

# Collaboration in an Era of Change: New Forms of Community Problem-Solving

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## Abstract

Campuses are developing new ways to respond to complex social, cultural, economic and environmental problems by adapting their educational approaches and their scholarship to address a changing world order. At the same time, government agencies, nonprofit organizations and businesses are embracing collaborative approaches to community problem-solving. These collaborative approaches, on and off campus, are creating new forms of university-community engagement that will require us to rethink the nature of the societal roles we play and how we generate knowledge, create an inspiring educational environment, and assist our students in acquiring the knowledge and skills they will need to work effectively with others to address the complex societal problems that they will face throughout their lives.

## Introduction

In this article, we will examine some recent examples from the Greater Portland Metropolitan Area in Oregon that offer insights into new forms of collaboration and collective action that involve faculty members, students and community participants. We will consider the creation of sustainable neighborhoods, the development of an age-friendly environment and the changing pattern of interactions among community-serving organizations, both governmental and non-profit and how the curriculum and the research work of faculty and students are contributing to these new relationships. Our nation's colleges and universities have gone through a number of transitions in their roles and responsibilities and in their approach to educating their students. The pressures for change have always been shaped by a combination of new generational values and expectations and social, economic and environmental changes in the world itself. As Rudolph put it in his class text on *The American College and University*,

War, declining enrollments, the sudden instability of whole areas of knowledge, dynamic social and economic changes—these and a multitude of other developments have often thrown the American college back upon itself and forced upon it a moment, perhaps even an era, of critical self-assessment and redefinition (Rudolph, 1990, p. 110)

Today's societal context offers an especially challenging blend of cross-generational change combined with the emergence of a pattern of complex, multi-faceted problems that require new forms of collaboration, knowledge creation and shared responsibility both within our institutions and within the context of our relationships with the communities we serve. Our colleges and universities, regardless of mission, are being called upon to educate our students to become the kind of people who can create sustainable communities in which individuals of all backgrounds can thrive in today's world. In this paper, we will look at some of Rudolph's "other development" and how campuses are both helping to shape the capacity of communities to work together and are, in turn, being shaped themselves by those experiences (Ramaley, 2003) in ways that enhance their ability to prepare their students and their communities for a world of complex social, environmental and economic change.

## From Repertory to Improvisational Work

In a recent essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Levine (2015) captured the gist of the transition

that we are undergoing. As he explains it, our nation is “making a transition from a national, analog, industrial economy to a global, digital, information economy.” Industrial economies focus on common elements that unfold over a predictable timeframe. Think of a repertory company in the theater where the performers follow a script, plays are performed on a defined stage that separates the actors from the audience, every part is defined and there is a formal ending to the play. Information economies are more like improvisational theater where innovation and discovery play a key role, the audience can become performers as well. The action may weave through a space that does not look like a formal theater. The story that develops and the outcome and the process of achieving that outcome are variable. The audience is often left wondering what might happen next and will probably be invited to participate in shaping the story.

We are all familiar with how the industrial model applies to education. It defines a 12 year sequence of schooling (a script) followed by an idealized four year college degree comprised of a prescribed number of courses of a set length (semester or term) followed by graduation (the end of the play). The roles in this play are defined as are the tasks to be performed. Teachers teach and students learn. The phrase often used to describe the role of the faculty member in this play is “sage on the stage.” Levine (2015) summarizes succinctly, “In education, [the assembly line] translates into a common four-year undergraduate program, preceded by 12 years of schooling, semester-long courses, credit hours and Carnegie units.” The coins of that realm are seat time and individual courses selected from a menu of options rather than a coherent sequence of increasingly demanding and consequential learning experiences.

Heifetz, et al. (2009) explain the tools and tactics for changing our organizations for a changing world, the kinds of challenges we face are not solvable by well-researched, well-practiced *technical* expertise. These unresolved dilemmas require *adaptive* strategies.

“What is needed from a leadership perspective are new forms of improvisational expertise, a kind of process expertise that knows prudently how to experiment with never-before-tried=before relationships, means of communication and ways of interacting that will help people develop solutions that build upon and surpass the wisdom of today’s experts (Heifetz, et al., 2009, 2-3).

Since the publication of *Greater Expectations* in 2002 (AAC&U, 2002) and the emergence of the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) portfolio a few years later .followed by the LEAP Challenge in 2015 (AAC&U, 2015), efforts to rethink the undergraduate curriculum and the experiences that accompany it have led to a shift of emphasis from teaching to learning and from individual courses and requirements to increasingly integration of learning over time. This path is structured around the study of increasingly complex problems and increasingly collaborative efforts that bring faculty, students and community members together to learn together, work together and address “real world problems.” In some ways, this approach is improvisational and more likely to prepare graduates to work in an increasingly collaborative and networked environment. In this model, anyone may play the role of teacher or learner at different times and knowledge is developed through collaboration in which participants learn with and from each other. Unlike the assembly-line or industrial model, the support structure for this kind of learning must be *adaptive* rather than *technical* (Heifetz, et al., 2009).

The goal of this shift in the enactment of what it means to be educated is to prepare “intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives (AAC&U, 2002, p. xi).” While foreshadowing the realities of today’s world in which our graduates will use their education in new ways, *Greater Expectations* focused largely on the adaptations taking place in the colleges and universities that participated in the studies and conversations that led to the report. The societal changes that were generating the need for new approaches to the curriculum, to faculty and student work and to relationships between the campus community and society

as a whole were an important but background element. In this paper, we will look at those societal changes in the foreground and explore some examples of the complex interactions and collaborations that are now emerging between increasingly networked communities and the colleges and universities that interact with those environments

## **Creating a Culture of Engagement**

Working in an adaptive mode requires deep cultural and structural changes in all of our organizations, including our colleges and universities. Over the past twenty years or so, postsecondary institutions have been slowly embracing a culture of engagement that supports the new kinds of relationships and collaborations that will be needed to address the Big Questions that characterize the challenges of our era. Colleges and universities that thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will adapt their approach to leadership and engagement with broader issues of society (Ramaley, 2014a). This will entail rethinking the roles and responsibilities of faculty and staff, the opportunities they provide for students to contribute to collaborative solution-finding and the ease with which all members of a campus community can work across disciplinary and organizational boundaries to create the kind of shared expertise and responsibility needed to participate in adaptive leadership and solution-finding. The patterns that are emerging suggest what these more interactive and cross-disciplinary institutions will look like. They will begin to connect with a rapidly growing network of cross-sector collaborations (Bryson, et al., 2015) within society at large. The components of a reconfigured internal community will increasingly create greater capacity to connect to the elements of more collaborative external environment. These growing connections between higher education and other community-based organizations and groups will begin to reflect and support a true *culture of engagement* both on campus and beyond.

On campus, the characteristics of a culture of engagement will open up access to innovative and relevant educational programs, new research interests and sources of information gathered both from the work of the academic community and beyond. These capacities will be supported by a broad array of partnerships that address social, economic and environmental issues, a growing capacity to integrate efforts across the campus and new forms of engagement within the university along with new policy choices that will support and invest in engaged scholarship and collaboration. These changes will result in a more collaborative approach to both learning and scholarship. These shifts in culture, working relationships and expectations will create new capacity to work on Big Questions that will have a measurable impact on the quality of life locally and globally through a focus on health, culture, economic stability and resilience and the environment.

## **Community Responses to an Emerging Set of Problems**

In the past decade, the challenges facing communities as well as the capacities that are emerging to address those challenges are leading to new ways of thinking about the role of collaboration within and across organizations that comprise the sectors of a community (e.g., business, public, nonprofit, educational) and the role of citizen participation in identifying and then working on complex societal problems that are shaping the quality of life, both locally and globally. In their text *New Public Governance*, Douglas Morgan and Brian Cook (2014), capture the basic shift that is going on in communities through the lens of the role of government in the public sector. Morgan and Shinn (2014) describe two contrasting approaches to rethinking the role and structure of local government that began to emerge in the 1980s. One path led to the concept of “a smaller and less intrusive government that reduced regulatory and fiscal burdens on individuals and property owners (Morgan & Shinn, 2014, p. 3).” This approach resulted in a move toward less government influence in the community and the expectation that other sectors both private and non-profit could provide services more efficiently and at lower cost to taxpayers. This shift in thinking has opened up two models of government, a business or market-based

model referred to as New Public Management (NPM) and the other “a collaborative approach to the provision of public services, working with partners within and across the public, nonprofit and private sectors (Morgan & Shinn, 2014, p. 3).” This second path, called New Public Governance (NPG) blends some of the market-based elements of NPM with a value structure that supports collaboration to seek the larger public good. Both approaches focus on reducing the size, scope, costs and inefficiencies of the older model of government but they approach the challenge in different ways.

As might be expected, the emergence of NPM has created problems for higher education as colleges and universities are being asked to justify the value of their educational model in strictly financial terms (Ramaley, 2013; Humphreys, 2013). Institutions are being asked about how long it takes to earn a degree, what an education costs and how much debt students will accumulate as well as what salary a new graduate can earn. The NPG model, in contrast, is based on a value platform that defines the role of government as a vehicle for promoting the public good. The means for accomplishing this is to create ways to facilitate “the generation of implementable agreements among wide-ranging stakeholders (Morgan & Shinn, 2014, p. 5).” This philosophy is generally more attractive to colleges and universities who are seeking to prepare their students for a changing world and who see their role as a contributor to the public good through their scholarship and the educational experiences they offer as well as through their preparation of active and engaged citizens who are well prepared for the workplace and who will contribute to the communities in which they live. For this purpose, public good equates to the quality of a college degree (Humphreys, et al., 2015).

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds, campuses are increasingly expanding their approaches to engagement with the broader community and focusing both on a culture of engagement within their own campus communities and in the context of different forms of collaboration with various community partners. These relationships are expanding to include coalitions and networks made up of several organizations that are working together on common goals. To the thoughtful taxonomy developed by Sockett in 1999, we now must add a new set of collaborations that link universities to the growing networks of participants working together to pursue a shared goal. These collaborations are cross-sector and are often referred to as Collective Action or Collective Impact Models (Kanter, et al., 2005).

## **Collective Impact and Wicked Problems**

Higher education institutions have long played roles in building healthy communities. In the past twenty years, these efforts have been collected under the term of *civic and community engagement*. A decade ago, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Rakesh Khurana and Nitin Nohria (2005) prepared a working paper entitled *Moving Higher Education to its Next Stages: A New Set of Societal Challenges, a New Stage of Life and a Call to Action for Universities*. After reviewing the adaptations that higher education has made to address changing societal needs in the past, Kanter, et al. (2005) lay out a clear vision of what lies ahead. As they point out, “new eras bring new challenges (Kanter, et al., p. 10)”. Along with the expected disruptions in the economy and the workplace that generates new demands for technical and adaptive skills, “a class of problems of another order of magnitude also appears today, which calls for new approaches and new leadership: societal challenges involving well-being and the social infrastructure. (Kanter, et al., p. 10-11).”

These problems are not as new as we often make them out to be but changes in the world order, including the forces of globalization and the impact of technology “tend to exacerbate them, make them more visible and/or increase the urgency of addressing them (Kanter, et al., p. 11).” Kanter, et al. (2005) build their emerging problem set from a Harvard Business Review global survey that Kanter conducted in 1991 (Kanter, 1991). The survey gathered information from 12,000 managers from 24 countries who agreed on four key issues that must be addressed in order to improve “the state of the world.” The issues

were global poverty, global health, basic education and degradation of the environment. In the intervening years, these issues have grown ever more challenging and have influenced the quality of life in communities across the globe.

Addressing these kinds of “wicked problems” (Weber & Khademian, 2008) will require new leadership skills, new ways of learning, new ways of working together across organizational, social and economic lines and new ways of drawing upon insights from many disciplines. This new pattern addresses many perspectives and a demand for cross-sector solutions that are shaped by what Archon Fung (2015) calls “the democracy cube.” The *democracy cube* raises three key questions: (1) Who participates? (2) How do they communicate and make decisions? (3) What influence do they have over the resulting public decisions and actions? To this *trifecta* of questions, we might add a fourth: Who decides what matters most?

Wicked problems can be described in a number of ways. According to Camillus (2008) who drew upon earlier work by Rittel and Weber (1973), these kinds of problems (1) involve a range of stakeholders who have different values and priorities, (2) have origins in a tangled set of interacting causes, (3) are hard to come to grips with or make sense of, (4) continue to change as we seek to manage them and (5) have no clear or familiar solutions. These problems unfold in “a diverse and mutually interacting ecology” (Fung, 2015, p. 514) of people and organizations and require a great deal of boundary crossing to bring together ideas and resources from multiple sources. To capture the experiences of a diverse community and to tap resources that otherwise might be ignored, new forms of interaction amongst citizens, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the business community are being created to support new approaches to community development (Fung, 2015, p. 515).

As Fung (2015, p. 517) explains, complex and wicked problems require “multi-sectoral problem-solving” and ways to remove the barriers to “pooling knowledge and coordinating action” through the formation of networks that connect organizations together. These networks are built on the basic concept that the solutions to many of society’s most pressing problems today will require tapping into the expertise and ideas of different parts of the community and different disciplines. Solutions to multi-faceted problems must be designed in an adaptive way rather than chosen from a repertoire of well-researched and well-tested technical solutions (Heifetz, et al., 2009).

Kania and Kramer (2011) launched a new generation of thinking about collective efforts directed at complex problems in their series of articles on the concept and practice of collective impact. The components that characterize an effective collective impact model built up through networks of interaction amongst the participants in solution finding and action are (1) a common agenda arrived at through a thoughtful process of exploration and interaction, (2) shared measurement systems and a willingness to look honestly at the evidence collected, (3) mutually reinforcing activities that draw on the strengths and interests of each participant, (4) continuous communication amongst the participants, and (5) a mechanism for backbone support that facilitates the building and maintenance of the relationships needed and the capacity of all participants to act knowledgeably and in cooperation with the others.

These kinds of collaborative solution-finding efforts will be unlikely to generate equitable and inclusive outcomes so long as “those advantaged by political, economic, or social circumstances exercise undue influence to secure policies and public actions that reinforce their economic or political positions (Fung, 2015, p. 519).” This fact reinforces the importance of rethinking how we define partnerships, who we choose to partner with and how we will draw these experiences into our curriculum. Building a curriculum around a succession of explorations of increasingly complex problems and the introduction of integrative and applied learning as a culminating or capstone experience offers an especially powerful example of how colleges and universities are adapting to the ways that their graduates will be called upon to use their education in the future (AAC&U, 2015; The LEAP Challenge). Integral to these curricular

reforms is a growing emphasis on ways to produce educational environments that are equitable and inclusive in order to prepare a more diverse group of graduates for the roles that they must play in the future as professionals and as active citizens and to engage a more diverse group of organizations and neighborhood groups in problem-solving (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Ramaley 2015).

## **The Challenge for Our Institutions**

In order to prepare a differently educated citizenry and to play meaningful roles in community-building, colleges and universities must model informed and collaborative ways of learning and working together within their own institutional context as well as through their interactions with the broader society of which they are an integral part (Ramaley, 2014b). The path toward a more interactive and collaborative approach to collective action will have implications for every aspect of our campus culture and practice—the nature of our curriculum, our expectations of our graduates, our approach to learning and teaching, the nature of our scholarly agenda, the ways that faculty and staff careers unfold, the structure of our institutions and how we will support our capacity to accomplish our mission. The path that lies ahead offers both challenges and opportunities for regaining a core role in working with others to shape life in our communities.

### **Connecting to Collaboratory Networks: The Sustainable Neighborhood Initiative in Portland, Oregon**

The Institute for Sustainable Solutions (ISS) was established in 2008 when an Oregon-based Foundation, the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, made a \$25M challenge grant to Portland State University (PSU) to integrate sustainability across campus and to prepare students for change-making careers. Since that time, ISS has served as a university hub for sustainability. It does so by supporting interdisciplinary research, curricular development, opportunities for student leadership and meaningful community partnerships that “contribute to a just, prosperous, and vibrant future for our region and the world (Institute for Sustainable Solutions (ISS), 2015).” ISS approaches programming and relationship building guided by two key principles: (a) learning happens everywhere and (b) a commitment to translating research into action in close collaboration with community partners.

PSU has used the ISS to begin to link together those community networks with a growing collaborative environment within PSU itself. It is clear that SNI is adding an additional element to the Carnegie (2015) definition of community engagement. The Carnegie definition emphasizes the concepts of (a) collaboration, (b) mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources and (c) a context partnership and reciprocity. These components inform the more complex forms of university-community collaboration such as Sockett’s Systemic and Transformative approaches. In these collaborations, “the parties share responsibility for planning, decision-making, funding, operations and evaluation of activities and...each institution is transformed through the relationship (Sockett, 1998, p. 77).” These kinds of relationships have developed further since Sockett developed his classification model. The focus is now more on the effects of these working relationships on the community and less on the partners themselves. In May 2014, ISS formally launched the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI).

The Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative builds on Portland State’s legacy of community-based learning and the interest and enthusiasm among PSU faculty and students to work on projects in Portland neighborhoods that will make a difference in the lives of people who live there. The initiative pairs PSU classes with a small number of Portland neighborhoods for multi-year relationships that will match University assets, expertise, and energy with specific neighborhood sustainability initiatives and community expertise. The SNI provides students with rich opportunities to develop meaningful community connections and gain valuable work experience. A lot of progress has been made in the year

since SNI began. The entire effort depends upon the fact that neighborhoods in the Portland area have been developing collaborative systems to address issues of importance to their communities.

Although the SNI is still quite young, one of its core goals is to match up the interests of faculty, students and community members but also to begin to help ISS shape the internal community that makes up PSU itself and to promote a culture of collaboration and resource-sharing and mutual influence than spans departments, schools and support units in ways that open up new ways to work together, learn together and address complex problems. It is never easy to shift the value structure and culture of a large institution. One way to move beyond individual efforts to a more institution-wide effort is to set up hubs like ISS and its newer offspring, SNI as a means to make connections and open up pathways to collaboration.

Consider the following project that was completed in the first year of SNI, the Maiden Court Community Orchard in the outer southeast neighborhood of Lents in Portland, Oregon. The Public Administration program offered a section of Introduction to Civic Engagement each term. For three consecutive terms, students in that course participated in a partnership with a local organization called Green Lents to create a shared community vision of a new community orchard. The students canvassed over 1300 homes in the neighborhood and talked with 260 local residents about the project and invited them to participate in planning efforts at community design meetings. This effort added much needed capacity to the local grassroots organizations who did not have the capacity to do this kind of community outreach on their own. At the same time, the project provided a practical learning experience for the students by providing them an opportunity to apply concepts of civic engagement that they were learning in their coursework and to begin to understand firsthand the challenges that community leaders face.

Similar projects took place in two of the other three neighborhoods that constituted the first cohort of Portland neighborhood that signed on to the SNI project—the South Waterfront Market area bordering the PSU campus (SoMa) and the Cully neighborhood in Portland’s northeast. One focused on building a miniature park (a “parklet”) in the neighborhood surrounding Portland State where people can gather and interact. The other created a map of biodiversity in the Cully neighborhood in cooperation with several community groups and residents of Cully. The map will be used to promote science literacy and environmental awareness among the young people in the neighborhood.

### **Responding to Generational Transitions: The Age-Friendly University**

The concept of an age-friendly university interacting with an equally age-friendly community offers another example of ways that new forms of collaboration and networking can create greater capacity to address rapidly emerging societal challenges.

The story begins in 2002 when the World Health Organization (WHO) (2002) began to focus on the development of Age-Friendly Cities. That year, the WHO organization estimated that between 2000 and 2050, the proportion of the world’s population over 60 years of age will double from about 11% to 22%, a total of over 2 billion people. Of those individuals, 395 million will be over the age of 80. Most of those people will be aging in the world’s cities.

Based on its active ageing framework developed in 2002, WHO proposed eight interconnected domains that can help to identify and address barriers to the well-being and participation of older people in the life of an urban community. The eight domains are Community and Health Care, Transportation, Housing, Social participation, Outdoor spaces and buildings, Respect and social inclusion, Civic participation and employment and Communication and information. The WHO’s Global Age-friendly cities research project included 33 cities in 22 countries. Portland, Oregon was the only U.S. city that participated at that early stage.

Portland's contributions to the WHO project were supported by research conducted by PSU's Institute on Aging (IOA). The Institute identified urban features that make cities age-friendly, features that are barriers to age friendliness, and offered suggestions for changes that could improve the experiences of older adults. In 2010, the WHO created a Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities, subsequently renamed the "WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities."

A core concept of this working definition of age-friendliness is the focus on people of all ages. In the past decade, efforts to create age-friendly environments have focused either on the specific needs and interests of older adults and the impact of an aging population on the economy or on the concept of multigenerational interaction and the participation, health and well-being of people of all ages in a shared environment, either within an organization or in a community.

The components of an age-friendly community are similar to definitions of a sustainable or healthy community (Institute for Sustainable Communities, 2015). In both models, all of the main community functions are aligned to create a high quality of life and active civic engagement in which a cross section of the community contributes in meaningful ways that generate significant capacity to adapt to larger social, economic and environmental changes. Both approaches include three core elements—a healthy climate and environment, social well-being and economic security.

### **Portland's Path to Age-Friendliness and Portland State's Role**

PSU's Institute on Aging (IOA) was invited by the WHO to join its Global Age-friendly Cities project and conduct the original baseline research on Portland's age friendliness. The IOA approached then mayor Sam Adams to request that he and the City Council commit to becoming more age friendly and apply for membership in the WHO's Global Network. Mayor Adams agreed, but in exchange asked for IOA staff to serve on his Portland Plan Advisory Group, which they did.

Once Portland was designated as a member of the Network, the IOA formed an Advisory Council for an Age-Friendly Portland and work began on drafting the Portland Action Plan, with strategies and action steps identified for each of the eight domains (expanded to 10 in Portland, to pull apart civic engagement and employment and community and health services). In 2008, the Multnomah County Task Force on Vital Aging released an action plan in the form of a report entitled *Everyone Matters: A Practical Guide to Building a Community for All Ages*, which guided this work, along with the baseline study and other relevant data and reports. As WHO explains, "Making cities more age-friendly is a sound investment. Supportive and enabling environments enable older people to stay independent longer and in turn cities and communities benefit from the contributions older people have to offer." A focus on age-friendliness can enhance inter-generational social relationships and bonds and facilitate community integration and benefit people of all ages.

In April 2012, the City of Portland's Portland Plan (2012) was adopted. The Plan seeks to make Portland "prosperous, educated, healthy and equitable." The Plan includes a section entitled Portland as a Place for All Ages (p. 24-25). That section, which was prepared by the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, addresses age-friendliness. However, the elements of age-friendliness that were included in the plan make no mention of education or the economic impact of older members of the community. The focus is essentially on the needs of older members of the community rather than on their contributions to the community, although the document quotes the WHO definition of age-friendly cities and is entitled "Portland is a Place for All Generations."

IOA staff drafted the Action Plan for an Age-Friendly Portland, members of the Advisory Council then reviewed it and provided comment, and IOA revised and submitted the Action Plan to the City Council.

The City Council accepted the Action Plan in October, 2013. Since then, IOA has continued to coordinate the Advisory Council and has staffed the working committees formed with overseeing the implementation of the Plan. Although there has been little funding specifically for this age-friendly work, a \$1 million gift provided by two PSU alumni has provided funds to support student and faculty efforts in support of the age-friendly agenda. The Board of County Commissioners of Multnomah County passed a similar resolution to the City's in October 2014, accepting the areas of the City's Action Plan but requesting that the Plan be modified to be appropriate for the County. IOA is supporting that plan also. PSU itself has endorsed the age-friendly effort but is still exploring the question of how it can become a model for age-friendly education and multigenerational engagement and how it might draw upon more of its intellectual and social resources across the institution to contribute through its scholarship, educational programming and community collaborations to Portland's effort to become a model age-friendly city.

In 2013, PSU picked up the age-friendly theme again along with a focus on PSU's role in promoting the development of Portland as an age-friendly city. Several briefing papers were prepared that outlined the demographic changes underway both globally and in Oregon. One of those papers entitled *Portland and the New Longevity*, issued in July 2013, laid out a portrait of what a New Aging Agenda might look like and why and how Portland might lead the way in developing that concept. The paper explored three themes: Rethinking Work, Engagement and Aging; Enhancing Age-Friendliness; Transforming Health and Social Services through New Technology.

Building on this briefing paper, the team then prepared an argument for the role of PSU in contributing to the formulation and enactment of a New Aging Agenda within an Age-Friendly Context. The second Prospectus proposed a plan entitled *Tapping Portland's Hidden Asset Rethinking Aging, Longevity, Engagement and Equity*. The report described the changing age demographics as a "whole new game moment" and proposed a scenario in which age-friendly cities will emerge as "more desirable, successful and economically viable than those that are not." In the report, the authors laid out a strategy that would position the Portland Region as a world leader and proposed the use of the Collective Impact Model with PSU as the backbone institution to link existing partnerships and create greater momentum for moving toward the goal of becoming an Age-Friendly City served by an Age-Friendly university.

In January 2015, the Dean of the College of Urban and Public Affairs (CUPA) at Portland State University submitted a prospectus for a "Big Idea" for the next PSU Comprehensive Campaign. The prospectus outlined ten components of a university-wide plan designed to make Portland State University an age-friendly campus built on a platform of inter-generational collaboration and mutual learning. These elements match up well with an earlier set of principles for an age-friendly university developed by Dublin City University (2014). The concept of age-friendliness articulated by Dublin City University is broad-reaching "to encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the university, including educational and research programs." The components include promoting personal and career development in the second half of life, promoting intergenerational learning, designing online educational opportunities for older adults, including the interests and needs of older adults in the university's research agenda, to promote participation by older adults in a broad range of university programs and to engage with the university's own retiree community and, finally, to ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the ageing population.

In March 2015, a consulting firm, ECONorthwest that focuses on ways to build a thriving economy in the Pacific Northwest and AARP Oregon, co-sponsored a gathering of community leaders from every sector of society to talk about the economic and social impact of the changing age distribution in both the metropolitan region and in rural Oregon. This was followed by a breakfast meeting for a similar mix of community leaders on September 22, 2015 to "challenge business and community leaders to explore how to engage with the 50+ population to strengthen the economy." As one participant put it, "it is time to shift from the metaphor of a silver tsunami to the idea of a silver reservoir of talent, energy and social and

economic resources.” These efforts to generate interest in the implications of changing demographics have been reinforced by articles in the local media.

The next step will be to prepare a white paper that makes the case for the social and economic benefits that older adults contribute to Oregon. At this point, Portland State steps in as a partner with ECONorthwest to develop and then promote the case.

The Academic Deans at PSU have met to talk about research activities, curricular treatments of aging and multigenerational topics and to identify and foster current partnerships across the Colleges that address some aspect of age-friendliness. This discussion could be especially helpful in assessing PSU’s efforts in the following three components of Dublin City University’s principles and can form a prospectus to be considered as PSU’s next comprehensive fund-raising campaign is developed.

- To ensure that the university's **research agenda** is informed by the needs of an ageing society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.
- To recognize the **range of educational needs** of older adults (from those who were early school-leavers through to those who wish to pursue Master's or PhD qualifications).
- To promote **intergenerational learning** and facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.

## Conclusion

The story of building a culture of age-friendliness in Portland, Oregon spans over a decade. The lessons offer insights into how Portland State University, a university built on a traditional academic structure consisting of colleges and departments and with a strong commitment to the concept of *Let Knowledge Serve the City* must rethink its own internal culture and ways of working together. How will the university mesh its people and ideas with the growing cross-sector efforts being developed within the broader metropolitan community to address complex problems and opportunities in our region? These two examples offer some lessons.

The initial impetus for creating an age-friendly environment centered on one node within PSU, namely the Institute on Aging, which began to work with WHO soon after the turn of the century. From this point, connections between the university and local government provided a channel to engage the City of Portland and then Multnomah County in exploring the opportunities and challenges created by an aging population. At this point, the path is becoming much more reciprocal as both the university and the community work to build a thriving intergenerational culture. Critical to this shift in emphasis has been the interests of key academic leaders, who have embraced the value of linking PSU as an age-friendly university to the effort to convert public opinion from a concern about a *silver tsunami* that we cannot afford to a *silver reservoir* filled with potential and opportunity.

PSU already is involved in long-term projects that address some of the most important aspects of life in the Greater Metropolitan area today. There is much to learn from our own local experiences in putting together a collaborative approach to addressing large scale, complex societal challenges. Might the concept of age-friendliness with its emphasis on creating Portland as a Place for All Generations become an element in each of the four identified thematic areas that guide decision-making at Portland State? Those areas are (1) Sustainability; (2) Cradle to Career; (3) Community Health; and (4) Economic Development. All that would be required would be to expand the second theme of Cradle to Career to include the career interests of people aged 55-79 or older. The Institute on Aging is continuing to serve a supportive role. Expanding the backbone to include additional components of PSU across all four themes could strengthen the ability of PSU to support additional community-based collaborations that link an

increasingly collaborative culture of engagement internally with the growing cross-sector patterns that are starting to shape Portland's future.

As the pattern of cross-sector collaboration become more common and as leadership and approaches to more equitable community representation gradually adapt to the challenges of working across institutional and community boundaries, the early efforts of institutions like Portland State to create a transdisciplinary academic culture and to practice new forms of communication and working together will intensify. As this process unfolds, more options will open up for university ideas, people and expertise to contribute more meaningfully to the creation of sustainable communities where people of all backgrounds can thrive.

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