



The Anchor Institutions Task Force

Update and Reflections

Fall 2018

In recent years, a movement to leverage the resources and expertise of enduring organizations toward community and economic development has been growing. Anchor institutions are enduring organizations that remain in their geographical areas and play a vital role in their local communities and economies. The Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF) was created in 2009 as a means of organizing the growing number of leaders and practitioners in various fields promoting the engagement of anchor institutions in their communities.

This paper highlights:

- Evolution of the Field of Anchor Institutions—engaging the entire institution and embedded with a deep commitment to social justice.
- Evolution of AITF—AITF has grown from 20 members to over 800 leaders in the field through outreach activities, including an annual conference, a journal, webinars, strategic local dialogues and peer-based working groups and is building new global partnerships and deeper connections to government.
- Reflections Going Forward—opportunities and challenges in advancing the field

Evolution of the Field

Enduring institutions in localities have been around for generations. But in the contemporary context, stability among institutions in their local communities has taken on greater meaning. As economies moved from manufacturing toward being knowledge- and information technology-based, and as industries have left their locales for cheaper operating costs, greater attention has been paid to those entities that have remained, particularly colleges and universities.

Institutions of higher education are inherently place-based in most cases, as their existence is interdependent with their surroundings. While many colleges and universities were increasing their external engagement in the 1980's, the emphasis was more on student service. Increasingly, the role of university research as a pathway to help resolve challenges facing localities emerged as another vital way in which higher education could contribute to their areas.

Gradually, conversations turned toward the total institution – the academic and corporate aspects of colleges and universities. Attention turned toward the role of anchor institutions as employers, purchasers, and real estate developers.

AITF developed at a pivotal point in the field's evolution. First of all, there was a clear need to organize representatives of anchor institutions and other supporters across fields – in higher

education, health care, philanthropy, the arts, government, the private sector, and beyond. It was becoming increasingly apparent that no single anchor institution's programs could create the level of change required at the community level – change will require collaboration across industries and sectors, as well as genuine partnerships with communities. Secondly, the field needed a values orientation, which could elevate the importance of social justice and equity, a commitment to place, democracy, and collaboration. There was enough evidence that we should distinguish between anchor institutions developing and expanding for their own ends and those engaging in authentic partnerships that prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations. Additionally, the field did not have one entity that could convene the range of individuals dedicated to advancing the role of anchor institutions in transforming communities. Existing organizations at the time were narrowly defined to particular types of anchors and focused on institutional memberships. AITF focused on individual members with awareness that those most committed to the engagement of anchor institutions in their communities were often engaged in uphill internal battles on these matters.

The Evolution of AITF

AITF became a place where committed institutions could learn from each other and bring lessons back to their home institutions and communities. The original small group of members grew to over 800 today. Our signature activity has been an annual conference - a forum for leaders in anchor institutions in varying fields and government and philanthropy to demonstrate ways in which anchor institutions are collaborating to address issues such as education, economic development, and health. Conferences have also provided opportunities to explore areas in need of greater attention, such as government/anchor partnerships, the role of the arts in communities, and the importance of a racial equity lens in anchor/community partnerships.

AITF conferences have stimulated the development of additional AITF initiatives, including publications, peer-based professional development subgroups, Local Strategic Dialogues, international partnerships, webinars, and technical assistance. As a movement organization, AITF has not only catalyzed greater activities within. It has also been a major engine behind expanding the field as a whole and challenging the field to evolve where necessary. Ultimately, AITF expects that by enhancing the knowledge and networks of representatives in our field, we will enhance the quality of engagement on the ground in communities, and improve opportunities for vulnerable populations and reduce inequities.

International Partnerships and Local Strategic Dialogues

AITF has been adding new dimensions. In Rome, Italy in 2017, AITF worked with the Council of Europe to convene leaders in higher education and government from throughout the continent to begin building a network similar to and in collaboration with AITF, promoting the local engagement of anchor institutions. The Council of Europe and AITF hosted an invitational meeting at Dublin City University on “Higher Education as Local Actors” on October 4-5. The



group of about 30 represented a cross-section of European higher education, as well as representatives from Australia and South Africa. There was a consensus by the Europeans to work to form a European anchors network. Planning is underway for a similar discussion in South Africa.

To date, the conversation about anchor institutions as agents of community and economic development has not been global. AITF is globalizing the movement. Our first U.S.-based Local Strategic Dialogue will take place in San Diego in 2019, focusing on affordable housing. We see the opportunity to convene groups in new conversations in their contexts in order to encourage unprecedented collaboration. The San Diego meeting will bring together local leaders across sectors who have not previously come together to discuss an important and pressing issue they are collectively facing.

Government Partnerships and Webinars

AITF is collaborating with the National League of Cities on a webinar series on how anchor institutions and municipalities can collaborate on community engagement strategies with a social determinants of health point of view. This has exposed numerous municipal leaders, many of which are in smaller towns and rural areas to the notion of anchor institutions as locally-engaged actors. It is clear that much work has to be done to ensure that the approach to these dynamics is fully inclusive of all geographic settings. This is a discussion that must engage local government.

Subgroups

AITF subgroups are small-scale peer-based groups that convene throughout the year. These dues-paying subgroups are all designing and executing their own agendas. The Higher Education Presidents Subgroup has been meeting across the country, looking at the role of philanthropy in anchor institution partnerships and building the next generation of engaged anchor leaders. The Health Professionals Subgroup has been writing a paper on social determinants of health that features the ways in which the group's members have been considering social determinants of health in their community partnerships. The Economic Development Executives Subgroup has selected the theme and goal of equitable and inclusive hiring and procurement, and has begun to organize webinars demonstrating how members of the group are accomplishing that goal.

Publications

AITF has played an important role in producing and demonstrating useful knowledge for the field. Its literature reviews have exposed the field and those interested in studying anchor institutions to the continually expanding body of literature on the topic. AITF's journal, *The Journal on Anchor Institutions and Communities*, has become an important avenue to further explore the lessons learned from case examples featured at AITF conferences. One important

future publication will be a Toolkit that will reflect the evolution of the field over the last decade, and include attention to anchors from varying fields and in different geographic contexts, emphasizing multi-institutional partnerships.

Technical Assistance

In some instances, the knowledge produced through AITF can be harnessed for targeted guidance to specific initiatives in localities. This approach is related to the emerging idea of Local Strategic Dialogues, but with an intentional effort to help refine and strengthen a local initiative underway. This form of technical assistance is currently being applied with an emerging multi-institutional cross sector partnership in Newark, NJ – The Newark Anchor Collaborative.

Reflecting and Looking Ahead

-Building a movement around a cross sector concept

- AITF's values orientation holds anchor institutions across sectors to a standard.
- Building a movement of any kind is not project specific. The nature of AITF's work is particularly challenging because it transcends sectors and fields.
- AITF is a big tent, bringing fields together around a common theme. Most associations and conferences are focused on constituents in predefined professional groupings.
- AITF is defining a cross sector constituency around the notion of *anchor institutions*.
- Multi-institutional/multi-stakeholder local partnerships are proliferating.

-Sustaining a movement and a level of commitment among anchors

- We expect mutual learning across the membership, facilitated largely by convenings, will lead to improved practice on the ground. We hope that the institutions themselves will be able to sustain their commitment to local communities and AITF's values.
- There is no guarantee that an engaged anchor institution will remain committed. Dedication to these values has to be embedded in institutions and able to transcend leadership transitions. We have begun to think more proactively about ensuring that we have a pipeline of next generation leaders who would be positioned to sustain the work.

-Equitable growth

- As the field matures, we know that some anchor institutions have stimulated significant development projects in their surroundings that have revitalized communities. Sometimes revitalization leads to gentrification and displacement.
- Community and economic development pursuits of anchor institutions must consider equity throughout their practices. We have to address it directly.

-Emphasizing people and prioritizing racial equity

- Similarly, we have to frame AITF's commitment to engagement as people-centered. AITF has always prioritized mutually beneficial collaboration that stresses the needs of community residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable.
- AITF must address racial equity directly. Disparities by race continue to persist even in communities where anchor engagement has been strong. Deliberately inclusive action is required. Our field must recognize where racial inequities are replicated even the work itself and in the leadership in the field.
- This is a next phase of development for the field – an Anchor Institutions 2.0. Now we have to not only maintain advances, but challenge the field on how to stimulate equitable growth, engage communities authentically, and apply a racial equity lens to the work.

-Becoming even more global

- Our global convenings have been widening the network of those discussing these issues.
- We want to encourage, in as many locales as possible, harnessing the resources and expertise of anchor institutions as collaborative change agents.
- We have only begun to help stimulate dialogue that can lead to unprecedented action beyond the U.S.

-AITF and policy

- AITF began with a group of people writing a report to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in late 2007. We made progress in dialogue with Federal agencies and the White House. The current administration has felt less certain.
- AITF has been focusing greater energy on local government - highlighting ways in which anchor institutions and local governments can collaborate. The inclusion of government in our communications at every step of the way is a priority.

-AITF and Philanthropy

- At local levels we have seen private philanthropy play an important role in providing capital to help launch and sustain multi-institutional partnerships.
- We have seen community foundations acting as engaged anchor institutions with a unique ability to convene across sectors and industries.
- We have also seen private philanthropists provide support to anchor institutions as stable partners that can help pursue issues they care about (i.e. strengthening local schools).
- Philanthropic institutions have been important actors in advancing anchor institutions' engagement locally and in the field as whole. Philanthropists/philanthropic institutions and anchor institutions can pursue the same goals simultaneously. Anchor institutions could provide ways to sustain and stabilize the initiatives in which philanthropy invests.



Overall, we can see that the anchor institutions movement is at a critical turning point. AITF, as the movement organization for the field, has a responsibility to help move this work to new stages of development. This is challenging work that requires substantial time and attention.