

Partners for Places Project Lessons Report

Project Name: *Incorporating Social and Racial Equity into Providence’s Sustainability Planning*

- **Year Complete:** 2018
- **Local Government:** City of Providence, RI
- **Local Foundation:** Rhode Island Foundation

Project Purpose

To incorporate social equity as a core pillar of the City’s Sustainability Plan and Office of Sustainability’s scope of work.

Key Lessons Learned

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

- The Project Team learned a great deal about how City government and the community can work together towards a sustainability plan that equitably benefits the most marginalized. Trust building was essential. This began first with the Project Team, whose work was slowed down early on due to the inclusive process and community partnerships. The consultants were critical in helping navigate this process to keep it moving it forward, albeit slowly.
- The degree of distrust between the City and community, as well as within the community, was eye opening. Ultimately, the Undoing Racism trainings were a critical component of the project because they demonstrated the City’s commitment to acknowledging and tackling institutionalized racism versus transactional solutions.
- A key challenge was fostering long-term, continued community engagement. This initiative intentionally set out to engage community members whose voices were typically not heard. This came with inherent problems. Many project participants did not have community organizing experience and those who did, were not accustomed to working side-by-side with City officials.
- Despite providing a stipend and other support for project participants, it was still difficult for many community members to put in the time to an intensive process like this one. One barrier to this work was the simple fact that people’s lives are busy with work and other responsibilities, that there is little time left to spend on community organizing.
- There were many barriers to communication and collaboration when breaking through the silos of government and community work. It was essential to build in time to create and practice trust and co-creation.

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

The project team created a first of its kind program in Providence that focused on racial equity. The project secured outside funding for year two expansion of the work.

Additional Information and Resources

In 2017, the city of Providence was [awarded](#) an additional \$125,000 to fund a second year of its Equity in Sustainability initiative. Additional updates on their efforts can be found [here](#).