

The USC Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy at USC Price teams up with The Kresge Foundation to “Draw on Detroit”

Few cities have been hit as hard by a confluence of major economic, social, fiscal and political headwinds as Detroit. From long-term economic decline to social unrest, Detroit was already impacted by a series of challenges when the nationwide economic downturn began in 2007. In the nine years that have elapsed since then, a period that included Detroit’s bankruptcy declaration in 2013, civic leaders have stepped up in new ways as the traditional boundaries between the public, private and philanthropic sectors are being reconfigured and recalibrated in an era of federal retrenchment and state and municipal austerity.



Jim Ferris, Rip Rapson and Elwood Hopkins lead roundtable discussion in New York at JP Morgan Chase in January.

The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy (The Center) at the USC Price School of Public Policy, in partnership with The Kresge Foundation, is undertaking an inquiry that chronicles lessons learned from Detroit and possible approaches that may drive the next-generation approach of urban policy and practice in cities across the country. A fundamental premise of this study is that Detroit is emblematic of other American cities. While the particular circumstances in Detroit may seem exceptional, they differ from those of other urban areas only in degree. How problems are tackled in Detroit may be helpful as a starting point for a broader discussion of urban practice and policy across the country. These new approaches do not necessarily reject conventional practice. While some may be innovative, many are simply smart and creative.

“One of the things we tried to do in Detroit was to apply a ‘torque’ to conventional practice: pivoting around entrenched assumptions or viewing problems from a slightly different angle,” says Rip Rapson, President and CEO of The Kresge Foundation. The work resulted in problem-solving pathways that shifted traditional boundaries, created new definition of new civic roles, and ultimately framed a different narrative about how positive change can take place in American cities.

The Center’s director, James M. Ferris, is leading the research project with Elwood Hopkins, managing director of Emerging Markets, Inc. “Philanthropy can play a catalytic role on some really tough problems when it wants. They have really been doing that in Detroit, placing big bets on the city’s ultimate resurgence,” says Ferris.

The Center is hosting five roundtable discussions about the leadership needed and the smart and creative approaches for revitalizing cities such as the role of the arts in placemaking, entrepreneurial strategies for economic growth, and community led urban planning, that will lead to a national forum: Drawing on Detroit: Bold Leadership and the Future of American Cities, scheduled for May 4-5 in Los Angeles. The Forum will bring together prominent thought leaders from Detroit and other cities to examine how philanthropy can help to ignite partnerships and investments that span sectors, what enabling conditions are necessary to stabilize cities, how to build economic momentum in turnaround cities and how new models of cross-sector leadership can help to transform cities.

“This project provides a real opportunity for leaders from different fields, different sectors and different cities to really learn from the Detroit experience,” says Hopkins. “But it’s not a one-way street. Other

cities like Memphis, New Orleans, Newark and elsewhere are sharing what they've been up to and reacting to the different approaches in Detroit." Following the Forum, a series of city to city exchanges will be facilitated to help identify cities with shared interests for cross city learning around particular ideas and strategies for urban revitalization.

The inquiry is guided by a distinguished advisory committee that includes, among others, Henry Cisneros, founder and chairman of CityView and former Secretary of HUD; Bruce Katz, vice president and founding director of the Metropolitan Policy Program at The Brookings Institution; Julia Stasch, president of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; and Darren Walker, president and CEO of The Ford Foundation. A full list of advisory members and participants in the roundtables can be found on [The Center's website](#).

About The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy

Since its inception in 2000, The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy has emphasized research and analysis as a means to deepen the understanding of complex issues in philanthropy, with a critical focus on strategies for greater impact in public problem solving. To translate this work into action, The Center brings together key decision makers in an array of targeted convenings to more deeply examine the issues, findings, and recommendations. See more at <http://cPPP.usc.edu/>

About The Kresge Foundation

The Kresge Foundation is a \$3.5 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America's cities through grantmaking and investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services, and community development in Detroit. See more at: <http://kresge.org/>

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