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Pittsburgh Provides Lessons for Metro Atlanta's Leaders to Apply at Home

The 2019 LINK trip served as a powerful learning opportunity for more than 100 metro Atlanta leaders representing the region's local government, philanthropic, business, nonprofit, and arts sectors. This year's trip boasted more than 20 first-time participants who contributed fresh ideas and energy.

Five carefully curated excursions, and the work sessions that followed, were designed to prepare and propel LINK leaders toward action once they returned home — applying what they learned to work together on specific efforts in the Atlanta region.

“There are actions happening because of this trip. Actual things are going to change because of the work that's being done here. And I think that's a huge positive shift.”

-Tom Reed, Mayor, Chattahoochee Hills

Why Pittsburgh

Consistently named a top livable city by The Economist magazine, Pittsburgh is a dynamic, fascinating region, offering numerous insights for the LINK delegation in areas ranging from technological innovation, to cultural cultivation, to community partnerships.

If Atlanta fancies itself the phoenix — a southern capital capable of reinventing itself again and again — Pittsburgh may be its northern counterpart. In recent decades, the Steel City has transformed itself from an industrial manufacturing hub into a highly diversified economy centered around healthcare, research, technology, and higher education.

Pittsburgh is a leader in research, development, and applied technology. Partnerships with local universities and private firms make the city a leading technology incubator. In 2018, it was selected as one of 22 communities — along with Atlanta — to participate in the second Smart Cities Collaborative, a program of Transportation for America. Pittsburgh is also the birthplace of the autonomous vehicle. Today, Carnegie Mellon University's (CMU) Robotics Institute is the world's largest robotics research and development organization.

Both metro areas are also grappling with similar challenges, including growing populations of older individuals. By 2030, 1 in 4 metro Atlantans will be 60 or older. In 2018, 21 percent of Pittsburgh metro residents were 65 or older. And both are home to historic African-American neighborhoods experiencing reinvestment while fighting to preserve a distinct cultural legacy and stem displacement.



DAY 1 — WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2019

LINK leaders started the trip at the Carnegie Science Center, one of four Carnegie Museums in Pittsburgh. The Science Center opens onto the North Shore Riverwalk and Park, which have transformed the face of Pittsburgh's riverfronts, historically dominated by railroads and factories.

The day began with a speech from city of Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto, who introduced two themes the group would see again and again: collaboration and equity. Regarding the importance of collaboration, Mayor Peduto noted that, "The city of Pittsburgh's transition from a western frontier town, to an industrial giant, to a corporate center happened because of partnerships." He also introduced the theme of equity, announcing the Pittsburgh region's unofficial refrain, "If it's not for all, it's not for us."

Two panel discussions also took place at the Carnegie Science Center. One was an overview of the Pittsburgh region, and the other focused on how Pittsburgh reshaped itself from an industrial city focused on iron and steel production to a tech hub.

"Pittsburgh's transition from a western frontier town, to an industrial giant, to a corporate center happened because of partnerships."

– Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto

The afternoon's sessions led LINK participants to discuss what the Atlanta region could learn from Pittsburgh's economic turnaround story.

"One of the things that opened up my eyes to Pittsburgh," noted Henry County Chair June Wood, "is they began with a crisis, and that helped to build the bond among municipalities that people here talk about. Steel manufacturing was Pittsburgh's sole industry, but in metro Atlanta, we've got several different markets of industry that we need to continue to build upon. So, we're doing good in a lot of ways. How do we continue in that mode so we can *prevent* some crisis — whether it's an economic issue or some other issue?"

The day ended at Phipps Conservatory with a rousing dinner speech from Majestic Lane, Pittsburgh's Chief Equity Officer, who focused on the importance of changing the conditions that cause inequity.





Takeaways from the Day's Sessions:

- » By the late 1960s, 28% of the Pittsburgh region's workforce was employed in manufacturing — more than 300,000 people in all. During this period, race, ethnicity, and topography defined Pittsburgh's neighborhoods. From 1969-2010, the region experienced devastating job loss and outmigration. One in five baby boomers left in the 1980s. By 2010, Allegheny County had lost more than 260,000 people. Communities that experienced the greatest losses are now home to people with the greatest needs.
- » Pittsburgh's economy has become much more diversified in recent years. Large universities have supported growth in healthcare and education. The region is working to capitalize on research strengths, and large tech firms whose headquarters are located elsewhere have established local offices. The city is seeing a rebirth of communities near the downtown and universities.
- » However, long-term residents are concerned about displacement. Just 27% of African Americans report never having a problem paying for necessities, compared to 51% of other residents, and just 7% of African-Americans rate their Pittsburgh communities as "an excellent place to live," compared to 30% of other residents. This has led to a common wry observation: Question: "Where are Pittsburgh's middle-class African-Americans?" Answer: "D.C."
- » Those who remained behind didn't necessarily have the right skills to secure one of the growing number of jobs being created by the increasingly diversified economy of the 2000s. Pittsburgh employers found themselves with a new challenge – finding qualified workers to fill those positions. Workforce development and training were identified as integral parts of the city's redevelopment and incorporated into a number of initiatives, including

Pittsburgh's P4 project, which considers factors of "People, Planet, Place, and Performance" when evaluating development opportunities.

- » As Pittsburgh transformed into one of the world's most livable regions, property values skyrocketed by as much as \$200,000 in some neighborhoods. New housing stock, meanwhile, is very expensive and out of reach for many. While residents in the 1980s and 90s left the city because of a lack of jobs, now others were leaving because they could no longer afford to stay. Pittsburgh leaders realized that the region's dramatic turnaround could be threatened unless they addressed underlying equity issues, such as housing affordability and access to transit, that eroded quality of life for so many residents.
- » The Pittsburgh region is situated atop major shale formation and has attracted a good deal of natural gas exploration and production. Natural gas drilling beneath Pittsburgh International Airport funded a renovation in 2014 and helped the Airport to climb out of debt. About 800 new wells a year are now being drilled in Pennsylvania, but the process is controversial: many people cite environmental concerns.
- » The collaboration theme continued as Jen Liptak of Allegheny County explained how Pittsburgh communities benefit from partnerships. "It is important that our elected officials from across the region work together — and they do. We have each other's back. We may agree or disagree on some policy issues, but we all are Steelers fans." Liptak explained how regional chambers of commerce work together to attract new business and lend their support to these new opportunities regardless of which jurisdiction successfully landed the newcomer.



DAY 2 — THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2019

As the second day began, it was clear to all that in each set of remarks, panels, and conversations, two major themes were emerging.

From Tech to Philanthropy, Collaboration is Key

The first was collaboration. Despite its 635 municipalities, the Pittsburgh region has, in recent years, found new ways to work together to build a brighter future. Local universities, government, and the technology sector have created a “living lab” in Pittsburgh’s streets to test a wide variety of transportation technologies, while formalizing these partnerships via memoranda of understanding that establish clear guidelines for research and development.

This collaboration has already brought about some important quality-of-life innovations, such as improved signal timing, as well as tech that predicts occurrences of fires, landslides, and potholes. What makes it work, speakers told the LINK participants, is keeping the needs of residents at the forefront. “It’s about using tech as a tool,” said CMU’s Karen Lightman, “not a guide.”

The importance of prioritizing people was echoed later in the morning by Diana Bucco, President of the Buhl Foundation: “If you want to know how to solve something,” she said, “ask the people who live the problems every day.”

The strength of Pittsburgh’s philanthropic sector is renowned, a legacy of the region’s days as a global industrial leader. A mid-morning session featured local philanthropic leaders discussing their collaborative efforts with local governments and with one another. According to Maxwell King, President and CEO of the Pittsburgh Foundation, this approach can be attributed, at least in part, to local culture: “We go to other cities,” he noted, “and often see, even when they have a fair number of foundations, there isn’t a lot of communication.” In contrast, “we meet regularly, we talk about what we’re doing, and that’s built out of the local culture, which tends to be a very collaborative culture.” Resulting collaborative efforts have addressed challenges like recidivism and displacement due to gentrification.

Community Foundation leader Alicia Philipp said there’s room for growth in the Atlanta region, noting, “We’ve got a vibrant philanthropic community in metro Atlanta, but we don’t all speak in the same voice — as [philanthropic



Grant Oliphant, President, Heinz Foundation

“In a time of unbelievable brokenness, it’s key not just to do economic development, but to build cities that work for all. Cities are the places to do it because this is the level at which leaders like you are still getting together in a room.”

– Grant Oliphant, President, Heinz Foundation

organizations] do here.” She also called for better governmental-philanthropic partnerships to address pressing issues such as metro Atlanta’s growing challenge with suburban poverty.

Addressing Equity is a Priority

Heinz Endowments President Grant Oliphant introduced the idea of “two Pittsburghs” during a talk in which he contrasted the renewal experienced by much of the city with the struggles of “the other Pittsburgh: experienced by folks who are poor, who are separated by lines of geography and class, and who are, in this town, disproportionately African-American.” He went on to champion efforts to break this pattern, such as the P4 equitable development principles, which hold development projects accountable not just for their economic impacts, but for impacts on the community and the environment.

Conversations about equity didn’t end with development. “Every time I heard someone talking about public transportation, it was in the lens of connecting people to jobs or how we’re reaching to the suburbs,” said MARTA CEO Jeffrey Parker, “and I think as we hear how important equity is, we need to continue to remember that in Atlanta.”

And journalist Maria Saporta had this observation: “There are organizations on the ground working on equity issues in metro Atlanta. But there isn’t yet a common consensus among us that: Yes, we’re going to look at things through a frame of equity. Can this be the frame we adopt as a region?”

LINK Discovery Groups: Taking the Work Back Home

On Thursday afternoon, LINK leaders took part in one of five carefully curated excursions designed to create momentum for action back home. They then spent time both Thursday and Friday in work sessions developing detailed plans.

Tom Reed, Mayor of Chattahoochee Hills was one of many LINK leaders to comment favorably on the new approach: “I appreciate the change in format,” he said. Actual things that are going to change because of the work that’s being done here. I think that’s a huge positive shift.”



Driving Innovation: The City/University Partnership

The city of Pittsburgh is an urban lab for technological innovation, thanks in part to groundbreaking partnerships with local universities, such as Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), and private firms these technologies are being tested and deployed throughout the region’s streets, due to unique partnerships between universities, government, and the private sector.

In March of 2019, the city of Pittsburgh and four of the region’s leading autonomous vehicle companies agreed to guidelines concerning autonomous vehicle testing on public streets. These guidelines, termed the “Pittsburgh Principles,” are coordinated through Pittsburgh’s Department of Mobility and Infrastructure.

LINK leaders toured the National Robotics Engineering Center at CMU to learn about their various areas of research.

They heard about the innovative ways the city of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon, and technology companies such as Uber are working together to develop new technologies that hold the potential to change the way we live. Attendees also explored how metro Atlanta might learn from Pittsburgh to advance our own public-private-university partnerships to improve residents’ lives.

Chris Tomlinson, Executive Director of SRTA, GRTA, and The ATL told fellow LINK leaders that he was impressed with the deliberate intentionality with which the city carried out its transportation advancements. They’re leveraging both the universities with the research and the industry — and of course, the foundation element — to fund some of these things, all happening together in a way that I think there might be some examples and lessons learned we can take back to our region.”

Next steps:

In the weeks and months following the trip, this LINK discovery group will consider what it would take to strengthen similar partnerships in metro Atlanta and create new ones geared toward improving residents’ lives.



Preserving Cultural Legacy and Fighting for the Soul of a Community

“This LINK discovery group learned about partnerships paving the way toward a brighter future in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, a collection of African-American neighborhoods known for the cultural richness and vitality of African American writers, theater and music. Notably, playwright August Wilson’s Pittsburgh Cycle was written and set in the Hill. Similar to Atlanta’s Westside, the Hill has been marked in recent years by redevelopment and the threat of residential

displacement — especially since the announcement of a major new redevelopment project in the area.

One thing that was really inspiring is that [residents] used their own challenge and pain to galvanize them toward a mission as important to them as a community, and my takeaway was the hope for what Atlanta can be.”

– Joshua Williams, Deputy Chief Operations Officer, City of Atlanta

A leader of the District’s Community Development Corporation led LINK participants on a tour of the district detailing both its history and the work to stimulate development that benefits all. One LINK leader came away inspired by both the relative agency residents have had in the redevelopment of their own neighborhoods, and by their willingness to wait for the right opportunity: “The community has taken the patient approach to development. They’ve challenged developers. They’ve created master plans. The community is committed not to sell its soul for new development.”

Joshua Williams, Deputy Chief Operations Officer with the city of Atlanta, found a lasting lesson in the afternoon: “One thing that was really inspiring is that [residents] used their own challenge and pain to galvanize them toward a mission as important to them as a community, and my takeaway was the hope for what Atlanta can be.

Next steps:

Following the trip, this group will examine strategies that might be worth adapting for the Atlanta region — such as the community benefits agreements implemented by The Hill District and other Pittsburgh neighborhoods, which aim to shape development in a way that benefits local communities.

Nurturing an Exceptional Cultural District

Downtown Pittsburgh’s 14-block Cultural District stands out as one of the nation’s most remarkable. It’s a living testament to powerful philanthropic roots that go back more than a century, as well as a more recent convening of business, philanthropic, and governmental leaders in the early 1980s, when this coalition created the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, a 501(c)(3) non-profit with the mission of transforming the city’s downtown.

Today, the Cultural Trust promotes and manages arts and cultural programming in the Cultural District and owns and

manages more than a million square feet of property, making it one of downtown’s largest real estate developers. Another piece critical to the success of arts, cultural, and other regional assets in Allegheny County is the Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD). The RAD is a special purpose, area-wide unit of local government in the county that funds regional assets throughout the county with half the revenues from a 1% sales and use tax.



By the end of 2019, RAD will have invested more than \$3.9 billion over its 24-year history into hundreds of regional assets, such as parks and greenspaces, sports and civic facilities, and arts and cultural organizations.



After visiting the Cultural District and hearing from a panel on the topic, one member of the LINK group noted that “Collaboration was the main thing here — it’s absolutely necessary to pull something like this off and sustain it: looking for people with similar missions but different strengths.”

Next steps:

The group will continue to explore what role philanthropy, arts and cultural organizations, and local governments, working together, could play in developing dynamic communities.

Developing a Region that’s Equitable for All

As with the Atlanta region, Pittsburgh now stands at a pivotal moment. Residential and commercial development has accelerated on a scale not seen in at least a generation. This development boom presents many opportunities for the region as it continues on its upward trajectory.

As one response, the city of Pittsburgh and the Heinz Endowments have developed P4, a set of equitable development principles that consider not just the economic impacts of new development, but also impacts on the community and environment, using four principles: People, Planet, Place, and Performance.

A set of quantifiable P4 performance measures are informing and guiding the development of Pittsburgh’s last major remaining brownfield site, Hazelwood Green, located in the Hazelwood neighborhood — the first stop of this LINK discovery group. The group learned about the challenges and benefits of employing a holistic lens to new development and also held tough conversations about what it would take to develop a similar statement of equity and inclusion for the Atlanta region.

Kevin Greiner, President and CEO of Gas South, spoke frankly when reporting for his group. “Themes like equity are conspicuously missing from conversations in Atlanta. Principles like equitably-shared benefits — these are not things we think of when it comes to development. So, Pittsburgh is ahead of us on that front.” On a brighter note, noted Chris Tomlinson, “We are fortunate in that we have a good foundation in metro Atlanta — we are not starting from a place of crisis. It makes it easy to say ‘Yes’ to opportunities and to take action.”

Next steps

LINK leaders will consider how a similar set of guidelines could be generated to effect positive change in metro Atlanta.

“I was impressed with how focused they can be on community. When you have so many different municipalities, that should bring some division, but everyone still looked not only in their own municipal range, but in adjacent ones, and that’s where I think a lot of the equity discussion came from — that they could still look across geographic lines and racial lines and with all this potential for fragmentation, still note areas that needed improvement.”

– Eddie Wade, Vice President, Croy Engineering

Building Welcoming Communities through Interfaith Relationships

Following the tragic 2018 shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue, the broader Pittsburgh community inspired the world by exhibiting a unity around shared values that define Pittsburgh as a unique place.

Led by a rabbi who had worked in the community for more than three decades, this LINK discovery group toured several Pittsburgh neighborhoods, including Squirrel Hill, which houses Tree of Life. This tour and the panel that followed illustrated how the city’s religious organizations form vital relationships that produce communities that are welcoming to all.

“I mean, these are groups with vastly different points of view,” noted Claudia Bilotto, VP and Area Manager of WSP, as she reported out for her group. “Their big challenge is to represent everyone, even if there’s not common ground on all issues. And they do that by focusing on commonalities across all faiths. So I was really inspired by the discussion.”

She went on to report that in metro Atlanta, some 25 organizations are doing great interfaith work, “but there’s no effort to institutionalize that to build relationships that stand the test of time.”

Next steps:

This group will continue to explore how a more formalized working relationship among faith groups in metro Atlanta might yield an even stronger safety net of community support.



DAY 3 — FRIDAY MAY 16, 2019

On Friday, LINK leaders visited Chatham University’s Eden Hall campus, home to Chatham’s Falk School of Sustainability & Environment. LEED-Platinum certified, the campus goes far beyond classroom learning, integrating the teaching and practice of sustainable agriculture and aquaculture as well as health and wellness into its operations.

The location, some 20 miles north of downtown Pittsburgh, was ideal for conversations focused expressly on collaboration among regional governments.

A panel of regional leaders discussed relations among the region’s diverse municipalities, focusing chiefly on The Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT), a group of 45 municipalities that convene monthly to discuss common issues. The organization, established in 2007, counts among its accomplishments a \$600-million sewer system improvement and a program combating opioid abuse.

To reach this place, panelists acknowledged a shift that needed to take place. Marita Garrett, the Mayor of Wilkinsburg, said, “As leader of a small municipality, it felt like the focus was always on the city of Pittsburgh. But that’s one of the beauties of a program like CONNECT. It brings neighboring municipalities together to focus on regional strengths.”

The day’s final speaker was the founder of CONNECT, David Miller, Professor of Public Policy and Management at the University of Pittsburgh. He summed up the importance of regional collaboration this way: “I could expend the rest of my career trying to reduce the number of governments in Allegheny County, so maybe the problem isn’t the number of governments. Let’s ask a better question: How do we get those governments to work together?”

In the end, Miller told those assembled, no one can improve conditions in *spite* of government. Instead, the focus should be on “creating the type of connected network that allows the work of the nonprofit, civic, corporate, and government spheres to work together.”





Atlanta Regional Commission

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