

The UTS Social Impact Framework

We're taking a new approach to demonstrating and enhancing the very real ways we make a difference.

Overview

As public purpose institutions, universities have a critical responsibility to contribute to the community through research, education and practice. At UTS, the concept of social justice is key to our core and purpose – we are committed to driving social change in the world beyond our campus.

This commitment is reflected by a diverse set of institution wide social justice initiatives that have only expanded in scope and depth since UTS was established. Our student-based programs, focused research and innovative teaching practices deliver education and research opportunities to create a more just and equitable world.

In order to formalise our social justice agenda and further articulate and structure our future endeavours in this space, in 2016 we began developing the UTS Social Impact Framework.

Purpose

Through the UTS Social Impact Framework, we will:

- contribute to increased public good, social mobility and equity
- support the creation of enabling environments for communities to thrive
- positively influence and impact the public, the individual, and the systemic forces that shape justice.

These are ambitious goals, reflecting our beliefs that universities have a significant role to play in driving change through education. The framework must recognise and enhance existing initiatives and practices at UTS, and must also identify new opportunities for transformational change. As such, the framework is both reflective and future focused; a living strategy, and the conduit through which the staff and students of UTS will communicate their vision for the future. It will also inform the next iteration of the UTS Strategic Plan, due to be implemented in 2019, and outline a series of practical pathways to effect more meaningful change.

Process

The initial development of the Social Impact Framework took place over a 12-month period. The extensive participation of more than 130 staff and students ensured that organisational knowledge and experience is embedded in the outcomes, and that the views, beliefs and values of a broad cross-section of the university community are clearly represented. The resulting framework is both aspirational and practical. It sets out a series of goals that reflect the strengths and opportunities that exist at UTS, and its ownership is shared across the university. As a result of this participatory approach, the framework will be collectively championed by UTS stakeholders, resulting in enhanced opportunities for connection in the broader community.



Structure

The process of developing the Social Impact Framework revealed ‘domains of focus’, external influences, leadership and institutional culture, and trust and social capital as the key components informing UTS’s success in driving future transformational change.

UTS staff and students identified six areas in which UTS must take action in order to achieve the broader goals of the framework. These six domains of focus are:

- increasing the number of equity target groups successfully completing a higher education degree at UTS
- giving students the agency to enact personal and social responsibility
- supporting staff to maximise their social impact
- producing targeted research, teaching and program outcomes that have social impact and actively contributing to communities
- being an advocate, critical voice and thought leader on issues that concern and impact communities
- developing business operations and strategies that reflect a long-term independent commitment to social impact.

Each domain is underpinned by a series of conditions that are vital to its success. In some cases, these conditions can be met by internal UTS activity; others require deep engagement with alumni, partners and community stakeholders in order to be achieved. **Trust and social capital** – meaningful relationships, mutual trust and respect both within UTS and between UTS and our community partners – are the necessary foundations of these domains of focus.

The framework process also captured the necessity of a supportive and inclusive cross-level **leadership and institutional culture**, ensuring that social justice is a collective interest across the university. All six domains of focus also intersect with **fourkey influences** that will shape the framework and its resultant activities: *government policies and practices, industry international frameworks, and media representations*. To maximise our potential for social impact, UTS must proactively engage with each at both the local and global level.

The precinct

As part of its focus, the framework will be implemented in UTS’s immediate cultural, socioeconomic and physical surroundings. This precinct is demographically diverse, with variable levels of need throughout. By engaging within our own geographic neighbourhood, we are responding to a growing belief that universities should be ‘pillars of the community’, and to our organisational responsibility to contribute to the world around us. Further, identifying a clear zone of activity will enable us to build rich, reciprocal relationships within the local community that circumvent traditional organisational siloes, and will also allow us to demonstrate the outcomes and impact of our work.

A foundation for the future

The Social Impact Framework supports UTS to better understand its collective organisational capacity, and to build and nurture strategic and generative partnerships that drive transformational community change. At its heart, the framework is a key part of our contribution to solving some of the world’s most complex challenges. These challenges require us to reach across difference to arrive at new solutions; harness our collaborative capacity, both within the university and beyond; and work across disciplines and areas of practice in order to effect change. This approach will position UTS to take a leading role in addressing complex social issues that impact and shape the communities of which we are a part.



