Prosper! Interdisciplinary Solutions for Prosperous Regions

LEGATUS GROUP

University of South Australia | Centre for Enterprise Dynamics in Global Economies

THEO MURPHY INITIATIVE (AUSTRALIA)

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Background

This document details the insights and learnings from the presentations and panel discussions on March 30, 2023, in the "The Prosper! Interdisciplinary Solutions for Prosperous Regions" (Proper) event. The activity was carried out as an add-on event to the North and Yorke SA Regional Forum which was held by the Northern and Yorke Regional Alliance and coordinated by the Legatus Group. The forum is an annual event that brings regional leaders to discuss relevant and topical issues. The Legatus Group through their MoU with UniSA also allocated funds for the activities and in-kind support.

The event was organised by the Centre for Enterprise Dynamics in Global Economies (C-EDGE) Precincts and Regions Group from the University of South Australia and funded by Theo Murphy Initiative (Australia), an organisation that aims to provide benefits, opportunities, activities and events annually to support Australia's early- and mid-career researchers (EMCRs) in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The activity took place in the Barossa Valley in South Australia. The event focused on in-person meetings of regional leaders and early- and mid-career researchers (EMCRs) to discuss current and future regional challenges.

EMCRs from various backgrounds across universities and disciplines presented solutions for prosperous regions of the future, followed by roundtable workshops between EMCRS and regional leaders. The event became an opportunity for researchers to partner with regional leaders on real-life challenges, thereby amplifying the impact of their research.

Researchers also had the opportunity to attend the second day of the Regional Forum on March 31 and interact with regional leaders to identify research areas relevant to South Australian regions and foster greater partnerships with regional communities.

Learnings

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What did people learn from the event?

Some participants highlighted opportunities for potential collaboration between researchers and regions. Bringing people together and starting the conversation is the first step to future collaborations. Some of the learnings from the event were:

- Understanding other research being done and the perspectives of other researchers is critical to avoiding overlap and building networks for collaboration.
- Recognising problems in the region that can be addressed by working together in a co-design process.
- The university is becoming more entrepreneurial, creating practical opportunities that can be implemented in the regions.
- For young researchers, this type of event will raise awareness of the fundamental problems in the regions and help them carry out a reality check for future research projects.

Suggestions

Suggestions about how to collaborate

Some academics and attendees from the region agreed that bringing people together is an excellent strategy to raise awareness and share problems and solutions for future projects. The leading suggestions regarding collaboration between academics and regions are:

- It is necessary to give continuity to this type of event, periodic meetings and develop a long-term strategic plan to build relationships between the parties.
- Invite regions to present their problems, as well as academics to work on how to solve them collaboratively.
- Encourage universities to visit isolated communities beyond the cities to understand their needs.
- Propose solutions based on the community-led perspective to ensure sustainability and engagement by identifying regional champions who can sponsor those projects.
- Create a model that brings in academics and community doers to raise awareness of the opportunities and potential of research that looks at the community gaps.
- The engagement of university business development offices, such as UniSA's Enterprise Hub, becomes a fundamental tool to increase collaboration between regional champions and researchers.

Needs

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What needs to be added regarding collaboration between universities and regions?

Some of the comments and opinions on what is needed for better collaboration between universities and regions are as follows:

- Increase the presence of universities for an extended period to gain trust, build long-term relationships with regional communities and avoid one-off consultations.
- A better understanding of what universities are doing in terms of how they communicate, how they find opportunities, how they integrate and what the business model is.
- Simplify some processes and procedures within the universities to speed up the progress.
- The provision of large grants will allow participants from regions and universities to apply for high-level research solutions.
- Develop longer sessions with more activities that encourage participants to become more involved and create joint projects.

Recommendations

This report provides some recommendations and actions to implement for better collaboration between universities and regions:

- Develop regular events throughout the year to discuss and explore possible opportunities for collaboration between researchers and regions.
- Align expectations between parties in terms of scope, time and budget. The typical issue is that regions seek to solve specific challenges that are eventually difficult to match with the researchers' agenda.
- Identify regional champions with extensive experience in a particular region to serve as channels between the community and the university.

The following Figure summarises the findings in an image that outlines a model for better collaboration between the university and the regions. Early- and mid-career researchers bring academic theory and technical knowledge to solve region-specific problems. Regional Champions are individuals who understand the needs and challenges of the region, sponsor the project and bring a community-led perspective to ensure sustainability and commitments to build long-term trust with academics. The university's business development managers support projects and assess stakeholder expectations to align the university's research capabilities and potential regional opportunities.