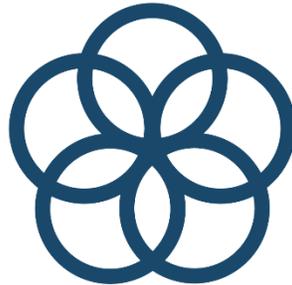# 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

MODERATORS

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The 17 Rooms initiative is convened by the Brookings Institution and The Rockefeller Foundation to stimulate near-term cooperative actions to advance the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This document summarizes insights and actions that emerged from the working group discussions in Room 17 during the 17 Rooms 2020 flagship process. The text was independently prepared by the Room's Moderators and participants, in response to the common question asked of all Rooms in 2020: "In light of recent crises linked to COVID-19, systemic racism, and other urgent challenges, what are 1 to 3 actionable priorities over the coming 12-18 months that address near term needs while also making a decisive contribution to protecting or advancing your Goal's 2030 results? What actions can members of your Room take to advance these priorities?" Corresponding documents prepared by all the other Rooms are available here, alongside a synthesis report prepared by the 17 Rooms secretariat.

Focus area
Room 17 focused on the question of expanding access around the world to education on sustainable development.

Practical challenges
- Access to high quality, affordable education, which can be facilitated via online education but highlights the essential nature of Internet connectivity
- Availability of open-source educational resources on sustainable development
- Integration of sustainable development into the curriculum

Desired steps forward in 2021
In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we need to cultivate leaders at the local level with a strong sense of agency and ownership. We also need globally-minded leaders who can understand the interdependencies between communities and engage in international networks of change. Higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to deliver this leadership talent; they have the expertise and capabilities. Higher education's response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the level of confidence higher education institutions inspire in their communities. For higher education to deliver on this promise, we will need to address questions of access, educational resources, curriculum, and connections.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced universities from around the world to adopt remote instruction almost overnight. This unplanned transformation has forced students and faculty alike to leverage technology to teach and learn, and it has demonstrated how even the most traditional institutions can deliver value in an online format. Higher education after COVID-19 will be much more open to online education than previously. This will create new opportunities to expand access and, in the context of the SDGs, develop the leadership talent that is necessary in communities around the world.

Online instruction can also facilitate new modes of collaboration and enable virtual exchanges and connections among faculty and students from different nations. In an era of limited travel, virtual exchanges and international collaborative courses can provide an effective avenue for developing students' global mindset and their ability to engage productively with individuals and institutions from other parts of the world. Virtual exchanges and shared courses can also help leverage the unique resources different institutions have around different SDGs and amplify the impact we can all have collaboratively.

While this massive shift to online instruction opens up exciting new opportunities, it also raises questions that are yet to be fully resolved. First, underlying cost structures, and therefore issues of affordability remain so far unchanged. While some exciting new models are leading the way into dramatically reducing or even eliminating tuition, most universities are yet to alter their models in that regard.

Second, while online instruction can expand access, it can also exacerbate differences between haves and have-nots, as availability of broadband Internet access continues to vary enormously between and within countries. Students residing in low-income households often do not have consistent access to personal computers and household internet connectivity, a disadvantage that was further highlighted when students departed campuses due to the pandemic in spring 2020.

Finally, for higher education to play the enabling role it can play in the SDGs, there needs to be the right content and curriculum. Several organizations are developing open educational resources that can be of great value. Universities will need to design non-credit micro-credentials, for-credit courses built into the curriculum, and community-based learning opportunities that will put that knowledge into action. The latter will require collaboration with non-profits, businesses, and governmental organizations.

We call on higher education institutions and their networks to identify and communicate their strengths within the 17 SDGs, create new courses and learning opportunities for students, and partner with others to share resources, connect students, and amplify their collective impact.

As a concrete action, the University Global Coalition is launching a year-long process to bring together diverse expertise and share best practices and impact projects, involving faculty, students, and staff for each of the goals.

The successful implementation of the SDGs requires the full participation of higher education. While the COVID-19 pandemic creates major new challenges for universities, it is also triggering a number of innovations that will be critical in delivering what is expected.

Our commitment for the next 18 months is pursuing solutions in this direction.