

Partners for Places Project Lessons Report

Project Name: *Extending Independence and Energy Security for Vulnerable Seniors in Virginia's New River Valley*

- **Year Complete:** 2016
- **Local Government:** Town of Blacksburg, VA
- **Local Foundation:** The Community Foundation of the New River Valley

Project Purpose

To develop and implement an energy and aging home modification program for lower income older adults in Blacksburg and the New River Valley.

Key Lessons Learned

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

A key element to this project was the realization that areas of critical need for vulnerable older residents closely intersect with key regional sustainability metrics. This program found that there are complementary missions with potential partnerships focusing on housing affordability, successful aging, environmental stewardship, strategic regional philanthropy, land use and transportation planning, and applied academic research.

The project team strongly recommended development of a local or regional aging-in-place team that was expansive in terms of partner inclusion – which included sustainability directors or others working toward similar ends. Community sustainability metrics were embraced and advanced more readily when linked to the well-being of a vulnerable segment of the population. The broader coalition also greatly expanded the effectiveness of each of the agencies as the project team sought to link the target population with the information and resources applicable to their needs, even and perhaps especially when their needs were outside the scope and capabilities of this program.

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

A collaborative relationship between sustainability directors and local place-based foundations was an unlikely but beneficial alliance. In this case, a partnership emerged from a regional planning process in which the Sustainability Director and Community Foundation staff were key partners. It required doing

the plodding work of building an institutional relationship and the trust that came with it. There was no magic ingredient - it came from dedication and shared priorities.

Over time, both parties came to deeply understand each other's mission and when an idea was ripe, they were poised to pool skill sets and resources to advance projects of shared priority. Beyond this simple binary relationship, each party brought in additional colleagues and allies from their respective networks.

Additional Information and Resources

To date, this program has completed several home modifications for community members in need, and developed a modification guidebook which eventually led to completion of an entire [apartment complex](#). Read more about their work with the Community Foundation of the New River Valley [here](#).