University of Pittsburgh | Institute of Politics

2026 Regional Progress Forum

A Blueprint for Prosperity: Aligning Talent Development, Small Business Growth, and Community Capacity

Thursday, October 1
7:45 a.m. – 5:15 p.m.
Heinz History Center-Mueller Room
1212 Smallman St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Agenda

Registration & Breakfast……**7:45 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.**

Welcome & Opening Remarks…….....**8:30 am. – 8:45 a.m.**
- **Kevin Washo, Senior Vice Chancellor for External Relations**
- **Chancellor Joan Gabel, Welcome Video**

Future Policies for the City of Pittsburgh……..…… **8:45 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.**
- **The Honorable Corey O'Connor,** Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh

Aligning Workforce Systems…….. ……..**9:15 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.**
- **Amanda Cage**, CEO, Shift Work Forward (formerly known as National Fund for Workforce Solutions)

Open Discussion……**10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.**

Panel Discussion: Aligning Education and Workforce Systems to Meet the Needs of Industry…….....**10:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.**

Moderator: Gaby Gonzalez**, RK Mellon Foundation
- Pennsylvania Representative Jill Cooper*, Pennsylvania's 55th Legislative District, Co-Chair of the IOP Education Policy Committee
- Dean Eboni Zamani-Gallaher*, University of Pittsburgh, School of Education
- Ami Gatts*, Director, Southwest Corner Workforce Development Board
- Jason Lucia**, Administrative Director Central Westmoreland Career and Technical Center

Open Discussion……...…**11:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

Lunch & Networking…….....**11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

Energy Affordability and Reliability:
Impacts on Pennsylvania Households and Businesses……..……..12:30 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.
Christina Simeone, Senior Energy Policy Advisor, Office of Governor Josh Shapiro & Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

Open Discussion……...1:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Panel Discussion: The Cost of Doing Business in Pennsylvania Cross-Sector ……....1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Moderator: Joel Burstein*, CEO, BEAM Collaborative, IOP Co-Chair Community & Economic Development Policy Committee

- Robert Stein, University of Pittsburgh, Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Entrepreneurship & Executive Director, Institute for Entrepreneurial Excellence
- NazAarah Sabree, Pennsylvania's Small Business Advocate, Pennsylvania Office of Small Business Advocate
- Pennsylvania Representative Valerie Gaydos*, Pennsylvania's 44th Legislative District
- Jeaneen Zappa, Executive Director, The Energy Efficiency Alliance
- Neal Lesher, Vice President Government Affairs, Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry

Open Discussion……...**2:30 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.**

Expanding Opportunity: CDFIs and the Power of Community and Small Business Investment.....……..**2:45 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.**

- **Harold Pettigrew,** President & CEO, Opportunity Finance Network

Open Discussion……..**3:30 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.**

Panel Discussion: Unlocking Pennsylvania's Potential: Strengthening Community and Small Business Investment in Western PA……......……...**3:45 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.**

Moderator: Sherene Hess*, Indiana County Commissioner, IOP Co-Chair Community & Economic Development Policy Committee

- Brandon Mendoza, CEO, Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership
- Varsovia Fernandez, CEO, Pennsylvania CDFI Network
- Henry Pyatt, VP Community Impact, First Commonwealth Bank
- Adam Kenney, Chief Programs Officer, Bridgeway Capital
- Angie Urban, Executive Director, Sharon Community Development Corporation

Open Discussion……...**4:45 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

Closing Remarks by Samantha Balbier…….....**5:00 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.**

Networking Reception…….**5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.**

Coleman Award Dinner……...**6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.**