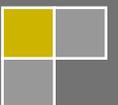


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Anchor Institutions Task Force



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## Economic Development

### SINA – An Enduring Multi-Anchor Partnership in Hartford

*Melvyn Colon, Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance*

Hartford, Connecticut is home to one of the earliest examples of a multi-anchor institution partnership. In 1976, Trinity College, Hartford Hospital and the Institute of Living<sup>1</sup>, an “ed” and two “meds”, came together to work with neighborhood organizations in the Frog Hollow neighborhood of Hartford. In 1978 the three anchor institutions formed a nonprofit called Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance. Since then, the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center has replaced the Institute of Living in the SINA partnership. Otherwise, the partnership has remained intact. The endurance of this partnership for close to forty years despite multiple changes in executive leadership in each of the member institutions, and the changing financial fortunes of those institutions, gives us an opportunity to examine the early evolution of an anchor model and explore the question of how it has endured and become institutionalized.

#### **Hartford and Frog Hollow**

SINA’s core area includes the Frog Hollow neighborhood and portions of the Barry Square and South Green neighborhoods in south central Hartford. For expository convenience we will refer to this area as Frog Hollow. Trinity College is separated from the two hospitals by a long city block. The compactness of the neighborhood, the proximity of the institutions to each other, and the perception that they shared a common fate, was an important factor in their initial coming together.

The population of Frog Hollow is 60% Latino and 20% other minorities. About 85% of the Latino population is Puerto Rican. The adult poverty rate is almost 45% while the child poverty rate exceeds 50%. The unemployment rate is 20%. The labor force participation rate is 53% but it should be noted that this number includes Trinity College students. The median income in the neighborhood is about \$19,000. Workers are most frequently employed in service occupations, especially food preparation and maintenance, and in sales and office occupations. An explanation for the troubling data on income and poverty may be found in the low educational attainment of Frog Hollow residents. Only 15% of the residents have an Associate’s Degree or higher while 40% do not have a high school diploma (Kwass, 2015).

#### **The Learning Corridor**

The Hartford experience with anchor institutions came to national attention with the construction of the Learning Corridor (see for example Zuckerman, 2013). Today the Learning Corridor is a 16 acre campus with four excellent schools that draw students from at least 30 suburban communities. It houses a performing arts theater, a boys and girls club and a family support program. The Learning Corridor remains one of the largest and most ambitious redevelopment projects ever undertaken in the city of Hartford. It was built on the site of a contaminated bus yard once identified as one of the most blighted areas in the city. The project originated in the 1980’s with a group of activists who mobilized community residents to develop a vision and plan for what the site could be. In the mid 1990’s, Evan Dobelle, then president of Trinity College, took up the cause of cleaning up the bus yard and worked with his counterparts in the SINA institutions to make a bold investment in the community. Between them, Trinity College, the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, Hartford Hospital and

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<sup>1</sup> A behavioral health medical center

the Institute of Living invested \$10 million in the development of the project. Trinity College invested half of the total, \$5 million, and the other half was divided equally among the remaining institutions. This investment leveraged \$104 million from the City of Hartford and the Connecticut Departments of Education, Public Works and Environmental Protection. Several local philanthropies including the Aetna Foundation and the Greater Hartford Foundation for Public Giving also made significant contributions to the project.

The Learning Corridor was possible because SINA, already in existence for more than 15 years, had created a culture of communication and collaboration between the institutions. In addition, SINA served as a vehicle through which to pool the institutions' investments. As a nonprofit organization, SINA could apply to the various public agencies for the grants to fund the construction. SINA also played an important role in managing the construction of the project.

### **SINA: Early Years**

Unlike present day Hartford, in the 1970's and for many years thereafter, Hartford boasted a strong community organizing tradition. Hartford Areas Rally Together, or HART, was the most visible of the grassroots organizing groups in the city. In the late 1960's Trinity College hired Ivan Backer as Director of Community Affairs. Backer, HART and a number of independent community activists and entrepreneurs began to work together on projects to benefit the community, which was undergoing a transition from a neighborhood of white factory workers to a neighborhood that was becoming majority Puerto Rican and whose workers were employed in the service sector. This joint effort led to the creation of a community newspaper and the formation of a community development corporation. It also led to the creation of a committee that brought the organizers and activists together with the representatives from the hospitals and the College. The catalyst for this coming together was a set of recommendations that accompanied a planning report commissioned by an influential business group called the Hartford Process (Backer, 2016). These meetings culminated in the formation of SINA as an independent nonprofit organization. Ivan Backer was hired as its first full-time Executive Director.

Between 1980 and 1990, and with few existing templates on which to model its work, SINA developed programs that we would now recognize as typical of anchor institution initiatives. In 1981 SINA worked with the hospitals and the College and with local lenders to develop an Employee Mortgage Assistance Program that would provide incentives for institutional employees to buy homes in the south central neighborhoods of Hartford. The program combined mortgage interest reduction with down payment assistance to make buying a home more affordable during a time of unusually high interest rates. In 1983 SINA surveyed its member institutions to compile a comprehensive purchasing directory that was used to highlight opportunities for local merchants who wished to sell their goods and services to the institutions. In 1986 SINA worked with the human resources departments at the hospitals and the College to develop a Secretarial Training Program to fill vacancies in the institutions. These three programs are early examples of the "live local, buy local, hire local" motto that encapsulates the strategies that many anchor institution have adopted in the past twenty five years.

Supporting and strengthening local education has become a mainstay of anchor institution strategies. SINA developed an early precursor of this approach in 1982. SINA staff worked with three Hartford public high schools and a Catholic school to create a Scholar of the Month program to honor academic achievement.

### **SINA: Strategic Investments Since 1990**

These early strategies have reappeared in various forms over the years and have been joined by strategies that focus on housing development, economic development and commercial revitalization, public infrastructure improvements and community engagement.

***Housing Development*** – Prior to the construction of the Learning Corridor SINA had not undertaken brick and mortar projects. Instead, with its community partners, SINA helped create organizations that took on housing

development and commercial revitalization projects. It was instrumental in the creation of a community development corporation that built hundreds of affordable rental housing units in and around the commercial center of the neighborhood. SINA also participated in the creation of the Spanish American Merchants Association, SAMA. In 1990 SINA partnered with a commercial real estate developer and SAMA to develop a market that included a food store, several small retail businesses and restaurant eateries representative of the cuisine of four Latin American countries. However, SINA was not directly involved in the construction of this venture.

In 1996 SINA developed a strategic plan that called for significant investment in housing development. The motivation behind this new strategic initiative was the need expressed by SINA's stakeholders to increase the rate of homeownership in the neighborhood, which was below 10%. New homeowners would bring increased purchasing power to the neighborhood and augment the potential for greater civic engagement. SINA would build new homes on vacant land and convert existing rental housing to homeownership where possible. Marketing for the new homes would be directed to employees of the institutions but would not ignore the community at large. It took several years for this program to get off the ground but it is now in full swing despite the fact that funding has been a challenge. To date, SINA has built 65 one and two family homes with plans to build at least 32 additional new homes by 2020. The two family model developed by SINA maintains the density of the neighborhood and increases the affordability to the buyer by providing an income-generating rental unit. Thus far less than 10% of the homes have been purchased by employees from the institutions. SINA has also developed 87 units of affordable rental housing to stabilize several deteriorating buildings in key neighborhood locations. However, the SINA housing effort continues to look towards developing homes for homeownership.

SINA is also administering a program to encourage institutional employees to buy housing in the neighborhoods that constitute the south end of Hartford. The Homeownership Incentive Program (HIP) is a simplified version of SINA's 1981 housing incentive program and was modeled after similar initiatives at other anchor institutions. Eligible employees of the hospitals and the College receive \$10,000 from their employers in down-payment assistance to purchase homes in the south end neighborhoods of Hartford.

***Economic Development*** – SINA's early ventures in economic development focused on compiling the purchasing directory and the development, with several partners, of El Mercado, as described above. These initiatives were followed in 1998 by the creation of the Jobs Center. SINA collaborated with HART, and later a local nonprofit, the Puerto Rican Forum, to develop and operate an employment center to train residents and link them to jobs in the hospitals and the College. Residents were trained in a variety of job skills that matched employment needs at the institutions. A first source agreement for selected categories of entry level jobs gave the Jobs Center two weeks to fill jobs before they were advertised more broadly. This program ended around 2003 as the workforce development model shifted to a more centralized "one stop" system.

In 2016 SINA completed an economic development plan for the neighborhood. The main strategic initiatives of the plan revive features of earlier programs. In 2017 SINA will play the role of "Job Navigator" to match job-ready residents to entry level job openings in the institutions. SINA will also explore the feasibility of developing a purchasing program to identify qualified vendors and train them to do business with the institutions.

***Work with Public Schools*** – Ivan Backer, who was hired as SINA's first full-time executive director in 1979, writes in his memoir, *My Train to Freedom*, "Education, especially the preparation of students in elementary and secondary schools, was particularly important to all three SINA institutions." (Backer, 2016) Ivan identifies the specific self-interest for each institution as the desire at Trinity College to enroll well-trained students and at the hospitals to have a supply of well-educated job applicants who could be trained to do technical work and patient support. SINA involvement in the public schools continues to this day. The aforementioned Scholar of the Month program was instituted in 1982. In 1988 SINA developed a program at the Betances School in collaboration with its dynamic principal, Edna Negrón. Eventually this led to the establishment of school-based medical and dental clinics at that school. In 1994 SINA developed the Bulkeley High School Connection which enabled students interested in health and STEM-oriented careers to shadow professionals at the institutions. The program also invited speakers from the institutions to address students on aspects of their jobs and their training. This program

later added mentoring and tutoring components as well as a scholarship program for students interested in pursuing higher education. SINA has also supported science education in the public schools by helping to organize the city-wide science fair, known as the STEM Expo. SINA provided prizes and logistical support, but perhaps its most important contribution was in recruiting over 50 professionals from its member institutions to serve as judges. This program was discontinued at the city-wide level due to school funding cutbacks but continues at a local elementary school.

**Infrastructure Projects**– SINA has been successful at directing the investment of city and state funds into streetscaping programs that include street and sidewalk repaving, replacement lighting and the installation of monuments. These projects have benefited the commercial corridor and other major corridors and entrances to the neighborhood. SINA has been able to leverage these funds not only through advocacy and relationship building but also by using its own resources to organize merchants and residents and to hire designers to work with them and translate their vision into compelling and persuasive plans and designs.

**Community Engagement** – Since its creation SINA worked jointly on projects with Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART). After a steady decline in its activism, HART closed its doors in 2015. For years,

Frog Hollow activists saw their ability to organize and unite residents around common causes diminish in strength. The demise of HART put an exclamation point to the loss of this important community capacity. Whether a cause or effect, during HART’s decline, the community saw a decrease in its civic engagement. Civic organizations such as baseball teams, block groups and crime watches disappeared from the neighborhood. Nonprofit service organizations that had been in existence for many years shut their doors for lack of funding. In the face of a growing drug trade, there was increasing distrust among residents.

Neither SINA nor its member institutions had ever needed to consider the effects of a loss of civic capacity in the neighborhood. This was a new situation and it called for a response. SINA created a community engagement initiative in 2015. The goals of this initiative were to rekindle trust and strengthen connections between neighbors, increase civic participation and identify neighborhood leaders.

As SINA works to restore this eroded community capacity, it is focusing on engaging residents around quality of life issues. Residents identify safety and security as the over-riding quality of life issue in the neighborhood. SINA is now working with residents and with police to create stronger bonds between them in order to address the drug trade in the area.

### **Endurance of A Multi-Anchor Partnership Over Time**

The following table highlights the endurance of the SINA partnership despite changes in membership and turnover of executive leadership.

<b>Table 1. SINA Partnership Institutions</b>		
<b>Institution</b>	<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Chief Executives During SINA Membership</b>
Trinity College	1978 to present	9
Hartford Hospital	1978 to present	5
The Institute of Living (a behavioral health medical center)	1978 until 2004. IOL Became part of Hartford Hospital in 1994	3 <sup>38</sup>
Connecticut Children’s Medical Center	1995 until present	4
Connecticut Public Television	1997 until it moved out of the neighborhood in 2002	1

The SINA multi-anchor partnership has lasted for close to 40 years surviving at least 17 changes in executive leadership in the institutions that support it. In a two year period, 2013 to 2015, the executive leadership of all three SINA institutions turned over. Some institutions have left the partnership and others have joined. Of the five institutions that have supported the SINA partnership, two, Trinity College and Hartford Hospital, have remained since 1978. Two have dropped out, the Institute of Living when it became part of Hartford Hospital, and Connecticut Public Television when it moved to another neighborhood. The CT Children’s Medical Center joined SINA in 1995 and is a current member. The SINA partnership has also survived the changing fortunes of the institutions including, most recently, lost revenues for the hospitals resulting from cutbacks in state reimbursements. The SINA partnership has also avoided potential dilemmas of collective action, such as an institution dropping out to become a free rider.

The SINA multi-anchor partnership has endured through change and adversity for a number of reasons. The obvious ones are results and positive recognition. The partnership’s signature project, Learning Corridor gained national attention and highlighted in a very positive way the role of the institutions in the community and the city. More recently, the homeownership initiative continues to highlight the role of the institutions in the revitalization of the neighborhoods. The SINA partnership reinforces the institutions’ reputations for service and good citizenship.

However, this is not a complete explanation as SINA has had its own ups and downs in terms of production and of its ability to shine a favorable light on the institutions. There are other, less obvious reasons for the institutionalization of the SINA model

**Organizational Structure** – SINA is governed by a nine-member board of directors, three from each institution. Each institution appoints a member to SINA’s three member executive committee and the position of chairperson has rotated among the three institutions. The board members are drawn from the upper management of the institutions. Most of the board members have a reporting line to the chief executive of their institution. The chief executives attend SINA’s annual meeting and approve its budget. The executive director of SINA meets quarterly with the chief executives of the institutions to report on initiatives, priorities and issues and to hear from the chief executives their priorities and concerns.

This structure has provided continuity through changes in executive leadership at the institutions. SINA board members advocate within their own institutions for the importance of investing in the surrounding community through SINA.

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<sup>38</sup> Estimate based on available documents

Another organizational feature is the existence of a committee that brings employees from the hospitals and the college together with community volunteers to work in the school system and to provide recognition to community leaders. The Recognition, Education, Achievement and Community Health (REACH) Committee allows employees of the institutions to have direct involvement with Hartford school children. As members of the REACH Committee they give out scholarships to high school seniors and participate in organizing science fairs. REACH Committee members also give out community leadership awards every year and thus come to know many of the outstanding activists and leaders in the community. This results in another set of advocates for SINA's work within the institutions.

It should be noted that one advantage of this structure is that it creates channels of communication between the institutions below the executive level. Board members often coordinate charitable giving, public relations and security concerns through conversations that start at board or REACH Committee meetings.

***Efficiencies Gained Through Sharing Costs*** – The institutions have demonstrated their commitment to revitalize the community by investing in the construction of homeownership housing and other brick and mortar projects. These projects call for a specialized staff that possesses skills and training not related to the core work of the institutions. The SINA partnership allows the institutions to pool their resources to hire seasoned professionals in the various disciplines related to community development.

***Ability to Leverage Resources for the Neighborhood***– SINA guides resources from a variety of sources to the Frog Hollow neighborhood. Because it is a nonprofit SINA has been able to raise project funds from city, state and federal sources as well as from philanthropic organizations such as the Aetna Foundation and the Greater Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. It also accesses construction financing from community development intermediaries such as the Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the Leviticus Fund. A number of private corporations, including Travelers Insurance Co. and Eversource, support SINA projects through the purchase of state-sponsored tax credits. The institutions can take credit for this leverage because SINA presents itself as an expression of an institutional partnership.

## **Conclusion**

The SINA institutions have invested in the development of their surrounding community for close to four decades. Their partnership has resulted in the construction of one of the largest redevelopment projects in Hartford history, the Learning Corridor. It has converted vacant land and significant numbers of houses that had fallen into disrepair into homeownership opportunities. The partnership has been able to hold together despite changes in executive leadership in the institutions. It has even survived the exit of two institutions. By institutionalizing the partnership in a nonprofit organization, SINA, the institutions have created a long-lasting expression of their commitment to the well-being of neighborhood residents as well as their own staff, students and patients.

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