

University Partnership Playbook



Leverage public resources for the public good



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Introduction

Leverage public resources for the public good.

There are many challenges facing transportation organizations. The transportation sector is growing, with emerging and disruptive technologies that are changing how people interact with transportation systems. However, the number of workers in transportation is on the decline. Public agencies are struggling to meet myriad new demands placed on their services with funding and staff numbers that have typically not grown commensurately. Moreover, changing legislative, funding, and policy environments require a workforce with a wider range of experience and skillsets.

Workforce development and the ability to recruit, retain, and develop a professional workforce capable of fulfilling organizations' mission critical functions over the long-term are crucial for planning and implementing effective transportation systems. Unfortunately, solutions can easily get siloed into human resource departments as agency staff struggle to meet day-to-day operational demands with limited resources. What if agencies made a conscious effort to identify their information needs and skillset gaps and to package these needs into project objectives optimized for undergraduate and graduate student participation? Could an agency address its internal capacity issues to get work done while at the same time exposing students to transportation work?

The challenges transportation agencies are currently facing present a ripe opportunity for establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with higher education institutions. Colleges and universities can bring a lot to the table in terms of multidisciplinary expertise, time and capacity, and a seemingly unending reserve of student energy and enthusiasm. At the same time, students are looking for ways they can make a positive impact, for real-world applications of their emerging knowledge and skills, and for experiences that prepare them for professional practice.

This playbook outlines steps agencies can undertake to launch productive and mutually beneficial partnerships with institutions of higher education, using the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities (EPIC) Model as an example of a proven effective framework. The purpose of the playbook is to encourage and facilitate implementation of new transportation agency/university partnerships by sharing tips, best practices, lessons learned, and case study examples.

The most fulfilling part of working on this project was understanding how my individual actions taken during the course of this project (e.g., collaborating with different partners, gathering details activity data, and using the latest methods for calculating greenhouse gas emissions) could ultimately be used to guide social and political measures aimed at addressing greenhouse gas emissions mitigation efforts.

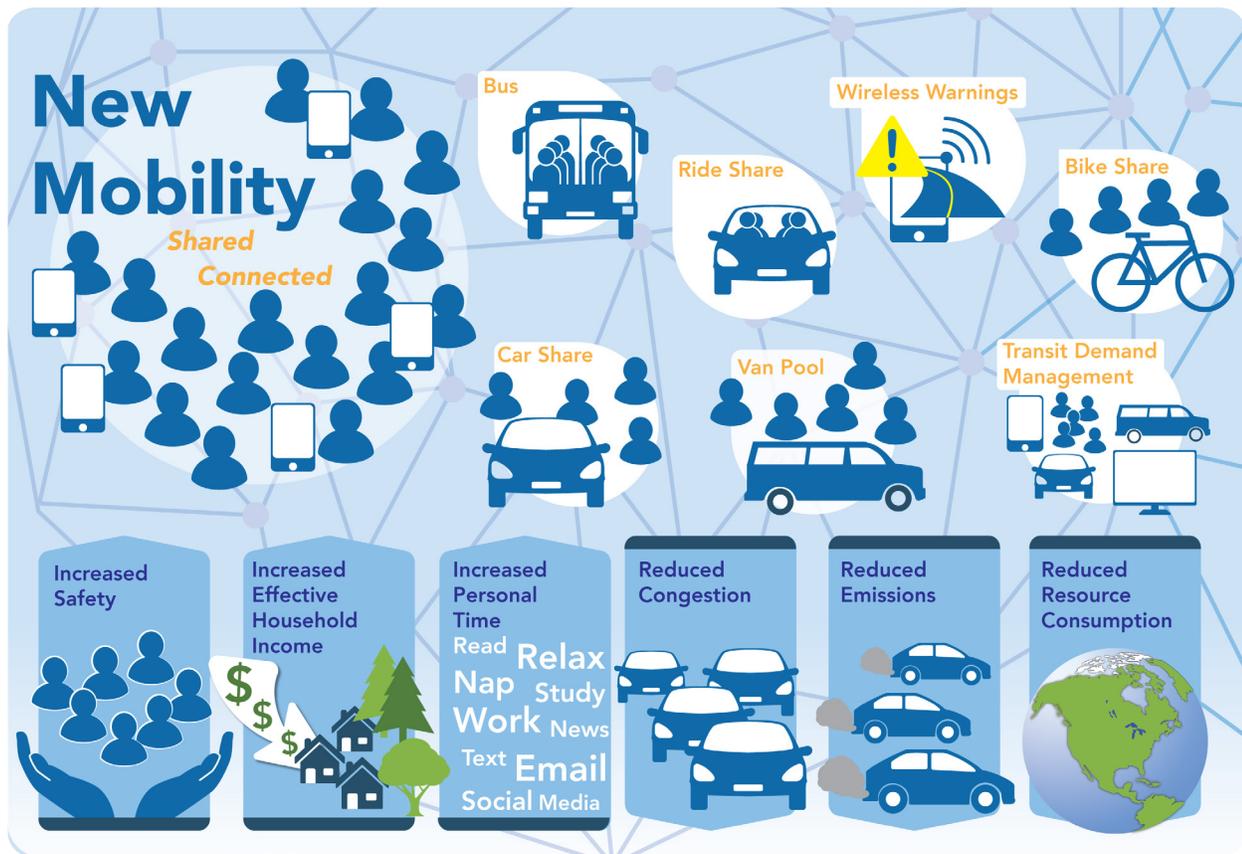
Gonzaga University student

The Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities (EPIC) Model

What is the EPIC Model?

Essentially, the EPIC Model makes university resources (faculty, students, laboratories, specialized and multidisciplinary expertise, etc.) available to public entities to help solve their priority challenges by creating mutually beneficial partnerships. The model provides a mechanism for public agencies to integrate a variety of project tasks into student coursework. In the process, the agency is able to expand its capacity dramatically from what otherwise might be possible with limited staff and available internal resources.

The transportation environment is becoming increasingly multidisciplinary with emerging technologies, increased coordination of services, and linkages between transportation and public health, inequality, and resiliency. All of these factors are shifting traditional mandates of transportation organizations into new realms. Workforce development is a critical component in this new landscape, as agency work often demands expertise outside of the traditional disciplines of civil engineering and planning. Recruitment of entry level professionals likewise needs to expand outside traditional pools. However, if students are not familiar with transportation as a field and are unaware how their academic background and knowledge might be applied to solve important transportation issues, recruitment will remain an issue for agencies.



The EPIC Model provides a promising framework for exposing students from a greater variety of academic disciplines to transportation challenges, and for providing students with opportunities to apply their knowledge to real world problem-solving, to meet with transportation professionals, and to get acquainted with public agency work.

Rather than the more common one-off course project collaboration, the EPIC Model facilitates campus-wide multi-project collaborations by providing a coordination and funding model for universities and agencies to utilize. Larger scale partnerships, which work within the existing administrative frameworks of universities and public agencies, improve outcomes for both entities. For instance, an agency could consider multiple options for a street redesign based on data collected and synthesized by course projects in GIS, civil engineering, business and marketing, economics, or public administration, as well as design ideations produced by students in landscape architecture, architecture, engineering, or art. In the process, students from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds are exposed to real-world problems, gain experience in working for a real client and in producing usable products and deliverables, making EPIC programs an excellent workforce development tool while offering agencies a cost-effective approach to expanding capacity.

EPIC provides agencies with an opportunity to pursue strategic objectives that may have been languishing due to limited staff capacity. The partnership between the university and agencies is an equal one, in which projects are finalized through an iterative process between faculty and agency staff, ensuring that they meet each other's needs. Course projects produce an agreed upon deliverable, which might include a synthesized professional report, multiple design drawings, or feasibility studies that can be used in agency decision-making.

Key Components of the Model

The EPIC Model is meant to fit the administrative structures of both universities and public agencies. A point of contact is identified from the agency and the university to facilitate implementation. For universities with established EPIC Model programs, the university point of contact is easily identified. For new partnerships with universities that do not lead EPIC Model programs, the agency may need to do some initial outreach to identify a university point of contact.

Key aspects:

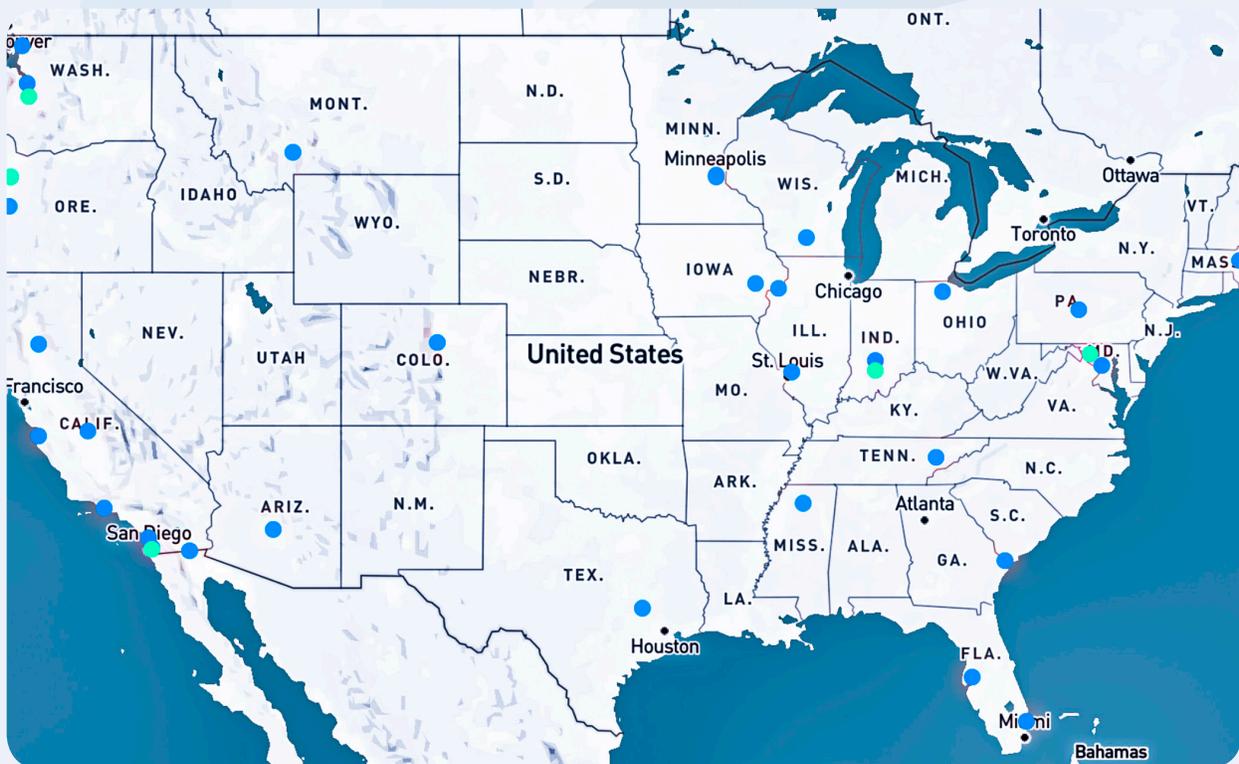
- A coordinator from the agency and a coordinator from the university work closely together on all aspects of the partnership, making it easy for staff members and faculty to plug in;
- Agencies identify the projects;
- Faculty can opt in, selecting projects that coincide with their existing course needs and learning objectives;
- Individual faculty and staff project leads from the public agency co-develop the scope of work, ensuring that the work produced advances the agency's strategic plans while also meeting the students' educational needs; and
- Both sides clearly define and establish funding or other program support mechanisms and expectations prior to the partnership launch.

Addressing a Missed Opportunity

To date, many EPIC program municipal partners successfully integrate transportation-related projects into the portfolio of collaborative work with which students engage. However, while municipalities have actively participated in EPIC programs, fewer transportation agencies have engaged as primary partners for these programs, highlighting a missed opportunity for transportation-focused collaborations. There is underutilized potential for the EPIC Model to be more widely utilized by State Departments of Transportations, local and county roads departments, MPOs, and transit agencies to add capacity to agency projects and to expose a greater number of students to transportation-specific issues and problem-solving.

History of EPIC-N:

In 2009, the University of Oregon launched its first Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP), which connected existing courses across the university over an academic year to a single city and needs identified by that municipality related to sustainability. University of Oregon began providing training and support to other universities interested in implementing this highly successful model for university-agency partnership and student engagement. As more universities adopted and adapted the model to fit their local contexts, it was decided that supporting and expanding the network of model implementers could best be done collectively through the formation of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N). EPIC-N provides opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and develops and disseminates tools and resources that programs can access to facilitate program development and management. It also provides opportunities to learn about the model, through workshops and conferences.



About this Playbook

This playbook uses the EPIC Model as an excellent framework for deriving maximum impact and benefit from a university partnership. However, the playbook is meant as a resource to provide options, tips, and guiding principles, not to dictate a specific approach. Every locality, every agency, and every college and university is different. Agencies should approach the university partnership puzzle with an openness towards adaptation, troubleshooting, and flexibility. The trick is to get started, rather than spending too much time perfecting the plan. Remember, processes can be changed over time to meet evolving needs. Even if you don't have a perfectly laid-out game plan in advance, you can still get the ball moving. When everyone on the team has the same end goal in mind, it's amazing how much progress can be made working together out on the field.

The playbook includes:

- Tried and true implementation steps for organizing a successful university partnership
- Common challenges and fixes
- Adaptations to the model
- Success stories from different locations around the country, which highlight potential outcomes and benefits

Winning Teams

There are many benefits that transportation organizations can accrue through university partnerships. If you think of a university partner as a broad based resource, you can quickly imagine how an academic yearlong partnership would serve to massively expand existing staff capacity, the types of expertise and facilities available to you, the types of questions you could pose, and the options you could consider. In this context, it is easy to imagine the many ways you can put the partnership to work to meet your needs. Some examples:

- Through well thought out course projects, students can gather and compile the information needed to get languishing projects moving again.
- Students may be able to collect baseline data that will improve initial project scoping, a proposal effort, or justify cost allocations.
- Design course projects can provide multiple design ideations for consideration, allowing you to fine-tune your project goals and parameters in the "pre-consultant" phase.

Beyond project work, the collaboration can bolster workforce development goals. Your presence in university classrooms exposes students to the many challenges needing solutions and raises multidisciplinary students' career awareness about the myriad opportunities available in the transportation field. The role the agency plays as "client" to student projects enhances students' professional skills and career competencies as they meet project deadlines and deliverables. Finally, through real world project work, students learn to apply what they are learning to a transportation problem.

The playbook will highlight just a few of the many potential partnership outcomes using examples from various programs in play.

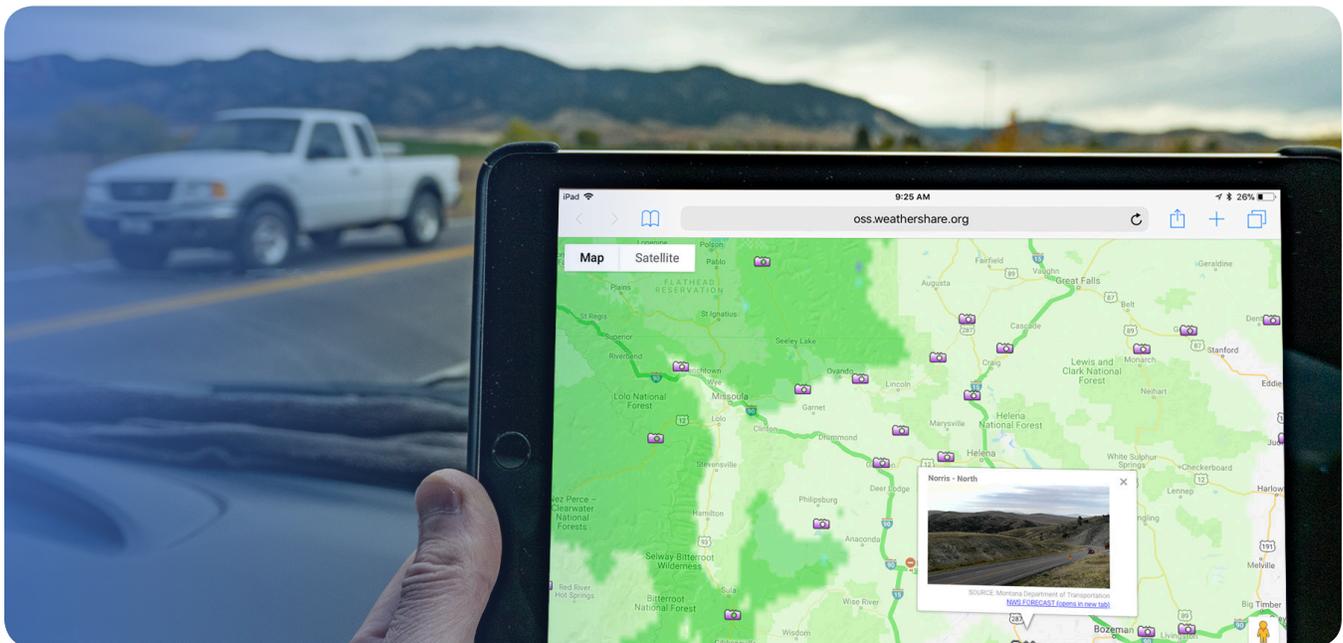
Play 1 Identify internal assets, resources, and gaps

Successful partnerships require time and commitment from both sides. Agency staff must set aside adequate time to identify what they have (e.g. project leads, information resources, data, guidelines, stakeholder connections) and clarify what they need (e.g. data analysis, new data collection, public outreach assistance) to achieve a successful collaboration. A brief scope of work can be developed for each proposed project based on this internal needs assessment. Scopes of work should include, at a minimum, the following items:

- Brief problem statement – what issue is the project addressing?
- Background/context – what work has already been done in this area? What gap does the project address? What data or other resources can the agency provide to students?
- Intended outcomes & deliverable – what product will the students provide at the end of the project? What is the intended use of the deliverable? How will project outcomes address agency goals?
- Internal assets/resources – how does this project link to strategic organizational goals? Who will be the internal project lead and point of contact for the faculty and students involved? What internal funding or other resources can be accessed to support the project? What are the expectations for participation, review, and feedback from the agency to assist student work?
- Other partners – does the project engage other external stakeholders or organizations? What roles will they play?

Internal strategy sessions should involve staff from multiple departments and allow time for discussion. One potential positive outcome from this approach is the identification of overlapping needs across departments.

Tip: A great source for project ideas that will have widespread organizational support is the agency's strategic plan



Play 2 Find a college or university partner

There are currently over 30 colleges and universities that utilize the EPIC Model and are members of the EPIC-Network, providing an easy way to plug in to the model using existing, well-established university programs. Network members can be located using the EPIC-Network website: epicn.org.

However, if there is no nearby EPIC member university, your agency will need to conduct a little more extensive outreach to identify a point of contact at the university of interest. Most agencies have had at least some interaction with higher education institutions located in their state or region, which provides a good starting place. If you have worked with specific faculty in the past, they may be able to make other faculty connections for you at the same institution. Establishing brand new relationships can be intimidating, but “cold call” outreach to universities has also proven effective and rewarding. Key word searches using terms like “community engagement” or “service learning” on a university website can also lead you to appropriate points of contact for project-based courses that engage with external partners. For land grant universities, Extension offices or agents are also a good entry point. Identifying “capstone,” “senior design” or other project-based courses can lead you to appropriate departments and faculty partners. The EPIC-Network also serves as a resource to public agencies and can help you to identify a university point of contact and to make connections.

Well Worth the Call

When Julia Castillo of the Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA) decided that the agency needed to rebrand its image, but didn't have the staff, knowledge, or time to do it internally, she decided students were the answer. Determined not to take no for an answer, she called the main line for Drake University, and after explaining what she needed, she was connected with a faculty member who teaches an Advanced Advertising class. The professor agreed to take on the project. Julia talked with the students during the first class about what her agency wanted to accomplish then came back again at the end of the semester. The result? Three student teams came up with complete marketing campaigns for the agency to choose from. Each campaign included: a creative strategy, brand identity, direct mail campaigns, newspaper and radio spots, a loyalty program, social media, and a marketing campaign budget. Many of the marketing products were then adopted and implemented by HIRTA.

This initial university partnership experience has led to other successful partnerships at multiple regional campuses. Why is Julia such an advocate for student engagement? “Creating a project where two entities can work together and both benefit is a complete WIN-WIN for everyone.” She sees universities as a resource that allows staff to access time and knowledge they may not have within their own agency. Project partnerships create a relationship and mutually shared knowledge, which can lead to bigger ideas and more collaboration. In the process, students learn about rural transit needs and, as Julia notes, “you have most certainly created future transit advocates! Isn't that one of the best types of sustainability for public transit?”

Play 3 Establish rules of the game

Single course project collaborations can oftentimes be fairly informal. However, the more extensive the partnership, the more you will want to establish the rules of the game up front. This may include composing a general Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the university and agency, outlining the responsibilities of each, expected partnership outcomes and products, expected number of courses/projects, and funding mechanisms and expectations.

Individual course project Scopes of Work (SOW) can then be attached to the MOA as addenda. The final SOWs are co-created by the agency project lead and the course faculty lead. The project SOWs will establish the expected outcomes and deliverables of the project as well as the responsibilities of each partner and a clear timeline. Agency staff need to be aware of the academic calendar and resulting time constraints for projects. Delays in providing needed information or data to faculty can completely undermine projects since there is no opportunity to extend project end dates past the end of the semester. Conversely, agencies may have deadlines for deliverables that faculty must accommodate with student project deadlines. Agencies should avoid projects that may present issues with timely production of needed resources.

This project has been filled with rewarding experiences that allowed me to grow as a student and gain valuable professional development...I look forward to using the skills I gained from this project in many situations in my career.

Gonzaga University student

Agency expenditures might include funds to cover the following expenses:

- hiring student research assistants or interns to compile project results into usable final deliverables for the agency;
- purchase of special software, equipment, teaching materials or supplies needed to complete the project;
- travel support for students to visit the agency, present results to stakeholders at meetings, or conduct field work; and
- support for the university coordinator.

Agencies can look for funding sources from general accounts or grants, within specific divisions, or by leveraging resources from other partner organizations (e.g. school districts, counties, cities); in addition, they should work with a university point of contact to determine the easiest methods for implementing agreements and invoices.

Beyond funding support, agencies can also demonstrate “skin in the game” by making staff and resources available to students and faculty as needed. At a minimum, the agency project lead should plan to visit the class early in the semester to provide orientation to the students about the project. If appropriate, it is a good idea for the lead to return to the class for final presentations. Alternately, inviting students to the agency for a celebration of the partnership, display of deliverables, or presentations helps connect both students and faculty from various classes as well as agency staff to the overall partnership impacts.

Play 4 Run with the play you're given

Agencies will get the most out of their partnership if they are engaged and present. A semester-long course moves quickly, so project leads need to be reachable to problem-solve if a project is significantly behind schedule or initial results are not as expected. However, staff should not expect a university partnership to demand considerable amounts of their time or be fearful that they are taking on a significant management burden. On the contrary, the reason EPIC partnerships are so beneficial is that they provide added capacity without placing substantial new management demands on staff time. Once a scope of work has been co-developed with a course instructor, the faculty takes on the project and class management responsibilities. Agency project leads do not need to be directly involved in student activities on a regular basis. In fact, some of the work students can excel at (as compared with agency staff) stems from their position as neutral outsiders, which allows them to engage with communities, ask tough questions, and examine disparities in ways that are not perceived as politically charged, and cover topics at a larger scale. The agency's role is to provide agreed upon resources, to provide real world context and constraints, and to be accessible to faculty to troubleshoot and advise as needed.

Tip: There is no 1:1 correlation between courses and projects. One project may span multiple courses or one course may encompass multiple projects. Leave course matching to your university point of contact as he or she will be most familiar with course offerings and faculty interests.

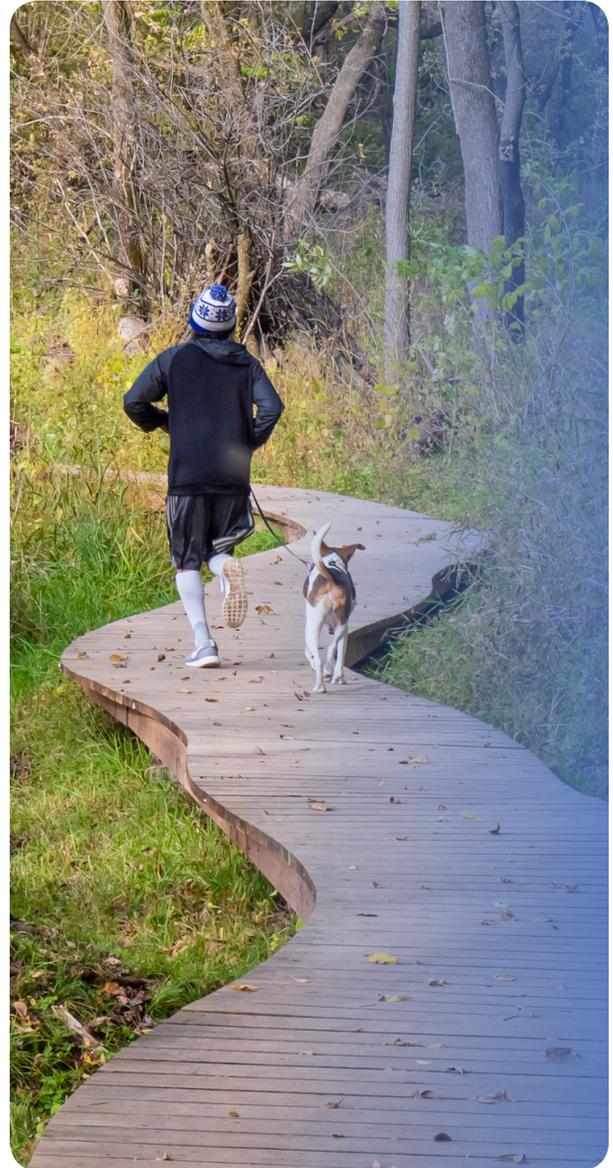


Play 5 Just start

The most common advice from established EPIC Model programs to those considering a new partnership effort? Just start! Program planning can easily bog down agencies and universities alike: Did we include all the relevant players? Have we dotted every 'i' and crossed every 't'? Do we know exactly what we are going to put into this and get out of it? The answer to all of these questions is simply no. Agencies (and universities) should be willing to embrace some of the unknown in exchange for the benefits that new approaches provide.

Don't reinvent the wheel

While this approach may be new to you, it is not untried. Transportation organizations will find many public sector or transit agency peers who have successfully embarked on large-scale university partnerships. Peer-to-peer information exchange can help you access useful ideas, lessons learned, and replicable resources (e.g. MOAs, scopes of work templates, etc.). Individual EPIC program websites will list past partners and projects, providing ready-to-use resources. Agency representatives can also sign up for the EPIC-N listserv and post questions to a network of peers. Paid EPIC-Network membership provides agency and university members with a variety of templates and resources that are helpful in launching new programs, as well as 1-on-1 support and training resources.



Play 6 Consider a pilot year

“Just start” doesn’t necessarily mean “go big or go home.” There is no prescription for how many projects or courses constitute a “real” partnership. Agencies and universities can work together to right-size their partnership to best suit their needs. Many partners implement a pilot year program to test and refine their approach. The pilot year may start with a few course projects. The pilot allows both partners to fully develop how the partnership model will be implemented at their respective institutions. Pilot years that encompass a few courses can establish the structures (MOAs, points of contact, etc.) that make future expansion of the partnership to multiple course projects over an academic year relatively easy. Just as important, outcomes from a pilot year can provide a proof of concept and help build institutional support. Leadership buy-in from both the university and agency side is important in sustaining successful long-term programs.



Courtesy of the University of Nebraska – Omaha, Service Learning Academy

“Just Start!” - Gonzaga University and City of Spokane Partnership Highlights Benefits of University-Agency Project Engagement

Representatives from Gonzaga University and the City of Spokane attended the 2018 EPIC-Network Conference and took the “just start” advice to heart. Following the conference, they embarked on a year-long pilot collaboration to engage students in developing a City of Spokane community and local government operations Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Inventory report. The project collaboration engaged 8 undergraduate students and 1 graduate student over a full academic year to complete the report, which covered both local government operations and a community-scale GHG inventory. The transportation sector contributes a significant portion of GHG emissions, and the report serves as a resource to decisionmakers in identifying energy savings and emission reduction strategies.

Project support from the City ensured that the agency received a high-quality, usable product while ensuring that students developed professional skills by providing opportunities for them to present their work to various audiences. The City supported a graduate student to provide technical writing support and to review the final report, as well as travel to the Washington Oregon Higher Education Sustainability Conference in Seattle where students presented a poster on “Spokane Counts Carbon: Delivering Local Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Inventories through the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities (EPIC) Model.” Students also presented their work to the Mayor’s Cabinet and at City Council meetings, which spurred support for pursuing more of these types of collaborative partnerships.

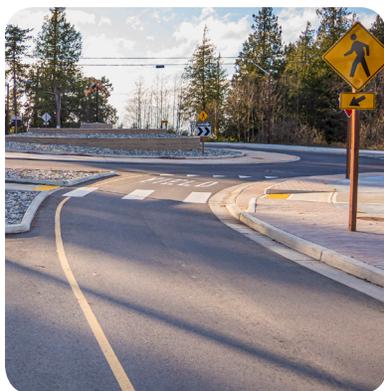
Students noted that opportunities to engage directly with elected officials and municipal decisionmakers and to make meaningful contributions to community efforts to address climate change were especially significant. Student testimonials also underscore the additional professional skills they gained (e.g. working on teams, technical writing, and presentation skills) through participation on the project.

Student professional development was deliberately designed into the project by the City’s Environmental and Sustainability Director and project lead, Cadie Olsen, who is dedicated to workforce development. She made sure that the project was designed to engage students in all aspects of the project, so they were able to participate in the entire process just like staff. The City was pleased with the high quality of the final product, which previously had been a heavy lift for in-house staff. Cadie also noted that the expertise and credibility of the faculty advisor, Civil Engineering professor Alex Maxwell, and the professionalism of the students both served to raise the level of public discourse around greenhouse gas emissions during public meetings. The inventory helps decisionmakers identify issues, but also validates successful strategies. For instance, inventory results demonstrated that Spokane’s transportation sector emissions – even considering air travel – are much lower than the rest of Washington State, which lends support to the City’s aggressive infill development policies and its strong regional transit partnerships, which emphasize multi-modal transportation.

Gonzaga University and the City of Spokane are embarking on additional project partnerships over the current and coming academic year. As Cadie notes, “Spokane is a ‘show me’ town, so this pilot provided a powerful proof of concept for the EPIC-N Model to many City leaders, specifically resulting in greater higher education collaborations between the City’s Innovation and Technology, Streets, and Integrated Capital divisions.”

Play 7 Celebrate your wins

Agency/university partnerships are mutually beneficial, but it can be hard to share the good news across large organizations. Find opportunities to recognize and celebrate the achievements gained and progress made through your partnership efforts. Bring students to your agency to present project results. Consider hosting an event to showcase outcomes. Keep management in the loop. You won't get an excessive celebration violation for doing a victory dance! Spreading the good news helps find new champions, builds institutional support, and promotes long-term sustainability.



Play 8 Leverage what you are already doing to grow

A common challenge facing partnership programs is getting buy-in for new, untried programs. Agencies and universities should try to work within existing organizational structures as much as possible for the least amount of friction. It is likely that your agency has engaged with a course project or student interns in the past. You can point to past examples and successes and highlight opportunities to scale up these types of partnerships. Rather than implementing something totally new, you are maximizing the potential impacts and benefits. On the university side, the partnership can be implemented without creating new courses, which would bog down the process with internal funding allocation and approval procedures. Rather, faculty are able to opt-in to course-based projects that fit their learning objectives. By working within existing institutional structures, the model limits the amount of approvals and red tape that could easily discourage partners and prevent them from just starting. The benefit of longer-term partnerships is that project outcomes from one course can be integrated into later courses to add depth of analysis or to garner input from multiple disciplines.



Students Gain Real-World Transportation Experience in the Lewis Clark Valley

Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho is leveraging its long-standing public agency/college project partnerships in the area of transportation to develop a framework to better institutionalize and expand project partnerships of this kind at the college and in the region. Since 2015, Lewis-Clark State College has been implementing contracted student project work through an internship model in collaboration with the local MPO, cities, and engineering firms. The faculty lead for these project collaborations is Jenni Light, who has extensive experience in industry. In addition to teaching, she also works part-time for a Lewiston engineering firm, which allows her to keep abreast of local projects where the college/students might contribute through contracted services or through service-learning projects.

Lewis Clark Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has been a key partner and many of the projects are transportation focused. Students have contributed to ADA compliance reports, undertaken a downtown Lewiston parking utilization study, conducted a sign inventory for the City of Clarkston, and analyzed turn count movement on 186 intersections in the MPO area including the cities of Asotin, Clarkston, and Lewiston as well as Asotin and Nez Perce Counties and the State of Idaho. Students also staffed the MPO's fair booth to obtain public input on transportation issues in the region. The feedback collected will help inform the Lewis Clark Valley MPO Long Range Transportation Plan update as well as local plans in development.

Lewis Clark Valley MPO Director, Shannon Grow, notes that she likes using student participation in transportation data collection efforts because it provides them with real world experience. "We try to make sure to let the students know when the work they did influenced decisions in the transportation network."



Courtesy of Lewis-Clark State College

Examples from the Field – EPIC Models in Play

#1 University of Oregon and TriMet Partner to Enhance Light Rail Expansion through Student Input

Partnership Overview

The Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) at the University of Oregon fosters collaborations between students and public agencies. Over the course of an academic year, students have the opportunity to work on one or more projects identified by a partner agency, which has been integrated into one or more of their courses. Through these projects, they learn about community challenges and then assist the partner agency in developing ideas and concepts for sustainable solutions. The total number of partner projects completed ranges from 25-30.

*G*aining new perspectives from students on the typical challenges we face with large scale infrastructure projects will be invaluable to the Southwest Corridor Project and to other future efforts.

(from TriMet's SCYP application)

During the 2017/18 academic year, SCYP partnered with TriMet, the tri-county transit agency that operates the transit network throughout the Portland, Oregon region. The collaboration focused on developing student activities to enhance the Southwest Corridor (SWC) project, a plan to expand the light rail system by adding a new 12-mile line in southwest Portland and southeast Washington County. The SWC project provided opportunities for students to work not only with TriMet, but with other stakeholder agencies, including Metro (the regional government), Washington County, Oregon Department of Transportation, and the Cities of Portland, Tigard, and Tualatin. The Southwest Corridor study area contains 11 percent of the region's population and is expected to grow by about 75,000 residents and 60,000 jobs from 2010 to 2040. When constructed, the Southwest Corridor will serve 45,000 students at five colleges and universities located in the project area.



Courtesy of University of Oregon Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP)

Course and Project Implementation

Given the scope of the Southwest Corridor expansion plan, TriMet had no trouble identifying a broad range of student projects, grouped into the four categories of urban mobility, placemaking and urban design, climate change and environment, and public outreach. A few examples include:

- Developing a multi-modal transit app in a product design course.
- Researching federal autonomous vehicle policy development and related legal cases in a law course.
- Exploring how to integrate future shopping center development with sustainable transit development in a planning course.



Courtesy of University of Oregon Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP)

- Developing designs that enhance the heritage and character of neighborhoods adjacent to transit development in a historic preservation course.
- Preparing cost estimates, preliminary construction schedules, and alternative analyses for components of the corridor plan, as part of a capstone course in engineering (at Portland State University).
- Studying the future of urban transport and potential impacts of emerging technologies on the urban mobility ecosystem in a business class.

Benefits

The SCYP at the University of Oregon has grown substantially over the past decade. In a typical SCYP year, more than 500 students across 12 disciplines work on dozens of partner-directed projects. By the end of the partnership with TriMet, students contributed approximately 40,000 hours of effort to help the agency with its sustainability goals. Students also provided a unique and valuable perspective to the development of this light rail line. TriMet is moving forward on a variety of students' recommendations, including a new transit app.

"SCYP was the single most valuable component of my undergraduate education. Working with the cities of Albany and Tualatin gave me real experience that enabled me to contribute to a sustainable future for Oregon's cities."

- Alex Nelson, Class of 2018; Planning, Public Policy and Management

"The Sustainable City Year Program provided unique opportunities for applied learning that helped me serve Oregon. As a future city manager, the applied skills that I learned and the city connections that I made ensured that I would be able to land a job when I graduated.

- Michael Thomas, Class of 2019, Master of Public Administration; current City Manager, City of Amity

#2 SCP and Metro Transit: Planning for the Future of Transit in Minneapolis/St. Paul

Partnership Overview

The Sustainable Communities Partnership (SCP), based at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, is a member of the EPIC Network. SCP conducts projects with multiple communities and agencies in the Minneapolis/St. Paul region to engage students in problem solving around the various ecological, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability.

SCP has cultivated a successful partnership with the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit that has launched multiple projects centered on regional and transit planning. Metropolitan Council is the primary regional policy making and planning agency for the Twin Cities metropolitan region, and Metro Transit operates an integrated, multi-modal network of transit services to the region. According to the Metropolitan Council, the partnership provided an opportunity to “kick-start” special projects: “Oftentimes we may have projects that require peripheral research, or we may have difficulty allocating staff resources to particular project areas, and SCP allows for sufficient flexibility and collaboration to really move projects and research forward.”

Course and Project Implementation

To address issues related to transportation, the University and Metro Transit worked together to offer nine multi-disciplinary courses that enhanced student knowledge and skills on transportation-related topics, while also helping Metro Transit conduct research and collect data for transit planning and improvements. Courses included:

- A communications course in which students created marketing materials to promote transit services to college students.
- A marketing course in which students learned to conduct surveys about transportation choices and preferences.
- A psychology of sustainability course that developed behavior change strategies to deter littering at transit stops.
- A business Spanish course in which students conducted customer satisfaction surveys with native Spanish speakers.
- A systems operations course and systems design course that developed standard operating procedures and associated technological solutions for a new vehicle tracking system.
- An economics/data analysis competition to identify research questions and glean real-world implications from transit passenger counts and ridership data.
- A social justice course to research the stories of transit riders and learn how services impact their lives.

Benefits

Many of the benefits from this partnership will enhance workforce development efforts and transit planning well into the future. The courses introduce students to the breadth of career opportunities within the field of transportation and provide grounding in emerging and highly desirable skills like data collection and analysis, systems design, market research, new communication strategies, and human factors/behavior. Metro Transit gains an understanding of the transportation needs and preferences of the next generation of potential riders and opportunities to incorporate this knowledge into planning and system enhancements.

Through working with aspiring student leaders, we have the opportunity to shape the future skills needed to overcome the many challenges that lie ahead for the Twin Cities metropolitan region.

(Metropolitan Council)



Courtesy of University of St. Thomas SCP Program

Next Steps and Resources

Ready to get in the game? You don't have to go it alone. There are a lot of helpful resources out there as well as a peer network to access for assistance. Some go-to resources are listed here for reference.

The West Region Transportation Workforce Center (WRTWC)

The West Region Transportation Workforce Center supports increased student engagement in real world project-based learning experiences by fostering partnerships between universities and public agencies. To this end, the WRTWC gathers and posts success stories of university/agency partnerships. Information on linkages to the development of transportation career pathway programs and new resources pertinent to transportation organizations are also shared with the WRTWC network.



To access resources and join the network: wrtwc.org



Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N)

The EPIC-N website lists universities with individual recognized EPIC Model programs. The list includes live links to individual program websites. The program websites are an excellent resource for learning about types of projects that have been implemented, which partners have been involved, and structures that are in place at various locations.

The website also provides access to a wide range of resources and tools. These resources include examples of requests for proposals, partnership agreement contracts, project tracking tools, faculty and student resources, and a start-up toolkit. EPIC-N additionally offers a listserv and webinars, disseminates a newsletter, and hosts an annual conference as well as regional workshops. Staff are available to help you reach your goals and answer questions. Contact information is also found on the website.



For a fee, agencies or universities can also request a site visit from EPIC trainers (cost depends on travel, lodging, etc.). EPIC-N also offers the option of a paid membership, which opens up access to additional resources, including more

example documents, 1-on-1 support, evaluation and marketing support, and a member learning commons.

To access resources: epicn.org



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Unless otherwise noted, all photos courtesy of Neil Hetherington, WTI-MSU.