



Solar panel installation in Millvale, Pennsylvania

SWPA Municipal Project Hub

Many communities throughout southwestern Pennsylvania have faced significant challenges due to deindustrialization, population decline and regional fragmentation. Civic and municipal leaders often report that they lack not only the funding but also the technical expertise and administrative capacities needed to develop and implement solutions. The region then loses out on competitive investments, especially from the federal government, and organizations might underperform with what allocations they did receive if they cannot fulfill compliance and reporting requirements, or if intercity silos preclude necessary collaboration.

In response, The Heinz Endowments launched the Southwestern Pennsylvania Municipal Project Hub in February 2024 with a \$1.25 million start-up grant—the beginning of a \$10 million, two-year commitment to helping our 10-county southwestern Pennsylvania region realize more equitable economic development, increase energy efficient and environmentally sound projects, and advance lasting positive change. By leveraging federal funds to support critical yet underfunded local projects, this new regional initiative supports local government and nonprofit leaders across southwestern Pennsylvania in accessing federal funds, tax credits, grants and other untapped resources.

The Hub itself is a coordination center headquartered in Pittsburgh's Lawrenceville neighborhood and led by CEO Megan Zeigler. Her team provides direct, no-cost, hands-on support to regional municipalities, school districts and nonprofits strategically pursuing funding for impactful projects—air and water quality improvements, infrastructure and connectivity initiatives, resilience and energy efficiency projects and others—but that need help to make that happen. Technical assistance includes areas such as grant writing, feasibility studies, project development and management, engineering services, and legal and tax advice. The Hub also seeks opportunities to coordinate and collaborate with Pennsylvania state government in an aligned effort to maximize federal investments.

The Endowments' investment helps build a pipeline of projects that could amplify more opportunities for the region ahead. Priorities include building up the capacity of existing organizations leading sustainable economic development work; identifying opportunities for catalytic federal investment in community-driven projects and locally owned businesses; creating, funding, and implementing these projects with local leaders and community members; and studying and making recommendations on specific system-level improvements that will deliver real benefit to residents.

An example of the possibilities could be a school district applying for federal funding to install solar panels. That process would include assessing suitable facilities, alternative electrification, and weatherization; crafting a financing plan; developing and releasing a request for proposals; and filing for installation subsidies.

Even amid shifting political and funding landscapes, the Hub is just one way the Endowments enables local changemakers to maximize investments in transformative projects and close local capacity gaps to catalyze shared success for our region, reinvest in our communities and create family-sustaining jobs. By strategically investing in local leaders, the SWPA Municipal Project Hub will drive long-term innovation and increase access to funding for meaningful projects and practical answers to the unique, diverse and frequently intersecting needs and opportunities of communities across the region.

“We're proud to partner with so many visionaries working for a region where sustainable practices and projects unite people because they are good for health and the environment, great for living wages, and help keep and attract the diverse workforce we need to thrive in the future,” said Chris DeCardy, president of The Heinz Endowments.