



ACU ENGAGEMENT

# Strategy

2021–2024

Facilitate, collaborate  
and celebrate



## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the First Peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways. We recognise their spiritual and ongoing cultural connection to Country.

We respectfully acknowledge Elders past and present and thank them for their wisdom and guidance as we walk in their footsteps.

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain to joy.

And, may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and to the poor.

*Sr Ruth Marlene Fox OSB*



# Message from the Pro Vice- Chancellor, Engagement

Since our launch in 2017, ACU Engagement has focused on building capacity in our students, staff and systems to support communities who experience disadvantage or marginalisation. Our success is due to the mutually beneficial partnerships we have forged and the five principles that guide our work: building connections, acting with humility, developing understanding, affirming dignity and pursuing justice.

ACU's achievements in community engagement and research engagement are not solely the outputs of the ACU Engagement team; they reflect the commitment, action and compassion of the whole ACU community. Our role is

to support, promote and celebrate these valuable activities that take place across our campuses.

We are committed to ensuring that all ACU students and staff have an opportunity to work with their community in a way that is feasible and meaningful to them, that meets community needs while honouring their strengths, and that recognises the reciprocal benefits of working in partnership. Through their contributions, our students and staff develop a greater understanding of themselves, of others and of the settings in which their actions can make a positive difference.

Integral to our work in community capacity-building is the Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit. It facilitates partner-driven scholarship that assists community organisations to develop and evaluate their programs, and to engage with significant issues impacting on their sector. Guided by a forward-thinking Advisory Group, the unit supports projects that bring about more just and compassionate social policies and services.

This plan sees us welcome ACU's Clemente Program to the ACU Engagement team, furthering our capacity to support programs for those experiencing marginalisation, or disadvantaged by multiple barriers to higher education. The ACU Engagement Strategy 2021–2024 is designed to improve understanding of our strategic priorities, define a framework for our future thinking, and provide a platform for recording and celebrating the role that ACU plays in supporting our communities.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra Jones".

**Professor Sandra Jones**  
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Engagement  
Australian Catholic University

# Supporting the ACU Strategic Plan

The ACU Engagement Strategy 2021–2024 supports the following priorities in the ACU Strategic Plan 2020–2023.

## PRIORITY 1

All our endeavours grounded in mission

- 1.2 Foster an inclusive community that welcomes all people, and engages every individual to the full extent of their human and intellectual potential.
- 1.3 Sustain and deepen staff understanding, engagement and formation with our mission and Catholic character.
- 1.4 Deliver a distinctive, enriched and authentically Catholic educational experience.
- 1.5 Engage the pursuit of truth, human dignity and the common good throughout our leadership, scholarship and research, integrating faith and reason.
- 1.6 Facilitate a demonstrably positive impact on society through the quality and effectiveness of our community engagement programs.
- 1.7 Advance the ACU Reconciliation Action Plan.

## PRIORITY 2

Distinctive, inclusive, dynamic and student-centred education

- 2.3 Enact mercy and create opportunity by increasing participation and outcomes for those from low socio-economic communities.
- 2.4 Widen participation, outcomes and deeply embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into our curriculum.
- 2.8 Equip all our graduates to be knowledgeable, skilled and ethical, sensitive to injustice and motivated to work toward the common good and dignity of all people.
- 2.9 Enrich learning through community engagement and the Core Curriculum as distinctive elements of an ACU education.



### PRIORITY 3

## World-leading research, with impact

- 3.3 Translate research into economic, social, environmental and cultural impacts to advance social progress and effect positive change in our communities.
- 3.4 Enable research-informed learning and teaching that is innovative, engaging and responsive to the changing demands of society.
- 3.5 Forge strong and mutually beneficial local, national, international and industry partnerships to develop practical research outcomes that benefit the wider community.

### PRIORITY 4

## Vibrant academic culture, enriched by innovation and discovery

- 4.5 Expand and embed value-adding scholarly engagement and activity throughout faculties and schools.

### PRIORITY 5

## Deeply engaged, globally renowned

- 5.3 Strengthen industry and community engagement to create tangible results towards significant issues facing society now and into the future, through Catholic partnerships, mission-focused research and executive education.
- 5.6 Deepen relationships with Catholic partners and the Catholic Church in Australia and around the world.

### PRIORITY 6

## Service, stewardship and sustainability

- 6.1 Sustain effective corporate governance and management practice that underpins our highest expectations of accountability.
- 6.2 Cultivate a highly capable, people-focused, safe and ethical workforce in support of our mission, focus and strategic priorities.
- 6.3 Ensure long-term fiscal sustainability and ethical stewardship of financial and non-financial resources.
- 6.4 Ensure the development and continual improvement of adaptable, accountable and transparent business and service delivery models.

## Living the ACU mission

ACU's mission as a Catholic university is at the heart of everything we do in ACU Engagement.

Within the Catholic intellectual tradition and acting in truth and love, Australian Catholic University is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person and the common good.



## Our work

Our work is to facilitate, communicate, collaborate and celebrate community engagement and research engagement at ACU. We function as a centre of expertise that works with internal and external stakeholders to build and support the University's community engagement and research engagement programs and culture within the communities we are located.

## Our vision

Our vision is for mission-driven engagement to be embedded into every facet of ACU; in how we teach, in how our students learn, in how and what we research, and how we interact with the world. Through this work we affirm human dignity and pursue social justice, all in advancement of the common good.



# Our guiding principles

ACU Engagement is guided by five principles. Founded upon the tenets of Catholic social thought and grounded in the rich heritage of the Catholic intellectual tradition, our guiding principles were developed in collaboration with the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy at ACU.

## Developing understanding



We aim to truly understand the people we work with. Empathic understanding involves listening and reflecting with one's heart and with one's intellect in order to come to a deep emotional and intellectual comprehension of the beliefs, dispositions, needs, desires and hopes of the people we work with, and of how these are shaped by experiences and environment. Based on such empathic understanding we can respond in a considered, compassionate and respectful manner to develop meaningful outcomes with community, as community.

## Building connections



We build genuine connections with community organisations and the broader community. It is through our being-in-relationship that we can develop empathic understanding, to realise the fullness of our dignity and to flourish as human beings. Through the development of respectful relationships and mutually beneficial partnerships, university and community can experience positive individual and institutional growth.

## Affirming dignity



We recognise the inherent and equal moral worth and rights of all human beings who are made in the image and likeness of God. Honouring the dignity of community members means working to ensure the protection and provision of fundamental human rights. It also means ensuring the development of people's capacities so that they can fully realise a sense of meaning, purpose and self-worth. Such a commitment to dignity translates into a fundamental orientation towards the support of those most marginalised or disadvantaged by the structures and attitudes of contemporary society. Supporting people's dignity means working with people in a holistic manner in a spirit of humility and collaboration for the common good.

## Acting with humility



We develop capacity and sustainability in the community through the virtue of humility. Humility allows us to look 'outward' with a sense of equality (not superiority or inferiority) and to work collaboratively with community instead of 'on' or 'for' community. Humility can help to minimise the power differentials inherent to some aspects of community work. Humility is a necessary precondition for genuine understanding and respect for human dignity. Humility opens our hearts to the contributions that those with whom we work bring to our relationships. Such a humble, non-judgmental and non-moralistic approach honours the autonomy, and therefore the dignity, of all involved, so that together we form our consciences and work in ways that facilitate personal responsibility and, with it, human flourishing.

## Pursuing justice



We work for social justice. Through developing understanding, affirming human dignity, acting with humility and building genuine connections, our community engagement works to stand in solidarity with those most in need, wherever they may be, and to advance the common good of our societies. This means working for the good of all, and for just and fair opportunities for participation in all aspects of society. The common good cannot be achieved if we ignore those most in need. In ACU community engagement, there exists a fundamental orientation towards prioritising the needs of those who experience the most disadvantage or marginalisation.



# Our strategic priorities

To achieve our vision, we will focus on and commit to the following strategic priorities:

1. Enriching learning through community engagement.
2. Developing a “community-centric” staff culture.
3. Addressing entrenched disadvantage.
4. Empowering people through education and life skills programs
5. Becoming a centre of expertise in community engagement.
6. Becoming a centre of expertise for the development of engaged and impactful research and scholarship.
7. Being a responsive and effective operation.





# 1. Enriching learning through community engagement

ACU Engagement will provide opportunities for students to engage with people who experience disadvantage or marginalisation through core and elective community engagement units. Guided by the principles of Catholic social thought, these units will develop our students' empathy and ability to think critically, ethically and reflectively. The support of extra-curricular activities, events on campus and scholarships will also enable our students to advance the ACU mission.



## GOAL

ACU Engagement is the first-choice solution for students in sourcing reciprocal and mutually beneficial community engagement placements, and ACU Engagement's campus events, scholarships and extra-curricular activities further enrich learning.

- 1.1 Strengthen community engagement in the Core Curriculum by reflecting our approach and philosophy in the course content.
- 1.2 Offer a diverse range of mission-aligned community engagement placements to undergraduate students.
- 1.3 Support undergraduate students by preparing them for their community engagement placements and guiding their reflections on personal and professional development post-placement.
- 1.4 Diversify our community engagement program by offering a community engagement elective unit in select postgraduate coursework degrees.
- 1.5 Forge mutually beneficial partnerships with community organisations to provide students with mission-aligned placement opportunities and support options for extra-curricular activities.
- 1.6 Deliver on-campus events designed to inspire our students to respond to entrenched disadvantage, injustices and underlying social issues they witness in their communities.
- 1.7 Provide scholarships to commit students more deeply to community engagement through involvement with programs and partners.
- 1.8 Showcase the value that learning through community engagement has for our students and partners.
- 1.9 Support community engagement teaching and learning staff in curriculum and professional development.

## 2. Developing a community-centric staff culture

ACU Engagement will support its staff in bringing the ACU mission to life by using the University's Community Engagement Time Release (CETR) Policy to engage with the community and by participating in scholarship projects that are driven by our Catholic and other community service partners. These activities will enable staff to make a positive impact in our communities by exchanging knowledge with organisations that support people who experience disadvantage or marginalisation. Community giving drives will also be organised on campus as another avenue for staff to assist communities in need and raise awareness of challenges in our local communities.

### GOAL

All ACU staff are supported to make meaningful contributions to our community in a respectful and reciprocal manner.

- 2.1 Raise awareness and increase staff uptake of the Community Engagement Time Release (CETR) Policy and monitor its success.
- 2.2 Facilitate collaborations between ACU staff and our Catholic and other partners through the Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit.
- 2.3 Utilise staff community engagement data to inform policy improvements to the way community engagement is supported at ACU.
- 2.4 Enhance the visibility of ACU's community-centric staff culture.
- 2.5 Increase the number of ACU staff who participate as Learning Partners in the Clemente program.
- 2.6 Assist ACU staff in establishing new community engagement projects and partnerships.





### 3. Addressing entrenched disadvantage

ACU will work to design and implement projects and programs that support the University's mission by addressing entrenched disadvantage experienced by those in the ACU and wider community. We will work in collaboration with other ACU organisational units to effect coordinated, efficient delivery of services to stakeholders. Projects and programs will be grounded in mission, responsive to community needs whether they be local to our campuses, national or international, and aligned with ACU's principles of community engagement.

#### GOAL

ACU Engagement supports the ACU mission to affirm the dignity of the human person through projects that focus on addressing entrenched disadvantage.

- 3.1 Select and organise purposeful community giving drives on campus in conjunction with Campus Ministry to support people who experience disadvantage or marginalisation.
- 3.2 Develop and implement research-grounded programs at ACU that address entrenched disadvantage experienced by those in the ACU or wider community.
- 3.3 Advance ACU's Reconciliation Action Plan through thoughtful, reciprocal community engagement initiatives and execution of the ACU Engagement Reconciliation Action Plan.



## 4. Empowering people through education and life skills programs

Aligned with ACU's Mission, Clemente Australia will work to empower individuals disadvantaged by multiple barriers and systemic inequity to make positive and lasting changes in all aspects of their lives through education. By focusing on research-informed 'teaching and learning' and collaborations with diverse community partners and ACU organisational units, Clemente will develop a suite of targeted programs that support academic learning and encourage life skills to help open doors to employment and further education.

### GOAL

Develop targeted programs that support academic learning and encourage life skills for positive and lasting change.

- 4.1 Establish 'Clemente for Youth' programs on at least four sites.
- 4.2 Develop and seek external funding for the pilot program 'Clemente for Prisons'.
- 4.3 Develop and seek external funding for the pilot program 'Clemente for First Nations People' with a mixed-age and youth focus.
- 4.4 Implement 'Clemente Pathways' as a non-assessable, academic skills building program.
- 4.5 Prioritise the well-being imperative for all staff, volunteers, students and their families.





## 5. Becoming a centre of expertise in community engagement

ACU Engagement will provide leadership, research, scholarship and professional development in the area of university-community engagement. Evaluating the University's community engagement programs to improve student, staff and partner experiences will be a high priority. We will also contribute to academic discourses, through conferences and publications, to ensure that ACU graduates are sensitive to injustice and motivated to work towards the common good and dignity of all people. By participating in external scholarly forums and assessments, we will test the efficacy of our community engagement programs and identify areas for improvement.

### GOAL

ACU Engagement is a leader in university-community engagement contributing to broader academic discourses and driving improved practices at ACU.

- 5.1 Evaluate and report on community engagement units and programs offered at ACU.
- 5.2 Offer a suite of face-to-face and online professional development activities for staff working in the area of community engagement.
- 5.3 Publish impactful journal articles and reports on community engagement and community engagement activities.
- 5.4 Host international conferences and visiting scholars to share best practices with other higher education providers and our partners.
- 5.5 Supervise honours and higher degree research students where community engagement is central to their research.
- 5.6 Participate in external scholarly forums and assessments and award programs related to community engagement to aid in institutional reflection and growth.
- 5.7 Increase our visibility as a centre of expertise in community engagement.



## 6. Becoming a centre of expertise for the development of engaged and impactful research and scholarship

ACU Engagement will build upon the University's success in Excellence in Research for Australia by supporting researchers to deliver benefits beyond academia. Leveraging our research strengths and encouraging academics to collaborate with research end-users will underpin our accomplishments.

The Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit will facilitate partner-driven scholarship that aligns with our mission and ethos as a Catholic university. Involving academics in high-quality engagement and scholarship will build and enhance our academic culture.

### GOAL

ACU Engagement furthers the translation of research and scholarship at ACU into societal, economic, environmental and cultural impact for the common good.

- 6.1 Embed engagement and impact in ACU strategies and policies.
- 6.2 Facilitate partner-driven and mission-aligned scholarship through the Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit.
- 6.3 Evaluate the impact of scholarship projects administered by the Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit.
- 6.4 Lead or contribute to research partnership grant applications at ACU.
- 6.5 Promote end-user associate supervision as an engagement activity and integral part of research training.
- 6.6 Participate in external assessments and awards related to research engagement and impact.
- 6.7 Undertake research to advance the scholarship of the Clemente program in partnership with researchers from ACU and other universities.
- 6.8 Present ACU Engagement as a centre of expertise for the development of engaged and impactful research and scholarship.





## 7. Being a responsive and effective operation

The work of ACU Engagement will be underpinned by effective governance and management. We will continually improve our business and service delivery models, and our staff will be afforded professional development opportunities that put them at the forefront of community engagement and research engagement practice. Simplifying and streamlining administrative processes will be a priority, as will identifying and mitigating risks to our operation.

### GOAL

ACU Engagement sustains effective governance and management practices that underpin ACU's expectations of service excellence and accountability.

- 7.1 Invest in the capacity of our staff by providing professional development opportunities and performance management.
- 7.2 Evaluate the efficacy of our governance structures to ensure they meet the needs of our internal and external stakeholders.
- 7.3 Review our business and service delivery models to maximise their effectiveness and efficiency.
- 7.4 Build our information technology infrastructure to support ACU students and staff in their community engagement work; including exploring innovative options for hardware and software support for Clemente students.
- 7.5 Assess the risks to our operations and put in place mitigation strategies.
- 7.6 Develop and implement a communications strategy to ensure that all programs are promoted in a timely manner, including contributions to external media and ACU media content (IMPACT, Staff Bulletin, Workplace and the website).



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