

“Our Neighborhoods, Our Future” Coalition

Equitable Infrastructure Principles for Modernizing America

Around the country families worry about the safety of their drinking water, dams and bridges are failing and public transportation projects sit stalled and underfunded. Our communities need access to new high-speed internet connections, modern energy systems and reliable child care. We are at a critical junction in our nation where we have to decide whether or not to make massive investments in our people and in our institutions.

We can invest in ways that raise the quality of life for everyone in this great nation or we can invest in projects that benefit a few and increase the inequality that is crippling our progress. When we invest in our country together, infrastructure investments can and should expand opportunity and improve the quality of life for everyone.

The choice before us will define us and shape the places we live for generations to come. To help ensure that infrastructure investments benefit all Americans, we believe policymakers should:

1) Go Broad

We need infrastructure that recognizes the needs of 21st century America and recreates the strong backbone for our economy that everyone in our nation deserves. Federal investment must go beyond roads, bridges, and airports to include access for all to safe, reliable, and clean affordable energy, telecommunications, clean water, parks, schools, libraries, community facilities and centers, childcare, and affordable housing. We must think bigger and more creatively about what we can achieve together and once again build an America that works for all of us from this greater vision. Moreover, our policies and investment approaches must fit together in order to provide the broad benefit to all people and ensure that all working people, families, neighborhoods, cities and regions flourish.

2) Prioritize Infrastructure Investment in Communities and Areas That Need Them the Most

Investments in infrastructure should be targeted to communities that have been shortchanged for far too long. Investments must avoid displacement of existing residents, and provide opportunities to create shared benefits and build wealth.

3) Invest in Projects that Deliver Community Benefits, Environmental Justice, Racial Equity, and Good Jobs

Infrastructure investment should raise the quality of life for everyone in the community, especially for those who have been underserved for far too long. Each dollar invested should promote equity, environmental and climate justice, career and business opportunities, resiliency and broadly shared economic prosperity.

4) Require Transparency and Diverse Local Input

Infrastructure is ultimately only as good and as useful as the community and stakeholders that use it believe it to be. Ultimately, investments should be directed toward projects identified as the highest priority by residents of disinvested communities. To ensure that infrastructure investments raise everyone’s quality of life, meaningful community engagement, transparency, and accountability from planning and design to procurement and implementation are critical.

5) Prioritize Public Financing and Public Control

Infrastructure is meant to benefit everyone. Handing over public goods to private entities through arrangements that allow multinational corporations and billionaire Wall Street firms to extract excessive profits while sticking taxpayers with long-term costs such as tolls and user fees harms local communities. Public financing such as bonds and control should be prioritized over private financing. Infrastructure is a public asset and should be subject to public control, operations and maintenance. Infrastructure investments should be designed, funded and managed in ways that maintain the public’s interest and safety by avoiding unnecessary corporate giveaways or rolling back administrative protections.

Equitable Infrastructure Principles in Action

The following examples are offered to illustrate how these principles can be implemented to create good jobs, benefit racially or economically disadvantaged communities, and mitigate environmental impacts in diverse areas throughout the nation. The first example of Pittsburgh contrasts past infrastructure investments which have damaged communities with a progressive approach to infrastructure.

Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh, like many American cities, has a long history of so-called urban renewal projects failing to help and even often harming low-income residents and communities of color. Through a landmark [community benefits agreement](#) in the historically African American Hill District in Pittsburgh, Partnership for Working Families' affiliate Pittsburgh United began to change that. The agreement brought together more than 100 community, faith and labor organizations to win first source hiring for construction and permanent service jobs, a grocery store in the neighborhood and an \$8 million fund for community investment. Since then, the Pittsburgh United coalition has worked to expand community input into a number of infrastructure projects throughout the city. It enacted several city ordinances, including one that stops new developments from putting stormwater into the sewer system causing illegal sewer overflows. After extensive community engagement and organizing, Pittsburgh United is working to implement a Green First investment plan for a multi-billion dollar EPA required sewer fix. This investment plan ensures that local communities benefit from the project by not only helping clean up local rivers, but also creating more jobs, cleaner air and raising the value of homes and businesses throughout the city. Recently, the coalition launched its [Our Water Campaign](#) to make sure the city water and sewer authority stays in public hands and prioritizes safe drinking water. More information here:

<http://www.forworkingfamilies.org/resources/publications/great-leap-forward-neighborhood-left-behind-how-one-hill-charted-path-toward> and <http://pittsburghunited.org/ourwater/>.

Los Angeles

In 2012, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro) became the first transit agency in the country to adopt a Construction Careers Policy for all major construction projects, including the \$2.4 billion Crenshaw/LAX Transit Project, an 8.5-mile light-rail line that runs through the heart of LA's black community. This project was not only important for improving access to public transit for residents of color, it also represented an opportunity to address elevated poverty and unemployment rates by directing good job opportunities to communities that needed them the most. Building on a decade of successful targeted hire policies, the Construction Careers Coalition, anchored by Partnership for Working Families affiliate LAANE, pushed for a policy that would create pathways for low-income residents and people of color and serve as a template for major infrastructure investments. To this end, the construction careers policy requires 40 percent of construction hours be performed by construction workers residing in economically disadvantaged areas, 10 percent participation of disadvantaged workers, and 20 percent participation of apprentices. This agreement also includes a project labor agreement which establishes wage, benefits, and training standards for all workers on the project. To date, 58 percent of work hours on the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Project have been completed by economically disadvantaged workers and 69 percent by workers of color. For more information about the [Los Angeles METRO Construction Careers Policy](#) visit: www.laane.org/what-we-do/projects/past-projects-2/construction-careers/construction-careers-policies.

New York City

Four years ago, Superstorm Sandy caused \$19 billion in damage in New York City and shined a light on deep inequality in the city. Low-income residents, communities of color and immigrants were hit hardest by the storm. Forty-one percent of the housing units most impacted were low-income renter occupied units. In its wake, the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding, including Partnership for Working Families affiliate ALIGN, advocated for a range of policies that would ensure that the communities hit hardest had access to the relief spending and that the recovery efforts did not further perpetuate pre-existing inequality. In addition to a range of housing and environmental remediation demands, the coalition also advocated for and won a 20 percent local hiring requirement and the first disaster relief project labor agreement in the country. The Alliance also secured funding for pre-apprenticeship programs and the creation of the Sandy Funding Tracker, which makes comprehensive reporting on recovery job creation and spending available to the public. To date, 21 percent of workers are from Sandy-impacted communities. For more information about the [Sandy Build It Back program](#) visit: alignny.org/resource/sandy-build-it-back-workers-rebuilding-their-own-communities

Oakland

The former Oakland Army Base employed thousands of workers before it was decommissioned in the 1990s. After the land sat vacant for more than a decade, the city approved a proposal to redevelop the former army base into a high-tech trade and logistics complex serving the adjacent Port of Oakland — the fifth largest port in the United States. The city estimated that the \$1.2 billion plan would create 1,500 construction jobs and 1,800 permanent jobs in warehousing and goods movement. Revive Oakland - a coalition of thirty community, labor, and faith advocates, convened by Partnership for Working Families affiliate East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE) - launched an extensive community outreach and organizing campaign to build community support for a good jobs policy that would ensure the public's investment created real economic opportunity for Oakland residents. The community benefits model enabled the coalition to build on existing city ordinances that protect workers and introduce new policies that meet community needs. In 2012, the coalition won an innovative good jobs policy that will create over 3,000 living wage jobs and reserve 50 percent of them for local residents. To date, the project has exceeded the 50 percent local hire goal. The policy not only delivers thousands of much-needed, family-supporting jobs to Oakland residents, it also removes employment barriers for the formerly incarcerated, creates a workforce development pipeline, and includes the first restrictions in the U.S on the use of temporary workers in warehousing facilities. This victory reflects the collective voice of Oakland residents, workers, and faith leaders demanding more from the investment of taxpayer dollars. To learn more about the [Oakland Army Base Good Jobs Policy](http://workingeastbay.org/work/revive-oakland) visit: workingeastbay.org/work/revive-oakland and www.forworkingfamilies.org/resources/publications/paving-path-opportunity-how-revive-oakland-innovated-new-model-inclusive

Additional resources for putting these principles in action

- [Building America While Building our Middle Class: Best Practices for P3 Infrastructure Projects](#), In the Public Interest and Partnership for Working Families
- [Community Benefits Tool Kit](#), Partnership for Working Families
- [Clean Power for All](#), Clean Power for All Collaborative