

## A Tale of Two Cities: Establishing Community Grant Programs

**The Partners for Places grant program is designed to deepen connections between urban sustainability and place-based funders. In Cleveland and Indianapolis, this took on the form of creating local funds for sustainability.**

**Cleveland OH** was awarded \$60,000 to support the establishment of an equitable model for developing and funding neighborhood projects that align climate action with the assets, concerns, and priorities of Cleveland residents. Partners on the project included the Cleveland Mayor’s Office on Sustainability, Cleveland Foundation, and The George Gund Foundation.

Engaging residents in taking action to address climate change is no easy matter. Partners for Places (P4P) grantees took on this challenge by launching the Cleveland Climate Action Fund in the spring of 2014. The Fund targeted six neighborhoods for workshops, reaching approximately 100 residents. Many others have accessed materials from the Neighborhood Climate Action Toolkit through the project website. Workshops begin by reviewing the basics of climate change, how it is impacting Northeast Ohio, and the Cleveland Climate Action Plan. Then using the Toolkit, neighborhood residents have the opportunity to describe the assets and concerns of the neighborhood, identify potential climate action projects, and learn how to apply to the Cleveland Climate Action Fund for support to implement projects.

The Cleveland Climate Action Fund is set up as a donor-advised fund at the Cleveland Foundation with \$54,000 contributed from P4P and additional funding from Cleveland individuals and businesses interested in mitigating their carbon emissions through local projects. The Fund’s Advisory Board already has reviewed more than 33 grant applications, totaling \$96,640, during the two rounds of request for proposals. Thirteen selected grantees have received small grants of up to \$5,000 and will be recognized at the City’s Annual Sustainability Summit in September 2015. Neighborhood projects have included a neighborhood composting program on bicycles, transitioning a youth landscaping employment program to gasoline-free equipment, a solar array on a K-8 community school that integrates with the STEM curriculum, a bicycle parking and repair station at the gateway to one of Cleveland’s EcoDistricts, and reforestation on vacant land.

The project partners are in discussion with a number of potential funders to expand the fund and strengthen the program. The goal of the Climate Action Fund is to hold workshops and fund projects in every one of Cleveland’s 32 neighborhoods by 2017.

Some lessons learned to date include:

- 1) Connect climate impacts and action to day-to-day interests and needs of residents and neighborhoods.
- 2) Connect with neighborhood leaders with genuine interest in the Fund’s mission who can take ownership over its success.
- 3) Identify other local organizations doing related work and find ways to cross promote and collaborate with them.
- 4) Use not only social media and web-based approaches, but also more traditional methods for informing people about workshops / grant opportunities (e.g., robo calling, hard copy newspapers, block club / committee meetings, etc.).
- 5) Provide actual grant examples that address how a project documents its carbon reduction metric of success. Most proposers have no experience in doing these types of calculations.

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**Indianapolis IN** was awarded \$45,000 to strengthen the Indianapolis food system through catalytic funding and capacity building, increasing access to healthy food, enhancing ecology, and creating meaningful economic and civic opportunities. Partners on the project included the City of Indianapolis Office of Sustainability and the Central Indiana Community Foundation.

A food council can activate a wide variety of food programs, including helping local producers to build the supply of healthy food. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation, City of Indianapolis, and the Central Indiana Community Foundation came together to create the Indy Food Fund Growth Fund, a yearly grant program of the Indy Food Council, created to scale up successful Indy Food Fund projects funded in 2013, intentionally building on the leadership and talent of those organizations.

The awardees for the Indy Food Fund Growth Fund used the \$80,000 they received in grants and technical assistance to grow and donate 4,548 pounds of produce to the area's needy residents, establish a new U-Pick site that distributed 1,289 pounds of produce, open a new farm stand, develop an egg co-op, support a youth farm, implement a new community garden program, and expand an urban farm. In addition, they conducted workshops, urban farm/garden tours, cooking classes, a summer youth farmer program, and more to link residents to the farming programs.

Applicants for grants that did not receive cash awards were eligible to receive technical assistance to help with program planning and organizational development and to participate in group activities that work to improve food access, equality, ecology, and economic development in Indianapolis.

Several organizations are considering providing funds for operation of the Indy Food Fund going forward. Providing healthy local food is a goal many local institutions can get behind.

One of the chief lessons from this program is that it could be replicable. In the spring of 2015, Cincinnati received a Partners for Places grant to establish a comprehensive set of programs for the Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council. One component is the Cincy Food Fund, offering grants ranging from \$500 to \$5,000 to nonprofits and businesses involved in healthy food-related initiatives.