



**Mel King Institute**  
for community building

# **Community Development Corporations and Academic Partnerships**

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*advancing skills, knowledge and leadership*

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The Mel King Institute for Community Building is a collaborative program of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and other public, private, and nonprofit community development partners.

## Introduction

*The Mel King Institute for Community Building fosters vibrant and thriving Massachusetts communities by advancing the skills, knowledge and leadership ability of professional practitioners and volunteer leaders in the community development field. We leverage collaborative educational partnerships that increase access, encourage innovation, and promote and institutionalize systemic success.*

As part of its work to continue to leverage educational partnerships, the Mel King Institute undertook an assessment of university-CDC collaborations in Massachusetts in 2012-13. We sought to understand the nature of those partnerships, and to identify places where the Mel King Institute might further these partnerships going forward. This study began with an e survey of Massachusetts CDCs, to which 24 CDC staff members responded (see summary chart at the end of this report). We then surveyed or spoke with 16 people at universities plus 10 funders, community development leaders and other stakeholders, seeking to identify model partnerships and opportunities for partnerships.

### **The primary sources of university support to Massachusetts CDCs identified by CDCs in our survey are:**

1. Interns
2. Learning opportunities for people from community and for CDC staff, and
3. Faculty expertise for specific projects.

### **CDCs noted that they are giving universities:**

1. Research opportunities for students
2. Guest speakers in classes
3. Student advice about community development careers
4. Hands on learning opportunities, and
5. Research opportunities for faculty.

### **CDCs would like to see:**

1. Coalitions to bring resources to residents of the communities that CDCs serve
2. Deep institutional investment in communities, including partnerships to bring financial resources to CDC programs and real estate projects
3. Partnerships to revitalize neighborhoods, and
4. Consistent and ongoing internships with a variety of undergraduate and graduate students from a wide range of institutions of higher education.

### **University leaders want:**

1. Opportunities for students to learn
2. Cutting edge research opportunities
3. Partnerships for community betterment in some cases, and
4. Opportunities for positive civic engagement/community service for students and for the university as a whole in some cases.

From our surveys and conversations, we found a rich landscape of programs and activities, including collaborations between the many CDCs and universities in Massachusetts, as well as other university-community partnerships. We saw little coordination among the partnerships. These partnerships are very dependent on personal relationships and the particular motivations of the parties involved.

We found some relatively new university-based collaborations that may present opportunities for Massachusetts CDCs and the communities that they serve, and a few examples of more comprehensive partnerships, some between universities and CDCs and some between universities and other community

based organizations and government agencies that bear watching. We learned about changes in partnerships over time, as key players moved on and funds ran out. These changes represent some important lessons for the sustainability of partnerships going forward.

This report represents a summary of our findings and some recommendations for next steps.

## The Range of Partnerships

### I. Individual Internships and Service Learning Opportunities

Students in academic programs in city planning, public administration, real estate, urban affairs, and other areas look for part-time internships while they are in school, or full time internships, typically over the summer. Increasing numbers of institutions of higher education encourage or require some sort of service learning or civic engagement activity. Some CDCs actively look for interns or people doing service learning to support program and administrative activities. Some make an ongoing commitment to providing students with a learning experience.

**The opportunities:** From the perspective of some CDCs, interns and people doing service learning represent an important source of low or no-cost labor. Students may not have a lot of experience but they are often enthusiastic and eager to learn. In some cases, they provide a community service that the CDC would not otherwise be able to offer. CDC staff members or leaders who are alumni of particular local programs often have ready access to interns through their personal connections with faculty and staff.

**The challenges:** Students are sometimes unreliable or have limited time to give, given their school schedules, and may only commit for a short term. They often require CDC staff supervision. Some CDCs leaders note that the time and effort isn't worth it to them, given other demands on their time. Professors at some of the universities report that there is competition for interns from programs that can pay (or pay more than CDCs), or are more "exotic" (e.g. go to another country to work for the summer) or "prestigious" (e.g. student thinks look better on the resume). Also, opportunities at CDCs are not always well-known to students and faculty. Some schools require that their students earn a certain amount (e.g. \$7000 for the summer) that may be prohibitive for some CDCs.

**An example of what works:** Fenway CDC as part of a strategic plan highlighted the need for further partnerships with the universities, particularly those in its backyard. Sarah Horsley, Civic Engagement Director at Fenway, successfully reached out to a wide range of academic institutions. Recruiting interns and service learners is part of her job. Fenway CDC and others have gone beyond graduate city planning and urban studies programs to find interns who assist in marketing and communications, teach yoga to elders, exchange language lessons and support non English speakers as they navigate local service systems. Fenway CDC has found its interns by posting at local universities and building particular relationships with particular professors but also by using [idealist.org](http://idealist.org) to find people who are post college and are seeking work experience.



**Some recommendations:** Several CDCs noted the need for some sort of intern or volunteer policies, in order to better clarify expectations and make the relationships work. Funders state that there are

opportunities to reach to a wide range of programs for interns (e.g. accounting programs, law schools). Some university faculty and staff asked for more information about CDCs' internship needs. The Mel King Institute may be able to play a coordinating and referring role in these areas.

## II. Supervised Learning Projects



Professors organize research projects as part of their classes. Some university programs require that students undertake a “practicum” or “policy analysis exercise” or the like. Some summer fellowships require analysis of a particular community development related question.

**The opportunities:** Some CDCs have been able to take advantage of these projects, which often come with more academic framing or supervision than internships. Alumni of particular programs who work at CDCs often know who to go to and how to frame a project to make it

sound interesting. In at least one case (see below), a CDC with limited resources has been able to carry out a specific program activity due to the engagement of a professor and her students.

**The challenges:** Accessing these particular opportunities typically depends on personal relationships. They are often time limited. Requirements to integrate in a particular theory or analysis may sometimes make the final product less useful than a CDC might have hoped. Some CDCs note that it's great when they are seen as “the flavor the month” but that can change over time, with faculty and student interest and information, or lack thereof.

**Some examples of what works:** Laura Goldin is a Professor of Environmental Studies at Brandeis University. She built a partnership with WATCH CDC, where for five years her students have worked in the Housing Assistance Clinic, advocating for low income tenants and training people on their housing rights. WATCH would not have been able to sustain this program without the support of this professor and her students, who receive some of their supervision from WATCH and some from Professor Goldin, plus training from Boston College Legal Assistance Bureau.

UMass Amherst has a Design Center in Springfield that connects UMass Extension and faculty and students in landscape architecture and planning with the City of Springfield's Planning Department. Students work on particular urban development problems that the City presents. They conduct feasibility studies through studio classes. The City pays \$5000 for a studio. Michael DiPasquale of UMass says this fills a need, given the City's limited capacity. But the distance from UMass Amherst to Springfield and limited student time are challenges.

**Some recommendations:** An opportunity that CDCs might better tap is a summer fellowship program supported by NeighborWorks America at the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies. Two Harvard Kennedy School or Graduate School of Design students are supported to address a policy issue or challenge, working out of the Boston or Washington DC office of NeighborWorks America. They typically interview practitioners and present their research at a NeighborWorks Training Institute. Pam Baldwin from the Joint Center noted that the Mel King Institute could suggest a particular policy challenge or research topic that would benefit CDCs.

### III. Learning Opportunities for CDC Staff and Community Members

Institutions of higher education in Massachusetts and nearby states have been home to a range of training and degree earning programs that CDC staff and community members have been able to take advantage of.

**The opportunities:** Programs like Achieving Excellence (based in part at Harvard, sponsored by NeighborWorks America) have allowed CDC Directors to pursue a particular organizational challenge while gaining a national peer group, formal coaching and support. The Boston University Institute for Nonprofit Management and Leadership has given a number of CDC Directors and staff people an opportunity to build their management skills, within a peer group of participants from a range of Boston area nonprofits. CDC staff and others in the community development field have obtained degrees from adult learning programs including those at Cambridge College and Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU).

**The challenges:** Some of the national Fellowship programs (e.g. Achieving Excellence, Loeb Fellows) are highly competitive. While CDC participants greatly appreciate the opportunities, some complain that there is little chance to follow up and get support once the Fellowship is over (Note: Some Achieving Excellence peer groups have continued past the program.). Others note challenges in finding the time to reflect and take advantage of the learning during the Fellowship, due to day-to-day work demands. In some cases, the cost is prohibitive. Southern New Hampshire University shut down its Master's in Community Economic Development program, except for the on line learning program component, due to rising costs.

**An example of what works:** The Barr Fellowship program, while not at a university, has provided a sabbatical, coaching and a learning community to a range of Boston nonprofit leaders, including a small number of Boston CDC Directors. Barr has provided grants to the Fellows' nonprofits during the sabbatical and some support for interim leaders.

**Some recommendations:** There might be opportunities to fund roving interim staff to fill gaps at CDCs and allow more of the above types of learning opportunities to take place. Perhaps more alumni gatherings among local participants in various training programs could be encouraged. We might want to explore what programs could fill the gap left by the closing of SNHU's CED Program. Cambridge College and UMass Boston (which may be starting a Master's in City Planning) seem interested in this.

### IV. Teaching and Promoting the Field

CDC leaders are asked to teach university classes, be guest lecturers, and participate in career fairs.

**The opportunities:** CDC leaders including Danny LeBlanc from Somerville and Bill Traynor, formerly from Lawrence Community Works, have taught at Cambridge College and elsewhere. CDC leaders speaking at universities have inspired students to pursue community development careers.

**The challenges:** Opportunities to be teachers, guest lecturers, or participants in career workshops typically come through personal relationships. Teaching is time intensive and not typically well paid, and therefore some CDC leaders have found that they could not continue to teach and run their organizations.

**Examples of what works:** Harvard's Kennedy School publishes a list of faculty and staff who are available to speak on particular topics. Pam Baldwin from the Joint Center for Housing Studies was recently involved with a NeighborWorks symposium on the "future of the field".

**Some recommendations:** The Mel King Institute could set up a Speakers Bureau with participants from various CDCs, and publicize this list at universities, in order to broaden the pool of people who do this

work. There may be opportunities to collaborate with faculty on community development curriculum. There may be other programs, such as the Rappaport Institute Summer Fellows, where we could connect more with students and expose them to local community development work. And there may be connections to make to seminars like the NeighborWorks symposium referred to above.

## V. Partnerships for Neighborhood Improvement

Universities have reached out to build partnerships with CDCs, government agencies and others in order to improve surrounding (or sometimes nearby) low income communities. Some of these partnerships have come from a university president's office and some come from a particular faculty member or students' interests. Some have been sustained by particular funding opportunities. Some partnerships are infused with a university's own service mission and some are tied into a desire to attract students and provide them with a safe community.

**The Opportunities:** These partnerships have brought significant financial resources into CDCs and into their communities. They have brought publicity for community development work, free student labor, and in some cases, valuable expertise. Ramon Borges Mendes at Clark University sees opportunities to plan more comprehensively as partners in small to mid-sized communities, and believes that a university can play a role as a stabilizing entity in low income communities.

**The Challenges:** Without deep sustained resources and commitment, some of these partnerships have come and gone. Managing the complex set of relationships and the power dynamics, and ensuring shared objectives can be a challenge. Much of the current interest from university partners seems to be in improving public schools and educational outcomes for young people, which is an area that only some CDCs have stepped into (although clearly there are opportunities for partnerships here).

**Examples of what works: Improve our Community Partnerships--**Clark University in Worcester and Springfield College in Springfield have each made significant long term economic and social investments in the low income neighborhoods in which they are located. In each case, there is a university mission to engage with the community, with significant leadership at the University administration level, and recognition of the economic impact that the university has on the community.



Clark has provided financial and technical assistance resources to the Main South Community and Main South CDC for more than 25 years. Beginning with a line of credit to help Main South CDC buy up abandoned buildings, Clark went on to work with the CDC and others in the community on more comprehensive community development efforts. The university has provided financial incentives for faculty and staff to buy homes in the neighborhood. They provide teaching support to a magnet public school that they helped develop. Clark and others have provided lending capital to

Main South's business lending program. Clark provides free university tuition to neighborhood residents

and free summer recreational activities based at the Main South Community Revitalization Center. University faculty and staff help lead these summer activities.

Springfield College has a 20 year old partnership with the neighborhood councils in the Old Hill neighborhood. They have worked with both Springfield NHS and with HAP Housing. Charles Rucks from NHS is on the neighborhood council. Together with HAP, the College puts money into neighborhood cleanups and large block parties where information and referrals are provided to area residents. They have contributed to first time buyer funds to get employees into homeownership in the neighborhood, and guaranteed a conventional loan for HAP to do land banking. The College also sponsors an AmeriCorps program for their students, many of whom work in local schools.

A long standing relationship between the Main South CDC and Clark, and successful access of key public and private resources (SEEDCO early funding, HUD University Partnership grant, HUD Promised Neighborhood Grant) combined with a commitment of part of the university's endowment to neighborhood revitalization have made that a successful partnership. Consistent long term leadership at the university (Jack Foley, Vice President for Government and Community Affairs) and at the CDC (Steve Teasdale) have likely also contributed to its success. Sarah Page of HAP Housing reports that while Springfield College is still a partner, the level and type of engagement changes with changes in personnel at the College doing this work.

**Examples of what works: Building on a relationship**--MIT at Lawrence began with three graduate students in MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning making a strong commitment, together with former CDC Director and consultant Bill Traynor, to building an effective community based organization, Lawrence Community Works. The partnership expanded over time largely due to the commitment of a particular faculty member, Lorraine Hoyt, who accessed HUD research funds, in order to work with several key local organizations on "action oriented scholarship". MIT graduate students found internships and research projects in Lawrence. Graduate and undergraduate students tutored and organized field trips for local high school students.

But MIT is in Cambridge, not in Lawrence. Lorraine Hoyt did not get tenure at MIT and moved to Tufts. Ezra Glenn of MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning currently manages the ongoing student partnerships with Lawrence. He notes that it is difficult to sustain this kind of partnership without strong faculty or university leadership, and that there are challenges combining funding intended for research with community service goals.

While not a partnership directly with CDCs, the commitment made by Harvard Law School's David Grossman and his students to City Life and their anti-foreclosure organizing work is worthy of note. Like the WATCH-Brandeis partnership and the start of MIT at Lawrence, the Harvard Law School partnership brought active student involvement and energy to bear on a critical community development need. Students have lent both technical expertise and person power that has been valued, while they received on-the-ground training in a current urban development challenge.

**Some recommendations:** Channeling student interest in a particular CDC or a particular issue, as was done in Lawrence and with City Life, and the funding and expertise of a university like Clark or Springfield College can have great impact, at least for a time. MACDC could sponsor an Innovation Forum where people who have been engaged in some of these deeper partnerships tell their stories. CDCs and university people from across the state could come together to further learn from these examples.

## VI. Universities as Funders

As noted above, universities have sometimes provided funding to CDC loan funds, and some have set up their own loan pools for faculty and staff to purchase homes. Some have initiated grant programs and some have set up a loan pool in response to concerns about their own expansion.

**Opportunities:** Harvard's 20/20 program was a source of support to CDCs. Smith College's Affordable Housing Fund (see below) has been a source of capital for Valley CDC projects in downtown Northampton.



**Challenges:** Sustainability of a program like Harvard's 20/20 is an issue, particularly when the initiator of that program moves on. Valley CDC's Joanne Campbell notes that some community activists may be critical of a CDC taking funds from a university that is taking over other community properties.

**Example of what works:** The City of Northampton came to an agreement with Smith College in response to concerns about Smith taking housing away from the community. Valley CDC has been able to take advantage of this \$3 million fund for gap financing for affordable housing projects. In the case of Smith and Valley CDC, the self-interests of each party presented synergy.

**Some recommendations:** Again, publicizing what has worked among CDCs and universities, and encouraging others to follow suit, seems valuable and a role that MACDC can play.

## VII. Universities as Sources of Data, New Thinking and Program Evaluation Services

Massachusetts university professors and staff have produced important reports, and provided sources of data and ideas to community development efforts, in Boston and nationally. They have evaluated community development programs and affordable housing initiatives. There are some newer university based efforts to collaborate across universities (BARI, URBAN) that may hold value for community development practitioners.

**Opportunities:** Community development practitioners can learn from the program evaluations and other topical work produced by university researchers. University research institutes have been and are likely to continue to be important sources of up to date analysis of data on housing, economic trends and the like.

**Challenges:** CDC leaders are not always aware of the work that local academics are producing. From our survey of academics, it appears that university researchers are also not up to date with what local CDCs are doing, and are not necessarily seeing CDCs as places to find cutting edge work that they can engage in, or raise funds to document and draw lessons from. University researchers, sometimes even in the same university or the same department, are often unaware of what other researchers are doing.

**Examples of what works:** Donna Haig Friedman at the Center for Social Policy at UMass Boston is providing active support to comprehensive community development work in Mattapan and Codman Square. The Boston Foundation asked her to evaluate their investments in the Fairmount Corridor and in LISC's Resilient Families/Resilient Communities Initiative over time. The Center for Social Policy has provided data profiles that help community groups develop action plans. By using participatory research

methods and frequent feedback in real time, this program evaluation is directly supporting the work of Codman Square NDC and Mattapan Family Center.

The Greater Boston Housing Report Card produced by the Dukakis Center at Northeastern has been a valuable source of information on Boston area housing trends, which CDCs and others in the field have used.

Professors at UMass Lowell and Viet AID teamed up on an analysis of the health issues in floor sanding and nail salon businesses, two business areas in which Viet AID constituents have been active.

**University collaborations to watch:** The Boston Area Research Initiative (BARI) is a relatively new effort at Harvard to connect university researchers, City government, and practitioners who are focused on the city of Boston. One particular interest of BARI is in opportunities for researchers and practitioners to interact over data analysis. BARI has brought people who “teach Boston” together at city hall. They are trying to work across universities and across silos within universities.

The Urban Research Based Action Network (URBAN) is a national network for community based research, seeking to connect urban scholars and practitioners around issues of urban economic development, sustainable neighborhoods and transportation. There is a Boston area chapter that is being coordinated by Professor Mark Warren at UMass Boston. The Boston URBAN Network met at Viet AID in March.

**Some recommendations:** The Mel King Institute could identify specific topics that would benefit CDCs and propose opportunities for academics to study these issues across communities. It could share information, including news about BARI and URBAN, with CDC leaders.

## Conclusion

As noted above, there are a number of areas in which the Mel King Institute could provide value to CDC-university partnerships. There are opportunities here to achieve efficiencies and set standards for CDCs getting resources, in the form of person power and information from universities. There may be value for universities to go through the Mel King Institute to learn about internship and learning and study opportunities. University researchers might provide more thought leadership and framing for CDC work. There are opportunities to better promote the community development field, to students, to university faculty, and to career and community service offices. There may be opportunities to expand the number of deep university-community partnerships that result in neighborhood improvement and there may be opportunities to build stronger advocacy coalitions among CDCs and university partnership, through education sessions and promotion of partnerships.

Several funders expressed an interest in partnerships that build the capacity of community development corporations to innovate and to address community development needs. At least one funder was cautious about being asked to support universities, particularly those that have significant endowments.

Among those we spoke to, there was some interest in having the Mel King Institute play a role in convening, informing, and enriching these partnerships. Several people suggested that the Mel King Institute dedicate a person to building the links between universities and CDCs, including funneling information back and forth regarding internship and research opportunities, successful partnerships, and the like. Which of these activities that the Mel King Institute takes on depends on what the Institute and Massachusetts CDCs seek to gain from these partnerships, and what resources the Mel King Institute can bring to bear. As a first step, we have begun to review these recommendations with the Mel King Institute Steering Committee and discuss priorities for action.

**Interviews:**

Angela Brown, Hyams Foundation  
Bob Van Meter, LISC Boston  
Chris Clamp, Southern New Hampshire University  
Chris Letts, Hauser Center at Harvard JFK School  
Danny LeBlanc, Somerville Community Corporation  
David Luberoff, BARI  
Donna Haig Freedman, UMass Boston Center for Social Policy  
Ezra Glenn, MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
Michelle Green, Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation  
Geeta Pradhan, Boston Foundation  
Jill Russell, Springfield College  
Jim Stockard, Harvard Graduate School of Design  
Joanne Campbell, Valley CDC  
Joe Kriesberg, MACDC  
Karl Seidman, MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
Michael DiPasquale, UMass Amherst Extension  
Newell Flather, Grants Management Associates  
Pam Baldwin, Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University  
Phil Clay, MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
Phil Hall, Grants Management Associates  
Philip Page, Cambridge College  
Rachel Bratt, Tufts University Department of Urban and Environmental Policy  
Ramon Borges-Mendez, Clark University  
Sarah Horsley, Fenway CDC  
Sarah Page, HAP Housing

**Responded via email survey:**

4 anonymous CDC representatives  
Antonio Torres, Mass Housing Finance Agency  
Aspasia Xypolia, Viet-AID  
Barbara Carrera, Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation  
Dean Harrison, The Neighborhood Corporation  
Elizabeth Gonzalez-Suarez, Dana Farber, Harvard School of Public Health  
Emily Rosenbaum, Coalition for a Better Acre  
Erica Schwarz, WATCH CDC  
Ezra Glenn, MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
Jane Carbone, Homeowners Rehab, INC  
Jennifer Van Campen, Metro West CD  
Joanne Campbell, Valley CDC  
John Fitterer, Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation  
Kristin Anderson, North Shore CDC  
Laura Goldin, Brandeis University  
Marc Dohan, Twin Cities Community Development Corp.  
Michael Johnson, UMass Boston  
Mullen Sawyer, Oak Hill CDC  
Perri Leviss, Mark Warren, URBAN  
Rachel Meketon, The Neighborhood Developers  
Sarah Horsley, Fenway CDC  
Sarah Page, HAP Housing  
Sheila Cuddy, Quaboag Valley CDC  
Sonrisa Cooper, Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation  
Vanessa Calderon-Rosado, Janelle Liceaga, Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion  
Wesley Williams, Harvard Business School Association



**CDC ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS: THE NATURE OF THE PARTNERSHIPS IDENTIFIED BY RESPONDENTS**

	<i>Individual Internships and Service Learning Opportunities</i>	<i>Supervised Learning Projects</i>	<i>Learning Opportunities for CDC Staff and Community Members</i>	<i>Teaching and Promoting the Field</i>	<i>Partnerships for Neighborhood Improvement</i>	<i>Universities as Funders</i>	<i>Universities as Sources of Data, New Thinking and Program Evaluation Services</i>
<b>Coalition for a Better Acre</b>	x	x		x			
<b>Codman Square NDC</b>		x	x	x			x
<b>Dorchester Bay EDC</b>	x		x	x			
<b>Fenway CDC</b>	x	x	x	x			
<b>HAP Housing</b>	x	x		x	x	x	
<b>Homeowners Rehab Inc.</b>	x	x		x			
<b>IBA</b>	x	x	x	x			
<b>JPNDC</b>	x		x	x			
<b>Lawrence Community Works</b>	x	x	x	x	x		
<b>Main South CDC</b>	x	x	x		x		
<b>Metrowest CD</b>	x	x					
<b>The Neighborhood Developers</b>	x		x				

	<i>Individual Internships and Service Learning Opportunities</i>	<i>Supervised Learning Projects</i>	<i>Learning Opportunities for CDC Staff and Community Members</i>	<i>Teaching and Promoting the Field</i>	<i>Partnerships for Neighborhood Improvement</i>	<i>Universities as Funders</i>	<i>Universities as Sources of Data, New Thinking and Program Evaluation Services</i>
North Shore CDC	X	X	X	X			X
Nuestra Comunidad		X					X
Oak Hill CDC	X	X	X	X			X
Quabog Valley CDC			X		X		
Somerville Community Corp	X	X	X	X			X
Springfield NHS					X	X	
Twin Cities CDC	X	X	X				
Valley CDC						X	
Viet AID		X					X
WATCH CDC	X	X	X	X			
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>

*Note: This data reflects the responses of CDCs and academic partners to surveys and interviews. CDCs that did not respond or for which we did not have data are not reflected on this list.*