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**CITY PLAYBOOK FOR
ADVANCING THE SDGS**
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How universities can help cities achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

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More than 111 university students have worked with the City of Los Angeles to translate a global agenda into local action

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global compact, but it is in cities where the work of sustainable development gets done. As Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti says, the SDGs are about us, and they start at home. But while city governments can lead, we cannot achieve the SDGs alone. Measuring and reporting our progress are done with tools, but they will not get us to the future we want without new initiatives and more capacity to build on and sustain them. And with most governments' budgets strained already, translating the Global Goals into local action must add value, not burden.

In L.A., partnerships are how we create capacity. Over the past three years, the city has partnered with universities and their students— collaborations rooted in making measurable and shareable progress on the SDGs.

How to leverage the SDGs for effective university partnerships

Academic partnerships have been a key component since we began work on the SDGs in 2017, with support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles. Having worked with Mayor Garcetti and L.A.'s Chief Data Officer Jeanne Holm, Dr. Sanjeev Khagram brought Occidental College on board as a first university partner for the City, and brought his professional network and his expertise in building multi-sector partnerships to support City Hall.

The Hilton Foundation connected us to their Hilton Summer Scholars Program at the University of California at Los Angeles, which supports students engaged in sustainable development fieldwork. Within six months, we had additional commitments from the University of Southern California and Arizona State University to engage their students in summer and semester-long courses focused on the SDGs in L.A., and have since added Pomona College to this team.

Most of these partnerships began by identifying champions at each of the universities. With each university lead, we worked to connect SDG-aligned projects to their expert colleagues and existing experiential learning programs. This deepened our connections to these complex institutions, and allowed us to create different templates by which we could structure project-based teams.

Translating the SDGs into student-led projects

Student teams can take different formats ranging from capstone projects, graduate-level research, challenge labs, and summer cohorts. Over eleven weeks from June to August, we hosted 54 students on nine different projects as part of

our 2020 SDG Summer Cohort, all overseen by "clients" in the Mayor's Office or city departments.

These project teams:

- Researched global best practices to improve indoor air quality (SDG 7, 13)
- Created a journey map for Angelenos experiencing housing insecurity (SDG 1, 11)
- Analyzed the distribution of federal entitlement grant funds (SDG 1, 8, 11, 16)
- Developed data sets and decision support tools for 21 of the 23 indicators comprising the City of L.A.'s Biodiversity Index (SDG 15)
- Created geospatial data layers to support equity-based investment decisions in street-level assets like bike racks and bus shelters (SDG 10, 11)
- Assessed linkages between housing security and educational outcomes (SDG 4, 11)
- Populated a database of activities across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to support launch of L.A.'s open-source SDG Activities Index (SDG 17)
- Identified SDG indicators where data could be disaggregated by sexual orientation and gender identity, an example of how cities can incorporate local priorities otherwise absent from the global framework to ensure we leave no one behind (SDG 3, 5, 10).

All together, the 2020 students contributed more than 10,000 work hours to advance the Global Goals in Los Angeles. Our university partners contributed several hundred more. A team of three (roughly 1.5 full-time equivalents) managed this effort for the city over the course of 12 weeks, with several more spent in preparation and closeout.

Building effective student projects and university partnerships

Rarely are these partnerships or projects "set it and forget it" endeavors, and both time and trust are essential to this process. In addition to developing the framework by which students are selected and participate, three considerations help these projects add value for all involved.

1. For students to produce deliverables that are immediately usable, city clients must make a consistent—though not onerous—commitment to keep the project on track, and to help make sense of internal processes and jargon.

2. Selecting and scoping projects for the amount of time available is critical, especially considering that students need time to learn the context of their projects. The best outcomes result from projects that have clear boundaries, deliverables, and a realistic scope for the time allotted.

3. All stakeholders should share expectations for what skills, support, and level of interaction are required of all parties to achieve the desired outcomes. This includes practical considerations like obtaining software licenses, scheduling interviews, and harmonizing data sets, all of which can always take longer than planned. The more we can anticipate the team's needs, the more efficiently they can deliver the project.

Partnering with universities on projects rooted in the SDGs offers both students and faculty an opportunity for applied research and service-based learning, and offers L.A. access to added capacity, expertise, and outside perspective. While student teams can't carry a municipal program from start to finish, they do add capacity, energy, and value to research and analysis that together contribute to and shape SDG-focused city services and programs. The SDGs give us the framework to link local solutions to a global agenda, and the common language to bring our whole community of the City of Los Angeles into action.