

# Community Engagement

## Terms of Reference

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## I. Objectives

The Community Engagement Topical Group aims to deal with the crucial question of engagement in alliances, enhance and reinvent students and staff (i.e., academic and administrative) participation within the European Universities Initiative, empowering them both as active co-creators and engaged beneficiaries. The group focuses primarily on students and staff as its target, aiming to foster engagement within the university community. It does not engage with external stakeholders or the local communities surrounding the universities.

By encouraging collaboration between alliances and tackling common challenges in staff and student engagement, the group sets the following objectives:

### 1 - Provide a collaborative platform for networking and peer learning, dealing with:

- Enhancing **discussion and knowledge sharing** between alliances and addressing common challenges when it comes to engaging all university stakeholders (students, academics and administrative staff) into the building of strong and sustainable alliances and the creation of offers that respond to their needs and expectations.
- Sharing **practical tips and replicable solutions** to support the involvement of students and staff and the professional development of the latest.
- **Facilitating the dialogue** between staff and students of the alliances.
- Sharing what has been done in each alliance and facilitating **peer learning and knowledge sharing**, enabling alliances to leverage each other's strengths and expertise.
- Identifying and understanding the **hurdles and challenges** faced by staff (academic and administrative) in terms of professional development, implication in collaborative teaching, contributing to the consolidation of alliances, time allocation, mindset shift, exploring possible solutions, etc.
- Identifying both the **difficulties** encountered by universities to effectively reaching out to students to ensure their active participation in the alliance initiatives and the main challenges and obstacles students face when engaging in mobility opportunities or international initiatives (i.e., the adequacy of financial support, the timing of these opportunities, and their alignment with students' academic pathways)
- Participating in the **identification of strategies** to better involve student and staff in existing international mobility programmes.

**Timeline:** month 1 to month 6

### 2 - Act as a centre of expertise dealing with

- Offering **insights and solutions** on students and staff's participation in co-development, decision-making and feedback
- Compiling **information and results** in terms of community engagement of staff and students on the European level;
- Enlisting **best practice initiatives** to increase staff and students' involvement in the building and consolidation of sustainable alliances.
- Reflecting on **recognition and motivation**: identify challenges, leverages and sources for a sustained motivation and commitment.
- Compiling the most effective **strategies** to acknowledge and highlight the contributions of students and staff within alliances

**Timeline:** month 7 to month 24.

### 3 - Strengthen awareness and communication dealing with

- Collecting insights for a **more efficient promotion to engage** the student and staff communities within the building of sustainable alliances.
- **Promoting a sense of belonging** among students and staff by encouraging their active role and visibility within the alliance community.
- Support initiatives that help students and staff recognize themselves as key contributors to the alliance's mission and development.

**Timeline:** month 7 to month 24.

## II. Background

This topical group will focus on the different dimensions of students and staff's involvement in the European Universities Initiative, which can mainly be categorised in two focus sub-areas:

- Participation of students, including: involvement of students in the activities and initiatives of the Alliances, co-creation and feedback processes (bottom-up approach), outreach, community building activities within the Alliances, inclusion, promotion, transnational collaboration with existing student bodies. The working group will rely on the experience and expertise of the Community of Practice on student engagement, established at the European level in 2024, of which several members of the working group have been involved with.
- Participation of all staff, including: active participation to the Alliances programme, recognition & career development, EU Mobility, trans-national Human Resources Departments collaboration, European identity and active citizenship, Multilingualism & multiculturalism challenges for faculty and staff, community building activities, promotion.

Areas of common interest will be identified in order to develop solutions that support the engagement of the entire university community. Particular attention will be given to communication, awareness, and sense of belonging.

### **Relevance to European Universities Alliances and to the European Higher Education and Research Areas in general**

Regarding **student involvement**, it is fundamental, rooted in European education policies and serving as a cornerstone for the design of educational offerings within the alliances. The alliances are committed to increasing international opportunities for students, actively consulting them, and integrating them into co-construction processes. The creation of inter-university campuses is considered contingent upon robust student involvement strategies. Given the diversity of approaches in this area, and the common struggle to engage students in new activities, a space for exchange, discussion, and cooperation is indispensable. The dedicated working group will contribute to enhancing student engagement in the initiatives of the alliances, as well as in the co-creation of new actions, through structured reporting and feedback mechanisms adopting a bottom-up approach. This will be carried out in close collaboration with key student stakeholders at the local, national, and European levels (i.e., Student boards/assemblies in the Alliances, ESN, Student-led Topical Group).

Concerning **staff (academic and administrative)**, they have a foundational role in building and consolidating sustainable alliances. The European Universities Initiative brings changes in their working methods and required skills. This working group aims to identify and share practices aimed at supporting staff to excel and thrive in these new models. It will enable the identification of challenges faced by staff in terms of involvement and recognition within the building of the alliances. It will also allow for the sharing of experience when it comes to facilitating professional development, promoting mobility and the common struggle to engage staff in proposed activities. The exchange of best practices, the sharing of experiences in training, and the identification of new modalities for inter-alliance mobility and community building activities are presented as levers for deepening excellence and innovation, while supporting the progression and recognition of individual career paths.

### III. Work plan and working modalities

#### *Work Plan and Provisional Timeline*

##### **Work Plan**

The Community Engagement Topical Group will launch its activities with a kick-off online meeting in May 2025. This session will introduce key priorities, define strategic objectives, and gather input from stakeholders.

Participants will discuss the group's focus areas and establish dedicated working groups for:

- Students' engagement;
- Staff's (academic and administrative) engagement.

##### **Provisional Timeline**

- Spring 2025: Elections of chairs and vice-chairs / Definition themes & topics / Defining work modalities and decision-making process
- Autumn 2025: Definition of subgroups (if needed) / Finalising definition of the working modalities
- Winter 2025/2026: 1st in-person meeting
- Spring 2026: drawing up an initial assessment

##### **Progress updates**

- Each working group will track the progress of its initiatives, ensuring alignment with the overarching goals.
- Regular check-ins by the Coordinating Board will evaluate foreseen outputs, allowing for necessary adjustments.
- A compilation of challenges and best practices will be shared to enhance collaboration and impact.
- Yearly Reports: An annual report will summarise key outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations for sustaining progress.

#### *Meeting Plan and Working Modalities*

The Community Engagement Topical Group will organise regular online meetings with alliance representatives.

The coordinators of the sub-groups and the chair and vice-chair can also meet an additional two times a year, physically, if need be.

The agenda will be shared by GCT in advance. The members of the group will be able to include agenda points. The meetings will be dedicated to discuss, develop and monitor set outcomes according to the foreseen work plan; provide information on key actions, events and initiatives related to community engagement, foresee possible synergies with other actions and topical groups.

The group will aim to meet physically once a year, e.g., benefiting the settings of events or others, such as EAIE.

- 2 thematic sub-groups will be set to address the specific challenges and set outcomes of the 2 different groups of beneficiaries: students and staff. The existence of thematic groups within the sub-groups will depend on the demand and work plan.
- Peer learning workshops are foreseen to be held according to the demand of the members to tackle particular topics (collaborative platforms, student surveys, recognition for student involvement, etc.) to support knowledge and practice sharing, solutions development.

Physical training workshops (staff training, Blended Intensive Programmes, etc.) can be organised according to demand or to disseminate produced joint output(s).

The topics of peer learning workshops, trainings and specific on-site events will be suggested and approved in organisational and informational meetings. Alliance representatives will nominate the workshop moderator.

### **Meeting Plan**

The working groups will meet once a month, holding their sessions in parallel but on different dates to enable members who belong to both groups to participate in each meeting. Meeting dates will be determined through the use of scheduling tools such as Doodle or similar platforms for sharing availability, initiated by the respective chairs or vice-chairs.

Each meeting will last between one hour and a maximum of one hour and a half, in order to minimize the impact on participants' schedules.

As for the Coordinating Board, remote collaboration will be encouraged whenever possible, primarily through email or other agreed-upon digital platforms. The Coordinating Board will convene once a month, with dates arranged either via Doodle or through email exchanges, given the small number of members involved. Additional meetings will be held whenever requested by the GCT (Group Chairing Team).

### *Attributions of the Chair, Vice-chairs, GCT and group members*

The GCT will deal with:

- Planning of meetings, preparation of meeting agendas and meeting minutes
- Coordinating the collection of information and contents produced by the working groups

- Regularly check the development of foreseen outputs, allowing for necessary adjustments
- Organising the planned events of the topical group
- Reporting to WP2 Board/WP2 Project Officer
- Developing topics of common interest as well as focusing on communication and sense of belonging.

### **Attribution of Group members**

Members of the Topical Group are expected to actively contribute to the activities of the working groups by engaging in the exchange of good practices and experiences, openly sharing challenges encountered during implementation, and collaboratively proposing solutions. They are also encouraged to take initiative by suggesting new ideas and supporting their realisation. The Co-Chairs will ensure the active involvement of all members, fostering an inclusive and participatory environment that avoids passive engagement and enables every member to contribute in ways best suited to their skills and availability.

Member contributions may take various forms, including experience-sharing, process recommendations, drafting of documents, creation of graphic or social media content, and support in the planning and delivery of events such as workshops. Participation in the monthly meetings is also expected, to the best of each member's availability, to maintain continuity and coherence in the group's work. This collaborative and flexible approach aims to maximise collective expertise and ensure meaningful and sustained engagement across the Topical Group.

### *Considerations on Equality & Diversity in organisational modalities*

The Topical Group fosters an inclusive, diverse environment with equal opportunities for all, aligned with the EACEA Inclusion and Diversity Action Plan. Representing a wide range of University Alliances, the group ensures broad geographic and gender-balanced representation.

A special focus of the group will be devoted to developing strategies to engage students and staff with special needs, promoting accessible participation, inclusive co-construction, and support for those facing educational, economic, or health challenges.

Key focus areas include:

- Students and staff with disabilities: strategies for inclusive participation and support.
- Gender equality: solutions to ensure equal gender representation in Alliances' activities, such as mobility programs, events, and governance.

Through these efforts, the group aims to create a more equitable European University Alliance, empowering all students to shape their educational experiences.

### *Communication and dissemination plan of both the topical group activities and outputs*

The communication and dissemination activities of the topical group will be structured into two main areas: **internal communication** and **external communication**.

## 1. Internal Communication

Internal communication will be overseen by the co-chairs supported by the vice-chairs, who will ensure a consistent and timely flow of information. This will be carried out through dedicated email lists for each working group as well as for the topical group as a whole, depending on the relevance of the topics discussed. In addition to email, the use of digital platforms and tools (e.g., Microsoft Teams) will be encouraged to facilitate effective interaction and collaboration.

After each working group meeting, co-chairs will be responsible for providing written summaries of key decisions and outcomes. These summaries will be promptly shared with all members to ensure that those unable to attend are fully informed and up to date.

Within each working group, co-chairs and vice-chairs will also ensure that communication is clear, inclusive, and that all decisions are effectively shared and validated by the participants.

At the level of the Coordinating Board, the same communication tools will be used, with in-person meetings organized when feasible to foster stronger coordination and alignment.

## 2. External Communication and Dissemination

The topical group will implement strategic actions to disseminate its work and outputs, consistent with its ambition to develop a **Centre for Expertise** in the field of community engagement.

Results will be shared through the publication of key documents, such as **reports, guidelines**, and other relevant materials. The group will also explore the use of interactive platforms to engage the broader academic community and promote the adoption of the solutions and strategies developed within the group.

Strong collaboration and continuous exchange with the **Topical Group on Communication and Dissemination** will be fundamental to ensure visibility, alignment, and amplification of outreach efforts.

In addition, members of the topical group will be encouraged to spread selected information and content through the **official channels of their respective Alliances**, including social media.

- **LinkedIn** will be particularly relevant for content related to **staff involvement and professional development**.
- **Instagram** will serve as a key channel for engaging with **students** and increasing awareness of the group's initiatives among the younger academic community.

The topical group will also promote and share relevant posts through platforms such as **FOREU4ALL's social media channels**, contributing to a unified visibility strategy.

Finally, high-profile public events, such as **the EAIE** and other large-scale initiatives, will serve as strategic opportunities to disseminate not only the existence of the topical group but also its key strategies, tools, and outcomes.

All members of the topical group will be invited to actively participate in public events organized by their respective universities or Alliances, whenever there is alignment with the group's themes and objectives, to present and promote the work carried out within the group.

### *The planned activities*

The Topical Group is committed to actively engaging in all workshops organized within the FOREU4ALL framework that are relevant to its thematic scope. Moreover, the group intends to propose a theme for one of the upcoming eight workshops, contributing substantively to the shared agenda of the community of practice (CoP).

In addition to participation, the Topical Group will explore the possibility of organizing a dedicated workshop or a thematic matching event, with a specific focus on topics central to university community engagement thus allowing the transversal participation of other topical groups.

To ensure targeted and effective work, the Topical Group will be structured into two primary working groups: one focusing on student engagement and the other on staff involvement. Furthermore, the group will assess the establishment of ad hoc task forces to address cross-cutting themes such as communication strategies, sense of belonging, and inclusion. These task forces may also be formed in collaboration with other topical groups where thematic synergies exist.

The Topical Group aims to evolve into a centre for expertise within the European University Alliances on the subject of university community engagement. In this role, it will support knowledge exchange, peer learning, and policy development through a variety of dissemination strategies. These may include the publication of reports, practical guidelines, and the development of digital tools such as online platforms and social media channels to enhance outreach and engagement.

The outcomes and progress of the Topical Group's activities will be systematically collected and synthesized in an annual report to be submitted to WP2. This report will document the achievements reached to date, share any materials or platforms developed, and outline forthcoming projects and actions planned for the following year.

## IV. Inputs to WP3 Policy Dialogue & WP4 Communication and Dissemination

Effective communication and strategic dissemination will be ensured through close collaboration and ongoing dialogue with WPs. This coordination will be essential to guarantee consistent messaging, strengthen the visibility of the group's activities, and enhance the overall impact of outreach initiatives. The group's outputs, including key documents and relevant materials, will be shared via established dissemination channels such as the FOREU4ALL website and associated social media platforms, in alignment with WP4 objectives and timelines.

Additionally, participation in high-level public events—such as the EAIE Conference and other major initiatives coordinated within the WP4 framework—will be leveraged as valuable opportunities to raise awareness about the group's work. These occasions will serve not only to promote the existence of the Topical Group but also to showcase its core strategies, operational tools, and tangible results to a wider European and international audience.

## V. Members

Each alliance can appoint 1 representative per working group (i.e., a maximum of 2 altogether for the "Community Engagement" topic group).

Additionally, guest participants can punctually be invited to present a specific initiative or topic of interest, during a meeting, during workshops or specialised tasks.

Members of the topical group should, on the one hand, possess specific expertise related to the thematic focus of the working group in which they choose to participate—whether as students or staff. They should have professional experience in these areas and be engaged in active participation in the discussion and in the creation of strategies.

At the same time, it is important that a portion of the group also brings complementary or transversal competencies—for example, in communication, in supporting students and staff with disabilities, or in designing international mobility pathways for students and staff. These diverse perspectives will enrich the dialogue and contribute to the development of shared solutions that are inclusive and responsive to a variety of needs.

In the “Staff Engagement” working group, participants should in priority be admins in charge of dealing with academic and/or administrative staff (not faculty and staff per se) i.e., HR, as they’re the ones supporting faculty, and additionally for their own sake.