

How Texas Tech's Office of Outreach and Engagement Unites Campus and Community with the InfoReady Engagement Hub

*How TTU promotes, manages, and funds campus and community opportunism
across the Texas Tech campus and the greater West Texas Region*

An InfoReady Scale Case Study



Contact Info:
Amanda Xydis
axydis@inforeadycorp.com
517-285-8715

Contact Info:
Max Dynerman
mdynerman@inforeadycorp.com
202-306-5539

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Finding a solution that worked for the Texas Tech

The institutional priority put forward by Texas Tech's Strategic Planning Committee was brief, to the point, and for many institutions, near impossible: "transform lives and communities through strategic outreach and engaged scholarship." Why "impossible?" Because as any staff member at a major research university knows, such institutions are comprised of scores, even hundreds, of autonomous departments, programs, functions, and offices – few of which are able to easily communicate even among themselves let alone external audiences, and fewer of which are even aware of the totality of the institution's offerings.

So the challenge for Dr. Birgit Green, Assistant Vice Provost of Tech's Office of Outreach and Engagement (OOE), and her staff was, to say the least, significant. First of all, Tech is a large, complex, multifaceted university -- a Carnegie Very High Research Activity institution, in fact, with 13 colleges and schools, 1600 full- time and close to 200 part-time faculty, 2500 academic staff, and a student population of 40,000. Equally significant is Texas Tech's role in the region, as it's the primary institution serving not only Lubbock but the entire West Texas region.

That latter fact helps explain the reasoning behind the University's Strategic Priority – the critical importance of better connecting the University's extraordinary resources not only internally for research and collaborative purposes, but externally to bring those extraordinary resources to community members; K-12 educators, students, and parents; business and industry; non-profits; healthcare; and other constituencies.

A major part of the challenge, too, is that Texas Tech's internal landscape was similar to that of other Research 1 universities – notable gaps in internal awareness and information, difficulties in coordinating activities and cross-promotions, and no effective way to coordinate the institution's myriad activities or make them accessible to the community.

Birgit Green phrases the challenge this way: "How can we bring the Campus together amongst our various colleges and also with the community? There's lots of individual

faculty activity, lots of research, and lots of teaching, and a very disparate set of outreach activities going on. As a result, we literally had gaps in information. We had parents calling our office trying to find camps for their kids or inquiries whether our performance series was happening this year because of COVID-19. So we acted as sort of a traffic manager, trying to direct people to the appropriate departments to find answers to their questions. The same with promoting activities since we have a huge offering of various K through 12 programs at the University, including individual staff and faculty working with schools in STEM- related activities. So there was sort of a lack of coordination of activities just in that single arena, but we also have non-profits, businesses, schools and civic groups that know our office exists and want to touch base or partner with us. But how can they go about it? Who should they contact and where do they need to go? And the situation is much the same for faculty, staff, and students who want to reach out and work with community constituents.”

Defining the need and engaging the support

Clearly, what Dr. Green’s Office needed was either magical intervention or a tool that could be employed for:

- Sharing wide-spread information with campus and community members
- Utilizing a central, easily accessible web location that eliminates time-consuming web searches
- Offering an easy-to-use and understand platform to promote and coordinate activities

Another part of the challenge facing Dr. Green and her staff was in translating the University’s priority into functional, measurable objectives. They ultimately decided on four discrete goals:

- Spark public interest and increase participation in Texas Tech’s outreach and engagement programs, activities, and events.
- Increase interest and participation by Texas Tech faculty, staff, and students in outreach and engaged scholarship activities (engaged teaching, research, creative activity, and service)
- Foster collaborations across campus and with community partners.
- Facilitate coordination and cohesion of programming and information exchange.

But where to find such a one-stop shop that could connect not only faculty, staff, and students, but community members and external organizations as well? Wisely, before even trying to find the answer, OOE staff made the decision to secure leadership support

for the effort, departmental and unit buy-in and support (because meaningful engagement has to be participatory rather than top down), and with those in hand, ensure sufficient staffing and resources. Only then could a truly effective search begin.

Fortunately, initial exploration right within the University led to a serendipitous result: Texas Tech's Office of Research Services had been successfully using InfoReady Review and introduced the Outreach and Engagement staff to Review's sister product, the InfoReady Engagement Hub.

That introduction convinced the OOE staff to seek further information about the Engagement Hub through participation in InfoReady webinars, discussions with the InfoReady team to further understand the Hub and its Scale backend, and then convene meetings with other campus stakeholders to view online demonstrations and review the platform's functionality and customization capabilities, again with the participation of InfoReady staff.

What the Engagement Hub does

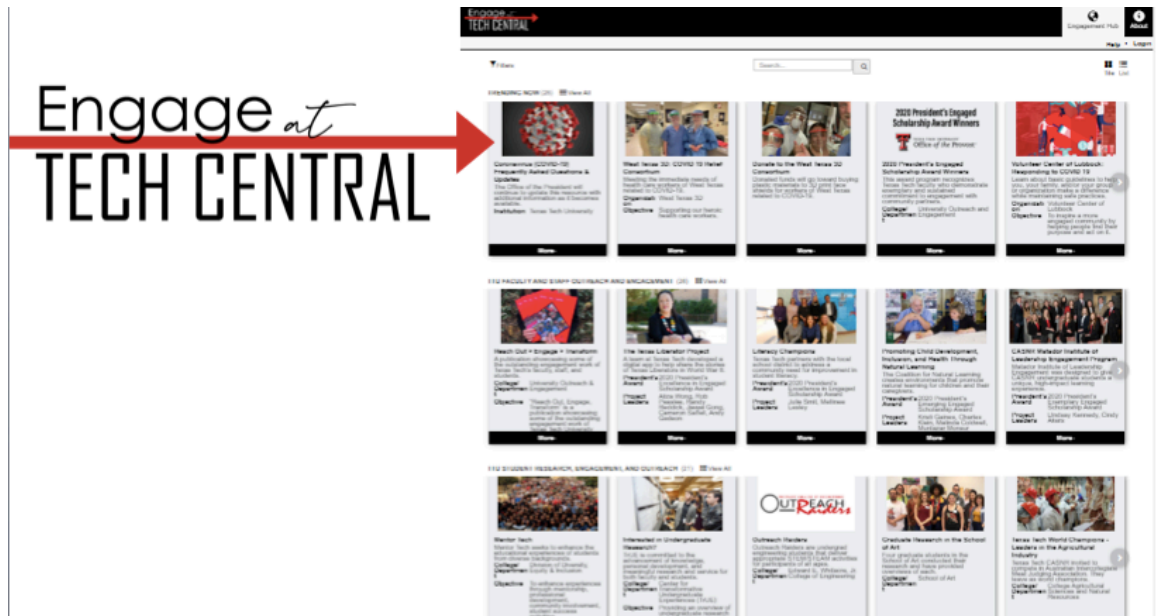
InfoReady's Engagement Hub™ organizes content, drives awareness, and increases participation in programs, opportunities, events, resources, and more. And because Engagement Hub instantly presents available opportunities to your audiences, it has hundreds of uses on- and off-campus.

Essentially, Engagement Hub creates a one-stop shop for anyone -- on campus and off campus -- to immediately know what's going on, what's available, and then to take action. All without searching, hunting through multiple webpages or dropdown menus, or dealing with broken links and missing information.

With Engagement Hub, administrators can easily create boxes or tiles to graphically represent opportunities at increasingly more detailed levels (with learn more and take action options), all set up on a single webpage. And that means users easily identify and access the information most important to them.

Moving forward with "Engage at Tech Central"

With the approval of leadership and key stakeholders, Dr. Green and her staff then worked with the InfoReady team to implement and customize the Engagement Hub, which OOE then branded as "Engage at Tech Central."



Once Tech Central was operational, Katie Evans, OOE Section Coordinator, summed up how the Office of Outreach and Engagement uses the platform: “We promote and support faculty, staff and student engagement with communities by creating connections between scholarly pursuits and community needs, fostering mutually beneficial partnerships between the university and community, and communicating best practices and outreach and engaged scholarship. And how this ties in, thanks to helpful feedback from collaborators across campus, is via a framework of storefronts. These different storefronts allow us to provide current and quickly updated information about Texas Tech’s vast array of outreach and engagement activities, including relevant, up-to-date content on COVID 19.”

What Texas Tech’s internal customers say about “Tech Central”

How did Texas Tech’s internal community react to Engage at Tech Central? Levi Johnson, Director, Center for Transformative Undergraduate Experiences, made the point that “There is no way the Center for Transformative Undergraduate Experiences can connect with every faculty member at Texas Tech—the University is just too big! “Engage at Tech Central” offers us a convenient platform for sparking serendipitous collaborations while simultaneously broadcasting useful information about our public-facing programming to students and community members. This has been particularly useful as we have worked to adjust our work and share timely updates in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Those thoughts were seconded by De'Lila Holder, Program Manager for the Whitacre College of Engineering STEM program: "I am so excited about Engage at Tech Central! This incredible resource is changing the way I provide access, support and communication to our community about the Outreach and Engagement opportunities offered through our College. With a university as large as Texas Tech, it has been impossible to know everything offered by each college, department, faculty and staff member. Having this centralized digital resource platform has helped me do a better job of directing inquiries and realizing potential partnerships and collaborations in planning for future events."

Why the Engagement Hub really is the magic bullet for Texas Tech's OOE

What's behind the appreciation of Levi, De'Lila, and other Tech Central users and administrators are the specific functional benefits summarized by Birgit Green, Katie Evans, and their OOE colleagues:

- The Hub's cohesive, organized structure
- Being easy to navigate, customizable, and simple and quick to create tiles
- Serving as a central 1-stop shop, internally and externally
- Its nature as a current and adaptable resource
- Serving as a vehicle for cross-department and cross-unit collaboration
- And a perfect tool for fostering university-community partnerships

Even the perfect tool needs to be used correctly

Finding the right platform, implementing it, and acknowledging its benefits are not themselves always synonymous with successful utilization – a critically important realization on the part of the Office of Outreach and Engagement Staff. And that understanding led them to take the following steps to ensure measurable and long-term success:

- Obtain the early involvement of campus stakeholders
- Engage campus partners in decision-making
- Provide ongoing communications with stakeholders
- Plan continuing team meetings to further refine use and scope
- Maximize success through sustained awareness-building and marketing both across campus and in the community

That concern for not only the perfect functional tool but its successful adoption by both campus and community constituents is a hallmark of Birgit Green's approach. "What we are hoping for," she says, "is that we will be able to explore everything the Engagement Hub has to offer and help each other, help other campus stakeholders learn about their customers and constituents, share information, cross- promote, and possibly even help develop new programs, piggyback on a program that might already be happening, or expand a program -- again all to better foster collaborations and engagement. These are our goals and we're already very happy to see a significant increase in use of the site."

To learn more about Review or Engagement Hub, schedule a demo, or get in touch with current InfoReady platform users, contact Amanda or Max at the contact info below.

Contact Info:
Amanda Xydis
axydis@inforeadycorp.com
517-285-8715

Contact Info:
Max Dynerman
mdynerman@inforeadycorp.com
202-306-5539