

COLLABORATING TO EXPAND CITY CAPACITY IN BALTIMORE

KATHRYN L.S. PETTIT

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Residents in Baltimore, particularly those in low-income neighborhoods, face major social and economic challenges, including increased violence, police misconduct, poor-quality schools, and a lack of job opportunities. Mayor Catherine Pugh, elected in December 2016, is charged with formulating responses to these complex issues and ensuring the city is a place where every Baltimorean can thrive. Though not in the headlines, the mayor has voiced other ambitious goals that could help address inequities in the city, including a healthier environment, a more data-driven approach to city investments, and community engagement for public safety. To achieve these, Pugh and city agencies must cooperate with community stakeholders outside of government. The Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance—Jacob France Institute (BNIA-JFI) has a long record of supporting local government aims and being a bridge across mayoral terms so initiatives do not lose momentum during political transitions.

Housed in the University of Baltimore's Jacob France Institute, BNIA-JFI produces reliable and actionable quality-of-life indicators for Baltimore's neighborhoods. Its signature product is *Vital Signs*, an annual report and set of indicators that take the pulse of Baltimore neighborhoods by measuring progress toward a better quality of life for all residents.

This case study is part of a series, including an overview brief, that demonstrates how local governments benefit from engaging with data intermediaries such as BNIA-JFI and other members of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership. In addition to their topical, analytic, and community engagement expertise, these organizations bring an understanding of local context, a reputation for impartial analysis, and a set of relationships that spans sectors. Their services build local capacity, including within governments, to use data for better decisionmaking. To read the full series, visit <https://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/localgovt>.

CULTIVATING DIVERSE AND CONTINUING CONNECTIONS

BNIA-JFI has a multifaceted relationship with the city government, from informal connections to formal collaborations. As mayors, agency heads, and city staff change, BNIA-JFI keeps in constant communication with the departments. The staff regularly interact with nearly all city agencies to acquire data for integration into the *Vital Signs* report. In addition, representatives from five city agencies serve on the BNIA-JFI steering committee, guiding plans and operations. City agencies tap BNIA-JFI's expertise on neighborhoods through executive director Seema Iyer, who serves on task forces and advisory boards as diverse as the Recreation

and Parks Master Plan, the Housing Typology Task Force, and the North Avenue Rising neighborhood development initiative. In addition, the city has contracted with BNIA-JFI for specific projects, such as a needs assessment for the Head Start program or evaluation of the Vacants to Value housing program.

BNIA-JFI's annual Data Day also offers city staff the opportunity to raise the visibility of the city's open data portal, reinforce current mayoral priorities, and engage with residents and community groups. During the event, community leaders, nonprofit organizations, and civic technologists learn about the latest trends in using data, technology, and tools to advance constructive change. The Baltimore City Police and Health Departments are regular presenters, but staff from the Office of Information Technology, public school system, and department of planning have contributed over the years. As with the task force participation, Data Day is funded through BNIA-JFI's philanthropic grants and corporate sponsorships.

IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH COLLABORATION

BNIA-JFI's in-depth, cross-sector projects also illustrate the value the organization provides the city. For example, BNIA-JFI's analytic tools created under the Urban Waters Federal Partnership program support the city's efforts to improve the physical environment through informed planning and practice. Led by the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service's

Baltimore Field Station since 2011, the partnership coordinates resources to revitalize urban waters and the communities that surround them. It includes state and federal agencies, the city department of public works, local nonprofits, and community groups. The local partnership undertakes various projects that protect and preserve the watershed, such as promoting community revitalization through removal of urban blight, establishing new open spaces, and furthering economic and social benefits from improved urban waters and adjacent lands (US Environmental Protection Agency, n.d.).

BNIA-JFI joined the coordinating team of the Baltimore Partnership to provide relevant data about the environment and other neighborhood conditions to inform partnership activities and members' advocacy, fundraising, and policy development. The task aligned with BNIA-JFI's interest in expanding indicators of sustainability for *Vital Signs* and tracking environmental policy. Over the next year, BNIA-JFI worked with five organizations to organize and de-duplicate their records of more than 1,000 community-managed open spaces, such as parks, playgrounds, schoolyards, and community gardens. The interactive website, initially called Baltimore's Green Registry, enabled the open space data to be mapped against other neighborhood indicators about the built environment (e.g., reports of clogged storm drains) and about the people (e.g., the number of elementary school students or low-income households). The information helped open space managers coordinate activities and

better connect efforts to improve urban waters to community revitalization. In 2014, BNIA-JFI updated the website's design and data and changed the title to the Green Pattern Map.¹

In spring 2014, former mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake announced the Growing Green Initiative, a sustainability program that aimed to encourage public-private partnerships and leverage resources from outside the city (City of Baltimore 2015a). In the Green Pattern Map's second phase in 2015, BNIA-JFI worked with the city department of public works to incorporate data on stormwater management sites to identify interventions to prevent or reduce the harm from pollutants from entering the storm drain systems. These data supported the city's federally required efforts to restore 20 percent of the impervious area where stormwater runoff was not managed to the maximum extent practical. In its 2015 plan on watershed strategies submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency, the department of public works included maps on community characteristics from BNIA-JFI's *Vital Signs 12* report and cited their mapping tool as a support for the Green Pattern book, a guide for transforming city vacant lots into beneficial green spaces (City of Baltimore 2015b). In her 2016 election campaign, Pugh named the environment as one of the critical areas to improving residents' quality of life, and the institutional infrastructure of the Urban Waters helped bridge the political transition (Committee to Elect Catherine A. Pugh, n.d.).² The mayor plans to release an updated city sustainability

plan in spring 2018, informed by community input (Baltimore Office of Sustainability, n.d.). *Vital Signs* and the Green Patterns Map will be available to track progress on the new plan over time.

SETTING GOALS FOR BALTIMORE'S PROSPEROUS AND INCLUSIVE FUTURE

BNIA-JFI also advances the city government's sustainability goals and other critical policy areas through its local leadership in the USA Sustainable Cities Initiative. In November 2015, this initiative funded Baltimore as one of three US pilots to explore how the 17 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) could be adapted to drive local action.³ The authors of the goals call for cross-sector partnerships at the national and subnational levels to advance economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion by 2030.

BNIA-JFI and the College of Public Affairs, both at the University of Baltimore, structured a consultative process for multisector stakeholders to translate the global measures of sustainable development into local ones relevant to Baltimore. After a first meeting, the initiative's steering committee established working groups on people, prosperity, and planet. With the support of Rawlings-Blake, city agency staff participated in the working groups with academics, advocates, funders, and nonprofit representatives. The final report, *Baltimore's Sustainable Future: Localizing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Strategies and Indicators*,

details 54 measures to track Baltimore's progress.⁴

The University of Baltimore team briefed Mayor Pugh when she assumed office, and she authored the introductory letter in the final report. The City of Baltimore had already focused on measuring city progress since 2015 with its OutcomeStat program that seeks to align city resources "to build and sustain the best possible quality of life for Baltimoreans."⁵ Many of the OutcomeStat's 23 indicators have been included in the proposed Baltimore Sustainable Development Goals.⁶ One principle of the program is to partner with community stakeholders "in an ongoing, collaborative process toward achieving population-level results." Through their local SDG initiative, BNIA-JFI created a broad ready-made process for city agencies to do this engagement and harness the efforts of nongovernmental partners to work toward its goals. The process also garnered buy-in for additional objectives that could be incorporated in future city decision processes and plans, such as the forthcoming sustainability plan, the city budgeting process aimed at strengthening the local economy, or the comprehensive master plan.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS TO PUBLIC SAFETY

BNIA-JFI also has joined forces with the city on federal grant proposals. In 2012, Mayor Rawlings-Blake's Office on Criminal Justice and BNIA-JFI received the US Department of Justice's Byrne

Criminal Justice Innovation grant to launch a planning process in the East Baltimore neighborhood of McElderry Park. BNIA-JFI's contributions to the application demonstrated the neighborhood need and improved the competitiveness of the city's bid. The initiative, launched in 2013, centered on developing and implementing a data-driven plan for community-based solutions to persistent neighborhood crime.⁷ The implementation of the three-year project required drawing on all the players' strengths. The cross-sector McElderry Park Revitalization Coalition served as the community-based steering committee. BNIA-JFI leveraged its expertise in neighborhood data and community engagement to provide analytic support and evaluate the initiative. The Office of Criminal Justice provided the committee a dedicated staff person and was a liaison to other government agencies. These community-based investments produced results for the McElderry Park community. After having two to four homicides each year from 2012 to 2015, the neighborhood experienced no homicides from September 2016 to September 2017.

BNIA-JFI'S UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS

The examples above demonstrate the value of a locally embedded data intermediary to city governments. BNIA-JFI brings wide topical expertise, deep knowledge of Baltimore's neighborhoods, and strong connections to nonprofit and resident groups to all its projects. BNIA-JFI's sustained involvement ensures that the

city does not lose ground on important initiatives during political transitions. In addition, BNIA-JFI helps the city leverage federal and philanthropic dollars to pilot innovative cross-sector projects and deepen government's community connections. It provides opportunities for the local government to engage with residents and community groups to accomplish common goals. The agencies' time and funding investments for these projects contribute to BNIA-JFI's organizational stability and capacity, which enhances their ability to provide services over the long term to the wider community.

As Baltimore residents and institutions tackle urgent issues, such as public safety and education, as well as lower-profile ones, such as the environment and open space, BNIA-JFI is a unique resource that provides a common understanding of how conditions vary across the city and how to track progress. BNIA-JFI will contribute to these efforts by monitoring Baltimore's neighborhoods, providing well-grounded insights on key policy issues, and raising the capacity of city government, nonprofits, and community groups to use data to address city challenges.

¹ See the interactive tool at "Baltimore's Green Patterns," Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance–Jacob France Institute, accessed February 19, 2018, <https://bniajfi.org/greenpatterns/>.

² The plan comes from the Catherine Pugh for Mayor website, which has been removed. An archived version of the page is available on the Internet Archive at <https://web.archive.org/web/20160629080501/http://www.pughformayor.com/the-pugh-plan-for-quality/>.

³ See the initiative's website at "Sustainable Cities Initiative," University of Baltimore, accessed February 19, 2018, <https://www.ubalt.edu/about-ub/sustainable-cities/>.

⁴ See the full report at "Baltimore's Sustainable Future: Localizing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Strategies, and Indicators," available at <https://www.ubalt.edu/about-ub/sustainable-cities/>.

⁵ See the website for the City of Baltimore's OutcomeStat at <https://outcomestat.baltimorecity.gov/>.

⁶ Carey L. Biron, "How Baltimore Is Using the Sustainable Development Goals to Make a More Just City," Citiscope, March 9, 2017, <http://citiscopes.org/story/2017/how-baltimore-using-sustainable-development-goals-make-more-just-city>.

⁷ "Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Grant–McElderry Park," Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance–Jacob France Institute, accessed February 19, 2018, <https://bniajfi.org/currentprojects/bcji/>.

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Kathryn L.S. Pettit is a principal research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute and directs the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership.

Coordinated by the Urban Institute, the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership is made up of independent organizations in more than 30 cities that have a shared mission to help community stakeholders use neighborhood-level data for better decisionmaking, with a focus on working with organizations and residents in low-income communities. BNIA-JFI joined NNIP in 1999.

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