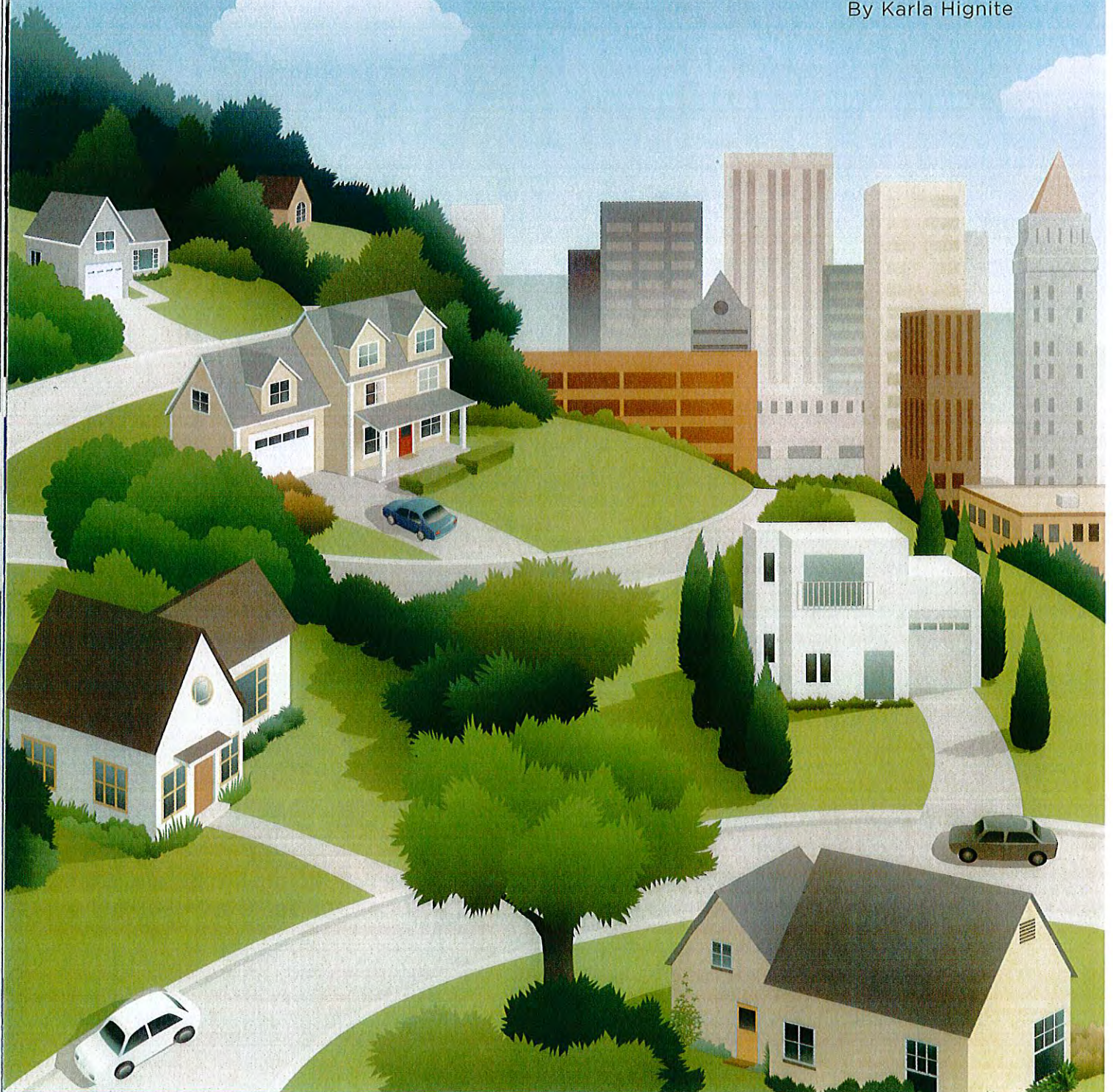


# *More Than Good Neighbors*

By Karla Hignite





## Increased civic and economic outreach can strengthen an anchor institution's already **stabilizing community influence.**

**W**agner College successfully evacuated the majority of its students in advance of Hurricane Sandy last October. President Richard Guarasci and his wife, along with about 80 students who stayed behind on the Staten Island campus, took refuge in the college's gymnasium to weather the storm. The college lost power for four days, but in no more than five hours after power was restored, students launched a Facebook account to organize efforts to unload trucks, clear debris, and deliver meals to families. "As an educator, you want to see this kind of direct link between community need and community service," says Guarasci.

Civic responsibility and outreach are nothing new to Wagner, or to higher education. "The education of students for a democratic society has been a core mission of higher education since its inception," notes Guarasci. Yet, he believes there has been a resurgence in recent years surrounding the civic purposes of higher education even as there remains a tension between educating students for a career and educating them to be citizens within society.

In 2009, the college formalized a partnership with members of the surrounding Port Richmond community aimed at enhancing the quality of life for individuals living and working in the neighborhood. In recent years, a rapid rise in the immigrant population in Port Richmond has created complex needs in the areas of health care, education, housing, and employment, Guarasci

says. In one example of the college's partnership outreach, Wagner business students are helping local small business owners with taxation issues, loan applications, and other transactions. By involving students with the Chamber of Commerce, local development corporations, and banks to identify business development opportunities and areas where measurable progress is needed, students directly link learning and location in a powerful way, says Guarasci.

This kind of place-based engagement is gaining traction, and in many respects is redefining the relationship between colleges and universities and their communities. From commitments to community-based service learning for students that continue to flourish, institutions have progressed to a new moment where leaders are seeking ways to align all the sustainable assets of the institution—financial, human capital, and academic expertise—with the particular needs and challenges of local residents, Guarasci says.

### **In Our Own Backyard**

Students today are yearning for real-life experiences connected with their studies, says Maureen Curley, president of Campus Compact, a national coalition of nearly 1,200 public and private college and university presidents who are committed to advancing civic responsibility and community-engaged learning within their institutions. "If institutions of higher learning are not connecting service and engagement with student studies and are not utilizing the scholarship of faculty

who can offer expertise in assessing the needs of the local community, then they are minimizing the capacity of their institutions to have true impact in each domain—the health of the community, the education of students, and the advancement of scholarship,” says Curley.

In fact, life in a democracy requires the full spectrum of economic, social, civic, and educational arenas working hand in hand to create an *engaged learning economy*—a community that learns and grows and thrives together, says Curley. “Higher education is the logical entity to combine all these efforts and to make the important connections for their students,” she argues.

“Conducting a food drive to stock the local pantry is a good volunteer initiative in and of itself, but how are we contextualizing this and what are we teaching students about poverty, its root causes, and its long-term impacts for a family and for society? Only then can we put our heads together to figure out how to solve the problem as it exists in our own community.” Engagement is all about embracing what’s in our own backyard, says Curley.

This more modern sense of engagement that has emerged reflects what Ira Harkavy and others would call an enlightened self-interest—a greater understanding not only of the connection between the health of the community and the health of the institution, but also of the capacity of the institution to address societal needs. “While they cannot transform their local environments single-handedly, colleges and universities possess the intellectual and human capital required to leverage real and lasting change,” argues Harkavy, associate vice president and director of the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania.

Harkavy has served as the center’s director since its founding in 1992, helping to develop a broad array of service-learning courses and spearheading efforts to create university-assisted schools, among other initiatives. Approximately 2,500 University of Pennsylvania students in academic courses and volunteer and

## The Engagement Smell Test

How does an institution best pair its expertise with community and economic outreach efforts? Sources interviewed for this article suggest three primary touchstones for assessing the value of the venture.

■ **Does it fit?** Are efforts aligned with the mission and expertise of the institution? Outcomes are best when outreach is grounded in an institution’s academic strengths and when student learning is a central part of the experience.

■ **Does it resonate?** Does the outreach appeal to key internal and external stakeholders? If faculty and students have no interest in the initiative, it will be difficult to encourage their participation. Take stock of the intellectual expertise of the institution and also of the passion of faculty and the energy of students to become involved.

■ **Does it make a difference?** Does the effort address a real need of the community? What will this effort produce of lasting benefit to all involved? How does this effort improve the health, wealth, and quality of life for individuals in your community, state, or region?

work-study opportunities, along with about 60 faculty members, provide school-day and extended hours of educational programming for kids and their family members in Penn’s local community of West Philadelphia. Similar university partnerships with community K–12 schools are gaining traction not only across the nation but around the world, says Harkavy.

He also serves as chair of the Anchor Institutions Task Force, a group of university leaders and others committed to exploring how their institutions can improve the quality of life in their communities across multiple dimensions. As entities that have deep and lasting roots in their communities—and are often the biggest employers in a city or region—anchor institutions include the full breadth of two- and four-year colleges and universities and affiliated entities such as medical hospitals—commonly dubbed “eds and meds,” notes Harkavy.

Contributing to this newer sense of enlightened self-interest is more than a generation of advanced scholarship in ethnic studies, poverty and hunger, social and environmental justice, literacy, and so forth, that has cemented into the present-day culture of institutions this greater understanding of the need for and merit of combining the economic role of the institution with its academic and civic missions, suggests Harkavy.

He believes the university of the future is a connected institution, seeking to make a difference not only on campus but also within the larger community. It sees local issues—be they unequal schooling, inadequate health care, poor urban nutrition, or substandard housing—as universal issues that occur locally and require solutions in a way that connects to the core academic activities of the institution. It does this by first assessing the strengths and needs of the university and the needs of the community, and then figuring out how to bring these together.

The particular focus of an institution’s engagement efforts will no doubt vary based on the specific needs of the community, the programmatic expertise of the institution, the passions of students and faculty, and the partnerships leaders are able to leverage with government, the private sector, and other nonprofit entities, says Harkavy. “The common thread for all these efforts is an understanding that the health and well-being of the institution is inextricably linked to the physical, social, and economic vitality of its surrounding neighborhoods.”

### Baltimore, Baltimore, Baltimore

Real estate agents know the importance of location; Johns Hopkins University leaders understand this as well. JHU has two primary campuses. Its East

Baltimore campus includes JHU's schools of medicine, nursing, and public health. The Homewood campus includes the university's schools of arts and sciences, education, and engineering.

In past decades, disinvestment and loss of neighborhood retail were among the contributing factors that had led to growing blight throughout sections of Baltimore. JHU had begun to suffer the consequences as well, with data showing increasing numbers of students who had been accepted to the university declining the offer, citing the conditions of the off-campus experience as one reason for their decision, says Daniel Ennis, JHU's senior vice president for finance and administration.

In recent years, JHU has invested well over \$20 million in community development initiatives to revitalize neighborhoods north of the East Baltimore campus, where in some sections of the city upwards of 70 percent of structures were vacant. More recently, JHU made the commitment to invest \$10 million in a public-private community partnership aimed at enhancing the livability and economic sustainability of communities surrounding the university's Homewood campus.

Officially launched in the summer of 2011, JHU's Homewood Community Partners Initiative was carefully crafted following hundreds of interviews and surveys of local residents, reviews of community plans, and meetings with various stakeholders to ensure that the partnership would be based not only on mutual interest but on a foundation of trust, explains Ennis. The yearlong assessment looked closely at five areas: quality of life, housing and residential development, public education, retail and commercial development, and job development.

The \$10 million development fund will directly finance projects, create a land bank to foster new development, and establish a neighborhood improvement fund to provide matching resources for other community-based projects. If successful, the partnership will transform the 10-neighborhood target area into a more vibrant college-town environment with new retail stores and

restaurants, an enhanced residential real estate market, pedestrian-friendly walkways, and safe and reliable transportation options. By the estimates of some JHU officials, the university's community engagement efforts related to both campuses could make a significant contribution toward achieving up to a third of the city's overall goal of attracting 10,000 new families to the Baltimore area, says Ennis.

### **Revitalization and Rebuilding**

Beyond the university's efforts to revitalize neighborhood retail and real estate, JHU is committed to bolstering public education. The university is already partnering with several schools in the area to create more early childhood and after-school programs. In the works is development of a JHU-operated community school. Future actions being explored include services for older kids and young adults and a college pipeline program to promote college preparation.

Another undercurrent running throughout JHU's engagement efforts is a strong focus on economic inclusion and rebuilding a once-thriving middle class. Among the institutional priorities aimed at helping more disadvantaged populations move into the mainstream are a renewed commitment to hiring local residents and purchasing from local businesses to ensure that the institution's employee, supplier, and contracting base reflects the broad diversity of Baltimore. JHU is also ramping up efforts targeted to local workforce preparation and career advancement. (See sidebar, "Building a Workforce Lifeline in Baltimore," on page 22.)

In his inaugural address, JHU President Ronald Daniels noted the university's commitment to its communities as one of three priorities, says Ennis. "Because so much of what allows us to retain our competitiveness and distinctive brand and to attract key talent relates to Baltimore, we have to pay serious attention to the health and stability of the city and our surrounding communities."

In this regard, economic development, neighborhood development, and workforce development do not detract from core

"Leveraging the resources of anchor institutions to address societal needs has recently gained increased attention, particularly with respect to community colleges, colleges, and universities, which bring a wide range of resources (e.g., financial, physical, and human) and maintain deep-rooted commitments to localities. As numerous communities have experienced capital flight, institutions of higher education have remained as critical anchors of stability."

—From **Anchor Institutions**  
**Task Force statement**



academic priorities. They become institutional priorities in support of the academic mission, argues Ennis. "We are a permanent part of this community. We are not picking up and moving. So there is a mutual interest here to figure out how to improve these areas where we live, work, and study."

### Rethinking Outreach

Like JHU, Purdue University is putting a new spin on university engagement. Outreach has always been core to Purdue's mission as a land-grant institution. Historically, this outreach was largely concentrated in agriculture, veterinary medicine, and health and human science, and was particularly focused on rural communities, explains Victor Lechtenberg, Purdue's former vice president for academic affairs and provost, currently serving as a special assistant to the president.

From the 1970s into the early 1990s, there was growing criticism that many of the nation's land-grant universities were losing relevance, notes Lechtenberg. Such critiques led to the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Institutions. This project, a series of in-depth evaluations directed by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, resulted in a critical assessment of this sector's role and a rethinking of what it means to be an engaged university.

The project essentially reset the narrative surrounding engagement, explains Lechtenberg. For instance, the tripartite mission of *teaching, research, and extension* evolved to that of *learning, discovery, and engagement*. "'Learning' and 'discovery' imply an outcome, which isn't necessarily the case with 'teaching' and 'research,'" explains Lechtenberg. "Furthermore, 'engagement' implies a dialogue and a contextualizing of issues, not a one-sided 'extension,' or imparting of knowledge."

Semantics aside, Purdue has embraced a contemporary interpretation of economic and community engagement. "Years ago, it wasn't viewed as part of a university's responsibility to consider commercializing its intellectual property or determining how to provide an incubator

environment for business start-ups to create jobs and spur the economy," notes Lechtenberg. He points to early pioneering efforts like those in Silicon Valley and Research Triangle Park, which have made clear that these intellectual hubs surrounding major universities can exploit an institution's capability in a positive way far beyond campus borders—that you can in fact use these concentrations of entrepreneurially minded students and faculty to help grow a state or region economically, adds Lechtenberg.

In response, 10 years ago Purdue launched its Discovery Park, dedicated to interdisciplinary and large-scale research projects. "We wrapped into this an entrepreneurship program, which has become a cornerstone of our economic development engagement," explains Lechtenberg. In addition to offering a certificate program in starting a business, the university offers entrepreneur boot camps and business plan competitions annually.

With a flourishing flagship business development park at Purdue's main West Lafayette campus, university leaders realized that the institution could support a greater business incubator presence throughout the state. Purdue now hosts four technology centers, each about two hours apart, spread up and down the I-65 corridor. "In each case, we've been able to nurture and leverage new business tied closely to Purdue technology that also provides opportunities for students," reports Lechtenberg.

## READ AN ONLINE EXTRA

To learn how three higher education institutions play a vital role in city planning efforts in Springfield, Missouri, see "Strength in Numbers" in *Business Officer Plus* at [www.nacubo.org](http://www.nacubo.org).

While Purdue may be singing a new engagement tune, outreach remains a core institutional priority. In one example, Purdue's manufacturing and technology assistance program offers the expertise of about 100 faculty and students to companies—mostly within the state of Indiana—that don't have the resources to hire a consulting firm. The roughly \$10 million program serves about 500 to 600 clients per year. "Our analysis suggests that this program easily returns \$100 million in value to the state annually," notes Lechtenberg.

### Bringing Wealth and Opportunity

Indiana University likewise has a long history of engagement with multiple sectors—public, private, and nonprofit—but never before in such a strategic fashion, says Bill Stephan, vice president of IU's Office of Engagement. While other efforts exist at IU that focus on a range of community and civic partnerships, Stephan's office has focused foremost on economic development since its inception in 2007. "Beyond traditional town-gown initiatives, what we are seeing more of today is higher-level collaboration between universities and their local communities to position their area, region, and state to attract new business and investment."

IU's concerted focus in this regard began about a dozen years ago when then President Myles Brand sought to link university outreach efforts with the state's economic priorities. At that time, the industry sectors that state leaders identified as strategic relative to future economic growth included life sciences, information technology, logistics, and advanced manufacturing. IU already had a natural fit in the area of life sciences with the university's school of medicine, the only one among the state's higher education institutions. In part to advance Indiana's interests in nurturing a vibrant technology sector, IU launched its school of infomatics—the first of its kind in the United States.

Fast-forward to current President Michael McRobbie, who has built on

Brand's earlier efforts, creating a formal structure to coordinate the university's intellectual expertise and resources in two primary areas: statewide economic development outreach via IU's campuses and centers throughout the state, and technology commercialization. The latter is tied to managing and protecting the university's intellectual property and determining how to leverage those assets, whether through start-up companies or licensing opportunities, to generate revenue in support of IU's fundamental mission of teaching and research, explains Stephan.

The technology commercialization component—the Indiana Research and Technology Corp.—has been organized as a separate 501(c)(3) with a separate board of directors. “Because this enterprise is largely self-supporting, we are able to deploy some of IURTC's revenues to assist IU's statewide economic development activities, and this allows us to further extend our reach without using scarce university dollars,” explains Stephan.

The university role to partner in a knowledge-based economy and to bring ideas to the marketplace rapidly is all the more important in a competitive global environment, notes Stephan. “This isn't only about leveraging success on behalf of the state's economy. It's also about seizing opportunities to remain competitive for the long term and to ensure that our graduates have the skill sets and educational attainment necessary to be responsive to changing workforce needs.”

### **Constraints Can Pave the Way**

With its combined health-care arm, IU is the largest employer in the state, but its leaders still understand the need to partner. One silver lining of the increased financial uncertainty that has emerged nationally in recent years may be this, suggests Stephan: “The realization that we all now exist in an environment where no one has the luxury of going it alone.” With all institutions facing constrained resources, more higher education leaders have begun talking in earnest about the need to leverage assets, and this provides opportunities to foster partnerships that may never before have happened,

notes Stephan. Increasingly these multipartner collaborations will include other higher education institutions.

One initiative currently before the Indiana state legislature would bring new revenues to a joint venture with medical device manufacturers that would combine IU's strengths in medicine with Purdue's strengths in biomedical engineering. “Our leaders have thought often about areas where we don't necessarily overlap but should interface more frequently on behalf of growing the state's economy,” says Stephan.

That's the kind of collaborative spirit Michael Thomas advocates in his role as president and chief executive officer of the New England Board of Higher Education, representing 260 colleges and universities in six states. His work at NEBHE includes helping bring together higher education leaders with leadership from state and local civic and economic development agencies to identify and cultivate partnership opportunities.

Thomas points to the leadership of several universities in launching the Massachusetts Green High Performance Computer Center. The scientific research data center is a collaboration among the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, private industry partners, and five universities, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Massachusetts, Boston University, Northeastern University, and Harvard University. The Holyoke-based, LEED-certified center is powered by renewable energy from the city's hydroelectric dam. Eventually the 90,000-square-foot facility will house 20,000 computers capable of sifting through reams of research data on everything from medicine to climate change to traffic patterns.

“All college and university leaders have an opportunity and an obligation to think broadly about the difference their institutions can make in their communities and to consider the local and regional impacts of their institution's strategic plan and mission,” says Thomas. Often the much harder part is forging the partnerships to put common goals in motion. Sustaining a consistent focus and commitment

“Engagement goes well beyond extension, conventional outreach, and even most conceptions of public service. Inherited concepts emphasize a one-way process in which the university transfers its expertise to key constituents. Embedded in the engagement ideal is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity.”

—From “Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution,” Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities

across transitions of university presidents or political leadership accounts for one challenge, says Thomas. Resources often pose another. “The reality is that resource constraints are likely here to stay, and this is actually a key argument for collaboration. If we all continue to work in silos, we will not succeed and may cease to exist.”

### **Business Minds Required**

The need to collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders to seek positive

change that promotes mutual benefit requires an ability to consider what can be done in the aggregate by leveraging the full capacity of what everyone brings to the table, says Harkavy. This requires not only a level of humility but also the business acumen to understand how the work gets done.

"The expertise of business and finance professionals is all the more crucial within this increasingly complex environment of multiple partners and funding sources," notes Harkavy. "At Penn, we must deal not only with funds from about nine different federal agencies, but also local and state funding, private sector funds, donations, grants, and performance-based

contracts." Strong business leadership and support is required to figure out not only how to allocate and use the money, but also how to maximize, optimize, and leverage it effectively to provide the greatest impact, says Harkavy.

Ennis can attest firsthand that community engagement is relentless work. But while there is constant demand to determine how best to allocate every dollar, it's also about leveraging your partnerships and supporting the members of your team who are vital in collaborating with local officials and neighborhood groups, says Ennis. "This takes a remarkable amount of patience and persistence and thoughtful leadership to focus on the collective needs

of all stakeholders, but the good news is that you are in this together."

None of this, however, is well-suited to third-party assessment to determine your success, cautions Ennis. "Yes, you establish target goals, but more important than meeting a quota is changing the culture of the enterprise and embedding in your ethos the commitment to your community's well-being, because you recognize that this is fundamentally crucial to your own success."

While Curley agrees that community engagement is not an exercise in numbers, she does see value in trying to measure impact. "At a time when many are questioning the cost of higher education, colleges and universities must do more to make evident

## Building a Workforce Lifeline in Baltimore

In collaboration with workforce development agencies and skills-training partners, Johns Hopkins University (JHU) is placing primary emphasis on creating an effective local workforce pipeline. The process has entailed assessing the work readiness of and barriers to employment for Baltimore residents.

Response efforts under way include outreach to residents through adult literacy programs, increasing internship opportunities with local employers, and developing job-brokering initiatives to match work-ready individuals of all skill levels with available job opportunities. Efforts to eliminate logistical barriers include enhancing the availability of affordable child care to enable parents and other primary caregivers to go to work, as well as better coordination of public transportation options to ensure that residents can reach work sites.

After a year spent studying local workforce development issues, JHU has likewise established some significant pipeline goals for the institution. These include increasing the number of local residents hired or advanced into mid-level positions within the university by 10 percent within the next five years. Through an internal assessment, JHU leaders were somewhat surprised to find that the university's workforce already includes significant percentages of Baltimore City residents (39 percent of all employees). However, local resident employees disproportionately represent the lower-skill and lower-wage positions of the institution.

"Discussion about how Hopkins can help grow the middle class in Baltimore stems in part from understanding that the university needs a strong employee community to sustain its mission," says Charlene Moore Hayes, JHU's vice president for human resources. Through its commitment to economic inclusion, JHU will not only actively seek a larger

percentage of Baltimore city residents in its employee profile, but will also commit to educating city residents about university careers they may not be aware of, and developing training programs so that residents can acquire the skills needed for those jobs.

The university's commitment to recruit, promote, and retain local residents comes with a significant challenge. The majority of residents in Baltimore City and surrounding communities lack sufficient work-ready skills, and many haven't finished high school, says Hayes. "If as an anchor institution we are committed to economic inclusion and helping the city of Baltimore build wealth, we have to start with better education of Baltimore City residents."

One of the university's primary efforts will focus on local residents who are already employed by JHU, helping them identify professional development opportunities, and building programs internally to support career advancement and prepare employees for what they might do on the other side of that training, explains Hayes.

Externally, JHU is collaborating with local workforce development partners to create training targeted to specific university jobs. In one example, JHU is piloting a program to introduce residents to the opportunity of becoming an ophthalmic technician. The 18-month training includes coaching individuals through completion of a certification process with the hope that they can move into jobs either at JHU's Wilmer Eye Institute or other area employers, says Hayes. "This is one small example of what we are doing, but it represents a specific and intentional approach to fill an employment need for Hopkins while also bringing local residents into the fabric of greater economic opportunity."

their value with regard to the quality of life for members of their communities,” notes Curley. Campus Compact’s annual surveys tracking community involvement of member institutions do show a steady increase in volume of activity and also in diversity of activity. Yet, getting a good handle on the actual impact institutions are having in their communities remains elusive.

One reason engagement is difficult to quantify in a consistent or comprehensive way is that no single set of metrics exists, notes Curley. “Some are struggling not only with what data to collect but also how to assimilate and categorize the data across the institution,” she adds.

According to Campus Compact’s 2011 annual membership survey tracking the state of campus-based community engagement, half of the responding institutions said they don’t have a mechanism in place to measure the impact of their engagement work within their community. For those

that are collecting the data, the majority are making assessments by individual units across the campus (36 percent) versus institutionwide (14 percent).

### Here for the Long Haul

No matter how impact is measured, reenvisioning an institution’s civic purpose in ways that commit the institution to its local community will bolster its legitimacy, believes Guarasci. “We live in a different moment that requires working off a different model than has existed in higher education for the past 30 years.” Since about the 1980s, the model has been one of segmentation and niche—of trying our best to be different or better, suggests Guarasci. This has fostered a competitive leadership culture.

What the world needs now is a collaborative leadership culture—one where we share costs and expertise, seek new allies, and strengthen relationships with our neighbors, argues Guarasci. “To revitalize the higher

## READ AN ONLINE EXTRA

A list of resources about the role of anchor institutions and their potential for transforming communities can be found in “Community Engagement Resources” in *Business Officer Plus* at [www.nacubo.org](http://www.nacubo.org).

education mission, we must repurpose our institutions by reengaging our responsibility to the people and the places where we live.”

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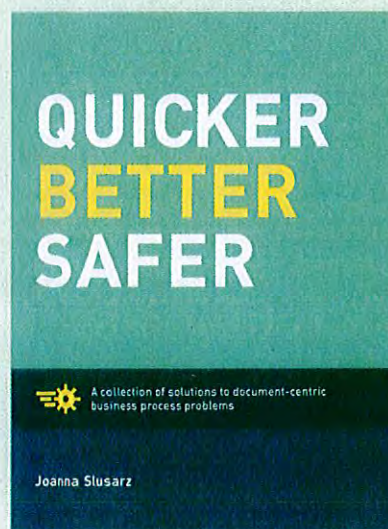
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