PERO GUIDE

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# OVERVIEW

The mission of the University of Illinois is to enhance the lives of the diverse people of Illinois, the nation, and the world through our leadership in discovery, learning, and economic development. Faculty public engagement is critical to the success of the University’s mission. When such engagement takes the form of research conducted in collaboration with public partners (e.g., local, state, national, or international communities and/or organizations), evaluation of impact may require alternative approaches. To address this issue in the promotion and tenure process, faculty members at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign can select the Public Engagement Research Option (PERO; see II.C.8 of [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)).

It is expected that publicly engaged research conducted by faculty members will generate scholarly and/or creative products (e.g., peer reviewed journal articles, books, and/or grants) whose impact can be captured by traditional means of evaluation (e.g., publication outlet, type of grant, and/or h-index). Publicly engaged research may also generate products for the public (e.g., policy reports, manuals, and/or museum exhibits) whose impact may not be adequately or accurately captured by traditional means of evaluation. PERO is suitable when a substantial proportion of a faculty’s record is comprised of such products. PERO allows traditional means of evaluation to be supplemented by alternative means that provide insight into societal impact.

Alternative means of evaluation are likely to evolve over time and may need to be identified by candidates and their Unit Executive Officers (EOs). Thus, the conversation about PERO between faculty and their EOs should begin as early as possible and continue over time so they can collaboratively develop and execute a plan for evaluation that will capture the intended impact of the research. The decision of whether to take PERO is up to each faculty member but should be made in collaboration with their EO. If additional input or guidance is needed (e.g., the EO is unsure and/or the candidate and EO disagree), the Dean’s office or the Campus Public Engagement Option Advisory Committee (PERO Advisory Committee) should be consulted.

Regardless of rank, the decision to select PERO should be made at least two calendar years prior to the candidate’s submission of their materials for promotion (for a detailed timeline, see below). Candidates selecting PERO may later decide, in collaboration with their EO, that the option is not appropriate for them (e.g., because most of their research can be evaluated via traditional means). Such a decision must be made prior to the deadline for the candidate’s submission of their list of external evaluators to their promotion and tenure committee (see Section II.C.10 for guidance on External Evaluation of Research and Other Accomplishments in [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)).

# ABOUT PERO

As highlighted in [**Provost Communication 9**](https://uofi.app.box.com/s/9d7miwmgcvyk4v4xpjgfgdua83jauhhs/file/936591220113) (see section II.A.1), publicly engaged research draws on a faculty member’s expertise to define and address societal problems, concerns, issues, or interests to contribute to the public good. Such research occurs in collaboration with communities and/or organizations at the local, state, national, or international level. In its model form, publicly engaged research exists through a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. Central in the evaluation of publicly engaged research is gauging its societal impact. PERO was developed to capture such impact via two key elements.

1. As highlighted above, PERO allows traditional means of evaluation to be supplemented by alternative means that provide insight into societal impact.
2. Two of the five required evaluation letters can come from experts outside academia who can objectively evaluate the societal impact of the candidate’s publicly engaged research. Second,

# GUIDANCE FOR FACULTY MEMBERS DECIDING WHETHER TO TAKE PERO

The decision about whether to select PERO involves consideration of a variety issues, often making it complex. The questions below are provided to help faculty consider these issues in making the decision. In answering each question, faculty should consider their research program as a whole—if only a small portion of their research is publicly engaged and/or it is their teaching and/or service that is largely publicly engaged, PERO is not appropriate. In addition, if the impact of the large majority of the scholarly and/or creative products can be evaluated by traditional means, PERO is likely unnecessary. PERO may be a good fit for candidates answering in the affirmative to the majority of the questions below.

* Does the research significantly draw on your scholarly expertise?
* Does the research generate significant new transferable public knowledge—that is, knowledge that can be used outside the specific setting in which it was produced?
* Can the knowledge be used by others outside the specific context in which it was studied?
* Is the research a collaboration with community or other public partners—for example, the partner identified the need for the research or is involved in the development of the methods?
* Did the work take significant relationship-building with external partners to maximize its quality and impact?
* Does the research meaningfully address a community or societal problem, need, concern, issue, or interest?
* Are the discipline’s traditional review mechanisms insufficient to evaluate the impact of the work? *Note.* The impact of some of the work must be able to be captured by traditional means of evaluation (see the Overview section above and the figure below).
* Does the work have a significant measurable direct impact on the public at the local, state, national, or international level? For example, did the work contribute to a new policy or legal decision, improve access to needed services or other resources, enhance how an organization works, or improve the mental health of those the work is designed to help?
* Is review of the work’s impact by stakeholders outside academia critical to the evaluation of its success? And is the work publicly available so it can be reviewed by external stakeholders as part of the promotion and tenure process?
* Does the success of the research depend on community buy-in?
* Can the work be sustained in the community? Is the work done in a way that the community can continue the program and/or policy developed by the work?

In general, as depicted in the figure below, the candidate draws on foundational scholarship to inform their publicly engaged research which in turn generates generalizable knowledge as well as practices reflected in academic and public products, respectively. (For resources on publishing publicly engaged research, see [**here**](http://here).) Critical is that this process takes place in collaboration with public partners. Critical is that this process takes place in collaboration with public partners.

A diagram of a community partners

Description automatically generated

From Doberneck, D. M., Bargerstock, B.A., McNall, M., Van Egeren, L., & Zientek, R. (2017). Community engagement competencies for graduate and professional students: Michigan State University’s approach to professional development. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning 24,* 122-142.

# PREPARING THE PERO MOU

All decisions about PERO must be documented in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU; see the PERO MOU template and sample in the attachments to [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)). The MOU must be developed by the candidate in ***collaboration*** with their EO using the PERO MOU template. The MOU is required to:

(1) demonstrate how the research is publicly engaged;

(2) indicate the types of external evaluators from outside of academia who are appropriate; and

(3) specify the products and means of evaluation reflecting societal impact.

The specification of alternative products and means of evaluation is meant to serve as a guide, rather than a contract, for the candidate and internal reviewers. Thus, the candidate does not need to produce all the products specified and may produce some products not specified. Key is for the candidate to make the case for the significance and impact of their work in the promotion and tenure materials (e.g., via their research statement).

Candidates must submit their draft MOU to the PERO Advisory Committee at [**facultyaffairs@illinois.edu.**](mailto:facultyaffairs@illinois.edufor) ***The draft MOU must be signed by both the candidate and their EO.*** The committee will provide feedback about the appropriateness of PERO versus the traditional promotion and tenure process, the range of products and means to evaluate societal impact, and the types of external evaluators. The MOU should be revised to be responsive to the PERO Advisory Committee feedback; the candidate is required to detail how they responded to the feedback with a clear and detailed rationale for any guidance they decided not to follow. The feedback report provided by the PERO Advisory Committee must be attached to the MOU. The PERO Advisory Committee does not vote, approve, or endorse MOUs nor will it evaluate the candidate’s research regarding its quantity or quality.

Once a MOU is reviewed by the PERO Advisory Committee, the candidate is expected to sign the final MOU in the required format and submit it to their EO for their signature who will then submit it to the Dean (or designee) for their signature. The signed version of the MOU must be submitted to [**facultyaffairs@illinois.edu**](mailto:facultyaffairs@illinois.edu) by the unit EO. Signatures on the MOU indicate that each party (1) acknowledges the candidate has selected PERO and the PERO guidelines will be followed, (2) agrees that the types of external reviewers specified are appropriate, and (3) views the listed products and means of evaluation as appropriate. Signatures do not indicate an endorsement for promotion and/or tenure. They also do not indicate that if the candidate produces the products and meets the evaluative criteria specified, they are guaranteed promotion and tenure.

Consultation with a PERO Advisory Committee member may be helpful in developing the MOU. The candidate, EO, or Dean (or designee) may send an email to the Office of the Provost at [**facultyaffairs@illinois.edu**](mailto:facultyaffairs@illinois.edu) to request a consultation with a PERO Advisory Committee member at any point. Please plan in advance as meetings with Committee members take time to schedule at a time that all relevant parties can attend.

# EXTERNAL EVALUATION LETTERS FOR PERO

For faculty members opting into PERO, two of the five required letters from external evaluators must be from experts outside academia who can objectively evaluate the societal impact of the candidate’s publicly engaged research (see section II.C.10 of [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)). The other three letters must be from external evaluators at academic institutions; it is advised that at least one of these evaluations be from a scholar with expertise in publicly engaged research in the candidate’s field at an academic institution. **Wording from the relevant template letters must be used in requesting evaluations** (see the PERO: Template Letter for External Evaluators in Academia and PERO: Template Letters for External Evaluators Outside of Academia attachments to [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)).

Candidates and their EOs should discuss what types of experts outside academia have the relevant knowledge to evaluate the societal impact of the candidate’s research. Specifically, based on the candidate’s dossier, experts outside academia must be able to discern whether the candidate has contributed to the public good. Candidates may find it useful to consult with others with more expertise and/or the PERO Advisory Committee. Types of experts who may serve as external evaluators must be listed in a PERO Memorandum of Understanding (MOU; see the PERO MOU template and sample in attachments to [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)). External evaluators outside academia may include, but are not limited to, an expert in industry or government, a leading public figure, and/or someone in another community who holds a parallel position to a community partner. Regardless of the letter writer’s position, letters from external evaluators outside academia must be appropriate along two key dimensions:

* **Be from highly qualified individuals with the expertise and/or perspective** (e.g., as a consequence of their experience working in a relevant organization and/or as demonstrated by awards) to evaluate the societal impact of the candidate’s contributions; and
* **Be from objective evaluators.** Evaluators cannot have a conflict of interest in that they may directly benefit from the candidate’s promotion. For example, letters should not be solicited from a candidate’s collaborators in the community. Indirect benefits (e.g., if a faculty member’s innovative school discipline program is successful in one school district, it will be available to a neighboring school district) are not considered a conflict of interest.

In submitting their list of external evaluators, PERO candidates should include not only evaluators at academic institutions, but also evaluators outside academia, with enough names to guarantee some degree of privacy to each type of evaluator. As is the case for all candidates, the majority of the five letters from external evaluators, regardless of whether they are from within or outside academia, must come from the unit’s list. ***In sum, for PERO candidates, there must be at least three external evaluators at academic institutions and two evaluators from outside academia.*** Whether evaluators in these two categories come from the candidate’s or unit’s list, is up to the unit.

Invitations to external evaluators outside academia must be made using the template letters created for this purpose (see PERO: Template Letters for External Evaluators Outside of Academia in the attachments to [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)). The relevant template letter should be modified to reflect the type of publicly engaged research conducted by the candidate with a brief but concrete description of the type of dossier being shared with the evaluator. The procedures outlined in section II.C.10 of [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/) for solicitation of external evaluators at academic institutions must be followed in that invitations must be neutral and indicate that the confidentiality of the evaluator’s remarks will be protected to the extent possible within the law. As illustrated in the template letter, the invitation letter must include guidance on the provision of concrete feedback to ensure the letter is informative to promotion and tenure committees. By using the template letter, the external evaluator should write a letter appropriate for the promotion and tenure process. The letter from the external evaluator should show how the candidate has made a societal impact.

As is the case for external evaluators at academic institutions, the unit must include the qualifications, including titles and current affiliation, of all external evaluators from outside academia in the promotion papers. The unit should also explain why each external evaluator from outside academia was chosen—that is, what qualifies them to evaluate the candidate—and report any direct relationship (e.g., collaborator) between the evaluator and candidate. When the contacted individual declines to serve as an evaluator, their name must be included with the list of external evaluators (see Outline of Promotion Dossier Section VII.B in [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)), and the reason for declining the request should be provided, if one is given. A copy of the letter or letters of solicitation must be in the promotion dossier. (If the same letter was sent to several different individuals, only one of the letters of solicitation need be submitted.)

# PERO TIMELINE

Advanced planning is necessary in selecting PERO to ensure candidates can identify types of external evaluators outside of academia along with products and means of evaluation that are meaningful in the context of their program of research. Candidates selecting PERO should have a fully signed MOU two years before submission of their materials for promotion. Thus, the due dates and feedback dates for the PERO Advisory Committee must be considered in the planning process. Below is a detailed timeline for Assistant Professors.

There is more variability in Associate Professors’ timelines and thus they can adapt the timeline to their own trajectory to ensure they have a fully signed MOU two years before submission of their materials for promotion. In rare circumstances, this timeline may be shortened for Associate Professors. However, the candidate may miss the PERO Advisory Committee deadlines and thus not receive the benefit of their review and guidance.

**Tenure Code[[1]](#footnote-1) 1, 2, 3**

* Candidate plans for PERO and develops a draft MOU in collaboration with EO.
* Candidate and/or unit EO may consult on MOU with a PERO Advisory Committee member via the Office of Provost (see above).
* Candidate submits draft MOU signed by both the candidate and their EO to the PERO Advisory Committee which reviews and provides feedback (see dates below).
* Candidate responds to PERO Advisory Committee feedback and resubmits MOU for further PERO Advisory Committee review if necessary.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Draft MOU Due to PERO Advisory Committee* | *PERO Advisory Committee Review Period* | *Feedback by PERO Advisory Committee Due to Candidate* |
| September 15 | October 1-15 | November 16 |
| October 15 | November 1-15 | December 16 |
| February 15 | March 1-15 | April 16 |
| April 15 | May 1-15 | June 16 |

**By the end of Spring Semester of Tenure Code 3**

* Candidate declares for PERO, submits revised and signed MOU to EO.
* EO reviews and signs MOU.
* EO submits signed MOU to Dean (or designee) for second level review and signature.
* The signed version of the MOU must be submitted to [**facultyaffairs@illinois.edu**](mailto:facultyaffairs@illinois.edu) by EO.

**Tenure Code 4 through the end of Fall Semester of Tenure Code 5**

* Candidate updates MOU in coordination with unit EO, as needed.
* Candidate, in coordination with unit EO, may consult on MOU updates with the PERO Advisory Committee.

**By mid-Spring Semester of Tenure Code 5**

* Prior to compiling their dossier for promotion and tenure, the candidate meets with EO to discuss whether PERO is still the best fit; the PERO Advisory Committee may be consulted on this issue.
* Candidates can decide to opt out of PERO before they submit their list of external evaluators. EO must send notification to [**facultyaffairs@illinois.edu**](mailto:facultyaffairs@illinois.edu)**.**
* Candidate begins process for promotion and tenure review.

# CHECKLIST FOR PERO

Because PERO has three unique elements that are required for the promotion and tenure process, we provide a checklist for these elements so candidates and EOs can ensure they have followed all the instructions:

* **PERO Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**—must be reviewed by the PERO-Advisory Committee. Once the Committee’s feedback has been addressed, the MOU must be signed by the candidate, the EO, and the Dean (or designee) at least two calendar years prior to the candidate’s submission of their materials for promotion (for rare exceptions for Associate Professors, see the PERO Timeline section). Use the template PERO MOU found in the attachments to [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/).
* **Two letters from external evaluators outside of academia**—use one of the PERO: Template Letters for External Evaluators Outside of Academia (see attachments to [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)) to request these evaluations.
* **Three letters from external evaluators in academia**—use the PERO: Template Letter for External Evaluators in Academia (see attachments to [**Provost Communication 9**](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)) to request these evaluations.

Candidates and EOs should also ensure they discuss the following three issues, beginning with the creation of the PERO MOU, as early as possible; attention should be given to the connection of these issues to the candidate's program of research:

* **The types of experts outside of academia appropriate to evaluate the societal impact of the candidate’s work**; this discussion should not focus on specific individuals but rather the type of expertise and experience that is appropriate.
* **The types of non-traditional scholarly and/or creative products the candidate’s work will generate and the rationale for why these products are appropriate.** The products are entities (e.g., documents and/or performances) with means of evaluation that reflect societal impact; they cannot include steps in the public engagement process, such as indicators of collaboration.
* **The appropriate means of evaluation of the societal impact of these non-traditional products.** The means of evaluation must speak to the societal impact of the research; a rationale for why they are meaningful should be provided.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PERO

1. **If a candidate takes PERO, do they need to have scholarly publications and/or grants? Or can all their work be non-traditional with non-traditional means of evaluation to evaluate it?**

*All promotion and tenure candidates need to generate scholarly and/or creative products considered traditional in their discipline. However, candidates conducting publicly engaged research may also have products considered nontraditional if such products are the conduits through which their work has societal impact.* *Thus, PERO candidates may have fewer products considered traditional in their discipline, but their work as a whole is expected to demonstrate societal impact. For resources on publishing publicly engaged research see* [*here*](https://engage.msu.edu/learn/resources-for-publishing-community-engaged-scholarship)*.*

1. **Is research in the context of entrepreneurship or work with private companies appropriate for PERO?**

*Only to the extent that research in these contexts meets the definition of public engagement as described in the About PERO section above (see also section II.A.1 of* [***Provost Communication 9***](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)*) would it be considered publicly engaged research.*

1. **How can candidates who do a substantial amount of publicly engaged service, but not publicly engaged research, be recognized for their work?**

*Publicly engaged service can be discussed in the optional service statement, which can be up to three pages of the dossier. It can also be listed in the service section of the dossier under “public engagement, outreach, and/or extension” (see section II.C.6.**a and Candidate Activity Outline Form sections IV.A.1 and V.C of* [***Provost Communication 9***](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)*).*

1. **Is it appropriate for the EO (or their** **designee) to have additional conversations to explain or educate external evaluators outside academia about the promotion and tenure process?**

*Like communication with external evaluators at academic institutions, communication with external evaluators outside academia should* *largely be restricted to the formal letter requesting the review to ensure the process remains unbiased. Of course, there may be correspondence around technical issues such as deadlines, format, conflicts of interest, or confidentiality. If an external evaluator has questions about the review process that go beyond these kinds of technical issues, the evaluator should be referred to the next level of leadership (e.g., the College Dean’s office).*

1. **Can the letter to external evaluators at academic institutions explain PERO and the different means of evaluation being used to gauge the societal impact of the candidate’s work?**

*Section II.C.10 of* [***Provost Communication 9***](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)*details the additional language that can be used in letters to external evaluators at academic institutions. A template letter including this language is also available (see PERO: Template Letter for External Evaluators in Academia in the attachments to* [***Provost Communication 9***](https://provost.illinois.edu/policies/provosts-communications/communication-9-promotion-and-tenure/)*).*

1. **Does the feedback from the PERO Advisory Committee need to be addressed in the MOU?**

*The feedback report provided by the PERO Advisory Committee must be attached to the MOU. The MOU also provides space for the candidate to indicate how they have revised the MOU in response to the Committee’s feedback and/or to provide a rationale for why they did not incorporate the feedback into the MOU.*

1. **Who develops the MOU?**

*The candidate must develop the MOU in* ***collaboration*** *with their EO to ensure there is unit support for the proposed types of external evaluators outside of academia and the alternative products and means of evaluation. To reflect this collaboration process, the candidate and the EO must sign the MOU that is submitted to the Advisory Committee.*

1. **What does it mean if the PERO Advisory Committee approves the MOU?**

*The PERO Advisory Committee provides feedback about the appropriateness of PERO versus the traditional promotion and tenure process, the range of products and means to evaluate societal impact, and the types of external evaluators. The Committee does not vote, approve, or endorse MOUs nor does it evaluate the candidate’s research regarding its quantity or quality.*

1. **What do the signatures on the MOU indicate?**

*Signatures on the MOU indicate that each party agrees that the listed external evaluators and the products and means of evaluation are appropriate. Signatures do not indicate an endorsement for promotion and tenure. They also do not indicate that if the candidate produces the products and meets the evaluative criteria specified in the MOU, they are guaranteed promotion and/or tenure.*

1. **What if a candidate does not produce all the products specified in the MOU or does not meet the evaluation criteria specified?**

*The specification of alternative products and means of evaluation in the MOU is meant to serve as a guide, rather than a contract, for the candidate and internal reviewers. Thus, candidates do not need to produce all the products specified and may produce some not specified. What is important is that candidates make the case for the significance and impact of their work in the promotion and tenure materials (e.g., via their research statement).*

1. **What if I submit my MOU to the PERO Advisory Committee for their last meeting of the academic year of my Tenure Code 3 year and they request a revised version for additional review?**

*In this circumstance, you will have missed the deadline for declaring for PERO. Candidates must* *plan ahead and submit the first draft of their MOU early enough to allow time for revisions. The last meeting of the academic year is* *largely intended for the review of revised MOUs and MOUs for candidates with three years or more prior to submission of their dossier. The earlier candidates submit their MOU, the less they are at risk of missing the deadline.*

1. **What does a reasonable timeline for PERO look like for an Associate Professor?**

*Candidates selecting PERO should have a fully signed MOU two years before submission of their materials for promotion. Thus, in consideration of the PERO Advisory Committee’s due dates and feedback dates, it is recommended that Associate Professors develop their MOU in the fall of the year prior to two years before submission of their materials for promotion for review by the PERO Advisory Board, following the timeline laid out for Assistant Professors above. In rare circumstances, this timeline may be shortened for Associate Professors. However, the candidate may miss PERO Advisory Committee deadlines and thus not receive the benefit of their review and guidance.*

1. **What are some examples of non-traditional products and related means of evaluation?**

*Non-traditional products will vary depending on the candidate’s area of research. However, some examples of non-traditional products are white papers, testimonies to Congress, policy briefs, public reports to organizations, replications of an intervention program, museum exhibits, documentaries, editorials published in major media outlets, websites, community-wide exhibits of research findings, amicus briefs, action briefs, manuals, and public videos. This is an illustrative, rather than exhaustive, list.*

*The candidate must also identify how the societal impact of the product will be evaluated. The means of evaluation will be individualized to the candidate’s scholarship and the products yielded by it. However, some examples of means of evaluation are citations of a white paper by Congress and legislation, references to a Congressional testimony by legislators and advocacy groups, integration of policy briefs in legislation, number of citations of public reports, number of people or organizations using a program, attendance of museum exhibits, number of viewers of a documentary, hit rate for a website, attendance of community-wide exhibits or events, extent of changed practices due to action briefs, and number of views of public videos. This list is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.*

1. **What are some non-examples of non-traditional products and related means of evaluation?**

*There are many activities that reflect the process of partnering with the community, which are critical to public engagement. However, these activities do not represent products or means of evaluating societal impact and thus cannot be used in PERO.* *Such activities include, but are not limited to, MOUs with community partners and evaluations of the candidate’s partnership with a community agency. Products that cannot be made publicly available due to proprietary reasons and/or non-disclosure agreements also cannot be used as part of the evaluation in PERO**.*

1. Each year, academic units determine which faculty members should be considered for promotion and/or tenure. Entry-level faculty members are normally assigned a tenure code of “1” upon initial employment, which is incremented in each successive year. Faculty members with a tenure code of “6” must be reviewed for promotion and tenure (see Provost Communication 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)