

Sustaining Communities: A Collaborative Approach to Community Engagement

Raymond A. Skinner

Keynote Address by Raymond A. Skinner, Secretary, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, at the Ninth National Outreach Scholarship Conference at Penn State on October 7, 2008: "The Scholarship of Outreach and Engagement: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?"

Introduction

Let me start by thanking Dr. Weidemann and the conference organizers for inviting me to be here with you this afternoon at this, the Ninth National Outreach Scholarship Conference. This conference marks the continuation of work begun here at Penn State in 1999 when the first Outreach Scholarship Conference was held. That conference was aptly titled "The Scholarship of Engagement for the Twenty-first Century." And, as we are now nine years into the twenty-first century, the scholarship of outreach and engagement has grown and matured in ways that I'm sure you didn't imagine nine years ago.

When Dr. Weidemann first asked me about speaking at this conference, my initial reaction was one of surprise. I thought—what would I, a government bureaucrat, have in common with a room full of academics? But as I began to think about it, it began to make more and more sense.

As a housing and community development practitioner, I work in communities on a daily basis to bring new resources and vitality to what are typically distressed communities; and as scholars and university officials you are seeking ways to engage in similar communities. So, if you think about it just a little, it makes sense that government bureaucrats and academic scholars can and should collaborate to bring different kinds of critical resources to communities in need.

In fact, I think it is critically important for people in government and academia to find new ways to meet in new arenas and, more importantly, find new ways to create change and transfer knowledge to others by direct interaction; we can be much more effective if we act together. And so this afternoon, I particularly want to talk with you about incorporating what you in academia do

best—scholarship and teaching—and what we do best in administering housing and community revitalization programs into a strong and sustainable system of community engagement and outreach. We need you to come down from your ivory towers and bring your skills, talents, and resources into the community.

As a member of the Outreach Advisory Board here at Penn State, I get to hear about many great engagement projects that the university is involved with. But today I want to frame our discussion by focusing on some examples of outreach and engagement programs that I am familiar with from my work in Maryland. Let me begin with a quote from what some of you may think is an unlikely source.

We like smart growth. It perfectly fits our editorial creed, which is never support anything stupid. (*New York Times* 2004)

The *New York Times* editorial board wrote this in 2004 following a losing battle by proponents of a proposed “smart growth”

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urban community development on Long Island, which would have cleaned up a contaminated site and provided the many benefits typical of smart growth development (e.g., high-density housing, walkable neighborhoods, live near your workplace). The proposal was defeated, it seems, primarily due to objections of current residents in this traditional sprawling suburban neighborhood where the site was located.

But why should we care about ideas like smart growth and the realities of urban and suburban development? We must care because successful collaboration among universities, local governments, and community advocates can have a real and positive impact on our quality of life if that collaboration results in action.

Our combined resources must be intelligently deployed to effect positive and concrete change. Colleges and universities can engage people in their geographic and cultural areas so that communities can begin to use all available resources in new and different ways for everyone’s benefit. Together, we can support a strong, healthy middle-class culture that values education, lifelong learning, and participation in a shared future life.

Sustainable housing and community development battles are the kind of battles we can no longer afford to lose to cynics. What we “know” about healthy communities must become what we actually do to support them. In fact, the continued engagement of higher education institutions with their communities is crucial if we are to successfully face many of our most pressing needs, from health care to transportation to affordable housing. We need university-level scholarship and knowledge to become “hands-on” practice so that we do not just research solutions to our problems, but actually implement those solutions that we know and believe will work.

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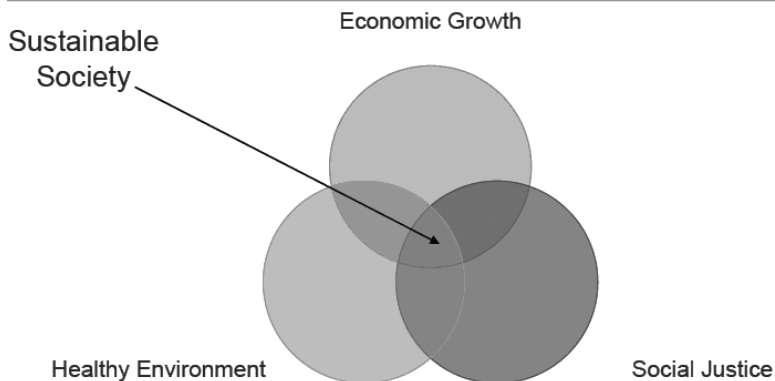
Scholarship, in its traditional sense, should have much to say about engagement and collaboration with people and the enrichment of cultures; and we must make collaboration among education, business, government, and communities work by engaging people with a vision of a shared future and by becoming part of the daily fabric of shared life.

Many educational outreach programs provide people with opportunities for lifelong learning, but education of the individual alone must not be the only goal and benefit. If we are to develop and profit from a supportive and sophisticated learning culture, higher education institutions must work to engage communities and transfer knowledge into practical work plans and projects now so that we can enjoy a shared future that will support life for all of us and for future generations.

Preparation for the future is no longer an abstract idea, as we are right now facing severe stresses to our financial and economic systems, costly wars, and climate change that threatens our environment and results in increasing scarcity of basic resources like clean water and air. It is in this context that there is now a lot of discussion about the so-called future disciplines—these include smart growth, climate change adaptation, environmental studies, and sustainable development.

So what is sustainable development? According to the World Commission on Environment and Development, “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (*World Commission on Environment and Development—Brundtland Commission 1987*). Every day I am directly concerned

Figure 1.



with sustainable development in this broad sense, where environment, economic concerns, and social concerns intersect and the future is not sacrificed for the present.

In the ideal world, we would want to be where these three intersect, the sustainable society (figure 1). Applying this in my role as secretary of the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) requires that I relentlessly seek to align my agency's mission not only with the governor's priorities, but also with the larger society, including representatives from business, environment, education, social service, and many other interest groups. It is also in this context that university outreach and engagement can provide enormous opportunities for enhancing this sustainability approach. To illustrate some of these concepts, I want to focus on a few examples that demonstrate different types of university engagement. As I review these examples, I ask that you think about some of the questions you might have before you take on any type of project. First and foremost, what are the university's responsibilities and commitment of resources? What are the legal obligations? What are the risks, legal and otherwise?

Before I go into the examples, let me step back for a moment and talk a little about my agency, the Maryland DHCD. When I started this talk, I asked the question, somewhat rhetorically, what is a government bureaucrat doing here in a room full of scholars? Well, government, through agencies like mine, can play a key role in facilitating partnerships between universities and communities; we also can provide essential resources to carry out project activities. Our mission is to work with partners to finance housing opportunities and revitalize places for Maryland families to live, work, and prosper.

The resources that DHCD has to offer include mortgage lending for single-family and multifamily housing (funded by tax-exempt and taxable housing revenue bonds, tax credits, and other federal and state resources) as well as an array of revitalization programs that include funds for infrastructure, streetscape improvements, housing rehabilitation, assistance to small businesses, redevelopment of neighborhood retail facilities, and grants to support the activities of nonprofit community-based organizations. Together, these tools provide a platform for DHCD's involvement with communities across the state of Maryland, and we are active in several communities where higher education facilities are located. We bring resources that can help forge partnerships with local governments and universities around shared goals.

And now let's get back to those examples of engagement that I mentioned.

East Baltimore Development Incorporated

The first example is of an institution getting involved in an engagement project to not only expand its facilities but to assist in the massive redevelopment of the adjacent low-income, distressed neighborhood. This is an example of what I will refer to as a community redevelopment initiative. I am referring to Johns Hopkins Medical Center, which is located just east of downtown Baltimore. Beginning in the 1970s and '80s, the area east of the Medical Center became a crime-ridden, drug-infested area that even I was afraid to walk through. At first, the university tried to wall itself off and focus inward. Then Hopkins began to buy up property in the area, leaving dozens of houses vacant and boarded up for years, leading to further deterioration of the neighborhood. Community residents began to openly talk about "the Plan"—that is, the plan to remove the mostly low-income, black residents out and transform the neighborhood into a playground for those "other people."

At that time, community leaders went to the city government for help. To make a long story short, the city convened a number of stakeholders who met over almost three years to come up with a plan that would not only accommodate the growth needs of Johns Hopkins, but would also address community need for jobs, housing, training, and better health care. Even more important, a structure was put in place to carry out the development through formation of a nonprofit, quasi-governmental entity called East Baltimore Development Incorporated, or EBDI. Created in 2003, EBDI is truly a lesson in power sharing, with a board of directors

made up of appointees of the governor, the mayor, Johns Hopkins, and the community. An agreement was signed spelling out the responsibilities of the parties and putting in place certain protections for current residents, including enhanced relocation benefits for those who had to move, and a right of first refusal to return to new affordable housing that would be built.

The EBDI mission is to successfully attract market-oriented investment, development, population, and enterprise to the East Baltimore community, while equipping community residents with the skills, information, and resources they need to benefit from new housing, employment, and business and educational opportunities, and while reinforcing the long-term success and vitality of the world-class health and research facilities that anchor and economically power the neighborhood, the city, and the region.

Additional partners in the project include the Annie E. Casey and Goldseker Foundations and the Greater Baltimore Committee, a regional economic development group. The foundations are providing funding for relocations benefits and other resident services, while the city, state, and federal governments, including my department, are providing support for various development projects.

The New East Baltimore will include a world-class science and technology park within an eighty-eight-acre mixed-use, mixed-income development. Phase I will encompass approximately 1.1 million square feet of research and office space, 100,000 square feet of retail space, and over 900 housing units. The New East Baltimore will also include homeownership opportunities for former residents, new public schools, community health services, and a job training/workforce development program. Six thousand new jobs will serve as an economic engine for the city of Baltimore and the region. The entire project is expected to cost \$1.8 billion and will be built in phases over a ten-year period. For the East Baltimore community, however, redevelopment is not just about money—it is also “an opportunity to create a new model of inclusive city rebuilding.”

Maryland Industrial Partnerships Program

A different type of program is exemplified by the University of Maryland's Maryland Industrial Partnerships Program (MIPS). MIPS funds collaborative high-tech research projects between Maryland companies and university faculty for the purpose of developing a specific product or process. The University of Maryland and the partner company each provide funding and

resources to develop the product. Examples of recent MIPS projects include:

- Polymer-drug Conjugates for Cancer Therapy
 - » Rexahn Pharmaceuticals Inc. and University of Maryland, Baltimore
- Material Study for Solid State Lighting
 - » Technologies and Devices International Inc. and University of Maryland, College Park
- Flexible and High Performance Biometric Tools
 - » Signal Processing Inc. and University of Maryland, College Park

University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) Business Incubator

Another type of engagement, which is very popular, is the university-related business incubator. One of the more successful ones is located at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, better known as UMBC. UMBC's incubator is home to more than twenty start-up and emerging high-tech and bioscience companies and operates an idea lab to help UMBC students and faculty develop businesses.

Founded in 1989 and located adjacent to the campus, bwtech@UMBC is a seventy-one-acre research and technology park that has graduated more than thirty companies and has accommodated over one hundred tenants. Firms have access to university expertise, students, technology, programs, and facilities. This type of engagement enhances UMBC's role as an economic engine for Maryland and the region by expanding university research opportunities, facilitating technology transfer between UMBC and the private sector while creating both jobs and tax revenue.

Center for Smart Growth

In Maryland, we have a great example of engagement and outreach where universities are involved in helping to shape public policy on major issues. The National Center for Smart Growth and Education located at the University of Maryland is a nonpartisan center for research and leadership training on smart growth and related land-use issues not only in Maryland, but also in metropolitan regions around the nation, and in Asia and Europe.

The center was founded in 2000 as a cooperative venture of five University of Maryland schools: Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Public Policy, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Engineering. The mission of the center is to bring the diverse resources of the University of Maryland and a network of national experts to bear on issues related to land use and the environment, transportation and public health, housing and community development, and international urban development.

The center accomplishes this mission through independent, objective, interdisciplinary research, outreach, and education. Some examples include:

- The center partners with Smart Growth America in the Governors' Institute on Community Design, a program designed to assist governors throughout the United States who are interested in issues of land use and development, land conservation, community design, or related issues.
- The center also offers smart growth leadership training to federal, state, and local government officials as well as to private sector decision makers. The center staff and its affiliate faculty offer specialized education and training programs as well as smart growth study tours and workshops.
- In 2007, the center merged with the Environmental Finance Center to provide technical and outreach assistance to individual communities.
- The Environmental Finance Center is one of nine university-based centers across the country established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992; these centers help create innovative financing solutions that help communities manage the costs associated with environmental protection and improvement.
- The Maryland Environmental Finance Center promotes a comprehensive model of environmental financing where state and federal funding programs are combined with innovative financing techniques to create a sustainable watershed protection financing strategy.

Since its founding, staff at the center have made important contributions to scholarship on a variety of topics, played significant roles on local planning and development initiatives, and helped educate a new generation of leaders on smart growth-related topics. In addition to this impressive research, outreach, and engagement,

the center is an active participant with the State of Maryland and DHCD in advancing these recent activities:

- Task Force for Future Growth and Development
- Maryland Commission on Climate Change
- Maryland Green Building Council

BEACON

One last outreach program example is called the BEACON, and it is located at Salisbury University on Maryland's eastern shore, a predominantly agricultural area with a large chicken processing industry. BEACON (Business, Economic, And Community Outreach Network) is a community outreach unit of the Franklin P. Perdue School of Business at Salisbury University (SU).

BEACON grew from the belief that SU's mission included a practical response to the increasingly urgent call for higher education to put research done and knowledge created on campus to work solving societal problems. It has been in place for ten years now and has implemented a philosophy of applied research, multifaceted consulting, experiential learning, and organizational networking. BEACON results include:

- Estimated economic impact around \$50 million.
- Over 1,000 jobs created/retained on the Eastern Shore.
- Strengthened relationships with local governments, businesses, and nonprofits.
- Provided experiential learning for students to prepare for lifelong success—over 90 percent of student research associates are placed upon graduation in jobs related to work done at BEACON.
- The fee and profits generated by BEACON's consulting work are shared with the university.

Discussion of Future Opportunities

The previously mentioned programs and initiatives are just a few examples of university/community engagement projects or programs in Maryland. There are many others in place, and I'm sure that there will be more in the future. In fact, I have a couple of additional ideas that I would like to partner with a university on. One is in the area of financial literacy for adults, who need to

learn how to make better choices so they don't get steered into all types of exotic mortgages that are a primary cause of our current economic instability but even more importantly, starting a program in elementary schools so they better understand finance and budgeting and do not make the same mistakes their parents did. Another idea is to partner with a university on a program that would be for what we refer to as "healthy homes and communities" initiatives. Such initiatives involve regulatory, policy, research, and outreach needs in the development of comprehensive, integrated approaches linking health and housing to ensure safe, healthy and efficient homes. The aim is to improve our health and well-being by ridding our homes of lead-based paint, mold, pests, carbon monoxide, radon, and other indoor pollutants

Conclusion

Finally, let me say in response to the question posed in the theme for this year's conference—Engagement does matter! It matters to you, and it matters to public sector officials like me—but

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more importantly, it matters to the communities that you serve and the people who reside in those communities. Outreach and engagement can take good, solid, scholarly research and add value by putting it into a form people can understand and apply.

For those of you that have been in this business for a while, I'm sure that you have seen the science, or should I say, the art of engagement take a quantum leap forward since that first conference nine years ago. Best practices abound. To keep moving forward and to make good things happen, you have to be committed. You must recognize outreach as a vital component of the teaching, research, and service mission of the university.

Universities can be an excellent source for data, economic analysis, and “person power,” but you should not just view community engagement as a pedagogic opportunity for students. That's why it's important for university leadership at the highest levels to set the tone for working appropriately with communities and making the commitment to be a good and engaged neighbor. As you go forth, do not forget about the public sector; there are state and

local governments and agencies just like mine that can be willing and able partners in your outreach activities. So don't overlook us as a potential resource.

Successful outcomes can be achieved by believing in a vision that requires cultivating a dedicated collaborative engagement between communities and our institutions of higher learning. Universities will also benefit from this vision, which can lead to financial growth, community support, and real-life, real-time learning opportunities for students, faculty, and researchers. The bottom line is that we must bring scholarship to our communities; we must engage now to build sustainable communities; and we must collaborate to secure our shared future. While engagement and engaged scholarship have come a long way in the last nine years, I want you to continually think about ways that you can make them better. In that spirit, let me close with a quote from Jim Collins, whose "Good to Great" model is being used here at Penn State Outreach, and which I have also adopted at the Maryland DHCD.

Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline. (*Collins 2005*)

So let us go forth and strive for greatness!

Thank you.

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