What is CONNECT?

The Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT) is a non-partisan initiative that convenes neighboring municipalities, including the City of Pittsburgh, that share borders, challenges, and opportunities in Allegheny County, PA. We provide resources, research, relationships, and opportunities to work together. The CONNECT network serves as both a policy think tank and membership organization, housed by the Center for Metropolitan Studies based in the University of Pittsburgh’s nationally-ranked policy school, the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

Why CONNECT?

Southwestern Pennsylvania is a very fragmented region; we have the country’s most local governments per capita. Immersed in the latest best practices and cutting edge research for governments, we collaborate across sectors and political boundaries in public and private partnerships to codevelop well-informed models and decision-making processes built on strong relationships and trust.
What does CONNECT do?

CONNECT incubates and pilots policies and programs such as the CONNECT Community Paramedic Program and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion. Meanwhile, staff also represents the members of CONNECT in multiple policy-oriented working groups convened by both our members and our partners throughout the region. We engage graduate students to participate in, contribute to, and learn from all facets of the work.

Who are members?

CONNECT members are municipalities, not individuals. Each member municipality designates 1-3 elected and appointed officials to be representatives and vote on behalf of the municipality to CONNECT.

Can I join CONNECT?

To be a member of CONNECT, your municipality must share a border with a current member. Meanwhile, we welcome many partners and “friends of CONNECT” that attend our meetings and events.

What are municipal dues?

Municipalities become members by paying a modest annual dues amount relative to its population. For many, this is a way to show the value they feel they receive from being a member of CONNECT.

Who are partners?

We partner with nonprofits, authorities, and businesses whose missions align with our work. We also work with governments and governmental agencies at the county and state level.

How do meetings work?

While every meeting will have an agenda with key speakers or moderators, we encourage as much participation as possible to hear a variety of municipal perspectives. The substance of our work comes from hard questions and candid conversations with one another.

When and where are the meetings?

Executive Committee meetings are bimonthly and working group meetings are quarterly. Our meetings move around the region and are hosted by a different municipality each time so that we may become more familiar with each other and our region. If we are unable to meet in person, we meet via Zoom.

What will I get out of CONNECT?

CONNECT provides a framework for continued interaction and collaboration between neighboring municipalities while respecting the borders in place. We understand that our fragmentation causes unique challenges that sometimes can be addressed through innovative, cross-boundary solutions and communication, and we work together towards finding and implementing those solutions. Change happens at the speed of trust, and ultimately, CONNECT builds trusting relationships between the leaders who make those changes through shared knowledge and experiences.
Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is all our members’ municipal representatives — the elected and appointed officials. The Executive Committee meets bimonthly to discuss a full agenda of various, relevant policy issues and convenes an annual Legislative Session & Reception.

Officers

CONNECT has seven representatives who sit on the Board of Officers: the Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary/Treasurer, Manager Representative, City of Pittsburgh Representative (always the Mayor), Allegheny County Representative (always the County Executive), and Immediate Past Chair. All officers are on the Executive Committee. These representatives are appointed annually via a nominating committee that takes nominations and input from the whole Congress and produces a slate to be voted on at the annual Legislative Session & Reception. Officers meet on a regular basis to discuss the direction and decisions of CONNECT.

Working Groups

CONNECT engages in policy areas that members identify as most pressing. These naturally change over time depending on the current political climate, global and local events, and member, partner, and CONNECT’s capacity. As of fall 2019, the top priorities of members are housed in one of our three working groups. Each working group focuses on two or three issues that we are actively engaging the region to address.

- **Infrastructure & Utilities Coordination Working Group examples:** stormwater regionalization & governance; implementing Coordinate PA software, regional climate action planning.

- **Economic & Environmental Development Working Group examples:** recycling coordination, transit-oriented development, lead safety.

- **Public Safety, Health, & Human Resources Working Group examples:** Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion; the 2020 Census, volunteer fire.

Events

CONNECT’s events are open to our municipal members, partners, and friends. We have various events throughout the year, and two annual events: The Legislative Session & Reception every April where our members representatives vote on new resolutions and policies for the year, and our Friendraiser every October which is a more informal networking event to celebrate all that CONNECT’s network does together. These are fantastic opportunities to build relationships across the region and are critical to the culture of collaboration within our organization. Everything we do is possible because we have learned to trust each other and share knowledge and resources. We rely heavily on these events to provide positive experiences for all so that our members are open to working with new partners and with other municipalities.