

# **Educating for Community Change: Higher Education's Proposed Role in Community Transformation through the Federal Promise Neighborhood Policy**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigated a federal comprehensive community initiative, the Promise Neighborhood initiative, in order to understand higher education community engagement in an embedded context. Promise Neighborhood programs aim to create a place-based system of family and education services that can support youth from early childhood through college access and career. Through a qualitative analysis of the 21 Promise Neighborhood awardee applications nationwide, the author concluded that higher education institutions commit to these partnerships in four ways: mission-related practices associated with teaching, research, and service; capacity-building practices, including teacher training and community leadership development; programs and services, including direct community services; and administrative functions, such as grant management. Many of these functions in university-community partnership intersect with contributions related to university missions. Exploring higher education–community engagement from the perspective of community goals offers insight into practices related to universities' and colleges' civic mission and potential as anchor institutions.

## **Introduction**

Over the last decade, higher education involvement in communities has been increasingly framed as part of a movement. At the same time, it is criticized as driven by institutional need, with potential to privilege diverse aims of higher education institutions over community needs (*Cruz & Giles, 1999; Maurrasse, 2001*). Comprehensive community initiatives, such as the federal Promise Neighborhoods, offer a broader lens to investigate higher education community involvement. Acting among many partnering organizations in communities, higher education institutions offer unique contributions to a change process. The Promise Neighborhood initiative aims “to take an all-hands-on-deck approach to lifting our families and our communities out of poverty” through a network of community organizations (*U.S. Department of Education, 2010*). In the ideal partnership, higher education institutions are embedded community partners, meaning

that they function as part of a system of solutions to deeply rooted community challenges.

## **Models of Higher Education Community Engagement**

Institutions of higher education are embedded in their communities, and thus have responsibilities to engage their neighbors as productive institutional citizens (Boyer, 1996; Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999; Dubb & Howard, 2007; Maurrasse, 2001; Smerek, Pasque, Mallory, & Holland, 2005). Boyer (1996) is often cited for igniting an institutional movement in community engagement through his articulation of the “scholarship of engagement,” which called for higher education to become a “vigorous partner” contributing to solutions for the “most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems” (*p. 18*). When he wrote this more than a decade ago, he saw higher education institutions falling short on this aim.

Recently scholars have increased efforts to model and, thus, encourage the engagement practices of higher education in communities. Ostrander (2004), in her influential multi-case study, finds three dominant rationales for community engagement in higher education institutions: pedagogy, encouraging civic outcomes of educating students; theories of democracy, enhancing grassroots theories of democratic participation that can be accomplished through community organizing and partnerships; and the application of knowledge, supporting the change needed within the institutions of society to achieve a more inclusive and effective democracy. The motivations to engage in relevant ways with community are multiple, and to be successful in creating effective relationships, institutions need to cultivate institutional engagement at multiple levels. Jacoby (2009) grounds institutional practice of civic engagement in higher education’s mission, asking colleges and universities to form their responsibility to the community based on their “unique mission, culture, and traditions” (*p. 10*). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching allows institutions to assess their involvement with communities with its Community Engagement elective classification, and this has become an influential driver of engagement practices. More than 300 institutions hold this classification, and the applications offer an in-depth profile of institutional engagement guided by foundational indicators, such as institutional identity and culture; curricular indicators, such as service-learning and tracking student outcomes; and outreach and partnership indicators, such as sharing of resources with the community and structures for community feedback (Carnegie Foundation, 2006). Another round of elective classifications is planned for 2015.

## Anchor Institutions

Many models of higher education engagement can be critiqued as promoting higher education and community engagement as completely separable ends unto themselves, or for considering these goals exclusively in terms of how they serve institutions. Models of engagement often start from the institution. Weerts (2011) offers an insightful criticism from the perspective of university advancement. He argues that if higher education tied its engagement to broader community goals, it would struggle less to demonstrate relevance and thus would frame its work more competitively, enabling institutions to position themselves to receive public funds. An alternative frame for understanding higher education is the “anchor institution” approach, which highlights how higher education institutions operate in their locations, seeking economic development ends. Cantor (2009) argues that an anchor institution is characterized by “designing and giving substance and solidity to the kind of inclusive community and democratic culture that befit a diverse society” (p. 9), and doing so contributes to a “civic infrastructure” that she argues can “make a difference” and “create a pipeline of inclusive human capital for the future” (p. 9). She emphasizes that projects at Syracuse University built in accord with this concept are large, collaborative, and cultivate the “entrepreneurial spirit” in communities (p. 9). Harkavy (2006) enhances the anchor approach by promoting a specific way in which universities should engage with the community—through schools. He writes, “The goal for universities, I believe, should be to contribute significantly to developing and sustaining democratic schools, communities and societies” (p. 7). He argues that the work of a civic institution cannot be severed from the community. A relationship is necessary to further the democratic mission of higher education.

Axelroth and Dubb (2010) highlight three primary roles of higher education institutions as they “consciously apply their long-term, place-based economic power in combination with their human and intellectual resources, to better the long-term welfare of the communities in which they reside” (p. 3). They find that an anchor institution can serve as a facilitator, leader, and convener. Anchor institutions participate in community development activities as *facilitators* when community development projects have limited funding, and relationships with higher education institutions play a strong role due to funding constraints. Higher education institutions acting as *leaders* often become engaged in community in response to crises. For example, they may work to improve local conditions to prevent crime. Finally, anchor institutions serve as *conveners* when they make strategic choices to engage, and work in nonadjacent neighborhoods where “universities view the

community as co-participants in leadership and agenda setting and give significant focus to building community and resident capacity" (*p. 11*).

These models offer several ways to understand higher education community involvement from an institutional perspective, and an anchor institutions approach broadens the institutional thinking from considering how community involvement serves its mission or how to create institutions that can engage, to understanding how higher education engages toward an end. Thinking about how higher education operates toward a specific goal in community, such as improving opportunities for youth and families in a neighborhood, can deepen our understanding of engagement and how colleges and universities can be expected to operate as anchor institutions.

## **Promise Neighborhood Program**

In 2010 the U.S. federal government launched a grant program called the Promise Neighborhoods, which aims "to improve significantly the educational and developmental outcomes of children in our most distressed communities, and to transform those communities" (*Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2010, p. 24671*). The federal government has funded several one-year planning grants with a special focus on "breaking down silos" and creating information-sharing opportunities across institutions and organizations; this planning phase of the program looks to build bridges across existing programs and services, while building a system that supports youth.

This system was modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone, a neighborhood revitalization program in Harlem with an education-based approach to community revitalization (*Tough, 2005*). Community partners banded together to apply for the Promise Neighborhood grants, and in order to qualify they submitted lengthy application packets, which included abstracts, detailed program narratives, and memoranda of understanding among key organizations. Applicants to the 2010 Promise Neighborhoods were nonprofit organizations, including faith-based partners, or higher education institutions. The applications needed to be partner-based and define a specific region, with at least one school in the designated neighborhood.

During the 2010 initiation year, the federal government allocated \$10 million to create 20 \$400,000–\$500,000 one-year planning grants. The allocated funds are less than 1% of the federal education budget, but the Promise Neighborhood program has lofty aims of sharing data across community organizations to more

seamlessly serve youth from “the cradle through college to career” (*Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2010, p. 24671*). Additionally, these one-year planning grants prepared communities to compete for three-year implementation grants in 2011, in annual amounts of \$4 to \$6 million, to support the planned structures and programs.

The applications were scored by anonymous peer reviewers along six dimensions: need for the project, quality of the project design, quality of project services, quality of personnel, quality of the management plan, and the program’s significance. Establishing need and the project design center on a continuum along two dimensions: (1) academic program indicators, and (2) family and community support indicators. The core academic indicators include early learning, moving through proficiency in core subjects and middle school transition, and then on to high school and success in college. The family and community support indicators include health, safety, stability, family and community engagement in learning, and education technology. Higher education institutions were not required partners in an initiative, but the “cradle-college-career” continuum of education and community partnerships encourages a range of roles for higher education.

## Research Questions

Because of its focus on broad systemic neighborhood change and the potential for higher education institutions to support these partnerships, the Promise Neighborhood Initiative creates an opportunity to closely examine colleges’ and universities’ diverse practices as anchor institutions—in other words, the process through which these institutions serve as anchors in their communities, and what contributions they are expected to make. This study explored the Promise Neighborhood applications to understand higher education’s role in community development through a primary research question: In education-based, community models of transformation, what are the proposed functions for higher education institutions?

## Method

The purpose of this study was to understand how higher education institutions are expected to contribute to proposed collaborative, neighborhood-wide change initiatives and what that means for an embedded, anchor institution framework for higher education engagement. I employed qualitative analysis of the 21 Promise Neighborhood awardee applications. In this section, I describe the awardees, the data, and my approach to analysis. I also include potential study limitations.

## Promise Neighborhood Awardees and Data Sources

In September 2010, 21 organizations were designated Promise Neighborhood planning grant recipients from a pool of 339 applicants (see Table 1). The one-year awards ranged from \$400,000 to \$500,000 and served a range of neighborhoods across the continental United States.

**Table 1. Promise Neighborhood 2010 Planning Grant Awards**

Neighborhood	Location	Lead Organization	Neighborhood Population
Appalachian	Clay, Jackson, and Owsley Counties, Kentucky*	Berea College	42,900
Arlington	Lawrence, Massachusetts	Community Day Care Center of Lawrence, Inc.	14,700
Athens	Georgia	Athens-Clarke County Family Connection, Inc.	100,000 (34,000 students)
Atlanta	Georgia	Morehouse School of Medicine, Inc.	40,000
Boston	Massachusetts	Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative	22,753
Boyle Heights	Los Angeles, California	Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission	97,000
Buffalo	New York	Westminster Foundation	11,000
Cheyenne	Northern Cheyenne Reservation, Montana**	Boys & Girls Club of the Northern Cheyenne Nation	7,280
District of Columbia	Washington, D.C.	Cesar Chavez Public Policy Charter High School	7,000
Delta	Indianola, Mississippi*	Delta Health Alliance, Inc.	12,066
Gulfton	Houston, Texas	Neighborhood Centers, Inc.	53,754
Harlem	New York City	Abyssinian Development Corporation	14,651
Hayward	California	California State University East Bay Foundation, Inc.	73,259
Los Angeles	California	Youth Policy Institute	32,007
Little Rock	Arkansas	University of Arkansas at Little Rock	24,592
Main South	Worcester, Massachusetts	United Way of Central Massachusetts	Not available <sup>1</sup>
River Rouge	Michigan	The Guidance Center	8,321
San Antonio	Texas	United Way of San Antonio & Bexar County	11,476
St. Paul	Minneapolis, Minnesota	Amherst H. Wilder Foundation	22,150
Sunset Park	New York City	Lutheran Family Health Centers/ Lutheran Medical Center	Not available <sup>2</sup>
Universal	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	University Community Homes	50,000

\* rural program      \*\*tribal program

The Promise Neighborhood awardee application abstracts, narratives, memorandums of understanding, and reviewer feedback were publicly available on the Department of Education's website. Compiled, these applications constitute more than 1,800 pages of relevant text with the potential to describe higher education institutions' proposed roles in these planned neighborhood transformation efforts.

The applications and accompanying documents serve as compelling texts to understand higher education engagement for two reasons. (1) Higher education institutions were approximately 20% of the successful Promise Neighborhoods applicants for planning grants, and among the final awardees several lead organizations were higher education institutions. (2) An explicit goal of the program is community transformation by improving educational opportunity through college and career, so a strong motivation (and incentive) exists for higher education institutions to partner.

## Approach to Analysis

The applications were reviewed individually to acquire descriptive information about the communities, partnership designs, and stakeholders. From the applications, I compiled information across the awardees about the neighborhoods and partners, including the population; number of partners; the type of organizations; the characteristics of the higher education institutions involved, including student population, institutional structure, and Carnegie Classifications; and the higher education areas of involvement along the continuum of community change for the program. I then identified the institutional level of involvement—in other words, whether the involvement was departmental, individual, or school- or university-wide. The level of the signing partner within higher education institutions was an important indicator of the level of involvement (where applicable).

Once relevant information about the diverse partners—with special emphasis on the higher education institutions—was identified, I coded the applications to flag passages framing higher education involvement and the expectations of these partners in the Promise Neighborhoods. The proposal narratives and memoranda of understanding yielded the most relevant data about higher education partnerships. Within the application information about higher education, I qualitatively analyzed these excerpts, resulting in themes relevant to engagement practices within the partnerships, as well as practices relevant to higher education involvement and expectations based in the neighborhood change efforts.

This is similar to the constant comparative method employed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). I read and reread the applications, coding them based on themes relevant to models of partnership. I then revisited these emergent codes, connecting them back to the points of analysis outlined above.

Trustworthiness was accounted for by attending to additional supporting documents and researcher triangulation. By following press reports about the Promise Neighborhood initiative, I could follow shifting trends. I also triangulated the application data by visiting partner websites. These supporting documents gave context and depth to my understanding of the partnerships and higher education institutions' involvement. Additionally, during the coding process, the coded institutional practices were shared with another advanced researcher for triangulation. When disagreements emerged, the codes were deliberated until agreement could be reached, and the findings were then coded appropriately.

## **Limitations**

Although hundreds of communities applied to be Promise Neighborhoods, only the 21 awardees are represented in this study, limiting its scope. Additionally, these applications may not reflect *actual* practice in community, as they articulate a plan and agreements about future grant-dependent practice. However, the selected Promise Neighborhood applications represent exemplary cases in partnership, recognized through a peer review process determining their federal financial support. They are worth examining closely for this reason alone. They reflect reviewers' expectations of what successful partnership configurations and practices would be. Other researchers have effectively employed an externally defined exemplary case selection method to explore community engagement, resulting in significant contributions. O'Meara (2007) used this sampling approach to understand faculty motivations, and Ostrander (2004) used "excellence" as a case identification strategy in her work to understand the civically engaged campus. I am careful to note that these applications do not represent the practice of higher education partnership (which is often more complicated than any plan). Rather, they represent expectations from community members and nationwide peer reviewers about what a successful community transformation plan would entail.

Additionally, limitations could result because, although it is a comprehensive community initiative, the Promise Neighborhood program has the explicit aim of improving schools. This is certainly not the only leverage point for engaged scholarship in higher education, nor should it be. Because of the program's educational aims,

these partnerships could be particularly configured in some ways to best meet this goal. Within the confines of this limitation, this study could still serve to inform partnerships aimed at improving practice with this end in mind.

## Findings

Analysis of the roles of higher education institutions in the Promise Neighborhood applications<sup>3</sup> shows a wide range of practices for higher education in communities that support colleges' and universities' potential to create wide-reaching community transformation systems. In this section, I highlight how higher education institutions were planned partners in the aggregate across the Promise Neighborhoods and then offer analysis of the diverse roles and functions higher education institutions potentially play in these partnerships.

### General Roles of Higher Education in the Promise Neighborhoods

Overall, higher education institutions were heavily involved in the Promise Neighborhoods. Approximately 44 unique institutions were outlined as partners to serve multiple functions within the 21 designated neighborhoods. Three higher education institutions were lead organizations serving to administer the grant (Berea College, the Morehouse School of Medicine, and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock), and one nonprofit foundation to improve a higher education institution also led a Promise Neighborhood (California State University East Bay Foundation). The remaining 40 institutions served multiple roles, including as a signing partner in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or as a peripheral or planned future contributor to the Promise Neighborhood. They were public and private institutions, varying in size, mission, and proximity to the neighborhood.

### The Specific Functions of Higher Education Across the Promise Neighborhoods

The application data indicate that higher education contributions to the Promise Neighborhoods fall into four primary categories: capacity building, programs and services, mission-related contributions, and partnership-maintaining contributions (see Table 2). Collectively, the Promise Neighborhoods included roles for higher education across every aspect of the cradle-to-college-to-career continuum<sup>4</sup>, as well as many roles that were not emphasized in the formal Promise Neighborhood program outline.

**Table 2. Functions of Higher Education Across the Promise Neighborhoods**

<b>Mission Based Contributions</b>		
<b>Capacity-Building</b>	<b>Programming &amp; Services</b>	<b>Partnership Maintenance</b>
Cultural capacity	Adult education	Administrative
Early childhood training	College access/readiness programming	Convening
Health professional training	Dual enrollment	Planning
Neighborhood leader and organization capacity	Early childhood programming	
School improvement	Other youth programming	
Sustainability		
Workforce capacity		

## **Capacity-Building Contributions**

The capacity-building elements of the Promise Neighborhoods are those potential contributions to systemic solutions that add value to the neighborhood through training and development. Higher education institutions contributed to developing an underlying structure of institutions, organizations, and individuals working toward long-term success of the initiative—and the neighborhood. Across the partnerships, higher education institutions committed to building the neighborhoods' capacity by strengthening early childhood education training, improving schools, developing neighborhood leadership and organizational capacity, contributing to a cultural change, emphasizing sustainability, and building workforce capacity (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Higher Education Capacity-Building Contributions by Function**

<b>Culture Building</b>	<b>Workforce Capacity</b>	<b>Early Childhood Training</b>	<b>Leadership/ Organizational Capacity</b>	<b>School Improvement</b>	<b>Sustainability</b>
Chief Dull Knife College	Delta State University	Athens Technical College	Houston Community College	Chief Dull Knife College	Temple University
Colleges of Worcester Consortium	Los Angeles Mission College	Bank Street College of Education	Trinity University	College of Visual Arts	
	Los Angeles Valley College	Los Angeles Valley College	University of Arkansas at Little Rock	CUNY-Brooklyn College SOE	
	Quinsigamond Community College	UDC-Community College		Teachers College at Columbia University	
				Trinity University	
				UCLA	
				University of Arkansas at Little Rock	
				University of Georgia College of Education	
				University of Minnesota	

### **Cultural contributions.**

Another social aspect of the Promise Neighborhood capacity-building efforts by higher education institutions involved supporting the promotion of local culture in the community. Chief Dull Knife College (CDKC) eloquently describes its contributions to the Cheyenne Promise Neighborhood Application, sharing its vision through a

prediction from a nineteenth century Northern Cheyenne leader, Chief Dull Knife . . . “We can no longer live the way we used to. We cannot move around no more the way we were brought up. We have to learn a new way of life. Let us ask for schools to be built in our country so that our children can go to these schools and learn this new way of life.” It is the mission of CDKC to provide Northern Cheyenne culturally influenced education through quality life-long learning opportunities. CDKC’s activities include building a “college-going culture” within each school in the neighborhood and dual enrollment opportunities through Montana State

University (Bozeman and Billings) and University of Montana. These activities align with the [local partnership] in developing and supporting a college-going culture; opportunities for children in the neighborhood to pursue a higher education; and preparation of children for a career.

The role of tribal colleges to support a “college-going culture” is an essential component of the Cheyenne Promise Neighborhood. Other neighborhoods, however, also incorporate higher education institutions to mark this important cultural capacity. The Worcester College Consortium emphasizes in the application narrative their orientation to the “awareness of college culture and expectations” across its organization member programs, especially as they influence the ambitions and potential for first-generation college students.

### **Workforce capacity.**

Workforce capacity refers to labor force development aligned with positions in local industries, such as health or technology. The institutions supporting this role were all associate’s-degree-granting institutions. Quinsigamond Community College (QCC) (in Worcester, Massachusetts), through the Boston Advanced Technological Education Collaborative (BATEC), created a series of “interactive workshops to increase awareness and promote Information Technology careers. QCC is committed to run a second series as part of our community building solutions in the [Promise Neighborhood].” Los Angeles Valley College pledged that its “Job Training Office will work with the program to plan for implementation of job training services for parents and community residents in high wage and stable fields such as health care.” These institutions have dedicated their efforts to doing what community colleges already do, but focus specifically in this target area, and cooperate with information-sharing efforts within the Promise Neighborhoods.

### **Early childhood training.**

Associate’s-degree-granting institutions also contributed to early childhood training efforts. For example, Bank Street College of Education contributes to “supporting professional development for preschool teachers.” District of Columbia Community College (affiliated with University of the District of Columbia) elaborates the contribution it will make to the DC Promise Neighborhood:

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In partnership with the Community College of the District of Columbia, [the DC Promise Neighborhood] will offer Child Development Associate classes, as well as AA- and BA-level child development courses at the nearby Educare facility, which offers a state-of-the art training room and observation windows into its care-giving environment.

At least four associate's institutions aligned with these efforts to better train for early childhood in communities.

### **School improvement.**

The school improvement efforts, which accounted for a large majority of higher education involvement, primarily focused on improvement in the classroom through evidence-based instruction techniques and professional development. For example, Trinity University, working in the San Antonio Promise Neighborhood, aims to “Explore implementation of evidence based practices to improve low performing schools; [and provide] professional development support, designed to enhance teacher and administrator effectiveness and the use of evidence-based curricula, to all Eastside K-12 campuses and the Tynan Early Childhood Center.” Similarly, Teacher’s College aims to “Strengthen Professional Learning Communities in schools to promote faculty use of its student data to drive instruction and understand the impact of its curriculum on student learning.” The majority of these institutions are master’s- or research-level higher education institutions. Only one of the higher education partners—of nine total—planning to contribute in this way is an associate's-granting institution: Chief Dull Knife College plans to “collaborate via a local Circle of Schools initiative led by CDKC and aimed at increasing k-12 academic performance—particularly, in reading and math.”

### **Leadership and organizational capacity.**

Neighborhood leadership and organizational capacity building was also articulated through institutional dedication to cultivating the assets in the community—local people and stable organizations. For example, the Gulfton Promise Neighborhood Planning Council, an advisory board, will include two students from Houston Community College: “one traditional age and one adult.” These students would be drawn from the community. Another institution, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, goes deeper into leadership development in the community by running “Neighborhood

Leadership Academy . . . [and] numerous neighborhood associations, both existing and recently formed," which "have become increasingly active." They also contribute to nonprofit organization development through the Institute of Government, which is "focused on improving the quality of government and nonprofit agencies in Arkansas." The Institute of Government's "faculty and staff have years of experience providing high quality public policy analysis, applied research, and management training to local organizations." Alternatively, Trinity University articulates a more general "community engagement" commitment in the neighborhood.

### **Sustainability.**

The only higher education institution that articulated a contribution to the long-term financial planning for the initiative was Temple University (in Philadelphia). It stood alone with this unique contribution from higher education to the long-term success of the neighborhood.

In sum, the capacity-building commitments of higher education institutions planned in these partnerships reach across the neighborhoods involved. These efforts are intended to strengthen the neighborhood, to educate residents, and to provide long-term structures for success in the neighborhood. Partnerships of this category were planned to overwhelmingly focus on school improvement—a primary goal of the Promise Neighborhood initiative. By strengthening teacher education programs to support early childhood and schools, higher education institutions could make significant contributions to the long-term success of the neighborhoods. Higher education institutions also aimed to build capacity along social dimensions, by such means as building an educational culture, improving community leadership, and increasing local workforce capacity through various forms of training. Only in one case, however, was a higher education institution expressing dedicated energy toward ensuring the initiative's long-term financial sustainability.

### **Programming and Services**

Higher education institutions also planned contributions in the Promise Neighborhoods that would work directly with youth and adults through programming. In the planning-grant applications, higher education institutions support the Promise Neighborhood continuum of solutions through academic and college-access programming, adult-education programs, early-childhood programming, dual enrollment efforts, and other forms of programming that reach beyond formal education (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Higher Education Institutions as Program and Service Providers in the Promise Neighborhoods**

<b>Academic and College Access Programming</b>		<b>Early Childhood Programming</b>	<b>Adult Education</b>	<b>Other Youth Programming</b>	<b>Dual Enrollment</b>
City College of New York-College NOW	Los Angeles Valley College	California State University-Northridge	Athens Technical College	California State University-Northridge	Chief Dull Knife College
Gainesville State College	Mississippi State	California State University East Bay	Mississippi Delta Community College	Houston Community College	Wayne County Community College
Georgetown University Ward 7 Initiative	Mississippi Valley State University Extension	Houston Community College	Quinsigamond Community College	State University of New York at Buffalo	
Northern Essex Community College	Trinity University	Los Angeles Mission College	State University of New York at Buffalo	University of Arkansas at Little Rock	
Piedmont College		Quinsigamond Community College			
State University of New York at Buffalo		Roxbury Community College			
University of Georgia College of Education		University of California-Los Angeles			
University of Massachusetts-Boston		Worcester State University-Latino Education Institute			
University of Massachusetts-Lowell					

### **Academic and college-access programming.**

The majority of higher education commitments across Promise Neighborhood programming involve postsecondary access or academic strengthening programs. However, some proposed or existing programs specifically develop around college access or college knowledge, while others focus on performance in specific academic subjects, such as the STEM fields or literacy.

For example, the Athens Promise Neighborhood aims to include existing academic programs from Athens Technical College, University of Georgia, Piedmont College, and Gainesville State University. In the DC Promise Neighborhood, Georgetown University's Ward 7 Initiative supports the partnership "through staff and student-run literacy programs, academic support services and college preparation programs, as well as faculty and course initiatives..." SUNY Buffalo also offers a wide range of educational programming services tied specifically to the institution's mission and college access:

The State University of New York at Buffalo vision is to enlarge not only its school's enrollment from within Buffalo and outside, but also its potential to attract top-flight faculty and researchers in order to regenerate the economic future of the region. This will enable UB to address specific needs of the community and mobilize resources and opportunities that strengthen academic preparation and college access. UB is committed to accelerated learning opportunities that expose, excite, educate, and engage youth in the STEM pathways (science, technology, engineering, and math), college preparation workshops and resources including SAT prep, college application boot-camps, mentoring, tutoring, and related support.

These SUNY Buffalo programs are all directly related to youth service in educational access.

### **Early childhood programming.**

Early childhood programming is available for youth and families in many Promise Neighborhoods, and in some it is a service that higher education institutions may contribute to support the Promise Neighborhoods. This is another service offered primarily by many associate's-degree-granting institutions in direct service to youth. For example, Northern Essex Community College in Lawrence, Massachusetts offers "on-site childcare for low-income and at-risk children from the neighborhood." In the Los Angeles Promise Neighborhood, the Los Angeles Valley College's Child Development Department commits its Family Resource Center to

work with the partnership to develop services to be implemented that include Parent and Baby play sessions, parenting workshops, family social events; a baby clothing exchange; a private lactation room with refrigerator; prenatal support groups, information and community services; referrals from agencies for "at risk" babies; specialized training programs in high demand areas such as infant and toddler and special needs.

Not all institutions committed to early childhood development services are associate's-degree-granting institutions, however. In the Delta Promise Neighborhood, Mississippi State University Extension and Mississippi Valley State University both align

their commitment with early childhood services, although less specifically.

### **Adult-education programming.**

In a few Promise Neighborhoods, higher education institutions were proposed as partners to improve educational opportunities for adults as well as youth transitioning to adulthood. The only higher education institutions that considered roles in adult education were associate's-granting institutions, and their offerings differed from the capacity-building workforce development efforts by emphasizing support structures for success, dropout programming, or GED support and programs. Quinsigamond Community College (QCC), Delta Community College, and Athens Technical College each planned to reach out to adults, parents, and high school dropouts, committing to serve the neighborhood directly through existing initiatives or practices related to their mission. For example, in the Main South Promise Neighborhood (Worcester, Massachusetts) the

College partner, QCC, has recently implemented the Shining Light Initiative, which seeks to advance educational opportunities among adult Worcester residents. The MSPN is one of the target areas of this initiative, as QCC strives to recruit and ensure the persistence of underrepresented populations who seek to pursue higher education.

Similarly, in the Delta Promise Neighborhood, Delta Community College commits to “workforce training in the region, which will be utilized in the training of high school dropouts and GED learners, as well as parents.” A similar plan exists for Athens Technical College in the Athens Promise Neighborhood, which “contributes GED programming and adult basic education opportunities” in the partnership.

### **Other youth programming.**

Additional youth programs offer a range of services tied to youth betterment, but which are not necessarily tied to specific academic- or school-based goals or college access. Higher education institutions contribute to these through neighborhood programming in the arts, safety, health, and youth employment. For example, California State University at Northridge commits

programs at the College of Arts, Media, and Communication to the LA Promise Neighborhood<sup>5</sup>:

College of Arts, Media & Communications performs for and works with youth and adults in the San Fernando Valley with programs ranging from classical to popular genres in the visual and performing arts. Art programs include: Faculty and student recitals; Matinee Series for the K-12 audiences; Art Exhibitions; Shakespearean Plays; Choral and Orchestral Performances...

University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), working in the Central Little Rock Promise Neighborhood (CLRPN), also lists existing programs as contributing to partnership goals, in this case through health and dental services: "UALR Children International (CI) provides in-school health and dental screenings for students in all three CLRPN elementary schools." They tie their existing programs specifically to the schools in their Promise Neighborhood, however. In the Gulfton Promise Neighborhood (Houston, Texas), Houston Community College contributes to developing youth employment possibilities by "develop[ing] an asset-based youth apprenticeship and employment program based on identified best practices in the field."

### **Dual-enrollment programming.**

Two Promise Neighborhoods included dual-enrollment programs. They are both through associate's-degree-granting institutions, Wayne County Community College and Chief Dull Knife College (CDKC). The two institutions approach this commitment differently, however. In the River Rouge Promise Neighborhood, Wayne County Community College commits to "dual enrollment for high school students and strategies for supporting students in their transition to college and throughout college." In the Cheyenne Promise Neighborhood, CDKC commits explicitly to dual enrollment partnerships with four-year institutions: "[A]ctivities include . . . dual enrollment opportunities through Montana State University (Bozeman and Billings) and University of Montana." These are different approaches to dual enrollment, one offering higher education credits while in high school, and the other easing the transition from two-year to four-year institutions.

## Partnership-Maintenance Contributions

The partnership-maintenance contributions to the Promise Neighborhoods refer to how higher education institutions aim to strengthen the relationship functions among partners or at the administrative level for the partnership. The roles outlined in this partnership include administration, convening and partnership, and planning (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Higher Education's Partnership-Maintenance Contributions to Promise Neighborhoods**

Administration	Convening & Partnership	Planning	
Berea College	Clark University	California State University East Bay	Berea College
Clark University	Loyola Marymount College	Chabot College	City University of New York-Brooklyn College School of Education + Brooklyn Center
Morehouse School of Medicine	University of California-Los Angeles	Georgetown University	Little Big Horn College
University of Arkansas at Little Rock	University of Southern California + USC Medical School	Northeastern University	Morehouse School of Medicine
		University of Arkansas at Little Rock	Trinity University
		University of Massachusetts Boston	Tufts University
		University of Southern California + USC Medical Center	University of District of Columbia/DC Community College

### Administration.

As would be expected, some of the articulated commitments from each of the three higher education institutions serving as lead organizations on the planning grants are captured in this section, as leading the Promise Neighborhood requires attending to the process of partnership. Berea College, for example, notes in the memorandum of understanding its intention to “work with the undersigned partners to refine the project plan, timeline for implementation and partner responsibilities.” Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) commits to a collaborative approach:

Through a collaborative approach, the MSM/UWMA Partnership will develop a plan that builds a continuum of solutions in *Atlanta's Promise Neighborhood* through a process that cultivates resident leaders, school partners, and community partners to increase the community's capacity to deliver seamless supports and services that

positively affect the academic outcomes and the well-being of children and families.

Administrative contributions were entirely by lead organizations. This process-focused commitment ensures that the work is carried out according to the proposal. For example, University of Arkansas at Little Rock pledged that:

being the lead partner in this collaborative effort . . . , as such, agrees to coordinate and contribute to all aspects of this project during the planning year as described in the application narrative submitted to the Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods Program.

The functions associated with administrative duties include fiscal management and coordination of the partnership. This is different from planning and convening, as it deals more with administrative or managerial functions than with simply bringing people together (convening) or taking part in the plan of the neighborhood.

### **Convening and partnership.**

Convening and partnership roles involve bringing other organizations or groups together in the partnership. Clark University (Main South Neighborhood in Worcester, Massachusetts), UCLA, Loyola Marymount, California State University Los Angeles, and USC & USC Medical Center (Boyle Heights Promise Neighborhood) all promised to contribute to the convening and partnership process. The institutions in Boyle Heights commit to “cooperative relationships.” Additionally, in the Main South Neighborhood, the “Main South Neighborhood Revitalization Committee (NRC) convening [will be] supported by Clark University Entrepreneurship Program.” These roles imply intermediary functions that create a structure of organizational relationships or commit to being part of a structure that aims to contribute to neighborhood success.

### **Planning.**

A large number of higher education institutions are making “planning” commitments. The descriptions of these commitments are in most cases less substantive than those for any other category, as “planning” contributions are the minimum required by the grant. These commitments to planning took many forms, including committing expertise to a specific workgroup area as part of the structure of the partnership. District of Columbia Community

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College makes a specific commitment in the memorandum of understanding:

We will provide a .20 FTE in-kind facilitator to manage the agenda, activities, and products of the results-driven work group on “High school graduates obtain a postsecondary degree, certification, or credential.” The value of this contribution is \$20,000.00.

In the Hayward Promise Neighborhood, both Chabot College and California State University East Bay commit to “Ensure [their] programs help build a continuum of solutions to the [Promise Neighborhood]” and participate in the “education and development task force.” On the other hand, planning commitments could also be much vaguer. Northeastern University and University of Massachusetts at Boston (Dudley Street Promise Neighborhood) are outlined as “partners in planning process,” and that is the only time they appear in the application. The extent of their commitment is unclear from this entry.

## **Mission-Based Commitments**

The term *mission-based commitments* refers to those associated specifically with what the university is already known to do: essentially, its mission of teaching, research, and service (see Table 6). This sense of the mission, however, is taken broadly to align more with the sense of scholarship expressed by Boyer, as it cuts across discovery, engagement, teaching, integration, and application (1990, 1996). These commitments included committing human resources to the partnership in the form of staff hours or student participation in service-learning courses and projects. These commitments also include expertise supplied by researchers, students, or consultants. In most cases, this expertise takes the form of faculty or student commitments to provide needs assessment, data alignment, or segmentation analyses within the Promise Neighborhood. In one unique circumstance, an institution committed to opening a campus branch in the proposed Promise Neighborhood (Worcester, Massachusetts).

**Table 6. Higher Education's Mission-Based Contributions to Promise Neighborhoods**

<b>Research Expertise</b>		<b>Student Resources</b>		<b>Campus Branch</b>
California State University East Bay	City University of New York-Brooklyn Center & School of Education	Colleges of the Worcester Consortium	Berea College California State University East Bay	Quinsigamond Community College
Chabot College	Mississippi State University Extension	Morehouse School of Medicine	Chabot College	
Clark University	Stanford University-John Gardner Center	University of California-Los Angeles	Clark University	
Morehouse School of Medicine	Tufts University		Trinity University	
Temple University	University of the District of Columbia/District of Columbia Community College			
Trinity University				
University of California-Los Angeles				
University of Arkansas at Little Rock				

### **Research expertise.**

Additionally, higher education institutions can make substantial contributions to these partnerships because of their research demands. Several research requirements in the Promise Neighborhoods, such as segmentation analyses, needs assessments, and data alignment, are practices that faculty are already performing and are well-qualified to contribute in this area. Sixteen institutions provided this type of support to the Promise Neighborhoods, but in different ways. As mentioned previously, Trinity University contributes to the segmentation analysis for San Antonio Promise Neighborhood through student and faculty contributions. UCLA's Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing will collaborate with a faculty member in the School of Public Affairs in the Department of Urban Planning to do the same in the LA Promise Neighborhood. The local evaluator in the Boyle Heights Promise Neighborhood is in the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies, and the evaluating faculty member will "help [the lead organization] connect with college and high school students who can also support our data process." Trinity is also responsible for an "impact analysis," which is a quarterly assessment shared with the Advisory Board. The higher education partners in the Hayward Neighborhood contribute to the partnership by sharing information. The number of students from some high schools in remediation from California State University East Bay and Chabot will inform the partnership

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as an indicator for school success. The DC Promise Neighborhood includes efforts by DC Community College to develop “a way of tracking vocational and other industry-related certificates.”

In the LA Promise Neighborhood, UCLA’s “Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing” is primarily committing to needs assessment. The center plans to “conduct separate needs assessments on the communities of Pacoima and Hollywood to assess the appropriate mixture of services that is required to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children in these two individual communities.” The Morehouse School of Medicine will also contribute a director of needs assessment to the Atlanta Promise Neighborhood.

A few of the higher education partners frame their potential role as consultants; in University Promise Neighborhood (Philadelphia), Temple University frames its role as “data consultants and support” through several faculty and staff in research. Also through the Metropolitan Philadelphia Indicators Project, the university aims to support “data management, collection, and analysis activities.” The consultancy relationship is also evident in the Sunset Park Promise Neighborhood, where CUNY plays significant roles: “As consultants to the project, the Center for the Study of Brooklyn staff resources will include the Director, Senior Research Associate, Research Associate and Research Assistant (project budget of \$60,000).” In this role, they

will facilitate strategic planning, a community needs assessment and produce supporting data analyses and reports—including graphical and mapping presentations where relevant—to ensure that both students in the target school and other children in the neighborhood have access to a continuum of solutions that improve educational and developmental outcomes.

The CUNY School of Education contributes to the partnership in this capacity as well. “Because of the dynamic needs of the initiative, consultation services will be provided by a variety of faculty and staff, based on the identified need.” University of Arkansas at Little Rock aims to collaborate with the Little Rock Promise Neighborhood through its Institute of Government because of its “experience conducting longitudinal surveys that require tracking individuals over time.” It will work with the “Sustainability Team” toward developing “the longitudinal data system during the course of the planning year.” In the Delta Promise Neighborhood,

Mississippi State University will contribute to improving data systems through a specific initiative through “First Impressions, a program housed at MSU designed to help Delta communities assess and improve their community and economic development potential.” In the Dudley Street Promise Neighborhood (Boston), Tufts contributes to the evaluation of the initiative in that two committed faculty members can “bring expertise in evaluative research and related methodologies, GIS, policy and legal analysis, and statistics.”

### **Student resources.**

Students served a range of roles in the partnership, and often the role of students had not yet been identified. Eight institutions (not including the Worcester Consortium, which also makes such commitments) commit their students to the initiative. Students were often identified as serving through specific existing initiatives. For example, in the District of Columbia, Georgetown’s students will commit through “student-run literacy programs.” Undergraduate and graduate students at Clark University will support Main South (Worcester, Massachusetts) through community development and education programs. Morehouse students will mentor in Atlanta, and they will contribute to other areas of the “continuum of solutions.” The Boyle Heights Promise Neighborhood mentions UCLA as an example for what they have done in the past, and what they plan to develop for the initiative: “UCLA students and faculty have provided us service-learning courses and a community education and resource initiative.” Finally, the Colleges of Worcester Consortium commits its Collegiate Success Institute to the partnership, which pairs high school students with college-age mentors. In one case (Trinity University in the San Antonio Promise Neighborhood), students were committed to helping with the segmentation analysis.

Institutions also make general commitments to the partnership through service-learning, but those commitments are not directed toward specific ends. Or, in the case of Berea College in the Appalachian Promise Neighborhood, the institution commits to growing the partnership through leadership that will “stimulate student and scholarly interest.” This vague mission-based language appeared in other applications as well, such as in the Hayward Promise Neighborhood, where two institutions, California State University at East Bay and Chabot College, commit to service-learning with no specificity.

## Campus branch.

As mentioned previously, in one unique circumstance an institution committed to opening a campus branch in the proposed Promise Neighborhood (Worcester, Massachusetts). Quinsigamond Community College had committed in the planning period to opening an institutional branch in the proposed Promise Neighborhood to better serve the area.

## Discussion

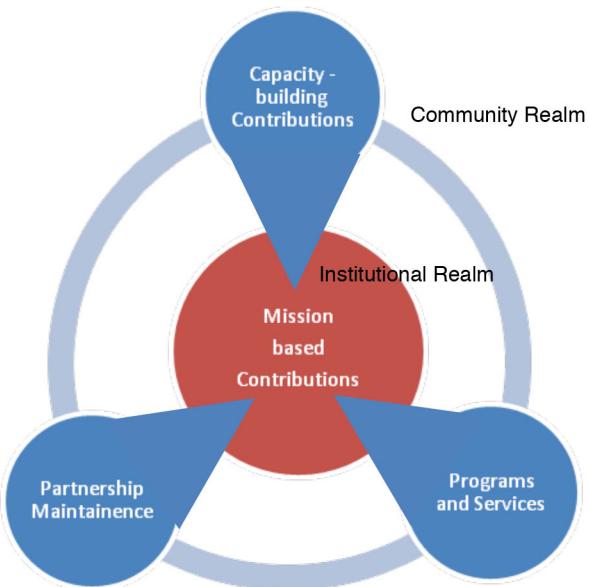
This study explored the proposed role of higher education partners in the Promise Neighborhood planning models to transform communities. In practice, higher education institutions are seen to have potential as anchors in their communities to serve many functions in a change process. Theoretically, the role of higher education institutions can be conceptualized as part of a broad and inclusive community-change process, which forces institutions to push beyond theorizing organizational and institutional community engagement driven by higher education ends. The Promise Neighborhood proposal narratives represent the plan to create a plan. And investigating across those proposals demonstrates a substantial amount of possibility for the contributions that higher education institutions can make to their communities. In fact, taking a community-wide perspective on the potential role of higher education serving a neighborly function, these institutions have a wide range of roles in the Promise Neighborhoods. Although much of the overall vision has not been built yet, the proposals show the foundation that they could be built upon, and give an understanding of how community organizations and individuals within and outside higher education can work together for community improvement.

This study shows how a richer, anchoring concept of higher education partnership can add dimension to our conception of services that higher education partners can offer in a community. Starting from the community and looking at what higher education can offer shows versatile, rich missions aligned with multiple dimensions of institutional citizenship where institutions can “consciously apply their long-term, place-based economic power in combination with their human and intellectual resources, to better the long-term welfare of the communities in which they reside” (*Axelroth and Dubb, 2010, p. 3*). The Promise Neighborhood program has community revitalization aims through education, and it makes contributions across the breadth of cultural, social,

and economic areas. The program serves to build interest and value in educational outcomes, develops the workforce, and contributes to long-term change in the community by being an institution that can bring people together. The value of any individual function in a neighborhood can vary, but taken collectively, higher education can add value through a wide range of contributions.

It is important to understand how these institutions serve their communities to align with their historical missions of research, teaching, and service, but this analysis also gives a glimpse into how they can be valued in communities in ways that extend those roles and make contributions to building the long-term capacity of a neighborhood, serve as a place where people can be brought together, and provide necessary services. In some places all of these functions may be necessary for higher education, but in others, the strongest higher education contributions may be mission-based contributions. The community ends must be continually reflected upon, and higher education institutions must reflect on their own potential to make contributions in partnership with other institutions and organizations in the community.

Contributing to the long-term sustainability of these community development efforts, higher education institutions plan to provide programming, build capacity, maintain relationships in the community, and fulfill mission-related responsibilities. These functions can be related directly to existing teaching, service, and research initiatives, but are not always indicated as such. Considering this, higher education's tripartite mission can be better framed through the expansion of engagement and understood as connected to community functions. Institutional representatives—faculty members, administrators, and students—have been doing community partnership work for a long time, but programs like the Promise Neighborhoods can embed the institution more deeply and deliberately in local communities (see Figure 1). In partnership, it is clear that higher education institutions are expected to do more to become relevant in the community realm, and they are trying to embed themselves more deeply as community partners—through specific or general commitments—as more incentives arise to construct change processes with communities.



**Figure 1. Higher Education Contribution Model for the Promise Neighborhoods**

This research also has implications from the practical perspective of neighborhoods implementing a comprehensive community initiative. First, if considering an education-based initiative, it is evidenced in the partnership proposals just by the number of institutions and the diverse roles they play that higher education institutions are perceived as pivotal partners in comprehensive community partnerships for education. Although they need not be central to the partnership, they can serve several functions to streamline a “continuum of solutions,” such as the efforts of community-based partnership. Higher education institutions demonstrate potential capacities to administer community-based programs and community-focused grants; they can smooth transitions through the education pipeline.

Finally, it is worth noting that in these Promise Neighborhoods, different types of higher education institutions can be better aligned with some needs than with others. Associate’s-degree-granting institutions could be looked to for a diverse set of roles within the community regarding workforce and early childhood capacity building and programming. In some cases, however, they acted without other higher education partners, with the possibility that some needs were not being met. The same concern could be raised about the partnerships in which higher education institutions

served as lead partners, usually without recruiting other colleges or universities to participate. Higher education institutions are not the only organizations that can perform capacity-building functions in communities, but several of them do. Overall, 18 different institutions made contributions in building various capacities in communities. Although many of them went along with their educational mission, by doing so in target areas and building structures to support youth and families, they extended their efforts beyond simply teaching to creating themselves as educational institutions with contributions to make.

Higher education institutions have considered their civic engagement mission in narrow terms based on the tripartite goal of teaching, service, and learning. Along these lines a host of innovative projects, partnerships, and practices are associated with a civic mission of higher education inside and outside the classroom. The civic engagement movement in higher education institutions is often associated with developing students' civic skills and practices, but it has also been put forth as a way to better understand partnership through the institution's capacity to demonstrate civic practices as a good neighbor with its locale. A comprehensive approach to community change, such as that encouraged through the Promise Neighborhood program, offers a broader vantage point for understanding the potential for higher education community practice, and encourages the development of a broader sense of possibilities for higher education's civic mission. At the same time, the civic capacity building in communities was but one small contribution of higher education institutions in the Promise Neighborhoods. This could show limits to institutions' civic capacity functions, and thus to their conceptualization of a civic mission. Investigating the ways that community practices of higher education interact with its traditional mission adds necessary depth and dimension to the potential of higher education institutions acting as anchors—but deeply embedded ones—in their communities.

## **Endnotes**

1. The population totals for the neighborhood of "Main South" are not given in the Worcester application materials, though the application does offer the city population total at approximately 170,000.
2. The population totals are not given in the Sunset Park application materials. The application speaks about the population in percentages, but does not offer numbers. The U.S. Census indicates that in 2000, the population of this

neighborhood (as defined by two zip codes in the application) was approximately 120,000.

3. In this analysis, I rely heavily on evidence found in the 2010 Promise Neighborhood applications. To improve readability, quotes from these documents are specifically attributed to the application document, but they are not formally cited in references. They are treated as data rather than as sources. For verification the applications are publicly available in full text at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/2010/grantees.html>.
4. The continuum is specific language employed by the U.S. Department of Education to describe the alignment plan for this partnership. It plans to align services for youth from infancy through career. The continua have two foci: one on alignment of education services, including schools and supplemental services, in order to smooth transitions and improve opportunity along the pathway, and one that includes family engagement and health indicators for youth in the neighborhood.
5. The inclusion of arts programming in this miscellaneous category isn't to devalue the important intellectual contributions of these programs, but rather to differentiate them from programs specifically tied to a school curriculum.

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