

UC Berkeley

IURD Reprint Series

Title

The Roles of Universities in Community-Building Initiatives

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4pq8v87q>

Author

Rubin, Victor

Publication Date

1998-09-01

Peer reviewed

Reprint 1998-01

**The Roles of Universities in
Community-Building Initiatives**

Victor Rubin

**University of California at Berkeley
Institute of Urban and Regional Development**

Journal of Planning Education and Research

Association of
Collegiate Schools
of Planning

Summer 1998
Volume 17
Number 4

Articles

Symposium: Community Outreach Partnership Centers: Forging New Relationships Between University and Community

To the Readers <i>Andrew Cuomo</i>	283
Forward <i>Michael A. Stegman</i>	283
Introduction <i>Marcia Marker Feld</i>	285
Goal Achievement, Relationship Building, and Incrementalism: The Challenges of University-Community Partnerships <i>Wim Wiewel and Michael Lieber</i>	291
The Roles of Universities in Community-Building Initiatives <i>Victor Rubin</i>	302
Institutionalizing University-Community Partnerships <i>Richard T. LeGates and Gib Robinson</i>	312
Enhancing the Capacity of Community-Based Organizations In East St. Louis <i>Kenneth M. Reardon</i>	323
Learning from Difference: The Potentially Transforming Experience Of Community-University Collaboration <i>Margaret E. Dewar and Claudia B. Isaac</i>	334

Cover. Illinois Avenue Playground, East St. Louis, Illinois.

These before-and-after photographs show a playground designed by the children of the Winstanley/Industry Park neighborhood in East St. Louis, Illinois. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign students and faculty members, supported by the Community Outreach Partnership Center program, assisted community members in building the Illinois Avenue Playground.

The cover photographs are by Brian Orland, East St. Louis Action Research Project.

Instruction	Problem-Based Learning: A Bridge Between Planning Education and Planning Practice <i>Anne Shepherd and Bryna Cosgriff</i>	348
Report	Professionally Related Public Service as Applied Scholarship: Guidelines for the Evaluation of Planning Faculty <i>Barry Checkoway</i>	358
Reviews	Oscar Newman: Creating Defensible Space <i>Gregory Saville and Wendy Sarkissian</i>	361
	Jennifer Rietbergen-McCracken and Deepa Narayan, compilers for The World Bank: Participatory Tools and Techniques: A Resource Kit for Participation and Social Assessment <i>Gilda Haas</i>	363
	June Manning Thomas and Marsha Ritzdorf, editors: Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows <i>Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.</i>	366
	Howell S. Baum: The Organization of Hope: Communities Planning Themselves <i>Siddhartha Sen</i>	367
	David Harvey: Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference <i>Ann Forsyth</i>	369
Editors' Note		371
Index		373

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE SCHOOLS OF PLANNING

The Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) is a consortium of university-based programs offering credentials in urban and regional planning. Acting together, the ACSP member school faculty are able to express their shared commitments to understanding the dynamics of urban and regional development, enhancing planning practices, and improving the education of both novice and experienced professional planners.

The ACSP promotes education, research, service, and outreach in the United States and throughout the world. It is committed to recognizing the diverse needs and interests in planning. It seeks to strengthen the role of planning education in colleges and universities through publications, conferences, and community engagement as well as through participation in the accreditation process. The ACSP believes that planning education should extend beyond the classroom and into the world of practice working closely with practicing professionals and communities.

The Roles of Universities in Community-Building Initiatives

Victor Rubin

ABSTRACT

Community-building initiatives in American inner-cities combine resident organizing, neighborhood economic development, reform and integration of human services, and collaboration among diverse organizations into a more comprehensive approach to community renewal. As these initiatives have proliferated, universities—often led by their programs in urban planning—have played varied and important roles. They have assisted in the creation of the initiatives, provided guidance and feedback, contributed technical expertise and financial support, and evaluated the outcomes. In this article, I examine the roles played by universities in three distinct community-building activities in Oakland, California, over a five-year period. Using three cases and other experiences in the same city, I outline four types of lessons for university-community partnerships. The lessons affirm that the contributions that universities can make to community-building are very important—and that the process of maintaining an effective partnership is complex, with a number of potential pitfalls.

Victor Rubin is an adjunct associate professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning and director of research and community programs for the University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum at the University of California at Berkeley; vrubin@uclink.berkeley.edu.

■ INTRODUCTION

Participants in many of the most ambitious recent efforts to improve the quality of life in U.S. urban neighborhoods have embraced the concept of *community building*. Community-building initiatives have been created in dozens of cities by national and local foundations and federal government programs (NCBN 1995, 1998). While the term has many different connotations, the initiatives share certain common qualities and values. Most basically, community building embodies a comprehensive view of neighborhoods. It stresses the linkages among the physical, social, cultural, and economic components of neighborhood life rather than treating each domain separately. These strategies assume that creating healthy neighborhoods is essential, in contrast to policies that would simply increase the human capital and economic mobility of low-income residents without regard to their communities. Born out of frustration with conventional urban redevelopment, human service planning, and community organizing, the new initiatives often meld strategies and tactics from all these fields (Naparstek, Dooley, and Smith 1997; Stone 1996).

Challenging the traditional forms of operation, community-building efforts often integrate at the neighborhood level, and restructure the major systems of human service delivery and local government, including health care, welfare, education, and criminal justice. Ties between economic development and the local education and training systems have a high priority in these initiatives. They also require a higher level of collaboration among diverse nonprofit and governmental organizations, and they place a high value on the empowerment of residents to define the issues and actively shape and govern the initiatives.¹

The current wave of community building was spurred by participant dissatisfaction with the characterization of their neighborhoods as merely collections of pathologies, deficits, and problems to be solved. The community builders, while realizing that the flow of funds usually depends upon demonstrating high levels of need, prefer to speak of *assets* and to engage residents, particularly young people, in identifying and mapping those assets as the starting point for organizing and action.²

A related aspect of community building is an emphasis on increasing the capacity of low-income individuals and indigenous organizations. In this formulation, information is a tool for grassroots education and organizing as much as it is a source for resolving technical questions. Therefore, technical assistance that broadens neighborhoods' access to expertise is frequently provided, but is often seen as less valuable than capacity-building that increases the locals' ability to eventually conduct this work themselves.

Several authors have recently attempted to capture the origins, spirit, principles, and organizational style of the new activities. Walsh (1997) provides five case studies of

community building in practice and a number of “lessons from the field” and “pillars of community building.”³ Kingsley, McNeely, and Gibson (1997) provide extensive background on the urban-policy context of community building and seven themes that characterize the new initiatives.⁴ They also present a set of recommendations for strengthening these efforts at the local and national levels. Both reports draw heavily from the experiences of the members of the National Community Building Network.

Universities are frequently participants in community-building initiatives, with campus leadership provided by faculty, staff, and students in urban planning programs. Many of the higher education grantees of federal programs such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Community Outreach Partnership Centers and Joint Community Development Programs and the U.S. Department of Education’s Urban Community Service Program are involved with community-building initiatives (U.S. HUD 1995, 1997). In some cities, the university participants are helping to set the course and steer the projects; in other instances they are providing technical support without a significant role in making policy. Whether their role is to design, guide, support, augment, or assess the initiatives, institutions of higher education are employing technical and organizational resources in a relatively new fashion. Thus far there have been few scholarly studies concerning the place of universities in these new initiatives, but there is a fast-growing discourse about the role of universities in community development. This discourse is carried out in the national networks, meetings, and publications of urban-focused universities and their supporters (Mazey 1998; Lapping 1995; Appleberry and McGrath 1993; and U.S. HUD 1995, 1997 describe the core issues and provide numerous examples of urban campus-community partnerships). Much of this discourse suggests, with a hopeful tone, that all parties are aware of the serious limitations of past university endeavors that were focused on local urban problems—and that with that awareness comes the chance to now operate on a different, more mutually respectful and productive level.

In this paper, I examine the various roles universities are playing in the creation, operation, and evaluation of community-building activities with an emphasis on the issues relevant to planning practice that arise from this work. My empirical focus is on the experience of one city, Oakland, which has become home to many of these initiatives over the past six years. Each initiative is complex, and will not be exhaustively described or analyzed in this article. Instead, the city-wide context and the key elements of three initiatives will be portrayed with special reference to the activities, responsibilities, and impact of local universities. The findings and the questions raised by this examination will be useful to planners in other communities and universities.

■ UNIVERSITIES’ COMMUNITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

At least nine distinct types of activity are carried out by faculty, staff, and students from universities in conjunction with community-building initiatives. The categories are common to programs supported by federal government agencies and major foundations around the U.S.⁵ In some instances the relationships with universities evolve organically, as the result of earlier interactions. In other situations they are imposed by the framework of a national evaluation, or the concurrent start-up of parallel programs in the university and in local neighborhoods. In addition to departments and research units of urban planning, programs of social work, education, public health, and public policy are frequently engaged.

The activities range from the conceptualization of the issues and strategies through the daily operations of the initiatives to the evaluation of completed projects. They include the following:

- **Needs assessment and problem definition.** The empirical information used to document community needs, and to define targets for intervention, often comes from previous university sources or is gathered and analyzed with help from university participants.
- **Identification and mapping of assets.** It is common for universities to aid the process of identifying and measuring the positive qualities of neighborhoods as a tool for community organizing and the development of revitalization strategies.
- **Advising on program design.** Faculty members with experience in community building are often engaged in the conceptualization of strategies and the development of plans for collaborative initiatives.
- **Training and mentoring staff and residents.** Students, staff, and faculty are frequently involved in teaching the neighborhood residents and the staffs of nonprofit organizations and local government in techniques of planning, analysis, and program management.
- **Technical assistance.** University support in the form of expertise often consists of consulting or performing specific technical tasks for the neighborhood-based organizations.
- **Building organizational capacity.** This function goes beyond training individuals and providing expert assistance. It involves developing the local organizations’ ability to carry out more of its technical and analytical work itself.
- **Formative evaluation.** Since many of the community-building initiatives are breaking significant new ground with regard to their process as well as their intended outcomes, they often have evaluators providing data and feedback on each stage of their development. This role is sometimes taken on by university researchers.
- **Summative evaluation.** Most community-building initiatives have some form of outside evaluation. Many of these are conducted by university research institutes, on

both the local and national levels. Summative evaluation is distinguished here from formative by an emphasis on measurement of outcomes or a case study of process and outcomes upon completion of the grant period.

- **Comparative documentation across initiatives.** In communities in which there are numerous activities, and as part of national programs that have many local sites, university researchers provide comparable case studies and, in some situations, the overall frameworks for the analysis.

There are many other university-community outreach functions, but they are less directly relevant to this inquiry. For example, campuses also place students as service-learning volunteers in neighborhood agencies, provide incentives and training to small businesses to obtain university contracts, conduct joint development of housing, and undertake other functions that can assist community-building initiatives. The focus here is on technical and analytical resources that support the planning and implementation of these initiatives.

■ WORKING IN THE CAPITAL OF COLLABORATIVES

Something about Oakland, California, has proven almost irresistible for the instigators and supporters of community building. The city of 375,000 is home to more than a dozen concurrent projects, partnerships, consortia, and initiatives in its low-income neighborhoods (Barnett 1994). Many of these activities take place in the same neighborhoods, with many of the same community-based organizations and local government agencies as participants. Several had the same initial design teams and regularly draw from one another for strategies and resources.

Oakland's appeal as a locus of community-building initiatives is based on its combination of serious social and economic problems with certain local resources and a sense of scale that provide many activists with grounds for optimism. Oakland is sufficiently large to be seen as a major league city, and indeed the city's three sports franchises do much to strengthen that recognition factor. Yet the city is small enough that activists can feel that they have an impact on the local political and organizational scene. A commonly expressed hope of participants and funders alike is that, through knowing all the necessary people and institutions, it should be easier or faster to get things done than in a city of several million.

The challenges faced by community builders, including high unemployment, lack of adequate job opportunities, poverty, dangerous streets, new public health dangers, and dysfunctional educational and human services are all present in Oakland in distressing proportions (Urban Strategies Council 1995). While the proportions of families and individuals in persistent poverty are substantial, the city remains diverse with regard to income levels. Large and active middle-class communities of all races form a base of activists and volunteers for myriad projects. The community is known for its ethnic

diversity, with no racial or ethnic group in the majority, and the relatively successful acceptance of multicultural values in public life. This does not mean at all that this domain is free of conflict, only that political and institutional change is less rancorous, and multiracial coalitions more prominent, than in many cities.⁶

Oakland is home to numerous technical resources for neighborhoods, as well as to several organizations that act as intermediaries and providers of training and applied research. Their presence has no doubt contributed to the proliferation and diversity of community-building initiatives. In addition to the many activities of universities and colleges, the city hosts two prominent training centers for community organizers, a national resource center on local economic development, an action research institute focused on combatting persistent poverty, and the headquarters of a national network of community builders.

The sense of potential for success in Oakland extends to the comparative economic situation as well. The city's economy is something of the "hole in the doughnut" of Bay Area regional economic growth, having roughly held constant in the absolute number of jobs while the number in the region has grown substantially. However, both the local employment growth figures and the availability of jobs in nearby suburbs are much more favorable than in Midwestern and Eastern cities where the inner-city poor are more isolated from most of a region's employment (Landis 1992; ABAG 1995, 1996). The residents of Oakland's public housing are as poor as their counterparts in other cities, and their developments equally in need of repair and community policing. However, a recent comparative survey of public housing residents found that they do not face the scale of threats to safety and community found in many of the high-rise projects of larger cities (Abt Associates 1996, 3/26). In short, while the problems associated with urban poverty are substantial and persistent in Oakland, there is also a hopefulness born of the sense that there are many assets that can be put to use for positive change.

The municipal government and numerous nonprofit community development and human services agencies contribute to the widespread local interest in building collaborations. Oakland's applications to most of the recent federal and foundation-supported neighborhood revitalization programs featured extensive networks of nonprofit organizations, even when these were not mandated. For example, the 15-city national baseline study of the HOPE VI public housing revitalization program shows the Oakland Housing Authority to have had many more nonprofit partners than any other housing authority (Abt Associates 1996, 5/24-5/43). The City's Enhanced Enterprise Community Partner Program Network, discussed below, has upwards of 150 member organizations. Some of the city's application efforts for discretionary federal funds were, to a great extent, organized by nongovernmental

organizations, working closely with the City staff and elected officials.

Local universities have played a major part in the assembly of these resources for community building and this style of operating. Since its inception in 1986, the University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum, a consortium of five local colleges and universities based at the Institute of Urban and Regional Development of the University of California at Berkeley, has organized local resources to support community development. This work has included applied research on local issues by faculty and graduate students, predominantly from the planning department, in response to the interests of community panels and local agencies. The Forum has also been a convener of leadership to respond to community-building opportunities, and at different times has been the source of facilitation, guidance, technical support, training, and evaluation for many of the initiatives (Rubin 1995). The Forum's work greatly expanded in 1995 as a result of grants from HUD under the Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC), Joint Community Development (JCD), and Community Development Work Study fellowship programs. Other parts of UC Berkeley, such as its School of Public Health, and other local colleges, have also been instrumental in establishing community-based initiatives.

■ ANALYSIS OF THREE LOCAL INITIATIVES

The three cases described below illustrate different aspects of the relationship of institutions of higher education to community building. The first is a foundation-funded collaborative of nonprofit and governmental organizations formed in the early 1990s to organize residents, improve services, reduce crime, and generally enhance the quality of life in one neighborhood. The second is the city's Enhanced Enterprise Community program, funded by HUD and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which is comprised of three strategies for economic and community renewal and which operates in three neighborhoods. The third case is a volunteer working group of the project managers and local evaluators of most of Oakland's community-building initiatives.

I was a participant in some respect in each of the campus-community activities profiled here. These accounts are based on observations and notes taken at the time, combined with later individual and group discussions with many of the participants. In addition, the work in progress of many researchers and evaluators who were studying these initiatives during the same period was reviewed, and served as an informal cross-check of the basic facts and trends. Most of that concurrent work has not yet been published. However, the exploration of common themes among these researchers, and the informal comparison of the experiences of university partners in community-building efforts around the country, strongly suggest that many of the findings described below are not unique to Oakland.

The Fruitvale Community Collaborative

The Fruitvale Community Collaborative (FCC) began in 1991 in response to a new alliance of foundations in the greater Oakland area, which had sought applications for neighborhood-focused activity from newly created collaborations of nonprofit organizations. The project in Fruitvale was one of three supported by the foundation consortium. The FCC began with a dozen agencies and with an established community development corporation, based in the neighborhood, as the fiscal agent.

After its selection, the new collaborative had a year in which to plan its course. Since the funding proposal had left certain key design components unresolved and many participants were new to working with each other, the FCC faced many challenging and fundamental questions. Its mandate was to be comprehensive, encompassing many if not all the salient issues facing this low-income, overcrowded, high-crime community. With this mandate in mind, it had developed three core strategies—block-level grassroots organizing, neighborhood master plans, and interagency coordination. Yet the new group faced many strategic questions: What should the relative emphasis be among their three core strategies? How would residents be brought into the governance of the collaborative? How would priorities be set among the main issues (youth development, crime prevention, employment) that community surveys had shown were vital, and which should come first? How much of the work should be done by the member organizations, and how much by a new project staff?

During this planning year, the university provided the facilitator of the planning process. The director of the University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum, a former foundation executive who had helped to create the consortium of funders several years earlier, facilitated the early planning sessions among the nonprofit agencies. In addition, the ties were strengthened when the FCC hired a recent graduate of the city and regional planning program at Berkeley as its staff director.

In the first year of operations, the university ceased facilitating and switched to a different role, that of internal evaluator. The new director of the Forum—an urban planner with experience in evaluation—and two graduate students were responsible for documenting and analyzing the FCC's process and developing measurements of its progress toward its objectives. This entailed monitoring the many committee meetings on youth issues, safety issues, and economic development and employment issues. The students, who were both fluent in Spanish, conducted research to find the available data about community outcomes in these areas, and interviewed residents about their priorities and views of the process. Each of the three times the collaborative's objectives were changed during the year, the evaluation team attempted to find suitable quantifiable outcome measures. Staff members of all the collaborating agencies were interviewed about the process, and

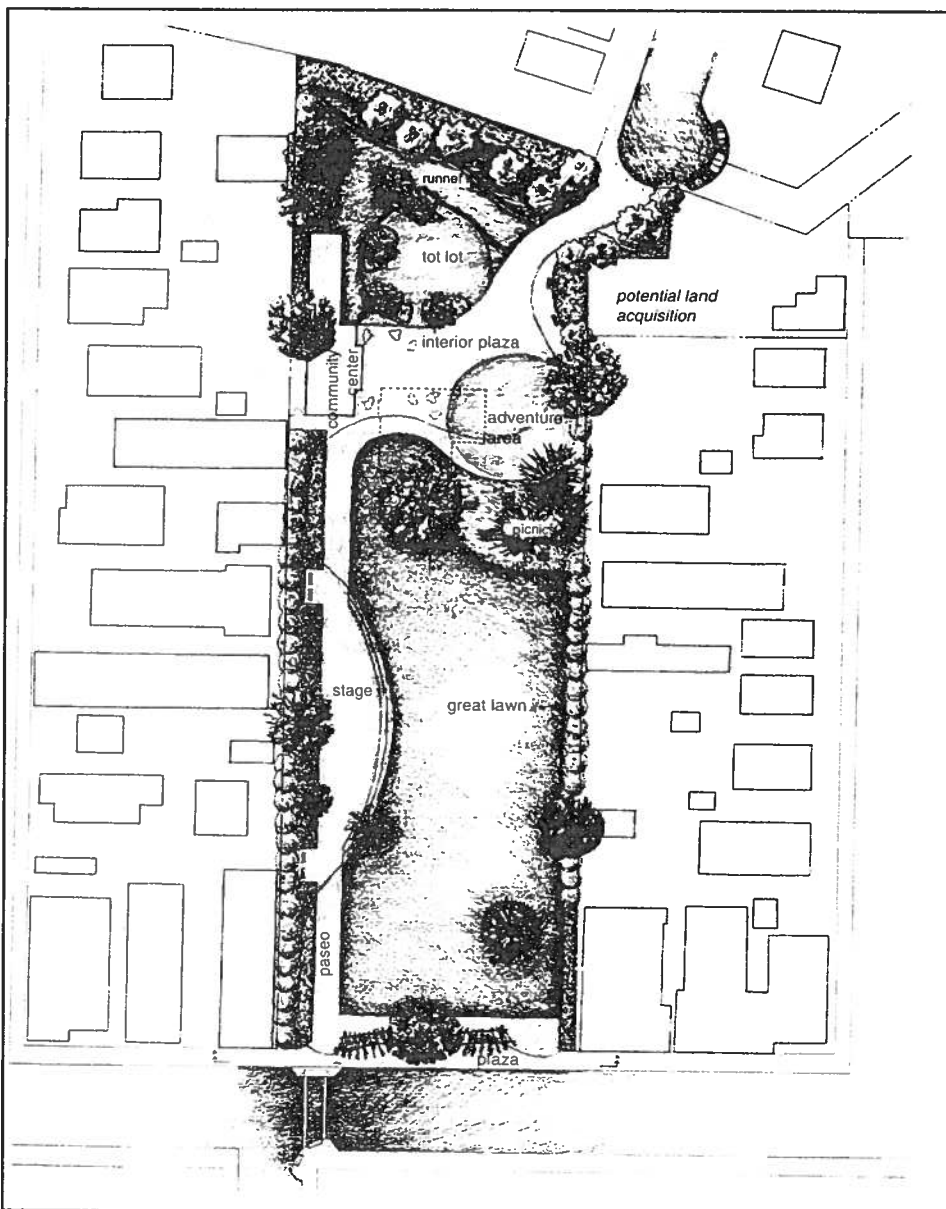
the results used in an intense end-of-year assessment session.

The FCC made extensive use of the evaluation team's research and feedback in its proposal for the second year's funding. The evaluation team understood the collaborative to be their principal audience and client, but intended that the information would be of considerable use to the funders as well. However, after that first year, the collaborative's budget was reduced and the university had to end its activities as local evaluator. From that point on, evaluation was conducted solely by the out-of-town consulting firm retained by the funders, whose responsibilities included monitoring the three projects and the activities of the funding consortium as a whole. The level of feedback that a continuing internal, formative evaluation might have

provided was therefore no longer available to the FCC. After four years of support for the FCC, during which there was substantial success in community organizing but fewer results in institutionalization of the partnership among all the agencies, the original funders ended their support to this and their other two projects, and terminated their own consortium

In 1995, a third chapter in the university's involvement with the FCC began. In this latest phase, which is still underway, the university provides financial and technical resources for neighborhood development. The Fruitvale Community Collaborative parlayed its neighborhood organizing and its base in a strong community development corporation into new sources of financial support. One

such source was a national, foundation-funded urban open-space initiative. When the University of California at Berkeley sought partners for its application to HUD for the new Joint Community Development (JCD) program, this open-space initiative was the basis for a campus-community alliance. The lack of sufficient parks, open space, and recreation facilities was a pressing issue in the neighborhood, and the revitalization of one key park and the creation of another was seen as central to the area's future. With JCD resources, the university currently supports resident organizing by the FCC so that neighbors are engaged in the parks project, from the design process all the way through to eventual stewardship of the new facilities. The university provides the services of landscape architecture faculty and graduate students for the community-based design process for two parks (one is shown in Figure 1), as well as the funds for construction of the new facilities. This partnership is scheduled to continue until 1999, and is seen by its foundation sponsor as an important model for other universities and cities.⁷



Source: Sanborn Park Master Plan, August 1997, 22. Drawing by Rebecca Liliks, Louise Mozingo, Walter Hood, and UC Berkeley students.

Figure 1. Sanborn Park, Oakland, California.

Oakland Enhanced Enterprise Community Program

The second case concerns Oakland's activities as an Enhanced Enterprise Community (EEC), one of four cities so designated in December 1994 by the federal government. The city had made a strong push for designation as an Empowerment Zone and, having missed out on that \$100 million opportunity, was given one of six sizable alternative awards. Oakland's package included \$22 million in loan guarantee funds from the Economic Development Initiative, and \$3 million in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Title 20 social service block grant funds.

The application process had been initiated and partly managed by several nonprofit and university-based community resource agencies. The application included extensive plans for economic development infrastructure, primarily business development and job training centered on the city's many transportation industries; university researchers contributed significantly to these plans. However, the more distinctive part of the application was a grassroots peer interviewing process through which dozens of low-income residents recorded the issues, complaints, aspirations, and recommendations of nearly a thousand of their peers. The interviewer-training process was proposed to be the starting point for a massive series of community-building teams. These teams would provide hundreds of residents each year with stipends to work as grassroots organizers, advance scouts for business development programs, and outreach workers for neighborhood services. The team members, many of whom would be otherwise unemployed or underemployed, would also be supported to complete their education and training in order to prepare for a career (City of Oakland 1994).

Once Oakland was not funded for the \$100 million, it was necessary to redesign a program for use of the available resources: the \$3 million grant and the \$22 million in economic development funds (mostly intended by federal statute as collateral for loans). A public and nonprofit working group was formed in early 1995 to create the new plan. University staff and students, with support from the HUD Bay Area COPC award, played a substantial role in this effort. The resulting plan included three components. First, a scaled-down version of the community-building teams was created. Second, lending and business assistance programs were drawn up, and a master's student in UC Berkeley's city planning program—who began as an intern during the design phase—was hired full time to administer them.

The third component, run by a City administrator who was also a former MCP student and Forum intern, became known as the Partner Program Network (PPN). This was an effort to leverage the resources and commitment of the many nonprofit organizations of all kinds in the EEC neighborhoods. The partner programs ranged from large

community development corporations to one-person youth programs in storefront churches. The underlying concept was to have these agencies see themselves and be seen by residents as community assets, rather than as simply service providers or applicants for new governmental funds.

The EEC could not offer them grants directly, but began several processes intended to bolster their capacity to serve the neighborhood and tie them more completely to organizing and planning efforts beyond their traditional boundaries. The Partner Program Network office coordinated the development of proposals for other federal grants, especially those that provided bonus points for serving the EEC neighborhoods. The agencies were encouraged to learn about each other, overcome their traditional isolation and competitiveness, and begin collaborative efforts with each other and with local schools, both in the context of collaborative grant applications and in other, less frenetic situations.

The Partner Program Network staff, with the assistance of two local universities, began acquiring technical support and training for the member organizations. As part of the COPC grant, UC Berkeley provided technical assistance from its Haas School of Business to nonprofit organizations in the PPN. After three years, 70 such consultancies (averaging 35 hours each) have been completed by MBA students under the supervision of the business school's Nonprofit and Public Management Program. The topics have included strategic planning, marketing, real estate, accounting, information systems, financing, and other aspects of running an organization. Evaluations by both the clients and the students were very positive. In 1996, UC Berkeley's law school also began supporting legal services for small businesses and nonprofit organizations in the EEC, provided by a legal clinic associated with the school.

Universities also assist nonprofits with information technology, particularly access to telecommunications, the Internet, and other networking tools. Nearby California State University, Hayward, was awarded an Urban Community Service Program grant to assist Oakland's community-based organizations with equipment, technical support, training, and customized applications. Soon after that, UC Berkeley won its Joint Community Development grant, which included a similar component. Technology demonstrations were given in the community, in conjunction with a project by the Oakland-based National Community Building Network to define practical entry points to the national information infrastructure for small community agencies.⁸ Organizations were selected on the basis of applications in which they described their objectives for community work, without regard to their prior level of experience. Over the next three years, the two programs worked with 20 community-based organizations, four branch libraries, and the four Community Building Teams. The objective was not only to build the organizations' individual hardware, software, and technical capacity, but

also to build social networks among them and, through the public library branches, a permanent support system for community-building activities. There were also opportunities for community residents to assist the computer and network technicians and gain possible entry into these career pathways.

The Oakland Collaborative

The third case was not the consequence of any particular grant or program. Instead, it was the result of the staffs and local evaluators of numerous initiatives and projects in Oakland recognizing their common interests. In 1993, the Urban Strategies Council, an Oakland-based anti-poverty research and action institute, convened the participants in nearly a dozen community-building efforts. They met monthly for two years, formed a cohesive group, and undertook a number of joint campaigns, particularly in the area of health education. But perhaps the most enduring aspect of the Oakland Collaborative was the working group of local evaluators, many of whom were from nearby universities.

The evaluators, who worked in a variety of disciplines and professions, quickly saw the value in comparing and sharing the contextual data on the city and their target neighborhoods, most of which overlapped. One project's central concern, on which they collect extensive data, would turn out to be useful background information for another whose primary issues lay elsewhere. There was a particularly good complementary relationship between evaluators who worked on projects focused in public health and those with a starting point in community economic development. The researchers compared definitions of empowerment and collaboration, both their own definitions and those used by their project participants. The evaluators found the opportunity to share data from a recent survey of residents and to plan for another, more ambitious, survey. They saw common trends in their relationships with funders and with national evaluators, and sought to provide these clients with an overall view of the rich and crowded collaborative scene in Oakland.

Beyond this information sharing, the evaluators, led by a staff member from the UC Berkeley School of Public Health, undertook a specific study of the strategies and objectives of a dozen community initiatives in Oakland (Barnett 1994). Staff members of 12 neighborhood initiatives were interviewed, and two detailed matrices of project characteristics were compiled from the interviews and from project proposals and reports. Both the written and oral reports were key to the approach. The proposals and early progress reports provided the initial concepts, goals, and objectives of the projects. In the interviews, the staff members reflected on changes they had made or now wanted to make to those objectives and approaches, and on the barriers to effective collaboration with other projects or completion of their missions.

One matrix depicted the basic core activities of the projects in the domain of *services and training for individuals*, sorted by

content area (e.g., health, youth, employment training). Also included were the linkages each project had to other content areas.⁹ On this matrix each project also listed the topics of outcomes measures on which the progress of their clients or participants would be evaluated.

The second matrix summarized the same projects' activities and outcomes at the level of *community and/or systems change*. Five different aspects of mobilization or advocacy were included, in nine different fields (i.e., medical, cultural, social). Projects were also sorted by five different aspects of organizational design, including such things as capacity building, response to citizen priorities, and inter-organizational resource sharing. Outcome measures in this matrix included 10 dimensions of change or improvement to the service systems or the overall health and viability of the neighborhoods. Taken as a whole, the matrixes depicted an extremely varied and ambitious set of agendas for these projects, despite the fact that most of them had very modest resources and not much immediate leverage over the larger systems they hoped to change.

In discussing the outcomes measures, staff members expressed frustration at being held accountable for outcomes in areas where they had few or no resources. Projects designed to effect community- and systems-level change generated the most significant interest, but also the least experience, and was seen as having the greatest potential for future collaboration. At the time of the report, many projects unable to effect systems change were falling back on individual-level outcomes as the central focus of their efforts. Although a jobs-creation program, for example, could not create jobs in the community as stated in the original proposal, it could get a certain number of residents hired at existing businesses. Or a prenatal care program may be able bring down infant mortality rates by obtaining better services for their clients, but could not change the county's system of prenatal care.

The interviews with staff members also focused on the benefits of and obstacles to collaboration. In general, a mood of realism and lowered expectations had settled in for many of the interviewees in the face of the challenges of these complex, ambitious projects. Eight benefits to collaboration were identified in the report, along with a dozen distinct obstacles. Staff members had not given up on collaborative strategies, but neither did they have the enthusiasm that had marked their proposal development and start-up periods.

The report stimulated some immediate information sharing as well as formulation of a far-reaching agenda by project managers and evaluators to take advantage of the potential for joint actions and analyses. The universities and consultants continued to work together into 1998 to create a citywide Oakland Neighborhood Indicators Project, which will provide standardized time-series data on key contextual measures, and will provide feedback on local policies and community-building initiatives.

■ FINDINGS

In just these three cases—the Fruitvale Community Collaborative, the Oakland Enhanced Enterprise Community Program, and the Oakland Collaborative—the responsibilities undertaken by universities have included all nine of the tasks listed in the introductory section. Faculty, staff, and students assisted these initiatives to define issues, identify opportunities, design their programs, train their staff and residents, solve short-term technical problems, and build their capacity for management and planning. They contributed to evaluations conducted for both internal and external audiences and helped to create networks among the projects.

Since these cases are from only one city and an overlapping set of participants, they do not represent the range of situations that could be uncovered through systematic comparative research. However, they do provide the impetus for preliminary findings of importance to those who are planning partnerships between universities and communities.

First, how well did university resources match up with the principal goals of the community-building initiatives? Second, what are some guidelines for effective practice that address the challenges that arise in this kind of endeavor?

Match Between Universities and Initiatives

There are always some potentially useful tasks for universities, and urban planning programs in particular, to undertake in support of the general revitalization and development of distressed neighborhoods. The more specific question is the degree to which universities can enhance the innovative qualities of the new community-building initiatives. The cases can be reviewed in light of the key elements of the conceptual framework of recent community-building activities.

- Support for a more holistic, integrated approach to neighborhood revitalization and service delivery.

Despite the familiar rhetoric of comprehensiveness, it remains relatively elusive in practice. Universities are valuable to community-building efforts when they help neighbors and agency staff to define issues and measure outcomes in more comprehensive ways. All three Oakland cases showed ways in which this was pursued, with partial success. In the Fruitvale case, university representatives facilitated a planning process among agencies that had previously dealt with diverse single issues, bringing them closer to a joint plan for the neighborhood. In the Enhanced Enterprise Community, the university staffed the process of bringing nonprofit and government agencies together to collaborate on joint projects. In the multi-organization citywide Oakland Collaborative, the university researchers pressed the various member agencies for definitions of process and outcomes that would move them beyond their individual, service-specific activities and toward their community-wide goals. However, as the review conducted by the

Oakland Collaborative's researchers showed, most of these initiatives fell short of their original ambitious goals for comprehensive strategies and systems-level change.

- Support for working with the assets of lower-income neighborhoods, rather than the problems, and for increasing the capacity of local residents and organizations.

The universities' roles in these cases started with the more familiar pattern of infusions of individuals with expertise in planning, management, and other fields. There was also a great deal of documentation of the problems of low-income neighborhoods in the traditional manner, often in service of proposal development. The documentation and technical assistance were followed in later years with more explicit efforts to develop local capacity. Recent activities organized by the University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum are as diverse as survey research, environmental assessment, and applications of information technology. They feature strategies through which residents and staff members of grassroots organizations are trained and equipped with skills and experience that will enable them to carry out many of these tasks independently.

Four Guidelines for Effective Practice in Partnerships

- Continuity of involvement is important to both the community and the university.

The activities that the University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum undertook through its HUD-supported projects did not begin with an application for federal support. Rather, they were the consequence of the Forum's previous eight years of building institutional and personal connections and credibility, and of service to community groups and local government. Several key individuals were involved in these university-community relationships for the entire decade, even as they changed jobs. Nearly a dozen former students who worked at the Forum, dating back to 1990, are now staff members in the city and in nonprofit organizations who supervise student interns and negotiate with the university about the next round of activities. As a result, when new needs or opportunities arise, they can be addressed through an informal network of connections among the university, community organizations, and local government.

A reliance on connections among specific individuals should not detract from the need to institutionalize the partnership. Faculty and staff at the university and leaders of community organizations, foundations, and local government can and do change positions. It is important to extend the network of relationships, codify the procedures, ensure an active board of community participants, and to take steps that allow new individuals with different perspectives to take on major responsibilities. Also, although a university's involvement can often be coordinated by one institute, it is also increasingly necessary to bring central university administrators into the

partnership in order to build wider campus recognition and support for the effort. The activities at UC Berkeley have expanded from a base in City and Regional Planning to a more multidisciplinary group of faculty and students from almost all the professional schools and other departments, and there is also significant budgetary support from the central administration.

- The partners should be flexible, and open to the likelihood that the university's roles will change over time.

The Fruitvale case illustrates how many different kinds of involvement can characterize the same partnership. From initial facilitator to formative evaluator, and then to supplier of technical expertise and financial resources over the course of six years, the university adapted to the changing circumstances of the community collaborative. The university's responsibilities in the Enhanced Enterprise Community changed as well over three years, from more general advising about program design to the provision of a specific set of technical services. In several other instances of community-building activities in Oakland during the last few years, a similar trend was observed: The university partners began as general advisers or part of an initial design team, and at a later point became providers of technical services and training.

- Working with community-building initiatives requires special orientation, training, and oversight for students.

The opportunities for graduate students in particular are remarkable, but also very challenging. Students in planning and public policy who worked with the FCC or the EEC in their first year were in new organizations that had not yet established consistent objectives or ways of operating. The initiatives relied on the students a great deal, and their assignments went well beyond the usual demands on a research assistant. The high degree of learning comes with this responsibility, and this learning is often as much about the organizational politics of community building as about any technical components in which they work. This is very valuable for a planner who would like to make a career of working with similar projects. It is not for everyone, though, and the lack of structure or clarity of the emerging collaboratives sometimes frustrate even the most able and experienced students. Academic supervisors of students working in these initiatives should be attentive to these situations and look for ways to support the students, including peer support, while maximizing their opportunities to learn from the initiatives.

- The independent stance of university researchers is a valuable asset when combined with extensive local knowledge and contacts.

Community-building initiatives are almost always being evaluated and studied, often by more than one team simultaneously. Because university partners have both research skills and detailed knowledge of the local initiatives, they are often called upon to perform a mediating role in the evaluation process. That is, they can provide something of an explanatory link between the project and the national evaluator or the funding agency.

The local evaluators' mandates vary from case to case, and are sometimes unclear at the outset of new initiatives. In some instances, the local university-based researchers are simply data collection extensions of the national evaluation, with little leeway or need to create their own methodology or even to publish their own report. In other cases they can report to the national evaluation organization but have substantial autonomy regarding their approach. In still other instances, the local grantee is essentially their client; their efforts and priorities in these instances may differ from the needs or interests of the national evaluation. The degree of critical distance that the evaluators maintain can vary, and there are situations where the line between formative evaluation and technical assistance is very blurred. It is in everyone's interest to seek clarity of expectations, resources, and reporting relationships from the outset.

■ CONCLUSION

The experiences that universities have had with community building in Oakland are in some respects unique to the city, but the findings also exemplify some basic issues, roles, and relationships that are relevant for partnerships in other cities. The recent proliferation of these partnerships around the country and the growing dialogue that is taking place among the participants suggest that there is the need and the opportunity for both case studies and comparative research. These inquiries about universities could elaborate on and reassess the points made here, and should evolve in close relationship to the emerging literature on community building. Many planning faculty members are well placed to conduct this research. Not only do they have strong backgrounds in the substantive urban issues with which the community builders are concerned, but they will also have a strong interest in using the results to enhance their own universities' activities.

■ NOTES

1. Pitt (1997) reviews some of the literature on these community-based collaborations and analyzes 11 examples across the country. One of the cases analyzed in Pitt's research is Oakland's Fruitvale Community Collaborative, which is discussed in this paper as well.
2. Kretzman and McKnight (1994) have, through many writings and trainings workshops, helped to popularize "asset mapping" and "capacity-focused development" by community builders in scores of cities.
3. The lessons that Walsh draws from her analysis address engaging government systems, building local institutions, investing in outreach and organizing, involving the corporate sector, and developing new structures. Her five pillars of community building are leadership, patience, high but realistic expectations, community-wide capacity building, and courage and candor about race.
4. Their themes elaborate on the importance of social and human capital development, resident-driven priorities, inter-organizational collaboration, neighborhood scale, comprehensiveness, a focus on assets, links to broader urban strategies, and the need to consciously change institutional barriers and racism.
5. A number of universities are involved in the national planning, technical assistance and evaluation of local initiatives for foundation and government programs. Many other universities are local partners, technical assistance providers, or evaluators. The sponsors of initiatives frequently identified as being within the community-building rubric include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and several activities of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and U.S. Department of Education.
6. In fact, readers of Gitlin (1995) might recognize Oakland as the site of an acrimonious debate over the selection of history textbooks based on their treatment of race and ethnicity, a controversy which foreshadowed the widely publicized 1996 furor over Ebonics. Notwithstanding those disputes, which are consistent with a tendency in Oakland for school district politics to be more racially divisive than other aspects of local government, the overall climate of race relations is widely perceived locally to be less polarized, and the power structure relatively more integrated, than in many other cities.
7. The ability of the Fruitvale Community Collaborative to diversify and thereby continue past the end of its initial grant period is consistent with the finding of a study in which it was included. Pitt's analysis of 11 community-based collaboratives, including the FCC, documents the accomplishments and limitations of the comprehensive, collaborative approach. In general, she found that start-up was easier than implementation; that the original goals were overly ambitious; and that the collaboratives often lacked necessary technical support (Pitt 1997). All of these points applied to the FCC, which during its first several years was more effective at block-level organizing than at larger-scale service systems reform or neighborhood-wide strategic planning. However, the FCC was also found to be one of those cases with many positive long-term impacts. Apart from the immediate victories won by the FCC's organizing efforts to combat crime and blight, the benefits included much stronger working relationships among diverse community-based agencies, and more attention from City government to the area's needs. Those qualities, including their strong working relationship with the university, led to their success in obtaining the new round of projects and grants.
8. A manual for community builders about information technology was produced by that project (see NCBN 1997).
9. An example is the federal Healthy Start Program in Oakland, evaluated by the University of California, San Francisco, which had the reduction of infant mortality as its primary mission and health education and clinical services as its core activities. However, the program was supposed to work to improve the economic climate of their neighborhood and thus report linkages to job training and business development.

■ REFERENCES

- Abt Associates, Inc. 1996. *An Historical and Baseline Assessment of HOPE VI: Vol. 1*. Washington, D.C.: HUD Office of Policy Development and Research.
- Appleberry, James B., and C. Peter McGrath. 1993. The new AASCU/NASULGC Office of Urban and Metropolitan Programs. *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum* 4(3):7-8.
- Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). 1995. *Projections 1995*. Oakland, Calif.
- Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). 1996. *Projections 1996*. Oakland, Calif.
- Barnett, Kevin. 1994. A review of project activities and outcome measures in Oakland collaborative projects: Setting an agenda for formal collaboration. Working paper. Oakland Collaborative, Urban Strategies Council, Oakland, Calif.
- Gitlin, Todd. 1995. *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Kingsley, G. Thomas, Joseph B. McNeely, James Gibson. 1997. *Community Building: Coming of Age*. Washington, D.C.: Development Training Institute and The Urban Institute.
- Kretzman, John, and John McKnight. 1994. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Evanston, Ill.: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University.
- Landis, John. 1992. The downsized economy: Employment and establishment trends in Oakland, 1981-1986. 2nd edition. Working paper 008. University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum, University of California at Berkeley.
- Lapping, Mark, ed. 1995. Urban studies and urban centers. Special issue of *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum* 5(4).
- Mazey, Mary Ellen, ed. 1998. Community outreach. Special issue of *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum* 8(4).
- Naparstek, Arthur, Dennis Dooley, and Robin Smith. 1997. *Community Building in Public Housing: Ties that Bind American Communities*. Report to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Urban Institute and Aspen Systems. Washington, D.C.
- National Community Building Network (NCBN). 1995, 1998. Introductory brochure and materials. Oakland, Calif. (Also available at www.ncbn.org)
- National Community Building Network (NCBN). 1997. *The Community Builders' Guide to Telecommunications Technology*. Oakland, California: NCBN and The Center for Human Resources, The Heller School, Brandeis University.
- Oakland, City of. 1994. *Strategic Plan for the Empowerment Zone*. Seven volumes. Office of the City Manager, Oakland, Calif.
- Pitt, Jessica. 1997. Community-based collaboratives: A study of interorganizational cooperation at the neighborhood level. Paper prepared for the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning Annual Conference, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., April.
- Rubin, Victor. 1995. The evolution of a campus/community partnership: The University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum. *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum* 5(4):27-36.
- Stone, R., ed. 1996. *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Office of University Partnerships. 1995. *University-Community Partnerships: Current Practices*. Volume 1. Washington, D.C.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of University Partnerships. 1997. *University-Community Partnerships: Current Practices*. Volume 2. Washington, D.C.
- Urban Strategies Council. 1995. *A Chance for Every Child: Prospects for Oakland's Infants, Children and Youth in the 1990s and Beyond*. 2nd edition. Oakland, Calif.: Urban Strategies Council.
- Walsh, Joan. 1997. *Stories of Renewal: Community Building and the Future of Urban America*. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.

