

Advancing an Urban Agenda: Principles and Experiences of an Urban Land Grant University

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Abstract

Our urban-located land grant institution has long been committed to engaged research, teaching, and service. This paper describes efforts to articulate and implement a strategic urban land grant vision that places urban/metropolitan engagement at the center of our institution's "urban age" future. We describe intentional and broad-based efforts in human development, vital communities, and health areas that engage faculty and community partners in collaborative endeavors to resolve complex challenges that confront our urban core.

The research needed for social practice...is...comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice" (Lewin 1948, 202-203).

...[It]is fair to ask whether our universities are doing all that they can and should to help America surmount the obstacles that threaten to sap our economic strength and blight the lives of millions of our people" (Bok 1990, 6).

Surely, scholarship means engaging in original research. But the work of the scholar also means stepping back from one's investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one's knowledge effectively to students. Specifically, we conclude that the work of the professoriate might be thought of as having four separate, yet overlapping, functions. These are: the scholarship of **discovery**; the scholarship of **integration**; the scholarship of **application [engagement]**; and the scholarship of **teaching** (Boyer 1990, 16).

The opening quotes provide a frame for understanding how we want to think about our being an engaged university. The message is that universities like ours cannot sit back and speak abstractly about how theory and research might affect communities, but for us to be relevant we need to conduct research that addresses important issues and that contributes to the economic competitiveness and quality of life of our citizens. Going further, as an urban/metropolitan institution, our engagements in today's urban world need to focus on local urban core issues, with particular attention given to conditions shared with other urban areas so that our engagement leads to knowledge that is practical and that can be generalized beyond our setting. (Despite differentiation

between the terms “urban” and “metropolitan” in some contexts, current demographic definitions view them as interchangeable. The authors will use “urban,” but the context subsumes more than just central cities, for issues formerly thought of as largely concentrated in central cities have dispersed across broader areas.) In addition to shaping impressions outside the institutions, work addressing urban community needs to be recognized within universities as important scholarship, focused on what Boyer (1990) called the scholarship of engagement (application), but drawing also from the other scholarships. Articulating these perspectives helps link engaged work to central functions of universities: research, teaching, and outreach/service.

As a land grant institution, our roots to engaged research, teaching, and service are deep, yet because of our focus on the needs and economic health of the entire state they have not been developed as strongly for the urban environment in which we are located (Harper 1905). Rather, they were primarily developed for the agrarian era from which we came, where improving crops and keeping livestock healthy was central to economic prosperity. Reflecting that focus, only our “land grant colleges”—agriculture, natural resources, home economics, and veterinary medicine—were colleges where faculty appointments regularly were split between traditional faculty work and engaged land grant research. We, like many other post-secondary institutions in urban areas, have considered and developed relationships with our local communities for many years—in our case, well over one hundred. Although our Extension programs have increased their focus on urban issues, their work, like that of individual faculty and staff who have engaged with urban communities, has not been broadly based across the university or coordinated in ways that would optimally impact communities (Vogelgesang et al. 2006). Particularly when viewed from outside the university, the work appears episodic and disconnected, with projects that come and go. Further, outcomes of the work have not been shared in a consistent manner with communities, so community benefits have not been as great as they could have been.

In addition to locating engagement only in parts of universities, for a variety of reasons during the twentieth century universities became increasingly disengaged from activities that translated “knowledge generation” into impact on community social issues and problems (Boyer 1996). Scholarship increasingly was focused within universities. Theory became an end rather than a means to solve important problems and understand critical issues (Cox 2006; Harkavy 1997). After World War II, during a time of rapid growth of universities, the focus was foremost on attracting federal research dollars that were flowing to universities and the internal task of educating the large numbers of students returning from the military (Kerr 1972), and eventually their even larger group of baby boom children. Faculty and staff deeply concerned about how universities could contribute to addressing important societal issues were not the dominant voice within universities. Although professional schools like education, public affairs, and public health were more engaged through links with constituents, they did not represent the mainstream.

More recently, in response to a number of internal and external forces and pressures, universities and urban universities in particular have rediscovered the importance of

“place” (Weiwei and Perry 2008). The forces have been many—accountability, self-interest, financial health, developing healthy citizenship, attracting students from diverse backgrounds. Here, at the University of Minnesota, these forces led us, like many of our peers, to think systemically about how to develop intentional and coherent relationships with our urban communities in ways that promote mutual benefits. Our urban location provides great opportunities for it favorably positions us to address urban issues. In addition, our broadened focus seems timely for it has been argued that urban universities will be the land grant universities of the twenty-first century (Holland and Gelmon 1998; Ramaley 2000). At the same time, however, as one of the few urban land grant universities, our institution faces challenges in effectively and substantively addressing urban needs in an urban age (Katz 2007) while still maintaining prominence as a comprehensive research university of the type that Carnegie calls a “Research I” or “Doctoral/Research University” and also sustaining our historical commitments to traditional land grant principles of addressing issues of all Minnesotans. Stated differently, our complex mission and history makes it difficult for us to bring urban engagement to the forefront of our university’s activities, which likely has forced us to be clearer in articulating its value and its inter-connections to traditional research functions and service to a state-wide constituency. But it also means that we never will be an institution where urban engagement is the single predominant thing that we do, for effectiveness in addressing local community issues will need to be balanced against creation of knowledge that can be generalized and serving our broader constituencies.

Consider the scope of the opportunities we have: The University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus, a public research university with a land grant mission, sits squarely in the middle of a large, complex, and dynamic metropolitan area containing the majority of the state’s population. Located in the heart of the culturally vibrant and productive Twin Cities metropolitan area, the campus interfaces with both Minneapolis and Saint Paul and their combined 650,000 residents, including many with middle and upper incomes, on many different levels. The Twin Cities are centers of employment through large Fortune 500 corporations including 3M, Target, General Mills, Medtronic, and Cargill. The metropolitan area is Minnesota’s center of economic power, social, cultural and artistic energy, and innovation.

As well as being home to great assets, metropolitan Minneapolis-Saint Paul is also the location of many of Minnesota’s greatest challenges. As the metropolitan area has grown substantially over the last few years, it has become more economically and culturally diverse. Like most major urban areas, it experiences stresses arising from issues including poverty, crime, and health disparities, and struggles with inequalities in opportunity and lack of capacity-building activities that engage, shape and empower individuals, groups and communities-within-communities. The recent report *Mind the Gap* (Brookings Institution 2005) describes disparities that underlie our regional economy and that are potentially threatening to long-term success. Disparities are tied to race, class, and locations (place), and affect areas including education, healthcare, and public safety. Specific recommendations are less important than the broad message for us and many other urban areas: what we are currently doing socially, educationally,

and economically is not working as well as it needs to work.

Further exacerbating current challenging circumstances, we like many other communities are facing dramatic demographic changes that will substantially increase numbers of young people from groups that historically have been less successful educationally, coupled with declining numbers of young people from groups that traditionally have provided most of our college-going population. Ethnic, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity is reaching all across the state, including into areas where diversity has not been present and where communities have not prepared themselves to deal with diversity. In some cases, their response seems to be to “shoehorn” new groups into existing structures and cultures – with limited success. In effect, challenges formerly concentrated in the central cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul have followed the spread of urban growth throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area and into smaller metropolitan areas across Minnesota. As a result, any solutions to urban challenges that we develop with our partners will have Minnesota impacts far beyond the largest and most urban areas, in effect serving the needs of people across the state and helping to accomplish our land grant mission.

In this paper, we describe our efforts thus far to frame our urban initiatives. It shares much in its processes with other institutions like the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and University of Illinois Chicago (Percy, Zimpher, and Brukhardt 2006), yet as the land grant and Research I university within Minnesota, we have a somewhat different history and context for developing and implementing our urban vision.. We believe that our work is consistent with six practices identified by Brukhardt and others (2006) even though our departure points are the first three—initiate engagement into mission, forge partnerships as the overarching framework, and renew and redefine discovery and scholarship. We first describe development of the ‘urban agenda’ intended to help shape our purpose and core functions for the next century (Cavendish 2001; Ostrander 2004), drawing from a strategic planning task force report charged by the university president. Then we discuss early efforts funded by the U.S. Department of Education to develop the kinds of long-term relationships that engage communities as respectful partners, that can be sustained, and that jumpstart our efforts to create what we believe is the first urban research and outreach/engagement center (UROC). Our goal of transformation is rooted in clear articulation of our land grant values coupled with intentional and pervasive efforts to engage faculty and community partners, and to provide examples to other colleagues and community partners of how work can develop and contribute to addressing important issues (Eckel, Hill, and Green 1998).

Developing and Implementing an Urban Agenda

Although the University of Minnesota is a great institution built upon land grant traditions of research, teaching, and engagement that should connect it to its public, it has not created images and mechanisms to connect it positively to all Minnesotans, and particularly those in its urban backyards. Despite noteworthy medical devices and

innovative approaches, development of cold-hardy plant varieties, retractable seat belts, an active Extension, and numerous other accomplishments, many Minnesotans are not involved in or aware of the ongoing public engagements and accomplishments of the University. And the University has not effectively enough seized upon its urban location and surroundings as a unique asset worth leveraging in our urban world. But that can change.

We believe that long-term, purposeful engagement manifested through expanded research and outreach/engagement centers in urban/metropolitan areas as well as rural Minnesota should be an important element of the University's core identity. Such centers would make prominent our engagements while visibly addressing key issues of society and promoting interdisciplinary engaged scholarship. They would increase the ways we partner with and affect our communities and provide them with greater benefits, improve the quality of life for all Minnesotans, and enhance the role of the University as an institution that connects with its communities in caring, constructive ways. Being exemplary in using research and education to fulfill our civic and land grant missions, particularly in the urban area where we are located, is an imperative for Minnesota's future and a route both to public support and to peer recognition as a top university (University of Minnesota Urban Agenda Task Force 2007, 3).

As exemplified in the quote above, the Urban Agenda Task Force argued for excellence through engagement, particularly urban engagement. That thinking aligns well with other urban work. There is increased realization that, regardless of their conditions, even the most challenged urban areas offer opportunities and possess competitive advantages—including strategic location, local market demand, and human resources that make them important locations for engagement activities and investment (Porter 1998). Yet tapping those advantages can be difficult, requiring coordination of public and private assets including those tied to education, human services, public safety, transportation, land use, and economic and community development. Few organizations have a combination of breadth and depth of expertise, credibility, and public trust that would allow them to organize and lead efforts that can offer a promise of success. Within urban areas, many businesses have left; those large ones that are left, sometimes called “anchor” institutions, are often medical facilities and colleges/universities. In part because of their permanence within communities, those institutions have an advantage of credibility that transcends their self-interest, and they are physically located where engagement is needed. We at the University of Minnesota have at or near our doorstep urban neighborhoods where challenges include large numbers of low income residents with high mobility, high unemployment and crime rates, low achieving schools, and large amounts of substandard and deteriorating housing. As a comprehensive university, we have expertise that can address that full array of issues so it stands to reason that as an engaged urban university we have an obligation to work to address these challenges.

Again as probably is true of many urban institutions, our urban work is rooted in earlier efforts with mixed results. Certainly, the substantial energy backing engaged work today

does not represent the first time the University has grappled with issues of engagement. For example, though not limited to urban areas, in 1993, University of Minnesota president Nils Hasselmo assigned an Outreach Council the following charge:

A strategic plan for outreach will clarify and direct our internal operations and increase awareness external to the University....The council's work will provide a foundation for visionary thinking and planning for our future in outreach. It will guide strategic decisions about investment and reorganization, identify potential connections between units and approaches, and identify what can be done centrally and within academic units to organize and support outreach efforts.

The resulting report included as key elements: addressing complex societal issues, being accessible to a diversity of people, developing a focused approach, being unbounded geographically, maintaining high quality in all efforts, and creating interdisciplinary collaboration. It noted the importance of linking outreach goals with other major University goals, of collaboration, of globalization, and of using the outreach mission in concert with research and teaching. Unfortunately, it did not produce much change and did not emphasize urban engagement for our campus.

Greater optimism for current efforts reflects both a changing zeitgeist as well as broader institutional support. A body of scholarly writings has developed supporting our work (Percy, Zimpher, and Brukhardt 2006). With respect to zeitgeist, changing language from "outreach" (*to and for* Minnesotans) to "engagement" (developing partnerships *with* communities) reflects a shift from viewing the University as holder of knowledge that it may choose to share with communities, to viewing the University as holding critical and useful knowledge about theory, research, and practice that complements knowledge of the same plus local conditions that exist in communities outside the university. This broader shift supports our urban engagement, for the urban work can be seen as a prominent part of our attempts to build respectful, enduring partnerships with communities that transform the way we do our engaged work and that reshape the institution to more prominently address the public good through research, teaching, and engagement. Concretely, this means moving beyond faculty-initiated engagement that by its nature tends to be driven by faculty interests rather than community or university ones and that is more episodic and disconnected (Vogelgesang et al. 2006). In contrast, our urban work is institution-initiated and organized, designed to develop sustainable and enduring partnerships that are systematic, coordinated, multi-disciplinary, supported by core funding, and that address key issues of urban communities and society. Identities are intended to be not those of individual faculty projects but those of an engaged urban institution.

It is interesting how marked changes in perspective can be driven by concrete steps. In 2005, Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak asked University President Robert Bruininks about creating a city-University partnership to address some of the complex issues facing the Northside. President Bruininks' support for a partnership (including designating a

Senior Vice President, Robert J. Jones, to represent the University) led to appointment of the Urban Agenda Task Force and a tangible commitment to more coherent urban work. A University Northside Partnership was developed linking the University to the city, county, and other partners. In collaboration with the community it identified areas of focus for partnership and brought together University and community participants to address issues of common interest. Areas of need identified through a community listening project organized by NorthPoint Health & Wellness, Inc., a community health clinic in North Minneapolis, include economic and community development, education, and health – areas also identified by the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities. Then two authors of this paper, Maruyama and Jones, received a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) to develop an urban research and outreach/engagement center, and specifically to fund projects in the three areas identified by the community, namely out-of-school time (education), youth entrepreneurship (economic and community development), and healthy foods (health). The final section of this paper will describe what has happened to those projects as our efforts have moved forward, but before turning to that we will do more to frame our efforts.

Conceptualizing the Work

Our land grant challenge. In the twenty-first century, a primary challenge for the community and the University is how to form, shape and engage a new “urban” land grant mission to leverage joint strengths and mitigate mutual weaknesses in pushing forward human progress, achievement and an equitable quality of life. It is a challenge that invites and requires institutional transformation from a twentieth century research university to a twenty-first century engaged multi-disciplinary research university. Part of what is required is creating successful broad-based engagement that crosses disciplinary boundaries that can drive an effective urban agenda. At their core, engaged activities are about partnerships and relationships that build trust and commitment (Lewin 1948). They should be transparent with respect to their goals and processes. To achieve such transparency a University task force developed a set of guiding statements articulated below that have been at the basis of our activities and will underlie and shape our efforts as we develop our urban partnerships. Changes proposed in how we engage are intended to effectively support urban and other partnership efforts. As our urban agenda is operationalized over time, collaborations will become more specific in defining what Minnesotans should and should not expect from us. The University’s governing board, while very supportive of our urban initiative have cautioned that the University cannot become a social or human service provider for all unmet needs or a landlord for urban renewal; those roles are not consistent with our core missions of research and teaching and would limit our outreach capacity. However, there are great opportunities to provide services in ways linked to and that build from our research and teaching missions.

As a foundation for the work, the Urban Agenda Task Force suggested the following mission and vision:

Mission: To fulfill the University’s land grant and civic missions through addressing issues of urban communities in collaboration with those communities, in order to improve the quality of life for all Minnesotans.

Vision: The University’s Urban Agenda will be:

- (1) Intentional and strategic across the institution
- (2) Grounded in the creation of multi-disciplinary teams and sustained, respectful partnerships
- (3) Drawing upon the basic teaching and research resources of the University, blending Boyer’s scholarships of discovery, integration, application/engagement, and teaching
- (4) Anchored where possible by a physical presence in communities where the issues to be resolved are most prevalent
- (5) Focused on work leading to measurable outcomes with significant impact
- (6) Broad in scope, addressing needs of the increasingly diverse populations of Minnesotans
- (7) Inclusive, drawing expertise from all across our comprehensive university as well as from the communities with whom we work

The task force also engaged in wide-ranging conversations about what falls within an urban agenda, how to engage partners, how to support work, and how to build support structures around the work. It laid out an array of points to consider and that help shape urban work. Those points are more pertinent to this discussion, for they are of broader relevance than are recommendations specific to our institution. Importantly, by addressing broad issues of engagement as well as urban issues, they link our urban engagement efforts with other types of engagement and with other locations even though we believe that the points are particularly important for engagement work in urban settings. What makes the points of particular importance for us is that, like many urban institutions, our urban areas are lower income communities where residents tend to be less educated, lack direct contacts with us other than superficial encounters, and have a limited understanding about research and what universities do. That can lead to unrealistic expectations about what universities may be willing and able to do for them and the resources that we might have available to commit. Further, we have a mixed history in our urban communities—some residents feel neglected, others feel that we have not been receptive to them or their children, and they may point to lack of tangible benefits from past efforts that make them less trusting of universities. The points discussed were:

- Engaged research typically is linked to, if not driven by, problems and issues whose solutions need to draw from multiple perspectives and disciplines.
- Universities need to be “straightforward and upfront” about what is in the partnership for different partners.
- At a macro level, urban work can look broadly at entire metropolitan regions, creating topographies that include housing, schooling, infrastructure, transportation systems, health care, etc., and at micro levels focus in on “local issues” in partnership with communities.

- At their core, engaged activities are about partnerships and relationships that build trust and commitment, and about transparency of goals and processes. Relationships and communication need to operate effectively within the University as well as being directed to others outside the University so understanding of goals and purposes is widespread.
- Work on engagement needs to emphasize that the major assets of universities are the faculty, staff, and students, and that the human capital that universities can apply to issues is our greatest strength.
- If the urban agenda looks like public relations, it will not work. There are respectful approaches to engaged work, like Kurt Lewin's (1948) action research—which talks about collaboration among experts in theory and experts in practice. Ultimately, community outcomes of our work will determine its success and the support we receive from our communities.
- Researchers new to urban work, to community engagement, and/or to culturally diverse community work need to learn about effective and respectful ways of interacting in community.
- Communication within and beyond the university about what is going on is integral.
- University and community roles need to be clear. In some instances it may be our role to help solve problems, but in others our role may be to help frame problems so they are amenable to local solutions driven by practitioners.
- Our tripartite mission of research, teaching, and outreach should be viewed as an interlocking triangle applied to our engaged work in general and our urban work in particular. We need to emphasize terms that explicitly make the connections, like Bench to Bedside to Community, and Discovery to Impact. Work needs to build upon our traditions, particularly the successful models of engagement that have been developed.
- Engaged work tends to be difficult and time consuming and is less controllable than laboratory work.
- Many systems within universities (e.g., Institutional Review Boards) were not developed with engaged research in mind.
- Although we want our overall urban agenda to be inclusive, work within that agenda needs to be characterized by prioritizing and developing specific areas of focus.

There is a growing national dialogue about areas of focus. NASULGC and its Commission on the Urban Agenda, along with the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, held an inaugural meeting in July 2006, yielding preliminary recommendations and strategic initiatives defining a national urban agenda for urban universities. Three strategic priorities were identified. Our community partners suggested that they be recast as follows to emphasize community assets:

- **Developing Human Talent (from Human Capital):** including PreK-20 education and access, STEM workforces, constructive and productive engagement of youth, effective use of out-of-school time, changing workforce needs and demographics, workforce professional development, and University redesign and renewal
- **Vibrant Communities (from Strengthening Communities):** including urban economies in a global marketplace; neighborhood revitalization; urban space use, design, and engineering; lived environment issues (safety, housing, transportation,

diversity); social relationships; aid to small businesses and nonprofits; and relevant community engagement

- **Urban Wellness (from Urban Health):** including uncompensated care; urban health disparities; environmental health threats, stressors, wellness, and other issues; innovative models of health care provision; and community partnerships and participation in health

The three categories were intended to be viewed as broad and inclusive and not to preclude or exclude topics of importance to either researchers or communities. At the same time, they support identification of priority areas, which are needed in order for the work to have some visible impact within communities. Furthermore, the particular categories seemed in our discussions to subsume most issues of suburban and exurban areas as well as urban ones and readily align with community needs we described earlier. Other issues mentioned from community listening sessions, like community violence, actually cross-cut the three areas, yet clearly can be addressed within the framework for they tie to constructive engagement of youth, wellness, and community vitality. In fact, within urban communities the priorities seem closely connected if not inextricably bound together. For example, children who are not healthy will have a difficult time learning in school, and if their parents are not employed or able to provide adequate housing and nutrition, the children's health will suffer. Such connections provide opportunities to create programs with multiple impacts, but also can create redundancies across areas of work if they are not well-coordinated.

Creating Structures That Support Engagement in Urban Settings

Organizing commitment. Engaging faculty is key for tasks have to be more than doing administrative work (Ramaley 1996). One of the challenges we faced in trying to make our urban engagement efforts operate in more integrated and coherent ways was identifying who is doing work and what it might take to get them to be willing to give up some autonomy to work with others. One effort that had started as part of our institution's strategic planning was an attempt to create a catalog of university engagement programs. This work in part updated earlier efforts, but was broader in scope than prior efforts. Unfortunately, responses were incomplete, so efforts are still continuing to create an accurate and representative if not complete database of engagement programs.

In initially convening internal stakeholders, we chose to "bring together the willing," that is, to focus on those who we knew were doing work and to convene them through regular meetings to help them make connections with others doing similar work (Ramaley 2000; Wergin 2006). The only incentive for participants was the opportunity to compete for community seed grants that promoted engaged partnership work in the North Minneapolis community. Our approach developed a large mailing list as well as a core group of participants who regularly attended the meetings. We considered different ways of engaging additional colleagues—and at different points issued open

invitations—as well as welcoming individuals who contacted us because they were interested. We have come to the view that as long as we can engage a sub-group of people who are interested and committed, we can create institutional change; we don't have to have everyone “on board” (Wergin 2006). Engagement efforts shouldn't need to be different from other initiatives or transformations of universities. Diverse perspectives and competing approaches assure that universities are constantly poised to change, even if change doesn't always happen. As long as our work becomes and stays a visible competing approach, it stays in the mix of ideas that shape our future.

Leadership. A second challenge was leadership. Faculty needed their efforts to be better coordinated, yet, at the same time, we knew that their human capital is our greatest strength, so we didn't want to drive faculty working in the community away by making it seem like we were interested in controlling their behaviors. Creating effective leadership is challenging, for leaders need to be able to work effectively with faculty and with community people, engaging them and getting them to commit their talents to participate in collaborative work. Providing value to enhance or simplify their work is key.

Support. A third issue is how to support initial efforts in creating collaborative work. Even though we invested substantially, we, like most universities, did not have resources sufficient to support a broad array of projects or to be the financial supporter of all the partnership efforts. And we, like many other institutions of higher education (Wergin 2006), were not about to take substantial resources from existing programs, which would, understandably, create unhealthy tensions within our institution. In addition to committing substantial new institutional resources, we were fortunate to get external support from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). We wrote the FIPSE proposal because we believed that the work we were doing was of interest beyond our campus and that with relatively modest support we could more effectively track development of the UROC as a model from which others could learn. By supporting convening of working groups to build partnerships and initiate key projects even before the physical facility was completed, the rate of our learning from our experiences was substantially increased as the support speeded up our ability to create partnerships to address important community issues. Through the work, we are examining our ability to reshape community perceptions about the University and about what collaboration means. The funding has allowed us to get several projects moving. In addition, it provided a venue for community members to react. For example, they asked pointed yet reasonable questions about how they benefit from the partnership: Is most of the money supporting the partnership going to the university to support its staff members who are collaborating? Will money come to the University from foundations and other sources that historically have given directly to the community partners? Shouldn't everyone collaborating be supported in their work? You get paid when you come to meetings, how about us? If you have all that money, why do you need additional money? We return to the practical questions later, but describe now how we framed the money in the FIPSE project.

Sustainability. When we wrote the FIPSE proposal, we tried to think about how best to create sustainable partnerships and decided not to use money primarily to fund projects, for we worried that if we did that the work would likely end when the grant did. And it would create expectations from our community partners that we would directly support their work. Instead we put money into university efforts we thought would likely be sustainable, primarily funding graduate assistants who could provide support for developing partnerships including: conducting program evaluations, performing literature searches to identify best practices, designing and administering interviews or surveys of stakeholders, gathering and analyzing data, helping identify potential funding sources, helping in developing collaborative proposals that will broaden the partnership and move us toward our goals, and/or providing professional development workshops. In effect, the money was used to hire staff to do things that we likely would be able to continue to do on some scale once the grant period ended. We did learn, however, that not having money to develop seed programs was a hindrance to getting work going quickly. In addition, not having money budgeted to provide lunches or refreshments at meetings is also a shortcoming for many models of community and relationship building involve fellowship around sharing food.

As we stated above, we chose not to focus available resources on funding projects or to limit ourselves to projects that we potentially could fully fund. It seemed that if the expectations for our partnerships was that we would take care of funding all the efforts, we would be putting ourselves in a role that we could not sustain, the scope of the partnership would be limited, collaborative and equitable partnerships might not develop, and partner buy-in and commitment to the partnership would be limited. An important initial part of our work was to allow partners to articulate their potential contributions to the efforts and what they would like to accomplish through the partnership. Along with that, setting goals and benchmarks creates expectations for how the partnership will progress and provide points where progress can be reviewed. It also can quickly determine where resources are insufficient which will focus the partners collaboratively on how to raise additional funds to make the partnership work occur.

Early Engagements: FIPSE Project Work

Selecting areas in which to work. In the area of *Human Talent Development*, we have brought together people with interests in “out-of-school” time—time outside the school day. What makes this topic critically important is that much of the academic achievement gap is tied to events that occur outside of the school year and day (Alexander, Entwistle, and Olson 2001; Cooper et al. 1996). Aligning out-of-school time activities with school curricula would provide strong support for educational achievement and create broader support for schools. A framework for the conversations is provided by a white paper on out-of-school time (Itasca Project 2006) commissioned by University of Minnesota President Robert Bruininks. In the area of *Vital Communities*, the focus is on creating for students entrepreneurial skills and business internships that complement their in-school work with real-life experience. Internships and other experiences that apply student learning in real-life settings provide important links for students. Those who participate are more likely to graduate from high school

and to succeed in college (Association for Career and Technical Education 2007; Laird, Chen, and Levesque 2006). For the community, this work helps create the next generation of business people who will drive future economic development. The Urban Wellness group has focused on healthy foods, nutrition, obesity, and exercise. Inequalities in income underlie many health disparities in the United States. Groups that suffer the worst health status, including nutritional health and obesity, are also those that have the highest poverty rates (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services 2000). Differential availability and affordability of healthy foods in low income neighborhoods have been suggested as important contributors to disparities in diet-related chronic diseases and obesity rates. The poor are more likely to live in areas with fewer large supermarkets and more convenience and small grocery stores which can result in higher food prices. As we began the work, the Northside had only a single supermarket serving sixty-eight thousand residents and still has only two. Direct links have been observed between access to supermarkets and healthier dietary intakes (Cheadle et al.1991; Laraia et al. 2004; Morland et al. 2002). For example, Morland, Wing, and Diez Roux (2002) found that fruit and vegetable intake increased with each additional supermarket in a census tract.

Hiring staff. Questions from community members asking how our money would benefit the community led us to reshape the hiring that we did for the project. We targeted university students from North Minneapolis by putting experience with the community as an integral part of our job descriptions. We were fortunate to hire two graduate RAs who were born and raised in North Minneapolis and who still live there. We also decided to redraft the project coordinator position to encourage community applicants as well as university types. We posted the position for three-quarters to fulltime rather than the originally envisioned part-time position (65 percent) so the position would be more attractive to people with community experience (even though we had to reduce graduate student work on the project). We advertised widely within the Twin Cities and allowed a sufficient time for the posting period to ensure broad access to the position description. During that time, there was also active information sharing about the position within the community, and our liaisons and others spread the message. Given the process and the over ninety applicants to review, it took longer than it might otherwise have taken to get fully staffed. But we started our work groups immediately so they would be closer to action steps by the time we were fully staffed, and having a project coordinator with community connections has been of great value.

Initiating working groups. We organized working groups focused on out-of-school time (OST), youth entrepreneurship (YE), and healthy foods (HF), identifying individuals and organizations who we should be involving as part of the working groups. Our community liaison sought out community and university contacts beyond our initial network. The goal of the working groups has been to build community capacity while laying the groundwork for sustainable partnerships addressing important community issues. The groups have focused both on immediate actions to develop the partnership and to try out particular activities, and on long-term, broad-scale actions that will create and sustain community level change.

After the three working groups each had had several meetings so natural leaders could emerge, co-chairs for each working group were selected. One chair for each working group is a University person, the other is a community person. Monthly meetings (now quarterly) were established, and a common agenda for the groups was set. Starting in early 2008, after two meetings in each group, we initiated a three-meeting sequence in each group designed to move them toward concrete work plans. Although the content varied across groups, the structure was the same, giving us three replications of partnership development. All meetings the first year were held in the North Minneapolis community. The meeting structure was as follows: Meeting One identified critical issues, Meeting Two examined resources currently available in the community to avoid creating redundancy and to engage and respect efforts of others already working in the community, and Meeting Three identified themes for partnership as well as a specific action plan and/or project for each group to work on in order to move the working groups beyond talk and to action. Key ideas are *complement*, *support*, and *collaborate*.

Group memberships. One success has been effectiveness in convening people to engage in conversations. When we convened the working groups we found that no one in any of the groups knew all the other people in their working group—we were bringing together people with common interests who had never been convened in groups exactly like ours. Our role as convener made us “matchmaker,” linking up people who knew of each other yet who had not made personal connections. That role has led to some serendipitous University-community collaborations that we created and nurtured. An outcome of our success in convening diverse groups of stakeholders has been the challenge of engaging all the stakeholders simultaneously, for they have come with different motivations as well as assets and knowledge, and attendance has varied from meeting to meeting. Despite varying motivations, participants share strong interest about the work of the University, as well as hope that our presence will bring resources. The groups each have over thirty members with a blend of community and University people. The Out-of-School Time (OST) group is largest, with twenty University people and thirty-five community people. That group includes participants from the Minneapolis Public Schools, the City of Minneapolis’ mayor’s office, its Youth Coordinating Board, and its Park and Recreation group, Hennepin County’s community health facility in North Minneapolis (NorthPoint Health & Wellness) and its libraries, the YMCA, the Greater Twin Cities United Way, faith community members, and OST program people.

Sustainability. The University has committed over \$5 million in resources to buy, renovate, and operate a building that will be our first community-based UROC. That commitment is the first step in our long-term commitment to building urban partnerships. The University also has been seeking additional funding so it can expand the partnerships. The FIPSE project, in addition to convening planning groups, has been initiating work (1) linking our conceptual experts to practitioners in mutually beneficial partnerships, (2) developing and disseminating information about best practices in the topic areas of the working groups and beginning to summarize available reports and research findings so they are accessible to the community, (3)

providing technical assistance in evaluation and beginning to work with practitioners to develop general evaluation instruments that could be used across programs within similar program types so that impacts of programs within the community could be aggregated, and (4) helping identify funding sources for grants and contracts including ones that would go directly to our community partners and complement the funding that we have.

Work group progress. A major test of partnerships comes when things move beyond words to projects, and when people have to manifest the commitments that they have articulated. Each working group has experienced a number of twists and turns and even false starts as we moved toward partnership projects. Work group progress is addressed in the next three sections. One aspect of our evaluation as well as of our group process has been having our research assistants meet individually with all partners to get their thoughts about their needs, their wishes for the partnership, and their level of satisfaction with the progress of their group. This information is being compiled and will be shared in aggregate with members of each group at a meeting this year.

Out-of-School Time (Human Talent Development/Education)

As noted above, the Out-of-School Time (OST) group has been the largest of our groups and also dominated by community member participation. At the third meeting, the group identified communication with youth and families about program opportunities and professional development for providers of OST services as the highest priorities. The group settled on communication to families and youth as an immediate priority and decided to canvass youth in two neighborhoods of North Minneapolis to see what they are doing for the summer, to provide information about options to all youth and families, and to match youth not engaged with existing programs. At its fifth meeting, as a very specific work plan was emerging, divergent perspectives emerged between the attendees who provide services and those who are more policy-level people. The service providers suggested that the group had been making unwarranted assumptions about capacity of existing programs and that the programs they personally knew about did not have capacity to take more youth—so we would be creating false promises and frustrating families and youth who might expect us to find opportunities for them. The providers' concerns refocused the group to the professional development area. OST providers took leadership, organizing a convening of OST providers in North Minneapolis and inviting FIPSE staff to attend. At that retreat providers developed an action agenda and worked with us to define our role in their action agenda. As a result, the OST FIPSE group is engaged in three action steps: (1) provide a GIS – Geographic Information System – mapping of existing providers; (2) in collaboration with the providers group, survey existing providers to determine who they serve, what their capacity is for taking on more youth, as well as the kinds of support they would like for their work; and (3) develop a plan that would bring together OST providers monthly over lunch, alternating successive months between professional development provided by UM staff and convening OST providers to create a professional community to collaborate on developing effective practices. We

will be providing the professional development programming without charge and took the lead in preparing a grant proposal that would support the meetings of the providers, doing things like providing stipends for hourly youth workers who would not be compensated for attending professional development sessions. Meetings are continuing, and the mapping and survey work are ongoing, as is planning of the monthly meetings. Longer term, we will work to help build and support a professional community defined by cooperation and collaboration across OST providers and UM partners, plus sharing of best practices and work to link policy makers with service providers in new ways. Youth programming ideally will integrate physical activity youth development programming, different kinds of educational enrichment programs, and activities to bolster physical, intellectual, and social skills of community youth.

Youth Entrepreneurship (Vital Communities/ Economic and Community Development)

The Youth Entrepreneurship (YE) group initially was viewed as taking a role in which it supported a couple of other previously initiated community-based efforts. As the work proceeded, one of the two projects was delayed, while the other stepped back from the work to reassess its focus. By that point in time, we had identified a number of youth programs seeking training for their youth, had surveyed existing YE programs from across the country, and had begun to develop a YE curriculum to use. That curriculum is designed to reinforce and complement educational programs, develop “soft” skills like time management and personal responsibility, build and refine leadership skills, and for youth who display interests in actual entrepreneurial activities, give them the skills to increase their effectiveness in entrepreneurial pursuits while building a cadre of future community business leaders and innovators. Primary University partners are our Carlson School of Management (business school), our Urban Youth Leadership program in the Center for Youth Development, and our Office of Business and Community Economic Development. Last summer we started with a single youth program, piloting a short entrepreneurial curriculum that the youth can apply to an ongoing business project within the organization. This fall, we have been working with a number of different partners primarily for programs occurring outside the school day that build leadership and entrepreneurial skills among young people while giving them knowledge about career opportunities. Programs are starting up now.

Healthy Foods (Urban Wellness)

The healthy foods group has been both the most far-reaching in its potential scope and the most varied in its focus. It has focused on increasing access to and consumption of healthy foods in the community. We have had strong expertise available from University faculty from a number of colleges: Education and Human Development; Extension; Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Sciences; the Institute of Technology; the Medical School; and Public Health. Yet the agenda of our group has been driven by our community partners tied to areas of community interest. Initially, our work was going to focus on supporting and expanding work on youth community gardening as well as helping develop a small farmers’ market in the community. Although the gardening work is continuing to develop, the farmers’ market work did

not result in actual work after the partner organization backed away from the project. More recently, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Minnesota released a RFP for communities to do work on healthy foods issues. We worked with our partners and are now a co-partner in a funded project headed by the community public health clinic. We helped shape the project based upon our work, pulling together the partners we had assembled—the local supermarket, Cub Foods, a local food shelf and umbrella food shelf agency, a farmers’ market, meals on wheels, youth gardens, University Extension master gardeners and nutrition workers and city of Minneapolis. The project will look at ways of integrating the different work being done to provide healthy foods in the community with a focus on consumption of fruits and vegetables. Longer term, we hope to be able to integrate our capacity with community partners to not only increase availability of healthy foods but also to use food demonstrations, meal planning, use of eligible government subsidies, and other means to change food preferences of residents and to increase healthy foods consumption. The healthy foods work also ideally will be integrated with the OST work, for out-of-school time can be used to develop healthier eating and exercise lifestyles that promote healthy youth development.

The youth garden initiative is also moving forward. We have three schools and one community site that are interested in a gardening partnership with us, and we have assembled an interdisciplinary group of faculty who are interested in building a broad-based partnership to develop STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) content around the gardening. The work will be done through after-school programming, so the garden work is supervised by a licensed teacher hired by the local school district. Community partners are key because the school programs do not go year-round and because we are interested in broad-based engagement around the gardens. We see this work as an opportunity to attract external support for developing a strong and diverse curriculum while also increasing science skills of urban youth.

Outcomes

One important outcome is to raise visibility of University work in the urban community and to change community attitudes about the contributions and impacts of the University. A baseline survey was collected in December 2007. We attached to a regularly administered statewide citizen survey a small set of extra questions expressly for residents of North Minneapolis and over-sampled that community by 150 residents, yielding a first-year sample of 158 North Minneapolis residents who answered the entire survey as well as our questions. Because the survey is baseline information, we provide information only about questions specifically focused on the University’s role in North Minneapolis. First, with respect to a question about familiarity with the University’s work in North Minneapolis, only 9% described themselves as very familiar, while 71% said they were unfamiliar with the project. In assessing the University’s impact on North Minneapolis, 44% viewed impacts positively, 8% negatively, and the remainder were neither positive nor negative. Finally, with respect to the impact of the University on them personally, a smaller proportion of 23% replied positively, 5% responded negatively, while the majority, 72%, were neither positive nor negative. The survey was administered again in December of 2008.

Other outcomes include developing the UROC and successfully engaging community partners for collaborative work. Because the work is still developing, we have focused evaluation on processes, keeping careful minutes from meetings and documenting action steps. Project staff members have been working with the project evaluators to summarize information from the meetings. We also use project staff meetings to share information and to compile data from our processes.

In the final section of this paper, we summarize some of the lessons learned so far. Program evaluation capacity in the community is a major component of our work, and we are in the process of developing instruments that can be used across programs so that impacts can be aggregated within the community. Interviews with partners are providing important information about the partnership development.

Our models of change. Creating engaged universities is complex work. Within our university, sometimes it starts by trying to shape attitudes about doing engaged work, other times by changing behaviors first. Some efforts provide substantial incentives to stimulate work, and others work to create a culture shift supporting structural changes. Because our work has been primarily work with “the willing,” our model of change has assumed the position that change can occur by articulating the work as a university priority and then engaging faculty in numbers sufficient to drive change. It is too early to judge our successes.

Methodologies. Our approach has primarily focused on variants of action research (Chein, Cook, and Harding 1948; Lewin 1948). Those include participatory action research, community-based participatory research, and what might be called “traditional” Lewinian “expert in theory, expert in practice” partnership research, for such approaches are respectful and transparent to partners. It is important to frame the work broadly, however, for there are likely to be times when different models of partnership are needed, including more traditional researcher-as-expert models. Additionally, an essential part of developing long-term partnerships is to increase the skills of both university researchers and community partners for engaged work.

Lessons learned. Because a major focus of this project is developing a model that can be used by other institutions, in closing we provide a summary of things we have learned through our work. Many of these lessons are ones that we were prepared for, but, nevertheless, they warrant describing for they have emerged in ways that were not always anticipated. And while the lessons learned were from our experiences in an urban community, they have implications for our broader engagement activities.

1. *It is not enough to raise money to invest in urban communities; community members want to see tangible impacts of the money in the community.* Probably not surprisingly, communities like the one in which we are working are not ones with a lot of available resources, and those that are available are widely scattered and not used in coordinated ways. If the community had more resources and used them in coordinated ways, they likely would be working much more effectively and would have much less need for our assistance and partnership. But the consequence of

limited available resources is that people are always looking for resources, and, given that our grant is for over \$1 million over three years (\$750,000 in government support), prospective partners expected that we would have money to put directly into the community. Even though our plan was to provide support to access funding for community partners, the absence of a pool of money to support the work has created challenges in getting projects started and probably has created some bad feelings from people who believe that we are funding the university rather than building a partnership.

2. *Tied to lesson one is that in challenged communities there is much less true volunteer labor available*, for being able to volunteer is a luxury of people with jobs that pay sufficient salaries to be able to contribute time without compensation. In effect, volunteers in challenged communities may need some support in order to “volunteer.” Similarly, engaging youth in summer programs is more complex, for rather than youth and their families expecting to pay to participate in enrichment programs, youth need resources and expect a stipend for participating, or they will find a job rather than participate—at least, to the extent that jobs are available. An illustration of challenges of resources comes from work we have been doing with out-of-school time providers. They would like professional development for their youth workers, but most of the workers are hourly workers (making between twelve and eighteen dollars per hour), and the organizations don’t have money to pay workers to attend sessions where they are not contributing directly to the needs of the organization. So, in order to support professional development, there needs to be money to provide some kinds of stipends to the youth workers so they can afford to attend the sessions, for the organizations want their employees to attend but have no leverage for assuring that they will attend. If there is money for stipends for attendees, the system can be made one with scholarships, so that attendees and their organizations have to apply (increasing their commitment to the process and work). Volunteerism has provided us an opportunity to link our work with that of colleagues who study volunteerism and civic participation, focused on how well their work applies to communities where family incomes are low.
3. *Trust needs to be earned*. Urban communities are not trusting of universities, at least not of ours, and we have no reason to believe that we are an exception. Part of this comes from past engagements that were viewed by community members as exploitive of their communities (e.g., researchers pursued their own goals and shortchanged the community in providing information about its needs and the findings of the research, or researchers reported findings that depicted the community in a negative way that might not have been warranted). Part comes because the University is so large and viewed as rich and powerful. People are afraid that we will attract all the resources that they otherwise would get and take all the credit for partnerships. So they might seem to be doing things that undercut our efforts or reshape our efforts to move forward even if we are trying to do what they have asked us to do. Ultimately, sustained respectful commitment to the work and to the health of the partner agencies will build the trust that is needed.

4. *It is very important to be able to track indirect impacts of projects* like ours, for much of our immediate impacts come from creating conversations among people with common interests—a convener role. For each of our groups, even though we assembled people all working on the same issue in the same area of the city, in no group did any individual at a meeting know everyone else who was there. So our meetings gave people a chance to make connections, talk and network with others, and schedule meetings with them.
5. *Flexibility is essential.* In each group, our direction has been characterized by frequent shifts or realignments. Openness to change is a necessity, even if all changes are not necessarily ones that immediately move work forward. Ultimately, sustainability likely depends on willingness to change. If a university is completely committed to developing work in partnership, it had better be ready to cede control to community members and to see the plans shift in unpredictable ways depending on who attends the meetings and speaks up. Developing clear agendas that build upon previous agreements can keep the work moving forward, as can keeping in contact with group members who miss meetings.
6. *Expect challenges when trying to engage practitioners and policy makers simultaneously.* When the focus was general, we had mostly policy-level people attending and practitioners felt that since there was no action, they were wasting their time. Once we shifted to support practitioners, we lost many of the policy makers, for they were less interested in issues of program implementation. There must be a delicate balance. We have tried to address it by keeping people focused on the long-term goals which are shared by all rather than on the specific step we currently are taking.
7. *If there are clear directions that one wants to pursue, it probably is not good to present the situation as if all possibilities are equally viable.* We have not yet encountered this, but for particular types of work we suspect that we would be better off outlining a vision and process and then inviting participation from partners who are willing to buy into the vision and plan and who are interested in helping to shape it. It is part of trying to develop authentic relationships and keeping work transparent; if we have an a priori place we want to end, it is not authentic to act like we are willing to go whatever direction the group decides.
8. *Pre-existing relations—be they good or poor, will strongly shape the work.* If universities tie too strongly to particular partners, they risk alienating other potential partners and creating in-groups and out-groups. For us, the challenge is to create *community level* partnerships, which would have to be inclusive. We already have faced challenges in selecting partners for initial pilot efforts, for those not selected asked us why we didn't work with them.

9. *If the process is really open and inclusive, it is important to expect participation not only from allies but also from critics.* This statement is not to imply that people are with us or against us, for most community partners, if they are willing to be honest with us, agree in some circumstances and disagree in others. Rather, there inevitably are people who would like to see us fail. In one of our three groups, the email announcing a meeting was forwarded to an outspoken critic of the University's work, who then attended a meeting and returned to the next meeting with others critical of the University's presence. They wanted to spend the meetings criticizing the University for its history and approaches which clearly interferes with attempts to move toward collaborative projects. Fortunately, their presence was countered by other community people who supported our work and who wanted to develop a partnership, so the work has moved forward despite the challenges that they presented.
10. *Virtually all parties, university and community, come to the table with their own goals and agendas, and they will promote those.* Sometimes those agendas are manifested by particular requests, sometimes by efforts to align our work with what others need to accomplish, and sometimes by trying to position themselves so that they will benefit long-term from our work. So part of the challenge is determining when to try to align with existing efforts and when to stay independent, and trying to maximize breadth of participation by people with common interests in the issues. The other part is being aware of how the agenda is being shaped and assuring that it is not co-opted by particular partners. Those of us from universities probably are more used to the ways our colleagues try to shape an agenda and probably are not as surprised by it as by attempts of community people to do the same thing but in different ways.
11. *Large universities have to deal with perceptions about them as powerful and controlling.* As a \$3 billion dollar organization, we have to deal with perceptions that we can do whatever we really want to do. As a learning community trying continuously to improve and committed to internal reallocation of money for transformation, we should always have some money available for high priority work. We have found this issue hard to adequately address, but have kept the focus on the goals of the group and the resources that we are willing to share in the partnership—while also asking partners to identify the resources that they are willing to share.
12. *We learn a lot about ourselves.* Perhaps residue from the “university as expert” model is that we tend to focus on benefits outside our institution rather than looking as closely at what we learn about ourselves and our processes. We are trying to understand how universities build partnerships, so a focus on us is critical.

13. *Expectations of university and community partners need to be managed.* A challenge that we have faced is that some people both inside and outside the university expect rapid results and transformation. Frankly, community work is slow. Using language from Schon (1995), compared to laboratory research (high ground) where the researcher controls all aspects of the work, applied work (the swamp) is “messy,” characterized by developing partnerships with practitioners and participants, by coming to agreements about what to do and how to proceed, and by efforts and management of many – and progress is slow. Setting modest and achievable goals is a way to build realistic expectations.
14. *People come with different views about what research is.* One of the challenges we have faced is that many community partners have images of research as consisting of things that researchers do to the research participants rather than things designed to help improve the lives of participants. Perhaps it is guided by their images of medical research and trials, but such research is not typical of the work we do. Projects like youth gardening are designed to teach youth about science and only “impose” on the youth greater learning and achievement and engagement in school, but they aren’t the kinds of projects people hold in their minds when they hear the word “research.” So an important part of our work is developing relationships in which community members can see what engaged research looks like as well as how it can affect their lives.

Conclusion

Perhaps we are being too optimistic, but we are enthusiastic about the opportunities we have for moving forward. Alignment of a vision for urban engagement, participation of a large group of faculty, administrative support, colleagues who have worked in the community for years who are part of our group, and enough time spent by our groups in the community to start to build trust and hear community members express interest in partnering with us on projects is leading us to believe that we are making substantial headway. As an urban land grant, we know that many issues that are almost givens for many urban universities (like supporting an urban renaissance act) can be complicated for us, for we have a strong historical commitment to rural areas as well as urban, and, in a time of limited resources, perceptions of competition come readily. But we are committed to the urban work, for we recognize it as the path to a more successful future in a regional world (Katz 2007), and we are excited about the possibilities for ourselves and our communities and for the other urban-serving universities who are sharing our journey. The FIPSE work we have described is getting us started and laying groundwork through partnerships and projects that will become part of the UROC as we move forward.

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