



Diversity Works

Office of University Partnerships

Minority-Serving Institutions Developing Partnerships, Building Communities

VOL. 1, ISSUE 2

Local Business Outreach Delivers Tangible Results

"... A higher education institution, public or private, is no different than a corporation in that it is a citizen of its community, and one of its civic responsibilities is to use its resources and research capacity to improve living at the local level—socially, culturally, as well as economically." Toni Murdock, president, Antioch University Seattle, Washington.

When institutions of higher education form partnerships with local businesses, communities can be revitalized and people's lives enriched. Lehman College and the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) represent two OUP grantees who are supporting local businesses in the communities where they live. They are using their Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities (HSIAC) grant to encourage and foster local business development, improve quality of life, and support local merchants.

Lehman College

Improving Merchant Activity in North Bronx

When it comes to community development projects in Lehman College's north Bronx neighborhoods, nursing professors Eleanor Lundeen and Keville Frederickson focus on improving quality of life and fostering community stability.

The neighborhoods surrounding Lehman College are home to more than 127,000 residents, and that population swells each day with large numbers of workers who commute to the communities. Both residents and workers appreciate safe, clean streets, friendly stores, and a

variety of goods and services. Local merchants want to be able to pay their bills and make a living, and local residents want their merchant areas to provide a variety of quality goods and services at reasonable prices. Quality of life is the glue that brings these ideas together and is what partnerships between the college and local groups are achieving.



Eleanor Lundeen (standing) and Keville Frederickson.

In 2001 and 2003, the college was awarded HSIAC grants and used the funds to develop activities to assist the north Bronx merchants. The grants helped to support local merchants, expand job opportunities for local residents, and develop a sense of community through merchants, restaurants, and retail stores.

"Our college's HSIAC efforts have been directed at improving quality of life in a community at risk for instability due to population turnover and ethnic diversity," says Lundeen. "Our merchants are as changing and as diverse as the local population. They are often unaware of opportunities to participate in local business improvements, or they do not know how to organize."

Outreach continued on page 2

Lehman's 2001 grant helped to develop its first merchant activity, a partnership between the Lehman College Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Mosholu Preservation Corporation (MPC), the community economic development arm of the Montefiore Medical Center. The aim of this activity was to revitalize two merchant associations in north Bronx. These first 2 years provided an understanding of the complex needs of the merchants and a realization that without our efforts the merchant associations would dissolve. Our next steps have been to replicate the New York City Business Improvement District (BID) model. We provide a counselor, much like a BID manager, and we provide minigrants, much like the financial support BIDs provide to merchants. Our aim has been to use the 2003 grant to expand efforts into new merchant areas, but, more importantly, to prepare at least one merchant area to submit a BID application.

Lehman's HSIAC Mini-Grant program seeks to show the merchants what they can achieve for themselves and the community if they are more united. "Our goal in providing a HSIAC-funded business counselor and minigrants is to model for the merchants what a BID would be like," says Lundeen. "Where we provide minigrants that the merchant must match, BIDs require merchants to contribute to a city-managed fund that is used for local business improvements. Where we provide a business counselor, merchants who belong to a BID have a manager who coordinates street repairs, ensures that sanitation and police services are adequate, and organizes merchants to participate in promotional events such as holiday discounts that attract people to the area to shop. Also with BID status, there is a manager who can coordinate efforts to influence key stores to move into the neighborhood when others move out. There would be a more coordinated merchant activity in the neighborhood."

According to Lundeen, one challenge is lack of commonality among the merchants. Approximately 25 percent are Hispanic and the others are from multiple other ethnicities, including new immigrants from Korea, Ireland, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and second- or third-generation Irish- and Italian-Americans. With this diversity comes a difficulty in communicating. This poses a problem because it takes two-thirds of the area's merchants to apply for a BID. Lehman's HSIAC business manager, George Acevedo, has identified key merchants who support BID status. They are being educated about BIDs and are playing a role in gathering consensus among the merchants.

Currently, Lehman's HSIAC Mini-Grant program provides matching grants of up to \$2,000 to merchants to improve their businesses. So far, the minigrants have provided support to individual businessmen and women to improve their facades, the safety of their stores, or their ability to provide efficient services. One major positive result of the program has been saved jobs. For example, due to rent gouging, a long-time jewelry merchant was faced with having to close his business. He decided to relocate his 40-year-old family business across the street from its original site. Minigrants helped him upgrade the entryway and install a safety system. Now when customers enter the store, they are buzzed through an outer door; when that door closes, the jeweler buzzes the inner door. This buzzer system along with a video recorder ensures the safety of customers and store clerks. Two recent retail store murders make safety systems essential for this merchant to remain in business. The awarding of a minigrant also supports the merchant's decision to keep his business and jobs in the area.

"The Bronx is big and complex, but person-to-person understanding can give businessmen and residents a small-town feeling," says Lundeen. "In essence, someone caring is true quality of life."

According to Lundeen, safety is an important aspect of business in the north Bronx, particularly in one of the new areas for activities. The merchant strip on Webster Avenue is often empty of pedestrians because it is not a residential area and does not have retail stores. Yet the businesses provide essential services that employ many people. In one building, there is a computer setup service, a photographer, an electrician, and a notary public, all of which maintain valuable equipment. A minigrant supported the installation of tempered glass and a security gate that has provided equipment security for nighttime hours.

"One of our minigrants supports a business that provides lunch van rentals and evening parking for 15 units," says Lundeen. "These lunch vans provide employment for approximately 30 persons who rent the vans and need safe nighttime parking. A hand-operated security gate to the parking area exposed workers to theft and injury. Our minigrant helped the merchant to install automatic security gates and a new pavement entry. The added security is a deterrent to would-be robbers." So far 15 merchants have applied for minigrants.

University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

International Innovation Center—Business Incubator

Amigoland Mall located in downtown Brownsville, Texas, was the city's first mall and a shopping hub for residents. But as its anchor stores moved to a new, larger mall in Northern Brownsville, and the smaller mall stores and surrounding businesses either closed or relocated, Amigoland began to decline. During this time, the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) were toying with the concept of securing a single location to house international business, technology, education, and commercial activities. UTB/TSC purchased the 647,000-square-foot mall facility, located just one mile from the main campus, and converted it into the International Technology Education and Commerce Campus (ITEC).



Front entrance to ITEC.

“We realized early on that one of the pieces to making ITEC successful was to form a business incubator that could provide resources necessary for new businesses to start and for growing entities to prosper, thus creating jobs,” says John Sossi, manager of business incubator services. Jim Holt, the college's dean of workforce training, saw the incubator concept as an opportunity to grow local talent, and also as an important part of the overall concept of ITEC.

Business Incubator

UTB/TSC used its 2002 HSIAC grant as seed funding for the International Innovation Center (IIC) business incubator program on ITEC. IIC provides a professional setting with conference rooms and all the equipment necessary to conduct business at a reasonable rate with flexible terms. UTB/TSC provides a staff of three full-time and two part-time people, consisting of a manager, two coordinators, and two administrative assistants. Interns and work-study students are also utilized for administrative support.

“The IIC incubator assists a business that is starting up, or at a growth point, with counseling through an experienced staff and advisory committee comprised of seven local business professionals. It provides an option for local entrepreneurs to take that chance in starting a business knowing that a ‘sanity check’ has occurred,” says Sossi.

On average, about 60 clients who are interested in the incubator program visit IIC every 6 months. IIC staff provide counseling, and help clients identify needs such as financial resources, import and export assistance, formation assistance, location, and whether they want to work from home or from some other venue. “In any case, we take the time to help them,” says Sossi.

Moreover, the incubator also provides business plan assistance, networking events, training opportunities, and a synergetic business environment that offers exposure to other IIC entrepreneurs. These resources, combined with affordable lease rates and flexible terms, give these businesses a better chance at succeeding, thus eventually exiting the incubator creating new jobs and staying in the area.

According to Sossi, a wide range of businesses have been successful, and they have had some “home runs,” including:

- * ConsultingPoint, a manufacturer of specialty electric motors. Joel Gonzalez is company president and this is his first business venture. The company secured a contract from Wavecrest Industries to manufacture the motors for electric bicycles and assemble them, which was previously being done in China. ConsultingPoint now does mining motors and recently manufactured the motor for NASA's project Thibodaux. ConsultingPoint will employ more than 80 people. Joel also utilizes UTB/TSC students.
- * HomeMaid, a cleaning service for homes and businesses. Monica Garza is company president. Her 26 employees are uniformed, trained, insured, bonded, and given the opportunity for higher pay rates.

Other incubator program participants include businesses such as publishers, IT services, home health-care, rehabilitation, import/export brokers, home designers and builders, real estate, personnel staffing, insurance, human resources services, and accounting.

Since its inception, 26 companies have been processed within the IIC incubator program. IIC's target job creation goal was 300 jobs by the end of the grant cycle

Outreach continued on page 4

in December 2005. To date, the 26 companies represent over 500 potential jobs.

For more information on Lehman College Mini-Grant program and north Bronx merchant activity, contact Eleanor Lundeen, Associate Professor, Department of Nursing, Lehman College, 250 Bedford Park Boulevard West, Bronx, NY 10468; Phone: (718) 960-1170; E-mail: Eleanor.lundeen@lehman.cuny.edu

For more information on the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College International Innovation Center Business Incubator, contact John Sossi, Manager, Business Incubator Services, 301 Mexico Blvd. Suite H3-A, Brownsville, TX 78520; Phone: (956) 548-8710; Fax: (956) 548-8717; E-mail: John.sossi@utb.edu



Business incubator clients pose in hallway of building.

Funding Resources

The Corporation for National and Community Service

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a public-private partnership that engages Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service. Through its Learn and Serve America program, it supports and encourages service-learning nationwide and enables countless students to make meaningful contributions to their community while building their academic and civic skills.

Learn and Serve America Higher Education Grants

Learn and Serve America Higher Education grants is one of several ways the Corporation's Learn and Serve America program supports nationwide service-learning. Through a competitive process, the Corporation awards these funds directly to individual colleges and universities or consortia of higher education institutions, which may include public or private nonprofit organizations.

Grantees may use these funds to implement service-learning programs that engage students, faculty, staff, and other volunteers in service to the local

community. Funds support training, course development, curricular and co-curricular service by students, activities to strengthen the ability of colleges to support student service, and support for community service federal work-study programs.

Individual Institution Grants

Individual institution programs are intended to integrate community service or service-learning into the life of a single institution—across an entire department, a school, in the core curriculum, throughout co-curricular activities, or throughout the entire institution.

Individual institution grants are awarded to innovative and replicable programs. Grantees form partnerships among schools (public and private), community agencies, traditional student groups, faith-based institutions, and other youth-serving organizations to determine and meet community needs.

Consortia Grants

Consortia grants promote not only the spread of community service and service-learning, but also the deepening of those efforts across the curriculum and beyond. Consortia programs function as

Current Literature on Community Engagement

Publications Highlight Campus–Community Engagement

Collaborations between IHEs and the communities they serve can stimulate significant neighborhood revitalization thus improving the lives of residents. This section highlights publications that provide information on the importance of campus–community collaboration, including innovative practices that can be implemented.

The Community's College: Indicators of Engagement at Two-Year Institutions is volume one of a two-volume series produced as a part of Campus Compact's Indicators of Engagement project.

Based on the findings of a multiyear research project, this publication profiles successful community engagement practices and programs at community colleges nationwide. Designed to provide both 2- and 4-year institutions with specific guidance for creating an engaged campus, this publication explores institutional culture, organizational structures, enabling mechanisms, curricular issues, and partnership strategies as avenues to community and civic engagement. Also included is a comprehensive self-assessment tool to help campuses evaluate and deepen their own engagement practices.

A nationwide project by the National Campus Compact has identified 13 indicators of how IHEs can work more effectively with their surrounding communities. All 13 indicators appear in this publication, which also includes profiles of IHEs that serve as positive models of civic engagement.

The second volume of the Indicators of Engagement project, *One with the Community: Indicators of Engagement at Minority-Serving Institutions*, is also based on the findings of a multiyear research project, and profiles successful community engagement practices at historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges. Engagement activities at these institutions are strong, and the innovative ways these activities are put into practice offer models for all IHEs. In addition to examining organizational structures, curricular approaches, institutional culture, and partnering strategies that support local communities, the book also offers a comprehensive self-assessment tool to help campuses evaluate and deepen their own engagement practices.

For more information or to obtain a copy of these publications, contact Campus Compact, P.O. Box 1975, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912, Phone: (401) 867–3950, Fax: (401) 867–3925, Web site: www.compact.org

The Promise of Partnerships: Tapping into the College as a Community Asset is designed specifically for community-based organizations and offers guidance on how to tap into the resources and expertise of local colleges and universities. Organizations can gain inside information on making valuable campus contacts, refining the planning process to ensure that they are true partners in any enterprise, working with students and faculty, and building long-term success. Examples from the field cover a range of partnership activities, from recruiting and training effective volunteers to establishing multimillion-dollar alliances. In addition, each section of the book includes practical tools such as tips, checklists, and best practices.

For more information or to obtain a copy of these publications, contact Campus Compact, P.O. Box 1975, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912; Phone: (401) 867–3950; Fax: (401) 867–3925; Web site: www.compact.org

The *Higher Education Collaboratives for Community Engagement and Improvement* monograph is the result of the Wingspread Conference on Higher Education Collaboratives for Community Engagement and Improvement, conducted on October 27 to 29, 2004, in Racine, Wisconsin. The papers included in this document explore the future of campus–community collaborations and offer a direction for research and practice that will advance engagement and capacity for such collaborations. Chapter titles include:

- * Reflections on Community–Campus Partnerships: What Has Been Learned? What are the Next Challenges?
- * Higher Education Collaboratives for Community Engagement and Improvement: Faculty and Researchers' Perspectives.
- * Challenges to Community–Higher Education Partnerships: A Call to Action.

continued on page 6

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of University Partnerships
451 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410-3000

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
HUD
Permit No. G-795

Return Service Requested
Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300

Publications continued from page 5

- * Mission and Community: The Culture of Community Engagement and Minority-Serving Institutions.
- * Research Universities Working Together to Serve Multiple Communities: The Committee on Institutional Cooperation Engagement Initiative.

For more information, contact:

Higher Education Collaboratives for Community Engagement and Improvement Monograph
National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good
School of Education, Suite 2339
University of Michigan
610 East University Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259
Web site: www.thenationalforum.org

Service continued from page 4

intermediary organizations that may make subgrants for new programs, conduct research in a number of sites, or deliver training and technical assistance with clear specific expectations to a target population. Grantees build upon proven strategies of integrating community service and service-learning in the curriculum and campus culture, while adapting to the institution's and community's unique environment.

For more information on the Corporation for National and Community Service, visit the Web site at www.nationalservice.org. More information on the next grant cycle, award amounts, or the application process for Learn and Serve America Higher Education grants can be obtained by contacting:

Learn and Serve America
1201 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20525
Phone: (202) 606-5000
E-mail: LSAabout@cns.gov
Web site: www.learnandserve.org