



# HBCU CENTRAL

Building Partnerships To Revitalize America's Neighborhoods

## HBCUs Share Secrets to Productive Partnerships

Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and LeMoyne-Owen College in Memphis, Tennessee, both have placed a high priority on attracting community partners and keeping them actively engaged in various neighborhood initiatives. As a result, these colleges have accomplished far more with HBCU funds than they could ever have done alone.

Promoting successful community partnerships requires a variety of skills in an HBCU, according to Eddie B. Thomas, associate vice president at Stillman College, and Jeffrey T. Higgs, director of the LeMoyne-Owen College Community

Development Corporation (LOCCDC). HBCUs must have a long-term vision of what they want their partnerships to accomplish, but they also need an appreciation for the day-to-day details that help partners feel valued. Colleges must be able to convince local businesses and government agencies to become actively engaged in community initiatives, but they also must let their partners help set the outreach agenda. In addition, according to Thomas and Higgs, the partnerships must be as inclusive as possible, representing all sectors of a neighborhood, and a partnership's action plan must be based on solid data about neighborhood conditions.

### Including every community element.

LOCCDC has relied heavily on a cross section of partners to help it meet its goals. The college's Community Action Coalition includes neighborhood residents, college staff, local businesses, two Baptist churches, a local museum, and the city's housing authority. The LOCCDC even includes the neighborhood's street corner loiterers on its list of partners.

"We started out very grassroots oriented," says Higgs about the LOCCDC. "If you were in the neighborhood, you became a collaborator and a partner of ours."

This inclusiveness is critical, says Higgs, because no community will be truly revitalized unless everyone shares in that success. So, while LOCCDC was establishing neighborhood associations, working on

## HUD Announces New HBCU Grantees

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently announced that the following schools had received HBCU grants. For more information about each grantee, visit [www.oup.org/about/hbcu02.html](http://www.oup.org/about/hbcu02.html).

- **Alabama:** C.A. Fredd State Technical College of Shelton State Community College in Tuscaloosa, Gadsden State Community College in Gadsden, Stillman College in Tuscaloosa.
- **Arkansas:** University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.
- **Delaware:** Delaware State University in Dover.
- **Florida:** Florida A&M University in Tallahassee.
- **Georgia:** Morehouse College in Atlanta.
- **Louisiana:** Dillard University in New Orleans, Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Southern University in Shreveport.
- **Mississippi:** Alcorn State University, Rust College in Holly Spring.
- **North Carolina:** North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro, North Carolina Central University in Durham.
- **South Carolina:** Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina State University in Orangeburg.

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*HBCU Central* is a free publication prepared by the University Partnerships Clearinghouse, the information service sponsored by HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP). *HBCU Central* highlights the contributions of HBCUs to local community efforts. You may contact the University Partnerships Clearinghouse at P.O. Box 6091, Rockville, MD 20849-6091, (800) 245-2691 (phone), (301) 519-5767 (fax). See the Office of University Partnerships on the World Wide Web at <http://www.oup.org>.

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the neighborhood's HOPE VI project, and trying to lure the National Bank of Commerce to town, it also was organizing loiterers to salvage bricks from LOCCDC demolition sites. Several of these unemployed young men have enrolled in LOCCDC's new job-training classes, a step that none of them would have considered a year ago.

"You can't leave anyone out, even the guys who hang out on the street corners," says Higgs. "These guys see all these new things happening in the neighborhood but they feel that none of it affects them. So rather than just have the police run them off, we decided to figure out a strategy to get them involved."

**Providing hard data about neighborhood problems.** The 12-year relationship that Stillman College has had with its 150 community partners began with a good meal that included a healthful serving of statistics about the college's Westside

Tuscaloosa neighborhood. Representatives of 50 local businesses, government agencies, and neighborhood organizations attended the meal, which took place in 1990. The focus of the evening's presentation was simple but discouraging: Although Tuscaloosa was home to 3 prestigious institutions of higher education, 13 major industries, and the sixth largest hospital in the southeast, the Westside Tuscaloosa neighborhood faced serious problems of poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy.

Attendees felt moved by the data and shocked at the economic disparity between the city and the neighborhood, says Thomas. By the end of the evening, many had signed on to first help Stillman write its application for an HBCU grant and then participate in efforts to revitalize the neighborhood. Twelve years later, Stillman's partners continue to contribute technical assistance, in-kind contributions, and outright donations to improve health-care in the neighborhood, rehabilitate dilapidated housing, reduce crime, make infrastructure upgrades, and train neighborhood residents for local jobs.

"The way to get support is to deal with facts that show what's proven," says Thomas. "If it's a fact, it's hard to hide from it. Our partners looked at our data and decided that they were going to do something to change it."

**Other characteristics of successful partnerships.** Thomas and Higgs suggest that

many partners initially become involved in HBCU initiatives because they see a potential benefit for themselves. For example, Stillman College's corporate partners desperately needed a well-trained workforce. LeMoyne-Owen business partners, on the other hand, knew they would benefit economically from a revitalized neighborhood. To keep partners at the table, coalitions must be carefully crafted and have the following:

- **A trusted community institution to lead the partnership.** Both Higgs and Thomas report that for years their communities lay dormant because no entity stepped forward to mobilize neighborhood stakeholders. "Everyone wanted the same things but there was no leadership," says Higgs. "People had always looked to the college for this leadership. But until LeMoyne-Owen established its LOCCDC, the college simply didn't have the resources to take on that role."
- **One person to coordinate the partnership.** Long before any official partnership begins, one person must make personal visits to get to know and gain the trust of individual partners. "You have to have a person who is visible, viable, and knowledgeable," says Thomas.
- **An influential core group to begin work.** When launching a partnership, you can be most productive if you start by holding discussions with a small group of influential individuals, according to Thomas. "The key to putting together the original group is to solicit folks who actually have some responsibility in these matters and can make decisions," he says. "Our original partners were the CEOs of companies, high government officials, and school superintendents. Later on, they sent their representatives."
- **New partners to fill specific gaps.** In addition to retaining existing community stakeholders, LOCCDC also seeks new partners that can bring something to the neighborhood that it does not already have. "We've got lots of beauty shops in our neighbor-

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## Stillman College Enjoys 12 Years With Faithful Partners

Hurricane Lili blew through Tuscaloosa on the fall night that Stillman College held its 2002 Good Neighbor Banquet. Stillman had invited 300 people to the dinner, designed to recognize the contributions that a variety of partners had made to the college's Westside Tuscaloosa neighborhood.

At first, it seemed almost certain that inclement weather would interfere with the dinner's success. By the end of the evening, just the opposite had occurred. The banquet turned out to be a powerful illustration of the commitment that Stillman's partners have to their community. Braving heavy rains and winds, 290 guests attended the event, remembers Eddie B. Thomas, the college's associate vice president.

"My president was shocked," says Thomas about Stillman President Ernest McNealey, who offered the evening's keynote speech. "He stood up to speak and said, 'I just can't believe that everybody is here.'"

Having worked closely with each of the partners who came to the banquet that night, Thomas was not entirely surprised by the large turnout. This was the same group of partners that had been faithfully working with Thomas and his staff since 1990 to plan and implement Stillman's HBCU workplan. These partners had not failed Stillman yet, and Thomas had no reason to doubt them that night.

The outreach effort on which the partners have collaborated for the past 12 years is concentrated in Westside Tuscaloosa, the economically depressed neighborhood where Stillman is located. Unemployment in the area is 24 percent, compared with a 3.5 percent rate for the city of Tuscaloosa. Forty percent of neighborhood households live in poverty, compared with 24 percent in the city. The mean family income is \$19,747 compared with \$38,929 in Tuscaloosa.

"There is a concentrated economic depression in spite of the large number of industries in the area," says Thomas. "Much of that is connected with the lack of formal education, in work skills and job skills, of people who live in the neighborhood. Recognizing these problems in 1990, Stillman embarked on a journey to empower community residents to help themselves."

About 150 business, education, and corporate partners are involved in Stillman's outreach activities. A smaller group of 50 partners forms the Stillman College Community Outreach Advisory Committee, which meets four times a year to plan and implement HBCU grant activities. Major partners include the city of Tuscaloosa and its housing authority, the city and county school systems, small businesses, and numerous corporate partners who operate large factories in town. Among them are Mercedes-Benz USA, Uniroyal Goodrich, Phifer Wire Products, Hunt Oil Company, JVC America Inc., and Gulf States Paper.

"Many of these partners recognized in 1990 that there was something gravely wrong with this disaffected and disenfranchised neighborhood, especially when it was compared to Tuscaloosa proper," says Thomas. "They joined our advisory committee

because they wanted to make a difference in Westside Tuscaloosa."

In addition to serving on the advisory committee, the corporate partners have worked together on several major initiatives including a recent feasibility study that explored ways to improve the local transportation infrastructure. In addition, 120 partners have officially pledged they will employ any local resident who completes Stillman's job-training programs.

Some local companies also have agreed to help Stillman carry out more targeted initiatives. For example, JVC America, Inc., which manufactures audio, video, and related software products, installed 10 computers complete with learning software in community learning centers that Stillman operates with HBCU funds. Uniroyal Goodrich and Mercedes-Benz both offer scholarships to local young people who are interested in attending Stillman. In a mutually beneficial partnership, Uniroyal Goodrich uses space on Stillman's campus to train its own midlevel managers. In return, the company donates \$10,000 annually to the college.

Although corporate partners have been vital to the success of Stillman's HBCU activities, they are not the college's only partners. Government and nonprofit agencies have also played an important role in advancing the outreach efforts. For example:

- **The Tuscaloosa Public Housing Authority** helped Stillman open four learning centers in public housing facilities. These state-of-the-art computer centers are located in renovated space donated by the housing authority and staffed by housing authority personnel. Each center provides tutoring, family-related services, job placement, and programs that teach job readiness, youth leadership, and conflict resolution.
- **The Maude L. Whatley Health Center** worked with Stillman to provide free health screenings to neighborhood residents.
- **The local chamber of commerce** and the local real estate association sponsored seminars on homeownership and financial management for local residents. In addition, a prominent member of the local real estate association recently donated a newly renovated, 14-unit apartment building to the Stillman College Community Outreach Program. The college is using the building to help some Westside Tuscaloosa residents move out of substandard housing.
- **Tuscaloosa Mayor Al DuPont** is a member of the college's Community Outreach Advisory Committee and has been instrumental in raising the program's visibility among city departments. Consultants from both the city and county governments have contributed to the committee's strategic planning effort. In response to committee recommendations, the city opened a police substation in the Westside Tuscaloosa neighborhood.
- In addition to its HBCU grant, which supports most outreach activities, Stillman also receives funds from the **U.S.**

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hood,” explains Higgs. “We don’t need any more beauty shops. But we did need a bank so we sought a banking partner. And we do need a grocery store so we want to find a partner who can help us there.”

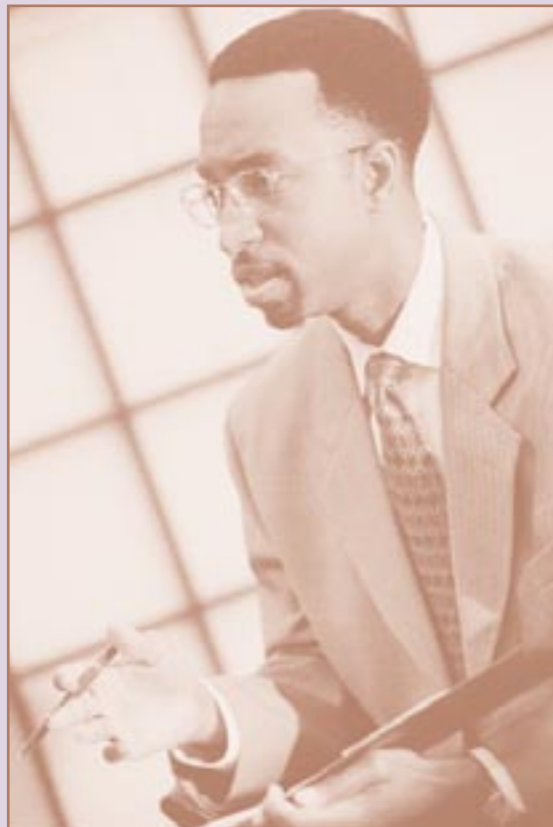
- **Benefits for all partners.** Every entity that joins a partnership must believe that it is receiving benefits, not just being asked to make one contribution after another. “Certainly, we want to meet our own objectives, which are to create jobs and bring economic development to the community,” says Higgs. “But we also want to meet the objectives of the partners—that’s important.” Thomas agrees. “Our partners feel comfortable and good about what we are doing because it helps them in what they do.”
- **Partners that remain actively involved.** Stillman’s partners meet quarterly and remain active between meetings. “Stillman College doesn’t dominate these meetings,” says Thomas. “A business representative who wants to discuss his company’s job-training needs may run one meeting. At another meeting, the city may give a presentation on an area where it thinks we should focus our efforts. We also assign tasks to our partners. Our partners don’t just come to a meeting and sit there.”
- **Partnerships that tap each member’s strengths.** “You need to understand what your partners do and what they do best,” says Thomas. “Then you must apply those strengths to the needs of the community. It’s best to design the initiatives so that the power to lift the burden doesn’t rest on one shoulder, but on 50 shoulders. That way your work will move very quickly.” ♦

**Department of Education** to finance its learning centers. The **U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Training Administration** provided technical assistance to help the college train 278 residents and find jobs for them during the past 24 months.

- **The Tuscaloosa Public School System and Shelton State Community College** worked with Stillman to establish community-based adult learning centers in neighborhood schools. The centers focus on technology, general equivalency diploma (GED) preparation, and other skill development areas, including job readiness.
- **Area churches** followed in Stillman’s footsteps by creating outreach programs that serve church members who are in need. As part of these efforts, the churches often refer their members to job training and other services offered by the college.

“We have seen a big change as we worked together over the past 12 years,” says Thomas about Stillman’s partners. “That is very crucial. We couldn’t have done all that we accomplished without our partners, their in-kind contributions, their input, and their cooperation.”

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## Memphis Partners Unite To Ensure a Bank's Success

Two years ago, banking was not a part of daily life for most residents of the LeMoyne-Owen community in Memphis. Those few residents who did have bank accounts left the neighborhood to deposit their checks or get their loans. Most residents simply relied on predatory check cashing outlets to fill their banking needs.

All that changed 2 years ago when the LeMoyne-Owen College Community Development Corporation (LOCCDC) convinced the National Bank of Commerce (NBC) to establish the neighborhood's first full service bank branch. Before the new enterprise could open its doors, LOCCDC had to help the bank secure sufficient deposits to make its new branch successful.

Neighborhood residents who had never been in a bank are now opening free checking accounts and qualifying for car loans. With technical assistance from the LOCCDC, small business owners who could never get the attention of a loan officer are qualifying for \$5,000 loans. Those who thought they would be lifetime renters are attending bank-sponsored housing fairs aimed at preparing them for homeownership.

"The perception is that something exciting and new is happening," says LOCCDC Director Jeffrey T. Higgs. "The bank is becoming a kind of neighborhood gathering place."

The LeMoyne-Owen community, a neighborhood of 15,000 residents, was once revered as the birthplace of some of Memphis' most prominent African-American citizens. Despite its illustrious past, the neighborhood has deteriorated in recent years as large numbers of its citizens moved to the suburbs, leaving behind what quickly became a poverty-stricken, crime-ridden, and drug-invested community. The neighborhood's average income is \$7,000, and until recently it had the highest crime rate in the city.

Now poised to share in a revitalization that has transformed downtown Memphis, the LeMoyne-Owen community is beginning to change. A \$50 million HOPE VI project has already transformed one end of the neighborhood and a new \$30 million project to turn the once-famous Stax Recording Studio into a museum promises to bring tourists to the other end.

To capitalize on the new development, LOCCDC used HBCU funds to help establish neighborhood and merchant associations through which residents could gain a voice in local decisionmaking and persuaded the city of Memphis to establish two police substations in the neighborhood. Now, LOCCDC is using \$300,000 in state and federal money to launch a Build-A-Block Initiative that will upgrade the community's housing one block at a time.

In spite of LOCCDC's successes in these areas, however, Higgs points to the bank's arrival as "probably one of the most important things we have done."

"This national organization decided to come into this low-income census track neighborhood when all the research and market analysis said it would not work," says Higgs. "The bank took a chance and it's doing quite well."

In essence, the bank took a chance that LOCCDC would be able to convince its community partners to make the \$1 million in deposits that the bank needed before it could open its doors. As a first step, LOCCDC decided to transfer all of its own funds to the bank. Higgs and a bank vice president visited LOCCDC's



community partners to convince them to follow suit. As a result, LeMoyne-Owen College moved some accounts to the NBC branch, the Stax Museum deposited \$1 million, and the city of Memphis and local churches transferred some of their funds to the bank. Today the bank has deposits of \$4 million and, according to Higgs, is "the fastest-growing branch in the NBC system in terms of new accounts being opened."

"We knew that if we could convince a bank to come into the neighborhood that it would send a sign to people that the neighborhood was really on its way back, and that folks were serious about this neighborhood," says Higgs.

As is the case with any good partnership, the bank also gained tremendous benefits from its new branch, says Higgs: "They are still a bank. They make loans and they charge service fees and ATM fees. They are making money."

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Office of University Partnerships

OUP is pleased to release the Foundation Resource Guide, which includes the program-specific focus, limitations on funding, and up-to-date contact information for national foundations likely to fund endeavors similar to those of OUP grantees. For copies of the guide, call (800) 245-2691.

Please review the searchable, online database for hundreds of additional state and regionally specific foundations available at [www.oup.org/funding/upcfoundation/PUBSearch.asp](http://www.oup.org/funding/upcfoundation/PUBSearch.asp).

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*NEW HBCU GRANTEES, from page 1*

- **Tennessee:** Fisk University in Nashville, LeMoyne-Owen College in Memphis.
- **Texas:** Jarvis Christian College in Hawkins, Paul Quinn College in Dallas.
- **Virginia:** Hampton University in Hampton, Norfolk State University in Norfolk. ♦

