

Anchor Institutions Task Force



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Strategic Plan

Fall 2023 through Summer 2026

Executive Summary

The last three years have been quite eventful in localities and globally. AITF and many other organizations were challenged to pivot in the midst of a pandemic and the shift toward virtual work. The field promoting the role of anchor institutions in strengthening communities has felt more justified as, especially underserved constituencies, in localities were confronted with widening inequities that required intervention from anchors. AITF served as an important resource in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and produced numerous publications on the valuable role that anchor institutions were playing in their localities during the height of the pandemic.

AITF's subgroups continued to function as communities of practice providing supportive learning spaces for peer groups within our broader membership. We highlighted and reaffirmed the significance of multi-institutional anchor partnerships with the development of our Anchor Partnerships Subgroup, bringing together cross sector collaborations from various localities. Leadership has been a major point of emphasis in AITF's work. We started to produce a publication series on leadership and continued to create cohorts of future anchor institution leaders through our Anchor Fellows Program. AITF developed a smaller scale format for in person events and organized numerous webinars. Overall, AITF continued to evolve and expand its breadth and reach nationally and globally.

Looking ahead to the next three years, AITF will:

- Continue to prioritize leadership and how to sustain a commitment to AITF's values over time in communities and within anchor institutions;
- Promote and support the power and potential of multi-institutional, cross sector anchor partnerships;
- Highlight and refine our understanding of effective ways to forge and maintain trusted democratic partnerships that appreciate and are informed by community voices;
- Encourage and bolster cross sector community-based anchor strategies, centering schools, that lead to stronger educational and career pathways across the entire continuum from early childhood to careers, and ultimately greater social and economic mobility and more just, democratic, and equitable communities;
- Raise awareness about anchor institutions' unique contributions to their communities and potential as change agents, including influencing policymakers at various levels of government;

- Emphasize the role of anchor institutions in building public trust in civic institutions in their localities in the midst of divisive political and social contexts;
- Alongside these strategic directions, AITF will continue to prioritize and demonstrate AITF's values - a commitment to place, democracy and democratic practice, collaboration, social justice and equity – with continued attention to the significance of racial equity and racial justice.

AITF's multi-faceted agenda with numerous programs will be the vehicles to implement these strategic directions. Initiatives that will continue and evolve during this period include Events, Webinars, Professional Development Subgroups, Publications, Policy Influence, Local Strategic Dialogues and Technical Assistance, and the Anchor Fellows Program.

Vision

AITF will continue to serve as a values-based big tent for various anchor and community leaders and other partners on the role of anchor institutions in engaging in mutually transformative partnerships and bringing about equitable growth in communities.

AITF will increasingly emphasize its unique qualities, such as its values -- a commitment to equity and social justice, democracy and democratic practice, place, and collaboration. We will build on a more explicit commitment to racial equity as well.

AITF will continue to pay particular attention to representing the broad array of institutions and sectors with a role and stake in the ecosystem of neighborhoods, cities, and regions. The pandemic reinforced the importance of collaboration and coordination among various types of institutions in interdependent communities. It is crucial that AITF help anchor institutions and community partners transcend silos and work together to strengthen their surroundings.

AITF must be a champion for the role that anchors can play, and be an informative resource and supportive space for anchor institutions and their partners. This includes being a strong voice for policies and incentives that will enhance the role and impact of anchor institution-community partnerships. This voice must include ways in which anchor institutions can contribute to dismantling systemic racism.

Overall, AITF will refine and strengthen its role as a unique values-based movement organization and premier resource for learning, sharing, and providing a powerful voice for anchor institutions and their partners across sectors with increased urgency.

Strategic Priorities

The last three years have been quite eventful in localities and globally. AITF was challenged to pivot in the midst of a pandemic and the shift toward virtual work. The field promoting the role of anchor institutions in strengthening communities has felt more justified as, especially underserved constituencies, in localities were confronted with widening inequities.

Furthermore, the political and legal context created new obstacles, but also catalyzed creative thinking about future possibilities. AITF served as an important resource in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and produced numerous publications on the valuable role that anchor institutions were playing in their localities during the height of the pandemic. This context

inspired the development of a policy brief on the need for greater public sector support for cross sector collaboration involving anchor institutions as a means of assisting communities in the face of crisis and transforming localities for their longer-term viability.

AITF's subgroups continued to be central communities of practice providing supportive learning spaces for peer groups within our broader membership. We reaffirmed the significance of multi-institutional anchor partnerships with the development of our Anchor Partnerships Subgroup, bringing together cross sector collaborations from various localities. Leadership has been a major point of emphasis in AITF's work. We started to produce a publication series on leadership and continued to create cohorts of future anchor institution leaders through our Anchor Fellows Program. AITF developed a smaller scale format for in person events and organized numerous webinars.

The current context has raised some new questions and challenges. For example, as we were experiencing the expansion of a racial justice movement catalyzed by the events of 2020, we witnessed greater sensitivity to and support for anti-racist strategies. AITF's work was influenced within this context, as we increased an emphasis on racial equity and racial justice and began to address issues such as local reparations strategies. More recently, we have been experiencing an aggressive resistance to racial progress. The U.S. Supreme Court decision on affirmative action was a stark reminder of the fragility of progress and policy victories from generations ago. The political and legal context has the potential to limit the momentum of recent years and it has been creating multiple obstacles for efforts to strengthen communities.

The dynamics that have emerged reaffirm AITF's work and values, but they alter some of our points of emphasis. While they justify and underscore the importance of a racial equity and racial justice lens, they also challenge us to help bring about greater impact at the community level. This is especially the case regarding educational and career opportunities. With fewer forms of policy assistance to help expand access, there is more work to be done in the schools and the communities in which underserved young people of color reside.

The current political and legal context also influences anchor institutions' priorities. Beyond the affirmative action case, some institutions of higher education have been forced to dissolve diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and alter curriculum. In these instances, it is important to consider anchor institutions' options. This also speaks to the importance of leadership. The leaders of anchor institutions that support and promote AITF's values and champion community engagement may not be fully embraced internally. This all varies

contextually, but AITF's work on leadership has focused on the decisions that leaders at various levels can pursue internally and externally to help sustain the commitment over time. As leadership transitions among many who have been longtime champions of this work proliferate, it will be increasingly necessary to both ensure the work is embedded and supported by a critical mass of relevant constituents as well as strengthen the pipeline of future leaders who share AITF's values but also understand the techniques to forge and maintain commitments.

We know that the pandemic highlighted the valuable role of anchor institutions in their localities, as various types of anchors were called upon for resources, knowledge, and spaces. But this did not seem to amount to a wider appreciation for the role of anchor institutions among policymakers. Thus there is still much to be done to raise awareness. For example, where skeptics might view anchor institutions as too wealthy to require additional public or private financial support, we must demonstrate the particular realities of community centric anchor institutions, which are far more prevalent than anchors with substantial endowments.

Given AITF's evolution and the broader context upon us, AITF must:

- Continue to prioritize leadership and how to sustain a commitment to AITF's values over time in communities and within anchor institutions;
- Promote and support the power and potential of multi-institutional, cross sector anchor partnerships;
- Highlight and refine our understanding of effective ways to forge and maintain trusted democratic partnerships that appreciate and are informed by community voices;
- Encourage and bolster cross sector community-based anchor strategies, centering schools, that lead to stronger educational and career pathways across the entire continuum from early childhood to careers, and ultimately greater social and economic mobility and more equitable communities;
- Raise awareness about anchor institutions' unique contributions to their communities and potential as change agents, including influencing policymakers at various levels of government;

- Alongside these strategic directions, AITF will continue to prioritize and demonstrate AITF’s values - a commitment to place, democracy and democratic practice, collaboration, social justice and equity - with some continued attention to the significance of racial equity and racial justice.

Leadership and Sustaining the Work

In the next twelve months

In the next three years

Anchor Partnerships

In the next twelve months

In the next three years

Trusted Democratic Partnerships

In the next twelve months

In the next three years

Pathways to Mobility

In the next twelve months

In the next three years

Awareness and Influence

In the next twelve months

In the next three years

AITF's Values

In the next twelve months

In the next three years

Navigating a New Reality

AITF will have to continue to rethink and redo various aspects of anchor institution-community partnerships. In this regard, AITF must become a valuable resource for members. AITF has already begun to engage in new activities.

In the next twelve months:

- Continue to research examples of how anchors are engaged in their communities during the pandemic;
- Disseminate these examples widely in a series of editions that capture the work in various stages;

- Begin researching examples of how anchor institution-community partnerships are addressing racial equity and racial justice within anchor institutions and in communities;
- Convene special conversations among subgroups and other clusters on how members are addressing the pandemic and the growing racial justice movement;
- Share articles, blog postings, op-eds by members that are discussing critical issues facing anchors during these remarkable times;
- Underscore the importance of cross sector collaboration in addressing the crisis by showcasing ways in which cross sector anchor partnerships have been responding in the pandemic, addressing racial equity, and identifying ways in which AITF can encourage the development of new cross sector partnerships;
- Inform members about how and where to acquire vital resources, such as Personal Protective Equipment (beyond health anchors), that will be needed in every sector for years to come;
- Inform members about various resources on racial equity and racial justice;
- Organize webinars that showcase members' activities during this period;
- Commission and disseminate brief summaries from Advisory Council members and other highly engaged members on their work;
- Rearrange the annual conference, and hold a brief online event that focuses on anchors' efforts in the pandemic, featuring the perspectives of Advisory Council members and other highly engaged members;
- Write about how AITF is addressing the pandemic, and the growing racial justice movement, and disseminate through social media, blogs, op-eds, and other formats;
- Develop and implement strategies that engage anchors and their community partners in on going democratic work to advance social justice and equity, particularly racial equity;
- Compose policy briefs on demonstrable ways in which anchor institutions can contribute to necessary changes in their communities:

- The first brief would focus on a locally-based service initiative that would involve students, community members, community-based organizations, anchor institutions and others in a collective effort to rebuild their neighborhoods, cities, and regions in the wake of the pandemic;
 - The second brief would build on AITF’s continuous efforts to gather and highlight the various ways in which anchor institutions are responding to the crisis by proposing an effort to incentivize anchor institutions to expand their collaborative efforts to rebuild their communities, pursue equitable growth, demonstrate AITF values, and endeavor toward racial equity;
 - The third brief would recognize the problem that many of the anchor institutions that are serving the most underserved populations are not properly financed and supported. This brief would focus on the need for policies that appreciate how significant these truly community-centric anchor institutions are to the future of equity and social justice.
- Establish or re-establish lines of communication with relevant government agencies, political campaigns, or policymakers at local, state, and national levels in the U.S.;
 - Leverage these lines of communication to inform the development and dissemination of these policy briefs;
 - Collaborate with international partners to adapt these briefs to other global contexts and stimulate dialogue about parallels and distinctions;
 - Investigate relevant policies and policy ideas from other countries and share them with the network.

In the next three years:

- Develop in depth case studies of how some anchors and anchor partnerships navigated the various stages of the pandemic and developed long-range strategies;
- Disseminate these case studies in various formats;

- Develop case studies on how anchors and anchor partnerships have been working toward racial equity and racial justice;
- Disseminate these case studies in various formats;
- Continue to engage subgroups and other clusters in focused dialogue and exchange;
- Develop a new version of the AITF conference, which is designed for smaller audiences in person, but reaching many others through technology;
- Continue to write and get out AITF’s point of view on anchors and the aftermath of the pandemic as well as racial equity and racial justice;
- Continue to emphasize the importance of cross sector collaboration and find opportunities to catalyze new partnerships;
- Continue to serve as an informative resource on how to navigate life after COVID-19 and connect members to necessary resources and equipment;
- Continue to develop and implement strategies that engage anchors and their community partners in on going democratic work to advance social justice and equity, particularly racial equity;
- Revise and adapt existing policy ideas in order to be relevant in an evolving context;
- Compose new policy briefs where necessary;
- Continue to engage policymakers and government agencies with AITF’s policy briefs and the findings from AITF’s research on the role anchors have been playing in their communities to encourage new public financing for democratic anchor institution-community partnerships;
- Continue to engage in global communication on policy ideas.

AITF is committed to place, collaboration, democracy, social justice and equity. Increasingly, AITF is highlighting the importance of racial equity in particular. The values-based approach is important given the many possible interpretations of what it could mean for anchors to be engaged in their communities.

In the next twelve months

- Further refine AITF’s messaging around values (especially given the pandemic), and more explicitly highlight these values in AITF’s writing;
- More frequently integrate racial equity and equitable growth into AITF’s messaging;
- Continue engaging the Economic Development Subgroup around how its members are responding in the crisis, and develop a strategy for highlighting important economic development considerations through the lens of AITF’s values;
- Continue engaging the Health Professionals Subgroup regarding the social determinants of health and their relevance in the pandemic, and develop a strategy to highlight the unique role of health anchors in their communities through the lens of AITF’s values;
- Further develop conversations on social mobility through educational pathways through the new Education Subgroup;
- Re-organize the postponed session on Social Mobility in collaboration with Rutgers University-Newark and CollegeNet to create a new frame of understanding on how to strengthen social mobility with a greater focus on influential factors especially in light of the debilitating impact of the pandemic on educational opportunities for lower income populations and communities of color;
- Align strategies pursued by issue-oriented subgroups with Higher Education Presidents’ Subgroup;
- Explore how to connect, through the Advisory Council, a range of institutions across sectors to a common multi-issue values-oriented strategy.

In the next three years

- Secure a greater media presence for AITF regarding AITF’s values orientation and emerging multi-issue strategy;
- Write on how each subgroup has developed a strategy in the face of the pandemic that emphasizes AITF’s values;
- Continue efforts with Subgroups and the Advisory Council.

Building a more Representative Network

Over the years, AITF has been striving to create a network that is representative of anchor institutions of various types along with philanthropy and government. Each community is an ecosystem of interdependent actors representing numerous fields within the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. In order to strengthen and transform communities, we must determine effective ways to coordinate efforts across this range of partners.

In the next twelve months

- Ask Advisory Council members to recruit their peers to join AITF's general membership, which is free of charge;
- Begin featuring the work of AITF Advisory Council members in the newsletter and elsewhere;
- Continue to be inclusive of representatives of anchors and other partners of all types and in different parts of the world in speaking and publications;
- Continue to write about the importance of cross sector collaboration and highlight the importance of coordination across the ecosystem in communities;
- Continue to engage internationally; and although some international meetings might not be able to transpire, we can encourage our partners to spread the word about AITF and encourage others in their countries and regions to join the general membership.

In the next three years

- Continue being inclusive in the composition of speakers, case studies in publications, and beyond;
- Continue to expand efforts to demonstrate the value and significance of cross sector collaboration in transforming communities;
- Continue featuring the work of Advisory Council members;

- Consider creating new subgroups (possibilities include the arts, local government, rural anchors, corporations);
- Develop online programming (webinars, etc.) specifically tailored to particular audiences that we would like to grow;
- Develop publications on the role of particular types of anchors or fields in their communities (local government, museums, etc.);
- Increase the visibility of Advisory Council members at conferences (speaking, moderating panels, etc.);
- Honor leaders from different sectors at conferences;
- Deepen remote international engagement, possibly pursuing joint online programming.

Sustaining Anchor Capacity and Commitment

How to sustain anchor partnerships and a commitment to AITF's values has been a recurring theme throughout AITF's existence. More recently, leadership transition became one important way in which AITF might be able to have some influence.

In the next twelve months

- Revive engagement with the current cohort of Anchor Fellows (hopefully they will be able to travel; if not, we should help organize online activities);
- Further revise the Anchor Fellows Program to be inclusive of different types of anchors beyond colleges and universities;
- Widely disseminate the call for applications for the 2022 cohort across representatives of various sectors and the Advisory Council;
- Begin discussing the Anchor Fellows Program in the Advisory Council in order to add a cross sector dimension to AITF's approach to building the future of anchor leadership

In the next three years

- Continue advancing the Anchor Fellows Program, perhaps with six in a cohort with half of them from higher education, and the other half from different fields;
- Actively promote the Anchor Fellows Program across AITF's membership and among anchor leaders and search firms;
- Help place current and former Anchor Fellows in CEO positions/presidencies;
- Develop profiles on anchors and anchor partnerships that have sustained themselves over time and lessons learned;
- Through publications and speaking, demonstrate how anchor institutions and anchor partnerships that have sustained a commitment to their communities are navigating long-range strategies due to the pandemic;
- Establish the Advisory Council as the liaison to the Anchor Fellows Program to ensure a commitment to cross sector leadership development

Connecting Directly in Particular Localities and Parts of the World

Recently, AITF began to bolster in person engagement in various locales in the U.S. and in Europe. The concept of Local Strategic Dialogues emerged as a way to help local leaders across sectors develop new collaborative efforts in their communities. AITF also began to establish technical assistance for anchor partnerships. Meetings in Europe have been helping to inform the idea of other networks in different global regions affiliating with AITF.

Conceptually, the idea of deeper connections in various localities makes sense for AITF. It helps AITF prove its value to a degree, as anchor work is ultimately about transforming particular localities and anchors. While this remains a priority for AITF, the approach will have to change given our new reality. Here again, AITF will have to make greater use of technology.

In the next twelve months

- Continue communication with established AITF partnerships about working together (such as ongoing conversations with Europe);
- Remain open to initiating new online Local Strategic Dialogues;
- Continue existing technical assistance relationships (such as the Newark Anchor Collaborative);
- Integrate new thinking emerging from anchor partnerships during the pandemic into all engagement with localities.

In the next three years

- Gradually resume in person engagement in the U.S. for Local Strategic Dialogues;
- Continue engaging internationally by remote means;
- Resume seeking a partner organization with a local chapter-based model to help coordinate new Local Strategic Dialogues;
- Remain open to entering into longer term technical assistance relationships on demand.

