

network stories

Cradle to Career Cincinnati - Cincinnati, Ohio



context

In Cincinnati, Ohio, a *local study* conducted as part of *The Cincinnati Project* found that an average of 12,439 residential evictions were filed each year. In 2017, Cincinnati's Hamilton County had the 10th highest eviction filing rate in the country. Similar to other cities with comparable eviction rates, there is also a massive shortage of affordable housing units for low-income households.

Despite citywide calls for better tenant rights and representation, it wasn't until the election of Greg Landsman to Cincinnati City Council in 2017 that changes were put into action. Landsman, former executive director of *StrivePartnership* (now *Cradle to Career Cincinnati*) came to office with five years' experience running a collective impact backbone focused on aligning energies and using data to drive decisions. He also brought with him a team passionate about making lasting change for families. This combination served as an ideal foundation to begin the crucial work of effective housing reform.

Figure 1: Eviction Filing Rates and Eviction Rates per 100 Renter-Occupied Units, 2002-2016 (Desmond et al. 2018a)





Lesson #1: Results Based Facilitation and a cross-sector team will get results.

Landsman’s chief of staff, Dr. Vanessa White, formed a team focused on improving housing issues. The team included stakeholders from Legal Aid, the city solicitor’s office, local housing agencies and the clerk of courts along with fair housing advocates from the community. According to White, the first step to making big policy change is going back to the fundamentals.

“You’ve got to set the table, and set it well. We brought in the decision makers we needed, and we knew we had to get them all on the same page if we were going to do anything meaningful.” -Dr. White.

With support from Colin Groth at StriveTogether, White designed a planning session aimed at identifying the eviction changes the group would collectively prioritize and pursue. Using a Results Based Facilitation frame and approach, the cross-sector team left that session with a list of changes that they are still prioritizing. Landsman and White both attribute the continued alignment to having the right people engaged and getting them all to agree on what changes tenants expressed and data showed were truly needed.



Lesson #2: The data infrastructure is as important as the data itself.

Landsman and White say the data is still a challenge, but they are making progress. For others beginning to engage in housing reform, Landsman recommends ensuring you have these three items in place:

1. A data sharing agreement with the clerk of court's office to ensure you are getting weekly data on eviction filings;
2. A data system that all partners providing rental assistance work with so that no person in need is overlooked; and
3. A tried-and-tested evaluation system.

“It’s hard to keep asking partners to invest and the city to budget for rental assistance if you can’t track how long tenants stayed in their homes.” - Landsman

As a result, Cincinnati is now working on building out a shared data system for eviction prevention.



What reforms did they pass?

The proposed policy changes were presented as a package of housing reforms, which were passed almost unanimously by Cincinnati City Council.

A few of the key enactments included:

- Creation of a residential rental registry and new database of landlords;
- Creation of a rental inspection program that shifts the burden to landlords;
- Creation of an eviction prevention and tenant-landlord information website;
- Institution of a cap on tenant late fees at 5% of rental fees; and
- Creation of a data-sharing agreement with the clerk of courts on eviction filings.

Additionally, in early 2019 Cincinnati City Council passed another ordinance that established an Eviction Prevention Fund to provide rental assistance to tenants in low-income households at risk of eviction. The fund increased from \$227,000 in 2019 to \$500,000 in 2020, and the city council expects to continue budgeting for the fund annually.

“There shouldn’t be a city or state official who isn’t working on this right now,” argues Landsman.

“The CARES Act funding as well as the moratorium on evictions has helped to keep thousands if not tens of thousands of children and families in their homes. But it’s also exposed how fragmented this system of support still is. With multiple agencies trying to help, and oftentimes on their own, the next big thing for us is to build lasting infrastructure that organizes all of our partners for tenant support and ensure everyone gets what they need.”