

# THE ANCHOR DASHBOARD

## Aligning Institutional Practice to Meet Low-Income Community Needs

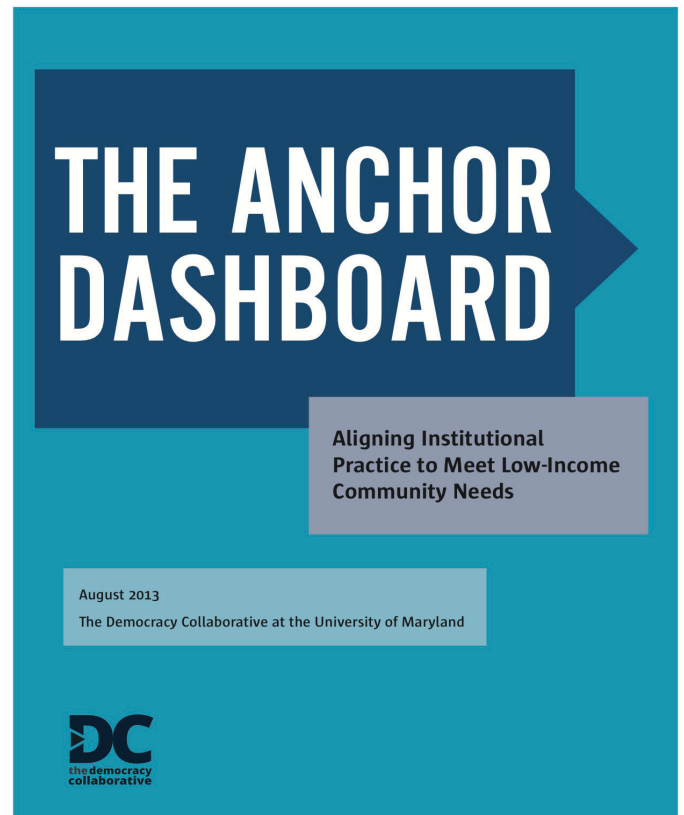
**A Democracy Collaborative Paper**  
by Steve Dubb, Sarah McKinley, and Ted Howard

Anchor institutions such as universities and hospitals spend over \$1 trillion a year combined and employ 8% of the labor force and are one of the most robust sectors of the still faltering American economy. But does their economic and institutional muscle translate to real benefits for the communities in which these anchors are located? The new Democracy Collaborative research paper, *The Anchor Dashboard: Aligning Institutional Practice to Meet Low-Income Community Needs*, presents a comprehensive framework—the first in the field—to begin to answer this question.

Developed through extensive research and in-depth interviews conducted with more than 75 leaders of anchor institutions, national nonprofit organizations, federal agencies, and community organizations, and supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, *The Anchor Dashboard* identifies twelve critical areas where anchor institutions can play an effective role. For each of these areas, the paper provides illustrative indicators that can establish a baseline of community conditions and subsequently track the impact of institutional effort—e.g., dollars spent, procurement shifted, people hired, policies and accountability procedures in place.

According to the authors of the paper—Democracy Collaborative Executive Director Ted Howard, Research Director Steve Dubb, and Research Associate

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Sarah McKinley—“as place-based entities that control vast human, intellectual, and institutional resources, anchor institutions have the potential to bring crucial [...] benefits to local children, families, and communities.”

But aside from a few institutions that have consciously embraced an anchor mission and are deploying their economic resources to comprehensively build community wealth, most efforts consist of isolated, uncoordinated programs. Remediating this situation requires a commitment from anchor institutions to rigorously measure and track the impact of their work on the communities they are responsible to. As the paper makes clear, “the

field of anchor institution research and engagement has now progressed to the point where developing a common dashboard of indicators is possible and desirable.” *The Anchor Dashboard* provides a framework to assess whether anchor efforts are really having a long-term positive effect on the well-being of their surrounding communities; as Sharmi Garmise, Vice President of Urban Initiatives at the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities puts it, going “beyond marketing, anecdotes, and good intentions.”

Through adoption of the recommended dashboard, anchor institutions can bring together real-world, outcome-focused data on employment, minority inclusion, community investment, asset preservation, public health, ecological sustainability, and educational impact into a comprehensive snapshot of the state of their communities and their own institutional commitments. Without real metrics to measure progress, universities and hospitals cannot be assured that they are effectively living up to their responsibilities as anchor institutions to their neighboring communities. But by committing to accountable community engagement and development with an empirical eye towards what works, hospitals and universities at the forefront of the increasingly sophisticated anchor mission movement can work together to find best practices to address the poverty, civic marginalization, and racial exclusion too often found right on their doorsteps.

## About The Democracy Collaborative

Widely recognized as a leader in the community wealth building field, The Democracy Collaborative works nationwide to create new models for economic development that empower communities, build democracy, and address the root causes of poverty and economic inequality. For more information about our work, visit <http://community-wealth.org>.

## About The Anchor Dashboard

The Democracy Collaborative's *The Anchor Dashboard: Aligning Institutional Practice to Meet Low-Income Community Needs*, along with the companion research report *Achieving The Anchor Promise: Improving Outcomes for Low-Income Children, Families, and Communities*, was released in September 2013, and was supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The paper and report are available for download at <http://community-wealth.org/indicators>.

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## Key Lessons

- As place-based entities that control vast economic, human, intellectual, and institutional resources, anchor institutions have the potential to bring crucial, and measurable, benefits to local children, families, and communities.
- An anchor strategy is more than the sum of individual community engagement programs; it is a mission developed to address tenacious community challenges, and implemented to permeate an institution's culture and change the way it does business.
- To date, few tools exist to help institutions step back and assess, from a broad perspective, the long-term impact of their anchor mission activities, and particularly their impact on low-income communities.
- The field of anchor institution research and engagement has now progressed to the point where developing a common dashboard of indicators is possible and desirable.

## Insights from the field

- "The point is not to measure everything. While in each area there are hundreds of things [to measure], let's agree on a few key indicators ... Perfect data can be the enemy of the good."  
—Wim Wiewel, President, Portland State University
- "Being able to, by the end of the day, track what's happening to the jobs, track what's happening to those families ... I think that would be extremely powerful."  
—Paulina Gonzalez, Executive Director of Los Angeles-based nonprofit group SAJE (Strategic Actions for a Just Economy)
- "Setting standards is a way to be more impactful than anything else. It creates an expectation that this is what should be done."  
—Chris Walker, Director of Research at the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)

