10 Lessons from the All-In Pittsburgh Initiative

PolicyLink

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In 2015, the City of Pittsburgh and The Heinz Endowments hosted the first P4 Summit, unveiling a new model of urban growth: People, Planet, Place, and Performance. The P4 framework recognizes the potential of cities like Pittsburgh to be global leaders in addressing our world's most complex problems in innovative, sustainable, and inclusive ways. During the summit, PolicyLink Founder Angela Glover Blackwell shared that equity is not only a moral imperative, but an economic imperative for an increasingly diversifying nation. In her remarks, she offered frank advice that also served as a call to action: "When you think about becoming a model for the nation—when you think perhaps you could be a model for the world—I would suggest that if you don't get the inclusion agenda right, you don't have the right to stand as a model, and no one will look to you as a model, because you will not be a model," she explained. The audience was largely White, signifying that more inclusive leadership would be necessary.

Following Blackwell's remarks, the Black leaders present approached her to see how PolicyLink could work with them in ensuring a more equitable Pittsburgh. Through support from Heinz, PolicyLink was invited to join Neighborhood Allies, Urban Innovation21, the UrbanKind Institute, and their partners to put forth an equitable development vision and strategy to enable low-wealth Pittsburghers to participate in and benefit from the region's economic transformation. All-In Pittsburgh soon became an initiative that elevated Black leadership, fostered new partnerships, helped diversify future P4 summits, and secured the passage of citywide equity legislation. Below are 10 lessons from All-In Pittsburgh's transformative early work which have served as a model for PolicyLink partnerships with other cities.

1. **National organizations can offer guidance, but should not drive work.**

Following the P4 Summit, there was a sense that outside expertise was needed to help advance an understanding of what a new, equitable growth model looks like for Pittsburgh, and to help reconcile competing definitions of "equitable development." As a national intermediary, PolicyLink has more than 20 years of experience working with local leaders across the country providing research and data analysis, technical assistance, and supporting policy development. However, PolicyLink is not an expert on life in Pittsburgh: local knowledge and innovation is essential to systems and policy change. And yet there is still hope that a national organization will have the answer. It was important for us to manage expectations on what we could deliver, and make it clear that national organizations can only really help local leaders overcome the unique challenges embedded throughout their institutions and policies.

2. **Leaders must engage the full equity ecosystem from Day One.**

While there was lots of hope that this process would be different, there was also plenty of healthy skepticism. It is important to address this skepticism head on, build trust, and even build bridges between organizations and sectors that don't often work together. The first step for All-In Pittsburgh was engaging more than 200 community leaders in interviews, community meetings, weekly forums, and workshops to help craft a definition for equitable development and shape the accompanying action agenda. This not only gave leaders an opportunity to share insights, concerns, and opportunities, it allowed them to ask questions and better understand the intention of the work they were being invited to join, and help shape the work before it was too late. In crafting the invitation lists to those meetings, we tried to ensure that leaders from different branches of the equity movement were present, including community organizers who engaged in direct action and protest, equity-focused leaders within powerful institutions, as well as community and economic development practitioners.

3. **People don't want reports that do not lead to action.**

In 2016, more than 100 community leaders gathered at the August Wilson Center in Pittsburgh for the release of *Equitable Development: The Path to an All-In Pittsburgh*. Like many other cities across the country experiencing "comebacks," much has been written about Pittsburgh over the years. Given the many reports that came before, it was important that this wasn't just another report, but an action plan. The action plan included in the report emerged from collaborative working sessions where participants vetted potential actions, and it was well-received. However, after the report release there was still a lack of clarity on how to prioritize the action steps, creating a period of uncertainty.

4. **Coalitions must define their target population and outcomes.**

When PolicyLink begins working with cities, we start by asking two simple questions: "Who are you targeting in this work?" and "What outcomes do you want for them?" This is the foundation of results-based accountability—a disciplined way of thinking and solving complex problems. When coalitions are formed to address a set of challenges they often assume everyone has defined the problem similarly. However, when leaders begin to answer these simple questions about the population they are focused on and what outcomes they want to see, leaders are often surprised to learn that their colleagues and partners have a different idea of the challenges facing communities. A coalition focused on "affordable housing" might have people participating who are focused on households with children while others are focused on workers. Some may prioritize rent control while others may be there to increase home ownership. While policy change is the goal, getting leaders across sectors in alignment is the work. Through numerous strategy sessions, the coalition developed a results framework targeting the 340,000 residents living below 200 percent of poverty in the county, and the definition of equitable development informed the result.

5. There are limits to gathering good data.

A critical component of results-based accountability is using data for learning, continuous improvement, and shared accountability. All-In Pittsburgh coalition members identified a set of measures to help drive and track progress of their collective work toward equitable development, including increasing the number of affordable housing units; decreasing the percentage of residents living at or below 200 percent of poverty; and increasing the number of minority-owned businesses. However, there are limitations on real-time data available to measure the impact of policy and programs on these indicators. The coalition would have benefitted from identifying short-term or interim measures of success, such as number of tenants engaged in this work, commitments by developers, and so forth.

6. Systems change requires "adaptive solutions."

"The single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify...is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems," Ronald Heifitz and Marty Linsky explain in *Leadership on the Line*. A technical problem is one with a known solution. For example, if your car breaks down, you take it to a mechanic where they can figure out the problem and then fix it. Adaptive challenges are much more complex and no single entity can solve them alone. As the hard work of advancing an equitable development agenda began, coalition members were uncomfortable with uncertainty and would look for technical fixes: the one program that could fix everything, or the one organization or leader to blame. The truth is, for challenges like gentrification or social mobility, multiple stakeholders control a piece of the puzzle and must examine what they can do differently as part of the solution.

7. Coalitions must be mindful of power dynamics.

One of the biggest challenges facing coalitions is navigating uneven power dynamics. The All-In Pittsburgh coalition included small community-based organizations and large, well-connected nonprofits. There were government officials participating as well as activists who saw them as their opposition. And then there were the foundations which many of the participants relied on for funding. The hope was that these entities could work out conflicts for the sake of the greater good. As part of the coalition, all voices and opinions were given the same weight, which helped level the playing field. Still, once participants left the meeting, they fell into their traditional roles. We needed to do more to address these dynamics head on, such as deeper power mapping and creating space for leaders to grapple with these tensions, address disagreements, and figure out a shared path forward. This is particularly important to ensure partners have equal decision-making power. This also creates opportunity for leaders in more influential positions like philanthropy and government to consider the full range of their capacities to better support the coalition—this may entail advocacy in support of legislation or changing how resources are distributed.

8. Coalitions must hold private sector leaders accountable for advancing their equity goals.

While leaders across sectors participated in All-In Pittsburgh—from activists to developers—private sector participation was light. While private sector leaders are increasingly understanding the stake they have in equity, it is also important to make clear demands of private sector leaders, and to hold them accountable to their commitments. PolicyLink is now leading an initiative to help companies understand and address the intended and unintended consequences of all their products, policies, and practices on people of color, and by extension, the economy and democracy. The standards will provide guidance inside the corporation, within the communities where the corporations are headquartered and conduct business, and at the broader societal level. *A CEO Blueprint for Racial Equity* presents an invitation and a roadmap to help companies understand and address these intended and unintended consequences.

9. A strong "inside-outside" strategy is necessary.

The most skilled elected leaders, from the local level to Congress, know that working closely with advocates to build public support for a shared agenda helps accelerate policy. Having outside pressure for a policy enables leaders to be innovative and introduce new, equity-focused policies. All the process work coalition leaders did to set priorities and get in alignment enabled All-In Pittsburgh to then create a strong working relationship with the city council to coordinate on foundational legislation. In May 2019, All-In Pittsburgh worked with the Pittsburgh Black Elected Officials Coalition to shape a legislative package declaring Pittsburgh an "all-in" city, adding equity reporting requirements for all city Department Directors, and creating an Equity and Inclusion Implementation Team to enforce equity and diversity goals in all city departments.

10. This work takes time.

This can be the hardest lesson for coalitions and their supporters to accept. As the uprisings during the summer of 2020 remind us, there is a sense of urgency to act on issues of racism and inequality. There are certainly policies that can be passed now that will have a huge impact on people's lives, such as improving worker conditions and increasing affordable housing in opportunity-rich neighborhoods. Transforming systems and institutions also takes time. As coalitions refine their understanding of the problems they are addressing, some partners may not fit into the partnership in the same way, or it may become clear others are needed. And as the work evolves, it is important to remember the original vision community members created for what they want to see for their city.

Conclusion

The All-In Pittsburgh initiative created a diverse coalition of cross-sector leaders who used a disciplined approach to drive advocacy for equitable growth throughout Pittsburgh. In addition to the legislative package, the coalition advocated for House Bill 163, which eliminated driver's license suspension for nondriving-related convictions; advocated for $2.5 million to be restored to the Urban Redevelopment Authority budget; and assisted Pittsburgh's Department of City Planning in launching a public comment period for the committee's Neighborhood Plan Guide, among other contributions. For a new coalition, these accomplishments were no easy feat, which is why Pittsburgh remains a flagship of place-based work at PolicyLink. The lessons above can help leaders in Pittsburgh continue to refine their work, but will also ensure Pittsburgh can truly be a model for other cities.

Acknowledgments

Author Biography

Tracey Ross is the Director of Federal Policy and Narrative Change at PolicyLink. She led the All-In Cites initiative for PolicyLink from 2016-2020. Prior to joining PolicyLink, Tracey worked at the Center for American Progress, and at Living Cities. Tracey began her career in the offices of former US Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) and former US Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO). She completed her master's in public affairs at Princeton University, and received a bachelor's degree in political science and anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley.

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