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Key Efficiency Opportunities Identified:

- Many institutions of higher education in the area have intellectual, social, and technological resources that could be used to great advantage to meet local agency and business needs with further coordinated efforts.
- Opportunities exist for these resources to serve Sangamon County citizens through internship programs, class projects, faculty research, or student research,
- The CEC recommends that local governments and institutions of higher education in the region identify opportunities of mutual benefit such that the teaching and learning that occurs has a practical application for the agencies that serve Sangamon County citizens, and establish a work group to coordinate and facilitate action that takes advantage of these opportunities.

**The Citizens' Efficiency Commission
Room 212
200 South 9th Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701**

Phone: 217.535.3110

Citizens' Efficiency Commission Recommendation:

Expand Local Government Cooperation with Institutions of Higher Education to Develop and Share Professional Resource Base

Introduction

This report represents a formal recommendation by the Citizens' Efficiency Commission. All information has been compiled, researched, and validated by the CEC and its volunteers. The Commission expresses its hope that relevant local leaders will review the recommendation and take strides toward its implementation.

In light of the research presented below, the CEC recommends that local governments and institutions of higher education in the region identify opportunities of mutual benefit such that the teaching and learning that occurs has a practical application for the agencies that serve Sangamon County citizens, and establish a work group to coordinate and facilitate action that takes advantage of these opportunities.

The Commission stands ready to provide assistance to the greatest extent possible in the review and implementation process. The CEC may be interested in further review of efficiency considerations that develop based on this advisory report, or of other recommendations that may arise.

Background

The CEC found as a theme of its first year of work that local governments often lack capacity to accomplish objectives or undertake research that would be beneficial to their work. In reviewing best practices in other communities, the CEC found that institutions of higher education can be utilized to meet needs at reduced cost.¹ Based upon this concept, the CEC approved research related to the following finding at its November 2012 meeting:

The committee finds that there is an "expertise gap" between the challenges that local governments face and the solutions to these challenges. The committee also finds that the higher education institutions in the area could help fill this gap if they were to establish the outreach, operational structures, institutional interest and leadership to do so. The committee requests that the CEC review this possibility, assessing the opportunities for greater university/municipality partnership, how these partnerships and

¹ Heaton, Brian (January 22, 2013). Virtual Interns Help Solve an Agency's Workforce Needs. *Governing: Technology*.



structures might be developed, and how both the students and faculty at these institutions may become an on-going component of local government effectiveness and efficiency improvement.

Recommendation Questions

The CEC focused on the following questions related to capacity-building for local government professionalism:

- What are existing structures and mechanisms through which local governments can draw upon the intellectual resources provided by institutions of higher education in the community?
- What professional resources do local governments in Sangamon County lack?
- How might existing resources at universities and colleges be better utilized by local governments? What structures would need to be set in place to encourage this use? What hurdles and obstacles would need to be overcome to encourage such cooperation?

Overview of Existing Needs and Opportunities

Local Governments

The majority of units of local government in Sangamon County operate with part-time employees and volunteer officials. Even for those with full-time staff and greater professional resources, the current economic climate constrains their budgets, thereby limiting both their capacity to complete customary tasks and their opportunities to take on unique projects. Internship programs or other university collaborative activities could provide opportunity for local governments to capitalize on university resources as a means for expanding their own resources through mutually beneficial activity.

Some investment on the part of local governments would be involved in such cooperation, most likely in the form of staff time needed to supervise interns, facilitate and explain projects, or provide research data and resources to universities.

A University of Tulsa report details a number of benefits for employers participating in internship programs.² Each of these benefits is applicable to local government actions as well:

- *Provide your business with a well-trained workforce by giving students the opportunity to cultivate knowledge gained in the classroom and apply it in a "real world" setting.*
- *Flexible, cost-effective workforce not requiring a long-term employer commitment*
- *Proven, cost-effective way to recruit and evaluate potential employees*
- *Year-round source of highly motivated pre-professionals*
- *Students bring new perspectives*

² The University of Tulsa, Alumni Internship Program. Benefits of Establishing an Intern Program. Retrieved from: internintulsa.com.



- *Increased visibility of your organization on campus*
- *Quality candidates for temporary or seasonal positions and projects*
- *Freedom for professional staff to pursue more creative projects*
- *Enhanced community image by contributing your expertise to the educational enterprise*

Universities

Multiple institutions of higher education exist in Sangamon County, including the University of Illinois at Springfield, SIU School of Medicine, Robert Morris University, Benedictine University, and Lincoln Land Community College. A number of technical and vocational schools also exist in the Springfield area, such as the Capital Area Career Center or ITT Technical Institute. All of these institutions may have students with skills valuable to local governments. Of particular interest may be students with backgrounds in public affairs/administration, communications, information technology, and statistical research.

For all institutions of higher education in the region, working to strengthen the community that serves as their home can only be of benefit. More students may be inclined to enroll and to stay local as alumni if they feel engaged in and connected to a vibrant surrounding community, providing mutual benefit for both parties. Hearn, Thomas, and Cobb, for instance, note that community outreach programs at universities foster positive relationships and can lead to increased University donations, student enrollment particularly among those in graduate programs or specialized fields, and economic development.³

As a potential venue for expanded cooperation, the University of Illinois at Springfield houses the Center for State and Policy Leadership. Through this umbrella organization, many students take part in programs such as the Illinois Legislative Staff Intern Program or Graduate Public Service Internships. However, the majority of these intern programs are currently oriented toward state government both in mission and intern placement. Based on the broad UIS public affairs mission, its university brand of "Leadership Lived," and the intertwined nature of state and local intergovernmental relations, however, the CEC recognizes that the benefits of its resources could be utilized to strengthen the local community.

Faculty

In any research endeavor undertaken at an institution of higher education, faculty support is likely to play a critical role. The CEC recognizes a need for faculty champions of local government projects and problems, and also notes that faculty time constraints play a role in the research capacity of these institutions. The higher education literature expresses support for faculty outreach endeavors in universities' surrounding communities. Hearn, Thomas, and Cobb note that benefits to faculty include career development, input on best practices from practitioners, and greater recognition and experience.

³ Hearn, Mark W., James Thomas, and Richard Cobb (2012). University Outreach Programs: Service to the Surrounding Communities while Developing Faculty. *Research in Higher Education Journal* 16(1).

Students

For student involvement in internship experiences and local government projects, both compensation and needed skills and experience are typical concerns. From the students' perspective, arrangements related to course credit for research projects may make these programs attractive. Conversely, students undertaking for-credit coursework in an internship setting helps generate tuition revenues for universities that may encourage them to take part in the program.

The University of Tulsa report also describes benefits to students of practical experience in this way:

According to a recent report, college graduates with more than a year of experience will have 15 times more job opportunities than those who have no experience. [Student benefits include:]

- *Test and apply academic theory in a work setting*
- *Develop skills and expand knowledge in a specific field*
- *Clarify career goals*
- *Opportunity to work and learn from professionals*
- *Smooth transition from the classroom to the world of work*
- *Sense of accomplishment by contributing to an organization*

Technological and Other Resources

In addition to the human capital at institutions of higher education, technology and other research resources are available at universities and colleges that may not be accessible to the broader public. Collaborative relationships and research projects help local governments gain access to information available through university tools such as publications, grant-writing and other databases, and statistical software packages available to students and faculty.

Project Possibilities

A range of university outreach project options could benefit local governments. The most obvious of these is an expansion of formal internship programs like those describe above to the local government level. This option requires the most investment from all three involved entities (local governments, universities/faculty, and students), but may also result in the most on-going benefit.

Less formal options also exist. A class research project can be conducted on behalf of a local government in the confines of a single-semester course of study. In such a scenario, a faculty member would facilitate an applied approach to the materials being learned in class, meeting the research needs of an outside local government entity while fostering hands-on learning within the framework of a course.



Individual research opportunities also exist. Faculty members whose research interests align with public entity needs may be inclined to take on such a project as an individual research goal. Individual students may also benefit from research opportunities. Particularly at the graduate level, closure requirements and senior projects may necessitate that students conduct research applicable to their field of study or practice. With greater coordination, these projects could be utilized as an opportunity to meet the needs of local units of government, rather than being selected by students solely based on theory and with limited practical application.

Some projects in each of these areas already occur in cooperation with local institutions of higher education. However, few mechanisms exist to encourage on-going adoption of such projects or to cultivate continued expansion of opportunities of mutual benefit.

Associated Concerns

Although the needs and benefits related to increased cooperation with local institutions of higher education are evident, such programming also raises some concerns. Time and resource commitment is the primary concern, as described above. Local governments may find that students, who would conceivably have little experience, face a steep learning curve with regards to the work they are being asked to perform. In short, personnel management takes time, especially when the personnel involved are young or inexperienced students.

Quality control may also be an issue for local governments, especially in the event that few university or faculty resources are ultimately available for project or intern oversight. Targeting activities specifically to the needs of local governments, rather than student or faculty research interests, as well as ensuring that the end product of cooperative efforts is a usable one, will require some degree of oversight, possibly a pre-existing contractual arrangement, and additional planning.

Finally, liability represents an area of concern. Particularly for intern programs, lack of oversight could lead to personnel challenges or other issues that are natural risks associated with placing students in the workplace. These difficulties should be taken into consideration.

Best Practices

Neighborhood Association Cooperation with Local Students

The Enos Park Neighborhood Improvement Association (EPNIA), an organization dedicated to the development and beautification of the Enos Park District north of Downtown Springfield, currently utilizes student volunteers for a number of projects. The most substantial relationship this organization has is with Robert Morris University. EPNIA has worked with individual student volunteers and whole classes to create their accounting database, produce podcasts for their historic homes walking tour, develop a comprehensive database of all properties owned by EPNIA, and develop a crisis management plan along with evacuation routes. EPNIA has also utilized students from



UIS as volunteers to do such projects as vacant lot clean up and posting signs for various Enos Park Development properties.⁴

Local Youth Employment Initiatives

A local non-profit organization, The Springfield Project, sponsors a Summer Youth Initiative (SYI) which places approximately 30-80 students of late high school and early college age in partner agencies including private, non-profit, and public entities.⁵ In this program, students earn hourly wages over the course of the summer for working 4 hours a day and 4 days a week in on of these employment contexts. The Springfield Project serves as the hiring agent and project “hub.”

As The Springfield Project's website notes, “The SYI assists participants in acquiring work experience and leadership development through high value, supervised job placements. In return, participants learn skills they can carry with them as they move into higher education or directly into the workforce.”⁶ The Project's goals are to tap local talent and provide young workers with exposure to local business and public agencies. The SYI is also working to help student build long-term relationships with local universities and the employers they work with during their internship experiences, in order to establish a lasting foundation for their employment success in the community.

Peer County Examples of University- Community Cooperation⁷

Another best practice example from nearby McLean County is the Action Research Center (ARC) located at Illinois Wesleyan University. ARC is dedicated to providing students with a set of experiences and skills necessary for applied research in the community; it also functions as a clearinghouse to facilitate community partnerships with students and faculty. Current projects include the utilization of a university class on grant writing, which has met success including a \$500 grant from a local organization to help fund a park in the area, as well as the creation of resources such as tool library in West Bloomington where residents can check out specific tools needed for home improvements.⁸

The concept of the Action Research Center began to be championed by a select number of university faculty at IWU in 1998. As the concept of ARC blossomed into a full center over the next five years, several faculty members taught additional classes above their required course load to facilitate pilot student projects and internships, suggesting the importance of committed faculty champions.

After some successful student projects in the early 2000s, the ARC Board of Trustees worked with State Farm Insurance as a private sector partner. State Farm currently

⁴ The Enos Park Neighborhood Improvement Association (2012, July). Project Updates from Robert Morris students. *The Enos Park Banner*.

⁵ Personal communication from Timothy Rowles, Director, The Springfield Project (March 27, 2013).

⁶ Available at: http://thespringfieldproject.org/Youth_Employment_Initiative.html.

⁷ Where not otherwise cited, communication related to the Action Research Center was provided via personal communication from Dr. James Simeone, Chair of Political Science Department, Illinois Wesleyan University (March 22, 2013).

⁸ Fields, Kristin (2012). Grant Writing Course Gives Back to the Community Available at <http://www.iwu.edu/news/2012/04-ARC-grant-writing.html>; Wells, Rachel. (2012). IWU student helping start a tool library in Bloomington *The Pantagraph*.



provides funding for ten summer internships in which students work three days a week at State Farm and two days a week with an ARC community partner. Corporate involvement has been important to ARC's lasting success. There is also a "city hall" internship program, through which interested students can gain internship experience in municipal government.

ARC considers itself a "hub" for students and business and non-profit partners in the Bloomington-Normal area. The Center recently was able to formally hire a director, Deborah Halperin, who had worked off grant funding in prior years to serve as a student coordinator and liaison. ARC also currently has pending a \$6.6 million grant request with the Attorney General for an affordable housing project for West Bloomington. Although ARC's focus tends to be oriented toward non-profit and social entrepreneurship experiences and opportunities for students, it provides a best practice model for consideration adaptable to public sector involvement as well.

Nationwide Higher Education-Community Collaboration

Numerous examples exist throughout the nation in which institutions of higher education are thoroughly integrated into the private and public sector activities in their region. Perhaps the ideal example of this cooperation is the Research Triangle region surrounding North Carolina State University, Duke University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in the Durham-Raleigh area. These institutions have vast impact on the region in terms of economic development, talent recruitment, and research integration into the business community. Collaborative activity and engaged research relationships are a stated goal of the universities, governments, and businesses in the region: "Fueling prosperity in the Research Triangle Region is cross-pollination between business leaders, educational institutions and governmental organizations at all levels. Their common ground: maintaining the region's extraordinary culture of innovation, job creation and business growth."⁹ Although the scope of the universities in the Sangamon County region is more limited, core industries in the region such as healthcare and public administration could benefit greatly from a more integrated approach between research institutions and local actors.

Alternatives

1. Maintain the Status Quo
2. Increase higher education outreach informally
3. Develop a project clearinghouse/community resources toolkit
4. Establish a community-wide workgroup or local government "academy" to facilitate project coordination
5. Expand formal internship programs to further institutionalize coordination

Alternative 1—maintain the status quo—as in most CEC recommendations, would produce functional, but not optimal outcomes. Local higher education resources are being used locally on a limited basis, and the CEC argues that failing to expand these efforts leads to squandered opportunities.

⁹ Research Triangle Region, "Cross-Pollination." Retrieved April 12, 2013, from <http://www.researchtriangle.org/assets/cross-pollination>.



Alternative 2—increase cooperation informally—would require local entities and institutions of higher education to pursue cooperative activity independently and organically. Because of the obstacles described above, the CEC finds this alternative unlikely to be a feasible option.

Alternative 3—develop a project clearinghouse—would begin to cultivate benefits of cooperative activity by providing a forum for collaboration, while minimizing overhead costs for this coordination. Since a variety of project types, durations, and stakeholders exist, one of the chief issues for local entities may simply be the problem of knowing what needs exist and what resources are available to meet them. A clearinghouse would allow all interested parties from local governments and businesses to post project and research needs. Faculty and students from all institutions of higher education in the region could then access this database and contact local entities for project initiatives. Such a clearinghouse or database would ultimately allow local governments to have an additional resource at their disposal for meeting needs. This alternative would also provide for increased opportunity and involvement with only limited additional resource investment. A clearinghouse could be established with only time and “gifts in kind” as costs to local governments and universities, rather than requiring upfront financial investment. Appendix A provides a sampling of questions that would need to be addressed to facilitate project awareness and assignment in a way that mutually benefits local governments and institutions of higher education.

Alternative 4—develop a community-wide workgroup or local “academy” to facilitate cooperative projects—would provide a greater institutional mechanism for collaborative efforts to be sustainable. Such a group could consist of a representative from each institution of higher education in the region working cooperatively with a subgroup of the Sangamon County mayors’ leadership council that the CEC has worked to establish. A neutral, multi-jurisdictional body such as the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) could play a convening role for this group. The local academy could meet on a quarterly basis to discuss available projects and the most appropriate avenue through which to pursue research coordination.

Having such a group would strengthen the likelihood that the goals described in alternative three could be accomplished by creating an institutional structure that convenes all groups involved. As previously discussed, lack of resources and cultural “inertia” from all parties may present difficulties in cultivating change without some sort of institutional framework to encourage collaborative activity. For example, the clearinghouse described in alternative three, without formal institutional support or a project convener, may end up being underutilized or used only on a haphazard basis. Alternative four provides a forum for sustainable cooperation that minimizes additional resource investment on top of the currently-existing structures, yet has both the flexibility to funnel various projects toward the most appropriate actors and the institutional strength to generate a culture of on-going university engagement in local affairs.

Alternative 5—expand formal internship programs—would achieve similar objectives to those described in alternatives three and four, but through an even more concrete institutional framework. Although this would be beneficial toward ensuring that identified opportunities are utilized, that there is appropriate oversight, and that there is a continual base of students who are aware of the existence of such programs, it would also require investment of substantial additional resource on the part of both local governments and institutions of higher education. Due to perceived funding limitations, a more limited



initiative may be beneficial for piloting this type of cooperation. Moreover, expanding internship programs to meet existing needs does not address the fact that there are a variety of project types and durations, not all of which can be accomplished most easily or usefully through an internship placement.

Recommendation

In light of this research, the CEC recommends that local governments and institutions of higher education in the region identify opportunities of mutual benefit such that the teaching and learning that occurs has a practical application for the agencies that serve Sangamon County citizens, and establish a work group to coordinate and facilitate action that takes advantage of these opportunities.

Benefits exist for all parties in relation to this recommendation, many of which have been discussed above. In short, benefits of implementation may include:

- Increased access to resources and research capabilities for local governments.
- Beneficial professional experiences for students.
- Greater ties between universities and their community.
- Stronger social fabric, leading to more vibrant community life.
- A sustainable institutional structure for cooperative activities.
- Opportunity to create a culture in which institutions of higher education are more thoroughly integrated into the fabric of local community life.

Drawbacks for this recommendation are similarly evident. Collaborative programs require an investment of resources and commitment on the part of both parties to the program. The recommendation may require a reversal in current institutional culture. Due to these drawbacks, the CEC has attempted to formulate a recommendation that achieves a balance between limited resource obligation and high potential yield for all parties involved.

Steps toward Implementation

In order to implement this recommendation, the CEC recommends that the following course of action would be beneficial:

- Identify relevant institutions of higher education, probable units of local government for involvement, and other student or business partners.
- Reach out to these institutions for one or more representatives to serve on the local academy coordinating body.
- Identify a body to serve as an impartial convener for these groups, such as the SSCRPC.
- Convene these representatives quarterly to identify, assign, and facilitate projects of mutual benefit for universities and local governments.
- Develop, as possible, the online projected clearinghouse or interface described in alternative three to provide assistance to this group, potentially using university resources or IT students to assist with technical issues and web development.
- Educate local governments and students as to cooperative opportunities that exist for project cooperation and collaboration.



The Citizens' Efficiency Commission offers its support for these implementation efforts. If the CEC can provide any further assistance in facilitating efforts toward cooperation, it would be pleased to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Karen Hasara, Chair
on behalf of the
Citizens' Efficiency Commission
for Sangamon County



Appendix A: **Local Higher Education Cooperative Opportunities** Program Enrollment Template Questionnaires

Internship Opportunities

- 1) Name of company/agency
- 2) Brief abstract of the project and overview of the intern's duties/activities
- 3) Time commitment and constraints
 - a. Which months
 - b. How long
 - c. Which days (# per week)
 - d. Hours per day
- 4) Opportunity for funding or financial support for intern
- 5) Goals
 - a. What intern can expect to learn
 - b. What agency expects to receive
- 6) Description of Mutual Benefits resulting from intern project
- 7) Point of contact for applicants/ recommenders

Class Projects

- 1) Name of company/agency
- 2) Brief abstract/overview of project needs
- 3) Expected timeframe for project completion
- 4) Goals
 - a. What students can expect to learn
 - b. What agency expects to receive
- 5) Description of Mutual Benefits resulting from class project
- 6) Point of contact for professor desiring to undertake project

Individual Student/Faculty Research Projects

- 1) Name of company/agency
- 2) Brief abstract/overview of research needs
- 3) Expected timeframe for project completion
- 4) Goals
 - a. What students can expect to learn
 - b. What agency expects to receive
- 5) Description of Mutual Benefits resulting from research
- 6) Point of contact for student or faculty desiring to undertake project