

# Rutgers University – Newark Report to the Rutgers University Senate March 22, 2024

Nancy Cantor  
Chancellor  
Rutgers University - Newark

## *What has it Meant for Rutgers-Newark to be a Trusted Anchor Institution in and of the City of Newark over the Past Decade?*

As many of you know, in 2014 Rutgers-Newark engaged in a very expansive strategic planning exercise, with town halls, charrettes, and working groups organized around the foundational question of “What does the public need from us?” and how can we, given our story and identity step up? There were many recommendations in the resulting strategic plan, and one of the central themes was how we, as a highly diverse, urban, research university, could best become a fully trusted anchor institution in and of our city of Newark. Today, ten years later, there has been so much impactful work by faculty, students, and staff in collaboration with community partners and I want to take this opportunity to briefly describe our evolution as a trusted anchor institution, built, critically on the substantial foundational commitment to social justice developed over decades before. The 2014 plan, titled [Where Opportunity Meets Excellence](#), identified five broad areas of anchor work that fit our faculty’s and staff’s expertise, our students’ diverse lived experiences and interests, and importantly, would resonate in our city. The five areas persist today as: building educational pathways; equitable economic growth; STEM in the public interest; safe and just communities; arts and culture for social change. Importantly, in each of these arenas of anchor work, we have seen not only a plethora of individual projects and courses and partnerships take root, but we have also seen both centers and spaces and programs in the university and multi-sector anchor collaboratives with community partners form that have the promise of real sustainability, and I will take a few minutes here just to point to a few of these sustainable efforts in each anchor focus area.

*Educational pathways:* In 2014, we formed the [Newark City of Learning Collaborative](#) (NCLC)—organized out of our [Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies](#) and including partners from all of the universities and colleges in the Newark region plus the Newark Public Schools and several charter and parochial schools, as well as several educational non-profits in Newark, aimed at increasing the college-going rate of Newark residents, looking to reach 25% by 2025 with post-secondary degrees. Not only has NCLC helped contribute to the spread of knowledge about college opportunities amongst the residents of Newark, and the percentage of residents with post-secondary degrees has indeed increased, but most importantly it has spurred or been part of city-wide educational movements that have had broad policy implications – for example, NCLC does college-knowledge workshops throughout the city including FAFSA workshops in the Newark Public Libraries, and helped encourage the Newark Public Schools to require FAFSA completion for all graduating students, and testified in support of statewide legislation that has recently passed into law. Moreover, as with all of our anchor work, as important as the city-wide

collaborative is in pushing for progress, we also can point to our own departments and centers that have taken up the cause of smoothing educational pathways, including the [Center for PreCollege Programs](#) that runs dual enrollment programs with city high schoolers taking our college courses and summer camps like [Generation Code](#) with our partners at Apple; the Cornwall Center's Freedom Schools programs in the summer and their Freshman on Track Programs with several high schools in Newark; and the [Department of Urban Education's](#) collaboration with City Hall on the Mayor's Leadership Academy, among many other relevant programs to connect Newarkers to Rutgers-Newark. And, of course, we have our RUN to the TOP financial aid program, begun in 2016, that has greatly enhanced the affordability of a college education for Newark residents, as well as the signature [Honors Living-Learning Community](#), proposed in the 2014 strategic plan to be a beacon of "local citizenship in a global world," with a special commitment to work to attract Newark residents to enroll, resulting in our partners at Prudential Financial contributing ten million dollars for student scholarships.

*Equitable Economic Growth:* Just as the anchor work on educational pathways promotes social mobility, so too do the considerable anchor institution commitments to equitable economic growth change the landscape of opportunity in Newark. For example, in 2017, with the encouragement of Mayor Baraka, we formed the [Newark Anchor Collaborative](#) (NAC), including now some 18 or more large anchor institutions in the city, from the universities to hospitals to arts and cultural organizations to major corporations, all committed to a campaign to increase the number of Newark residents that we hire and the percentage of our procurement budgets spent with local diverse Newark businesses. The [Newark 2020](#) campaign reached and surpassed its hiring goal – 2,020 Newark residents hired by 2020 – and is still marching on, with new and more nuanced programs to mentor and capacity build with local suppliers and to retain Newark residents being hired by anchor institutions and to enhance the housing affordability of local residents in Newark. RBS faculty leader Kevin Lyons' Local Supply Chain Resiliency Center has provided the backbone of research on the supply chain in Newark throughout, to enhance the buy local goals of NAC, and the considerable research of David Troutt and his research fellows at the [Center for Law, Inequality and Metropolitan Equity](#) (CLiME) has provided invaluable data and policy suggestions for the Mayor's [Equitable Growth Advisory Council](#) working to enhance housing affordability for Newark residents. Moreover, the potential impact of both the supply chain and housing research is magnified by the financial support from the State Legislature for their centers. And through partnership with the Newark Alliance, the city-wide economic development group, the anchor research of our faculty increasingly is finding its way into the halls of policy-makers, at the city and state level, and our state-wide business partners, like the global fintech firm [Fiserv](#) are committing in their Back to Business grants program to support the capacity building of local Newark entrepreneurs, along with the work of our business school faculty at [CUEED](#) and [RAISED](#). In other words, equitable economic growth takes all hands-on deck and in so doing we also provide an extraordinary educational landscape for our next generation innovators to grow, both within Newark and at Rutgers-Newark.

*Safe and Just Cities:* Central to the health and well-being of both our city and our university is the commitment to build a safe and just landscape for all of us, and here the anchor partnerships at the core of our [Newark Public Safety Collaborative](#) (NPSC) couldn't be more vital. NPSC is built on the backbone of a research model pioneered by professors Joel Caplan and Les Kennedy, called risk terrain modeling, in which the focus is on the characteristics of the places where crime occurs, rather than the people committing the crime, be that vacant lots, dark bus stops, idling cars, or isolated ATM locations, and so on. Building on this technique, they organized NPSC, now directed and grown under the leadership of Alejandro Gimenez Santana, to include 40 or more Newark partners – law enforcement,

city residents, community development groups, business leaders, and more – all of whom gather regularly to engage in what they call [DICE](#) – data-informed community engagement – collectively designing crime reduction interventions based on the data on risk terrain modeling and fully incorporating their community-based lived experiences as knowledge. The federal Department of Justice took note and recently awarded a grant of \$3million for NPSC to work with two community-development organizations in Newark on crime reduction strategies following the DICE model. In a related vein is the collaborative work of our prison education and re-entry program, [NJSTEP](#), dedicated to engaging the wisdom of justice-engaged citizens throughout NJ. While Rutgers-Newark is the backbone organization of NJSTEP, it is, of course, engaging Rutgers and other institutions’ faculty all over the state, even as it has special significance in our anchor work in Newark. Newark has a large re-entry population, and our School of Criminal Justice also offers the Justice Studies bachelor’s degree both in prisons and on campus, working also with our RBS faculty in the [RU-Flourishing](#) Program for capacity building for formerly incarcerated budding entrepreneurs. In related capacity-building work, NJSTEP leaders collaborate with faculty in Urban Education, Journalism, and the Institute for Global Racial Justice, on a Mellon-Funded Sawyer Seminar on the “[Potentialities of Justice: Toward Collective Reparative Futures](#).”

*Socially-Engaged Art and Civic Voice:* Justice and artistic express intersect at Express Newark, our center for socially engaged art and design, which is celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Amiri Baraka’s landmark book *Blues People* with a [series of events](#) linking Newark’s past to our present,<sup>1</sup> which the collective behind the [Queer Newark Oral History Project also does, documenting](#) the resilience and struggles of the LGBTQ+ community, as in history professor Whitney Strub’s new edited volume: [Queer Newark: Stories of Resistance, Love and Community](#).<sup>2</sup> Likewise the students in our [Lives in Translation](#) Program work with our Design Consortium and the Newark Public Library to celebrate our Latino heritage and language, through an exhibit – [A Feeling of Itself](#) – showcasing the “diversity and vibrancy of linguistic expression within our community.” And, of course, language comes in many forms and genres, as our collaboration between our creative writing program and NJPAC artists on a city-wide celebration of and education on Jazz/Poetry, called [City Verses](#), supported in the past by the Mellon Foundation and now a part of the Dodge Foundation’s Dodge Poetry Festival, signifies. Moreover, as anyone who has wandered through the archives of our world-famous Institute of Jazz Studies knows, some melodies never stop singing to us. Yes, history is so much a part of what doing good anchor work means today, as it is woven through our present-day struggles – as we see in the anchor work of the Rutgers-Newark collaboration with NJISJ, Newark Community Development Network, and the Newark NAACP on [imagining what reparations might look like](#) for a city like Newark, as part of a nationwide network project supported by the Mellon Foundation through the Center for Social Solutions of the University of Michigan.

*STEM in the Public Interest:* As I transition now from anchor work in the arts to the robust anchor collaboratives in STEM that are contributing to the public good in Newark, it is striking again how so much of the progress depends on engaging a broad variety of voices to spur innovation. As Scott Page, my friend and colleague at the University of Michigan, always says, the *Diversity Bonus* is built on our collective intelligence, and that is what I am so impressed is happening in so many of our STEM labs

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, L. (1963). *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. New York: William Morrow and Company.

<sup>2</sup> Strub, W. et al. Eds. (2024). *Queer Newark: Stories of Resistance, Love, and Community*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

and community projects in Newark.<sup>3</sup> Take, for example, the newly \$4.3million NSF-funded “[Newark Geoscience Ecosystem](#)” that Professor Ashaki Rouff is forming with a wide range of academic and non-academic partners, including faculty and graduate students from across campus (humanists, scientists, urban education scholars), community gardeners and conservancy non-profits, and K-12 students and educators, to face the climate and environmental challenges of this post-industrial city, while simultaneously training a new and diverse generation of environmental problem-solvers. Even more proof on the ground in Newark of the value of these kinds of university-community STEM collectives is found in the work of Professor Mark Gluck and his repeatedly funded NIH grants on Alzheimer’s disease, as part of the [African American Brain Health Alliance](#) that he has built with a thoroughly inter-generational group of graduate students, faith leaders and community residents across Newark and Greater Newark. Indeed, these collectives can have real promise, engaging scientists and non-scientists alike, moving from the soil to the brain to artificial intelligence, as our newly proposed roadmap project – Institute for Data, Research and Innovation Science – will attempt to do in addressing the “wicked” problems in our urban context of health, environment and digital justice, and as SPAA faculty Suzanne Piotrowski and Gregory Porumbescu do in their work with partners in New Brunswick and across an NSF funded consortium on [Smart and Connected Cities](#), along with RBS faculty [Jaideep Vaidya’s pioneering data science applications](#) aimed at solving societal problems with technology.

### **Mutual Benefits to Universities and Communities alike of Engaged Anchor Institutions**

In taking this quick tour through some of the publicly-engaged scholarship, curricula, and anchor collaboratives in Newark, I was reminded of what [Ira Harkavy, Myra Burnett and I wrote in a 2014 white paper](#) spurred by our discussions in NSF’s Committee on Equal Opportunity in Science and Engineering. We posited that there is a virtuous cycle of innovation to be reaped when we include a wide-range of voices and lived experiences as we tackle the vexing problems locally that resonate globally – and that is my hope for the continued anchor collaborative work at Rutgers-Newark, in and with the City of Newark. I believe that this collective work has substantially contributed to the excellence and impact of our university – to our ability to promote the social mobility of our students whom we recruit and the residents of Newark whom we hire and the businesses of Newark whom we support; to the scholarship and teaching of our faculty, the innovative nature of their curricula and the federal and state and private funding that they have been able to garner for their research, and last, but definitely not least, to the sustainability of the partnerships that promise progress for a safe, just, flourishing community. Finally, as my scholarly hero Kurt Lewin,<sup>4</sup> the progenitor of action research so long ago, wisely noted: “The best way to understand something is to try to change it.” And that, is ultimately what we are all about doing.

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Page, S. (2017). *The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> Lewin, K. (1951). “Problems of Research in Social Psychology,” in *Field Theory in Social Science*, ed. Dorwin Cartwright, New York: Harper & Row: 155-169.