



Sustainable PGH

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Contact: Ginette Walker Vinski

gvinski@sustainablepittsburgh.org

412.258.6646

Fighting fragmentation: More than 40 groups meet to explore shared visions and metrics for a sustainable region

DISCOVER project links region's networks of organizations, aligns goals, and uses data to better understand and drive progress toward a healthier, more sustainable region

(Pittsburgh, PA) - What does it take to create a more sustainable region? The social and environmental challenges that southwestern Pennsylvania face are widely recognized, including uneven opportunity and health outcomes across race and gender, poor air quality, and the need for an inclusive transition to clean energy. But the region's many nonprofits, municipalities, and businesses haven't always compared notes on how best to promote a healthy and resilient region where everyone can thrive. In the last decade, dozens of reports on equitable and sustainable development have been published by regional leaders, each of which envision, measure, and track success in different ways. Counter to the common wisdom that "what gets measured, gets managed," these reports reveal that data and measurement alone are not enough to achieve real impact in our region. We need shared vision, goals, and metrics to drive coordinated action and achieve true impact.

Since 2020, the DISCOVER (Defining Intersectional Sustainability to Collaboratively Optimize for a Vibrant and Equitable Region) network has been working toward just that. Spearheaded by Sustainable Pittsburgh in partnership with a number of regional conveners, DISCOVER builds beyond data and measurement to create a shared, inclusive framework for tracking sustainability performance, communicating regional needs and progress, and driving coordinated interventions toward regional sustainability outcomes and policies. Representatives from dozens of institutions have been meeting toward this goal in virtual working groups since the start of the pandemic, but recently convened in person for the first time to note progress and set goals for continued network leadership and impact.

"Southwestern Pennsylvania has so many leaders, organizations, and communities that are focused on doing good work," shared Joylette Portlock, Ph.D., Executive Director of Sustainable Pittsburgh. "DISCOVER is a way for changemakers to come together, collaboratively envision where we want to go as a region, and understand how our collective work is –or isn't yet– getting us there, so we can maximize effectiveness and alignment."

Sustainable Pittsburgh has facilitated the convening of a steering committee and two, soon to be four, working groups. The working groups each focus on a key dimension of just and sustainable regional development: Equity, Environment, Infrastructure (forthcoming) and Health (forthcoming). In this way, DISCOVER helps us understand – and make positive change – based on a shared understanding of the status of our people, communities, and our environment.

Each working group collectively develops regional targets for a more just and sustainable region. Once targets are created, they identify data sources to be used to track progress. Even when these groups identify gaps in the data, this too can help tell a story about the region.

To link this work to even higher scales of shared measurement and impact, the working groups are using the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UNSDGs) as a framework. The UNSDGs outline global priorities for sustainable development, providing a standard set of goals and indicators that DISCOVER is adapting to our region's specific needs.

“By tailoring this framework to our local context,” says Alex Hiniker, Director of the Sustainability Initiative at Carnegie Mellon University, “we are joining a global movement to identify shared solutions to the world's most pressing challenges.”

To date, the Equity and Environment working groups have crafted over 60 regional targets across ten of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. These targets, taken together, help shape a regional vision. The final working groups, to be assembled as a next step, will complete this vision, and position the network to accomplish its goal of supporting regional organizations with data-driven goals. Organizations interested in participating in this process should contact Sustainable Pittsburgh.

Lydia Morin, Executive Director of Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT), noted, “CONNECT applies a like-minded ethos to our network of local governments and public/private NGOs, and we are excited to work with DISCOVER to create data driven regional narratives that help all of us work better, each in our own way, toward shared sustainability goals.”

In addition to Sustainable Pittsburgh, the following organizations comprise the DISCOVER steering committee:

- City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning, Division of Sustainability and Resilience;
- CONNECT (Congress of Neighboring Communities);
- The Forbes Funds;
- New Sun Rising;
- The Sustainability Initiative at Carnegie Mellon University;
- UrbanKind Institute;
- Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center.

More information on DISCOVER is available at SustainablePittsburgh.org and in [The Tropman Report](#) (beginning on page 49), which is a compilation of strategies, thought pieces, research articles, and case studies published by The Forbes Funds.

About Sustainable Pittsburgh

Sustainable PGH is committed to building the knowledge, perspective, and ability needed to create a better tomorrow for our region. We're optimistic, having worked with nearly a thousand businesses, communities and organizations to take action using our customized frameworks to track progress and simultaneously advance social equity, environmental stewardship, and prosperity. The strategic networks we host leverage the collective expertise and diverse perspectives within our region to ensure our communities can meet our challenges today and thrive into the future. Together, we are co-creating a fundamentally equitable, resilient, healthy, and prosperous southwestern Pennsylvania.

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