The University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics is a neutral and nonpartisan convener of regional leaders determined to examine and respond to the critical issues facing our region, thus promoting improved quality of life, government efficiency, and economic vitality in Western Pennsylvania.

In recent months, the Institute and its community partners have engaged in highly impactful work on critical issues such as the opioid overdose epidemic, local government efficiency and effectiveness, urban agriculture, and innovation in K-12 education. By addressing these areas of concern with the help of national and regional experts, elected officials, community leaders, and professionals, the Institute has played a significant role in raising public awareness and formulating meaningful and effective solutions to the region’s most pressing issues.

Through continued engagement, and through the development of informative, nonpartisan educational forums and publications, the Institute aims to turn the political discord that has permeated our society into informed and intelligent political discourse, favoring collaboration over division.

To build further upon our community’s response to this national crisis, the Institute has continued to convene the Single County Authorities, key public health executives, and members of the U.S. District Attorney’s implementation team to assist with the execution of the policy and procedural recommendations put forth by the Institute’s report in a comprehensive and coordinated way.

During the spring of 2017, the work of the implementation team resulted in two community workshops held in Indiana, Pa., and Erie, Pa. The workshops featured presentations by law enforcement and public health practitioners from our region, including a keynote address by Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro. The Institute developed the workshops in partnership with the Heroin Overdose Technical Assistance Center (TAC), which is part of the Program Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) of the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Pharmacy. PERU’s TAC is charged with providing counties with evidenced-based strategies to reduce overdoses in our region. PERU also hosts the OverdoseFreePA Web site, www.overdosefreepa.pitt.edu, a statewide resource on the overdose epidemic. Registration for both community workshops reached full capacity (120 attendees in Indiana and 170 attendees in Erie).

The community workshops offered presentations and discussions on the following topics:
- Introduction and role of the Single County Authority
- Review of Pennsylvania’s client-placement criteria
- Review of medication-assisted treatment
- Overview of SBIRT (screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment)
- Coordinating county-level public health and public safety
- The role of warm hand-offs

The Institute has posted the resource guides that were distributed at the community workshops, as well as a summary of the deliberations, and survey results from each event on its Web site for reference. Visit: http://iop.pitt.edu/active-programs/opioid-overdose-epidemic
Voluntary Municipal Disincorporation

The Institute of Politics called upon past Allegheny County Executives Dan Onorato and Jim Roddey to lend their expertise and leadership to co-chair the Voluntary Municipal Disincorporation Task Force. The task force was composed of former elected officials, state government officials with an expertise in local government affairs, local government practitioners, academics, and business leaders. The group convened regularly over nine months to deliberate on issues surrounding municipal disincorporation.

Urban Agriculture

Starting in the winter of 2016, the Institute of Politics collaborated with the Allegheny County Conservation District to examine and address municipal concerns around urban agriculture. To help guide the work, the Institute assembled a special committee of policy makers and experts, tasked with researching best practices and developing a model urban agriculture ordinance.

The model ordinance serves as a resource to municipalities interested in establishing effective policies and guidelines for urban agriculture activities, which have become increasingly popular throughout the region and across the nation. The committee expects that municipalities interested in allowing urban agriculture practices can adopt the model ordinance (in whole or in pieces) and avoid spending time and money on researching and developing their own comprehensive and effective ordinance. In addition, an event for municipal leaders will explain the purpose and scope of the ordinance and address their concerns.

Remake Learning Network

For the past three years, the Institute has partnered with The Grable Foundation and other regional entities to host and support an event as part of the region’s Remake Learning Days. On May 15, 2017, the Institute hosted approximately 200 students from 10 districts on the University campus for the “DiscoverEd” event. The students worked together to solve an engineering design challenge. The cooperation helps to break down the artificial barriers that persist among students, teachers, and school leaders in the region by encouraging them to work across district lines.

For more information on this initiative, visit: www.remakelearningdays.org.
Never a Spectator

On March 16, 2017, 160 students joined 21 community leaders for this year’s Never a Spectator campus-wide event. The 2017 program was designed to highlight regional leaders who saw a need in their communities and developed a sustainable solution or program that addressed that unmet need. This theme was framed by a keynote presentation by John M. Wallace Jr., PhD, professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh, who founded the Homewood Children’s Village, which partners with residents, government, schools, philanthropic foundations, and faith- and community-based organizations to revitalize Homewood in hopes of making it a place where children can thrive.

The goal of Never a Spectator is to inspire, empower, and engage students to be civically active in their communities by providing them with an opportunity to learn from some of the region’s most impactful leaders. The event brings Elsie’s leadership style and legacy of collaboration to a large number of students, including those who may not be involved with other long-term Elsie programs.

Never a Spectator afforded me the opportunity to encounter real impact leaders in the Pittsburgh region while a student at the University of Pittsburgh. In my two years of participation in the event, I was able to engage with leaders such as the mayor of Pittsburgh and the director of a non-profit that reduces food waste in the region. This experience gave me perspective as to the accessibility of leaders in the Pittsburgh area that seemed unimaginable before the event. Never a Spectator gives students the chance to interact with some of the most influential people in the city and can show a small-town kid like me that real change is possible and that no resource in this area is “too big” to engage.

— Kevin Zedack, senior

Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Project-based Learning

In August 2017, the Institute released *Moving Beyond 20th Century Education: Emerging Trends in CTE and Project-based Learning*. The report, intended to be an update to the Institute’s 2011 CTE report, attempts to highlight the connections between improving educational achievement and preparing students to take part in the workforce of tomorrow through the new methods of integrating career and technical education and project-based learning that are occurring in our region. The report highlights such innovations to promote greater understanding of the practices among education and workforce stakeholders.

The publication is available at: [http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/33158](http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/33158).

Elsie Hillman Civic Forum

With an endowed fund awarded by Henry Hillman through the Hillman Family Foundations, the Institute of Politics manages the Elsie Hillman Civic Forum to serve as the student engagement and mentorship arm of the Institute. The Elsie Hillman Civic Forum advances the ideals of social responsibility and public service by providing educational programs, research projects, and civic engagement and leadership development opportunities to students and community leaders. The academic and community engagement activities of the Elsie Forum align with the University of Pittsburgh’s goal to strengthen the local community through service-oriented scholarship and mindful collaborations with strategic community partners.

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Legislator for A Day: On March 21, 2017, 15 students traveled to Harrisburg, Pa., to “shadow” an elected official for the day. This experience provided the undergraduate students with a unique look into the political process and a personal introduction to key legislators from the region.

The Legislator for a Day event was by far one of the most impactful experiences I have had at the University of Pittsburgh. Despite my interest being in public health and medicine rather than political science, this experience fosters civic engagement, community vision, and enabled me to understand how policy is implemented and changed in government. This fundamental understanding will lend great importance to me as an active member of my community and as a health care provider in the future. Understanding differences in views during civic dialogue during the current political climate will lend us the tools to impact our families, communities, and workplace in meaningful ways, whichever path we may choose for ourselves.

— Zachary C. Clapp, senior

Internship and Seminar: During the 2016–2017 academic year, the Elsie Forum placed 36 students with an elected official from local, state, or federal government for a nine-hour-per-week internship. The students worked closely with the official’s staff, gaining firsthand knowledge of the political workings and atmosphere of the Pittsburgh region. At a weekly seminar, participants supplemented their experiences by using creative learning techniques and discussing and analyzing the public service process.

Elsie Hillman Honors Scholars Program: In spring 2017, the first cohort of Elsie Hillman Honors Scholars completed the program. Over the course of the school year, each student was connected with a community partner to develop an original, student-led civic engagement project that addressed an issue(s) important to the community partner and reflected the passion and social commitment of the student. Through a structured and collaborative process, each student worked closely with a university mentor and community agency to develop a project that will advance the goals and mission of the community partner and develop the student’s leadership skills. This year’s cohort addressed a variety of regional issues, including community health and economic well-being, education equity, food insecurity, and language barriers for immigrants in health care. Below are a sample of community partners and an example of one of the projects an Elsie Hillman Honors Scholar developed last year.

Community partners for 2016–2017 include:
— Homewood Children’s Village
— Allies for Children
— Institute of Politics
— Sustainable Pittsburgh and PA Representative Dan Frankel
— Greater Pittsburgh Area Community Food Bank
— Sarah Heinz House

Student project highlight: Rachel Bukowitz, Elsie Hillman Honors Scholar, partnered with the Homewood Children’s Village to address food access and security in the Homewood neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Through this partnership, Rachel developed the “Homewood Healthy Food and Gardening Access Guide,” which serves as a comprehensive resource on healthy food options available to residents. To develop the guide, Rachel and the Homewood Children’s Village talked with current residents to understand their relationship with and memories of food in their lives. They also spoke with organizations in Homewood that are working to bring fresh and healthy food into their neighborhood. Homewood Children’s Village community partners will distribute the access guide throughout Homewood.