

Economic Democracy Case Studies

Overview

The Economic Democracy Project at Demos envisions liberation for Black and brown people. This requires us to address inequities in economic, political, and institutional power. The concept of economic democracy recognizes that everyone deserves a stake in the system and that the economy should exist to serve the people—the demos. In a moment in which a corporate ruling class exploits racial and class divisions to dodge accountability and accumulate power, preserving our democracy requires creating opportunities for the public to lead and shape economic outcomes.

The Economic Democracy Project aims to highlight and develop strategies that Black and brown communities can use to build economic and political power. It has 3 priorities:

1. **Break up and regulate new corporate power, including Amazon, Google, and Facebook.**
2. **Expand the meaning of public goods and ensure that services are equitably and publicly administered.**
3. **Strengthen “co-governance” strategies so that people and public agencies can collectively make decisions about the economy.**

The following case studies spotlight 4 community campaigns working across the U.S. to reclaim power over economic resources.

Water As a Public Good: Pittsburgh’s Our Water Campaign

This case study follows Pittsburgh United and its partners in the Our Water Campaign as they seek to restore public governance over the local water authority. After a private company left Pittsburgh’s water infrastructure corroded and contaminated, local organizers built community pressure to hold the agency accountable, increase oversight and civic participation, and ward off threats from other companies hoping to privatize the city’s water supply.

Building Civic Power: Equitable Access to Flood Recovery in Harris County, TX

This case study follows the Texas Organizing Project (TOP) as it worked to redistribute political and economic power in greater Houston after Hurricane Harvey. TOP organizers wanted to change how Harris County allocated relief funds and ensure that the people most impacted by the climate crisis have a seat at the table. To accomplish this, they implemented a 3-part inside-outside strategy: a leadership development program, an electoral campaign, and co-governance work to develop an “equity framework” for future funding.

Banking for the Public Good: Public Bank NYC

This case study follows the New Economy Project as it organized a cross-sector coalition of local worker collaboratives, housing cooperatives, and community wealth-building organizations to win public-banking infrastructure in the city and state of New York—the finance capital of the country.

Standing Tall Against Corporate Power: For Us, Not Amazon

This case study follows the coalition For Us Not Amazon (FUNA) and members of the Athena Coalition as they organized to prevent one of the biggest corporations in the world from taking over the civic, social, and political life of Northern Virginia and beyond.

In all 4 case studies, ordinary people found ways to battle concentrated power in the hands of the corporate ruling class. Organizers and community members held to a belief in the common good, public institutions, and principles of justice and equity against enormous odds.

The campaigns in Pittsburgh, PA, New York City, and Arlington County, VA confronted corporations with global reach attempting to take control of precious natural and financial resources and undermine civic governance. In Harris County, TX, New York City, and Pittsburgh, community members built relationships and worked closely with government officials while simultaneously organizing and agitating those same officials to ensure community control over public goods and resources. And in all 4 cases, organizers developed new leaders from Black and brown communities to take power into their own hands by joining local governance boards, leading meetings with government officials, engaging in direct actions, and participating in oversight and decision-making about public spending. Together, these case studies show that another economic paradigm is possible. Right now, people all across the country are building a better future by recognizing their common bonds, reclaiming civic and economic power from corporate elites, and working to transform their communities into something more humane, inclusive, conscientious, and just—a democracy of, by, and for the people.

