



*Building Pathways for a Better World*

## **Anchor Institutions Task Force**

### ***Background***

In winter 2009, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was advised by a national Task Force, coordinated by the University of Pennsylvania, on how HUD could increase its impact and strategically leverage anchor institutions, particularly higher education and medical institutions (“eds and meds”), to improve communities and help solve significant urban problems.

The Task Force, which produced a report, “Anchor Institutions as Partners in Building Successful Communities and Local Economies,” emphasized the need for more collaborative policy approaches, promoting HUD’s potentially catalytic role in stimulating interagency cooperation across the Federal government. This Task Force is continuing; functioning as an ongoing think tank, developing long-term strategies, and making the case for the crucial role of anchor institutions in economic and community development. Communities cannot be revitalized and redeveloped without greater alignment across policy, institutions, civil society organizations (such as community based nonprofit organizations), and private resources (such as philanthropy).

Leveraging the resources of anchor institutions to address societal needs has recently gained increased attention, particularly with respect to community colleges, colleges, and universities, which bring a wide range of resources (e.g., financial, physical, and human) and maintain deep-rooted commitments to localities. As numerous communities have experienced capital flight, institutions of higher education have remained as critical anchors of stability.

### ***Values***

Core values of the Anchor Institutions Task Force include:

- Collaboration and Partnership
- Equity and Social Justice
- Democracy and Democratic Practice
- Commitment to Place and Community

### ***The Task Force and its Work***

The Anchor Institutions Task Force has been convened as a permanent organization to develop and disseminate knowledge to help create and advance democratic, mutually beneficial anchor institution-community partnerships. The Task Force is a distinctive and unique group that aims to:



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- Bring together a group of scholars, university presidents and other leaders in higher education, and practitioners;
- Increase cooperation and alignment among government, anchor institutions, businesses, schools, community organizations and philanthropy in order to improve communities;
- Develop strategies to promote interagency government collaboration;
- Provide tools for anchor institutions to enhance their societal missions, address local needs, as well as strengthen democratic, mutually beneficial partnerships between institutions of higher education, schools, and community based organizations;
- Provide tools for anchor institutions to help students develop as democratic citizens who are lifelong contributors to communities and the nation's well-being.
- Complement philanthropic strategies to support and strengthen vulnerable communities.

In its first year, the Task Force will sharpen its primary goals and develop a variety of strategies.

#### *Engaging the Federal Government*

Communication with HUD has established opportunities to advocate for and promote policies that impact anchor institutions. Interagency collaboration has been central to the Task Force's recommendations, stressing the potential catalytic role HUD can play in strengthening collaboration across Federal agencies.

The Task Force will continue a dialogue with the White House Office of Urban Affairs, Corporation for National and Community Service, National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, Departments of Education, Agriculture, HUD, as well as other Federal agencies. The strategic tapping of anchor institution resources cannot be accomplished through a single agency. HUD through the Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) and the Office of University Partnerships has provided multi-year support for higher education-community partnerships. However, opportunities exist to integrate anchor institution strategies into agencies across Federal, state, and local governmental agencies.

The Task Force will continue to arrange meetings with Federal officials, partner with key lobbying firms, identify policy opportunities, and draft policy recommendations. Effectively engaging media is key to laying the groundwork for policy opportunities. The Task Force will make use of various media outlets in order to educate the public about the significance and potential of anchor institution partnerships. Placing Op Eds is one particular approach the Task Force will pursue. The



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placement of these articles in publications, such as *the New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, as well as others, can simultaneously educate the public and demonstrate the urgency of engaging anchor institutions in democratic partnerships with communities.

#### *Enhancing Anchor Institution Practice*

One of the core areas in which the Task Force can make a critical contribution to enhancing the impact of anchor institution-community partnerships is through ongoing information sharing. The premise behind the need for greater policy and financial incentives for anchor institution-community partnerships is to increase the likelihood that institutional resources will be harnessed in order to help solve major societal problems. Communities stand a better chance when revitalization strategies make use of the resources of anchor institutions. Subsequently, improving the practice of anchor institution partnerships can enhance prospects for social and economic growth.

The Task Force will strengthen the field by providing a forum through which representatives of anchor institution partnerships can improve the quality of their practice through learning exchanges with colleagues not only focused on sharing examples of effective practice, but also on dialogue about mistakes, challenges, and future opportunities for action.

Specific activities related to learning exchange and quality improvement will include:

- An online network – An online portal will provide an avenue through which representatives of anchor institution-community partnerships can present their work, learn from others, attain valuable resources, and post inquiries. Tools, such as the University of Pennsylvania’s [Anchor Institutions Toolkit](#), could be exhibited through the portal, providing a useful avenue for accessing valuable information, promising practices and guidance.
- An annual gathering – This annual convening will provide opportunities for face-to-face communication and exchange. At these meetings, Task Force members will have an opportunity to demonstrate progress, network, and hear from influential and informative speakers. While Task Force members would be the primary participants in the annual gathering, representatives from national higher education associations and K-12 and community organizations would also be invited to attend.

#### *Engaging Philanthropy*

Private philanthropic resources can strengthen the Task Force’s efforts and provide flexible dollars for planning and innovation. The work of the Task Force, from policy and media strategies to



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strengthening a field of practice, requires time and resources. Democratic, mutually beneficial anchor institution-community partnerships have been developed in cities across the United States. The Task Force can document this work and make its lessons available to a national audience. Private philanthropic support can bring flexible funds to enable the continuous dialogue, travel, and writing that will be required to realize the Task Force's goals of advancing anchor institution-community partnerships as a strategy to revitalize communities. Private philanthropy, of course, can also enhance anchor institution-community partnerships as they develop on the ground. In particular, by working with community colleges, colleges and universities, philanthropy can catalyze and institutionalize long-term change, leveraging the significant resources of these institutions to benefit communities.

Foundations have been thinking about alternative means to grant making that can lead to transforming communities. Transformation will more likely take place when initiatives are rooted in institutions that are likely to remain in, and thereby maintain a longstanding interest in, a community over time.

Dialogue between the Task Force and various philanthropic entities has been ongoing. The Task Force is looking to foundations as both partners and funders. The dialogue between the new Administration and the philanthropic community has been extensive. Bringing the idea of leveraging anchor institutions as a means of meeting Federal priorities into this discussion would be useful and important.

#### ***Short Term Steps***

Over the next several months, the Task Force will:

- Develop the initial frame of an online portal for exchange and information;
- Organize a number of conversations with Federal officials;
- Coordinate a strategic convening between Task Force members and key Federal officials;
- Design an initial annual gathering;
- Compose and place two Op Eds on the significance of anchor institution partnerships to Federal priorities;
- Engage a group of foundations in a strategic conversation focused on opportunities, challenges, and possible steps forward;



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- Engage a group of community organizations, including public schools, in discussions on how to effectively develop and advance mutually beneficial, democratic partnerships with anchor institutions.

#### ***Task Force Management and Administration***

The Task Force is led initially by the University of Pennsylvania and administered by Marga Incorporated.

The University of Pennsylvania's experiences in recent decades provide a persuasive case as to how an anchor institution can comprehensively contribute to a neighborhood and city, by tapping its intellectual, social, economic, human, and physical capital to transform its environment. Numerous lessons have been drawn from this story in the form of the Anchor Institutions Toolkit (Netter Center, 2009), which provides a useful guide for anchor institutions on how to simultaneously strengthen their purpose and surroundings and the results of a Penn-sponsored national conference, "Urban Anchors in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Commitment to Place, Growth and Community" (October 2007). The Penn Institute for Urban Research, co-directed by Eugenie Birch and Susan Wachter, coordinated the development and publication of a series of task force reports titled Retooling HUD for a Catalytic Federal Government: A Report to Secretary Shaun Donovan, which included the "Anchor Institutions" report. Eugenie Birch was also the co-chair on the "Anchor Institutions Task Force" report. The Director of Penn's Netter Center for Community Partnerships, Ira Harkavy, is the chair of the Task Force. Marga Incorporated is a consulting firm dedicated to strengthening partnerships and philanthropic initiatives through research and strategic guidance.

7/20/10