

# An Issue of Citational Politics: Elevating the Academic Labor in Community-Engaged Projects

Maria Novotny

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

---

## Abstract

While universities and colleges encounter new challenges to the sociopolitical climate influencing higher education, many institutions have embraced “community engagement” as a response to the growing public skepticism surrounding higher education. This article responds to this current moment by discussing the invisible labor that occurs in community-engaged scholarship. Many scholars across disciplines have already written about the challenge of accounting for community-engaged practices within review, tenure, and promotion (RTP) materials. Despite efforts to address these challenges, misalignment remains between the institution’s claim to value community-engaged scholarship and their documentation practices that attempt to reward community-engaged labor via RTP. I argue that this misalignment is an effect of the invisible labor guiding a community-engaged scholar’s ethical practice as they develop community relationships outside of the institution. In this chapter, I discuss this invisible labor through a relational ecology framework and offer examples from my own community-engaged scholarship to surface the invisible moments of community-engaged labor. I find that the invisible labor of community engagement is an issue of citational politics, or what gets “counted” in RTP at universities and colleges. As a response, I urge scholars to reflect on their citational practices and cite non-academic genres to better amplify the invisible labor of community engagement.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.37514/ALR-J.2025.9.1.06>

---

Maria Novotny (she/her) is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She joined the CCCC Social Justice at the Convention (SJAC) Committee in 2019 in tandem with her role as the Local Arrangements Chair for the CCCC 2020 Milwaukee Convention. Since that time, she has also served on the CCCC Executive Committee. Currently, she serves on the Coalition of Community Writing Program Planning Committee, and the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition Advisory Board Member. Her scholarship has been published in several edited collections and academic journals including: *Community Literacy Journal*, *Computers and Composition*, *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*, *Peitho*, *Reflections*, *Rhetoric Review*, *Rhetoric of Health & Medicine*, *Writers Craft & Context*.

---

Recent events ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic, campus protests, the arrests of international student visa holders, the cancellation of federally funded research grants, the presence of ICE on college campuses, and pressures for institutions to “make a deal” with the Trump 2.0 administration have drastically pushed higher education into new, and arguably chaotic, dilemmas. While today’s sociopolitical climate has contributed to anxieties for those working in higher education, these times are also reflective of growing public skepticism about the role, purpose, and necessity of higher education. Evidence of the public’s waning value of higher education surfaces in a July of 2024 [Gallop](#) poll. The poll finds that the noted decline of public support for higher education can be traced to a combination of factors including the rise of college tuition, concerns about the value of a degree, the perception of workforce needs as misaligned with higher education’s training, and the general politicization of higher education (Jones). In response, some institutions have sought to restore confidence in higher education “with a focus on transparency, accountability, and community engagement” (Clark et al.). This community-centered approach has been marketed by some universities as adopting a “third mission”, which calls for university administrators and faculty to imagine their purpose as social leaders investing university resources and time into the broader (not just academic) community.

Similar appeals to align scholarship with more “public facing” or community-centered commitments have also been adopted at a departmental level. English Departments including the University of Wyoming and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee have created recent graduate programs grounded in community engagement.<sup>30</sup> The Conference on Community Writing, and its close association with the Coalition of Community Writing, demonstrates another shift by which disciplines are embracing community-engaged work. Collectively, these examples illustrate the range of ways institutions, departments, and disciplines are embracing the inclusion of communities in academia. This academic shift towards communities can generate excitement and new ways to imagine an institution’s purpose. Arguably, finding excitement and new ways to imagine our work matters perhaps more than ever before given the sociopolitical climate and the defunding of higher education. For myself, I continue to find purpose in community-engaged work at my institution and can attest first-hand how community engagement can produce both public good and good for the institution. Both can be true. But, for good to flourish, structural revisions must occur to address the unique labor conditions of community-engaged work.

One overt labor issue is how institutions reward community engagement; often described as a practice that “measures,” “recognizes,” and thus “counts” community-engaged labor during academic merit reviews and tenure and promotion cases. Universities claiming to value community engagement have more recently begun to understand that the realities of community-engaged scholarship simply do not align with more traditional academic metrics of tenure and promotion. One suggested approach to address this misalignment has been the

---

<sup>30</sup> See the University of Wyoming’s “English PhD in the Public Humanities” degree and UW-Milwaukee’s “Public Rhetorics and Community Engagement” program.

strategic inclusion of more ambiguous language in university merit review and promotion policies to allow for a more “open” interpretation of community engagement’s labor (Janke et al. 30). However, closer examination to assess the impact of these policies found that the decision to adopt a broader, more blanket approach to revising tenure and promotion language increased and muddled — rather than decreased and clarified— the labor of evaluating tenure and promotion cases (Janke et al. 42). Rather than create documents that clearly reaffirm and define the labor of community engagement, the ambiguous language reduced the clarity to guide evaluations because “faculty held different views about the key elements that distinguish community-engaged scholarship as an aspect of scholarly work” (Janke et al. 39). As a result, the inclusion of ambiguous language within university review, tenure, and promotion (RTP) policies can produce “additional work” at the college and departmental level; effectively increasing the labor of faculty serving on academic reviews and tenure and promotion committees by requiring them to reconcile the ambiguous language in university policies with more specific college, departmental, and/or disciplinary values of community engagement (Janke et al. 39). In effect, the unclear language of these policies created unintended obstacles thwarting the institution’s intention to more explicitly embrace community engagement.

For faculty serving on tenure and promotion committees, the task of conducting academic reviews and evaluating promotion files for community-engaged scholar invites a host of new questions. Adding to the confusion is the unfortunate reality that many of the metrics of community-engaged scholarship frequently do not typically align with the metrics of more traditional academic research and teaching. Laura Wendling elaborates on the reasoning behind this misalignment, writing:

community-engaged research often operates in historically nontraditional ways, in that it includes community members as coresearchers, seeks to produce additional scholarly products outside peer-reviewed publications, and often favors local impact over national recognition, [as such] it cannot be evaluated in the same ways as traditional research. (222)

Wendling details how the required labor of community-engaged scholarship fails to align with more traditional approaches to academic scholarship. As a result, it can be a challenge for how universities understand, acknowledge, value, and reward more non-traditional forms of academic labor. Part of the challenge to adequately evaluating community-engaged work is the fact that many merit and promotion “policies often do not specify metrics and products aimed at public audiences” (Janet et al. 41). In turn, the labor conditions of rewarding community-engaged work disproportionately require faculty members— those who are both going up for promotion and being asked to serve as RTP reviewers—to engage in more nebulous labor of arguing how work typically invisible to university promotion policies matters and should count towards promotions.

Institutional change is slow, and, as such, can take time to adequately address this misalignment of evaluating community-engaged labor within the university. In response, community-engaged scholars have encouraged interventional approaches to address the labor conditions which often reward faculty “for publishing traditional research outputs” rather than “truly promoting public scholarship” (Alperin et al. 19). For institutions “to better align public scholarship goals with the metrics and RPT [review, promotion, and tenure] processes that

guides faculty work” (Alperin et al. 19), scholars suggest that interventions could begin to manifest at a disciplinary-level rather than at the broader institutional point-of-view (Janke et al. 44). To be certain, localizing how we “count” community engagement via RTP via a more localized, disciplinary scope places the task of arguing for the value of that non-traditional scholarship once again upon faculty, rather, than demand a larger institutional restructuring of RTP policies. Nonetheless, it should be noted that some disciplines have found some success in drawing upon disciplinary arguments for community engagement across institutional contexts.

Take, for instance, the discipline of writing, rhetoric, and literacy studies, which has found some success in advocating for the value of community-engaged work and the realities of the labor required of community-engaged work. Scholars trained in this discipline incorporate the topics of rhetoric, writing, and literacy with a host of community issues. New sub-disciplines such as prison literacies, cultural rhetorics, and community writing projects offer unique insights that center community perspectives, knowledges, and methods. To be sure, these sub-disciplines exist because of how communities are centered in our work, whether that work includes our teaching, research, or service. In general, the reception towards actively incorporating communities as central to our disciplinary identity has been well-received, evident by the creation of new community engagement degree programs within English Departments. In fact, it can be argued that the intentional incorporation of communities into our disciplinary practices has pushed the discipline to adopt more critical and social justice orientations to guide the ethics of this work; one example is the [CCCC Statement on Community-Engaged Scholarship and Pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition](#). Position statements like this one are invaluable tools for community-engaged scholars because the statements can serve as a form of guidance translating how the discipline understands and recognizes this work for our other colleagues responsible for evaluating the credibility and “rigor” of our work. These disciplinary statements can be of particular use when advocating for community-engaged work to be counted by universities and colleges as they address the slow, relationship-building (and invisible) labor of cultivating trust with communities. Furthermore, these statements describe how to understand the value of community-engaged work as a discipline; and thus, can reduce the labor of other faculty evaluators working across other disciplines as they review promotion materials that may not resemble their traditional deliverables of knowledge-making.

While I find my discipline to be an exemplar of how to advocate and produce useful resources for community-engaged scholars, what remains missing are anecdotes of how scholars use those resources to account for the community-engaged labor, often invisible to their institutions. More attention to *how* and *who* is often doing community-engaged scholar is needed in order to offer more transparent models of how to sustain (and receive promotions) based on the merits of our community-engaged labor across institutions. Following the racial unrest of 2020 and struggles of the pandemic, the University of Michigan conducted a study to examine how these sociopolitical moments were impacting community-engaged work. The report, titled [“Faculty Equity & COVID-19: The Problem, The Evidence, and Recommendations”](#), found that while there was a general appetite to actively engage in developing community relationships and projects that connected students and research with

issues of racial justice and health equity, many leading these efforts on campus identified as women and faculty of color. Noting this finding, the report urged university leaders to create mechanisms for making what they called *invisible* service work more visible, and thus equitable for the women and faculty of color doing this labor.

In their *ALRA* research article “The Path Ahead for Recent PhDs,” Thomas Miller and Charles McMartin present findings that echo similar themes found in the University of Michigan report. Referencing [The Chronicle of Higher Education’s 2020 report](#), Miller and McMartin found that, during the pandemic, women and faculty of color in particular were negatively impacted by their university’s expectations for tenure and promotion. In response to these findings, Miller and McMartin recommend universities, colleges, and departments recognize leadership from a distributed model in order to counter the invisible labor of service that disproportionately impacts women and faculty of color (102). These issues of invisible labor must be addressed if institutions of higher education continue to circulate more “adaptive leadership” models, which argue that higher education does not just serve its campus body but the surrounding campus community.<sup>31</sup> Such a model operates based on the belief that, because our scholarship (whether that is teaching, research, or service) connects to community issues and concerns, the impact of our work extends beyond university walls and thus should be seen as a value by community members. Yet, as the University of Michigan’s report and Miller and McMartin’s research assert, for this argument to actually hold, critical action must be taken to adequately resource and reward those faculty members who embrace community-engaged practice as part of their institutional work. Without doing so, more early career scholars, women, and faculty of color tasked to take on this invisible labor, will burn out and ultimately leave. For example, Arellano et al.’s article, [“The Mass Exodus: Why People Are Leaving Academia and What We Can Learn from Their Stories”](#) published in *Constellations*, provides anecdotal insight into these challenges of sustaining an academic identity given the increase hostilities surrounding higher education. A similar conversation at the October 2025 Conference on Community Writing, titled “After Academia,” highlighted perspectives on reimagining our academic work beyond the institution and featured a panel of formerly tenured or tenure track women the majority of whom left academia post-COVID.

Notably, this article arrives during a very real “mass exodus” of faculty in higher education. Personally, I have known nine individuals (either with tenured or in tenure track jobs) that have left their academic positions within the last five years. Their departures have often left me asking, *Why am I still here?* Wrestling with that question, I have come to realize that it is my commitment to community engagement that remains the driving reason of why I choose to remain employed by my institution. To be clear, I am deeply privileged to devote my time,

---

<sup>31</sup> In her article [“Adaptive or Transactional Leadership in Current Higher Education: A Brief Comparison,”](#) Natalie Khan defines adaptive leadership as an approach that “takes a holistic view of leadership” and “allows institutions to properly plan for change and consider many factors affecting the complex nature of the leadership relationship” (179). Because adaptive leadership considers all factors that affect an organization, it has become a popular stance to address the sociopolitical climate directly impacting public perceptions around higher education.

energy, and the ability to receive a paycheck as I develop community research and teach experiential learning courses alongside community partners. But, real talk, this work is hard on my body. It takes emotional, physical, and mental fortitude. Perhaps more so now than ever, the work is lonely given how many of my colleagues have left. My hope in writing this article is that it can be of value to those community-engaged scholars who may also be contemplating why and if they should remain in academia. I anticipate that this article may be helpful in offering new ideas about how to better capture the invisible labor required in our community-engaged projects. Making that labor visible, I see, as one intervention to the misalignment between institutional value for community engagement and institutional policies guiding faculty community engagement.

\*\*\*

In what follows then, I argue community-engaged scholarship requires relationship building. I explain how I understand relationship building as a form of invisible labor by demonstrating how community-engaged scholarship operates as a relational ecology. Doing so, I offer scenes that describe the embodied toll of doing this work, which I argue are necessary to unearthing the invisible labor practices community-engaged work requires. To demonstrate this, I offer personal anecdotes from my community-engaged work to provide examples of how to account for these labor practices. These scenes reveal how relationship building is essential to any ethical engagement with communities, and yet, it takes an incredible amount of time (not often compatible with the tenure clock) and is not a practice always taken into consideration by RTP committees. By drawing from my experiences, I hope to provide more transparency for others on how to best account for their (likely invisible) community-engaged labor at their institutions.

### ***The Relational Ecology of Community-Engaged Projects***

The documentation in RTP materials often correlates to how our work is cited, either by others in academic publications or by ourselves on our CVs. In fact, Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaaq and Jordan Firth write, “maybe the most important way people show their work in research and establish their place in the conversation is through citations” (10). As such, it is often the academic article, book chapter, or conference presentation that becomes a formal citation on the CV due its genre. Megan Farve Hartline explains this is because

“university policies as enacted in professionalization documents leading up to tenure create a larger system that discourage emerging scholars from thinking of their broader body of engaged work as research, except when it results in traditional forms of scholarship like a publication or conference presentation” (594).

Citations thus make our work (whether teaching, research, or service) visible to our fields of study and our university, acting as a technical professionalization artifact (Janke et al. 29). Yet, for those scholars who position their research, teaching, and service as community-engaged (tenure track, teaching track, graduate students, or otherwise), the reality is that the traditional citation practices by which we make visible our labor do not account for the range of invisible labor required to do ethical and responsible community engagement. Part of this is due to the deep relationship building (and sustaining) that is required of community-engaged scholarship.

Relationship building (and the ability to sustain these relationships) should be understood as a practice in community-engaged work that encapsulates the intricate nuances of working with and alongside other bodies. In this way, relationship building is an embodied practice that evokes invisible labor (often in the form of emotional, intellectual, and material). Jessica Rose Corey and Barbara George understand the invisibility of this community-engaged labor as part of a larger and underexamined issue related to institutional focuses on high impact practices (HIP) (31). Community engagement often falls under the umbrella of HIPs, and while there has been scholarship attesting to the positive impacts of community engagement as a HIP on students, little to no discussion has considered its impact on professors — whether tenure track or non-tenure track (Halonen and Dunn). Corey and George explain that within HIP literature:

There is often little mention of the work needed to facilitate an effective community-engaged project, including researching, networking, organizing, leading, mediating, and teaching. This lack of recognition, and therefore lack of support, for the work expended by these faculty members ultimately depletes faculty members' emotional, cognitive, and in some cases, financial resources, making both community-engaged projects and the faculty position itself unsustainable (30).

Community-engaged scholarship is thus an embodied experience, impacting the faculty member's body through various stressors (in part due to the lack of sufficient university support).

While the embodied effects of doing community-engaged work as a professor directly impacts the faculty member's body, other bodies are also being managed, negotiated with, communicated to, and often mentored. As such, because of the multiple bodies often involved in community engagement (the professor, the student/s, the community member/s, the university), a relational ecology informs much of the community-engagement. In this relational ecology, professors work alongside and with a range of stakeholders with various positionalities and, at times, differing exigencies informing their participation in the community engagement. Given that, the professor (as often situated as the project lead) is tasked to manage the invisible, embodied labor that is required when working with and alongside other stakeholders. Corey and George describe these embodied challenges writing that:

Material and emotional labor often coincides with researching, networking, organizing, leading, mediating, and teaching while facilitating community-engaged projects. Professors choosing to take on these projects not only often face the emotional task of helping students confront injustices but also face pressure to meet expectations of community partners, which reflects on the professor, the students, and the institution. Likewise, professors may experience stress over how to yield results that they can argue fit within their tenure, promotion, or other evaluation criteria. (38)

Understanding community engagement through the framework of a relational ecology allows for making visible the various and ever-evolving invisible layers of community-engaged labor, which are simply not accounted for by university policies. Furthermore, by adopting a relational ecology framework to community engagement, there can be more transparency in the reality that “like any relationship, the connections forged among people, ideas, and resources in community-engaged projects are messy” (Corey and George 42).

Given then how community-engaged projects are messy, as they involve the communication and coordination of multiple bodies, critical consideration must be given of one's positionality within a community-engaged relational ecology. That is, "the community-engaged scholar" is not a monolith identity. How one is positioned within and alongside the community-engaged project (and community members) matters in many ways, particularly in how it can contribute to invisible labor. Toward this aim, Corey and George suggest that those professors adopting community-engaged projects advocate for additional support — before, during, after, and throughout the project. Yet, other scholars have warned that while self-advocacy for support is important, it can also function as an additional form of "communicative labor," particularly for those who embody gendered identities (Gist-Mackey et al. 21). Meaning, "the concept of communicative labor exists at the intersections of workplace emotion, compassionate communication, and gendered occupational experiences" which can lead to disproportionate burdens of communication (Gist-Mackey et al. 29). When critically examining communicative labor, Gist-Mackey found that it is often women scholars in particular "who are interpellated into academic labor disproportionately" (42). The consequences of this gendered phenomenon is that "those who engage communicative labor from a critical standpoint are likely being systematically pushed to perform in ways that exceed individual capacity yet are not rewarded or supported institutionally for the communicative labor that is rendered visible" (Gist-Mackey et al. 42).<sup>32</sup> Because communicative labor in community-engaged work often leads to what Gist-Mackey et al. find as "emotionally-laden work amid research, teaching, and service that threaten healthy work/life norms," solutions to simply advocate for more support can at times replicate systems of invisible labor (21). How to move beyond practices that continue to make invisible the messy realities of a relational ecology in community engagement is a focus of this article.

In what follows, I build upon the work of Corey and George and Gist-Mackey et al. and demonstrate how relationship building becomes invisible yet central labor in community-engaged work. I describe three examples of relationship building across the traditional university categories of research, teaching, and service. Doing so, I articulate the unique challenges that come with relationship building and attempt to move beyond the suggestion that we simply advocate for our work by asking for more resources. Rather, I propose other forms of documentation as possible citation practices to make visible the centrality of relationships in community-engagement by proposing more community-centered approaches to the documentation of this work. Such an approach asks us to also consider how we may incorporate the perspectives from the communities we partner with as a form of citation, which may serve as an accountability check ensuring that our community-engaged work supports not just the university but is in service with and alongside the communities central to this work.

---

<sup>32</sup> Arguably, Gist-Mackey et al.'s argument about the gendered experiences of communicative labor should be applied to consider the impact of communicative labor on other marginalized identities (i.e. LGBTQ+ professors and/or persons of color).

### ***Invisible Experiences of Labor across Community-Engaged Research, Teaching, & Service***

Critiques of community-engaged scholarship suggest work between universities and communities is too transactional and does not do enough to adequately address resource allocation and support to partnering communities (Clayton et al. 8; Enos and Morton 23). But as universities embrace community engagement, viewing it as an essential HIP, more scholars committing themselves to community-engaged projects have pushed against these critiques. Rhetoric, writing, and literacy scholars, like Aimée Knight, have identified practices that can work against the exploitation of community collaborations for university gain and scholarly recognition. In her book *Community is the Way*, Knight asserts that we have done well with creating knowledge to establish our field, but she also asserts that a gap remains in our field, as there are “fewer resources [that] make visible the everyday, local action that we implement in our classrooms and in our communities” (6). These everyday, *invisible* practices include reciprocity (Opel and Sackey 1; Ríos 63), accountability (Itchuaqiyaq 99), trust (Bloom-Pojar and Barker 92), openness (Shah 97), and shared lived experience (Collins 276). When operationalized collectively, they contribute to a slowing down of our work by focusing on the relationships central to the community-engaged project (Novotny, Davis, Grobel, and Vesbit 32). In fact, Julie Lindquist echoes much of this, reminding researchers invested in engaged scholarship that community work can be “unpredictable, time [...] intensive, and entirely inefficient” (651). As a result, community-engaged work “is a long uneven process” only made possible “within the carefully cultivated relationships of trust between researchers and participants” (Lindquist 649). The ability to slow our work in order to develop relationships can present challenges, especially in today’s ideological embrace of hyper-efficiency.

Slowing down our work (whether research, teaching, and service) is often a fraught experience for the faculty member, as it is antithetical to how universities and departments recognize and reward such work (i.e., through review, evaluation, and merit increases based upon completed and reportable projects). The relational ecology of community-engaged projects, and the practices they require, often conflict with the time-driven realities of being employed at a university. As Knight reminds us, the labor of relationship building remains invisible only until there is an academic publication or presentation that can be cited as evidence of such labor (6). In what follows, I detail experiences of building relationships through the three categories by which much of our RTP is evaluated: research, teaching, and service. I provide examples to illustrate the importance of slowness in this work and how adopting a slow approach facilitates a reciprocal, accountability, trusting, and open relational ecology. And I offer suggestions for how universities and departments can revise professional documentation practices to better account for (and cite) this necessary slow, relational approach that centers the community collaboration over the university gain.

### ***Relationships in Community-Engaged Research***

#### ***Example: An Infertility Art Exhibit During National Infertility Awareness Week***

In April 2025, my arts-based storytelling organization curated a two-day long private exhibition titled “Light the Night: Stories Through A.R.T.” in New York City in conjunction with National Infertility Awareness Week (NIAW). This exhibit featured 20 patient-artists who

turned to artmaking to process and represent their experiences with assisted reproductive technologies. The exhibit was sponsored and paid for by Progyny, Inc. which is a fertility and women's health benefits company, and hosted with RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association. The goal of the exhibit was to share stories and art relevant to the challenges of building a family in the United States. For two days, Progyny, Inc. hosted private events with fertility stakeholders and used the exhibit as a backdrop for these events. It was estimated that about 170 fertility professionals, advocates, and clients of Progyny, Inc. attended events featuring the exhibit. This included members of the National Infertility's staff and board members. Two images below portray the exhibit and the various engagement attendees had with the exhibit.



*Image 1 features a wide-shot of the exhibit and numerous attendees engaging with the exhibit content who were invited to the private event, "Light the Night: Stories Through A.R.T."*



*Image 2 details a closer shot of an attendee engaging with the exhibit content for “Light the Night: Stories Through A.R.T.”*

*Discussion: Making Visible the Invisible Scholarly Labor of This Exhibit*

The exhibit example raises two issues about community-engaged scholarship and the invisible labor involved in the execution of such an event. The first issue is simply one of time and, specifically, the length of time it takes to develop relationships with nationally recognized stakeholders in the infertility community (like Progyny, Inc. and RESOLVE). This is an important note especially for community-engaged scholars just beginning their work, as these types of “mass production” community events that cost around \$16,500 are made possible because of the years of relationship building. For instance, my organization was first introduced to members of Progyny’s team back in 2018. In fact, it was at RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association’s “Night of Hope Awards” where my organization was being recognized that introductions to Progyny were made. At that time, the Progyny team asked my co-director and me to participate in Progyny’s podcast. We did so and years passed until Progyny reached out to my organization in September of 2024 to inquire about the possibility of working with us on an NIAW exhibit. The months of September 2024 through January 2025 were then spent creating a proposal and budget for Progyny’s consideration as well as numerous virtual meetings to discuss Progyny’s intentions with the exhibit and its scope. As the exhibit dates grew near, time was spent during February 2025 and March 2025 to identify potential artwork for the exhibition. In early April 2025, a few weeks before the exhibit opened, artwork was secured and the exhibit was installed for NIAW.

I share this timeline and backstory to this exhibit as it showcases the long period of time it can take to not just host a patient art exhibit but really to demonstrate how this exhibit was only made possible through the years of Progyny, Inc. following my organization’s work and establishing credibility as two infertility advocacy organizations. It was through this that trust between Progyny, Inc. and my organization was established. Rachel Bloom-Pojar and Maria Barker write about the centrality of trust in their own community-engaged work, or *confianza*, as they refer to it (92). For them, trust (understood as *confianza*) is “much more dynamic than simply talking about whether someone trusts another person or not” (91). Rather, trust “is something that the promoters have developed an expertise with as they continuously work to build relationships and genuine connections with their communities” (Bloom-Pojar and Barker 91-92). And, as a result of the time this takes, “*confianza* comes with great responsibility and, at times, additional pressure to help people” (Bloom-Pojar and Barker 92). In this way, Bloom-Pojar and Barker remind us that “researchers need to recognize that *confianza* takes time and needs to extend beyond any specific project, grant, or interaction. It must be built up through consistent and genuine interactions that center relationships and mutually beneficial goals” (92). I argue that the NIAW exhibit illustrates Bloom-Pojar and Barker’s concept of trust in action, which often can be in conflict with the timelines established by our university merit committees. In other words, there is not a lot of reward for building deep trust at our universities, yet it is arguably necessary as it allows for an openness between community scholars and the partnering community.

In the NIAW exhibit example, openness was a needed value to be put into practice. Much of this is because exhibitions are not neutral. They tell a larger curatorial story. And in the instance of the April 2025 one, it was an exhibition focused on the range of persons living with infertility (e.g., persons of color, LGBTQ+ persons, single parents by choice) and sociocultural

obstacles (e.g., no federal insurance mandate to cover infertility, cultural stigmas attached to infertility, misconceptions about the mental stress of an infertility diagnosis). The ability to curate a show that invited the diversity of infertility as a topic was available to my organization because of the embrace of openness between my organization and Progyny, Inc.

Community-engaged scholar Rachel Shah discusses “openness” as an asset-based knowledge production tool in community projects, which works to redefine intellectualism to “interact with difference in a generative way” (106). For her, practicing openness in community projects involves embracing “open minds, open construction of self and others, open hearts, open revision, open communication, and open structures” (97). In this way, Shah asserts “openness enriches critical community-based epistemologies by suggesting that it is not simply enough to make a theoretical argument for the validity of community stories” (39). Openness, in this way, suggests that it is not just who is speaking that is important as what is said and can require “those from the center sometimes hav[ing] to defer to those with experiential knowledge of a situation” (123). Because of the trust that had been established between my organization and Progyny, Inc. there emerged the ability to display open, and at times, conflicting representations of infertility in the exhibition. For instance, some of the artwork displayed a narrated story that highlighted the unsuccessful ability to build a family through assisted reproductive technology. For some at the event, this could have been interpreted as antithetical to the more hopeful (and even happy ending) narratives presented. Specifically, for Progyny, Inc., as a benefits company attempting to demonstrate the need for employers to provide fertility benefits, the stories of IVF not working could have been flagged as inappropriate. But because of the trust and the open conversations about my organization’s values and Progyny’s values, the competing narratives were allowed to be told at the event and demonstrates the realities that, even with fertility insurance coverage, sometimes the happy ending doesn’t result.

Finally, the fact that the exhibit was private also lends challenges for community-engaged scholars about how to document the exhibit's impact as an act of research. As a closed event, it can be difficult to make visible its impact to university members.<sup>33</sup> Private events have a particular advantage to ensuring impact. For instance, at the NIAW exhibit, Progyny, Inc. was tasked with bringing key fertility stakeholders to the exhibit. In this way, while the exhibit could not be viewed by the public, those who are either practicing fertility doctors, infertility advocates and lawyers, as well as clients of Progyny, Inc. who provide employers with fertility benefits were directly engaging with the exhibit content. As influential stakeholders in the infertility community, this exhibit may not necessarily translate at the university-level, but it certainly holds weight and aids in further establishing the relevancy of community-engaged work in communities like the infertility community. Still, questions of how community-engaged scholars are recognized at their universities for this work remain.

---

<sup>33</sup> Arguably, this very article in which I’m discussing the event, is one attempt to make this scholarly curatorial work visible.

*Proposed solutions to the question “How do you make that labor visible in our research?”*

The example above illustrates how some community-engaged research projects require time to build relationships with community stakeholders, especially those who hold influence in their communities but often do not engage with universities. Issues of making non-campus related events and activities that involve the community-engaged scholar have not fully been discussed in our discipline, and yet, this work no doubt occurs. One such solution is to write about the event and the labor involved for an academic journal, much like what this article is. However, I want to push against the obvious solution as it reinforces the need for the community-scholars to produce an academic piece as justification to count the labor. Rather, the labor itself that it took to host the event (i.e., the NIAW exhibit) should simply be the “countable” artifact. What would such an artifact look like then?

One solution is the inclusion of community-engaged events on CVs and even personal websites. For instance, at my institution, there is the ability to include a section for tenure and promotion purposes that allows for the documentation of exhibits. While I appreciate the ability to have CV lines for community exhibits, I am skeptical of how much weight that actually bears and the full comprehension of the exhibition’s community impact. Meaning, the exhibition’s goal was to engage community members about a researched and scholarly informed topic (i.e. infertility). Yet, much of our RTP materials address our scholarship in the context of our disciplinary training and identities, and not the impact it has on our communities. To respond to such a disconnect, I propose adopting citational practices that actively include the documentation of community partner impact by including numbers reflective of community participation/attendance, the citation of media clips that resulted from the community-engaged event, and statements of impact from community members on merit and annual review documents. While such documentation could be added to tenure and promotion applications, there should also be considerations for how such engagement is measured on academic reviews. Given that, in what ways may we need to rethink the yearly documentation that measures our scholarly impact and output?

At my institution, we are required to list the percentage of contributions made to a collaborative and co-written article. For example, on my tenure and promotion materials, this documentation looked as so:

Gagnon, J. and <b>Novotny, M.</b> (2020). Revisiting Research as Care: A Call to Decolonize Narratives of Trauma. <i>Rhetoric Review</i> , 39(4), 486-501. <b>*50% collaborative contribution</b>
--

Other universities sometimes also require “journal impact factors” that measure the publication’s impact, measuring how often other scholars reference the publication in their published scholarship. Thus, enforcing a merit-based evaluation of a scholar’s citational presence. Yet, in the case of community-engaged projects, how one makes visible the impact of that project/event is often not measured. As the NIAW example demonstrates, community-engaged projects are collaborative genres that include multiple and various engagements with people. To better account and measure its impact, I propose a citational practice on the CV that may look like this:

**Novotny, M., Gressel, K., & Horn, E. (2025). "Light the Night: Stories Through A.R.T."**

A private two-day exhibition sponsored by Progyny, Inc. in Honor of National Infertility Awareness Week. New York City, NY.

***\*50% collaborative contribution***

***\*Viewed by 170 infertility professionals and advocates***

***\*Exhibit included 26 pieces of artwork and personal narratives created by infertility patients from around the United States***

***\*Received \$16,547 in sponsorship funds to cover exhibition costs***

Including these impact numbers can then make more visible the impact of the community-engaged scholarship. Furthermore, I would encourage other community-engaged scholars to consider how they may cite other community-engaged projects in their work. Meaning, by making the choice to list our projects on our CVs, we can provide moments for our fellow community-engaged colleagues to cite our projects and not just the academic publication. In this way, this citational practice implores Dawn Opel and Donnie Johnson Sackey's concept of reciprocity in communist-engaged work, which advises that "we revise or even abandon accepted notions of partnership in community-engaged scholarship" as a way to avoid "privileg[ing] academic notions of justice and balance that might be inconsistent with community beliefs and needs" (2).

Rethinking our citational practices can better account for the invisible labor of community-engaged work requires. While we do a good job thinking critically about who we cite in our academic publications, we must continue to extend that critical inquiry to also what we cite – including deliverables and labor practices that are not just in the form of an academic publication or white paper. We need to start citing the invisible labor that is part of our CVs, just not always featured on the first 2-3 pages. Instead, we need to cite the service, the exhibitions, the websites, and the public talks our community-engaged work requires. Doing so will demonstrate the value embedded in our careful, relationship-building work that is community-engaged.

### ***Relationships in Community-Engaged Teaching***

#### ***Example: Teaching A Grant Writing Course Collaborating with Community Partners***

Prior to going to graduate school, I worked at a fundraising firm where I was trained to research and write grants for clients, many of whom were non-profit organizations. After graduate school, I was hired at a different institution tasked with developing professional writing courses. Grant writing became one of those courses, and since then I have taught that course on a regular basis. While many other scholar-teachers in writing, rhetoric, and literacy studies have designed grant writing courses (see the [Call for submissions for Teaching Grant Writing: Deepening Learning, Deepening Engagement](#)), my course is designed as an experiential learning course where students learn the fundamentals of grant writing, from how to work with

grant funding databases to drafting a full grant proposal. Students learn these skills by being assigned a community partner for the semester and serving as the community partner's grant intern. In this way, the student gains first-hand knowledge of the community's mission and funding needs, and in doing so, researches and works with members of the community partner staff to draft a grant application. I use this design as a rationale for this approach to teaching grant writing as I understand grant funding as largely a relational project. Funders want to understand who the organization is and what they are funding. Grantee organizations are often working within particular communities to support community needs. Additionally, securing a grant for a community organization often takes time because for relationships to form between the funder and the organization. Because of these factors, I explain to students that while they can write a beautiful grant, funding success is not always relative to the quality of writing, but the establishment of relationship building.

*Discussion: Making Visible the Invisible Scholarly Labor of This Course*

Like any other course, there is the obvious labor of prepping a syllabus and preparing materials and assessments. Yet, this grant writing course, because of its experiential learning design and collaboration with community partners, requires additional, often invisible, labor. Specifically, prior to the course beginning, I connect with my institution's center for Student Experience and Talent (SET), which supports faculty who offer experiential learning courses. With the help of SET, I write up a description of the course, and the type of projects students will work on, to solicit interest for community member involvement. This solicitation phase takes several weeks, often when I am not on contract, and frequently involves emails and virtual meetings with potential partners. During this time, I often am building rapport with community partners. We have conversations about the purpose of the course, the type of students enrolled in the course (e.g., major, prior writing experience, undergrad level), the general schedule, how student placement would occur, and the current financial and material needs of the community organization. This is largely a relationship building practice where I am attempting to get to know the partner and vice versa. This work enacts Bloom-Pojar and Barker's concept of trust and also invites open conversation about how well the course structure and design may fit with the needs and expectations of the community partner. Yet, the only indicator to signal the appearance of such labor is the fact that I categorize the class as an "experiential learning" course, which from a university perspective can range in meaning.

In addition to teaching students about grant writing, I also serve as a mentor helping students navigate coursework and communication with community partners. Students have a range of experiences with community members. Some have never worked with a community partner for a class, while others may have this experience. In this way, I am also building into my curriculum professionalization materials that encourage students to understand themselves as writing professionals. Encouraging this new frame of understanding for students is for me a form of emotional labor, requiring that I support students as they start to develop professional experiences and relationships beyond the university classroom.

The engaged structure of the course adds additional complex factors, often immune to non-community partner courses. For instance, for many students the outcome of the drafted grant (aka if the grant was secured or not) will likely not be known at the time of the course

completion. Meaning, student evaluations are somewhat incomplete in fully evaluating the outcome of their work. Furthermore, because this course is directly tied to community engagement, there is also a disconnect in the fact that community partners are not provided an opportunity to assess the course. While the university has systems to ensure students can provide evaluations upon course completion, there is no formal mechanism for community members. In this way, there are disconnects with how such courses reinforce student accountability at the expense of community accountability. Cana Itchuaqiyag warns of the dangers of ignoring how our community work may not always remain accountable to those communities we work with (97). Writing about her own experiences, she explains “I might have the credibility to do research in my community based on my fancy degrees, position, and identity — but that credibility don’t mean shit if I don’t hold myself accountable to the self-determination and sovereignty of my people” (99). Rather, for Itchuaqiyag, accountability means “caring more about the needs and safety of my community more than my own professional needs. Simply, it means putting my community first—in the position of power—when I choose to engage with them in my professional capacity” (99). Her critique of accountability in community settings is one that warrants more critical examination of where and to what degree community partners appear and are valued in our evaluation metrics.

*Proposed solutions to the question “How do you make that labor visible in our teaching?”*

Because many universities and colleges have centers (like SET) focused on community engagement, I argue that these centers could do more to capture the impact of courses that collaborate with community partners. The onus of making visible this labor should not solely be on the individual instructor. Rather, there are larger university mechanisms that can and should work to understand the impact these courses have on the community, in addition to students instructors. In my grant writing course, the known impact of how successful that specific grant research and proposal may be for a community partner may not be known until the course is complete. However, follow-up and continued engagement with the community partner could and should happen from a university perspective and not necessarily the instructor. For example, in my grant fall 2022 writing course, the success and impact of the skills taught were only measured in my teaching evaluations. However, in February 2025, I received an email from a past student in that course who informed me about her recent grant success. She shared:

“I took your grant writing course in the Fall of 2022, and I wanted to thank you for your incredible instruction throughout the semester. I’ve been awarded every grant I’ve applied for so far! Most notably, I just received \$4.25 million from the Flexible Facilities Program (FFP) Grant, which will fund the construction of a new library and community center. A tremendous amount of work went into this application, and I couldn’t have done it without the foundation you provided in your class. Your class most definitely enhanced my professional abilities but has also created a ripple effect that will now benefit my entire community, particularly the underserved populations. I’m grateful for the difference you’ve made in my life and the lives of those I serve.”

I offer this example because it demonstrates how the impact of an experiential learning course is not always directly known nor realized at the end of the semester. In this example, nearly three years passed, demonstrating how the immediacy of these skills may not always be

known or clear to students at the conclusion of course. Yet, the labor required to facilitate such a course can lead to successful outcomes. Mechanisms that the university can support to either follow-up with past students and/or past community partners in these types of courses may be one potential approach to addressing both the length of time it can take to document “success” of the skills gained in these courses as well as the direct impact such skills can have on communities.

Because some aspects of facilitating these types of courses involve open discussions and building trust with community partners, documents that can speak to reciprocity can be added value to ensuring these courses remain accountable to community partners. Gabriela Ríos, for example, reminds other scholars interested in working with communities that reciprocity is established through the building of our relationships with the communities that we research (63). As a practice, reciprocity requires an awareness of how our own positionality impacts and can subconsciously influence the decisions we make in collaborating with our communities for research. As such, Ríos cautions us against “assuming that our disciplinary standards define our commitment to communities” (63). To avoid this, one option may be to build in opportunities for community partners to evaluate courses. By incorporating the community partner experience in these evaluative metrics, we can provide a more balanced documentation and representation of the range of labor required of instructors. Such documentation can then be referenced later on in RTP materials.

As a discipline, we can work to cite not just the syllabus when referencing examples of other community-engaged teaching practices but also cite their impact. In this way, we can understand that the teaching notes on our CV can be added to as we hear from either past students, community members, or the centers on our campus, who can track the impact of our experiential learning courses through follow-up with students and community members. For example, prior to hearing from my grant writing student, I listed my grant writing course on my CV as: Grant Writing (*Fall 2022*). Yet, this citational style fails to adequately capture the labor involved in this course. Instead, when citing experiential learning, I encourage us to adopt a resume style, as it better captures the range of work required to instruct such a course. One model for this may be listing and describing the course as:

<p>Grant Writing (<i>Fall 2022</i>)</p> <p><i>*Paired 15 undergraduate students with community partners to conduct grant research and writing</i></p> <p><i>*A student in the 2022 course, received a \$4.25 million community grant which she attributed to skills gained from my course</i></p> <p><i>*5 of the community partners from this course, elected to collaborate on future experiential learning courses I instructed</i></p>
--

Such an approach makes visible how these types of courses, as a result of relationship building and time spent cultivating student professionalization and community partner relationships, result in continued academic and community impact. This can serve as a visible marker for university reviewers and for our disciplinary community members, who may be

interested in adopting a similar course design. Demonstrating the impact of the course through more descriptors aids in adding to the argument for the additional labor required of such a course, in spite of their reservations about the intense labor it requires.

### ***Relationships in Community-Engaged Service***

#### *Example: Serving as a Steering Committee Member for Building Families Alliance of WI*

Many community-engaged scholars serve on community boards related to their research and/or teaching. In such a capacity, scholars often operate as a private citizen who offer their professional and personal experience to topics and issues important to the community organization. Often, while these are unpaid positions, a motivating factor to participate is derived from the shared lived experience one has with the organization's mission. Shared lived experience is a feminist practice theorized extensively by Patricia Hill Collins, who explains that "for most African-American women those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences. Thus lived experiences as a criterion for credibility frequently is invoked by U.S. Black women when making knowledge claims" (276). It is through a shared identity of experiencing the world that an unspoken discourse about what it means to be a Black woman (in the case of Collins' work) emerges. Similarly, collective knowledge about being a marginalized body (in this case an infertile body) evokes a similar type of shared lived experience, whereby a shared sense of knowing what it means to live as an infertile person emerges in a world where the body is assumed to be a fertile body. This experience can serve as a motivating factor to participate on committees advocating for the needs of those who hold a similar lived understanding of the world because of their shared identity.

My personal and professional experience with infertility has positioned me to serve on several different community leadership positions as a volunteer. For example, since 2021, I have participated as a Steering Committee Member for the Building Families Alliance of WI (known as the BFA), which brings together patients, medical professionals, and supporters from across the state to increase awareness of and advocate for mandated insurance coverage for infertility in Wisconsin. This organization was formed following a 2020 Federal Infertility Advocacy Day, in which I served as an organizer for the state. Understanding that access to fertility coverage is both a national and state-level issue, following that 2020 Advocacy Day, the group of Federal Advocacy Day participants decided to create the state-level organization, referred to as the BFA. As a member of the steering committee, I bring both my personal infertility experience to the group as well as my professional expertise through my work with my organization and as an English professor. My role on this committee is to identify methods to ethically recruit and share patient stories that reveal the challenges they encounter when trying to build a family in a state with limited access to fertility care. As someone with access to a university, I also support the committee by identifying potential grant funding opportunities to support the organization's fiscal needs. Additionally, I often rely on my professional infertility networks established through my organization to help connect the BFA with other similar state-based infertility advocacy groups to inform them of the future

directions of our advocacy. While the committee meets monthly over Zoom, much of the individual expectations of serving as a steering committee member occur on one's own time. And while it is hoped that each member "carries their weight," there is no formal assessment or evaluation to ensure each member fulfills their duties; we all are volunteers after all.

*Discussion: Making Visible the Invisible Scholarly Labor of This Volunteer Role*

Occupying the position of volunteer for this organization — one that is not affiliated with a university nor the discipline, poses challenges to documenting the many ways that my volunteering supports the aims of my scholarly identity and work. While I can and certainly do list my role as a Steering Committee Member on my CV and on other forms of annual review, the impact such a volunteer role has upon my community-engaged scholarship and teaching is often unclear and invisible. My service and the labor I do on this committee may not directly impact my university or my students. However, this service is key to fostering relationships that can (and have led) to research collaborations and teaching partnerships.

For example, serving on the BFA has allowed me to meet and establish relationships with a range of infertility stakeholders that otherwise I likely would not meet (i.e. fertility doctors, patient advocates, and lobbyists). Connecting to this network of diverse individuals is made possible because of our shared commitments to improving access to fertility care in our state. Through this shared commitment and the ability to work together over the course of nearly five years, we have built and established not only trust amongst each other but a deep understanding of the various skills we each offer to the issue. In my capacity, because of my research in health and medicine, I was made aware by my institution of a local community health grant which would support community health projects. I brought this grant opportunity to the BFA, where it was decided we should apply for funding. Collectively, a group of us worked on writing the grant proposal, which I supported through my knowledge of teaching grant writing. Such illustrates an example of invisible labor; work that I am supporting because of my skills sets yet is not directly tied to any university recognition of such labor.

The relationships that are established through this type of volunteer service can reap several benefits, beyond simply "getting to know each other." For instance, a fertility doctor, who also serves on the BFA committee, recently recommended me to serve as a lay reviewer for the American Society for Reproductive Medicine's (ASRM) educational department, which is tasked with creating patient-informed shared decision-making documents. This opportunity was made possible to me only because of the fertility doctor's working relationship with ASRM and their knowledge of my work, which they know focuses on shared decision-making in fertility settings. Here, relational ecology is at work—connecting individuals who share an experience with other individuals who work similarly on topics of fertility expertise. While the ASRM example again illustrates my decision to take on another form of unpaid service, I also understand how such service can inform my own research and teaching practices on the topic. Therefore, it is a service that will aid in my professional development, which is arguably an outcome that my university can and should recognize. Meaning, understanding service as labor should not be solely understood as labor that the faculty member provides; but rather that the labor can also directly influence and generate deeper conversations, insights, and relationships with other stakeholders around topics that connect to the faculty member's expertise. Such is

then a more reciprocal understanding of what it means to engage in forms of service as labor. The time and work spent on non-university or discipline related service organizations yield results that frequently are not always visible to the university, leading to the question of how to address such invisibility in our service work.

*Proposed solutions to the question “How do you make that labor visible in our service?”*

While there is the ability to list non-university or disciplinary service on one’s CV, the actual labor and generative activity that it can produce is not made clear by a CV line. In this way, other forms of documentation can and should be included. For instance, one option is to create a personal website where one can add a section documenting the connections between service and professionalization. My website does this by including a webpage titled, “Infertility Advocacy” which attempts to make more transparent not just how I view myself as a scholar-advocate, but my service to the infertility community and how it connects to my research and teaching. Arguably, though, I am not convinced that my university actually has seen or read that page, as it is not part of any formal university evaluative document.

Instead, community impact statements can encourage universities to better understand the relational ecologies of a faculty member’s community service. These statements can function as testimonials from the community partner regarding the involvement and impact of the scholar-volunteer. While many tenure and promotion deliverables ask for scholars to write about their community partnerships, such a process often only highlights the faculty member’s perspective. A community impact statement can serve to address this disparity and bring in the community partner’s insight as a valuable part of the evaluation criteria. Further, the impact statement can serve as a testimony to how the faculty member’s labor (which may be invisible to the university or understood as less ‘rigorous’ compared to other academic genres) carries significant weight and impact in their community. In other words, the community impact statement gives a voice to that community partner and can encourage the university to see the community member’s insight as a factor in assessing the merit of the faculty member’s work. To be clear, the adoption of such an impact statement would require equitable compensation from the university as writing the impact statement would ask the community partner to engage in an act of labor at the expense of the university. Compensation is thus a necessary component of this practice. But still, it is a valuable one as it shifts how universities evaluate the impact of community engagement in faculty settings to an evaluative system that asks faculty members (and universities) to be accountable to the communities they claim to service. In this way, it holds our community-engaged scholarship accountable to the community changemaking our collaboration seeks to foster.

\*\*\*

Across each example, I have tried to illustrate how community-engaged scholarship measured by each academic category (research, teaching, service) often involves the ability to have time and use that time to then cultivate relationships that are built upon trust, openness, reciprocity, shared experiences, and ultimately ensure that our community-engaged intentions are driven by the community’s needs rather than the institution’s. This is tense work and deeply impacts the body of the community-engaged scholar who must navigate the tensions of working across competing timelines, manage resources and (at times) students, and account

for their labor to their institution. Furthermore, the examples that I presented are ones that are grounded in my own positionality as a tenure-track professor working at a research university in a department that very clearly declares value of and support for community-engaged scholarship. My own positionality must be noted as there are many other community-engaged scholars who do not occupy such a position, which certainly can elevate inequities and challenges to making visible the time needed to build successful, ethical relationships in community-engaged projects. Acknowledging this, I conclude the article with a larger disciplinary call for us to rethink our own citational politics. By citing the alternative genres our community-engaged scholarship produces, we can model disciplinary-specific interventions for the larger issues of misalignment between institutional values and policies, which many scholars experience when attempting to document their community engagement at their universities and/or colleges.

### ***Rethinking Our Discipline's Citational Politics***

The sociopolitical climate surrounding higher education serves as a reminder that our work and scholarship is not neutral. Our work lives and circulates in a larger ecology that can influence the public's perspective about what it means to not just work at a university or college, but also what it means to claim to be a community-engaged scholar. For rhetoric, writing, and literacy studies, we have done much to reflect upon the meaning of identifying as "community-engaged" as well as to develop guidelines to ensure and evaluate ethical outcomes of such scholarship (["Promotion and Tenure Resources"](#)). However, as this article has demonstrated, the labor of such work does not always neatly align within the larger institutional structures like review, tenure, and promotion materials that measure the impact of our community engagement. This disconnect between the labor of community engagement and institutional practices measuring merit and impact are not new; and yet, the misalignment between the two continues to remain with Kelly and Given noting that "much of the existing research is focused on institutional rather than academics' experiences" (442-443). Hence, a critical gap in how institutions support the required labor of community engagement. Janke et al. explains why such tensions in community engagement and university policies have remained the norm, finding that

"if the goal of policy revisions related to community-engaged scholarship is to shift the academic culture of the institution...then adding language, while important, is not enough" and argues instead that policy revisions that reform academic culture should take place "at the organizational locations where faculty live" (44).

To aid realigning academic culture within a community-centered paradigm, we should ponder the small actions we as a discipline can take in order to better address the invisible labor of community engagement. One example may take the form of rethinking our own citational practice.

As a discipline, we have embraced critical citation practices (Itchuaqiyah and Frith 13; Pritchard) and understand that "citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow" (Ahmed 1). In this way, more critical conversations around citation practices have emerged in writing, rhetoric, and literacy studies. Arguably, we

are a discipline which models citational justice by “moving away from individualistic views of authorship and toward a shared, reciprocal understanding of how knowledge is produced” (Ahmed et al. 79). Other scholars like Tannenbaum et al. have called for similar reform related to citational practices. For instance, those who may transition in their scholarly lives face new citational questions about how to account for their new “identity infrastructures” as they must contend with how to accommodate name changes in prior publications. Towards this idea, Ahmed et al. encourages scholars to consider how our citations may better account for other “dialogic practices” that resist Western intellectual thought that “knowledge is produced in a vacuum” (80). Instead, they encourage scholars to transform our citational practices to “underscore their relational nature, reconceptualizing them as acts of listening, as opposed to transactional or performative practices” (Ahmed et al. 80). Their call is one that we should begin to embrace by moving beyond our already established critical disposition about who we cite and move toward what we are citing. I build upon these ideas to suggest that one way we can begin to intervene in the invisible labor required of community-engaged projects is collectively citing the products we develop that are not part of the traditional academic genre (i.e. the journal article, the monograph). Instead, we need to make the relationships and the range of invisible labor involved in that work visible to not only our institutions but also our larger discipline, if we are to truly claim to be a field that values writing as a tool for changemaking.

I end this article then with an invitation for community-engaged writing, rhetoric, and literacy scholars to critically examine their own citational practices by asking: *What am I listing on my CV? How may I include other non-traditional academic genres on that CV or even a personal website to make that community labor visible to others in my discipline and my community partnerships? What am I citing my academic publications and at my academic conferences? Are they traditional academic genres or do they represent the breadth of community-engaged labor? How can I use citations to elevate the slow community work of my disciplinary colleagues?*

These are large questions, but they are ones that need to be tackled at this moment of increased precarity around higher education, considering the commitments we claim to have with our communities. The article [“Accounting for ‘Alternative’ Genres in Community-Engaged Work”](#) offers potential models for adopting citational practices that recognize the non-traditional deliverables often produced by community-engaged work (Novotny 53). Still, such a move that I’m advocating for takes time. My hope though is that we can begin to critically reflect on the questions related to what we cite and, in doing so, identify new citational practices as a response. Citing not just our publications but the other forms of labor (such as exhibits and webpages and mentoring) are equally essential to doing community engagement. Adopting more critical citational practices that account for these “alternative” deliverables may elevate the deep care work and labor of community-engaged scholarship. While we are not the only discipline who values this type of work, we understand the rhetorical power of writing and citations. We can and should do more at this moment to better address how we make our labor in these community projects visible if we are to sustain this laborious and embodied scholarship during these precarious and trying times in higher education.

## Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Ahmed, Syed Ishtiaque, Sareeta Amrute, Jeffrey Bardzell, Shaowen Bardzell, Nicola Bidwell, Tawanna Dillahunt, Sana Gaytán, Naveena Karusala, Neha Kumar, Rigoberto Lara Guzmán, Maryam Mustafa, Bonnie Nardi, Lisa Nathan, Nassim Parvin, Beth Patin, Pedro Reynolds-Cuéllar, Rebecca Rouse, Katta Spiel, Soraia Prietch, Ding Wang, and Marisol Wong-Villacrés. "Citational Justice and the Politics of Knowledge Production." *Interactions*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2022, pp. 78-82. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3556549>.
- Alperin, Juan P., Carols Muñoz Nieves, Lesley A. Schimanski, Gustavo E. Fischman, Meredith T. Niles, and Erin C. McKiernan. "How Significant Are the Public Dimensions of Faculty Work in Review, Promotion and Tenure Documents?." *ELife*, vol. 8, n. e42254, 2019, pp. 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.42254>.
- Arellano, Sonia, Will Kurlinkus, Caitlan Spronk, moderated by Alexandra Hildago. "The Mass Exodus: Why People Are Leaving Academia and What We Can Learn from Their Stories." 29 May 2024. *Constellations: A Cultural Rhetorics Publishing Space*, vol. 7. <https://constell8cr.com/issue-7/the-mass-exodus-why-people-are-leaving-academia-and-what-we-can-learn-from-their-stories/>. Accessed 4 June 2025.
- "CCCC Statement on Community-Engaged Scholarship and Pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition." Conference on College Composition & Communication, November 2023, <https://cccc.nete.org/cccc/resources/positions/community-engaged>. Accessed 3 June 2025.
- Clark, Cole, Megan Cluver, Tiffany Fishman, and Danylle Kumkel. "2025 Higher Education Trends." Deloitte Center for Government Insights, 7 April 2025, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/2025-us-higher-education-trends.html>. Accessed 2 June 2025.
- Clayton, Patti H., Robert G. Bringle, Bryanne Seno, Jenny Huq, and Mary Morison. "Differentiating and Assessing Relationships in Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Exploitative, Transactional, or Transformational." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Spring, 2010, pp. 5-22. <https://scholarworks.indianapolis.iu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/c85d1fdb-d8d1-4734-8fd0-da5b5dcc6f6f/content>.
- Corey, Jessica Rose, and Barbara George. "Sustaining Community-Engaged Projects: Making Visible the Invisible Labor of Composition Faculty." *Academic Labor: Research and Artistry*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-19. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1034&context=alra>.
- Enos, Sandra, and Keith Morton. "Developing a Theory and Practice of Campus-Community Partnerships." *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning*, edited by Barbara Jacoby and Associates, Jossey-Bass, 2003, pp. 20-41.
- Gist-Mackey, Angela N., Adrienne Kunkel, and Jennifer A. Guthrie. "Surviving Communicative Labor: Theoretical Exploration of the (In)Visibility of Gendered Faculty Work/Life Struggle." *Academic Labor: Research and Artistry*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2021, pp 1-30. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/alra/vol5/iss1/3>.
- Halonen, Jane S, and Dana S Dunn. "Does 'High-Impact' Teaching Cause High-Impact Fatigue?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 27 Nov. 2018, [www.chronicle.com/article/Does-High-Impact-/245159](http://www.chronicle.com/article/Does-High-Impact-/245159). Accessed 4 June 2025.

- Hartline, Megan Faver. "Shaping Emerging Community-Engaged Scholars' Identities: A Genre Systems Analysis of Professionalization Documents that (De) Value Engaged Work." *College Composition & Communication*, vol. 74, no. 4, 2023, pp. 592-617, <https://doi.org/10.58680/ccc202332519>.
- Itchuaqiyag, Cana Uluak. "No, I won't introduce you to my mama: Boundary Spanners, Access, and Accountability to Indigenous Communities." *Community Literacy Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2022, pp. 97-99. <https://doi.org/10.25148/CLJ.17.1.010653>.
- Itchuaqiyag, Cana Uluak, and Jordan Frith. "Citational Practices as a Site of Resistance and Radical Pedagogy: Positioning the Multiply Marginalized and Underrepresented (MMU) Scholar Database as an Infrastructural Intervention." *Communication Design Quarterly Review*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2022, pp. 10-19. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3507870.3507872>.
- Janke, Emily, Melissa Quan, Isabelle Jenkins, and John Saltmarsh. "Persistence and Proliferation: Integrating Community-Engaged Scholarship into 59 Departments, Seven Units, and One University's Academic Promotion and Tenure Policies." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2023, pp. 27-50.
- Jones, Jeffrey M. "U.S. Confidence in Higher Education Now Closely Divided." *Gallup*, 8 July 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/646880/confidence-higher-education-closely-divided.aspx>. Accessed 2 June 2025.
- Kelly, Wade B., and Lisa M. Given. "The Community Engagement for Impact (CEFI) Framework: An Evidence-based Strategy to Facilitate Social Change." *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2024, pp. 441-459. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/10.1080/03075079.2023.2238762>.
- Khan, Natalie. "Adaptive or Transactional Leadership in Current Higher Education: A Brief Comparison." *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2017, pp. 178-183. <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v18i3.3294>.
- Knight, Aimée. *Community is the Way: Engaged Writing and Designing for Transformative Change*. University Press of Colorado, 2022.
- Lindquist, Julie. "Time to Grow Them Slow: Practicing Slow Research in a Fast Field." *JAC*, vol. 32, no. 3 / 4, 2012, pp. 645-666. <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/stable/41709847>.
- Miller, Thomas P., and Charles McMartin. "The Path Ahead for Recent PhDs." *Academic Labor: Research and Artistry*, vol. 8, 2024, pp. 73-106. <https://doi.org/10.37514/ALR-J.2024.8.1.07>
- Novotny, Maria. "Accounting for "Alternative" Genres in Community-Engaged Work." *Community Literacy Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2025, pp. 35-58. <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/communityliteracy/vol19/iss1/5>.
- Novotny, Maria, Gina Davis, Maya Grobel, and Jennifer Vesbit. "Community-Driven Concepts to Support TPC Coalition Building in a Post-Roe World." *Communication Design Quarterly Review*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2023, pp. 28-37. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3592356.3592360>
- Opel, Dawn, and Donnie Johnson Sackey. "Reciprocity in Community-Engaged Food and Environmental Justice Scholarship." *Community Literacy Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-6.
- Pritchard, Eric Darnell. "'When You Know Better, Do Better': Honoring Intellectual and Emotional Labor Through Diligent Accountability Practices." *Education, Liberation & Black Radical Traditions for the 21st Century: Carmen Kynard's Teaching & Research Site on Race, Writing, and the Classroom*, 8 July 2019, [carmenkynard.org/featured-scholar-eric-darnell-pritchard-when](https://carmenkynard.org/featured-scholar-eric-darnell-pritchard-when)

[you-know-better-do-better-honoring-intellectual-and-emotional-labor-through-diligent-accountability-practices/](#). Accessed 5 Feb. 2023.

“Promotion and Tenure Resources.” *Coalition for Community Writing*, 2022.

<https://communitywriting.org/promotion-and-tenure-resources/>. Accessed 10 June 2025.

Settles, Isis H. and Jennifer Linderman. “Faculty equity and COVID-19: The problem, the evidence, and recommendations.” 5 Oct. 2020. *University of Michigan ADVANCE Program*.

<https://advance.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UM-ADVANCE-Faculty-Equity-and-COVID-19-Oct-2020.pdf> Accessed 3 June 2025.

Shah, Rachael W. *Rewriting Partnerships: Community Perspectives on Community-Based Learning*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2020.

Tannenbaum, Theresa Jean, Irving Rettig, H. Michael Schwartz, BM Watson, Teddy G. Goetz, Katta Spiel, and Mike Hill. “A Vision for a More Trans-Inclusive Publishing World: Guest Article.”

*Committee on Publication Ethics: Promoting Integrity in Scholarly Research and Its Publication*. 18 Jan. 2021. <https://publicationethics.org/news-opinion/vision-more-trans-inclusive-publishing-world-guest-article>.