

Partners for Places Project Lessons Report

Project Name: *Greenworks Equity Index: Community-Centered Sustainability Decision-Making*

- **Year Complete:** 2019
- **Local Government:** City of Philadelphia, PA
- **Local Foundation:** The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Project Purpose

To identify Philadelphia populations disproportionately exposed to environmental stressors, and reduce disparities through community-centered decision-making.

Key Lessons Learned

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

In order to use equity as an approach for a project that takes place in any community—and particularly in marginalized communities—it is extremely important to begin with foundational research that uncovers the ways in which institutional power and bias have impacted the neighborhood. Conducting background research—through historical analysis, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups—can help answer the following questions:

- Why do environmental inequalities like exposure to heat exist in low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color in the city?
- What is the specific history of land-use that has led to this unequal exposure to environmental risk?
- What are the historic policies that have and continue to determine where people live in the city?
- Who are the key stakeholders and actors in the neighborhood?
- What are the important community assets and landmarks in the neighborhood?
- How are residents already organizing and leading?
- What are the key barriers that residents face to accessing existing resources?

It is also important to do regular team and self-reflection to understand how you are embodying your values around equity and inclusion in the ways that you interact and engage with residents, including:

1. **Voicing Needs:** Are you holding space for people to be able to express their needs?
2. **Respect:** In the process of understanding the changes that community members would like to see, how are you also respecting the existing neighborhood history, identity, and strengths?
3. **Shifting Power:** How does power show-up in this space? How are you acknowledging your own privilege and power, and working to shift this power so that community members are

- leading decision-making? How are margins within the community already showing up and how are you backing their leadership?
4. Relationship Building: How does the planning process strengthen connections, and relationships, and trust? This is especially important in climate change planning, because during climate emergencies it is the relationships immediately around folks that will be the most important in terms of how quickly they are able to organize and respond.
 5. Storytelling: Are their places and opportunities for people to share their stories and experiences and do you value this as data?

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

As with many other funders, it is helpful to understand their giving priorities, previously funded projects, and current list of grantees in order to craft a compelling proposal, connect with other partners and elevate the impact of their giving.

Additional Information and Resources

Read more about Philadelphia's release of their Hunting Park Beat the Heat Plan [here](#). The full plan can be accessed [here](#).