

University City Community Building Project (UCCBP)

ACTION PLAN

UCCBP RESOURCE TEAM MISSION

Building on the strengths of the diversity in the University City area, stakeholders will develop an action plan to foster a sense of community among those who live, work, learn and worship in the University City area.

INTRODUCTION

The University City Community Building Project (UCCBP) is a collaborative effort of three partner organizations: University City YMCA, The Lee Institute and Community Building Initiative (CBI). In January 2002, these partners engaged over 25 residents and civic leaders, who live and/or work in the University City area, to form a Resource Team.

A Resource Team, a model developed by CBI, is a proactive, strategic planning group rather than a problem-solving, task force responding to a crisis. The UCCBP Resource Team's charge was to research and examine community issues and craft an action plan aimed at enhancing the connectivity and quality of life in University City.

To achieve its mission, the UCCBP Resource Team posed a strategic question: What promotes and/or detracts from building a *sense of community* in the University City area? Team members then set out to identify and document strengths and weaknesses of their community. Their research included a scan of existing reports and studies and a series of interviews, surveys and focus groups.

The UCCBP Action Plan is designed for implementation by a variety of individuals, organizations and institutions that the UCCBP Resource Team identified as having a vested interest in University City's future. The team crafted the action plan under the following guiding principles:

- University City's unique diversity is a strength that can be built upon.
- Building trust among those who live, work, learn and worship in University City can contribute to a sense of community and enhance the quality of life in the area.
- UCCBP and its processes for community building can serve as models for other geographic areas.

Three primary themes emerged from the Resource Team’s research on how to foster a sense of community in University City. The action plan addresses each of the following themes:

Leadership: The people who convene stakeholders, initiate action, influence decisions and affect change.

Physical and Social Infrastructure: The systems and structures that connect and support people, neighborhoods and businesses.

Identity and Image: The beliefs, attitudes and perceptions that contribute to a sense of community.

THEME ONE: Leadership

Vision: Visible, recognized leadership that promotes University City and mirrors its diversity.

Objective: To establish a group of effective, visible leaders and to create a supportive community environment that allows individuals representing diverse populations to achieve influential leadership positions.

Desired Outcomes:

- A. Cadre of recognized civic, business, political and grassroots leaders (existing and emerging; old and new) that reflects the diverse groups in University City.
- B. Connections (formal and informal; institutional and organizational) among civic, business, political and grassroots leaders.
- C. Mechanisms for sharing and communicating community topics and issues with residents and leaders.
- D. Institutions and organizations serve as resources for leadership development in University City.
- E. Institutions and organizations assume leadership roles within University City.

Strategies:

- 1. Identify current and emerging leaders and groups in University City.
- 2. Sponsor a leadership summit.
- 3. Create leadership development programs for current and emerging area leaders.
- 4. Position University City leaders in local, county, regional and state decision-making bodies and initiatives.
- 5. Mobilize the voting power of University City residents.
- 6. Develop and leverage local media for communicating about and promoting University City and its leadership.

THEME TWO: Physical and Social Infrastructure

Vision: Physical and social infrastructure that builds a sense of community in University City.

Objective: To increase and promote accessible systems and structures in University City that connect its diverse residents and increased numbers of neighborhoods and that recognize its history and future.

Desired Outcomes:

- A. Transportation options expanded to improve how people to move around, within and through University City.
- B. Multi-functional gathering places that are designated for social/recreational activities and discussion of community topics and issues.
- C. A signage and information system that facilitates travel, transportation, social connectedness and sense of place for residents and visitors of University City.

Strategies:

- 1. Conduct a needs assessment of public service entities, social gathering places and civic and recreational spots. (e.g., mall, hospital emergency room, University City library branch).
- 2. Obtain accessible city/county services in University City.
- 3. Identify and capitalize on new and existing special events to strengthen community ownership and encourage participation across all sectors.
- 4. Develop a University City online campaign.
- 5. Lobby city and county officials and coordinate with real estate, residential and transit planners to accelerate plans for infrastructure (e.g., greenways, sidewalks, transportation modes and routes).

THEME THREE: Identity and Image

Vision: A shared community identity and a widely held image about University City that illustrate its value to the greater Charlotte Metropolitan area and its rich diversity.

Objectives:

- To foster a shared community identity among the diverse people who live and work in University City.
- To enhance the sense of community in University City by promoting its image as a civic and economic driver and diversity magnet.

Desired Outcomes:

- A. A climate that reflects and respects diverse people and divergent viewpoints.
- B. Opportunities that bring a diverse group of people together.
- C. An image of University City that is shared and articulated by residents and others.
- D. People from a range of backgrounds coming to and staying in University City to live and work.
- E. An economy that is driven by and flourishes because of University City's educational options, talent pool, and technological and corporate resources.

Strategies:

1. Develop and execute a comprehensive strategic marketing/public relations plan.
2. Conceive, develop and promote balanced economic development opportunities for University City that will enhance its financial growth and economic vitality.
3. Develop and promote cultural assets and institutions specific to University City and build pride in University City's past, present and future.
4. Promote area events and activities as "University City" events.

RATIONALE

During its research the UCCBP Resource Team found the following:

I. Leadership

- Perceived lack of leadership.
- Absence of mechanism (i.e., structure, process, place or forum) for discussing community issues and topics.
- Few broadly perceived mechanisms for change.
- Few corporate and civic leaders reside in the area.
- Desire for UNC Charlotte and CPCC to enhance their institutional roles in the area.
- Significant presence of churches and faith community in the area.
- Need for making connections among existing groups, initiatives and plans.
- Need for a substantial investment of time, talent and money from its residents and stakeholders.

II. Physical and Social Infrastructure

- Wide recognition that the area has grown rapidly over the past 20 years, is still growing, and has space for continued growth.
- Convergence of both challenges and opportunities to improve the area's infrastructure.
- Need for change in the development paradigm (e.g. mixed-use, lifestyle center; broader housing options).
- Need for improving traffic patterns and an eliminating congestion.
- Desire to improve physical infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, bike paths, greenways).
- Absence of mechanism (i.e., structure, process, place or forum) for discussing community issues and topics.
- Absence of a visible and accessible "town center."

III. Identity and Image

- Absence of a shared community identity or a widely held sense of community.
- Inconsistencies in perceptions about the area, especially between those who live and work in the area and those who don't.
- Belief that diversity is a community strength.
- Need to strengthen neighborhood schools.
- Desire to recognize and preserve the area's farming and rural heritage.
- Increase in the numbers of renter-occupied dwellings versus owner-occupied dwellings.
- Need for a unifying message among the area's diverse residents and stakeholders.
- Need for events, signage/markers, and campaigns that promote the area.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

To gauge progress toward achieving its goals, UCCBP identified the following as indicators that will be tracked, monitored and added to over time.

I. Leadership

- Number of people identified as leaders (with disaggregated data on who is deemed new, emerging and established).
- Number of people participating in summit and leadership program.
- Number of summit sponsors.
- Number of University City residents in local, county, regional and state leadership/decision-making roles.
- Number of organized events and sessions in University City where residents share and communicate community topics and issues with leaders and other residents.
- Number of joint sponsorships and collaborative efforts among organizations to organize events and sessions in University City where residents share and communicate community topics and issues.
- Disaggregated data on the diversity (e.g., racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, cultural) of University City leaders participating in UCCBP leadership initiatives.
- Percentage of corporate, civic, grassroots and neighborhood groups represented in summit and leadership program.
- Voter turnout rate in University City precincts.
- Number of media outlets highlighting University City news and articles.
- Number of media hits related to University City leaders, leadership programs/events and other topics that influence its prominence.

II. Infrastructure

- Completion of a needs assessment that identifies existing public service entities, social gathering places and civic and recreational spots and gaps in these entities, places and spots.
- Increased number of city/county services available to residents in University City.
- Number of area events and activities with shared sponsorship and promoted as "University City events."
- Presence of a University City online campaign.
- Increased pace and number of plans for the development of greenways, sidewalks, transportation modes and routes and other infrastructure projects.

III. Image

- Existence of a multi-media UCCBP marketing/public relations plan.
- Number of organizations playing an active role in the UCCBP marketing/public relations plan.
- Number of cultural assets and institutions actively working to raise awareness and pride in University City's past, present and future.
- Disaggregated data indicating the diversity (e.g., racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, cultural) of identified cultural assets and institutions.
- Number of special events that help strengthen transition and generate broad participation.
- Number of people attending identified special events.
- Disaggregated data indicating the diversity (e.g., racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, cultural) of people attending identified special events.
- Number of media hits related to University City residents, events, and other topics that illustrate its value to the greater Charlotte Metropolitan area and its rich diversity.
- Percentages of University City residents and Charlotte Region residents expressing increased knowledge about University City.
- Percentages of University City residents and Charlotte Region residents expressing positive attitudes about University City.
- Percentage of University City residents indicating high levels of trust.
- Percentage of University City residents indicating a high quality of life in the area.
- Percentage of University City residents articulating common views and values about the sense of community in University City.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

UCCBP Core Concepts

To guide their work, Resource Team members established a set of 10 core concepts that explain the premise behind their community-building effort. Five of the concepts focus on the rationale for the project, while the remaining five center on processes used the Resource Team.

Project Purpose: UCCBP's Rationale

1. Connections between people, organizations and institutions build a stronger, more livable, more responsive community. These connections equate to a "sense of community." An idea central to the Social Capital theory is that connections between and within a community's formal and informal networks can create a sense of community.
2. University City's unique diversity is a strength that can be built upon.
3. Social Capital is a framework for research/data collection in the UCCBP. Methodology for data collection includes: Random Sample Telephone Surveys (including the Urban Institute's Annual Survey), Focus Groups, Key Informant Interviews, Secondary Research and Demographic Data.
4. The University City Community Building Project (UCCBP) can be a model for other geographic areas in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.
5. Given University City's rapid growth, this is an opportune time to focus on developing a "sense of community" before further expansion occurs and the task becomes even more challenging.

Project Process: A CBI Model

6. UCCBP is a proactive, strategic process rather than a problem-solving, task force response to crisis.
7. This process requires work and learning at two levels: 1) work towards a product (an action plan); and 2) personal and team engagement and learning.
8. A team of individuals that experiences *a sense of community* and understands more deeply the meaning and value of diversity will bring leadership, individually and collectively, to the UC area. The team and its learning can serve as examples of what can happen in the larger community.
9. The UCCBP Resource Team process will encourage the development of informed, energized leaders in the UC area.
10. The Collecting and analyzing data as part of the Resource Team process and sharing this data with the larger community can encourage a community to take responsibility for its present and future.

Definition of Diversity

The UCCBP Resource Team's work centered on "building on the strengths of the diversity in the University City area." Data on University City indicate it is a "diversity magnet," attracting people from a range of backgrounds.

When asked "what does the term *diversity* mean to you," Resource Team members collectively defined it as: The presence of a wealth of perspectives brought by people from a range of races, ethnicities, cultures, genders, ages, faiths, jobs, neighborhoods, socioeconomic levels, education levels, interests, talents, personalities, motivations and experiences.

Team members also indicated that building on the strength of their community's diversity would require the following: inclusion, openness about differences, a demonstration of mutual respect and appreciation for differences, and the ability to leverage the differences among people to solve issues.

GLOSSARY OF ELEMENTS FOR THE UCCBP ACTION PLAN AND REPORT

Below are brief descriptions of the elements proposed for the UCCBP Action Plan and Report (in alphabetical order).

Core Concepts: Key premise, elements, beliefs and values that directed the Resource Team's work and the development of the Action Plan.

Definition of Diversity: How Resource Team members described the make-up of their community and what they wish to see among residents and stakeholders.

Desired Outcomes: Anticipated changes in behavior, systems, and community climate as a result of UCCBP's proposed actions. *(theme-specific)*

Goal: Ultimate state of being or condition sought by UCCBP. *(theme-specific)*

Guiding Principles: Shared beliefs among Resource Team members that frame the development and proposed implementation of the UCCBP Action Plan.

Indicators of Success: Benchmarks, products/deliverables, change and other evidence that can gauge progress toward achieving UCCBP goals.

Potential Stakeholders: Individuals and organizations that have a vested interest in outcomes of a strategy and who can play a vital role in implementing an identified strategy. *(strategy-specific)*

Proposed Champion: A public institution, corporation, business, nonprofit organization, grassroots group or individual with the influence and resources to convene stakeholders and to champion and implement specific strategies. *(strategy-specific)*

Objective: Summative description of the action UCCBP aims to undertake or foster in the community. *(theme-specific)*

Project Goal: Statement of purpose and ultimate aim of UCCBP.

Rationale: Compelling data from the Resource Team's research that support UCCBP's proposed actions. *(theme-specific)*

Strategies: Broad approaches to fulfill identified goal and produce desired outcomes. *(theme-specific)*

Theme: Broad, reoccurring topic found during the UCCBP Resource Team's research and deemed crucial for "fostering a sense of community" in University City.

Timeline: Projected start date for strategic action. *(strategy-specific)*