

America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model

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Courtesy of Blue1647

By Courtney Hutchison

At *America's Tomorrow*, we are continuously inspired by the countless activists, policymakers, community leaders, and others who are working tirelessly to build an equitable economy that works for everyone. As the nation prepares for the many changes and challenges that 2017 may bring, it is important to remember that in so many places around the country, communities are coming up with innovative solutions to get racial and economic equity right. In celebration of these changemakers, we want to lift up some of 2016's most inspirational stories.

Fostering Local Entrepreneurship

Across the country, community leaders are proving that fostering a thriving, inclusive economy starts in their own backyards. In Cincinnati, Ohio, the city's [Minority Business Accelerator \(MBA\)](#) is ensuring that Black- and Latino-owned businesses are at their most competitive, spurring economic growth by helping local entrepreneurs thrive. [Community-led development](#) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin has transformed a once-blighted commercial corridor into a bastion of healthy food, job training, and local businesses. Many other community organizations are also making the link between healthy food and a flourishing local economy, from youth entrepreneurship at the [Detroit Food Academy](#) to [urban farming and food production](#) programs in Denver, Chicago, and Brooklyn that are leveraging

sustainable agriculture to grow good jobs.

Dismantling Barriers for Formerly Incarcerated People

For the 600,000 Americans returning home from prison each year, discriminatory policies can make it nearly impossible to find a job or pursue higher education. In 2016, the newsletter featured public and private sector initiatives that are giving returning residents a second chance at opportunity. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, [Cascade Engineering](#) helped create a prison-to-profession pipeline for formerly incarcerated workers that inspired a sister effort in [Louisiana](#), where returning residents are connected to training and mentorship with regional employers. At the University of California, Berkeley, the student-led [Underground Scholars Initiative](#) is providing support to formerly incarcerated students and helping other returning citizens apply to college. We interviewed [Daryl Atkinson](#), the inaugural Second Chance Fellow at the U.S. Department of Justice, who is working at the national level to shift the narrative around those who have been incarcerated, and connect them with the support, respect, and opportunity needed to thrive.

Bending the Tech Economy toward Equity

Though the technology sector has been a key driver for growth in the national economy, it has not often led with equity. That's why *America's Tomorrow* highlighted companies and local initiatives that are bucking this trend and promoting inclusion, diversity, and quality employment within the innovation economy. We featured [app-based start-ups](#) HomeHero, Hello Alfred, and Eden that are turning "gig economy" jobs into quality employment by offering employees a decent pay, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. [Blue1647](#), an entrepreneurship and technology innovation center founded in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood is connecting youth of color to career pathways in tech through educational and workforce development programming. At the city level, we shared the story of urban leaders in [Portland, Oregon](#), who partnered with the [Equitable Innovation Economies initiative](#) to institutionalize diversity and inclusion within its burgeoning tech sector.

Practical Strategies for Equitable Development

As many cities see a resurgence in population growth and economic activity, it's essential that new investments and development serve all residents — especially low-income communities and communities of color. Projects like the [Oakland Army Base](#) — an \$800 million construction project that has met and exceeded ambitious targets for hiring local and disadvantaged workers — prove that equitable development is possible and profitable. In an interview with [Tracey Nichols, Cleveland's director of economic development](#), *America's Tomorrow* explored how city partnerships with anchor institutions can provide jobs where manufacturing and industrial jobs are waning. In Baltimore, Maryland, the human rights organization United Workers showcased the role of art in activism through their [Development Without Displacement art show](#), which bolstered movements to protect the city's vulnerable low-income residents from displacement, eviction, and alienation.

Celebrating Changemakers

Throughout 2016, *America's Tomorrow* lifted up the work of innovators in policy, research, and community organizing through its Q&A series. In an [interview](#) and [podcast](#) with PolicyLink CEO Angela Glover Blackwell, author, lawyer, and political activist Steve Phillips shared his research on how the dramatic growth of communities of color can transform the nation's politics, policies, and economy. [Sarita Gupta](#), executive director of Jobs With Justice, discussed several of her organization's campaigns that have successfully advanced the rights, voice, and power of America's workers. And we heard from academics [Darrick Hamilton](#), associate professor of economics and urban policy at The New School, and [Ananya Roy](#), founding director of UCLA's Institute on Inequality and Democracy, about the bold activism and resistance necessary to address America's legacy of inequality, displacement, and disinvestment.

Check out the archive of all our past issues, including all 14 of our Q&A interviews, at

www.PolicyLink.org/AmericasTomorrow. Thank you to all our readers and to the working people, researchers, community leaders, and policymakers who shared their stories with us.