

IDEA Center vision on inclusive engagement

Erasmus University Rotterdam strives to be an engaged university that is locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally connected. To do so effectively, it also requires an internal organisational culture of engagement. As such, engagement is a dynamic and multifaceted process that connects universities with the communities they serve both on campus and beyond. Whether through research, education, direct engagement with society, or organisational culture, engagement is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

To guide meaningful engagement, IDEA Center at EUR has delineated the IDEA-L principles for inclusive engagement. These five interconnected principles – Inclusive engagement, Diverse engagement, Equitable engagement, Accessible engagement, and Lasting engagement- guide inclusive engagement in all domains of academic life: research, teaching, institutional culture, and partnerships with society. These principles are guiding orientations, rather than fixed rules. Think of engagement as a journey, not a destination, for which these principles can function as a guide to help institutions reflect on how engagement is done, who it includes, what it reinforces, and what it might transform.

The IDEA-L principles for inclusive engagement are deeply intertwined with each other and must work together to create meaningful, effective, and long-lasting engagement. Not integrating all principles can create unintended consequences or weaken engagement efforts. For example; Inclusion without accessibility leaves collaborators behind; diversity without equity risks tokenism; equity without inclusion can lead to top-down solutions that do not reflect community needs; inclusion without diversity creates a narrow or homogenous perspective; accessibility without equity means some barriers are removed, but deeper systemic issues remain; and sustainability (lasting) without equity can perpetuate unfair systems - just to name a few. To bring these principles to life, we have outlined a set of practical strategies* that translate these principles into action. In addition, we include an in-depth case example which illustrates how these principles can be embedded into every aspect of societal engagement. Taken together, these principles, strategies, and real-life example help us move beyond abstract commitments and ground our approach to engagement in reflection, intentionality, and shared responsibility.

*Note: The strategies listed under each principle are not exhaustive, nor are they intended as a fixed checklist. Their relevance and application will vary depending on the context, the communities involved, and the domain of engagement – whether research, teaching, institutional culture, or external collaboration. Use them as starting points to reflect on what inclusive, diverse, equitable, accessible, and lasting engagement could look like in your specific setting.

It is important to recognize that IDEA-L engagement often requires significantly more time, resources, and relational effort than traditional, transactional forms of engagement. It demands sustained trust-building, meaningful co-creation, and structural responsiveness. However, motivated by both social justice and quality, it leads to more ethical, relevant, and impactful outcomes – and ultimately outperforms conventional approaches in terms of depth, legitimacy, and sustainability.

The IDEA-L principles for inclusive engagement



The inclusive engagement principle

We are committed to including all perspectives- especially those who are underrepresented due to systemic barriers- in shaping how we work, what we value, and what we create, both within the university and beyond.

Strategies for inclusive engagement

- Recognize expertise across roles and communities: Value and actively include the expertise of internal and external colleagues and partners – not only in setting agendas and making decisions, but also in shaping how problems are understood, what questions are asked, and what outcomes are considered meaningful.
- Create a welcoming environment: Actively challenge exclusionary norms and behaviors to make participation safe, respectful, and meaningful.
- Be guided by cultural context: Let the perspectives, identities, traditions, and lived experiences of those you engage with – both within and beyond the university – inform the format, tone, and rhythm of engagement processes.
- Honor multiple forms of knowledge: Value community-based knowledge, lived experiences, and cultural knowledge on equal footing with academic knowledge – for example, by offering co-authorship, co-design, or co-teaching.
- Co-create from the start: Develop engagement goals, activities and questions with diverse internal and external communities.



The diverse engagement principle

We embrace all perspectives— ensuring that visible and invisible diversity is reflected in our teams, culture, and partnerships.

Strategies for diverse engagement

- Be representative: Form teams and partnerships that reflect the diversity of the communities you engage with, across all levels of hierarchy- including leadership, facilitation, and outreach roles.
- Partner with diverse organizations and networks: Ensure that especially those that are grassroots, community-led, youth-based, or typically underrepresented in academic collaborations are incorporated in your network.
- Proactively involve underrepresented perspectives and experiences from the outset: Expand who is invited to shape priorities, participate in design, and inform decision-making.



The equitable engagement principle

We confront and redress systemic barriers — ensuring that all participants have the resources, opportunities, and power to engage on fair and meaningful terms.

Strategies for equitable engagement

- Engage as equals: Recognize and address the power dynamics that shape whose knowledge and perspectives are prioritized, ensuring that all participants and collaboration partners have meaningful influence and agency.
- Meet people where they are: Hold engagement activities in spaces that are familiar to participants, rather than expecting them to come to institutional environments. Prioritize community settings that feel safe, welcoming, and contextually relevant.
- Build space for trust: Allow time and resources to address and mitigate any personal or project-based hesitations, (systemic) mistrust, and/or (institutional) unfamiliarity, recognizing that these may reflect systemic harms or exclusions.

- Compensate contributions fairly: Acknowledge and compensate community members for their (intellectual, emotional, and logistic) contributions, through appropriate recognition, payment, or credit.
- Embed equity in planning: Budget for accessibility, trust-building, and reciprocity into funding proposals, project planning, and institutional systems.



The accessible engagement principle

We address diverse needs (in tone, timing, tools, and formats) so that everyone can participate fully, comfortably, and meaningfully.

Strategies for accessible engagement

- Use plain, inclusive language in all communications: Avoid academic or professional jargon unless it is jointly unpacked and adapt formats and tone to different audiences and needs.
- Be sensitive to emotional and cultural nuance: Listen closely, avoid assumptions, and create space for people to show up fully, without having to navigate unspoken expectations or hidden norms.
- Design engagement methods to be fit for purpose: Tailor the pace, methods, and formats of engagement to the specific needs and sensibilities of the community/individual and to the context, including physical, sensory, and neurodiverse accessibility, as well as non-digital, in-person, asynchronous, multilingual, or low-barrier formats.
- Involve experience experts in access design: Involve people with lived experience of exclusion in designing and reviewing accessibility measures, recognizing they are best positioned to name what works and what doesn't.



The lasting engagement principle

We invest in long-term relationships and structures that support ongoing collaboration and systemic change.

Strategies for lasting engagement

- Show up over time: Maintain a consistent and reciprocal presence both by showing up in community spaces and by creating space for community actors

within the university. Lasting engagement requires long-term relationship building, not just project-based contact.

- Set honest expectations: Be transparent about what can and cannot be influenced, and communicate clearly about roles, responsibilities, and expectations from the beginning.
- Design for evolution: Design for flexibility- build in space to adapt goals, methods, and timelines in response to shifting community priorities, new knowledge, or changing conditions.
- Create shared accountability: Create shared structures for accountability throughout the collaboration.
- Evaluate with care: Embed reflection and evaluation into the engagement process, using both qualitative and relational indicators of impact- and involving partners and participants in defining what success looks like.
- Share lessons openly: Document not just successes, but also tensions and failures, to support collective learning and continuity.

Case study: Embedding inclusive engagement through EUR's Academic Outreach Programme

Academic domain: Engagement with society

The Academic Outreach Programme at Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) exemplifies how inclusive engagement can be executed structurally and strategically within the university's societal mission. The programme supports Rotterdam pupils, historically underrepresented in academic education, to explore and access academic pathways. In doing so, it operationalizes all five IDEA-L principles of inclusive engagement: Inclusive, Diverse, Equitable, Accessible, and Lasting.



At the heart of the programme is a commitment to **inclusive engagement**. From its inception, it was co-created with pupils, caregivers, educators, school administrators, community organisations, and university students (i.e., student ambassadors) and staff to ensure that goals, priorities, and delivery formats of the programme not only reflect a shared mission but also respond directly to the systemic barriers that shape unequal access to academic education. Stakeholders are not merely consulted—they are actively invited to shape the programme's direction and delivery, recognising that those closest to the problem often hold the clearest insight into its solutions. By valuing lived experience, cultural knowledge, and community insights alongside academic perspectives, the programme works to challenge dominant narratives about talent and merit. Role models (i.e., university students and staff) who share the backgrounds of pupils are involved throughout—from design to delivery—creating spaces where pupils can see their own identities reflected in academic contexts. This fosters recognition, belonging, and a more just sense of what is possible.



Diverse engagement is reflected in who is engaged and how. The programme team, including its student ambassadors and university staff, is intentionally diverse and share linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds with the pupils they engage with. This mirrors the lived realities of the communities the programme engages with and helps build trust and relatability. The programme also works with partners who bring different forms of diversity—grassroots initiatives, youth-led collectives, and schools—ensuring that outreach efforts are not just limited to formal institutions but also rooted in the lived experiences of underrepresented groups. Student-ambassadors are invited to take on leadership roles, shaping new programme directions and reflecting a commitment to representation and relevance.



To ensure **equitable engagement**, the programme recognises that unequal access to academic education is rooted in systemic barriers—ranging from socioeconomic disadvantage to institutional bias and lack of

representation. It responds by designing outreach activities that are low-threshold, relationship-driven, and sustained over time, particularly in schools where academic aspiration is often undermined by structural disadvantage. Engagement takes place in familiar and trusted environments, such as local schools and community centres, as well as on university grounds to combat unfamiliarity with university spaces. Resources are dedicated to building trust and making space for pupils and caregivers to voice their needs and doubts. The programme also compensates student ambassadors and community contributors fairly, acknowledging that equity requires redistributing not only opportunities but also recognition and resources. Planning processes account for this by embedding concrete measures—such as budget lines for community partner honoraria and logistical support for on-campus activities—into project proposals and institutional frameworks. These are treated as essential components of equitable engagement, not as optional extras. Importantly, collaboration partners are not required to pay for the outreach activities, removing financial barriers to participation and ensuring that collaboration partners serving under-resourced communities can still fully benefit from the programme.



Accessible engagement is central to how the programme communicates and operates. Written materials are prepared in plain, inclusive language, and key documents, such as invitations and consent forms are translated into multiple community languages, including Arabic, Dutch, English, French, Polish, Spanish, and Turkish. Where necessary, workshops and stakeholder engagement activities, are scheduled outside of standard working hours or offered online to accommodate caregivers. Sessions are adapted in length, tone, and delivery method to suit different groups. These might include shorter, interactive sessions for younger pupils or multilingual formats for families. In addition to traditional communication tools, the programme also uses channels that may be more familiar or accessible to different communities, such as messaging apps or face-to-face contact, rather than relying solely on email or printed letters. This flexible approach to communication helps ensure messages reach their intended audience and supports stronger, more reciprocal relationships. Engagement methods are developed in dialogue with those who have lived experience of exclusion, such as first-generation university students and community workers, ensuring that accessibility is not a one-size-fits-all concept but tailored to real needs, preferences, and lived realities.



Finally, the programme is designed with **lasting engagement** in mind. Rather than approaching outreach as a series of isolated initiatives, the programme is grounded in long-term relationships, shared goals, and mutual commitment. Strategic engagement with schools and communities is built over multiple years, fostering continuity and trust. Partners are actively involved in shaping activities and goals through regular joint reflection moments. This ensures that the programme remains responsive to changing needs and priorities. Partners are engaged with

transparency around goals and limiting factors, and reflective evaluation practices are built in throughout not only to measure outcomes, but to cultivate mutual learning. When financial or structural constraints limit the scope of programming, the emphasis remains on working together to explore alternative paths — without compromising on the commitment to shared goals and equitable effort. Success is not predefined unilaterally but co-defined with partners, allowing for shared accountability and continuous learning. Lessons learned, including challenges and failures, are documented and shared internally and externally to support a culture of transparency and long-term institutional learning.

The academic outreach programme at EUR thus shows that inclusive engagement is not a checklist but a living practice. The IDEA-L principles are embedded in everyday decisions and long-term commitments, resulting in an approach to societal engagement that is relational, systemic, and transformative.