M Partner Celebrates Successful Pilot Phase

Staff Report
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Community engagement initiative will continue to improve quality of life in partner communities

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Oxford, Miss. – As COVID-19 has dramatically altered the landscape of higher education, one aspect remains constant at the University of Mississippi: a commitment to community partnership.

While the M Partner pilot phase concluded as the pandemic intensified in Mississippi, the relationships supporting the initiative ensured that university representatives could continue to make a contribution as community priorities altered shifted in response to COVID-19.

"M Partner has shaped the University of Mississippi in profound ways," said Laura Martin, director of M Partner and associate director of the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement.

"Faculty and students from a range of disciplines have made deep connections in our partner communities, and I expect that work to outlast the pilot phase of M Partner. This speaks to the vision of our community partners and the commitment of our colleagues on campus."

The university launched M Partner, a community engagement effort that seeks to improve life in Mississippi communities, in 2018. M Partner offers a framework for community and university representatives to pair university resources and expertise with priority projects in partner cities across the state, and supports institutional efforts to promote healthy and vibrant communities.

The inaugural M Partner communities were Charleston, Lexington and New Albany.

"M Partner embodies our vision for how the University of Mississippi conducts purposeful and impactful community engagement to fulfill its public purpose as our state’s flagship university," Chancellor Glenn Boyce said. "We are indebted to the faculty, staff, students and community partners who contributed to the success of the pilot phase, and we look forward to the next phase of M Partner."

M Partner uses talent and expertise from across the university to create value in partner communities. The projects identified by community members revolved around educational attainment, economic development, health and wellness, and beautification and tourism.

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

Oxford, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of $100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy’s new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying “thank you.” “It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting.

Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve’s
During the pilot phase, 25 faculty and staff members engaged more than 400 students in 35 courses and projects, 18 programs and special events, and 15 national service placements in M Partner communities. These efforts reached an estimated 8,000 individuals across the three pilot communities.

“M Partner has provided a point of entry for community engagement efforts that reach into communities across Mississippi,” said Albert Nylander, UM professor of sociology and director of the McLean Institute. “The McLean Institute has nested M Partner alongside other community engagement initiatives such as Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development and the North Mississippi VISTA Project, to ensure that our partnership remains sustainable as community priorities evolve.”

The institute has adapted the national Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities, or EPIC, model to best suit the dynamics of campus and community partners. The model creates time-bound partnerships between universities and the elected officials of a given municipality.

M Partner has blended curricular and co-curricular approaches to maximize community engagement opportunities. This innovative strategy earned M Partner recognition as a finalist for the EPIC-Network’s 2020 Outstanding Program Award.

“M Partner, although a relative newcomer to the EPIC-Network, brings an amazing intentionality to university-community partnership,” said Marshall Curry, program manager with the EPIC-Network. “By incorporating AmeriCorps VISTA placements and service days with the existing courses – traditionally prescribed by the EPIC model – M Partner brings even more beneficial resources to community partners, while also quickly becoming a leader in the EPIC-Network.”

M Partner embodies a multidisciplinary culture of innovation and collaboration to advance community priorities, leveraging expertise in the College of Liberal Arts, Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, and schools of Applied Sciences, Education, Engineering and Pharmacy, including the latter’s Oxford and UM Medical Center campuses.

The program’s strategy in Charleston, Lexington and New Albany has encompassed credit-bearing courses, co-curricular service, faculty-led research, technical assistance, student internships and placements through the North Mississippi VISTA Project. This multifaceted strategy exemplifies an institutional commitment to commit comprehensive resources to advance economic prosperity in partner communities.

M Partner was also featured heavily in the university’s successful application for the Carnegie Elective Community Engagement Classification and the Innovation and Economic Prosperity designation given by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.

“M Partner was the opportunity of a lifetime for a small town with limited resources like Lexington to be provided with the expertise and collaboration with the best and brightest of the university’s campus,” Lexington Mayor Robin McCrory said. “We were able to attain community goals and complete projects that will leave M Partner footprints forever ingrained throughout the city of Lexington.”

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