



Collaboration Between the University of Michigan and the Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES) to Advance Diversity and Social Justice

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1) Provide a one-paragraph summary of your NCID-sponsored project.

The project developed and implemented a multi-pronged strategy to strengthen and leverage relationships between the University of Michigan and the Detroit-based nonprofit community organization MOSES. The project involved three inter-related activities: (1) engage U-M students and faculty in activities that build civic capacity in metropolitan Detroit and foster stronger, positive relationships between U-M and the diverse communities of the metropolitan area; (2) develop and launch a new undergraduate course, internships, workshops, and public events to educate U-M students (both undergraduate and graduate) about the theory and practice of community organizing in a diverse society; and (3) evaluate the effectiveness of organizing as a means to strengthen civic engagement among residents of selected Detroit neighborhoods.

2) Describe the extent to which you have been able to meet the expected outcomes of your project. What conclusions or findings have you made through this project, and what questions or next steps remain?

The project substantially achieved its intended outcomes. I developed and taught a new undergraduate course, Theory and Practice of Community Organizing, offered jointly by the Department of Political Science and the Residential College in the Winter 2007 semester. The 27 students in the class collaborated over the course of the semester with MOSES affiliates or potential affiliates in metropolitan Detroit, including Western International High School (WIHS), in southwest Detroit. Through readings, discussion, writing, and practical action, the students learned how to develop effective, resilient organizations that build the leadership capacities of individuals and the democratic power of communities to control their own futures. In addition, they gained insight into how this practical work can inform basic knowledge about political participation, democratic theory and practice, and organizational processes. Student evaluations of the course were very positive. I plan to teach the course again next Winter semester.

In October 2006, I organized and accompanied more than 100 U-M students, faculty, and staff to the MOSES public issues meeting at Fellowship Chapel in Detroit. Three U-M students spoke to

the gathering of some 1000 people, including Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Rev. Jesse Jackson, U.S. Rep. John Conyers, and other public officials and community leaders.

I collaborated in developing and launching in February 2007 the Harriet Tubman Center for Community Organizing. Based at historic Second Baptist Church in downtown Detroit, the mission of the Tubman Center is to attract and educate young people to take on jobs as professional community organizers. Rachael Tanner, an April 2007 graduate of U-M, was hired as the first Tubman fellow. A second 2007 U-M alumna, Jaime Nelson, and two students from my community organizing course, Brian Peck and Sarah Sweeney, joined Ms. Tanner over the summer as Tubman fellows to work as paid organizers with Detroit congregations.

Ms. Nelson and I led the MOSES 2006 nonpartisan voter registration, education, and turnout project during the late summer and fall of 2006. In collaboration with the U-M student organizations Voice Your Vote and The Detroit Project, MOSES registered some 7000 Michigan voters, the vast majority of them residing in metropolitan Detroit. U-M students and MOSES volunteers went door to door in the Brightmoor and Delray communities of Detroit and they visited congregations, high schools, and community centers, making brief presentations, registering voters, and distributing information on absentee voting. Voter-turnout operations took place in the two weeks prior to Election Day. U-M students went door to door in Brightmoor and Delray encouraging residents to vote and answering questions about voting they had. Beginning on the Friday prior to Election Day and continuing until the early evening of Election Day, community volunteers and U-M students contacted registered voters by telephone. Using laptop computers and computerized maps, they directed hundreds of Detroit voters to their correct polling locations. Door-to-door turnout blitzes took place all day on Election Day in those neighborhoods. Rides to the polls were offered and accepted. MOSES teams visited the polls throughout the day to monitor and attempt to resolve any problems—which, in contrast to 2004, were generally minor.

One group of students in my community organizing class expanded upon the action research of students in some of my other classes to collaborate with staff, parents, teachers, and students at WIHS to identify and implement practical strategies to address educational and community issues surfaced in the preceding research. The U-M student team assisted WIHS students in preparing for the SAT and ACT, tutored them in reading and math during and after school, and arranged for a group of them to tour the U-M campus. These service projects not only provide direct benefit to the high-school students, they also build a foundation of mutual trust and reciprocity that serves as the basis for future school-based organizing initiatives.

3) How has your project led to or encouraged social or organizational/institutional change?

My NCID project has strengthened and broadened relationships between U-M and Detroit communities. Its positive results helped me persuade the MOSES board to re-focus the organization's efforts on developing leadership and relational power within and among local congregations, activities that had been neglected somewhat over the past few years. In close collaboration with its student leaders, I helped to expand The Detroit Project to incorporate new opportunities in community organizing in Detroit's Brightmoor neighborhood and new service and school-based organizing programs at WIHS.

Perhaps most of all, my NCID project has fostered support within MOSES, WIHS, and several Detroit nonprofit institutions for continued collaboration with U-M students and faculty. The Department of Political Science, the Ford School of Public Policy, the School of Social Work, the Urban and Regional Planning Program, and other U-M units participate regularly in MOSES-related activities. Support has also been provided by U-M's Office of the Provost and Office of the Vice President for Government Relations. The Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning is the institutional point of contact on campus for MOSES-related activities.

4) In what ways have you worked to promote the sustainability of the project?

I continue to serve as an executive board member and vice president of MOSES. I interpret my election to those positions to be a testament to the organization's high regard for U-M's active collaboration. I also continue to serve as faculty advisor to the U-M student organization, The Detroit Project (DP). DP operates a broad array of service-learning projects in Detroit's Brightmoor and Southwest communities that engage hundreds of U-M students. The annual "DP Day" brings as many as one thousand U-M students to Brightmoor each spring for a day of service in collaboration with neighborhood residents.

I helped to secure funding from the nonprofit Center for Civic Participation (CCP) to support the MOSES voter project in 2006. Our very successful execution of that project has led to a continuing collaborative relationship between MOSES and CCP.

The successful launch of the Harriet Tubman Center in 2007 with seed money from my NCID grant and significant financial support from the C.S. Mott Foundation and other sources represents a major step forward in sustaining the collaboration between U-M, other higher education institutions, and community organizing initiatives in the state, nationally, and eventually, internationally. I will continue to collaborate with Gamaliel Foundation Mid-East Territory Director Bill O'Brien, Detroit-based community organizer and 2007-08 NCID Fellow Victoria Kovari, and other key leaders in expanding the reach and impact of the Tubman Center.

5) In what ways is your project a national exemplar?

The relationship between U-M and MOSES provides significant benefits to undergraduate and graduate education, research, and service involving a number of units across the University. It promotes diversity in education and society by providing new opportunities for student and faculty engagement with diverse communities; it encourages new interdisciplinary research, teaching, and dialogue; it promotes cross-campus collaboration, as faculty and students from other higher education institutions in the region participate in MOSES-related activities along with those of U-M; and it encourages civic engagement among students, faculty, and staff.

The syllabus for my course in community organizing is available on the Web (at www.umich.edu/~gmarkus) as a resource for institutions of higher-education and community organizations.

Our successful voter registration, education, and turnout project in 2006 can serve as a model for future efforts nationally.

The launch of the Harriet Tubman Center serves as a platform from which to engage and educate a new generation of community organizers, as well as to learn from and support more experienced organizers, statewide, regionally, and—eventually—nationally and even internationally.

My NCID project also evaluated strategies for higher-education institutions to engage in community-based projects that build civic and political capacity. I find that, if done carefully and respectfully, collaboration between higher-eds and community organizing projects is mutually beneficial in advancing scholarly and applied learning and achieving practical objectives.