Bristol

The City of Bristol completed its _Voluntary Local Review (VLR)_ in 2019, the first city in the United Kingdom to report on local progress for the _Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)_. Bristol's VLR summarizes SDG progress and challenges in the city, highlighting dozens of local initiatives and organisations working to make the city more sustainable. The VLR was developed as a baseline measure of the SDGs in the _One City Plan_, "a city-wide approach for creating a fair, healthy, and sustainable community for all by 2050."

The VLR was prepared by researchers at the University of Bristol in close partnership with the City Office at Bristol City Council and members of the _Bristol SDG Alliance_. The work was funded by the University of Bristol ESRC Impact Acceleration Account.

The information in this brief is based on the Bristol VLR and personal communications with the Bristol VLR team.

In 2015, United Nations Member States adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to guide global action on the urgent economic, social, and environmental challenges facing our planet. The creation of a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) is an effort by city and community leaders to confirm their commitment to the SDGs and present a holistic portrait of local sustainability work connected to the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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Bristol

Summary of Key Aspects for the VLR Process

Collaboration

Bristol's Mayor, Marvin Rees, stressed from an early stage of his term the importance of collaboration throughout the community as a way to achieve the big sustainability challenges the city faced. Mayor Rees recognized the opportunity the SDGs presented as a common language for diverse city partners to come together to reflect a community-wide agenda and not one solely driven by the City government.

A strong SDG Alliance within Bristol was also an important component in mobilizing the community around the VLR. The Alliance is a network of city stakeholders covering many of Bristol's anchor institutions (e.g. universities, City Council officials, major businesses, and voluntary organizations and networks) working towards the implementation of the SDGs. This regular dialogue about the SDGs among organizations and networks has been a vital component in promoting the uptake of the SDGs in Bristol. Alliance members have also been able to apply for funding from the University of Bristol to support SDG localization efforts.

SDGs Implementation

Bristol reported on all 17 SDGs in the VLR, combining key statistical findings and trends with listings of organizations and specific initiatives working towards each SDG. The integration and mapping of the SDGs throughout Bristol's One City Plan acted as a backbone for the VLR, informing the statistical basis from which targets and indicators were compiled.

A city-wide consultation complemented the statistical review to help identify organizations in the community that were contributing towards the SDGs. The consultation was done through an online survey, asking respondents about the SDGs they were working towards and a series of questions about their scale of activity. The survey was shared widely by a variety of key community partners such as the SDG Alliance, the University of Bristol, the Black Southwest Network, and LGBT Bristol.

The VLR also came at a time when City leaders were exploring how to more deeply integrate the SDGs into City operations, including mapping to business plans and procurement policy, and establishing an SDG Ambassador within the Mayor's Cabinet.

Leaving No One Behind

The VLR acknowledges that many residents face serious systemic challenges and entrenched inequalities which, among other impacts, have led to youth and ethnic inequality within unemployment, disparity in access to higher education between local government wards, and premature deaths due to poor air quality. These inequalities and the ethos of the SDGs to 'leave no one behind' inspired the City in its efforts in the VLR and the One City Plan to rethink the way that city priorities are set and pursued.

Throughout the VLR, the City highlights a variety of initiatives aligned with the SDGs that aim to ensure no one is left behind, including:

- The Bristol Refugee Rights helps asylum seekers in Bristol receive support, avoid destitution and assist them in obtaining jobs (SDG 1 - No Poverty).
- 1625 Independent People is an organization that helps youth living in the care system and young unhoused people obtain access to employment (SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth).
- LGBT Bristol is working to raise awareness on discrimination faced by the LGBT+ community and partnering with the Bristol Hate Crime and Discrimination Service (SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities).

Political Buy-In

Leadership for the VLR came from Mayor Rees' Office and expanded to include the Policy, Strategy, Partnerships team, the City Office, and the International team. With strong buy-in for the SDGs across political parties, City Council explored a number of ways to integrate the SDGs into government operations, including mapping the SDGs to City business plans and procurement policy, establishing an SDG Ambassador within the Mayor's Cabinet, and establishing the Bristol City Funds to provide loans and grants to support key priorities in the One City Plan aligned to the SDGs.

The idea for the VLR came in 2017, when the Bristol SDG Alliance, the City Council Resilience Officer, and the Bristol Green Capital Partnership commissioned a relevancy assessment of the SDGs and their fit with the City's emerging strategic planning. This work helped garner further interest in the SDGs and led to formal partnerships and the creation of an SDG Research and Engagement Associate based at the University of Bristol (who later led the writing of the VLR).

Data Collection

The VLR includes a comprehensive review of statistical indicators which were informed by a prior mapping of the SDGs onto the One City Plan (explore how the data structure was created here). From the targets that were relevant to the One City Plan, the City compiled indicators from a range of sources (including eight city sustainability frameworks and existing sets of metrics and the United Nations Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators) and adapted those that were inappropriate to the city scale or unavailable with alternatives that reflect the ethos of the SDGs (adapting the City of L.A.'s methodology). Data was also gathered from other publicly available sources such as the Office for National Statistics or Public Health England. Wherever possible, data was benchmarked against 2010 to find sustained trends.

While the quality of the data in the VLR is considered very good, it is noted that much of the data relies on indicators at the regional level, making it difficult to identify inequalities within the city across wards. A key consideration for future VLR work identifies the need to develop deeper disaggregation of data and to consider how to better incorporate the de facto urban area that Bristol serves with the formal administrative boundaries of the city.

A Data Annex is also included in the appendix of the VLR, listing all 140 underlying data points with sources cited in the report. The Data Annex uses a traffic light analysis for each indicator identifying progress.

Accountability and Transparency

The City of Bristol created the Bristol One City website to track progress on the One City Plan and related SDGs. The site features a dashboard of SDG targets as they relate to targets in the One City Plan. Work on a separate data platform to track SDG progress and use local data points is also underway. The City has also been working to upload data and references included in the VLR to the Office for National Statistics SDG portal. The Bristol City Office also regularly works to engage the community to generate insight and feedback on ways to continually improve on the One City Approach.

The City of Bristol and the University of Bristol also created a VLR Handbook to share the Bristol VLR experience and assist other cities in the UK to create their own VLR.

While reporting to the United Nations was not a primary driver for the VLR, the City was able to align itself with the Voluntary National Review process that the United Kingdom was undergoing at the time, joining the UK delegation at the UN and presenting the VLR in a variety of international forums and meetings.

Los Angeles

The City of Los Angeles (L.A.) completed its first _Voluntary Local Review (VLR)_ in July 2019, one of the first cities in the world to report on local progress for the _Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)_. L.A.'s first VLR highlights initiatives in place to address all 17 SDGs, taking a priority focus on _SDG 5 - Gender Equality_ and _SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities_. The VLR summarizes the City's SDG efforts to date, contributions of partners, progress already made, key learnings and insights, and next steps.

The VLR was supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles, and a variety of academic partnerships. The City is currently working on its second VLR for 2021, focusing on local avenues of action and the lived experience of residents.

The information in this brief is based on L.A.'s first VLR and personal communications with the L.A. SDGs team.

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Los Angeles

Summary of Key Aspects for the VLR Process

Collaboration

The City of L.A. has a long history of working with community partners. The VLR highlights many examples of this collaborative work as they relate to the SDGs, and explores ways these partnerships can contribute to future SDG work, including:

- Working with Occidental College, Arizona State University, University of California at Los Angeles, and University of Southern California to support the VLR and SDG activity through dedicated classes, seminars, and student research.
- Creating a shared vision for public education through partnership with the L.A. Unified School District, the L.A. Community College District, the County of L.A., and the L.A. Chamber of Commerce, including provision of free first year of community college, paid job opportunities for low income youth, and establishing family resource hubs to support students and their families with financial planning and applications to college.
- Partnering with the Annenberg Foundation and more than 80 venture capitalists to launch PledgeL.A. to encourage civic engagement, diversity, and inclusion in L.A.'s rapidly growing tech sector.

SDGs Implementation

L.A.'s VLR developed and applied a four-phase process for implementing the SDGs:

- **Mapping and Alignment** - producing a baseline of current activity based on an assessment of all City plans, policies, and initiatives to understand what progress has already been made and where challenges remain.
- **Gap Analysis** - determining where shortfalls or gaps exist when considering the City's activities and responsibilities mapped to the SDGs.
- **Localization** - adapting SDG Targets and Indicators to fit L.A.'s local context, including engaging and validating revisions to the framework with community partners and identifying available data sources to measure progress.
- **Mobilization** - engaging across sectors in the City to identify new ideas, new partnerships, and new initiatives to accelerate progress toward the SDGs.

Leaving No One Behind

The City of L.A. recognizes that low-income families, undocumented persons, communities of colour, the unhoused, the formerly incarcerated, and foster youth are the most vulnerable and underserved communities at greatest risk of being left behind in the city. The VLR provides a spotlight to reconfirm the City's commitment to creating a more just and equitable L.A., including:

- An increase in the City budget by more than 2,000% from 2015-2019 to end street homelessness, as well as leading a campaign to build thousands of units of supportive housing over the next decade.
- A Gender Equity Action Plan to increase gender parity on all levels of local governance and in business enterprises, including tackling harassment and discrimination towards women and the transgender and non-binary communities.
- A Mayor's Office fund to support young and underrepresented persons pursue careers within L.A.'s entertainment industry through internships, mentorship, mini grants, and production gap financing.

Political Buy-In

The VLR was led by L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti and his Office, alongside the Mayor's Office of International Affairs. Based on the results of the VLR mapping, the City engaged with senior leaders in key departments to include them in the VLR process. The City is planning to build on this work for the 2021 VLR by creating an internal SDGs Advisory Group to help guide the process.

The decision to work on the SDGs was originally announced in 2017 by Mayor Garcetti as an opportunity to gauge progress on current City sustainability approaches and as an opportunity to engage with other cities around the world on the SDGs and share best practices and methodologies.

Data Collection

The City started by examining each SDG target to determine if the target applied to the City, and if not, whether it could be revised while meeting its original intent. The City created a five-step process to guide this work, as well as a decision-tree to categorize how to create new, more local and relevant SDG targets. The City is currently developing more detailed localization tools for the 2021 VLR, focused further on localizing SDG indicators.

This data collection used existing governmental data sources, with data disaggregated by demography and geography throughout the community where available. The Mayor's Office was particularly keen not to use the data to only show "good news stories", but rather to spotlight where the City needs help.

Accountability and Transparency

The City of L.A. created a suite of SDG tools and resources that they host on the Los Angeles Sustainable Development Goals website.

On data, the City created the SDG Data Reporting Platform, a dedicated website that lists the City's local SDG indicators to communicate progress to the broader community. Future work is planned to source data for all SDG indicators, disaggregating data, and identifying trends over time.

The City also created an SDG Activities Index to map local SDGs work in the community. The Index will be continually updated as a way to engage and collaborate with community organizations on the SDGs, help raise awareness of L.A.'s commitment to the SDGs, and invite community groups to reach out and share their work.

Pittsburgh

The City of Pittsburgh completed its first _Voluntary Local Review (VLR)_ in the fall of 2020, amidst the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pittsburgh's VLR maps and aligns City initiatives for all 17 _Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)_, with a focus on operations to understand how City work is contributing to SDGs outcomes. The City was keen to use this first VLR to identify opportunities for inter-department and cross-sectoral partnerships to understand how different groups in the city may already be working toward progressing the SDGs.

The City of Pittsburgh recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic created an opportunity to rethink status quo approaches to sustainability and be more intentional about efforts to uplift communities that have traditionally been left behind. The City plans to use the VLR as a tool to hold itself accountable and as a way to engage with the global community.

_The information in this brief is based on the _Pittsburgh VLR _and personal communications with the Pittsburgh VLR team._

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Pittsburgh

Summary of Key Aspects for the VLR Process

Collaboration

A main focus of the VLR was to explore opportunities for inter-departmental cooperation across the City. Using a mix of online engagement approaches, the City was able to bring together key City staff to steer the VLR process, including the Gender Equity Commission, the Office of Equity, and the Department of Planning.

The City of Pittsburgh also worked closely with Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh, harnessing both grant money and student contributions to complete the VLR.

More than 17 collaborative relationships contributing to the SDGs are highlighted in the VLR, featuring already established partnerships between the City, the private sector, academia, and non-profit organizations.

SDGs Implementation

The City of Pittsburgh adopted a phased approach to the VLR similar to the approach used by the City of L.A. The first phase focuses on localization to better understand which SDGs Global Targets were applicable in Pittsburgh while trying to keep the spirit of what each Target was trying to measure. Phase two focuses on mapping and aligning City work to the SDGs.

Once mapping was completed, the City engaged staff through an online survey asking them to identify how their work related to the SDGs. The survey was followed by a 17 Rooms exercise with City staff to further gather information on City contributions to the SDGs and explore opportunities for departments to work together towards similar goals. Smaller follow-up meetings also took place to fill in any knowledge gaps and create alignment with local action.

Leaving No One Behind

The VLR emphasizes that some of the city's greatest sustainability challenges relate to systemic racism, inequality, and social fragmentation, all of which have been exacerbated by COVID-19. The City of Pittsburgh sees the SDGs as a way to uplift the city's most marginalized communities that have been traditionally left behind.

Through the VLR mapping process, the City highlights a variety of initiatives aligned with the SDGs that aim to ensure no one is left behind, including:

- Advocating for a guaranteed income to ensure there is an income floor for those affected by COVID-19.
- Developing the Vacant Lot Toolkit and Adopt-A-Lot program to create streamlined processes for residents to access city-owned vacant lots for community gardens.
- Partnering with the Government Alliance on Racial Equity to train senior City officials and staff about how City policies can affect racial equity.

Political Buy-In

The Pittsburgh VLR was championed by the City's Chief Resilience Officer. The VLR involved cooperation from across the City, including the Mayor's Office, the Gender Equity Commission, the Office of Equity, Commission on Human Relations, and the Department of Planning. Following the completion of the VLR, Mayor Peduto sent a resolution to the City Council requesting the formal adoption of the SDGs to serve as a framework for City policies, practices, and procedures.

The VLR stemmed from a 2016 resiliency assessment which found racial inequity, climate change, and fragmentation as some of the city's greatest challenges. The City acknowledged the important role of the SDGs framework to help overcome these challenges and became one of the first cities in the United States to announce a public commitment to meeting the SDGs in 2019.

Data Collection

The Pittsburgh VLR emphasizes a qualitative approach to data collection through a focus on mapping of existing City SDGs efforts. This work gathered information from City departments through online surveys, virtual roundtable discussions and bilateral meetings to reveal internal SDGs-aligned work.

Some quantitative data was gathered through reports published by the City and work was started to align and localize SDGs targets of community relevance using the City of L.A.'s decision tree. There was little disaggregated data available to use in measuring progress.

Accountability and Transparency

The City of Pittsburgh presented the VLR to the public in a Facebook Live panel as part of a mayoral series on equity. The City identified that this first VLR is a step towards improving measurement and accountability for the SDGs and will serve as a good baseline for future comparisons. VLR work will continue each year, with the next phases focused on creating a gap analysis for SDGs activity and engaging with VLR global best practice cities to learn about new approaches and actions.

Pittsburgh is also positioning the VLR as a 'periodic report card' to try to align internal City and community (e.g. nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, universities) efforts towards measuring progress on the SDGs.