

THE AMERICAN CITY AGENDA

Living Cities is a philanthropic collaboration of 15 of the largest foundations and financial institutions in the world.

This partnership base has given Living Cities the leverage to bring about the kind of meaningful change for urban America that no single organization could have achieved on its own.

Living Cities began its work in 1991.

Since then, we have leveraged \$550 million of our own funds into \$16 billion in tangible community assets in 23 cities. These consistent and patient investments have created 140,000 new housing units, enough homes to house the entire city of St. Paul, Minnesota, and have helped create a sophisticated community development sector with national reach.

But the challenges of the 21st Century demand much more. They require a fundamental re-thinking of the policies and investments needed to harness the full economic potential of cities and the people who live in them. In response to this challenge, Living Cities is launching the American City Agenda—a new, integrative policy framework that contests the outmoded assumptions that have driven urban strategies for the last 40 years. Living Cities believes we must focus on people, place and opportunity simultaneously. We must focus on neighborhood economies within larger regional and global economic contexts, and we must reengineer our education and workforce systems to meet the needs of tomorrow’s employers.

To accomplish this, we need to align local, state and federal policies and the roles of the public, private and philanthropic sectors so that funding and regulations support rather than inhibit this vitally needed transformation.

[A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

We are in a special moment in American history as unique forces are converging to give us the opportunity to not just re-think cities, but to reengineer them. These powerful forces of change include:

THE WILL OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE Today, more than ever, Americans believe that cities are critical to our economic future and global competitiveness. In a May 2008 poll of Democratic and Republican political donors conducted by Living Cities and CEOs for Cities, 85 percent said that the country simply cannot be competitive in today's economy without dynamic cities. And 90 percent said that the economic futures of cities and the country as a whole are entwined.¹ This result is not surprising because most Americans live and/or work in cities. Though the nation's 100 largest metro areas take up only 12 percent of the nation's land area, they contain 65 percent of the nation's population and 68 percent of its jobs, and they generate 75 percent of the nation's gross domestic product.²

A NEW BRAND OF LEADER We are seeing the emergence of new leaders who are more pragmatic, unencumbered by past ideological divisions, and not tied to failed systems of the past. These leaders, whether from the public or the nonprofit sector, are more open to risk taking and crosscutting approaches. Indeed, they are tackling large-scale, critical issues, such as public education in New York and Washington, D.C., and universal health care in Massachusetts and California.

BROAD ADOPTION OF TECHNOLOGY Mass adoption of new technology gives us the chance to transform government and overcome historic barriers to the economic mainstream. Today, 83 percent of Americans have a cell phone and use it for tasks that only recently required a computer. For teenagers in particular, the Internet and cell phones fuel the rhythm of daily life. The number of teenagers using the Internet has grown 24 percent in the past four years, and 87 percent of those between the ages of 12 and 17 go online.³ With technology so accessible, creating large-scale technology-based solutions is within reach, making it possible to streamline and integrate virtually all city products and services.

CAPACITY FOR LOCAL INNOVATION The federal government's retrenchment in the 1980s helped stimulate innovation by states and cities. From welfare reform to school reform, nearly every major federal domestic policy change since the 1980s was road-tested at the state and local level. Cities and states are now primed to lead a new urban agenda.

URGENT ISSUES The nation is facing a series of urgent issues, such as the sub-prime crisis, universal health care access and climate change, and there is a growing sense that cities must address these issues directly because the federal government has failed to do so.

Taken together, these forces of change create both the opportunity and the urgency for action.

¹ Lake Research Partners, *Banners from a Nationwide Survey of 400 Political donors, CEOs for Cities and Living Cities* (May 2008).

² Alan Berube, *MetroNation: How U.S. Metropolitan Areas Fuel American Prosperity*, The Brookings Institution (November 2007).

³ Amanda Lenhart et al., *Teens and Technology: Youth are Leading the Transition to a Fully Wired and Mobile Nation*, Pew Internet and American Life Project (July 2005).

**THE
AMERICAN
CITY AGENDA**





**Individual Opportunity
and Wealth**

**Business Expansion
and Investment**

Strong Neighborhoods

**Sustainability and
Wellness**

Critical Infrastructure



Living Cities believes that local, state and federal policies and the actions of the public, private and philanthropic sectors must be aligned to promote:

INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITY AND WEALTH Ensuring that people have access to education and training at all levels; are able to save and build wealth; and have access to the work supports, such as childcare and education, they need to stay on the job and advance in their careers.

BUSINESS EXPANSION AND INVESTMENT Ensuring support for both existing and emerging businesses, and filling the capital gaps that keep small businesses from expanding.

STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing for all residents and the development of high-performing community institutions such as schools and healthcare centers.

SUSTAINABILITY AND WELLNESS Ensuring that transit is properly aligned with economic and housing needs; that the basic health needs of all residents are met; that fresh food is broadly available; and that climate change is fundamentally addressed.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE Maintaining and improving core infrastructure of transit, bridges and sewer systems and ensuring access to the Internet for all residents.

Whether it's promoting linkages between colleges and local businesses, developing new healthcare options for all residents, or undertaking "green job" development initiatives, successful strategies in these five areas exist in cities throughout the country.

But no one city is addressing all of these priorities in a comprehensive manner that improves the quality of place, raises the quality of life and expands opportunity.



MOVING THE AMERICAN CITY AGENDA

Achieving the American City Agenda will require new and integrative planning, investing and governing strategies. Living Cities will move this agenda forward by:

HELPING cities and states adopt proven programs, policies and statutes across the five key areas;

WORKING with cities and states to identify, modify and remove programs, policies and statutes that inhibit this integrative approach;

FOCUSING on key federal policies that accelerate the large-scale implementation of proven strategies, remove unnecessary barriers to innovation and provide incentives that give cities more tools to succeed;

USING the power of flexible philanthropic grants and loans to foster robust private-sector investment; and

PROMOTING best practices through a series of convenings, conferences and reports.

We will establish unprecedented partnerships in selected states where we will work directly with the governor and the mayor of a major city to intentionally align local and state policies related to each of the five American City Agenda priority areas. We will also leverage the support and investments of local philanthropy and the business community to move these efforts forward. Once the model is established in one city, we will work to expand it statewide.

Together, we will redirect and align public and private resources to secure America's cities as engines of national and individual prosperity.

Together, we will build communities and transform lives.

This is the American City Agenda.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
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THE AMERICAN CITY AGENDA

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- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- J.P. Morgan Chase & Company
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- The Cleveland Foundation

