

Thoughts on the Next Phase of the Anchor Institutions Movement

Anchor Institutions 2.0 and Racial Equity

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The Anchor Movement

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. AITF is a values-oriented movement organization that has been committed to social justice and equity, place, democracy, and collaboration. AITF's intent has been to organize an anchor institutions movement around these values and increase the likelihood that anchor institution-community partnerships will be dedicated to significantly improving the lives of the most vulnerable constituents in neighborhoods, cities, and regions.

As AITF enters its tenth year, it is important to recognize where we are as a field and consider how this movement develops. The field has come a long way in just a few years. The work has become national across the United States in urban and rural communities, and it is increasingly global. Institutions across fields, beyond higher education and health care, are identifying as anchor institutions and realizing that cross sector multi-stakeholder partnerships are going to be required to stimulate true change in neighborhoods, cities, and regions.

A larger critical mass of leaders in government, philanthropy, and the private sector have acknowledged that anchor institutions are essential partners in community and economic development.

A New Phase

Anchor institutions can be important catalysts for economic growth as employers, purchasers, and real estate developers. Anchor institutions can attract commercial development and stimulate innovation. AITF is very well aware of these realities, which are important features that have helped popularize our movement.

Inequities, however, persist in neighborhoods, cities, and regions where anchor institutions have become active and integral partners. These inequities are reflective of national trends and illustrative of the racial dimension of disparities in education, income, wealth, health, and other important social indicators.

Now we are transitioning into a new phase – an Anchor Institutions 2.0. This next phase of the anchor movement should elevate the significance of *people* in addition to place more than ever, with clear and increased attention to the relevance of race. Communities of color are traditionally among the most vulnerable; therefore, prioritizing race helps us target the most persistent structural inequities and strengthen our approaches to reducing disparities.

There is much more to be said about the dynamics of race and contemporary manifestations of racism. Tensions around demographic changes fueled by the immigration of communities of color, the rise of hate groups emboldened by recent political developments, and divisive political rhetoric that limits our ability to see what unites us more than what sets us apart are among some of the realities that underscore the urgency of these matters.

This phase should, more than ever, stress equitable growth, seeking to ensure that the economic growth spawned by anchor partnerships reaches lower income communities and historically underrepresented populations. If we are committed to transforming communities, this revitalization should include increased access to opportunity for communities of color. The anchor movement will have to increasingly confront the root causes of inequality and racial inequality in particular, including self-reflection within our field.



AITF's Contribution

AITF developed at a pivotal point in the field's evolution. Ten years ago, 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.

Additionally, 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. AITF galvanized an action-oriented learning community of nearly 900 members around these values and developed a multifaceted agenda including annual conferences, publications, local strategic dialogues, global partnerships, technical assistance, and peer subgroups among higher education presidents, economic development executives, and health professionals.

As the field matures, we know that some anchor institutions have stimulated significant development projects in their surroundings that have revitalized communities. Many of the partnerships we have featured over the years have brought an equitable lens to their endeavors. But, sometimes revitalization leads to gentrification and displacement. Community and economic development pursuits of anchor institutions must consider equity and racial equity in particular throughout their practices. We have to be even more direct and deliberate about advancing projects and initiatives that intend to result in expanded opportunities and reduced disparities. And when we see that that these efforts are not resulting in greater equity, we have to be willing to change course.

People, Place and Racial Equity



AITF has always prioritized mutually beneficial collaboration that stresses the needs of community residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable. Going forward, it will be important for our field to encourage all anchor partnerships to lead to greater racial equity, and challenge the field to assess their practices accordingly. It is worth repeating that disparities by race continue to persist even in communities where anchor engagement has been strong. Deliberately inclusive action is crucial and urgent. Our field must also recognize where racial inequities are replicated in the work itself and in the leadership in the field, and be willing to point out these dynamics.

This is a next phase of development for the field – an Anchor Institutions 2.0. Now we have to not only maintain the movement’s advances, but challenge the field on how to stimulate equitable growth, engage communities authentically, and apply a racial equity lens to the work.

A special plenary session at AITF’s upcoming Annual Conference on November 15 and 16 in New York City will address these dynamics as they are manifested nationally and in Newark, New Jersey. This luncheon plenary on November 16 will include remarks from Nancy Cantor, Chancellor, Rutgers University-Newark and Ryan P. Haygood, President & CEO, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. This session can begin to deepen our conversation on these issues and establish groundwork for future discussion and action.