



Office of Community Impact: Advancing KU's Mission, Uplifting Our Community Champions

Welcome to Community Impact at KU

A New Chapter in Our Public Mission

We're proud to introduce the Office of Community Impact (OCI)—a KU Lawrence office advancing the university's commitment to community-centered teaching, research, and engagement across Kansas and beyond.

Established in 2025, OCI serves as KU's first centralized infrastructure for documenting, supporting, and amplifying community engagement across campus. As a Carnegie-designated institution, this work ensures that our impact is not only meaningful—but measurable.

Led by Vice Provost Nicole Hodges Persley and Dr. Jomella Watson-Thompson, OCI empowers faculty, staff, students, and administrators to build reciprocal, community-driven partnerships. From Lawrence to Edwards to collaborations with the KU Medical Center, we are strengthening a unified vision of engaged scholarship—where every Jayhawk contribution creates lasting public value.

[Meet our team](#)

National Recognition

Carnegie Community Engagement Reclassification (2026)

KU has been **recertified** with the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement—one of the highest national recognitions for institutions demonstrating deep, reciprocal partnerships across teaching, research, and service.

KU is among ~277 institutions nationwide holding this distinction

The 2026 cohort includes 230+ campuses, with 48 first-time designees

Our 2021 designation laid the foundation—2026 strengthens alignment, data practices, and collective impact

This milestone reflects a coordinated, campus-wide effort to improve how we define, track, and communicate engagement and positions KU as a national leader in public-impact scholarship.



[Explore KU's Carnegie Recognition & Resources](#)

What's Next

Preparing for the 2029 Carnegie Cycle

As we look ahead, OCI is launching new tools to support campus-wide engagement tracking and storytelling:

Engaged KU Community Check Box

A streamlined, campus-wide tool to track engagement activity and support data-informed decision-making.

Sign up your unit to participate below.

[Sign Up for Check Box System Pilot](#)

Engaged KU Tool Box (Phase One)

A practical resource hub designed to help faculty, staff, and students strengthen and document community-engaged research and service.

Launch: Late Summer–Fall 2026

[Engaged KU Campus Tool Box Sneak Peek](#)

Aligning Our Impact

Transitioning from Jayhawks Rising to One KU

OCI is helping lead the transition from *Jayhawks Rising* to the university's new *One KU* framework—ensuring that community engagement remains central to KU's mission as a driving element of institutional excellence.

This year, we successfully partnered with campus leaders to advance the strategic goal of **“Engagement for Community Impact in Kansas & the Nation.”** As we celebrate the goals we have achieved in 2025-2026 and prepare for the 2026–2027 academic year, we look forward to supporting new priorities set by the One KU Executive Cabinet in late spring-early fall 2026.

Jayhawks Rising Team Members 2025-2026

Research & Thought Leadership

Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar

Launched in February 2026, the Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar Series supports interdisciplinary research and dialogue on pressing social issues. The seminar is co-sponsored by the Hall Center for the Humanities, the Office of Community Impact and the KU Center for Democratic Governance.

Led by professors Nicole Hodges Persley, Giselle Anatol, Will Duncan, Randall Fuller, and Christopher Koliba, the seminar elevates KU's national presence in arts-and-humanities-driven public scholarship—advancing critical conversations that connect research to real-world impact. [KU is one of a select group of universities](#) to receive funding for this 2 year exploration of American democracy.



Learn more about Sawyer Seminar Series

OCI Spotlight: ThrYve: A Community-Engaged Approach to Youth Violence Prevention in Kansas City

The Youth Violence Prevention Center–Kansas City (YVPC-KC), led by Associate Vice Provost Dr. Jomella Watson Thompson, Office of Community Impact and Professor of Applied Behavioral Science, in partnership with the Center for Community Health and Development (CCHD) at KU's Life Span Institute, received \$1.2 million in Year 5 funding to advance the [ThrYve](#) approach to youth violence prevention in Kansas City. Drs. Robert Winfield, KU Medical Center, and Dr. Jerry Schultz, KU CCHD, serve as co-investigators.

This funding is part of a five-year, \$6 million CDC grant designating the Youth Violence Prevention Center- Kansas City through the University of Kansas as a [National Center of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention](#)—one of only five nationwide. Through ThrYve, YVPC-KC implements comprehensive, community-engaged, and youth-centered strategies, including youth leadership, hospital-based violence prevention, and systems-level change. The funding award supports translating research into sustainable, youth-centered prevention efforts with local and national impact and reflects the strength of KU's community impact ecosystem.



[Learn more about ThrYve](#)

Up Next: Save the Date — Community Engagement Summit Reboot (January 2027)

As the Spring 2026 semester comes to a close, mark your calendars for the Office of Community Impact's reboot of the KU Community Engaged Learning Summit in January 2027.

Originally held in 2021 and 2023, the summit returns in partnership with the Center for Service Learning, KU Libraries, and The Commons, with primary support from the Office of Community Impact.

A call for presenters (CFP) will be announced in late summer to early fall, so stay tuned to our social media and upcoming newsletters for details.

We look forward to showcasing the impactful community-engaged scholarship of our faculty, staff, students, and community partners.

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