

Partners for Places Project Lessons Report

Project Name: *Utilizing Equity as the Lens for Sustainability Plan Development*

- **Year Complete:** 2018
- **Local Government:** City of Baltimore, MD
- **Local Foundation:** Baltimore Community Foundation

Project Purpose

To use equity as a lens for development and implementation of the City of Baltimore Sustainability Plan.

Key Lessons Learned

Lessons learned about tools and tactics through the project that other sustainability directors could use to advance their work.

- There was high Ambassador drop-off, but the project team found that fewer Ambassadors worked as well or better than a large number and were easier to manage. Most of the Lead Ambassadors were community leaders and this worked well. There were many new residents who stepped up to lead for the 1st or 2nd time, and wider outreach was done to find those who might like the opportunity to step up. Promoting the idea of being an Ambassador along with a friend made participants more comfortable, and it was emphasized that strictly interviewing family, friends and co-workers was perfectly fine.
- In an effort to gain more detail from the survey, two interns were employed to read through every answer, create subcategories, and categorize so they could dig deeper to capture what residents had told Ambassadors. This ensured that the ambassador process was valuable.
- When conducting engagement, even if all the facets of racial equity or justice are fully understood, the topic must be approached in an authentic manner.
- Finding informal advisors to help with equity was invaluable for the Plan update. Taking this to the next level and forming a kitchen cabinet of racial equity/racial justice advisors was imperative. Regularly reaching out to people was a way to keep the equity work on track. Listening to voices, the radical ones, the fearful ones and the conformed was important to get a fuller view.
- Because the Office of Sustainability was in contact with so many individuals and organizations, there was a close working relationship that gave the funder insights they might not otherwise have. Conversely, the funders have many relationships and connections that city government does not and is privy to different aspects of organizations the city does not see.

Lessons for developing a collaborative process between a local government sustainability director and local place-based foundation(s).

Having a strong, committed, interested local partner makes all the difference in the world. There is so much value in the relationship in terms of working as a team. Having a funder who understands the limits and also the reach and capabilities of city government was invaluable. Baltimore successfully increased the voice of underserved populations in the sustainability planning laying a foundational framework for others to follow.

Additional Information and Resources

In 2018, Baltimore formally adopted [updates](#) to their Sustainability Plan, which employs an equity lens, embraces accountability, and more intentionally addresses all three prongs of sustainability.