EPIC-NETWORK

COMPILED BY ADA INMAN

U.S. FACULTY GUIDE

A guide for university/community partnerships



WWW.EPICN.ORG

INFO@EPICN.ORG

+1 608-709-8644

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WHAT IS EPIC-N?

The Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N) is the international network of about 100 university-based programs that partner with local governments or community organizations to address community-identified projects through student coursework. All programs in the EPIC-Network follow the five tenets of the EPIC Model. See the EPIC Model below:

- Respect **E**xisting administrative structures/individual responsibilities and incentives on all sides
- Create a genuine **P**artnership with local governments (or community organizations)
- Aim at **I**ntentionally improving quality of life
- Focus on projects that are **C**ommunity-identified, -driven, and -evaluated
- Catalyze multi-disciplinary collaboration and large **N**umbers (of courses, students, hours)

The EPIC Model is radically simple. It works within administrative structures of universities and communities to achieve tremendous outcomes for all involved. It brings together the greatest resources in academia — professors, students, laboratories, research libraries, existing curricula — and creatively draws them together to tackle the biggest challenges in local communities. The results areimmediate, lasting, and transformative: Solutions that might never have been imagined through traditional structures; public goodwill toward the university; real-world learning for students; and a community that feels meaningful change.

By adopting the EPIC Model, colleges and universities around the world can become an active part in catalyzing real change in local communities, leading to high-road practices that will make life richer and more sustainable for generations to come.

View the EPIC-N website here.
View the EPIC-US webpage here.
View the EPIC 101 training here.

HOW CAN FACULTY GET INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORK?

There are many ways you and your students could be involved. Here are examples of previous engagements:

1. **Connect a community-defined project into your course:** Timeline of projects vary.
2. **Directed or independent study:** Guiding students to do a special research project in the community.
3. **Internship:** Connecting students who want or need intern or field experience.
4. **Post-Doctoral Fellow project:** Applying the post-doc's time to a community-defined project.
5. **Honors Credit:** Students wanting honors credit for any class can do an additional project for a community.
6. **Undergraduate Research Scholars (URS):** Apply for a group of students (aspiring scholars) to work on a community-defined project.
7. **Honors Thesis:** Advise an honors student looking for a meaningful topic.
8. **Students Thesis or Dissertation Topic:** Advise an honors or a graduate student looking for a meaningful topic.
9. **Faculty Consultation:** As a subject matter expert, lend your perspective with communities who need your expertise.

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local governments generally include counties, municipalities (cities, towns and villages), townships, and special districts:

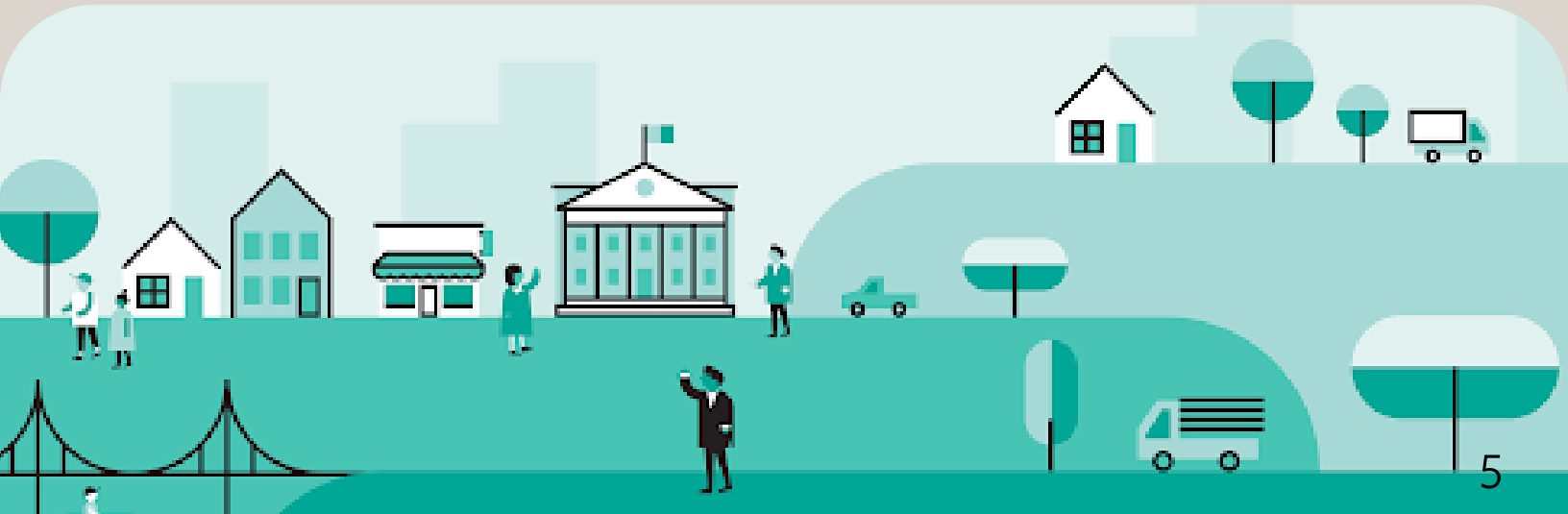
- County governments are defined as general purpose governments which provide services to a broader geographic area that often includes multiple municipalities and special districts. In a few states, counties are known by different names such as in Louisiana, where they are called parishes and in Alaska, where they are called boroughs. In some states, counties are further divided up into townships, especially in rural areas, and generally overseen by a governing board.
- Municipalities are defined as a city, town or village that has corporate status and local government.
- Special districts consist of independent governments with a limited purpose usually focusing on a specific service such as water and sanitation.

To learn about local government bureaucracy, we advise you watch a recorded city council/county commission meeting in your home community (https://www.harriscountytx.gov/Government/Court-Agenda/Court-Videos, for example) or attend a meeting in-person.

(Source: https://www.multistate.us/insider/2025/4/30/local-governments-101-common-structures-and-how-local-laws-are-made)

Here are some additional resources to check out:

- **Deed Dive into Local Gov with Ben Kittelson**
- **Deep Dive into Local Government II**



FINDING A LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNER

Start small - Reach out to local government contacts that you have, for instance, an alum of your university. Ask to meet with them at their office and explore possible projects that they would like help with.

Meet the community where they are at - The EPIC Model relies on existing resources. Meeting community members in their gathering places, their businesses, their volunteer events instead of asking them to come to campus helps break down the barriers between universities and our community members.

Start a list - Staying organized can help track community members' levels of engagement. Many staff and community members move. The average time before moving somewhere else is 9-years, and the average tenure for an employee to stay in one job is now 4.2 years. Keeping track of who showed interest in the past may identify a future community partner or ally.

End a conversation with a request for referrals - Even though the faculty or administrator you are currently talking with is not interested, someone else in the department might be.

To help you in your journey to make connections with local government affiliates, here is a list of local government organizations that also have a statewide presence:

- National Counties Association: https://www.naco.org/ (most states have counties associations, see here: https://www.naco.org/page/state-associations-affiliates-and-affinity-organizations)
- National League of Cities: https://www.nlc.org/ (most states have municipal leagues, see here: https://www.nlc.org/membershipold/state-municipal-leagues/)
- International City/County Management Association: https://icma.org/ (many states have affiliates, see here: https://members.icma.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?WebCode=stateassoc)

View an EPIC-N lesson on finding community partners here.

WHO ON YOUR CAMPUS CAN HELP YOU

There are many contacts within universities who are eager to help you with your community engagement initiatives. Here are a few places to start:

- Check to see if there is an EPIC Model program on your campus. If so, this is a great place to start.
- Get in touch with your university community engagement office, or center for public service.
- Reach out to faculty who teach service-learning or community-based courses.
- Get in touch with your university's community or government relations coordinator.

INITIAL MEETING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNER

When meeting with the community partner for the first time, it is important to let them lead the conversation. Listening to their needs, challenges, and priorities is pivotal in ensuring a successful, trusting partnership. Find below a draft agenda for this meeting:

1. Welcome & Introductions (5 mins)

- Brief introductions of attendees
- Overview of each participant's role and interest in a potential partnership

2. Overview of Collaboration Goals (10 mins)

- General discussion on the purpose of the meeting: exploring potential collaboration between the faculty and the local government
- Exploring shared goals for community impact

3. Community Needs and Interests (15 mins)

- Discussion of community-identified issues or needs that may present opportunities for the project
- Identifying broad themes or challenges (e.g., housing, education, sustainability, healthcare) that could form the basis of a potential project

4. Faculty Member's Expertise & Contributions (10 mins)

- Overview of the faculty member's academic background and expertise
- Discussion of the kinds of research, technical assistance, and resources that the faculty member and students can bring to the partnership
- Sharing of past successful collaborations with local governments or community groups

5. Local Government's Role and Resources (10 mins)

- Overview of the local government's priorities and resources available for community-based projects
- Discussion of potential support mechanisms: funding, access to local data, infrastructure, or staffing

6. Brainstorming Potential Project Ideas (20 mins)

- Open brainstorming session to explore possible project ideas based on community needs, faculty expertise, and government resources
- Discussion of feasibility, scale, and expected impact of each potential idea
- Identifying which ideas align best with both parties' goals and capabilities

7. Community Engagement Strategy (10 mins)

- Strategies for involving the broader community in the project development process
- Methods for gathering further input from local residents and stakeholders
- Ensuring the project will address community needs and have broad support

8. Funding and Resources (10 mins)

- Discussion of potential funding sources (e.g., grants, local government support, private partnerships)
- Exploring financial contributions or in-kind resources that can be provided by both parties
- Identifying potential budget or resource constraints for each side

9. Next Steps & Action Items (10 mins)

- Identifying next steps for further refining the project idea(s)
- Setting timelines for additional research, community consultations, or follow-up meetings
- Assigning tasks and responsibilities to ensure progress toward a final project concept

10. Closing Remarks (5 mins)

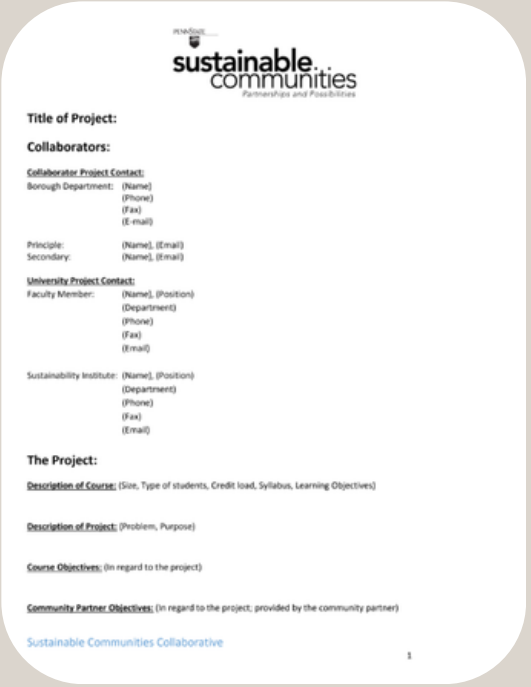
- Final thoughts from both parties
- Expressions of commitment to further collaboration
- Confirming next meeting date/time, if applicable

Total Time: 105 minutes

CREATING A SCOPE OF WORK

Once you have decided on a project with the community partner and identified the course the project will be matched to, it is important to co-develop a scope of work with your community partner. It is essential that you include the following items in this scope of work:

- Contact information
  - Faculty
  - Community project lead
  - Program manager (if applicable)
- Course day, time, and location
- Student coordinator information and contact (if applicable)
- Project information
  - Project description
  - Project goals and objectives
  - Final deliverables
  - Project timeline
  - Data needs
  - Anticipated expenses
- Participant responsibilities
  - Community partner responsibilities
  - Faculty responsibilities
  - Program responsibilities (if applicable)
  - Student responsibilities
- Assessment of accessibility and student security risks, if at all
- Approvals
  - Signatures and time stamp for all participating project leads



sustainable communities
Partnerships and Possibilities

Title of Project:

Collaborators:

Collaborator Project Contact:
Borough Department: (Name)
(Phone)
(Fax)
(E-mail)

Principle: (Name), (Email)
Secondary: (Name), (Email)

University Project Contact:
Faculty Member: (Name), (Position)
(Department)
(Phone)
(Fax)
(Email)

Sustainability Institute: (Name), (Position)
(Department)
(Phone)
(Fax)
(Email)

The Project:

Description of Course: (Size, Type of students, Credit load, Syllabus, Learning Objectives)

Description of Project: (Problem, Purpose)

Course Objectives: (In regard to the project)

Community Partner Objectives: (In regard to the project; provided by the community partner)

Sustainable Communities Collaborative

1

See here for example scopes of work.

For additional information on how to scope and scale projects, see this webinar and these resources.

Find additional scoping resources here

BASICS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT

In order to make sure that the community-based project in your class goes well, it might be helpful to get familiar with project management. You as a faculty member may be the ultimate project manager, or you may use your students to help manage the project as a part of their class responsibilities. Whoever is a project manager needs to know some things:

What does a project manager do?

- Responsible to bring in projects on budget and on time
- Project coordination and communication
- Technical work
- Quality assurance/Quality control
- Marketing

Project Manager Keys to Success

- Good communicator, planner, and coordinator
- Good delegator
- Meet regularly/collaborate
- Provide team with resources and info to operate in scope
- Keep an eye on schedule and budget
- Motivate the team

Effective Team Members

- Communicate well
- Inspire best from each other
- Honor commitments
- Look for ways to streamline process
- Stay flexible
- Avoid surprises
- Be reliable

Team Responsibilities

- Ask for copy of proposal and work hours estimate
- Understand scope, budget, and schedule
- Have thick skin (markups are typical) – let negatives bounce off, accept constructive criticism

If you as a faculty member will serve as the project manager, you will want to ensure:

- Clearly defined scope of work that is revisited throughout the semester
- Consider how to break up the work that students will do over the semester

(Source: UW-Madison CEE 578 / GLE 479 Capstone Design – Project Management Slides)

View project management tools here (including work plans, budgets, tracking sheets, invoices, and more).

View an additional resource for faculty members engaging in project management here.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE PROJECT

BEFORE THE SEMESTER STARTS:

TASK	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT TO PREPARE
SCOPE & CHARTER	Keeps everyone working toward the same deliverables and success metrics.	A 1–2-page project charter (goals, deliverables, success criteria, timeline) plus a Gantt or Kanban board. A good charter template appears in most faculty service-learning toolkits. • Project charter explanation and template • GANTT chart templates
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)	Formalizes roles, timelines, data-sharing, IP, and exit clauses; protects everyone.	Draft an MOU with the partner, signed by you, the partner lead, and (if required) your department. Use language from your campus community-engagement office or adapt a public template. • Data Sharing Agreement • MOU Templates
COURSE ALIGNMENT	Ensures the project advances learning outcomes rather than hijacking the syllabus.	Map each project milestone to a graded assignment or reflection; show this mapping in your syllabus addendum. • Example syllabus addendum

TASK	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT TO PREPARE

PROJECT-MANAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE	Gives students a real-world project management experience.	Shared repository (Teams, Google Drive, or Trello/Asana board)
		• RACI matrix identifying who is Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed
		  ◦ *RACI template*
		• Issue/risk log seeded with known risks.
		  ◦ virtosoftware.com

COMPLIANCE & APPROVALS	Avoids last-minute roadblocks.	• IRB application **if** students will collect or analyze data about people (surveys, interviews, administrative data).
		  ◦ See here for sample IRB templates
		• Risk-management forms for any off-campus site visits. Your risk office may require waivers or travel notifications.
		  ◦ Example of risk waivers

ORIENTATION & TRAINING	Sets a professional tone and supports equity.	• Briefing on local government context (org chart, political sensitivities) • Ethics & confidentiality module • Tool training (e.g., GIS, project-management software)

During the Semester:

CADENCE	KEY ACTION
WEEKLY STUDENT STAND-UPS	Students report progress, challenges, and next steps in <15 min. You log issues/risk items raised.
BI-WEEKLY PARTNER CHECK-INS	Short agenda, sent 24 h in advance, followed by posted notes and updated action items.
MILESTONE REVIEWS	At each major deliverable (e.g., draft policy memo), hold a review with a rubric tied to the charter. Invite partner staff so feedback is immediate and authentic.
ONGOING RISK & CHANGE CONTROL	Keep your risk log live; if scope creep appears, negotiate formally via a *change request* documented in the MOU addendum.

End-of-semester close-out:

STEP	DETAILS
DELIVERABLE HAND-OFF	Package final products in both student-friendly and partner-friendly formats (e.g., executive summary + full technical appendix). Confirm acceptance in writing.
PARTNER DEBRIEF	30-minute virtual or in-person meeting to capture “What went well / Even better if….“ Record insights for the next cohort.
STUDENT REFLECTION & ASSESSMENT	Require individual reflection linking project management artifacts (risk log, RACI, charter) to course theory.
EVALUATION & ARCHIVING	Collect partner satisfaction survey; store all project files where future cohorts can access them; note any MOUs that must be renewed.
RECOGNITION & DISSEMINATION	Thank-you letters, campus news blurb, or public presentation to the city council—helps sustain the relationship and showcases student work.

Reference to common documents:

DOCUMENT	TYPICAL OWNER
PROJECT CHARTER & GANTT	Faculty lead, updated by student project management team
MOU/DATA-SHARING AGREEMENT	Institution's community-engagement office + partner legal/administration
RISK-MANAGEMENT PLAN & WAIVERS	University risk-management office
IRB PROTOCOL (IF NEEDED)	Principal investigator (you)
SYLLABUS ADDENDUM	Faculty lead
REFLECTION RUBRIC	Faculty lead, shared with students & partner

TIPS FROM SEASONED PROJECT MANAGERS:

Front-load realism. Spend an extra week scoping with the partner before the semester; it pays off in fewer mid-term surprises.

Keep the MOU alive. Treat it like code—version it, and don't hesitate to push an update when the project pivots.

Model "managing up." Show students how you negotiate timeline changes with a city department head; they rarely see that skill demonstrated.

Build an exit ramp. Document what happens if the partner's priorities change or the project falls behind (e.g., scaled-down deliverable).

Celebrate publicly. Spotlighting student work at a council meeting or in local media reinforces civic value and deepens the partnership.



★ WHAT TO DO

- Think about what kind of assignment makes the most sense for your course
  - A singular final project
  - A project for the entire course
- Engage in frequent communication with the community partner to ensure students are on the right track and the community goals are being met
- Set realistic expectations for the community partner- do not overpromise!
- If possible, invite the community partner to your class to talk about the project(s) with the students
  - This helps build a connection between the community partner and the students, and allows students to put a face to the project
- Pay close attention to project deadlines and deliverables
- Track project deliverables
- Evaluate the students and community partner to gather feedback after the project is completed

★ WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not go to the community partner with your own agenda. Listen to their needs and concerns, and take the conversation from there.
- Do not overpromise on final deliverables. It is important to be realistic with what the student can accomplish within the designated time frame.
- Do not stop the communication with the community partner after the scope of work is completed. Stay in touch with them throughout the project lifecycle to gather feedback, guidance, and needed resources.

BASICS OF REPORT WRITING

Find below some tips on how to put together a final report:

- Draft Timeline
  - Before week 1: Gather high-quality images and other digital files.
  - Weeks 0-3: Work on rough draft of report, with text placeholders for Figures (images, tables, and other graphics).
  - End of Week 3: Rough draft with as many sections filled in as possible. Upload the draft and a folder of images to the server, even if you don't have all of the images you need yet.
  - Week 4: Professor will proofread the reports and provide feedback.
  - Weeks 5-6: Incorporate feedback from your professor, and finish up any sections that were incomplete.
  - Weeks 6-7: Format the report in InDesign, Canva, or any other graphic design tool you have access to.
  - Weeks 7-8: After reviewing the formatted document, the professor will send drafts to city staff partners for review and feedback.
  - Weeks 8-9: Gather and incorporate feedback from city staff.
  - Weeks 9-10: Finish and publish reports. Celebrate.

- Gathering student work
  - Gathering student work is critical to the report-writing process. Students should be encouraged to upload all of their high-quality images and other digital files to the university server so that you can use them in the final report.

- Other report elements
  - Pull quotes
  - Sidebars
  - Figures
  - Figure captions

Report Structure:

- Cover page
- Acknowledgements: Remember to thank any local government staff, elected officials, community members, or other interested parties who helped you complete the project. It is also a good idea to thank other university faculty and/or staff who helped you with the project.
- Program information (if applicable)
- Course participants
- Table of contents
- Disclaimer: List any conflicts of interest or funding agencies.
- Executive summary (no more than 1-2 pages of summary recommendations aimed at local government staff and local policymakers)
    - Tips on writing an executive summary/policy briefs can be found HERE, HERE, and HERE.
- Introduction
- The Problem / Current State / Policy Context: Discuss the current state of the issue
    - What's the issue? Describe the challenge or opportunity using plain language.
    - Why now? Explain urgency or relevance (e.g., new state mandate, budget pressure, equity goals).
    - Local framing: Include any relevant stats, trends, or existing programs from the jurisdiction.
- Methodology: How did you gather your information? (interviews, literature review, comparative analysis, etc.) Be brief and non-technical—it can help build trust in your document.
- Best practice cases / Possible interventions or alternatives
    - Consider using a structured format for each case or city, such as: location, practice, outcome/evidence of impact, relevance to current context
    - Include 3–5 diverse and comparable jurisdictions.
    - Focus on what was done, how it was done, and what the results were.
    - Highlight implementation strategies: staffing, funding, partnerships, policy change.



Report Structure:

- Analysis / Takeaways / Key insights
  - Common elements across successful cases (e.g., leadership commitment, stakeholder engagement, technology use).
  - Pitfalls to avoid, based on your research.
  - Equity & access considerations, if applicable
  - Financial impact on the local government
  - Connect findings to local capacity or constraints—what would need to be adapted?
- Recommendations:
  - 3–5 actionable steps the locality can take.
  - Include:
    - Quick wins (e.g., training or pilot project)
    - Medium-term strategies (e.g., policy revision, budgeting)
    - Long-term considerations (e.g., interagency collaboration, capital investment)
    - Each should include a brief justification and an estimate of feasibility (including cost and political feasibility).
- Conclusion
- Appendix/Appendices
- References



(Reference: SCYP Report Writer Guide)

View guides for report writing here
View poster guidelines here
View report templates here
View summary reports here

ASSESSMENT AND REFLECTION

EPIC-N encourages all project participants to complete a 360 evaluation after the partnership ends. This involves evaluating the faculty, students, and community partners. To help with this, EPIC-N has put together professionally-reviewed template surveys for each participant group. View the template surveys below:

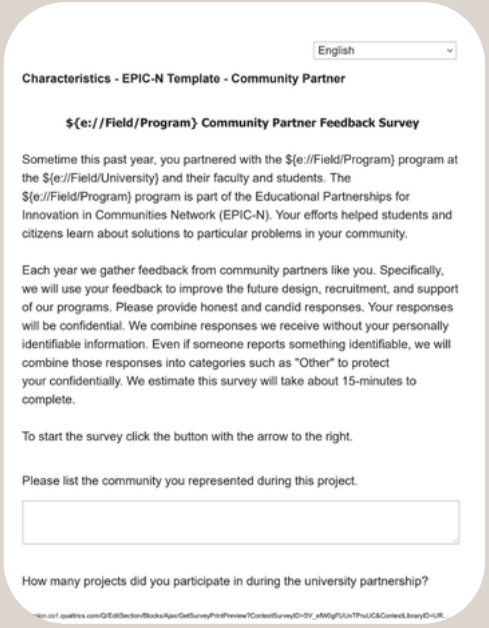
- Community survey
- Faculty survey
- Student survey

EPIC-N suggests conducting long-term impact assessments with the community partner 2-3 years after the project ends to evaluate any lasting impacts caused by the students' recommendations. Find below some resources to help you with this evaluation:

- Long term impact assessment template
- Ripple Effects Mapping
- A Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping

View an EPIC-N meeting on ripple effects mapping here. (Passcode: N$p4kA#U)

View additional evaluation and assessment resources here (including assessment calendars, EPIC-N's MEL framework, and more).


English

Characteristics - EPIC-N Template - Community Partner

${e://Field/Program} Community Partner Feedback Survey

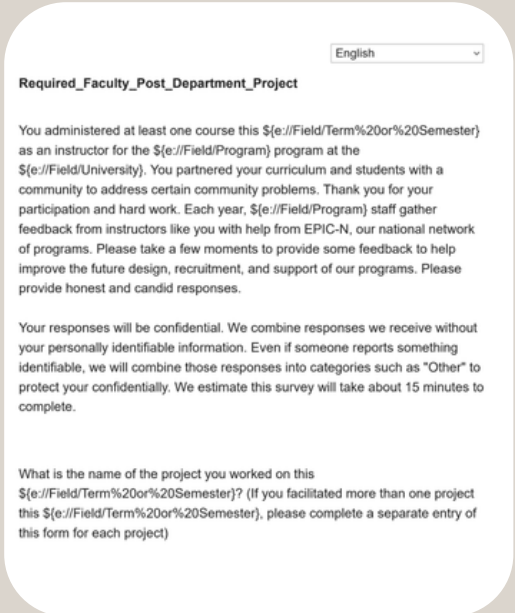
Sometime this past year, you partnered with the ${e://Field/Program} program at the ${e://Field/University} and their faculty and students. The ${e://Field/Program} program is part of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N). Your efforts helped students and citizens learn about solutions to particular problems in your community.

Each year we gather feedback from community partners like you. Specifically, we will use your feedback to improve the future design, recruitment, and support of our programs. Please provide honest and candid responses. Your responses will be confidential. We combine responses we receive without your personally identifiable information. Even if someone reports something identifiable, we will combine those responses into categories such as "Other" to protect your confidentially. We estimate this survey will take about 15-minutes to complete.

To start the survey click the button with the arrow to the right.

Please list the community you represented during this project.

How many projects did you participate in during the university partnership?

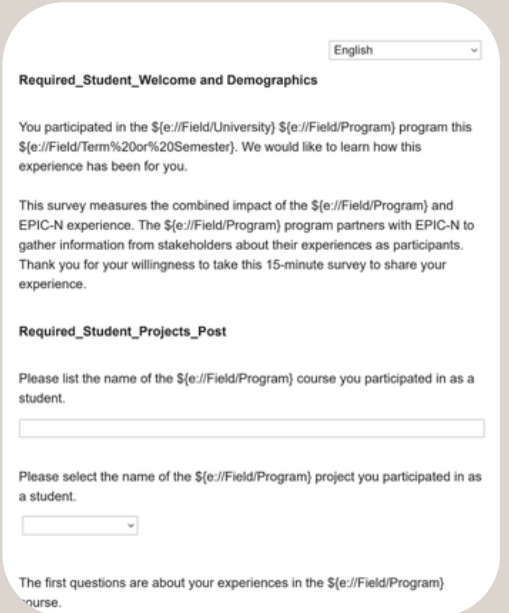

English

Required_Faculty_Post_Department_Project

You administered at least one course this ${e://Field/Term%20or%20Semester} as an instructor for the ${e://Field/Program} program at the ${e://Field/University}. You partnered your curriculum and students with a community to address certain community problems. Thank you for your participation and hard work. Each year, ${e://Field/Program} staff gather feedback from instructors like you with help from EPIC-N, our national network of programs. Please take a few moments to provide some feedback to help improve the future design, recruitment, and support of our programs. Please provide honest and candid responses.

Your responses will be confidential. We combine responses we receive without your personally identifiable information. Even if someone reports something identifiable, we will combine those responses into categories such as "Other" to protect your confidentially. We estimate this survey will take about 15 minutes to complete.

What is the name of the project you worked on this ${e://Field/Term%20or%20Semester}? (If you facilitated more than one project this ${e://Field/Term%20or%20Semester}, please complete a separate entry of this form for each project)


English

Required_Student_Welcome and Demographics

You participated in the ${e://Field/University} ${e://Field/Program} program this ${e://Field/Term%20or%20Semester}. We would like to learn how this experience has been for you.

This survey measures the combined impact of the ${e://Field/Program} and EPIC-N experience. The ${e://Field/Program} program partners with EPIC-N to gather information from stakeholders about their experiences as participants. Thank you for your willingness to take this 15-minute survey to share your experience.

Required_Student_Projects_Post

Please list the name of the ${e://Field/Program} course you participated in as a student.

Please select the name of the ${e://Field/Program} project you participated in as a student.

The first questions are about your experiences in the ${e://Field/Program}

TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

- To get things done, you have to be willing to grind (and put up with local government bureaucracy, which can be crushing, but it can be worth it to get things accomplished)
- Come to the table ready to be the learner, not the expert
- Tap your network to identify new connections, think interdisciplinarily
- Stay attuned to local news and interests
- Practice self-awareness (power, airtime, etc)
- Recognize and elevate community strengths
- Politics are inevitable. Learn about what the politics are around any issue. Watching the local government political body meeting videos can help you get familiar with those issues.
- Be a sponge
- Listen and learn about how local government departments work together
- Listen to how elected officials talk to each other at the political body meetings
- Keep frequent communication with the community partner throughout the project lifecycle
- Tell your story of impact! This is your opportunity to get the work noticed by university higher-ups, and it can be used in future funding proposals.
- Remember the simple things: Can the partner access a campus parking space? Can they navigate campus buildings? Consider community partner ambassadors.
- Share norms/expectations for campus & community environments
- Get letters of support from community partners that speak to their involvement in the research.
- Plan for flexibility
- Manage your workload
- Remember that partners don't expect perfection
- Proactively manage student expectations




epic-network