

How do we help small towns in America?

We started PilotCity on the notion of, what how do we build cities of the future with the people from the community? I started my work because my hometown of San Leandro was transforming itself into a city of innovation. Mostly a city that wasn't well-known, or well-recognized... for much of anything. Anything at least that people knew about it. Haha. Growing up, we were the city next to Oakland. We would latch onto the larger communities next to us to build a sense of pride for ourselves. Yet, we knew that we were one of the most diverse communities in California, thus America. One of the strong suits that I recognized as I grew up with friends, school students and others at McKinley Elementary, Bancroft Middle and San Leandro High. When I discovered my hometown was on a mission to transform itself into a city of innovation, I had a spinal cord tap of inspiration that rushed to my primal being that, "I want to help do that." It was the emotional investment I had in my hometown given my mom, dad, sisters, aunties, uncles, cousins, best friends, and so forth all were there. Who wouldn't have an emotional investment in their hometown? Quite frankly, PilotCity was invented for this exact purpose, how do we build small to medium sized communities into the future by putting it "on the map."

There are 19,500 cities and towns in the United States. Just about 92% of them are under 10,000 in population. This is an incredible number to witness. That means most cities and towns in the United States are small. Small towns that don't have many resources. Most folks don't know much about it. People typically leave for larger dreams outside the town they grew up in. Most of them aren't "on the map" so to speak, yet have big town personalities, very connected families and communities, and dreams that represent what the community can fully be.

I recognized this about my hometown of San Leandro, and started on my mission to transform my hometown into a city of innovation. I asked myself, where do we start first that will be applicable across any small to medium sized community? What is the protocol for development? Who needs to be involved and how? What needs to be built to facilitate this and why? These are all questions I asked myself 10 years ago - and here it is...

First phase, we must start with the youngest citizens of our community. Every city and every town has young people who are "trapped" (haha) in a classroom somewhere in America. This classrooms represent an entire school, a body of citizens and residents that represent that community. This is the only real, sustainable place to begin when codifying how we build communities in the future because they are the single thread, the single engine that all cities and towns have: a K12 institution. It just so happens that K12 institutions are also typically one of the top employers, by size in that community. Usually the 1st largest employer if the city or town goes smaller in size. By engaging our young people in our schools to propel them into the "real-world" to solve real-world problems and create entrepreneurial efforts in their own jurisdiction - we then have a developing engine for problem solving in the community that can make the city or town better by the people who know it the best. By instilling innovation into this

problem solving process, we can then inspire students to enter high-growth industries, STEM, and opportunities that allow them to swim in a small pond, with the big fish of opportunities of larger markets across the US. This is an important element to build a city of innovation. By providing students a career "pathway" or what school systems typically call Career Technical Education (CTE), and the promises of CTE such as Work-Based Learning (WBL) and specifically, Internships and opportunities that literally place students in the real-world, at-scale is the first achievement a city or town, alongside its K12 institution must achieve in order to install a kickstart engine for innovation in their own community and put themselves on the map.

Second phase, we expand programs and opportunities to the adults in the city or town. Starting with parents, of the same students who are engaged in the first phase. This allows us to do "workforce development" now on the decision-makers of households across a community, its parents. And when I say workforce development, I mean that in the broadest sense which includes business ownership and entrepreneurialism. Parents, typically employed by an organization, and if not - still applicable, has a "job" of being economically mobile and having upward mobility as an adult, or authority in a household. Advancing economic mobility is important for them to consider and thus important for them to upskill, get better at what they do, move up in the ranks of their employer, and perhaps even start a business that allows them to flourish as a human, but also in terms of resources for themselves and their family. Upskilling programs, reskilling programs, opportunities to advance their skillsets, promote themselves to employers, and secure opportunities such as higher ranking employment opportunities is a natural set of focuses for a community, town and city of citizens to get better overall as a society. This could be potentially working for the local government, typically the next largest employer, and other well known employers in their communities in healthcare (hospitals are another top employer in a community), perhaps manufacturing, and if available, technology.

Third phase, advancing organizations of a city or town to improve its work, innovate as institutions and companies, and if applicable, expand its market within its own community, the region, state, nation and globally. Programs and opportunities that support learning and development within organizations help support skills that advance creativity and innovation from within the organization can create scalability of strategic and tactical innovation from within the organization. Typically, this is called "Learning and Development," which supports the efforts of "Research & Development (R&D)" internally.

There you have it, a short tutorial of how to put a small city or town on the map. To pursue its dreams and goals utilize