



Stellenbosch

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SOCIAL IMPACT POLICY



1 January 2026

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SOCIAL IMPACT POLICY

Type of document:	Policy
Purpose:	The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for social impact at Stellenbosch University that will guide all internal and external stakeholders in enhancing social impact as an institutional imperative.
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Regulation curator²:	Senior Director: Social Impact and Transformation
Keywords:	Social impact, engaged scholarship, engaged citizenship, knowledge exchange
Validity:	The English version of this regulation is the operative version, and all other versions are translations.

¹ Policy owner: Head(s) of Responsibility Centre(s) in which the rules function.

² Policy curator: Administrative head of the division responsible for the implementation and maintenance of the rules.

1. ESSENCE OF POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for social impact at Stellenbosch University (SU) that will guide all internal and external stakeholders³ in enhancing social impact as an institutional imperative. It further provides guidelines for embedding social impact as a core function and outcome of the university, aligned with its vision to be an engaged university in service of society. This is transversely integrated through citizenship, teaching and learning, and research activities, reflecting the university's values of excellence, compassion, equity, respect, and accountability. Development frameworks also inform this policy on all levels (local, regional, national, continental, and global).

The aim of the policy is fourfold:

- 1.1 to clearly define social impact and related concepts (see section 12 of this policy) so that all SU environments operate based on a similar understanding of social impact;
- 1.2 to outline the measures to implement and govern social impact at the university as well as the institutionalisation of social impact at the university;
- 1.3 to ensure that ethical standards and best practice principles governing social impact are observed in social impact undertaken by the university; and
- 1.4 to provide the basis for a Social Impact Plan and the implementation thereof.

2. BACKGROUND

The SU Social Impact Policy succeeds and replaces the Social Impact Strategic Plan 2017-2022. It provides guidelines for conceptualising and understanding how SU understands, defines, and regards modalities for social impact at the university as well as measures for the institutionalisation of social impact at the university. Through this policy, a first of its kind for SU, the university gives further expression to its understanding of what it entails to be an engaged university. As such, this policy brings together SU's expanding understanding of social impact, which includes community engagement, knowledge exchange, interaction with spheres of government, and so forth.

Given the nature and purpose of this policy, it should be read in conjunction with the SU Restitution Statement and Code 2040: SU's Integrated Ethics Code as these documents give further expression to SU's understanding of engagement, restitution, and ethics.

3. ALIGNMENT TO STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY'S VISION 2040 AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The SU Social Impact Policy:

- 3.1 Supports the **SU Vision 2040** by acknowledging that all social impact structures, initiatives, projects, and programmes operate within the context of a *research-intensive university* that advances knowledge in service of society, in and for Africa. The *reciprocal impact* of the university on society is primarily based on the principle of *knowledge exchange*. The *grand challenges* of society and the *development agendas* on all levels (the international Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063 of the African Union, the National Development Plan, and Integrated Development plans on

³ Given the nature of this policy, stakeholders are defined broadly and are often specific to a particular initiative and/or environment.

local municipal level, etc.) are crucial in the framing of SU Social Impact initiatives, projects, and programmes.

- 3.2 Supports the **SU Mission** by conceptualising social impact as *empowering strategies to help transformative change and the enrichment of communities* - local, continental, and global. Here, the principle of *transformation of and through SU* applies.
- 3.3 Subscribes to the **SU Values** of excellence, compassion, equity, respect, and accountability as *action guides* for all social impact structures, initiatives, projects, and programmes, within and outside the university.
- 3.4 Acknowledges the *eight attributes that define the qualities and characteristics of the university* and embody what the university stands for: all-encompassing impact; agility, adaptability, and responsiveness; collaborative nature and approach; organisational culture built on shared values; professionalism; systemic sustainability; strategic focus with a shared vision; and entrepreneurial mindset.
- 3.5 Recognises and acknowledges the importance of *the elements that make the success of the university possible*, or the enablers, namely people (staff and students), purpose, technology, infrastructure, sound finance, good governance, and good communication.
- 3.6 Fully endorses the **SU Restitution Statement 2018** by accepting an approach of *engagement as transformation* in its dealings with historically disadvantaged communities in general, and in particular, communities around SU campuses. It is an affirmation of the themes of restitution and reconciliation that were strongly articulated in the SU Strategy for the Turn of the Century and Beyond (1999) and in the institutional frameworks and imperatives that followed it.
- 3.7 Further defines the term '**social impact**' within the context of SU. In this regard, social impact as a concept should be understood as an overarching expression based on the quintuple helix principle of engagement: academia, civil society, business, environment, and government.

4. POLICY PRINCIPLES⁴

The foundational principles guiding the interpretation and implementation of the Social Impact Policy are the following:

- 4.1 **Societal relevance and working for the public good**
Making available the university's expertise, resources, and facilities to external stakeholders where appropriate and feasible, and in turn to open the university to external expertise and lived experience(s) to make the university a more tolerant, accessible, and socially responsive public institution aimed at addressing development and sustainability challenges through planned and strategic interventions. Reporting on social impact that

⁴ The set of policy principles draws on the Rhodes University Community Engagement Policy: https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/institutionalplanning/documents/Rhodes_University_Community_Engagement_Policy.pdf

includes the ways in which the university is intentionally contributing to development of the community.⁵

4.2 Transformation and social justice

Raising awareness and sensitivity in staff and students regarding the problems and societal injustice created by the legacy of apartheid and colonialism as well as the impact of larger world events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent economic crisis, and plaguing world conflicts. Thus, it prompts social impact initiatives aimed at addressing past injustices relating to SU's history and the continuous qualitative improvement of well-being and (human) life.

Promoting engagements that change society through jointly identifying and co-managing initiatives with joint decision making and co-ownership, and where there is shared control over processes and the distribution of resources.

4.3 Mutually beneficial and reciprocal knowledge exchange

Promoting a reciprocal (mutual) process of knowledge co-construction, dissemination, and exchange through social impact activities allows for deliberate engagement that breaks down prejudices and injustices, thus promoting democracy and reciprocal partnerships with and through stakeholders.

4.4 Engaged teaching, learning, and research practices

Ensuring the relevance of teaching and learning programmes for societal transformation needs in the contexts of Africanisation, decolonisation, disability, 'information age', and global competitiveness in alignment with the SU Transformation Policy (2025).

Developing and enhancing teaching, learning, and research initiatives that enable SU university staff, students, and external stakeholders to participate in collaborative activities to co-produce, co-develop, and co-define (knowledge exchange) on various levels. In this regard, external stakeholders play a significant role in guiding SU concerning critical development and sustainability issues locally, in the broader South African society, and in global development contexts.

Such approaches will increase the scholarship of SU, thus increasing its ability to share knowledge in service of society.

4.5 Promoting student social responsibility

Developing critical, capable, and well-rounded graduates who are aware of their social responsibilities through their involvement in social impact initiatives, which are embedded in teaching and learning, research, and volunteering endeavours, and enabling the development of critically conscious citizens who have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to play transformative roles in society and the economy.

Institutional coordination of social responsibility, through the institutional imperative of social impact, and the integration of research, learning and teaching, and social impact are emphasised, as opposed to maintaining artificial barriers between the core institutional imperatives.

⁵ 'Community' is defined in the first instance in relation to SU's campuses and the communities surrounding them.

4.6 Promoting staff social responsibility

Co-creating opportunities for social impact initiatives by university staff based on specific expertise and developing the social impact capacity of both academic and professional academic support services (PASS) staff.

4.7 Recognition of excellence in social impact

Providing recognition for excellence in social impact for both staff and students, continuously benchmarked against similar institutions locally, continentally, and globally. Excellence in social impact, as an integrated imperative, is included in the criteria for promotion of academic staff, which are similar across all faculties. As such, social impact, as an integrated imperative, should enhance academic excellence, which can include expressions of thought leadership in research, learning, and teaching, and should be evaluated and recognised accordingly. In the case of both staff and students, appropriate incentives will be provided to promote social impact.

5. VEHICLES OF SOCIAL IMPACT

Reciprocal social impact at SU is activated and implemented through the following:

- 5.1 The ongoing, day-to-day research and innovation, learning, and teaching of the academic environments that have a clear and specific focus on social impact and SU's service to society.
- 5.2 The rich diversity of professional academic support services.
- 5.3 Cross-cutting programmes and initiatives that advance excellence of transformative social impact.
- 5.4 Units, centres, and institutes in departments and faculties, and interfaculty schools.
- 5.5 The specific research-based and learning-centred social impact initiatives of academic departments. These specific social impact initiatives draw from and inform the ongoing academic work of the department.
- 5.6 Social impact is also embodied in the knowledge-informed and knowledge-informing volunteerism, thought leadership, and dissemination of knowledge of staff and students in academic and professional academic support environments, namely through responsible and engaged citizenship.

6. MODALITIES THROUGH WHICH WE ACHIEVE SOCIAL IMPACT

6.1 Engaged scholarship

This occurs through teaching, learning, and research with an intentional public purpose or benefit in collaboration with external stakeholders. In this regard, the role of academics is acknowledged, but the role of PASS staff and students, especially senior students, in engaged scholarship is also recognised in this policy. Further to this, the notion of thought leadership, as understood as part of knowledge sharing and exchange, is also acknowledged (see definition of engaged scholarship in section 12).

6.2 Engaged citizenship

This occurs through social impact initiatives by university staff based on specific expertise and on the student side via compulsory community service required by a profession, student voluntary community service, and as part of the formal curriculum, for example as part of service learning. It further

occurs when students and staff partner with each other or with external organisations as volunteers (see definition of engaged citizenship in section 12).

6.3 Democratic institutional citizenship

This occurs through the role that the institution, represented by its management or other delegates, plays in serving the public interest via various local, regional, national, and international forums (see definition of democratic institutional citizenship in section 12).

7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SOCIAL IMPACT⁶

The below-mentioned considerations align with the [Values of SU](#) and, as such, should be read in conjunction with these. Further, these considerations are also aligned with the practices of community engagement/social impact in the higher education sector in South Africa and elsewhere.

7.1 Mutual respect and co-operation

All parties have respect for and co-operate with one another. Active listening and understanding are important tools in cultivating a respectful relationship.

7.2 Nondiscrimination and equality

Social impact work must consciously be informed by nondiscrimination and equality in a context where discrimination and inequality are still rife, both within broader society and in the academic context. All stakeholders must ensure that they do not replicate or entrench power disparities that are either harmful or contrary to the constitutional imperatives of equality.

7.3 Security, dignity, and nonmaleficence

The life, health, and human dignity of all stakeholders should always be protected and respected. The emphasis must be on avoiding or minimising harm or potential harm to others.

7.4 Cross-cultural competency

Stakeholders engage in reflective practice by sharing cultural knowledge and expertise so that building cross-cultural competencies is part of our social impact activities and allows for knowledge exchange.

7.5 Transparency and access to information

Transparency relates to the openness of decisions and actions. Transparency includes transparency regarding finances and other related resources as well as transparency regarding information.

7.6 Research ethics and integrity

As part of SU's fundamental principles of research ethics and scientific integrity, SU formally endorsed the Singapore Statement of Research Integrity and the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings as part of the Policy for Responsible Research Conduct at SU.

⁶ The set of Ethical Considerations for Social Impact draws on the Wits Community Engagement Policy: <https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/faculties-and-schools/commerce-law-and-management/research-entities/cals/documents/CALS%20Community%20Engagement%20Policy.pdf>

8. IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE

8.1 Application of policy

- 8.1.1 The Social Impact Policy, including regulations and rules that will flow from it, will, by default, be applicable to all members of staff (both permanent and temporary) who work in the management corps of the university, in academic entities, and in the professional support environments; it will also be applicable to all students and to the members of the statutory bodies of the university and the members of the companies or legal entities under the control of the university who are involved in the governance of policy and management documents.
- 8.1.2 Other policies and management documents that are developed after the date of approval of this policy will have to comply with it.
- 8.1.3 Existing policy and management documents will be adapted to comply with the policy during a general and planned revision process over the first three years after approval of this policy.

8.2 Policy provisions

- 8.2.1 All parties must adhere to the principles and ethical considerations stipulated in this policy in the execution of this policy.
- 8.2.2 The policy must be reviewed and, if necessary, revised at least once every five years. Given the nature of the policy and its intended impact, a broad review and revision process must be followed.

8.3 Roles and responsibilities

8.3.1 Owner

The owner of this policy is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel. The owner does the following:

- 8.3.1.1 Oversees the development of the Policy.
- 8.3.1.2 Ensures that the necessary supporting documents exist.
- 8.3.1.3 Ensures that the curator (see 8.3.2) functions effectively.
- 8.3.1.4 Ensures that a task team for the periodic revision of the policy document is appointed, as required.

8.3.2 Curator

The curator of this policy is the Senior Director: Social Impact and Transformation. The curator:

- 8.3.2.1 Is responsible for the formulation, approval, revision, communication, release, and monitoring of the implementation of the policy document.
- 8.3.2.2 Interprets the policy, guides its implementation, and convenes a task team for the periodic revision of the policy, as required.

8.4 Implementation

- 8.4.1 The Social Impact Policy is implemented via the environmental plan of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel and through the Social Impact Plan.⁷
- 8.4.2 Implementation takes place within SU environments via the specific environmental plans. This process is monitored by the Responsibility Centre heads and is guided by the Social Impact Committee of Senate.

The various faculty and environmental committees for social impact will

⁷ The Social Impact Plan will be completed after this policy is approved.

further guide the implementation of the policy through the various committees, environmental plans, and actions.

9. MONITORING, REPORTING, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- 9.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel is accountable for the creation of the necessary controls for the monitoring and reporting of this policy.
- 9.2 The Senior Director: Social Impact and Transformation is responsible for carrying out these controls in collaboration with the Social Impact Committee of Senate as well as the various environmental committees for social impact.
- 9.3 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel is responsible, as stipulated in the policy, for reporting on the outcomes of the policy to the Senate via the Social Impact Committee of Senate and to Council via the Social and Business Ethics Committee.
- 9.4 Procedure for the settlement of conflicting interpretations of the Social Impact Policy takes place within the normal management lines and existing SU structures.

10. NONCOMPLIANCE

In case of noncompliance, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel will indicate which remedial steps or sanctions are applicable in accordance with SU's Disciplinary Code for Staff and Students and the Code of Conduct for Council members. This will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

11. REVISION

- 11.1 The Social Impact Policy will be reviewed every five years, or sooner if deemed necessary.
- 11.2 Any amendment to the policy that is of an editorial nature or a change to the title of an office bearer, or a functionary that does not change the essence of the policy can be approved by the Rectorate.
- 11.3 Any amendment that changes the essence of the policy must be approved by Council.

12. DEFINITIONS

12.1 Democratic institutional citizenship

The strategy of democratic institutional citizenship refers to how the university, on an institutional level, serves the public interest and contributes to the nation's democracy, prosperity, societal well-being, and intergenerational socio-economic mobility (Crow & Dabars, 2020, p. 71-74). It thus refers to "...a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity in the nation's life ..." (Boyer, 1996, p. 19).

12.2 Engaged citizenship

According to Julius Bertz (2015:4), "...to be an engaged citizen means to relate to one's political community in an attitude of habitual interest and care. This means to follow public concerns and discourse with an active mind and taking actual action if necessary. Participatory democracy is the form of deliberative democratic method, which places political responsibility primarily on the citizen as being actively involved in its discursive processes."

12.3 Engaged scholarship

Ernest Boyer coined the term ‘engaged scholarship’ to describe teaching and research that connect “the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems” (Boyer, 1996). Engaged scholarship denotes an orientation in which engaged scholars direct their energies not solely toward an academic community but also toward pressing public issues or shared problems.

- 12.4 Engagement as transformation/transformational community engagement**
SU has acknowledged its contribution towards the injustices of the past and has unreservedly expressed its regret in this regard in its Restitution Statement (2018). In the same document, SU commits itself unconditionally to the ideal of an inclusive world-class university in and for Africa. Against this background, engagements with external parties, especially with historically disadvantaged communities in and around Stellenbosch and SU’s other campuses, must be embraced as opportunities for transformation of the university and broader society, through the university. Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, and Herremans (2010) consider transformational community engagement to be characterised by joint learning and sensemaking, joint management of projects with communities, and the involvement of community leadership in decision making.
- 12.5 Impact**
Impact is defined as the effect on or change in different stakeholders over time that we can see, demonstrate, measure, or capture and that happens as a result of an activity or an organisation. Although not exclusively so, impact is intrinsically linked to transformative programmes and projects, and the assessment of impact helps us to identify the changes and effects, and their extent, on different stakeholders over time (Times Higher Education, n. d.).
- 12.6 Knowledge exchange**
A reciprocal (two-way or mutual) process of knowledge construction and dissemination through various social impact activities that challenges epistemic prejudices and injustices and promotes a knowledge democracy.
- 12.7 Quintuple helix**
The quintuple helix model focuses on the interactions and exchanges among five key societal systems: the education system (universities), the economic system (business and industry), the political system (government), the media-based and culture-based public (civil society), and the natural environment, with particular attention to how knowledge is harnessed to promote social, political, and economic development.
- 12.8 Social impact**
Social impact is the positive, measurable change to the public good resulting from the reciprocal, mutually beneficial collaborations between the university and external stakeholders (government, industry, civil society, and the environment). Even though not explicit, research and economic impact contract to social impact and transformation of society, communities, and well-being. The link to the Sustainable Development Goals is also implicitly implied as one of the measures of sustainability and impact.
- 12.9 Thought leadership**
Thought leadership is the act of an individual or organisation that is recognised as an authority in a specific field, offering valuable, innovative

insights that influence and inspire others to think differently and drive meaningful societal change. It involves strategically sharing expertise and unique perspectives, often through conducting interviews, sharing public platforms, engaging on thematic panels, and writing/publishing opinion pieces.

13. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

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- <https://avreq.sun.ac.za/people/prof-john-brewer>

14. RELATED DOCUMENTS

Indicate existing policies, regulations, legislation, or other documents that might assist the reader to better understand this policy.

Name of document	Status (identified, in process, approved, etc.)
SU Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework 2019-2024	Approved
SU Teaching-Learning Policy	Approved
Policy for Responsible Research Conduct at SU	Approved
SU Transformation Policy (2025)	Approved
SU Restitution Statement 2018	Approved
SU Strategy for the Turn of the Century and Beyond (1999)	Approved
Code 2040: SU's Integrated Ethics Code	Approved
Policy for Performance Advancement	To be approved