

AITF LEADERSHIP GUIDE

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*Sustaining a
Commitment to
Community
Engagement and
Social Change: A
Guide for Aspiring,
New, and Existing
Anchor Institution
Leaders*



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INTRODUCTION

This guide emerged from a visible need to capture lessons from leadership in how to forge, advance, and sustain an anchor institution's commitment to being an active participant in its surrounding community. As a modern anchor institutions movement has evolved and grown over recent decades, the significance of leadership has become increasingly evident. Many visionary leaders of anchor institutions have been retiring or transitioning to other positions. This development has raised questions about how to build a pipeline of future anchor institution leaders with similar skills and values. It has also stimulated the need to capture lessons from existing leaders of engaged anchor institutions.

The idea for this guide surfaced during discussions in the Anchor Institutions Task Force's Higher Education Presidential Subgroup. This group of leaders had been discussing strategies to sustain anchor institutions' commitment to their localities and community partners over time. The conversation gradually began taking on a greater urgency as members of this group began to retire.

AITF's hope is that this guide can be a practical tool for existing and aspiring anchor institution leaders hoping to develop or further an institutional commitment to place, collaboration, social justice and equity, and democracy and democratic practice in their communities. The guide provides a range of internal and external considerations in the complex journey to instill, nurture, and demonstrate this set of values in community partnerships. This tool is informed by the wisdom and experiences of various anchor institution leaders in the Anchor Institutions Task Force.

SECTION I: AITF and the Anchor Field

About AITF

Founded in 2009, the Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF) is an action-oriented learning community of roughly 1000 members, promoting the role of anchor institutions in strengthening their communities through democratic collaboration. AITF acts as both a think tank and a network, as it creates a space for mutual learning among practitioners designed to enhance the contributions anchor institutions can bring to their communities and society. AITF organizes numerous subgroups from within its broader memberships in order to provide focused learning communities for specific populations within AITF's broad membership, which is represented by leaders of anchor institutions and other partners from across numerous fields, including higher education, health care, the arts, philanthropy, government, business, and various community-based organizations.

AITF's Values

While AITF is a big tent for a wide range of those with a stake in bringing anchor institutions and community partners together in mutually transformative partnerships that lead to more equitable communities, AITF promotes particular values. These include a commitment to place, social justice and equity (with some emphasis on racial justice and racial equity), collaboration, democracy and democratic practice. Together, these values provide a combination that can significantly improve opportunities in communities. For example, it is difficult to have a healthy democratic society without social justice and equity.

Today's anchor institutions are situated in a context including aggressive challenges to democracy as well as tense political divisions. These dynamics are transpiring at national levels, but they are also defining many interactions and policy shifts locally. Anchor institutions are in positioned to promote democratic principles, but also open doors for dialogue across ideological divides. The community solutions that lead to increased opportunities and access in education, economics, health, and other basic concerns are non-partisan. Some anchor institutions are faced with direct opposition from political figures and being forced to respond. Anchor institution leaders are compelled to determine their position and approach. While some anchor institutions might be in circumstances where they are supported by politicians. In others, they might be targets. Whatever the circumstances, anchor institution leaders must make difficult choices, and determine how to leverage their strengths, take positions, and join with local partners in strengthening communities.

It is important to note that in many localities, a wide array of residents and partners see the value of community and are not politically divided. Because of these dynamics, anchor institutions have a particular opportunity to act and democratically collaborate with their neighbors around their shared local interests.

AITF's Definition of Anchor Institutions

AITF defines an anchor institution as an enduring organization remaining its geographic area and playing a vital role in its local community and economy. This definition encompasses various types of organizations, including colleges and universities, hospitals, and others. Historically, the forms of anchor institutions have varied. For example, in earlier decades, typical anchor institutions might have been manufacturing or retail corporations. But, as economies shifted, many larger nonprofit organizations became the institutions that remained and became significant local employers. In AITF's view, an anchor institution can be rooted in an urban or rural area. Furthermore, larger organizations may have a more visible economic impact on their communities, but smaller organizations that remain in their communities can also qualify as anchors. Some examples of smaller anchor institutions include faith-based organizations, community development corporations (CDCs), and community development financial institutions (CDFIs). An anchor institution can come from any sector in this definition as well. It is also important to note that AITF sees anchor institutions from both an objective and philosophical perspective. An anchor institution is not only objectively rooted in its geographical setting; it also identifies with its location and plays an active role amidst an ecosystem of other organizations and stakeholders in its neighborhood, city, town, or region in strengthening the community.

The Anchor Institutions Movement

AITF emerged out of a growing interest within and beyond anchor institutions to encourage these enduring organizations to become more actively engaged and harness their resources in order to solve problems alongside other local partners. Various associations have been created over the years that have been highlighting the role of particular types of anchor institutions. AITF was created as a movement organization that anyone in this growing field could join. This movement's priorities have continued to evolve over time. The modern anchor institutions movement began with a heavy emphasis on higher education in communities, stressing the service that college and universities stakeholders could bring

through local collaboration. Over time, the movement began to demonstrate how the social, economic, intellectual, human, and physical capital of institutions could be leveraged. The movement gradually became more cross sector with the rapid growth of attention to hospitals as important local anchors. The definition of anchor institutions began to stretch even furthermore recently. At this juncture, the movement is recognizing the power and potential of multi-anchor institution partnerships. Whereas earlier iterations of the movement focused on the programs and practices of singular institutions, with greater awareness, more anchor institutions began to realize that greater transformation of communities could only be achieved through broader local collaborations that tap the resources of multiple types of anchor institutions along with government, philanthropy, and community organizations. The movement has become increasingly international as well. With the centrality of race as a determinant of life outcomes, and a reawakening of a more visible racial justice movement, the anchor movement has more significantly incorporated a racial equity lens into its various approaches.

The Mission of Anchor Institutions

Many more anchor institutions are integrating their role as engaged anchor institutions into their strategic plans and wider institutional priorities. Some institutions are explicitly crafting “anchor missions” to illustrate specific goals and objectives for manifestations of anchor institution practices. For example, many institutions are intentionally developing strategies for local hiring and procurement. The core mission of any anchor institution can be advanced through local collaborative activities. Many anchor partnerships pursue mutually beneficial opportunities that both improve the community and advance the central goals of institutions. Indeed, anchor institutions are interdependent with their surroundings. Therefore, they have a stake in the future of their communities. However, it is important to note that anchor institutions can become too self-serving and can potentially do more harm than good in their localities. This is why AITF is values-based. AITF’s values help anchor institutions make choices that are pursuing, for example, strategies that aim for equitable growth rather than gentrification and displacement of lower income residents. Furthermore, while anchor institutions bring assets to their communities, all in the community have value to contribute. It is important to avoid a deficit-based view of underserved populations in anchor partnerships. Anchor institutions should bring humility to their community engagement and be willing to change and adapt themselves, informed by the wisdom of community-based constituents. Additionally, many effective anchor institution community change strategies (including local hiring) require some institutional adaptation. AITF recommends mutually transformative partnerships that simultaneously seek community and institutional improvement.

The Role of Anchor Leaders in Advancing Anchor Strategies in Localities

Throughout the life of the modern anchor institutions movement, the significance of anchor leaders has been highly apparent. CEOs or Presidents or Chancellors have played a crucial role in prioritizing and advancing the engagement of their anchor institutions in local communities. Many other levels of leadership in anchor institutions have also played significant roles. From AITF's inception, how to sustain an anchor institution's commitment to AITF's values and a portfolio of activities around them has been a point of emphasis. The challenge has been to embed a commitment to an anchor mission over time, especially beyond the tenure of a particular chief executive. Leaders set the tone and provide the environment and incentives for stakeholders throughout an institution to implement programs and practices. Typically, an exceptionally engaged anchor institution is guided by leadership that intentionally prioritizes this work. This leadership creates opportunities for stakeholders to engage and provides a vision for why being an engaged anchor institution furthers the mission of the institution.

SECTION II: Forging an Anchor Institution's Commitment

Developing a Plan to Build, Renew, and Sustain a Commitment

A serious commitment to being an engaged anchor institution begins with a plan. Ideally, this plan is aligned with the strategic priorities of the overall organization. Some institutions that have developed effective strategic plans for their programming on their role as an anchor have embedded these intentions within a broader institutional strategic plan and agenda. These plans have the potential to coordinate a range of activities across the institutions around a common anchor mission. Sustaining a comprehensive commitment to an anchor mission involves securing buy in across numerous stakeholders within the institution. In order to do this, it is important that the plan demonstrates how various anchor endeavors further the overall mission of the institution and the current existing institutional plan. This level of alignment makes numerous institutional stakeholders aware of the anchor strategy as an element of a broader institutional purpose. Just as strategic plans are reviewed, revised, and renewed, the various components of an anchor institution strategy should be treated accordingly.

Establishing Mutually Transformative Anchor Institution-Community Partnerships

Mutually transformative partnerships assume change among all parties involved. Therefore, anchor institution-community partnerships are not merely pathways to bring about outcomes externally. These arrangements should lead to institutional self-reflection, adaptation, and alteration. If, for example, an anchor institution seeks to create or expand local hiring and procurement, the institution will not be able to maximize the impact of such pursuits without changing. This may require policy changes about hiring requirements or different arrangements with existing contractors – perhaps challenging larger contractors to increase local hiring or bring in local subcontractors. Mutually transformative partnerships also require a greater appreciation for community-based wisdom and strengths. This approach departs from a deficit-based narrative of the community, focused only on problems to be fixed. This approach emphasizes community

assets and engenders a willingness to learn from local residents, community-based organizations, and other partners. It embraces the expertise of all partners and promotes authentic, trusting, and respectful collaboration in which all stakeholders shape the agenda.

Forging Values that Shape Institutional Practices

As AITF is guided by a series of values, it is important that the various aspects of how anchor institutions engage in communities are grounded in principles. Anchor institutions are complex organizations with numerous divisions and stakeholders. Ideally, a comprehensive anchor mission draws upon a wide range of units in an institution's community engagement. It would be difficult to maintain consistency in the implementation of various community-based programming without some degree of rules of engagement. The process of how anchor institutions engage in communities is highly significant. It determines outcomes and the nature of relationships. As previously noted, AITF's definition of anchor institutions transcends the mere objective reality of an institution's presence in the community and contribution to a local economy. The definition is also philosophical, stressing a conscious commitment to the community. This can mean the difference between extending real estate developments in a locality and region without community input and an intentional approach to equitable growth in developments.

Working with a Wide Variety of Internal and External Stakeholders

As anchor institutions are complex organizations, often with numerous, sometimes semi-autonomous, units, neighborhood, cities, towns, and regions are even more multifaceted. Localities are ecosystems of numerous organizations and institutions of various shapes and sizes across sectors. An engaged anchor institution works across all of these boundaries, balancing internal coordination across departments and stakeholders as well as collaborating with numerous entities in the community. Therefore, a number of internal and external factors must be considered which is addressed comprehensively in this guide.

Challenges to Sustaining a Commitment to Community Engagement and Values

Anticipating challenges is fundamental to leadership in advancing an anchor institution mission and strategy. Many other challenges are contextual, based on the dynamics of a geographical area and local and institutional culture. The field has generally agreed that the complexity of this work, and especially, the goal to sustain it over time is fraught with challenges.

Leadership Transitions

It is important to build a comprehensive commitment across institutional units and among community partners because leadership transitions will take place. Planning for transition is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of anchor institution strategies over time. CEO level transitions can be particularly challenging for anchor institutions, as visible commitments to local engagement can often be identified with an individual chief executive. Those responsible for hiring CEOs (e.g., Boards and other governing bodies) should understand the significance of community partnerships to the core purpose of the institution so they can take this into account when hiring new executives.

Resource Limitations

Expanding anchor institution strategies can create new costs, which are not covered by existing line items. Aligning an anchor mission with the core priorities of the institution helps to meet some of the resource challenges. However, additional resources are still required, and it is important to build resource development capacities to support the work. This can be an even greater priority for community centric anchor institutions that primarily serve local, often lower income, constituents. These institutions often are not able to draw upon substantial budgets, endowments, or other pots of funding, yet they are expected to extensively meet community needs.

Internal Critics

Not everyone within an anchor institution will agree that the organization should prioritize community partnerships. Internal critics might dismiss the work as unnecessary or a departure from institutional priorities. This is one reason why aligning the anchor mission with the central mission of the institution is so significant. Leaders of engaged anchor institutions should expect internal resistance and be prepared to continually justify the work. When community partnerships and a shared understanding of an anchor mission and strategy are widespread throughout the institution, it is harder to dismiss the importance of the work. This spreading creates numerous champions throughout the institution, who will continue to convey supportive messages. Embedding a commitment to the values,

principles, and practices of being an engaged anchor throughout the institution helps establish a supportive organizational culture.

External Obstacles in the Local Community

Each community reflects its own culture and context. Some communities are highly collaborative. Some have substantial nonprofit sectors with high capacity and engaged community-based organizations. Local governments operate differently from one community to the next. It is important that anchor institutions recognize the range of distinctions in their communities and learn to navigate obstacles and join with external partners in ways that make sense for them.

Lack of Coordination across Programs and Initiatives

As noted, coordination around an anchor institution strategy across units is essential to creating an effective and sustainable approach to local engagement. However, this is easier said than done within a complex organization. Many institutional units enjoy their autonomy and might resist aligning with an institutional strategy. At the very least, the various units across the institution should be continually informed about the various initiatives underway throughout the organization. Anchor leaders should continually consider ways to establish communication across units to advance an anchor mission.

Quality of Institution's Historical Role in the Community

Anchor institutions are far from perfect. Often, they may have historically damaged the local community. Memories can be long among community residents about an institution's role. The nature of this historical role will ultimately inform the work of the future. It is important to be aware of and acknowledge the role. If the role was negative, anchor institutions should address this directly, and engage in honest dialogue with community partners. The institution, in these instances, will have to demonstrate some proof that a new day has arrived. Committing to mutually transformative collaboration is vital in this regard. The institution should be willing to relinquish some control and allow for co-created steps forward with community partners.

Internal Considerations in Sustaining Commitments

A number of the ideas below have already been mentioned. However, this is a useful checklist of items to consider internally in order to build and maintain an effective anchor strategy.

Recognizing the Range of Relevant Internal Stakeholders

A commitment is only institutional if a critical mass across multiple internal stakeholders shares similar values and contributes to the work of community engagement. This includes those at levels of leadership as well as those at varying levels in both programmatic and administrative capacities. An engaged anchor institution leverages the breadth of the organization's resources in service of the community, which requires buy-in from stakeholders representing all of these facets of the institution. Chief Executives are especially charged with setting priorities and values in ways that are meaningful across units and their stakeholders.

Communicating with Boards

While Chief Executives might wield significant influence to build, advance, and maintain a commitment to community engagement, it is always important to keep in mind the unique influence of Boards. Boards are positioned to either elevate or diminish an anchor institution's commitment to community engagement. It is important to continually update the Board on community work underway, and, particularly, demonstrate its value to the institutional mission and strategy. As the Board is likely to determine the next Chief Executive, their buy-in is crucial to sustaining the commitment over time.

Working within Systems (e.g., a public university system or a health network)

In institutional systems, lines of decision-making are even more complex. As the engagement of anchor institutions is local, commitment to place is paramount. Many anchor institutions, while based in and connected to a locality, are situated within networks or systems that set some priorities for all their member or satellite institutions. Therefore, a significant feature in anchor institution engagement, such as procurement might be established at headquarters or by the flagship. These decisions might not emphasize locality. These dynamics challenge leaders of localized institutions to engage headquarters about the importance of local commitment.

Assessing Existing Initiatives (from throughout the institution)

In strategic planning, it is always useful to take stock of existing assets and build from strengths. Anchor institutions are complex organizations with numerous stakeholders who may have their own projects and initiatives that engage the community. A new anchor leader might enter an environment where various units have operated relatively

autonomously in their community engagement or an environment in which some semblance of a broader anchor institution strategy encompassing numerous units has been established. Whatever the situation, it is important to embark on some form of an assessment to understand the landscape of what has been in existence in order to inform a course of action going forward.

Developing/Refining an Overarching Strategy for the Institution's Engagement

With knowledge of pre-existing efforts in the institution and community, it is important to pursue the development of an overarching anchor institution strategy. It is useful to embed this strategy within the institution's overall strategic plan, as it should be in alignment with the core priorities of the institution. This serves the dual purpose of ensuring that being an engaged anchor institution is centrally significant and providing connective tissue for a complex array of activities throughout the institution and community.

Coordinating Multiple Community Projects

Because numerous semi-autonomous projects operating in the community on behalf of the institution could be taking place, an anchor leader's role in building a cohesive strategic plan for anchor engagement could catalyze new opportunities for internal coordination. This might be perceived as an effort to exert control. This should not be an anchor leader's intent or desire. This level of coordination should be treated as an opportunity to increase communication among those working in the community. It is also an opportunity to shine a brighter light on the work. In some institutions, working in the community might be treated as ancillary or insignificant. Embedding anchor institution values and activities into a broader strategic plan should increase the internal value of this work and galvanize a collective sense of purpose across stakeholders and units.

Rewarding Community Engagement

Community engagement comes in many forms. Various stakeholders within the institution could be involved in any variety of ways, based on their responsibilities and areas of expertise. Regardless of how they are involved, a sense of a greater anchor mission and strategy should also bring greater incentives and rewards for those who are doing the work. Rewards systems can be complicated in some instances depending on the nature of the position. In higher education, tenure track faculty positions, for example, can be particularly challenging. Rewarding community engagement in fields that have no tradition of legitimizing this form of applied work involves additional stakeholders, such as disciplinary associations and faculty beyond the institution, as well as strategic conversation and planning with Deans and Department Chairs. Other fields and industries have to grapple with how to reward community engagement as well. Whatever the complication or field of practice, rewards and incentives must be addressed if an institution

is going to live up to commitment to community engagement or sustain this commitment over time.

Aligning with Overall Institutional Strategic Plans/Priorities

Alignment is fundamental to establishing a true institutional commitment, as noted. This is true for overall strategic plans for the institution, but also for plans and priorities across various units. The idea of being an engaged anchor institution should be a principle that is applicable in every segment of an institution. Each unit should be able to articulate and demonstrate how this commitment is manifested in their work.

Budgeting

The prioritization of being an engaged anchor institution in collaboration with the community integrated across segments throughout the organization can incorporate community engagement into existing budget lines. When this work is considered ancillary, it is isolated, requiring entirely new costs that are not supported by existing line items. Indeed, community engagement does carry costs. An Office of Community Engagement, for example, may have to be robust in order to facilitate the numerous forms of community partnerships within an anchor strategy. But ensuring the work is primary enables a greater base of support in the core budget.

Resource Development (paying for the work through various sources)

Being able to demonstrate a core base of support for the work actually enhances the ability to attract outside resources from various sources. These sources might come from individuals, private foundations, corporations, government, or others. Overall, it is wise to create a resource development strategy alongside an anchor strategy. Additional revenue could be driven by who has a stake in the role of the institution in helping to transform the community. This could mean local and state governments. It could mean locally focused foundations. The context of the institution and the community would help define prospects in a resource development strategy.

Staffing (planning and hiring people to handle the work)

If an anchor mission is spread through an institution, and various stakeholders in all relevant units are sharing in values and a commitment to being engaged in the community, the profile of staff involved is very important. Sustaining this commitment over time requires champions for the work throughout the institution. An anchor leader must determine an appropriate structure to enable staff leadership. Some leaders might want the next line of leadership to exist within their office while others might want to rely on an office with external affairs responsibilities. Some others might want to create an entirely new unit. Whichever path is selected, it is crucial to ensure the staff in place believe in the

work, are capable of effectively collaborating in the community and navigating internal alignment. It is useful to develop a shared understanding of relevant competencies to advance the work. In some cases, the right staffing might already be in place. In others, staff might have to be trained or developed. Sometimes new staff must be hired. Overall, staffs are essential to sustaining the work. When an anchor leader is a vocal champion for an anchor strategy without the appropriate staff and leaders and various other levels, it is unlikely the commitment can be sustained over time.

Working across Program Units

An engaged anchor institutions involves both the core substantive work and the business side of the organization. For a hospital, this would mean applying the clinical expertise of the institution as well as its economic and physical capital. The substantive programming side of an anchor institution has many dimensions with numerous divisions and units and experts in various fields of interest. As a leader of an anchor institution is challenged to forge a common vision and strategy in collaboration with numerous stakeholders, the practical process of establishing cohesion across multiple units requires specific attention. Anchor leaders should be aware of the range of relevant programs and initiatives working in the community and help them connect to a common vision and set of values shaping the institutions broader anchor mission. Embedding a commitment to being an engaged anchor institution into the core programmatic work helps align anchor engagement with the central purpose of the institution, its mission, and its strategic priorities.

Engaging Constituents (Students, Patients, Audiences, etc.)

Stakeholder engagement is a fundamental aspect of an anchor leader's role in forging and sustaining an anchor mission and strategy. Of course, this is true both internally and externally. Anchor leaders should look for opportunities to establish lines of communication among stakeholders within the institution about the significance of being engaged in the community, and the relevance of this work to the broader mission and purpose of the institution. It is important to develop a shared sense of the significance of this commitment to the community across numerous constituents within the institution. This level of internal community building is vital for the long-term sustainability of the work. This internal engagement influences organizational culture, which is far more difficult to dismantle in the face of leadership transitions.

Leverage the Institution's Economic Capital (hiring, procurement, etc.)

Anchor institutions possess various forms of capital. As noted, they bring substantive expertise that can be applied to help solve problems in localities. They are also corporate entities with various forms of economic capital. They are employers as well as purchasers. They also hold and develop real estate to varying degrees. This capital can be leveraged

for community gain. An anchor leader should consider the degree to which their institution is hiring locally and hiring historically underrepresented and underserved populations in their communities. Anchor leaders can assess the degree to which the institution is purchasing from local businesses and spending in ways that benefit local populations and reduce economic disparities. They can consider whether current contractors are hiring locally and challenge them to do so. They can review opportunities to increase housing opportunities for local residents.

Identifying and Sustaining Internal Champions

Most anchor institutions, whether or not a wider strategic commitment to a local anchor mission is in place, have programs and initiatives that work in the community. Those who are responsible for these activities could be the basis for internal champions promoting the centrality of community engagement for the institution as a whole. Anchor leaders can consider how to strategically support existing champions or create new ones throughout levels of leadership, across institutional units, at levels of governance, and other areas. Champions situated throughout an institution can be crucial to institutionalizing a sustained commitment to the work. There are numerous perspectives on where the core of external engagement work should reside in the institution. Wherever this might be (e.g., a separate office or embedded in a chief executive's office), champions who support and promote the significance of an anchor mission and its centrality to the institution's primary purpose help deepen the institution's commitment. When an anchor institution has a clear strategy and set of values for its local engagement, champions who spread this vision throughout the institution are essential to prioritizing this commitment to the role of the institution in collaborating and strengthening the community in which they reside.

Facilitating Relevant Internal meetings

An anchor leader is positioned to convene various constituents within the institution. These could include champions as well as critics. Internal meetings on the role of the institution in the local community, and its value to the broader institutional mission send signals about the relevance of this work. Internal meetings of this sort also bring the opportunity to connect those working in the community across units or disciplines to share and learn and provide incentives for them to collaborate and coordinate. These kinds of meetings help to strengthen relationships internally. They can also complement strategic plans very well. In advance of developing a strategic plan, internal conversations about the institution's work in the community can inform the development of new priorities. With an existing strategic plan, internal conversations can help track the success of stated goals and provide an opportunity for reflection and change where necessary.

Remaining Willing to Change, Evolve, and Adapt

As previously noted, AITF promotes mutually transformative partnerships. This concept suggests that the fulfillment of an anchor strategy should not only lead to tangible improvements in the community, it should also catalyze internal change in anchor institutions. For example, an anchor institution could seek to increase its local hiring and prioritize hiring low-income residents in the community. As anchor institutions make such shifts in priorities, in order to be effective and bring about tangible opportunities in the community, they must be willing to institute policy changes. An anchor leader can encourage the institution to reflect on historical practices that may actually serve as barriers to deeper community engagement. Staying on local hiring, an anchor institution could require degrees for several positions that may not actually need degrees in order to do the job in question. An institution might have strict policies regarding formerly incarcerated persons that could block certain residents from working at the institution. Additionally, a lot of the programmatic work of anchor institutions that draws upon the expertise of faculty, for example, prioritizes the wisdom of the institution's professionals. In order to effectively improve a local community, however, the wisdom of what works in the locality possessed by residents is also very important. For some experts at anchor institutions, it may take some time to appreciate local wisdom. An anchor leader can remain aware of these dynamics and encourage internal experts to shift their mindset or narrative about the community.

Levels of Leadership

While this guide largely emphasizes the decisions and circumstances of chief executives, anchor institutions are complex organizations with many levels of leadership. Many anchor institutions do not have a CEO who prioritizes community engagement. Additionally, a great deal of institutions' external collaboration in local collaboration is driven by stakeholders at various levels in an organization. These realities raise the possibility of leading an anchor mission from the middle. As CEOs should recognize, elevate, and coordinate with internal stakeholders fueling the institutions' community partnerships, these same internal champions beyond CEOs can make the case internally. They can demonstrate to senior leadership the value and impact of this work and demonstrate how community partnerships advance institutional priorities

External Considerations in Sustaining Commitments

A commitment to the local community transcends a few short-term episodic projects sponsored by the institution. An institutional commitment must be reflected throughout

the whole organization and by the organization's ongoing relationship with the community. An anchor institution leader represents the whole organization and is positioned to be a vital liaison to external constituents.

Here is a list of items to consider internally:

Defining the Institution's Surrounding Community

The communities in which anchor institutions are situated vary. It is always important to acknowledge and understand the particular dynamics of an institution's local and regional context. Some anchor institution strategies target a particular neighborhood that may or may not be in immediate proximity to the institution. Some focus on a series of neighborhoods. Some focus on entire towns, cities or regions. Clearly, urban, suburban, and rural contexts all suggest different approaches to the local boundaries under consideration. Whatever the circumstances, it is important to define, at least loosely, the parameters of the community in which an anchor institution strategy will primarily take place. It is also important to note that the boundaries may shift over time as the work unfolds. Engaging the community about their needs and local dynamics should help inform the institution's thinking. An anchor leader can encourage this level of communication.

Understanding the Ecosystem of this Community

Neighborhoods, towns, cities, and regions are made up of both people and institutions. The institutions in a locality, representing different fields and sectors, are essentially an ecosystem in which organizations play different roles. They bring different assets to communities. Community colleges, universities, hospitals, arts and cultural organizations, community-based organizations, government agencies, businesses, philanthropic foundations, and others all make up the fabric of a community. Each anchor institution should remain aware of its position and role within an ecosystem of institutions and consider its strengths and contributions toward deeper engagement and collaborative action in the community. Anchor institutions should seek to maintain healthy and consistent lines of communication across local organizations, and continually seek opportunities to partner.

Reviewing Data on the State of this Community

In considering an anchor institution's strengths and potential contributions to a locality, it is important to be aware of relevant data on the state of the community. Local government, for example, may have relevant data on issues such as employment, housing, education, and other important social and economic factors. Demographic data by race and ethnicity can be vital to helping an anchor institution understand issues to be addressed, as well as gaps in data. Anchor institutions can conduct new research (e.g., neighborhood level data)

that can broaden the public’s general understanding of conditions in a given geographic area.

Recognizing and Appreciating Community Assets

It is important for professionals at anchor institutions to avoid viewing community residents, particularly in lower income neighborhoods from solely a deficit perspective. Indeed, this work is about leveraging the resources of anchor institutions to strengthen communities by taking on pressing challenges such as economic inequities. Regardless of these challenges, communities possess many strengths and a knowledge and understanding of their realities that can escape those who do not have the same lived experiences. It is difficult for anchor institutions to actually help historically underserved constituents without authentic collaboration. For example, an antidote to a disease cannot be effectively delivered in a community without the active participation of residents in shaping how the antidote is distributed. Anchor leaders should continually demonstrate the utmost respect for communities in which the institution is working and ensure that an appreciation for community assets is a fundamental component of how the anchor institution approaches its local role.

The Institution’s History in the Community

Many anchor institutions do not have a good reputation in their communities. In some instances, this can be due to historical transgressions that may have harmed the local community. In these cases, memories can be lengthy. An anchor institution can demonstrate significant goodwill and intend to improve community relations, but a negative history can serve as a barrier to a renewed commitment to community partnerships. Anchor institution leaders must be aware of the historical role of the institution in the community. If it is difficult to overcome, the anchor institution will have to acknowledge history and engage in community dialogue about these dynamics. As has been the case in some instances, discussions about reparations for past injustices may surface. Even if the relationship has historically been relatively positive, recognizing history is important in understanding how the institution can do better in the future.

The Institution’s Impact on the Community

Ultimately, anchor institution-community partnerships should lead to tangible improvements locally. Therefore, this work should involve institutional and community stakeholders in dialogue about expectations and potential outcomes. Impact can be demonstrated on multiple levels – some quantitative and some qualitative. Efforts to improve local employment, for example, have some quantifiable potential outcomes in terms of hiring. Anchor initiatives should be goal oriented in this regard. Greater

awareness and access for the community could represent other types of potential outcomes that may lend themselves to qualitative measurement.

Identifying existing Community Partners

As anchor institutions take inventory of the range of internal programs that engage the community, it is essential to understand the community partners in these various efforts. These could be community-based organizations, unincorporated associations, government agencies, and others. A broader institutional commitment to an anchor mission and strategy means a commitment to sustained relationships with various community partnerships. A relationship suggests ongoing engagement that transcends periodic projects. For example, a community-oriented project that is supported by a grant may require collaboration between stakeholders at an anchor institution and the community. What happens after the grant period ends is the difference between a sustained relationship and an episodic collaboration. When an anchor institution maintains ongoing relationships with community partners, an external grant is not required. The relationship is not transactional; it is more of an implied mutual agreement to keep working together.

Listening to These Partners

As noted, anchor institutions should appreciate and acknowledge community assets. Anchor institutions should also actively listen to community partnerships. Democratic anchor institution-community partnerships require listening. Therefore, community partnerships should include ongoing and periodic opportunities for dialogue at various stages – forming projects and initiatives, executing the work, measuring progress, and renewing or revising the work.

Recognizing Community-based Stakeholders not Already Working with the Institution

Anchor institutions should seek opportunities to hear from community partners as well as engage residents and community organizations beyond those who are actively working with the institution. Community-centric anchor institutions with a primary mission to serve local constituents, such as hospitals that care for patients regardless of their ability to pay and located in or near low-income residents, have a built-in tie to constituents that may not be connected to the institution's community programming. Several local residents might take courses at a local community college. These community ties are significant assets that can be leveraged to deepen connections in the community and learn additional ways in which the institution can contribute to the community. For anchor institutions that do not primarily serve the local community, there is a need to remain highly intentional about finding ways to engage the broader community.

Addressing Systemic Racism

Many of the challenges in a community that anchor institutions can help resolve, such as educational and health inequities, have a racial dimension. These are challenges that will not be effectively addressed without acknowledgement of these racial dynamics and a racial equity lens through which solutions are planned. While these factors are evident and sometimes quite obvious, some avoid emphasizing race. An anchor institution leader has a responsibility to highlight systemic racism, which is manifested both in the community and in the institution. Anchor institutions can intentionally review and assess how racism is operating internally and in the community in order to inform solutions. Representation of people of color is another important consideration when considering systemic racism. Anchor institutions must take into account who is working with particular demographic groups in the community and ensure representation of these populations.

Co-Creating Mutually Transformative Strategies and Programs

Collaboration should also involve co-creation. Professional experts at anchor institutions are accustomed to defining terms, crafting questions, and designing programs and strategies. In community partnerships, these roles are shared. Community partners and anchor institution stakeholders can work together to think through the design of their work together. Anchor institution leaders should encourage co-creation in community partnerships and inquire about the role of co-creation in program design.

Training Internal Constituents to Work in the Community

Professional stakeholders within anchor institutions may be unfamiliar with local communities. Stakeholders who are working in communities might not be mindful of some of the aforementioned dynamics regarding community assets, race, history, culture, and other dynamics. Anchor institutions should establish various forms of training regarding local communities and how to work in those communities. This could include visits to the community to hear from local leaders and other constituents in the community. It could also include training on collaborative techniques that involve listening to the community and co-creation, among other relevant matters.

Aligning Priorities with Local Government

Local government is a significant potential partner for anchor institutions. The issues that anchor institutions-community partnerships tend to address are of significant interest to local governments. However, anchor institutions and local governments are often not aligned in their efforts. If local impact is the goal, this alignment should be fundamental. Anchor institution leaders should maintain a line of communication with Mayors about shared interests. Various local government agencies should be made aware of anchor institutions' community programming. For example, agencies responsible for local

economic development should be informed about anchor institutions' efforts to expand access to capital in the community. If local government seeks to improve health outcomes, enhance public schools, or increase access to jobs, anchor institutions can be relevant partners in meeting these needs.

Engaging other Anchor Institutions in the Community

As noted, one of the important trends in the anchor institutions field is the advent of multi-institutional anchor partnerships. These collaborative efforts bring together multiple anchor institutions across sectors in ongoing collective strategies to strengthen their communities. While it is important for each anchor institution to develop a strategy for community engagement in alignment with the institution's core priorities, it is also useful to recognize the ecosystem of organizations in which each institution is situated and establish lines of communication with other local anchor institutions.

Working in Multi-Anchor Institutional Partnerships

By combining their resources and expertise, a range of local anchor institutions can create ongoing collaborative efforts. Indeed, these are complicated partnerships because they are bringing together institutions with their own community programs and their own systems and priorities. Moreover, these are cross sector partnerships that transcend fields and industries. Despite these complexities, these broader networks of a locality's anchor institutions have the potential to maximize community impact and develop a high level of coordination that can be an ongoing asset to the area.

Assessing Community Impact

Anchor institution-community partnerships should include systems of measurement, evaluation, or assessment. In this regard, it is important to consider taking a nuanced approach to measurement that is quantitative and qualitative and significantly informed by community wisdom and experience. When anchor institutions are collaborating with each other, they have the opportunity to consider systems of measurement across their respective efforts in the community.

Considerations for Various Types of Geographical Contexts

While there are some common ideas and themes relevant to all anchor institutions, geographical contexts shape the reality of institutional roles locally. One very important matter facing anchor leaders, as they map anchor institution strategies is to determine the geographic parameters for engaging. Some anchor institutions focus their strategy on a neighborhood; others might emphasize clusters of neighborhoods, entire cities, or even

regions. The size of the city or town in which an anchor institution is situated often influences the boundaries around anchor institutions' community partnerships.

Larger Cities

Anchor institutions within very large cities, perhaps with populations of 2 million or more, often exist within a complex ecosystem of numerous types of organizations with highly varied experiences depending on neighborhoods. In these contexts, no single anchor institution is dominant.

Medium Cities

Medium cities can sometimes be ideal contexts for multi-anchor institution partnerships. They tend to include numerous institutions, but in an ecosystem that is small enough to bring local anchors together around a common agenda along with local government.

Smaller Cities/Suburban

Smaller cities, perhaps under 100,000, might also present opportunities to bring multiple anchor institutions together. The smaller scale overall, could allow for greater alignment across sectors.

Rural Towns

Distance can be a significant factor in rural areas. Local communities in rural towns may depend on anchor institutions from very long distances. Even a smaller anchor institution could have a regional influence across numerous towns in rural areas.

Global Considerations

The anchor institutions movement is most robust in the U.S. But it is still a relatively recent construct. Beyond the U.S., particularly in higher education, the anchor institutions movement is growing. Even in instances when the term "anchor institutions" is not being used, the dynamics of enduring organizations playing a role in their localities is universal. Increasingly, the language of anchor institutions is being used in Europe, and various parts of Africa, South America and the Caribbean, and Australia. The reality of anchor institutions, as in the U.S. is shaped by local context. The notion of anchor institutions does bring some assumptions that do not apply in all contexts internationally. In poor countries, for example, anchor institutions with significant resources may not be present. The idea of transforming localities in collaboration with anchor institutions assumes some extent of economic and other resources that can be leveraged. When these resources are not present, strategies must transcend geographies in order to secure them. Cultures and systems of government also influence the role of anchor institutions in communities and societies. Many of the forms of anchor institution engagement that have become



commonplace in the U.S. are facilitated by democracy. An anchor institution in a country with an authoritarian system of government is situated very differently.

Entering a New Environment with Established Commitments

Anchor leaders who are beginning new positions at institutions with which they have little background or experience are presented with a particular set of considerations. As noted, anchor leaders are poised to initiate new strategies and set the tone for values and principles for community partnerships. An anchor leader (particularly one who intends to champion the local engagement of the institution) entering a new environment with established commitments with the community is starting with an existing foundation. These leaders will have to learn the terrain of existing plans and programs and build relationships with numerous partners. One consideration is to make sure to respect and understand existing work. In this situation, a new anchor leader should schedule numerous meetings with internal and external stakeholders and reiterate the institution's commitment, and willingness to continue, advance, and expand the work. These conversations could be opportunities to recognize the work underway and identify opportunities for growth. Leaders in these contexts should look for opportunities to further existing work, enhance coordination among different internal units and stakeholders, and strengthen the existing anchor mission. If a strategic plan for anchor engagement is already in place, a new anchor leader can review the plan, and lead a process in which various internal and external stakeholders can inform how to affirm and strengthen the existing plan.

Entering a New Environment Requiring Substantial Additional Effort

Assuming a new anchor leader intending to expand community engagement was hired with knowledge of the new leader's thinking, an environment without much existing activity presents challenges and opportunities. Even in an institution without a history of being an engaged anchor, chances are, some people and units within the institution are either attempting to engage or advancing a program that may have been operating without much institutional support. It is important to assess this terrain and showcase the work that is being done. These contexts present the opportunity to bring the institution together around some new ideas in a strategic planning process. One challenge could be that the lack of engagement of the institution could be a point of contention in the community. Therefore, it is important to deeply engage in the community and learn what external stakeholders think the institution could contribute to the community. It is also important to note that a new anchor leader might have a covert intent to explore deepening the institution's engagement. In this instance, the new leader might have been hired without community engagement as a point of discussion. The pace of how to gradually move the institution in a new direction might be slow. But, as previously noted, in all cases of leaders trying to create, enhance, or expand an anchor mission, the rationale for the work should be clear

and aligned with the central priorities of the institution and the institution's overall strategic plan.

Likely Factors Shaping the Future

Politics and Challenges to Democracy

We would be remiss if we did not mention the significance of political divisions and the growth of authoritarian sentiments. As anchor leaders look to the future of advancing the role of anchor institutions in their communities, politics must be taken into account. Anchor leaders will have to be able to catalyze and implement strategic plans through political divides. In the U.S., the political tendencies of State governments are already shaping the context for anchors' local engagement. Anchor institutions that are public and deeply tied to their state governments can be substantially defined by statewide policies. Some anchor institutions may reside in localities where local populations might be politically opposed to institutions in general. Some may reside in localities that are politically divided and might be put in the position of attempting to serve as bridges across differences.

Persistent Systemic Inequities and Racism

The anchor institutions movement is increasingly paying attention to the significance of systemic racism. Often, race is a factor in community partnerships, particularly in instances where predominantly white institutions are working in largely BIPOC communities. Anchor institutions' strategic plans for local engagement should apply a racial equity lens to understanding issues in communities and look for opportunities to intentionally reduce racial inequities externally as well as internally. This is an area in which anchor institutions should pay particular attention to mutually transformative partnerships. Additionally, many of the matters around equitable development and growth in anchor institutions' local engagement often have a racial dimension. Many of the issues that anchor partnerships might seek to strengthen in their communities – education, public safety, employment, health, environmental sustainability, transportation, and housing – often have racial implications. This is why a racial equity lens is pertinent.

Vulnerable Conditions in Local Communities (exacerbated by the pandemic)

One characteristic of contemporary times is the role of natural disasters that exacerbate inequities and injustices. The realities of climate change have made excessive heat, fires, droughts, storms, floods, and on more likely in numerous contexts. These are locally experienced conditions, making it incumbent upon anchor institutions to act as responsible

local assets and respond. The COVID-19 pandemic is somewhat of a super disaster, because it has impacted so many local communities simultaneously. The pandemic unquestionably creates additional obstacles for lower income populations, and BIPOC communities. The reality of the pandemic has proven that the social determinants of health shape outcomes, as the most vulnerable populations were most impacted by the pandemic. Anchor institutions were called into action on numerous levels throughout the pandemic, creatively leveraging their various forms of capital to meet immediate needs. Looking to the future, it is difficult to imagine that we will not experience other pandemics. Moreover, climate-related disasters will only increase. Anchor leaders will have to include crisis preparation in their planning.

Budgetary Constraints Facing Anchors

Further crises will create budgetary constraints on some anchor institutions. Community centric anchor institutions serving historically underserved populations have persistently been underfunded. Yet, these are the anchor institutions that are best positioned as community partners.

Vulnerability of Community-based Nonprofits

One of the most important aspects of anchor institutions' local engagement is identifying the right community partners. Amidst the ecosystem of local organizations, various types of institutions play different roles. It is important that anchor institutions are able to collaborate with organizations that represent the most underserved populations in the community. These are often community-based organizations that are also underfunded. Currently, in philanthropy, there is increased attention to the needs of grassroots community-based organizations. However, this has not amounted to a new trend that provides community-based organizations access to greater capital. These are organizations that are typically disconnected from financial capital. This is one reason why anchor partnerships can be crucial to helping community-based organizations fulfilling their missions.

Conclusion

Whether you are early in your journey toward leading an anchor institution or currently in a chief executive position, it is clear that building and sustaining a commitment is complex and multifaceted. This is dynamic work and the wisdom in the field is constantly evolving. Therefore, this guide should not be treated as static. It will likely be revised on numerous occasions in the coming years. It is important to remain nimble and adapt to changing times and new thinking.

As you continue your efforts, please see AITF as a resource. We should always be reminded that anchor institutions can play a crucial role in the future of communities and in the ability to solve pressing social and economic concerns. Ultimately, the great issues of our times are experienced in many different types of localities throughout the world. Those institutions that are local assets in proximity to the populations most adversely impacted by poverty, hunger, climate change, diseases, and other challenges have a unique responsibility to help bring about solutions in place. These endeavors have implications far and wide.