Partners for Places Project Lessons Report

Project Name: smART [sustainability + Madison + art]

- Year Complete: 2018
- Local Government: City of Madison, WI
- Local Foundation: CUNA Mutual Foundation

Project Purpose

To empower residents of diverse neighborhoods to identify and pursue neighborhood sustainability goals through art and organizing.

Key Lessons Learned

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

- Community driven work hinges on trust and relationships. These take time to develop and are critical for success. Invest time in being in communities and enhancing relationships.
- Cross collaboration with funders, non-profits, and the city often depends on the non-profit to host events which puts unfair burden on the non-profit. Incentivize foundations and sustainability directors to meet more often and/or support non-profit’s work to mobilize partners.
- When working at a grassroots level, language matters - partnerships first - no “serving”.
- Jump on emergent opportunities and be flexible to pivot when you learn more about your community. These two highly successful initiatives: “Environmental Groups Working Toward Equity” and “Greater Madison Engaged,” happened because of adaptive strategies.

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

- Similar to community-driven work, building a collaborative relationship between government and foundations takes time.
- Clear and consistent communication makes projects more effective.
- It is critical to understand the stakeholder organization’s respective values and how your values overlap and interplay.
Additional Information and Resources

In addition to the smART program (and as a result of its adaptable strategy), this project also developed opportunities to engage the community around sustainability, including the Greater Madison Engaged initiative.