

CASE STUDY 2

EIDOS INSTITUTE **SCOPES** CURRENT TRENDS AND ISSUES OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY PARTNERS...



The project developed out of international interest in two areas. First, there is a perceived need to address a civic deficit, particularly among young people. Second, there is a requirement to spark national interest in developing the capacity of universities to contribute to regional and community wellbeing in economic, social and cultural terms.

Photo: The Honourable Minister Lyn Kosky (Minister for Education and Training) with the authors, Professor Bruce Muirhead, Dr Alexandra Winter and Professor John Wiseman after launching Beyond Rhetoric.

Objective

- Victorian universities have always had a strong commitment to the development of education, training and research programs and partnerships which deliver positive economic, social and environmental benefits to their local communities.
- However, most of the information was anecdotal and wrapped up in media and communications releases. The Victorian government sought an initial scan of current practices to provide valuable models and lessons for public and private audiences.

Approach

- The Victorian Government, through the Department of Education and Training, funded research titled Australian Universities as Sites of Citizenship and Civic Responsibility (Victoria).
- Eidos Institute facilitated a collaborative research project involving all Victorian universities. The Institute worked in partnership with the Australian Consortium to bring together its best researchers in community engagement, education, economic and social policy.
- Each of the nine Victorian universities completed a case study analysis, in order to provide a snapshot and discussion of university-community engagement partnerships at the university. The individual reports form the basis of an integrated report that highlights the strategic importance of such partnerships. This report, including its key findings and recommendations.

Government policy benefits

- The recent history of university-community engagement initiatives in Victoria highlights the importance of community engagement partnerships (i) in defining university identity; ii) as a foundation stone for high quality teaching and research; iii) in delivering social and economic benefits to local and regional communities and iv) in providing the essential social and physical infrastructure for thriving, sustainable cities and regions.
- The educational, social and economic benefits to universities and to regional communities of strong university-community engagement partnerships are however at risk because of the deepening Commonwealth Government focus on competitiveness, commercialisation and funding cutbacks as the key drivers of higher education policy.
- There is an urgent need for the current national debate on the purpose of Australian universities to include their role in working with and for local, regional, national and international communities. This debate needs to be informed by broader research on the current and potential benefits of building strong partnerships between universities and their local and regional communities.

Since this research the Victorian Government has commissioned further research by the Institute into community engagement indicators - *In Search of Evidence. Measuring Community Engagement: A Pilot Study* - for the higher education sector and sponsored a national debate focusing on "What is the good of the University" and used as a launching pad for the previous two reports in Brisbane and Melbourne in November 2006.

More information at <http://www.eidos.org.au>