



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Regional Visioning: Power of 32

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Pat was a founding board member and past Chairman of the *Fund for the Advancement of Minorities through Education, Inc. (FAME)*, is an Emeritus Trustee and past Chairman of *Shady Side Academy*, and is a past board member and Chairman of the *Boys and Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania*. In West Virginia, he is a member of the Board of *Vision Shared, Inc.*, a West Virginia state-wide economic development initiative, and the board of *Imagine West Virginia*, an independent policy research institute.

Regional visioning had occurred in many places across the U.S. and elsewhere in the world, before a group came together in 2009 to consider such an effort for the Pittsburgh region. By then it had become apparent that metropolitan economic regions are the competitive units in the global economy.

Projects had to promise meaningful impact on a regional scale, and there had to be a committed entity or group with the capacity to achieve implementation.

Three groups – the Allegheny Conference on Community Development representing business, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission representing government, and the Greater Pittsburgh Nonprofit Partnership representing the nonprofit sector – formed a committee to plan a visioning effort. They concluded that it would be appropriate to focus on the entire economic region centered on Pittsburgh, which is 32 counties in parts of four states – Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio and Maryland. This region of 4.1 million people not only is "Steeler Country;" it also has in common a remarkable shared industrial heritage, the headwaters of the Ohio River and other enviable natural resources, strong research universities which increasingly have come to work together, and a phenomenon that truly was unanticipated – the common opportunities and challenges presented by Marcellus and Utica Shale gas.

The planners recruited a steering committee comprising 62 business, civic and government

POWER OF 32
32 Counties : 4 States : 1 Vision

leaders from across this region who, in turn, raised financial support from 54 organizations. A staff was engaged to manage the process, and many volunteers played significant roles.

Power of 32 began with 156 community conversations in each of the 32 counties, from which it was apparent that the public saw the most significant issues as economy, education, environment, government, people and community, and transportation and infrastructure. Within each of these issue areas, a group of regional leaders was assembled and charged with identifying projects that met three criteria:

- Address a challenge or opportunity that is common across the 32-county, four-state region.



- Provide a strategy for implementation that is likely to create more progress than a state-by-state approach; that is, a project where regional collaboration will make a meaningful difference.
- Have a champion – an entity or group committed to achieving each goal through implementation of the regional strategy.

Projects had to promise meaningful impact on a regional scale, and there had to be a committed entity or group with the capacity to achieve implementation. Fifteen projects ultimately were identified, and may be found at www.powerof32.org. While these are in varying stages of implementation, some clearly already have achieved success:

- STEM education - www.remakelarning.org
- \$49 million site development fund - www.p32sitefund.com

- Regional trails long-term plan - <http://ihearttrails.org> (see article, page 26).

Four important lessons have emerged from the Power of 32 experience. First, establish a geographical scale which is entirely relevant to challenges and opportunities, but is not the established jurisdiction of any political or economic development entity. This makes it far easier for good ideas to come forward and be embraced. Power of 32 successfully avoided “that’s my job” inertia and, to the contrary, successfully engaged organizations that historically have been competitors.

Second, create collaborations, not a new entity. Power of 32 is simply the name of a project; there is no entity bearing that name, needing ongoing financial support that otherwise should be available to the projects.

Third, don’t create a plan headed for the shelf. There must be commitment to implementation.

Fourth, luck is better than anything else. The shale gas phenomenon has done far more to create willingness to think and act regionally than Power of 32 ever could have done alone, and continues to do so. ▽

