

# Practicing Equity

## A Community-Driven Approach to Tackling Heat

In spring 2016 the Office of Sustainability solicited feedback from Philadelphia residents and stakeholders as it updated the Greenworks plan. One theme residents consistently mentioned was that despite significant progress, not every neighborhood in Philadelphia enjoys the benefits of sustainability such as well-maintained parks and sidewalks, tree canopy, or access to healthy food.

To address residents' concerns, *Greenworks: A Vision for a Sustainable Philadelphia* explicitly centers equity as an approach to work towards the eight Greenworks visions. As a companion effort to the report, OOS committed to use its data to identify disparities and to directly engage with communities not currently benefiting from sustainability work. Using equity as an approach means:

- Acknowledging that environmental inequalities, like exposure to heat, often exist in majority low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color in Philadelphia;
- Working to understand how the City's systems, policies, and procedures might create barriers that maintain these inequalities; and
- Redirecting our resources towards dismantling these barriers.

Members of the community attending the Beat the Heat Neighborhood Design Workshop



OOS launched its community-driven, equity focused approach in 2018 with the Beat the Heat Initiative. Beat the Heat focuses on communities of color disproportionately exposed to environmental stressors, particularly extreme heat. The goal of this first effort was to work in one of Philadelphia’s hottest and most heat vulnerable neighborhoods—Hunting Park—to identify and acknowledge causes for heat disparities while also supporting community-driven decision-making about how to reduce these inequities.

Through funding from the Knight Foundation and Partners for Places, OOS worked with more than 30 government departments, community organizations, and stakeholders to convene Philadelphia’s first Heat Team. The Heat Team worked with residents and community leaders to launch the Beat the Heat pilot in Hunting Park in spring 2018.

### **Inclusive Climate Planning**

Equity can be embodied in community climate planning through inclusive practices that value, uplift, and amplify the voices and experiences of marginalized communities. Marginalized communities are groups of people who face systemic barriers to opportunities, resources, and power based on their identities—such as people of color, immigrants, and poor and/or low income communities to name a few. Practicing inclusion requires regular self and group reflection regarding engagement across differences.



**Voicing Needs:** How are you creating space for all participants to express their needs? How are different communication and learning styles acknowledged and encouraged?



**Acknowledging Community History & Identity:** In the process of understanding the changes that community members would like to see, how are you also respecting the existing neighborhood history, identity, and strengths?



**Shifting Power:** How does power show-up in the spaces that you hold? How are you acknowledging your own privilege and power as an individual—based on your organizational position as well as your social identities—and working to shift this power so that community members and people with marginalized identities are able to lead? How are those with marginalized identities within the community already showing up and how are you backing their leadership?



**Storytelling as Data:** Are there places and opportunities for people to share their stories and experiences and are these stories valued as data?



**Relationship Building:** How does the planning process strengthen connections, relationships, and trust? This is especially important in community climate planning, because during climate emergencies it is the relationships immediately around folks that will be the most important in terms of how quickly they are able to organize and respond.