

CAUSE CONNECTION

Connecting people who care to causes that matter

LVCF Leading the Early Childhood Workgroup in Allentown’s Reconnect Grant Success

The Lehigh Valley Community Foundation (LVCF) played a pivotal role in the City of Allentown’s successful bid to secure a \$20 million federal grant aimed at revitalizing some of the city’s most economically distressed neighborhoods. This significant funding, part of the U.S. Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) Reconnect Pilot Program, represents a transformative opportunity for the city to address barriers to employment, including challenges in transportation and access to affordable childcare.



LVCF’s Central Role in Childcare Planning



A key component of Allentown’s Reconnect Plan is improving access to quality childcare—a critical factor in enabling residents to enter and stay in the workforce. Through the leadership of **Megan Briggs**, Vice President of Community Investments, LVCF has been instrumental in this effort. Megan led a coalition of community partners and stakeholders in crafting the childcare section of the Reconnect application. Their work focused on enhancing childcare services to support not only families but also those who work in the childcare sector, thereby fostering better job opportunities for Allentown’s residents and contributing to the overall economic growth of the Lehigh Valley.

The importance of this focus cannot be overstated. As **Alejandra Y. Castillo**, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development, emphasized during the grant announcement, “We tend to forget how critically important the childcare component is” to employment. The inclusion of a robust childcare improvement plan in the application helped distinguish Allentown’s proposal from a competitive pool of 565 submissions, ultimately securing its place as one of only six communities nationwide to receive Reconnect grant funding.



IN THE NEWS

Lindsay Watson and Jennifer L. Mann Join LVCF Board of Governors

LVCF recently named two distinguished leaders to its Board of Governors, **Lindsay Watson** and **Jennifer L. Mann**, who bring extensive experience, entrepreneurial spirit, and a deep commitment to community service. Lindsay serves on the Community Investments Committee and Jennifer serves on the Community Relations Committee.

[Lindsay Watson](#) is the Co-Founder of the award-winning FIA NOW Employment Solutions and Founder of Joy Fluent, a virtual assistant and support business. Lindsay has made a significant impact in human resources, business development, and public speaking, with over 19 years of experience in staffing, recruiting, relationship management, and career coaching.



[Jennifer L. Mann](#) also brings a wealth of experience back to the Board, having previously served from 2013 to 2022. As a seasoned professional in government, business, and philanthropy, Jennifer’s background includes serving as a Pennsylvania State Representative and working in various leadership roles across multiple sectors.



Collaborative Effort for Transformational Change

The Recompete grant is designed to help economically distressed communities by removing barriers to employment and creating pathways to economic opportunity. In Allentown, where the unemployment rate among young residents in poorer neighborhoods is a staggering 12.3%, this funding is poised to make a significant impact. The city’s poverty rate, which stands at 23.3%, is double the national average, with racial and ethnic disparities contributing to unequal access to opportunity. Only 38% of Allentown’s Latino population, for example, has “high access to opportunity,” compared with 78% of the city’s white population.

Allentown Mayor **Matt Tuerk** highlighted these challenges at the press conference held on August 5, 2024, to announce the \$20 million-dollar Recompete grant, stating, “While the Lehigh Valley has seen tremendous economic growth, not all residents of Allentown have felt the benefit of that growth equally. Disparities in job access, skills alignment, and essential services like transportation and childcare have left some behind.” The Recompete grant is seen as a crucial



LVCF staff discuss early childcare issues with Congresswoman Susan Wild

tool for addressing these disparities and ensuring more equitable economic growth in the city. At the “Presser,” Mayor Tuerk was spoke to the more than 100 people assembled for the announcement. **Congresswoman Susan Wild** and **Senator Bob Casey**, Pennsylvania’s Lt. Governor **Austin Davis** and **Alejandra Y. Castillo**, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development (pictured on page one) all provided their perspectives.



Involvement Beyond the Recompete

LVCF’s involvement extends beyond the Recompete Plan. The Foundation has also been invited to serve as the backbone convener of the Early Childhood Education Action Committee, a coalition working toward systemic change in the early childhood sector across the Lehigh Valley. As a backbone organization, LVCF is collaborating with nonprofits, policymakers, advocates, and the community to plan actions that will drive significant improvements in early childhood education and care.

Looking Ahead: A New Chapter for Allentown

The \$20 million in Recompete funding is just the beginning. As Alejandra Castillo noted, these federal dollars are “seed dollars” intended to attract further investment from the private sector and philanthropic organizations. The successful implementation of Allentown’s Recompete plan is expected to be transformational, with city projections

indicating that over 650 people could be employed by 2030, significantly narrowing the local employment gap.

Allentown’s selection for this grant underscores the city’s commitment to creating a more inclusive economy where all residents can thrive. Through its leadership role in the submission of the Recompete Plan grant and broader community initiatives, LVCF is helping to pave the way for a brighter future for Allentown where economic opportunity is accessible to all.. In collaboration with partners, we are working to change the narrative for Allentown’s most vulnerable communities, demonstrating the power of partnership and shared vision in driving lasting change.

[Learn More...](#)

CITY OF ALLENTOWN PHASE 2 RECOMPETE PLAN
 Submitted 04.23.2024
 \$20M funding goal

RECOMPETE IS A PLACE-BASED INVESTMENT THAT WILL:

- Recompete serves Allentown's most vulnerable in our rapidly changing economy. Franklin Park, Center City, and the 1st and 4th Wards are economically distressed.
- Recompete creates new partnerships between service providers and industries. 38 local and regional partners have contributed to this plan development. Further support from state dollars will **12x commitments and leveraged assets.**
- Recompete creates strong demand for on-site employment and builds connections to high opportunity industries. Priority industries for this plan are **healthcare and manufacturing.**
- Recompete jobs Allentown workers in a stronger position to **earn higher wages, live closer to transit, and create new avenues of opportunity for communities.**

RECOMPETE AREA

Center Tract: 4.5, 5, 10, 18, 20
 Population: 23,182
 Labor/Unemployed: 78.7%
 Median Household Income: \$43,510
 Per capita income: \$17.3k
 Unemployment: 12.1%

PAID REDUCTION GOAL → SUB-5%
 This Plan will employ a maximum of 659 Recompete Area residents by 2030. Recompete investments will cut the localized PAEG by 60%.

TRANSFORMING ECONOMIC DISTRESS
 By 2030, the City of Allentown PAEG will be less than 4.75%, and therefore, no longer classified as an economically distressed local community.

READ THE FULL PLAN HERE: [QR Code]

4 STRATEGIC COMPONENT PROJECTS