

The Engaged University:

Engaging students, research,
and communities

Burnaby, Canada





General Information

Title	The Engaged University: Engaging students, research, and communities	
Pitch	How to develop a vision and a strategy for an engaged university through a dialogue-driven sense-making process	
Organisation	Simon Fraser University	
Country	Canada	
Author	Dr. Thorsten Kliewe (University Industry Innovation Network)	
Nature of interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration in R&D <input type="checkbox"/> Commercialisation of R&D results <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility of staff <input type="checkbox"/> Academic entrepreneurship <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Governance	<input type="checkbox"/> Lifelong learning <input type="checkbox"/> Joint curriculum design and delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility of students <input type="checkbox"/> Student entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> Shared resources
Supporting mechanism	<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operational <input type="checkbox"/> Policy	
Summary	<p>Simon Fraser University (SFU) has developed and implemented its vision and strategy to be <i>the leading engaged university</i>. The university undertook a dialogue-driven and iterative sense making process that aimed to better understand what SFU stood for at that time and what it should stand for. The term 'engagement' emerged from the extensive consultation process with internal and external stakeholders as the core attribute to all functions, including education, research and SFU's linkage to the community. Based on this, SFU developed a strategy and various initiatives that today contributes to the university's vision of being an engaged university.</p>	



Introduction & Overview

1. BACKGROUND

Simon Fraser University (SFU), named after an early explorer of the British Columbia region in which SFU is located, opened in 1965 with 2,500 students. Around 50 years later, the university has three distinctive campuses, 30,000 students, 6,500 faculty and staff, as well as 140,000 alumni, and has matured into **one of the world's leading teaching and research universities**.

Consistently ranked as Canada's top comprehensive university and named in the Times Higher Education list of 100 world universities under 50 years old (rank 27 in 2015; the last year in which SFU was able to join the league table), SFU is also the first Canadian research university to be accredited by the United States Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU).

SFU is located on British Columbia's west coast, **embedded in a competitive and diverse higher education landscape**.

2. OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATIONS

When Prof. Andrew Petter became SFU's president in 2010, he had a sense that while the university developed and implemented a variety of impact-generating programmes and activities in education, research and the so-called 'third mission', they were not optimally structured and communicated in a coherent way, missing **opportunities for advancing SFU's competitiveness and growth**.

Influenced by existing concepts, such as the ideas put forward by Jim Collins in his book 'Good to Great and the Social Sectors', President Petter and SFU set out to identify:

- ▶ what SFU was **good** at (and what they could be the best at in Canada and in the world);
- ▶ what SFU staff, students and alumni were deeply **passionate** about; and
- ▶ which **resources** were needed and which ones were accessible

to develop a strategic vision and strategy that clearly differentiates SFU from other universities in the province of British Columbia, in Canada and beyond.

3. STAKEHOLDERS

Rather than developing the new strategic vision behind closed doors, SFU decided to make the development process as open and engaging as possible, involving a large variety of internal and external stakeholders, including but not limited to:

- ▶ **SFU** (university leaders and managers, students, staff from service units and the administration, faculty members, and alumni);
- ▶ **Industry** (business and industry representatives, arts organisations);
- ▶ **Local community** (aboriginal people, multicultural community leaders, teachers, secondary school students, parents of high-school age children); and
- ▶ **Government representatives** (mayors and councils of BC municipalities).





Implementation

4. INPUTS

The strategic vision development process was time-intensive given the engaging nature of the process. Central resources that were put into the multi-year process included:

Human resources: The strategic vision development process was a dialogue-driven and iterative one, which meant that the most critical human resources were the aforementioned internal and external stakeholders. Without the input of these stakeholders, SFU would not have been able to achieve its main goal of developing a vision that reflects the wants and needs of the stakeholders that SFU aims to serve.

The primary resources were the secondment of the majority of time of three senior staff to the project over a period of one year. In addition, a modest non-salary budget was allocated for contractors and facilities cost. A number of faculty and staff volunteered their time to act as facilitators.

The entire development process also required the high-level commitment of SFU's university leadership and management as the entire process was managed internally, without external consultants. To get further impetus, university leaders and managers also visited various other universities and initiatives around the world.

Financial resources: Given the high level of human resources required to develop and especially implement the new university vision and strategy over the next decades, SFU launched the *Power of Engagement* fundraising campaign in 2014. As of September 2016, SFU raised a record-breaking CAD\$275m (€196.2m), well surpassing its CAD\$250m (€178.3m) goal.

5. ACTIVITIES

SFU was confident that the various programmes and activities that have been implemented in the past years and decades were generating wide-spread social, cultural and economic impacts. However, a strategic concept that incorporates all these successful initiatives and gives direction for the future was missing. Thus, SFU started a **process of sense-making** to identify how SFU's DNA can be best formulated and communicated.

The vision development process took place over an intense five-month period although subsequent strategic plans were developed over a **period of several years**.

The vision development process, named '*envision>SFU*', started with an **internal consultation process** in February 2011. The university kicked off the process with a **webcast presentation and panel discussion** combined with the release of **discussion papers** and the launch of the ***envision>SFU* website**. A variety of activities aimed to create a conducive platform for internal and external stakeholders to engage with SFU and to jointly work on discovering SFU's DNA. Ten main questions were used to generate discussion during the process.

Over the next two months, a **dialogue event** with more than 150 students, staff and faculty members as well as a total of 13 **focus groups**, with representatives from the same stakeholder groups, were held at SFU's campuses in Burnaby, Surrey and Vancouver. In addition, until November 2011, various

community engagement activities, such as meetings with business and industry groups, arts organisations, aboriginal people, multicultural communities, SFU supporters as well as governmental representatives (including meetings with the mayors and councils of eight cities) were held. The personal engagement process was accompanied by an **extensive digital engagement process** that enabled internal and external stakeholders to inform themselves and provide input (e.g. to the 10 guiding questions) through the *envision>SFU* website, e-mail, Twitter, and Facebook.

SFU's resulting new vision was announced on February 20, 2012.

In 2012, following this extensive vision development consultation process with internal and external stakeholders, SFU began the development of its first community engagement strategy. Building on the community engagement objectives identified in the *envision* process, **interviews and discussion rounds** were held **with all SFU Deans and community engaged units** (student services, alumni relations, continuing studies community education, etc.) to develop the strategy for the vision. In order to integrate **external ideas and good practices** from around the world, the university also undertook visits to the University of Brighton, Bristol University, Newcastle University, and UK Public Engagement Project and scanned community engagement units at universities in Canada, the UK, USA and Australia.

In 2013, SFU fostered dialogues and discussions with various internal and external advisory groups and hosted Community Engagement Dialogues.

Last but not least, the developed community engagement strategy was presented to the Board of Governors and received approval.

6. OUTPUTS

Throughout the *envision>SFU* consultation process the term 'engagement' emerged as the most widely discussed one. The term became the core attribute to all functions, from education to research, to SFU's linkage to the community. Ultimately, this resulted in SFU's strategic vision: **"To be the leading engaged university defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research and far-reaching community engagement"**¹. Guiding future action and innovation, the engaged university was further defined in SFU:

- ▶ **Engaging students:** to equip SFU students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare them for life in an ever-changing and challenging world;
- ▶ **Engaging research:** to be a world leader in knowledge mobilisation building on a strong foundation of fundamental research;
- ▶ **Engaging communities:** to be Canada's most community-engaged research university.

Engaging Communities became a central element in SFU's new strategy. Community Engagement was thus embedded into SFU 2013-2018 Academic and Research Plans², with a number of academic plan objectives identified for the Faculties and Departments to undertake.

In their 2013 Community Engagement Strategy Report³, SFU defined the goal of their engaged university vision as 'to be Canada's most community-engaged research university', and outlined the following objectives to realise the goal:

- ▶ **Integration:** SFU will maintain and expand its community connections as an integral part of its academic mission, creating opportunities for practical and experiential learning; informing and inspiring research; and contributing to its relevance and success;
- ▶ **Reach:** SFU will develop partnerships and maximise the capacities of its three campuses to enhance the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities locally and globally;
- ▶ **Relationships:** SFU will build respectful and mutually beneficial community relationships;
- ▶ **Lifelong Learning:** SFU will meet the lifelong learning needs of students, alumni and the community, and respond with innovative programmes and learning opportunities for academic, personal and professional development;
- ▶ **BC's Public Square:** SFU will be BC's public square for enlightenment and dialogue on key public issues; it will be the institution to which the community looks for education, discussion and solutions.

Following the finalisation of this strategy, this vision was also integrated into a strategic institutional community engagement plan that fostered involvement of stakeholders at all levels.



7. IMPACTS

SFU's new vision and its strategy to put this vision into reality provided significant impacts in the course of the past several years.

With respect to **student preferences**, while difficult to ascertain the influence of its new vision, SFU has continued to attract both domestic and international students. In terms of its reputation, the **SFU external reputation survey** (Spring 2016) highlighted that people believe that 'SFU supports the community' (59% versus SFU's closest competitor of 52%), 'SFU is friendly' (63% versus 52% in 2015. This item is seen as a proxy for approachability), 'SFU is trustworthy' (62% versus 50% in 2015) and 'SFU is innovative' (61% versus the norm of 45%). Generally speaking, opinions of SFU over the past year have seen a net improvement of 12%.

SFU Public Square, the first signature initiative that was launched by SFU as part of its engagement strategy, has also been evaluated recently. The Brand Audit Tracking Report 2014-2016 reports significant impacts in terms **SFU's and SFU Public Square's visibility**. For example, in the past three years, awareness of *SFU Public Square* has increased among both BC's general population (17%, up 5 points) and *Public Square's* Network (76%, up 13 points). Among those aware of *SFU Public Square*, familiarity with the organisation has also increased significantly over the past two years – up 9 points among British Columbians (21% to 30%) and 23 points with individuals in *Public Square's* network, (38% to 61%).

Furthermore, participation in *SFU Public Square* events has jumped significantly over the past two years. Among those who know of the organisation, approximately one-in-three British Columbians say they have attended or participated in at least one *Public Square* event (28%, up 6 points since 2014), and close to two-thirds of people in *SFU Public Square's* network have done so (63%, up 32 points; most of the increase is in the 3+ number of events range). In addition, an increased number of students (36% compared to 22%) reported that *SFU Public Square* increased their engagement with the university. For example, 16% of the students would recommend SFU programmes based on their experience with *SFU Public Square* (up from 10% two years earlier). Ultimately, the numbers show how *SFU Public Square* contributed significantly to SFU's new engagement approach.

In addition to the positive impacts on the university itself, SFU reports a better standing with governments. Yet another positive impact is seen in the increased interest of companies and philanthropic foundations to engage with SFU, providing an additional source of funding.

On a broader level, SFU's clearly communicated engagement approach contributes to a global understanding that many future challenges, whether social, cultural or economic, might be best approached in a collaborative way.



Support & Influencing factors

8. SUPPORTING MECHANISMS

In addition to the newly developed, documented and widely communicated vision and strategy, SFU's engagement practice is supported by a variety of engagement initiatives (offices, programmes etc.) that were newly created, including:

- ▶ **SFU Public Square**⁴: A signature initiative that trigger conversations on issues of public concern at the annual Community Summit and at other events;
- ▶ An internal competition for seed funding for university-community initiatives⁵;
- ▶ **SFU Innovates**⁶: SFU's central hub to explore SFU's culture of innovation and collaboration;
- ▶ SFU Surrey TD Community Engagement Centre⁷; and
- ▶ The Warren Gill Award for Community Impact⁸ and The SFU Surrey —Central City Student Community Engagement Competition⁹.

A number of existing initiatives also gained significant momentum through the new strategy including:

- ▶ **Friends of Simon**¹⁰: An award-winning SFU Faculty of Education initiative, Friends of Simon recruits, prepares, and assigns university students as literacy tutors in the Lower Mainland, particularly with newcomer K-12 students;
- ▶ **Philosophers' café**¹¹: Scholars, seniors, students, and others involve in stimulating dialogue in informal settings around Metro Vancouver;
- ▶ **Café Scientifique**¹²: Informal meet-ups in local pubs and coffee shops for discussions on health and popular science; and
- ▶ **CityStudio**¹³: Vancouver: Partnership between the City of Vancouver and six post-secondary institutions helps advance real-world sustainability initiatives.

Further mechanisms include the VanCity Office of Community, the SFU Camps Programme¹⁴, and the SFU Life Long Learning Program.

9. BARRIERS AND DRIVERS

The open SFU Consultation Process acted as a main **driver** that brought awareness among stakeholders towards the initiative. Every stakeholder had the chance to bring in their own ideas and respond to the ideas of others which resulted in a highly dynamic vision development process.

The main **barrier** was lack of resources in the early stages of the process as the development and implementation of the new vision and strategy was very labour-intensive. To address any scepticism, particularly on the part of the faculty, a continuous and open communication was seen as essential to highlight the unique opportunities that an interactive and iterative development process entailed.

10. FUTURE CHALLENGES

A central challenge for SFU is to ensure a **campus-wide acceptance** of the engagement strategy. For example, the president of the SFU faculty association Prof. Glenn Chapman reported in 2012¹⁵ (at the very beginning of the vision and strategy development process) that some academics in the campus wanted to see a greater emphasis on research, rather than engagement. Therefore, it is crucial for SFU to continue dialogue with its stakeholders and integrate perceptions in future plans and actions. Acknowledging this, SFU will implement a stakeholder-centred vision and strategy review in 2017.

11. CONTEXT

SFU is located close the University of British Columbia, a much older and larger university that is also widely regarded for its (academic) successes (e.g. ranked as number 45 in the 2016 QS Ranking). Given this strong 'neighbour', SFU did not aim to compete with the University of British Columbia, but **to find its own space and its own way to serve the community**

12. KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Sense making process

It was seen as crucial to develop a vision and strategy that fits with the culture and experience of the university. Neither a command and control 'top-down' approach, nor a pure 'bottom-up' approach was found to be suitable. Rather the university had to go through the process of *sense-making*, an interactive and iterative process of finding the sense and articulating it. It was a matter of looking within the university, and seeing how SFU can best celebrate and make use of its capabilities. In other words, it was central to bring the strengths to the surface and build on these strengths; not to focus on overcoming weaknesses.

Stakeholder integration

Within the sense making process, the implementation of an iterative and process through engagement with different stakeholders was seen as critical for the development of a long-term and widely shared vision. The extensive consultation process enabled moving from President Petter's intuitive sense, to an affirmed vision and strategy, and a shared lexicon around it.

'A shared vision is like wind in the sail'

This quote by SFU President Petter highlights the importance of the shared vision on the latter development and acceptance of the university strategy, as well as all associated initiatives, structures and actions. The shared vision contributed especially to the rise of initiatives that came from people that were external to the university management (e.g. students, faculty, or people from the community).



Further Information

13. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

SFU's community engagement strategy has become a central part of the university's **integrated planning framework**. To monitor and evaluate the strategy, SFU developed measures for the North-west Commission on Colleges and Universities accreditation process. These measures include but are not limited to:

- ▶ An Alumni Engagement Score;
- ▶ The number and depth of active international partner; and
- ▶ The number of participants in a range of SFU local outreach programmes.

In addition, SFU takes into account the results from its reputation survey as well as further commissioned studies, such as the SFU Public Square Brand Audit Tracking Report 2014-2016 (see example measures in the impact section).

14. SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

A variety of measures have been implemented to sustain SFU's approach to be *the engaged university*:

- ▶ SFU's **vision and strategy are well defined and documented**. The long and collaborative consultation process through which the vision was developed ensures that the **vision is shared** by internal and external stakeholders alike. The vision is used as an organising framework for most communication activities;
- ▶ SFU frequently publishes **progress reports** that keep interested stakeholders updated on past activities and achievements;
- ▶ A separate, prominently placed section, called **SFU Engage**¹⁶, has been added to the SFU website, which provides information on the strategic vision, strategy, initiatives, outcomes, events and much more;
- ▶ SFU publishes **project calls** (e.g. SFU's Community Engagement Initiative¹⁷) **and initiatives** that enable interested parties **to get involved; and**
- ▶ Through the **Power of Engagement fundraising campaign** SFU raised a CAD\$275m (€196.2m) for the implementation of its engagement strategy.

15. TRANSFERABILITY

The transferability of this case can be considered as high, given that it presents an open and dialogue-driven vision and strategy development process approach in which most limitations can be addressed. Thus, only governmental limitations regarding the institution's decision autonomy with respect to its future strategy might limit the transferability of the case.

16. AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

In 2014, SFU has been rewarded the **'STARS'** (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System) **gold label** by THE Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)¹⁸.

The SFU Surrey–TD Community Engagement Centre (SFU Surrey CEC) is co-winner of a **2016 Silver Global Best Award** from the International Partnership Network and the Conference Board of Canada¹⁹.

SFU ranked as one of the **top ten universities in Canada**, and one of the top 250 schools world-wide in the 2016 Times Higher Education (THE) Rankings²⁰.

17. PUBLICATIONS AND ARTICLES

Provençal, Johanne (2011) 'Strengthening Community Engagement at Simon Fraser University: Key Resources and Models for Success Examples from Canada and Abroad, and Recommendations for SFU' (February 28th)²¹

Provençal, Johanne (2011) 'Recognizing and Rewarding Community Engagement at Simon Fraser University' (April 15th)²²

Provençal, Johanne (2011) 'Community and Civic Engagement for Students at Simon Fraser University: Considerations for the University Administration, Faculty Support, and Curriculum Offerings' (July 31st)²³

Petter, Andrew; Littlemore, Joanne and Curry, Joanne. (2015). 'From Burnaby's mountain top to Vancouver and Surrey: The making of an engaged university'. In: A. Teo, ed. *Univer-Cities: Strategic view of the future from Berkeley and Cambridge to Singapore and Rising Asia*. Vol. II. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Ptd. Ltd.:119–138.

18. LINKS

Simon Fraser University <http://www.sfu.ca>

SFU Community Engagement <http://www.sfu.ca/sfu-community.html>

SFU Engagement <http://www.sfu.ca/engage.html>

19. CONTACT PERSON



Joanne Curry
Vice-President, External Relations
Simon Fraser University
joannec@sfu.ca

20. REFERENCES

- ¹ <http://www.sfu.ca/engage/background.html>
- ² <http://www.sfu.ca/vpacademic.html>
- ³ <http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/engage/SFU%20Community%20Engagement%20Strategy%20Mar2013.pdf>
- ⁴ <http://www.sfu.ca/publicsquare.html>
- ⁵ <http://www.sfu.ca/engage/community-engagement-initiative.html>
- ⁶ <http://cec.sfu.ca/>
- ⁷ <http://innovates.vpr.sfu.ca/>
- ⁸ <http://www.sfu.ca/engage/community-impact-award/call-for-nominations.html>
- ⁹ <https://www.sfu.ca/engagement-competition.html>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.sfu.ca/education/fostutor.html>
- ¹¹ <https://www.sfu.ca/continuing-studies/about/program-units/philosophers-cafe/about-philosophers-cafe.html>
- ¹² https://www.sfu.ca/science/programs---events-for-the-general-public/cafe_scientifique1.html
- ¹³ <http://citystudiovancouver.com/>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.sfu.ca/camps.html>
- ¹⁵ <http://www.straight.com/news/simon-fraser-university-president-andrew-petter-chooses-road-less-travelled-forging-connections>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.sfu.ca/engage>
- ¹⁷ <https://www.sfu.ca/engage/community-engagement-initiative/call-for-proposals.html>
- ¹⁸ <https://stars.aashe.org/institutions/simon-fraser-university-bc/report/2014-10-29/EN/public-engagement/EN-13/>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.sfu.ca/sfunews/stories/2016/sfu-nets-global-award-for-community-engagement-partnerships.html>
- ²⁰ <https://www.sfu.ca/sfunews/stories/2016/sfu-ranked-a-top-ten-university-in-canada-according-to-the-world.html>
- ²¹ https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/engage/community_engagement_report1_final.pdf
- ²² https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/engage/community_engagement_report2_final.pdf
- ²³ https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/engage/community_engagement_report3_final.pdf