

A Fruitful Collaboration Spreads Ideas for Embedding Equity in Sustainability Work

Innovative tools to incorporate racial equity considerations into climate and sustainability actions could be more broadly used in communities across the country with a boost from two new resources offered by the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) and The Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities (TFN).

The USDN Equity Professional Development Program and the Partners for Places Equity Pilot Project have created standardized tools and processes for municipal governments to add equity lenses to sustainability activities in ways that can be tested, assessed, and more broadly deployed. The tools were developed with technical support from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) and Center for Social Inclusion (CSI) and funding from the Kresge Foundation and the Kendeda Fund.

The goal is to unleash a new wave of equity-focused decision-making in climate and sustainability projects and policies across the nation. Embedding equity in sustainability and climate action is a practice ripe for replication and in high demand in large part because of the work in multiple USDN member cities and financial support provided by the Partners for Places grant program.

USDN: USDN has launched a turnkey equity professional development program for city governments and nonprofit organizations interested in mastering best practices for adding an equity lens to sustainability work. The USDN Equity Professional Development Program includes a holistic, five-segment curriculum of readings, videos and worksheets that support local government staff in applying an equity lens to sustainability projects. It also includes a facilitator's guide for offering workshops using this content. The curriculum is available [online](#). More than 50 local government sustainability leaders already have used the program. 90 percent have reported that it gave them a better understanding of equity, how to choose a good project to advance equity, how to build a strong racial equity team, and how to craft a compelling story about racial equity and sustainability in their community.

Partners for Places: Leveraging the progress achieved through the USDN Equity Professional Development Program, Partners for Places has launched a two-year, pilot initiative to provide financial and technical support to a cohort of 5 to 8 cities that participated in the USDN Professional Development Program and their place-based foundation partners to build local capacity to lead with equity in advancing a sustainability and/or climate action initiative and intentionally learn together. Using an equity lens for a project is a means to actively insert racial equity questions into decision making from project design through project evaluation and to find ways to embed these questions in every decision. Through an annual learning report and webinar, the Partners for Places Equity Pilot Project ([see RFP here](#)) will share lessons learned with USDN and the philanthropic community.