

Sharing New Methods to **IMPACT** Pittsburgh's Neighborhoods



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*innovative project report:*

**THE ONE NORTHSIDE COMMUNITY PLAN**





Our mission is to support the people,  
organizations and partnerships  
committed to creating and maintaining  
**thriving neighborhoods.**

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We believe that Pittsburgh's future is built upon strong neighborhoods and the good work happening on the ground.

It is integral to our role as an advocate, collaborator and convener to lift up exemplary projects and share best practices in ways that advance better engagement and community-led decisions and ensure a better understanding of the processes that lead to success and positive impact on our neighborhoods.

***We share this story with you to inspire  
action and celebrate progress, and most  
importantly, to empower leaders and  
residents in other communities to actively  
shape the future of their neighborhoods.***



— **Presley L. Gillespie**  
*President, Neighborhood Allies*

*innovative project report:*



## From concept to consensus

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*Upwards of 600 people braved the chill of an early December night in Pittsburgh last year to celebrate in the warmth inside Heinz Field, home of the Pittsburgh Steelers. Their reason for celebration had nothing to do with the exploits of the city's beloved professional football team.*

**A community plan was being unveiled** for improving the quality of life in the city's Northside neighborhoods around the stadium that the voices of several thousand residents and community stakeholders had shaped. And hopes were high that improvements in infrastructure, schools, employment and lives would be more broadly and quickly realized, as they had in other city neighborhoods where resources and revitalization were attracting investment and people.

The Buhl Foundation, whose namesake himself had been a Northsider, decided in 2013 to focus its grantmaking in the neighborhoods above the north shore of the Allegheny River. The foundation would develop a partnership with local residents and leaders to explore solutions to the issues they find most pressing. And it would commit to doing so for the next 10–20 years.

What followed was a process that saw the foundation borrow from the concepts of place-based and embedded philanthropy to create a new framework for community-driven change.

The community plan announced that December night was a milestone along that process, which began two years earlier — when the likelihood of getting the 18 disparate neighborhoods to reach consensus on something as profound as a shared agenda for the future was anything but certain. >> *(continued on p. 4)*



55% white  
40% black

**NORTHSIDE:**  
18 neighborhoods

½ rental housing  
½ owner-occupied  
4,475 vacant lots

40% of Northside  
children live  
in poverty

46% of families  
with children are  
female head of  
household

31% of  
school students  
chronically absent



**Just Ask:** *Thirteen census takers, recruited from Northside neighborhoods, were trained and paid to conduct door-to-door surveys — targeting areas with traditionally lower community participation.*





## Pittsburgh's Northside

*Nearly 41,000 people live in the neighborhoods that make up the Northside — once the third largest city in Pennsylvania (known as Allegheny City) until it was annexed to Pittsburgh in 1907.*

**The North Side is where steel magnate Andrew Carnegie resided** and where H.J. Heinz made a fortune in food processing. It is home to Allegheny General Hospital — its largest employer — and top city attractions, such as the Carnegie Science Center, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, National Aviary, Andy Warhol Museum, Mattress Factory, Rivers Casino, Heinz Field and PNC Park, home of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

It is a demographically diverse place with whites making up 55 percent of the population and African Americans 40 percent.

It's a place with long-standing community organizations, including the Northside Leadership Conference, a coalition of neighborhood groups that stands as the largest, most comprehensive community development corporation in the city. The issues they face are complex and made more challenging by stark differences among the Northside neighborhoods.

Decisions of government have profoundly affected the Northside with the most impactful having been decades of road construction that carved bypasses and highways through its neighborhoods, dividing them with concrete and traffic.

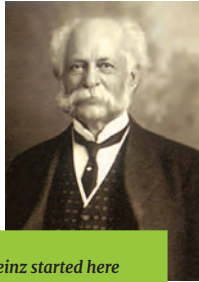
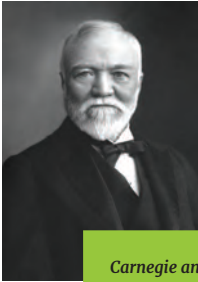
The population of the neighborhoods has dwindled to about one-third of what it was in 1950.

Retail trade has thinned significantly, leaving a strip along East Ohio Street as the Northside's chief commercial corridor. More than 1 in 5 Northsiders live in poverty, including 40 percent of its 9,500 children under age 18. But the distribution of poverty is uneven, ranging from 5 percent of the population in the most affluent neighborhood to 63 percent in the poorest.

Fewer than half of Northside children attend Pittsburgh Public Schools. About one third of them are chronically absent and 85 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch programs.

The median sales price for a house in the Northside was \$37,000 in 2012, about half of the city average. In neighborhoods where demand is greatest, houses list at 10 times as much. But vacant property is a problem shared across neighborhoods.

"The Northside is not a forlorn wasteland," said Frederick Thieman, president of the Buhl Foundation. "It has assets and a lot of potential. But there was a sense that the Northside was struggling and that at times it had been penalized because it didn't speak with one voice." >>



Carnegie and Heinz started here



## A focus on place

*In 2012, Frederick Thieman and his board of directors were reassessing the Buhl Foundation's grantmaking strategy. The organization had been a multipurpose foundation since it was started with an \$11 million endowment from Northside resident and retailer Henry J. Buhl upon his death in 1927.*

**The foundation had made significant contributions to southwestern Pennsylvania,** providing the seed money that led to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Buhl Planetarium, Blue Cross/Blue Shield health plan, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work and Chatham Village, an 80-year-old planned urban community renowned for its innovative design and use of greenspace.

But its grantmaking had come to represent only 1–2 percent of philanthropic dollars awarded in the region. “We asked: Does it make sense to be a multipurpose foundation at that level of giving? That started a journey to find a way to be more impactful in our giving,” Thieman said.

Bringing all of its resources to bear on a single program area, such as education, was considered. Investigating a place-based approach attracted greater interest.

And the Northside was a natural place to explore the concept. It was where Buhl's department store raised the fortune that endowed the foundation. The foundation had invested there for decades. Neighborhood needs aligned with the foundation's historic focus on education, human services, youth development, and economic and community development. And there was a feeling that the Northside was missing out on the kind of resurgence seen in several other city neighborhoods, despite its just-across-the-river proximity to a revitalized Downtown.

### Addressing Needs



## The 4 historic focus areas of The Buhl Foundation



Education



Human Services



Youth Development



Economic & Community  
Development





## The Buhl Foundation



The Northside was Buhl's home base

### The mission of The Buhl Foundation:

*To create community legacies  
by leveraging its resources to  
encourage people and organizations  
to dream, to innovate and to take action.*

The foundation hired Diana Bucco as vice president with the full-time assignment of exploring the idea of focusing the foundation's grantmaking in the Northside. During her first years, she conducted 400 interviews, gathered data, and studied place-based and embedded philanthropy concepts, practices and experiences to inform a decision on the next grantmaking approach.

Thieman, meanwhile, contacted organizations that receive foundation grants to assess how the loss of those funds, should the new grantmaking strategy be adopted, may adversely affect them, which was a concern of the board's. Working with the foundation's current grantees, a transition plan was created and communicated that gave plenty of advance knowledge of the foundation's plan to shift focus. Arrangements for final grants were made so that grantees would be able to plan for and transition to other possible funding sources.

Bucco reported that focusing the foundation's grantmaking in the Northside was warranted and that such an approach appeared to have wide support in the community. Many residents and stakeholders, in fact, were already volunteering to help.


The proposed approach called for a long-term commitment, a deeper relationship with the local neighborhoods than the foundation had ever attempted and ceding much of the decision making to Northside residents, organizations and community stakeholders on whose shoulders shaping, implementing and sustaining the initiative would largely rest. The foundation would help to convene residents and stakeholders and build their decision-making capacity, provide reliable funding opportunities, and work to leverage additional public and philanthropic dollars. >> (continued on p. 14)



“There was a risk of diluting our impact and reputation in the community. We have a long, rich history as an important foundation. If all of a sudden we focus only on a particular geographic area, would we limit our opportunities to interact with the broader community and lose influence?”

*View from atop the Mattress Factory Museum looking over Central Northside rooftops toward Downtown.*





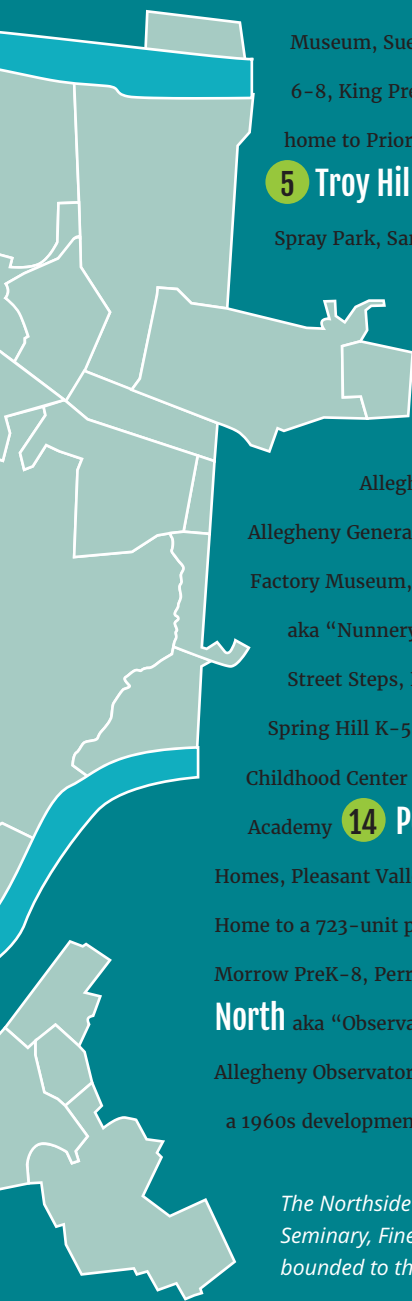
I can say it has been just the opposite. We have the resources and opportunity to do innovative work on the Northside and we've seen indications that other foundations will partner in some of the projects in ways that didn't happen before."

— *Frederick Thieman, President, Buhl Foundation*



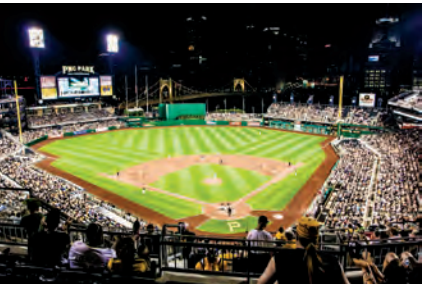
# The 18 neighborhoods of Pittsburgh's North Side





- 1 North Shore** Home to Heinz Field, PNC Park, Andy Warhol Museum, North Shore Riverfront Park, Stage AE
- 2 Allegheny West** Pittsburgh's smallest neighborhood, home to CCAC, Gertrude Stein House, one-time "Millionaire's Row"
- 3 Allegheny Center** Home to Allegheny Commons Park, National Aviary, Pittsburgh Children's Museum, Sue Murray Pool, Allegheny Traditional Academy PreK-5 Magnet, Allegheny 6-8, King PreK-8, New Hazlett Theater
- 4 East Allegheny** aka "Deushtown," home to Priory Grand Hall, Teutonia Mannerchor, East Ohio Street Business District
- 5 Troy Hill** Home to Saint Anthony's Chapel, the Ober-Guehl House, the city's first Spray Park, Sarah Heinz House
- 6 Chateau** Home to Manchester Craftsman's Guild & Bidwell Training Center, Rivers Casino, Carnegie Science Center
- 7 Manchester** A National Register Historic District, home to Manchester PreK-8, Conroy Center School
- 8 California-Kirkbride** Home to U.S. Postal Service Sorting Facility, Old Allegheny Rows Historic District
- 9 Central Northside** Home to Allegheny General Hospital, Mexican War Streets, Carnegie Library Allegheny, Mattress Factory Museum, YMCA, Propel Northside School, Jefferson Rec Center
- 10 Fineview** aka "Nunnery Hill," home to Heathside Cottage, Hendersen-Metz House, Rising Main Street Steps, Fineview Field, Fineview Playground
- 11 Spring Hill—City View** Spring Hill K-5
- 12 Spring Garden** Home to Schiller 6-8, Spring Garden Early Childhood Center
- 13 Marshall-Shadeland** aka "Brightwood," home to Oliver Academy
- 14 Perry South** aka "Perry Hilltop," home to Brightridge Street Historic Homes, Pleasant Valley/Snyder's Hollow, Woods Run Library
- 15 Northview Heights** Home to a 723-unit public housing development
- 16 Brighton Heights** Home to Morrow PreK-8, Perry High School, Jack Stack Pool, Marmaduke Playground
- 17 Perry North** aka "Observatory Hill," home to the highest point in Pittsburgh, Riverview Park, Allegheny Observatory, Riverview Pool
- 18 Summer Hill** aka "Harpen Hilltop," home to a 1960s development built to house residents who lost homes due to I-279 construction.

*The Northside of Pittsburgh has seven hills: Observatory, Monument, Troy, Spring, Seminary, Fineview, and Mt. Troy. The cluster of 18 Northside neighborhoods is bounded to the west by the Ohio River and to the south by the Allegheny River.*



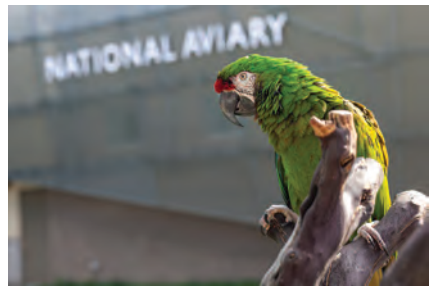
*Numerous*  
**Northside  
Cultural Assets  
& Destinations**







Allegheny Commons Park  
 Allegheny General Hospital  
 Allegheny Observatory  
 Andy Warhol Museum  
 Carnegie Science Center  
 Children's Museum of Pittsburgh  
 Heinz Field  
 Kayak Pittsburgh  
 Manchester Craftsmen's Guild  
 Mattress Factory  
 National Aviary  
 PNC Park  
 Rivers Casino  
 Riverview Park  
 Watersteps



<< (continued from p. 7) “I thought it was extremely ambitious, but who wouldn’t?” said Jean Robinson, one of the five foundation directors. “Certainly, it involved risks. But the Buhl Foundation historically has taken risks with seed funding that others picked up and moved forward. So, while we knew there were risks, we felt we were structurally capable of being adaptive.”

In December 2013 the board of directors voted to adopt a place-based strategy on the Northside for 10–20 years and pursue the values of embedded philanthropy in those neighborhoods.

“My thought was, why didn’t we think of this sooner?” said Peter Mathieson, chairman of the board of directors. “It’s an opportunity to get people to sit at the table, come up with a plan, put it together and build the scaffolding for their neighborhood based on their vision and their needs. It just makes sense to me.”

## Framework for collaboration

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*“I sit on the Northside Leadership Conference and the Northside Pastoral Alliance. We talk about collaboration on the Northside. But people tend to sit in their silos and we weren’t coming together as regularly as when this [One Northside] intentionally brought us together,” said Rev. Brenda Gregg, pastor of the Destiny of Faith Church and founder of Project Destiny, which offers a range of programs to support to Northside children and families.*

**The framework for what became a catalyst for greater community collaboration** emerged from Buhl Foundation’s due diligence in deciding whether to shift its focus to the Northside.

Bucco first conducted interviews with top officials of public, private and nonprofit organizations, who offered their perspectives on the city, its issues and future, particularly the Northside. She interviewed Northside stakeholders ranging from local businesses to the director of the county Department of Human Services to get their views on such things as the challenges of working in the Northside, issues of concern, what works, and their successful partnerships.

Another 200 interviews focused on people who live or work in the Northside ranging from clergy to shop owners to grandmothers. They spoke about what they loved about their community, its assets and challenges, and about their own lives, including what makes life difficult for them and what they thought were the basic things everyone needs to live in dignity.

That group grew as word of the interviews spread and interviewees referred Bucco to others. “My phone started ringing off the hook. ‘I hear you want to know about the Northside. I want to meet with you.’ Once people realized we didn’t have an agenda and were serious about this they wanted to talk to us,” Bucco said. “And never once did anyone ask me for a grant.” >>



## Strategy

# Choosing a community-driven approach



**Diana Bucco**  
Vice President,  
Buhl Foundation

Buhl Foundation Vice President Diana Bucco was charged with exploring the idea of focusing the foundation's resources in Pittsburgh's Northside neighborhoods and a framework for such an initiative. As part of

the process, she looked at examples of place-based philanthropy across the country before deciding on the community-driven approach that defines One Northside.

"Many of the efforts we looked at were around how to better organize organizations, institutions and service providers to improve outcomes in communities. We felt that wasn't the best first step for us. We felt strongly that the first approach was to reach out to residents — have a conversation about what is important to them in their community. What are their hopes, their dreams? What do they think is great about their neighborhood? What do they think needs to be improved?

"One of our core values was to put people in position to create solutions to the problems they see in their lives and communities. So everything we do ought to lead toward self-sufficiency.

"The power of this approach was in the use of primary and secondary data. We interviewed. We had conversations with Northsiders, anchored in dignity, around what they wanted to improve. While doing that, we collected every publicly available data point. Where there wasn't data, we commissioned it. When you do that at scale, themes emerge that are undeniable — in the messages consistently heard in the interviews and in the data. The community, those who lived and worked in the Northside, defined the issues. And the data validated what they were saying.

"When we were doing this, we tried to find a unifying topic. We intentionally did not focus on economics or economic development or markets because, with those, there inherently is an imbalance of power and resources. But the minute we asked, **'What does it take to live a dignified life?'** everyone was able to respond. By asking that question it was not just about what is important to me but also what is important to the community.

"One of the things that surprised me was the number of times people said, 'Thanks for asking. Nobody ever asked me before.'" ●



<< The outreach also identified neighborhood anchors — people trusted by their neighbors whose influence isn't defined by resources. Their participation was seen as lending One Northside credibility, and helping to tamp down opposition and convince others to become involved.

At the same time, data was gathered on Northside demographics, household income, housing, education, employment and other aspects of the neighborhoods.

When the data and interviews were compiled and analyzed, three broad areas of focus emerged — education, employment and place — that would guide the community toward reaching consensus on the most pressing issues in each category and how to address them.

In addition to neighborhood outreach, leaders of major city educational institutions, cultural organizations, Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto, Allegheny County Chief Executive Rich Fitzgerald and other leaders with ties to the Northside communities were convened for a day and a half for facilitated discussions to identify ways institutional assets might be harnessed to support a Northside plan. Information gleaned from the retreat tended to reinforce what the Northside data suggested and what the residents were saying.

In 2014, foundation officials held a public forum on the Northside to report their findings and to announce the foundation's decision to direct its resources toward improving the Northside for the next 10–20 years. And they invited residents and stakeholders to sign on to work on a consensus plan for the community that reflects their vision.

A website was also created to open communication throughout the neighborhood and report on the work being done by the strategy teams and others as it progressed.

"That was when this transitioned from being a strategic plan to help the foundation decide how to spend its money to becoming a Northside plan, to becoming about the Northside," Bucco said.

Some 150 residents and stakeholders volunteered, Debra Caplan among them. "It was a very organized, thoughtful approach — a true strategic planning process that included anybody who wanted to be involved. That was important," said Caplan, a retired Allegheny General Hospital vice president. "The fact there were resources to support it was also important. People saw the foundation as a partner willing to work with them and invest in having the Northside succeed."

## The road to consensus

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*The Buhl Foundation hired Jackson/Clark Partners to organize residents and local stakeholders who volunteered to work on a consensus plan, build their capacity to do so and facilitate the process. The consultants also conducted a census to gain the perspectives of a wider swath of Northside residents than had been interviewed.*

**Volunteers formed three "strategy teams"** to meet monthly around issues related to education, employment and place. Jackson/Clark began with building their decision-making capacity, then facilitated discussions around identifying specific issues within an area of focus and ways to address them. Buhl staff made a point to attend every strategy >>



## Facilitating

# Putting the community to work



**Traci Jackson**  
Managing Partner,  
Jackson/Clark  
Partners

*Jackson/Clark Partners was retained to organize and facilitate teams of residents and community leaders who volunteered to work on strategies to address issues related to place, education and employment in the Northside. Traci Jackson, managing partner, talks about facilitating the discussions that led to a consensus plan for the community.*

“We use a deliberative process to engage communities. We didn’t come in and say we are the experts and know what should happen here. We’d give them tools to help them work together to get out their ideas in a way that was collaborative and that everyone had an equal chance to participate.

The first thing we did with the strategy teams was have them develop a list of shared values for how they wanted to work together as different people from different neighborhoods with different backgrounds and ideas about what they wanted to see happen in the community. Those values didn’t go away. They would see them at every single meeting.

“So, the first meeting we did a ‘float the boat’ to come up with the values for working together in the strategy teams around the issues identified in the interviews. Each team was asked what they want the community to be known for, what they want to accomplish. The next meeting was about what they thought they could do in the near term. Then, the next meeting was around what projects might be accomplished in the short term and longer term. Whittling it down, basically.

“There are divisions in the community. And you can’t assume that is going to go away immediately. **You have to meet people where they are.** You have to give them a space where they can get that out constructively, in ways that don’t suck the air out of the room and derail it for everyone else. That is what we facilitated. We put people to work and didn’t let them just come into a room and complain. Once people were able to get through a few meetings, I think even the hardest skeptics realized this was something different.” ●

<< team meeting as a partner as a way to reinforce to residents the foundation’s commitment and help to build trust.

Perhaps for the first time, groups as diverse as the Northside neighborhoods they came from were working shoulder to shoulder on a common mission.

“You could have a senior VP at the hospital sitting with a grandmother from the neighborhood who had her grandchild with her. For many, it was an unusual experience to be working together on the same playing field,” said Pat Clark, managing partner, Jackson/Clark Partners. “There was very little attrition in these strategy teams.”

The process also offered an opportunity to take a more holistic view of the challenges they face.

“Some polarization is part of the reality on the Northside. We have neighborhoods that have been working to improve things for a long time. Sometimes the efforts have been individualized. Everyone is battling for resources,” said Scott Pipitone, president and CEO of Pipitone Group, a Northside marketing firm, and president of the Northside Chamber of Commerce. “The Chamber and Northside Leadership Conference do their job promoting the neighborhoods and building up housing and businesses. [One Northside] is more of a social and quality of life initiative. But its real strength is bringing all of those people and groups to the table.”

The census was created with the help of residents and posed questions related to education, housing, employment and other key issues. Multiple platforms were used, including an online survey.

In low-income neighborhoods, responses were gathered by door-to-door canvassing. Those knocking on doors were Northside residents trained and paid to conduct the census. They also helped phrase the questions in ways they felt would encourage a response from residents. The “One Northside” brand was their idea as well.

“I was interested in doing it because I wanted to make sure all of the voices were heard — not just those who use the web or those who are savvy and know how to network,” said Lisa Freeman, a Northside resident who worked on the census team. “Some communities are very well organized. Others aren’t and they don’t always come together and they aren’t always heard.”

The census reached more than 2,500 households across the Northside. One of the questions asked whether they would be willing to volunteer to help make the Northside a better place. Nearly 1,000 said they would. >>



### Door-to-door Data

*Census team members wore One Northside shirts and used tablet computers to collect survey data. Their primary work was accomplished in five Northside neighborhoods targeted by the team for door-to-door outreach. Their efforts yielded 1,500 direct interviews with community members.*





## Census

# Reaching out to voices seldom heard



**Lisa Freeman**  
Manchester resident;  
One Northside census  
team member

*Lisa Freeman, a resident of the Northside neighborhood of Manchester, helped lead a team of residents organized to conduct a census in low-income neighborhoods that lack resources and influence. Here, she offers a glimpse of how they met the challenge of engage-ing those residents.*

“I was concerned about our targeted communities, where there are minorities, refugees, people who don’t speak English, people who don’t come out to vote, don’t go to their children’s schools, don’t **interact much**. They’ve been studied, tested, surveyed. If you’re in public housing, you’re required to do this and comply with that. There’s some kind of system already in their home. It’s invasive. And most of them feel imposed upon. So they’re not eager to open the door to a face they don’t recognize asking, ‘Can I take a few minutes of your time?’

“We would take it block by block. In Northview Heights, we went through one time and we weren’t engaged. We went through again and got a little more. We had to make multiple attempts. It wasn’t one time, in and out.

“We had training. We had weekly meetings. Our notes, walk schedules, canvassing were documented. And [the community facilitator] Jackson/Clark was willing to listen to us and say, this isn’t working, let’s try another way.

**“No stone was left unturned. We would go where we knew people would be.** When they had the music festival, we were there. We went to the food bank at Martin Luther King [Elementary School] because we knew people from our target neighborhoods would be there. We were at schools. We knew people used the MAC machine for their social security on the first of the month. We went there. Some people were given \$100–200 to host a community event. That was a door opener for us — ‘Thanks to a contribution from One Northside, we’re here to talk about...’

“We wore One Northside T-shirts to be recognized. You saw One Northside logos everywhere: in windows; people had it on the back of their cars.

“And when we went to neighborhoods, we went with someone on the team who lived there who had a personal connection. That made it more neighbor-to-neighbor. When they saw our uniforms, it was, ‘Miss Ginger has one on. You must be with Miss Ginger.’ That helped.

“It took months. But people began recognizing the face and engaged.” ●

<< The work of the strategy teams was shared in public forums. By November 2014, the teams reached consensus on a plan that outlined a community vision for multiple issues related to education, employment and place, and set goals to work toward over the next 3–5 years.

One vision, for example, was that of a community committed to the well-being of expectant mothers. A goal of creating a continuum of prenatal support and quality childcare was set. To realize the vision of all Northside teenagers having access to quality after-school programs, a goal was set to create a coordinated system of such programs. Another goal was to turn the Northside into a home for entrepreneurs, small businesses, and safe, accessible retail districts.

Those and other visions and goals were rolled out as the One Northside consensus plan that more than 600 turned out to celebrate at Heinz Field in December 2014.

Even before then, One Northside was stimulating activity within the neighborhoods. The census team, for example, was reactivated to help with a get-out-the-vote campaign ahead of the 2014 general election. Some ideas that had been stirring for years took shape, gained support and began to be implemented.

One such project is connecting Northside school children to Northside assets like the National Aviary and Children’s Museum. Lessons based on curriculums developed by the city public schools and the institutions are taught at the Aviary and museum, as well as in the classroom, exposing students to topics, resources and places that many had never experienced.

“Many of our students live below the poverty line or are just above the poverty line. They don’t get to the Aviary or the [Carnegie] Science Center or the Children’s Museum,” said John Canning, a retired public school history teacher and lifelong Northside resident. “We want Northside youngsters to have those experiences and, by the time they get to eighth grade, develop a strong sense of identity with the Northside and the pride that comes with that.” >> *(continued on p. 24)*

The Issues

3 Near-term Focus Areas



EDUCATION

Birth–age 2: Health/wellness  
Age 3–4: School readiness  
Age 5–9: Attendance/reading/math



EMPLOYMENT

Age 12–15: Out of school activity  
Age 16–18: Job readiness/part-time work  
Age 18–24: Full-time employment/  
micro-enterprise/continuing  
education





“Think about this initiative. Several hundred interviews were done. A very good consultant was hired. A community census was done. There isn’t an organization on the Northside, or in any community, that could’ve done something like this on their own.”

— **Scott Pipitone**, Northside business owner;  
President, Northside Chamber of Commerce



## PLACE

Quality, affordable rentals  
Home ownership  
Vacant property/land  
Parks/outdoor amenities



## The Model

### The following is a snapshot of the model that led to the One Northside consensus plan,

a shared, community-driven vision for Pittsburgh's Northside neighborhoods. It was conceived to facilitate the Buhl Foundation's strategy of focusing its grantmaking in those 18 neighborhoods.

## Data-driven due diligence

- ❖ **Some 400 people were interviewed** to gain their perspectives on neighborhood issues, strengths, challenges and ideas for change, including leaders of private and public organizations and local stakeholders and residents.
- ❖ **Neighborhood-specific data was analyzed** to develop an evidence-based understanding of employment, housing, education, household income and other issues.
- ❖ **A local census was conducted** to gain perspectives from a larger sample of residents. It included an oversampling of residents of low-income neighborhoods.
- ❖ **Interviews helped identify neighborhood "anchors"** — residents and stakeholders of influence — who lend the initiative credibility and local leadership.

## Community-driven decision making

- ❖ **Strategy teams of community volunteers were convened** around three areas of focus that emerged from community interviews: education, employment and place.
- ❖ **Professionals were hired to organize** the teams, build their decision-making capacity and facilitate discussions to identify issues and reasonable approaches to address them.
- ❖ **Strategy teams were assigned** to reach consensus on their visions related to education, employment and place and set 3-to-5-year goals for taking steps to realize them.
- ❖ **Resident and stakeholder strategy teams were retained** following the consensus plan to provide the framework for community deliberations around action and implementation.



## Emphasis on inclusion

- ❖ **200 residents were interviewed.** A community census reached another 2,200 residents.
- ❖ **Efforts were made to reach low-income residents** whose perspectives and ideas are not always sought, such as door-to-door census canvassing in low-income neighborhoods.
- ❖ **Open public forums were held** to discuss the initiative and community issues.
- ❖ **Residents were invited and encouraged to participate** in the decision-making process.
- ❖ **A nonprofit was hired to help residents apply for grants**, particularly in neighborhoods where few are accustomed to doing so.



## Flexibility

- ❖ Organizing framework, including strategy teams, was **open to change** as circumstances warranted. Census process, including the wording of questions, was open to revision.

## Transparency

- ❖ The foundation's Northside **strategy and commitment was made public** at a community summit. Foundation officials have visible presence in community.
- ❖ **Public meetings and community summits** were held to review progress.
- ❖ The One Northside process, findings and **results are documented** and have been made public online at [onenorthsidepgh.org](http://onenorthsidepgh.org)

## Long-term commitment of resources

- ❖ The Buhl Foundation made a **10-to-20-year commitment** to focusing its grantmaking in the Northside and maintaining a partnership with its residents and stakeholders.
- ❖ The foundation works to **leverage additional public, private and philanthropic dollars**.
- ❖ The first round of grants immediately followed the unveiling of the consensus plan to **encourage action and move projects along** in order to show early examples of success.



## Moving forward

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*The consensus plan was a milestone, but only an early step on the long journey of transforming the Northside neighborhoods into the vision residents imagined. The task then turned to putting ideas into action. Sustaining the community's engagement and enthusiasm that made the plan possible is seen as another challenge.*

**“It’s fragile because it’s still new.** We don’t have enough successes yet. It’s like our newborn baby over here,” Rev. Gregg said. “This work can get tiresome. You have to keep parents and residents involved and keep them together to stay the course. Because, if you don’t, it will just become another agency-led initiative that says, ‘we know what’s good for you.’”

The foundation began 2015 awarding more than \$400,000 in grants to begin funding of projects residents see as advancing the visions of the consensus plan. Each neighborhood received \$10,000 to start work. Mini-grants of up to \$1,000 each were awarded to residents for small projects they conceived related to improving their neighborhoods. The nonprofit Sprout Fund was retained to help residents write winning proposals and compete for the money.

The framework of the One Northside model remained in place. The strategy teams that created the consensus plan were retained with the invitation for others to join, but the teams’ focus shifted to taking action to improve education, employment and place and implement projects. Each was awarded \$50,000 to begin their work.

“We’re a relatively small foundation focused on a large neighborhood where convening, leveraging and consensus-building partnerships are more important than our dollars,” Thieman said. “This model represents something that doesn’t need deep pockets. It’s a relatively large undertaking in terms of geography and population that relies as much or more on human spirit than resources to accomplish its goals. I believe that makes it more replicable, more sustainable. If the implementation goes well, there will be a lot here to learn from.” ● [Learn more at onenorthsidepgh.org](https://onenorthsidepgh.org).



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