Financial Aid, Student Affairs, Student Life, Fraternity & Sorority Life, Off-Campus Student Services, and many other areas to provide service opportunities and streamline engagement in the local community.

The Center of Community Service is housed in the university's division of [City and Community Affairs](#), an external facing department focused on building relationships with local community individuals and organizations, as well as the city of Boston. The existence of this branch of the university is evidence of the institution's commitment to the community, and its mission links explicitly to Northeastern's role as an urban university which is located at the center of four historical, complex Boston neighborhoods (South End, Mission Hill, Roxbury, and Fenway). The Center utilizes an asset-based approach to community engagement, dedicating time and resources to teach new students about the community, leading asset-based tours of the local neighborhoods and working in partnership with local community members and organizations to create mutually beneficial partnerships.

Every ten years, Northeastern develops and presents their Institutional Master Plan (IMP) to the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA), formerly known as the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). The last IMP was presented and passed in

November 2013, after several years of preparation and planning involving university and community stakeholders. Not only does this plan detail the physical growth of the campus over the next ten years, but it also outlines the agreements made to members of the community in its compilation and negotiation. Our current IMP details multiple community benefits, among them the most significant the creation of a community/neighborhood hub that is accessible to residents surrounding our campus.

The division of City and Community Affairs opened Northeastern Crossing in September of 2015, a space that now serves as a dedicated venue for authentic dialogue and events to engage local community members and organizations with the Northeastern community. Northeastern Crossing's mission is to elevate the voices and visibility of Boston's neighborhoods, particularly Roxbury, Mission Hill, Fenway, and the South End; Provide greater access to resources at Northeastern University for Boston residents; and be a platform where Boston residents and the Northeastern University community can convene, interact, and learn from each other. Follow this link to our full 2015-2016 Community Benefits Report:

[https://issuu.com/northeasterncrossing/docs/annual\\_report\\_2016\\_final](https://issuu.com/northeasterncrossing/docs/annual_report_2016_final)

Also under the umbrella of City and Community Affairs is the Youth Development Initiative Project (YDIP). YDIP creates sustainable partnerships between Northeastern and local housing complexes bordering the university that provide students and their families with the foundation and education to attain a college degree and a successful career. YDIP prepares students for college by: introducing them to the college and campus environment early on in their educational career, designing and implementing educational programming that will provide them with resources to supplement their current classes and to fill in educational gaps, and supporting social and cultural changes as they arise in their communities.

The division of City and Community Affairs is led by Vice President John Tobin and Assistant Vice President David Isberg. The Vice President of City & Community Affairs reports to Senior Vice President and General Counsel Ralph Martin. The VP and AVP oversee the two Co-Directors within the Center of Community Service (one who oversees Service-Learning, the other oversees co-curricular service programming), the Director of Neighborhood Partners and Programs at Northeastern Crossing, and the Youth Development Initiative Program Director. Our team resides in four distinct locations embedded across campus: the renovated YMCA Building, Columbus Place, Northeastern Crossing, and Curry Student Center.

Northeastern Crossing, the Youth Development Initiative Project, and the Center of Community Service, all entities of City and Community Affairs, are meant to provide resources and programming internally and externally to connect the campus and the community. The intentional interconnectedness of these three dynamic community-centric entities provides us with a signature model for community engagement at Northeastern. In this model, the Center of Community Service will be catalyst for campus change under our Civic Action Plan.

## **Opportunities for Action**

Our response to the Campus Compact 30th Anniversary Action Statement comes at an important time. Northeastern University's Opportunities for Action lie in the ***improvement and expansion of our existing infrastructure under the City and Community Affairs umbrella***. As we continue to settle into our new structure and learn from the past several years of growth, we have an opportunity to more purposefully educate, involve, and connect our own faculty, staff, students, national service members, and hundreds of community partner organizations we work with each year. As the central hub for community collaboration and engagement, we have the ***responsibility of reaching out to and across our institution and our community to increase understanding and impact***. We aim to hold those who plan, practice, and participate in community engagement accountable to standards of reciprocity and good practice.

**Leveraging our work with partners:** Our relationships with our community partners is paramount to everything we do, and we consider reciprocity and community voice to be the foundation of our engagement work. Some of our progress in this area is described below and will be integral to our CAP.

*Community Advisory Board:* Like many institutions, the work of community engagement at Northeastern University has expanded rapidly in recent years, and the formation of this board was motivated by the desire to have this growth be as responsive as possible to the communities within which we live, study, and work. City and Community Affairs (as stated previously) encompasses the [Center of Community Service](#), [Northeastern Crossing](#), and the [Youth Development Initiative Project](#) who work together to create reciprocal partnerships with the University's local and global communities. Both on and off campus, residents, community partners, students, faculty, and staff have the opportunity to develop relationships through collaborative engagement.

While we had these stated commitments, we had not yet incorporated a structured, systematic way to bring community members and partners into our work and decision-making. Therefore, in June of 2016 we envisioned and enacted an advisory board that consists of two subgroups. Representatives from local organizations and neighborhoods surrounding Northeastern University were recruited to participate on the advisory board because of their current or potential connections with the University and for the valuable perspective that they bring to community-university conversations. The two subgroups comprising the CAB are: 1) Community Partners & Programs Advisory Group which provides feedback on how Northeastern students, staff and faculty interact through initiatives run by the Center of Community Service. 2) Neighborhood Advisory Group which provides feedback on how Northeastern Crossing and YDIP engage residents and community members, and engages in dialogue regarding the University's Institutional Master Plan (IMP).

We currently have around 30 advisory board members. They are expected to: 1) Attend the CAB meetings: 2 full group and 2 subgroup meetings per year; 2) Strengthen and grow the network of community engagement programs & initiatives as fostered by the division of City & Community Affairs 3) Serve as advocates for our work in their various community roles as appropriate (e.g. if a member hears about an initiative that is pertinent to his/her connections in the community, he/she will relay that information to the appropriate party); 4) Provide ongoing feedback to City & Community Affairs staff on the work and initiatives of the division.

In addition to realizing and working toward the goals and vision of City & Community Affairs, we also considered the complex political landscape within the City of Boston and the university's relationship to those dynamics. As such, managing and co-developing expectations with advisory board members this first year has been crucial. This board provides us with a critical and continuous feedback loop for Northeastern University's civic engagement work while supporting the growth and development of relationships with local leaders and community based organizations. This CAB is going strong in its second year of operation and will continue to respond to our shared needs as we move into the next phase of growth.

**Communication and Visibility:** Currently, we have multiple avenues for communicating, sharing, and plugging various stakeholders into the work of our center. These include:

- [Our website](#) (including the Service Finder feature to better connect the NU community with organizations seeking volunteers)
- Our monthly Center of Community Service newsletter to more than 5,000 subscribers to connect students with volunteer opportunities
- Our Center and program-specific social media pages/accounts
- Large City & Community Affairs-wide events, such as [Pancakes & Partnerships](#), an annual celebration of our partnerships
- The once-per-semester [Service-Learning EXPO](#)
- An [annual grant program](#) and final grant showcase
- Multi-annual Volunteer Fairs
- Advise service-focused student clubs including Circle K, Strong Women Strong Girls, Generation Citizen, Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity
- Provide individual and group meetings and extensive support to students receiving Boston scholarships (Balfour, Boston Housing Authority, Boston Valedictorian, Northeastern Neighborhood) in finding meaningful volunteer opportunities
- Feature students, community partners, and faculty through our [#capturingcommunity](#) series on the Service-Learning blog ([www.slogatnu.com](http://www.slogatnu.com))
- Send quarterly Service-Learning Newsletter to 1,000+ recipients, featuring student, community, and faculty collaboration
- Host a Service-Learning Fellows Program in partnership with the Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning through

Research (CATLR), part of the Teaching & Learning Group at Northeastern

- The co-curricular team sends weekly Volunteer Opportunity emails to CEP students and publishes a regular ACES newsletter, sharing opportunities for Center and partner opportunities to 1000+ students

**Creating & Sharing our Community Engagement Framework:** Work on our Community Engagement framework first began prior to the Summer 2016 Campus Engagement Directors Retreat led by Campus Compact and facilitated by Marshall Welch and John Saltmarsh. As one of the initial campuses that participated in the inventory tool that emerged from the pieces co-published in 2013 by Welch and Saltmarsh, *Current Practice and Infrastructures for Campus Centers of Community Engagement*, in preparation for this retreat, we learned and reflected on how our infrastructure had almost outpaced our foundational understanding and articulation of why we do what we do. It served to document our approach to engagement and partnership, and illustrated a lack of common language across our programs by which we could both describe, but also come to measure, what we do and its impact. Over the following months, and as a result of conversations between staff and feedback from the Community Advisory Board, Northeastern students, faculty, and staff, as well as our stakeholder groups more widely at our annual Pancakes and Partnerships event, we have arrived at our working framework language. This reads:

***Northeastern University's Office of City and Community Affairs focuses on fostering a mutually sustainable future in Boston and beyond based upon respect, trust, and communication.***

***To achieve this, the collaborative teams from the Center of Community Service, Northeastern Crossing and the Youth Development Initiative Project (YDIP) work to create reciprocal partnerships with the University's local and global communities. Both on and off campus, residents, community partners, students, faculty, and staff have the opportunity to develop relationships through collaborative engagement.***

Moving forward we hope this serves as a framework to test and improve our current programs and set the standard for future programs under City and Community Affairs.

**Leveraging our work with practitioners and participants:**

*Assessment:* The Center of Community Service uses multiple mechanisms to assess—on an ongoing, real-time basis—community partners' experiences with students, faculty, and the institution. The NU Service-Learning Program assesses community partners' experiences through both formal and informal measures. At the midpoint of every academic semester, community partners complete a survey of current projects. At the end of each semester, more thorough feedback and assessment is provided through interviews as to community partners' interaction with S-L program administration, the university, and with each of the students with whom

partners worked during the semester. Similarly, the NU Civic Engagement Program surveys community partners twice per year to better understand the impact student volunteers have on partners' programs and to receive critical feedback on the information and support they receive from the Center of Community Service.

In addition, we have many faculty engaged in research regarding partnership, faculty development, student learning and engagement, and many efforts underway to assess the viability and impact of our programs on each of our stakeholder groups. Through this Civic Action Plan, we will further explore how we might best collect, utilize, and disseminate data in ways that improve our programs and allow for significant contributions within the field of community engagement. We also have a sincere interest in not only learning more about how to measure satisfaction of interaction, but also what the true impact of this work is on community members, students, and faculty. We want to create more opportunities create qualitative data about what we know and what we don't know.

*Online Training Modules:* Northeastern students can be a tremendous asset to our community partners and the experience of engagement is a tremendous opportunity for our students to learn and grow. On average more than 2,000 students serve each year through our Center programs. Increasing engaged student knowledge of critical topics such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), identity, and justice/power issues facing the neighborhoods where they serve will help to ensure that all Northeastern students serve respectfully, bringing our philosophy and values alive on the ground. Currently CCS is piloting short online orientation videos for students to watch before participating in our programs. After getting feedback on these training videos, we plan on developing new, more extensive modules that will capture more about what students know and learn before service and upon completion of their service commitment with CCS. We anticipate that online training modules serve several purposes. First, we have seen a significant shift in learning opportunities through the increased use of technology and social media, and we hope that shifting toward online training modules will allow us to reach students in mediums they are using regularly. Second, we anticipate we will be able to reach a greater number of students. While CCS engages more than 2,000 students annually, there are thousands more we do not directly engage, many of them who are engaging in the community on their own or who have expressed interest that they are interested in community engagement. Creating training modules allows our work to be shared more broadly across the campus, and reach more students to ensure more students engage with neighbors using an asset based lens and work toward our goal of creating reciprocal partnerships. Third, we also plan to collect data through the creation of online training modules. We will have the ability to collect data regarding who is using our modules, assessing what they know and what they learn, and using it to identify patterns and improve preparedness. Finally, we hope to be able to share these modules broadly across our networks, including Campus Compact and the NASPA lead Initiatives network.

**Civic Action Plan Outcomes and Impact Table**

Outcome	Type of Change	Commitment*	Strategies to achieve outcomes	Date of completion	Responsible office/group	Measure	Indicator (s)
<i>Develop shared language that reflects our values and directs the work of City &amp; Community Affairs</i>	<i>Sustainable Capacity Development</i>	<i>1,2,3</i>	<i>Sharing of CE Framework</i>	<i>June 2016</i>	<i>CCA Directors w stakeholders input</i>	<i>Connections made across campus department and faculty</i>	<i>Community is central to engagement efforts</i>
<i>Demonstrate increase in student knowledge of ABCD and the communities they serve in</i>	<i>Sustainable Capacity Development</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Share existing videos, Create and implement new Online module</i>	<i>Ongoing/ June 2017</i>	<i>CCS</i>	<i>Number of students taking the online module</i>	<i>Online module tracks increase in understanding</i>
<i>Demonstrate increase in student knowledge of themselves and their role in communities</i>	<i>Sustainable Capacity Development</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Incorporate existing videos into CCS trainings, Create and implement new Online module</i>	<i>Ongoing/ June 2017</i>	<i>CCS</i>	<i>Number of students taking the online module</i>	<i>Online module tracks increase in understanding</i>
<i>Increased attendance of NU and community members outside of CCS at events</i>	<i>Culture</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Use of social media, transition from CCS to CCA-division wide events</i>	<i>ongoing</i>	<i>CCA Directors</i>	<i>Scale and scope of event</i>	<i>Recognition of the importance of community engagement</i>
<i>Increased reciprocity and community voice in projects and programming</i>	<i>Sustainable Capacity Development</i>	<i>1, 3</i>	<i>Utilize CAB Create a resource from the CE Framework</i>	<i>ongoing</i>	<i>CCA Directors</i>	<i>Quality of the partnership on terms of reciprocity</i>	

