

Anti-Racism Skill Share Planning Meeting Minutes

Thursday | June 11, 2020 | 3:30PM

Via Zoom



Municipal Attendees: Deneen Underwood, Carnegie; Darla Cravotta, Allegheny County; Tom Rengers, Etna; Ben Estell, Dormont; Mark Sampogna, Green Tree; Tim Rogers, Shaler; Mandy Steele, Fox Chapel; Patty DeMarco, Forest Hills; Steve Beuter, Carnegie; Jonathan Bradford, Pittsburgh; Josh Schneider, Pittsburgh; Josiah Gilliam, Pittsburgh; Laura Drogowski, Pittsburgh; Phyllis Anderson, Oakmont; Amanda Settlemaier, Turtle Creek Valley COG; Brittany Reno, Sharpsburg; Susan Hockenberry, Quaker Valley COG; Jay Dworin, Churchill; An Lewis, Steel Rivers COG and Tri-COG Land Bank; Ian McMeans, Mt. Lebanon; Mark Wells, Wilkins; Jessica Semler, Etna

Other Attendees: Laura Stephany, Allies for Children; Steven Irwin, US Commission on Civil Rights, PA SAC; Jami Pasquinelli, Urban Land Institute Pittsburgh District Council; State Rep. Sara Innamorato; Ken Aquiline, State Rep. Innamorato's Office

CONNECT/GSPIA Staff: Lydia Morin, CONNECT; Tess De Jong, CONNECT; JoEllen Marsh, CONNECT; Ally Walker, CONNECT; Kaleigh Dryden, CONNECT; Kelley Kelley, CONNECT; Sarah Downing, CONNECT

Introductions and prompted discussions in small groups

Who you are, who you are representing and what motivated you personally to show up today? What kind of conversations are you having with your colleagues, friends, family? What can CONNECT do? How and when should we do it? Are there resources that you are particularly finding useful that CONNECT should share and explore more deeply?

- Personal comments and comments that people are hearing from their communities:
 - Even prior to George Floyd, COVID was exposing systemic inequity in America. More people are really starting to think deeply about some of these things.
 - Issues of race are becoming less political and more of something that everyone and every party must address
 - Some people are stepping into new roles and wonder what advocacy can look like in their new roles, with more impact
 - I want to protest but do not feel comfortable due to COVID
 - Racial equity is something that must be central in my health field. I am looking to hear what is happening at the municipal level so it can be more integrated into the conversations in my work
 - It has taken generations to get here. We may not have caused this, but we benefit and we can help stop it
 - So many people in CONNECT are interested but have no idea what to start implementing
 - This group has a great mix of newer and older perspectives
- Comments regarding municipalities
 - Using our platform as government agencies is very important

- Equity is one of the promises made when working in local government
 - Citizens Academy can get people more involved/knowledgeable about local government
 - If there are educational programs for citizens, keep a continuous feedback loop with a place for evaluation and feedback
 - Local governments can make factual statements that don't have to be 'political'
 - Share the history of your municipality and how it came to be, for example, through redlining
 - Learn and teach how communities are shaped using racist practices
 - I am trying to amplify the existing voices already in my community
 - My community is becoming more diverse which is great, and we are looking for ways to bolster that and support People of Color here
 - The municipality I represent has the resources to be a regional leader, but we are not
 - Dealing with COVID is still taking up most of our time
 - Are there best practices for police? We worked on the pillars of "good government" in PA and there are no standards for departments. It is usually just focused on the officer, which is a weakness of the PA system
 - We identified the need for social workers assisting police about two years ago through our Chiefs meetings. The stumbling block has been funding. It will be approx. \$70k per social worker. Any thoughts on funding?
 - A Skill Share with some of our Police Officers leading in the conversation would be of interest
 - Trying to figure out the best way to approach diversifying our boards and leadership teams
- How can CONNECT support?
 - Create forums and educational sessions for citizens about how to talk with local government leaders
 - Help get citizens more involved
 - Continue the skill shares. Bring in experts. Have zoom sessions with community leaders from diverse backgrounds who can educate the CONNECT municipalities/leaders because the majority of people involved with CONNECT are white. Thomas Merton Center has White accomplice training
 - Assist with policy-making around systemic and structural racism
 - Help organize community listening sessions
 - We need to compensate those we ask to come speak to us for their time and effort
 - Give us action items
 - Give members educational programs for their community
 - I would like to see a specific action plan from CONNECT and Pitt on how they will become more diverse

- Help us figure out the role between local government and NGOs; how we work together (or separately) to address systemic racism

My Brother's Keeper Presentation – Josiah Gilliam, City of Pittsburgh

- My Brother's Keeper (MBK) has recently come to the City of Pittsburgh. It's an ongoing initiative of the Obama Foundation for Black men and boys that was started after murder of Trayvon Martin. The program has a 6-goal framework that covers the life cycle of Black boys and men, which is then broken down into dozens of specific objectives that organizations are already working on, so as to avoid duplicating/frustrating efforts. Naturally, they many partners, including schools.
- MBK addresses opportunity and achievement gaps, criminal justice reform, reentry work, and any environment a Black male can be in.
- MBK very much takes on the shape of the community it's in. It is a collective effort where many players envision what it can look like before it's implemented. It is tailored to the goals and assets of the region. The important part is to keep a feedback loop going with data and listening to local Black leaders. MBK emphasizes listening to those with lived experience.
- It is safe to say there's been a swell of attention on policing. This is a very complicated issue with 109 police departments in the county, and the police live, work, play, and worship in our communities too. Police officers are interested and want to be involved in this conversation.
- Pittsburgh Mayor Peduto has signed this Mayor's Pledge: <https://www.obama.org/mayor-pledge/>
- Something to start thinking about: municipalities can sign on to join the MBK initiative!
- About: <https://pittsburghpa.gov/mayor/mbk/about.html>
- Action plan: https://pittsburghpa.gov/mayor/mbk/action_plan.pdf

LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) Presentation – JoEllen Marsh, CONNECT

- This is an update on where we are at with LEAD and to explain how it is especially relevant with current events
- Similar to all these calls for police reform, we have had many of these conversations over the last year about community policing, and specifically pre-arrest diversion
- LEAD falls within the calls to action that many people are making right now
- We have been hearing police chief voices loudly saying that they cannot be social service workers and mental health workers, too
- Petty crime stems from unmet behavioral health needs. If you arrest someone 10 times in a year for the same thing, arrest is probably not the best thing for addressing that issue
- Pre-arrest helps people who are repeatedly engaging in those issues and instead connects them with case managers, who can connect them with other services
- LEAD is different than other models because the intervention is much earlier in the timeline. LEAD intervenes before somebody is caught up in the criminal justice system

Roundtable Brainstorming and Planning Discussion

- As CONNECT, as policy makers, we have a responsibility to undo the effects of racism in our communities, effects due to policy. I have spent 20+ years in fair housing. When you talk about the environment, when you talk education, when you talk crime, you are talking about housing policy. Housing discrimination and lending policies have, over time, made it so that it costs \$11,000 per year just to be Black in Pittsburgh. Most programs to help community members don't even cover this baseline gap. Majority White communities must invest and invest in these programs.
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/devaluation-of-assets-in-black-neighborhoods/>
- Unfortunately, you can overlay that map with ACHD's lead-poisoned children, areas with higher breast cancer rates, etc. etc. It's the same map for everything. You can see how starkly the health impacts of redlining remain today.
- You are right on the mark. Communities have been abandoned, resources are extracted and very little gains return. Wealth is shifting to multinational corporations, and we must focus on reinvesting in local communities and healthy societies. The horrendous wealth gap is not by accident but by deliberate policies. Important decisions will have a much bigger impact if we make them together than alone.
- Sometimes it is easier to talk about racism in systems because it removes the human element, but that is the painful part. I represent a lot of white constituents who do not see themselves reflected in this movement. Many of them do not know all the language yet and feel shamed and excluded for not knowing. My question is, how do we invite them to work through it with us? How do we invite them into cohesive and vibrant communities? I just want to express that these are difficult conversations.
- **People who are scared that they will not say the right thing won't say anything. CONNECT is good at creating the environment where you can ask questions. CONNECT could intentionally bolster that aspect even more and make it explicitly clear that this must be a non-hostile environment.** You could create an anonymous survey for people to ask anti-racism 101 questions. People will learn best without fear of criticism.
- As a Black police officer (with community outreach and neighborhood organizing hats), I don't feel completely accepted in either identity. How can police departments recruit more Black people and then retain them once they are there? Some of the things people want to see changed are not even allowed yet in Pittsburgh. More education is possible through civilian police academy for people to see what goes into officers' training. I am brainstorming about a model like My Brother's Keeper but for the next generation of police. And I'm all in on LEAD!
- 911 calls are a result of another system's failure (housing, education, mental health, etc.) We could bring in speakers to talk about those systems.

Next Steps

- Thank you!! We will put start putting together this series and plan dates! Members will do the survey and volunteer to help stack the zooms and guide the conversations.