Measuring the "Messy": Assessing Assumptions, Attentions, and Affect in Community Engagement Work

Jennifer Bay, Purdue University
Erin Brock Carlson, West Virginia University
Megan Faver Hartline, Trinity College

Background for panel

Our work is often measured through outputs or outcomes that don't account for moments that are rich with complexity.

Each of us provides a different perspective on how to account for the multiple exigences in community engagement work.

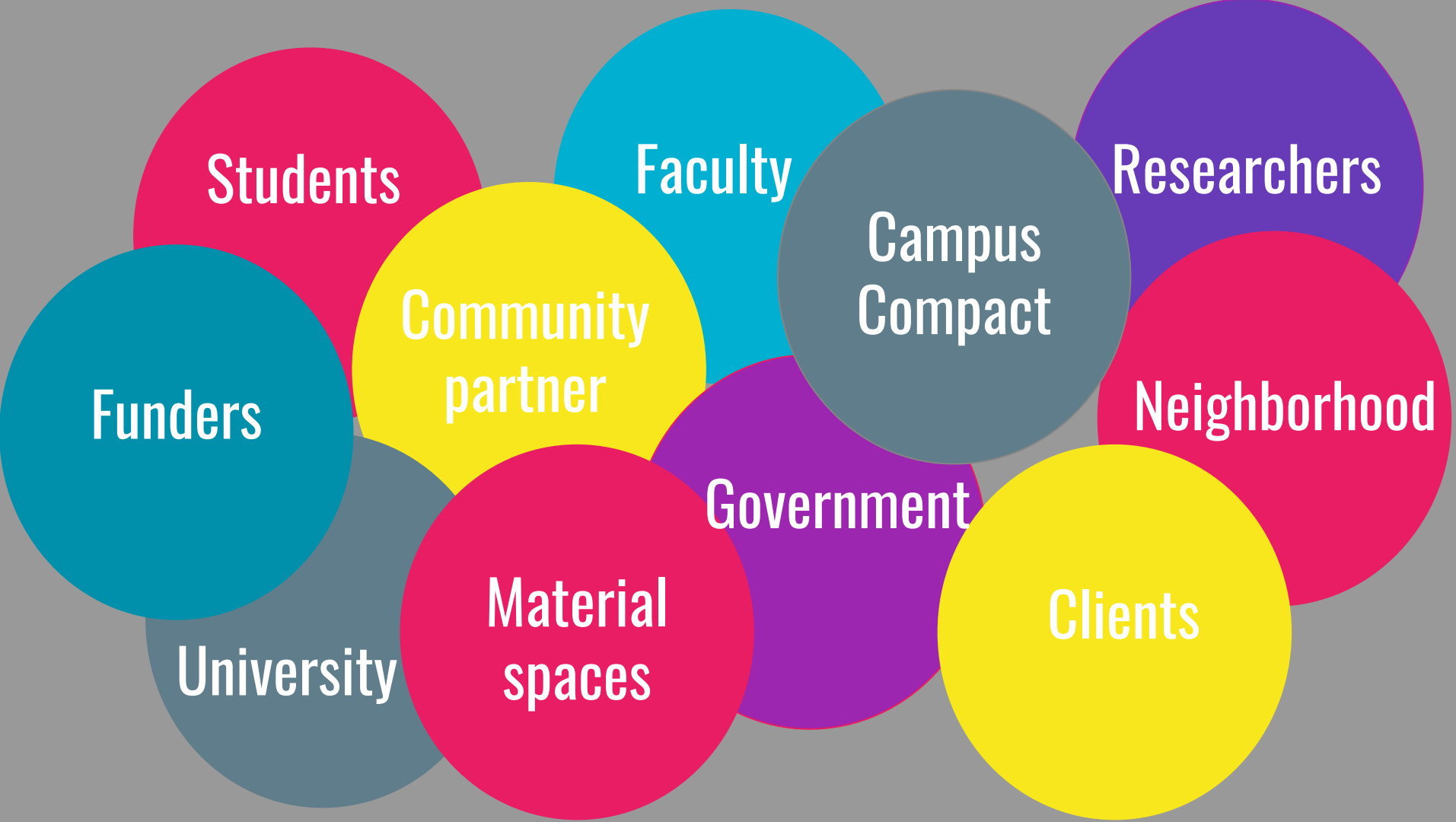# Measuring Impact: Accounting for Affect in Community Engagement Work

Jennifer Bay, @jennybay
Associate Professor of English
Director of Professional Writing
Purdue University

How do we assess community engagement work?

It depends.

___

Students

Funders

Community partner

Faculty

Campus Compact

Researchers

Neighborhood

University

Material spaces

Government

Clients

Data Imperative (Bay & Swacha, 2019)

-the drive to produce measurable data that proves
outcomes

What does the data imperative eclipse?

Do feelings count? Which feelings? And how do we count them?

Midwest Food Bank

- 16 counties
- 150 emergency food outlets
- Pantry education center
- Resource advisors

Because it takes more than food to end hunger.

More Than Food is an initiative for building capacity in food banks and food pantries to more effectively address the root causes of food insecurity. The purpose of More Than Food is to help pantries offer healthy client choice, connect clients with community services, and instill a culture that is welcoming so clients can set and reach goals. More Than Food is designed to help pantries offer more choice, connection and culture.

Through Foodshare's Institute for Hunger Research & Solutions, we provide practical tools, training materials and guidance to help food banks and pantries build capacity.

http:ittakesmorethanfood.org

Takeaway 1

Provide opportunities for those less visible impacts to show up, which can include visual methods for fleeting and non-discursive moments.

- Photovoice (Sullivan; Swacha; Brock Carlson)
- Iconographic tracking (Gries)
- Autophotography (Glaw et al)

Takeaway 2

Make room for what you don't want to hear.

- What gets excluded or doesn't seem to fit may be a matter of learning to recognize different ways of knowing
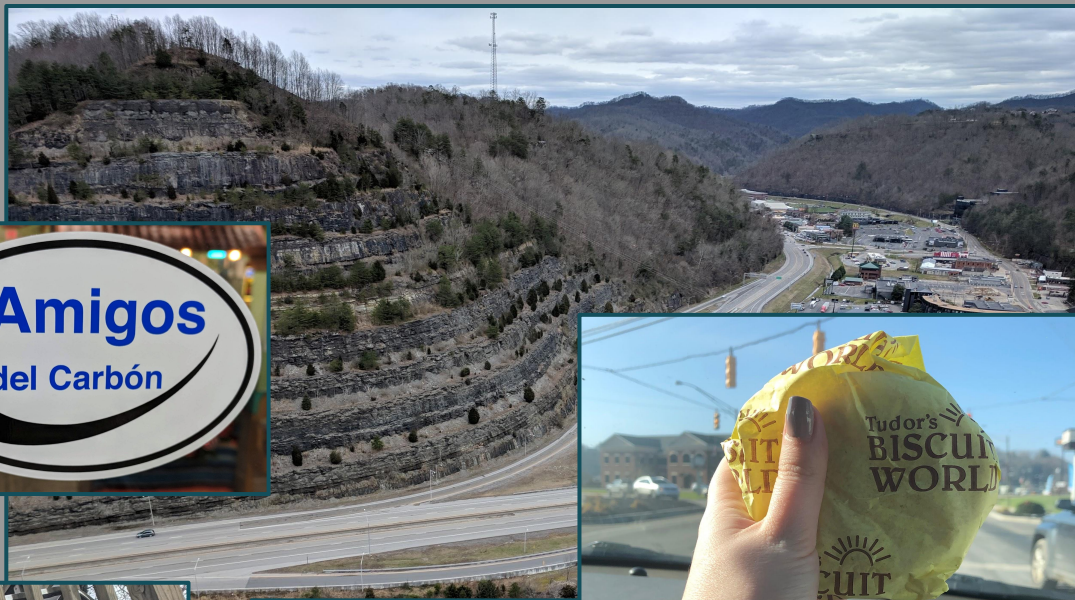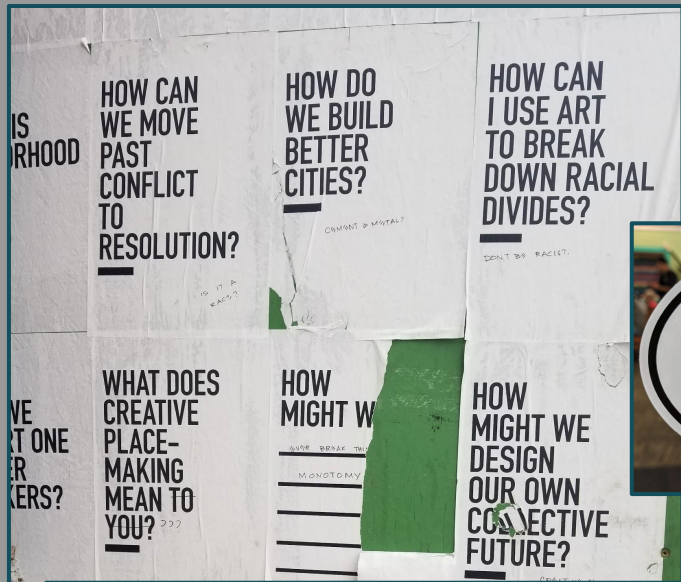
Takeaway 3

Non-representational ethnographic methods, which attempt to capture an atmosphere or feeling

- Kathleen Stewart
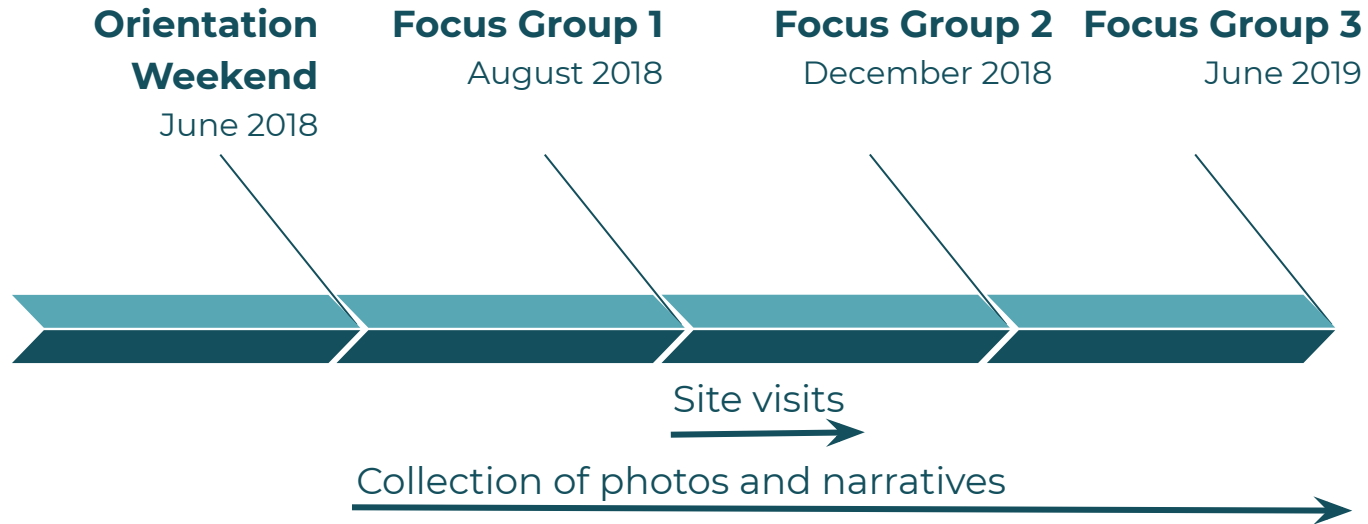- Nigel Thrift
- Phil Vannini

Facing and Embracing the Unexpected in Community-Based Research

Erin Brock Carlson, @brinerock
Assistant Professor of English
West Virginia University

HOW CAN WE MOVE PAST CONFLICT TO RESOLUTION?

HOW DO WE BUILD BETTER CITIES?

HOW CAN I USE ART TO BREAK DOWN RACIAL DIVIDES?

WHAT DOES CREATIVE PLACE-MAKING MEAN TO YOU?

HOW MIGHT WE

HOW MIGHT WE DESIGN OUR OWN COLLECTIVE FUTURE?

Amigos
del Carbón

Tudor's BISCUIT WORLD

FREE THEM ALL

Project Timeline

Orientation Weekend
June 2018

Focus Group 1
August 2018

Focus Group 2
December 2018

Focus Group 3
June 2019

Site visits

Collection of photos and narratives

Participant-generated research questions

___

- How might various forms of wealth be converted into people power?
- How do you see the past, present, or future of this place's economy, culture, or society? Is the just transition framework useful in understanding these elements?
- What is the relationship between building the world we want and challenging or resisting harm?

Participatory elements

———

- Project design, structure
- Research questions, which influenced:
  - Photo prompts
  - Focus group questions
  - Writing prompts
  - [Interview questions]
  - [Participatory mapping activity]
- Outcomes and uses of project

1. Demanding Complexity, Contradictions

Participants craved nuance in the ways that people outside the region talk about it.

Why can't our story have layers?

———

"I think my pictures show a lot of the complications of Appalachia instead of this bullshit media narrative that is like Trump Country or, look at this leftist in Appalachia, how weird and wild! Because neither of those things are true. **There's complication and nuance here that I think is never represented in media**, but I really tried to show in my photos."

Baxter, Focus Group 2

2. Questioning "The Good"

Participants challenged the narrative that nonprofits are a positive force for social change.

Who are our efforts actually helping?

———

"That's where I get jammed up. We keep asking this question: who are we accountable to? And the answer from **all of us**, I think, always ends up being, people who live here, people we're trying to help, people in the margins, but it seems like a lot of the **people in this structure**, in nonprofits who make things happen, their answer is, well we're accountable to the people whose money we're taking. And I think that's the big disconnect."

Violet, Focus Group 3

3. Challenging Relationships

Participants were not afraid to interrogate and critique traditional intellectual patterns.

When do **we** get to be the authority?

———

"And there are interviewers, there are filmmakers, researchers, whatever, that are here, and they...take intellectual property, social property, cultural property from folks and like give nothing back. So this knowledge is stored away in the Ivory Tower in academia...**It's always distilled through this filter of power that like—never is reciprocated**, there's never any profit or benefit that comes back to the people that give this information away. And there's this dichotomy too where like, obviously we...have knowledge that other folks don't, that folks want from us, but at the same time, people from the mountains are supposed to be stupid or backwards, like, ignorant or whatever and behind the times."

Jackson, Focus Group 1

Participatory, visual methods

———

- Provide space for participants to share on their terms
- Build in reflection as part of overall process
- Capture moments that might otherwise go unnoticed
- Emphasize embodied nature of everyday life
- Invite co-interpretation, co-navigation
- Demand radical honesty and humility from **everyone**

> **Attend to the beautiful "mess" of community work**

Assessing Campus-City Engagement through Focus Groups

Megan Faver Hartline, @meganhartline
Director of Community Learning
Trinity College

2017 Focus Groups

Protocol for 2017 Focus Groups

———

Share your feedback on past experiences:
- In what ways have you partnered with Trinity faculty and students in the past?
- What worked well?
- What could have worked better?
- What surprised you about the partnership?
- What do you wish Trinity faculty and students knew before they began working with you?

Protocol for 2017 Focus Groups

———

Share your ideas for future opportunities:
- What problems does your organization face, or what plans do you have for the future?
- Might any *possibly* connect with Community Learning courses or Action Lab projects?
- What types of student work would be helpful? (i.e., volunteer hours, digital storytelling, research projects)
- How can we work better together to improve reciprocal partnerships in the future?

Protocol for 2018 Focus Groups

———

1) Create a List
Our goal is to make concrete examples more visible to everyone in the focus group. Feel free to add notes to this page during our discussion. We will collect your sheet at the end.
- Name of your organization:
- List ways that Trinity students interacted with your organization over the past school year.

2) Looking at what you wrote above, what type of work did students do for your organization?
- Did students provide hours of service?
- Did students provide information or research products?

Protocol for 2018 Focus Groups

———

3) In your own words, tell us more about how Trinity students interacted with your organization and the service/information/research they provided.

4) Tell us about the conversations with people at Trinity and your organization that led to this arrangement, and why you agreed to participate.

5) Did the Trinity students provide service/information/research that your organization would not have had otherwise?

6) Did the Trinity student service/information/research require additional supervision from your organization? If yes, was it worth the investment of your supervisory time?

Protocol for 2018 Focus Groups

———

7) Thinking about your organization's partnership with Trinity, and other Trinity partnerships you're aware of, have these relationships made any difference in Hartford?
8) What are your organization's plans for the next year?
9) Would you like to continue partnering with Trinity in the future? Why or why not?

1. Never Underestimate the Power of Positive Feedback

2. Learn Your New Context, Including How Your Theories and Ideas about Engagement Hold Up

3. You Need Strong Relationships for Good Feedback

Assessing Your Own Community Engagement Projects

1. Identify an aspect of your community work that you want to have a deeper understanding of.

1. My learning goal for this assessment process is:

2. I want to use this information to do:

___

2. In groups of 3-5 people...

Share your assessment goals with the group, and select one of the processes that your group will work on developing together.

___

3. Use post-its to answer the following questions:

- What kind of information are you seeking? (turquoise)
- Who are the stakeholders you want to involve? (pink)
- What methods or tools will you use in your assessment? (yellow)

Thank You!

Please keep in touch!

Jennifer Bay
jbay@purdue.edu
@jennybay

Erin Brock Carlson
erin.carlson@mail.wvu.edu
@brinerock

Megan Faver Hartline
megan.hartline@trincoll.edu
@meganhartline

Slides available at:
bit.ly/MeasuringMessy