

PhotoWings “Bursting the Bubble” Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help universities and colleges around the world connect with their local communities and/or promote a connection to the ‘local’ wherever students may land after graduation.

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1. Project Overview

Many higher education institutions can be disconnected from their local communities, living in an “academic bubble” that doesn’t foster an understanding or appreciation for the “local,” nor the value of civic engagement. And conversely, local communities can typecast university students or lack an awareness of the mission and focus of a school right in their backyard. The “**Busting the Bubble: Fostering Connections Between Community and Campus**” project attempts to connect the community and institution of higher education by showcasing and celebrating the friendships, working relationships, and volunteer connections between graduate students and the local community.

The project developed over 10 months and culminated with the sharing of 10 photo narratives of Middlebury Institute students and the connections they have made in the community in photo display in the student dining and study hall, one of the most trafficked buildings on campus. The process involved a mini-education in photography for all participants thanks to our industrious and enthusiastic student photographer, Hanqui “Tom” Wang as well as two workshops that brought participants together to share visions for future collaboration between MIIS and the community as well as personal observations and lessons learned from the process.

This project was jointly sponsored by the Middlebury Institute Committee for Art in Public Places (CAPP), a student and staff led group of volunteers as well as the Graduate School of Immersive Professional Learning and Special Programs Immersive Learning Department. We recommend the project include student involvement, particularly in the form of recruiting students who have made local connections for the workshop and exhibit. Our student photographer chose Rembrandt style lighting for all portraits. This was his preference but also a nice option for projects where photographers do not have funding for equipment. This option allowed us to take classical portraits with simple lighting.

2. Sample Timeline

Task	Timeframe
Base project in department, class, or within club at school	Month 1-2
Assign student to recruit participants through call-out for stories of existing relationships in the community (through jobs, volunteering, or recreational activities)	Month 2-6
Recruit Student Photographer interested in also sharing method and approach with participants during photo shoots	Month 1-2
Student project manager works with photographer and participants to set-up photo shoots	Month 2-6
Project manager collects stories and works with coordinating club or group to select images	Month 6-8
Schedule and plan workshop for participants to share experiences and connect	Month 6-8
Plan and launch exhibit in public space at school	Month 8-10

3. Workshop Design

We offered two workshops, the first involving 10 Middlebury Institute students and their partner community members and the second involving photo subjects as well as the public.

Workshop One: Fostering Connections Between Community and Campus

Who: 10 sets of 1 student and 1 community member with established relationship either through work, volunteering, or extracurricular activity such as martial arts, rock climbing, etc. Attendees also included the photographer and project managers.

Duration: 2 hours

Setting: Design space or classroom with moveable chairs and a comfortable and creative ambience.

Workshop # 1 Outline	Question/Process
Introductions; fostering group connection	Participants introduce themselves and share what they remember from their first time working or meeting partner. <u>Instructions:</u> Students and community members group together and each share

	<p>their story</p> <p>(1 minute per person; 20 minutes total)</p>
What does this connection mean to you?	<p><u>Instructions:</u> Using a “card and chart” project, each participant writes down three words, each on a separate card that describes the connection they’ve developed with their colleague/friend. Participants post index cards or sticky notes on board in clusters. Group stands and reviews results with each pair sharing their experience.</p> <p>(5 minutes for writing; 20 minutes for sharing)</p>
What was your biggest take-away from the photo shoot?	<p><u>Instructions:</u> Groups sit in a U-shape and each share one takeaway.</p> <p>(1 minute per person; 20 minutes total)</p>
Observations from the Photographer	<p>Student photographer shares lessons learned and approach</p> <p>(10 minutes including Q&A with participants)</p>
What could the school do to foster more connections with the community?	<p>Facilitator asks group to write down ideas on index cards. Group then shares ideas (those who are comfortable). Cards are placed on wall.</p>
What could the community do to foster more connections with the school/university?	<p>Facilitator asks group to write down ideas on index cards. Group then shares ideas aloud (those who are comfortable). Cards are placed on wall.</p>
Group Reflection	<p>Group is asked to stand and see if there are any connections between the sets of recommendations.</p>
Conclusion	<p>Group is asked to reflect on biggest take-aways or “ah ha” moments from the workshop.</p> <p>Facilitator(s) summarize findings and send to group; share with other stakeholders including community associations and university administration as fitting.</p>

Workshop Two/Opening Reception: Sharing the Experience with Campus and Community

Who: Project participants, photographer, and the public (campus and community members)

Duration: 2 hours

Setting: in the space where photo exhibit is featured

Workshop #2 Outline	Question/Process
0-30 minutes	Guest arrive and mingle
30-35 minutes	Introduction of exhibit and thank-yous
35-45 minutes	Words from the Photographer
45-1:30 minutes	Groups share their experiences with public (this could also be done as a walkthrough in the exhibit depending on the number of guests and setting); Include Q&A if possible after each exhibit stop.
1:30-2 hours	Guests mingle

Additional Time Option:

We recommend extending the first workshop by 3 hours to use human-centered design-thinking to reinvent engagement between a college and its local community. The Stanford D School and Ideo.org offer curriculum tools for utilizing this method.

The process builds empathy and guides participants through the design-thinking process in which they design an option for their community member partner and vice versa that includes understanding the other participants perspective, needs, interests and then leads to ideation, prototyping, and testing the project/engagement activity proposed. We took inspiration from the Stanford D School Gift Giving Project and asked participants to design a program using photography that would bring students and community members together. We replaced any reference to “gift giving” with “community program”.

4. Outreach Plan

A key goal of the project was to foster awareness across two often disparate groups (college/university students and the local town and/or county/region where the school is located).

Resources for connecting with your local community

Local Media

- Pitch story to local daily or weekly newspapers
- Post on public access tv calendars
- Send as community bulletin or PSA to local TV stations

Local Community Groups

- Invite local Rotary, UN, Kiwanis, Elks Clubs, and other community groups
- Encourage participants to invite one friend/contact from community school
- Connect with local artists or photography groups
- Connect with relevant classes and departments on campus including any staff/faculty working to foster local community connections.

Traveling Exhibit

- Connect with city hall and other public art spaces outside of the college/university to determine if exhibit could rotate around community.
- Connect with coffee shop for possible exhibition

For more information on this exhibit, please contact Carolyn Meyer at cmeyer@middlebury.edu or by phone at 831-647-6417.

5. Additional Curriculum Resources

- [NAFSA's Statement of Ethical Principles](#) (2018)
- [Place-Based Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement](#) (CLDE) Action Collaborative, Association of American Colleges and Universities (2018)
- [How to Build Relationships in Your Host Community](#), Diversity Abroad, by Isra Eldosougi, (February 19, 2017)
- [Challenges and Opportunities of Community Engaged Teaching](#), Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching website, by Joe Bandy (no date)
- [College and University Engagement Initiative](#) (CUEI) and 2020 Carnegie Classification, Swearer Center at Brown University (no date)
- [Youth and adults learn how to use photography as a tool for civic engagement, Michigan State University Extension](#), by Brian Wibby (February 24, 2012)
- [Using Human-Centered Design to Advance Civic Engagement in Nonprofits](#), Stanford Social Innovation Review, by Fiona Kanagasingam (February 21, 2018)
- [The Gift-Giving Project](#), Stanford University Design School (no date)