

2026 INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONFERENCE
Pre-Conference Workshops

Background

A brief informal discussion on the need to develop a generic training programme for the South African context took place among a few friends and colleagues at the MUT Conference on the Scholarship of Engagement, held in Durban in November 2025. These two pre-conference workshops are a consequence of that discussion.

One workshop will follow the other, and a light lunch will be served in between.

Workshop 1

Co-Developing a Generic Training Programme for Community Engagement in Higher Education

From the HEQC's (2004) basic definition of community engagement (CE), the majority of higher education institutions have, over the years, established their own conceptualisations of CE, reflecting their specific contexts and histories. However, common to the various delineations of CE is the understanding that it is increasingly being recognised not only as a core institutional function, but also as a transformative space for advancing social and epistemic justice, reciprocity, community, and human development. Yet, the preparation of students and academics for meaningful engagement remains uneven, often lacking a coherent ethical and philosophical grounding.

This concept note responds to the need for a training or preparation framework that is not only technically robust, but also ethically grounded in the cultivation of humanity. Drawing on the African philosophy of Ubuntu, with its emphasis on relationality, dignity, interdependence, and interconnectedness, this initiative seeks to foreground community engagement as a practice of becoming fully human through others.

In alignment with universal human values such as respect, empathy, responsibility, justice, and care, the proposed training and preparation programme aims to move beyond instrumental approaches towards a more humanising, reflexive, and socially responsive praxis. In this framing, community engagement is not simply a methodological or institutional requirement, but a pedagogical and ethical project oriented towards the cultivation of humanity in both students and academics.

Purpose of the Workshop

The purpose of this two-hour workshop is to initiate the co-development of a generic, values-driven training programme framework for community engagement, grounded in Ubuntu, universal human values, and the cultivation of humanity, which can be adapted across different contexts.

Workshop 2

Towards a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework for Community Engagement in South African Higher Education

As a core function of higher education, CE is central to transformation, social responsiveness, and the public good. However, while CE practices have expanded, monitoring and evaluation systems remain underdeveloped, inconsistent, and often informal across institutions.

Current challenges include:

- Lack of a standardised M&E framework
- Weak integration of CE into teaching, learning, and research evaluation systems
- Difficulty in measuring social impact, reciprocity, and knowledge co-production
- Limited inclusion of community voices in evaluation processes

Without a coherent M&E system:

- CE remains marginal in institutional performance systems
- Impact is under-recognised and under-reported
- Opportunities for learning, accountability, and transformation are lost

This workshop responds to the need for a shared, adaptable, and context-sensitive M&E framework grounded in:

- Ubuntu philosophy (relational accountability, mutuality)
- Social justice and transformation imperatives
- Engaged scholarship and the co-creation of knowledge

Workshop Purpose

To collaboratively explore and outline the core components of a monitoring, evaluation, and learning system for community engagement that is:

- Contextually relevant to South Africa
- Adaptable across institutions
- Grounded in ethical, participatory, and transformative principles