

## Focus Group Report 2001

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Report to Sustainable Pittsburgh on the issues and trepidation of Pittsburghers and why they are choosing to leave the region: **Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow**

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# BRIEF

The organization instrumental in bringing this report forward is Sustainable Pittsburgh (SP). It is a new organization committed to addressing social issues and phenomenon at the micro, meso and macro levels. Committed to diversity, Sustainable Pittsburgh seeks to extrapolate salient information from a wide range of residents within the City of Pittsburgh, creating a holistic perspective of the social, communal and economic issues influencing the exodus of Pittsburghers.

The impetus of this project was to gather relevant information from the Pittsburgh communities to better understand their concerns and perspectives regarding the recent exodus of young people from the city over the past few years. This project was commissioned in October 2001, by Courtland Gould, Director of Sustainable Pittsburgh and executed by Fred Brown, President of Unity Consultants.

This project undertook the responsibility of 1) developing focus group questions, 2) facilitating a number of focus group meetings, 3) providing an analysis of the information in a report and 4) providing an organizational recommendation.

The most current census figures indicate that we are becoming a more multiethnic and multiracial population, and therefore more heterogeneous as a community. Over the last ten years, the City of Pittsburgh has had a significant shift in its population. In Allegheny County, there was a decrease in the population by 54,000 people. Of concern was that within this figure 40,000 people were represented by White residents. In 1990, the city had a sharply bifurcated class and racial structure; however, five years earlier in 1985 the city ranked number one (#1) as the most livable city in the United States, by Rand McNally. Despite this ranking, there existed a divide between the White and African American communities of Pittsburgh. What had seemingly been omitted in this assessment was the lack of balanced economic support for the entire region and its effects on the entire population.

The African American (minority) populations in the city of Pittsburgh suffered from a lack of shared economic opportunity. In light of an increase in poverty, violence, crime rates, unemployment and segregation that afflicted the African American community, they continue to seek higher levels of functioning while lacking opportunity for youth and the community (Urban League of Pittsburgh, 1999). Between 1990 and 2000, Pittsburgh saw a decrease in its African American population. Last year 93,000 African Americans lived in Allegheny County, while ten years prior, there were 95,000 residents. Despite the decrease, the African American community represents a larger percentage of Allegheny County's population due to the larger number of white residents departing this region during the same period.

An interesting trend identified that 1.6% of Pittsburghers were designating themselves as more than one race. Because of this shift, the City of Pittsburgh is now 69% white and 29% African American. Additionally, the Asian population is represented by 21,716 people and the Hispanic or Latino population is represented by 11, 166 people. Lastly, 1.1 percent of the nation's population is designating themselves as multicultural (The Urban League of Pittsburgh, 2001).

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## ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW AND PARTNERSHIPS

Sustainable Pittsburgh was initiated in 1999 as a public-policy advocacy group that links economic prosperity, ecological health, and social equity. SP is a project of the Tides Center of Western Pennsylvania, has a diverse board of community leaders, and a staff of five. It serves as a coalition uniting organizations and individuals around shared goals of broadening regional decision-making and building livable communities. Through on-the-ground projects, advocacy, and education, SP's affiliates are accelerating sustainability in the region. Their key strategic issues include the necessity of a regional approach to smart land use planning, the importance of a clean environment, outdoor recreation amenities, improved economics and a better quality of life improvement, and diversity and civic engagement.

Working in collaboration with Sustainable Pittsburgh is *Invest In Diversity* a project headed by Ayanna A. King. The Invest in Diversity project has a natural fit with the mission, goals and objectives of SP. Moreover, its vision and impetus seek to create a condition at the grassroots level that will give rise to new leadership from a more holistic perspective. Initial feedback from the focus groups held between November 2001 and December 2001, illustrate a strong desire for new and different leaders, partnerships and collaborations. Invest in Diversity seeks to achieve this dynamic by engaging in difficult and challenging dialogue among various ethnic and socioeconomic groups and across gender and age demographics. It has a specific mission, but offers a range of input and support to addressing and achieving change at the systemic level. Through integrated ideologies and a strategy to confront and challenge existing stereotypes, Invest in Diversity fosters a universal process that galvanizes people around common issues and concerns. In a multicultural society, instituting a formalized concept and strategic initiative with a diverse group further insures and helps to determine change within the entire society. Through the advent of grassroots input and cross-cultural integration, this project uses a wide range of individuals to help identify the issues and solutions to problems.

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### ***Invest in Diversity***

"Leading the Region by Inclusion"

*Invest in Diversity* is a project developed by Ayanna A. King, which evolved from personal experiences working with students at the University of Pittsburgh and as co-chair for Sustainable Pittsburgh's Diversity & Civic Engagement committee.

Over the past few years, diversity has become a notable buzzword or as most would say a "*politically correct*" term. Now, cities that have grasped diversity and made it a reality have progressed and evolved into the new millennium with a talented diversified workforce. In Crosses article, *Diversity: Makes good business sense* she states that the issue is not so much as diversifying the workforce, but inclusion in the workforce. The issue is why people who differ in race, gender, and culture cannot be included in the organization in the same

manner as white males. I agree with Cross because most of Pittsburgh's initiatives have never been about inclusion but being politically correct or following a trend. If Pittsburgh is serious about changing the dynamics of the workforce, inclusion is the only way to make an impact and create change in the future.

Pittsburgh has spent numerous dollars on the Ralph Bangs disparity studies. The findings were valid and needed in order to create awareness, but how many years will these studies tell us that there is a disparity in this city? Is it not time to invest in solutions? As an answer, I propose Invest in Diversity, a project whose goal is to 1) increase the awareness of workforce inclusion, 2) provide resources, 3) welcome Pittsburgh's newcomers to the city, 4) mentor and provide professional growth for college students, and 5) link the private and public sectors to a talented workforce.

*Invest in Diversity's* concepts will address the migration issue using the following objectives:

1. Develop a welcoming committee for incoming people of color to the Pittsburgh area
2. Create a professional mentoring program for Pittsburgh's college students
3. Acquire funding to provide college students paid internships that will connect them to Pittsburgh's neighborhoods, which in turn will provide private and non-profit organizations with skilled interns
4. Develop a database of Pittsburgh's college students and it's high school graduates who attend college outside of the city
5. Build and maintain a line of communication with recent high school graduates concerning the progress of Pittsburgh and its newly developed workforce using newsletters, web sites, and an e-mail list
6. Recruit people of color and diversify the city's workforce with skilled professional Pittsburgh natives and newcomers
7. Create a liaison for the private and public sectors and connect them to a diverse workforce
8. Provide diversity/inclusion training in the workforce

### **What will Invest in Diversity do?**

Reaching this ultimate goal of sustaining and recruiting people of color to the Pittsburgh region, diversifying the workforce, and grooming future leaders through mentoring and inclusion is the vision and mission of Invest In Diversity. Upon contracting Ayanna's Consulting & Concept, two surveys will be developed. The first will identify the needs from the private and public sector and the second survey will focus on why talented people of color are interested in leaving Pittsburgh. *Invest in Diversity* will utilize the information from the surveys and focus groups and implement the following services to address these issues

in the city's public and private sectors. Therefore, these proactive approaches serve as catalysis for systemic investigation of pertinent issues affecting region growth and development, while providing pensive solutions that embrace shared values for human equity. Therefore, these proactive efforts will demonstrate Pittsburgh has opportunities with good salaries and is a place where a positive professional and economic future can be sustained.

**Development of various databases:**

- Maintain different majors of college students, marketable skills, hands on experiences, community activities, and interests
- Connect out-of-state college students to resources in the city such as cultural events, notable individuals, role models, communities, and the workforce through paid internships
- Link skilled, career ready workers to a viable workforce
- Connect students to mentors and professionals
- Track Pittsburgh high school graduates college information

**Recruitment and Welcoming Committee:**

- Newcomers will have a People's Chamber that will provide resources and information to assist them with adjusting to the city
- Recruit people of color from other cities by promoting Pittsburgh and its assets revealing the initiatives of diversity, and its importance to building a brighter future for Pittsburgh
- Commencing tours and information on cultural activities and groups within Pittsburgh

**Pittsburgh College Student/Community Internships:**

- Linking college students to the community for paid internships
- Creating an extended family environment for the student during their college years in Pittsburgh
- Providing community organizations with skilled resources and networks

**Pittsburgh High School Graduates Database:**

- Maintain communication with students that attend colleges in other states and provide resources utilizing a help line consisting of e-mail list with students surveys to answer questions on financial aid, various colleges edit papers, suggestions for topics, research tools, and mentoring.
- Send quarterly newsletters about activities in Pittsburgh, and various jobs, and internship opportunities

## **Implement Diversity Training to the Private and Public Sectors:**

- Develop a training curriculum focusing on inclusion
- Educate corporations about the benefits of a diversified skilled workforce
- Teach cultural sensitivity

## **Why is Invest in Diversity important?**

*Invest in Diversity* will provide the much-needed vehicle that Pittsburghers are seeking to address the issues of inclusion and diversity. Opening doors and providing opportunities for Pittsburghers as well as attracting people of color to this city will bridge many gaps and groom an inclusive workforce in the future.

Pittsburgh's workforce is decreasing due to a constant population loss recently reported, in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette (March 9, 2001). The census reported "the City of Pittsburgh lost 4.8 percent of African Americans and an overall population loss of 9.5 percent between 1990-2000." The population decline has created a serious concern for Pittsburgh's future workforce and leadership. The decline of Pittsburgh's workforce has stimulated conversations throughout the region and many groups such as Sustainable Pittsburgh are trying to devise ways to increase the population, recruit and retain talented people of color, and prepare college students for future leadership positions in private and public organizations. This initiative would demonstrate that Pittsburgh leads by example.

## **METHOD OF PROCEEDURE**

The Data Analysis methodology used in this instrument is a Qualitative Content Analysis. In Phase I, the project focused on the following:

- Determining framework for examining data
- Determining target groups
- Develop pre-survey questionnaire (Likert type)
- Analyze data within framework

In Phase II, the project focused on the following:

- Correlate census data
- Analyze pre-survey questionnaires
- Transcribe tapes
- Report on emerging themes
- Provide recommendations

The reporting data encompassed raw data method, descriptive summary method, survey analysis and the interpretive method.

The focus group questions used were extrapolated in part from the Invest in Diversity proposal, created by Ayanna A. King.

1. How would you define diversity? Are we diverse? If so, how? How can Pittsburgh's region become more diverse? Is diversity the real issue or is access to inclusion to the process the real issue?
2. Is your neighborhood/community diverse? How would you rate the Pittsburgh's regions neighborhoods on diversity? What would you do to improve your neighborhood in regards to diversity?
3. How would you describe the value of diversity in your organization/corporation/institution?
4. What would you do to improve your organization's diversity issues? What role could the Invest in Diversity project play in your organization? Do you feel this project could make a positive impact? How would you implement this project?
5. Do you feel Pittsburgh's elected officials value and practice diversity? If not, how could we engage our elected officials to embrace the Invest in Diversity project?
6. Are you aware of any other resources, programs, or projects similar to Invest in Diversity? If so, what projects and do you have any contact person?

The issue of migration and diversity in the City of Pittsburgh were seen as paramount in addressing the overarching reality of Pittsburgh's recent young adult and professional population departure. This issue is significant when one considers the individuals migrating reflect the youth and young adults of the city. Notwithstanding, Pittsburgh has the second largest elderly population in the United States and an increasing oriented service sector. The continuous decline of blue-collar jobs and the advent of an emerging technology sector have further segregated low achieving student's capacity to gain employment in this emerging sector. Ralph Bangs' disparity reports have been instrumental in acknowledging the range of prevalent issues influencing the current condition in the City of Pittsburgh. Ultimately, this project aims to link the private and public sectors to a talented workforce. The following questions were used to drive the focus groups and provide a framework for evaluation. These issues underscore some of the prevailing concerns targeted in this project. Pittsburghers who choose to leave the city reveal a deeper and greater issue, which encompasses the need for better economic opportunities not just in the indigenous communities but also throughout the region.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The project objective was to obtain a wide range of responses from community members to help determine the potential focal areas in a needs assessment, as to the reasons why young people are leaving the city. Furthermore, this project serves as an initiator for determining how past practices regarding community and economic development can be employed differently now, than in the past, to be more effective. The need for collective responses regarding economic and social phenomenon continue to evade current political, educational, and business community practices. As illustrated in this report, the African American community in particular has termed past actions and current conversations regarding economic opportunity as historical rhetoric. Many of the participants illustrate that the motivation for these focus groups reflect a reactionary aptitude that reflects past practices from other people and organizations. The participants in these focus groups considers the continued research practice of focus groups and other research apparatuses as limited and quick references to more long-term issues. They feel that past research efforts have done little if anything to resolve the problems outlined by past focus groups and other forms of research, therefore, they refer to some of these efforts as historical rhetoric. Many individuals believe there is a level in inequity prevalent in Pittsburgh which forces the African American to work twice as hard for opportunities they qualify for or search for, other opportunities outside the region. African Americans have expressed that there have been greater opportunities afforded them when they have departed from this region.

Collective responses to community phenomenon in the City of Pittsburgh are seldom seen and never fulfilled in its entirety. The needs of the community reflect a more complex set of variables not easily defined by current political, educational and business community practices. A holistic apparatus is necessary to fully understand the complex factors and nuances influencing the exodus of Pittsburghers and how a more inclusive model can be implored to shift the current paradigm. A holistic apparatus is simple a process that seeks to include people beyond the individual perspective. It considers the person as apart of a greater family and the family as part of a greater community and the community as part of a greater society. In its application, it considers historical frameworks, which may contribute to its status and uses this information to address the current condition from a holistic perspective.

Historically, some communities' needs have been expressed across ethnic groups and economic divides. In the past, communities that have strong civic and institutional leadership connections to the political systems seem to have obtain greater assistance with their particular community's concerns. These communities have been more politically active at times, granting their community the political power needed to shift making practices decisions regarding resource allocations, police protection, new initiatives, opening and closing schools, business development, etc.

The impact of these practices has shifted the Cities infrastructure community by community. When we consider a neighborhoods like Squirrel Hills, Shady Side, Oakland, Morning Side, Highland Park, Stanton Heights and Friendship, which make up the east corridor of Pittsburgh, we see the strengths of each community in politics, economic development, housing, business corridors, police protection, etc. However, next to Squirrel Hills is Homewood, next to Shady Side is East Liberty, next to is the Hill District, next to Highland Park is Larimer, next to Stanton Heights is Garfield Heights.

In each of the connecting communities, you see a disparity in income, political power, community protection, community development, community empowerment, and a basic level of community integrity. The belief that a disenfranchised community has the same wherewithal as its thriving neighboring community is not a fair analysis of the problem.

When one community is developing community enterprises to enhance itself, the other community is in survival mode. How can a community in survival mode act with the same due diligence as a community with greater support, commitment, resources, political influence, etc.? Yet, the disenfranchised communities are challenged to do more politically, do more with the schools their kids attend, exist in hostile environments with gun shots rattling through the community with little or no attention giving to their collective metaphysical state. There is a stark difference in the residence in each of the partnered communities. That difference begins with economic power and ends with social class. In the middle exists another reality the majority of these residents in the thriving communities are white, while the majority of the residents in the disenfranchised communities are black.

The history of segregated communities in Pittsburgh has ensured specific practices across the City that have historically ensured these communities with the resources, political support, economic development, police protection, community support, and thriving environments associated with the current strength evident in today's culture. Is the fact that the communities in Pittsburgh that are doing well seem to be made up of white residents, while the communities doing poorly, having little hope, high crime, open drug avenues, high rates of homicide, fratricide and genocide are black communities have anything to do with equality, racism and opportunity. In facilitating the focus groups, these types of sentiment resounded with the participants of color, while different perspectives were offered by their white counterpart. The perspectives highlighted in each focus group detailed the fragmented perspective people maintain about the issue, thus providing a very difficult and multifaceted frame of the issue. Yet, if we consider the status of the residents in the City and their desire to leave, one could look at the reality of the communities right next door and see a very different picture.

To address these issues of differentiation and other concerns, the project instituted a pre-survey to attempt to understand the respondents current analysis of the conditions influencing Pittsburgh's populations status and understanding of diversity issues. Because of the nature of this project, the research tool sought to validate this undertaking reflected the application of a quasi-stratified sample group. Stratified sample methodology is used when there is a particular interests in making sure that certain groups will be included in the study or that some groups will be sampled at a higher (or lower) proportion than others. Because the issue of diversity may be significant in determining some of the underlying issues influencing this paradigm shift, input from a stratified sample population is necessary to validate conceptual frameworks and practices within this population subset. This can be explained by Stratum A. (African American) Stratum B. (Caucasians) Stratum C. (Asian) and Stratum D. (Latino). The following is the pre-survey administered to the quasi-stratified sample population.

## DIVERSITY FOCUS GROUPS PRE-SURVEY

### I. Please respond to the following questions:

1. How would you rate the state of race relations in the United States today?  
 Very Good    Good    Bad    Very Bad
2. How would you respond to the following statements?  
“Our society is multicultural and the more we know about each other the better we get along.”  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree    Don't know
3. “A diverse student body on college campuses has a positive effect on the education of students.”  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree    Don't know
4. “Courses, campus activities and programs that emphasize diversity perspectives have a positive effect on the education of students.”
5. Has Affirmative Action achieved what it is designed to accomplish?  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree    Don't know
6. In the community you live in, is racial and ethnic diversity celebrated?  
 Yes    No    Don't know
7. In your K-12 education, were courses in racial and cultural diversity offered?
8. In Pittsburgh, I feel workforce diversity is:  
 Excellent    Good    Average    Below Average    Very Bad
9. How would you assess or rank your skills in being a diverse person:
  - a.  I am skilled
  - b.  I have skills, but rarely use them.
  - c.  I value diversity, but lack skills in cross-cultural communication.
  - d.  I am not skilled, and I realize I need to become more skilled.
  - e.  I am not skilled, and do not value diversity.

### II. Please tell about yourself:

**Age:**  16-20    21-35    36-50    51-65    66+

**Geographic location:**  urban    suburban    rural

**Education:**  High School    College degree    Graduate degree   Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Race:**  African American    Asian    Caucasian    Hispanic    Native American  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:**  Female    Male

**Marital Status:**  Single    Married    Divorced

## DIVERSITY FOCUS GROUPS RESPONSES TO PRE-SURVEY

1. How would you rate the state of race relations in the United States today?  
**(0) Very Good    (1) Good    (20) Bad    (3) Very Bad**
2. How would you respond to the following statements?  
“Our society is multicultural and the more we know about each other the better we get along.”  
**(4) Strongly Agree    (12) Agree    (4) Disagree    (2) Strongly Disagree    (2) Don’t know**
3. “A diverse student body on college campuses has a positive effect on the education of students.”  
**(6) Strongly Agree    (9) Agree    (2) Disagree    (0) Strongly Disagree    (7) Don’t know**
4. “Courses, campus activities and programs that emphasize diversity perspectives have a positive effect on the education of students.”  
**(5) Strongly Agree    (12) Agree    (1) Disagree    (0) Strongly Disagree    (3) Don’t know**
5. Has Affirmative Action achieved what it is designed to accomplish?  
**(0) Strongly Agree    (3) Agree    (8) Disagree    (4) Strongly Disagree    (8) Don’t know**
6. In the community you live in, is racial and ethnic diversity celebrated?  
**(3) Yes    (17) No    (4) Don’t know**
7. In your K-12 education, were courses in racial and cultural diversity offered?  
**(4) Yes    (20) No    \_\_\_ Don’t know**
8. In Pittsburgh, I feel workforce diversity is:  
**(1) Excellent    \_\_\_ Good    (5) Average    (8) Below Average    (9) Very Bad**
9. How would you assess or rank your skills in being a diverse person:
  - a. **(9) I am skilled**
  - b. **(5) I have skills, but rarely use them.**
  - c. **(7) I have skills, but need more training.**
  - d. **\_\_\_ I value diversity, but lack skills in cross-cultural communication.**
  - e. **\_\_\_ I am not skilled, and I realize I need to become more skilled.**
  - f. **\_\_\_ I am not skilled, and do not value diversity.**
  - g. **(1) I am skilled, and do not value diversity**

## II. Please tell about yourself:

Age: (2) 16-20 (9) 21-35 (11) 36-50 (1) 51-65 \_\_ 66+

Geographic location: (17) urban (3) suburban (1) rural

Education: (7) High School (8) College degree (6) Graduate degree Other: (1) 3years of College

Race: (16) African American \_\_ Asian (5) Caucasian \_\_ Hispanic \_\_ Native American Other: \_\_

Gender: (14) Female (9) Male

Marital Status: (15) Single (6) Married (1) Divorced (1) Committed Partner

## DATA ANALYSIS OF THE PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

From the initial responses to the pre-survey questions, specific themes can be identified that reflect the issue of diversity and inclusion. Using a quasi-stratified sample methodology provided this project with a semi-balance perspective of the socioeconomic, ethnic, and political issues influencing community development and regional growth retention. The following percentages highlight participant responses to the survey:

- **75%** of respondents illustrated that there is a **race issue** in the United States today
- **50%** of respondents believe our **society is multicultural** and that more knowledge about each other will produce better cross-cultural relationships
- **50%** of respondents believe practiced **diversity programming has a positive effect** on people
- **12%** of respondents indicated that **Affirmative Action has achieved its goals**, while **50%** of the respondents **believe it has not** reached its goals
- **75%** of respondents indicate that there is **no active level of diversity being celebrated in the communities** they reside in
- **80%** of respondents illustrated that during their educational experience in Pittsburgh, they had **no courses offered in cultural diversity**
- **60%** of respondents indicate that they **have not experienced any workforce diversity** in the City of Pittsburgh
- **30%** of respondents indicate that they **are skilled in diversity**, while **20%** illustrate they **have the skills and rarely use** them and **25%** illustrated they have **some skills but need more training**
- The **average age** of the participants in the focus group was between **29-42** years old

- **75%** of respondents lived within the **urban setting**
- **30%** had **High School Diplomas**, **35%** had **College Degrees** and **25%** had **Graduate Degrees**
- **70%** of participants were **African American**, while **23%** were **White**
- **60%** of participants were **females**, while **40%** were **males**
- **65%** of participants were **single**, while **25%** were **married**

Viable work opportunities for young adults and youth in the city of Pittsburgh represent a hypothesis potentially influencing retention. One variable conceptualization of this issue can be identified by evaluating the practice of diversity and inclusion in Pittsburgh and how it influences the population retention. The pre-survey information suggests that the lack of inclusion in developing opportunities in the city has potentially forced residents to move to other cities where greater opportunities exist.

## **THEMES IDENTIFIED FROM THE PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Themes that can be discerned from these responses indicate a need to review the following:

- Diversity practices both academically and institutionally, within the professional work environment need redressing
- People who believe they possess diversity skills still feel a need for more practice and training (Is practicing diversity a way of life?)
- The issue of race is significant in America yet often ignored in group settings and professional environments
- Many of the respondents were highly educated and had a wealth of hands on work experiences to speak saliently to the issues discussed in the focus groups
- Issues revolving around finding partners (significant others) in the Pittsburgh region is significant and also reflective of the exodus

These themes could be seen clearly within each focus group. Although each group possessed its own characteristics, conversely they addressed the same issues from multiply perspectives. The participants in each focus group had a plethora of systemic issues emanating from their individual life experiences and group comfort zones. The balanced delivery and facilitation of the focus group process was difficult to achieve across groups due in part to what can be described as community trauma (post traumatic stress), cross-cultural awareness, competency, and practice. Community trauma can be described as the inability to address and resolve community issues due to the stress associated with day-to-day existence and the lost faith the community has towards the system. The following focus group questions serve as the guide used in this project.

# FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How would you define diversity? Are we diverse? If so, how? How can Pittsburgh's region become more diverse? Is diversity the real issue or is access to inclusion to the process the real issue?
2. Is your neighborhood/community diverse? How would you rate the Pittsburgh's regions neighborhoods on diversity? What would you do to improve your neighborhood in regards to diversity?
3. How would you describe the value of diversity in your organization/corporation/institution?
4. What would you do to improve your organization's diversity issues? What role could the Invest In Diversity project play in your organization? Do you feel this project could make a positive impact? How would you implement this project?
5. Do you feel Pittsburgh's elected officials value and practice diversity? If not, how could we engage our elected officials to embrace the Invest in Diversity project?
6. Are you aware of any other resources, programs, or projects similar to the Invest in Diversity? If so, what projects and do you have a contact person.

## OVERVIEW AND MAJOR FINDINGS:

This report is based on a series of surveys and discussions with individuals from diverse racial, gender, class, educational, and professional backgrounds in the Pittsburgh region. Participants included 30% with a high school degree, 30% with college degrees and 1% with graduate degrees. Professionally, the group was comprised of students, educators, organizational and community leaders, workplace professionals, and small-business owners.

Participants completed a pre-survey on diversity issues and during the focus group discussions responded to a series of questions regarding the state of diversity in Pittsburgh's social, educational, business, corporate, and political communities. Participants were also asked to identify issues, conditions, and problems that prohibit and stifle diversity initiatives and opportunities.

The responses to these questions created lively discussion across this diverse group of participants. In many instances, the dialogue continued between participants long after the focus group concluded. During these interactions, one could denote the level of interest participants had in the issues discussed and solutions. Furthermore, the participants seem to express a strong desire to seek resolution to these issues. This was evident by their exchange of information, telephone numbers and special projects they were currently participating in. The dialogue regarding interests and projects they thought could help address the concerns expressed in the focus groups were also shared during this time.

## FOCUS GROUP COMMENTARY

Although specific comments were captured on tape, a general theme of the comments captured in the focus groups reflected a sense of hopelessness and despair. This was more evident in the processing participants engaged in regarding the need to help their children survive in this region or move on to other regions of the country. The following responses articulate some of the pervasive issues expressed and expounded upon in the focus groups:

- “Pittsburgh offers a huge opportunity to network and access opportunities”
- “Top management in the region needs trained in diversity and inclusion”
- “There is an issue of professionalism (work experience) verses academic credentials”
- “Racism is the biggest issue in Pittsburgh”
- “Leadership drives change and funders drive change”
- “Pittsburgh needs outside organizations to confront issues of diversity”
- Institutional racism is an issue, when professional opportunities are questioned by the employer when your applying for a vacant position which provides you with upward mobility, you are often questioned why do you want to do this, or why do you think you’re qualified to do that?”
- “People have to keep and open mind, I don’t see color I see people first and their good will”
- “The old boy network needs confronted and dismantled”
- “Diversity equals equality and current practices are not equal”
- “Diversity mean variety, culture, height, weight, color”
- “Diversity is a game that is played, it’s a hidden quota system”
- “College can change the mindset, if people go to college to create their own”
- “The City of Pittsburgh cannot define diversity because of its mindset”
- “There is no real progressive neighborhood in Pittsburgh”
- “Leadership is having the voice of the people, currently there are no real leaders”

- “Leaders that have shared values with whites tend to be acceptable leaders for the black community”
- Pittsburgh has vision, but an absence of shared mindset”
- “We lack the networks to build on the strengths of the knowledge here”
- “We get paid, but not equally compensated”
- “We need to create sister cities”
- “A better life equals better awareness”
- “Pittsburghers build things, we are hardworking blue-collar and white-collar”
- “Pittsburgh is not a culturally diverse city”
- “Pittsburgh has a limited world view, classism, limited resources, and a lack of good educational system”
- “Pittsburgh is afraid of change”
- “The city is black and white and gloomy”
- “Culture has been taken out of the communities, and moved downtown, gentrification”
- “Education is the key in changing the diversity in Pittsburgh”
- “Excellence is whatever we believe we will do”

These were some of the comments capture during the sessions. These comments generated in depth discussions about the root issues impacting this region. Other topics were discussed which offer a perspective of the range of discussions engaged by the groups and the insight offered from this dynamic.

The regions practiced level of cultural competency and inclusion, were often topics of discussion. For example, the survey responses suggest that the lack of cultural educational opportunities may contribute to poor ethnic and cultural relationships. This perspective was reverberated when the topic around race issues and community segregation began. Participants that were not from Pittsburgh shared a very different perspective of their experiences in this region. They were very concerned about the segregation and voiced their concerns and their personal history and experiences in other regions of the country. Some indicated that Pittsburgh reminded them of a Northern Southern City.

Issues regarding economic opportunity also provided an in depth perspective of the participants viewpoint on opportunities. The issue of **contracting and procurement**

depicts another area in which African American owned firms received only 49% of their allotted state and local contracts. With the emergence of construction opportunities in the region, apparent discrimination continues to influence participation in the regions growing economic arenas. In Pittsburgh, African Americans represent only 4% of construction prime contracts and 8% of professional services prime contracts. African Americans currently receive none of the architecture and engineering prime contract (Urban League of Pittsburgh, 2001). Furthermore, a lack of cultural competence may lead to acceptance of potentially culturally destructive behaviors as culturally appropriate regardless of the impact on a group of people. A culturally competent region would be expected to reduce activities that retard holistic growth in a diverse setting. However, information introduced in this report reflects a series of issues, which are institutionally rooted and practiced without regard for the regions investment in diversity and future returns. The evidence of this is clearly reflected in the decrease in population in this region by 54,000 residents in the past decade. Moreover, this decline is representative of the best and brightest young adults and youth that should be retained in this region. The lack of reciprocity regarding investing in youth and young adults in this region has created a stagnant environment. During the focus groups, those high school students and college students present indicated that they had neither desire nor inclination to remain in Pittsburgh once they graduated. When asked why, they indicated that there were no opportunities here from them, the things they were interested in professionally did not exits here for them and that the social activities available to them were inadequate and dilapidated.

## **INVEST IN DIVERSITY FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS**

The focus groups were held in the following areas:

- **Kingsley Center, 6118 Penn Circle South**

**Date: Monday, November 26, 2001**

**Time: 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.**

- **East Liberty Shadow Lounge**

**Date: Friday, November 30, 2001**

**Time: 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.**

- **Wilksburg Café**

**Date: Monday, December 17, 2001**

**Time: 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.**

- **East Liberty Shadow Lounge**

**Date: Friday, December 21, 2001**

**Time: 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.**

## FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

- In each focus group, several participants conveyed a strong desire for change and improvement in the political leadership for implementing diversity initiatives in the Pittsburgh region.
- Many expressed a sense of guarded optimism that Pittsburgh's increasing racial diversity will provide real and sustainable opportunities for people of color, specifically for African Americans, who represent the largest ethnic minority group in the Pittsburgh region.
- The majority of women, small business owners, and entrepreneurs expressed a desire for inclusion or access to the mainstream political, business, and social networks that avail financial and technical resources to start-up businesses and organizations in the Pittsburgh region.
- Most participants were hopeful that diversity as a regional initiative and sound business strategy could lead to meaningful inclusion, decision-making, economic self-determination, and empowerment for groups who have been historically excluded from participation in regional and emerging markets planning forums in the Pittsburgh region.
- Almost all participants expressed a desire for Pittsburgh's corporate leadership sector to make a stronger commitment to diversity at the top of the organization. It was noted there is a clear need for top-level executives to lead the implementation of vision, values, strategies, and organizational practices that links diversity to the corporate bottom-line.
- Most educators and professional participants agreed that educational leadership is vital to the implementation of diversity in secondary and post-secondary education. It was stated that developing diversity skills in K-12 and college students directly affects the corporate sector's potential for recruitment, mentoring, and retention of "home-grown" ethnic minorities and women in the Pittsburgh region.
- Almost all participants agreed that the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of implementing diversity in the educational setting directly impacts the understanding and appreciation for diversity in the public setting as well as social life and race relations in neighborhoods and communities in the Pittsburgh region.

## PARTICIPANT CONCERNS

- In areas of racial diversity, African American participants shared less optimistic opinions about the capacities of Pittsburgh's current educational, political, corporate, and civic leaders abilities to implement effective regional diversity initiatives.
- From life in neighborhoods and communities, to schools, colleges and the workplace setting, almost all African American participants expressed concerns and doubts that Pittsburgh's current leadership community itself embodies and models the genuine commitment and values needed to foster and promote diversity and inclusion practices. Current African American political, business and civic leaders were also criticized for failure to deliver tangible economic benefits and results to African American communities. Participants expressed a desire for African American Leaders that are able to deliver tangible economic benefits and results to African American communities
- Several African Americans stated that Pittsburgh's elected officials, civic, and corporate leaders tend to articulate the "rhetoric" of diversity in terms of programs and practices that often do not provide ethnic minorities, specifically African Americans, meaningful representation and access to jobs and careers that promote social and economic equity or that lead to employment opportunities and advancement to higher level positions and careers in the workplace setting.
- The lack of representation of African Americans and other minority groups in the senior and management ranks in Pittsburgh's corporate sector. The lack or token African American representation on the top decision-making levels in the corporate sector was seen as a major problem and deterrent to developing, retaining, and attracting African American talent to the Pittsburgh region.
- Recognizing the lack of diversity and inclusiveness at the corporate, political and civic rank levels, many African American high school students, college graduates and professionals are forced to leave the Pittsburgh region to seek educational opportunities and careers in other cities with higher costs of living, but greater social, economic and workforce opportunities.
- Another major issue for African Americans participants is the ongoing reality of racism and its prohibiting socio-economic impact on the overall quality of life for African Americans in the Pittsburgh region. Several African American participants shared personal stories of encounters with racism and discrimination in the public and workplace settings. Others shared experiences that so emotionally impacted them that they have encouraged their children or family members to leave the Pittsburgh region after graduation from high school or college.
- For many professional participants, especially those working in business and technology –based fields, the general consensus is that an "elite" group of white

males control the civic, philanthropic and corporate networks in the Pittsburgh region. It was stated by several participants that the cultural values of this predominantly white-male network permeates into every sector of civic, political, educational, and economic decision-making in the Pittsburgh region.

- Several entrepreneurs stated that in the Pittsburgh region it is very difficult for culturally diverse individuals with innovative ideas to receive funding and support for start-up initiatives. A few participants stated that if an idea or business plan does not meet a certain prescribe cultural standard or profile; most likely it will not get funded or supported by mainstream organizations. This concern was identified in each focus group as a major problem and challenge for women, ethnics, and gay/lesbian minorities.
- In relation to white privilege, it was stated that women and ethnic minorities are expected to acquiesce their “expressive culture” to norms established by white males, which demonstrates that most corporations do not understand, appreciate, and value the benefits of diversity and inclusiveness.
- Several single, professional and career-oriented women found the social and leisure environment in Pittsburgh limiting for relationship-building and two-career couples. Some desire regions where social and leisure opportunities as well as salaries and careers are more suitable and attractive to finding mates who share their aspirations and lifestyle status.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Opportunities:** Discussions revealed Pittsburgh is viewed as a region for emerging high-tech fields, urbanization, cultural development, leisure, and economic opportunities. These factors greatly contribute to the desires of many participants to live and work here and become apart of networks and organizations that promote “real” diversity and opportunities to implement diversity and inclusiveness initiatives.

What can be done to make Pittsburgh a region that invests in diversity?

- Develop new “leadership communities models” for building and promoting innovative diversity initiatives in the Pittsburgh region. A New Leadership Models looks to include the growing number of diverse people into the decision making process. It takes into account the paradigm shifts, which has occurred throughout the City and seeks to enlist local residents as key figures in the values scale for making community decisions. It does not simply rely on pre-existing leaders from these communities, because it recognized that many residents have lost faith in the system. Therefore, the current leadership remains in office by default, not because they were the chosen political leader, but because residents do not vote by-and-large and they have few if any choices in the candidacy. The New Leadership Model should represent new leaders from the community that represent the population of Pittsburgh, and represent the

ethnic, economic and social conditions of Pittsburgh. Current practices allow for existing community leaders to represent a new generation of people, who in many instances do not have a clear grasp of the X generation. These existing leaders are comfortable figures for the existing political systems to deal with, but by-and-large, these existing leaders do not represent the current community populations

- Present the idea of diversity to the general public as “good business sense” and a sound practical investment for improving the region’s outlook for positive economic change, growth and prosperity in the future
- Increase the involvement and commitment of corporate Pittsburgh in regional diversity partnerships and collaborations with ethnic minorities groups, specifically African Americans and emerging Hispanic and Asian communities
- Improve diversity awareness education in secondary and post-secondary education (K-12 & HE) in the Pittsburgh region
- Train teachers, college faculty and educators in diversity and multi-cultural education values and practices (K-12 & HE)
- Develop and mentor a new cadre of African American leaders to address historical and systemic racial, political, economic and social issues, conditions and problems in the Pittsburgh region. These new leaders should be selected on a wide range of criteria, and they should represent their constituents. Look in schools, colleges and the streets to find the peoples choice of leadership. Limit the politics of leadership and help to develop leaders early so that they can replace the current leadership. In the African American community, there seems to be very little time and energy given to mentoring new leadership. Changing the way leadership is cultivated, will change the way residents view their opportunities for change and their community voice and representation
- Train civic, political, educational, corporate and community leaders in diversity as a regional leadership strategy that uses current focuses to target new and emerging community needs by inquiring who decisions will influence the entire region. When decisions are made that enhance one community without looking at how a neighboring community might be affected, it further fragments the wealth between communities and widens the gap between regions. This activity lends itself to segregated practices that fail to see the value in holistic business practices that help to develop thriving economic communities throughout a region
- Develop culturally diverse youth-based coalitions and partnerships that foster and promote diversity and inclusiveness across Pittsburgh’s many segregated neighborhoods and communities
- Provide significant county and city funding to individuals and community-based groups seeking to establish innovative networks and coalitions for promoting diversity and inclusiveness in the Pittsburgh region
- Plan and implement a diversity leadership summit in the Pittsburgh region featuring a new cadre of individuals, groups and coalitions by fall 2002 or spring 2003

## Conclusion

Based upon the initial responses of the focus group and the dexterity available to engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue, a few more focus groups are necessary to further validate these early results. In addition, a combined debriefing with all participants, with a question and answer period following the presentation of the materials seems warranted.

The data gathered from this project identifies some of the common themes influencing the exodus from Pittsburgh. This information, however, is largely correlated with individuals from the urban environment. Although there was some representation from the suburban area, the project could benefit from a greater cross-section of residents for adequate representation of the regions perspective. Despite this issue, there was a rich and informative exchange between the participants, which offered new and greater insights to the issues impacting the region from a more holistic perspective. There exists a need to educate current leadership about the informal processes that exist across communities. We must consider a universal practice that educates all leaders about the importance of cross-cultural practices that seeks to sustain and maintain a region. This effort must be a collective effort, not one left simply focused on educating leaders, but one that mentors leaders and creates cadres of new and emerging leadership that seeks to enhance the current system, while maintaining the integrity of their community constituents.

Many factors contribute to the current state of Pittsburgh; however, there exists a plethora of individuals that want to contribute to a new and better tomorrow. The information obtained in this initial report reflects a disturbing phenomenon regarding community input and societal outcomes. The participants from these focus groups have clearly articulated their concerns as well as acknowledged an interest in getting more involved with a more inclusive process that addressed the issues influencing the exodus from Pittsburgh. This new group of concerned citizens represents what may be deemed as the X generation. Important in distinguishing this group from others is their desire to do things differently. This desire is reflective of their observation of past practices, which have seemingly further segregated Pittsburgh, thus creating the current state of affairs. The focus group comments, clearly articulated a need to deal directly with the old systems, or the old way of doing things. This challenge is directed at the corporate level, public sector and on a communal level. Diversity is important to a multicultural society. Therefore, the inclusion of such a culture suggests the need to further educate others to “different” ways of knowing and experiencing reality holistically.

If future steps concerning community action occur across community divides the need for identifying and grooming new community leadership seems paramount. Moreover, the need to cultivate equitable racial leaderships, greater levels of inclusion, planning and participation is necessary as well as including a percentage of Pittsburghers from across the city’s diverse neighborhoods and regions.

Participants in the focus groups clearly articulated that they see many current leaders as not fully understanding their community’s needs and not truly representative of their social concerns. Their perspective spoke clearly to the issue of differentiation. Leadership is

always a key factor in change as well in vision. The changes needed in Pittsburgh which have been illustrated by the participants in the focus groups, reflect the vision and willingness of the leaders and people to address the issues outlined in this document. Some of the following objectives reflect the participants ideas of areas that need addressed:

1. Increase the amount of people of color in the Pittsburgh region
2. Increase awareness of workforce inclusion and diversity
3. Develop a database of talented professional people of color for the private and public sectors
4. Develop relationships with college students from Pittsburgh and out-of-state
5. Increase the skill level and resources of community-based organizations by creating internships for college students
6. Build an extended family model between college students and community residents
7. Stimulate community youth through connection and mentoring by college students from the Pittsburgh's colleges and universities
8. Groom native Pittsburghers for its workforce and provide career resources
9. Develop a welcoming committee to the City's newcomers
10. Connect Pittsburgh's college students with professional, career-based mentors
11. Train the private and public sectors on inclusion and cultural sensitivity

In conclusion, the need for new and creative ways to build collaborations and partnerships is paramount. As this city embarks upon the challenges confronting it, there exists a need to confront the issues of racism in a strategic manner. Heretofore, the city has acknowledged racism in a fragmented manner. This approach speaks directly to the power of knowledge and the power of ignorance. If we chose to ignore the plight of others, how can we expect a city of multiethnic, multicultural and multitalented people to collaborate and partner when their basic desire for inclusion is relegated to the hegemony of the power elite. Many issues have surfaced during these focus groups; however, what was said unanimously was that change must occur if Pittsburgh is to survive and move collectively into the next millennium.

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