The Role of Anchor Institutions in Sustaining Community Economic Development

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development | Office of Policy Development and Research | Office of University Partnerships

Building Resiliency: The Role of Anchor Institutions in Sustaining Community Economic Development analyzes the positive impact that institutions of higher education can have in stabilizing and improving the nation's struggling communities.

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BUILDING RESILIENCY

The Role of Anchor Institutions in Sustaining Community Economic Development

Prepared by:
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of University Partnerships

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"[T]hese cities contain significant—although often underutilized—assets that may well be pivotal to the economic future of their metro areas and regions. Their rich history, their compact and walkable spatial pattern, their distinctive architecture, as well as their parks and riverfronts, all represent valuable assets that can draw new, dynamic populations and trigger future activity."[1]

Alan Mallach, Visiting Scholar,
Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

Introduction

Chester, Pennsylvania, a small, formerly industrial city located on the Delaware River, not far from Philadelphia, exemplifies the problems and possibilities faced by older manufacturing cities across the United States, especially in the Northeast and Midwest. Chester's problems of poverty, stagnation, and unemployment stem from the late 20th-century decline of an industrial economy in the United States—which in Chester was primarily centered on automobile manufacturing and shipbuilding—and the flight of the more affluent residents to the suburbs. The remaining residents face high poverty, high unemployment, a crumbling infrastructure, lack of services and businesses, and underperforming schools. There is hope, however. Although the Federal Reserve Bank classifies Chester as a "struggling city," Chester also embodies the possibilities in the concept of *resilience* defined as "the individual and collective capacity to respond to adversity and change." The project of turning Chester around is a work in progress, but Chester is also a community that has taken intentional action "to enhance the personal and collective capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to and influence the course of social and economic change."[2] In fact, Chester, and one of its key partners in community revitalization, Widener University, can serve as a case study of what building resilience can look like in the face of daunting challenges.

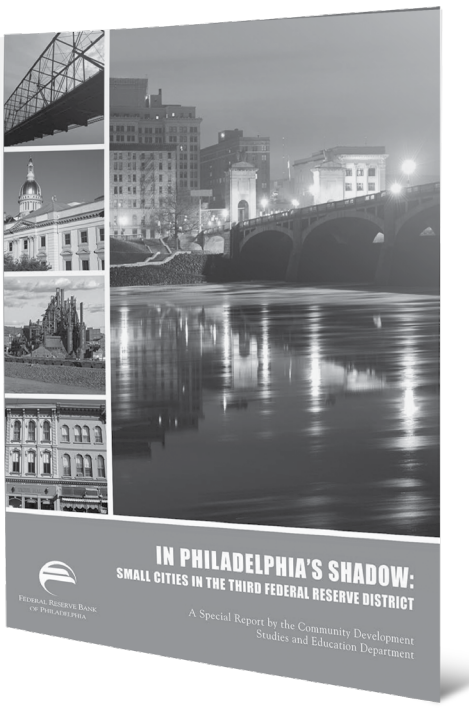
What does a resilient city look like?

Resilience takes many forms, but one key indicator would be a city that is focused on improving its educational system and is creative in its approaches to doing so. A good education is necessary to equip residents for skilled jobs in a knowledge-based economy. Chester's groundbreaking school partnership between the Chester-Upland School District and the Crozer Keystone Health System to create a "Health Care High School" that equipped Chester students for careers in healthcare fields, is an example of an innovative, private- and public-partnered approach to public education, which, though short-lived, had an immense impact on the lives of its students while the program was in operation.

Another key indicator is a city that is taking initiatives to improve the quality of life and social well-being of its residents. These initiatives might involve creating partnerships with nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, local businesses, and the federal government, to bring different levels of expertise into the mix. The Chester Youth Collaborative (CYC) is an example of an organization that works with the city, community leaders, organizations,

residents, and the youth of Chester to develop programs that meet the needs of and increase opportunities for Chester's youth by delivering quality out-of-school-time programs, workforce preparation programs, and safety and wellness programs. Examples of CYC programs include the Wells Fargo College Bound Program, the Widener University Saturday Ecology Program for Girls, the Young Chester Entrepreneur Program, and the Chester High Mural Arts Program.

Yet another indicator is a city that has clearly taken stock of its assets—durable housing stock and walkable streets, a riverfront that could be developed into a tourist attraction, an active and engaged university or hospital with a civic consciousness[3]—and is working to maximize these assets. Cultivating these assets—all cities have them—in ways that lead to revitalization is the crucial step, but there are two conditions community developers, government officials, and urban planners have identified that are more likely to make this transformation happen—leadership and long-range planning. For example, Chester has identified its downtown area, its proximity to Philadelphia, and its position in the Washington, D.C.-New York corridor as prime assets to leverage its development as an arts-oriented community. The arts are a multi-million dollar industry in this region, and Chester is hoping to parlay its assets into a regional hub for the arts.



In Philadelphia's Shadow: Small Cities in the Third Federal Reserve District. A Special Report by the Community Development Studies and Education Department, Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

Bringing about the changes that make an older industrial city into a resilient city is a difficult process, and leadership is one of the key elements to bring about positive and lasting change—whether at the national level, at the state or regional level, or at the local level. An institution of higher education (IHE) can be that leader in the community, by bringing partnerships together, by facilitating change, and by a creating a space where community ideas and talents come to the fore. It takes a special type of leader, though, to orient an IHE to this role, if the IHE has never assumed this responsibility in its community. Widener University in Chester, Pennsylvania, is the example of an IHE that went through the process of internal change, under the tenure of its current president, James T. Harris III, to remake itself into the type of institution that could catalyze change in the community. Leadership at the city level is also a key factor. Chester is fortunate to have Mayor John Linder, who works in partnership with Widener University, business leaders, and the federal government to effect positive community changes. The city of Chester's relationship with Widener University is an example of what can be accomplished when a forward-thinking mayor and a visionary university president join forces to work together and work with community and business leaders, government officials and agencies, university staff and students, and city residents to empower the city to remake its own future: "Leaders must form broad-based coalitions that include the government, business, and nonprofit sectors. Leadership and collaboration are important in the development of a long-range plan that guides a city's growth and provides…continuity in the face of changing administrations, [chief executive officers], and executive directors."[4]

These days, the federal government is keenly interested in how to encourage the process of developing resiliency in the struggle to revitalize decayed urban communities. The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of University Partnerships (OUP), and Widener University cosponsored a recent event to discuss the concept of resiliency and revitalization. At the event, "Building Resiliency: The Role of Anchor Institutions in Sustaining Community Economic Development," held on November 27, 2012, at Widener University, participants from the private sector, government, academia, and nonprofits discussed how to create these types of collaborations and partnerships, using the example of Widener University as a case study. OUP staff members, especially Madlyn Wohlman-Rodriguez, were instrumental in putting together an inspiring and interesting program.

The federal government is not only interested in how to encourage these types of partnerships, but it is also making an effort—in keeping with the Obama Administration's initiatives and imperatives—to think broadly about cross-agency and cross-sector programs. In her introduction to the Resiliency event, Milissa Tadeo, a senior vice president of Corporate Affairs for the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, explained that encouraging strong, revitalized communities is in keeping with the mission of the Federal Reserve to ensure a sound financial system and a sound economy and implement monetary policy. Developing connections to communities is an important part of the Federal Reserve's mission and supplements its economics research. The Federal Reserve is interested in keeping an eye on emerging issues, such as credit in underserved communities, affordable housing, the dynamics of credit and capital, and fostering public-private partnerships.

BOX 1 | Bridges to the Outside

The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia's Community Development Studies and Education Department

The Community Development Studies and Education Department conducts outreach to community development bankers, developers, advocates, and government representatives. It also conducts research and sponsors biennial conferences and events about the issues and challenges faced by older, formerly industrial, and economically distressed communities in the United States. The department prepared a report following the 2012 conference, which focused on the challenges faced by 13 small cities—including Chester—in the Third Federal Reserve District (Delaware, Southern New Jersey, and Eastern and Central Pennsylvania) after deindustrialization and population loss. The report also focuses on future prospects and directions for these 13 cities.

The White House, through the Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) initiative, is also seeking to create cross-agency collaborations "to strengthen neighborhoods, towns, cities, and regions around the country by enhancing the capacity of local governments to develop and execute their economic vision and strategies, providing necessary technical assistance and access to federal agency expertise, and creating new public and private sector partnerships."[5] HUD's involvement in the SC2 initiative has led to envisioning community revitalization as something larger and more complex than improving public housing, though affordable good-quality housing is key to revitalized communities.

Implicit in the idea of SC2 is the concept of partnerships with anchor institutions, a concept that is no stranger to OUP. Sherone Ivey, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for University Partnerships in HUD's Office of Policy Development, introduced the keynote speaker, Barbara Holland, a consultant, scholar of educational change, and visiting director of OUP for two years, and the topic of anchor institutions—a topic that OUP has been closely involved with for many years, since many of its IHE grantees have taken on the anchor institution role in their communities.

BOX 2 | Bridges to the Outside

What Is an Anchor Institution?

The term anchor institution refers to long-standing and deeply rooted community organizations that often are the largest contributors to their communities' continued economic stability and strength. Any large enterprise or organization—hospitals, churches, nonprofits, housing cooperatives—that brings together economic and financial assets, human resources, and physical structures, and has an established presence in the community can act as an anchor institution. Institutions of higher education (IHEs), however, are especially well-placed to lead in communities and develop partnerships with other anchor institutions, for many reasons. IHEs are deeply rooted into their communities and can contribute to a sense of neighborhood identity. The symbiotic relationship that IHEs share with their communities gives ample incentive for them to invest in improvements from which both parties will inevitably benefit. IHEs also contribute to economic growth by generating new ideas that can become the seeds for business development, from high-profile biotechnology and high technology industries to more modest efforts such as creating local affordable housing or local small business incubation. IHEs work to create and educate future community leaders. IHEs can lead other similarly placed potential anchor institutions and spearhead the creation of partnerships.

"There are examples of the good, the bad, the ugly, and the expedient among the stories of academic institutions and their cities."

Barbara Holland, Holland Consulting

Making It Happen: Creating and Sustaining a Shared Future Through Partnerships

Barbara Holland, former director of OUP and director of Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, spoke insightfully on community engagement and the necessary organizational changes in higher education to position IHEs to engage effectively with their communities. She emphasized that OUP offers a model of partnership building that brings academia into the mix.

BOX 3 | Who's Who

Series Presenters

Barbara Holland

Barbara Holland is recognized internationally for her expertise on organizational change in higher education, community engagement, service learning, and partnerships. As an academic leader, she has held senior administrative positions at Portland State University, Northern Kentucky University, the University of Western Sydney, and the University of Sydney. In government-related roles, she was director of the Learn and Serve America National Service-Learning Clearinghouse for 7 years and visiting director of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of University Partnerships (OUP) for 2 years. As a respected speaker, author, and consultant, she has advised many universities in the United States and other nations. Among her affiliations, she was a founding board member and 2011–12 chair of the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement and a founding member of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (now called Engagement Australia). She is the executive editor of *Metropolitan Universities* and serves in editorial roles for six other refereed journals. Her current research and practice interests include the development of leaders for community engagement, the integration of community engagement into institutional strategic priorities and policies, and the development of approaches to measuring the impacts of engagement from the perspective of communities, institutions, students, and faculty.

She also highlighted the involvement—and research— of the Federal Reserve into the well-being of the small cities in the Third Federal Reserve District, including Chester. The Federal Reserve's efforts created the opportunity for a life-changing dialogue on the causes and conditions that have brought changes in 13 small post-industrial cities in the Middle Atlantic region that were profiled by the Federal Reserve in its report *In Philadelphia's Shadow: Small Cities in the Third Federal Reserve District*.[6] Through its evidence-based research findings, the report identified six key strategy areas that could be the starting point for building an agenda to turn around distressed communities. This agenda would, of necessity, involve the kinds of partnerships with city officials, anchor institutions, federal government agencies, nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, community leaders, and community residents that HUD and OUP are familiar with through their grantmaking and grantee assistance experience.

BOX 4 | A Call to Action

Six Key Strategy Areas for Building an Agenda[7]

1. Build the middle class.
2. Integrate newly arriving communities and address racial/ethnic disparities.
3. Leverage assets and public resources for private investment.
4. Link the city to the regional and national economy.
5. Build and sustain leadership and partnerships.
6. Foster state-level policy reform.

Holland believes in the capacity of American cities to reinvent themselves in response to changed circumstances. She pointed to Widener University as an example of an IHE that has strived to better its community, and noted that Widener is "here because the community wants them here."

Holland reminded the audience that IHEs acting as anchor institutions is part of a deeply rooted academic tradition that dates from the 19th century—the idea that IHEs were drivers of economic change and had a role in economic success during the industrial age. IHEs recognized the need to connect with communities. This attitude and vision changed later in the 20th century, after the First World War, when the trend in academia was to move away from the issues that linked IHEs to the particular places in which they were based to issues that were universal and independent of place. The history of academia in the 20th century is largely the history of loosening this connection and increasing IHEs' detachment from their surrounding communities, except when IHEs needed to acquire property for expansion. This thinking dominated most of the 20th century relationships between IHEs and communities, and encompassed much of the time when Widener and the community of Chester were talking past each other. At the same time that IHE detachment was growing, the former industrial-based cities—small, medium-sized, and large—became urban ghost towns through the related processes of deindustrialization and outmigration.

Holland described this history of IHE-community relations as "the good, the bad, the ugly, and the expedient." Part of any current discussion of community rebuilding, Holland acknowledged, has to start with how to develop a healthy relationship between IHEs and the community, with an emphasis on the distinctive characteristics of urban-located institutions.

Holland recommended that IHEs and communities look at their shared destiny and explore together ways to overcome all of the challenges that small post-industrial cities face. She urged stakeholders—business, academia, cities, government, neighborhoods, and networks—to look forward and think about creating a community of collaboration with a shared vision. All of these stakeholders are necessary to help address the tangled economic and social challenges that distressed urban communities face. Holland conveyed the sense of urgency around these challenges that many cities—Chester among them—face. Holland used the term "Wicked Problems" to describe the high poverty, high unemployment, low educational achievement, aging housing stock, lack of services, and other daunting, complex, and multi-layered challenges, that despite our best efforts, have not gone away, and, indeed, have been intensified by the economic crisis that our country has faced in recent years.

Help, however, is at hand. There are a growing number of IHEs that have started to identify themselves as anchor institutions. These institutions have been figuring out—largely by trial and error—how to work at community engagement for nearly 20 years, and they have a body of knowledge and best practices to share. Many of OUP's grantees are in this company.

Holland also sees education and training—at the college level on down—as key to the response and to the solution. Even if the solution inherent in economic redevelopment involves creating jobs in distressed areas, the residents will not be helped by increased job opportunities unless and until the daily social issues that they face—crime, poverty, ill health, poor education—are addressed as well.

Funding and support for higher education on down, however, has eroded and the recession has multiplied the problem. Many, if not all, IHEs and school districts alike are facing less support, more students, and rapidly rising costs. IHEs have hit the wall in being able to put these costs on the backs of students, as the crisis in and debate about student loan borrowing has demonstrated. IHEs and educational systems must develop new ways of dealing with the money issues.

Holland sees several factors coming together, one of which is a greater commitment among today's students to public engagement. Another is a redefinition among IHEs and community activists of what community building entails—equity in participation and economic well-being. A more nuanced view of community building goes beyond just constructing physical structures, which Holland sees as a "deficit model," but linking physical structures and human assets. The greatest local asset is the power of voluntary association, and the process of community building requires innovative ways of bringing these human assets together in a shared project.

She sees anchor institutions as an efficient way to leverage IHE resources into this enhanced process of community building. She notes that IHEs may often be the primary industry in a decayed downtown, as for example, in downtown Cleveland, where Case Western Reserve and Cleveland State are the main businesses. She adds that anchor institutions are not anchors because they are static. They are actively and dynamically engaged in what they see as their shared future with the community. This lesson is not lost on the Federal Reserve, whose report describes the pivotal role of IHEs in the struggling small cities, and mentions the challenges for communities that do not have anchor institutions.

This enhanced process of community engagement requires academics to see the community in a different way. The community is not merely a convenient experiment subject or a place for academics to do research, and then run back to the university to publish. She is advocating for IHEs to directly engage with the community. She acknowledges that within the university there can be pockets of resistance—an experience directly shared by Widener president James T. Harris III—but notes that the new generation of faculty coming from Generation X, Generation Y, and eventually the Millennials, look on community engagement as a positive feature of IHEs, with valuable recruitment and retention possibilities.

Holland pointed out a few global trends that she described as the future of higher education:

1. A change in how research is conducted and disseminated. The Internet has opened up a community of people all around the world who might never meet face-to-face, but share the same problems and interests.

2. The undermining of traditional "ivory tower" knowledge dissemination (for example, via peer-reviewed publishing processes) by the Internet and open and instant information access. Research has become "very dynamic, networked, international, interdisciplinary, and collaborative."

3. A return to the "Big Questions." Engaging the Wicked Problems that are the byproducts of globalization and the post-industrial economy is happening both globally and locally, inspiring scholars and students to be involved in collaborative work that engages these problems.

4. The failure to produce answers through the old ways of researching problems. The role of IHEs "as a valued and critical resource for local, state, national, and global problemsolving" has been undermined. "Pure scholarly research has failed to produce answers" and much of the new work in community engagement and revitalization is interdisciplinary and involves business and community partners.

5. The requirement of new methods of research and experimentation, and the discovery of new metrics for measuring success and ranking IHEs based on their levels of community engagement. Students, for one, value the opportunity for community engagement and service learning, as it enriches education and brings new dimensions to classroom learning.

Holland praised the work that has been done by the Anchor Institutions Task Force, the Coalition of Urban Universities, and Campus Compact throughout the last two decades, which has led to a body of knowledge that constitutes best practices. She stressed that the most important best practice in the community engagement field is the recognition that anchor institutions and communities must engage in partnerships that provide benefits for all parties. Each party to the bargain must be regarded as an equal, and each decides what the benefits will be. For example, an IHE may gain a better learning experience for its students through a program from which the community may expect—and gain—results. Reciprocity and fairness are key to successful collaboration. Holland emphasized that the most successful and fruitful partnerships should feel like an equitable arrangement in a collective, collaborative effort involving the exchange of knowledge. The Wicked Problems cannot be solved without a combined effort. Community engagement, in Holland's view, is a "method involving lived experience, wisdom, and insights."

She notes that the federal government's most successful programs of engagement, such as AmeriCorps' Volunteers In Service to America and OUP's Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) program, have had sustained impact on communities. Current federal policy, such as the HUD's Choice Neighborhoods initiative and SC2 are moving toward placed-based community strategies and cross-agency programs that create locally tailored policies. In community revitalization, one size does not fit all.

Holland offered some "quick illustrations" of successful projects in the field, some which may seem small and modest, but had great local impacts. She noted that projects don't have to be expensive or complicated to work or to bring about valuable and desired results.

1. Boston Architectural College's "Gateway Projects" engaged its students to work with community and neighborhood organizations in distressed areas to develop designs relating to "housing restoration, retail redevelopment, safe streetscapes, and outdoor spaces." Architecture and planning students acquired professional development and client management experience, and the community gained "professionally prepared designs that have increased success rates in gaining loans for implementation."

2. Indiana University Northwest in Gary, Indiana, set up a Center for Economic Education that works with more than 150 school teachers to integrate content regarding local economic information and issues about Gary into school curricula for Grades 6 through 12 to encourage students to pursue higher education.

3. University of Michigan at Flint partnered with the Great Lakes Fishery Trust to support a university-schools partnership that has involved students and teachers from more than 185 schools in place-based learning related to math, science, language arts, and social sciences using joint university-student research on community-based environmental issues. This research has also led to real-life action and solutions in school neighborhoods.

4. University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Omaha Mayor's Office collaborated to develop a guide and a Web site to help local homeowners identify and apply for home rehabilitation support. Students and faculty helped conduct training and evaluations.

5. University of Memphis faculty and students worked with a neighborhood network to end a "food desert"—a local shortage or total absence of access to fresh, affordable foods—by providing a farmer's market. Students, faculty, and community partners lobbied their city council to set up the market, and along the way, gained skills in communication, community decisionmaking, and working with local power structures.

In each of these cases, the project impacts could be felt at the IHE level and in the community. Both parties mutually gained from the experience.

BOX 5 | A Call to Action

An Experienced Practitioner Offers Suggestions From the Field

Barbara Holland offered some strategies for setting up successful IHE-community partnerships based on her experience in visiting IHEs and community partnerships in action:

1. Resist the desire to find the "magic bullet," the one thing—project, development, idea—that will save the day. The individual projects must be part of a comprehensive strategy.
2. Get some early efforts and some early successes under your belt to demonstrate evidence of change and progress.
3. Choose issues that resonate with the IHE's and the community's ideas, goals, and ambitions. Some examples are improving local schools, encouraging good nutrition, helping residents set up healthy homes, and incubating businesses.
4. Expand community-based clinical practice services.
5. Organize institutional purchasing to benefit local businesses and encourage small businesses to be entrepreneurial (for example, using local caterers for campus events).
6. Incentivize local employment and local living (that is, make it possible for IHE staff to live in the communities where they work, through mechanisms such as homebuying subsidies and matching funds).
7. Connect with other cities through cross-city and regional strategies, especially regarding housing quality and attracting new residents.
8. Engage large numbers of students in this work. They will thrive on the opportunity to be involved in community-building activities, either through classes or volunteer activities.

The decisions that an IHE makes today—even taking small steps—will contribute to a healthier institution and a more viable and sustainable community. Together, the IHE and the community become a community of learners, each mutually responsible, each with assets, and each with "skin in the game." Individual goals are enhanced by mutual efforts. "In this context, 'community' designates a group of interacting people who have something in common with one another, sharing similar understandings, goals, and visions for the future."

"My vision of a best practice is maybe you hear of an idea from another community and you see whether or not it is appropriate to fit into a community where you are working. Maybe not exactly; maybe there is a twist or a turn that makes it a local initiative, but it is always good to get ideas from the outside."

Jane C. W. Vincent, HUD's Regional Administrator for Region III

HUD's Engagement With Anchors in Community Partnerships

HUD has long been engaged with facilitating community partnerships and encouraging the role of anchor institutions, and the agency has put forth transformative initiatives to enhance this process of encouraging local ideas. Madlyn Wohlman-Rodriguez introduced two speakers from HUD—Jane Vincent and Sherone Ivey—to speak more about these transformations.

Jane Vincent, HUD's Regional Administrator for Region III, spoke about HUD's transformative initiatives and how the agency recognizes the role that anchor institutions can play. She noted that even the words that we use to describe the process can broaden perspectives about the work. She brought the European perspective, which conceives of the process as community regeneration, rather than community development or revitalization.

These days, HUD is emphasizing:

- **Performing high-quality continued research and evaluation.**
- **Designing and executing major research initiatives.**
- **Delivering on technical assistance and capacity-building.**

She described some of the operational shifts at HUD, which have changed the way in which HUD does business. She noted that the agency has become more adaptable, responsive, and innovative. As HUD moves beyond its legacy approaches, it looks at shaping new markets and incorporating ways to become more green and sustainable. She also noted that in the new and improved HUD, metrics, research, demonstrations, technical assistance, and initiatives to track spending through technology are all initiatives going forward.

All of these components are integral and need to work together. Vincent emphasized that local practitioners are needed to implement these initiatives, measure success, and make improvements in what HUD is doing. She used her hometown of Wilmington, Delaware, as an illustration. Wilmington suffers from many of the ills of urban centers, including a dying main street with isolated corporate centers. She praised the efforts of a few important IHE anchors—the University of Delaware, Wilmington University, and Drexel—and noted an innovative program that partnered with two nationally renowned art schools, Pratt in New York and the Corcoran in Washington, D.C., whereby students could engage in a 2-year

arts-based education at the Delaware College of Art, and then finish their last 2 years at the Pratt or the Corcoran. The program brought art students to the downtown area. Businesses such as coffee shops and bookstores to cater to this population soon followed. Thus, a strategic decision to partner with these schools led to a more vibrant downtown in Wilmington.

Sherone Ivey talked about what OUP does in the areas of community engagement and service learning. OUP grantees have engaged in affordable housing, homeownership training and counseling, mentoring, and tutoring programs. OUP, having funded grantees for 18 years, is a repository of information on funding opportunities and best practices. Its grantees can share models of success and best practices, and develop a network at the events, meetings, and conferences that OUP convenes throughout the year.

"How goes Chester, so goes Widener."

James T. Harris III, President,
Widener University

From Gates to Engagement: Widener University's Journey as an Anchor Institution

President James T. Harris III described the journey of Widener University from a gated university to an engaged community partner with the city of Chester. In the early 2000s, when Harris assumed the presidency of Widener, there was a sense that engaging with Chester—or crossing I-95—was off limits. Some university officials even advised him that he should plan to build better fences. He thought a better idea was to engage the community of Chester in a more meaningful way. In his inaugural address, President Harris promised to educate students to become good and responsible citizens, but noted that the university itself had to first learn to become a responsible citizen.

Harris pointed out that Chester—a struggling city with a poorly performing school district—exists in the midst of great wealth and educational attainment. A mere 2 miles north of the city are some of the wealthiest communities in the nation. The borough of Swarthmore—home to the college of the same name—is half a mile to the east, a community with the highest educational attainment in the region. Widener University, though, is situated in the middle of Chester's high poverty and unemployment. The disparities of income and educational opportunity made for stark contrasts and seemingly unavoidable conflict. One university official described Chester as a black hole in which one throws money and gets nothing in return. Widener, on the

BOX 6 | **Who's Who**

Series Presenters

James T. Harris III

James T. Harris III became the ninth president of Widener University in 2002. Under President Harris's leadership, Widener aspires to be a national model for how an IHE uses its resources to develop a robust learning environment for its students, while addressing the most pressing needs of the metropolitan area that it serves. He has been asked to serve in several local, state, and national leadership roles, including serving as chair of the board of directors for the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania and serving on the board of trustees for the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). Before joining Widener, he served 8 years as president of Defiance College in Ohio. During this highly successful tenure, Defiance College developed the Presidential Service-Leader Scholarship Program and the McMaster School for Advancing Humanity. President Harris has been the recipient of many awards and honors, including the Chief Executive Leadership Award from CASE District II, and the Citizen of the Year award from the Delaware County Chamber of Commerce in recognition of his contributions to the local community.

other hand, was seen by the Chester community as an overprivileged and insatiable dragon that eats up land and does not pay taxes.

Harris wanted to see Widener find ways of becoming involved in the fate and fortunes of Chester, but he appreciated that Widener is in an anomalous position. It is neither a well-funded state university nor a world-renowned private institution like the University of Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, Harris made community engagement a priority of his new administration's strategic planning and visioning process. He sought to connect the curriculum to community engagement and prepare Widener's students to become citizens and the next generation of community leaders. He noted that some parts of the university had already been doing this—most notably the School of Human Service Professions, which overnight changed from "a pariah to a poster child."

Harris explained that by 2003, the movement for change at Widener had started gaining momentum, but then tragedy struck in the form of a random act of violence. In that year, a Widener student was murdered in the course of an armed robbery. This untimely tragedy could have derailed the progress that had been made, but it opened up a dialogue with questions such as what caused a young man from Chester to see armed robbery as his only option and how did the community best address those causes.

In perhaps the most fitting memorial to the Widener student's life, progress toward community engagement continued at Widener. Today, almost 10 years later, the university offers approximately 70 courses with a Chester engagement component. Every student has taken at least one such course in Chester during their time at Widener. Scholarships at Widener are based on a certain number of service hours and a demonstrated commitment to community service. The university has a civic engagement committee, which helps the board of directors stay focused on the mission. The university has created a new entrance to the community, and has ongoing projects: public school assistance, economic development, public health outcome improvement in the city, and mentoring and tutoring opportunities for the city's young people.

President Harris also described how Widener "got into the charter school business," by developing a "robust and holistic" curriculum based on the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) approach. When the school superintendent at the time scrapped the developed curriculum, the university worked to open a charter school that operates on a lottery system and brings in children at kindergarten.

Widener's engagement efforts go across all programs and departments. Social work and nursing students gain experience in the community before they graduate, and the business school facilitates economic development efforts and business incubation projects. The university also has become more inclusive and locally minded in their purchasing. Some of the university's landholdings were turned over to an investor who built housing. Widener also offers $5,000 of assistance as an incentive to employees who want to buy a house in Chester. In turn, these employees advocate for more amenities and better schools in the city.

President Harris admits that Widener's approach may have been scattershot and some initiatives have not been as successful as others. These days the university is trying to be more focused. All along, it has maintained a good relationship with the mayor's office. This rapport between the city and the university has positively influenced the SC2 initiative, in which Chester was designated one of six pilot cities. Two SC2 fellows are housed on campus, and are working on an initiative to attract the arts community to Chester, an initiative that President Harris uses his "presidential bully pulpit" to fully support.

President Harris closed by using his presidential bully pulpit to ask why more universities are not engaging their communities similarly. He wants to see more community-based learning resources made available, and calls on the federal government to find ways to reward IHEs that embrace their role as anchor institutions.

"You need more than the illusion of inclusion. You have to want inclusion."

Fred Clark, President and CEO, Clark Resources

How to Engage and "Get the Most Out of It"

David Maurrasse, the founder and president of Marga Incorporated, moderated a lively panel discussion about how to make the most out of community engagement and how to increase social capital. He stated that one of Marga's goals is to create a space in which people can have a dialogue and share lessons learned on how to set up partnerships that strengthen healthy economic development.

BOX 7 | **Who's Who**

Series Presenters

David Maurrasse

David Maurrasse is the founder and president of Marga Incorporated, which has been providing strategic advice and research to philanthropic initiatives and partnerships since 2000. Marga, in conjunction with the University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center, coordinates the Anchor Institutions Task Force, for which Maurrasse is director. At Columbia University, he is the founding director of the Program on Strategic Partnerships and Innovation at the Earth Institute and adjunct professor at the School of International and Public Affairs. He has served as an assistant professor at Yale University and a senior program advisor at the Rockefeller Foundation. Maurrasse has also published several books, notably *Beyond the Campus: How Colleges and Universities Form Partnerships With Their Communities*. His upcoming book, *Strategic Public Private Partnerships: Innovations and Development*, discusses cross-sector partnerships around the world.

Fred Clark, president of Clark Resources; Paula Silver, dean of the School of Human Services at Widener; and Gwendolyn Smith, president of Springfield Hospital and vice president of Crozer Keystone Health Systems participated in this panel discussion of the underlying dynamics and processes of community engagement.

Clark emphasized the importance of getting stakeholder buy-in at the beginning, or nothing will happen. He cautioned that sincerity has to be at the core of every engagement effort. Community engagement has to be embedded in honesty and cannot be just marketing and packaging. In other words, "even if you say you don't want to discriminate, you won't necessarily have inclusion." When considering how to create self-sustaining buy-in, Clark explained that people make the process work, and that President Harris's programs worked precisely because people who believed in them made them happen. He added that inclusion is not just giving something to get what you want. "You have to change the mindset of the decisionmakers for having inclusion. It is why we buy and hire." Clark even explained that there is a business case for inclusion. When an institution commits to

local purchasing, everyone moves together in a way that is important to the process. "It just isn't about 1,000 taxi rides or 5,000 cookies. It is about a sense of ownership of the process." In this way, buy-in lasts longer, when individual stakeholders have become invested in the process. In short, he advocates for a ground-up approach to development, where the community's ideas and needs are heard, where outside assistance looks at and supports what the community is already doing and what the community has identified as what they are interested in.

Silver, whose efforts at engagement on behalf of the School of Human Service Professions actually preceded President Harris's inauguration, saw the problems in the community and wanted her program to be an asset and not a drain on the community. As she described it, land expansion was the only way that Widener engaged with the community. For example, the university imported workers rather than hiring locally. Rather than working to create a more secure community, it hired campus security.

She noted that leadership made the difference. Even before President Harris, there was a core of Widener faculty who wanted to approach the community with the idea of resilience rather than a deficit model. They looked for allies in the proud and loyal core of the community, such as faith-based institutions, and taking stock of Chester's assets, tried to get it on the federal radar to turn around the decline.

Students in the School of Human Service Professions, as part of their degree, are required to do field training. Silver's thought was to have the students do their fieldwork in Chester, but the city was unable to supervise students, because its social service agencies were underfunded and understaffed. Silver and her colleagues looked for ways to fill in the gaps, and came up with the idea of creating a social work consultation service. She explained that the consultation service was a great idea, but it initially met with distrust in the community because of Widener's history of disengagement. Silver and her colleagues then got some training on how to more effectively engage with the community, and again reached out to faith-based organizations and nonprofits as potential partners to get the consultation service started.

Silver and her colleagues wrote grants and did the community partnership building under the radar until Harris became president. They even applied for a COPC grant, though they did not get it. She recalled how President Harris set the tone for Widener's role as an anchor in the Chester community. Even though President Harris's plan sparked bitter debates among faculty in strategic planning committees, his thinking eventually prevailed and his leadership turned around 90 percent of the faculty.

BOX 8 | **A Call to Action**

An Experienced Practitioner Offers Suggestions From the Field

Paula Silver offered some suggestions based on her experience in overcoming community distrust and engaging in community partnership building:

1. If you do not plan to stick around, do not attempt to engage the community. Broken commitments will just add to the problem.
2. Do not attempt community-building alone. Find community partners to give you credibility.
3. Community engagement is not antithetical to an IHE's educational mission. Learning for students is enhanced through engaging with the community.
4. Get good at grantwriting, as funding has becomes more tenuous.

Silver also noted that turning around Chester's underperforming schools is a first step for changing outcomes for Chester's young people and changing Chester's destiny.

Smith, a key figure in the partnership between Chester Upland Schools and Crozer Keystone Health System, has on-the-ground experience in trying to change educational outcomes for Chester's students. For her, this mission is personal, since it was in high school that she became interested in the health sciences and saw the field as a career possibility. She wanted to give this experience to other Chester high school students, while at the same time addressing the shortage of qualified healthcare workers. She approached the Crozer executives with the questions of why could Chester youth not apply to these programs and why were the schools not educating their students about health careers, and got the executives to agree to a formal contract with the Chester Upland School District to set up a "High School for Health Care Careers" at the former location of Smedley High School.

Smedley High School was a dilapidated old school building. Smith's colleagues had a very short time to get the pilot program ready for the start of the 2008–09 school year and to refurbish the Smedley property for incoming students. Smith got local construction companies and construction unions to donate labor, if she would purchase products such as desks and chairs and construction materials. With a lot of imagination and hard work, Smith's crew was able to renovate Smedley in time for the start of the school year.

The pilot program involved parents as well as students. It recruited 8th graders to come to the Healthcare High School in the 9th grade. Prospective students needed recommendations from teachers and they needed to write personal essays for consideration. A board of parents, teachers, and students selected 100 students for the trial program. Another innovation was that the program created a working laboratory with donated materials, and offered students the possibility of getting Certified Nursing Assistant or Emergency Medical Technician accreditation as well as engaging in college preparatory courses for further education. Students responded enthusiastically to the program. School attendance increased to 92 percent and higher and the school climate and student standardized test scores in reading and math greatly improved.

Unfortunately, the school district made changes to the program in the 2011–12 school year. The school district decided to merge this program with another science magnet program at Showalter High School. After the merge, the Smedley program could not duplicate its previous success. The students in the program were given the option to finish at Delaware Community College; Smith and Chester community leaders are still looking into ways to bring the successful and popular program back in another guise.

"One of the centerpieces of the SC2 initiative...is that we have these inter-agency federal teams on the ground that are truly inter-agency...and what they do is roll up their sleeves and work with the mayor and his staff on a regular basis and say, 'What are some key priorities that are driving your vision for your economic future and how can we help with that?'"

Mark Linton, Executive Director of the White House Council on SC2

Conclusion: Looking to the Future and Leveraging Community Partnerships With Strong Cities, Strong Communities

SC2, a current White House initiative that calls on support from several federal agencies, offers a kernel of hope to revitalization efforts in Chester, by further enhancing the community partnerships that Widener and the city have already been creating for several years. In 2011, HUD chose Chester as one of six pilot cities for the SC2 initiative.[8] The designation carried with it technical assistance and staff support to build the kind of partnerships that can accelerate economic revitalization and turn around cities, although it provided no new money to make things happen.[9]

BOX 9 | **Bridges to the Outside**

The Strong Cities, Strong Communities Initiative

This White House-led federal inter-agency program is focused on retooling and rebuilding the capacity of cities facing long-term economic challenges. Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) focuses on making it easier for local governments to navigate the maze of federal agencies when seeking federal funding, and it provides assistance in developing partnerships for economic revitalization that will build up local economies and create jobs. Six cities were chosen in 2011 to be pilot locations: Chester, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Fresno, California; Memphis, Tennessee; and New Orleans, Louisiana. HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan described the six participating cities as "critical to America's prosperity and future economic growth."[10] He also noted that the cities are currently undergoing economic, demographic, and urban planning changes.

Initiative strategies are to strengthen the capacity of local partners to implement government programs and participate in decisionmaking and planning; support knowledge sharing by disseminating best practices; help incubate and test new ideas; and encourage a local and regional focus in planning and community development.

Mark Linton, executive director of the White House Council on SC2, led a panel discussion with some of the Chester and Widener personnel who are involved in Chester's SC2 initiative programs. These individuals included John Linder, the mayor of Chester; Brett Roe, an SC2 community partner and a local business owner of Roe Fabricators, a sign fabrication and large format printing company; David Marable, the SC2 program manager and a senior management analyst in HUD's Philadelphia regional office; Julie L. Dietrich, SC2 university liaison and director of special projects and initiatives at Widener; Ricardo Soto-Lopez, an urban planner and one of the SC2 fellows at Widener; and Janet S. Riley Ford, an SC2 community partner and the director of the Chester Youth Collaborative (CYC). The diverse experiences that these individuals bring to the SC2 initiative are examples of the wide-ranging potential in community partnership building.

BOX 10 | Who's Who

Series Presenters

Mark Linton

Mark Linton serves as the executive director of the White House Council on SC2, created through an executive order by President Barack Obama to oversee the work of the SC2 initiative. SC2 is an innovative pilot program designed to support locally driven visions for job creation and economic development, and strengthen municipal operational capacity, while also improving federal policymaking, slashing red tape, and better leveraging taxpayer investments. Linton has worked for the President in a variety of capacities for more than 6 years, most recently serving at HUD as the general deputy assistant secretary for congressional and intergovernmental relations, helping to oversee the agency's legislative, policy, and constituent service activities with Congress. Before that, he was the director of the HUD Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Linton described the SC2 initiative and the rationale for the choice of Chester, which even though it has suffered a decline in its manufacturing economy, has assets and represents a ripe opportunity to rebuild its economy in a new direction. The partnership between Widener and the city stood out as an outstanding example of the role of anchor institutions. Linton explained that the federal government is not here to say that this is how you ought to do things, but is available to provide advice and technical assistance. One of the goals of the pilot program is seeing how cities can partner with outside organizations, such as anchor institutions, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector to set up a network that is engaging in community revitalization. The federal government is looking for policy lessons on what does and does not work.

Linder, Chester's newly elected mayor, expressed Chester's excitement to be working with the SC2 "family," which has brought energy and resources to bring about the positive changes that he wants to see for Chester and has provided the opportunity to learn from federal experts how to do better for the city. A Widener graduate and a retired professor of social sciences from Delaware County Community College, he said that when he came back to Chester, Widener was still there—it had just been underutilized. He also acknowledged how President Harris's vision for Widener's role in the community has contributed to the idea of one Chester working together. He welcomes the chance to change policy in Chester and increase transparency and good governance. In the past year, Chester has upgraded the city Web site, is working to get the Crozer Healthcare High School program back on track, and is broadcasting city council meetings via closed circuit TV. He looks forward to maximizing SC2 inputs to transform Chester into an entrepreneurial community where everyone and everything has value—a "small but mighty" city.

Dietrich, who serves as the SC2 liaison for the program, the university, and the mayor's office, works to enhance the ways that Widener can be supportive of the SC2 initiative. In many ways, the initiative's focus is on local and

federal governments, and Widener is in the back seat. Widener shares the city's vision and is oriented to find ways to cross bridges. She works closely with the SC2 fellows and looks for ways to incorporate students in some of the SC2 projects. The spirit at Widener is that everyone is a community partner working for a better Chester. She notes that the city has already benefitted from the SC2 initiative, which has spurred local partnerships and collaborations.

A few representatives of some of the collaborations and partnerships spoke about the initiatives with which they are involved. Roe, a private-sector employer and small business owner, graduated from Widener. Based on his experience there, he decided to reinvest in the city and opened his sign and printing business in Chester. He has been involved in developing an electronic message board with positive mentions of key points about the city. CYC Director Ford spoke about her program, which looks for collaborations within the community to create a network to enhance afterschool programs. The community needed small partnerships to continue to provide afterschool enrichment programs for Chester's youth, when the schools fell down on the job.

Marable, a senior management analyst from HUD, and the SC2 program manager, highlighted three key factors that led to the SC2 initiative's choosing Chester as a pilot city:

1. The Obama Administration and the White House decided that federal agencies needed to do business differently in the field of community engagement—namely enhancing buy-in, empowerment, and ownership of the process. Initiatives in Chester demonstrated these qualities.
2. Mayor Linder actively sought out Widener and made it a key partner in a truly collaborative partnership.
3. The mayor's office had established a community liaison team with people who were community leaders in Chester and with whom residents identified and respected.

SC2 Fellow Ricardo Soto-Lopez, an urban planner with 25 years of experience, spoke about Chester's future. He described his assignment to promote the arts in Chester as a focal point for redeveloping its downtown. He noted that the arts are a multi-million dollar industry in the region. To foster this goal, he has met several times with local business leaders and property owners, and community members and learned that much of Chester's unused property is not city-owned, but in tax abatement with private owners sitting on property and waiting for market conditions to change. With the city having less leverage to call the shots, Chester needs particular catalyst projects—such as the arts-oriented initiatives—to spur the redevelopment of a vibrant downtown. He noted that Chester has some success factors in place. It has what he calls "bones," or real estate that is intact; it has robust anchor institutions such as Widener; and it has the SC2 initiative providing technical assistance. All of these advantages can serve as a springboard for these catalyst projects to spur community development.

In response to the question of how sustainability is being built in when the SC2 initiative is gone, Linton responded that the pilot cities in the second year are focusing on building in sustainability. This legacy design work is one of the primary functions of the work of the SC2 fellows. In addition, the SC2 initiative is all about bringing different stakeholders together and getting them to talk to each other and make things happen. The SC2 team will not always be in place, but the relationships will not go away—for example, the relationship that Marable and Linton have established with the mayor's office and Widener. This initiative represents a change in the way that the federal government has done business, Linton stressed. Because the emphasis has been on relationship building and partnership building, there is going to be an "alumni network" of the pilot city cohort after the first phase, and the team in the White House SC2 initiative expects to stay connected. There will continue to be peer networking opportunities and other ways to institutionalize best practices. Mayor Linder also agreed that SC2 has been a catalyst for change that has helped Chester galvanize the resources needed to empower Chester's community leaders, residents, business people, anchor institutions, and nonprofits to make the changes they hope to see. Chester and Widener leaders and the SC2 team together believe that establishing

a strong organizational structure, a strategic plan and policies combined with the sound leadership that is in place in Chester, will move the city forward toward the vision of a 21st-century Chester.

Theresa Singleton, vice president and community affairs officer at the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, summed up the "high-level" discussion where everyone took away "accessible and thoughtful examples of programs and program models and tools that will be helpful in thinking about the roles" that anchor institutions, specifically IHEs and hospitals can play. She added that the program organizers had two primary concerns. First, they did not want to focus overly on the collaborations that were successful in big cities such as Boston and Philadelphia. They felt that there was something "unique and special about the cities of Chester's size," and wanted to bring in examples that fit in the context of smaller cities suffering challenging problems. Second, they did not want to set the bar or expectations too high by "suggesting that anchor institutions or educational facilities could solve all of the problems" that cities face. The Federal Reserve's research has given them a "pretty good picture" of these fiscal and economic challenges. What the organizers felt was important was to have an "honest conversation about the reasonable opportunities that exist for collaboration and partnership between anchor institutions and cities and communities."

Endnotes

[1] Mallach, A. (2012). *In Philadelphia's Shadow: Small Cities in the Third Federal Reserve District,* a publication of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, p. 5.

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[3] Wardrip, K. (2012). "Keys to Success for Small Industrial Cities," *Cascade,* a publication of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, (81) Fall 2012, p. 3.

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[5] http://www.eda.gov/SC2Challenge/

[6] Mallach. *In Philadelphia's Shadow*.

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[9] Mallach, *In Philadelphia's Shadow*, p. 60.

[10] "HUD Selects German Marshall Fund to Manage Strong Cities, Strong Communities Fellowship Program." December 2, 2011. HUD Press Release. Available at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/press/press_releases_media_advisories/2011/HUDNo.11-281.

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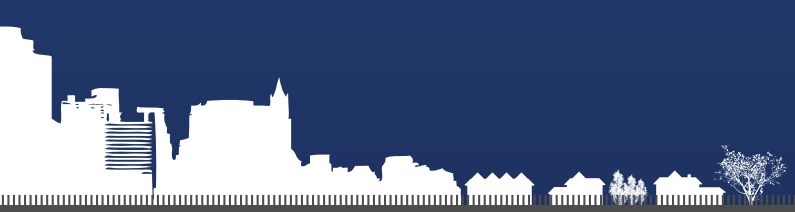

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