

Lessons from the All-In Cities Anti-Displacement Policy Network

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Overview

Cities thrive when all people can live in safe, stable, affordable homes in healthy neighborhoods connected to opportunities without fear of displacement. But for many low-income people and communities of color, housing costs and displacement pressures are rising across the country, destabilizing families, neighborhoods, and entire cities. This growing crisis is being met with growing actions by communities directly impacted by displacement, and cities are taking notice and starting to act.

In 2018, PolicyLink created the All-In Cities Anti-Displacement Policy Network (ADPN), a national network of more than 65 leaders from 11 cities to work together to fight displacement

and build thriving cities. Over the course of a year, the network participants developed anti-displacement strategies for their cities while building the power, voice, and capacity of communities directly impacted by displacement in defining challenges and advancing solutions.

Today, in the fall of 2020, the country is facing an unprecedented public health, economic, and housing crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic, a crisis that is falling disproportionately on Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. As communities develop equitable response and recovery strategies in the months and years ahead, efforts such as this network can inform both the strategies that are needed and how to develop these strategies by centering those most impacted. This report provides a summary of the network—what we did, outcomes, and emerging lessons for the field. It is written to help funders, policy advocates, and others who lead networks refine our approaches so we can more effectively create equitable outcomes.

What We Did

Network design and objectives

Communities of practice oftentimes help support change in one of three ways: increase individual participants' skills to make them more effective in their role; increase the overall field's knowledge of best practices by sharing across places; or encourage breakthroughs and innovations by bringing in ideas from other places to solve challenges. They accomplish their goals by tapping into people's desires for social connection, curiosity to learn new things, and drive for leadership.

This network was designed with all three outcomes in mind, and with one addition. Most communities of practice are designed with participants who play a similar role, for example, a network of department directors, or community organizers, or elected officials. However, we created an additional goal of developing and strengthening relationships between policymakers—city staff and elected—and those who are most directly impacted by displacement. To help achieve this outcome, each city team had to include local elected officials, city staff, and community leaders from communities directly impacted by displacement.

During the initial design phase, we also worked closely with Homes For All, an initiative of the Right To The City Alliance, to connect the network to the organizing efforts of grassroots leaders. Homes For All is a translocal, grassroots network of tenants who are fighting to protect, defend, and expand housing that is truly affordable and dignified for low-income and very low-income communities and assert housing as a human right.

Recruitment to the network was through a competitive application process. We identified 26 target cities based on geographic and market diversity, readiness, relationships, and other factors, and invited them to apply with a team of four to six people that included local elected officials, city staff, and community leaders. After reviewing applications and conducting team interviews, we selected 11 cities in 10 places (Minneapolis and Saint Paul applied jointly as the Twin Cities).

At the launch of the network, participants collaboratively created and adopted a unified goal to guide the initiative: for low-income people, Indigenous people, marginalized LGBTQ people, and people of color to experience increased housing security and less housing, business, and cultural displacement in their communities.

Participants also collectively developed six objectives for the network:

- Increase member **knowledge, skills, and relationships** to advance anti-displacement policies.
- Develop effective **anti-displacement policy roadmaps** and the internal infrastructure to implement in a manner accountable to impacted communities.
- Increase capacity to **measure indicators using data and research**.
- Increase **public awareness and support** of the housing crisis and solutions.
- Increase the **political voice and power** of impacted communities in decision-making.
- Contribute **policy and thought leadership** to build momentum at the state and national level to address displacement.

List of cities:

1. Austin
2. Boston
3. Buffalo
4. Denver
5. Nashville
6. Philadelphia
7. Portland, Oregon
8. San José
9. Santa Fe
10. Twin Cities (Minneapolis and Saint Paul)

Network activities

Starting in the spring of 2018, PolicyLink created several online and in-person activities to facilitate meeting these objectives.

Learning Labs

We held 14 learning labs over the length of the network, creating a regular space for the network to come together to learn from peers about best practices and discuss challenges they were facing. Each city team led one learning lab, co-designing the content and format with PolicyLink staff and facilitating the discussion. Examples of topics included:

- Data, knowledge creation, narrative, and power with the Twin Cities team;
- Using data to measure displacement with presenters from Portland State University and the Urban Displacement Project at UC Berkeley;
- Strengthening just cause and tenant protections in San José;
- The campaign to win anti-displacement policies in Portland's Comprehensive Plan;
- Models for place-based community-driven development without displacement examining the Fruit Belt community land trust and Green Development Zone in Buffalo;
- Santa Fe's anti-displacement overlay district; and
- Strategies to keep low-income homeowners in place in Philadelphia.

Working groups

Working groups created a space for network members to have more in-depth discussions on a particular policy area. There were four working groups that met for the first six months of the network: affordable housing preservation; community ownership; equitable development; and tenant protections. A fifth working group, on business and cultural stabilization, was organized but not continued due to low participation; some teams, however, such as Philadelphia and Austin, continued to discuss business and cultural strategies in their team discussions. The working group calls included presentations from city and outside experts and strategic discussions on challenges particular cities were facing.



One of the lightbulbs I've had through the All-In Cities process is how some cities... have been funding community-based organizations more than [our city has] to do capacity building, engagement, to help bring community to the table during community processes.

Team Councilmember

Topics covered in the working group calls included:

- Acquisition funds to preserve affordable housing, with information shared from Denver and Minneapolis on their funds;
- Displacement risk analyses and mitigation for large projects, with information from Portland;
- Community land trusts, and other community ownership models, with participation from experts from the Grounded Solutions Network, the Democracy Collaborative, and the Right To The City Alliance;
- Community benefits agreements, with participation from experts from PolicyLink Legal and Nashville; and
- Tenant protections and addressing state preemption, with information shared from Portland and San José.

In-person convenings

In April 2018, all the team participants came together at the PolicyLink National Equity Summit to officially launch the network and participate in three days of sessions and workshops on racial equity and anti-displacement strategies. Halfway through the year of the network, participants gathered in Austin for a two-day [convening](#) to learn about the work happening in Austin and strategize in person.

In addition to these activities, many of the city teams themselves organized regular team meetings, community forums, and other activities to engage residents and other stakeholders in their policy work.

Outcomes

By the time the network ended in 2019, many of the cities already had started to take action to address displacement in their communities. Some of the actions cities took included:

- Committed new funding for affordable housing;
- Moved land into community land trusts and other forms of non-speculative land ownership;
- Advanced policies to protect tenants and stabilize communities;
- Asserted community power in negotiating new developments, including community benefits agreements and creating better community participatory processes; and
- Built stronger relationships between community and city actors.

The Appendix includes additional actions taken by each city during the network’s operational period and in the year after.

After the network ended, PolicyLink conducted interviews and surveys of the participants to better understand how the network helped them achieve better policy outcomes. Here are the highlights they shared:

The network created and strengthened lasting relationships, within and across teams. According to participants, one of the most valuable and positive outcomes of the network was the benefit of building relationships within the city teams and connecting with peers in other cities.

The structured collaboration of the city teams created a space for honest conversations to happen with people who do not always work together. Several participants stated that the teams helped them build a common understanding of challenges, needs, and possibilities. People in grassroots organizations felt they were able to better understand how things get done within city government and what are some of the barriers and challenges faced by city staff and local elected officials.

Roughly half of the city teams have continued to meet either formally or informally to continue to collaborate, share information, and develop strategies together. In Denver, a wider, ongoing stakeholder group was created as a space to share learnings and themes from the group. Minneapolis and Saint Paul formed a joint team for this network, and they are continuing to meet regularly to discuss learnings and potential next steps, as informed by community.

Policies that teams worked to advance as a part of the network:

Tenant protections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good/just cause eviction • Fair chance housing and more equitable tenant screening • Tenant protections for housing projects receiving public dollars • Rent control at the state and local level • Source-of-income non-discrimination policy • Right to counsel
Affordable housing preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservation funds • Mobile home park preservation • Community/tenant opportunity to purchase
Equitable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community benefits agreements • Assessment of fair housing in equitable development • New or increased funding for affordable housing development
Community ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community land trusts • Community control of public land • Tenant opportunity to purchase
Business and cultural stabilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small business stabilization strategies • Cultural districts
Institutionalizing racial equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New or increased funding for grassroots organizations • Ongoing anti-displacement team meetings • Anti-displacement task force

The teams also gained value from the extended network of contacts they now have access to in other cities. Across cities, community organizers met and learned from organizers in other cities, while planners or housing department staff connected with those with similar roles in other cities. While there were also connections with people in other cities who held different roles, this was less common.

The network helped to shift the policymaking process to center impacted communities. In many cities, community engagement occurs after the top priorities have already been determined and does not always reflect the priorities of people who live in the community. For example, a city may hold a series of public meetings about where new bike lanes should go, while local, low-income residents want to address how new transportation infrastructure might increase displacement pressures, and how to mitigate that. Many public processes, such as city council hearings and neighborhood association meetings, are not inclusive or empowering for low-income people or people of color due to time and location, language, and other access needs.

As a part of the network, team participants examined how they approached centering the voices of those who are most affected by displacement—low-income communities of color. Centering impacted communities entails going beyond traditional community engagement to bring communities into decision-making processes. For example, the San José team held a series of community meetings in neighborhoods to hear directly from residents impacted by displacement about what their policy priorities should be. From that process, the team changed some of their original ideas of which strategies to pursue, and added new ideas that came from the community meetings. In early 2020, the team developed a [city-wide anti-displacement strategy](#) that outlines their process and top strategies.



These conversations have assisted us in strengthening our voices here [in our city] around this issue.... [W]e get so used to listening to one another I think we can stop hearing one another. New ideas coming from outside the community and just knowing that others are experiencing successes is encouraging.

Team City Staff Person

After participation in this network, some community groups felt they had a more positive relationship and a greater sense of trust with some city departments, though this was not true in every place. Several people said their relationship is now less adversarial, and there is now a greater sense that city staff would be willing to listen and think about how they could address issues being raised by the community.

Participants learned and adopted best practices. One of the key outcomes of the network was to equip the city teams with information on anti-displacement strategies that have been effective in other places that they could move locally. The network provided examples from other communities and access to key stakeholders in other cities who could talk about how they developed and implemented a strategy. This led to accelerated action on a number of strategies as people were able to learn more about how these strategies have worked in other places, such as community benefits agreements, tenant opportunity to purchase, community land trusts, fair chance housing and tenant screening, and more. Beyond the technical aspects of policy development and adoption, the network also looked at questions of how decisions are made and how to increase resources and capacity toward tenant organizing and power building.

Participants developed new ideas and approaches to addressing anti-displacement. The network also allowed for new ideas to emerge. For example, in Boston, the network sparked analysis of displacement as a fair housing issue and how to apply fair housing assessments in the review of new, large, proposed development. In Philadelphia, the team hadn't focused on small business displacement prior to the network, but they developed an approach and set of strategies due to their team's conversations. In Nashville, the network sparked interest in developing equity metrics for the city's overall performance management plan.

The network increased political will to take action.

Participation in the network raised the profile of displacement in the network cities, increasing pressure on elected officials to take action. Several noted an increase in media coverage locally. In some cities, participants felt that their city's participation in the network provided legitimacy to the community organizers and city staff working on issues related to anti-displacement policies. This increased credibility allowed them to advocate from a stronger place, informed by examples and successes from other cities. The network helped to shift local perspectives and build political will for bigger, bolder

solutions such as framing housing as a human right and creating a right to return for residents who have been displaced. It helped create stronger commitments from policymakers in the cities in the forms of resolutions, increased budget allocations, staff time, and stronger policies to address displacement.

The network built on national momentum around advancing tenants' rights. Network participants said they felt solidarity with other cities across the country, breaking through feelings of isolation or being overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge. Several community organizations in the network were also engaged in larger campaigns to expand tenant protections through other national networks. They also contributed to a national report, [Our Homes, Our Future](#), authored by PolicyLink in partnership with the Right To The City Alliance and Center for Popular Democracy to support local campaigns to advance rent control.

Community groups were able to access additional resources. As an outcome of the network, some cities, including Portland and San José, increased resources to support outreach, education, and organizing to residents on anti-displacement strategies. In addition, some of the community organizations in Santa Fe, Buffalo, Philadelphia, and elsewhere were able to build off of their participation in this network to attract additional funding to support their anti-displacement efforts.

While many of these themes relate to the original six objectives of the network, some of them emerged during the network even though they weren't a stated goal.



Concretely, I think that we developed a really constructive relationship. A trust was developed between affordable housing community activists and city staff.

Team City Staff Person

Emerging Lessons

After a year of building a national network committed to advancing anti-displacement strategies, several lessons have emerged about what worked and challenges the network faced.

What worked

Each team brought a different set of skills and strengths to the network. Across all the teams, however, there were some lessons that surfaced about what worked well for them and increased their chance of success:

- **Identify a dedicated team champion.** Teams that had a dedicated person who took on the role of convening the team were better able to stay engaged and focused. Several of these teams are continuing to meet after the formal end of the network to continue to move the policies forward.
- **Integrate with existing work.** In some cities, the timing of the network aligned well with other processes, or they were able to build additional processes around the work of the network. This allowed them to integrate the network with existing work, making it easier to prioritize and immediately translate learnings into action. In San José, for example, the city had just begun a planning process to develop anti-displacement strategies, and they were able to integrate learnings from the network to inform their community engagement processes and strategy development.
- **Tap into the expertise of the network.** This network facilitated building new relationships for participants with others from around the country who are committed to addressing displacement. Based on 24 survey responses, there were over 100 connections formed with people from other teams over the course of the year. Many network participants also reached out to PolicyLink staff for technical assistance; PolicyLink provided 35 TA activities during the year. This rich exchange of information across different cities and with PolicyLink accelerated the adoption of successful strategies from one place to the next.
- **Center impacted communities in decision-making.** Several of the city teams engaged directly with residents who were at risk of or had experienced displacement, to define the challenges and opportunities in their neighborhoods and set the agenda and policy priorities. Some teams, such as the Twin Cities, had already begun to do this through previous planning efforts, and were able to build off of the relationships and work they had already done. Others, such as San José, created new processes and community partnerships to facilitate centering impacted communities.

- **Connect with a broader set of stakeholders.** Many of the participants acknowledged that they needed to involve more than just the people who were on their team, and created additional tables or forums to deepen their engagement. In Portland, for example, the mayor, city staff, and anti-displacement PDX coalition co-convened a half-day convening with 40 participants to develop a strategy around creating an anti-displacement task force. Minneapolis, Saint Paul, San José, and Denver also held community forums or stakeholder meetings to engage stakeholders through this process, while other city teams, such as Boston and Austin, already had ongoing meetings and spaces for the broader community to engage in developing and implementing anti-displacement strategies.

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Being part of the network gave some legitimacy to a city government addressing issues of displacement and gentrification and economic disparity... It was helpful to have the legitimacy of a national network run by nationally recognized leaders and had all these other cities involved.

Team City Staff Person

Challenges

The participants in the All-In Cities Anti-Displacement Policy Network were able to accomplish a tremendous amount in one short year. However, there were some challenges that prevented the teams from being more effective. By honestly assessing these challenges, we hope to illuminate how to strengthen future efforts.

- **Need for dedicated funding for community group participation.** While many found immense value in having grassroots community groups actively participating in the teams, the lack of funding of these groups affected how much time they could spend on this network. While efforts were made to connect these groups to funding from their cities and philanthropy, directly providing funding to these groups would have been more efficient and equitable. When these groups did have resources, they were able to engage much more effectively.
- **Need for sustained commitment from all team members.** Some city teams lacked consistency in who participated and lost focus and engagement as the year went on. Careful consideration of who is on the team and ensuring they have the resources and support to fully participate could have helped these teams maintain cohesion and momentum throughout the year.
- **Uneven alignment on policy priorities.** Several teams were able to use the network to define and develop their policy priorities; other teams, however, experienced conflict and a feeling of misalignment between strategic priorities of community groups and city team members. Those teams that started with impacted communities' strategic anti-displacement priorities had a more solid foundation on which to build from and made more progress on policy development and implementation.

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I think that we gained a shared understanding of our lack of shared understanding about how things get done.

Team Community Representative

- **Varying need for structure to develop concrete policy strategies.** Each city team joined the network with varying levels of capacity and structures already in place to develop their anti-displacement strategies. Some already had established a task force or other process and were able to connect the learnings from this network to these ongoing processes. However, some participants expressed that a more structured process for developing a concrete policy initiative from PolicyLink and the network could have helped.
- **Lack of common understanding about the histories and contexts in which they were operating.** On some of the city teams, there were differences in knowledge of the historical drivers of displacement. In one city, there was still disagreement on the team as to whether displacement was a major challenge for low-income communities and communities of color after a year of participation in the network. These teams could have benefited from spending time at the beginning understanding the history and drivers of displacement.
- **Differences in state laws.** Several of the participants also raised challenges stemming from state pre-emption of policies—such as rent control, just cause eviction, inclusionary zoning, and affordable housing fees—which left them feeling that they had limited options of what they could actually do. Conversely, some participants expressed that the diversity of the cities across various states helped them think of creative strategies they would not have otherwise considered. In Austin, for example, the city is pre-empted from enacting many tenant protections, but the city has developed a way to provide some tenant protections in housing developments receiving public dollars by including them as a part of the contract agreement.

Conclusion

The All-In Cities Anti-Displacement Policy Network ended in May 2019. But the work continues. All of the cities that participated in the network remain committed to advancing anti-displacement strategies, equipped with the new tools, knowledge, and relationships they gained through this network. PolicyLink has stayed involved in supporting many of these cities as their efforts continue.

Communities around the country today are facing the tremendous challenge of how to act in the midst of a public health, economic, and housing crisis that is without precedent in our lifetime. Networks such as the All-In Cities Anti-Displacement Policy Network can be a powerful tool to facilitate connection and learning across places and accelerate actions that will stabilize communities. We hope the lessons from this network will inform future efforts.

Appendix: What We Accomplished

The PolicyLink All-In Cities Anti-Displacement Policy Network helped to catalyze impactful anti-displacement efforts that will help stabilize low-income communities and communities of color. In the two years since the network began, these cities have passed new policies and sharpened their strategies to fight displacement. Many of these efforts were already underway when this network began, and many ideas that came up during the network have not yet come to fruition. Below is a partial list of actions as of September 2020:

- In **Austin**, voters approved a \$250 million bond for affordable housing in November 2018, which included funding for acquisition, rehab, and development and maintenance of affordable rental housing. The city's [Anti-Displacement Task Force](#) released its [final recommendations](#) in 2018, after a year of public process and meetings. The community group BASTA worked with the city to strengthen tenant protection language for projects receiving public dollars.
- In **Boston**, the city is developing an analysis of displacement on fair housing in new, large-scale development. The team also helped to secure a [\\$1.8 billion](#) affordable housing bond and [expand tenant protections](#) at the state level.
- In **Buffalo**, the city transferred eight parcels of land to the Fruit Belt Community Land Trust in early 2019, the culmination of [a multiyear campaign](#). The city was also awarded an \$800,000 grant from the New York State Attorney General's office to expand the land trust.
- In **Denver**, the city created the [Neighborhood Equity and Stabilization Team](#) in 2018, which has expanded and continued the anti-displacement policy network stakeholder meetings. The team is also working on creating equitable development policies for new, large project developments.
- In **Nashville**, the city is developing an equity lens to incorporate into its performance management system to evaluate the equity impacts of budget and policy decisions made by the city.
- In **Philadelphia**, the city [passed](#) an estimated \$71 million in funding for the Housing Trust Fund over the next five years. The team increased its focus on business stabilization, and developed an approach and set of strategies.
- In **Portland**, the city passed robust tenant screening, security deposit, and fair chance housing [policy](#), developed in close partnership with community organizations. The city and the Anti-Displacement Coalition (ADPDX) hosted a two-day [convening](#) in July 2019 facilitated by PolicyLink staff to develop a robust anti-displacement strategy, culminating in the creation of an Anti-Displacement Action Plan with funding for both city and community partners to engage. Coming out of this convening, the city committed funding for a full-time organizer for ADPDX. The organizer was hired by the Portland African American Leadership Forum in 2020. Portland metro area voters approved a \$653 million bond for affordable housing in 2018, and a \$250 million tax on the wealthy to provide support for unhoused residents in 2020.
- In **San José**, the team conducted a series of public meetings in 2019 to engage residents impacted by displacement in identifying and developing their strategies. The team released an [action plan](#) for anti-displacement strategies for the city in early 2020; the city council adopted recommendations in September and took action to establish a community preference policy for affordable housing and explore a community opportunity to purchase program, as well as support equitable Covid-19 recovery measures for tenants and homeowners. In 2020, San José was selected for the Partnership for the Bay's Future Challenge Grant; one of the community leaders who participated in the ADPN team was selected to be a fellow with the city for the next two years to implement tenant protection and affordable housing preservation strategies. The city also passed a source-of-income non-discrimination policy in 2019 to reduce barriers for people with vouchers to access housing.
- In **Santa Fe**, the city has developed a more robust community engagement process for the redevelopment of a 64-acre city-owned site that is adjacent to a low-income neighborhood at high risk of displacement. The ADPN team is also continuing to develop an anti-displacement overlay district concept.
- In the **Twin Cities**, the team developed a [final report](#) on accomplishments and actions moving forward and held forums in each city to share the results of their network participation. Minneapolis passed a [tenant screening protection policy](#), which includes protections for people with criminal records. The city and community partners are also working to develop a tenant opportunity to purchase/right of first refusal policy, a community preference policy, and a right to counsel policy. In Saint Paul, the city council passed [a set of tenant protections](#) in July 2020, including just cause for eviction, tenant screening guidelines and a security deposit limit, and advance notice of sale before an affordable property is placed on the market. The Twin Cities team continues to meet regularly to share updates and to continue to move the work forward.

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Cover Photo: The members of the All-In Cities Anti-Displacement Policy Network at the PolicyLink National Equity Summit in Chicago in 2018. (*Alexis Stephens*)

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