

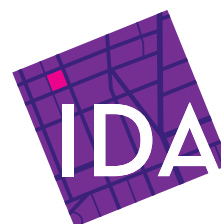


Inclusive Places

PRIORITIZING INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN THE URBAN PLACE MANAGEMENT FIELD:
THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A 2018 TOP ISSUES COUNCIL REPORT

A PUBLICATION CREATED BY MEMBERS OF THE
INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION



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IDA

The International Downtown Association is the premier association of urban place managers who are shaping and activating dynamic downtown districts. Founded in 1954, IDA represents an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations that employ 100,000 people throughout North America. Through its network of diverse practitioners, its rich body of knowledge, and its unique capacity to nurture community-building partnerships, IDA provides tools, intelligence and strategies for creating healthy and dynamic centers that anchor the well-being of towns, cities and regions of the world. IDA members are downtown champions who bring urban centers to life. For more information on IDA, visit downtown.org.

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Top Issues Council Inclusive Places



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Executive Summary

The IDA Inclusive Places Top Issues Council formed to address a core contradiction facing the urban place management profession today. Despite a remarkable urban revival over the past few decades, wealth and income disparities have widened inexorably in the United States and in city centers, including both within and between metropolitan regions.

Some place managers are asking themselves if their work has unintentionally fostered increasingly homogenized and exclusive urban districts that may be unwelcoming to those with less financial means, to youth, to people of color, to immigrant communities, and to other traditionally marginalized populations. How can public and private sector resources devoted to supporting thriving center city economies also benefit the social needs of underserved neighborhoods? Instead of seeing economic development and social inclusion as intertwined, many see social welfare goals and economic growth in opposition, turning debates around city budget and policy priorities into a zero-sum game. Where is the intersection? And what does this mean for the evolution of urban place management?

The Inclusive Places Council confronts these questions head-on, exploring ways that urban place management organizations (UPMOs) can:

- Generate dialogue about the role they play in either challenging or perpetuating inequality and racism in the cities they serve;
- Use practical tools and tactics to ensure that their approach to city building and urban place management does not explicitly or implicitly exclude people and perspectives based on income, age, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, or other dimensions of identity and privilege;

- Create a space for diverse stakeholders who recognize the interdependence of economic growth and inclusion to share perspectives and develop win-win strategies that support more equitable development patterns; and
- Introduce practitioners who are grappling with issues of inclusive growth and social equity in the urban place management profession to resources and examples that can help them chart a path forward.

Because of their role in facilitating public-private partnerships, bringing diverse stakeholders to the table, and thinking critically about the complex dynamics that make places succeed or fail, UPMOs are uniquely situated to galvanize much-needed conversations about the kinds of policies and economic development strategies necessary not only to sustain economically healthy cities, but to mitigate negative impacts, especially in terms of workforce development, affordability, and policing issues. UPMOs can play a role in ensuring more people, particularly those who have been historically marginalized, can enjoy the opportunities and benefits that arise from the massive social, technological, and economic shifts underway in today's cities and regions.

This report includes toolkits designed to help urban place management organizations to incorporate a more inclusive approach into their programming. It also includes a short literature review on some of the work being done to better integrate economic growth strategies with social inclusion goals at the regional economic development level. Finally, it includes case studies focused on the challenges and opportunities of inclusion efforts in the field.

Introduction

About the report

The place management profession has grown tremendously in tandem with the much-lauded urban revival over the last few decades. After experiencing decline and disinvestment from the postwar period through the 1990s, many cities have become engines of economic prosperity with more mixed-use neighborhoods, urban amenities, dynamism, and innovation. Place management organizations have played a critical role in this trend, helping to shape economic development, revitalize the public realm, provide a clean and safe place, rethink urban parks, and foster mixed-use urban environments and livable, walkable communities.

This work has helped cities grow their tax base, which many argue has helped provide the revenues needed to fund social programs, improve public education outcomes, and increase investments in affordable housing. In Washington, DC, for example, the net fiscal benefit of downtown's central business district (that is, the amount of taxes generated versus what the city pays for in services) is \$1 billion—equivalent to nearly half the city's school system budget.

Yet with this growth, including the expansion of a healthy tax base, huge wealth and income disparities have become woven into the fabric of the cities. Many residents and small businesses from communities that suffered most from late 20th-century urban disinvestment find themselves not only left behind, but also priced out of or alienated from places where they have deep social and cultural connections.

As city centers have become less affordable, even to middle-income earners, they've also grown homogenized and more exclusive, losing some of the very qualities that drew many city lovers to urban neighborhoods and place

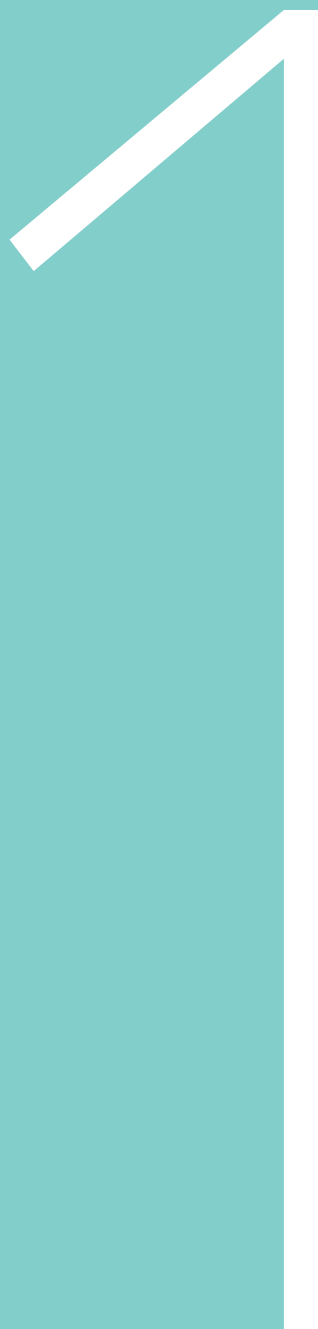
management in the first place. Journalist Matthew Yglesias articulates the contradiction many urbanists must wrestle with, writing: "People want—or at least claim they want—America's newly thriving cities to be engines of economic opportunity. But status quo policies are delivering the opposite result."¹ The affordability crisis has come to a head in San Francisco, where in 2018, the Department of Housing and Urban Development guidelines state that a San Francisco metro family of four making up to \$117,400 a year is low-income.

The Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program has led the charge in helping economic development organizations at the city and regional level understand the need to bring inclusion to the forefront not only as a moral imperative but an economic one. Brookings Metro director Amy Liu argues that "economic development that improves living standards for only the few undermines current and future human capital, depresses economic demand, and dampens a region's overall competitiveness and potential for growth."²

Through the process of developing this report, we have explored how we as urbanists and place management practitioners can promote inclusion and equity in the services and programs we provide. We also want to explore how we can be players on the larger urban economic development stage and promote policies that enable the benefits and opportunities created by urban revival to be spread more widely.



SECTION ONE
Toolkits for
Creating
Welcoming
and Inclusive
Communities



Toolkits for Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Communities

When exploring best practices around UPMOs' work in the public realm, our Council decided that terms like inclusion can themselves be obfuscations. When we use words like "inclusion," what we are often really talking about is racism, ageism, ableism, and ethnocentrism. In developing toolkits for creating welcoming and inclusive communities, we focused on how, instead of perpetuating these and other "isms," our organizations can directly counter them.

The toolkits provide practical tools and critical questions to help transform certain practices and priorities in the programs that UPMOs run, the investments we make, and the policy or advocacy positions we take. They are based on best practices research conducted by members of the Council as well as experiences in our own organizations and communities.

While there are many downtown development and programming efforts that could be made more inclusive, the following toolkits focus on a few areas of priority identified by the Council. Topics include:

- Race, class, and culture in public spaces;
- Assessing inclusion in downtown districts; and
- Inclusive placemaking and public art.

Each of these toolkits is followed by case studies that highlight examples of successful tools, practices, and programs for ensuring inclusion and diversity in downtowns.

Toolkit: Race, Class, and Culture in Public Spaces

Public spaces have tremendous potential to bring people together and create connections across cultures. Parks, plazas, and sidewalks are popular gathering areas for people to spend time outdoors, hang out with friends, or enjoy a meal. These shared spaces create an experience of togetherness, allowing people from diverse income levels, ages, and ethnicities to interact.

Inclusive spaces in the public realm, particularly in our cities' downtowns, can help break down the social barriers that often divide us. Thriving downtown districts and public spaces promote not only economic prosperity, but also social cohesion.

However, certain populations—youth, communities of color, and immigrants, to name a few— may not feel welcome in public spaces due to discrimination and historical exclusion. Gender and sexual orientation can also impact one's experiences in shared spaces. Social scientists from the Project for Public Spaces assert that,

"We would like to believe that public spaces in our community are free from inter-cultural hostility and discrimination, yet studies reveal that many people do experience overt discrimination in public space, which discourages them from using parks, business districts, civic centers, and other places."³

An important question for urban place managers to address is: "How do we make public spaces inclusive and welcoming for all?" This toolkit shares creative and practical strategies that UPMOs can use to promote inclusive design and programming in downtown public spaces. The toolkit also highlights successful strategies to advance inclusion and equitable access to public spaces.

Defining Public Spaces and Their Impact

Our cities' downtowns are made up of a mix of private commercial and residential properties, as well as public spaces. The two types of property are fairly self-explanatory, but when we talk of public spaces, what do we mean? Generally speaking, downtown public spaces are made up of parks, plazas, sidewalks, streets, public buildings, and parking areas, and also sometimes public or semi-public spaces within the confines of private property. Public spaces can be large urban parks (like Central Park in New York City) or small courtyards outside office buildings. They can be the sidewalks that line our streets, a plaza outside city hall, or little pocket parks tucked between buildings or neighborhoods.

UN-Habitat explains that "public space is often referred to as 'the poor man's living room' which hints at its particular importance for marginalized groups, but also its ability to foster integration between different socio-economic groups. Improving access to good public spaces for the most vulnerable urban residents is a powerful tool to improve equity, promote inclusion and combat discrimination."⁴

If public spaces in downtowns are poorly designed and programmed, they will feel unwelcoming and/or unsafe, and people will not use them. This can in turn affect the economic prosperity of businesses and residential properties downtown and overall public safety and may also impact social cohesion and the level of democratic/civic engagement in a community.

This toolkit for creating public spaces that are inclusive for all is intended to advance the conversation about the importance and role of inclusionary public spaces and to help promote social justice in the design, development, and programming of our downtown public spaces.



"A truly public space, is accessible to everyone, irrespective of their physical abilities, age, gender, ethnicity, income level and social status."⁵

—Ali Mandanipour



Dozens of survey studies from around the globe have found that women and minorities often do not feel safe in public places. A recent report for example – Right to the Night – surveyed 600 young women aged 15 to 19 across Australia. The study found that 1 in 3 young women did not feel safe in public spaces at night. This included streets, parks, public transportation and other public spaces.⁶

Common Challenges and Barriers to Inclusion

One of the biggest barriers to creating welcoming public spaces and parks is a lack of understanding of how different populations use public spaces, what cultural values they attach to them, and how safe and accessible those spaces feel. Authenticity is a key part of creating welcoming, inclusive public spaces in our downtowns. However, often in the development, redevelopment, or maintenance of our public spaces, we create sterile environments that prioritize utilitarian design over neighborhood needs and wants. When public spaces lack elements that are engaging or in any way familiar or comfortable, people walk right through or avoid them.

UPMOs must realize that historic exclusion from public places based on race and gender still plays a role today in people's perception of an area being welcoming and safe. Women and minorities may still avoid certain parks, plazas, or even sidewalk spaces based on previous experiences with harassment and exclusion or the expectation that discrimination might occur.

There are many design and programming issues that act as real or perceived barriers to inclusive and thriving public spaces. In *The Arsenal of Exclusion & Inclusion*, authors Tobias Armbrorst and Daniel D'Oca argue that we are at war for equitable and inclusive public spaces and that some tactics and design measures are weapons in that war, including:

- Lack of places to sit or gather with other people. Sometimes public spaces even actively discourage sitting, by using benches that are tilted or have railings, or having spikes and other objects along ledges and walls to discourage sitting or lying down.
- Lack of opportunities for art, events, greenspace, or other activities that promote interaction. Often downtown public spaces are rigid and permanent, and lack flexible designs that meet different users' needs.
- Spaces that do not focus on people's comfort and safety. They may not have adequate lighting or flexible and comfortable seating, and if public spaces are not well-maintained (such as tall grass, broken concrete, or abundant garbage) they can feel unsafe and uncomfortable.
- Lack of access for people of all ages and physical abilities. If young children, parents with strollers, or people in wheelchairs or who have other mobility issues must navigate stairs or steep entrance and exit points, they will not be able to easily use these spaces.
- Features that are hostile or detract from a convivial atmosphere. When downtown public spaces include things like signs that forbid certain uses (such as no skateboarding or no loitering), fence off certain areas, or otherwise restrict uses (e.g. severe parking restrictions), they are telling some groups of people (youth, poor or homeless, and others) that they are not welcome.
- Spaces that are overly policed, particularly for people of color, young people, and poor people. This can include security or police presence, cameras, curfews, and other use restrictions.
- A failure to reflect local cultures and values (either the city's personality, local cultures/ethnicities, or neighborhood vibe). If the architecture, amenities, features, and programming don't feel familiar or engaging, the place may seem boring and inauthentic to users.

How do these failures of public space design and programming impact the vitality and well-being of our communities? They limit social interaction, exacerbate cultural divides, contribute to lack of community engagement, and ultimately can harm the economic and social well-being of the entire community.

"The ambiance of a place – a combination of its design, management, and use – is more likely to have an impact on groups that experience exclusion in other walks of life, such as lesbians and gay men, women, disabled people, people from minority religions and cultures and from deprived social backgrounds. It may be about the design of the space, about the attitude of staff, the furnishings, facilities, the type of events held in the place – the programming – or quite simply: are there other people like me here?"⁷

–Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

Successful Strategies for Creating Inclusive Public Spaces

UPMOs across the country are innovating strategies to ensure that the offerings of downtown public spaces are inclusive of diverse communities. Many approaches are emerging to amplify the feelings of belonging and inclusion that are integral components of great public places.

Strategy #1: Start the Conversation

Many UPMOs, representing downtowns of various sizes, struggle with where to begin the journey toward inclusion. An important first step is to invite diverse voices to the table and initiate honest and authentic conversations with a representative mix of community members, businesses, and other stakeholders about the design and programming of public spaces. These conversations can help create a sense of shared ownership and connectivity to parks and public spaces.

Some placemaking practitioners argue that “when people can be co-creators of their own spaces, those spaces become more welcoming to all.”⁸ Listening to residents and surrounding businesses will help inform strategies to make public spaces more inviting and reflective of community interests.

Below are questions to help guide conversations with community members about how to design and activate inclusive public spaces.

Broadening the Conversation

- Who are parks and public spaces for?
- How do we define inclusivity?
- What makes a public place welcoming, comfortable, and engaging?
- What are the main reasons that people visit parks and public spaces?
- What are the profiles of individuals who visit parks and public spaces in our community (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.)?
- Do parks and public spaces play a role in breaking down racial, ethnic, and religious barriers and misunderstandings?

Design and Accessibility

- How does the physical design of our public spaces impact usage?
- Are there physical barriers or challenges that prevent people from accessing public spaces?
- What physical amenities can help make our public spaces more inviting (benches, trees, lighting, etc.)?
- How can we better maintain and manage public spaces so that they are more welcoming to a broad and inclusive audience?

Programming and Activation

- What types of programming would make our public spaces feel more welcoming and appealing to people from a broad range of ages, abilities, income levels, and cultures?
- What policies or operational procedures prevent certain populations from using public spaces (policing, harassment, etc.)?
- How can we infuse diverse cultures into our programming to make public spaces more vibrant and inclusive (concert series, games, art, etc.)?
- How can we bring everyone to the table for this discussion, especially those who have not traditionally felt welcomed or included?

UPMOs can employ a range of outreach strategies to collect public input on inclusive placemaking. Surveys, pop-up events, and social media can be used to solicit community feedback and test programming ideas. Partnering with trusted community organizations is another effective strategy to gather input from marginalized communities who may not participate in traditional planning processes.

Starting the conversation around inclusivity will help UPMOs develop a clearer understanding of how various populations use public spaces and what strategies will contribute to greater usage by people from all walks of life.



Better Together Initiative: Promoting Equity and Inclusion in Decatur, Georgia

Decatur, Georgia is a growing city of 20,000 residents that boasts the benefits of living in a major metropolitan area and the charm of a traditional, small-town atmosphere. In 2014, frequent reports of police profiling of African-Americans in public spaces captured the attention of Decatur residents. At the same time, many community members were expressing concern over the decrease in diverse city population and soaring housing prices. These concerns regarding racial profiling, gentrification and the rising cost of housing fueled community discussions about diversity and social equity in Decatur.

In 2015, the City of Decatur launched the Better Together Initiative to cultivate a more welcoming, inclusive, and equitable experience for everyone in Decatur. Better Together is a citizen-led, government-supported effort to build deeper connection, understanding, and mutual respect among the Decatur community. This year-long engagement process facilitated a “substantive community conversation around the myriad differences — in culture, race, age, abilities, politics, economic resources, and more — that make us who we are.”⁹

Over 800 citizens shared their perceptions of Decatur as a welcoming city and prioritized strategies to address challenges to inclusion. Community engagement was conducted through townhall sessions, a survey and an all-day meeting of about 250 people to plan for action. This collection of public input culminated in the Better Together Community Action Plan for Equity, Inclusion and Engagement. Community members, UPMOs, and city staff identified specific actions for emerging focus areas, including:

- Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive retail environment;
- Maximize the use of public spaces for all;
- Prioritize racially-just community policing; and,
- Expand community participation and engagement opportunities.

The Better Together Advisory Board, comprised of individuals representing diverse perspective and interests, was established in 2016 to implement the actions identified by the community. As cities and UPMOs grapple with how to embed inclusivity into our public spaces, the Better Together Initiative offers a promising model to follow.



Strategy #2: Prioritize a Welcoming Environment through Management and Maintenance

UPMOs may be charged with maintenance and management of public spaces in downtown. While the design of a public space has a huge impact on how welcoming the space feels, maintenance and management of that space are equally important. Ongoing maintenance, such as repair of lighting, sidewalks, or other infrastructure in the space; snow plowing; or graffiti removal all play an important part in creating a safe and inviting place. Maintenance affects people's ability to physically access a space, their perception of safety, and their interest and curiosity about the place. Some examples include:

- Unplowed sidewalks can make it difficult for people in wheelchairs or pushing strollers to navigate.
- Broken lights may make the space too dark for women, children, or other marginalized groups to feel safe there.
- Broken glass or other equipment may make the space hazardous for small children and generally unattractive to other users.
- Overflowing garbage cans and litter can make the space seem dirty and unattractive.

UPMOs should ensure that adequate funding is available for ongoing maintenance and management of public spaces. If resources are limited, there are opportunities to partner with local businesses and community groups to undertake some of this effort. Some downtown partnerships have hosted clean-up and maintenance weekends, or established ambassador programs that engage volunteers and community members in the ongoing maintenance of parks and public spaces.

UPMOs can also create more inclusive environments through other ongoing management strategies. Adopting a balanced security approach can help create a safe and welcoming environment. Over-policing or implementing heavy-handed security measures such as "no loitering" signs and security cameras can make public spaces less welcoming for some groups who may fear harassment (particularly people of color, low-income people, and youth). A better approach is to ensure that the space is activated (which helps with community self-policing) and make alternative security resources available. Depending on available funding and staffing, this might mean occasional patrolling by police, signs providing information on security resources such as phone numbers, or having on-site resource people available who can serve as information ambassadors and liaisons with local police or city officials.

Strategy #3: Focus on Inclusive Activation and Programming for All

Most of us have participated in recreational programming in a park, an evening concert or festival in a plaza, or informal activities such as games set up in a park or public space. These features and programs are an important part of activating a space and making it vibrant.

But are the activities and programming designed to meet the needs of a broad and inclusive audience? When creating public space programming, UPMOs should ensure that the activities reflect community and neighborhood demographics while helping to affirm the identities and importance of all groups of people. For example, if a UPMO sponsors a summer concert series in a downtown plaza, organizers should schedule a range of music styles to meet the broader needs of their community. This might include different cultural music styles, a mix of participatory versus spectator music and dance events, and/or options that could appeal to youth.

The best way to ensure inclusive programming is to work in partnership with surrounding businesses and residents to explore their interests, unique needs, and potential contributions to the programming and activities in the space (see Strategy #1 above). Getting input from neighborhood groups, surveying residents about their interests, reaching out to community organizations, or simply asking regular users of the space what they might like to see offered are all options for shaping the activities and programming of public spaces. This approach not only yields a diversity of ideas, it also increases social engagement and community capital.

Changing uses of the park or public space over time and allowing users to shape features of the space on an ongoing basis can also help create a more welcoming and inclusive environment. For example, providing furnishings that can be moved around by users to suit their needs or adding new amenities (such as art or flowers) will continue to engage and surprise people over time and make them want to come back. It also allows the space to naturally reflect different cultural values over time. For example, parks and public spaces, even small ones, are often used by people for tai chi, yoga practice, or for the practice of Salat daily prayers. These informal uses of public space organically broaden the user base and make the space more welcoming for all.

Places for People, Eugene, Oregon

The City of Eugene, Oregon recently worked with the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) and other partners such as Downtown Eugene, Inc. to make the city's downtown more welcoming and inclusive – particularly around places like Park Blocks, Kesey Square, Hult Center Plaza, and the Library Plaza. In recent years, these places had seen declining use and participation, were rundown, and were being used as places of refuge for unhoused people in the community. This led to some people feeling unsafe or uncomfortable using those spaces.

The city launched a Places for People effort in 2016, with help from PPS, to make the downtown more welcoming and engaging. They also allocated over \$5 million in urban renewable funding for physical improvements and programming to achieve those goals for downtown.

As part of the process, PPS surveyed over 2,000 residents about how these spaces could be improved. Eugene's residents showed strong support for improving these downtown public spaces and expanding social services in the area to help make the spaces inviting and welcoming for all. Implementing the recommendations of the public engagement process, the City worked with PPS to add some traditional placemaking elements such as new seating, bistro tables, event space, and recreation features for children and teenagers. In addition, day use lockers, expanded shelter areas, and new (attractive) public restrooms were added to help create safe and healthy spaces for all people who needed them.

Combined with the infrastructure changes, the city invested in programming to help make these spaces more welcoming. Programs such as the Downtown Youth Initiative and a Youth Mentorship Program, provide programs and activities for at-risk local youth and utilize youth in temporary jobs to help maintain and program downtown spaces. The city also hired Downtown Ambassadors to manage the spaces and added a Homelessness Liaison to City staff.

The result of the city's Places for People efforts is a series of connected, vibrant and welcoming public spaces in Eugene's downtown. People feel safer and more engaged, and overall use of these spaces has been increasing over the last few years.

Strategy #4: Track and Measure Progress towards Inclusivity

High-quality parks and public spaces contribute significant social and economic value to our cities' downtowns. UPMOs can use various tools and metrics to track how a broad range of constituents use and value public spaces. Establishing baseline data will help make the case for inclusion and encourage financial investments from local government and business stakeholders.

Tools to collect input from a representative cross-section of communities include online surveys, focus groups, behavior mapping, and pop-up events held in public spaces. Many UPMOs are also leveraging social media (e.g. NextDoor, Facebook, and Twitter) to broaden their reach and connect

with community members. These tools will help benchmark growth of and changes in public space usage, as well as community satisfaction with public spaces.

Capturing the social impacts of public spaces is equally important. Related metrics to track include social connectedness and the impact of parks and public spaces in breaking down racial, ethnic, and religious barriers and misunderstandings. Based on the resulting data, UPMOs can modify and adapt their approach as needed. This data should be evaluated periodically, and associated changes should be made to infrastructure and programming to better activate public spaces.



Yellow Brick Road: Transforming Lives by Transforming Public Space

The Yellow Brick Road Project was originally conceived by a group of teenagers in the Iron Triangle neighborhood of Richmond, California to create a network of safe and beautiful walking and biking routes that connect key community assets such as churches, schools, transportation, and parks. As one of the toughest inner-city neighborhoods in America, the Iron Triangle faces challenges of unemployment, widespread blight, poorly maintained green open spaces, dangerous streets and persistent

health problems such as asthma and obesity. The youth envisioned the Yellow Brick Road as an interconnected and artful network of roadways where children, parents, and all members of the community can travel safely.

Pogo Park, a community-based nonprofit working to transform underutilized parks into vibrant public spaces, partnered with the youth group and the City of Richmond to organize and manage this unique resident-driven community



engagement process. In 2012, Pogo Park received an Environmental Justice Transportation grant from Caltrans for \$6.2 million to build the first leg of the Yellow Brick Road. An early step in the process was to form a Community Outreach Team (COT) comprised of a diverse group of residents who reflected the demographics of the Iron Triangle. The COT conducted a walk audit to collect baseline research on the neighborhood street conditions, documenting “both ‘positive’ (a yard with flowers) and ‘negative’ spaces (vacant houses, snarling guard dogs, speeding cars, menacing gang tags)” that influence how welcoming streets are to pedestrians and cyclists from all walks of life.¹⁰

Building on this asset mapping and data collection, the COT identified proposed routes and brainstormed solutions to address mobility barriers. They worked side by side with a professional design team to create a “Living Preview” of the Yellow Brick Road as a way to communicate the proposed street improvements to the local community. A variety of

temporary materials were used to create a three-dimensional model of the proposed improvements, including “astroturf, traffic cones, chalk, paint, scavenged road signs, two huge carved wooden totems to create mini-circles, straw waddles to create the illusions of wider sidewalks, narrower streets, crosswalks, and bike lanes.”¹¹

Over 350 community members attended the two-day “Living Preview” to test the design and to share their input and ideas on the look and feel of the improvements. Following additional community input, the design was refined, and in February 2016, Richmond celebrated the grand opening for their inclusive and child-friendly street design. More critically, the Yellow Brick Road Project is pioneering new thinking for how to reimagine and rebuild urban public spaces in ways that more deeply and authentically engage residents. A brief video describing the process is available on [Youtube](#).

Toolkit: Assessing Inclusion in Downtown Districts



Making your district a more inclusive place begins with opening the conversation up to the community and building a team of advocates who care about this work. These assessment tools provide a place for you to start and a way to measure progress regularly as you embark on this work.

A thorough assessment of weaknesses and opportunities to enhance inclusion should consider three levels of inclusion:

1. **Personal:** Assess your own experiences, acknowledge your own biases
2. **Organizational:** Assess your organization's representation, the perspectives that are guiding your work, and those that are absent
3. **Municipal:** Assess representation and outcomes at a community level

This toolkit focuses on the second level: a rapid assessment you can do with and for your organization.

To begin, assemble a team of at least two people who are familiar with your staff and organization and supportive of the idea of assessing dimensions of identity and experience for your organization and your community as a whole.

Community Demographic Benchmarks

The first part of this tool uses dimensions of identity that are readily available for most American communities, taken from the U.S. Decennial Census. U.S. cities and towns can access this information using this 2010 Census Interactive Population Search tool available at <https://www.census.gov/2010census/>. By clicking on Interactive Population Search, you can then navigate to specific data about your community by drilling down from state to place.

If your organization is in a different country or if you have access to a different set of detailed benchmark data for your community, adjust the assessment template (pg. 21) accordingly.

For organizational assessment, you may want to look at dimensions of identity in leadership (executives and board) and across staff as two separate categories.

You may need to enlist the support of your human resources staff to complete the organizational profile of race, income, and age demographics. The purpose of this exercise is meant to help you start to understand where you may have limited or no representation of a group that makes up a large part of your community; it should not be an exacting categorization of individuals within your organization. If there are areas where you do not know how to answer the questions for your organization or the community, that may be a good place to start learning as a team.

Dimension of Identity or Access	Community-wide (Benchmark)		Organization
Race	Total Population:		Total Employment:
African American	/ Total =	%	%
American Indian + Alaska Native	/ Total =	%	%
Asian	/ Total =	%	%
Native Hawaiian + Pacific Islander	/ Total =	%	%
White	/ Total =	%	%
Other	/ Total =	%	%
Two or more dimensions of race	/ Total =	%	%
Ethnicity: Hispanic or Non-Hispanic	Total Population:		
Hispanic	/ Total =	%	%
Not Hispanic	/ Total =	%	%
Age	Total Population:		
Under 18	/ Total =	%	%
18–34	/ Total =	%	%
35–64	/ Total =	%	%
65+	/ Total =	%	%
Annual Median Income	Community:		Organization:
Housing	Total Housing Units		
Owner-occupied	/ Total =	%	%
Renter occupied	/ Total =	%	%

Benchmarks for Additional Dimensions of Identity & Access

Some dimensions of identity, experience, and access are not easily measured or benchmarked against nationally available census data. As a team, consider these additional ways that residents of your community may be privileged or burdened.

Gender identity

How do our community and organization welcome or exclude individuals based on gender?

Consider: On the spectrum of gender identity, individuals may be male (cisgender), female (cisgender), agender, nonbinary, or have another way of relating to the gendered roles in our culture.¹²

Sexual orientation and domestic and marital status

How do our community and organization welcome or exclude individuals based on sexual orientation or domestic or marital status?

Consider: employment benefits, leave policies, culture, and social gatherings.

Educational attainment

How do our community and organization welcome or exclude individuals based on educational attainment?

Consider: employment policies, opportunities for continuing, and lifelong education.

Housing tenure and stability

How do our community and organization welcome or exclude individuals based on housing stability and income?

Consider: availability and cost of rental housing, availability and cost of housing for sale, geographic distribution of renter and owner-occupied housing in the community, costs of frequent moves or housing instability, access to public education, and access to safe modes of transportation.

Opportunities

What have you learned from considering the questions above?

What gaps have you identified?

Techniques and Tactics for Inclusion

For each opportunity listed above, list 1–3 concrete steps your organization can take to invite in, empower, listen to, and learn from groups within your community who lack access to your downtown and decision-making spaces.

Here are some ideas:

Listen. Seek out opportunities to visit with and learn about a population or community that is part of your city but not well-represented in your leadership.

Ask: How can I help? Sometimes this simple question and the act of welcoming another can make all the difference in building connections in your community.

Invite others to lead you on a tour of downtown or another part of town. Ask a group that does not normally have access to the halls of power in your organization: a neighborhood group, a faith-based organization, a nonprofit or advocacy group, or individuals who frequently use public spaces in downtown but do not have their own private refuges nearby.

Offer public tours with your organization, advertised and on a regular schedule, followed by a conversation where residents may ask questions or offer input on what could make the community more welcoming and inclusive.

Convene community dialogues on specific topics. UPMOs are outstanding conveners and communicators; bringing people together to talk about shared goals and issues is the bread and butter of what we do. Perhaps there is a role for your organization in convening stakeholders, concerned citizens, and leaders in your community to work on specific issues of access or exclusion—even if these issues do not directly relate to safety, economic development, or other issues that are typically on a UPMO program of work.

Look for opportunities to influence policy. Systemic exclusion is often embedded deeply in our policies, both large and small. Examine the rules that we take for granted and seek out ways that those rules can be changed to extend opportunities to everyone.

Toolkit: Inclusive Placemaking and Public Art

In 2017, IDA and Springboard for the Arts released *Guide for Business Districts to Work with Local Artists: A Creative Placemaking Toolkit* and defined creative placemaking as “the act of people coming together to change overlooked and undervalued public and shared spaces into welcoming places where community gathers, supports one another, and thrives. Places can be animated and enhanced by elements that encourage human interaction—from temporary activities such as performances and chalked poetry to permanent installations such as landscaping and unique art.” Given this conceptualization, it is easy to consider how urban place management organizations might leverage public art to activate spaces within their district. And yet, despite practitioners’ best intentions, spaces that privilege public art may still feel exclusionary to certain segments of the population. Therefore, it is important for place management practitioners to consider the characteristics that make a place feel inclusive or exclusive, the voices amplified through public art, and who is (or is not) using a space.

Public Art Inclusivity Challenges

Positioning public art as an invitation, rather than a statement of exclusive values, starts with understanding the particularities of a place and the motivation for intervention. Practitioners can start by critically analyzing: why this place? When the answer is that because a particular area or place is underperforming, consider how and for whom is it underperforming? Identifying a site where an intervention can increase the diversity of users and encourage a positive dialogue is a key component of inclusive placemaking.

When a site has been identified, it becomes important to consider the voice of an intervention. This can come in the form of the intervention itself, or the creator(s) of such an intervention. Engaging diverse stakeholders is part of creating inclusive public art; however, privileging underrepresented voices in its creation and messaging can be equally important. In some cases, it may be important to identify a local artist. In other cases, certain work may call for an outside voice to truly amplify underrepresented voices. The conversations around who creates work and the form of that work should be just as inclusive as the final piece itself.



Once installed, place management practitioners can continue the conversation around inclusive public art by examining who is (and is not) interacting with a piece or using a place. The natural, easier starting point is to understand who is using a place. What do they look like? How are they using it? Where are they coming from? How long are they staying? These are common questions when evaluating the performance of a place/intervention. To further that conversation, place management practitioners can also begin examining who is not there and try to understand why. Those insights may provide direction on how to adjust the project or provide valuable feedback for future projects.

Public Art Opportunities

Despite the challenges detailed above, public art and inclusive placemaking provide a model, that, when critically examined, can produce places that are enjoyed not just by more people, but by more types of people. Public art interventions present the opportunity to encourage dialogue and break down social barriers.

In Chicago, for example, the Green Star Movement engages students and community members to create works of art in public spaces such as transit hubs, schools, and recreation centers. The organization's model includes extensive engagement from concept to creation, ensuring that the site, voice, and users are represented in the artists' work.

Philadelphia's Monument Lab is a public art and history project that questions and reconsiders the role of monuments in public space. Who or what is afforded recognition? What does the placement of a monument say about the represented person, idea, or event's perceived value? The Lab's work includes the curation of experimental monuments as well as critical analysis that generates new types of civic data. Their practice, combined with their research, provides an important model for place management practitioners to consider.



Resources to Consider

If nothing else, the examples and considerations above should raise more questions than answers. They can be read as a challenge to critically examine how place management professionals approach placemaking, and perhaps facilitate a new way of approaching creative interventions in your district. To learn more about the projects and resources mentioned above, please visit:

- IDA and Springboard for the Arts' *Guide for Business Districts to Work with Local Artists: A Creative Placemaking Toolkit*: <https://www.ida-downtown.org/eweb/dynamicpage.aspx?webcode=Springboard16>
- Project for Public Spaces: <https://www.pps.org/article/equity-and-inclusion-getting-down-to-the-heart-of-placemaking>
- Chicago's Green Star Movement: <http://greenstarmovement.org/>
- Philadelphia's Monument Lab: <http://monumentlab.com/>



SECTION TWO

Inclusive Economic Development Strategies for Urban Place Management: Literature Review and Resources



In many urban political debates, economic development and social justice exist as an either/or proposition, with advocates from each perspective operating on two separate tracks. There's rarely dialogue between the two, and little acknowledgement, on either side, that there are benefits and values to be shared across vantage points. To economic development and business proponents, social advocates can seem out of touch with fiscal realities and willfully ignorant of the connection between a thriving economy and the tax base needed to invest in affordable housing, social services, public schools, and quality transportation systems. To many social advocates, growth proponents can seem heartless, uncaring, and out of touch with the struggles of poor and working people who can barely afford to live in the city anymore or lack the skills or social networks to access new employment opportunities.

There is substantial evidence that economic growth policies focused on business attraction and retention cannot, alone, achieve broad-based social welfare goals. Economic development actors must go beyond traditional approaches to develop more robust strategies to help people, especially those who've been historically marginalized, to access opportunities and to actually benefit from the changing economy. There is also a need for new strategies to address the lack of affordable housing close to job centers.

At the same time, it will be difficult for most cities to achieve social equity goals without continued growth. As Joseph Parilla of the Brookings Institution argues, "Economic expansion has not always led to shared prosperity, but it will be hard to achieve inclusion without sustained overall growth and connecting more people to key segments of the advanced economy."¹³

Acting as conveners and collaborators, place management organizations are uniquely situated to help bridge this gap. They have the networks, capacity, and experience to bring together a range of private and public stakeholders along with economic development and social justice advocates to create the kind of dialogue and engagement that is needed to formulate more inclusive economic development strategies.



In this regard, UPMOs have two major challenges. They need to:

1. Demonstrate the role of healthy downtown economies in generating the tax base needed to fund an ambitious social agenda and improve outcomes for a wider range of people.
2. Make a business and economic case for inclusive growth that helps business and growth stakeholders not only understand the value of more equitable development to their own bottom lines, but bring resources to bear on pressing social issues in a more robust and strategic way.

UPMOs can also create the space for people with diverse perspectives to truly listen to and understand one another's viewpoints when discussing an urban place in which they all have a stake and to which they all feel connected. Ideally, this helps to catalyze the partnerships needed to develop a more innovative approach to urgent social issues impacting our cities and to help social welfare advocates better leverage private investment for community improvements and meaningful opportunities.

In this section, we explore some of the work being done around inclusive prosperity in metropolitan economies. Most of this work is focused on policy makers and economic development organizations operating on a regional scale. The focus in this section will be on lessons learned that are applicable to urban place management organizations.

Ryan Brookings Donahue, Brad McDearman, Rachel Barker, Committing to Inclusive Growth: Lessons for Metro Areas from the Inclusive Economic Development Lab, Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings, September 2017.

https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/metro_20170927_committing-to-inclusive-growth-iedl-report.pdf

Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program has led the charge in helping regional economic development actors rethink their approach to growth and better integrate inclusive strategies in their efforts to sustain healthy metropolitan economies. In 2017, Brookings founded the Inclusive Economic Development Lab (the Lab) to work directly with economic development organizations (EDOs) and to share insights and data more widely.

They believe EDOs at the regional level have an important role in helping to shift growth efforts away from business attraction alone and toward policies designed to extend opportunity to more of the population.

As this is new territory for many organizations, the Lab recommends that inclusive development efforts start by bringing stakeholders together to better understand the negative long-term impacts of exclusionary growth strategies. “EDOs need to step back and make the case—to their business members, boards, and other EDOs and community development organizations—that inclusive economic development should be central to their work because it is a growth and competitiveness imperative.” (p. 7) They emphasize that this kind of work is a precursor but not a substitute for action.

The areas the Lab focuses on include:

- Practice (e.g. expanding access to business networks and better targeting programs that help companies);
- Policy (e.g. advocating for new investments in transit and affordable housing); and
- Partnership (e.g. using the Lab’s convening power to unite and educate leaders across sectors and communities).

The report includes practical suggestions that UPMOs can use to start developing a business case for inclusive economic growth. For example, the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce calculated that if its rate of intergenerational economic mobility were to mirror that of San Diego, its regional GDP would rise by \$5–16 billion each year (or 6–15 percent of its entire regional economy).

The report includes practical tools, critical questions, and case studies from the Lab and is essential reading for anyone considering bringing an inclusive economic development approach into their UPMO work.

Thomas Burns, “Community Development through More Inclusive Urban Place-Making: Challenges and Opportunities for the Urban Revitalization Field,” *Social Innovations Journal*, January 2016.

<http://www.socialinnovationsjournal.org/sectors/92-nonprofit-community/1110-community-development-through-more-inclusive-urban-place-making-challenges-and-opportunities-for-the-urban-revitalization-field>

For many communities, especially those that have long experienced disinvestment and decline, urban placemaking efforts like new bike lanes, landscaping, and streetscape renovations can feel like a bad omen. For many poor urban residents, upgrades to the public realm can mean only one thing: improvements for new people who will displace them.

This article by Thomas Burns addresses this conflict. Investment in public realm improvements, writes Burns, “has gained support as a method of stimulating increased economic growth and encouraging more affluent residents to relocate into the urban core. Unfortunately, too few of these typically large-scale investments are now designed with principles of equitable development in mind.” (para. 1)

He argues that placemaking efforts that consider the needs and priorities of low-income residents and respect and incorporate their perspectives into planning efforts can help to improve neighborhood conditions, attract neighborhood services, and create new wealth-building opportunities.

He suggests moving away from the typical public benefits agreement approach that often favors single-purpose social programs, and instead shifting toward bolder transformation plans that have a wider impact. “The best of these efforts,” he writes, “recognize and build from specific assets and economic strengths, are inclusive in their focus, and recognize the value of offering both diversity and choice in residential, employment and other options including arts, culture, entertainment and recreation.” (para. 23)

This piece is an excellent source for UPMOs working in districts where new development meets the old neighborhood. It directly confronts the challenge of making physical improvements and working with, rather than against, market realities at the neighborhood level, while also fully embracing the need to improve opportunities and conditions for low- and moderate-income residents who are often extremely suspicious of development.

Leah Hendey, “If We Had a More Equitable DC...,” *Urban Wire*, November 19, 2015.

<https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/if-we-had-more-equitable-dc>

This piece by Leah Hendey of the Urban Institute is an example of the kind of data and analysis that can be used to make the business and economic case for a more inclusive approach to growth. Hendey uses data to tell the story of exclusive growth in Washington, DC “Despite a 54 percent citywide increase in average family income since 1980 (adjusted for inflation), family incomes in Ward 7 have remained stagnant. In Ward 8, they are below 1980 levels.” (para. 1) This represents not only a huge economic gap based on geography, but also the huge racial disparities in wealth and income in Washington, DC.

Hendey asks: what would it look like if Wards 7 and 8, the city’s poorest neighborhoods and which are predominantly populated by African Americans, experienced the same levels of growth in employment and income as the rest of the city? Her findings are striking. “According to the National Equity Atlas,” she writes, “the District’s gross domestic product would have been almost \$66 billion larger in 2012 if there were no racial gaps in income and employment. That’s an economy that would have been 60 percent bigger. With racial equity in income and employment, in a District of Columbia where all residents could participate, prosper, and reach their full potential, there would be more people with income to

spend and stimulate the economy for the benefit of not only neighborhoods east of the Anacostia, but also the city and Washington region as a whole.” (para. 7)

This is the kind of data and analysis that could help UPMOs demonstrate to their stakeholders the value of addressing poverty and integrating growth and inclusion efforts more strategically. It also brings the issue of racial wealth and income disparities to the forefront.

Erika Poethig, Solomon Greene, Christina Stacy, Tanaya Srin, Brady Meixell, Steven Brown, and Diana Elliott, *Inclusive Recovery in US Cities*, Urban Institute, April 2018.

https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/97981/inclusive_recovery_in_us_cities.pdf

This report takes a deep dive into the factors and conditions that lead some cities and metropolitan areas to achieve more inclusive prosperity than others. The report authors assert that inclusive recovery “occurs when a place overcomes economic distress in a way that provides the opportunity for all residents—especially historically excluded populations—to benefit from and contribute to economic prosperity.” (p. 2)

One of the goals of the report is to provide the research needed to develop better tools to foster inclusion. The authors acknowledge that for economically struggling cities, wide-ranging advice exists to guide growth strategies, but there is much less on inclusion. This report is a step toward filling that gap.

For UPMOs, this report not only helps to make a business case for more inclusive growth, but it also makes the case that healthy economies tend to be correlated with more inclusive prosperity. It also makes a strong case that when cities in distress are waging a comeback, that is an ideal time to be intentional about equitable development. In such circumstances, “many decisions must be made regarding where to allocate resources and how best to deploy them. These inflection points are opportunities to promote greater inclusion. They spark local conversations about a city’s future and demand bold, coordinated action. If these conversations include diverse communities and stakeholders and actions are aimed at harnessing growth for inclusion, all residents can share in future growth.” (p. 4)



Like Brookings' Inclusive Economic Development Lab, the authors of this report emphasize the importance of uniting diverse stakeholders around a shared vision and the need to reframe racial and economic inclusion as integral to growth. There is a huge amount of data and information that UPMOs can use as guideposts as they explore moving into this territory.

Xavier de Souza, Briggs Rolf, and Victor Pendall Rubin, "Inclusive Economic Growth in America's Cities: What's the Playbook and the Score?" Social, Urban, Rural and Resilience Global Practice Group Policy Research Working Paper 7322, June 2015.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281685947_Inclusive_Growth_in_America's_Cities_What's_the_Playbook_and_the_Score

This World Bank Working Paper makes the case that social safety net programs alone are necessary but not enough to promote social mobility and inclusion. Rather, cities and localities have a role to play in devising strategies to broaden the benefits of economic prosperity for all.

The authors argue that integrating inclusion into economic growth efforts is particularly important in localities that have seen tremendous economic transformation but that have also tended to price out low-income residents and/or import talent as opposed to growing and supporting it locally.

In terms of interventions that are applicable to the UPMO field, the authors focus on the need for cities to:

1. Improve institutional access and to support workforce development and hiring practices that build capacity and skills of disadvantaged workers;
2. Improve access to jobs through better transportation options and greater connectivity;
3. Increase the positive local economic and social impact of anchor institutions (e.g. universities) and recruit more stakeholders to strengthen education efforts, from pre-K to community college; and
4. Promote racial and ethnic diversity in entrepreneurship, from small neighborhood businesses to innovative technology firms, including streamlining the process for local people to start and sustain small businesses.

The paper is an excellent resource for UPMOs navigating equitable development strategies who want a broad review of the relevant academic literature, the strengths and weaknesses of competing perspectives on what is driving growing inequality, and the interventions needed to ensure more inclusion.



Laura Adler, “Getting Insight Into Inequality: How Cities are Investing in Social Equity Indicators,”
Data Smart City Solutions, October 19, 2017.

<https://datasmart.ash.harvard.edu/news/article/getting-insight-into-inequality-how-cities-are-investing-in-social-equ1-114>

This piece provides an excellent overview of the variety of ways that city stakeholders are collecting and presenting data about social inequality at the city level.

Adler emphasizes the importance of cities as sites not just to document but to solve issues around social inequity. “Cities are home to particularly high levels of inequality, with vast disparities between rich and poor,” she writes. “Cities also have tools to address inequality: local government can work with labor and education leaders to strengthen pipelines to good jobs; collaborate with developers and leverage

policy to reduce housing costs; and even institute their own minimum wages—as Seattle did in 2014. In addition to major policy initiatives, cities also shape equity outcomes through the daily work of land use planning, infrastructure development, and growth management.” (para. 3)

The article explores a range of indicators that can reveal different dimensions of inequality at the neighborhood and regional levels. It offers a good starting point for exploring how to use these indicators to further equity and inclusion agendas and to get a better idea of what dynamics are impacting a UPMO’s work spatially and economically.

SECTION THREE
Case Studies



Inclusive Place-Based Economic Development: Historic West End, Charlotte

The Landscape

The Historic West End of Charlotte is a residential and business corridor anchored by Johnson C. Smith University and located less than a mile from the thriving central business district of Charlotte. Once a bastion of the African-American middle class, the primary business corridor of Historic West End has suffered from disinvestment in recent decades.

In 2015, Charlotte's downtown association, Charlotte Center City Partners, was invited by neighborhood advocates to catalyze a multi-year partnership effort to transform the corridor. The first three years of this work were funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the Knight Foundation. The timing was opportune, as the association was able to capitalize on the City's investment in a new four-mile east-west streetcar line connecting Historic West End with downtown and points east.

The Challenges

Trust & Communication. Work in the Historic West End started from a place of distrust. Stakeholders in the corridor did not understand the UPMO's interests and goals. There were many questions about who would benefit most from this work to bring new energy and investment into the area. Building trust with stakeholders from all sides was the first step, and it continues to be the most important part of the initiative.

Gentrification & Fear of Displacement. The city of Charlotte as a whole is grappling with growing investment in and gentrification of urban areas, as well as a widening disparity in income and economic opportunities. There is an affordable housing deficit citywide that overwhelms public tools' attempts to mitigate the rent gap. In West End, long-tenured residents and businesses threatened by rising property values feel this pressure acutely as they face predatory investors and find very limited affordable housing options for those who wish to move but stay in the neighborhood.



Key Players

- Charlotte Center City Partners – urban placemaking organization
- Johnson C. Smith University – historically black college and university
- Knight Foundation – grantmaker
- City of Charlotte – municipality
- Mecklenburg County – municipality
- Historic West End Partners – community organization
- Five Points Community Collaborative – community organization
- Biddleville Neighborhood – neighborhood association
- Seversville Neighborhood – neighborhood association
- Wesley Heights Neighborhood – neighborhood association
- Neighboring Concepts – local architecture firm based in West End



Toward a Solution

In the first three years, the Historic West End Initiative¹⁴ hired a full-time director, established an office, and created an advisory board of neighborhood leaders and partners. The team developed an extensive community engagement process that led to a tactical plan¹⁵ for inclusive economic development, new branding for the corridor, and the launch of a music-centered annual community festival called Soul Junction.

Now, in the second three year phase of the Historic West End initiative, Charlotte Center City Partners is focused on leveraging new infrastructure investments to foster transit, public spaces, new businesses and equitable development. The initiative and partners are beginning work on an anti-displacement and retention study that will examine what tools and policy can be used to aid both residential and business corridor stakeholders who want to remain in the district for years to come.¹⁶

Lessons Learned

Work on the Historic West End Initiative is ongoing, but the experience in the first three years has already yielded some lessons and best practices for UPMOs embarking on similar work to bring inclusive economic development to areas that have suffered a lack of investment. Historic West End Director Alysia Davis Osborne offers these five tips for UPMOs embarking on similar work:



1. **Begin with humility.** Learn about the neighborhood, history and people, and listen more than you speak.
2. **Remove yourself from being the hero** who has to come up with solutions. Be the host, not the producer. Set the table and then invite those who are affected to lead the conversation and teach you and others about what is important. Facilitate, provide tools and resources, and listen.
3. **You cannot teach culture.** You also cannot learn it. Develop a practice of asking others who understand specific culture and context for advice, and whenever possible bring them onto your staff or advisory team. Trust them.
4. **Be visible.** People in the community need to see you, even when you are still learning and things are happening slowly. They cannot see you only when you want something.
5. **Messengers matter.** Find key people who are trusted in the community and build your own relationship of trust with them.

New Development Meets a Neglected Neighborhood: Bridging the Gap through Congress Heights Partnership in Washington, DC

The Landscape

Congress Heights is one of Washington, DC's lowest-income neighborhoods. Though only minutes from downtown DC and other job centers, the neighborhood had suffered from years of disinvestment. The neighborhood is now on the cusp of significant redevelopment. A new metro station opened in 2001, linking the neighborhood by subway to emerging growth areas. It also sits on the edge of Saint Elizabeths campus, which is undergoing major redevelopment, including the construction of a new sports arena and 1,000 units of new housing. One of the campus's new main tenants is the Department of Homeland Security, and the campus is only a short distance from the Coast Guard Headquarters.

Congress Heights is a tight-knit community supported by a constellation of community service organizations, schools, and churches. Since 1988, the Congress Heights Community Training and Development Corporation (CHCTDC) has focused on training local residents for jobs and supporting small business success. It also plays a key role in supporting revitalization of its commercial corridor, a low-density strip of shops, beauty parlors, and carryouts that runs along Martin Luther King Jr. Ave to Malcolm X Avenue. Steeped in black history, many residents see the neighborhood as one of the last bastions of true DC culture.

The Challenge

For many, Congress Heights is on the precipice of a disorienting transformation that threatens to drive up housing prices and displace long-term residents. Many worry that new development will overwhelm what they value most about the neighborhood—its affordability, small-town feel, and sense of community—while glossing over, without actually helping to solve, social priorities like poverty, unemployment, and disconnected youth.

At the same time, the neighborhood has experienced decades of disinvestment, lacking key neighborhood services, sit-down restaurants, quality public spaces, and parks. There is also concern that the new investments on Saint Elizabeths campus will remain disconnected from the rest of the neighborhood, cut off geographically and psychologically from the neighborhood's historic commercial and residential areas.

In 2017, CHCTDC seized this challenge and launched an effort with the following goals:

- Improve the overall experience of living near, working in and visiting Congress Heights.
- Ensure long-term residents, small property owners, and local retailers have a voice in shaping the future of the neighborhood.
- Ensure that local culture, community aspirations, and priorities are integrated into development plans and neighborhood branding efforts.
- Ensure that real estate development efforts connect with and benefit existing Congress Heights residents and local business owners.



Key Players

- Congress Heights Community Training and Development Corporation (CHCTDC)
- Destination Congress Heights
- Congress Heights Community Association
- Small business owners
- The Urban Partnership (consulting team)
- The Advisory Neighborhood Commission
- Monumental Sports
- WC Smith Real Estate Services
- DC Deputy Mayor's Office for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED)
- Saint Elizabeths
- Career Path DC



Toward a Solution: Developing a Sustainable Funding and Partnership Model

CHCTDC developed a framework for investing in a place-based inclusive economic and social development strategy centered around Congress Heights. It sought to leverage funding streams from the local government, voluntary contributions from businesses, and grants and contributions from larger property owners and businesses moving into the neighborhood. It was built on extensive community engagement with a broad variety of stakeholders, from large developers to local youth, to city economic development officials, to local civic association members and more.

The plan incorporated three elements, summarized below:

Building an Inclusive Neighborhood Branding Process

With new development on the horizon, CHCTDC felt it was important to ensure that “Congress Heights”—the name, the feel, the story—grew out of an authentic community process and reflected and built upon the values, history, and culture of existing residents and institutions. The organization wanted to ensure that the old neighborhood was connected to the new development and that new residents and visitors would have a strong sense of Congress Heights as a place with an existing identity and rich history.

CHCTDC launched a six-month process that included interviews, interactive workshops, and community meetings to surface and define the core elements of Congress Heights’ story and identity. These included “Heart and Soul,” “Hometown Pride,” and “Growing Together.” Brand attributes included welcoming, creative, respectful, spirited, and entrepreneurial. From there, the team developed messaging documents and graphics that reflected these fundamentals and embodied these attributes, seeking even more community feedback on whether the team had gotten it right.



Improving the Public Realm for Both Existing and Future Residents

Like the place branding efforts, planning for place enhancements involved deep engagement with a range of residential stakeholders. The CHCTDC team worked with a landscape architect to build a plan based on the fundamentals that emerged during the branding effort—“Hometown Pride,” “Growing Together” and “Heart and Soul”—that would result in a public realm designed to be welcoming, creative, respectful, and spirited, and would provide space for the entrepreneurial spirit to thrive. With the architect’s help, the team focused on wayfinding that would connect the arena and new housing development on Saint Elizabeths campus to the core commercial areas. They also identified design enhancements to important nodes along the main business corridors, as well as landscaping, seating, and other design features that would create more community gathering spaces and better connectivity. A centerpiece of the effort included designs for a long-neglected neighborhood park.

Place Management Efforts Connected to Workforce Development Needs

The place management plan that grew out of this effort was rooted in some key goals identified by Congress Heights stakeholders: (1) to create a cleaner more welcoming environment; (2) to provide job opportunities and training to existing residents, particularly those with employment challenges; and (3) to improve the sense of safety. The plan sought to add capacity to the existing clean team and to better coordinate the team’s efforts around improving safety by involving members in regular meetings with community stakeholders—including police, local residents, and business owners—about how to solve emerging and ongoing safety issues. The plan also outlined an effort to connect clean team members with job training and ultimately employment in the new arena being developed on Saint Elizabeths campus.



Lessons Learned

1. By focusing on and valuing place, the leaders of this effort were able to find common ground between stakeholders who are typically wary of each other. Though many Congress Heights residents fear gentrification and displacement, they also hope for more amenities, better opportunities, and more spaces to celebrate and enjoy their community. This effort put their desire to be part of—and not displaced or overtaken by—neighborhood change front and center. The focus was on how to leverage new investment and development efforts more strategically for the community's benefit and to build a framework that would help locals to more meaningfully participate in planning efforts.
2. “Branding” is an off-putting term. Many, especially from marginalized communities who have experienced years of disinvestment, hear “brand” as “erase.” CHCTDC’s effort flipped the script, encouraging stakeholders, especially those whose perspectives are typically ignored, to seize their community narrative and use their own voices to determine how it is told to new residents, businesses, and visitors who are expected to arrive along with the new investments.
3. Community engagement needs to be both transparent and strategic. It is critical to create ample space for stakeholders affected by planning efforts to provide feedback and to shape ideas. It is also critical to actively seek support from key stakeholders who can help obtain the most authentic and broad participation possible. In addition to asking for input and feedback during the process, it is critical to give people a chance to comment on outcomes.
4. Be clear about what your effort can and cannot do. In this case, stakeholders recognized that a set of programs focused on making the neighborhood a better place for long-term and existing residents alike has limits, especially when it comes to the array of larger social issues impacting the neighborhood. It was important to acknowledge the need to solve these larger problems but to also be clear that the program in and of itself was not designed to explicitly address these issues. However, by bringing key players together and leveraging untapped resources, the partnership could lay the groundwork for more ambitious social efforts, including much more strategic and coordinated deployment of public benefits packages that are tailored to community priorities.

Concluding Thoughts

The Congress Heights Partnership is still in very early phases of development. However, it has garnered important buy-in from community, private sector, and government stakeholders. The hope is that the planning effort will help guide a more sustainable and inclusive development process that mitigates potential negative impacts of a large-scale development effort and steers investment around a social agenda shaped by longtime residents.

West Philadelphia Skills Initiative: A Case Study

The Landscape

University City District (UCD) in Philadelphia, PA, is one of the fastest-growing job nodes in the city of just over 1.5 million people. Located in West Philadelphia, UCD is home to a significant concentration of academic, research, and commercial enterprises that collectively employ about 80,000 people. Despite impressive developments and job growth, a significant gap persists between those residents living below the poverty line (about 31 percent of the West Philadelphia population) and new economic opportunities being created. In 2011, UCD launched the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI) to help bridge that gap by leveraging the impressive relationships UCD had developed with major employers in the district.

The Challenge

Philadelphia has long been one of the poorest big cities in the United States. Today, the city is adding new jobs, and the anchor institutions of UCD are at the forefront of that growth. Yet the creation of jobs has often not translated to new economic opportunities for the local residents of West Philadelphia, who still suffer from stifling rates of poverty. One in three West Philadelphia residents live below the poverty line, 45 percent of households have incomes of less than \$25,000 a year, and only 21 percent of those older than 25 hold a bachelor's degree.

The Players

Central to WPSI are the large employers in University City. Since launching in 1997, UCD has developed close relationships with its anchor institutions, many of whom are significant employers in West Philadelphia. WPSI seeks to provide innovative job training that specifically prepares West Philadelphia residents to meet the needs of West Philadelphia employers. These employers are key to the success of WPSI, as are the funders who drive the program forward and the training providers who develop unique curriculums that address the skills gap keeping residents from local employment.

Toward a Solution

WPSI develops training programs only after employers have agreed to partner and provide the necessary information on the skills they are looking to hire. As a result, WPSI participants have a much higher placement rate than other job training programs, which ultimately helps build credibility within the local community. Each curriculum is entirely unique and designed to prepare cohorts of West Philadelphians for jobs that are available today. Each custom curriculum includes on-the-job training, allowing participants to earn a wage while training; technical skills unique to the employment opportunity available; and soft skills that serve as a foundational building block for the entire experience. While placements are not guaranteed, interviews are, as well as opportunities to build relationships with employers throughout the training process. Since 2011, 785 individuals—who, prior to engaging with WPSI, averaged 62 weeks of unemployment—worked with WPSI through job training, internship, and workshop opportunities, resulting in over \$15.4 million in new wages.

Removing Marketing Barriers to Permanent Supportive Housing Availability in DC: DowntownDC BID Landlord Partnership Fund

The Landscape

Over the past two decades, downtown Washington, DC, has transformed into an economic success story. By the end of 2017, employment in the BID was around 183,000, making it the largest employment base in the city. With 30 hotels and 11,202 rooms, downtown continues to see record growth in hotel revenues. The area is increasingly mixed-use as more residential developments come online; the residential population has grown significantly (to around 9,700), with a median household income of \$109,000 per year.¹⁷

The Challenge

Along with the growth and affluence of the residential population, the number of chronically homeless individuals who live on streets and in parks downtown has grown. Though family homelessness in the District of Columbia has declined somewhat, the unsheltered homeless population has nearly tripled in the past decade, going from 400 to over 900 in 2017.

Since its inception in 1997, DowntownDC BID has prioritized connecting people who are experiencing homelessness with housing and services. DowntownDC BID has long partnered with local government and service providers to fund homeless outreach and to advocate for the investments needed to connect people experiencing homelessness with supportive housing and case management.



Despite the fact that the city has increased funding for vouchers over the years, many private landlords, especially as the housing market tightens, refuse to take them, citing risks and negative past experiences. This has meant that even with a voucher and with a service provider helping them to navigate the system, people ready to move into housing face yet another roadblock. The delays caused by reluctant landlords can be devastating, especially in cases where outreach workers have worked for months or years to finally connect a very ill person with safe housing and wraparound services.

Key Players

- DowntownDC BID
- The DC Department of Human Services (District agencies)
- Pathways to Housing DC
- Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development
- The Community Foundation of the National Capital Region and other DC Foundations
- Private sector companies and developers

Toward a Solution

In response, DowntownDC BID partnered with the Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development, local foundations, and the DC government to launch the Landlord Partnership Fund. The goal of the fund is to cover certain costs incurred by landlords of tenants whose rent is subsidized. In return, the expectation is that landlords will relax screening criteria around barriers like poor credit and past evictions that have prevented these individuals from securing housing on their own. The coverage, which is capped, will be available to cover costs associated with property damage that exceed a tenant's security deposit, along with unpaid rent. Though not a solution to homelessness, this is one tool in a toolkit aimed at addressing the growing issue of homelessness in DC. Not only does the program help to overcome a market barrier, but the project itself has helped galvanize and build trust among key business and philanthropic players. The BID and its partners are also working with local business groups and philanthropic organizations to secure resources needed to sustain the effort and to measure success.

The initiative has the potential to make a broad impact. Not only does it help people in dire need of housing and support to obtain a safe place to live, it is also an important tool for mitigating the impact of street homelessness in parks and public spaces.

Gateway 85 Gwinnett CID—Tackling Education and Affordable Housing

The Landscape

The Gateway 85 Gwinnett Community Improvement District (CID) serves a 14 square mile area generally centered around the interchange of Interstate 85 and Jimmy Carter Boulevard outside of Atlanta, Georgia. About 25 percent of the district is in the City of Norcross, a small portion is in the City of Peachtree Corners, and the rest is in unincorporated Gwinnett County. The land use is a broad mix of retail, restaurant, office, and industrial properties, with a large residential population.

The CID serves one of the most diverse populations of one of the most diverse counties in the Southeast. The district includes approximately 36,000 jobs and about 3,600 businesses. The average income of the daytime population is \$70-80,000 but the average income of the nighttime population is in the \$30-40,000 range. In addition, the district includes a network of 104 religious institutions or organizations.

The Challenges

This was the first part of the county that developed in the 60s and 70s when jobs migrated away from rural farmland areas and into the county. As the rest of the county developed over the subsequent decades, prosperity moved out to the rest of the county. The economic downturn of the 2008–2011 era hit the area very hard, with an exceptional loss of businesses and jobs. These were the early days of the CID, which was already fighting the blight that had taken hold in the area.

Today, the district faces major challenges around housing and education. There is a need to maintain adequate and varied housing types in good condition but that remain

affordable. Equally important, there is a need to improve educational outcomes for the children in this school cluster. Current apartment dwellers often move to chase a free month's rent, which causes instability in the children's education as the move sometimes forces them to change schools. The students in this community's schools speak more than 100 different first languages and are almost all Title 1. Often their parents don't speak English, and many do not have an education to be able to help their children succeed.

The CID's business stakeholders recognize the importance of supporting a strong and stable workforce locally. The CID has created a platform for private sector stakeholders, renters, and public entities to develop the variety of solutions that will be needed. The organization is also bringing together the philanthropic and private sector resources needed to fund the interventions that are identified.

The Players

- Gwinnett County
- City of Norcross
- Greater Atlanta Christian School
- Department of Community Affairs
- Meadowcreek Cluster Schools and Gwinnett County Public Schools
- United Way
- Habitat for Humanity
- Gateway 85 Gwinnett CID



Toward a Solution

The CID and its partners are in the early stages of dissecting the array of challenges embedded within the larger issues of education and housing. The CID is a partner with the school cluster in many ways: by providing books for the elementary school children; by sponsoring a race that raises funds for the school foundation and local boys and girls club; and by spending time at the schools to identify other partnering opportunities for the CID and the local businesses or philanthropic organizations.

For housing, the organization has an opportunity to participate in the Georgia Initiative on Community Housing over a three-year period. The CID is forming a 20+ person task force and creating subcommittees to focus on specific issues, which will have different needs and solutions (e.g., addressing homelessness, which includes families living in cars and those living in extended stay hotels, all the way up the path to homeownership). The CID provides a limited amount of funding while also utilizing its relationships to bring others to the table who can provide additional human and capital resources.¹⁸

Conclusion



The role of urban place management organizations is rapidly evolving. Many districts can no longer focus solely on the maintenance and beautification of public spaces, but are being tasked with taking on increasing responsibility for a number of social challenges.

We believe that social equity and inclusion are urgent priorities for the urban place management profession, requiring us to turn a critical lens inward as we examine whose voices and identities are privileged when making decisions about public space and economic policy and whose are excluded. We can use these insights to shape programs and initiatives to be more inclusive. At the same time, our organizations can play a more robust role in promoting growth strategies in which new opportunities and benefits are more widely shared.

There are many approaches to addressing social equity and inclusion. Tracking data and metrics on the community and even within your own organization can also lead to

greater self-awareness about equity gaps and diversity challenges. One of the keys that underlies any new initiative is community engagement and involving all stakeholders, especially those who traditionally may not have had a strong voice, early and often. For a UPMO to be successful in inclusive efforts, they must develop a strong bond of trust with the entire community, from residents to tenants to property owners, and work in partnership with other community organizations to strengthen the entire neighborhood. There is no single approach that will ensure inclusivity, but as conveners who work with a wide variety of stakeholders from all sectors and industries, UPMOs are critical players in starting the challenging conversation of social equity, and being trusted partners to deliver thriving neighborhoods for all.



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