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Leading Case Studies
TOGETHER of Successful
Gateway City
Initiatives

DEVELOPING A FRESH GENERATION OF CIVIC LEADERS IN WORCESTER

Collaborative leadership has been a central theme in this series examining successful Gateway City initiatives. The extent to which community leaders work together to solve complex problems was first identified by researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston as the key distinction between comeback cities and those still struggling to transition to the new economy.[1] The bank found this finding so compelling that it took the extraordinary step of designing the Working Cities Challenge to help today's leaders coalesce around shared priorities.

But how can cities proactively groom the next generation of civic leaders to work together effectively? A large body of research tells us that collaborative leadership thrives in cities where citizens trust their government, are engaged in the life of the community, and are tolerant of cultural differences. For the last case study in this series, we look at how Gateway Cities cultivate these qualities in their changing citizenry through the prism of Worcester.
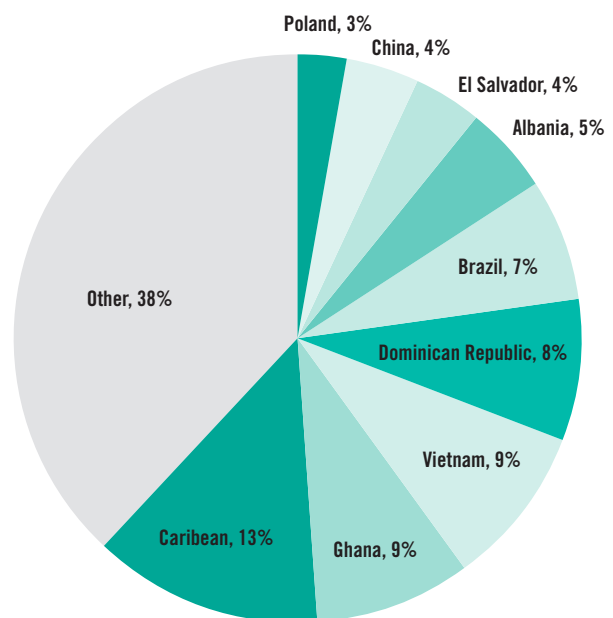
THE SETTING
All paths lead to Worcester

Worcester is an iconic all-American community that welcomes immigrants from every corner of the globe. The city's 40,000 plus immigrants compose nearly one-quarter of its residents; add in over 26,000 first generation youth whose parents were born oversees, and Worcester's multi-cultural immigrant community swells to well more than one-third of the city's population.

Unlike many of its peers, Worcester has absorbed these immigrants while maintaining a strong middle class and public

schools with a relatively high degree of economic integration. Still, Worcester is not immune to the challenges that other Gateway Cities face incorporating new residents. Immigrants arriving in Worcester today do not find good-paying factory jobs—the employment pathway that provided past generations a sure shot at the American Dream. Today's immigrants are generally confined to low-wage work, which means they have more difficulty supporting their families.

Worcester's Foreign-Born Population by Place of Birth

Source: US Census Bureau, ACS 2011-2013

"Educating a citizen goes far beyond the experiences students receive in the classroom."

Many immigrants are also escaping violent conflict in their homelands. Worcester struggles to soothe the traumas these newcomers have experienced while at the same time helping them adjust to the challenges of a new life in America. The fate of this struggle has serious repercussions: In the near future, Worcester will need the talent of this new generation to replace aging workers. The city is equally dependent on immigrant youth to engage in the community and assume leadership roles.

THE CHALLENGE
Preparing a diverse generation to engage

Worcester faces two critical tests in its quest to develop the next generation of citizens. The first is educating youth that face cumulative disadvantages. In an oft-quoted study describing the link between education and civic engagement, the political scientist Philip Converse summarized extensive research on the topic noting that "education is everywhere the universal solvent...The educated citizen is attentive, knowledgeable, and participatory and the uneducated citizen is not."[2]

Educating a citizen goes far beyond the experiences students receive in the classroom. From adolescence to young adulthood, the opportunities youth have to fill leadership roles in organized sports, community organizations, religious institutions, and summer and part-time jobs contribute to their development as engaged citizens and civic leaders. Research shows that, on the whole, low-income urban youth today have far fewer of these opportunities. Gateway Cities must figure out the arithmetic of providing the next generation with more of these formative experiences.[3]

The second challenge is more complex. Sociologist Robert Putnam has pointed out that while educational attainment is rising throughout the country, civic participation is on the decline, particularly at the local level. In part, he attributes lower engagement to increasing diversity. Compelling data show that, all things being equal, residents in diverse communities like Worcester have lower levels of trust and civic participation. Social psychologists attribute this finding to the social distance between people who lack shared life experiences and common identities, but Putnam's data reveal lower levels of trust and engagement even among those with the same racial and ethnic backgrounds.[4]

This is what makes the leadership challenge for Worcester so acute. It's not just a matter of affording low-income youth with more opportunities. Civic engagement among all of the city's residents is likely to be suppressed unless concerted effort is made to bring them together. To be sure, this problem will almost certainly resolve over the long term, as the community acclimates to its growing diversity. But cities like Worcester can't afford to wait. In today's rapidly changing and globally competitive world, the most successful inclusive urban communities will be those that find effective strategies for accelerating the acculturation process.

Organizations throughout Worcester and the city government are working together passionately to rise to these challenges. To learn more about these efforts, we visited the Latino Education Institute and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

STARTING YOUNG
The Latino Education Institute

Latino youth represent more than 40 percent of all students enrolled in the Worcester Public Schools. Fifteen years ago, recognizing that Latino students were experiencing unique educational challenges, a cross-sector working group was convened to explore potential solutions. Among several recommendations, the group called for the formation of a university-based institute to support the school district's efforts to find innovative models to help Latino youth thrive.

Worcester State University took the lead launching the Latino Education Institute (LEI) in 2000. The institute was chartered to conduct research to better understand the needs of the city's Latino youth and families; to provide programs that help students excel in the Worcester Public Schools and pursue post-secondary education; and to prepare parents to serve as educational stewards for their children in a new community and different culture.

The institute has grown to approximately 70 staff members who provide direct services in Worcester schools and on college campuses. While the majority of students served by LEI are Latino, about one-third come from other ethnic backgrounds.

Latina Achievers in Search of Success (LASOS) is one example of the institute's efforts to reach youth and prepare them to be better educated, more involved citizens. Created in 2001, with funding from the Women's Initiative of the United Way of Central Massachusetts, LASOS serves Latina girls ages 11 to 13 and their mothers. The two-generation model is a common thread, explains Mary Jo Marión, the institute's executive direc-

LEI students developing their voices for leadership

tor: "We look at the family as our unit. We don't serve students, we serve the family. Everything starts with the family. Making sure that we know them, that we touch them, and that they're part of what we do."

LASOS includes a summer camp, a 24-week after-school curriculum, and eight family academies held on Saturdays. Girls are also assigned bilingual mentors. An evaluation conducted by a professor at Holy Cross found that students report significantly higher positive-identity, self-esteem, and personal agency after completing LASOS.[5]

Gains in these civic leadership qualities can be at least partially tied to the service-learning component embedded in LASOS and all of LEI's middle school programs. LEI engages students in youth-led service-learning projects. The students identify both a community problem and its solutions. with a curriculum that includes three components:

- **Direct service** Youth participate in activities that directly respond to the problem, building their sense of agency;

- **Public education** Youth provide outreach to the larger community to explain the problem, developing communication skills; and

- **Advocacy** Youth meet with local officials and elected leaders

to advocate for policy change, increasing their awareness of the system and appreciation that their voices will be heard.

As an example, LEI's assistant director Hilda Ramirez tells the story of a middle school group that identified litter as a concern in their neighborhood. To respond directly, the youth encouraged local businesses to take an "adopt a trash can" approach to the problem. Thinking they could affect more change by starting early, for their public education campaign they developed a PSA geared to elementary school students. And for the advocacy component, they met with a city counselor to discuss the problem. Through projects like these, LEI educators teach Worcester youth that they can bring about change by participating, emphasizing that "Often times the best things are those that people work hard to construct together," says Ramirez.

LEI's curriculum aligns with a large body of research on the effects of high-quality service learning, which shows that youth-led experiential learning increases the communication, research, critical thinking, and problem solving skills residents need to positively engage in civic life.[6]

As a university-based institute, LEI's work is informed by rigorous research. "We spend an immense amount of time thinking about the principles of youth development" says LEI executive director Mary Jo Marión. However, because youth

"These experiences are intended to give emerging leaders a better understanding of a community that is undergoing dramatic change and greater knowledge of the city's resources to respond.

development research is generally lacking in terms of documenting how these practices transfer across cultures, LEI often must adjust these models to serve their population.

For example, LASOS is attuned to how basic adolescent development processes vary in Latina girls. LEI's leadership model explicitly focuses on families and group work in part because this is how Latino youth are accustomed to thinking. Marión explains that "Latinos as a whole are more community driven. It's less of an individualistic culture, which is why family matters and so you see a lot of group leadership models. Our students really enjoy working with one another in groups to solve a problem."

While research shows that civic participation for immigrant youth is often rooted in their status as immigrants or concerns about conditions in their home countries, LEI also works to help students develop their voices and self-identify within the context of the larger Worcester community.[7] Ramirez explains: "We try to give the context of 'who you are' and from there we develop 'who you are within this community.' They do a community mapping activity, where they learn about the history of Worcester, how it was shaped as an immigrant community, the city's many innovations, and how Worcester has changed."

Community mapping is a common technique to help youth represent themselves and their understanding of the world around them. Scouring their neighborhoods with cameras, youth capture their concerns as well as things that are important to them and that convey their values. The images help the youth transcend language and other communication barriers. Placing the photos collected on maps provides a layered view of the community and offers an inclusive, participatory, and accessible starting point for a conversation about civic engagement.[8]

Another standard component of LEI's model is hiring homegrown college students to assist the licensed teachers delivering afterschool programs. Ramirez says they carefully train these young adults to know that "the relationship they build with the youth is what really transforms the student." This model works both ways. Offering college students these mentoring opportunities further enhances their leadership capacities and civic identities during a crucial period in their own formation, as we learned during our visit with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

CAPTURING YOUNG ADULTS
The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce

Many chambers offer leadership academies. Typically, these yearlong experiences enroll a mix of one to two dozen emerging leaders from a community's public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Participants gather to visit different organizations, hear from leaders to learn more about local problems and priorities, and develop their individual networks. In the past, the Worcester chamber ran this kind of leadership academy for the community, but some years ago the program lapsed.

When former lieutenant governor Tim Murray took over as president and CEO of the Worcester Regional Chamber or Commerce in 2013, one of his priorities was to reestablish the program. Murray spent years serving the city in elected office, he recognized the value of building ties between Worcester's public and private sector leaders.

Murray's efforts have led to the creation of Leadership Worcester, an intensive program delivered in partnership with the Greater Worcester Community Foundation over nine monthly full-day sessions. In addition to these gatherings, participants take part in an opening overnight retreat and a concluding celebration. Companies sponsor the employees they nominate for the program. Scholarship aid is available for government and nonprofit organizations that are unable to cover program costs.

Murray says the program provides experiential learning: "It's hands on, getting people out, questions, answers, visiting, seeing, touching, and exposing them to the community in lots of different ways. It builds excitement and awareness."

By design, these experiences are intended to give emerging leaders a better understanding of a community that is undergoing dramatic change and greater knowledge of the city's resources to respond. The program also helps emerging leaders from different backgrounds coalesce. Participants come away with a stronger cross-sector network. They also gain the knowledge required to test old assumptions and put forward viable solutions to today's challenges.

Murray underscores the need: "We're a growing, diverse community. We want to make sure that people in leadership positions now and in the future reflect that diversity." Recognizing that today's pipeline of emerging leaders is not fully reflective

of the larger Worcester community, the chamber is also working to prepare the next generation through the Worcester Youth Leadership Institute.

The Worcester Youth Leadership Institute is a partnership between the chamber, United Families for Change, the Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board, the United Way of Central Massachusetts, and the City of Worcester. Over the summer, selected students entering their senior year of high school participate in the seven week program.

The institute is attached to the city's youth summer jobs program, which provides employment opportunities for teens from low-families income. Each year 30 youth in the summer jobs program are selected to participate. The students learn about the city through meetings with local leaders and visits to businesses and institutions in the community.

"It's about reaching out at a young age, where young people are saying, 'What am I going to do, where do I fit into this community?'" says Murray, adding that at each of these events they try to underscore that "there's an expectation from the broader community that you are going to lead one day."

Both of these leadership models conform with the literature on civic engagement and leadership development in young adulthood. Political scientists have long pointed out that the experiences youth have as they come of age heavily influence their future patterns of civic engagement. With the transition to adulthood taking longer, as young adults today pursue more education and delay marriage, they tend to hold off on getting involved in their community. With young adults today having fewer leadership experiences at this formative stage, cities like Worcester are at risk of not having talent on the bench to assume responsibilities for community stewardship in the future.[9]

For Murray, these two leadership initiatives are grounded in an understanding that soon Worcester will need a fresh generation of leaders who can work together collaboratively to position the city to succeed. But the chamber is also responding to the concerns of its members. The number one issue they raise concerns preparation of the future workforce; at the end of the day, the skills emerging leaders gain through these programs make them more productive employees. Murray also acknowledges a little bit of benign self-interest on the part of the chamber: "Our immigrants often come from cultures and backgrounds that aren't as familiar with what chambers do. And there's a natural connection because many of the new immigrants are more entrepreneurial, not afraid to start their own businesses. I think there's a real opportunity by engaging not only young people but reaching out to educate a broader community about how chambers act as an advocate for business."

LEADING TOGETHER IN GATEWAY CITIES
Lessons from Worcester

Gateway Cities perform a critical function absorbing newcomers and preparing them to contribute to the economy. Their efforts produce very real benefits for our state and nation in the long run, and very real costs for these communities in the near term. The state and federal government provide at least partial compensation for the direct cost of delivering necessary services, but there are also large indirect costs, most notably the social stresses Gateway Cities face as they work to incorporate newcomers into civic life. Worcester's efforts to develop a next generation of civic leaders crystalizes what's possible when Gateway Cities exercise collaborative leadership to tackle complex social and economic challenges.

Fortunately, the currents of policy change are flowing in a favorable direction for Gateway City efforts to build a fresh generation of leaders. For instance, all of the state's Gateway Cities are home to public colleges and universities, and these campuses are increasingly civically engaged. University partnerships like those led by the Latino Education Institute play an important role in Gateway City leadership development initiatives. In addition, an increasingly large number of Gateway City students are going on to post-secondary education at public colleges and universities. What these youth learn on campus exposes them to new points of view and differing perspectives.

College is also a time when internships and volunteer experiences give young adults exposure to community institutions. While low-income students attending public universities (and private colleges with low endowments) tend to receive far fewer of these formative opportunities, Massachusetts is working to remedy this problem.[10] Last year, the Commonwealth became the first state in the nation to adopt a policy making civic learning an "expected outcome" for undergraduates at public colleges and universities. To ensure follow-through, the policy called upon the campuses to develop reliable measures of civic learning.

Changes that should benefit Gateway City efforts to prepare the next generation for civic life are also brewing in our K-12 education system. School leaders often lament that the pressure to increase test scores has led to a narrowing of the curriculum and less attention to civic education. (In a survey administered to Massachusetts school superintendents last spring, 60 percent reported that the level of civic learning in their districts was insufficient.)[11] A working group convened by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education recently issued several recommendations for improving civic learning in the Commonwealth's public schools. Among these recommendations, the group called upon the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Board of Higher Education to revise their common definition of college and career readiness to explicitly include readiness for civic life.

While the renewed attention to civic learning is promising for Gateway Cities, there are legitimate questions about whether these communities have the resources to respond. The state has done excellent work building model curricula for service learning and afterschool programs, but delivering this instruction takes time and resources. Gateway City school districts have been increasingly eager to cultivate this learning through an expanded school day and community partnerships, but across the board, the core resources that enable cities to operate these programs are on the decline—the Extended Learning Time grant, the Gateway City English Language Learners Academies grant, the Afterschool and Out-of-School grant, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, and the Connecting Activities grant have all faced significant cuts in recent years.

This drop in resources may change as service- and civic-learning gain more traction and private sector partners become more engaged. In many Gateway Cities, business groups are increasingly involved in advocating for improvement in public education. These groups have been particularly vocal about placing greater emphasis on the development of "soft skills" such as timeless, team work, and work-appropriate behavior. The changing economy is demanding workers who are prepared to communicate, resolve conflicts, and solve problems in ways that keep pace with rising diversity and rapid workplace change. On this note, we conclude with a quote drawn from the preface of a report by the state boards' working group on civic learning: "There ought to be a happy convergence between the skills most needed in the global knowledge economy and those most needed to keep our democracy safe and vibrant."

ENDNOTES

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This paper is one in a series of case studies examining innovative Gateway City initiatives. Each profile explores the unique dynamics of change in small to midsize urban communities, where resources are limited and social challenges are complex. These papers capture the basic mechanics of the initiative. Then they attempt to distill universal lessons for leaders by looking at how communities come together to make their change effort a success.