



OPENBUFFALO

A proposal submitted to
Open Society Foundations

December 2013

And I'm wondering what it will take for my city to rise;
First we admit our mistakes, then we open our eyes.

from *Subdivision*, by Buffalo native
punk-folk pioneer, Ani DiFranco

It's the City of Good neighbors, where people take care of each other
rather than looking out for No. 1, where it's about building a community for everyone.

from swearing in remarks, by Buffalo native
U.S. Secretary of Labor, Thomas E. Perez

TARGETED REGION: Buffalo as a City and a Metropolitan Region

The geographic focus for Open Buffalo (OB) is the city of Buffalo, set in the context of the Buffalo Niagara metropolitan region. City of Buffalo residents face the most severe Open Society challenges, bearing the burdens of concentrated poverty, racial and economic segregation, disenfranchisement, and mass incarceration. Blacks, Hispanics and refugees live overwhelmingly in the city, where the core organizations of OB are all headquartered. Yet the regional framework is important, too. Increasingly, people with low incomes and minorities are living in inner ring suburbs, and 27 out of 28 municipalities in Erie County have more vacant addresses than they did five years ago.¹ Many OB solutions involve multiple layers of government; for example, the county runs most correctional programs, and regional authorities administer most economic development functions. Opening Buffalo requires a stereoscopic vision that takes in the region and state while focusing intently on the urban core.

THE SITE: A City at a Crossroads

In recent decades, like other Rust Belt cities, Buffalo has been hit hard by suburbanization, manufacturing decline, and competition from the south and southwest. The city's population has fallen from 580,000 to 260,000.² More unusually, the metro region's population has fallen from 1.35 million to 1.1 million.³ The shift from unionized manufacturing jobs to low-wage service sector jobs has been devastating, with average wages falling from 8% above the national average in 1970 to 16% below average in 2011.⁴ Exacerbating these problems are Buffalo's intense racial, economic, and geographic inequalities. While the metro poverty rate is below average, the urban poverty rate is one of the nation's highest, at 29.6%.⁵ Eighty percent of blacks live in high-poverty neighborhoods, compared to only ten percent of whites.⁶ Large sections of the city suffer from a vicious spiral of declining property values and disinvestment.



Buffalo has proved resilient in many ways, however. Having never experienced a housing bubble or bust, the region was spared the worst of the Great Recession. In contrast to some Rust Belt peers, Buffalo saw its GDP grow in recent years, largely due to medical and education sectors.⁷ For all its racial inequality, Buffalo has elected and re-elected a black mayor – in a city where whites still outnumber blacks. The arts sector is unusually large, diverse, collaborative, and engaged in social justice. Most strikingly, Buffalo has become a top destination for refugee resettlement, and the city’s west side is coming alive with Burmese temples, Rwandan gift shops, and Sudanese vocal choirs.

City government features a strong mayor system with nine council members who are relatively representative of the population, with three black members and one Hispanic member. All are open to equity concerns, but their days are consumed by constituent service with little time to craft innovative policy. Both city and county government suffer from weak tax bases and tend to provide few programs beyond basic services.⁸ Many public funds – especially in economic development – flow through a “shadow government” of independent authorities.

Local foundations are engaged and innovative but have small endowments for a city Buffalo’s size. The business sector has changed recently in two important ways. First, locally-owned businesses have organized and claimed a larger role in public policy and discourse.⁹ Second, leaders in the corporate sector have shown an increased interest in collaboration with public, non-profit and advocacy groups. The civic culture is shifting as a new generation of leaders takes the stage. One turning point occurred when Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ), VOICE-Buffalo, Partnership for the Public Good (PPG), and People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH) led a campaign to demand changes in plans for the city’s waterfront, blocking a massively subsidized big box retail store and winning a community benefit agreement for living wages, first source hiring, local businesses and green design. The four groups also have collaborated in successful campaigns around



daycare, utility reform, minimum wage, and tax equity, learning to complement each other's strengths while engaging a multitude of partners among emerging and established groups.¹⁰

Important dynamics in the near future include Governor Cuomo's creation of the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) and his promise of a "Buffalo Billion" over the next ten years, offering a window of opportunity for high road economic development. The fact that the new Labor Secretary, Buffalo native Thomas Perez, has made modernizing the workforce development system his top priority – and that it is also a lynchpin of the REDC plan – creates potential to shape new policies and create "on-ramps" for disadvantaged residents into training pipelines.¹¹ A continued influx of refugees will re-shape the workforce, while the region's intense focus on the crisis of public education will fuel a demand for innovative policies. Buffalo stands at a crossroads. Will it further splinter into poor and rich, black and white, immigrant and native; or will it rise to its best self-image as the "City of Good Neighbors?"¹²

VISION STATEMENT: Open Buffalo

Open Buffalo will be an equal, just and free city driven by a united and empowered community – open to full democratic participation by all its residents; open to innovative ideas and policies; open to new leaders from disadvantaged communities; and open to meaningful economic opportunity and sustainable wealth creation for all.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS: Diverse and Innovative

Hundreds of individuals and organizations are involved in Open Buffalo. A full listing can be found in the Appendix, but following is a brief summary of their participation.

Planning. The Planning Council that governed OB planning included eleven members. CEJ, PPG, PUSH, and VOICE-Buffalo each contributed one staff person and one community representative, and three other members were chosen for expertise in base building, policy advocacy and communications. The planning staff consisted of a project director, project manager and three



teams: research, planning and communications. Staff gathered community input via door knocking, a “Food for Thought” campaign at community events, focus groups, a bus tour, and one-on-one interviews. Three Working Groups developed the programmatic goals, and an Advisory Committee from government, philanthropy, business, academia, and non-profit sectors offered advice and feedback throughout. Local artists who infused the planning with creativity included visual artists, spoken word performers, rock musicians, rappers, and break dancers. National experts who visited Buffalo to offer counsel and galvanize OB participation included Heather McGhee (Dēmos), Seth Borgos and Tammy Greaton (Center for Community Change), Aaron Smith and Jasmine Hicks (Young Invincibles), and Marshall Ganz (Harvard University).

Implementation. OB implementation will be guided by the OB board and implemented by a staff of five and a set of contracts with CEJ, PPG, PUSH, VOICE-Buffalo, and other organizations, of which nine have been chosen thus far. OB identified these nine based on careful capacity analysis, once programmatic goals and civic capacity strategies had been developed. They are Buffalo Peacemakers, Public Policy and Education Fund/Citizen Action of New York, Clean Air Coalition of Western New York, Community Health Worker Network of Buffalo, Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition, Investigative Post, Prisoners are People Too, Public Accountability Initiative, and Western New York Worker Center. Together they add tremendous diversity, depth and range to OB. In addition, numerous other groups and individuals have committed to partner with OB; more information about them can be found in the following sections and the Appendix.

SUBSTANTIVE GOALS AND STRATEGIES: A Coordinated Plan for Equity

Buffalo is an average metropolitan area by most measures, but the aggregate figures mask savage disparities: whites and suburbanites fare better than their national counterparts, while people of color and urban residents fare much worse – particularly in education, criminal justice, economic



development, and employment.¹³ OB has crafted a plan to advance equity through three programmatic initiatives and four capacity building strategies, all closely coordinated and synergistic.

Restorative Justice. Buffalo suffers from a school to prison pipeline, exacerbated by the city's concentrated and racialized poverty. Approximately 78% of the city's students receive free or reduced price lunch, and the four year graduation rate is 53%.¹⁴ In 2012-2013, there were 10,048 short term suspensions – in a district with only 33,743 students.¹⁵ Blacks, who make up 53% of the students, incurred 74% of the suspensions. Similarly, in the county's criminal justice system, blacks account for 14% of the population but 65% of prison sentences, and Hispanics represent 5% of the population but 9% of prison sentences.¹⁶

OB partners are active in many aspects of education and criminal justice, but currently the most promising opportunity is restorative justice – the practice in which all stakeholders affected by an injustice discuss its effects and decide what should be done to repair the harm. Restorative justice offers more satisfying resolutions for victims while preventing offenders from getting criminal records and keeping low-level offenses from clogging the courts. Schools using restorative justice in cities such as Baltimore, Denver, and Oakland have seen improvements in attendance, graduation rates and school climates.¹⁷ Restorative justice can also be used to offer inmates and ex-offenders a way to reintegrate into their communities.

Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition (ECRJC) has begun working with the Buffalo school district and local courts on restorative justice. Successful community organizing by Public Policy and Education Fund (PPEF) and allies such as the national civil rights group Advancement Project recently caused the school district to overhaul its code of conduct and disciplinary procedures and embrace the concept of restorative justice. This is an important victory but, as the experience of the Chicago public schools demonstrates, implementation of restorative justice can pose an even greater challenge.¹⁸ OB staff and contracted organizers, led by PPEF, will help parents and students



understand and request restorative justice, with an initial focus on five “early adopter” schools, while the OB Innovation Lab aids in the development of research-backed best practices and ECJRC offers resources and expertise.¹⁹ Key benchmarks will include number of schools participating, number of incidents for which restorative justice is used, reductions in out-of-school suspensions and racial disparities, and increases in attendance.

ECJRC has begun productive discussions with Buffalo City Court and Erie County Family Court, both of which are willing to refer certain low level offenses and probation violations. With OB’s support, ECRJC plans to train 50 facilitators and handle at least 25 cases in year one. By year two, ECRJC will take at least 50 cases per year. Prisoners are People Too will lead advocacy efforts to bring restorative justice to the Erie County Holding Center, both to resolve inmate disputes and to help inmates repair damage done through their offenses and reintegrate into the communities they will be re-joining. In year one, Prisoners are People Too will train at least 25 of its constituents, including ex-offenders and families of those incarcerated, in restorative justice.

As these pilot projects prove their worth, they will attract support and funding from state and local governments and begin to scale up. Equally important, they will mobilize the public for broader reforms in education and criminal justice – changing the narrative of justice from punishment and exclusion to repair and re-inclusion, and bringing new participants into local and state campaigns by Drug Policy Alliance and others to create “front-end” programs such as law enforcement assisted diversion (LEAD), to reform drug and sentencing laws, to improve correctional facilities, and to reverse the “New Jim Crow.”

Worker Equity. An astonishing number of Buffalo workers live in poverty, partly due to the replacement of manufacturing jobs with service work.²⁰ The median household income in the city is only \$30,043, with minority workers heavily clustered in low-wage and part-time jobs. As of 2006-2010, part-time employment among the region’s whites was 30% (national average, 29%), but



among blacks it was 37% (national average, 30%), and among Hispanics 39% (national average, 31%).²¹ Permanent jobs are being replaced by contingent positions offering lower wages, less job security, and more hazardous conditions.²² The temporary job market relies on minorities, youth, ex-offenders, and refugees excluded from better jobs by bias, misunderstanding, and language barriers.²³ Unfortunately, the plight of these marginalized workers remains mostly absent from mainstream media and culture.

Buffalo has assets to build on in addressing worker equity. Workforce development is a key focus of the REDC's Buffalo Billion. Mayor Brown has made expansion of the city's Summer Youth Employment program one of his top priorities. Many groups, including the Center for Employment Opportunities and Back to Basics, employ and aid ex-offenders, and Buffalo recently passed "ban the box" legislation to combat job discrimination based on criminal records. Cornell's Worker Institute researches worker equity and provides hands-on training to ex-offenders and marginalized workers. Other specialists in work equity include staff at PPG and scholars such as Erin Hatton, author of *The Temp Economy* and a member of the city's Living Wage Commission (which has won numerous worker equity victories in recent years and is co-chaired by PPG's Megan Connelly).

The Western New York Worker Center is a key ally for worker equity. Spearheaded by the WNY Council on Occupational Safety and Health, the Worker Center has CEJ, PUSH, and VOICE-Buffalo on its steering committee alongside the WNY Area Labor Federation, Journey's End Refugee Services, and other groups. Although still in its infancy, the Worker Center has helped form an Upstate Worker Center Network with groups in Rochester, Albany, Syracuse, and Ithaca, and has begun base-building with over 300 door-to-door interviews.²⁴

OB will forge a broad coalition to empower workers – particularly minorities, youth, ex-offenders, and refugees – to learn their rights, tell their stories, access quality job training and change policy. OB will engage these populations through door-knocking, the Mobile Democracy Center and



Emerging Leaders programs (see below). Groups like Peacekeepers and Prisoners are People Too will reach urban youth and ex-offenders while groups like Journey’s End and Catholic Charities connect with refugees. In year one, OB will contact over 1,000 workers and form four or more worker committees, with a focus on the six largest temporary agencies in Buffalo. The Worker Center will develop a temp worker rights curriculum and translate it into languages such as Spanish, Burmese and Bhutanese, and Ujima Theater will create a production in which workers perform their stories.²⁵

Workers will set goals for changes to policy and practices, which may take the form of temporary agency agreements to observe high road employment practices,²⁶ and/or legislation such as the Massachusetts Temporary Workers’ Right to Know Law,²⁷ as well as improvements to workforce development policy – moving contingent workers into “on ramps” to well-paying careers in growing fields such as health care and education, creating a key synergy with the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus campaign described below. While starting with a focus on temporary work, this campaign will be a part of broader local and national efforts to “raise the floor” and re-define the future of work, and OB will explore opportunities to collaborate with local and national partners such as Jobs With Justice on sectoral living wage campaigns, paid sick leave, and other reforms.

High Road Economic Development. For the past five years, OB partners have worked to bring high road economic development to Buffalo, winning victories such as a community benefit agreement (CBA) for the waterfront and state and local reforms regarding industrial development agency subsidies.²⁸ But Buffalo has lacked the capacity for a coordinated advocacy effort around the three most important development programs in the region: the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC), and the New York Power Authority (NYPA), which operates the state’s largest economic development programs through its low cost power allocations. The public is making huge investments (NYPA once awarded a subsidy



worth \$5.6 billion), and OB's involvement is critical to ensure that this capital flows to public goods.²⁹ The time is right because the leadership of these programs has never been more receptive to new ideas and approaches.

The first priority is to forge a CBA with BNMC, a consortium of health care, life sciences, medical education, and community interests. The flagship for Buffalo's burgeoning "eds and meds" sector, BNMC has grown from 7,000 workers in 2003 to more than 12,000 in 2012, with 17,000 expected by 2017. BNMC is an anchor institution that sits adjacent to Buffalo's impoverished and segregated east side, and it has recently embraced a broader mission that includes community economic development. Local leaders are intrigued by national examples such as Cleveland's Evergreen Cooperatives; they understand that the BNMC cannot succeed as an island in a sea of blight. The University at Buffalo (UB) is a major partner at the BNMC and OB's many partnerships with UB offer fertile ground for innovative solutions.³⁰ OB has completed a careful analysis of potential community benefits at the BNMC, which can be found in the Appendix. The work of OB partners in winning a waterfront CBA, which included a coalition of over 60 groups and a coordinated organizing, litigation, research, and communications strategy, offers a template and a springboard.

The CBA with the BNMC will include quality jobs for local residents; education and training for youth and disadvantaged workers; increased opportunities for local businesses (especially minority, refugee, and worker-owned businesses); sustainable transportation policies that adequately serve low-wage workers; and assistance to nearby residents in improving their neighborhoods. In order to reach a CBA, OB will work first to ensure fuller community participation in decision-making at BNMC and its member institutions. Key allies include labor unions, local and minority business groups, neighborhood groups, education providers, and environmental groups.³¹ First year



objectives include getting input from 1,000 residents, forming a coalition of 50 groups, setting goals for a CBA, and beginning constructive meetings with BNMC leaders.

The BNMC project will be a key step in a broader campaign to make sure that no economic development projects take place without mechanisms to ensure community benefits, accountability, and transparency. By year three, OB will have persuaded the REDC to adopt high road criteria regarding job quality, local/minority hires, local business, and sustainability in its Buffalo Billion spending; and NYPA will have incorporated these criteria into low cost power allocation. Action research from the Innovation Lab and contributions from Investigative Post and Public Accountability Initiative, as well as state and national resources such as ALIGN, Good Jobs First, and the National Employment Law Project will inform this campaign at every step, ensuring the use of the most comprehensive data and best practices.

Interplay of Substantive Goals. Vital to economic development projects such as BNMC is a skilled work force that will elude us if we push youth down the school to prison pipeline and trap refugees in dead-end, contingent labor. Economic development is counterproductive if it creates poverty level jobs; it means paying twice: once for the business subsidy, and once for the public assistance needed to support the impoverished worker. Unless work is respected and rewarded, youth will lose motivation to complete school and find jobs. Unless Buffalo becomes more equal and just, it will splinter into pieces that repel rather than attract new residents and employers.

CIVIC CAPACITIES: Democracy, Leadership, Innovation, and Art

Until now, Buffalo has lacked a broad-based, coordinated equity movement informed by action research, infused with creativity, and accessible to all citizens. **Systemic** barriers include public bodies that produce limited innovations; insufficient leveraging of academic resources; and a lack of portals for democratic participation, especially for disenfranchised groups. In the **field**, the capacities most needed are leadership development for diverse constituents, skill building for



organizations, and a deeper bench of trained advocates. **Tactical** deficits include an absence of experience in drafting policies; a lack of coordinated messaging; and the “siloeing” of social justice work. To address these challenges, OB will employ four strategies.

Mobile Democracy Center (MDC) is an innovative way to increase individual engagement and action while overcoming Buffalo’s geographic and cultural divisions. MDC will be staffed by OB organizers and community partners, volunteers, artists, Emerging Leaders, and translators. MDC will visit events, block clubs, youth activities – wherever people gather – to provide information on OB campaigns, voter registration, and advocacy tools such as PPG’s Citizen Tool-Kit.³² This mobile work will be supplemented by permanent OB displays at libraries, community centers, the Worker Center and other locations. MDC will actively engage at least 1,000 residents annually with a focus on minorities, youth, ex-offenders, and refugees, creating a data base for use in OB issues, projects, and Emerging Leaders.

Emerging Leaders. Of over 1,000 residents identified through the MDC and other channels, OB will recruit 100 to participate in a year-long Emerging Leaders program. The 100 leaders will be trained to mobilize their communities around restorative justice, worker equity, and high road economic development and to build the leadership corps of the participating organizations and the city as a whole. Building on best practices from Buffalo and the nation, OB will develop a curriculum for skills such as meeting facilitation, one-on-one meetings, member recruitment, goal setting, campaign strategy and planning, media relations, power analysis, campaign mobilization, social movement history, popular economics, participatory budgeting, and arts integration.³³ Collaboration with leadership programs for corporate and non-profit sectors, such as Leadership Buffalo and Oishei Leaders, will build powerful networks of mutual support and professional development.



Of the 100 leaders, OB will choose Democracy Fellows to further develop their capacity to take other leadership roles such as serving on boards and commissions or running for office, with skills such as campaign planning and management, fundraising, issue research and analysis, public speaking, and speechwriting. OB will match Fellows with mentors from business, government, and non-profit sectors, including past Fellows.

In addition to local experts, OB will bring in trainers from leading groups such as Center for Community Change and Wellstone. Training will draw on the public narrative model pioneered by Marshall Ganz and include the use of arts and effective media work.³⁴ Leaders will appear on PPG's radio show, the Public Good, and Artvoice, an independent weekly with more than 140,000 readers each week, will host a blog by an emerging leader on Open Buffalo topics.³⁵

Leadership development will be integrated with the OB campaigns; each training will feature issue updates and opportunities for taking on campaign roles. Trainings will include meals, child care and small stipends, and Democracy Fellows will also be paid for organizing and advocacy activities such as canvassing. Participating organizations will agree to numerical goals and accountability measures. As OB evolves, MDC and Emerging Leaders will be key sources for the identification and development of OB projects and campaigns. They will also promote racial and civic unity, as residents from different parts of the city share stories and build relationships.³⁶

Innovation Lab. The Innovation Lab will build Buffalo's capacity to generate new ideas, do original action research, draw more effectively on existing local and national research, and share that research more broadly. The Lab will support OB projects with power analysis, best practices research, investigative reporting, and data collection and analysis. It will aid Buffalo legislators to draft new policies, laws, and regulations on OB issues and provide the public with plain language arguments for those policies.



OB has strong relationships with university and non-profit researchers at Cornell University, University at Buffalo, Buffalo State, and other institutions, which it will leverage with tools such as an interactive directory of all scholars who study Buffalo-specific issues and a central library of their research.³⁷ The OB Policy Fellows program will encourage, facilitate, disseminate, and publicize work by local and national scholars on OB issues. The Resident Fellows project will attract national scholars and public artists to work directly with Buffalo scholars, artists and activists. The Lab will provide training for scholars and community groups on community-based participatory research. It will collect topics related to OB issues and market them to local faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates for their research projects, and then centrally house and disseminate the resulting work. As a hub for classes, internships, and fellowships for law students, social work students, and Cornell University High Road Fellows, the Lab will involve hundreds of students in civic life.

The Innovation Lab will offer key data and make it easily accessible to community groups and individuals, including (i) data crucial to the issue campaigns and projects of OB; (ii) measures and indicators of progress or decline on equity, justice, and democracy; (iii) data generated by crowdsourcing and other participatory methods. The Lab will help partners and residents gain access to government data through freedom of information requests and other means. Lab research will coordinate closely with the work of the organizers to ensure maximum synergy. Public Accountability Initiative will add its unique tools for power analysis (see, for example, its website, littlesis.org), while Investigative Post does investigative reporting on key OB issues such as accountable economic development.

Open Buffalo Arts Network will mobilize arts groups to aid in Mobile Democracy, Emerging Leaders, and OB campaigns and, more broadly, to change the stories that Buffalo tells about equality, justice, and democracy. Drawing on the arts sector's strength as the most racially inclusive and united part of the community, the Arts Network will identify opportunities for performances,



exhibits, and projects that can be tied to OB issues. Examples include the Ujima Theatre production on worker equity mentioned above, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra's plan to work with OB on its West Side Connection program with public schools, and the Burchfield Penney Art Center's collaboration with OB to mount an exhibit that tells the stories of refugees and other community members throughout the city in a way that complements OB's worker equity campaign and its training of refugee Emerging Leaders. Large, medium, and small arts organizations have committed to working with OB on these efforts, and the John R. Oishei Foundation has expressed interest in funding and facilitating.

INSTITUTIONAL HOME AND GOVERNANCE: A Backbone for Buffalo

OB's governance reflects its origin as a collaboration of four organizations and its swift evolution into a much broader, community-wide initiative. Even in the planning phase, OB assumed its own identity, with its own governance, events, and communications, all centered on a radically open process that involved hundreds of Buffalo residents. Initially, OB will be steered by a nine person advisory board, including leaders from CEJ (Jennifer Diagostino), PPG (Sam Magavern), PUSH (Aaron Bartley), and VOICE-Buffalo (Duane Diggs), along with five other members: Jonathan Rivera (banker, Hispanic community leader), Grace Tate (vice-president, Buffalo Urban League), Dennis Walczyk (president, Catholic Charities), Franchelle Hart (communications coordinator, 1199 SEIU), and Paul Vukelic (CEO, Try-It Distributing, Inc.). Demographically, the advisory board resembles Buffalo, with one Hispanic, three black, and five white members. After one year, the advisory board will consider adding members, including ones recruited from OB Democracy Fellows.

The advisory board, aided by the planning team and PPG staff, will guide the transition and hiring process. Although, at least initially, OB will not be separately incorporated, and thus the fiscal sponsor's board will exercise oversight and bear ultimate legal responsibility, the advisory board will



play the primary role in setting policy, hiring and supervising the executive director, approving the budget and major contracts, supervising finances, and representing OB to the broader community. The leaders from CEJ, PPG, PUSH, and VOICE-Buffalo will recuse themselves from decisions that pose conflicts of interest; none of the other advisory board members represent groups slated to receive OB funding.

PPG will serve as the fiscal sponsor, with ultimate legal responsibility for the project, including hiring, contracting, and finances. PPG makes a natural fiscal sponsor because the other three organizations are all PPG partners. Due to its unique relationship with PPG, Cornell University ILR is willing to house OB in its suite in downtown Buffalo, where PPG and CEJ are already located, at a rent discounted by 50%. After the first year, OB advisory board and staff will evaluate whether to incorporate separately.

OB will add great value to the region as a “backbone organization” that guides vision and strategy, supports aligned activities, establishes shared measurement practices, builds public will, advances policy, and mobilizes funding.³⁸ OB will establish a culture and practice of continuous learning, evaluation, and response, drawing on the PERE Framework for Metrics that Matter. OB will offer social justice movements a way to collaborate across racial and geographic lines and find “unlikely allies” in business, arts, and other sectors.

A strong internal staff will ensure innovation, coordination, and accountability, while contracts will draw from the strengths of existing organizations without duplicating their resources. The executive director will provide leadership, direction, and oversight, while serving as the lead communicator and building relationships with local and national allies and funders.³⁹ The administrative director will handle finances, human resources, contracts, evaluation and monitoring, and the details of development. The director of communications will frame the overall message of OB and work with partners to shape consistent, coordinated messages for OB campaigns and



projects with traditional and social media.⁴⁰ The director of civic capacity will be responsible for public outreach and education, leadership development, field level technical assistance and network development, government relations, issue tracking, and comprehensive collaborative strategy development. He or she will supervise the manager of issues and projects, who will work on issue tracking, campaign coordination, and the detail-level work of the MDC and Emerging Leaders.

Each contracting organization has been chosen after careful capacity analysis by OB's planning team. PPG will administer the Innovation Lab under the direction of the OB executive director and chief administrator, aided by Investigative Post and the Public Accountability Initiative. CEJ, PUSH, and VOICE-Buffalo, coordinated by the Director of Civic Capacity, will provide staffing for the three issue projects, the MDC, and Emerging Leaders, joined by other groups with relevant capacities, including the nine groups identified in section D. Contracts will be carefully drawn to establish continuous evaluation, learning, and accountability, and to ensure that OB funding goes only to new OB work, not existing projects.

SUSTAINABILITY: Strong Support Networks

The OB plan is designed to complement existing funding streams while drawing new resources from local and national sources. Local funders have played key roles in forming the plan; in particular, Paul Hogan (vice president, John R. Oishei Foundation), Cara Matelliano (vice president, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo), and Beth Gosch (executive director, WNY Foundation), served on the Advisory Committee, attended every meeting, commented on drafts, and met separately with OB staff to shape the plan. Oishei has indicated particular interest in Emerging Leaders and arts integration, and CFGB in Emerging Leaders and participatory budgeting. The WNY Foundation's focus on capacity building aligns well with OB's field level technical assistance and network development. The Margaret L. Wendt Foundation has stated its interest in OB's restorative justice and high road economic development plans.⁴¹ The Center for Community Change



has expressed preliminary interest in aiding Open Buffalo through its anti-poverty initiative, in addition to its commitment to providing ongoing technical advice and support.

OB core organizations currently receive funding from public sources, including the City of Buffalo, New York State, and HUD, and from corporations such as M&T Bank and Citizens Bank, and the OSF investment will help OB to build and expand relationships in those sectors. OB has completed research on federal funding and identified ten potential long-term sources at the Departments of Justice, Commerce, Labor, and Health and Human Services. Assemblyman Ryan has pledged to help to identify and win funding from New York State.

OB partners are seeking funding for particular aspects of the plan and related activities. For example, the Worker Center has submitted applications to the Public Welfare Foundation and the Labor Innovation for the Twenty-First Century Fund, and Peacemakers has won a commitment of \$100,000 from Mayor Brown and the City of Buffalo. OB will explore doing fee-for-service work through its Innovation Lab (PPG has launched a fee-for-service model with five contracts in 2013) and will cultivate individual donors. OSF's investment will complement long term support from national funders such as Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program and Ford Foundation, which fund CEJ, and the Rockefeller, Surdna, and Kresge Foundations, which fund PUSH.



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- ¹ HUD Aggregated USPS Administrative Data on Address Vacancies, Fourth Quarter 2007 – Fourth Quarter 2012.
- ² U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1950-2010.
- ³ U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1950-2010.
- ⁴ Ramon Garcia, “Buffalo Profile,” Open Buffalo (2013), citing Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Information System.
- ⁵ While from 2006 to 2010 white unemployment in the region was at 5% (compared to a national average of 6%), black unemployment was 13% (compared to a nation average of 11%), and Hispanic unemployment was 10% (compared to a national average of 8%).
- ⁶ Diversitydata.org, Harvard School of Public Health.
- ⁷ See Ramon Garcia, “The Great Recession in Buffalo Niagara,” Partnership for the Public Good (2013), and Bruce Fisher, “Detroit is America,” Artvoice, July 25, 2013.
- ⁸ Of course, there are many exceptions, such as Buffalo’s ambitious re-writing of its land use policies, the “Green Code” effort, in which the City has engaged an unprecedented number of residents from every section of the city.
- ⁹ As evidenced by the passage of state “benefit corporation” legislation and Buffalo’s hosting of the 2013 national conference of BALLE (Business Alliance for Local Living Economies)
- ¹⁰ In addition to new leaders, Buffalo’s civic infrastructure is benefiting from two recent developments: increased collaboration in new networks and backbone organizations, and major new efforts in holistic, long-term planning. The collaboration can be seen in entities such as the REDC, the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Partnership for the Public Good, WNY Environmental Alliance, and Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance. The major planning efforts recently completed or underway include the REDC Strategic Plan, Erie County’s new economic development plan, and the HUD-sponsored One Region Forward plan.
- ¹¹ See Jerry Zremski, “WNY native Perez stresses job creation as top priority.” Buffalo News, September 4, 2013.
- ¹² In the article cited above, Labor Secretary Perez expressed this positive vision of Buffalo as follows: “It’s the City of Good Neighbors, where people take care of each other rather than looking out for No. 1, where it’s about building a community for everyone.” While not always true, this Buffalo story strikes a chord with local residents and offers a foundation for progress.
- ¹³ These were the four most common themes identified by residents during OB’s door-knocking and “Food For Thought” campaign this summer.
- ¹⁴ OB completed an original analysis of 90 local schools showing that the most potent reason for the failures of city schools is the concentrated poverty of the student body. Our regression analysis suggested that three-fourths of the variation in test scores could be attributed to poverty.
- ¹⁵ Buffalo Public Schools attendance and suspension data, www.buffaloschools.org. A short term suspension is one to five days. These short term suspensions resulted in 31,752 lost instruction days; long term suspensions, which last at least six days, added more than 12,528 additional lost days
- ¹⁶ Erin Carman, “Alarming Disparities: the Disproportionate Number of African American and Hispanic People in Erie County Criminal Justice Systems,” Open Buffalo (2013).
- ¹⁷ See, for example: International Institute for Restorative Practices, “Improving School Climate: Findings from Schools Implementing Restorative Justice;” Myriam L. Baker, “DPS Restorative Justice Project: Year Three” (2008-2009); and Michael D. Sumner, et al. “School-Based Restorative Justice as an Alternative to Zero-Tolerance Policies: Lessons from West Oakland,” Thomas E. Henderson Center for Social Justice.
- ¹⁸ See, for example, High HOPES Campaign, “From Policy to Standard Practice: Restorative Justice in Chicago Public Schools,” Spring 2012.
- ¹⁹ ECRJC recently created a dialogue between the school district and the International Institute for Restorative Practices, for example.
- ²⁰ While in 1970, the metro region’s average wage of \$43,562 (adjusted for inflation) was 8% higher than that of the nation, by 2011 the average wage had actually fallen to \$41,523, a full 16% lower than the national average.
- ²¹ Manuel Pastor et al, “Open Places Initiative: Equity Indicators for the Buffalo Region,” USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (2013).
- ²² ProPublica reports that one tenth of U.S. workers do temp work each year and that temp work is rebounding from the Great Recession ten times faster than private employment as a whole. Temp workers make 25% less than their permanent counterparts; only 4% get pensions and only 8% health insurance from their employers. See www.ProPublica.org, June 29, 2013.
- ²³ For example, OB research has revealed that local employers routinely violate the law by requiring job applicants to retrieve and supply their arrest records – a practice with a disproportionate impact on people of color.

²⁴ The Worker Center is part of one of the most dynamic trends in worker equity in the United States – which has seen the number of worker centers rise from five in 1992 to over 150 today.

²⁵ Ujima’s acclaimed *Unheard Voices* production in which refugee women told their stories and discussed them with the audience serves as a good model.

²⁶ The Restaurant Opportunity Center’s work to create RAISE (Restaurants Advancing Industry Standards in Employment) offers a good example of high road work with employers – a type of collaboration that Buffalo has a long tradition of doing, including Cornell ILR School’s Champions at Work project.

²⁷ For example, early research and door knocking suggests that public transit reform to improve job access may be a priority for workers.

²⁸ These efforts first crystallized in the landmark “The High Road Runs Through the City” conference in 2007 (which led to the creation of the High Road Runs Through the City summer fellowship program, in which 20 Cornell University ILR students work and study in Buffalo each summer).

²⁹ See the Partnership for the Public Good’s “Generating Waste: Problems with NYPA and the IDAs and How to Solve Them,” available at www.ppgbuffalo.org, and ALIGN’s “The \$7,000,000 Wager: New York State’s Costly Gamble in Economic Development,” available at www.alignny.org.

³⁰ For example, UB Management Professor Paul Tesluk, who is committed to working with OB through his Center for Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness, is a member of the University at Buffalo and St. John Baptist Church Economic Opportunity Panel and co-author of “Opening Economic Opportunity Around UB’s Growing Downtown Presence.”

³¹ Buffalo First, an organization of locally-owned, independent businesses, is a key ally that worked hard on the community benefit agreement for the waterfront. Local 1199 SEIU and CWA represent many of the BNMC workers; GoBike Buffalo and Buffalo CarShare are already collaborating with BNMC on sustainable transit; George Arthur is a legendary political leader working closely with neighborhood groups.

³² The Citizen Tool-Kit includes tools for working with elected officials, the media, and the community as well as key data about Buffalo issues; see www.ppgbuffalo.org. Other examples of MDC locations include workfare sites, ex-offender support groups, ESL classes, worker trainings at Cornell University ILR School, and the Hands Across Buffalo event in May 2014, when over 7,000 Buffalonians will link hands.

³³ Local examples include the Clean Air Coalition’s Lois Gibbs Fellowship and the Community Health Worker Networks’ Core Competency and Asset Based Community Development trainings, along with the leadership development done by CEJ, PUSH, VOICE, and Citizen Action. National examples include Urban Habitat, Center for Community Change, New Organizing Institute, National People’s Action, Gamaliel Foundation, and Wellstone.

³⁴ OB has already brought Marshall Ganz to Buffalo to train an initial cadre of organizers and grassroots leaders in public narrative techniques.

³⁵ To give another small example of media work, the Buffalo News has a daily column called “My View” in which residents submit first-person narratives. Part of leadership training could be helping each leader to write a personal “public narrative” and place it the My View column.

³⁶ OB will explore collaboration with youth-oriented programs such as the Mayor’s Summer Youth and Urban Fellows programs, Peacemakers, Say Yes, Promise Neighborhood, Erie Community College, and Young Audiences; with reentry and related programs such as Back to Basics, Prisoners are People Too and the Center for Employment Opportunities; and with refugee resettlement and service organizations and community groups.

³⁷ These include including the Cornell University ILR School, Buffalo State Educational Pipeline Initiatives, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Public Accountability Initiative, and SUNY Buffalo (including the Law School Clinical Program, Social Work School, Civic Engagement and Public Policy Strategic Research Initiative, Regional Institute, and Center for Urban Affairs).

³⁸ Shiloh Turner et al. “Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact.” Stanford Social Innovation Review.

³⁹ Some key partners include Demos, the Center for Community Change, Young Invincibles, Jobs with Justice, National Employment Law Project, Good Jobs First, ALIGN, National People’s Action, and the Gamaliel Foundation.

⁴⁰ OB will build capacity with sophisticated, coordinated messaging and communication around OB projects and campaigns, while also helping OB partners and other local groups to improve their communications work by offering trainings and open source tools such as media lists, sample press releases, a “Media 101” guide, etc. OB will partner closely with mainstream, public, and alternative media to create a regular “OB” presence through blogs, columns, radio shows, etc., as well as through project specific press work (press conferences, rallies, op-ed pieces, meetings with editorial boards).

⁴¹ OB has identified the James H. Cummings Foundation and William G. McGowan Foundation as likely prospects. In addition, there are roughly 60 other local foundations with capacity to support OB at levels of \$15,000 per year or less.