The Atlanta University Center as a Stronger Anchor Institution for the Westside Community

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Applied Research Paper

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Introduction

The Atlanta University Center (AUC) is one of the most dynamic areas in Atlanta. The AUC consortium (AUCC), located west of downtown (see Figure 1), consists of four iconic higher education institutions: Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, as well as one medical institution, Morehouse School of Medicine.

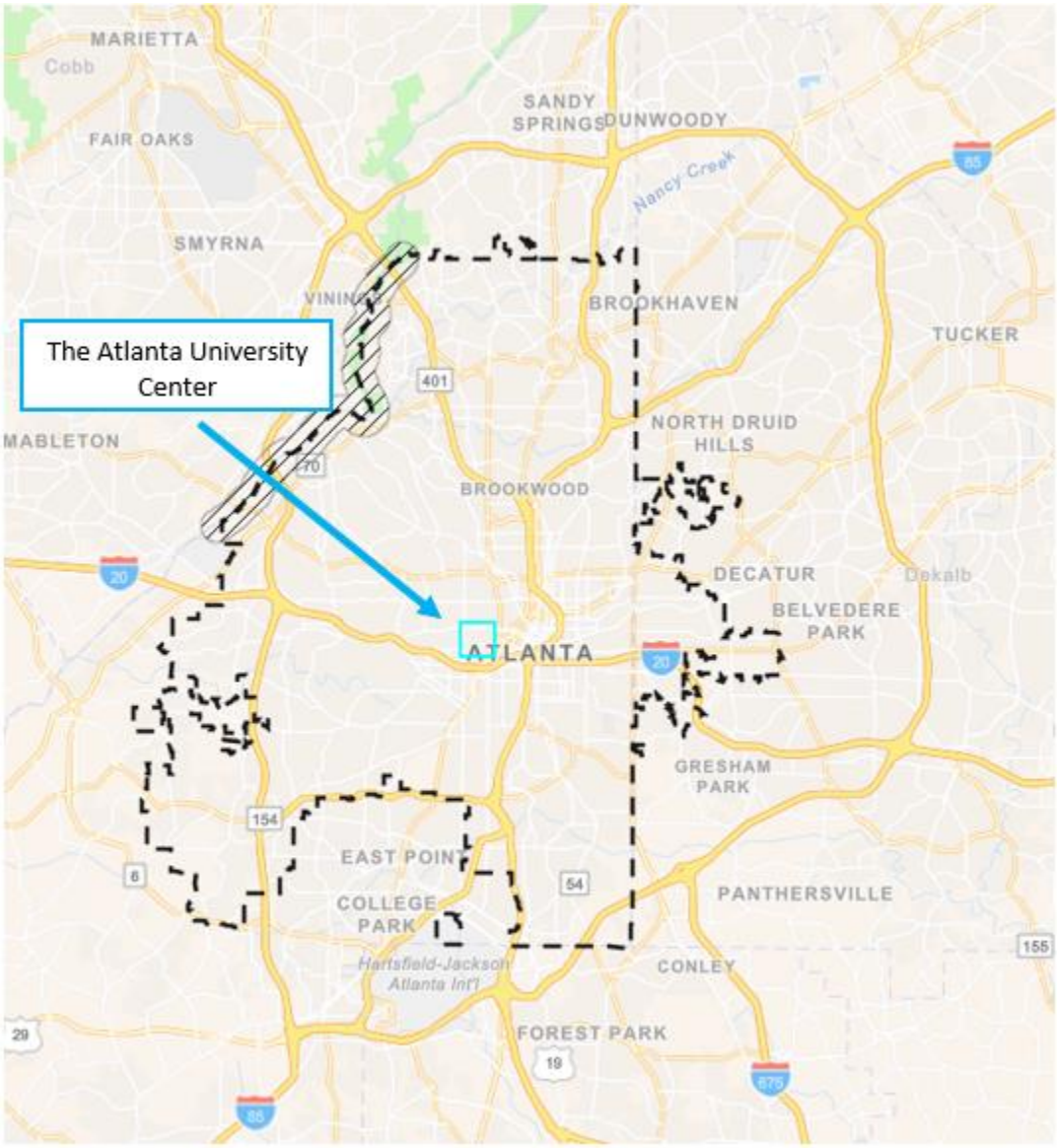

Figure 1. The Atlanta University Center is just west of downtown Atlanta, GA. Source: *City of Atlanta GIS map*

The legacy of these institutions has undeniably changed the landscape of the city and our country. Spelman College and Morehouse College have been ranked as number one and two amongst historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) by the U.S. News and World Report. They both boast of innovative business and science programs. Clark Atlanta University is continuously rated as a leading university for its arts, science, and social work programs. Morehouse School of Medicine, which emphasizes healthcare for people of color and low- and moderate-income families, has a successful track record of high-quality healthcare professionals. All four institutions have famous alums, including esteemed author Alice Walker, civil rights leaders Marian Wright Edelman and Martin Luther King Jr, award-winning actor and directors Spike Lee and Samuel L Jackson, and successful entrepreneur Pinky Cole. Most recently, President Joe Biden presented Johnetta B. Cole, the first black president of Spelman College, with the National Humanities Medal (National Endowment 2023).

The AUC is in the process of expanding. The consortium hopes to create a district (The Atlanta University Center District) that meets the following four objectives noted from the AUCC website:

- Position AUC campuses to support their academic and research missions,
- Enhance the institutions' competitiveness in attracting students and faculty,
- Create a dynamic and vibrant environment for community residents, businesses, faculty, staff, and students, and
- Develop a lasting vision that respects the neighborhood's rich history.

With all these accolades, influential alums, and future initiatives, we might expect the AUC to have a harmonious relationship with the local community. However, as an anchor institution, the AUC needs to improve. An *anchor institution* is an organization that plays a vital role in the local community and economy. Anchor institutions are typically universities, hospitals, and other organizations that tend to "anchor" their geographical settings, even as conditions change (Maurrasse 2013). Because of their relevance in an area, they are normally a vital part of the stability of a community. Although the AUC is an essential part of the community, it is an inaccessible fortress for many current and former residents.

The AUC is not in a category of its own in this regard. Many universities, especially those in urban areas, are often cut off from their neighborhood, sometimes physically through real estate development (Kysiak 1986) but typically in a symbolic way. The dissonance between the two populations may seem inevitable, considering that urban universities are often located in low- and moderate-income communities. The Brooking Institute published a report that showed only 46 percent of children from low-income families

enroll in four-year colleges compared to 76 percent of children from more affluent families (Reber et al., 2020). So, while students and faculty of these institutions may not intentionally disassociate from the neighborhood, the chasm is clearly defined.

Nevertheless, this redlined distinction is not a natural phenomenon. There are numerous studies of universities as anchor institutions that have positive partnerships and bring impactful resources to their surrounding neighborhoods. These studies are mentioned in the literature review as well as analyzed as examples further in this paper. They highlight the many resources institutions offer to the community including jobs, commerce, healthcare, and educational incentives. In addition, studies show the benefits institutions receive when they become intentional with community outreach and involvement. The focus of this paper is to understand the current role of the AUC and identify practices that they can leverage to strengthen their civic engagement in the community.

There is no prescribed method for an institution to serve as a responsive anchor institution. As research has shown, the role of the anchor institution may vary based on the community's needs and the institution's resources. This paper uses the AUC's current strategic vision plan and community development initiatives to create a baseline for the AUC's current relationship with the community. It then reviews three anchor institutions in similar demographic areas that have established mutually beneficial community relationships to compare best practices with the AUC's initiatives. Finally, this paper synthesizes findings from interviews of AUC members, surrounding neighborhoods, and academic professionals, to develop recommendations the AUC might utilize in their efforts to create impactful and sustainable relationships with the community.

Research Setting

The AUC is located on the west side of Atlanta in the Atlanta University Center Neighborhood (AUCN). The AUCN comprises of five colleges and universities, including Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Morehouse School of Medicine, and Morris Brown College (Morris Brown College is currently not a member of the AUCC). Figure 2 provides a closer view of the precise locations of each institution. Six neighborhoods surround the AUCN: Ashview Heights, Just Us Neighbors, Vine City, West End, Westview, and the Villages of Castleberry Hill. All six surrounding neighborhoods provide a strong history for African Americans in the city.

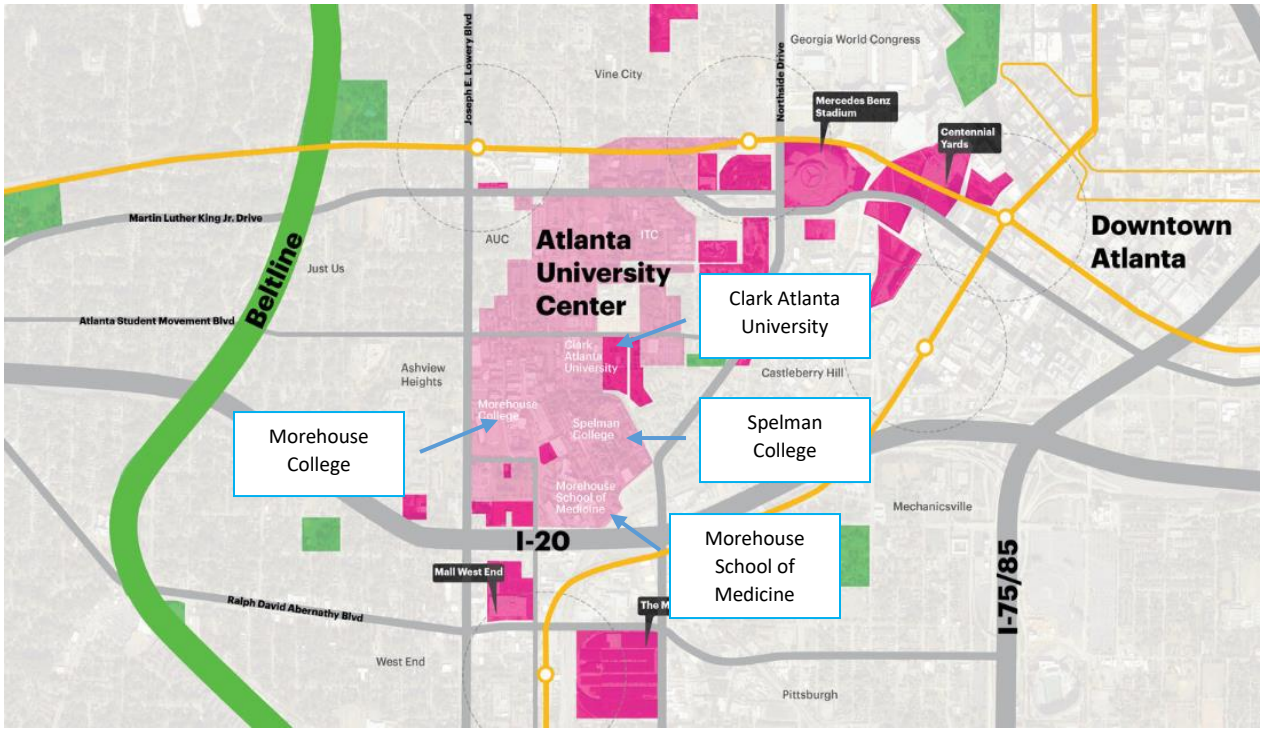

Figure 2. The Atlanta University Center is made up of three colleges and one university. Source: Map is courtesy of the *Atlanta University Center strategic vision design.*

Around the early 1900s, race riots and other civil disturbances resulted in the relocation of many black families to safer communities around the AUC and Sweet Auburn Avenue area. These neighborhoods became thriving black communities filled with well-maintained residential areas, strong businesses, and highly regarded educational institutions. Booker Washington High School, a designated landmark building in the Washington Park neighborhood, was the first black public high school in the state of Georgia (City of Atlanta 2023). Washington High, opened in 1924, and produced many prominent African Americans, including Nobel Laureate and civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Vine City neighborhood was previously full of affluent African Americans. The homogenous population was mainly due to

segregationist and redlining tactics that forced black residents out of their homes downtown. During this time, Alonzo Herndon, the wealthiest African American, built his home in Vine City. The house is now a historical landmark memorializing the success of black people in the area (Majeed 2022).

During this time, black Americans became tired of poor conditions and treatment in society. Jim Crow laws in the South and a general racist agenda in the North caused strain and stifling amongst African American families. As highlighted in an article from the American Historical Association, by the time the Civil Rights Movement began in the 1950s, black American communities were at a tipping point, including several west side neighborhoods in Atlanta that had strong ties to the Civil Rights Movement (Myrick-Harris 2006). The linkage of the Civil Rights Movement to the west side of Atlanta is attributed to several factors. The west side of Atlanta contained a conglomerate of black Americans at different socioeconomic levels. While there was a robust working-class community, there was also a young academic presence due to the area's leading black educational institutions. As previously mentioned, middle- and upper-class black families also moved to neighborhoods on the west side of Atlanta. The results of varied social and economic residents made these communities a massive think tank full of ideas and resources to create change.

Unfortunately, although the Civil Rights Movement had many successes, by the 1970s and 1980s, many black communities faced poor infrastructure, high unemployment rates, and even higher crime rates. The effects of creating legislative changes at the national level caused many local municipalities, often run by racist politicians, to intentionally disinvest in urban black communities as more and more white constituents moved to suburban areas. Atlanta's mayor at the time, Maynard Jackson, attempted to revitalize these west side communities. However, the mayor's plans were largely inadequate to surmount the magnitude of problems in the area, leaving many of these previously thriving communities to become food and service deserts (Auburn Avenue 2023).

Atlanta was the host of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. The Olympic era should have been a moment for these communities to be restored to their glory. Most west side neighborhoods were directly affected by the Olympics due to their proximity to Centennial Olympic Park, the Georgia World Congress Center, and the Mercedes Benz stadium (formally the Georgia Dome). These communities were considered a part of the Olympic Ring Neighborhoods (Dobbins 2021). Residents and churches in Vine City created the Vine City Coalition to ensure the Vine City neighborhood had a seat at the table when discussing Olympic plans and funding. Specifically, the city's Capital Improvement Program was created to fund projects that improve neighborhoods affected by the Olympics (Dobbins 2021). Unfortunately, most of the budget went

toward other neighborhoods. Although a few monuments and affordable housing units were created, and a new Olympic size gymnasium was built on Morehouse College's campus, not much else was done. The neighborhoods continued to suffer with large areas of blight and disinvestment. This has been the area's state for many years until most recently when developers have found a renewed interest on the west side.

Similar to other urban areas, the west side of Atlanta is currently experiencing a positive shock to its economy. Companies like Microsoft are investing in these neighborhoods, as they offer cheap land in a very convenient location. Unfortunately, along with this development comes displacement and cultural erasure. An article by Canopy Atlanta, an Atlanta based publication that discusses communities directly affected by civic issues, explains that residents in these west side communities feel the effects of higher rents and property taxes. It is becoming more apparent that legacy residents are finding it harder to stay in their homes, while gentrifiers move into these historical neighborhoods and create a new identity (Iyengar and Billingsley 2022).

With the current state of these neighborhoods, leaning into a historic anchor institution like the AUC is critical. These neighborhoods need to work with a long-standing entity that understands the history and relevance of the area. A partnership between the community and AUC would be mutually beneficial, as the AUC could utilize the human capital, and members of the neighborhood could use the name and resources of the AUC. Together, they can collaborate on revitalizing and stabilizing the city's west side.

The Long-standing Divide between HBCUs and Local Communities

HBCUs were founded to provide opportunities for black Americans to obtain a higher education during a time when it was almost impossible. Extremely high entry barriers, as well as harassment and unsafe campus environments, made it challenging for black scholars to successfully earn a degree at a predominately white institution. Around the mid-1800s, HBCUs were founded to allow more black Americans entry into higher education. Due to the nature of their existence, HBCUs have an innate mission around the development and advancement of African American communities.

Unfortunately, there has become a stigma about the neighborhoods surrounding HBCUs. Traditionally, HBCUs are located within low- or moderate-income, majority-black communities. These intentional locations made it convenient for most of the faculty, staff, and students to access the campus. However, as segregation and redlining practices became illegal, opportunities for relocation increased. As a result, more affluent members of HBCUs moved further away creating a shift in the culture of the communities

surrounding the institutions. As resources left the communities, the narrative of the neighborhoods became unsafe, with an abundance of nefarious activities and ne'er-do-wells. This mentality is not limited to HBCUs. The term "town and gown" has been dated back to the middle ages by European universities, who often created a physical distinction between the non-academic population of an area and members of a university (Preservation Leadership Forum, 2019).

However, another layer is present with HBCUs regarding the distinction between college campuses and local neighborhoods. In 1903, famed sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois became known for popularizing the term *the Talented Tenth*, regarding a small group of educated African Americans that would be the answer for uplifting the Black race. Du Bois wrote, "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the mass away from the contamination and death of the worst, in their own and other races" (Du Bois 1903, 31). Although Du Bois later moved away from this concept, the idea was planted and continued to take shape in the lives of African Americans. Du Bois felt it was an obligation for this "elite" group to reach back and improve Black communities. However, although well-intended, to some extent this concept helped to formulate a divisive ideology of "us versus them" within the Black community. While parents with little to no education strived to create a path for their offspring to attend an HBCU or Ivy League college in an attempt to provide them with a better life, along the way, the idea to utilize their educational attainment to advance those from their community was lost (Bradley 2018). Instead, in some instances, as the talented tenth grew in their economic success, it became more evident that the overall objective was to dissociate themselves from their prior community. Even students at these HBCUs who identified more with the surrounding community than their college peers found that local residents did not embrace their sentiment. In the movie School Daze, by actor and director Spike Lee, the main character, Dap, and his friends, primarily first-generation college students in school on scholarship, are confronted by local residents who resent the students because of what they symbolize. In the eyes of the local residents, these college students represented a future they felt they could not obtain. The lead character for the group of local residents, Leeds, played by Samuel L. Jackson, continuously degrades the college students in an attempt to remind them that they are no better than himself and his friends (School Daze 1988). Ultimately, the mindset and social divide between members of HBCU campuses and local community members is a result of both groups being unable or unwilling to recognize their connectedness. Although there have been and will probably always be waves of social justice movements

that will reengage black academics with local community members (like the Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter Movement), the class division within Black communities continues to stand firm.

Literature Review

Anchor Institutions as Positive Contributors to Their Community

A large body of academic literature investigates the relationship between anchor institutions and the neighborhoods and cities they occupy. Different researchers employ varying methods for evaluating this relationship and its impact. Before discussing the positive attributes of anchor institutions, it is important to highlight the academic discussion around the historical development of these community rooted entities. The concept of anchor institutions is not new. Researchers have looked at the symbiotic relationship between universities and their surrounding communities for decades. Famous economist and urban planner, Jane Jacobs, noted that flourishing knowledge creation of higher education would generate more growth and development in local communities than more specialized research and development from the private sector (Jacobs 1969). She and other urbanists advocated for understanding the interactions between universities and local neighborhoods (Harris 2016). Thinking about the anchoring concept in other industries also helps to understand the necessary relationship between a place-based entity and its surroundings. Department stores are considered "anchor" stores in a shopping mall. These stores are critical to the survival of a mall because their popularity, name recognition, and size/ presence encourage people to come there and shop. Once shoppers are at the mall, they are more inclined to shop around the other smaller stores in the area. Department stores provide a potentially higher revenue and benefit to everyone in the area just because of location. Universities have this same power that communities can leverage. They are large place-based entities that draw attention to the area. How much attention a university draws to an area typically depends on its mission and output (Ehlenz 2018).

Although the partnership between a university and a community can vary based on the needs and nature of the community and the institution's mission, there has been an increase in collaborative efforts over the last few decades. Many universities are offering service-learning classes (Kronick and Cunningham 2013) and finding ways to create affiliations with local public schools (Benson et al. 2007). The "engaged university" movement has made it to the forefront of several previously disassociated institutions with their local community.

At a general level, anchor institutions “value and advance the social development of their cities” (Harris 2016). However, without directly focusing on community engagement, community and economic development can sometimes end up as a consequential byproduct instead of an intentional outcome. The National Anchor Institution Task Force, a network of higher education leaders and practitioners that collectively work towards creating mutually beneficial partnerships between higher education institutions and communities they reside within, believes anchor institutions should hold a social-purpose mission (Harris and Holley 2016). Drexel University president, John Fry, created a social-purpose mission by asking university students and employees: “What are the moral and practical obligations of an urban institution, like Drexel, to its surrounding community?” (Dolkart 2016). Values around equity and social justice can help institutions find tools to develop themselves as agents of change. Although this concept is being spread more pervasively throughout our country, especially as social and political issues have become more of a localized agenda, there is not much empirical data on the university level of operationalizing a “social justice mission” (Harris 2016).

Although there is not much empirical evidence explicitly linking a university's degree of social responsibility to creating local change, there is an extensive collection of literature on the economic impact of universities and communities. In a study around benefits that spill over from universities to cities and regions, researchers noted that universities are a transfer point that can provide “access to and dissemination of information and knowledge” to students and the community (Arbo and Benneworth 2006). Additionally, they improve the local business environment through procurement opportunities and job creation” (Clark and Bruno 2000). In fact, some researchers have postulated that a critical component of a region's economic and social advancement is a workforce with the education to meet the area's industrial needs. Urban economist Edward Glaeser suggests that “skilled cities” correlate with economic productivity and a college-educated workforce. His research shows that a slight increase in a college-educated population has a noticeable increase in per capita gross metropolitan product (Glaeser 2011).

Even looking at specific regional industries, anchor institutions that foster local procurement can have a multiplier effect on economic activity (Dubb 2016). One study conducted around the food industry showed that a shift of 25 percent of food production to local production in northeastern Ohio could create over 27,000 new jobs across the region, in essence, providing work for one in eight unemployed residents and expand state and local tax collections by $126 million (Yee and Harvie 2020). Shifts like these would take the combined efforts of anchor institutions and local municipalities. All would need to collaborate with building ecosystems that tapped into existing human capital and targeted initiatives to provide

resources that met the community and anchoring institution's needs (Harris 2016). The National Anchor Institution Task Force found that when institutions develop activities that support regional initiatives, they bring critical economic enhancers like "real estate developers, purchasers, employers, workforce development agencies, service/ product providers, and community infrastructure builders." (Harris 2016)

When considering the built environment, universities can provide public spaces to host community events that encourage collaborative discourse and knowledge production (Hambleton 2018), which could provide more robust policy recommendations to enhance the neighborhood. In a case study of the University of Twente (a public technical university in Enschede, Netherlands), researchers found that the university was able to provide a high level of sustainable innovation and economic growth to the region. The university supplied "direct support of regional initiatives" by integrating teaching, research, and direct activities corresponding to the region's development goals. The university began with internal efforts that eventually spread to involve local actors (Benneworth and Hospers 2007). In 2014 Drexel University opened The Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships. This is a community based resource center for the campus and the residents of West Philadelphia. It includes a wellness hub that provides low-cost wellness services, a learning and workforce development center, a community lawyering clinic, and space for community events and gatherings. The center allows students and faculty to more directly engage and work closely with residents and neighborhood leaders. By investing back into the neighborhood, the center is seen as the cornerstone of the university's commitment to the community (Drexel 2023).

Why Some Universities are Hesitant to Fill the Role of "Anchor"

With all the benefits that come from universities and cities when they collaborate, it is difficult to understand why more universities do not take on the role of being solid anchor institutions. As previously mentioned, having a strong partnership between a university and a community provides valuable resources for all parties. However, an inability to internalize the positive spillovers that occur from these relationships prevents many universities from stepping into the leadership role of an anchor institution.

When universities do not make an intentional effort to build symbiotic relationships with the city, region, or community they reside in, it is typically because they neglect a comprehensive understanding of the actual costs, benefits, and range of strategic options available (Birch et.al 2013). Research around this dilemma concludes that often the potential for universities to take on a more leadership role in their communities is overshadowed by misperceptions regarding the benefits of engaging and an exaggerated concern around the dangers of getting involved in community activities. Instead of institutions conducting

a thorough cost-benefit analysis that considers the full range of strategies and possibilities that can result in community change and development (Harris and Holley 2016), there is an emphasis on the additional "burden" of aiding their communities. Unfortunately, this has been the mindset of many larger universities located in urban areas that have seen substantial disinvestment versus institutions located in "college towns." Due to the additional political and economic layers entangled in urban areas, these communities are often in need of basic necessities to survive. These communities may need the leadership of an anchor institution to serve as advocate that will push local government to provide more resources to counter housing precarity and food insecurity or for the university to take on this challenge themself. These challenges are complex and require committed leaders that understand the importance of their investment in the community. Northwestern University in Chicago, IL, and Yale University in New Haven, CT, are examples of universities that saw their communities as liabilities rather than assets. Both universities had a common strategy around developing real estate for their respective institutions. However, instead of involving the communities in their growth strategy, they isolated their campuses from the deteriorating community around them. They ultimately built literal walls around their campuses or purchased contiguous parcels of land surrounding the campus to shield themselves from their neighborhood (McKnight and Kretzmann 1993). As these universities continued to make "unilateral decisions" without the input or inclusion of the communities, their relationship with the city became increasingly callused (Harris and Holley 2016). As noted in the case studies for both universities, their attempt to intentionally separate themselves from their cities caused "strife as economic and social problems escalated, ultimately threatening the long-term success of both the cities and institutions" (McKnight and Kretzmann 1993).

Some institutions believe they need to make large shifts in their mission to appease cities. However, studies have shown that small changes can drastically benefit both universities and communities (Harris 2021). A study was conducted to understand how the research priorities of a university can strengthen its role as an anchor institution and uncovered numerous advantages for the university (Harris 2021). Two challenges stood out in this study: the community feeling disengaged from the university and the mindset of the university members regarding engagement with its community (Harris 2021). When looking at universities, it is easy to see how communities could develop a level of distrust. Rather than connect with communities, most urban universities have a development framework in which they continue to buy adjoining properties to create a campus that can enclose itself from the rest of the neighborhood (Cantor et.al 2013). Regarding university members, they felt that work in the community was undervalued at the school. Community-focused projects came and went but were not created or designed for the long term.

Additionally, projects that incorporate local community-based organizations and neighborhood associations were siloed within the various schools on campus. Without creating a broader purpose that could expand at an enterprise level, these projects were typically limited in their impact. Because the university relies heavily on federal grants, the money source often guides the focus. The focus on projects that could yield large grants, in turn, deterred prioritizing the community's needs (Harris 2021).

Literature around collaborative efforts suggests that internal shifts around "faculty policies, reward systems, and tenure policies," must be implemented to influence a stronger relationship with community members (Harris 2021). In the study mentioned, it was suggested that the university "foster bridging and coupling to bring together internal and external actors," which is often seen with universities that focus on entrepreneurial goals (Harris 2021). By switching a university's narrative around community engagement, they can create a positive partnership cultivated by mutually beneficial goals and the ability to lean into each other's assets to strengthen their work and objectives. For universities, this could look like neighborhood support for research projects, as well as key knowledge around community and city initiatives that may already align with current university programs, which could save the university tons of dollars, time, and other resources.

One thing anchor institutions should be aware of is how their presence can sometimes create unintended negative externalities that can harm the surrounding area. Because of the size and nature of anchor institutions, they can change the overall economic structure of their community. For example, a case study of the University of Cincinnati showed that around the 1960s, the university had an aggressive initiative to increase enrollment. The city agreed with the plan and redesigned street grids to accommodate the new students. Ultimately, this changed the traffic pattern in the area, which changed some of the patronages of local store owners. In addition, the housing stock decreased significantly (McGirr et al. 2004) - issues with housing stock are not uncommon in neighborhoods and towns that rely heavily on universities. However, housing is not the only negative externality. Neighborhoods around the University of Cincinnati found that local businesses that typically do not provide services to college students, such as dry cleaners, were rapidly closing (McGirr et al. 2004). In another study conducted around 15 "college towns" in California, the universities lowered property tax values and ultimately increased the need for civil services like policing and maintenance for parks and recreation centers causing a strain on local municipality services (Baker-Minkel et al. 2004).

Although the cautionary tales around the negative externalities focus on universities' lack of foresight, local government also plays a role. Planners who fail to conceptualize the abundant benefits of institutions

anchored to their region miss a significant opportunity to leverage resources that could revitalize their cities (Birch 2013). While local municipalities promote income-producing land uses through lenient zoning code requirements and strategic infrastructure improvements, they sometimes fail to consider universities in these initiatives. Local officials may fail to fully comprehend the value of universities because "as nonprofits, the nature of their contributions differs from those of for-profit entities." In addition, officials could fear reputational risk due to the "tainted history of insensitive urban renewal activities" (Birch 2013).

The literature around universities as anchor institutions provide an intrinsic overview of what a positive anchor institution/ community relationship could accomplish, a need for anchor institutions to make sure their mission and purpose for community impact are embedded in the culture of the institution, and cautionary tales around what can happen when universities are not connected to their communities. The next section of this paper discusses the methodology around the case studies used to analyze best practices for a successful anchor institution.

Methodology

For the methodology, this paper first analyzes three well-recognized anchor institutions in the U.S. These examples were selected based on their location, the surrounding communities in which they reside, and their ability to harness community engagement to create mutually beneficial relationships. All three institutions, Case Western Reserve University, Syracuse University, and Johns Hopkins University are located in the northeastern part of the United States and range in enrollment size from around 12,000 to 24,000. All three institutions are universities with both undergraduate and graduate programs. They are also all predominately white institutions (PWI) in historically black or low- or moderate-income communities. Although the circumstance surrounding these institutions' ability to foster their desired outcomes vary in different ways from the AUC, this paper analyzes them to identify key best practices and cautionary tales that can be utilized and explored to build stronger relationships with traditionally disenfranchised communities.

Next, this paper aggregated data from interviews with community members, students, and faculty of the AUC and other stakeholders regarding their experiences around their relationship with the AUC and the community, and identified trends and patterns based on the stakeholder's role. Finally, recommendations are provided to assist with fostering a better relationship between the AUC and the surrounding community.

As mentioned, data was gathered through interviews[1] conducted with stakeholders in and around the AUC. Preliminary reviews of the interviews indicated recurring themes based on what this paper term the "role" of the interviewee regarding their relationship with the AUC. To understand the trends from the data, each interviewee was assigned a role. These roles included: Resident/ Business Owner, AUC Student, AUC Employee, Neighborhood School Employee and Parents, Local Official, and Industry Expert. The responses were reviewed and aggregated for each question asked to each role (except for Local Official and Industry Expert) to identify reoccurring themes. In total, this paper includes interviews with 26 people. However, in some cases, individuals fell into two roles (i.e., Resident and AUC Employee). In these circumstances, the individual answered questions for each role. Therefore, the total number of interviews conducted was 32. Table 1 provides the distribution of individuals per role. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours, and most interviews were conducted via phone or a virtual conference application.

	Role					
	Resident/Local Business Owner	**AUC Student**	**AUC Employee**	**Neighborhood School Employee or Parent**	**Local Elected Official**	**Industry Expert**
Number of Interviewees	10	7	3	5	3	4
In person Interviews	0	2	0	2	0	1
Virtual/Phone Interviews	10	5	3	3	3	3
Average Length of Interview (mins)	75	60	60	90	45	60

Table 1. The number and type of interviews conducted based on the role of the interviewee.

Analysis of Leading Anchor Institutions

The Evergreen Cooperative Initiative of Cleveland, Ohio

[1] IBR Exemption Approval # H22493

The Evergreen Cooperative (Evergreen) is an example of a successful cooperative economics approach with anchor institutions. Although utilizing anchor institutions to help form and develop cooperatives is a rare practice, implementing this approach seems sensible because cooperatives and anchor institutions are both grounded in community building. Cooperatives are often seen in agriculture and consumer sectors; however, the framework can be used in any industry (Zeuli and Radel 2005). According to the University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, there are nearly 30,000 cooperatives in the United States.

Evergreen is a pioneer in fostering comprehensive community building and development. It started with a group of anchor institutions in the city of Cleveland. These institutions include hospitals, universities, cultural organizations, and the Veterans Administration Medical Center (Howard 2010). In 2005, the Cleveland Foundation, which has a mission to "enhance the lives of all residents of Greater Cleveland by working with donors to build community endowments, address needs and provide leadership," (Cleveland Foundation 2005) helped create the initiative by bringing these multi-billion-dollar institutions together to help address the needs of the most underserved neighborhoods in the city (Howard 2010). Their goal is to stabilize and revitalize these neighborhoods using the resources and collaboration from anchor institutions. Although the Evergreen initiative includes additional institutions outside of one university, it provides an innovative approach to building community through economic development and therefore was selected as an example. The initiative includes several projects around transportation and transit, commercial development, an employer-assisted housing program, education impact programs, and community engagement and outreach (Howard 2010).

One of the key strategies of Evergreen is to leverage the power and resources, through procurement and investments, from anchor institutions to "build a network of cooperatively owned, community-based businesses that supply goods and services to the institutions" (Howard 2010). At the center is economic inclusion which builds the local economy. Evergreen focuses on creating jobs needed to provide resources to businesses and anchor institutions in the area, which does several things that help build the community. For starters, it keeps wealth and financial resources within the community. It creates vital, livable-wage jobs anchored to the neighborhood, which helps create job retention. Also, the cooperative model allows workers to have ownership in the company which creates wealth for their families. This initiative recognizes that job creation is not enough, especially within low-income communities. Cooperatives help workers increase their wealth through equity in the business. Finally, the democratic structure of the cooperatives allows for all people to have a voice, making the community and anchor institutions more

invested in the success of the businesses (Howard 2010). Another one of the key strategies is that Evergreen focuses on green jobs that create environmentally sustainable communities. They look for opportunities that will not only help the economic sector but the health and environmental concerns of the neighborhoods (Howard 2010). Ultimately, the initiative has worked to make the city cleaner and build wealth in low-income neighborhoods.

Evergreen has launched several businesses since its inception in 2008. Two key businesses to highlight are the Evergreen Cooperative Laundry (ECL) and Evergreen Energy Solutions, both launched in 2009. ECL is a green commercial-scale laundry linen service business. It serves healthcare facilities as well as hospitality and hotel establishments. It boasts of a state-of-the-art, cost-effective local facility that offers competitive rate and is the greenest commercial-scale healthcare linen laundry in Ohio. It has the capability to clean 10 to 12 million pounds of healthcare linen a year and employs over 50 residents (Howard 2010). The other business, Evergreen Energy Solutions, provides energy-saving solutions for residential and commercial needs. Their services include installing solar panels and LED lighting, weatherizing properties, and lead-abatement projects. Additionally, their solar panel installation allows institutions to purchase the generated electricity from Evergreen Energy Solutions for over a 15 year period. It employs as many as 75 residents and maintains large-scale solar generators (panels) on the roofs of the city's biggest nonprofit health and education buildings (Howard 2010).

The Evergreen Cooperative Initiative: Best Practices

There are two takeaways from the Evergreen Cooperative initiative. The first is the **use of multiple institutions to create the initiative.** In most cases, anchor institutions work with their city officials or solo to built a functional relationship with the community. In this case, several institutions that bought different levels of expertise and resources came together, which allowed them to have stronger donors to build community endowments. This is an important factor because anchor institutions are often concerned with financial constraints. It is no secret that many of the institutions within the AUC have limited endowments and fluctuating financial resources. However, by pulling resources together, they can impact the community more than they would as an individual college or university.The AUC has a unique structure as a consortium that it can leverage to its advantage.

The second takeaway is the business model developed from the Evergreen Cooperative initiative. The **initiative was centered around economic inclusion at the local level. For them, this meant creating an economic structure through local procurement and investments.** This concept is importan because it

shows how reinvestment in the local economy through everyday services can yield impactful results. For Evergreen, it was the formation of a laundry service, solar power company, and lettuce factory owned and run by community members with the institutions as their primary clients. This could easily be implemented within the AUC as well. Even if they do not create a new business, there are several procurement opportunities that the AUC could strategically develop, from hospitality services to office supplies, that would help boost the local economy.

Syracuse University and the City of Syracuse

Syracuse University (SU) in the city of Syracuse in upstate New York. SU is a private research university that was able to become a trusted anchor institution by building "civil infrastructure" to enable lasting "social infrastructure" (Cantor et. al 2013). Trust, although difficult to empirically quantify, is often used to measure a relationship, and with anchor institutions, it is no different. Most anchor institutions are in communities that historically have not had an active role regarding their development. Because of this lack of consideration, neighborhoods often feel that planning and development are being done to them instead of with them. This process creates an alienated effect within the community (Cantor et. al 2013).

To break this cycle of development, which SU admittedly was also engaged in, they reframed their 2004-2005 academic year under a theme that pushed their public mission to serve as an anchor institution that could provide social glue and economic engines to the surrounding community (Cantor et. al 2013). To start, the university decided to host listening sessions with the neighborhood and other public and private stakeholders. One of the key purposes was to create a dialogue that broke down the "barriers between the university and community" (Cantor et. al 2013). From these sessions, the university gathered the public's view on their previous community engagement activities, which ultimately were seen as one-offs or short-term projects. These activities appeared to be more feel-good projects that did not provide much use to the neighborhood once completed. SU recognized that one of the biggest fundamental changes it needed to make was to move beyond a one-way flow of intellectual capital and technology and instead create "communities of experts, with coalitions from within and outside" of their academic walls (Cantor et. al 2013).

Ultimately, SU was able to define specific areas that would help it provide the necessary resources the community needed while leveraging its expertise. This enhanced the lens of "experts" to account for community assets. This changed the city from despair to one full of assets and by taking this approach, the shift between leader/ follower turned to equal partners. This led to coalitions filled with diverse views and ideas and raised up "home-grown" voices (Cantor et.al 2013).

With the input of its stakeholders, SU created several buildings and engaged in new infrastructure that intertwined the university and the community. This included the development of an abandoned warehouse, which became home to several of the university's programs. With the development of this space, a new corridor was designed that included new bus and pedestrian routes, a public art gallery, and a café, amongst other community activities. The corridor also linked the university to local theatres, museums, galleries, shops, restaurants, and parks (Cantor et.al 2013). This linkage created a bond between university members and local activities and vice versa. The university continued to look for ways to link itself to the community and break down physical and sociological barriers. It next transformed a deserted area of warehouses and railroad bridges, which at one point was a "hotbed of industrial innovation," into projects that transformed the space (Cantor et.al 2013). They created the Near Westside Initiative in 2006, a nonprofit comprising a collaborative model with community members, the university, foundations, businesses, nonprofits, and the city. The Near Westside area includes the ninth-poorest census tract in the nation and the majority (52%) of its residents are below the poverty level (Cantor et.al 2013). SU made strategic goals to create "third spaces" for interactions where the power shift moved from university knowledge to community knowledge, leveling the previous unequal relationship between the two. The Near Westside Initiative has acquired 103 residential parcels that were previously vacant in the area and building new homes, rehabilitating others, and selling some for $1 to homeowners who commit to restoring them (Cantor et.al 2013). SU is a clear example of what can happen when an anchor institution builds the trust of its community. Silos are broken, and progress is made.

Syracuse University: Best Practices

The takeaway from the SU anchor institution example that would benefit the AUC is the university's fundamental change in how it defined community. In order to establish the level of trust needed to make impactful and mutually beneficial changes, SU made a strategic paradigm shift. They **acknowledged that the boundaries of how they define "community" must also include the area and people outside of the physical campus**. This acknowledgment cannot stop with words; it must include actions enmeshed in the university's fabric.

The effort to create an open dialogue with the community helped to foster healing from years of mistrust. This gesture was essential in SU's attempt to break down the barriers between the university and the community. Once trust or at least a level of it was established, it helped the university and community members see each other as essential partners in creating sustainable development in their neighborhood.

Johns Hopkins University & Medicine and the East Baltimore Development Initiative

As stated on their website, Johns Hopkins University and Johns Hopkins Health System (Johns Hopkins) consider themself to be proud residents of Baltimore. They are often at the forefront of discussions around leading anchor institutions. However, as examples were gathered for this paper, it was important to identify the challenges some anchor institutions face. In this example, although Johns Hopkins is noted as a leader in the discussion around anchor institutions, they also provide a cautionary tale regarding what can happen when a well-intended community initiative misses the mark because they fail to recognize the outcomes they seek may cause more harm than good to legacy residents.

As the city's largest anchor institution, Johns Hopkins provides a prominent hub for knowledge and research, a world-renowned medical campus, and a center of employment and construction for Baltimore. As of 2017, the Baltimore Business Journal showed that the university employed 25,869 local employees. In addition, the hospital ranked the number two employer in the city, with 22,142 employees (Economic Alliance 2023).

As of 2023, Johns Hopkins has contributed nearly $5 billion in economic output to Baltimore (Johns Hopkins University 2023). They have a strong track record of redevelopment and reinvestment in the city. In 2014, the City of Baltimore created the Anchor Plan, which comprised four areas: public safety, local hiring, local purchasing, and quality of life. Through its continuous mission to serve the community, Johns Hopkins pledged to partner in the Anchor Plan. In 2015, they created HopkinsLocal, a commitment to leverage their power and resources to increase economic inclusion at the local level. HopkinsLocal includes measurable goals to hold themselves accountable to the public. These specific goals include increasing the participation of “local and minority-owned businesses in construction opportunities; increase their hiring of city residents, with a focus on neighborhoods in need of job opportunities; and enhance economic growth, employment, and investment in Baltimore through their purchasing activities” (HopkinsLocal 2023). Some of Johns Hopkins’s anchoring accomplishments included committing 23.5% of its addressable construction spending towards minority-owned, women-owned, and disadvantaged business enterprises. They also hired 1,017 people in the focus area Baltimore City zip codes for higher earning positions. In addition, they hired 402 local citizens returning from incarceration.

Johns Hopkins was also a key player in the East Baltimore Development Initiative (EBDI). EBDI was a long-term project (over 20 years) that would invest $1.8 billion in redeveloping the Middle East neighborhood adjacent to Johns Hopkins’ medical campus. Middle East Baltimore was an area that suffered greatly from disinvestment stemming from white flight during the 1970s (Theodos 2022). In an attempt to revitalize

the area, several entities created EBDI, with Johns Hopkins as a lead player. EBDI invested or facilitated the provision of hundreds of millions of dollars into the Middle East neighborhood with a focus on five objectives. The first being to create close to 1.6 million square feet of commercial and community facilities. The second area of focus is the construction of affordable and market-rate housing. This focus involved the relocation of 742 households living in the project area. (Theodos 2022). Although residents were given the first opportunity to return, this was still a very controversial effort, met with backlash from the community. In opposition to the initiative, some residents formed the Save Middle East Action Committee. The third focus was contracting with minority or women-owned companies based in Baltimore. The fourth focus was creating employment and workforce training. They created "a workforce development pipeline to connect participants to training and to help remove barriers related to literacy, transit, and childcare" (Theodos 2022). The fifth area of focus was education, including opening a primary school and early childcare center.

In November of 2022, the Urban Institution released a study documenting preliminary results of the EBDI. The report provided mixed results regarding the initial success of the initiative. While the data showed that the project helped to stabilize the neighborhood's population, it also revealed an increase in the average monthly rents as a possible correlation between the initiative and the drop in homeownership rates. In addition, the average income, poverty rate, and home values did not change. However, the biggest concern is the rate of return of original residences. When long term relocation is implemented, displaced residents often do not come back to the area to enjoy the benefits of the revitalized community for various reasons. Based on initial projections, the number of returning residents will be about one-fourth of the original community members (Theodos 2022). In this case, the project did not fully consider how intentionally uprooting people for over 20 years would negatively impact the return rate.

Sometimes a big project can yield a big result. In the case of the East Baltimore Development Initiative, there were some obvious wins that helped to make the neighborhood a better place to live and provide a higher quality of life. However, if the residents are unable or unwilling to return (in this case, after 20 years), the win is not for the community.

Best Practices

In the example of Johns Hopkins, it is important to **ascertain the need to include the community in all aspects of development**. As mentioned, there was community opposition to the development. Primarily residents were weary of the massive project and how it would affect their day-to-day lives. Although the

initiative attempted to include some safety rails, it failed to fully listen to a neighborhood whose voice was often unheard. When institutions come into a community with a mentality of the "experts," they fail. Academic research and quantitative analysis do not fully encapsulate a community. Residents will always and should always be considered the experts of their neighborhood.

Analysis of the AUC Interviews

The following are the results of the themes identified by roles.

Resident/ Business Owner

The residents of the surrounding communities varied in their backgrounds. Some were native to Atlanta, while others were recent transplants from out of state. Ages and occupations ranged as well; however, most were working-aged adults. Although an effort was made to speak with residents in all six neighborhoods surrounding the colleges and university that make up the AUC, four neighborhoods are represented in this data. Regarding involvement in the community, all residents interviewed were either involved in their neighborhood association, NPU, or active members in their community. The average amount of time living in their respective community was around 12 to 13 years, ranging from two years to over 25 years.

Residents in the communities interviewed almost unanimously felt that the AUC was not a "good neighbor". When provided the definition of an anchor institution, many felt the colleges in the AUC were anchored physically in the community but did not have an inherent connection. Most residents were aware of some of the activities the AUC were involved in at the local schools (High School, Middle School, and Primary Schools) in the area; however, outside of occasional beautification projects, they did not see members of the institutions heavily involved in neighborhood initiatives. One thing noted by local officials was that although the AUC has a consortium, each institution within the AUC has its own goals and objectives. While it could appear certain schools in the AUC are not as actively engaged as others, in actuality, it could be that the activities are not as publicly known or specifically directed towards certain areas in the community. This was highlighted through discussions with residents regarding their thoughts about the AUC's involvement in the community. Morehouse has the Morehouse College Community Revitalization Initiative (MCCRI). This initiative was developed for Morehouse College to play a stronger role in the greater West End community. More specifics about MCCRI are explained later in the paper. Neighbors active in their neighborhood association and/or NPU were familiar with MCCRI and agreed that the MCCRI leadership provided regular communication around the community activities Morehouse

College was engaged in. They also agreed that the contact person for MCCRI was responsive and open to partnership opportunities. This was primarily because MCCRI leadership regularly provides updates at the monthly NPU-T meetings and has made themselves available to community members through strategic outreach efforts.

Although there was agreement surrounding communication with the MCCRI, most neighbors did not feel the AUC provided proper communication around its plans and activities. Reasons behind this varied. While some felt that the neighborhood associations should have better contacts with the institutions in the AUC, others stated the NPU should be more actively involved as the conduit for information from the institutions to the community and vice versa. Neighbors felt left in the dark about plans and activities happening with the colleges and university. There was no welcoming connection for residents to join and participate in college events. This included various activities, from art and cultural events hosted by a member of the AUC to partnership opportunities for economic development initiatives in the community. Ultimately neighbors expressed that the colleges provided information only when they needed something from the community. An example provided was the acquisition and development of land by Morehouse. As required by the city, part of the development process is to present the information to the neighborhood(s) that will be impacted by the change. Neighbors mentioned that Morehouse came to their neighborhood meetings to discuss their proposed developments with the community; however, the nature of the meetings was more informative versus an opportunity to actively seek input. Another missed opportunity highlighted during resident interviews was around a large neighborhood cleanup sponsored by Spelman College. The cleanup included several students from Spelman as well as students from other schools in the AUC. When residents spoke with students, they were surprised to learn that most students did not know where they were, even though the clean was less than two blocks from their school. Students were unaware of the neighborhoods' names, history, or any significant attributes. While the surrounding neighborhoods encompass many highly regarded professionals and active community members who have made great strides in redeveloping the area, most students were still surprised that the neighborhood did not embody the negative connotation they had assumed. In addition, some neighbors mentioned their frustration with the lack of funding the AUC has provided. During the height of the social justice movement, institutions in the AUC received large amounts of funding from government and nongovernment entities; however, neighbors explained that very little of it was distributed to the community. In fact, some stated that none of the resources the schools were allotted actually went directly toward community development.

Finally, all residents were asked for their final thoughts on how the AUC could be a better neighbor and lift the community's voice. The thematic results focused on two areas: reframing the narrative members of the AUC have about the local community and enhancing communication channels to help foster awareness and partnerships. Several community members mentioned that the disconnect between students in the AUC and local neighbors stems from the false narrative that the community is unsafe. The term "unsafe" is relative and often derived from a person's personal level of safety. Based on data obtained from Neighborhood Nexus, a data gathering source created to provide more equitable data for the Atlanta region, crime rates in NPU-T have decreased significantly overall from 2012 through 2021. The crime rate per 10,000 population overall saw a change of -366.4 (Neighborhood Nexus 2023). Although there has been a decrease in overall crime, the idea and heightening concern around safety is still a running narrative among the AUC. Residents believe part of the continued assumption around the level of safety is due to the lack of knowledge students have about the history and current activities in the community. During interviews, several residents and members of the community suggested the AUC takes an active role in educating students about the rich history of the community. While some suggested the institutions offer an invitation for community members to speak directly with students (possibly as a requirement for freshmen) in an informational forum, others mentioned a more immersive educational experience, where the history of the community was a required course for all students. In addition to reframing the narrative, community members felt the AUC could be a better neighbor by simply creating and enhancing communication with them.

In all cases, members felt unaware of activities happening on the campuses. They also felt they did not know how to access more information or whom to contact. One resident stated, "you don't know what you don't know" (Personal Interview, February 12, 2023). All the colleges and the university in the AUC have active social media sites. From a review of the information provided on these sites, there were several mentions of upcoming events and ongoing activities. However, most of the information provided is for informational purposes and not an invitation for community members to actually participate. Additionally, there do not seem to be communication channels readily available for community members to inform the AUC about their initiatives or how to propose collaborative projects. A suggestion was made to create an email blast that could be provided to and from the AUC and neighborhoods in NPU-T. Another suggestion was to create a message board that could post

Figure 4. Bulletin board located on the campus of Stanford University.

upcoming events. This physical board could be located in a local establishment or outside on a bulletin board. Residents felt by maintaining a stronger and more regular form of communication, both community members and students could better understand their agency as stakeholders in their neighborhood.

AUC Student

Current and former students from the colleges and university were interviewed to better understand the experience students have while attending a college or university in the AUC. Spelman College, Morehouse College, and Clark Atlanta University students provided insight into their relationship with the surrounding community. Most of the students interviewed were from cities outside of Atlanta; however, a few were natives of the city. None of the students were native to the surrounding communities.

When discussing their volunteer activity with the surrounding community, all the students were involved in community activities. This was primarily due to two factors; they were recipients of scholarships that required an extensive amount of community service (such as Bonner Scholar or Adam Scholar), or they were required to complete a certain number of community service hours as part of their graduation requirement. Their participation ranged vastly. Some participated in community engagement activities designed to foster better relationships with the neighborhood. This included participating in NPU meetings and conducting workshops that provided useful information on topics such as financial literacy, local government structures, community organizing, and technology training. Other students assisted with neighborhood cleanups, Habitat for Humanity projects, and volunteering within the neighborhood primary schools and community centers. There were some students that volunteered with local organizations within the community. These organizations focused on watershed management, historic preservation, and community building.

The level of impact regarding these experiences also varied widely. As previously mentioned, most of the institutions in the AUC require a certain number of community service volunteer hours as a graduation requirement. The students who were not involved in community service as a requirement of their scholarship expressed that their community service did not provide significant value to their college experience. They enjoyed volunteering for a particular activity but did not have a strong desire to engage further with the community. In a few cases, even students on community service-based scholarships did not find their volunteering activities particularly beneficial. The motives behind some of their community outreach projects did not seem altruistic. In fact, similar to comments made by some residents, these

activities only seemed to be conducted as a way for an institution to obtain backing from the community for an upcoming project they were looking to pursue. However, this was not the case for most of the students interviewed. Most students had positive experiences that either furthered their community engagement or helped them pursue community-based areas of interest. Students that had more immersive experiences felt that they were able to make a small difference with their service. A majority of them also felt they were able to learn a lot more about the community and have a better understanding and appreciation of it.

Regarding the relationship between AUC students and the surrounding neighborhood, all students believed there was a strong divide. Students did not feel that they were considered equals to community members. Some believed this perception was based on socioeconomic conditions that fostered barriers, while others mentioned the physical barriers their respective institution created. Students sometimes experienced negative encounters with local residents who saw them as arrogant or privileged. There was also a strong concern about safety. Most of the students interviewed did not feel completely safe in their surroundings. They discussed not walking around during certain times of the day or on certain streets. Some even felt they could not walk around without having other students accompany them. Although none of them mentioned a particular incident that threatened their safety directly, there was an overall sense of uneasiness. It was also stated that most campuses have created a narrative about the neighborhood being unsafe. Coincidently, many students interviewed welcomed more opportunities to engage with community members. They felt that the AUC offers a decent number of activities that could foster stronger relationships; however, students do not take advantage of these projects. Instead, most students do not try to engage in more impactful community-centered opportunities.

Challenges around the general student body's unwillingness to interact with community members also raised safety concerns. However, the main theme was that the AUC did not create a structure to promote strong community bonds with students. Several students mentioned that the focus of the AUC is not to help them find meaningful work that will assist the community. Instead, the focus is on helping students to obtain affluential careers to bring more prestige and income to the institutions. Other students mentioned that one of the greatest challenges was that community members did not see the value in building strong networks and relationships with students. Students were not considered relevant to the long-term goals of the neighborhood. Rather, they felt they were viewed as transient and not of significant concern. Some even pointed to the lack of amenities that would create a more favorable environment for students to feel like they belonged. At the same time, some of the students interviewed acknowledged

that their peers did consider themselves transient. Most of their peers were not from Atlanta and did not intend to stay after graduating. Those who planned to stay did not see themselves living near the campus; instead, they looked to move into neighborhoods they felt were more affluent or had more conducive amenities. Ultimately, there appeared to be a disconnect between how students believed they were perceived in the community that might overshadow their desire to work more closely in the neighborhood.

When asked about ways to encourage students to become more involved in the community, the students interviewed had several suggestions. One thing that was mentioned by most of the students was the need for their institution to think about the community differently. Students stated that the AUC does not see the community as an extension of themselves; instead, they create an environment that feels like a thriving collegiate entity *despite* its location. The culture of the campuses must shift before the student body can fully embrace the need and urgency to work together with community members. Some students suggested providing more information about the community to expose students to the area's rich history. Classes directed to upperclassmen that not only teach the history of the community but implement practical work that can help students to understand life skills would be helpful. Explaining how to buy real estate, open local businesses, and other community development curricula would provide positive reinforcement by immersing students in the neighborhood.

AUC Employees

The employees that provided input into the research had a direct relationship with their respective schools' community outreach and volunteer initiatives. These employees all worked for their institution for at least ten years. All employees also had a nonprofit, higher education, and/ or community development background. Although an attempt was made to gather information from each of the four institutions, only employees from two of the colleges and one member from the consortium responded to interview requests.

The institutions that provided interviews were able to point to several initiatives and activities they are currently and have previously done in the community. They mentioned several programs that have partnerships with the local neighborhood schools. These programs centered around tutoring, literacy development, and teacher assistance. Additionally, there was mention of opportunities for students to volunteer with nonprofits in the immediate area as well as other minority communities further away from campus. Both schools advised that they have marketed community cleanups in the area, which tends to

have many student participants. For these types of activities, they have partnered with community associations. Additionally, both schools try to make sure students have some connection to the community, whether it is to meet their required hours for graduation or to help pursue an interest. One school mentioned engaging students to participate in strategic workshops designed to meet the community's current needs. These workshops were sponsored by the school, another university in the city, or the NPU. This school also mentioned having volunteer opportunities directly with the NPU and neighborhood associations as interns. While the schools seemed to focus on a variety of civic engagements, the consortium has worked more with targeted community development projects.

When discussing students' involvement with community service and level of interest, both schools mentioned that it varies. For the most part, they stated the students that were Bonner Scholars, Adam Scholars, RL Corporate Foundation Scholars, or students with a strong interest in community engagement seemed to be most involved with reoccurring volunteer activities. However, other students' actual engagement level typically depends on their overall objectives. Students with an affinity for working with younger children or teaching tend to lean into volunteer opportunities with the local primary schools. In several cases, these students have fostered longer-term relationships with their respective primary schools and even helped with developing or enhancing programs that might be more relatable to primary students. Other students that are looking for an easy way to obtain their required service hours tend to participate in one-off activities such as neighborhood cleanups or serving at a food bank. One example is the MLK Day of Service. This event is designed to help students implement the legacy of Martin Luther King's "life and teaching into community service that helps empower and strengthen local communities" (Spelman College 2023). Partnerships with community agencies in the area are designed to create engaging activities on and off campus. Both schools have community service portals that students can access to find various volunteer opportunities. The school does not directly sponsor all these activities but gives students opportunities to explore a number of interests, from environmental concerns, homelessness and the unhoused community, to food banks, summer camps, and STEAM programs.

Challenges around engaging more with the community seemed primarily around communication and expectations. Leadership changes within the neighborhood associations and with the institutions have been a challenge because it leads to a change in focus and the direction of the respective entity. This affects and alters priorities which affect relationships and communication. Members of the institution noted that the neighborhood and the colleges typically face the same issues (for example, housing shortages and crime). Unfortunately, how they have approached them has not necessarily been

collaborative. It was mentioned that, during the height of the pandemic, shared concerns around health and well-being did foster new relationships with the community. Another challenge is that each institution has its own agenda, which might not align with the other members of the AUC. While this is not an excuse, it does make efforts to create formalized community engagement goals more difficult. Finally, members of the AUC mentioned funding concerns and safety issues. In most cases, to offer students these volunteer opportunities, the institutions must provide transportation to and from various sites. With limited resources, this can be challenging to implement regularly. In addition, many students are unable to dedicate a significant number of hours to working in the community without any form of monetary compensation. To offset this, institutions must provide stipends often obtained from grants which may or may not be long-term. Regardless of the event or program, the school has to prioritize the safety of its students. Most of the students in the AUC are from out of state, and their parents and guardians have entrusted the institution with ensuring they are safe. This means while the institutions are open to and promote community engagement activities, they have to operate cautiously.

Overall, there was a general consensus that the institutions could better engage with the community by making students feel more connected. While there is a range of opportunities for students to participate in neighborhood-centered activities, there could be a larger emphasis on forging more meaningful connections that create more impactful experiences. These types of opportunities would create more established mutually beneficial engagements in which students could utilize their academic knowledge in a practical way, and community members could leverage this knowledge to strengthen the community. Ultimately it can help to dismember the town and gown narrative.

Neighborhood School Employees and Parents

As research was gathered from the other roles, it became evident that there was a dynamic relationship between the local neighborhood schools and the AUC. Due to this, this paper conducted interviews with teachers, staff, and parents of two of the primary schools in the area. Most teachers interviewed had been at their respective schools for approximately 3-5 years. Parents interviewed had children that ranged from pre-kindergarten to the 4th grade.

Both parents and teaching staff spoke highly of the relationship between the AUC and their respective schools. The teaching staff mentioned the unique structures of their schools. One of the schools is STEAM certified and conducts a learning curriculum focusing on critical thinking. Their students are engaged at an early age to understand the steps required for problem-solving. This structure has been extremely

influential in determining the volunteering opportunities for students in the AUC. Students from the AUC assist with setting up science-related projects that range from agriculture to robotics. They are involved directly with students and as teaching assistants. The other school focuses on preparing students for secondary education. They look at students as a whole person and create an environment fostering academic and social skills development. Students from the AUC primarily work with tutoring and literacy advancement in the classroom.

When asked about the biggest benefits of the relationship between the schools and the AUC, parents appreciated the free programs offered through the AUC. The neighborhood's demographics indicate that most of the communities in the area are in moderate-income tracts. A few parents stated that these free programs, typically STEM and STEAM related, allow their children to participate in activities that they would not have been able to do if a fee was imposed. However, the biggest benefit from the relationship was exposure. The teaching staff noted how interactions with students in the AUC affected their class. Their students could see someone who looked like them, who was not much older than them, doing something positive. Their students love to ask them questions about school and their life on campus. They also talk about their studies and goals after graduation. Additionally, parents felt exposure was a huge benefit. Specifically, parents that had students in programs with direct interaction with AUC students. The SpelRead program, for example, was mentioned as a great program that allowed their children to enhance their literacy competency and give them a chance to have a young adult show interest in them, validate them. Overall, as one teacher stated, “kids are very impressionable, and the presence of the college students can create a lasting impact” (Personal Interview, March 10, 2023).

Local Elected Official/ Industry Expert

Although not analyzed for trends, interviews with local elected officials and industry experts were obtained to understand the current development in the area. Additionally, these individuals provided information about challenges with projects and initiatives in the community. Elected officials included roles identified through local and state government, including the NPU system. Industry experts included academic and nonprofit professionals who conducted research regarding anchor institutions, either directly in the AUC or other cities outside the state. This data was used to provide more context into the experiences shared by the roles mentioned above.

Summary of Analysis

Table 2 provides an overview of the themes captured from each role.

	Overall Themes
Resident/Local Business Owner	Although legacy residents are not as involved in the community in recent years, there is still a strong desire to preserve the history of the community. Between dilapidated properties, upkept vacant land and a lack of transparency, most neighbors do not see the AUC as a "good neighbor." In addition, a lack of involvement with community and economic development has left most residents frustrated with the relationship between the institutions and the neighborhoods. To create a mutually beneficial relationship, residents suggested the AUC create more dialogue with the community on a regular basis and look to the community to engage in partnerships that will promote civic engagement and economic opportunities.
AUC Student	Most of the students interviewed have a strong sense of commitment to volunteerism, however, they also expressed a strong divide between their respective school and the neighborhood. AUC institutions provide opportunities for community involvement, but the underlined culture of the campuses does not promote meaningful relationships with community members. At the same time, students did not feel community members made a strong commitment to seek their involvement or acknowledge them as actual residents.
AUC Employee	AUC employees have a strong commitment to the community and their students. They are consistently looking for opportunities to engage and bring a higher level of involvement with students in the local neighborhood. There are several well-run longstanding programs they promote and encourage students to participate in. They acknowledge that the institutions could be doing more to serve the community. However, there are several challenges such as financial resource constraints, leadership changes, and the safety of their students that can hinder connectivity between the institutions and the community.
Neighborhood School Employee or Parent	The partnership with the AUC and surrounding neighborhood schools is strong. Both school employees and parents feel the AUC student volunteers bring a much needed benefit to the school and to the primary students. AUC students help provide exposure to opportunities that have had a strong impact on the students. Even their presence in the classroom allows some students to see someone that looks like them in college. These interactions can change the trajectory of a student's life. Employees and parents would love to see more personal relationships built between the AUC students and their kids. This could be through a mentoring programs or even scheduled on campus visits/ field trips.

Local Elected Official/ Industry Experts	There is a lot of opportunity in the AUC and surrounding neighborhoods for both community development and economic development projects. Unfortunately, there seems to be several factors that have prevented the AUC and the surrounding neighborhoods from developing stronger partnerships. Most of the schools as well as the neighborhoods have their own objectives. Although some overlap, the priority of these objectives might not align with all parties. The NPU could be utilized to foster more meaningful dialogue that could bridge stronger collaborative efforts; however, both the community and the AUC would need to make strong efforts to achieve this. In addition, this would require all parties to make sure they are promoting an environment of togetherness, where they can lean into each other for expertise and resources.

Table 2. The overarching themes captured from each of the roles interviewed.

Overall, it can be surmised through most of the roles interviewed that there is a disconnect between the AUC and the community; however, the depth of this chasm is unclear. Members of the community, students from the AUC, and employees in the AUC all agree that the relationship between the institutions in the AUC and the community could be stronger. Community members continue to feel isolated from the AUC primarily from a lack of communication and access to the institutions. While there was plenty of evidence that the AUC is actively participating in community events, the level of impact did not seem to yield satisfactory results. Even parents who spoke highly of the activities that the AUC conducts in the primary schools felt that stronger bonds, such as structured mentorship programs, would be more beneficial than some of the higher-touch activities often offered. However, communities did not seem to have developed ideas around collaborative opportunities that would provide mutually beneficial engagements for the AUC. For example, community members would like to see more students volunteer with their neighborhood associations. However, structures have not been implemented to accommodate a rewarding opportunity for students to partake. AUC students seem to want a stronger relationship with the community, but there is a general lack of motivation to seek these opportunities from the general student body. It could be attributed to the overall culture of "us vs. them," which has been prevalent throughout the campuses of the AUC for many years. This mentality continues to skew the perception that students have toward the community and the community's perception toward students. In multiple interviews, community members alluded to students and faculty in an elitist manner. Ironically, many students felt they could not have stronger ties to the neighborhood because they did not feel accepted as community members.

Conclusion

Research has shown that institutions that build a strong relationship with their surrounding communities can develop a mutually beneficial relationship that empowers everyone. When it comes to HBCUs, such as the institutions within the AUC, community and economic development is a mission historically embedded in each campus's fabric. However, what "anchoring" looks like for the AUC will depend on several factors, including the community's current needs, the physical and socioeconomic conditions of the area, and the resources the institution has available.

The current relationship between the AUC and the surrounding community is complex. While there are well-established activities the AUC is doing in the neighborhood, these activities are not providing the impactful results that the neighborhood desires. This appears to be due to a lack of communication and transparency. Methods to enhance communication, such as creating accessible digital and physical platforms to provide information about events, objectives, and opportunities, can show good faith toward a more inclusive relationship with the community and the AUC. In addition, the current culture of the community as well as on the campuses fosters a divisive mentality. The AUC should focus on creating a cultural shift on campus that acknowledges the community as members on and off campus. Seeing and building on the community's assets can lead to mutually beneficial collaborative projects that will promote desirable results for all.

Recommendations

Institutions that are civically engaged in the welfare of their communities' become agents of change that can provide a voice to neighborhoods that often are unheard. In reviewing the relationship between the AUC and the surrounding neighborhoods, two overarching recommendations were determined that may aid in the creation of a stronger anchor institution.

1. Create Strong Communication Channels

Throughout the interviews as well as the anchor institution examples analyzed in this paper, having a strong communication network is key to developing a positive relationship with institutions and community members. For the AUC, this could entail the following:

- Creating online and physical communication platforms that discuss events around campus and the community.
- Create a collaboration board where students can input their interests and community members can post opportunities to promote more alignment with engagements.

- Developing a cadence for regular meetings with AUC and neighborhood leadership members to ensure everyone is kept abreast of information and has an equal seat at the table to discuss expectations and collaborative opportunities. This could be done by leveraging the NPU.

1. Reframe the Narrative of "Community"

Although the AUC is responsible for keeping its students safe, how the level of danger in the community is portrayed to students and faculty is unsettling. Instead of emphasizing the threats in the area, the AUC could encourage an understanding of the historical relevance of the community and the need to protect it. An overall cultural shift within the community and on the campuses is required to develop a successful collaborative relationship that institutionalizes engagement. Some of the efforts could be:

- Educating students (many who are not from Atlanta) on how to be aware of their surroundings in a major metropolitan area, instead of isolating the narrative to the dangers in the local area.
- Providing students with the opportunity to hear from neighborhood residents in an immersive experience, such as a required historical mini-course that included neighborhood tours and opportunities to engage in ongoing community-led projects.
- Welcome neighborhood associations to speak with freshman students about the history of the community to ground the importance of the neighborhood with their college experience.
- Creating forums for upperclassmen to engage with community members to learn life skills such as buying a home or starting/ acquiring a business in the neighborhood. This would create a pipeline from the AUC into the community, allowing knowledge and resources to stay within the area.
- Develop annual volunteering challenges based on dorms, class year, or majors that will promote student engagement with the neighborhood.
- Determine ways to restructure current procurement practices to utilize more local businesses. In addition, make sure faculty and students are aware of these efforts and promote them as high priorities.
- Develop curriculums that involve practical work for all majors so that they can utilize their expertise in the community.

Research Limitations

The research conducted for this paper had several limitations. As previously mentioned, representatives from each of the surrounding neighborhoods were not available to provide insight, which caused a gap in

information provided, as each neighborhood had certain distinctions in their relationship with the AUC. In addition, employees interviewed from the AUC held positions that promoted student engagement, however, interviews with faculty and staff that are involve in each institutions' strategic goals would have yielded more data around how the colleges and university's plan for community and economic development at an enterprise level. Finally, the anchor institution examples analyzed were all PWIs. Since there is such a dynamic historical relationship between HBCUs and local communities, an analysis that includes HBCUs located in urban centers would provide more data around trends and challenges faced with building mutually beneficial relationship with the surrounding community.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions:

Resident/ Local Business Owner

1. Can you provide your background, how long have you lived in the area, are you a native of Atlanta, what is your affiliation with the AUC, etc.?
2. Can you talk a little about the neighborhood association? What are the demographics of the neighborhood association, age, legacy resident's vs new residents, approx. how many people attend the meetings?
3. What are some of the initiatives the neighborhood is currently working on? Or previously?
4. Do you feel the AUC has been an active partner in neighborhood initiatives?
5. What if any have been the challenges with working with the AUCC?
6. Dr. Hodges shared the AUC's strategic vision. There is a lot of positive impact the AUC is looking to have in the community. Which is very exciting and hopeful. How would you say your association's role was in helping to shape the vision?
7. What has been the community's involvement with the AUC?
8. Often times communities feel like they are not active participants in the development of their area, do you feel the AUC community has a strong voice in the future of the neighborhood's development?
9. How do you think the AUCC could assist in lifting up the community's voice?
10. Final thoughts?

AUC Student

1. Can you provide your background, how long have you lived in the area, are you a native of Atlanta, what is your affiliation with the AUC, etc.?
2. How was/ is your experience with the community as an AUC student?
3. How would you describe the relationship between AUC students and the surrounding neighborhood?
4. What are the current programs/ activities the AUC is doing in the community?
5. What were the challenges with students interacting with/in the community?
6. What do you think would encourage students to be more involved in the community?
7. Final Thoughts?

AUC Employee

1. Can you provide your background, how long have you lived in the area, are you a native of Atlanta, what is your affiliation with the AUC, etc.?
2. What are the initiatives/ projects the AUC is working on in the community?
3. How are students involved?
4. Can you talk about challenges with working with students, the institution, and the community?
5. How could the AUC be more connected with the community?
6. Final Thoughts?

Neighborhood School Employee or Parent

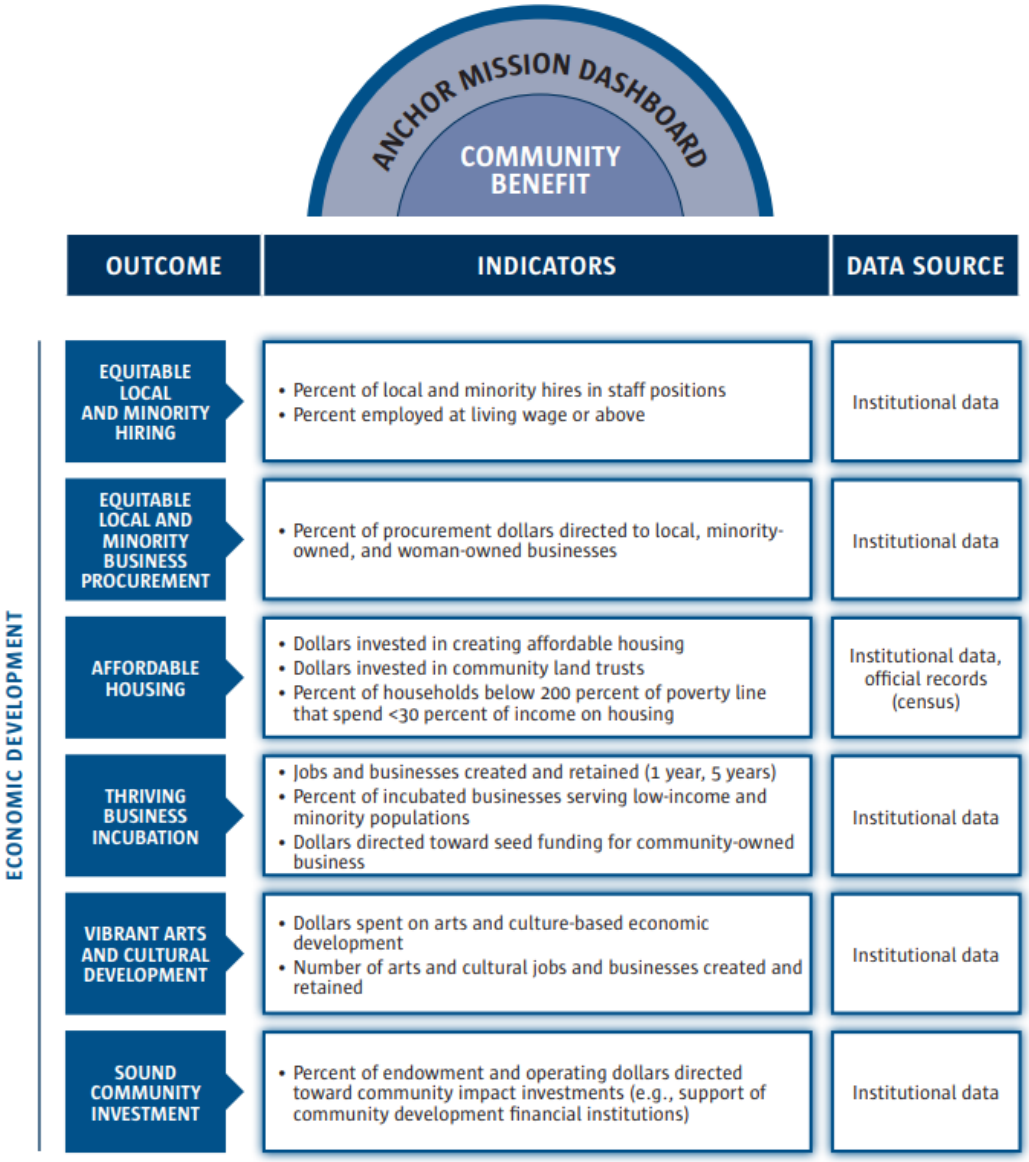
1. Can you provide your background, how long have you lived in the area, are you a native of Atlanta, what is your affiliation with the AUC, etc.?
2. Can you talk a little about the neighborhood your kids go to school? What made you send your kids to these schools? OR Can you talk a little about your school?
3. What programs have your children participated in sponsored by the AUC? OR What programs does your school offer with the AUC?
4. How have these experiences shaped your children/ students?
5. How did you find out about these programs? What type of communication was sent out?
6. What improvements to the current programs would you make, or what would be a suggestion for an AUC sponsored program?
7. Final Thoughts?

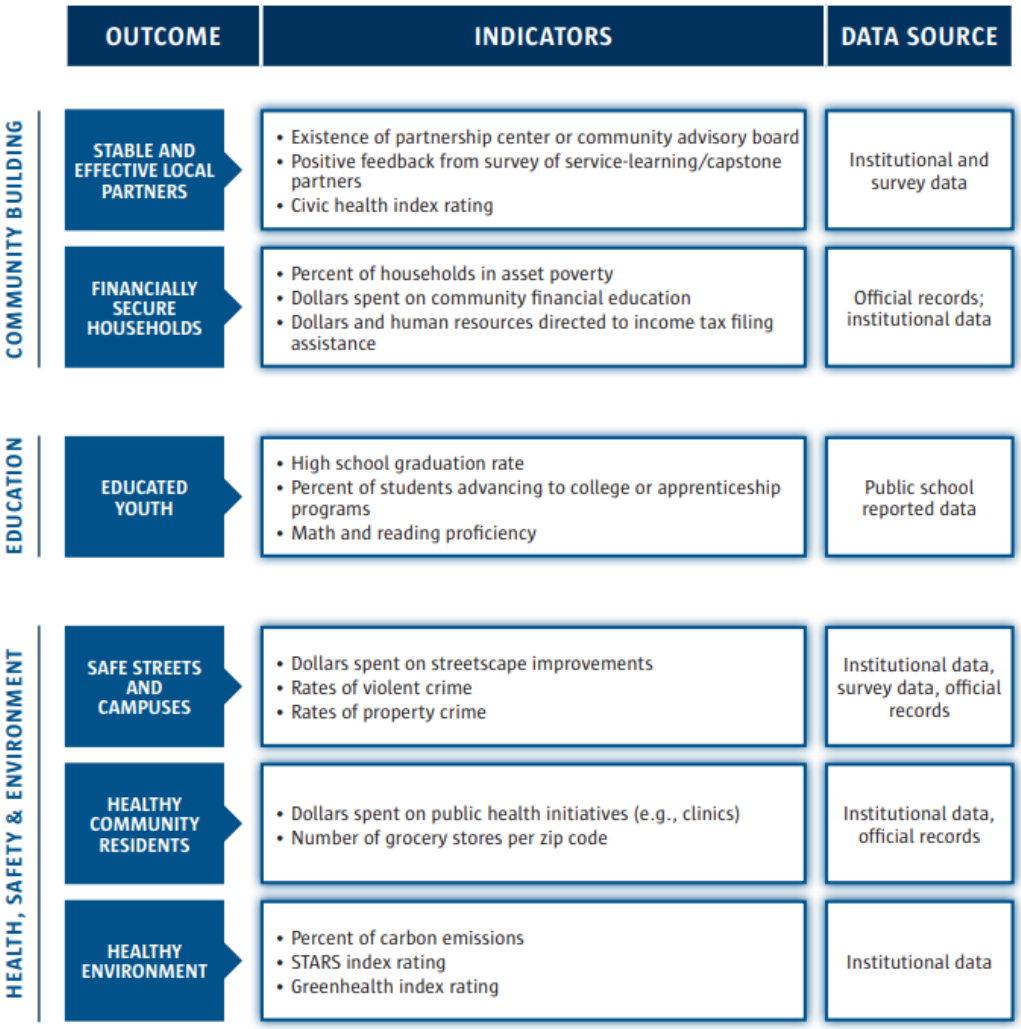
Local Elected Official/ Industry Expert: *Questions varied based on current role and expertise.*

Appendix B

The Anchor Dashboard

Understanding the best way to invest in the local community can be a daunting tasks. In an effort to develop empirical results for anchor institutions, the Democracy Collaborative at the University of Maryland, through funding and support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, created an "anchor dashboard," designed to assist with understanding the impact their efforts have on the local community. Although the dashboard was not utilized to ascertain the AUC abilities as an anchor institution, the data points provided can be used in future studies to assist with measuring meaningful impact.





Because the activities of an anchor institution as well as the needs of a community will vary, the dashboard is divided into categories based on interest. While some communities' interest may be in economic development, other communities may have a focus on healthy and safe environments. The goal is not to tackle all areas, but instead find the areas that most align with the anchor institution's capacity and resources.