

March 4, 2019

Dear Committee Chair(s),

As the leaders of the Associated Students of Stanford University (ASSU), it is our role to provide student perspectives to Stanford's many decision-makers. We believe that the most holistic committee outcomes occur when there is broad student input to the committee beyond the student representatives on the committee and ASSU leadership. Committee chairs often ask us how they can best **ensure robust and sustainable student engagement and input to their committees**. We've compiled a list of best practices below that we recommend as starting points as you seek further student input.

Overall, we recommend student representation on your committee, holding in-person events with a variety of key constituencies as well as the student community at-large, and providing clear and transparent communication to students about your committee's work. Following these suggestions is a great way to ensure student engagement with your committee and help bolster student trust in your committee's processes and outcomes. At the end of this document, we've also listed three case studies of committees that we believe have done an exceptional job at engaging students.

We are always happy to individually meet with committee leadership to provide additional perspectives on student input processes specific to your committee's charge.

Sincerely,  
Shanta Katipamula, ASSU Executive President  
Rosie Nelson, ASSU Executive Vice President  
[president@assu.stanford.edu](mailto:president@assu.stanford.edu)

## Best Practices for Student Engagement

### THE BASICS

- **Do you have students on your committee?** We highly recommend having at least two students, one undergraduate and one graduate, on your committee to consistently provide input to ensure student voices are heard. The ASSU Nominations Commission (NomCom) has a standing pool of undergraduate and graduate students who are excited to serve as student representatives on university committees. Nothing beats a student's perspective in every committee conversation, and we strongly recommend the ASSU NomCom process for nominating student representatives. You can request student nominations at this [link](#). We encourage you to work with the students on your committee to also gather input from their peers, except in situations where the committee's work may be confidential.
- **Reach out to elected student representatives.** The ASSU Executives represent both the undergraduate and graduate student population; however, there are often times when it would be beneficial to meet with a larger subset of both populations to gain further insight. In these situations, we recommend scheduling time on the agendas of the ASSU Undergraduate Senate ([ugs-chair@assu.stanford.edu](mailto:ugs-chair@assu.stanford.edu)) or Graduate Student Council ([gsc-chair@assu.stanford.edu](mailto:gsc-chair@assu.stanford.edu)) to present and gather feedback. If your charge will impact one class year more than others, the Class Presidents may also be appropriate to reach out to for additional feedback. Similarly on the graduate side the Law School, Graduate School of Business, Graduate School of Education, and School of Medicine all have their internal student governments that you can reach out to as well.
- **Identify communities that will be most impacted by your decision and intentionally listen to their perspective.** This practice is especially important to ensure that the committee is hearing from students who deeply care about the issues you are considering. Make sure to identify key student groups and communities who might be advocating for goals that fall under your committee's charge and proactively reach out to them. For example, the renaming committees working to quantify the impact of the Junipero Serra name on campus buildings met with Native students as one of the primary constituencies who would be impacted by their decision.

### HOLDING EVENTS

- **Meet students where they are.** Instead of holding office hours or town halls in administrative buildings unfamiliar to students, consider instead holding them in student-centered spaces such as dorm lounges, dining halls, community centers, or central spaces such as Old Union, Tresidder, and the Graduate Community Center.

- 
- **Contact us for a gut check.** Some committees recently have begun reaching out to a small group of trusted students, including the ASSU Executives, for feedback and reaction to preliminary recommendations with the promise that students will keep these conversations confidential. We understand and appreciate the need for confidentiality of processes before the recommendations are finalized by the administrator you are reporting to. We believe that having a confidential conversation with a few students prior to submittal can be an effective way to ensure that the committee is on the right track. This check-in will also help anticipate any concerns that may arise as a result of the recommendations.
  - **Create focus groups.** Organize student focus groups to hear from a diverse group of students. This format allows you to receive targeted feedback on very specific questions. We can provide suggestions of students to invite to your focus group and we also recommend reaching out to staff in your offices, at community centers, and other student-facing offices to solicit suggestions. To prevent sampling bias, we suggest using a random sampling method so the focus group provides a representational cross-section of our community.
  - **Hold town halls.** Having a town hall is a great way to demonstrate openness and transparency to the student body, as any student who is interested in the issue has the opportunity to attend and participate. Some ideal times in the quarter for town halls are mid Week 1 through the end of Week 3, as well as Week 8 through mid-Week 9 to avoid midterms and finals conflicts for students. We also recommend checking in with the student representatives on your committee for their preferred weeks in the quarter. Based on the key impacted communities that you've identified, you should host at least one set of town halls or office hours in their space. If we take the example of the renaming committee again, they should have held office hours in the Native American Cultural Center.
  - **Host office hours.** Holding open office hours for any interested student to drop by and speak to members of the committee is helpful for students who may not speak up in a larger town hall setting. We recommend offering office hours at a couple of points throughout the quarter and having them on different days of the week to decrease the likelihood that a student will have class conflicts with all of the times.
  - **Conduct surveys and interviews.** Surveys are a great way to gather empirical data to help further understand the problem your committee is trying to solve. We highly recommend supplementing survey data with student interviews to understand the lived experiences behind the data. Student groups can be a great partner in this effort, as they can help forward your survey to various communities on-campus. We also recommend working with ASSU Executives and student representatives on your committee to develop strategies for limiting sample bias.
  - **Incentivize student attendance and participation.** Offering food at your event is a great additional incentive for students to attend. Gift-cards or giveaways can be a great

---

avenue to incentivize online participation (i.e. surveys, virtual town halls). Be sure to include this information in your advertisement and ensure adequate options for students with dietary restrictions.

## **COMMUNICATION IS KEY**

- **Advertise early and often.** Students are constantly juggling academic and extracurricular commitments, so the more notice you can give of an open committee meeting, town hall, or another committee related event where you are hoping for student attendance and participation, the better. A reminder the day before and/or the day of is also very helpful, but this should *not* be the first time students hear of the event. Unfortunately, we've seen this happen all too often and ultimately results in ill will from students toward the committee.
- **Advertise beyond the Stanford Report.** We've seen many administrators announce things only in the Stanford Report and be surprised when few to no students show up. Often times, advertising in the Stanford Report alone is insufficient as very few students are subscribed. Instead, consider having students who are on your committee advertise using student email lists. As ASSU Executives, we have access to an email list of all students and are happy to help disseminate committee information. The Stanford Daily and the Roundabout are also great ways to keep students informed about the committee's work. Other regular email communication channels that may help spread information your committee's work include the weekly digest from the Haas Center, weekly UAR advising emails through Newcomer Guides and Academic Advising Directors, and BEAM weekly newsletters.
- **Leverage social media.** Many students become aware of information through social media. Work with us, student representatives on your committee, and student groups to communicate updates, events, and other opportunities for student engagements from the committee on social media.
- **Setup a website.** Make sure that information about your committee's charge and membership is easily accessible to students. Any events, office hours, etc. that the committee is holding should be public and regularly updated on this site. Make your committee transparent and accountable to students! An example of a committee website with information on committee charge and composition can be found at [ourvision.stanford.edu](http://ourvision.stanford.edu).
- **Share accessibility information.** All of your communication should note how accessible your event location is to ensure that all members of our community have equal opportunity to participate.

---

## **CASE STUDIES**

Here are three excellent examples of university committees in the past year that successfully implemented many of our suggestions. We highlight things they did well, as well as note who on the committee we worked with in case you wish to contact them for additional guidance.

### **Title IX Coordinator Search Committee**

We worked closely with Lauren Schoenthaler, Senior Associate Vice Provost for Institutional Equity and Access, to ensure that robust input from students would be considered when selecting our new Title IX Coordinator. Lauren partnered with the ASSU Executives to allow any student to participate in interviews with the finalists through one of two mechanisms. An all-campus email with both input options was sent out through the ASSU list to reach all undergraduate and graduate students. Any interested student could submit an anonymous question to be asked of the finalists, solicited via a survey. This question was only viewable by the ASSU Executives and the student representative on the search committee. The other option allowed for any student to apply to participate in the interview session itself. We offered two interview slots with each finalist, and students had to commit to attending one of each if chosen. Their application information was submitted directly to the ASSU Executives and was only viewable by ourselves and the committee's student representative. We intentionally designed both input options so that, rather than administrators, the ASSU Executives had final say on which students would conduct finalist interviews and what questions would be asked of candidates, with the goal of increasing student trust in the process and final outcome. We all agreed this process was particularly important given a historically low-level of student trust around Title IX issues. In addition, all students who participated in one of the two interview sessions were given an opportunity to provide their feedback on the candidates directly to the ASSU Executives, which was then provided directly to the Provost to increase student trust in the search process.

### **Campus Climate Survey Advisory Committee**

Chaired by Professor Susan McConnell, this committee heard students express frustration at how the committee was operating and immediately incorporated student suggestions. For example, while the committee had organized a few town halls at the suggestion of the student representative on their committee, town hall attendees expressed frustration with the university's general practice of not acknowledging feedback and failing to provide updates. In response, the committee sent additional emails to the student body summarizing what they heard from students and updating them on where the committee was in their deliberation process (i.e. still gathering feedback, close to reaching a decision, etc.). Members of the committee also attended meetings of the Undergraduate Senate and Graduate Student Council and took into consideration a bill passed by the Undergraduate Senate directly related to their

committee's charge. Committee members also provided email contacts for students to send input for committee consideration via email. Students felt heard throughout the process and ultimately were pleased with the committee's process and final recommendation.

### **ResX Task Force**

Jenn Calvert, Assistant Vice Provost for Strategy and Assessment, met with the ASSU Executives biweekly to keep us updated on the work of the committee as well as get our feedback on ways to engage students throughout the process. ResX held numerous in-person and virtual town halls, had an online form to provide feedback, had a website with the committee's charge and membership, provided periodic all-campus email updates to the community, met with affected communities such as Ethnic Theme Associates (ETAs) who had been organizing for better pay and other staffing conditions, heard a presentation from the ASSU Executives, held focus groups with current student staff, and briefed a small number of students on preliminary recommendations to get a gut check.