Anchor Collaboratives: Building Bridges With Place-Based Partnerships and Anchor Institutions

preparing by

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The anchor collaborative conversation in Poughkeepsie has been taking place over a number of years. A community wealth building summit was held in 2016 and was attended by several anchors, nonprofits, community groups, and representatives from city government. In 2018, a county legislator organized a city delegation to attend the TDC Baltimore Anchor Collaborative meeting. This event, and the effects of increased development and the higher cost of living in the city, led to the creation of the Community Wealth Building Coordinator at Hudson River Housing.

One economic development project that Hudson River Housing initiated was the Poughkeepsie Open Kitchen, a shared-use kitchen utilized by more than two dozen food entrepreneurs. The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) provided some of the kitchen equipment and CIA students taught cooking classes. The CIA’s involvement was later expanded to work with the youth in the Teen Business Lab. This began with the Pete’s Grr-Nola project, an idea of Hudson River Housing’s youth advisory board, to teach the youth about food production skills at the Poughkeepsie Open Kitchen. The youth created and tested the recipe, and then developed the product. In the fall of 2018, the project was scaled up to include training on starting and running a business and presentations on such topics as marketing and personal finance.

Within the larger geographic area of the town of Poughkeepsie, there are four colleges and institutes and two major hospitals. Hudson River Housing is laying the groundwork for an anchor collaborative, looking at anchors such as Vassar Brothers Medical Center, Nassar College, Marist College and The Culinary Institute of America. One of the goals of that partnership would be the creation of a training and employment pipeline for the anchors to hire local disadvantaged residents, such as the program they have with the Open Kitchen.

The mission of the **Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona (CFB)** is “to change lives in the communities [it] serves by feeding the hungry today, and building a healthy, hunger-free tomorrow.” To fulfill this mission, they are shifting their work towards addressing the root causes of hunger by tackling such larger societal and systemic issues as the food system and economic
justice. This means developing partnerships with anchor institutions, conducting civic engagement and public advocacy, and equitable community development by providing capacity-building grants, microloans, and supporting food and health enterprises.

CFB started the Farm-to-Institution program in 2014 as part of its food system work to address healthy food access, particularly for disadvantaged youth and adults, as well as to support small farmers—an important local economic engine in southern Arizona. The program connects small and midsize farms looking for new outlets to sell their products to anchor institutions such as schools and hospitals that want to add local produce to their menus. CFB reached out to anchor institutions and enlisted the partnership of Tucson Medical Center, Tucson Unified School District, and the University of Arizona’s Student Union. The farm-to-institution network is developing a regional agricultural value chain to get fresh, local produce to residents in maximum volume.

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Over the 40-plus years that CFB has been in existence, it has grown into an anchor institution thanks to the breadth of its work in the region and the partnerships it has developed with community groups, farmers, philanthropy, elected officials, school districts, and other anchor institutions. Tucson has both unique opportunities and challenges because it is situated in a vast, rural border region. For example, there is only one major university and a few hospitals. CFB is starting the work of institutionalizing the anchor mission at their anchor partners’ institutions. The Farm-to-Institution program was a good starting point for their anchor collaboration work. Now CFB is looking at how to engage new partners in equitable economic development work.

What are the common funding structures?

If properly resourced, anchor collaboratives can start up with low levels of funding through the support and resources of the backbone organization and the collaborative partners. Some collaboratives identify “low-hanging fruit” projects immediately in order to get the collaborative moving, score some early successes, and better learn how to work together toward shared priorities. However, larger, systemic changes do not happen overnight. Often times com-