PennPraxis

This paper analyzes the governance structures and established partnerships (with public, not-for-profit, and private partners) that underpin successful reinvestment initiatives in other cities. The paper addresses the best practices behind these administrative structures, including the structure of appropriate public-private partnership models, the identification of appropriate partners, the roles and responsibilities of each partner and the public agencies, and the role that financing plays in the structure of these partnerships, in the short- and long-term.

The interviews and case studies shed light on both systemic and site-based examples of strong governance and partnerships, making it clear that financing is usually the major driver for partnerships. The need to underwrite investments in capital improvements, operations/staff, and programming often encourages creative models for partnerships, which in turn propels the governance and management structures for these civic assets. In other words, funding is often the variable and key factor in the governance and partnerships that spur reinvestment initiatives: how much money is necessary? Who is contributing? How much oversight do they receive in return? Is their investment a one-time contribution, or a sustained funding source?

With the rise of websites like GoFundMe, Ioby, FundYourPark, Kickstarter, etc., a wave of park and library projects have been able to raise money from the private sector on a grassroots basis, upending some of the conventions of public-private partnerships. On each of these platforms, the governance/partnerships for each campaign varies, as spearheaded by 1) public agencies; 2) friends groups or conservancies, in partnership with public agencies; 3) friends groups or conservancies (with no public agency participating); and 4) various actors, to match grant funds issued by public agencies. These platforms, and their resulting fundraising successes or failures, have drawn much attention and study in recent years. They are, however, largely untested on a long-term or systemic scale; rather, they seem to generate the most support for projects that are local, charismatic (in other words, not ongoing operating support), and sustained by communities with enough disposable income to contribute.

No clear-cut matrix of model funding or governance structures emerged from the research and interviews—e.g. if you are a _park_, you should enlist _these partners_ and adopt _this governance structure_. Instead, the role of the public agency may vary, aligning with one of the following models or creating a hybrid of more than one governance structure:

> **Publicly-funded initiatives** that are fully funded by a public agency (or agencies) or partially funded by the agency and offset by private donations solicited directly by the agency. Milwaukee's MKE Plays, spearheaded by a city alderman and supported in part by allocated funding in the city budget, is one example of this model. MKE Plays focuses specifically on the city's playgrounds (a scope that is also true of San Francisco's Let's Play SF! Initiative). This narrowed scope may be designed to respond to the limits of this particular governance model, taking advantage of the smaller scale of playgrounds (as opposed to parks or libraries), easier marketability (in terms of public relations), more manageable design, more immediate health/safety concerns (e.g. chemically-treated wood, in the case of San Francisco), or all of the above.
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> ***Systemic* conservancies/affiliated foundations** that fundraise to fill budget gaps for *numerous* parks and/or libraries that are otherwise managed and operated by public agencies. Seattle's Libraries for All campaign, conducted between 1998 and 2008 (and continued in subsequent phases to the present), represents this distributive model.

***Site-specific* "friends groups"** that fundraise to fill budget gaps for *individual* parks and/or libraries that are otherwise managed and operated by public agencies. The City of Raleigh, North Carolina has adopted this model as it redesigns Dorothea Dix Park with the support of the Dorothea Dix Park Conservancy. It should be noted that this model tends to support the wealthiest, most stable parks in city centers, perpetuating the same issues of inequity in most discussions of parks investment. To address that inequity, some cities such as New York and Chicago are exploring funding arrangements that would redirect some portion of the conservancies' fundraising to smaller parks outside the city center.

**Private/corporate funding in exchange for branding**, for parks/sites that are otherwise managed and operated by public agencies. In Portland, Oregon, for example, Nike is sponsoring the city's bike-share program (BIKETOWN) for 5 years and $10 million in funding, in exchange for prominent branding opportunities in the program name (a Nike "swoosh" accompanies the name BIKETOWN) and at the bike-share stations.

**Business Improvement Districts/Special Services Districts** that lease public space from the city in exchange for managing operations. Dilworth Park in Philadelphia is managed by the Center City District and is one example of this governance model.

**Parallel public-sector district**, which may include the ability to levy taxes to support park or library maintenance and operations. The Seattle Park District, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, and Chicago Park District—among others—are all empowered with special taxing authority and/or dedicated tax streams to acquire and manage public parkland in their respective cities.

**Nonprofits that serve as facilitators**, convening public and private stakeholders to redesign and reinvest in public space. In San Francisco, for example, a community-based partnership between the Trust for Public Land, Citizen Film, and local green enterprise Green Streets has transformed the Buchanan Street Mall—driven by the local stakeholders and facilitators long before the city got involved.

**Nonprofits that raise funds for programming** to offset public money for capital improvements. For example, at Chicago's Garfield Park Conservatory, the city's Conservatory staff focus their time and funding on capital investments for the physical facility and its horticultural collection, while the nonprofit Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance acts as the fundraising and programming partner for the site.

**Funding from foundations and public agencies to umbrella groups**, which partner with public agencies and individual friends groups. In San Francisco, the San Francisco Parks Alliance acts as such an umbrella group, empowering local stakeholders by funding community-driven park projects. In this way, SFPA also acts as a facilitator between local communities and city agencies.

**Community land trusts** to manage public parkland. Examples of this ownership model can be found in Baltimore (the Charm City Land Trust and the North East Housing Initiative), the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, DC (Anacostia Community Land Trust), and elsewhere.

Despite this spectrum of governance models and potential partners, the research and interviews did identify common themes, markers of success, and lessons learned across the various case studies profiled for this paper. These indicators and best practices apply not only to the initial design and launch of the initiative, but also to the ongoing implementation and sustenance of the project and partnerships.

As noted above, the common thread for most governance and partnership models is the question of funding. Thus, while many of the partnerships profiled in interviews have noble collaborative goals as well, they almost always originate from the determination of financing. As a result, the structure of the projects' governance and partnerships directly relates to the reinvestment financing. For example, if voter-approved referenda, levies, taxes, or bonds are involved, then governance structures often include citizen representatives or a citizen oversight board. This was true in Seattle, where a Citizen Implementation Review Panel was created to provide public oversight of voter-approved bond funds. If corporate sponsorship is involved, then public agencies must be very deliberate in the allowances for corporate branding in public space. If public agencies collaborate with affiliated private foundations, then both must retain strong leaders to sustain a productive partnership. These structural questions of management and funding underpin all considerations of governance and partnerships, and should be addressed in an intentional and transparent way from the beginning of the project.

Moreover, the strongest case studies of governance and partnership models demonstrate the importance of qualified and committed leaders at the helm of each partner organization or agency. This may be an obvious observation, but it cannot be taken for granted or presumed. Each of the case study initiatives reflect strong leadership not only on behalf of the public agency, but also at the helm of oversight boards, local partner organizations, affiliated foundations, etc.—Seattle's Libraries for All campaign is one example. In some case studies (like the Garfield Park partnership), a reinvestment initiative can start out with strong leadership on all fronts, but a change in leadership mid-project or after the completion of a project can significantly alter the impact, scope, and lasting effect of the reinvestment. This does not mean that case studies such as Garfield Park do not offer ongoing models for governance and partnerships, but it does stress the importance of creating a *succession* of strong leaders, not simply one charismatic person.

Just as the leaders at the top are important for the success of these reinvestments, the support and engagement at the grassroots level is also vital. The research establishes that the strongest partnerships do not create grassroots support from scratch. Rather, the lead public agency (or other organization) built (genuine) relationships and joined forces with activists and organizations with longstanding community roots. This is true of MKE Plays, the San Francisco Parks Alliance, the Buchanan Street Mall project, and other case studies—they do not reinvent community organizing, and they do not duplicate existing efforts. Instead, they work with existing partners (sometimes waiting until a strong local partner emerges) and then piggyback on that local partners' own engagement at the grassroots level in a way that benefits both groups. (Piggybacking does not mean "capitalizing on.") For the lead agency/organization, they benefit from the partnership by gleaning genuine community input; for the local activist/organization, they get more traction for their organizing, in the form of a tangible improvement. This mutual benefit, rather than any power imbalance, is what sustains the successful partnerships profiled here.

In order to sustain public trust for the long-term success of reinvestment initiatives, it is important for all project partners to be transparent in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the initiative. This includes regular reporting and (ideally) objective measurement, both of which are key tools in sustaining public support, which may translate to increased use of the site, ongoing funding for the project, or both. In the case of Milwaukee's MKE Plays program, the organizers built a measurement component into the pilot playgrounds from the very beginning of the process, using this quantitative assessment to guide site selection, measure the number of users before and after the improvements, and evaluate the quality of the playground design. The results have shaped the design and implementation of subsequent playground projects. Similarly, Seattle's Libraries for All campaign issued regular reports to the public, fielding questions and updating residents on the progress of the project. In both of these cases, and others where reporting and measurement were addressed, such transparency was key to building partnerships and sustaining public trust—a particularly vital aspect of reinvestment projects that require occasional or regular funding approvals via city councils and/or voter-approved referenda.