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Social Entrepreneurship Education as a Viable Approach to Building Resilient Communities



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Synonyms

[Social enterprise](#); [Social entrepreneurship](#)

Definition

Social entrepreneurship: Engaging in new and innovative activities geared toward creating social value and producing measurable societal benefits.

Building resilient communities: Equipping communities with capacities to identify and address vulnerabilities as well as withstand and/or recover from major incidence(s) that impact viability and sustainability.

Dallas southern sector: South of Interstate 30, including the communities of West Dallas, Oak Cliff, South Dallas/Fair Park, Pleasant Grove, and Southeast Dallas.

Introduction

Opportunities to promote economic development and socioeconomic mobility are plentiful in Dallas County, especially in the southern sector loosely defined as south of Interstate 30, including the communities of West Dallas, Oak Cliff, South Dallas/Fair Park, Pleasant Grove, and Southeast Dallas. Implementing a social entrepreneurship approach that fosters social enterprises by either individuals or collectives could be the antidote to much needed transformational change in southern Dallas County. Such an approach will empower residents, especially the youth to be change agents in the transformation of their communities. Similarly, a social entrepreneurship approach will effectively complement existing economic development agendas coordinated by the City of Dallas such as the Grow South Initiative and the South Dallas/Fair Park Opportunity Fund as well as emerging private ventures from existing community nonprofits and business advocacy organizations such as the Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Existing economic growth statistics points to an economic divide between northern and southern Dallas County. As of 2017, 86% of jobs, 83% of property values, and 86% of permit values were associated with the north while the south shares compared at 14%, 17%, and 14%, respectively. The consequence of inequalities between north and south values amounts to billions of dollars in

economic disparities in income, debt and assets, as well as education (Joseph and Cowan 2017). The median income of residents in Dallas County, especially Blacks and Hispanics who live mostly in the southern sector, is less than 60% of their Asian and White counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau 2015). About 30% or more of residents have subprime credit scores and 65% spend more than 30% of their income on rent; 73% of Dallas County public schools students are disproportionately economically challenged which implies eligibility to receive some food-related assistance from the federal government; and White residents stand a better chance of completing bachelor's degree, at least 2.4 to 5.2 times than their Hispanic and Black counterparts (Groves and Tingle 2018; Texas Education Agency 2016; U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

The disparities as referenced are staggering and unlikely to promote the county's socioeconomic health in the long term, especially as measured per capita. There is a need to build resilient communities in southern Dallas County that act as conduits to promote equity in socioeconomic development and ensure sustainable living wages. Education, especially social entrepreneurship education has the potential to be a catalyst to building and fostering resilient communities. Building resilient communities means equipping them with capacities to identify and address vulnerabilities as well as withstand and/or recover from major incidence(s) that impact viability and sustainability.

For the purposes of this entry, social entrepreneurship is defined as engaging in new and innovative activities geared toward creating social value and producing measurable societal benefits. The new and innovative activity can be sector specific, i.e., public sector, business, or nonprofit. The activity can also be interconnected across sectors in ways that help address a complex or an endemic social problem plaguing a community. The concept of social entrepreneurship is synonymous to social enterprise. It is used interchangeably with social enterprise to denote business ventures with missions focused on garnering societal benefits.

The realization of emergent opportunities for social value creation in economic, social, education, transportation and health issues in Dallas County, especially southern Dallas, motivates the Urban SERCH Institute (SERCH) and School of Business (SB) at UNT Dallas to embrace social innovation through tailored training and education programs. In fact, SERCH and SB's efforts are inextricably intertwined with UNT Dallas mission to "empower students, transform lives and strengthen communities" (UNT Dallas 2020).

UNT Dallas's strategic location and mission support SERCH's and SB's commitment to be conduits for social innovation through cutting edge training and development of social entrepreneurs. With support from like-minded entities and individuals, the partnership between SERCH and SB will help to collectively transform communities and empower individuals to facilitate much needed socioeconomic improvements.

This paper is written as a prospectus with a goal to explore community interventions through social enterprise education. It will also discuss the various components of a model social entrepreneurship program, its significance, benefits, and best practices in social enterprise education.

Intervention Through Social Entrepreneurship Education

Dallas County is very cosmopolitan and diversity is apparent in many spheres of life. As of 2019, the county has over 2.6 million people. Hispanics constitute 40.5% of the population; Whites 28.5%; Blacks or African-American 22.4%; Asians 6.7%; American Indians and Alaska Natives 1.1% (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). The county is projected to grow to about 3.8 million people by 2050 with people of color likely to constitute about 80% to 88% of the population (Texas Demographic Center 2019).

The current demographics of Dallas County and long-term projections suggest that people of color are the cornerstones to the county's socioeconomic health and development. Yet there is apparent geographical separation based on race and ethnicity (Groves and Tingle 2018). Historically, policies

drew lines of demarcations to separate communities culturally, ethnically, and economically, isolating historically disenfranchised populations and preventing them to benefit in the economic advancements reaped by the majority White business community in the county (Glasrud 1974). Practices such as redlining during the Jim Crow era also proved to be problematic for communities of color to advance socially and economically in the area (Macon 2017).

Disparities in areas such as income, education, and health are also apparent and strongly correlated with geographic location in Dallas County. The average Black or African-American in the workforce earns 54 cents and Hispanics 58 cents of every dollar earned by their White counterparts (Groves and Tingle 2018; U.S. Census Bureau 2015). Educational attainment is also low with only 16.5% of disadvantaged students earning a college degree or certification (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board 2017; Groves and Tingle 2018). These disparities, even though dire, present opportunities for constructive and innovative solutions with social entrepreneurship education as one of the viable means to promote change and consequently empower individuals and build resilient communities.

Education, especially higher education, in many ways is considered as an opportunity equalizer (Marina and Holmes 2009). Educating youth in southern Dallas County, especially in social entrepreneurship, will build their skill sets as change agents capable of building resource bases to develop and support resilient communities. In fact, some scholars accentuate the role of education in promoting equity and empowerment that advances individual and communal well-being (Winkle-Wagner and Nelson 2009; Blau and Duncan 1967; Benedict and McClough 2010; Grove and Montgomery 2003; Bernardi and Ballarino 2016). Social entrepreneurship education as proposed will be community-centric. Youth with keen interest in using business approaches to help address endemic social problems in their communities will be identified, recruited, and supported through all stages of their entrepreneurship education.

The proposed social entrepreneurship program is inextricably connected with the mission and vision of UNT Dallas, the only comprehensive 4-year urban public university in the city limits of Dallas. The university's vision encapsulates education and community connectedness as a conduit to viable social and economic mobility (UNT Dallas 2020). Collectively, the university's driving rationale coupled with its location, which is in the midst of communities plagued by multiple vulnerabilities, places UNT Dallas in a unique position to serve as a catalyst in transformational change.

In the 10 years of its existence, UNT Dallas has been steadfastly focused on its education and community transformation agenda for societal benefits. For instance, in the 2018–2019 academic year alone, about 900 plus students graduated from various disciplines and most of these graduates are currently working and spearheading change in various communities in southern Dallas through efforts with nonprofits, local governments, and private entities (UNT Dallas News 2019). The Urban SERCH Institute (SERCH) and School of Business (SB) will develop and implement a model social entrepreneurship program that is scalable to the growth of both the university and the surrounding communities. SERCH will facilitate multistakeholder engagements to disseminate and realize established program goal and objective. The School of Business' extensive pragmatic educational methodologies and proven connectedness with key players in industry will enrich program content and attendant experiential learning components. With additional support from community partners, the social entrepreneurship program will build a synergy among its components that will enhance current community development efforts to better leverage resources and knowledge with resulting exponential improvements in outcomes.

Components of the Social Entrepreneurship Program

The intent of SERCH and SB Social Entrepreneurship Program is to develop social

entrepreneurs with keen interest in the local system context to provide meaningful market-based solutions to the complex social challenges in the various communities of Dallas County, especially southern Dallas County, and eventually, the State of Texas. The program will equip participants with much needed social entrepreneurship, technical, and business skills, and competencies to effectively facilitate change through innovative social enterprises. The participants will enroll in a five-course Social Entrepreneurship Certificate Program on the campus of the University of North Texas at Dallas with a curriculum that is firmly rooted in social enterprise principles and practices within the larger framework of market-based solutions. Eventually, a satellite campus will be established by capitalizing on the existing partnership with Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD), which is now called Dallas College, to maximize access and presence in the community.

The goal is to train 150–200 social entrepreneurs within a 5-year period consisting of 20–25 students per cohort in a 6 months-to-a-year using innovative and evidence-based curriculum with attendant experiential learning components. The experiential learning component will cut across local, state, regional, national, and international domains to help develop relevant competencies to foster the generation of much needed social impact for the communities' benefits. Relatedly, the following objectives in consonance with program intents and purposes are established: (a) to grow social entrepreneurship knowledge of participants through evidence-based social enterprise curriculum with specific student learning objectives, (b) to equip participants with the relevant skillsets for success through innovative social enterprise rooted in market-based principles and practices, (c) to enhance abilities of participants to promote effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders across public, private, and non-profit spheres toward purposeful ends, (d) to help participants develop unique competencies through extensive experiential learning at key innovative market-based enterprises with established tradition of social responsibility and social impact, and (e) to create a pipeline of

entrepreneurs who can also serve as consultants to foster sustainable solutions through engagement with various entities that focus on innovatively addressing complex social problems. The program curriculum and attendant instruction by experienced and highly-credentialed faculty and professionals are the pathways to attain student learning objectives.

Curriculum

The curriculum will be innovative and evidence-based using highly-credentialed faculty and professionals to deliver relevant and timely market-based social enterprise content. A distinguished innovative entrepreneurship guest speaker series of accomplished business and social enterprise entrepreneurs will augment the curriculum. An experiential learning component consisting of individual and group mentorship, field trips, conferences, social innovation lab, and social entrepreneur-in-residence, knowledge network, and placement with key market-based social impact entities will be included for an integrated experience.

Examples of courses to be taught in the Social Entrepreneurship Program will include:

- (a) *Microfinance and Applied Finance in the Social Sector*: Course that connects multiple business principles (Finance, Accounting, Economics, and Microfinance) and applies them to the entrepreneurial journey
- (b) *Strategic Perspectives and Principles in Social Entrepreneurship*: Course in strategy that will introduce participants to various schools of thought in strategy. Students will learn to apply each to their entrepreneurial pursuits
- (c) *Sociology of Social Sector Entrepreneurship*: This course connects the study of society, patterns of social relationships, and social interaction to the building, scaling, and growing of businesses in an economic ecosystem, specifically in an entrepreneurial venture that places an emphasis on building on the social good
- (d) *Fundamentals of Social Impact Investing*: Course that relates the rudiments of social

impact investment in vulnerable communities for social value alongside attendant financial rewards/returns, and

- (e) *Cases in New Venture Leadership and Management*: Course that uses relevant conceptual and practical cases in social ventures in emergent and established economies/societies. The courses as referenced will collectively blend relevant conceptual and functional competencies that are essential to equipping the participants for various social enterprise endeavors including management and sustainability. Furthermore, practical components involving experiential learning, innovation labs and mentorship among others will expose participants to contemporary realities of social entrepreneurship within local and regional contexts to foster comprehensive and collective understanding of relevant components. The uniqueness of the program is grounded in its synergy to draw on and leverage capacities and strengths of multisector collaborative stakeholders to help create innovative solutions to endemic social problems and doing so from collective multisector lens.

Target Groups and Enterprise Solution Component

The intent of the social entrepreneurship program, especially the resolve to bolster collective social impact as a conduit to community transformation, will guide recruitment of participants. While the program will be inclusive in its approach, the underlying commonalities in upbringing and community experience in underserved and under-resourced setting, coupled with a passion for enterprise solutions to endemic social challenges will guide selection into the program. Consequently, the target groups for the social entrepreneurship program will be a blend of associate degree holders from any of DCCCD programs, bachelor's degree holders from Paul Quinn College, and bachelor's and graduate degree holders from UNT Dallas programs. Similarly, individuals and community stakeholders with related and relevant qualifications, and with demonstrated interest in innovative social enterprise as an alternative approach to social and

economic viability, especially for Dallas County communities, will be considered as well. The focus on participants from the various communities is to foster change agent roles by empowering them to creatively use their acquired social enterprise competencies, business skillsets, innovation, and passion for community solutions to engineer transformational change.

The enterprise solution component of the program will be an attempt to foster collaboration between for-profit, nonprofit and public entities relative to promoting viability and sustainability. The startup seed funding of \$50,000 with guarantees from SERCH and School of Business and other program collaborative partners will promote access to capital. Besides the likely microcredit arrangements, SERCH and SB Business Education Innovation Lab will work with program participants to apply for general and categorical grants, bid for low threshold contracts from the City of Dallas among others and provide technical assistance during the life cycle of each project. Proposals focusing on endemic challenges in southern Dallas, i.e., food insecurity, neighborhood development, property development and management, innovation in public safety, career readiness education, transportation, reentry and reintegration of offenders, creative waste management, sustainability, innovation in poverty alleviation, promoting health equity and culture of health among others will be supported. Intentionality relative to participants' diverse cultural backgrounds, but with similar socioeconomic predicaments, demonstrated passion for social solutions for social impact, understanding of sound financial management principles, viable implementation plan and relentless resolve to make change even in instances of mounting and dire personal and professional challenges are some of the characteristics that will shape consideration for seed funding.

Social Entrepreneurship Model

The model/figure 1 below depicts the multisector collaboration in social entrepreneurship education as a conduit to building resilient communities. Education takes the center stage in this model/figure 1 because of its catalytic role in fostering

knowledge, skills, and abilities of program participants with eventual empowerment and economic mobility at both the individual and community levels. The linkages of aspirations and interests coupled with shared understanding, communication, and commitment of collaborative partners to the established program goal and objectives create the needed synergy for constructive outputs and/or outcomes for societal benefits. Furthermore, the model/figure 1 underscores the essence of robust and integrated partnerships grounded in a common resolve to ameliorate, if not eliminate, endemic vulnerabilities that plague various communities in southern Dallas County. In essence, the model's uniqueness is rooted in its focused intervention and local value proposition for societal benefits.

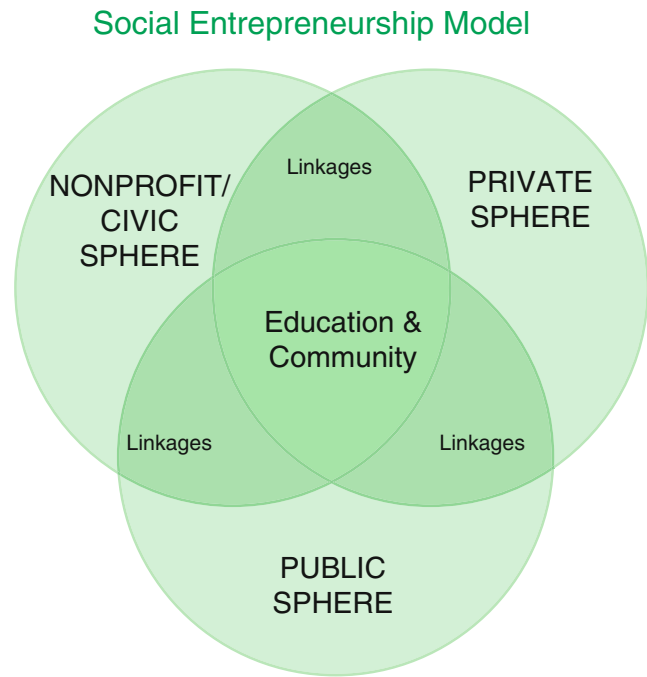
This social entrepreneurship program will be a collaboration between SERCH, School of Business, UNT Dallas, Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce (DBCC), Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (GDHCC), Dallas County Community College District, (DCCCD), now Dallas College, Dallas Entrepreneurship Center (DEC), Dallas Regional Chamber (DRC), Greater Dallas Asian American Chamber of Commerce (GDAACC), the African American Leadership Institute at Paul Quinn College, Star United Global Outreach (SUGO), Career Services at UNT Dallas, like-minded community-oriented foundations, individuals and corporate investors and other emergent partners based on the evolution of the program. These partners will play unique and critical roles and collectively help achieve the intents and purposes of the program for the communities' benefits. For instance, the chambers of commerce, foundations and corporate partners will be heavily involved in resource generation, mentorship, and experiential learning among others while the civic and educational partners will mostly help shape the curriculum, strategic community engagement, workshops and seminars, innovation lab, etc. to augment SERCH & SB efforts in general. The uniqueness of this partnership is grounded in its extensive multi-stakeholder engagement of state-owned educational institutions, private, and nonprofit entities including chambers of commerce, private equity

lenders/angel investors among others which represents the convergence of three (3) spheres for collective impact and the opportunity for collaborative education/learning and sustainable outcomes based on the collective resolve of all the partners involved.

Significance, Benefits, and Best Practices

The growing complexity of social problems and their endemic nature call for innovative approaches to foster viable and sustainable solutions. While government and private sector entities promote policy-based and profit-oriented approaches/solutions in their respective capacities, there still appears to be some gaps in constructively addressing complex problems i.e. poverty, homelessness, lack of affordable housing, inequity in urban infrastructure and transportation, and others plaguing various communities in Dallas County. Social entrepreneurship which encourages innovative activities to help create social value has become an accepted approach in both developed and emerging economies for addressing such complex social problems. Scholars such as Austin and Rangan (2019), Austin et al. (2003), Kokko (2018), Lyne et al. (2018), Thorgren and Omoredede (2018), Dionisio (2019), Finlayson and Roy (2019), White et al. (2018), Akella and Eid (2018), Shin (2018), Tian et al. (2018), MacMillan and Thompson (2013), and Bornstein and Davis (2010) among others persuasively postulate how social entrepreneurship serves as an antidote to complex societal challenges based on its use of innovative community-centric enterprise-oriented undertakings. For instance, Austin and Rangan (2019) constructively document Harvard School of Business' experience with social entrepreneurship education in the past 25 years involving multi-sector stakeholders and emphasizing the use of cases in developing areas/Global South to inform both theory and praxis. The program has multiple components in instructional and practical terms and so far, graduated 7,565 students at the graduate level and 12,329 executive practitioners from various parts of the world with additional

Social Entrepreneurship Education as a Viable Approach to Building Resilient Communities,
Fig. 1 Model designed by the authors, Agbodzakey, Shumway and Houston (2020)



scholarly output of over 1000 cases to highlight associated social enterprise efforts (Austin and Rangan 2019, p.12).

The proactive and collaborative nature of the proposed SERCH and SB program once implemented is likely to lead to some direct and indirect benefits to participants, communities, and the county at large. The likely benefits are: (i) empowered county residents who will creatively help address endemic social problems in the various communities, (ii) equitable economic development as the emergent entrepreneurs foster economic opportunity in Dallas County, especially southern Dallas, (iii) empowered communities as the created economic opportunities promote social viability and sustainability, (iv) increased tax base as a result of the innovative social enterprise activities positively improve the city's revenue base and consequently improve the community's access to additional development funds, and (v) enhanced economic mobility for individuals with attendant benefits to families and communities. Regular evaluation of program content and attendant outputs/outcomes will be informed by both direct and indirect measures.

Academic institutions and affiliated centers and institutes have embraced social entrepreneurship because of its viability as an alternative approach to community problem solving. Notable institutions such as Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Southern California, and numerous others have integrated social entrepreneurship as part of their emergent innovative curriculum. Thus, the entrepreneurship program fosters training and empowerment of students and practitioners to play change agent roles in community problem solving. Consequently, the SERCH and SB Social Entrepreneurship Program will benchmark the Harvard Business School Social Enterprise Initiative and the Brittingham Social Enterprise Lab (BSEL) model at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business as well as other proven programs in the US and overseas. Furthermore, the program will have an Advisory Board to promote viability and sustainability and a Social Enterprise Knowledge Network (SEKN) consisting of local, national, international/global social entrepreneurs to foster sharing of practical knowledge and expertise. Modeling best practices of the referenced established programs in

curriculum and social innovation lab will bolster training of entrepreneurs with a passion to help address social problems in Dallas County, especially in southern Dallas and by doing so enable building of resilient communities.

Conclusion

Is there a hope for southern Dallas? And can the endemic social problems be mitigated? This paper attempts to highlight a proposed social entrepreneurship education program involving multisector stakeholders targeted toward individuals with common socioeconomic background and experiences, but with a passion to make change for personal and communal well-being. The program is conceptualized as an innovative approach to tackling endemic social problems using insights from established programs at Harvard Business School, and University of Southern California Marshall School of Business among others, but with a particular attention to Dallas.

Education is believed to be an impactful equalizer (Bernardi and Ballarino 2016; Marina and Holmes 2009) and such will be the case in southern Dallas if the targeted social entrepreneurship program is implemented. While it might not entirely eradicate endemic social problems that plague southern Dallas, it can be a genesis of sustainable systems and a social impact approach to building resilient communities by relying on individuals with understanding of the local system context and collective solution-oriented interests to spearhead transformational change for the communities' benefits. There is no doubt there will be systems and resource challenges to implementation, but the common resolve of the multisector stakeholders should help trump any such emergent situations and/or occurrences.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Governance and Social Enterprise](#)
- ▶ [Social Entrepreneurship](#)

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