Rethinking Communities Research Questions

This document is a list of questions that will help you understand the ways in which your school is acting as an Anchor Institution as a part of the Rethinking Communities project. Completion of this set of questions has been influential in shaping projects all across the country, from Roosevelt@SantaMonica to Roosevelt@NYU, and from large public institutions like Roosevelt@UofMichigan to small private institutions like Roosevelt@Amherst. It will help you discover what aspect of your Anchor Institution is ripe for change. This research will be a combination of information found in official documents and in general census information, but it should all be publicly available.

Things you might need to complete this research

- US Census Database
- ProPublica Database of Nonprofit Tax and Financial statements
- And a resource for interpreting these forms.
- Opportunity Index
- GuideStar (one place to find a 990 form)
- The Datacenter has lots of interesting information on Education outcomes.
- Google “Audited Financial Statement” and the name of your school, and look at the last few years of institutional reporting.

If your school is private, it is by definition a non-profit, meaning that the information we’re hoping to gather is mostly available on the official 990 Form they are legally required to file. If your school is public, the filing situation varies slightly from state to state – please get in touch with your Regional Team for assistance in navigating the individual state-wide system and look at the Audited Financial Statement.

Community Questions

☐ How are you defining your “local community”?
☐ What is the local unemployment rate? *This is a question designed to begin to map community need.*
  o Check U.S. censes data
☐ Percentage of local population living below the poverty line? *This is another community need question.*
  o Check the Opportunity Index, or look at U.S. censes data
☐ What percentage of local households spend less than 30% of income on housing? *This is a question designed to begin to map community need.*
  o Check the Opportunity Index, or look at U.S. censes data
College or University Questions

☐ How much money does the university spend overall? This is a question designed to build an initial understanding of how large the university is, and thus what the different percentage numbers effectively mean.
   ○ Check the 990 Form, Part IX, Question 25: Total functional expenses if your school is private

☐ How big is the schools endowment? This is a question designed to build an initial understanding the scale of how large the university resources are.
   ○ Check the 990 form, Schedule D, Part V, Questions 2 & 4: Provide the estimated percentage of the current year balance held as broad designated or quasi-endowment or permanent endowment if your school is private

☐ What is the total amount of money spent on investments? This is a question designed start you thinking about the relationship between University resources and how they are being deployed in the community.
   ○ Check the 990 form, Schedule D, Part VII, if your school is private

☐ Is there an official policy focused on buying locally? This is a question designed to get you to start thinking about how the school spends money.
   ○ Don’t worry (yet) if it is a policy that is enforced or not!

☐ Is the University associated with a hospital?
   ○ Look at the 990 form, Part IV Q20a: Did the organization operate one or more hospital facilities?

☐ How much is spent on independent contractors? Give the ratio of the total number of local independent contractors to the total. This is a question designed to get you to start thinking about how the school spends money.
   ○ Check the 990 form Part VII, Section B, under the Independent Contractors section if your school is private
   ○ This might not be clearly available in a large public school

☐ What are the five highest paid independent contractors and are any of them locally owned or operated? This is a question designed to get you to start thinking about how the school spends money.
   ○ This might not be clearly available in a large public school

☐ Are there any notable groups that have transactions with the University? This is a question designed to get you to start thinking about how the school spends money.
   ○ Check the 990 form, Schedule L, Part IV: List the organizations that have transactions with the university and the amounts involved for each transaction if your school is private
   ○ This might not be clearly available in a large public school

☐ Is there organized labor on campus? If yes, in what form? This is a question designed to get you to start thinking about how employees are treated by the school.
Extra Credit

These are questions that we hope will spark a better understanding of the ways in which your school acts as an Anchor, as well as raise questions about places of great need for local policy to address:

Financialization

- Which bank does your university use? This question is designed to see whether you are interested in the financial aspect to your school’s spending. If you are interested in the finances of where your school’s money goes, you may be interested in aiding Four Freedoms Center Fellow, Saqib Bhatti’s ReFund America Project.

- Has your university expanded by either buying land from the community and/or building new facilities in the past 5-10 years? Does it plan to do so in future? This question is to identify if your school is embarking upon big projects and tries to get you to think about how your school is paying for it. If you are interested in looking deeper and aiding in the ReFund America Project, contact your Regional Coordinator.

Energy and Environment

- Institution’s STARS sustainability rating (If the institution does not have a STARS rating, what is the ratio of carbon emissions to number of students?) This is a question designed to begin to map the University’s effects on the local environment

Education

- What is the local high school graduation rate? This is another community need question.
  - Check the Datacenter

Safety

- What is the local crime rate? This is another community need question.

Transportation and Equal Justice

- What is the proportion of households without vehicle access by race/ethnicity? This is another community need question.
  - Check the American Community Survey section of the US Census

When completed, this research should be the orientation you need to create a Roosevelt case study for your college or university, as well as give you some direction for what aspect of your Anchor Institution you hope to change. If you have any questions or comments, please reach out to Alan (asmith@rooseveltinstitute.org).