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URBAN.Boston (Urban Research-Based Action Network): Creating connections between community + academia

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URBAN.Boston (Urban Research-Based Action Network)

Creating connections between community + academia

Summary/Abstract

The Urban Research-Based Action Network (URBAN) is a national platform that facilitates community-based research, teaching and learning for action across disciplinary lines, connecting scholars and community activists within and across cities. It was started in 2011 to honor the memory of activist scholar Marilyn Gitell, and has received generous support from SAGE Publications. URBAN currently has local nodes in Boston, LA, NY, and Northern California. It also has nodes that connect at the national level among sociologists, education researchers and community planners.

Goals and Objectives

The purpose of URBAN.Boston is to promote + advance research collaborations that create **new knowledge** and support **community action**. It does this by:

- Fostering connections and relationships between academics, researchers (outside of academia), community members, and community organizations;
- Facilitating and incubating research-action ideas and projects;
- Developing and encouraging the use of truly collaborative principles of research;
- Facilitating sharing of resources and development of collaborative and participatory research skills;
- Encouraging graduate students and supporting academics pursuing community-based research within the academy;
- Fostering understanding and support of collaborative research within academic institutions;
- Supporting community organizations in building the capacity to link research to action; and
- Connecting URBAN.Boston members to the national URBAN network.



URBAN.Boston is led by a Planning Team comprised of diverse practitioners who are committed to building this emerging network. Current Planning Team members include: Ina Anderson (MA SmartGrowth Alliance), Soo Hong (Wellesley College), Chien-Chi Huang (Asian Breast Cancer Initiative), Michael Johnson (UMASS Boston), Patricia Krueger-Henney (UMASS Boston), Patricia Molina-Costa (MIT), John Saltmarsh (UMASS Boston), Mark Warren (UMASS Boston), and John Wooding (UMASS Lowell). There are currently over 150 participants in the URBAN.Boston network including members of local and statewide community groups, labor unions, think-tanks, academic institutions, government agencies, businesses, financial institutions, and other non-profits.

Approaches/Methods

In 2012-2013, URBAN.Boston focused on engaging in public discussions and increasing our network capacity both online and in person. The Boston node coordinated 4 public meetings over the past year:

- ✓ July 2012 – 1st exploratory meeting held at UMASS Boston, where over 40 community leaders and faculty members shared ideas of what URBAN could be
- ✓ October 2012 – 2nd meeting held in partnership with the MA Smart Growth Alliance with over 40 attendees who discussed the issues that typically arise in collaborative research
- ✓ December 2012 – 3rd public meeting held at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, convening over 60 participants engaging in conversation about how URBAN.Boston can help create a new kind of relationship between communities and academics
- ✓ February 2013 – 4th public meeting at Viet-AID where over 50 attendees had an opportunity to meet new people in their fields of interest and discuss current policy issues affecting local neighborhoods

Conclusion/Next Steps

URBAN.Boston is focused on bringing researchers and community members together to work on mutual areas of interest including, but not limited to health, housing and education as well as neighborhood-level issues, such as transportation; and to assist community members in using diverse data sources and analytic methods to devise evidence-based interventions. Additionally, URBAN.Boston will continue to enhance its communications capabilities to connect the Boston community around engaged research and action.

Additional Partnerships, Interests, Information and/or Contacts

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