

BUILDING COMMUNITY/UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

**DRAKE UNIVERSITY
AND
TRINITY COLLEGE**

A MAKING CONNECTIONS
PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MATCH

NOVEMBER 14-17, 2000

**THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RESOURCE CENTER
OF
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION
AND
THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY**

BACKGROUND

Through its *Making Connections* initiative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation is working with Des Moines, Iowa and 21 other cities across the country to strengthen neighborhoods and support families. One of the goals of the initiative is to connect families in tough neighborhoods to economic opportunities, informal social networks and supportive services that contribute to improving their lives.

The Foundation supports partners in the 22 *Making Connections* sites with technical assistance to help them achieve their family strengthening goals. Peer technical assistance helps participants to learn from the innovations of their peers in other locations who have faced similar problems.

Working with the leader of the Des Moines site team from the Foundation, Ira Barbell, Drake University expressed a desire to learn more about university-community partnerships. After researching the diverse partnerships underway in all parts of the country, the Technical Assistance and Resource Center (TARC) of the Foundation sponsored a peer exchange between Drake and Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, which has undertaken a comprehensive community development initiative in partnership with the neighborhoods in which it is located.

Because most of the projects supported by Trinity have been primarily “bricks and mortar” in nature, its team also viewed the peer match as an opportunity to gain some insight as to how the College’s community relations approach can be modified to encompass less concrete issues—such as meeting the needs of families in its surrounding communities. In pursuing an expanded agenda, Trinity hopes to build upon internal service learning, internship, and community organizing initiatives that are devoted to strengthening the “human infrastructure” in Hartford neighborhoods.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), a major technical assistance partner of the Foundation, facilitated several pre-match conference calls and information exchanges among key match participants to design and plan the match. The calls focused on establishing mutually agreeable expectations for the match, establishing an agenda, identifying prospective participants, and organizing the logistics.

Among the invited participants were a team of University administrators and faculty, public and elected officials, neighborhood association presidents, community-based agency staff, and a spokesperson for the public school system represented Drake and the City of Des Moines. The Trinity team included staff and faculty from the College, leaders of the Southside Institutional Neighborhood Alliance, local community organizers, Hartford city officials, and neighborhood residents. As the match was structured, Trinity’s Community Relations staff maintained a consistent presence while other members of their team were invited to participate in individual segments that were related to their activities and responsibilities. (A full list of participants is appended.)

SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE MATCH

Technical Assistance Focus

Drake University is located in a neighborhood that is facing many of the same challenges as those being successfully addressed by Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. In sharing their experiences, Drake and Trinity agreed to:

- Explore strategies for building working partnerships among each group of stakeholders in neighborhood revitalization efforts, including residents, schools, businesses, other public and private organizations, and local and state government;
- Share innovative approaches for involving students and faculty in community (service) learning;
- Identify financing options;
- Discuss ways to create dialogue between universities and their neighbors that value residents' voices, assets, and concerns; and
- Brainstorm strategies for expanding neighborhood revitalizations efforts to include approaches that support families.

Drake University

Located in Des Moines, Iowa, Drake University is fully engaged in a variety of neighborhood and city outreach initiatives. Among them is the Neighborhood Improvement Task Force, which is comprised of University administrators, city department directors, area business owners, representatives of religious and volunteer organizations, and neighborhood leaders who meet monthly on the Drake campus to strategize about local challenges and development opportunities. University facilities centers such as the Adult Literacy Center and the Drake Legal Clinic offer services such as reading instruction for persons over 18 and pro bono legal representation for low-income citizens. In addition, Drake recently entered into a partnership with several central Iowa schools and businesses to provide support for Partners in Economic Progress (PEP), a new nonprofit organization working to boost the high school graduation and college enrollment rates among local African-American students.

These examples highlight just a few of the many community service projects supported by Drake administrators, faculty, and students. The University's Board of Trustees has also been very supportive of neighborhood planning and economic projects, including their involvement with a \$15 million improvement project during the 1980s.

However, faced with the continuing deterioration of surrounding areas, the University is now seeking to expand its neighborhood efforts to include educational initiatives, service learning activities, and further economic development. Drake was also interested in exploring ways to

improve relations with its low- and middle-income resident neighbors, many of whom do not feel welcomed by the University.

As they work to identify new avenues for promoting community revitalization and collaborating with neighborhood residents, the Drake team indicated that it would like to gain more in-depth knowledge about promising community/university partnerships already underway across the country.

Trinity College

In January 1996, Trinity College announced that it was spearheading a comprehensive \$175 million neighborhood revitalization plan involving a distressed 15-block area adjacent to its Hartford, Connecticut-based campus. The decision to back such an initiative represented a dramatic reversal in policy since the College had long sought to protect its reputation as a safe, competitive institution by distancing itself from the poverty, drugs, and crime that increasingly plagued surrounding communities.

Guided by the leadership of Dr. Evan Dobbelle, who was appointed President in 1995, Trinity embraced the idea that investing in the neighborhood rather than trying to shut it out was not only the moral thing to do, but also in its own best interest. Recognizing that the fate of Hartford was inextricably linked with its own future, the College went from characterizing its setting as a liability to celebrating and engaging the community as an invaluable educational asset.

For the past five years, Trinity has worked in collaboration with its Southside Institutional Neighborhood Alliance (SINA) partners (Hartford Hospital and the Institute of Living, Connecticut Children's Medical Center, and Connecticut Public Television and Radio), community residents, public officials, and private businesses to create an infrastructure for local families that encourages stable home ownership, supports neighborhood economic development, and provides educational resources for people of all ages. The cornerstone of their efforts is the Learning Corridor, a newly opened 16-acre complex constructed on a former brownfield site that consists of a public Montessori elementary school, a Hartford middle school, a science and math resource high school, and the Greater Hartford Academy for the Performing Arts. Its facilities also include a 700-person theatre and space set aside for a planned family resource center.

Beyond the Learning Corridor, Trinity and its SINA partners have lent their support to various community renewal projects, including:

- An initiative to improve housing stock and create new home-ownership opportunities for neighborhood residents.
- A campus-based Boys and Girls Club located across the street from the Learning Corridor, which opened in February 1999.
- The HART (Hartford Areas Rally Together) Job Center, which provides training and employment services for neighborhood residents.

- A Streetscape Improvement program designed to make the neighborhood more attractive, safer, and more welcoming.
- Local community policing initiatives, including an expansion of block-watch programs and the construction of a new police substation in the neighborhood.

THE CONSULTATION

The Agenda

The peer match was scheduled over three and half days. It began with an informal reception on Tuesday evening that allowed participants to get acquainted. The first full day session commenced Wednesday morning with a formal welcome. Following introductions, the lead members of the Trinity and Drake teams took time to describe the nature of their community/university initiatives as well as their expectations for the match.

Wednesday's agenda included issues of listening to neighborhood voices, linking with public schools and youth-serving programs, stimulating economic development, technology programs, and financing strategies as well as a neighborhood bus tour. The sharing and networking then continued during the evening when other Trinity staff, Hartford residents, and local city officials joined the teams for dinner.

On Thursday, participants attended a Trinity-sponsored conference on Higher Education and Community Engagement and toured the Learning Corridor campus. The match was then concluded midday Friday after a debriefing and wrap-up session.

Please Note: The order of Community Engagement Parts I & II was reversed because invited residents and community agency staff were unable to attend the Wednesday morning session.

Community Engagement Part II: Technology Programs

John Langeland, the Director of Information and Technology for Trinity College, began the discussion by providing an overview of the Smart Neighborhood Initiative. Funded under a 5-year Kellogg Foundation grant, Smart Neighborhood promotes the sharing of knowledge between Trinity and neighborhood participants through projects that make information technology more readily available. The hub of the initiative is the Trinfo Café, a drop in center that offers community members access to computers and technology training.

Other Smart Neighborhood efforts to cross the digital divide include offering free Internet wiring and service for each residence within the targeted 15-block revitalization area. The College is also providing nearby civic organizations and small businesses with web connections. Moreover, it has stationed new and refurbished computers in more than 50 small labs within the neighborhood.

Key Issues Identified and Lessons Learned Along the Way:

- Increasing access to the information highway presents a whole series of opportunities for establishing strong connections that are vital to resident empowerment. Through Smart Neighborhood, local organizations have become more visible through the development of websites, e-mail capabilities, and documents outlining their efforts. In addition, Trinfo Café trainings and neighborhood labs have boosted economic opportunities by helping a number of individual residents acquire marketable job skills.
- The tech support Trinity provides is not looked upon as charity. Student interns appreciate the educational benefits such work entails and those receiving support are explicitly encouraged to explore ways that they can give back to the College or other neighborhood entities in exchange for services.
- Wiring local residences with free Internet services involved some logistical challenges arose because vendors were accustomed to servicing customers who are billed individually via personal credit cards.
- When the Kellogg grant expires in three years, Trinity plans to restructure their tech support services as a self-sustaining, for-profit initiative. However, the College recognizes that balancing the pressure to earn money with meeting the needs of neighborhood residents and organizations may be difficult.

Potential Next Steps for Drake/Des Moines Team Members:

- Assess the institutional capacity to address technology as part of their neighborhood efforts.
- Explore opportunities to provide tech equipment and support in partnership with community agencies and the local small business development center.

Community Service Learning

The faculty and administrative staff who oversee Trinity's Community Learning Initiative (CLI) joined the match for lunch on Wednesday. Via collaborations with local community partners, the CLI team creates opportunities for students to apply classroom learnings within a 'real world' context. Six years after the program's launch, approximately 800 students are serving more than 60 organizations through CLI courses and a new minor in community action has been established.

Key Issues Identified and Lessons Learned Along the Way:

- Although the CLI initially emerged out of a strong sense of obligation to the community, it has legitimate educational value. Preliminary findings from course evaluations consistently show that 95% of participating students find service learning activities useful and 70% of enrollment applications received by Trinity now cite its community engagement efforts as a major draw.
- The support of administrative staff who are solely dedicated to CLI is crucial to the initiative's success. Without their assistance, participating faculty members might feel overburdened by the extensive planning and outreach that course-based community collaborations require. In addition, strong community organizing skills are deemed essential to establishing solid partnerships.
- The CLI team attributes much of the attention and cooperation they receive to Trinity leadership who recognize the importance of practicing internally what they preach in support of the neighborhood revitalization initiative.
- Regarding recruitment, a voluntary and collaborative approach that allows professors to identify for themselves those opportunities that would be most helpful in furthering their course objectives has been most effective. For instance, the CLI team hosts regular brainstorming lunches, where faculty members who are interested in exploring community learning can share ideas with colleagues who have done it or may be also be interested in it.
- Although Drake students and faculty have shown great interest in community service projects, inevitable student turnover has made it difficult to sustain ongoing service learning initiatives. Also, many who participate find that community learning requires additional time from their already heavy schedules.

Potential Next Steps By Drake/Des Moines Team Members:

- Develop strategies to promote a greater institutional commitment to service learning and related course development.
- Explore less resource-intensive service learning enticements (e.g. faculty/student rewards, paid course release time, the offering of additional course credits to students).
- Strengthen the infrastructure for sustaining local community partnerships and assess the need for a coordinating presence within the University.

Financing the Initiatives/University Investments

As described by Linda Campanella and Jackie Mandyck, Trinity launched a development effort that was focused squarely on obtaining corporate,

“When students know that people are counting on them to do something thoughtful and useful with their studies, it helps them to feel as passionate about course work as the faculty does.” Todd Vogel, Trinity Professor of American Studies

foundation, and individual support for the neighborhood renewal. While the sheer size of the planned \$175 million initiative generated a great deal of interest among potential funders, the college was able to successfully tap into public and private dollars by leveraging its own \$6 million investment. However, to offset concerns that community improvements were being sought at the expense of academic endeavors, care was taken to maintain a balance between development activities designed to support neighborhood initiatives and internally focused investments. (A detailed listing of funding sources is provided in the Trinity brochure entitled *Strengthening a Neighborhood from Within.*)

Key Issues Identified and Lessons Learned Along the Way:

- Trinity was able to secure a substantial amount of public funding by identifying money that had already been appropriated for educational and development purposes. For example, voters had previously authorized funds that were used to construct new schools in Hartford.
- When undertaking such an initiative, both capital and operational funding needs must be thoroughly analyzed. In addition, comprehensive neighborhood projects often require that funding be gradually pieced together over the course of a few years.
- The City of Hartford's role in getting the initiative off the ground was critical beyond the financial. Local officials cut through red tape in order to expedite the distribution of needed funds and permits.

Potential Next Steps By Drake/Des Moines Team Members:

- Build support among University leadership for the leveraging of Drake funds to support local neighborhood initiatives.
- Develop strategies to access county and state funding.

Focus on Youth: Linking with Public Schools and Youth-Serving Programs

Jackie Mandyck offered a brief overview of planning processes that led to the Learning Corridor's creation. Because Trinity recognized education as an essential means for neighborhood renewal and advancement, it sought to establish a visible school presence within the 15-block target area. Teamed with Eddie Perez, the President of SINA, Jackie embarked upon a 'road show' to talk with officials from surrounding schools about Trinity's goals and commitment. The College also lobbied to gain access to educational and development funds that had already been authorized as part of a larger state bond issue.

While working to secure funding and the support of the Capitol Region Education Council, Trinity also enlisted the help of local officials in launching the project. For the City of Hartford, the Learning Corridor represented an opportunity to simultaneously clean up a problematic brownfield site and provide sorely needed additional space for its Montessori School program.

Key Issues Identified and Lessons Learned Along the Way:

- Trinity faculty and administrators feel a genuine connection to the Learning Corridor because of its educational mission. Thus, many were willing to assist planners with curricula design and instruction.
- Deliberate steps were taken to ensure that the Learning Corridor student body was ethnically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse. However, planners recognized that many students emerging from less affluent school systems--most of whom were African-American and Latino—may not have had prior exposure to advanced curricula. One strategy employed to address such disparities was the intentional concentration of minority students at the new Math & Science Academy in the 9th and 10th grades so that they could build their skills over the course of four years.
- The decision to recruit students from both the City of Hartford and surrounding suburban areas involved a compromise that has resulted in some local tensions. Although the Learning Corridor regional focus has helped to generate funding and create an atmosphere where youth from diverse backgrounds can come together, many neighborhood parents were resentful that more enrollment slots were not available to local children.
- Suburban parents whose children now attend Learning Corridor schools have become much more involved with the city itself, which has helped to diffuse many of the negative perceptions many of them had about Hartford.

Potential Next Steps By Drake/Des Moines Team Members:

- Follow up with the North Carolina-based consultant who created the model that served as a blueprint for the Learning Corridor's Math and Science Academy.
- Seek to establish connections between faculty and area schools.
- Explore the idea of establishing a centralized boarding school in Des Moines for students across the state of Iowa.

Stimulating Economic Development: Home Ownership, Retail Development and Employment Opportunities

The President of SINA, Eddie Perez, outlined in detail the efforts of community partners to support housing and economic improvements that directly benefit existing residents, guard against gentrification, and prevent excessive displacement. Pat Williams, the Assistant City Manager for Hartford, then spoke of how the city government has collaborated with Trinity and its SINA to achieve development goals.

Housing: Focusing their resources on a block-by-block basis, SINA has obtained funding to rehabilitate over 30 two- and single-family homes over the next three years. Housing renovations are being completed gradually to allow community partners time to grow their own buyers via local home ownership programs that offer reduced mortgage rates and down payment assistance. Under a practice Trinity refers to as “geographic affirmative action”, prospective buyers who work and live in the area receive first priority. To aid this process, nearly \$1 million in city and state funding has been provided for home mortgage gap financing. Also, city officials and local residents are helping SINA selectively demolish and remove abandoned or uninhabitable buildings.

Retail Development: To ensure that the Learning Corridor “would have life after school let out”, 6,000 square feet within the complex was set aside for retail businesses funded by a \$2 million HUD/Economic Development Initiative grant and an additional \$6.2 million in commercial loan funds. Beyond the Corridor, Trinity and SINA are continuing to explore opportunities to assist small, community-based businesses via collaborations with a local merchants association and potential investors.

Employment Opportunities: SINA purchased and rehabilitated the building that houses the local Job Center before turning it over to HART. Through a first-source hiring agreement with SINA partners, the HART Job Center has helped residents attain Learning Corridor construction jobs and entry-level positions at community institutions. While the Corridor was being built, a training program was also established for minority contractors that offered mentoring support and financial consultation.

Key Issues Identified and Lessons Learned Along the Way:

- Both residents and city officials were involved in planning processes to identify what was going to be built and how.
- Under the guidance of Eddie Perez, who is well-known and trusted within the community, Trinity and its SINA partners made a concerted effort to calm and reassure residents who were concerned about the threat of displacement. Rather than moving in quickly to seize properties once they were granted the power of eminent domain, they dedicated a great deal of time to building relationships with residents and communicating the broad message behind the neighborhood initiative. Along with Mr. Perez, partners took the time to go door to door and sit down with community members to talk simply about what community partners were trying to accomplish. They also attended neighborhood meetings regularly to ensure clarity regarding their roles and responsibilities.
- Those residents who were displaced were well-compensated and received assistance with finding new housing. Although all were encouraged to remain in the Hartford community, most chose to relocate away from the city.
- As it was originally constructed, the Hartford city code was not amenable to expediting planned development projects. However, city officials and council members felt very strongly that the neighborhood initiative was important and should move forward quickly.

Motivated by this belief, they chose to remove existing impediments by revising the code under the guidance of their legal team.

- Rather than targeting areas spread out across the community, Trinity and its SINA partners pursued a density strategy that concentrated development efforts on a block-by-block basis.
- Home mortgage financing included incentives to promote stability among new owner occupants. Buyers were required to live in a house for at least three years and if they stayed for ten year or more, 10 percent of the debt would be discounted.
- Trinity did not want to promote principles it was not living on the campus, so the College made a commitment to allocating financial aid dollars to domestically underrepresented groups. As a result, minorities now comprise 20% of the student population.

Potential Next Steps By Drake/Des Moines Team Members:

- Promote the increased involvement of county and state officials in local neighborhood initiative.
- Identify and address the bureaucratic impediments to neighborhood revitalization efforts.
- Investigate how the Partners in Economic Progress (PEP) model can be expanded to include adults.

Community Engagement – Part I: Listening to Community Voices

Alta Lash, the Director of the Trinity Center for Neighborhoods, initiated the discussion around community engagement. The conversation continued during dinner Wednesday evening, when invited Hartford residents and other community stakeholders were able to join the match.

“If the rules just don’t work for you, change them. That’s why city code books are drafted on loose leaf paper!” Pat Williams

“Trinity is as proud of increasing student and faculty diversity as it is of its neighborhood achievements.” Linda Campanella

“Partners willingly left their egos at the door to accomplish their goals.” Eddie Perez

The renewal strategies favored by Trinity and its SINA partners are those designed to build the community from within. From the very beginning, the grassroots participation of residents and community groups was considered essential to the success of the neighborhood initiative. Following its launch, one of the first things Evan Dobelle and Eddie Perez did was go into the neighborhood to hear directly from those who lived there. By taking the time to sit down and talk plainly about what needed to be accomplished, they began laying the groundwork for what has become a true partnership between residents and local institutions. Rather than imposing their own solutions, Trinity and its SINA partners have worked collaboratively with residents to develop common agendas, a collective sense of purpose, and a shared commitment to success.

To support these aims, the Trinity Center for Neighborhoods (TCN) was established to serve as knowledge and capacity building resource for residents and community organizers. As described by Alta Lash, its purpose is to bolster the human infrastructure within Hartford neighborhoods. With the assistance of Trinity faculty and administrators, TCN conducts applied research to provide residents with the data and information they need to address community issues, offers community leadership trainings, assists frontline agency staff in making the transition to senior level positions, and oversees an internship program designed to recruit the next generation of community organizers.

Key Issues Identified and Lessons Learned Along the Way:

- When institutions seek to partner to with communities on local initiatives, a structural shift occurs in the relationships between universities and their neighbors. Recognizing that assuming leadership for community transformation requires specific skills and knowledge, Trinity chose to invest in building such capacities among residents. Overall, this decision was grounded in an understanding that neighborhood renewal is not something you do *to* people, but *with* them. In promoting this principle, Trinity went so far as to create an institution within itself that encouraged the voice of the community—even if it meant being challenged on the issues at times.
- Staff members such as Eddie Perez and Alta Lash, who were active in the community long before joining the Trinity team, played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for viable community partnerships. Their strong, pre-existing ties to Hartford boosted the College’s credibility among residents and helped to ensure that institutional responses to local problems were both relevant and effective. Going forward, Trinity is working to move beyond its reliance upon individuals well-versed in community organizing toward a framework that integrates resident participation and empowerment throughout the institution as a whole.
- Consistent, direct, and honest communication is the key to maintaining a strong university/community partnership. True partners must be clear and up front about what is in their self-interest.

Potential Next Steps By Drake/Des Moines Team Members:

- Seek opportunities to strengthen the University’s internal commitment to investing in resident partnership and capacity building.
- Expand outreach efforts by venturing out into neighborhoods to get to know residents and engaging persons who can serve as bridges to university/community partnerships.

“Because Trinity put its money where it’s mouth is and chose to invest in less tangible capacity building among residents, the community takes the College very seriously.” Alta Lash

Evaluation

Daniel Sirbirsky discussed his role as the evaluation coordinator for Trinity-based neighborhood initiatives funded by a \$5 million grant from the Kellogg Foundation, including Smart Neighborhoods and the Community Learning Initiative. Kellogg has adopted a unique approach to evaluating initiatives in that it seeks to balance the need for accountability with the goal of improving services.

An evaluation committee comprised of Trinity faculty and administrators, residents, and community representatives of local nonprofits worked together to establish outcomes and indicators. In addition to reviewing grant guidelines, they conducted numerous interviews and focus groups with residents to ensure that the process was participatory. Committee members also sought the input of residents who may not be engaged via focus groups by attending community meetings and just venturing out to walk and talk with people.

The evaluation criteria that were developed encompass both qualitative and quantitative measures to assess process and outcomes. They also reflect an emphasis on sustainability since Kellogg will exit in five years.

Common assessment tools include student surveys and focus groups designed to identify perceived benefits. However, the expectation is that goals and objectives will be adjusted or modified as neighborhood initiatives continue to evolve. Given the fluid nature of projects, evaluators have willingly chosen to adopt flexible means for measuring short- and long-term effects.

Key Issues Identified and Lessons Learned Along the Way:

- The process of collectively trying to think through what Trinity is trying to accomplish has been very healthy in terms of bringing about shared understandings and a clarity of purpose.
- Evaluation should be centered around an ongoing, continual process of touching base with stakeholders to obtain their input and provide feedback.
- The establishment of reliable baseline measures is critical to assessing true impacts.

Potential Next Steps By Drake/Des Moines Team Members:

- Clarify internal goals and objectives regarding neighborhood efforts.

Commenting on the practice of erecting barriers to shield institutions from community problems, Don Adams offered the following: “As long as universities administrators build gates and send memos instructing people not to cross certain boundaries, they’re going to be part of the problem—not the solution.”

- Seek resident and community partner input regarding relevant evaluation criteria.

Community Engagement – Part III: Moving From Bricks and Mortar to Supporting Families

The Aetna Center for Families was established to provide parents with the tools and support so necessary to the vital act of child-rearing. Funded by a \$1 million donation from the Aetna Foundation, it is envisioned as a multipurpose service center offering assistance, training, and referrals for young children and their families. Among the resources it will make available once its doors open are pre-natal and pediatric health services, parenting support, child care, and school readiness programs.

Located across the street from the Learning Corridor that houses the Aetna Center for Families is the Boys & Girls Club at Trinity College. The Club is dedicated to promoting the character, health, and well-being of children ages 6 through 12 and emphasizes social, cultural, and educational growth. Its facility is owned by Trinity and the program is managed by the Boys & Girls Club of Hartford. Along with experienced personnel who provide quality supervision and training, College students assist with Club operations through work-study programs, internships, and volunteer opportunities.

Key Issues Identified and Lessons Learned Along the Way:

- Providers should seek to build on family strengths rather than assume that they are there to ‘dole out services to poor, needy residents’.
- In thinking about ways to support families, it is often more effective to play a supportive role to indigenous institutions rather than becoming a provider.
- Vehicles for talking about the issues and challenges residents confront on a daily basis need to be established.
- Family-serving and neighborhood organizations that are being developed should be reflective of the diversity within the community.

Potential Next Steps By Drake/Des Moines Team Members:

- Conduct a community assessment to identify the strengths and needs of local families.
- Expand existing recreational and tutoring programs to address more substantive issues.
- Explore possible linkages with neighborhood-based service providers.

DEBRIEFING THE MATCH

Friday morning, both teams spent time revisiting the issue of resident engagement and reflecting on previous discussions held during the match.

Community Engagement

Much of the discussion around community engagement involved the Drake team's acknowledgement that the University was still in the process of shifting its perception of the community as a liability to that of an asset. Although Drake's strong record of academic excellence has always been a draw for students, many applicants have chosen not to attend the University because of perceived dangers and security threats. In the past, Drake pursued policies that created more distance between the institution and its neighborhood.

The success Trinity has been able to achieve by investing in the community helped the Drake team to see for themselves that they can do more to connect and partner with surrounding neighborhoods. Although they were not yet certain as to how they might proceed, University administrators committed to exploring ways in which they can do things not only differently—but better.

Neighborhood leaders from Des Moines who had been somewhat skeptical regarding Drake's intentions coming into the match expressed a sense of increased confidence in the University's willingness to collaboratively confront difficult issues (e.g. racial tensions, economic disparity). They went on to divulge that a disconnect existed not only between the university and the community, but also between neighborhood organizations and the residents at large. In their view, communication and outreach strategies needed to be improved on both fronts. Furthermore, they suggested that Drake take some initial steps that demonstrate its shift in perception to residents.

Participant Reflections and Lessons Learned

Key themes and learnings that were identified by Trinity and Drake team members include:

- Neighborhood change is not about just throwing money at a problem. The process of building relationships and capacities is as important as the initiative.
- Revitalization agendas must originate within the community. Building interest and excitement among stakeholders is more effective than dictating their involvement.
- An initiative of this magnitude requires strong, catalytic leadership both on campus and off to broaden and deepen connections among partners.
- When crafting neighborhood renewal projects and partnerships, one must consider the potential for sustainability.
- Given the concentration of capital resources in universities, it is immoral for institutions to do nothing about the disparity that surrounds them. Yet, community involvement is not simply the “right thing to do”—it also has fundamental educational value. Since Trinity

chose to adopt a more socially-conscious attitude and link its academic initiatives with community renewal, both enrollment applications and the quality of its applicants have greatly increased.

- Neighborhood initiatives can't be all things to all people. When pursuing specific goals, the idea is spur others to become active and engaged in different areas.
- It is always better to do something rather than nothing. However, goals should be realistic since even the slightest shortfalls may lead others to characterize an initiative as a failure—regardless of whatever limited successes were achieved.
- Message development and communication strategies are an integral part of any neighborhood plan. For example, Trinity used PR very effectively to generate enthusiasm and momentum for the neighborhood revitalization initiative. In contrast, match participants felt that the College's commitment to community engagement and empowerment was not fully illustrated during its one-day conference because there were very few resident participants—which is an observation Trinity plans to take them into consideration when reworking its promotional materials.
- Inevitable conflicts that emerge can be successfully worked through as long as there is an underlying agreement as to what partners are trying to accomplish.

Commitments for Moving Forward

As the match came to a close, Drake Team members made commitments about the actions they will take as a result of the match. Several also expressed an interest in hosting a reciprocal visit for the Trinity team.

Don A.: Will share the ideas discussed during the match with the Neighborhood Improvement Task Force and Drake leadership in an effort to promote strategies of resident engagement and partnership.

Wayne F.: Will work more closely with Drake administration and regularly attend University-sponsored community meetings that he had previously chosen not to participate in.

Jim F.: Will do some things differently to engage resident and keep them informed, including getting out to talk with people and doing some mailings.

Robert S.: Will work to change resident perceptions that Drake does not value them.

Dan S.: Will follow up with the Provost regarding Trinity's Community Learning Initiative and how that can work with Drake faculty.

Connie C.: Will visit the North Carolina schools that served as a model for the Learning Corridor high school facilities.

Larry M.: Will work to promote increased county support for Drake/community partnerships and local neighborhood initiatives.

Steve G.: Will work to improve the city's flexibility with respect to supporting neighborhood initiatives and will continue to explore opportunities to improve the delivery of neighborhood services.