RETHINKING COMMUNITIES

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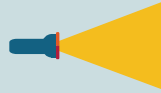
Check the Tools
and Trainings website

Get in touch with
Regional Coordinator

Get in touch with
Community Manager

For all the Rethinking Communities trainings and other tools, go to the following URL
http://rc-rooseveltcampusnetwork.nationbuilder.com

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The Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network has a new focus. A collective decision-making process spanning 2013-14 has yielded a network-wide commitment to tackle the rise of economic and political inequality. While inequality is widely acknowledged as one of the most pressing issues confronting our country, we've seen that many of the proposed solutions are too large in scope for an individual or even a group to grapple with. Since our federal system as it is currently constructed is not responsive nor fine-tuned enough to effectively promote local economic development or democratic access, we're focused on how to make those things happen intelligently and with input from the people who will be directly affected by them. We believe that a local plan can – and must – be stronger and more sustainable than what we have the chance to create through the U.S. Congress of 2014. To tackle the sweeping issue of economic inequality, to maximize the potential of our complex and vibrant network, and to build on 10 years of success in implementing impactful policy ideas, we've developed the Rethinking Communities initiative.

Now, it's time for the new class of Roosevelt to take the reins.

RETHINKING COMMUNITIES

Our goals are clear: to make meaningful, lasting change in our local communities; to put pressure on colleges and universities to be more thoughtful about their responsibility to their communities and the many ways they act as Anchor Institutions; and to build a national narrative that takes advantage of many projects within our network and brings the issue of economic and social inequality to the forefront of the public debate.

Anchor institution: Nonprofit entities – like hospitals, universities, or churches – that are tied to a location due to infrastructure or mission. Due to their status as Anchors, these institutions are often one of the chief economic drivers of the area, and have a vested interest in improving the community around them.

The Rethinking Communities initiative has a clear statement of purpose produced by the student BrainTrust – the six students who have been guiding the evolution of the initiative:

Rethinking Communities aims to utilize and expand the role of Anchor Institutions by recognizing them as key community change drivers, and by strengthening a mutually beneficial relationship with the community. In doing so, we seek to inspire all parties involved with greater self-determination, agency, and equity, and hold universities accountable to the broad range of people they provide for and engage with.

We plan on accomplishing this in two phases: research and action. First, we must understand each Anchor and its place, and grapple with the impact that it is already having. Then, based on this data, we'll design and implement impact projects that target a specific area of a school's interaction with its community, and combine those projects into a larger narrative. Eventually, this narrative – bolstered by successes from around the country – will be strong enough that we'll see everyone from university presidents to city governments using Anchor Institutions as a tool to alleviate inequality.

Why Anchors?

Anchor Institutions are a vital tool for economic development. Their inherent connection to place means they offer stability in an ever-more-volatile job market, and have the ability to provide the local investment and demand that can incentivize local business growth. In many locations, Anchor Institutions have surpassed traditional manufacturing to become their regions' leading employers. Anchors also have amazing resources at their disposal. Yale's endowment is the equivalent of the entire GDP of Zambia, and the University of Texas system has resources that rival the GDP of Afghanistan. If the economic power of these Anchor Institutions were more effectively harnessed, they could contribute greatly to combating economic inequality on a community-by-community basis. Since the idea of Rethinking Communities is based in introducing new ways to grapple with economic and social inequality, we need Anchors to embrace the vital importance of democratic access and social justice.

Why Roosevelt?

The Rethinking Communities initiative is a core example of our larger theory of change: that great public policy ideas can – and must – be tested, refined, and then brought to scale in ways that make a difference in the realities of the people around us. Despite sometimes being transient and temporary residents of our communities as students, we are working to improve our current communities with the tools we have. While this will help improve our schools, and thus increase the value of our diplomas, at its core Rethinking Communities is also about making the voices of students matter. Students pay tuition, we live on campus, and we interact with the communities surrounding our Anchor Institutions on a regular basis. Students impact their universities just as much as universities shape their students. Shouldn't we have a say in how our universities put their resources to use?

Roosevelt is also a network. With more than 115 chapters in 38 states around the country, we have the capacity to build a larger narrative about the responsibilities of Anchors by bringing this initiative to our communities in nuanced ways that reflect the differences in need and resources on the ground. With a team of students in each region ready and waiting to support Rethinking Communities ideas, we're poised to collaborate network-wide like never before. But to do so, we need you to get involved, and to tell your fellow students about the work of Rethinking Communities on your campus. If you do, we'll be able to get you resources and trainings, connect you to advice from policy experts in the Roosevelt Institute's Four Freedoms Center, and teach you how to leverage the media to accomplish your goals.

How can you be involved?

In honing our focus on economic and social inequality and on Anchors as our tools for change, we've created a few specific impact "tracks" that can be used as templates for making change at your own school. These tracks, which have developed from the work of the 2013-14 year, have already begun to be implemented. This document will dig in to how those tracks might be useful to your chapter and your college or university, and you'll learn the process for starting your own work within the Rethinking Communities initiative.

We've spent a lot of time in the Campus Network thinking about the best ways to create impact through Anchor Institutions. The idea of a "good" Rethinking Communities Impact Project comes with a set of values and stipulations. If we develop impact projects that fit all of the following criteria, we can be assured that Rethinking Communities is sustainable, focused, and relevant, and is successfully building on our shared strength and fostering collaboration from around the network. The criteria the student BrainTrust has been using to measure successful impact include the following: community engagement/relationship building, sustainability, strength of research, writing, institutional buy-in, and connection to values. For a more complete breakdown of the categories and questions and why they are imperative to impact, see page 4.

WHAT DOES IMPACT MEAN?

Impact projects under the Rethinking Communities banner is deemed successful if it addresses the six following categories.

- Community Engagement and Relationship Building
- Sustainability
- Research
- Writing
- Institutional Buy In
- Directly Connects to Values

	A	B	C
How well does your project engage with the community and build relationships?	How well did the impact project connect to the community of the university?	Santa Monica chapter did a fantastic job working with mapping community stakeholders, bringing in community groups to help them figure out what Santa Monica needed. As a part of that process, they identified student homelessness as a problem that had roots in both community need and the way their school was running. In reaching out to the national office, NYU students were able to have a meeting with both professors and experts in the field to get a better sense of what a clear impact project might look like.	It is vital in any good policy work to reach out to the community that you are hoping to serve, to make sure that your ideas are grounded in community need. If you'd like more information on how to make sure you're doing your due diligence in engaging the community, check out the Campus Network's "Engaging Stakeholders" training, available on the Rethinking Communities resource website.
How sustainable is your project moving forward?	Can this project be implemented in the long term? Has there been significant thought of the future?	The MSU project has really grappled with log term sustainability by looking to push for a State wide law diversity purchasing policy, meaning that their work will be spread to every anchor in Michigan moving forward.	Anchor Institutions are, by definition, around for the long term. Yet colleges and universities have demonstrated huge problems with maintaining research or activism projects: students and faculty leave and the community is left feeling as though they are the guinea pigs in an experiment! How the project plans to have long term and sustainable impact is vital to it being good change.
Was your research thorough?	Does the research demonstrate a holistic understanding of the workings of the Anchor institution? Is the proposed project addressing a clear research driven need?	The GW investment project have built a great sense of both the community need and the many complexities of which local financial institutions could benefit the most from University investment.	Good policy is based in strong research. If you've completed the above Metrics, and had a conversation with leadership that unpacks your findings, you've got the base you need to push forward.
How well is your proposal written?	Is the plan succinct, clear, & well articulated?	For an example of well-written projects, feel free to check out all three proposals on the Resources Website.	If you want to convince others that you have a good idea, your ability to write about it clearly and succinctly will make all the difference.
How much institutional buy in is necessary to make impact successful?	Does the project challenge or require institutional help in order to be implemented? At what level is institutional buy in necessary for the impact project to work?	The investment project counts on heavy support from the office of the President – there's no work around here. So while George Washington has that buy in already, the NYU project has a clear hurdle to get over in getting members of their administration on board.	In our attempts at using our Anchor Institutions as tools to pursue economic and social equality, we're going to be engaging school's administration and faculty. To that end, an ideal project will have allies within the existing power structure, or at least have a work around if those allies can't be found or don't exist.
Does the impact directly connect to the values of Rethinking Communities?	Are the values of Rethinking Communities present or promoted through this impact project?	All the projects feed back into these values! From Amherst's case for using mapping to hold their school accountable to NYU's push to utilize their school's resources to bring more resources to the communities that need them most, these projects help us advance these key values and ideas!	ALT is good to check back in and make sure you're keeping our guiding principles in mind. The values of the Rethinking Communities project include responsibility, self-determination, accountability, economic and community equity, and agency and action.

THE RETHINKING COMMUNITIES IMPACT TRACKS

Our work so far has coalesced around three specific tracks that highlight different ways that colleges and universities act as Anchor Institutions. We hope you will find that one of these three tracks fits the needs of your campus, and that it makes sense to opt into one of these tracks to be a part of building many successes around a single idea. The true potential of the network will be realized when each of the following tracks are happening on multiple campuses – sharing resources, building power, and providing ideas for a larger conversation about how we challenge inequality in this country.

The three tracks are: an investment track designed to think through how a university can put money into community infrastructure; a procurement track designed to look at how a college buys the things it uses; and a social safety net track designed to consider how schools can tackle the problem of student homelessness.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU when you've hit Impact points! Reach out to Aman Banerji, the Community Manager for the Campus Network, at abanerji@rooseveltinstitute.org with any Impact point he should hear about.

Without your support, this collaborative movement pushing universities to local impact will fail. Remember that your stories will help build the structure and narrative that will support ALL of Rethinking Communities.

Potential for Impact
Roosevelt defines Impact Points as concrete successes. From being published in the school paper, to sitting downs with administration, to getting a team of committed people together to work on an issue, these successes don't have to be a complete project. Don't wait until we've reached the Final Goal of changing the minds of university presidents and the policy of university work to reach out to us.

INVESTMENT TRACK

We are encouraging our colleges and universities to use their sizable financial resources to invest in the communities surrounding them. The goal is to pressure the universities into investing in a local community bank or community development financial institution (CDFI). Universities across the country have money that is either held in cash reserves or invested in places that do not align with their values as an Anchor Institution. Students are leveraging the power of their administrations – specifically university presidents, boards of trustees, and other offices and administrators – through student coalitions and existing institutional support to move that money. This track is about pushing for active investment in the sorts of organizations that are working to improve communities, without sacrificing the schools' own financial planning goals. While success will require real institutional buy-in, the potential for matching a university resource with a community need makes this a clear Rethinking Communities initiative.

Multiple chapters are already embarking on the investment track: Students at George Washington University (GW) have connected with the president of the university directly, whereas students at New York University (NYU) are finding they need to use other existing channels of power to push for a vote on their investment idea. While the process may evolve differently at different schools, GW and NYU are working toward a similar goal and can share ideas, strategies, and even resources. As such, this track highlights both how an Anchor can invest in the community and how Rethinking Communities can utilize our network and the uniqueness of our various campuses.

PROCUREMENT TRACK

Students are taking a good hard look at how exactly a university goes about purchasing the things it uses in its daily operations. Postsecondary institutions spend over $350 billion on goods and services per year, but very few colleges or Universities have thought through how that spending can be channeled to benefit the communities nearby. Furthermore, many schools don't track information on how they spend their money when it comes to buying locally or focusing on woman and minority owned business procurement. By looking at exactly where the university already purchases goods from within the community, and working with data that the schools are already collecting and making available, students can put pressure on their Anchors to implement a diverse purchasing policy and thus move real money to communities that need it.

For example, students from Amherst were able to get their hands on lots of financial data, and hope to meld geographical systems, network theory, and social sciences to create a physically map of where their school is already spending, and compare that map to the areas of local economic need. Compare that to students at Michigan State, who found that no one in their administration had the information they wanted. MSU hope to create the list: compiling minority owned businesses in the area around their school that are providing the things that the school is already buying. With the support of other Michigan Roosevelt chapters, they are also working on legislation at the state level to make this tracking mandatory and to hold Anchors to a minimum standard. While both cases count on data provided from the university to create a successful procurement track, they have evolved in different ways to meet the needs of their schools. This track is a way to hold the university accountable for how they are spending their money, and to find ways for students to build a better plan through research and community engagement.

SOCIAL SAFETY NET TRACK

While the first two tracks focus on how colleges and universities engage with economic and social inequality in the communities around their campuses, the social safety net track is about students tackling economic inequality by helping a larger swath of the local population take advantage of the university's resources. The goal of this track is to think through the ways a school's different resources can be used to support the community by integrating them into social safety net systems. For example, the Santa Monica chapter seeks to have university cafeterias accept food stamps, thus providing a variety of healthy food options to students who need it most. Chapter members hope to leverage existing federal and state laws and policies to implement this idea in their university.

This impact track demonstrates the diversity of ways in which a school fills the role of Anchor Institution, and can thus be utilized as a tool to tackle inequality. The social safety net track exemplifies the values of Rethinking Communities by improving equity and access for all students, and aims to provide a means for economically disadvantaged students to receive a quality education and healthier food options.

BREAKING DOWN IMPACT EVEN FURTHER

We have a three-step process for deciding what Rethinking Communities should look like at your chapter. This toolbox will get you prepared to make an impact.

1

Hold a conversation

Discuss with your chapter: What is your school like? What's the community around it like? How is it acting as an Anchor already? A facilitator's guide and some questions to shape this conversation are available on the resource web page that accompanies this toolbox.

2

Research your school

After your conversation with your chapter, there are 20 questions that will help round out what you already know about your school. These questions are available on the resource web page that accompanies this toolbox.

3

Plan for impact

Get back on the horn with your Regional Coordinator! Based on what you've learned from the first two steps they'll talk you through what comes next, including further research ideas, adopting one of the three impact tracks outlined above, and using the information you've gleaned to think through your own impact idea.
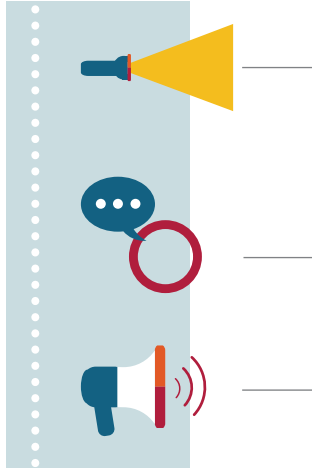
The three tracks outlined above didn't just spring up fully formed and ready to go! Each went through this same multi-step process: first examining schools as Anchors, and then crafting policy that takes into account the different things that colleges and universities can do as well as the things they are actually doing.

Each step below will not outline the process in the abstract, but also give examples of how the different tracks utilized these steps in concrete ways.
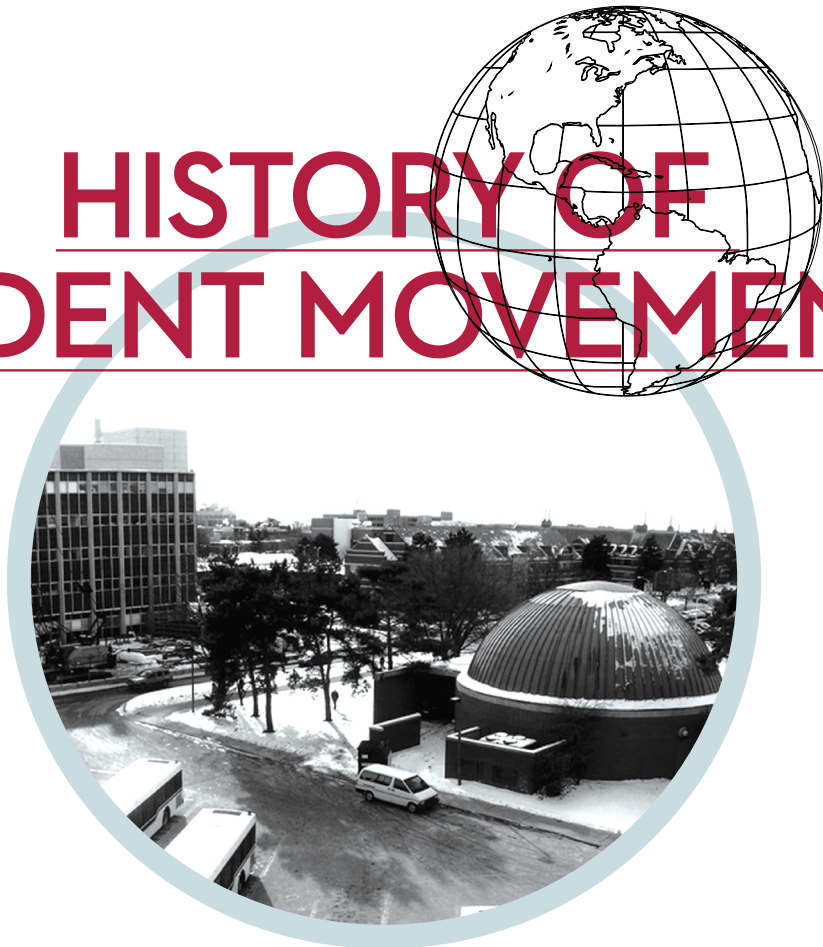
IMPORTANT NOTE:

while every campus within this network has a unique set of problems and opportunities, there are real similarities that bind us together. The real power of Rethinking Communities projects comes when we work together to tackle the same issues – building not only small wins on our own campuses, but a larger narrative of change that capitalizes on the strengths of the network. Thus, while you should feel comfortable with designing a project that fits your chapter, please consider how the three existing tracks might work for you.

	PHASE 1 HOLD A CONVERSATION			PHASE 2 PRELIMINARY RESEARCH	PHASE 3 ANALYSIS AND OUTREACH

	Description	
College students can accomplish huge things by harnessing the power of their Anchor Institutions, but our first step should be coming to terms with the current landscape of the Anchors. Does your school already think of itself as an Anchor Institution? Within your chapter, set aside a general meeting to have a discussion about your university. On the website under "Guided Discussion on Your University we've included a way to help facilitate the discussion, as well as some questions to consider. Think of this discussion as a feeler to build interest in this initiative, and as a way to get a sense of how much the administration and campus culture would support and give institutional support to any project. This discussion is designed to get everyone thinking of what they already know about their school as an Anchor, and to consider how exactly universities influence the community at large. Use this time to determine what common knowledge you already have and what you need to find out in regard to your university's actions.	Now that you think we know where you're starting, it is time to see if some of the numbers that are publicly available align with your perceptions. The following metrics are designed to be quick and simple questions that you should be able to answer with a small bit of digging. This preliminary research may either reinforce the perceptions of your university that you've established in the discussion or change your perception of the university and lead you to think of new ways in which your university influences your community. With each question, we've also provided sources where you can easily locate the answer. If you go to a private school, you will need the 990-tax form that every non-profit must fill out for the IRS – public state schools will have different filing mechanisms. We think the process of answering the 17 research questions should take about two weeks. IMPORTANT NOTE: If it is too difficult to find answers to certain questions, it's okay to skip them and move on! This process is meant to be a snapshot of the current state of your university, so do not spend more than a day trying to answer a specific question. By the end of this preliminary research stage, you should have a fairly good picture of the amount your university spends and what the area around your university looks like economically and socially.	So, what did you learn? You have gone through the basic research to start thinking about the things an Anchor does – now it's time to figure out where to begin pushing for Impact. The next step is to get in touch with your Regional Coordinator. Why? The final stage of research is going to be a little different for each university in the network, but our goal remains the same across the country. Sharing your data with your Regional Coordinator, who will then share the great work you've done with the student BrainTrust, is vital; it will allow them to help you dig deeper into your specific areas of interest, build off of the data that you've already collected, and help us all find areas where our work overlaps around the network. We want leading to projects that complement each other as they evolve. This next phase will inevitably include building outward to create new relationships. We will challenge you to engage with your administration and the community, which means sending emails, requesting meetings, and making phone calls. This will start the process of relationship-building that will ultimately be vital when moving toward impact. This phase is designed to begin a seamless transition into action, and working with all of these different stakeholders, you will make connections early on that will ease that shift. On the Resources Website there is also a training to help you engage with potential stakeholders as well as examples of how to go about getting in touch with them. Finally, if you are curious about what has worked for others in the past, students at the University of Richmond have put together the best practices from their experience for engaging with administrators and community leaders.

	Goal	
To build excitement in your chapter for Rethinking Communities, and to rank your Anchor Institution from 0 (no anchor mission exists) to 3 (an active anchor mission throughout the campus). This ranking, however subjective, can help you explain to your Regional Coordinator what you are dealing with at your specific campus!	Use the metrics to build a baseline understanding of how your school acts as an Anchor Institution.	Reconnect with the rest of the network, and deepen your understanding of the many ways a school can be an Anchor.

	Example	
George Washington University, working on the investment track, started as either a 2 or a 3 on our scale of Anchor activity. This is important information given that their plan involved connecting with the office of the President. Since NYU's ranking was closer to a 0 or a 1, they might need to rethink the goals of an investment campaign or develop a plan to bring more people on board.	After looking at these research questions, Michigan State saw two areas of community need. They originally looked at poor education outcomes they found in East Lansing, but found that tutoring programs within the university already existed, and that their school was already putting significant time and resources into that issue. After delving deeper into the questions and talking to their administration, they discovered a new challenge: not only was there no internal tracking mechanism to see how much of the school's money was being spent with minority- or woman-owned businesses, but they also discovered that the state of Michigan did not certify which businesses were minority- or woman-owned at a state level. The research helped build a holistic view of their university and allowed them to better identify need and demand.	By reaching out to the national office, NYU students were connected with Four Freedom Fellows and other professors connected to the network who could help them think through what they had found so far. The conversations helped the chapter shape a better sense of what a clear Impact project might look like.

HISTORY OF STUDENT MOVEMENTS

Before embarking on an ambitious, seemingly daunting initiative, take a step back and recognize who stands with you — who has come before you and who will support you today. There are many successful student movements that have shaped national discourse and public policy. No matter what the scale of the policy or action plan, it is a part of the long history of student activism and organizing in this country. Those ready and willing to embark on Impact projects stand on the shoulders of greatness that came before and will continue to build on the work of others.

In 1964, activism culminated in the Freedom Summer campaign in Mississippi, which aimed to register as many African Americans to vote as possible. Thousands of out-of-state volunteers went to Mississippi, many of them students. During this campaign, three students were shot and killed by the Ku Klux Klan, but the effects of their efforts were felt with the historic signing of Civil Rights legislation, and echo to this day. Enacting change requires challenging existing bodies of power. Remember the scale of our potential to make change – even on an issue as seemingly intractable as economic or social inequality– as you go forward in Rethinking Communities.

In the 1970s and 1980s, significant student movements across the country pushed the United States to divest from South Africa in response to the Apartheid Movement. Student campaigns beginning at Stanford, Michigan State, and the University of Michigan sought to dismantle the Apartheid state using the only lever they had: economic pressure. By 1988, 155 total Anchor Institutions divested from South Africa, putting pressure on state governments to take concrete action. This eventually set the stage for the federal action. In 2010, 19 years after the fall of the Apartheid state, Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote, "In South Africa, we could not have achieved our freedom and just peace without the help of people around the world, who through the use of non-violent means, such as boycotts and divestment, encouraged their governments and other corporate actors to reverse decades-long support for the Apartheid regime."

It is in this same spirit that Rethinking Communities embarks on a campaign to foster meaningful change. While the South Africa divestment campaign grew to make lasting national and international change, it started from where we are today — in dorm rooms on college campuses. It is in one's own community where the foundations for national movements lie. What can we build?

Rethinking Communities hopes to harness the power we wield as a network by working together, while preserving the integrity and uniqueness of each individual campus. With these three tracks toward investment, procurement, and improving our social safety net, we hope to tackle the very real social and economic inequality that is present within our communities across the nation. We need you to make lasting change a reality. Let's use this Tool Box to get it done!

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