

Building Consistent and Reciprocal Partnerships in Holyoke

Holyoke Planning Network
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the formation and progress of the Holyoke Planning Network, a coalition of community-based organizations, activists, professionals, government officials and representatives from six local institutions of higher education who are working to build respectful and sustainable partnerships that promote social, political and economic equality in the city of Holyoke.

We begin by describing how Hampshire College's Community Partnerships for Social Change Program began to transform its fragmented efforts to address problems and promote social justice in Holyoke into a more encompassing coalition of colleges and community-based organizations. We describe how the collaborative planning of a conference entitled "New Visions for Historic Cities: Bridging Divides, Building Futures" in June 2002 became the impetus for the formation of the more enduring Holyoke Planning Network and a wider community/college dialogue. Engaging the region's Five College community-based learning committee, this dialogue is designed to identify critical issues of sustainability that might be addressed through a partnership with Hampshire, Amherst, Smith and Mount Holyoke colleges and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. It is also an effort to construct an infrastructure to enable Holyoke residents and agencies to better access the resources of the colleges and influence the research agendas and teaching at these institutions to better meet the city's needs.

In addition to discussing our slow deliberate progress toward these goals, and the relationship building that necessarily under girds the process, we will devote considerable attention to discussing the many challenges that we face. Prominent among these is the fact that only one of the six institutions of higher education involved (Holyoke Community College) is actually located *in* the city of Holyoke. The Five-college consortium, in collaboration with Holyoke Community College, has the potential to employ substantial resources yet at the same time, the multi-institutional approach also complicates the process. Additionally, the steering committee has been concerned with widening community participation, while also enabling its higher education participants to meet regularly in the City of Holyoke with community partners and to reflect especially upon matters of reciprocity, commitment, and sustainability. At this early stage, the process has focused deliberately upon strategies for assisting the voices of community organizations and individuals to be heard on our campuses, rather than upon a particular set of issues and community challenges. Our paper highlights the difficulties presented by the physical distancing of five of the six colleges, but also the unique opportunity this presents for developing a new and more responsive model of 'education for sustainable development' that is based on a regional and metropolitan, rather than, local focus. By the Five Colleges promoting and practicing regional resource sharing through its sustained partnership with Holyoke, it provides an opportunity for the regions' local governments and the business groups to build upon our regional framework to pursue regional equality and economic growth. Academic research has determined that regions that cooperate and share resources are more successful in achieving metropolitan economic growth than those regions where central cities have to fend for themselves.