



# CODIFYING REBUILD

EQUITY FOR PHILADELPHIA'S CIVIC COMMONS

BY TOMMI LAITIO AND LEIGH GRAHAM

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Executive Summary	3
I. Introduction	5
II. A Partnership Capabilities Model	6
III. Codification for Equitable Investment	10
IV. Equity for Philadelphia’s Civic Commons	13
V. Lessons on Codification as a Partnership Capability	24
VI. Conclusion	26
Endnotes	27
References	30
About the Authors	35

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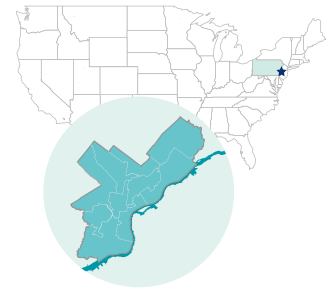
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# Executive Summary

**This case study examines how local authorities codify collaborative intent and establish an accountability structure for partnerships. Philadelphia’s Rebuilding Community Infrastructure, or Rebuild, is a groundbreaking partnership between the City of Philadelphia, local philanthropy, community-based organizations, businesses, and labor unions established to renovate neighborhood parks, libraries, and recreation centers. Rebuild is a multi-year capital investment, community engagement, and workforce development program funded by municipal bonds from a tax on sweetened beverages, capital funds, and historic philanthropic investments. Partners navigated significant friction to codify and successfully deliver legislative commitments to disadvantaged neighborhoods, businesses, and workers.**

Rebuild is one of a series of cases that illustrates the partnership capabilities model derived from Laitio’s research as a Bloomberg Public Innovation Fellow at Johns Hopkins University. The research project posed the question: *What skills and practices do local governments need in order to advance innovative partnerships that sustain the legitimacy of governance?* Across five cities worldwide, he examined the development and operations of public parks and libraries — areas of governance where partnerships are common. The resulting model proposes four capabilities — navigation, convening, experimentation, and codification — that local governments utilize to advance effective partnerships and produce innovative outcomes.



City of Philadelphia map.

## Codification as a Partnership Capability

Codification is the process of turning the local authority’s intentions and practices into institutionalized structures and policies. Codification is a partnership capability because it communicates shared priorities, offers frameworks for collaboration, and establishes accountability mechanisms. In the spirit of Kattel et al.’s (2022) concept of “agile stability,” codification strikes a balance between predictability and flexibility.

Rebuild illustrates three partnership practices germane to codification: advocacy, policy adoption, and enforcement. First, former Mayor James Kenney’s administration successfully advocated for a tax on sweetened beverages to pay for Rebuild. Tactics to implement this approach included an influential reframing of the tax, which had failed twice in the prior mayoral administration due to being viewed as public health overreach, and successful mobilization of grassroots parks organizations. Shared messaging additionally portrayed Rebuild as a generational bet on the city and its future through material investments in communities and children.

Second, a two-phased process of policy adoption codified Rebuild. A start-up agreement between the William Penn Foundation and the Kenney Administration structured the use of \$100 million in philanthropic funds, the foundation’s largest single commitment ever, according to four values: data-driven decision-making, financial transparency, design quality, and deep community engagement. Next, the Philadelphia City Council passed legislation authorizing Rebuild as a

Community members and Rebuild partners celebrate the ribbon-cutting of the renovated Fotterral Square Park on July 13, 2023, featuring new play equipment, an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible entrance, landscaping, and lighting.



new city program with access to capital and bond funds. The legislation gave the council power to approve Rebuild site selection, opened up redevelopment opportunities to neighborhood-based contractors, and required extensive reporting. Rebuild legislation codified the council's commitments to community engagement, diversity and inclusion, and transparency.

Third, legislation made the bond issuance subject to meeting explicit and ambitious workforce diversity and inclusion targets to achieve a shared priority of the mayor and council: integrating the building trades. Enforcement was governed by a master Economic Opportunity Plan (EOP) that set targets meeting or exceeding recommended goals from the city's own disparity analysis. The EOP and a system of oversight codified in Rebuild legislation governed a historic Memorandum of Understanding between the city and the Philadelphia Building Trades Council, as well as enforced requirements of subcontractors to meet Rebuild's diversity and inclusion goals.

## Key Lessons

As of September 2024, Rebuild had committed \$460.8 million to a data-driven project list of 72 neighborhood sites, with 52% of funds procured by minority- and women-owned businesses. Seventy seven percent of graduates from Rebuild's construction workforce programs, the vast majority of whom were people of color (96%), joined unions or gained full-time employment (Rebuild Philadelphia, 2024). Furthermore, Rebuild has potentially transformed how Philadelphia approaches public-private partnerships due to the intentional codification of how to measurably meet Rebuild's capital investment, community engagement, and diversity and inclusion goals. This case study suggests the following lessons for how to advance codification in city partnerships, based on the three practices observed in Rebuild:

1. Advocacy can overcome political friction and institutionalize partnership priorities.
2. The adoption of legislative policy priorities enshrines public values and their delivery mechanisms.
3. The establishment of shared policy enforcement systems holds partnerships accountable to shared goals.

# I. Introduction

A key objective for former Philadelphia Mayor James “Jim” Kenney (2016-2023) was improving access to high-quality parks and recreational spaces in disinvested and underserved neighborhoods. In Philadelphia, the Kenney administration launched Rebuilding Community Infrastructure, or Rebuild, a multi-year capital investment, community engagement, and workforce development program to renovate parks, libraries, and recreation centers in the city’s neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup> Rebuild is funded through a combination of municipal bonds released against revenues from a local beverage tax (Vargas, 2016b; McCrystal, 2020), historic philanthropic investments, and the city’s capital budget. The initiative is a groundbreaking public-private partnership between the City of Philadelphia, local philanthropy led by the William Penn Foundation, community-based organizations, businesses, and labor unions. This case study of Rebuild, from its strategic planning beginning in summer 2015 before Kenney’s election through the end of his second term in 2023, highlights the partnership capability of *codification*.

Codification is a partnership capability because it communicates shared priorities, offers frameworks for collaboration, and establishes accountability mechanisms. Local governments, such as Philadelphia, seek partnerships to improve the quality of public spending by doing new things faster, with greater resources, and with higher design and engagement quality (Ansell & Torfing, 2021; Bloomberg Associates, 2020; Saunders-Hastings, 2022).<sup>2</sup> While partnerships can generate these positive outcomes, they can also risk ceding control over public policy and assets beyond democratic decision-making — or creating the perception of such.<sup>3</sup>

This case study of Philadelphia’s partnership practices is one in a research series developed under the Bloomberg Public Innovation Fellowship at Johns Hopkins University that asks: *What are the skills and practices local governments need to advance innovative partnerships that sustain the legitimacy of governance?* To explore this question, the research project focused on the development and operations of public parks and libraries as an area of governance where partnerships are common. Through comparative research in five metropolitan areas, each case study in this series analyzes partnerships that generate tangible results for residents through the pooling of resources, knowledge, or other assets.<sup>4</sup> Studying the practices and skills of effective partnerships within different institutional settings led to the identification of a partnership capabilities model with four capabilities that local governments need to drive impactful and legitimate partnerships.

## II. A Partnership Capabilities Model

The partnership capabilities model begins with the common public sector goals that motivate partnerships, namely resident health and wellbeing, equity, and sustainable development.<sup>5</sup> Procedural goals are also important considerations in partnerships, especially fairness, efficiency, and efficacy. To those procedural goals, we add “convivencia” as an approach to navigating friction. As Laitio (2025) argues, convivencia refers to an orientation and active effort to co-exist across differences, in which difference is not a feature to be resolved but an opportunity for negotiation toward shared outcomes (DiMasso Tarditti, 2007; Low, 2022; Wise & Noble, 2016). Because the policies and practices of local governments create the conditions that can either foster or curtail civic life, we propose convivencia as a foundation for municipal action in operationalizing responses to friction through the partnership capabilities.<sup>6</sup>

This model proposes that navigation, convening, experimentation, and codification are the four partnership capabilities that local governments need to ensure both innovative results and legitimacy in the delivery and governance of public goods.

Navigation enables local governments to enter partnerships with confidence, understand the root causes of friction, and assess their need for external facilitation and brokerage in convening. Convening ensures sufficient stakeholder buy-in and helps identify the resources and actors available for experimentation. Experimentation provides evidence and builds confidence for systems change. Codification sustains the lessons of the previous phases into institutionalized practices.

The model also delineates skills versus practices to illustrate how actions may differ for individuals versus teams or organizations. In reality, skills and practices are interwoven and shared among staff, teams, organizations and networks. As such, they may be less distinguishable from one another in practice compared to their depiction in the model.

The capabilities are interdependent, iterative, and, ideally, sequential.<sup>7</sup> We define each capability in more detail in the diagram on pages 7-9.

# Partnership Capabilities Model

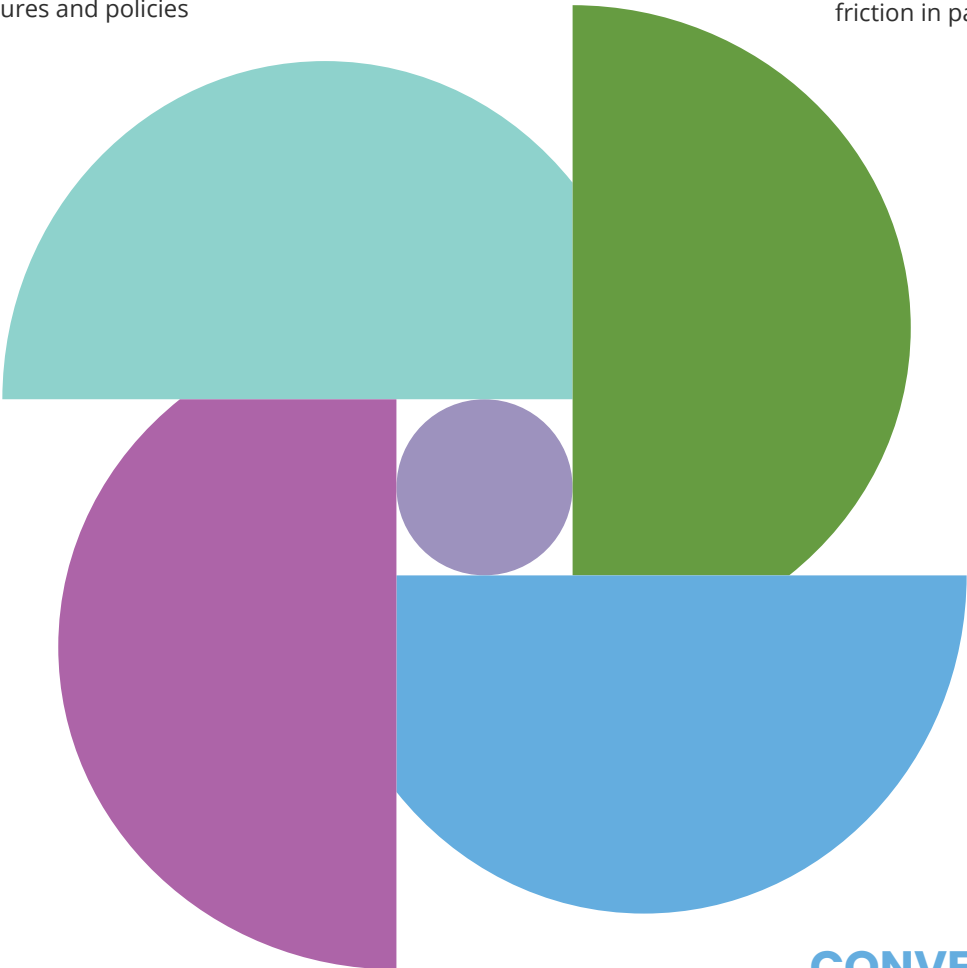
From Capabilities to Outcomes

## CODIFICATION

Institutionalizing partnership structures and policies

## NAVIGATION

Building staff agency, support, and ability to embrace and work through uncertainty and friction in partnerships



## EXPERIMENTATION

Providing institutional spaces and resources for ideation and testing of new or reconfigured solutions

## CONVENING

Gathering partners and brokers to recognize and leverage differences and to develop a shared action plan

## NAVIGATION

Local governments as employers and stewards of civic life have a responsibility to build staff agency, support, and ability to embrace and work through uncertainty and friction in partnerships. The capability to navigate friction entails being attentive to an alignment between resident needs and partnership opportunities and reconfiguring services and policies based on actively listening to stakeholder feedback. For staff, approaching friction as an opportunity to learn how to navigate complexity can improve work satisfaction, staff retention, and their sense of equity and safety. Embracing friction in partnerships with civil society can lead to a better understanding of resident concerns, foster a collaborative culture with stakeholders, and inspire new governance practices.

## CONVENING

Convening establishes a foundation from which diverse stakeholders can build and advance a shared agenda. The capacity to convene for learning aims to ensure that parties with different assets, and perhaps conflicting priorities, feel seen, heard, and fairly treated as they enter into a partnership. When successful, learning together with a curiosity toward differences builds a common understanding of the challenge and problem definition, facilitates a systemic approach to addressing public problems, ensures shared recognition and ownership of the challenges, and allows the partners to understand each other's assets and contributions towards advancing solutions (Alhanen, Soini, & Kangas, 2019; Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; Forester, 2009).

## EXPERIMENTATION

In experimentation, the local authority and its partners engage in an adaptive learning process in which they create, test, observe, and adapt or reconfigure new ideas or existing practices (Ehnert, 2023a, 2023b). It is a process that can improve the design quality of scaled-up solutions by mitigating risks and creating sufficient support for new interventions. Experimentation is a useful strategy for building confidence in organizational change by producing evidence for and prototypes of a different tomorrow (Bason & Austin, 2022; Ehnert 2023b).

## CODIFICATION

Codification is the process of turning the local authority's intentions and practices into institutionalized structures and policies. Codified policies and practices communicate institutional decisions and priorities; provide frameworks for government staff in partnerships; and allow stakeholders, the public, the media, and elected officials to hold the institution accountable (Barker & Rees, 2021; Bason & Austin, 2022; Huntington, 2006; Kattel et al., 2022; Wolff & de-Shalit 2007). Legitimate codification requires stakeholder engagement that is experienced as authentic by the involved parties. Particularly germane to public innovation, successful codification strikes a balance between predictability and flexibility (Kattel et al., 2022).

**Table 1: Partnership Capabilities Model**



**SKILLS**  
active listening, attentiveness to resident needs

**PRACTICES**  
embrace friction, reconfigure services

- POTENTIAL OUTCOMES**
- Collaborative culture
  - Better understanding of resident concerns
  - Staff work satisfaction and retention
  - Equity and safety



**SKILLS**  
dialogue, curiosity, negotiation

**PRACTICES**  
facilitation, learning together, shared agenda

- POTENTIAL OUTCOMES**
- Problem definition
  - Systemic approach to collaboration
  - Sense of recognition and shared ownership
  - Understanding of assets



**SKILLS**  
creativity, observation, learning by doing

**PRACTICES**  
testing, iteration, adaptive learning

- POTENTIAL OUTCOMES**
- Flexibility and speed
  - Higher design quality
  - Proof of concept
  - Confidence for change



**SKILLS**  
assessment, evaluation, policy development

**PRACTICES**  
advocacy, reporting, enforcement, policy adoption

- POTENTIAL OUTCOMES**
- Predictability
  - Legitimacy of government
  - Accountability and transparency

### III. Codification for Equitable Investment

This case study examines Philadelphia's partnership practices to illustrate the capability called codification.<sup>8</sup> Codification is the process of turning the local authority's intentions and practices into institutionalized structures and policies. Codified policies and practices communicate institutional decisions and priorities, provide frameworks for government staff in partnerships, and allow stakeholders, the public, the media, and elected officials to hold institutions accountable (Barker & Rees, 2021; Bason & Austin, 2022; Huntington, 2006; Kattel et al., 2022; Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007). Legitimate codification requires stakeholder engagement that is experienced as authentic by the involved parties. We take an expansive view of the process of codification, guided by Kattel et al.'s (2022) concept of "agile stability," in which bureaucracies play a uniquely important role in the innovation process by ensuring a stable environment for experimentation and discovery. Particularly germane to public innovation, successful codification strikes a balance between predictability and flexibility (Kattel et al., 2022).

We selected Rebuild as a case study of codification because stakeholders worked through significant political friction around how to operationalize shared equity aims, ultimately achieving institutional alignment on what Mayor Kenney (2016, p. 17) called "a set of guiding values." As Laitio (2025) explains in the accompanying research brief, *Innovation Through Partnerships*, friction is an inevitable dynamic when stakeholders bring competing priorities and unequal resources to collaborative efforts. However, as we argue and this case demonstrates, friction is also beneficial for partnerships, catalyzing innovation and heightening democratic legitimacy from partners' negotiation toward shared outcomes. Philadelphia's history of constrained public resources and dependency on the philanthropic sector for public space stewardship in an economically stratified city set the stage for the innovative partnership model in Rebuild, as public sector and civil society leaders coalesced around a historic investment for neighborhood public spaces.

Rebuild highlights three codification practices:

1. Advocacy as a means to navigate political friction and advance partnership priorities through legislation.
2. Policy adoption that institutionalizes shared values and their delivery mechanisms.
3. Enforcement of policy aims to hold partners accountable.

In the remainder of this case study, we detail these practices in Philadelphia's Rebuild program to illustrate how codification works as a partnership capability, followed by takeaways for other cities and organizations. First, given the legislative complexity of Rebuild, we provide a brief primer on the program.

## What Is Rebuild?

Rebuild was created to meet three objectives: (1) invest in capital improvements to public recreational facilities and libraries in the city's neighborhoods, (2) engage communities to guide those improvements, and (3) create economic opportunity for people of color and women through union careers and procurement opportunities via Rebuild capital projects. Increasing access to union jobs for Black and Brown Philadelphians had been a long-time goal of the Philadelphia City Council, which was Black-led with a Black majority during Rebuild.

**Policy:** Rebuild is governed by Council Bill #170206, passed on June 22, 2017. The bill authorizes the Philadelphia Authority for Industrial Development (PAID) to issue bonds to pay for Rebuild as part of a "Service Agreement" with the city, with oversight by the city's finance director. The bill also includes an "Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement" (known as Exhibit B) between the mayoral administration and the council.<sup>9</sup> The agreement stipulates that the council, via legislative action, annually approves all Rebuild plans and site selection submitted by the Rebuild team. The practice of "councilmanic courtesy" (Strom, 2005) means that the full council defers to individual council members to approve the sites in their districts.

**Operations:** A Rebuild team operates outside the city's traditional capital and procurement processes and instead reports directly to the city's managing director, the number-two position in the executive branch. This team has "day to day responsibility for project management" of Rebuild, including oversight of "Project Users," the redevelopment teams competitively selected for Rebuild sites. "Project Users" are vendors that apply to lead design and engagement and/or construction for rehabilitated parks, libraries, and recreation facilities. Exhibit B prescribes extensive and detailed responsibilities for these teams, including committing to community engagement, meeting design excellence standards, and achieving diversity and inclusion targets in hiring and procurement.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** Rebuild enters into partnerships with unions to offer workforce training programs via a separate Memorandum of Understanding with the Philadelphia Building Trades Council, a regional body of over 50 construction unions. Rebuild and unions collaborate on workforce training and career paths for women and Philadelphians of color. An Economic Opportunity Plan, approved by the council and overseen by the city's Office of Economic Opportunity, governs explicit diversity and inclusion goals and targets in local workforce hiring of racial minorities and women and in procurement with disadvantaged businesses for Rebuild.

**Funding:** Rebuild has four funding streams, which totalled \$549 million per an August 2024 progress report. Municipal bonds generated by a 1.5-cent tax on sweetened beverages (\$300 million) and city capital funds (\$104 million) finance site renovations. A William Penn Foundation grant (\$100 million) covers programmatic investments. Finally, “Other Executed Grants” (\$45 million) cover investments stipulated in individual grant agreements (Rebuild Philadelphia, 2024).<sup>10</sup> A start-up agreement with the William Penn Foundation governs the use of their funds pending annual approval from the foundation for Rebuild’s plans. Bonds and capital financing are authorized by the council in its annual approval of Rebuild’s site selection and plans. Rebuild is expected to deliver fiscal accountability and transparency as it braids multiple sources of funds to pay for projects.

**Timeline:** Mayor Kenney proposed Rebuild in March 2016, and it became law in June 2017. It was in limbo through July 2018 due to the beverage tax being in litigation. In July, the tax was upheld, and Rebuild launched its first workforce training program. In November 2018, it issued its first bonds, and broke ground on its first project in December 2018. (See **Figure 1** for a timeline of Rebuild.)

**Figure 1. Rebuild Timeline**

2015	2016	2017–2018	2019–2023
<p><b>Planning</b></p> <p><b>Summer:</b> Strategic planning between city and William Penn Foundation (WPF)</p> <p>WPF funds citywide strategy for neighborhood infrastructure investments</p> <p><b>November:</b> Kenney elected Mayor</p>	<p><b>Advocacy</b></p> <p><b>March:</b> Kenney proposes Rebuild</p> <p><b>June:</b> City Council authorizes Philadelphia Beverage Tax</p> <p><b>July:</b> WPF awards city \$4.8M start-up grant for Rebuild</p> <p><b>November:</b> WPF announces \$100M commitment to Rebuild</p> <p>Beverage tax goes to court</p>	<p><b>Adoption</b></p> <p><b>June 2017:</b> City Council authorizes Rebuild</p> <p>City signs Memorandum of Understanding with Philadelphia Building Trades Council</p> <p><b>November 2017 - June 2018:</b> Rebuild projects submitted and approved in City Council</p> <p><b>July 2018:</b> Beverage tax upheld</p> <p>Rebuild career programs launched</p> <p><b>November 2018:</b> First Rebuild bond issued for \$86.5M</p> <p><b>December:</b> First Rebuild project groundbreaking</p>	<p><b>Enforcement</b></p> <p><b>May 2019:</b> Rebuild Ready and Emerging Vendors Programs launched</p> <p><b>July 2019:</b> First Rebuild project completed</p> <p><b>September 2019:</b> Rebuild Workforce training programs begin</p> <p><b>November 2019:</b> Kenney reelected</p> <p><b>March 22, 2020:</b> COVID-19 order</p> <p><b>June 2022:</b> Rebuild First Fix! Program announced</p> <p><b>November 2023:</b> Council Member Cherelle Parker elected Mayor of Philadelphia</p> <p>17 Rebuild projects complete, rest in progress</p>

# IV. Equity for Philadelphia’s Civic Commons

Approximately 95% of Philadelphia’s residents live within a 10-minute (1/2 mile) walk from a park, and residents make good use of their local facilities. However, in the racially diverse city (see **Table 2**), “neighborhoods of color” have 32% less access to parks than majority-white neighborhoods, according to the Trust for Public Land’s 2024 ParkScore for Philadelphia. The Trust also notes that the city’s “low-income neighborhoods” have 45% less access to parks than upper-income neighborhoods.<sup>11</sup> Compared to its peer cities, Philadelphia has significant recreational infrastructure but relative underfunding of parks and libraries, which has translated into deteriorated facilities at the neighborhood level.

**Table 2: Key demographics on Philadelphia**

U.S. CENSUS QUICK FACTS	PHILADELPHIA	U.S.
Population estimates, July 1, 2023	1,550,542	334,914,895
Population per square mile, 2020	11,936.9	93.8
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	33.5%	58.9%
Hispanic or Latino	15.7%	19.1%
Black or African American alone	40.1%	13.6%
Asian alone	7.6%	6.3%
Two or more races	6.3%	3.0%
Foreign-born persons, 2018-2022	14.6%	13.7%
Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2018-2022	24.0%	21.7%
Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2018-2022	52.2%	64.8%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2018-2022	\$215,500	\$281,900
Median gross rent, 2018-2022	\$1,250	\$1,268
Median household income (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022	\$57,537	\$75,149
Persons in poverty	22.7%	11.5%

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *Population Estimates, July 1, 2023 (V2023) — Philadelphia City, Pennsylvania and United States [data table]. Quick Facts.* Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/philadelphiacitypennsylvania/PST045224>.

Philadelphia's racial and socio-economic inequities in park access have resulted from decades of anemic public investment: Philadelphia's share of private funding for parks (28%) is over five times the national average of 5% (Trust for Public Land, n.d.).<sup>12</sup> The William Penn Foundation is one of the region's largest grantmakers and has a longtime commitment to public green spaces. Executive Director Shawn McCaney described the foundation's strategy in the early 2010s to "generate high quality, highly visible investments in public space that would reinforce Philadelphia as a regional destination."<sup>13</sup> McCaney described Philadelphia as "a city of scarcity," where there was a widespread "sense that park and rec facilities across the city were under-invested, deteriorated, poorly maintained, and there was a need for a big catch up [to] reinvest in community spaces."<sup>14</sup>

Rebuild was the "brainchild" (Vargas, 2016c) of Michael DiBerardinis, Mayor Michael Nutter's (2008-2016) inaugural and popular Parks and Recreation commissioner (Shields, 2009). DiBerardinis's goal with Rebuild was to establish a more reliable funding source and higher investment level for public spaces via a partnership with the William Penn Foundation, given the foundation's enduring commitment to civic spaces and its recent success revitalizing them downtown.<sup>15</sup> Together, the city and William Penn could collaboratively spur long overdue investment in neighborhood parks, with the city offering bond funding and William Penn supplying "a large matching grant" and organizing other philanthropy to help "grow the pot" of parks investment, per McCaney's memory of DiBerardinis' proposal. For William Penn, Rebuild offered the potential to address a "serious equity issue" from the foundation's priority of "building great public spaces" in downtown Philadelphia and along the riverfront, McCaney explained.<sup>16</sup>

Through Rebuild, the foundation could build on its downtown investments by creating a new citywide "investment strategy" encompassing Philadelphia's neighborhood parks, along with the Knight Foundation and other philanthropies who would subsequently "ride the Rebuild wave" (Burnley, 2017d). This strategy, if implemented, would constitute a shift in how capital funds were historically distributed in the city, with equal funds, typically used for facilities maintenance, going to each City Council district regardless of need. Even as Rebuild remained an idea, the foundation initiated this new public-private investment strategy with a \$501,920 grant to PIDC Community Capital (Vargas, 2016a) to empirically identify possible infrastructure projects, an approach "designed to be much more data informed" than council tradition, per McCaney.<sup>17</sup>

Following his election, Mayor Kenney appointed DiBerardinis as his administration's managing director, bringing the prospect of Rebuild into city hall. Kenney introduced Rebuild, and a sweetened beverages tax to pay for it, in his inaugural budget address in March 2016, seeking legislative support from the Philadelphia City Council for both.

This would be the first instance of friction between the Kenney Administration and the City Council over the design and implementation of Rebuild. The City Council was reasonably reluctant to raise residents' taxes. Furthermore, most Council members were deservedly skeptical about Kenney's promises to create career pathways for people of color through agreements with the building trades, given the construction unions' long history of fighting racial integration in their ranks (Reyes, 2022). Finally, the executive branch's intentions to select Rebuild sites and program partners would be experienced as a challenge to the legislative body's tradition of relying on district council members' approval to advance neighborhood projects.

Philadelphia used three codification practices — advocacy, policy adoption, and enforcement — to channel friction between the administration and City Council toward the successful implementation of Rebuild. Advocacy can be understood as organized influence exercised in service of political change, with such change typically framed as being in the public interest (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). Advocacy is a codification practice because it uses strategic action to address political friction that complicates partnership aims. Policy adoption institutionalizes those aims and puts partnerships on more stable footing. Finally, enforcement equips partnerships with the resources and tools to deliver on promised aims. Enforcement may be used to ensure predictability in outcomes through corrective responses or via targeted incentives.<sup>18</sup>

## Practice 1: Advocacy for a New Funding Mechanism

Kenney introduced Rebuild as a \$600 million, eight-year capital investment program to revitalize the city’s “460 parks, playgrounds, recreation centers, libraries, and other assets” using \$350 million in public funding and \$250 million contributed through philanthropy. Kenney described the city’s goal with Rebuild to make civic infrastructure facilities “true neighborhood centers” through restoration and redevelopment (Kenney, 2016). Rebuild would prioritize “the most neglected neighborhoods,” according to former Rebuild Executive Director Kira Strong (2020-2024), with labor hired locally and “[looking] like the folks who use those centers,” per Tumar Alexander, the city’s former managing director (2020-2023).<sup>19</sup> In an interview, Ray Smeriglio (2021-2023), Rebuild’s former chief of staff, described the initiative as a gamechanger, explaining that in “a city like Philadelphia, [the] poorest big city in America, [that] struggles to deliver simple services on a regular basis, you do not have an opportunity to promise and deliver in large scale often. And Rebuild represents the first time in a long time that [city government pledged to] the millions of residents that live here, we are going to invest the right way and en masse in Philadelphia.”<sup>20</sup>



2 Residents provide feedback on Happy Hollow Playground design options during a May 7, 2024 community meeting in Philadelphia’s Germantown neighborhood.

As part of this pledge, \$300 million of new public funding would come from releasing bonds against expected revenue from a 3-cent-per-ounce local tax on sugary beverages (Kenney, 2016; Vargas, 2016b). Notably, the previous mayoral administration failed twice trying to pass a similar tax, with their efforts defeated as perceived public health overreach (Cohen, 2016). Given the Philadelphia City Council's legislative authority for passing such a tax, the Kenney administration needed the body's support for a historically unpopular levy, which also faced organized opposition from the beverage industry, local businesses, and many community groups (Sanger-Katz, 2016). The administration and the City Council soon clashed on the potential impact, benefits, and shape of the soda tax, with each body providing their own revenue assessments.<sup>21</sup>

An influential reframing of the tax and successful mobilization of grassroots parks organizations — which Managing Director Mike DiBerardinis saw as enhancing the tax's public legitimacy — were advocacy tactics used to secure public funding for Rebuild.<sup>22</sup> Per DiBerardinis, these tactics communicated the Kenney administration's intentions to “fund hundreds of millions of dollars in investment in public space” using a public-private funding framework. First, they reframed the purpose of the beverage tax from prior efforts, now campaigning for the increase as an infrastructure investment that would deliver material community benefits for Philadelphians, including physical improvements to public spaces (Cohen, 2016). More critically, in public messaging, both the administration and the Philadelphia City Council framed Rebuild as a generational bet on the city and its future through investments in its children. In a retrospective look at Rebuild at the end of Kenney's tenure, Terruso and Brennan (2023) recalled Kenney's successful advocacy for the beverage tax:

As a new and relatively popular mayor who had relationships with City Council, he was able to get it done by tying the funds to free pre-K and much-needed updates to the city's parks, libraries, and recreation centers. His administration launched a robust advocacy campaign that framed a vote against the tax as a vote against helping Philly's kids. ... “Literally every Council session they were here with signs and little children,” Council President Darrell Clarke said in a recent interview. “So what are you gonna do?”

Second, DiBerardinis, who sees his public service legacy as one rooted in community organizing, described the Kenney administration activating “an organized constituency around parks and recreation” in the small community stewardship groups common to Philadelphia's parks and libraries. These include friends of groups and Recreation Advisory Councils for the city's extensive facilities. “If given the right supports they can be a pretty strong political force,” DiBerardinis explained, and the Kenney administration “outwardly [mobilized]” these grassroots entities in support of the tax.

The council made history in approving the beverage tax with a 13-4 vote on June 16, 2016: Philadelphia became the second and the largest U.S. city to tax sugary beverages (Cohen, 2016; Dilworth, 2018; Sanger-Katz, 2016). The following month, the William Penn Foundation donated \$4.8 million to the Philadelphia City Fund to cover “start-up costs and initial implementation of the Rebuilding Community Infrastructure Initiative (‘Rebuild’) that will develop and implement a new model for improving urban parks, recreation centers” over the ensuing 33 months (William Penn Foundation, n.d.).

According to former Managing Director Tumar Alexander, the key to success was “tangibly” connecting the tax to parks and pre-K investments, which showed people “this is what this funding is going for. That was the only way we were able to get the soda tax.”

## Practice 2: Adopting “a Set of Guiding Values”

The city’s commitment to investing in its civic infrastructure was solidified with the council’s approval of the beverage tax. In November 2016, the William Penn Foundation pledged \$100 million to Rebuild for programmatic activities. It was William Penn’s largest commitment ever, “nearly four times bigger than any it has given before. In a single swoop, it covers one-fifth of the overall cost of the program, known as Rebuild,” reported Nadolny (2016). Jones (2016) described the grant, \$75 million plus another \$20.2 million for philanthropic matching funds, as “structured as a challenge to assist the Kenney administration in raising the full \$500 million budget for Rebuild.”<sup>23</sup>

The Kenney administration established Rebuild’s leadership team and released a publicly available map of 406 redevelopment sites supported by the Foundation grant to PIDC Community Capital (Hahn, 2016). Coinciding with William Penn’s commitment of \$100 million, Rebuild’s first Executive Director Nicole Westerman (2016-2019) presented the initiative as a “new calculus” for the city to fulfill an equity commitment to neighborhoods who had not experienced anywhere near the level of civic investments directed at Philadelphia’s downtown. As Rebuild deputy director for community engagement and communications and a former William Penn employee, David Gould explained to WHYY’s PlanPhilly (Hahn, 2016), “I think a critical question is how are we connecting that investment and leveraging it to address our most intractable challenges,” including poverty and inequality.

3  
Glavin Playground after a \$3 million Rebuild investment that included a new recreation center, outdoor lighting, sprayground, and repaved sidewalks. Renovations started October 3, 2021 and were completed on March 16, 2023.



The policy adoption process in Rebuild is illustrative of a second codification practice. Policy adoption occurs in two phases for Rebuild: First, the start-up agreement between William Penn and the Kenney administration codified the values that Rebuild must meet to access the \$100 million in grant funding. Second, the City Council would need to pass legislation authorizing Rebuild as a new city program with access to capital and bond funds. We address these two rounds of policy adoption in chronological order, beginning with the start-up agreement.

William Penn leadership described a set of conditions to guide Rebuild's creation and implementation written into the start-up grant, which serves as "a direct agreement with Rebuild," Cara Ferrentino, senior program advisor at William Penn, explained.<sup>24</sup> Neither she nor Sean McCaney, the foundation's executive director, described the conditions in specifics, but based on our interview data and publicly available remarks, we summarize the four values codified in the Rebuild start-up agreement as a) data-driven decision-making, b) deep civic engagement, c) high-quality design, and d) financial and operational transparency.<sup>25</sup> Ferrentino explained that establishing financial controls was very important to the foundation. McCaney explained that using a donor-advised fund "created an additional level of review and scrutiny" and that the start-up agreement set expectations and created systems for prudence and transparency in public spending. The Rebuild team would access philanthropic funds for programming by submitting to the foundation an annual "plan that would document how their approach to community engagement, design excellence, [and] site selection" aligned with a set of "values William Penn had laid out," Ferrentino explained. Once the foundation felt these values were met per the guidelines set out in the start-up agreement, the funds would be released with no further stipulations.

The start-up agreement depended on Rebuild's adoption by the City Council. The administration initially proposed three bi-annual rounds of \$100 million bond financing for Rebuild for Council approval. In November 2017, the Rebuild team, with its map of potential sites and a "framework to help evaluate priorities," approached the City Council to "develop a list of priority sites by council district" (Hahn, 2016). In a memo to the legislative body, City Council President Darrell L. Clarke described this as the start of "a dialogue" about Rebuild's "scope" and "the various approaches to achieving its promise" (Clarke, 2016). Although the City Council concurred with the overall ambition of the program, the administration's proposed structure for Rebuild became a significant source of friction in this period of policy adoption. Negotiations, which ran well into 2017, focused on three dimensions of program design: project delivery, site selection, and workforce and procurement diversity and inclusion goals. We address the first two here and the diversity and inclusion goals in the next section.

The first source of friction concerned project delivery. Initially, the city proposed that Rebuild operate outside the city's traditional capital process to (a) avoid its lengthy four-step approval process and lowest-bidder requirements and (b) activate nonprofit fundraising capacity to facilitate additional grantmaking. Rebuild would be housed in the managing director's office for oversight and administrative support and would contract with two citywide nonprofits the administration considered effective fundraisers and proven partners: the Fairmount Parks Conservancy and the Free Library Foundation. The nonprofits, known as "Project Users" in Rebuild's parlance, would subcontract at competitive rates with racially and gender diverse vendors on site redevelopment (e.g., planning, design, construction) to ensure economic opportunity for Philadelphians through Rebuild (Blumgart, 2016). The city's perspective was that

high-level administrative oversight of two partners with strong investment capacity and “a track record of success” citywide, per DiBerardinis, would ensure Rebuild met the administration’s goal of efficient project delivery.

The City Council rejected this proposal of bypassing the city’s capital and procurement processes, citing a lack of public transparency and risk to public accountability. To place all \$300 million in bond funds with two citywide nonprofits without a “competitive bidding process” seemed to flout the community engagement commitment of Rebuild, Council President Clarke argued. It would also curtail the council’s decision-making authority by structuring appropriations of large transfers to two nonprofits, which would then ultimately determine how to spend the funds (Clarke, 2016). This limited municipal control, particularly for the 10 district council members, who, as Nadolny (2017a) described, “have long managed an outsize need for [neighborhood] improvements on a limited budget.”

The Kenney administration and the City Council were in agreement that Rebuild needed private sector partners to help implement the initiative. But the council proposed that community-based entities serve as Rebuild’s Project Users, organizations with which they held or could form relationships. In our interview, Strong summarized the council’s position on Project Users as qualified nonprofits that “know these neighborhoods better than” the two citywide entities.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Clarke and the Rebuild team both acknowledged the citywide nonprofits’ lack of racial diversity as a concern, with Clarke questioning their ability to achieve diverse hiring (Blumgart, 2016). By March 2017, the Kenney administration agreed to redesign Rebuild to include a competitive process for local nonprofits to qualify as Project Users (Nadolny, 2017b).

Bill #170206 was introduced in the Philadelphia City Council on March 2, 2017, where it remained in committee for three months until a hearing was held in June 2017. A new source of friction over Rebuild’s site selection process delayed the bill’s passage. Council members did not disagree, per se, with the administration’s proposal to prioritize sites based on data, but they sought final approval of any sites in their neighborhoods. The chair of the council’s Committee on Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs, Council Member Cynthia Bass, was especially vocal. For Bass, Rebuild’s legitimacy depended on council members’ “knowledge and connection to the community,” as the people “sitting in those rec center advisory meetings and seeing the wires hanging from the ceiling” (Nadolny, 2017a). She also pointed out in a June 2017 hearing that city protocol was for council members to approve capital projects in their districts, highlighting the body’s legacy of parks investments:

**“[We have] collectively pooled our capital dollars in the past, all of my district colleagues, to make sure that there were cameras and that there were anti-loitering devices and other things to make our playgrounds as safe as possible. We worked on our playgrounds and rec centers for quite some time. So it became a little bit of a challenge, a bit daunting, a bit disappointing, I should say, that so much of Rebuild, in my opinion, has been done without the support, the advice, the involvement of District Councilmembers.”**

The Philadelphia City Council finally approved Rebuild on June 22, 2017, amending the original bill to make explicit the council's "standing" as "beneficiary" of an Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement with the power to authorize and enforce the bill's requirements. The bill codified the administration's power to issue bonds subject to meeting the conditions of a master Economic Opportunity Plan to guide workforce and business diversity efforts.<sup>27</sup> Under the plan, the Rebuild team would produce detailed monthly, quarterly, and annual reports, enabling council members and the public to track Rebuild's progress (Philadelphia City Council, 2017). Through this approval, Rebuild was officially adopted, kickstarting its community engagement and enabling the city to issue requests for qualifications (RFQs) for nonprofit Project Users based on specified criteria in the bill.

### Practice 3: Enforcement of Diversity and Inclusion Goals

Former Managing Director Tumar Alexander described Philadelphia as "a very pro-union town" where integrating organized labor is "an age-long battle." Now, given "the amount of money and the funding that we were leveraging" in Rebuild, he explained, the administration hoped enforcement of its economic inclusion goals would "be a way to change and diversify some of those labor unions," a shared priority of the mayor and council. In this section, we highlight the friction generated in designing enforcement mechanisms in Rebuild legislation to achieve workforce diversity and inclusion goals and targets.<sup>28</sup>

The Kenney administration and City Council alike foresaw the transformative nature of Rebuild. Council Member Cherelle Parker, who would go on to become the city's 100th mayor in 2023, remarked that council members were "unapologetic about seeing the employment opportunity here as a vehicle to provide African Americans, women, [and] other minorities with a systemic way into the building trades ... [that] allows them to have self-sufficiency and take care of their own families and pay mortgages in the middle neighborhoods that we represent in the City of Philadelphia." Council members agreed with Nicole Westerman, Rebuild's executive director at the time, that Rebuild had "really ambitious goals" for its apprenticeship program that could take advantage of significant private sector economic development activity in the city. Given that Philadelphia already had a model apprenticeship program, PennAssist, championed by Council Member Jannie Blackwell, that Rebuild planned to replicate, "the hope is that if [Rebuild apprentices] get into a pipeline to get those skills and they get access to *that card*," Parker said, then they could also work on Rebuild projects in the city's neighborhoods (emphasis added). She anticipated the council and mayor making history together if they developed through Rebuild "a systemic pathway created to allow access to union jobs" (Committee of the Whole, 2017). In this sense, Rebuild could create "the template for what we need to do city wide" to diversify the building trades, according to Council President Clarke (McGinnis, 2019).



The ability to achieve career pathways for racial minorities and women depended on labor union participation and cooperation in Rebuild, initially via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) intended to codify a partnership between the Kenney administration and the Philadelphia Building Trades Council. The MOU appeared to offer a pathway for skilled laborers through the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (PRA), a pathway “created specifically for Rebuild [that] is the first of its kind” (Jones, 2017).<sup>29</sup> The MOU was meant to counter Philadelphia’s long but underwhelming history of trying to use major capital projects to integrate the historically white and male building trades (Briggs, 2017).<sup>30</sup> According to critiques, the Philadelphia Building Trades Council’s persistent homogeneity belied their proclaimed efforts at diversity and inclusion (see, for example, Briggs, 2017), and they did not release demographic data on membership or apprenticeship participation that could aid an independent assessment of their initiatives (Madej & Reyes, 2022). Some council members remained unconvinced that Kenney could deliver on concrete diversity and inclusion agreements with the unions. As Council Member Leslie Quiñones-Sánchez put it, she saw in Rebuild “aspirational goals” and not “hard numbers” of workers who would be admitted to construction unions (Committee of the Whole, 2017).

Therefore, in addition to the MOU with the unions, the council also required a master Economic Opportunity Plan (EOP) for Rebuild to codify diverse hiring and contracting for large city projects under the auspices of the city’s Office of Economic Opportunity.<sup>31</sup> As a result, Rebuild mandated specific participation requirements for diversity and inclusion across race, gender, worker skill, and business type to guide hiring and procurement. Rebuild’s EOP set “hard” workforce participation targets of 45% for racial minorities and 5% for women, meeting or exceeding recommended Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 goals from the city’s FY2016 Disparity Study.

4 Children play on the new Cobbs Creek Nature Playground equipment, part of a \$1.6 million renovation through Rebuild, completed May 31, 2023.

To enforce these target goals, Rebuild legislation established a Diversity and Inclusion Oversight Committee to monitor the program's performance on workforce and contractor engagement, with the power to hire third-party monitors to track and improve compliance in real time. The Rebuild office was accountable for meeting these targets but dependent on its Project Users and their assembled project teams to do so. Failure to meet diversity and inclusion goals could trigger termination of contracts by Project Users and possibly "liquidated damages," with compliance monitoring built in to proactively assess contractor performance in project implementation. The findings of this monitoring would be reported to Rebuild and the relevant district council member for redress and intervention.

The Rebuild team has directed resources and effort toward meeting its diversity and inclusion goals. Since September 2019, Rebuild has piloted and scaled workforce development training programs aimed at entry-level and skilled workers seeking union careers in the building trades. By November 2023, Rebuild had run 10 different workforce training programs, with more planned. Of Rebuild's 94 workforce training graduates, 77% were in union apprenticeships or working full time. Graduates had joined seven different unions.

In an interview, Aiisha Herring-Miller, Rebuild's Deputy Director for Diverse Business and Workforce Development, spoke of promising relationships with a range of building trades, designed with significant intentionality.<sup>32</sup> Other partners cited in Rebuild's progress reports include state workforce initiatives like PA CareerLink and government entities with hiring needs such as the Philadelphia Housing Authority.

Since its first progress report was released in November 2019, Rebuild has consistently met or exceeded its diversity targets for working with minority- and women-owned enterprises (MWBES) in professional and construction services (see **Table 3**). It has also consistently exceeded its workforce targets for Hispanic/Latino Philadelphians (see **Table 4**). As Kenney prepared to leave office at the end of his second term in 2023, Rebuild was exceeding its target for hiring racial minority laborers and was close to meeting multiple targets, including hiring African American workers (at 74% of its goal), overall racial diversity in the workforce (93% of its goal), and the proportion of racial minorities among skilled workers (85% of its goal). Additionally, based on a sample of progress reports, Rebuild's projects outperformed those it "inherited" from other departments on diverse hiring and procurement. One consistent gap for Rebuild, however, has been bringing more women and Asians into the trades.

**Table 3. Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Targets and Results**

Rebuild Progress Report	As of	Journeyman					Laborers		Skilled Workers	
		African American	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	Total	Racial Minorities	Women	Racial Minorities	Women
Goals		27%	15%	3%	0%	45%	60%	5%	40%	5%
November 2019	11/30/2019	20%	21%	0%	2%	44%	39%	0%	30%	2%
November 2023	11/1/2023	20%	21%	1%	0%	42%	62%	2%	34%	2%

**Table 4. Procurement from Minority- (MBE) and Women-Owned (WBE) Businesses, Professional (P) and Construction (C) Services**

Rebuild Progress Report	As of	P-MBE	P-WBE	C-MBE	C-WBE
Goals		25%-30%	15%-20%	30%-35%	15%-20%
November 2019	11/30/2019	45%	26%	34%	22%
November 2023	11/1/2023	30%	32%	33%	20%

*(Sources for both tables: Rebuild Philadelphia, 2019, 2023)*

Herring-Miller suggested Rebuild’s approach to MWBE participation is a good example of changing the way the city operates by reducing bureaucracy and potential institutional bias. The city has lacked “a clear process” concerning “how we go after participation as a municipality,” she told us.<sup>33</sup> Philadelphia’s typical 35% participation goal for MWBEs is based on money spent, she explained, but how to meet this goal has not been “clearly stated to the departments.” In contrast, Rebuild’s programs are designed to meet “very aggressive participation goals,” she noted, citing the initiative’s two new efforts, the Emerging Vendors Program and Rebuild Ready, as examples of demonstrating “flexibility” in counting participation and how to build capacity of MWBEs. Now other departments in the city look to Rebuild “as a model” for building MWBE capacity to go after contracts based on these programs. “It’s not easy, but ... the city is looking at how we’re changing the way that business has been done,” Herring-Miller explained. She also described Rebuild’s broader goals of not just “building a pipeline in terms of construction but also building a pipeline in workforce” as state and federal infrastructure investments take shape in the region.

## V. Lessons on Codification as a Partnership Capability

As of November 2023, near the end of Kenney's final term, Rebuild had completed 17 of its planned 72 projects and had another 36 in design or pre-construction. The initiative had also introduced a new intervention, First Fix, to make emergency repairs in advance of Rebuild projects. Almost 40 sites were in construction or had received a first fix. Three hundred ninety million dollars of Rebuild funds were spent or committed. Rebuild had raised over \$41 million, including a suite of recent state awards totaling almost \$4.8 million for seven sites. Two of those sites also had philanthropic funds totaling \$300,000 (Rebuild Philadelphia, 2023).

From former Managing Director Alexander's vantage point, Rebuild was "probably the most significant public-private partnership" in Philadelphia ever. Rebuild experimented with making major investments in city assets differently, putting new "mechanisms in place for [leveraging funding]." He continued, saying, "I think Rebuild has probably written the guidelines for how public-private partnerships work for the city." He described the initiative as a learning curve for all stakeholders, with its "roadmap ... written and edited along the way." Looking ahead, Dave Wilson, deputy managing director for general services, expected Rebuild to "change how we look at major capital projects" for Philadelphia's civic spaces.<sup>34</sup> In fact, coverage of Mayor Cherelle Parker's incoming administration reported that Rebuild would move into a new Office of Capital Projects, headed by Aparna Palantino, who was previously the deputy commissioner for capital infrastructure & natural lands management in the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation department. The office will "[consolidate] infrastructure spending" within city government and streamline the capital process (Rinde, 2024).

As shown in this case study of Philadelphia's Rebuild, codification institutionalizes public sector intentions and practices through policymaking and implementation. Codification is a partnership capability because it communicates shared priorities, offers frameworks for collaboration, and establishes accountability mechanisms. The partnership between the City of Philadelphia and the William Penn Foundation brought the prospect of Rebuild to life through committed advocacy. By navigating significant friction, this partnership expanded to include the Philadelphia City Council, which ultimately adopted sophisticated "enabling legislation" with enforceable and "very ambitious participation goals," according to Kira Strong, Rebuild's second executive director. This governing partnership spanning philanthropy and the executive and legislative branches established widely shared expectations among Rebuild stakeholders, per Strong, which contributed to the program's ability to deliver on its ambitious and multifaceted mission. According to Herring-Miller, deputy director for diverse business and workforce development, multiple sources of funding illustrated "the great need" for Rebuild in Philadelphia to modernize neighborhood civic spaces, increasing Rebuild's legitimacy.

For other cities, we suggest the following lessons from this case study of codification and the three practices highlighted here:

- 1. Advocacy can help overcome political friction and institutionalize partnership priorities.** Mayor Kenney's winning frame of investing in children and former Managing Director DiBerardinis' ability to mobilize his networks contributed to the passage of a controversial tax that had previously failed twice. By bringing in public financing for Rebuild versus relying exclusively on philanthropic funds, the "beverage tax tee up created a scenario where [Philadelphians] also feel ownership of these dollars," according to Strong. As a result, she explained, Philadelphians expect accountability from Rebuild. This expectation of accountability plus the braiding of funds also spurs ongoing advocacy and support for Rebuild. According to Kathy Cueva, Rebuild's deputy director for planning and engagement, the Rebuild team has a responsibility "to document and talk about this major investment," requiring them "to be really thinking critically, 'Does this work?'"<sup>35</sup>
- 2. Policy adoption enshrines public values and their delivery mechanisms.** Measures by both the William Penn Foundation and the Philadelphia City Council helped encode accountability in Rebuild, as it also broke new ground in how the city handled public space investments. William Penn's seed funding enabled investments to be prioritized from an empirically validated list of more than 400 neighborhood sites. Its foundation grant agreement ensured an ongoing commitment to engagement, design excellence, data-driven decision-making, and transparency. The council's concession to the administration to keep Rebuild as a standalone program increased the initiative's chance of transformative change, the team felt. Positioning Rebuild as a "fresh start," as Ray Smeriglio, Rebuild's former chief of staff put it, enabled the initiative to avoid the "biases ... that are built into the system." Moreover, the council put in place mechanisms in Rebuild's legislation to ensure commitments to diversity and inclusion and community engagement were met in site selection, hiring, procurement, and project delivery. The way Rebuild's legislation was written and the "hard work at the beginning" undertaken in policy adoption has helped the team meet this expectation and "to just stay focused on our mission of improving these sites," explained Angie Dixon, Rebuild's deputy director of design and construction.
- 3. Policy enforcement holds partnerships accountable.** Former Executive Director Kira Strong described the foundation's message to Rebuild as "there has to be some sunshine on your spend." The council "doubled down on that," she continued, in how it legislatively codified the initiative's operational structure, workforce diversity and inclusion targets, and "regular" reporting of data. This shared emphasis on measurable accountability underpins Rebuild's "ethos" of being "transparent" and welcoming of public oversight, she explained. As federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act began arriving in U.S. cities in 2023, Rebuild was fielding "inquiries," Strong said, about how to replicate their programs and how they achieved "such high participation." Other interviewees independently reinforced this message, highlighting Rebuild's minority participation rates as demonstrating "what works," Alexander said, for future capital projects and all city contracting.

## VI. Conclusion

Rebuild was designed to redress inequitable investments in civic spaces between Philadelphia's downtown and its neighborhoods. Legacies of under-investment in neighborhoods were visible in deteriorating, once stately parks, recreation, and library facilities that remained "cornerstones" and "centers of neighborhoods" where "magic still happens," as the deputy director of design and construction Dixon put it. Along the way, Rebuild has potentially transformed how the City of Philadelphia approaches public-private partnerships. Rebuild's complexity, challenging at times, has also generated widespread buy-in. Residents' sense of ownership of their community spaces, mentioned repeatedly in interviews, give the Rebuild team and administration the sense that they're changing how city government works. Rebuild's multiple sources of funding and strict reporting and transparency requirements have enhanced Rebuild's accountability to residents, funders, the City Council, and partners.

The codification of Rebuild was a multifaceted process that required the partners to navigate friction to achieve shared goals; the public record and interview transcripts suggest significant stakeholder conflict at times. However, we encourage readers to see the potential for "convivencia" in the enduring willingness of philanthropy, legislators, the mayoral administration, organized labor, and civil society stakeholders to make enforceable, transparent, accountable investments in Philadelphia's neighborhoods, workforce, and businesses. As Laitio (2025) describes in an accompanying brief on partnership capabilities, *convivencia* is a proactive approach to navigating friction and an orientation of coexisting across differences that creates opportunity for negotiation toward shared outcomes. This case suggests the inevitable friction in potential partnerships can be reframed as an opportunity to codify and enforce what Kenney called a "set of guiding values" in partnerships (2016, p.17).

Ultimately, this willingness to navigate friction to achieve Rebuild proved transformative for Philadelphia. For Alexander, the city's former managing director, Rebuild is a conceptually "different" public-private partnership and capital investment program in its commitment to "sitting down with the community and figuring out, 'what are you envisioning? What do you want? ... let us dream with you about what this center could be.'" Similarly, Dixon spoke of Rebuild's "personal stories" that make its reporting "tangible," describing it as an investment in public spaces where "joy happens" and memories are made. This reflects former Managing Director DiBerardini's "vision" of partnering with communities to "make a new vision for what Philadelphia is today and what it could be in the future."

Donna Griffin, president of Community Capacity Builders, LLC, which holds a professional services contract with Rebuild as an MWBE business serving the Fotherall Square community, described this vision as "amazing." Through Rebuild, it has become possible to build community "capacity to be good stewards of the space," she said, adding, "I fell in love with that idea, because I know the power of creating that ownership."<sup>36</sup>

# Endnotes

- 1 More information about Rebuild can be found on the City of Philadelphia's website: <https://www.phila.gov/programs/rebuild/>.
- 2 Partnerships typically involve shared responsibilities between local authorities and companies, philanthropies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or community-based organizations. They are established through varying levels of institutionalization, from verbal agreements to contracts or joint investments (Hofer & Juric, 2015).
- 3 We define legitimacy in rational terms (Weber, 1947), as an acceptance by residents and partners that the government is carrying out its legal duties in a manner consistent with democratically defined objectives. Risks to government legitimacy from partnerships include ceding control over public policy and assets to private actors, reinforcing distributional inequities, a lack of transparency, and prioritizing the needs and views of the powerful (Foster, 2013; Greenspan & Mason, 2017; Saunders-Hastings, 2022).
- 4 The research compares partnerships for parks and libraries in five metropolitan areas across three continents: Amsterdam, Netherlands; Fortaleza, Brazil; Los Angeles, California (USA), Mecklenburg County, North Carolina (USA), and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (USA). In 2022- 2023, Laitio interviewed 123 public sector leaders and staff, stakeholders, and residents using a semi-structured protocol focused on why local authorities pursue partnerships.
- 5 The UN's Sustainable Development Goals is an example of shared policy objectives, endorsed by all member countries, which aim to reduce poverty and inequality, improve health and wellbeing, encourage economic development, and address climate change.
- 6 This research aligns with applications of the notion of *convivencia* in policymaking and professional capabilities (Addy, 2023; Blattman et al., 2022; Ciudad Buenos Aires, 2020).
- 7 Building capabilities for collaboration can be difficult in bureaucracies. Drawing on Mayne et al.'s (2019) state capability framework, capabilities can be understood here as assets for successful governance. They derive from the set of group practices (e.g., within organizations and teams) and individual-level skills that are routine and habituated in an institution. For example, see Anderson (2023) for how the public sector can adopt a problemsolving capabilities approach.
- 8 This study is based on 23 interviews conducted with stakeholders from the Kenney administration, philanthropy, and civil society partners by Bloomberg Public Innovation Fellow Tommi Laitio between November 2022 and February 2023 in Philadelphia. The interviews focused on understanding the ideas, proposed delivery models, anticipated and realized outcomes, and lessons from Rebuild. We supplemented interview data by reviewing publicly available documents and local media coverage, paying close attention to the role of the Philadelphia City Council, who is underrepresented in our snowball sample.
- 9 Section 2 and the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement (Exhibit B) specify in detail how Rebuild operates (Philadelphia City Council, 2017). The full text of the bill can be found here: <https://phila.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=2978206&GUID=C081D9E8-50C6-47D4-BD4D-3D123C4AF79B&Options=ID|Text|&Search=170206>.
- 10 All Rebuild progress reports are available online at <https://www.phila.gov/documents/rebuild-monthly-reports/>.

- 11** The Trust for Public Land’s proprietary ParkScore compares the 100 biggest cities in the U.S. on “acreage, access, investment, amenities, and equity.” Philadelphia’s full ParkScore report is available here: [https://parkserve.tpl.org/downloads/pdfs/Philadelphia\\_PA.pdf](https://parkserve.tpl.org/downloads/pdfs/Philadelphia_PA.pdf).
- 12** The Trust for Public Land’s definition of private funding includes nonprofits, philanthropies, universities, and private corporations.
- 13** The William Penn Foundation is in the top five largest philanthropies in the region, with assets of \$3.175 billion at the end of 2023. It has prioritized investments in local green spaces since its founding in 1945 (Ranghelli, 2014). In the 2010s, the William Penn Foundation co-launched the Reimagining the Civic Commons initiative, a national partnership model for public space investments piloted in Philadelphia.
- 14** Interview by Tommi Laitio on February 17, 2023.
- 15** According to former Parks and Recreation Commissioner Kathryn Ott-Lovell, the city was primed for an investment like Rebuild through its relationship with the William Penn Foundation. She described how much the Parks and Recreation department benefited from “a special relationship with William Penn” given the philanthropy’s “core” emphasis on public space. (Interview by Tommi Laitio on November 8, 2022.)
- 16** Research funded by William Penn suggests that many celebrated flagship public space investments unintentionally exacerbated urban inequities and accelerated neighborhood change (Greenspan & Mason, 2017; see also Burnley 2017a, 2017c).
- 17** Per Hahn (2016), the Knight Foundation made a smaller, complementary planning grant (\$62,896) to the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC), which would administer the bonds proposed for Rebuild. See Burnley (2017e) for additional reporting.
- 18** Rebuild legislation left open the possibility of “incentives to achieve higher rates of workforce diversity” in project labor agreements.
- 19** Interviews by Tommi Laitio on November 8 (Strong) and 9 (Alexander), 2022.
- 20** Interview by Tommi Laitio on November 8, 2022. “Poorest big city in America” is a colloquial description of Philadelphia widely used by elected officials, in the media, and in my interviews. See, for example, Butler (2020).
- 21** In beverage tax negotiations, several council members expressed concerns that a flat tax would put an excessive burden on low-income residents (Terruso 2016a, 2016b). Ultimately a compromise was reached of 1.5 cents per ounce from 3 cents to accommodate lower-income communities (Orso, 2016).
- 22** DiBerardinis thought the tax was likely to pass anyway, but believed campaign mobilization increased the vote margin, which enhanced the tax’s legitimacy. (Interview by Tommi Laitio on February 17, 2023.)

**23** In 2017, William Penn and the Knight Foundation enlisted the Philanthropy Network of Greater Philadelphia to convene the Rebuild Leadership Group to develop an “investment framework” for the initiative (Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia, n.d.). Online artifacts from the Network framed donations as delivering collective impact through pooled philanthropic funding.

**24** Interview by Tommi Laitio on November 9, 2022.

**25** For example, in her announcement of William Penn’s support for Rebuild, Board President Janet Haas highlighted its planned “data-driven investment strategy” and “an extensive civic engagement process” to instill community “ownership and stewardship” (William Penn Foundation, 2016).

**26** Interview by Tommi Laitio on November 8, 2022.

**27** The legislation also established approval from a Project Review Team that would exercise councilmanic courtesies and mandated a 20-member Rebuild Oversight Board.

**28** Although we focus on diversity and inclusion goals in this section, Rebuild legislation also prescribes extensive guidelines across six categorical responsibilities and includes three subsidiary plans for Project Users participation: Rebuild’s Diversity and Inclusion Plan, its Engagement Program, and its Design Excellence Program (Philadelphia City Council, 2017).

**29** Through the PHL Pipeline Program, unskilled racial minorities and women would apprentice with unions on larger Rebuild projects. To address council concerns about skilled laborers of color who did not belong to unions, the MOU included

a plan to place such workers with the PRA for smaller Rebuild projects, which would qualify them for union membership.

**30** In 2023, 26% of metro Philadelphia’s private construction workforce were union members, according to Hirsch et al.’s (2024) tally of union membership and coverage in the nation’s metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs). This puts the metro in the top 20 for unionized construction jobs among the nation’s 100 largest MSAs (measured by total employment in Hirsch et al.’s database). An estimated two-thirds to over 90% of members in Philadelphia’s building trades identify as white men. Lack of racial integration in the building trades contributes to racial wealth gaps, since unionized construction offers “some of the highest-paid jobs for those without a college degree” in the United States, Madej and Reyes report (2022).

**31** An Economic Opportunity Plan governs city contracts of \$100,000 and up on the employment of “minority, women, and disabled-owned businesses” (“M/W/DBE/DSBE”) (City of Philadelphia, n.d.).

**32** Interview by Tommi Laitio on February 17, 2023.

**33** Interview by Tommi Laitio on November 8, 2022.

**34** Interview by Tommi Laitio on November 9, 2022.

**35** Interviews with Cueva, Smeriglio, and Dixon all conducted by Tommi Laitio on November 8, 2022.

**36** Interview by Tommi Laitio on November 9, 2022.

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**The Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University** works to advance public sector innovation across the globe by marrying cutting-edge practice with world-class research to transform the culture of government, deliver exceptional results for residents, and inspire trust in public service. Since its launch in 2021 in partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies and Johns Hopkins University, the Center has brought research, technical assistance, and training programs in proven approaches for impact to 214 global cities, improving the lives of millions of people around the world.

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