

## Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership

### INNOVATION

The City of Pittsburgh has a dubious distinction as having lost more population than almost any other city in the mid-Atlantic region. Between 1969 and 2017, the region shed 400,000 people. With this population decline, the city and region suffered parallel declines - in vibrant street life, nightlife and weekend public activities, and a sense of place, especially in the once-smoky downtown corridor of Pittsburgh.

The DAPA program was born in 2012 to help reverse the declining vibrancy of downtown. Through public-private partnerships, the PDP used DAPA to launch a series of events and activations with an audience of originally downtown's white-collar office workers and a sparse community of downtown residents. Quickly, with initial success of early efforts, the audience grew to include the regional community population who would be encouraged to visit downtown and enjoy the family-friendly art and programming, showing that the neighborhood was more than just a place for work.

By bringing innovative, artistic, and outside-the-box events to downtown, DAPA's programming success instilled confidence in the philanthropic community that our organization was capable and successful at projects beyond traditional programming, holiday events, and farmers markets and that the PDP was able to successfully engage the creative community. Since then, with that additional community support, target audiences have continued to expand. In 2019, the PDP piloted WorldSquare, a pop-up market focused on Pittsburgh's international and refugee vendors that brought together numerous community groups to shine a light on the growing ethnic communities and small businesses in the region.

### OUTCOME

There are likely as many ways to measure the success of DAPA as there have been activities, art performances, markets, and participants themselves in the project's eight-year history.

Several metrics encouraged the PDP to continue scaling the project in its early days. In the first year of programming, more than 55,000 people participated in one of roughly a dozen events. Nearly half of that number - 24,000 - participated in the immensely popular Night Market series, held quarterly. Another 10,000 participated in the Market Square Public Art project. As a result, business owners reported an immediate uptick in business during off-peak hours - i.e. nights and weekends, when downtown was historically "dead."

DAPA has led to a fundamental shift for the downtown community to embrace art and activation of our public space as a way to support their bottom line and our collective goals of creating a vibrant downtown experience. The first Rooftop Shindig required wrangling of the garage owner, city permitting, and sponsors. Now, the City of Pittsburgh is designing a new garage with a rooftop park in response to the success. Today, we receive calls from property owners seeking out collaborations. Numerous pop-up activations that were developed as part of DAPA have become vital components of PDP programming. Also, early projects introduced our board to the benefits of programming, allowing us to take bigger risks on major events while expanding our events team. Most importantly, the PDP can count 180 local businesses engaged as partners over the eight years of DAPA.

### EXECUTION

DAPA programming is shaped through data in the neighborhood. The PDP conducts annual data assessments that it collects, narrates, and publishes in a report called the State of Downtown Pittsburgh. The findings from the report, along with a bi-annual Resident Survey, inform the range of PDP activities for the coming years and what DAPA projects will likely best serve the community.

The project has rapidly grown and scaled over its eight-year history. In 2012, the DAPA budget was \$28,000. In 2018/19, it grew to \$275,000. This number does not include the impact DAPA has made on our organization's programming and events budget. In 2011, this budget was \$500,000 and, thanks largely in part to the success of DAPA, grew in 2019 to almost \$1.3M, all with the same BID investment of \$140,000. Similarly, the number of partners involved has grown as the project has earned respect from government, businesses, residents, and the greater regional community. What began as a relatively targeted effort with a primary audience

of downtown workers now includes refugee communities, dozens of local artists, a proliferation of food entrepreneurs, and the general public, as well as the encouragement of more permanent public art in downtown.

## REPRESENTATION

DAPA programs are designed and implemented by an inclusive group of community members, businesses, vendors, and artists.

For example, with help from the Office of Public Art, juries for art events include a diverse representation of community artists, with selection panels consisting of residents and fellow entrepreneurs. Also, we work to build the capacity of local artists, even when working with national or international groups, through workshops on concept ideation, construction, and the facilitation of apprenticeships.

The PDP did have to work harder in some areas, though. The immigrant and refugee communities in the city's outer urban areas are growing, but that diversity is not always well-represented in downtown Pittsburgh.

DAPA's WorldSquare effort was the result of an internal assessment to ameliorate that situation. Debuting in 2019 out of a collaboration with a variety of community groups and nonprofits, the program highlights refugees and immigrant entrepreneurs. The PDP expects that these businesses and artists will find their early footing and first fans in downtown through WorldSquare as it expands in 2020.

DAPA has involved dozens of additional partners, including Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Magenta Foundation, Fairmont Pittsburgh, Lululemon, BikePGH, USA Dance, Pittsburgh Port Authority, Pittsburgh Hispanic Development Corporation, and more.

## REPLICATION

Imitation is the highest form of flattery. The PDP regularly provides technical assistance and mentoring to neighboring municipalities, who, seeing the astonishing results of DAPA in downtown Pittsburgh, would like to replicate some of the impacts in their areas. Resulting initiatives locally include the Art Market in Garfield, a historic African American neighborhood in Pittsburgh's East End; the Wilksburg CDC; and First Fridays Art Crawl. Nationally, we have talked to dozens of delegations from cities large and small about the various components of this work and the rapid impact it can have on their downtown.

Further, the PDP is a partner to the Office of Public Art, who is leading a regional effort in multiple municipalities to create vibrant communities through public art activations. Much of this effort is based on the learnings and successes of DAPA. Nationally, the program scales well and speaks to the importance of contextually appropriate events and activations.

Lastly, we have spoken at multiple conferences about DAPA programs and the important and timely role that place-based programming can play in working to create stronger communities and meet real economic development goals with minimal lift, allowing organizations of any size to initiate similar work.

## COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

The complexity of DAPA is in its details. Engaging dozens of nonprofit partners, 180 businesses, a handful of government agencies, a healthy heap of independent artists, and battling the ever-changing weather conditions of downtown Pittsburgh has been - in a word - complex.

We asked staff to recall some of the most memorable and complex challenges DAPA has endured:

- Serving 75 people a gourmet five-course meal in what was at that point felt like an abandoned lot.
- Just because the calendar says it is spring, it can still snow, a lot, on your Welcoming Spring event.
- Small port-a-johns can make it up to the top floor of most parking garages, normal ones can not.
- Many (many) people get very excited about pickles and quirky event ideas.
- Oftentimes (always) temporary public art projects are not what you were pitched or envisioned.

The simplest solution has always been transparency and shared vision around the outcome of DAPA. By partnering across sectors with the goal of increasing the vibrancy of downtown Pittsburgh to spur economic development, it is creativity that has always been the right antidote to what appears at first to be insurmountable complexity.