

FULL-LENGTH ARTICLES

Elevating Engaged Scholarship in Landscape Architecture: Strategies for Recognition in the Merit and Promotion Process

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Participatory Action Research (PAR) supports community-engaged scholarship (CES) by fostering deep collaboration, mutual learning, and actionable outcomes through the active involvement of stakeholders as co-researchers in addressing real-world challenges. In landscape architecture education and practice, engaged scholarship connects university-based research, teaching, and service to broader community needs, advancing institutional missions. Despite its value, this work remains time-intensive and is often undervalued in merit and promotion processes that privilege traditional academic metrics like publication and citation counts. To better support CES, some universities have begun expanding definitions of scholarship and evaluative criteria, though challenges remain in validating and recognizing their broader impacts.

This paper unpacks multi-level strategies for supporting CES across institutions of higher education. At the campus level, we examine initiatives such as institution-wide dossier statement guidelines on public impact and participation in the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification as signals of formal commitments to engagement. At the college, departmental, and unit levels, we highlight reforms including revised authorship conventions to recognize collaborative and participatory research, expanded definitions of scholarly output, and the integration of CES into promotion guidelines and mentorship structures. At the individual level, we share techniques for framing alternative project metrics within review narratives and documenting public and scholarly impact in ways that align with both disciplinary norms and institutional expectations. Through these strategies, the paper offers practical insights into the challenges engaged scholars face and provides recommendations for how units and institutions can pursue opportunities for developing more inclusive and supportive evaluation frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

Post-secondary design education programs have long embraced project-based learning as a pedagogical cornerstone. These projects are typically rooted in real places and often involve partnerships with agencies, property owners, and community members. In the 1960s and 70s, such work gave

rise to design centers and service-learning initiatives, models that encouraged students to apply their knowledge in community contexts while fostering a sense of civic responsibility. Over time, these efforts evolved into more reciprocal, participatory approaches that position community members not simply as recipients of academic expertise but as collaborators and co-creators of knowledge. This shift has blurred the traditional boundaries between research, teaching, and service, laying the groundwork for what Ernest Boyer (1996) and others (M. Beaulieu et al., 2018) have described as engaged scholarship. In this paper, we use the term community-engaged scholarship (CES) to describe this integrated approach to research, teaching, and outreach grounded in principles of reciprocity, mutual learning, and public impact.

The discipline of landscape architecture sits at the intersection of environmental design, ecological science, and the arts. It addresses issues ranging from climate adaptation and ecological restoration to urban design, public health, and environmental justice. Because it is inherently concerned with the design and stewardship of public spaces (places that are often socially, culturally, and ecologically significant) landscape architecture provides a fertile ground for CES. Projects often involve complex, multi-stakeholder contexts where collaboration with communities is essential to producing relevant, impactful outcomes. In practice, this might include co-designing climate-adaptive waterfronts with coastal residents, restoring culturally significant landscapes in partnership with Indigenous nations, or working with neighborhoods to reimagine vacant lots as community gardens and green infrastructure.

Following Flyvbjerg's (2006) framework for strategic case selection, landscape architecture can be seen as a "least likely" case for the marginalization of CES. Given its interdisciplinary ethos that bridges design, science, and community, one might expect CES to be highly valued and rewarded. The field has a long history of place-based, participatory work - ranging from the University of Washington's Green Futures Lab collaborations with local communities to design public realm improvements, to the University of Minnesota's College of Design-led projects on equitable park planning - yet such efforts still struggle for full recognition in academic review. Thus, if CES scholars face systemic barriers here, it might suggest these barriers are deeply embedded across the academy, including in disciplines less naturally aligned with CES values. Within landscape architecture programs at many research-intensive (R1) universities, CES scholars continue to face structural disadvantages. Merit and promotion systems often fail to recognize the time-intensive, collaborative, and relational nature of CES, privileging instead metrics such as publication counts, citation rates, and grant dollars - measures rooted in traditional, individualistic models of scholarly productivity. This, in turn, discourages faculty from pursuing CES and devalues its contributions to public knowledge, design innovation, and social transformation.

The core problem is evaluative: engaged scholarship is often measured by the wrong instruments, misunderstood or undervalued in review processes, and excluded from the dominant definitions of impact and excellence. Few established frameworks exist for documenting and assessing the broader significance of CES, particularly when it produces non-traditional outputs like policy briefs, exhibitions, toolkits, community reports, or long-term community partnerships.

To address these challenges, this paper asks: *What are some approaches, policies, and procedures that CES is evaluated for during merit and promotion reviews in university landscape architecture programs?* We answer this question through a cross-sectional multi-site case study of various universities, examining strategies across three levels—campus, college/department/unit, and individual faculty practice. By analyzing a range of structural reforms, policy adaptations, and personal strategies, we aim to reveal actionable approaches for elevating CES within academic review systems. In doing so, we contribute to a broader conversation about how universities can more effectively support engaged scholars and fulfill their public missions through inclusive, equitable, and contextually grounded definitions of scholarship.

CAMPUS APPROACHES

Engaged scholarship has the ability to help universities fulfill their public missions and contribute to social innovation, but most institutional cultures – especially at R1 campuses – have not done enough to support it. As more faculty weave community engagement into their research and teaching programs, they continue to run into the same outdated metrics and reward systems that privilege traditional scholarship. This system ultimately creates barriers for work rooted in relationships, reciprocity, and public impact.

Why is there a disconnect?

Bell and Lewis (2023/2022) point to four major reasons why CES struggles to get a foothold in academia. First, biases run deep: universities continue to prioritize hierarchical models of knowledge production that elevate academic expertise while simultaneously sidelining community knowledge and collaborative processes. Second, higher education has increasingly valued what can be measured, monetized, and scaled—like funding totals, publication counts, citation scores, and productivity rates—while undervaluing the slower, relational work that CES requires. This neoliberal perspective has often disincentivized faculty interested in CES work (Doberneck et al., 2010; O’Meara, 2008). Third, gendered norms that reward independence, competition, and objectivity over collaboration and care are still a driving factor. These norms disproportionately disadvantage women, faculty of color, and scholars from historically marginalized backgrounds, many of whom are leading engaged research efforts. Finally, the colonial foundations of U.S. academia continue to shape what kinds of knowledge are seen as legitimate, privileging Western, “universal” frameworks. And as Van de Ven (2007) and Ahmed (2012) point out, these dominant knowledge systems systematically

marginalize relational, Indigenous, and community-driven approaches. All these forces make it not only personally difficult, but also structurally challenging for scholars to engage equitably and meaningfully with communities.

Recognizing these barriers, Foster (2010) offers a spectrum of change, from “contextual” to “structural” to “transformational.” Contextual interventions involve adapting individual work to fit within existing systems – reframing community engagement so it checks the traditional boxes of research, teaching, and service. These kinds of adaptations can help individuals survive, but they leave the broader structures untouched. Structural interventions move farther down the spectrum, creating formal programs, policies, and practices that begin to carve out institutional space for CES. But true transformation happens when those structural shifts accumulate and begin to rewrite deeper assumptions about what counts as scholarship, what excellence looks like, how impact is measured or understood, and who the university should actually serve. In short, transformation embeds community-engaged work at the center of academic life. This transformation cannot happen simply by adjusting existing frameworks; rather, it requires rethinking the university’s relationship to democracy and the public good (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

Pathways for Structural Transformation

What could structural transformation look like at the campus scale? [Table 1](#) presents examples that have been organized into three overlapping categories: institutionalization, recognition and reward, and capacity building. Institutionalization pushes back against structural biases by embedding engagement into strategic plans and leadership structures. Recognition and reward systems redefine what counts as rigorous, impactful scholarship. Capacity building gives faculty the tools, networks, and collaborative frameworks they need to carry out engaged work meaningfully and sustainably. These interventions are not only bureaucratic moves – they are also direct responses to the deeper barriers outlined earlier.

All ten R1 campuses featured in [Table 1](#) have landscape architecture programs and hold the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, a voluntary, evidence-based process that recognizes institutions for their strong commitment to public engagement through scholarship, teaching, and outreach. This signals a formal commitment to integrating engagement into their core practices.

1. Institutionalization

Institutionalization involves weaving community engagement directly into a university’s mission, leadership, and daily operations – not as an add-on, but as a core commitment.

At the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the Office of Public Engagement (OPE) was created through the “Next 150” strategic plan, a move that signaled a shift toward making public impact a visible and

Table 1. Summary of three types of campus-level interventions—Institutionalization, Recognition and Reward, and Capacity Building—that respond to structural barriers by embedding, valuing, and enabling CES.

INTERVENTION TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Institutionalization	Offices, centers, and mission statements that embed engagement into the university fabric	University of Illinois, Urbana- Champaign University of Hawaii, Mānoa North Carolina State University
Recognition and Reward	Policies, awards, or dossier support tied to merit and promotion	University of Minnesota University of California, Davis Michigan State University
Capacity Building	Fellowships, mentorship, development institutes, funding, and tools for conducting and assessing engagement	Cornell University West Virginia University University of Washington Purdue University

measurable part of the university's future. OPE serves as a bridge between campus and community, anchoring efforts like collaborative policy research, leadership development, and civic learning (University of Illinois, n.d.). For example, OPE's Community-Campus Partnership program has supported projects such as the Mahomet Aquifer Consortium, where faculty and local stakeholders work together to safeguard a critical regional water source through applied research, policy recommendations, and public education initiatives. Other efforts include coordinating annual Public Engagement Symposia that showcase collaborative work across disciplines and provide faculty with tools to strengthen community relationships.

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Office of Civic and Community Engagement (OCCE) has been doing similar work since 1994, helping faculty build service-learning into curricula, cultivating long-term partnerships with nonprofits and government agencies, and linking student learning to real-world civic challenges. Notably, OCCE's collaboration with the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana has enabled students and faculty to participate in ecological restoration and cultural stewardship activities on the island of Kaho'olawe, blending environmental science, design, and Indigenous knowledge systems. Their participation in national initiatives like the Association of American Colleges & Universities Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education framework ensures that the impact of this work is tracked and reflected back into institutional planning (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2014).

North Carolina State University took a different but complementary approach. Their 2011–2020 strategic plan, *The Pathway to the Future*, placed engagement at the center of their goals for student success, interdisciplinary collaboration, and public service. One example is the Community Food Strategies initiative, a statewide network facilitated in part by NC State faculty that works with local food councils to strengthen food systems through community-driven planning, policy advocacy, and capacity building.

Structural moves like creating centralized repositories of engagement activities and celebrating collaborative research helped solidify engagement as an institutional norm (North Carolina State University, 2017).

2. Recognition and Reward

Recognition and reward structures shape what kinds of work faculty feel they can pursue and what kinds of work they believe will be respected and institutionally valued. They provide faculty with professional development goals and pathways to celebrate achievement in core areas of scholarship. Recognition and reward structures for CES are critical for elevating the rigor, impact, and commitment of faculty members that support communities as an extension of institutional missions, visions, and values.

At the University of Minnesota, a university-wide definition of public engagement was formally adopted in 2005, and the Review Committee on Community-Engaged Scholarship was established soon after. This voluntary review body, made up of tenured faculty with experience in CES, provides internal assessments for promotion and tenure candidates, ensuring that engaged work is reviewed with the same rigor as more traditional scholarship (University of Minnesota, n.d.). Review bodies like this have proven essential for legitimizing public work within academic evaluation systems (Ellison & Eatman, 2008). For instance, the committee has reviewed projects such as the “North Minneapolis Greenway” initiative, in which faculty partnered with local residents to design a safe, community-centered green transportation corridor, resulting in both academic publications and tangible urban infrastructure improvements.

At UC Davis, an optional “Statement of Contributions to Public and Global Impact” was introduced into the merit and promotion process in 2023. This space allows faculty to explicitly frame how their public-facing work like policy briefs, community exhibitions, and participatory programs advance the university’s broader mission. For example, the statement has been used to document projects like “Resilient by Design,” a multi-university and community partnership addressing climate change adaptation in the San Francisco Bay Area through design competitions, community workshops, and policy briefs that have influenced regional planning strategies. It acknowledges that contributions to the public good deserve formal recognition, even when they don’t easily fit into traditional categories (University of California, Davis, 2016).

Michigan State’s Community Engagement Scholarship Award (CESA), launched in 2006, further normalizes engaged work by recognizing exemplary partnerships between faculty and community organizations. In awarding faculty and community partners jointly, the CESA also models the kind of reciprocity that CES aspires to (Michigan State University, n.d.). Past awardees have included collaborations like “Flint Youth Film Festival,” a project in which MSU faculty worked with local educators, artists, and youth to develop filmmaking skills, share community narratives, and foster civic pride in a city navigating post-industrial recovery.

3. Capacity Building

Capacity building recognizes that faculty need time, mentorship, and material resources to do engaged scholarship well and sustainably. Faculty need more than isolated support programs; they need long-standing infrastructures of mentorship, funding, and recognition (Welch, 2016).

Cornell University's Engaged Faculty Fellowship Program, based in the Einhorn Center, supports faculty over the course of a full academic year to deepen their community-engaged teaching and research. Fellows meet regularly, receive stipends, and join a growing internal network of engaged scholars who can mentor one another across disciplines (Cornell University, n.d.). Projects supported by the fellowship have ranged from urban agriculture initiatives in low-income neighborhoods of New York City to collaborative planning for climate resilience in rural upstate communities, both of which have produced applied research outputs and lasting community partnerships.

West Virginia University's Engaged Scholars Institute (ESI), launched in 2023, takes a similar approach, offering workshops, one-on-one mentoring, and resource development that help faculty integrate engagement into their research and promotion strategies (West Virginia University, n.d.). One recent ESI-supported project, "Mountaineer Habitat Restoration," brought faculty, students, and local conservation groups together to rehabilitate degraded forestland while simultaneously generating peer-reviewed ecological studies and community-led stewardship plans.

At the University of Washington, programs like EarthLab's Innovation Grants and Urban@UW's Research to Action Collaboratory fund interdisciplinary, community-driven projects tackling climate change and social justice. Teams must include academic researchers, community partners, and students, ensuring that projects are co-designed from the start and deliver tangible outcomes like community toolkits or publicly-accessible blogs (University of Washington, 2022). For example, the "Just and Resilient Waterfronts" project, funded through EarthLab, engaged coastal communities in developing equitable adaptation strategies to sea level rise, producing both a policy roadmap for local governments and a set of design guidelines rooted in community input.

Purdue University's *Guide: Documenting, Evaluating, and Recognizing Engaged Scholarship*, published in 2017, fills a different but equally important gap by offering clear criteria for how engaged work can be evaluated during promotion and tenure processes—another key move toward normalizing CES at every level of the academic ladder (Purdue University, 2021). The guide has informed departmental criteria updates across the university, including revisions in the College of Agriculture to better account for applied research with farmers, food system stakeholders, and rural development agencies, ensuring that these partnerships are documented and valued in faculty reviews.

But it should be noted that across all of these initiatives, attention to equity remains critical. Faculty from marginalized backgrounds like women, BIPOC scholars, and first-generation academics are disproportionately represented among those doing engaged research. Building capacity without addressing systemic inequities risks reinforcing the very barriers that CES tries to dismantle.

The Role of the Carnegie Classification

All ten campuses highlighted in this section hold the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, a voluntary but highly respected designation that signals a university's deep, structural commitment to community-engaged work. Unlike other Carnegie classifications that draw on national datasets, the Community Engagement Classification requires universities to produce rigorous self-assessments documenting how engagement is woven through their mission, planning, infrastructure, curricula, partnerships, and evaluation practices.

Securing this classification is not the end point. Rather, it is a continuous call to action. There is an expectation that institutions will keep refining, deepening, and sustaining their engagement commitments over time as the designation needs to be renewed every 5 years.

Looking forward

The examples shared in this section point toward an important lesson: supporting CES requires much more than individual adaptation or isolated programs. It demands broad, intentional shifts at the campus level – in mission statements, funding allocations, evaluation processes, and leadership priorities. Especially in fields like landscape architecture, where the public realm and social innovation are fundamental to the discipline's identity, elevating CES is vital to the discipline's future relevance and impact.

That said, even promising structures can be fragile. Offices can be defunded. Champions can leave. Strategic plans can be rewritten. Real transformation means embedding engagement so deeply into the institution's fabric that it persists beyond leadership transitions, budget cuts, and political shifts. Thus, looking forward, campuses should build systems that are resilient enough to survive and are adaptive enough to evolve through every level of institutional hierarchies (L. J. Beaulieu & Cordes, 2021; Post et al., 2016).

COLLEGE, DEPARTMENTAL, AND UNIT-LEVEL APPROACHES

If structural change at the institutional scale sets the stage for valuing CES, then departmental, college, and unit-level policies shape how that value is operationalized. It is at this level that evaluative criteria are interpreted, mentorship is offered, collaborative norms are modeled, and faculty dossiers are reviewed. Departments serve as the critical bridge between institutional

commitments and individual faculty practice. Without intentional alignment at this level, even the most promising university-wide reforms can fail to take root, leading to uneven support for CES across an institution.

How can academic departments—especially in design fields like landscape architecture—institutionalize support for CES? This question is explored through strategies such as revising authorship norms, diversifying scholarly outputs, redefining evaluative criteria, and building structures of support within promotion and tenure processes. These efforts respond directly to the barriers outlined by Bell and Lewis (2023/2022), challenging epistemic hierarchies, neoliberal metrics, and narrow definitions of impact.

Rethinking Authorship Norms and Collaborative Scholarship

At the departmental level, authorship norms serve as a foundational proxy for scholarly contribution and impact. However, conventional authorship models—especially those rooted in STEM disciplines—can marginalize community-engaged work, which is often collaborative, non-linear, and co-produced with partners outside the academy. The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa explicitly addresses this issue by encouraging departments to document authorship conventions and collaborative norms in their tenure and promotion policies. Their guidelines acknowledge that “collaborative research and joint and shared publications may be the norm in some fields or disciplines,” and they call on departments to include explanations of “the significance of authorship order” as well as norms around shared leadership and co-authorship (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2024, p. 10).

In landscape architecture, where CES projects may result in reports, toolkits, installations, exhibitions, or policy briefs developed with multiple contributors, clarifying the value of co-authored work is essential. This includes not only adjusting internal review rubrics but also mentoring junior faculty on how to articulate their roles and leadership in collaborative outputs. As Ellison and Eatman (2008) argue, departments must recognize collaborative modes of knowledge production as legitimate and valued forms of scholarly labor, especially when such work bridges university and community contexts to co-produce public scholarship. This shift also challenges gendered norms of individualism and independence that dominate academic reward structures (O’Meara, 2008). Recognizing shared authorship and distributed expertise allows departments to center relational forms of inquiry that are essential to equitable CES.

Expanding Definitions of Scholarly Output

Departments that support engaged scholarship must also expand the scope of what counts as scholarly output. Traditional metrics—peer-reviewed articles, monographs, and high-impact journal citations—fail to capture the full range of public-facing, applied, or relational contributions that CES entails. Several design schools have responded by explicitly validating creative professional work as scholarly contribution. At the University of California, Davis (UCD), the Landscape Architecture + Environmental Design’s

Table 2. Matrix of academic and scholarly pursuits.

	INDUCTIVE	REFLEXIVE	DEDUCTIVE
OBJECTIVE	Descriptive	Modeling	Experimentation
CONSTRUCTIVE	Classification	Interpretation	Evaluation & Diagnosis
SUBJECTIVE	Engaged Actions	Design Projection	Logical Systems

Adapted from Swaffield and Deming (2011).

(LA+ED) merit and promotion criteria document offers a strong example that describes different modes and outputs of scholarly and creative work. Integrated into every faculty review, it broadens the definition of scholarship to include design research, community-based planning, spatial advocacy, and public installations. The document outlines diverse forms of impact—including influence on public policy, design awards, press coverage, and community outcomes—and encourages faculty to include these in their files (UC Davis, 2016).

Additionally, both UCD LA+ED and the University of Washington's Department of Landscape Architecture in the College of Built Environments (UWLA) explicitly recognize multiple forms of scholarship—drawing on Ernest Boyer's (1990) four categories of separate yet overlapping functions: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application and engagement, and the scholarship of teaching. Both UCD LA+ED's and UWLA's Departmental Guidelines for Merit, Promotion, and Tenure draw on these four different forms and foci of scholarship, offering faculty guidance on how to define their work within different modes and functions that fall under faculty expectations with regards to research, teaching, and service. Additionally, both guidelines offer a list of primary and secondary activities for each of the four foci to help guide faculty in the documentation and solicitation of their scholarly outputs. UCD LA+ED also references Simon Swaffield and Elen M. Deming's 2011 article "Research Strategies in Landscape Architecture: Mapping the Terrain" that presents the following matrix for academic pursuits:

In 2024-25, the UWLA Department updated its guidelines to more fully embrace CES by decoupling the "scholarship of application and engagement," adding a fifth foci, the "scholarship of engagement," which is defined as work that bridges theory and practice in the service of public good. The guidelines of Boyer's 1990 report were supplemented by later work of Ernest Boyer and by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) that introduced an additional hybrid form of scholarship, the Scholarship of Engagement. As described in the UWLA Guidelines, the Scholarship of Engagement "supports activities within any one of Boyer's four scholarships that connect the work of the academy with issues of the larger community. The AAHE stresses that the Scholarship of Engagement has three components: pedagogy, community-based research, and collaborative practice. Students and faculty bring the intellectual and technical resources of the university to bear upon a community's pressing

needs. Such pedagogy is therefore inherently contextual and is often local. The acquisition of knowledge by students and faculty is multi-dimensional, rather than being faculty-centric and bound to the campus. The hallmarks of such collaborative practice are reciprocity and shared responsibility, and as in the Scholarship of Application, mutuality between theory and practice.” This addition also led to the recategorization and reorientation of primary and secondary activities. While traditional forms of scholarship place greater emphasis on national and international reach and recognition, for the Scholarship of Engagement, local, community-oriented engagements are recognized as primary, not secondary, activities. These revisions create space for scholars to include planning charrettes, participatory research protocols, oral history archives, invitations to present at local community meetings, and other forms of community-engaged practice in their merit cases.

More broadly, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), an academic organization that supports faculty and schools in built environment professions, has developed several white papers titled “Research and Scholarship for Promotion, Tenure, and Reappointment in Schools of Architecture” over the last decade. The most recent one at the time of this manuscript was released in 2024 (hereby, the “White Paper”). The White Paper also references both Boyer’s seminal article and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s Community Engagement Classification. The authors offer three categories of products – academic, applied, and community – for faculty to consider in their work and are recognized across disciplines. ACSA details these categories in the 2019 White Paper titled “Assessing the Quality of Architectural Research & Scholarship,” which the 2024 White Paper references.

Academic products are the most familiar and entail peer-reviewed products including publications, presentations, and awards. Applied products demonstrate the application of disciplinary knowledge to public contexts. Community products are those that are produced for and with community partners and can include products for outreach. However, the categorization of specific products is fluid as it may be dependent, among others, on the venue of dissemination. There are also projects that can fall into all three categories — it is recommended that the faculty member describe the ways a particular project has achieved a series of outcomes and products through documented evidence, or to develop multiple outcomes and products from a single project. Following this approach, examples of tangible products that can demonstrate excellence in CES are summarized in the table below. The summary of products is intended to be examples but are not an exhaustive list. However, what is considered primary evidence of academic products is disciplinarily specific, and therefore, should be discussed and determined within specific units who craft their own guidelines.

Guidance on evaluating the significance and excellence of CES and how impact will be measured should be included in Promotion and Tenure Guidelines. In defining criteria for evaluation of a faculty member’s overall

Table 3. Examples of tangible products that can demonstrate excellence in CES. Adopted from ACSA White Paper, 2024 update.

ACADEMIC PRODUCTS	APPLIED PRODUCTS	COMMUNITY PRODUCTS
Articles (peer-reviewed*, competitively selected, or invited)	Copyrights, Patents, and Inventions	Creating and sustaining partnerships with community
Book texts, book chapters, and monographs	Reports (governmental, technical, etc.)	Community attained grants/funding; Community awards
Conference presentations	Policies (writing of, advocacy for, or expert testimony in court, congressional hearings, etc.)	Community presentations, seminars, or workshops
Conference abstracts and proceedings	Designs	Community events, displays, and exhibitions; Facilitation of community-based/public artistic projects
Grants, competitive contracts, and gifts	Consultancy, training, and technical assistance	Community reports
Honors and awards	Leadership/membership of a board of a professional or community organization in one's scholarly or teaching area	Websites
Indigenous scholarly activities (ex: curation or creation of artistic or cultural exhibits, significant oral dissemination of research, policy development, and CES under the ownership of Indigenous nations).	Guides and handbooks	Newsletters
Non-peer-reviewed articles (or non-traditional-peer-reviewed articles)*	Exhibitions / Displays (peer-reviewed, competitively selected, invited, and/or as the curator)	Public-focused writing (such as white papers, op-eds, etc.)
	Educational materials, curricula, and instructional activities	Forums / Workshops / Seminars intended for public attendance (ex: TEDtalks, media interviews, etc.)
	Professional Licensure	Creative works, such as exhibitions or performances or other forms of cultural interventions in civic/popular forums (including electronic media), films or documentaries
	Participatory, community-based, or community-engaged production and dissemination of knowledge, social justice, or activism	

*Note that under Academic products, both peer-review and non-peer-reviewed articles are included; in the White paper, the authors advocate for considering peer review sources from outside the academy and to hold discussions around appropriate peers for reviewing community-engaged research.

body of work (rather than individual products), the White Paper references the 1997 book *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate* by Charles E. Glassick, Mary Taylor Huber, and Gene Maeroff, suggesting an emphasis on clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, and effective presentation. The significance of CES includes “defining or resolving relevant social problems or issues, facilitating organization development, improving existing practices or programs, and enriching the cultural life of a community” (p. 19). The White Paper includes recommendations for highlighting the impact of CES at various levels. For example, “long-term sustained community relationships should be documented to establish impact,” such as completing an assessment of how a project has transformed the community (p. 10). Letters from community

partners can be one avenue to document these efforts. The authors of the White Paper highlight the importance of scholarly peer review of community-engaged research, but they advocate for considering peer review sources from outside the academy and to hold discussions around appropriate peers for reviewing community-engaged research. Such practices reflect what Ellison and Eatman (2008) described as a shift from valuing public scholarship as an add-on to embedding it as a central modality of academic life. The inclusion of non-traditional outputs is not a dilution of standards—it is an expansion of what excellence can look like when grounded in reciprocity and public impact.

Career Narrative as a Space of Advocacy in the Dossier

In departments where formal criteria are still catching up to practice, the faculty dossier—particularly the personal statement—becomes a vital tool for framing CES. Faculty can use their narratives to articulate goals, clarify methods, and explain how their public work contributes to scholarly conversations and institutional missions. The career narrative in the dossier is often emphasized as a critical component for articulating the faculty member’s scholarly activities and impact, particularly around CES. It is recommended that faculty highlight their community partnerships and activities as a larger body of work, rather than individual products, as well as complete a self-evaluation of the impact of their community-engaged activities.

The University of Washington’s 2024 Faculty and Staff Professional Development Report underscores this point, emphasizing that “narrative statements provide an opportunity to present evidence of impact in a variety of domains” (UW Office of the Provost, 2024). In engaged scholarship, these domains often include long-term community partnerships, capacity-building efforts, and translational outcomes not captured by standard metrics. Departments can encourage faculty to name these outcomes and contextualize their relevance. One way to contextualize their relevance is by embedding CES within the Mission, Vision, and Values of a faculty member’s unit. In many cases, the efforts of including community engagement goals are intrinsically tied to efforts towards promotion of equity and inclusion.

In parallel, the ACSA’s (2024) white paper on tenure and promotion highlights how narratives can help reviewers evaluate “non-traditional” scholarly methods, approaches, and outputs on their own terms. The document recommends that units adopt review frameworks that recognize community accountability, knowledge co-production, and the time-intensive nature of relational work. By mentoring faculty in how to craft dossier narratives and providing models that showcase engaged scholarship, departments can help scholars bridge the gap between practice and policy. As Boyer (1990) argued, scholarship should be assessed not only by where it appears but by whether it is rigorous, peer-informed, and socially meaningful.

Departments as Sites of Cultural Transformation: Codifying Departmental Support through Policies, Guidelines, and Practices

Departments that institutionalize support for CES often do so through formal documents: promotion and tenure guidelines, annual review rubrics, mentorship protocols, and hiring priorities. These documents communicate values and set expectations for both reviewers and faculty under review. Coordination between institutional and unit levels of leadership, as well as faculty governance, are critical to ensure alignment with system-wide commitments to public impact. This reinforces the visibility of engaged scholarship as part of an academic career trajectory.

At the University of Washington, the 2024 collection of merit and promotion guidelines from multiple units demonstrates wide variation in how engagement is referenced—some departments make it central, while others omit it entirely. In the Department of Landscape Architecture, updated guidelines adopted in 2024–25 added “scholarship of engagement” as a distinct category, defined as “work that bridges theory and practice in the service of public good.” The policy specifies that local, community-oriented engagements such as participatory design charrettes, oral history archives, and co-created research protocols are to be recognized as *primary* scholarly contributions, not secondary. This change legitimizes projects rooted in local partnerships and is likely to lead to an increase in the inclusion of engagement-focused dossiers in promotion and tenure cases.

Faculty members who serve on personnel committees, write peer letters, or chair departments have the power to revise language, propose inclusive criteria, and model CES as a pathway to academic distinction in collaboration with other faculty. For example, the University of California, Davis’s Program of Landscape Architecture + Environmental Design has, since 2016, included explicit language in its merit and promotion guidelines recognizing “design research, community-based planning, spatial advocacy, and public installations” as scholarly outputs. Reviewers are instructed to assess these works based on their contribution to advancing the discipline and serving the public. Personnel committee members have credited this policy with enabling more non-traditional CES outputs, such as exhibitions and policy frameworks, to be successfully advanced in review.

At a broader scale, initiatives like the UW’s Building Tri-Campus Capacity for Community Engagement call for departments to integrate CES into hiring and advancement processes. These top-down signals are important, but lasting change requires bottom-up leadership from faculty units. While institutional structures may provide the scaffolding for change, it is often at the departmental level that cultures of academic evaluation are most strongly felt. Departments can either reinforce outdated metrics or push the field forward. In landscape architecture—where public space, design justice, and ecological restoration are central concerns—there is a unique opportunity to lead by example.

By updating authorship norms, validating non-traditional outputs, supporting reflective dossier narratives, and codifying inclusive policies, departments can make CES not just permissible but exemplary. These practices align with Ernest Boyer's vision of a more inclusive scholarly enterprise—one that recognizes the full spectrum of academic contribution and reaffirms the university's commitment to the public good. Departmental support for CES does more than facilitate promotion and tenure—it builds the foundations for a more democratic, responsive, and grounded discipline. In a moment where landscape architecture must grapple with climate justice, land dispossession, and infrastructural inequity, supporting CES is not just a bureaucratic reform—it is a moral imperative.

INDIVIDUAL APPROACHES

The University of Washington College of Built Environments (UW CBE), University of California, Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (UCD CAES), and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa School of Architecture (UHM SoA) acknowledge not only traditional research as tenurable achievements, but also those diverse forms of scholarship that are inherent to design fields like landscape architecture—design research, creative works, and practice that often require collaboration between interdisciplinary scholars. While each of these institutions accepts traditional products of scholarship including peer-reviewed grants, publications, presentations and awards as demonstrations of excellence, they have also expanded their evaluation criteria to include outcomes unique to publicly-engaged creative work such as exhibitions, project reports, and impact assessments.

This section surveys examples of CES conducted by academics from each of these institutions, the outcomes of this scholarship, and the techniques they employed for documenting their work to meet the evaluative criteria for the tenure and promotion process ranging from the traditional to the non-traditional. The three scholars featured in these case studies are co-authors of this paper, each of whom provided explicit permission to be included and reviewed the descriptions to ensure accuracy. Two of the three have since been successfully promoted and tenured, while the third left academia for personal reasons before going up for tenure. In at least one case, evaluators explicitly referenced the scholar's CES framing in their determination letter, noting that “her work has reached broad public audiences through popular media outlets and through her public exhibits” and that she had collaborated with “diverse stakeholders including federal and state agencies, local planning departments, and Indigenous groups.”

Documenting CES for Traditional Forms of Recognition

At the University of Washington College of the Built Environments, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture Catherine De Almeida's “landscape lifecycles” research investigates the material, social, and spatial challenges and opportunities of waste. Within this body of scholarship, De

Almeida has conducted several community-based studios and action research that focus on issues of equity, justice, and repair as they relate to waste and waste landscapes.

For the merit and promotion process, De Almeida framed the impact and achievement of this work according to the Department's evaluation criteria for Boyer's "Scholarship of Discovery" (1990). These criteria include demonstrating "a broad range of research approaches that contribute to building knowledge and theories" to address "a diverse set of physical and social issues that require different epistemological frameworks and methods of inquiry," including "action research" (UW, 2022, p. 1). According to the Landscape Architecture Department, "successful grant awards, dissemination of research findings through publications in peer-reviewed journals and book chapters, presentations at conferences, etc." demonstrate achievement and excellence in this category of scholarship (UW, 2022, p. 2).

At its core, the *Scholarship of Discovery* necessitates "building knowledge and theories" (UW, 2022, p. 1). De Almeida fulfilled this requirement through the publication of critical theories for landscape lifecycles in several prominent peer-reviewed journals like *The Plan Journal* and *Landscape Research Record*. The teaching, engagement, and design research facets of De Almeida's work were framed as using methods of Boyer's integration, application and engagement, and teaching to achieve the broader goals of landscape lifecycles as "Scholarship of Discovery."

Repairing Waste Relations and *Just Circular Communities* are examples of how De Almeida packaged engaged scholarship to fulfill traditional outcomes outlined in the Department guidelines to demonstrate achievement. Supported by a successfully awarded Urban@UW Research to Action Collaboratory Grant, De Almeida taught a series of design studios that collaborated with community groups to explore the regenerative economies and design opportunities of waste landscapes in the Duwamish Manufacturing and Industrial Center in South Seattle. The work from this series of studios has been presented at double-blind peer-reviewed conferences and invited presentations.

De Almeida's approach to framing "landscape lifecycles" as design research offers one example of how engaged scholarship can create outputs and demonstrate impact in the more traditional methods of grant awards, conference presentations, and peer-reviewed publications to meet the requirements of department merit and promotion guidelines.

Making Non-Traditional Forms of Scholarship Count

Engaged scholarship emphasizes local contextual learning, community collaboration and co-authorship, and integrated teaching, research, and service (Huber, 2000; Rice, 2003). The outputs of CES often include a broader spectrum of applied and relational community work whose impact, though hyper-local, is no less meaningful than that recognized through traditional international and national formats. The following case studies

are examples of how diverse outcomes of CES might demonstrate impact through awards acknowledgment, implementation of design ideas, news coverage, legislation, and collections acquisition.

While an Assistant Professor in the Landscape Architecture Program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa School of Architecture, Phoebe White studied the climate adaptation and care of coastal cultural landscapes. Much of White's work was conducted through the University of Hawai'i Community Design Center (UHCDC)—a platform for UH faculty, staff, students, and allied professionals to collaborate on proof-of-concept community-based projects. The UHCDC is an example of institutional capacity building to encourage the pursuit of CES and to teach students its value before they enter the workforce.

The Ala Wai Small Boat Harbor (AWSBH) Vision Plan is one of the multi-year, community-based teaching and design research projects that White conducted while at the UHCDC. Commissioned by the Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Boating and Ocean Recreation (DOBOR), White collaborated with Co-Principal Investigator Dr. Priyam Das of the UHM Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Landscape Architect Ariel Dungca, and a group of UHM undergraduate and graduate student research assistants. The collaborative group participated in guided field research with Senator Moriwaki and the AWSBH Working Group, conducted focus group engagement sessions, and created sea level rise resiliency vision plan for the Harbor that would offer insight for future requests for proposals (RFPs). Two undergraduate BEnvd studios, a graduate MLA studio, and a planning practicum course were all integrated into the process to conduct background research and engagement, generate programmatic ideas based on the engagement findings, and test experimental design concepts at multiple scales.

The outcomes of the project included a Vision Report that documents the engagement and research processes, its findings, a conceptual sea level rise adaptation design for the entirety of the Harbor, and a conceptual cost estimate. From 2023 to 2024, some of the programs outlined in the Vision Report were implemented and tested through temporary, pop-up concession stands.

Some, though not all, of the project's impact met UHM School of Architecture Tenure and Promotion Requirements, Criteria, and Guidelines. Upon its release in July 2022, the AWSBH Vision was featured on the front page of the Sunday Honolulu Star Advertiser—the sixth largest daily news publication in the nation with a Sunday readership averaging 310,257 people (Oahu Publications, Inc., 2023). The 2020 AIA Hawai'i Chapter Student Award of Excellence was awarded to an undergraduate student project from one of the integrated studios, demonstrating “increasing professional accomplishment as a teacher” (UHM School of Architecture, 2014). The

project received the 2023 APA Hawai'i Chapter Urban Design Award, meeting criterion for the "Other Creative Work Model" of scholarship (UHM School of Architecture, 2014).

Another outcome of the Vision Report is its intended use as guidance for future legislation and RFPs. Design guidelines outlined in the Report have informed introduced Hawai'i Senate Bills such as SB364, which look to secure legislative funds to help implement the concept design. While this is not technically seen as a tenurable outcome according to the UH SoA criteria, it, along with its prominence in the local media, does indicate that the project has had the socially meaningful impact that Boyer deems worthy of assessment (1990).

UC Davis' Landscape Architecture and Environmental Design Program (LA+ED) has established specific Merit and Promotion Criteria to promote the pursuit of community-engaged work and recognize the unique research that it can produce. Situated in the Department of Human Ecology in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, LA+ED has crafted the criteria not only as a tool to advocate for CES, but also as a means of articulating the centrality of public scholarship within the field to other programs within the department.

At UC Davis, Associate Professor Emily Schlickman investigates how landscape stewardship and community design can inform adaptation in wildfire-prone areas. *Design by Fire* and *Pyro Futures* are two examples of Schlickman's community-based scholarship that have produced non-traditional outputs and received evidence of impact according to the LA+ED Promotion Criteria (UCD, 2016, p. 1). *Design by Fire* is a body of research that surveys how 27 case studies of fire-prone communities around the world are adapting to living with wildfire. Community-based fieldwork and interviews were core to the research. The project, its process, and findings were packaged in a book titled *Design by Fire*, which Schlickman co-authored with Professor Brett Milligan. According to the UCD LA+ED Promotion Guidelines, books are one of the acceptable primary outputs of successful research (UCD, 2016, p. 1). A 2023 Great Places Award Honorable Mention and 2024 National ASLA Honor Award in Communication are evidence of the book's exemplary contribution (UCD, 2016, p. 4). In preparing her work for tenure and promotion, Schlickman emphasized the book's rigorous peer-review publishing process as proof of the book's assessment by external peers—another form of critical evaluation that demonstrates its impact (UCD, 2016, p. 4).

Schlickman and Milligan's *Pyro Futures* project contained a clear engagement process and produced "artifacts of public and intellectual value" that qualify as tenurable outcomes according to the LA+ED Criteria for engaged scholarship (UCD, 2016, p. 1). The project involved engagement with residents from 16 different wildland-urban interface (WUI) communities and field-based research on indigenous-led fire management practices to gain insights into the possibilities of future fire adaptation. Based

on this research, three possible futures for living with fire in California were displayed in an exhibition at the Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at UC Davis in the spring of 2024. The subsequent acquisition of parts of the exhibition by the Permanent Environmental History Collection at the National Museum of American History further emphasizes the project's collaboration with and impact on multiple publics—criteria for engaged scholarship developed by Ellison and Eatman and adopted by the LA+ED program (2008). The project has reached an estimated 20,000 people, demonstrating the breadth of its impact.

Takeaways

These three case studies at the individual level demonstrate a small sample of the diverse outputs CES can yield—from peer-reviewed journal publications to public exhibitions. What is important to note is that several of the non-traditional outcomes will have enduring impact in actual communities beyond the sphere of academia. Recognition of these forms of scholarship will only encourage their pursuit, expand the field's presence outside of academia, and ultimately add to future innovation.

SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

CES holds transformative potential for landscape architecture and the broader academy, offering a model of scholarship that is grounded in reciprocity, responsive to community priorities, and oriented toward the public good. Yet despite its alignment with the mission of public universities, and its deep roots in design education, CES remains undervalued in many merit and promotion systems. The dominance of traditional academic metrics continues to create structural barriers for faculty whose work blurs the boundaries between research, teaching, and service, and whose outputs do not always take the form of peer-reviewed publications or grant-funded studies.

This paper has outlined a multi-level framework for addressing these barriers. At the campus level, we highlighted institutional reforms such as public impact dossier statement guidelines and Carnegie Community Engagement Classification participation that signal formal commitment to engagement. At the college, department, and unit levels, we emphasized the importance of revising authorship norms, expanding definitions of scholarly output, and embedding CES into promotion guidelines and mentorship structures. And at the individual level, we shared strategies for framing CES in review narratives and documenting impact in ways that resonate with both disciplinary and institutional expectations.

Together, these strategies point to a broader imperative: supporting CES is not just about accommodating new types of scholarship, it is about redefining what academic excellence looks like. For landscape architecture in particular, CES reflects the discipline's core values of environmental stewardship,

community collaboration, and design justice. Recognizing and rewarding this work is, therefore, not only a matter of fairness but also of disciplinary integrity and relevance.

Real transformation requires more than isolated interventions. It demands cultural change where CES is not an exception or addendum but a valued and integral part of academic life. By building resilient, equity-focused systems of evaluation, universities can more fully realize their public missions and better support the scholars who are helping to bridge the gap between campus and community and reduce perceptions of elitism. As this paper demonstrates, such change is possible, already underway in many institutions, and essential to the future of engaged scholarship. Looking ahead, the framework we have outlined here has the potential to resonate well beyond landscape architecture to inspire similar conversations and reforms in fields as diverse as engineering, architecture, law, music, and the social sciences. We hope this paper helps move the needle, sparking broader impact and deeper interdisciplinary dialogue on how engagement can redefine academic excellence.

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