

## USDN Survey Reveals “Sweet Spots” for Triple Bottomline Progress

**The 2016 USDN Member Impact Survey revealed a great deal about which of 52 major actions meet the many criteria that make a project a strong potential contributor to community sustainability.**

**Read more about the survey [here](#).**

The “sweet spot” is a convergence of actions that are feasible, have a strong positive GHG emissions impact, enhance political will, and benefit disadvantaged communities. According to USDN member responses to the survey, some of the sweet spot actions are:

- Planning: sustainability teams, sustainability indicators, sustainability planning
- Engagement: business recognition, multi-stakeholder commissions, resident campaigns
- Leading by example: employee commute reduction programs, sustainable procurement
- Energy: residential energy efficiency upgrades, industrial energy efficiency upgrades, distributed energy generation, energy efficiency building codes
- Transportation: car sharing access, complete streets planning, waste reduction programs
- Waste: residential recycling
- Natural systems: forest canopy programs, urban agriculture programs

The majority of USDN members are pursuing these sweet spot actions, often with a strong focus on equity. For example, 80 USDN members responding to the member survey have or are implementing a sustainability plan. These plans are providing an excellent opportunity to build equity into sustainability programs. For example, Portland OR, Baltimore, and Providence all have made equity an overarching goal of their planning.



Unfortunately, some of the actions with the greatest potential positive impact on GHG emissions and disadvantaged communities are more challenging to implement. USDN members are forging ahead, even on the most ambitious actions.

More than 20 USDN member cities reported that they are implementing a 100% renewable energy commitment, and many of these cities are creating opportunities for people of color and low-income communities. For example, Washington DC's district council unanimously approved a 50% by 2032 renewable energy target this year, along with provisions to reduce energy costs for low-income households. Berkeley is implementing the Brighter Futures Berkeley program to bridge the solar divide by increasing equitable access to renewable energy for low-income residents and providing hands-on solar job training.

Emerging actions that could have potential high impact on GHG emissions and on disadvantaged communities in the next few years include consumption policy and battery installation. Vancouver's Upcycle Design Project is working on building demand for recovered materials in order to catalyze the shift to a more circular economy in the city's design, production, construction, and demolition sectors. For Vancouver, the circular economy offers not only a waste solution but also new local green jobs and economic development that will benefit residents.

Local food through urban agriculture and climate vulnerability assessments have more moderate GHG impacts, but they can have a significant impact on political will and a very positive impact on disadvantaged communities. Almost 80% of USDN members responding to the survey are taking these actions. In 2015, Boston became one of the first cities of its size to assess gaps in food system



resilience and identify ways to address them. Three of the five areas for improvement of the Boston food system will benefit disadvantaged communities: more national chain grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods, resilience plans for small grocery stores and corner stores, and expanded capacity of the city's food safety net.



USDN members have become increasingly skilled at finding the “sweet spot” projects that offer triple bottomline sustainability impact, and USDN is supporting this work through its grant programs. For instance, on July 15, 2016 in Washington DC, both [Desiree Williams-Rajee](#) (Portland OR, top left) and Kristin Baja (Baltimore, bottom left) were honored as White House Champions of Change for Climate Equity. Portland OR received a Partners for Places grant to bring an equity lens to climate action planning, and Baltimore received a Partners for Places Equity Pilot grant to use an equity lens for its sustainability plan update. By sharing their collective experience and funding equity advancing work, USDN hopes to help other cities find the sweet spots too.