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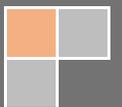
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Article Preview of

Tackling “The Two Americas” with City-Wide
Collaboration in Newark

by Nancy Cantor, Tai Cooper, Marcia Brown, and Peter Englot

Anchor Institutions Task Force



Tackling “The Two Americas” with City-Wide Collaboration in Newark

Nancy Cantor, Tai Cooper, Marcia Brown, and Peter Englot¹

It has been just over 50 years since rebellions in Newark, Detroit, and more than 160 other cities became ingrained in the American psyche, framing clearly for all to see the urban inequality built on systematic, *de facto* and *de jure* discrimination that marginalized populations of color, and further solidified the “Two Americas” that Martin Luther King, Jr. proclaimed then as demanding immediate attention (King 1968). Whereas much activism and some real progress have filled those intervening years since 1967, the relevance and reality of this narrative remains eerily present, as Newark’s Mayor Ras J. Baraka and legal advocate Ryan Haygood marked in describing our city today (Baraka and Haygood, *Cities Have the Power to Finally Bridge MLK's "Two Americas"* 2017).

As a recent report from Haygood’s New Jersey Institute for Social Justice declares: “Despite a period of substantial economic growth in its downtown, Newark also embodies the persistent race and class divisions of the Two Americas, as local residents—predominantly people of color—are largely excluded from the burgeoning economic opportunity in their own city. Incredibly, Newark residents hold only 18 percent of all jobs in the city” (The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice 2017). The report goes on to document a landscape of racialized inequality, in a city with Fortune 500 companies, major transportation hubs, performing arts center and museums, higher education institutions, hospitals, and substantial real estate development, the poverty rate (33%) is twice the national average, and 42% of Newark children live below the poverty line. The employment landscape is highly racialized, such that while the clear majority of Newark residents are people of color, 60% of the people employed in Newark are white.

The educational landscape is equally problematic. Segregation in New Jersey’s schools, reflecting segregation of the state’s municipalities and neighborhoods, is among the worst in the United States—worse than any state in the American South, according to former New Jersey Supreme Court Justice Gary Stein (O’Dea 2018). For example, Asian and white students make up only 55.2% of all students in the state, but 87.3% of students in low poverty schools; conversely, 40% of students across the state are black or Hispanic, but make up 80% of students in high poverty schools, where proficiency and graduation rates are low and dropout rates are high (Tractenberg and Coughlan 2018, IX, 29).

¹ This article is based on the panel presentation by Nancy Cantor and Tai Cooper at the Anchor Institutions Task Force Annual Conference, October 27, 2017 in New York City. Nancy Cantor is Chancellor of Rutgers University – Newark; Tai Cooper, Former Chief Policy Advisor, City of Newark, NJ, is now Deputy Chief Policy Advisor, State of New Jersey; Marcia Brown is Vice Chancellor for External and Governmental Relations, and adjunct professor, School of Public Affairs and Administration, Rutgers University – Newark; Peter Englot is Senior Vice Chancellor for Public Affairs and Chief of Staff, Rutgers University – Newark.

In Newark, New Jersey’s largest school district, these patterns are among their most intense, where we find 7,000 youth disconnected from progress in high school (Newark Public Schools 2016). Ripple effects of these mutually reinforcing trends carry into higher education, with only 18.1 % of Newark residents age 24 and older holding an associate’s degree or higher in a state where 43% of residents do (U.S. Census Bureau 2018). While crime in Newark is highly concentrated to 20% of the streets, within those neighborhoods the homicide and robbery rates are much higher than either the state or national averages (Safer Newark Council 2018). Not surprisingly, health and nutrition statistics also follow this distressing pattern.

While this narrative of Two Americas serves as a critical and ever-present reality check and overarching framework for leadership and anchor institution work in Newark—and in cities across the country—it implores us to look more deeply at the complexity of the landscape on the ground that also tells a different and equally compelling story of talent and resilience and opportunity-seeking, even as that tale is yet to be fully realized. There is, for example, the narrative of this city in which a very well-organized network of community development corporations has been actively pushing for social justice since the 1967 Newark rebellion (La Casa de Don Pedro 2016), alongside well-voiced faith leaders, and universities with long-standing roots in the struggle for opportunity, including but not limited to the Rutgers-Newark Minority Student Program at the law school, with 50 years of commitment to and success in changing the color of the bar in New Jersey and beyond (Carter 2018).

There is the narrative of the city’s public schools, which were returned to local control in 2018, more than 20 years after the State of New Jersey took them over ostensibly because of historical mismanagement and lack of contemporary managerial capacity, but suspiciously on the heels of New Jersey State Supreme Court decisions demanding that the state increase funding to underfunded, poor, and predominantly black and brown districts like Newark (Morel 2017). Yet, now, they are back under local control, having passed many state-mandated criteria of progress, and a new, home-grown superintendent is taking over the Newark Public Schools.

There is the narrative of youth “disconnected” from the educational system and attendant employment opportunities, but who nonprofits such as the Opportunity Youth Network are showing to be brimming with talent and drive, young people who have not so much failed out of the system as have been failed by it (Youthbuild Newark 2016). There is the finely-tuned voice of activism, expressed in cultural traditions birthed here—think jazz and Sarah Vaughn and James Moody (Kukla 2014)—and in generations of poets and educators turned community leaders, epitomized by the Baraka family (Curvin 2014), and in the leadership now of a son of Newark, who told the people when first elected, “when I’m the Mayor, you’re the mayor.” This legacy of home-grown talent, resilience, and activism combined with a renewal of investment in the city—both by long-standing corporations and new business development—and the mobilization of cross-sector, public-private collaboration, gives a realistic push to the Mayor’s second term

motto of “Newark Forward,” and convinces all of us that it is our responsibility collectively and collaboratively to articulate the counter-narrative to the “bleak urban narrative” too often rather automatically attached to cities like Newark (Baraka 2018).

In Newark, as in many cities, there is this paradox of home-grown resilience and talent alongside the sequelae of decades of an “architecture of segregation” and marginalization—of the Two Americas—that is, poverty side-by-side with considerable prosperity and investment locally (Jargowsky 2015). Here, as elsewhere, then, the challenge is how to create in its place an architecture of participation and inclusion that lays the groundwork for inequality to be supplanted by *equitable* prosperity and growth, rather than the counter-narrative we see so frequently of gentrification and displacement (Troutt 2018). How can the many billions of current dollars being invested in Newark—in real estate development, in new business development, in cultural and educational and health care institutions, in its already superb technology infrastructure—translate to new opportunities—education, jobs, capitalization of local businesses, affordable housing equity, improved health, citizen engagement through the arts and public dialogue—for the residents of Newark?

While no one, including the city administration and the many local community development organizations, wants to stop what Mayor Baraka calls the “avalanche of investment” in Newark, everyone, at the same time, wants to work together in collective solidarity across sectors to ensure many “safe havens”—landing places of prosperity and opportunity—for the current residents of Newark, for the future generations of citizens, professionals, and leaders being educated now in Newark, as well as for those who increasingly are moving to Newark as it moves forward. That is why Newarkers who hear outside observers ask, “Is Newark the next Brooklyn?” are liable to hear it not as a compliment, but as a cautionary tale of another predominantly black and brown community that has proven unable to leverage enough of its own investment avalanche to propel its residents forward and upward. That is why Newarkers are not likely to respond to that question with an enthusiastic, “Yes, please!” and more so take a cue from our Mayor’s now standard retort: “Newark is the next Newark!”

Mobilizing Anchor Institutions for Equitable Growth and Opportunity

What may make Newark’s quest more credible than quixotic is its intricately woven fabric of public, private, and nonprofit anchor institutions, which proved to be a durable and enduring safety net through the city’s indisputably challenging past half-century. Among the sturdiest threads in that fabric are the Newark Public Library system, which has been an escalator of aspirations for generations of Newarkers from that of novelist Philip Roth to today’s undocumented immigrant families from six continents. For the last twenty years, cultural anchor institutions like NJPAC have made consistent commitments to arts education and to celebrating diverse creative production.

In the nonprofit sector, a resilient network of community development corporations has gained deep trust, and consequently become deeply embedded, in Newark’s neighborhoods for the expertise that they have honed through unrelenting advocacy for residents when it seemed that institutions of virtually every other kind failed to do so, whether to secure safe and affordable housing, gain job training and placement, learn basic language or numeracy skills, or obtain access to affordable family supports such as child and elder care. They are complemented by religious organizations that are neighborhood hubs of such services, as well, and by a small set of local foundations that have consistently funded initiatives over decades to mend gaps in city, state, and federal social safety nets.

As a health-care hub in the region, Newark also long has been served well by hospitals such as Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, part of the RWJ/Barnabas system, St. Michael’s Hospital, and University Hospital, which have come to take an expansive view of what their missions to promote community health mean. Newark is also a hub for higher education institutions, from community colleges to research universities to medical and health professional schools, educating upwards of 40,000 students every year, in what constitutes a “college town.” Private corporations in Newark have earned the badge of “anchor institution” as exemplified by Prudential Financial, which has invested in the city not only through its social foundation arm, but its core business divisions, doubling down at critical moments over its 140-year history in Newark when less-principled companies might well have pulled up stakes. They are joined by long-time stalwarts such as the energy company PSEG, founded as a “public service” corporation, and a newer generation of private-sector leaders such as Audible.com, which encourage their employees not just to work, but to shop and live in Newark. And, fortunately, many of the developers investing in Newark, like the RBH Group building Teachers Village and the L+M Development Partners renovating the historic Hahne & Co Building downtown, are genuinely and creatively committed to Newark’s future and to the future of Newarkers.

Cities of all sizes likely can point to examples of organizations from the various sectors similar to these that have demonstrated a commitment to place-based, local action and investment. In our experience in a number of different cities, however, the number, size, and combination of such committed anchor institutions that one finds in Newark today is unusual. Perhaps even more unusual is that combination plus the public sector leadership of a mayor who also is not just “in” the city, but “of” the city. Newark’s mayor, the honorable Ras J. Baraka, is a third generation Newarker, born to two of the city’s—indeed, the nation’s—most prominent advocates and activists for social justice, Amiri and Amina Baraka. By virtually all accounts, as Baraka’s second four-year term in office begins, this public school teacher, who turned politician somewhat reluctantly, has demonstrated an unusual ability to combine an activist’s pedigree with a pragmatist’s determination to get things done (Moran 2018, Corasaniti 2018). He has shown this adeptness nowhere more clearly than in his ability to mobilize his agency leaders to collaborate with “experts” from across the sectors within an equitable growth framework.

Mayor Baraka has not been shy about taking on sensitive turf and insisting on cross-sector, public-private collaboration to build these “communities of experts” within his agencies and across the anchor institution landscape in Newark. Consider, for example, the Safer Newark Council—a collaboration between law enforcement, community street teams, Rutgers-Newark faculty in criminal justice and social work, neighborhood community development corps, public health experts, environmental justice groups, faith communities, local philanthropists and business leaders, all committed to reducing crime in Newark by 20% by 2020, especially on the 20% of the streets where it is most concentrated. Crime in neighborhoods is a public health issue, as Mayor Baraka articulates it, and it must be taken on collectively, the way in which we tackle diseases that undermine the ability of children and families to thrive.

The Safer Newark Council takes a systemic approach to neighborhood safety, from mobilizing street teams to walk children to school to intervening using evidence-based practices in the re-entry process to prevent recidivism to rehabilitating vacant lots into community farms with safe soil testing, and much more, and combining it with a strong data-gathering focus to concentrate law enforcement where it is most needed and to share data with residents in the Mayor’s regular ward meetings. This comprehensive approach with four focal areas of intervention (victims’ rights, juvenile justice, re-entry, and violent crime reduction) is beginning to really pay off, even as it will certainly be a long-term project. Nevertheless, it lays the groundwork for strong, healthy, safe neighborhoods to support equitable growth for the citizens of Newark.

Holding Anchor Institutions Accountable for Equitable Growth

In so many similar areas of critical importance to the city, Mayor Baraka has introduced a crystal-clear agenda to hold the anchors and their city partners accountable for transforming their own institutional practices in order to work toward specific goals that are indicators of inclusive, equitable growth. For example, research done for a 2014 Brookings Institution study showed that while the largest anchor institutions across sectors in Newark were only spending 3% of their combined procurement budgets on goods and services sourced from Newark, Newark businesses could potentially provide goods and services that would constitute up to 40% of the anchors’ procurement needs. Awareness of this local under-sourcing, and its relationship also to job growth for Newark residents, became the impetus for the mayor to bring the anchor institutions to the table and commit to increasing local procurement to 20% by 2020. The underlying notion is that the anchors can spur local business growth by forging long-term contracts with local entrepreneurs and resident businesses, who in turn, are very likely to hire locally as well, complimenting the local hiring by the larger anchors themselves.

Now, with 17 major anchor institutions—from Prudential to Audible, Inc. to United Airlines to Rutgers and NJIT to Panasonic, PSEG, and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield, and more—joining City Hall in Newark 2020, with a goal of local anchors hiring 2,020 Newarkers and increasing annual local sourcing to \$200M by 2020, the collective will to “Hire-Buy-Live” local has truly been mobilized. With the on-the-ground expertise of Rutgers Business School faculty, the economic development and workforce programs of the Newark Economic Development Corporation and the Newark Alliance and the Newark Community Development Network, and the legal advocacy and social justice voice of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, all the anchors are moving forward, setting goals for hiring and procurement, collaborating with a workforce training and placement hub, and already moving the dial.

An early indicator is that local sourcing has moved from an average of 3% to 9% in just the first year of the initiative. There is much work left to do, but the will seems strong to organize the anchors for sustainable commitments, even beyond 2020, and a Newark Anchors Collaborative has formed amongst a subset of the broader group to constitute a learning community around the transformation of institutional practices and policies so as to undergird sustained progress on an equitable hire-buy-live local city-wide landscape to bridge the Two Americas in Newark.

Additionally, and complementing the commitments of these anchor institutions to encourage and incentivize their employees to live locally, Mayor Baraka also commissioned a study by a Rutgers Law faculty member with expertise in metropolitan equity issues examining what equitable housing policies could look like in the midst of all the downtown development in Newark (Troutt 2018). Meanwhile, the Newark Community Development Network, working with the City Council and the Mayor, advocated successfully for a new inclusionary zoning regulation to drive affordable housing in downtown development (Yi 2018). Further, a group of city agency directors and university and community leaders now are working to implement the recommendations of the equitable housing report, including enforcement of rent regulations, opportunities for local residents to gain housing equity, and anti-foreclosure and eviction protection in all of the city’s five wards. This collective is also looking to be institutionalized for long-term sustainable oversight in a public-private, cross-sector advisory council on equitable growth.

Moreover, all of this collective work occurs within a context of considerable commitment to business development, both in terms of established corporations moving to Newark and in terms of the development of new ventures here. For example, Broadridge Financial moved 1,000 employees to a new headquarters in Newark in 2017, the global candy company, Mars, Inc., is opening a new headquarters in Newark to be up and running by July 2020 with 500 new jobs, and Newark Ventures Partners, organized by Audible.com, has opened an accelerator and angel fund on a floor in Rutgers Business School (Strunsky 2017, Ivers 2015). As importantly, if not more significant for our equitable development goals, there is robust support for local women- and minority-owned businesses and entrepreneurs (WMBEs) across the city.

With public-private cooperation across sectors, such as from the Newark Economic Development Corporation, Rutgers-Newark’s Center for Urban Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, and NJIT’s New Jersey Innovation Institute, substantial attention is being paid to technical assistance to solidify the base and capitalize the growth of local entrepreneurs across a variety of types of enterprises. For example, a business hub for arts and cultural entrepreneurs now operates out of Express Newark, the 50,000 square foot University-Community Arts Collaboratory which Rutgers-Newark opened in 2017 in the newly renovated Hahne’s Building downtown (Forman 2015). These “third spaces” of collaboration and investment, public-private, across sectors, take considerable effort to initiate, maintain and sustain, but ultimately, they will likely be the real source of equitable growth and community development in Newark.

Building Collaborative Tables for Comprehensive Community Development

A key to achieving comprehensive equitable growth and opportunity in Newark, as presumably in most cities with the paradox of substantial capital investment side-by-side with persistent inequality and segregated opportunity, is the recognition by anchor institutions and community organizations and local government alike that vigilantly sustaining collaborative infrastructure is as important as setting short-term goals such as hiring 2,020 Newarkers by 2020 in *Hire-Buy-Live Newark*, increasing post-secondary attainment of residents to 25% by 2025 through the *Newark City of Learning Collaborative*, or reducing major crime by 20% by 2020 with the *Safer Newark Council*. To be sure, the short-term goals both rally cross-sector collaboration and hold anchors accountable to common purposes, but they are likely to be insufficient to perpetuate commitment and engagement for the long-term, including the transformation in institutional practices and strategic missions that then translate to continued community change.

With an eye especially on sustainability as well as accountability, the city-wide equitable opportunity efforts in Newark have been methodically established according to a shared set of principles. They include a set of anchor institutions (not just one) partnering with CBOs and the City. They engage directly both high-impact, evidence-based practices and policies and on-the-ground insights (often enunciated in discussion with a broad community of experts, with and without pedigree) to inform the implementation of specific projects. They work on many fronts toward a common city-wide goal within a broader framework of equitable opportunity for Newarkers. They are open to a notion of improvement science or implementation research, wherein one learns from doing and shifts priorities, practices, policies accordingly. Following are some examples in the educational arena broadly defined of these collaborative tables filled by a community of experts in common cause.

Newark City of Learning Collaborative: Connecting for Educational Attainment pre-K-20

The Newark City of Learning Collaborative (NCLC) focuses on the full K-20 continuum, engaging the corporate, government, and non-profit sectors around a shared commitment to increase the post-secondary attainment rate of residents of Newark to 25% by 2025. When the initiative was launched in 2015, that rate was 17%; in spring 2018 it has reached nearly 19%. Rutgers-Newark’s Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies serves as the backbone organization for NCLC, convening study groups to identify obstacles and interventions, evaluate programs, and collect data to assess progress in city-wide high school graduation, college access, retention, and degree completion. It organizes CBO and educational anchor partners to staff “college knowledge” centers, college fairs, and workshops throughout the district where college and high school counselors work with families and students on FAFSA completion, SAT prep, and college applications, offering workshops on these and related topics in partnership with the Newark Public Libraries in each of the city’s wards.

NCLC and the Newark Public Schools work closely together, sharing a staff liaison, providing monthly professional development sessions for high school counselors throughout the district, and articulating educational pathways for Newark students across the divides between high school and two-/four-year colleges, employing cohort programs, for example, for students in grades 10 through 12, following them through to community college and/or four-year colleges and universities. NCLC also works closely with the City of Newark, since 2015 providing more than 1,000 students in the city’s Summer Youth Employment Program with college readiness workshops and carrying over those workshops during the school year. It also works with local corporate partners in a College Freshman Institute to provide incoming first-year college students from Newark with internships and a social capital network for career development advice. NCLC will be producing a regular scorecard report with data on a variety of metrics across the traditional publics, parochial, and charter sectors.

Understanding, however, that sometimes progress in high-poverty school districts must be made school by school, the Mayor has organized a community schools collaborative effort with the Newark Educational Trust serving as a backbone organization and connecting non-profits with public schools in Newark’s South Ward. Rutgers-Newark, for example, has become the lead partner institution in a university-assisted community schools partnership (UAP) at Malcolm X. Shabazz High School, a chronically underperforming school in an area of the city’s South Ward with a history of underinvestment in public infrastructure combined with a history of street violence. Rutgers-Newark faculty and staff have joined together with the faculty and staff of the school and the leadership of the District to expand Shabazz’s college-going culture, as well as to support the effective integration of programs and services in ways that tailor interventions for Shabazz students facing academic and socio-emotional challenges that often impede the successful completion of high school and the transition to the post-secondary level.

Yet the pathways from school to college remain unfamiliar to a startlingly high number of youth in Newark who are disconnected from school or work, estimated by the Opportunity Youth Network (OYN) to be as high as 7,000. Employing innovative interventions to re-engage them is a high priority for OYN, a city-wide, cross-sector network, initiated by leaders from Newark YouthBuild, in cooperation with the Mayor, Rutgers-Newark, Newark Community Development Network, Newark Public Schools, and NCLC, among others. Again, it takes a fulsome collaboration to support the development of youth voice and empowerment, enabling young people to develop a global perspective on justice and citizenship. One key innovation is OYN’s LEAD Charter School, a unique presence in Newark’s network of partners, opened in 2017 as the first alternative charter school in New Jersey, which builds its educational and support programs for opportunity youth with a foundational focus on the assets, not the deficits, that its students bring with them every day. Among LEAD Charter’s feeders is the Newark Street Academy, a front-line intervention created by Mayor Baraka that also takes an asset-based, case management approach to re-engaging youth through classroom and community service components. And LEAD, in turn, plugs opportunity youth into other innovative initiatives in Newark, like the Newark City of Coding, in which Rutgers-Newark, Apple, Inc., the city, and others are setting up “coding labs” throughout the city, including in LEAD and Shabazz High Schools.

Without such interventions, school-to-college pathways may very well turn into school-to-prison pathways, throwing up barriers to making a living—or even just living—that may be insurmountable. In Newark alone, about 1,000 people re-enter the community from New Jersey state prisons annually; 80% of homicide victims and 90% of suspects have criminal records; and 31% of homicide victims are killed within 12 months of release from state or county prisons (Delmore 2016). Beyond the inconceivable cost in human lives, the cost of incarceration outstrips the cost of sound intervention by about seven to one, according to a study by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice 2016).

These are among the tragic statistics that drove the creation of the New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons Consortium (NJ-STEP) at Rutgers-Newark, a consortium of eight higher education institutions across New Jersey that works in partnership with the State of New Jersey Department of Corrections and the New Jersey State Parole Board. NJ-STEP aims to provide higher education courses for students under the custody of the State of New Jersey and to assist in the transition to college life upon their release into the community. NJ-STEP’s vision is that every person in prison who qualifies for college have the opportunity to take college classes while incarcerated and continue that education upon release; each consortium member has a working partnership with one or more of the correctional facilities in New Jersey. Students receive regular advisement about what courses to take in order to maintain progress toward an A.A. degree in liberal studies *en route* to a B.A. degree. Affordability for NJ-STEP students is aided by its participation in the national Second-Chance Pell Pilot Program of the

U.S. Department of Education, through which they may qualify for federal need-based grants to help cover costs.

Mindful that access to college without affordability for any and all students is not really access at all, anchor educational institutions in Newark are working to complement this work with financial aid planning for Newark residents and community college transfers. For example, Rutgers-Newark has the Talent and Opportunity Pathways (RU-N to the TOP) “last-dollar” financial aid program which guarantees aid to completely cover full-time, in-state tuition and fees for admitted students whose adjusted gross family income is \$60,000 or less and who are either a resident of Newark or a New Jersey resident transferring in with an associate’s degree from a New Jersey county college. Since RU-N to the TOP’s founding in fall 2016, 1,762 students have benefited from this scholarship, and it has played a major role in helping increase enrollment of Newark residents at Rutgers-Newark by 59% since 2013.

The Rutgers-Newark residential Honors Living-Learning Community, dedicated to an interdisciplinary social justice curriculum on local citizenship in a global world, has enrolled more than half of its students every year from Newark, including those who have come through programs like NJ-STEP, are undocumented Dreamers (some recruited through the UndocuRutgers College Fair), those who have transferred from New Jersey’s county colleges (where so many first generation students get their first taste of higher education), and those who are part of the growing cadre of Newark Public Schools students heading now to college on their way to fulfilling NCLC’s goals of 25% Newark residents with post-secondary credentials by 2025 (Kirp 2018, Backstrand and Donaldson 2018).

Recognizing the Challenges to Make Progress

There is no doubt that Newark, though in the early stages of transformative change, has moved beyond the stage of mere ideas and conversations. This is precisely why at this time, when the city is rife with social and economic innovation and change, it is correspondingly necessary to be mindful of the obstacles and difficulties inherent in this kind of city-anchor collaborative work. There is an extraordinary level of good will and eagerness to problem solve from a wide swath of stakeholders who believe in the City’s leadership and more importantly, in its capacity to move beyond its historical archipelago of poverty and racial division. They have brought their ideas, their resources and their wisdom to these various tables of anchor work. This mayor and the city’s allies are quite determined that to the degree that success eludes us it will not be because all of us have failed to provide adequate support or effectively implement or execute good ideas. Conversations about issues and barriers are evident in the mayor’s most recent post-election initiative, the formation of a Newark Forward Committee that will look at what the first four year’s accomplishments have been, identify the gaps and make recommendations to move the change trajectory forward over the next four years. Several key issues are emerging as critical to tackle.

Breaking silos across the public-private divides. We need to break silos and build stronger relationships among anchors across sectors, so that city employees and corporate and non-profit representatives can talk to each other with understanding about how their separate environments can best ramp up to more effectively meet goals (matching Newark 2020 applicants with prospective jobs, for example). We all must acknowledge that, at heart, authentic public engagement is about culture change and an end of the “business as usual” template. Not surprisingly, this can be very difficult not only for city employees who have typically been segmented from social innovation and entrepreneurship, but also for corporate leaders and the community development sector who are also key to success in Newark. Similarly, if universities are to fulfill the mandate of the mayor to not only be engaged anchor institutions but to serve as “neutral” conveners and gatherers of evidence-based best practices, then they must transform as well. Publicly engaged faculty and university leaders need to learn how to collaborate rather than to instruct or “take charge,” so that cross-sector and cross-community trust is enhanced in ways that will sustain the transformative anchor work.

Communicating effectively about the work. We also are challenged to effectively communicate with a public that is tired and beleaguered from so many attempts at revitalization and unfulfilled promises over the years. We need to develop a credible narrative about the value of the anchor collaborations and the approaches underway to tackle social problems that confront the community. The Mayor has held public meetings in every ward of the city, providing forthright discussion and transparency about what is happening and what is on the horizon. His two state of the city addresses have been highly effective encapsulations of concrete changes that have been made or are on the runway and his “When I’m the Mayor You’re the Mayor” mantra has become an iconic invitation to offer citizens more concrete and direct ways to actively engage with these changes and with the city. Indeed, there is so much going on that many stakeholders are beginning to think that a communications roundtable with professionals from a broader swath of the community, not just city hall, will need to be deployed in order to not only look at how data and information are shared, but how to brand the collaborations as an inspired enterprise that creates tangible results.

Engaging the youth leadership. Finally, but not least of all, the city has demonstrated a deep and abiding interest in how to effectively engage our youth in Newark in an enterprise of innovation and change. How do we, as the Mayor asks, best get their feedback on all the ways that living in this city affects them—from education to public safety—and create opportunities for their feedback? Given the goal of Newark 2020 to keep our youth from leaving the city after college graduation, they too are part of the audience that must view living, working, and playing in Newark as an inspired welcoming choice.

Bridging Two Americas in Newark for the Next Generation to Thrive

In many respects, thinking about the progress—however non-linear and slow it may be in changing the landscape of opportunity for the next generation of Newarkers—brings us squarely back to the inter-generational resilience of this city. As the physical spaces and places change, there is an accompanying analysis from across anchors to look at both the catalysts and the barriers and use their inherent powers to build a road map of a new Newark. While there are no easy ways to overcome these barriers, what is exciting and incredibly motivational is that the new wave of collaborations is advancing a new wave of committed leaders and stakeholders aiming for a culture of sustainability and transformation. The avalanche of new investment in Newark is happening side-by-side with firm commitment to creating safe havens of opportunity for those who have stuck it out and for those newest Americans who continue to come to this city of migrants and immigrants (Newest Americans 2015). No one thinks this will be easy, as the durable inequalities of the Two Americas have endured even with past efforts at a “renaissance.” Yet the promise of genuinely democratic third spaces of collaboration, like the newly formed Center for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (Association of American Colleges & Universities 2017), mobilized by Rutgers-Newark in partnership with the Mayor, the Newark Public Libraries, and the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, feels real, and turns even the most defensively pessimistic of us in to true believers. As Mayor Baraka says, it is our time to move Newark forward.

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