Why is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Essential to a Sustainable Community?

We are all products of our environment, to some extent. Thus, an inclusive attitude becomes second nature to a child of a diverse community. This same community becomes a village as it also breeds compassion for values, beliefs or opinions that may differ from her own. A diverse community produces role models and success stories that motivate and inspire us to live and raise our children in such a prolific environment.

The shrinking globe and quickening pace of international exchanges calls for adaptability in the face of change for a community to prosper. A sustainable orientation in all aspects of community life can provide the ability to anticipate change and be nimble and innovative in reacting to the surety of change. The length of time it took the Pittsburgh region to evolve from the world’s steel capitol to a resilient, diverse economy is an object lesson in this respect.

In addition to social and equity demands for diversity and inclusion there is an economic case that has been extensively researched and reported. Young professionals in new and growing knowledge-based industries are diverse themselves in terms of race, gender and ethnicity. Naturally they want to live and work in areas that are similarly inclusive and welcoming of diversity.

Technical skills rather than strong backs are the power behind the new regional economy. When a large segment of the population does not have such skills the region is, logically, less competitive. At the same time, unemployed and underemployed individuals require government support for social service and health needs plus they are more likely to be engaged in the criminal justice system including incarceration. Inequity imposes high economic costs. It stifles growth, slows momentum, and erodes the sense of community.

Diverse viewpoints commonly enrich any dialogue and most often strengthen decisions. When a community undertakes a visioning process as an initial step in creating a comprehensive plan, the strength of the resulting products will depend on the extent to which that diversity is reflected.

Lack of diversity and inclusion manifested by white flight and high unemployment rates reduce the tax base of the region’s cities and older suburbs. This reduces the ability to pay for a high level of urban services perhaps most meaningfully seen in the education field. Clearly, this vicious circle has negative consequences for the future of the region.

Resources for Communities

- African American Chamber of Commerce of Western PA
  http://www.aaccwp.com/
  412/392-0610

- Black Political Empowerment Project
  http://www.b-pep.net/
  412/758-7898

- Center for Race and Social Problems, University of Pittsburgh
  http://www.crsp.pitt.edu/
  412/624-7382

- Local Government Academy
  http://www.localgovernmentacademy.org/
  412/237-3171

- PA Department of Community and Economic Development
  1-866-GO-NEWPA

- Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network
  http://www.piin.org/
  412/621-9230

- Remaking Cities Institute
  http://www.cmu.edu/rci/
  412/268-9553

- Sustainable Pittsburgh
  http://sustainablepittsburgh.org/
  412/258-6642

- Western Pennsylvania Diversity Initiative
  http://www.wpdiversity.org/

Photo: Jason Cohn
Cranberry Township in Butler County recently prepared and adopted a comprehensive plan. One part of the plan addressed diversity with the following goal:

“Cranberry Township will be a diverse community that is accommodating and attractive to diverse populations by taking proactive steps to create an inclusive environment through ‘deliberate inquiry’ to understand diversity through seeking active community leadership and participation from underrepresented ethnic/social groups.”

Proposed actions to achieve this goal include:

- Recognize ethnic holidays on the Township’s calendar.
- Develop an action plan with the Cranberry Area Chamber of Commerce to identify minority-owned businesses in the area.
- Develop and implement a plan for Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility at all Township-owned facilities and all new developments.
- Provide diversity training for all Township staff.
- Create a diversity committee within the Township to focus on increasing the diversity of Cranberry Township’s population.

The Plan also addressed housing diversity with the goal:

“Cranberry Township will become a community with increased housing options including a variety of housing types (single-family homes, apartments, townhouses, and condominiums) to serve different lifestyles and income levels, located within the same neighborhoods.”

Proposed actions include:

- Review best practice inclusionary programs from across the country and determine applicability for use within the Township.
- Amend the zoning, subdivision and land development ordinance requirements to include inclusionary housing provisions through the use of density and other incentive programs.
- Complete a study to define workforce housing in the Township and identify strategies to preserve and enhance workforce housing.

These goals found application while the Plan was being developed when Westinghouse announced the selection of Cranberry for a major new facility. This action will bring a large and diverse workforce into Cranberry to work and, perhaps to live and shop. The Township took the initiative to meet with the human resources staff at Westinghouse to identify ways that it could accommodate this influx.

The Township is also exploring several actions such as adding new languages to their welcome sign, translation of the Township website and investigating some sister city relationships in countries represented by the new workforce and who may send delegations to the Westinghouse and other businesses in Cranberry with international connections.

Case courtesy of Cranberry Township

How is this Essential Linked to other Sustainable Community Essentials?

Successful governance directly depends on providing the public goods and services needed to meet citizens’ expectations. These expectations are communicated through dialogue that includes all interests of the community. A vital local economy, especially new service-based enterprises, depends on being able to attract employees with a wide range of skills and education. The quality of schools and the availability of housing at all income levels contribute to the productivity of these workers as do air quality and provision of human services. Also, conservation of civic and historic places can reflect the respect due to citizens of diverse national, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

In short, honoring all people, and future generations is a clear indication of a sustainable community.

Photo: Jason Cohn
Actions for Implementation

- The governing body should adopt principles of sustainability including commitment to promote diversity, equity and inclusion. A benchmark is the harmony evident in a community, evidence of hate crimes and support for specific celebrations of diverse backgrounds.

- Review policies and ordinances to ensure they do not exclude groups of people. Benchmarks include availability of housing within reach of all people and availability of houses of worship for all religions.

- Launch an aggressive outreach and education program – in partnership with non-governmental organizations, religious communities and others - to promote the benefits of diversity based on “We are all in this together”.

- The diversity of the population should be reflected in the makeup of the governing body, the municipal workforce and all appointed boards, commissions and authorities.

- Public infrastructure and service investments should be provided equitably to all parts of the municipality and to all citizens. Benchmarks include a uniform quality of public streets, well-designed and maintained parks and playgrounds available to all, high quality schools, libraries and health services that serve all neighborhoods.

- Public incentives to attract or retain jobs should be conditioned on the jobs being of family supporting wages and that recruitment be open to all. The benchmark is the makeup of the community being fairly reflected in the jobs.

- Municipal contracting must be open to all and should include goals for minority- and women-owned businesses.

- Engage in education outreach to citizens and businesses informing and encouraging them to ensure diversity throughout the public and private sectors. The best outcome is to mirror the community in terms of inclusion and diversity.

- Enlist the real estate community to combat steering. A benchmark is existence of diverse neighborhoods throughout the municipality.

- Market the municipality as an exciting and vital community that prizes and celebrates diversity, stresses equity and is committed to inclusion of all citizens.

Resource sheet produced by:

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Sustainable Pittsburgh | 425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 1335 | Pittsburgh, PA 15219 | (412) 258-6642
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