ESTELA DE LA GARZA, ERIKA PEREZ, BEVERLY GONZALES | THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

A TIERED SUPPORT FRAMEWORK FOR SERVICE LEARNING: STRENGTHENING FACULTY, STUDENTS, AND COMMUNITY PATHWAYS

ABSTRACT:

This session highlights The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) practice-based, tiered Service Learning (SL) support framework developed over the past decade. The model strengthens faculty, students, and community partners through coordinated assistance. The framework provides nonprofits with volunteer management tools, equips faculty with professional development and syllabus design support, and engages students through trained SL Ambassadors. Participants will explore lessons learned, practical tools, and replicable structures for sustaining community-engaged teaching.

THEMATIC FOCUS:

Convergence and Intersections: How increasing or decreasing hyperconnectivity can impact community engagement.

Floods and Droughts: Too much of one thing, not enough of another. How complimentary partnership can fill the gaps.

Gauging the Waters: Using research and assessment to course correct or gain deeper insight.

BIO:

Estela De La Garza has served UTRGV and its legacy institutions since 2008, bringing 17 years of experience in student engagement, experiential learning, and academic-community partnerships. She previously led the Service Learning Ambassador Program for 15 years, helping shape student leadership in civic engagement and volunteerism. In her current role as Director of Community Engagement, Estela supports faculty, staff, and students in expanding and tracking community engagement, co-administers the university's volunteer and service-learning management platform, and provides professional development to faculty. She has contributed to three Carnegie Elective Classification applications, advancing sustainable, reciprocal partnerships that enhance learning and community impact.