



NOVEMBER 15-18, 2025
PARRINGTON HALL & SEABECK CONFERENCE CENTER

PUBLIC IMPACT ACCELERATOR

Workshop Newsletter

Overview of the Accelerator

Historically, public universities have played a foundational role in the civic life of their communities. Yet, the erosion of trust in higher education has called into question the value of public universities in service to their communities. To rebuild trust, we must demonstrate and deliver more value to our state and local community partners. Public Affairs and Public Policy Schools at R1 public institutions are uniquely equipped to lead the way in defining, enabling, delivering and documenting public impact.

The Public Impact Accelerator was designed to **bring together a coalition of scholars, deans, practitioners, and institutional leaders committed to reimagining a future of research that is rigorous, relevant, and capable of producing real public impact.**

Over four days, we convened a community of scholars from major public universities—a coalition of the willing. We listened to stories and engaged in conversations around what is needed to activate scholars' capacity and develop a strong network of public affairs scholars across peer R1 public institutions – the **Public Impact Accelerator**.

The Accelerator created a space for listening, reflection, design, and imagination. We hope this newsletter brings back the energy of your conversations and the momentum of our shared learning.



Hosted by:



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
JOHN GLENN COLLEGE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS



**EVANS SCHOOL
OF PUBLIC POLICY & GOVERNANCE**
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON



Deans Share Perspectives

After Collective Story Harvest concluded Sunday afternoon, four deans shared reflections on the role their institutions play in supporting Public Impact Research (PIR). Their comments revealed both enthusiasm and candid realism.

Patterns emerged across institutions. All of the deans underscored the importance of faculty recognition, durable organizational structures, and a collaborative approach to supporting Public Impact Research. They also shared a common concern about how to measure impact—and how to make it visible within assessment systems that often privilege bibliographic measures of scholarship. Yet the level of existing infrastructure varied considerably, signaling different institutional baselines for this work. Even so, there was unanimous agreement that now is the right time to move forward collectively.

After an engaging workshop at Parrington Hall in Seattle, participants transitioned to the serene Hood Canal at Seabeck, Washington. The change of setting provided space for deeper connection and informal dialogue, allowing ideas from the day's sessions to evolve in a more relaxed environment.

Designing a Collaborative Network

As we settled into Seabeck Conference Center, participants reflected on the learnings from Collective Story Harvest and individual reflection to generate discussion topics around forming a collaborative network with current funding and resources across institutions:

- Training & Mentoring
- Recognition & Rewards
- Showcasing and measuring the use of research to achieve public impact

Working together on a common 'moonshot problem' was added as an additional category as we moved onto imagining a collaborative network with significant funding in place.

These sessions produced rich documentation that will be used to generate strategies and plans. The detailed questions, concepts, tensions, and ideas surfaced in each group are now being woven into a whole.

Key Takeaways

Across topics, people leaned toward capacity-building, shared language, durability, and clarity of purpose.





Designing a Network Structure

After an afternoon of network design discussions, participants translated their ideas into three-dimensional models using a sensory, story-based method for illuminating complex systems.

In just five minutes, three distinct patterns emerged: a **Tiered Model** organized around individuals, institutions, and a shared network; a **Reciprocity Model** marked by multi-directional flows between universities and publics; and a **Hub-and-Spoke Model** with rotating leadership and a central coordinating team.

Across all three, participants emphasized the need for practitioner and community representation, flexible governance, and designs that complement rather than compete with existing centers. Concerns about funding-levels emerged and there was an expressed interest in rotating or time-bound structures that keep public impact at the core.

“This [collaborative network] is about changing the way we fundamentally do things”



What is Public Impact Research?

As the day came to an end, the group turned toward refining our definition of Public Impact Research. Drawing on the Moulton-Sandfort concept paper and the collective insights of the workshop, participants began shaping a working definition that centers the use of research and the outcomes it produces for the public. The conversation surfaced both clarity and productive tension—questions about rigor and relevance, value and process, and who ultimately defines impact. Participants emphasized that PIR must make conscious use of public resources, uphold high standards, and meaningfully engage communities in shaping the inquiry, not simply the solutions. This working definition will continue to evolve as the network forms, offering a shared foundation for the work ahead.



"This is not a moment - it's a movement."

LIN MANUEL-MIRANDA,
HAMILTON

Attendees

Amanda Bankston - University of Washington
Benjamin Olneck-Brown - Pew Charitable Trust
Brandon Frye - Ohio State University
Carolyn Hill - MDRC
Crystal Hall - University of Washington
David Suarez - University of Washington
Heather Hill - University of Washington
Jill Clark - Ohio State University
Jodi Sandfort - University of Washington
Julia Carboni - Ruckelshaus Center UW/WSU
Julia Karon - University of Washington
Karin Martin - University of Washington
Luke Shaefer - University of Michigan
Michael Collins - University of Wisconsin
Mo Torres - University of Michigan
Nisha Botchwey - University of Minnesota
Raj Darolia - University of Kentucky
Sarah Strochak - University of Wisconsin
Stephanie Casey Pierce - U of Tennessee, Knoxville
Stephanie Moulton - Ohio State University
Trevor Brown - Ohio State University
Vic St. John - Ohio State University
Yingling Fan - University of Minnesota

Next Steps

In the coming weeks:

- Jodi Sandfort and Stephanie Moulton will draft initial charter language and an MOU for review by the emerging Steering Committee.
- The Evans School will host the Evans Deans Forum about Public Impact Research on December 2, we invite you all to join the conversation via Zoom.
- Worksheets about each University created by participants are being transcribed and will be sent to participants by mid-December.
- Jodi and Trevor Brown will continue discussions with Deans from other Big 10 Academic Alliance sites to gauge their interest in joining the network.

Looking ahead:

- We will begin identifying design teams for specific components of the network. We will create draft proposals for training, recognition, and PIR measurement.
- We will explore potential funding models.
- We will create our Year 1 workplan.



Resources

[Photo Album](#)

[PIA Website](#)

[Spotify Playlist](#)