

Urban Revitalization: Replicating the Success in Other Cities

 By [Scott Cooney](#) | May 4th, 2010 [View Comments](#)



At last week's **Social Enterprise Summit** in San Francisco, the Democracy Collaborative gave an inspiring talk about economic revitalization in Cleveland, OH, a city that is suffering from high unemployment, urban blight, and the emigration of several large employers from the area. The story of the collaborative's process of revitalizing Cleveland is inspiring. It began by [engaging anchor institutions](#) and achieving buy-in as partners in the revitalization process. It then [developed green business models](#) that would succeed in the area. Helping those companies get founded, funded, and off the ground gave them multiple important lessons that other municipalities looking to develop green jobs can learn from. But the bottom line is that they're succeeding at creating green jobs in their community, recapturing manufacturing capacity, and most importantly, building community wealth that is likely to stay and not just pick up and leave, like many of the Fortune 500 companies that used to call Cleveland home.

This work can be replicated in other areas for much the same benefits. Here's what Democracy Collaborative suggests for other municipalities looking to replicate their success.

1. The first crucial element is a project champion. In Cleveland, the [Cleveland Foundation](#) played that role. The Cleveland Foundation is a non-profit community development agency, and seeded the entire project with \$3M. It organized pre-development funding, set up anchor institution backing and loan guarantees to banks and secured political backing.

2. There needs to be a player in Business Development. The business development partner can help recruit appropriate management and develop appropriate business plans like the Green City Growers Cooperative, the Ohio Cooperative Solar, and the eco-friendly industrial laundry business in Cleveland, which were the first three green businesses launched during the Cleveland revitalization campaign. In Cleveland, this partner was the Ohio Employee Ownership Center. It recruited and hired for all the Evergreen Startups, and made sure that the human resources were there so that when the demand came, it could be well-served, assuring that anchor institutions would see these new startups as viable long term partners that would provide quality service over time.

3. There must be a community loan fund incubator. It is crucial that some sort of revolving loan funds be set up. With the success in Cleveland, it should be easier to replicate this success elsewhere, since it's no longer an unproven model.

4. There must be workforce development capacity. This includes the capacity to screen, recruit, and train workers (as opposed to management, #2, above). This organization would screen employees and allow the businesses to focus on getting their business models right.

5. Political support, especially locally, is crucial. It might seem like a no-brainer that local pols would support job development and increased community wealth, but nothing in politics is a no-brainer, unfortunately. The Collaborative defined the important question: "Is a comprehensive community wealth strategy likely to have political legs?" In most places, especially on the local level, this should be fairly straightforward, especially given the success in Cleveland that other municipalities can rally behind.

6. Perhaps most important (and most difficult to achieve), there is a need for anchor institution backing. In Cleveland, the anchor institutions made their supply chain staff available to assist in strategic plan development, made commitment to purchase goods, and provided visible examples of success.

This all took time to build, but now that there's a success case like Cleveland, it might come faster in other communities—[Annie E Casey Foundation](#) is asking these guys to replicate this in Atlanta and other places. Imagine the economic change that will come as more and more communities replicate this process, create green jobs, and build community wealth in our cities. As Van Jones said, one solution can solve our two biggest problems: green jobs help to alleviate underemployment (and all its associated issues of crime, poverty, disease), and environmental calamity.

Can your city use this model?

Worker co-ops were a good model financially as well as socially.