



Proposal for Establishing a Fund for Anchor Institutions and National Work Initiative: Pursuing Just and Equitable Communities in Light of COVID-19

Anchor Institutions are enduring organizations that remain in their geographic settings and play vital roles in their local communities and economies and include universities, hospitals, colleges, museums, libraries, and more. Among the vast array of these organizations are community-centric anchor institutions, which have a primary mission to serve their local communities and largely meet the needs of historically under-served constituents, such as community colleges, public regional universities, independent community-based hospitals, and locally-focused arts institutions.

Anchor institutions have been absolutely essential during the pandemic and anchor institutions must play an essential role in our national rebuilding effort and recovery from the pandemic. Outlined below are policy recommendations to provide support for these institutions during this critical time:

Create a Fund for Anchor Institutions

- A Fund for Anchor Institutions would be a competitive grants program providing incentives for anchor institutions, especially community-centric anchors, to collaborate toward rebuilding local communities. Applicants would be required to recognize specific strategies to dismantle systemic racism. This would be a Fund of roughly \$50,000,000. It would distribute multi-year grants in the \$1,000,000 range. These grants would be for up to a four year period.
- The Fund would be a multi-agency partnership housed in a relevant federal agency such as the U.S. Department of Education. Numerous agencies would be allocated a portion of the Fund to distribute to anchor partnerships aligned with their particular priorities. This would enable the Fund to be as cross sector as possible. Resources from the Fund could support single anchor institutions for their collaborative efforts in their communities as well as multi-institutional, cross sector partnerships designed to solve problems in their localities.

This Fund would support anchor institutions specifically for community engagement activities – the kinds of efforts that many anchor institutions conduct with limited or no funding, which requires expansion to meet community needs. It would support both individual anchor institutions and their partner organizations for their joint pursuits as well as partnerships involving multiple anchor institutions. The nature of this work could involve a wide range of the kinds of community and economic development efforts. Examples include health awareness activities, the provision of health services (including telehealth), creative use of physical spaces for community benefit, activities to increase access to technology, programming to dismantle systemic racism in local institutions, efforts to enhance local public schools through the resources of anchor institutions, capacity building of community-based organizations, planning



to strengthen local collaboration, efforts to assist community residents in finding and securing affordable housing, and various others.

Establish a National Anchor Institutions-Community Work Initiative

- A National Work Initiative would be a competitive grant program designed to leverage anchor institutions to enable work opportunities to help reimagine and rebuild communities. As many have lost work and entire industries have been decimated throughout the pandemic, new needs have emerged. The work of strengthening communities over the next few years will lead to new jobs. Anchor institutions will play a central role in hiring and training for growth areas of employment. This program would stress new forms of employment that focus specifically on strengthening local communities and enhancing opportunities for underserved communities with some emphasis on BIPOC communities.
- This Initiative would also be structured as a multi-agency initiative, and housed in a logical federal agency, possibly U.S. Department of Labor.

This Initiative would support efforts by anchor institutions and their partners as well as efforts by collaborations of multiple anchor institutions to address various work needs in their communities. These work needs could be in all sectors and fields. Examples could include training for local residents in growing job categories. We can imagine job growth in various healthcare occupations, employment related to infrastructure development, and sustainable jobs. Examples could also include targeted local hiring initiatives by anchor institutions, targeted local procurement initiatives by anchor institutions, capacity building of local small and minority-owned businesses, new educational programming in growth industries in the local community, the development of volunteer civic and community engagement programs to solve local problems, the planning and development of new partnerships focused on workforce development, and various other areas related to forms of work and training.

These initiatives would engage all levels of government to ensure collaboration and coordination from the national to the local. Applications to the Fund for Anchor Institutions or the Work Initiative would be required to include collaboration with local government.

Background and Rationale

COVID-19 has devastated communities. It has illuminated and deepened existing inequities. These public health and economic crises are experienced in neighborhoods. The consequences are long-term. Communities that were already vulnerable are even worse off. This has been especially the case for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) populations. Underserved populations of all backgrounds in urban and rural contexts will heavily rely on government for some semblance of stability. They will also rely on anchor institutions – hospitals, colleges, universities, arts institutions and other enduring organizations that remain in their communities.



Anchor institutions have been absolutely essential during the pandemic. They cared for patients, used their facilities, provided supplies and equipment, instituted virtual programming, distributed meals, maintained civic life, contributed to funds, and on. Community centric anchor institutions will be especially needed in their localities in the years to come.

If we are to set communities on a stronger path given all that has transpired, public policy must support the role of anchor institutions in strengthening their localities. Public policy must be positioned to help communities progress. A dedicated national rebuilding effort will be required, and anchor institutions must play an essential role. It is hard to imagine that communities will be able to effectively navigate an uncertain future without the engagement of anchor institutions.

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¹ The Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF) has been promoting the role of anchor institutions in community and economic development since 2009. AITF is an action-oriented learning community of leaders at anchor institutions and other partners dedicated to enhancing the engagement of anchor institutions in mutually transformative collaboration that can lead to equitable growth in communities of all types. A values-oriented big tent organization, AITF mobilizes representatives of multiple sectors around the common pursuit of equity and social justice, democracy and democratic practice, collaboration, and the significance of place.