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.

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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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.