

The University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum, a partnership of five colleges and universities with the Oakland, California community, has become a valued source of technical support and the initiator of many community-building programs in the areas of economic development, education, and neighborhood revitalization. The Forum has evolved through three distinct stages over eight years, first building trust and credibility, then organizing several major policy development campaigns, followed by a period of diverse, smaller-scale applied research activities. Now the partnership is entering a fourth stage in which it will strengthen the bonds among the five institutions of higher education and broaden its support of community services.

Evolution of a Campus/ Community Partnership: *The University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum*

Introduction

The University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum is a partnership of five institutions of higher education with the Oakland community. The Forum has become a valuable technical resource for community planning and policy-making, a training ground for many of the city's urban development professionals, a convenor of local leadership for debate of pressing policy issues, and the incubator of several innovative new organizations. The partnership has attempted to combine applied research and community organizing in some inventive ways.

When the Forum was being created, its founders on the university side promised permanence, or at least a very long-term commitment. No longer, they said, would there be "hit-and-run research" from which Oakland benefitted little, or through which academics exploited their access in order to write mainly for their professional peers. Nor would promising studio projects and technical assistance be abandoned midstream because the semester ended and the students and faculty moved on to other things. Continuity of effort and a locally-driven agenda were to be the watchwords of future activities.

Eight years later, we can say that those guiding principles have generally been upheld, and that the consortium of colleges and universities has been genuinely useful. However, very little about the Forum remains as it was at the outset. The overall partnership has been continually evolving as new compelling issues emerge, leaders arrive

and depart, crises arise and are resolved, and different sources of support are sought. This is a particularly good time to review these stages of development and change, for the Forum is in the midst of reshaping itself for the next several years. The managers of the project may be planners and advocates of systematic approaches to change, but our institution-building has thus far been very improvisational.

In this article I will describe the evolution of the Forum, focusing on community issues, political and institutional context, modes of operation, resources and outcomes. This history falls neatly, at least in retrospect, into four periods. Then we will analyze four continual challenges which the Forum faces: relationships between the university and community; how to organize the technical work; resource development; and relationships among schools in the consortium.

This is an account from the inside, with the advantages and limitations which that implies. As the executive director and the only staff member who has worked at the Forum since its inception, I will aim for a critical perspective that could elucidate helpful points for readers from other universities or partnerships.

Evolution of a Partnership

Stage One (1986-1988): Building Trust and Getting Underway

The city of Oakland has always been engaged in some fashion with the University of California at Berkeley, whose campus actually lies partly within Oakland's boundaries. There was, for example, an active community design center based in East Oakland during the 1970s, through which UCB architecture students developed plans for neighborhood facilities and low-cost housing. The UCB School of Education and Lawrence Hall of Science ran a number of curriculum development projects and college-preparatory programs in Oakland schools. Most prominently, there had been the Oakland Project of the late 1960's and early 1970s, through which Graduate School of Public Policy faculty and students provided analytical work for top staff of the City government. The Project, however, became best known not for any assistance it provided but for the many books produced by its researchers chronicling the futility of federal urban initiatives in Oakland and the very limited range of action of the city government. As valuable as any of these efforts may have been, by the mid-1980s the city's governmental and nongovernmental leaders were looking for something current, new, and different.

The mayor of Oakland and chancellor of UC Berkeley agreed on the need for a vehicle for applying university resources, and enlisted the Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IURD), an organized research unit on campus. In 1986, IURD convened a cross-section of Oakland leaders from business, local government, community-based service providers, churches, the military and other sectors, along with faculty and administrators from UC, Mills College and Holy Names College. (The latter are independent liberal arts colleges in Oakland.) Out of these initial sessions, after a great deal of searching for a common language and set of expectations, emerged the rough framework and a core leadership for what became the University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum. Edward J. Blakely, chair of the UC Berkeley Department of City and Regional Planning and an Oakland civic leader in his own right, was the organizer of the process and the faculty head of the project.

The framework consisted primarily of three panels of community leadership, each of which would focus on a broad domain of critical policy issues. The panels would, in collaboration with faculty members, examine the problems specific to Oakland in their broader context, and then design a program of applied research,

community education, or whatever else of value could be generated from the campuses.

The three panels organized by the founding group were on Economic Development, Education and Youth, and Civic Vision. The first two of these are readily recognizable topics, while the third represents a distinctive Oakland spin on several issues.

The Economic Development group concerned itself with the retention of business and creation of jobs. After several meetings they had organized three task forces: one to analyze specific targeted industries and recommend growth and retention strategies; one to design policies to support small business; and a third to establish a system to closely track growth and change in local employment. By early 1988, each task force had a UCB professor of city and regional planning and several graduate students working on empirical projects. The panel as a whole contained many persons who were impatient with the pace of City-guided development and the absence of a strategic plan for that activity.

The Education Panel, co-chaired by the president of Holy Names College and the head of a local poverty action research council, went through a more prolonged search for a mission and work plan, perhaps because of the complexity of the issues and the lack of an obvious role to play. The group initially decided to forego working directly on K-12 education, and instead applied itself to policies to expand and improve out-of-school programs for school age children.

The third panel, Civic Vision, represented a response to a constellation of issues distinctive to Oakland. Oakland has long had a serious image problem, and community leaders fretted continually about the unfair portrayal of the town as a haven of crime, slums and all around bad news. The media, including the (then) locally owned daily newspaper, came in for much of the criticism, and an initial focus of the panel was on how to improve news coverage of Oakland. This was not, for the most part, the kind of discussion destined to engage many faculty members, but it had genuine salience to the community members. Aside from the obligatory media-bashing, however, the discussions led to creation of several valuable inventories and publications about the city's architectural and cultural assets. The name "Civic Vision" itself came from a desire to focus on a meaningful positive goal of social cohesion and community pride rather than a negative or superficial slant (e.g., Panel on Improving Oakland's Image.)

In keeping with that broader view, the Civic Vision panel also became the setting through which the Forum's urban design and neighborhood revitalization work was started. Several design competitions for neglected public spaces were undertaken, and neighborhood shopping districts were the subject of graduate planning and architecture studios.

The full, somewhat unwieldy name of the Forum reflected the organizers' view that not only should the universities and Oakland be partners, but that the Forum should be concerned with the greater Oakland metropolitan area. With reference to economic issues, the researchers saw it as critically important to assess Oakland's comparative advantages and problems in a regional context, while the business boosters couched this as the need to regain Oakland's role as "the capital of the East Bay." The overtures to other East Bay cities were sporadic and ineffectual, however. Officials in nearby communities saw the Forum as belonging first to Oakland, and many of the Oakland community leaders did not really want to share, at least not yet.

During these first two years a small staff of part-time researchers and orga-

nizers was supported by grants from several local foundations and corporations. They managed the numerous meetings, networked with hundreds of people and organizations, collected documents and data sets, conducted the research, and produced a variety of publications for local use. These Working Papers, Issue Briefs, Directories, Bibliographies, and other documents were circulated, mostly free of charge, to the panel and task force members, city staff, community organizations and many others.

This opening period is most important for having established enough trust, credibility, mutual agreement and high expectations for the work to continue. The research itself was modest but mostly competently done, and was intended more to frame the issues than to make detailed policy. An annual reception and dinner meeting was established which over time became a major community event. The staff overextended itself to maintain the momentum that had been created, to the point where a decision was made to seek major funding for expansion.

Stage Two (1988-1991): Expansion and Major Initiatives

The early success of the Forum in convening local leadership and providing useful information led to constant requests for our involvement in other issues. The first full-time executive director, hired in late 1988, concentrated on organizing, community outreach and fundraising. This allowed the author, who remained as a part-time associate director, to concentrate more on supervising the research activities.

The next three years were dominated by three concurrent high profile, complex initiatives in education, economic development and neighborhood revitalization. Each of these combined research, organizing, community education, and advising of policy-makers.

In late 1989, the Oakland school system was in serious trouble, with large budget shortfalls, criminal investigations of staff and Board of Education members underway, a state-imposed trustee, and poor educational outcomes for a majority of its students. The superintendent's position had not been filled with a permanent executive for half a year, and a number of qualified candidates had turned down the job. The Forum and the Urban Strategies Council, an independent poverty action research institute, organized a joint Commission on Positive Change in the Oakland Public Schools in response to the problems. The Commission including education faculty from each of the campuses, business leaders, and parent group activists. For the next two years, the Commission was a focus of school reform efforts in the city, beginning with well-attended multi-lingual public hearings, followed by six fact-finding task forces on topics such as curriculum, staff development, budgeting and facilities. The results of these early efforts were reports that summarized community values and laid out detailed strategies for both site-based development and district-wide restructuring. The new superintendent, hired in early 1990, worked closely with the Commission, and many of its findings were incorporated into the District's official Five Year Plan in 1991.

The Commission for Positive Change, which was nominally started by the Forum's Education and Youth Panel, soon eclipsed that panel and consumed the greatest share of the organization's resources and time.

The work in economic development during this second stage built upon the earlier baseline studies of the local economy in order to facilitate community-wide planning. First, a team of graduate students compiled and summarized a comprehensive collection of documents and data sources about the local economy, and over

800 copies of the compendium were distributed free of charge. Then a series of community education symposia, similarly entitled "Oakland's Economy in the 1990's," gave activists and government staff the chance to hear experts from campuses, consulting firms, and community development organizations and to discuss the issues. Each of these sessions were attended by an average of nearly 100 persons and the proceedings were distributed to many others.

The Forum's neighborhood revitalization efforts took on more coherence and had greater impact during this period. The process of working in a neighborhood was broken down into a three year time frame which the Forum committed to carrying through, in close collaboration with City government and community development organizations. The process began in each district with a general community development graduate studio and formation of a "contact group" of neighborhood activists and merchants to review and guide the work. Based on the findings, a second stage would involve more focused technical work, such as urban design or economic feasibility studies for renovation of shopping districts. The third phase entailed technical support for the implementation of specific projects, such as mixed use housing and retail or "transit village" developments. The process began in a different neighborhood each year in 1989, 1990, and 1991, and each one progressed, more or less on schedule, through to the specialized architectural and economic work, in conjunction with the efforts of local nonprofit development corporations.

The Civic Vision panel, once so concerned with critiquing the media, turned its attention to the production of neighborhood newsletters. (They took to heart the old maxim, "If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own.") In 1989 the Forum began, with the support of the public library, a monthly newsletter editors' meeting and series of trainings by university communications faculty, which continues to this day. Today Oakland has more than thirty regularly published newsletters whose editors exchange information and techniques and hold briefings with top city officials.

During this period two more institutions joined the Forum, adding greatly to its diversity and creating a more complete local educational roundtable. The new partners were California State University, Hayward, located ten miles south of Oakland and increasingly engaged with the city and its school system; and the Peralta Community College District, headquartered in Oakland and with four campuses in all. The student bodies of these institutions are more local in origin than are those of the original three member schools, and their core missions are more explicitly urban and metropolitan in emphasis.

Also in this period the Forum's organizing committee became a formal Policy Board with 23 members representing higher education, business, community-based organizations, and local government. The Board reviewed all major policy initiatives and generated support for the partnership.

At its point of greatest size, in early 1991, the Forum had five full-time staff, 12 graduate student employees, numerous faculty members and independent consultants, and many other students assisting through their classes or theses. The annual budget exceeded \$600,000, and was drawn from more than a dozen foundations and a grant from the Educational Partnerships Program of the US Department of Education. At least half of the funding was specific to the Commission for Positive Change, much of it due to end within a year. In 1991, then, the executive director and a key assistant were hired by the superintendent of schools, to organize implementation of the Educational Plan.

Stage Three (1991-94): Technical Support for Diverse Activities

The next three years were characterized by an eclectic array of smaller and more specialized activities through which university technical resources were brought to bear on policy issues. The community context had changed, with the activities of other groups making it less necessary for the Forum to be the convenor of major initiatives. The foundation laid in the first five years, along with Forum leaders' direct access to top leadership in government and many local organizations, led to many opportunities. In general, the community was now less interested in fact-finding and broad strategies, and more in the detailed implementation of new concepts and programs.

In 1991, the City embarked upon a community-based strategic planning process known as Oakland — Sharing the Vision (OSV). The Forum was generally understood to be the "research arm" of the effort. Although this relationship never resulted in any additional analysis being conducted, most of the information used in the OSV proceedings and reports came from the Forum's existing research or our archives of other data.

The firestorm which swept through the Oakland hills in October of 1991 presented another set of demands for university resources. The Forum assisted a city task force by organizing faculty and researchers in architecture, energy studies, planning, business and other disciplines during the immediate recovery period. Over the next two years the Forum produced a widely used collection of materials on how to landscape for fire safety and organized a studio to redesign the public spaces in one of the burned neighborhoods.

Other neighborhood revitalization efforts continued on a smaller scale in the three districts where the work had been started in earlier years. Graduate students conducted housing feasibility studies, environmental education projects with junior high schools, marketing plans for merchants' associations, multi-cultural fairs, and many other activities.

The work on education shifted from the broad scale systems changes of the Commission to a detailed, long-term evaluation of the School District's Academies program, a school-to-work transition program being supported by the City's Redevelopment Agency. Faculty and graduate students from the UCB School of Education joined the Forum staff in this effort, which has continued for almost five years.

The role of local evaluator became a staple of the Forum, as the we also undertook similar responsibilities to assess a foundation-funded neighborhood organizing collaborative, a public housing revitalization program, and a community service program. In each case, the Forum was sought out as a local, nonpartisan source of technical expertise, more familiar with and trusted by the funders and the local community than a consulting firm might be. In general, evaluation research has offered a wealth of diverse research tasks for graduate students to perform, and can be an excellent way to influence policy. On the other hand, the situations can be politically contentious, given the resources and local reputations at stake, and the need for quick turn-around of study results can tax a student-centered effort.

The graduate student work force of the Forum was the backbone of the operation in this third period, and many of those who worked there have become staff to city agencies and nonprofit organizations in Oakland. More than 60 percent of the fifty students who have been employed by the Forum are persons of color, including six who have been supported by HUD Community Development Work Study fellowships. Most of the students were in city planning, with others from programs in public policy, education, and architecture.

Stage Four: Organizing a True Consortium

By the middle of 1994 the course which the Forum was on was known to be not sufficiently stable. While each of the numerous small projects had its own funding source, they did not provide enough support to maintain even a reduced staff in the long run, and most recent attempts to secure general funding had been unsuccessful. Professor Blakely announced his retirement in the spring, adding to the uncertainty. But the Forum has since rebounded with both some new funding and, more importantly, a different approach.

Although the Forum has five member institutions, it was always weighted heavily toward UC Berkeley as the administrative site and the school from which most of the faculty and almost all of the students were drawn. In 1994 the Forum Board and staff took steps to more actively involve all five campuses in the governance and the activities of the consortium. A working group of administrators has recently completed a plan to support student community service and policy research with the resources of all these schools. The combination of community colleges, a metropolitan state university campus, two distinctive liberal arts colleges and a research university is an uncommon asset which should be fully developed in the years ahead. IURD and The Forum will also join with San Francisco State University and Stanford University to produce the new Bay Area Community Outreach Partnership Center, a HUD-supported regional consortium focusing on housing and community development. Thus we will begin working in several other cities after all.

Challenges

There have been continual challenges to maintaining a viable campus/community partnership and few precedents to guide our actions. For this discussion we choose four of the most important issues.

1. Relations with government, community organizations, and citizens.

Although at first the university organizers had to establish their capacity to be of use to local policymakers and activists, soon the problem became one of how to sort out the multitude of requests for assistance and how to allocate our time and resources.

One continual challenge has been to maintain broad-based citizen involvement in the project as a whole. The three community panels were good for defining the Forum's initial activities. However, after two or three years these panels were too large and unwieldy to maintain. They required more staff time than was available and did not yield the high-level policy discussions that were increasingly needed to guide the work. As a result, the panels were superseded by more specialized, time-limited, task-oriented groups of citizens and officials. Each project-specific group had its own structure, leadership, goals and time frame. While many of these groups, such as the Commission for Positive Change, functioned very well, there was little overlap of membership and few common elements to knit together the Forum as a whole. By 1992 the Forum had largely ceased to organize citizen groups on its own, and instead provided technical support to groups organized through other projects. An annual meeting and newsletter continue to keep several hundred people informed, but there are no ongoing settings for large numbers of citizens to interact or to help to govern the partnership.

A second issue concerns the relationship of the Forum leadership to government. We have tried to maintain a nonpartisan stance through a few simple rules: no involvement in election campaigns; public, equal access to all our reports and data; and open meetings with widespread invitations to all organized groups in a neigh-

borhood. Our preferred mode is to be activist but not partisan; focussed on technical work but not removed from the political scene. We are not traditional organizers, consultants, evaluators, or researchers, but have some attributes of each in our work.

One consequence of the Forum's impact has been continual requests from public sector leadership for advice and targeted assistance. The Forum CEO, the first executive director, and this writer have each played critical roles in Oakland, filling vacuums, helping to solve problems, organizing responses to emergencies, and advising on future courses of action. The CEO, Professor Blakely, joined the staff of Mayor Elihu Harris as chief policy advisor in 1992 while continuing to head the Forum, and in 1993 also became the director of Oakland — Sharing the Vision, the strategic planning body. At times the agendas of the Mayor's Office, OSV, and the Forum tended to merge, and while the Forum's efforts were appreciated by these other entities this work did not do as much as had been hoped to build the consortium for the long term. Former executive director Izumizaki was a *de facto* assistant to the superintendent of schools for months before he resigned to join his staff. Our continual challenge has been to use the opportunities we have to get close enough to decision-makers to make a difference, without compromising the Forum's independence or viability.

A similar problem can arise at the neighborhood level. We begin each project with a broad contact group of neighborhood interests. Over time, as the work grows more specialized, we tend to become closely linked with particular community development corporations, especially when they are well-managed and can be good supervisors of students. In the long run, the Forum should be careful to maintain a wide constituency in each neighborhood.

2. Conducting community service work in a campus setting. We sometimes liken the Forum's situation to that of running a consulting firm without a permanent staff. The work schedules, backgrounds and interests of faculty and graduate students do not always meld readily with the needs of local government and community organizations. Students can be employed with the Forum up to two years, and many work for less time than that. They must be oriented and trained before they are of maximum value to the community. The continual turnover is a problem for complex multi-year policy research projects, and for neighborhood-based work where personal relationships with many people must be reestablished. Students, of course, have multiple responsibilities, and sometimes they are not available to meet the real time demands of city government.

Many faculty members have become involved with the Forum and regard it fondly, but most of them do not see their involvement as contributing directly to their professional advancement. Rather, it has been for them a self-initiated form of community service, mostly as its own reward (and with, in some cases, a modest stipend.) Given the small amount of time they can give, the productivity of faculty members in this setting is almost entirely dependent on the quality of the work of the graduate students who are assisting them. The number of faculty involved with the Forum has declined in recent years, and we are taking steps to reverse the trend with outreach to departments on all campuses planned for 1995. To the extent that future Forum grants can offer stipends to faculty they can devote more time to this work, but we have not altered the reward structure of the campuses.

3. Resource development and stability. The preceding account provides ample evidence of how the Forum has grown and then reduced its size to about half of its largest phase. All of the budget comes from outside support. None of the colleges or universities contribute funding directly to the project, although existing

related expenditures are sometimes used as the matching portion of grants.

Approximately half the outside financial support for the Forum has come from foundations, with another 30 percent from federal grants and 20 percent from the City of Oakland. In its first several years the Forum was able to raise funds for general purposes from the City and the foundations, but after that almost all funding came in return for increasingly specialized tasks and projects. Several of the evaluation activities are contracts rather than grants.

A growing number of local supporters of the Forum are interested in seeking direct budget contributions from the campuses to the partnership. While this would undoubtedly be a challenge given the difficult financial circumstances of the schools, there are precedents in the recent growth of other community service activities.

The continual struggle to raise funds consumes a great deal of staff time and energy. The uncertainty limits our capacity to hire permanent staff, sometimes causes the premature departure of student employees, and creates pressures to take on certain short-term projects on which the Forum might otherwise pass.

The current strategy, aside from responding to federal RFP's and invitations from the City and other local agencies, will be to propose that foundations next support the consortium-building activities which will bring the five campuses together in a more effective alliance with local communities.

4. Developing a multi-school consortium. The Forum was for most of its history primarily geared toward immediate responses to urban problems, not toward consciously building its own consortium. As a result, the schools are unequally represented, with UC Berkeley providing almost all of the services and handling almost all of the budget. UCB was close at hand for the staff, and had the greatest number and variety of professional schools from which to draw, most notably in city and regional planning.

Only now is full attention is being given to building that consortium, for the heads of all five institutions are clearly interested in seeing their schools fully engaged. This requires development of a mode of operations that serves the needs and builds the capacity of each school, and creates good opportunities for joint projects. One new emphasis will be on assisting the growing student community service programs on each campus, so that they have the best information about Oakland and its organizations, and so that the latest concepts in service learning are disseminated throughout the faculties. Another new step will be to create multi-campus symposia on local issues as a way to engage more faculty members.

One policy area which has great promise for a consortium effort is that of school-to-work transition programs. UC Berkeley is the site of the Forum's evaluation of Oakland's high school academies, and is home to the National Center for Research in Vocational Education. The Peralta Community Colleges are partners with the School District in the school-to-work programs, which link high school and community college curricula with work experience. CSU Hayward has a strong interest in ensuring that school-to-work programs keep four-year college options open for these students, and is also home to a research institute on labor markets and education. Thus, through the Forum the three schools plan to work out policy questions of import to their own institutions, make a concerted impact on the local programs, and in the process generate data on which to base some academic writing. In the coming year we hope to identify other topics which lend themselves to joint action.

Conclusion

The University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum, founded to facilitate the work of community development, has become something of an institution in its own right, though a continually evolving one. In the process of responding to urban issues, the Forum has developed a style of operation that consistently engages faculty and students in productive community work. In its next phase the consortium will further diversify in terms of areas of expertise, types of students, and communities involved with the effort. This promises to be at least as interesting and hard to predict as the past eight years have been.