CAMPUS COMPACT FUNDS FOR POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT

Arizona and the Southwest: A Moveable Feast for Positive Community Engagement

Project Humanities
Arizona State University
Campus Compact Funds for Positive Community Engagement

Title: Arizona and the Southwest: A Moveable Feast for Positive Community Engagement

Please describe in 500 words or fewer. Your description should include a brief account of the challenge this project is intended to address; (2) key activities in the project, (3) significant project dates, and (4) any context that will help reviewer understand the project.

Ernest Hemingway described a moveable feast as Paris, “Where ever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you.” Arizona is our southwest Paris. It stays with us for the rest of our lives, so it is important that we build positive relationships by talking, listening and connecting within our communities, across cultures, disciplines, professions and even generations.

Arizona and the Southwest: A Moveable Feast for Positive Community Engagement proposes to bring together individuals and communities to engage in meaningful critical dialogue about our individual and our shared humanity. In the face of never-ending news cycles, social media feeds and crawling headlines, and sidebars advancing most often the worst of our human actions, reactions, and interactions, we propose to engage humanities disciplines as the vehicle for bringing our university and surrounding communities together geographically, politically, and socially around critical topics that impact us all.

The umbrella under which we offer this programming is “Place and Place-making,” in our specific location in the Sonoran desert of southwest Arizona where dustiness and heat represent a lack of and a need for communications and interactions that help us better understand our individual lives within our ever-changing world. Our conversations are both locally and nationally necessary as headlines and news stories remind us almost hourly that divisiveness, violence, incivility, inhumanity, and misunderstanding need not overwhelm or disempower individuals and communities committed to effecting positive and impactful change in our world. Hence, our focus is not on dryness and moisture but rather on the aridity that emerges from such natural elements.

Project Humanities will organize and lead (4) Moveable Feasts, bringing together 50-65 individuals for community feasts to catalyze positive engagement among Arizonans.

Such community meals will be held at local restaurants or other eating venues, and offer an opportunity in a relaxed social setting to facilitate discussions and for participants to explore a wide variety of topics. Two Moveable Feasts will take place in fall 2017 and two in spring 2018:

- Aridity and the Desert: Identity, Community, Place, and Progress uses music, performance, and poetry to explore “aridity” and the basic human need for tolerance, social harmony, and civility.

- Aridity and the Desert: Politics and Politicians: Are we losing our humanity? uses narrative and storytelling to explore the unique place of Arizona in national political conversations about education, healthcare, immigration, and borders.
• Aridity and the Desert: Life on Mars considers cultures and their futures. As we witness modern expeditions into space and cyberspace, what is controlling the human need to explore and mark territory? How do these expeditions raise questions about the sustainability of our planet, our cultures, and our humanity; especially the southwest with its own sustainability resources and challenges?

• Aridity and the Desert: Homelessness and Human Vulnerability uses visual arts and photography to bring attention to some of the most vulnerable and neglected Americans. Participants will share stories about homelessness and instability by actively creating art during this “Moveable Feast.”

Please describe any additional institutional-specific goals:

ASU Project Humanities’ Mission Alignment

Project Humanities works to broaden audience perspectives and to show the interconnectedness of humanities within and across disciplines. We also strive to create positive within individuals and communities across political, socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural boundaries, and in our daily lives. Aligning seamlessly with our institution’s design imperatives to be socially embedded and to leverage our place-- in the southwest, in Arizona, in an urban fast-growing city--Project Humanities is both a leader and a catalyst for community- and bridge-building. We engage individuals and communities through discussions and seminars, multidisciplinary events, community forums, symposia, performances, exhibitions, lectures, workshops, trainings, film screenings, and more.

Arizona State University’s Goals Alignment: 1) Enhance our local impact and social embeddedness and 2) Establish ASU as a leading global center for interdisciplinary research, discovery and development by 2025.

If all goes as you hope, how will this project lead to positive engagement?

While we may be connected electronically more than ever and faster than ever, there is compelling evidence that we are also more divided than ever. With social media and media, it is increasingly easy to surround ourselves only with those who are like us. Our goal is to show that while we may be different in our values, personal tastes, behaviors, and attitudes, we are indeed more alike than we are unalike (Maya Angelou). The “Moveable Feast” community meals will allow people to become friends. We humanize our friends and support people we know even if we do not always agree with their views and perspectives. We also want to practice mindful listening such that we are listening to understand and to enhance. Using the platform of Project Humanities and of Arizona State University as the largest university in the country, we see this opportunity as a viable piece of our growing Humanity 101 Movement to promote and practice these seven values that are indeed fundamental to any and all success: respect, integrity, kindness, forgiveness, empathy, compassion and self-reflection. We are committed to promoting conversations that unify and enlighten, and promote the notion that engaging multiple aspects of diversity makes us better individuals, better families, better neighbors, better communities, and ultimately a better world. Those who attend these four “Moveable Feasts” will be connected, empowered, and included; thus witnessing and facilitating the transformative power of civic and community engagement.
We are interested in identifying promising practices, so we ask you to consider the evidence your project might generate. How will you know whether you are making progress toward the project goals? What kinds of qualitative or quantitative data will you gather? How will you make sense of the date you gather? (Up to 250 words)

We will approach identifying practices of positive engagement from the evidence gathered from this project as a qualitative research study. We will create research questions that guide our understanding of positive engagement in the context of topics that address the challenges of our ongoing and new social and political climate.

Project Humanities will collect written evaluations and will record (audio, visual, or written) the stories of volunteering participants who are interested in sharing their perspectives on the topics of each “Moveable Feast” before and after the event, giving people the opportunity to self-reflect on the experience. The qualitative data will be analyzed by looking for meaningful patterns and themes around specific items in the data (content analysis and thematic analysis), noting deviations, and seeing what stories emerge from the data that shed light on identifying promising practices for positive engagement around the topic of each “Moveable Feast.”

We will analyze this data by interpreting what the findings mean, how the findings help answer the research question(s), and draw implications from the findings by connecting what we learned from the analyzed data and the findings of other corresponding analysis.

How will you document the story of the project so that others can easily understand it and learn from it? (i.e. video, blog, article, etc.)

Project Humanities will document the story of the project in a combination of video, media and news stories, and articles written about the Moveable Feast on the Project Humanities website.