



# DIVERSIFY LEADERSHIP

## > Barney Oursler

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PITTSBURGH UNITED

**T**here is reason for distrust from people of color. They feel like they are being left behind and left out. I believe when you make an effort to reach out, when you ask people to join the struggle, and when you make sure the leaders are included in the decisions to address their needs, it is a pretty good way to create community.

Many of us don't want our city to follow so many others, where development means even more displacement and poverty for the working poor. These are the ones who are challenging the status quo and being change makers. I think those who oppose change makers are the few who benefit from others' poverty, or some who are afraid of losing what little they have and are confused about who threatens them with the words of the very rich and powerful.

If we want "a community of we" in Pittsburgh, we have to try to end structural racism, which involves building leadership for the city that includes black, brown and many other diverse communities. That's why Pittsburgh United coalition partner organizations

invite the leaders of those communities into the decision-making of our coalition. Winning progressive policies is not going to change the structural inequalities in our city—which include race, gender, class, gender identity and more—unless it is accomplished with the leaders of communities most hurt by these inequalities.

Pittsburgh United has identified leaders of color within our existing partners to support as coalition leaders, and we are building long-term relationships with organizations led by people of color. This has been effective because the staff working on different campaigns has prioritized this shift in internal leadership as a goal that is as important as external organizing.

We have had our missteps and challenges. But we are embracing them so we can change the internal and external power dynamics that hold us back from fully tackling the economic, racial and other structural inequalities that prevent our city from being a place where everyone can flourish.

— Interviewed by Cristina Rouvalis