

Announcing \$1.4 million in support for cities and sustainability through Partners for Places

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How many partnerships does it take to create healthy and sustainable communities for all? Tons. The opportunities are endless and the needs urgent. Just think about the challenges before us: rapidly accelerating climate change, unsafe drinking water, neighborhood flooding made worse with more intense storm events, western drought and wildfires, uneven access to safe and healthy local food, and the list goes on. That is why the [Funders' Network](#) and [Urban Sustainability Directors Network \(USDN\)](#) have joined forces to provide financial and technical resources to communities across the United States and Canada through two grant programs: the Partners for Places general grant program and the [Partners for Places](#) Equity Pilot Initiative.

Today, we're excited to share that 12 grantees will receive a combined \$1.4 million to advance their work through Partners for Places.

The work began five years ago, when the Funders' Network and several member foundations were excited by a new field in the making – urban sustainability – and the power of peer networks and partnerships to accelerate learning and best practices. We put our heads together with colleagues at USDN to create a matching grant program that improves U.S. and Canadian communities by building partnerships between local government sustainability leaders and place-based foundations. The national funders would invest in local projects developed through these partnerships to promote a healthy environment, a strong economy, and well-being for all residents. At the same time, through these investments, the Partners for Places general grant program would foster long-term relationships between cities and funders to help make communities more prosperous, livable and vibrant.

Fast forward to today, and we're well on our way toward achieving our goals. As of now, Partners for Places' general grant program has awarded nearly \$3.5 million in grants to support 63 projects across the U.S. and Canada, with these dollars matched 1:1 by local, place-based funders. That's close to \$7 million invested in a wide range of terrific sustainability and climate action partnership projects, which have engaged 95 local funders in this work.

Partners for Places has provided a reason for place-based funders and city sustainability leaders to start to talk to each other, and for many of them to work together to improve the livability and quality of life in cities across the country. These projects are making a difference in people's lives, especially those in greatest need.

In Philadelphia, our grant provided staffing for the city's new [Food Policy Council](#), a broad group of stakeholders working across the city to create urban farms on vacant lots and increase neighborhood access to healthy local food. In Columbia, Missouri, the [CoMO Energy Challenge](#) is starting to significantly reduce energy consumption in every household and municipality-owned building in the city. At the end of the grant period, overall residential electric use was down 11.4 percent, residential gas use down 12.4 percent, and gas use in city buildings down nearly 15 percent. Fully, 85% of these Partners for Places partnerships are continuing on beyond the life of our grant.

In our latest grant round, the selection committee approved eight grants totaling \$437,108 to support projects working to promote urban agriculture, advance green stormwater solutions, provide open space to disadvantaged communities and green jobs for low-income workers. These sustainability efforts will take place in cities big and small, and largely focus on low-income communities. They include a Boston project training young adults involved in the court system to work on urban farming and a Milwaukee effort to create a welcoming green space for neighborhood residents on the city's long-industrial waterfront.

Six investor funders support the Partners for Places general grant program: [Bloomberg Philanthropies](#), [The JPB Foundation](#), [The Kendeda Fund](#), [The New York Community Trust](#), [Summit Foundation](#), and [Surdna Foundation](#).

Our spring 2016 general grant program recipients are the cities of:

- **Atlanta, Ga. (\$75,000):** to create green jobs for unskilled workers through a training program that employs residents from one of the city's oldest neighborhoods on an urban, aeroponic farm. (Partner: The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta)
- **Berkeley, Calif., (\$35,000):** To bridge the solar divide and ensure that all Berkeley residents have access to renewable energy sources by providing solar installations for low-income communities, including multifamily affordable housing developments, and offering free hands-on solar job training. (Partner: The San Francisco Foundation, and The East Bay Community Foundation)
- **Boston, Mass. (\$50,000):** to provide green job training in urban farming to young returning citizens and offering healthy, fresh produce to residents in underserved neighborhoods. (Partner: The Boston Foundation)
- **Bridgeport, Conn., (\$45,138):** to engage residents in developing a plan to create more tree canopy, open spaces and stormwater solutions that will reduce flooding in a low-income area of this city. (Partner: The Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation)
- **Burlington, Vt., (\$30,000):** to improve the water quality in Lake Champlain by developing pilot stormwater management projects on public schoolyards. (Partner: The Linthilhac Foundation)

- **Ithaca, N.Y. (\$51,970):** to make Ithaca more energy efficient by evaluating the policy tools the city can use to incentivize or mandate green building standards for new construction. (Partner: The Park Foundation)

- **Los Angeles, Calif. (\$75,000):** to provide more open space in underserved communities in Los Angeles—a city where only 33 percent of children are within walking distance of a park—by transforming nine schoolyards into parks for use during non-school hours. (Partner: The Goldhirsh Foundation)

- **Milwaukee, Wis. (\$75,000):** to bring the public back to the long-industrial waterfront through community outreach and a greening of the city’s long-industrial Harbor District. (Partner: The Brico Fund, and The Fund for Lake Michigan)

Today, we are also announcing the four grant recipients in the Partners for Places Equity Pilot Initiative. This two-year pilot was created to provide financial and technical support to a cohort of cities and their place-based foundation partners, as a way to help local efforts use an equity lens in advancing sustainability and/or climate action. They are also learning together, and sharing their insights with each other to advance their work. Why is this important? Communities of color and low income neighborhoods are disproportionately harmed by the effects of climate change and environmental hazards, yet typically lack the political clout to ensure their needs are adequately addressed. That’s why it’s essential that decision-makers are equipped with the resources and tools to protect the health and well-being of their most vulnerable residents. The Equity Pilot Initiative is made possible with generous support from the [Kendeda Fund](#) and the [Kresge Foundation](#).

The recipients are:

- **City of Baltimore, Md. (\$35,000):** To ensure social equity is a key consideration and lens in updating and implementing the city of Baltimore’s sustainability plan, in addition to becoming a model that can be replicated and used across departments. (Partner: Baltimore Community Foundation)

- **Knoxville, Tenn. (\$74,000):** Working with the Change Center Jobs Initiative and the City of Knoxville Save Our Sons Initiative to strengthen career pathways for young adults of color by expanding employment and job-training opportunities, mentoring students and entrepreneurs, promoting diversity and inclusion in the private sector and building the capacity of local government to address equity through a wide variety of projects. (Partner: Anonymous)

- **Las Cruces, N.M. (\$51,981):** To launch a community engagement project in eight underserved neighborhoods that gathers neighborhood-level data and stories, and then brings residents together with city staff to address institutional barriers to equity in community development, climate preparedness, and emergency planning. (Partner: Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico: Doña Ana Communities United initiative)

• **Providence, R.I. (\$50,000):** To better understand the needs of the city's most vulnerable, address them in an updated sustainability plan and make equity a fundamental part of Providence's Office of Sustainability's work. (Partner: Rhode Island Foundation)

As a member of the grant selection committee, I want to extend our congratulations to all of our Partners for Places grantees from these spring rounds. We look forward to hearing more about how the partnerships and the projects develop over the next year, how they are shared, and how they can inspire other cities to step outside their comfort zones to work with diverse sectors of the community. I've learned a lot by just sitting on the selection committee with funders and city sustainability leaders, and I'll learn a lot more watching how the projects unfold over time.

In the meantime, the Partners for Places General Grant Program will open a ninth round of funding with a Request for Proposals to be released in early June 2016. Today, we are [hosting an informational webinar for funders and public sector leaders](#) to alert funders to this upcoming matching grant opportunity, and to give a taste of some of the terrific partnerships and projects that have been launched with help from this program. You can register [here](#). Be on the lookout for the application too to be released early next month.