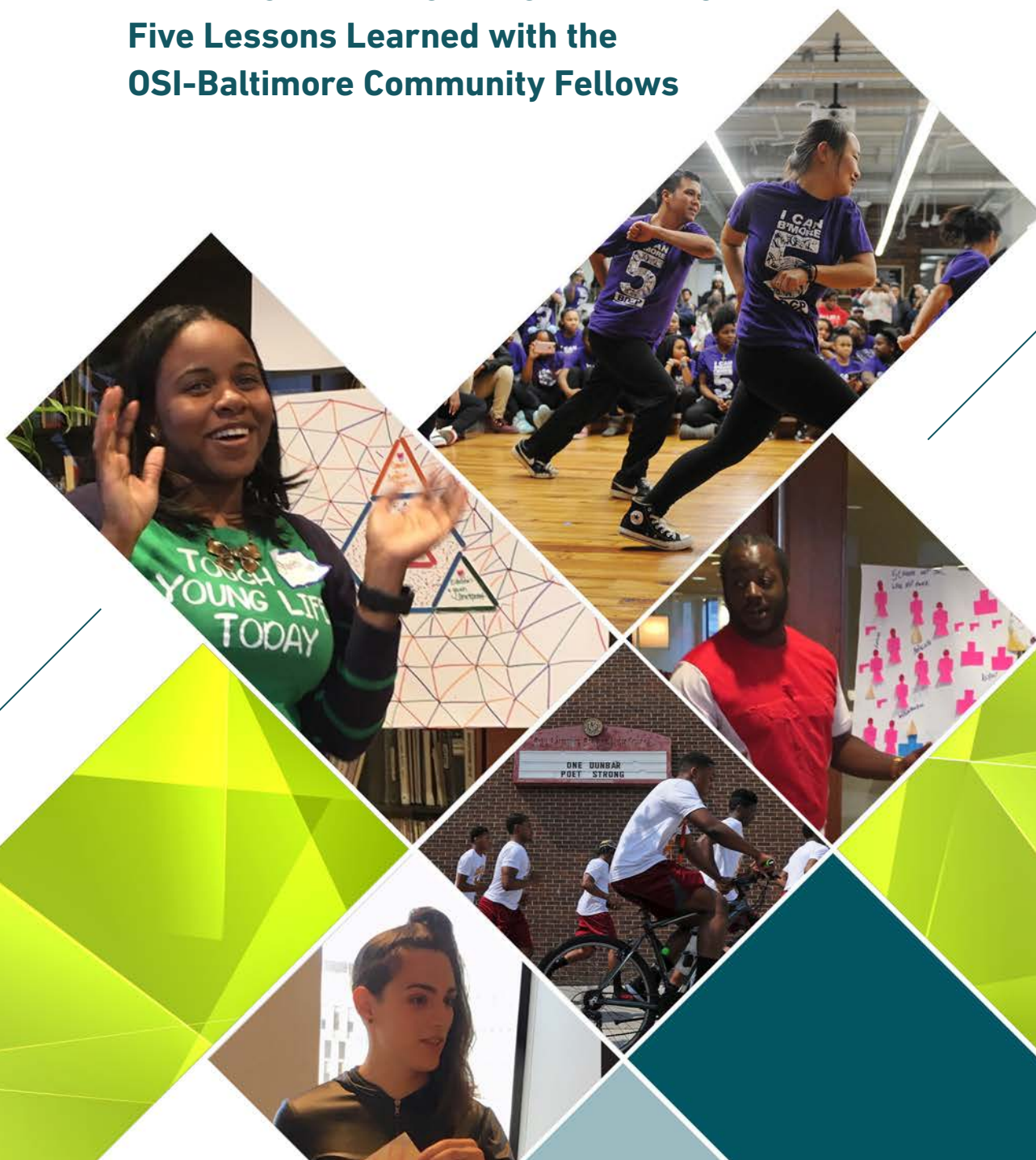


# AUDACIOUS THINKING

**WEAVING A NETWORK FOR BALTIMORE:  
Five Lessons Learned with the  
OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows**



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Cover photos by Colby Ware and Didi Goldenhar



## LETTER FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR

I have had the privilege of serving as the acting director of OSI-Baltimore for several months. While this role has brought a healthy mix of challenges and accomplishments, my overriding feeling is a sense of inspiration and optimism generated by working with the many talented and brilliant individuals and organizations that are moving our city forward. Our thoughtful and knowledgeable staff members work closely with our partners, grantees, and Fellows to develop long-term and strategic approaches to some of the most difficult issues facing our community.

Our efforts bring real successes that give me hope for the future, despite the many ways that justice and equity are challenged in our current environment. Incarceration rates in Maryland have dropped to their lowest levels since the mid-1980s, a key goal of our Criminal and Juvenile Justice Program. School arrests decreased by 90 percent after school police were trained in restorative practices, a fundamental pillar of our Education and Youth Development program. Our Addiction and Health Equity Program works to save lives by combatting the overdose crisis, including by actively engaging and empowering people who are directly impacted by substance use in advocacy efforts.

I am particularly awed by the tremendous OSI Community Fellows Network, a group of more than 200 individuals who have advanced some of the most innovative, effective ideas to support Baltimore's underserved populations (see cover story, page 3). In uncertain times, I am reassured that these activists see solutions and act upon them with unparalleled vigor, commitment and selflessness.

My role as acting director has caused me to reflect more deeply on the impact of creative leadership, transformational vision and strategic thinking. These qualities are critical both for an organization such as OSI that is promoting social justice values as well as for governmental leaders who have an obligation to create and maintain a stable and equitable society. Unfortunately, progress in our city has been compromised by the crisis in local elected leadership. Community members have the right to have access to and the commitment of elected officials who leverage their resilient, creative, hard-working constituents to create a safer, equitable, and prosperous city. A stable and responsive government working with an engaged public is essential to meaningful change.

In order to ensure robust community input that results in the elected leaders that Baltimore needs and deserves, in September, OSI-Baltimore launched a new initiative, **Blueprint for Baltimore: 2020 and Beyond**. It is designed to lift up community voices and support a process to elect competent, accountable, transparent leadership for Baltimore City. As part of the process, OSI is partnering with grassroots community groups to conduct a citywide survey of more than 10,000 residents, and using that data as the basis for a series of Mayoral and City Council forums in the lead-up to the primary election in April, 2020. After the general election in November, OSI and community partners will monitor leadership's adherence to community priorities and engage business and philanthropic leaders to explore how they can also respond to community priorities (more information on page 19).



A stable and responsive government working with an engaged public is essential to meaningful change.



We hope you'll participate in the Blueprint for Baltimore process and actively engage in the crucial local elections coming in 2020. Whatever the results, OSI-Baltimore looks forward to many more years of partnership with Baltimore's leadership and all of its residents to realize our city's full potential.

L. Tracy Brown  
Acting Director

# WEAVING A NETWORK FOR BALTIMORE

## FIVE LESSONS LEARNED WITH THE OSI-BALTIMORE COMMUNITY FELLOWS

By **Didi Goldenhar**

**I**t's a November morning at Upton's Avenue Market. Just beyond the ample produce stands and sounds of breakfast at Mary's Kitchen and Just Juice, twenty OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows take their first steps in the large meeting space, responding to verbal cues from Brian Francoise, alumni Fellow:

"Imagine we're standing on a map of Baltimore," he says. "Here to the west - Upton, Sandtown-Winchester, Druid Heights. East to Belair-Edison, Highlandtown. To the north— Better Waverly, Original and New Northwood. South to Cherry Hill. Southwest to Irvington and Pigtown. Okay - Show us where you live!"



A city's narrative about itself can suppress or bolster its aspirations and achievements.



Mural at the Avenue Market in Baltimore's Upton neighborhood.  
Photo by Didi Goldenhar



People turn, bump into each other, laugh then locate their neighborhoods in this city often dubbed “Smalltimore.” The occasion is Peer Coaching Day, 2018. Ten new Fellows have been matched with ten alumni Fellows to share their projects, from what’s meaningful and delightful to the inevitable doubts and downturns that arise when planting new ideas on the frontiers of social change.

As a group, these twenty Fellows represent a dynamic fractal of the OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows Network. Since 1998, OSI-Baltimore has supported over 200 Fellows whose projects range from micro-solutions at the neighborhood level to systems-based initiatives serving citywide constituencies. As OSI-Baltimore’s founding director Diana Morris once said, “A city’s narrative about itself can suppress or bolster its aspirations and achievements.” The Fellows’ creativity and the utility of their projects contributes a vibrant counter-narrative to a city typically portrayed as fractious and bleak. As positive role models, grassroots activists, on-the-ground experts, and outspoken community advocates, the Fellows continue to replenish local leadership and strengthen Baltimore’s social fabric.

Peer Coaching Day was launched in 2018 as part of Orientation Week as new Fellows begin their 18-month journey. **Maya Kosok** welcomes the cohort to “this Network where we’re all here to fight the good fight.” When Maya received her fellowship in 2011, she was already fluent in network-building as founder of the **Baltimore Farm Alliance**, which helped urban farmers secure resources ranging from marketing to large farm equipment. These days, she grows more than eighty varieties of flowers and feeds her passion for community at her Hillen Homestead Urban Farm. **Brian Francoise**, who led the mapping exercise, is a theater artist and educator whose 2014 fellowship project, **Sister Neighborhood Arts Program**, used theater to bridge Original Northwood and Northwood, two historically segregated Northeast Baltimore neighborhoods. He now practices “civic arts” at Lakeland Elementary



The OSI-Baltimore Fellows Advisory Board  
Photo by Bruce Weller

and Middle School, a community hub for students and families. Dietician and 2001 Fellow **Wanda Best** brought the term “food insecurity” into the local discourse while mapping local food systems and health disparities during her fellowship. As she likes to say, “When I got my fellowship, it was for life!” Today, as Executive Director of the Upton Planning Committee, she is hosting Peer Coaching Day at Avenue Market. For some Fellows, this is their first visit to Upton, four miles from Baltimore’s sparkling waterfront and less than one mile from the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood where a young African-American man, Freddie Gray, died in police custody in 2015, leading to a civil uprising in the city.

“Upton has not received a lot of love over the past forty years,” Wanda says, referring to redlining and other discriminatory policies that have led to high unemployment and low income among its 8,000 residents and thirty blocks. But Wanda also shares

the glory of Upton in the early 20th century, when the neighborhood was home to an affluent African-American population. This is where W.E.B. DuBois attended church, where Thurgood Marshall and Eubie Blake lived, and where U.S. Congressman Elijah Cummings lived until his recent death. She holds Upton up as the community that recently fought to keep a major bus line, where the Avenue Bakery hosts jazz concerts in its courtyard, and where meetings for its 2026 Master Plan are standing room only.

“I’m finally beginning to see Upton turn,” says Best, who’s lived here for thirty years. “My contribution is moving fluidly through all economic levels and with all kinds of people. I sleep in-between the excitement. That’s why I like the OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows. We’re all like that. We wear each other out.”

Today, Wanda is more than ready to be a mentor and bring 2019 Fellow **Shelley Halstead** into the fold. The timing is ripe. In recent years, Upton has attracted more than 3.5 million dollars to revitalize its commercial and historic districts and it was recently designated as a Black Arts and Culture District. Shelley left a Federal legal job to launch **Black Women Build**, which provides training in construction skills and opportunity for home ownership in Upton and adjacent Druid Heights. She envisions the project as a model of sustainable growth in a disinvested community. “We are building community, wealth, and knowledge together by turning shells into safe, clean, well-built housing,” she says.

“You can’t get through law school without mentoring,” says Halstead. She is eager to learn from Best, with whom she has been matched as part of the OSI Fellowship Program’s Peer Coaching Day. “But this is peer coaching, with more of a reciprocal mindset.”

**Miriam Avins**, 2007 Fellow and founder of **Baltimore Greenspace**, agrees. “This exchange is better for

everyone. I wasted so much time during my fellowship trying to look good rather than being vulnerable.” She listens closely as biologist and 2019 Fellow **Eric Fishel** describes how his **Foodparks** project will convert vacant lots into mixed-use parks with native edible plants and also offer education and jobs for local residents. He admits that, as a white person working in African-American neighborhoods, he is on a new learning curve. Miriam, who brings more than fifteen years of experience to community-managed open space, will be his sounding board. She also will connect him to like-minded Fellows, including **Eric Jackson** (2017) whose **Building Black Land and Food Practice** organizes residents to create community-oriented food solutions, in partnership with the Black Yield Institute.

By day’s end, each coaching pair has scheduled a weekly or monthly check-in and exchanged invitations to project events, family dinners, and church. For Maya, Brian, and Wanda, these gestures illustrate the “culture of support” they want to cultivate throughout the Fellows Network.

## The Fellows Network – A Vision for Transforming the City

**Pamela King**, founding director of OSI-Baltimore Community Fellowships, established the Community Fellowships Program in 1998 with the vision of creating a corps of social activists and entrepreneurs “who would combine idealism, pragmatism, and innovation to revitalize Baltimore’s underserved communities.”

In 2013, Pamela and Diana Morris hypothesized about the potential of the Fellows Network, then in its fifteenth year. As Pamela later recalled, “We wanted to explore the idea of increasing the effectiveness of the Fellows to improve social and economic conditions and deepen the foundation’s knowledge of how to achieve sustainable change here in Baltimore.”

The foundation invited **Marianne Hughes**, founding executive director of the Interaction Institute for Social Change, to introduce the theory and practice of network weaving to OSI staff and board. The following year, Marianne and her consulting team were engaged to analyze the program through a comprehensive survey and interviews with Fellows, OSI staff, board members, and city stakeholders.

The resulting white paper, *Strength in Numbers*, told a compelling story about the Fellows, showcasing OSI's "open valve" approach for identifying talented citizens from all walks of life in Baltimore. The social network maps displayed intricate webs of relationship among Fellows, within and across issues and neighborhoods. Interviews with local stakeholders highlighted the Fellows' influence and impact, including rising graduation rates and declining numbers of juvenile incarceration; expanded land use for urban farms and community gardens; city streets made new by bike paths and vibrant

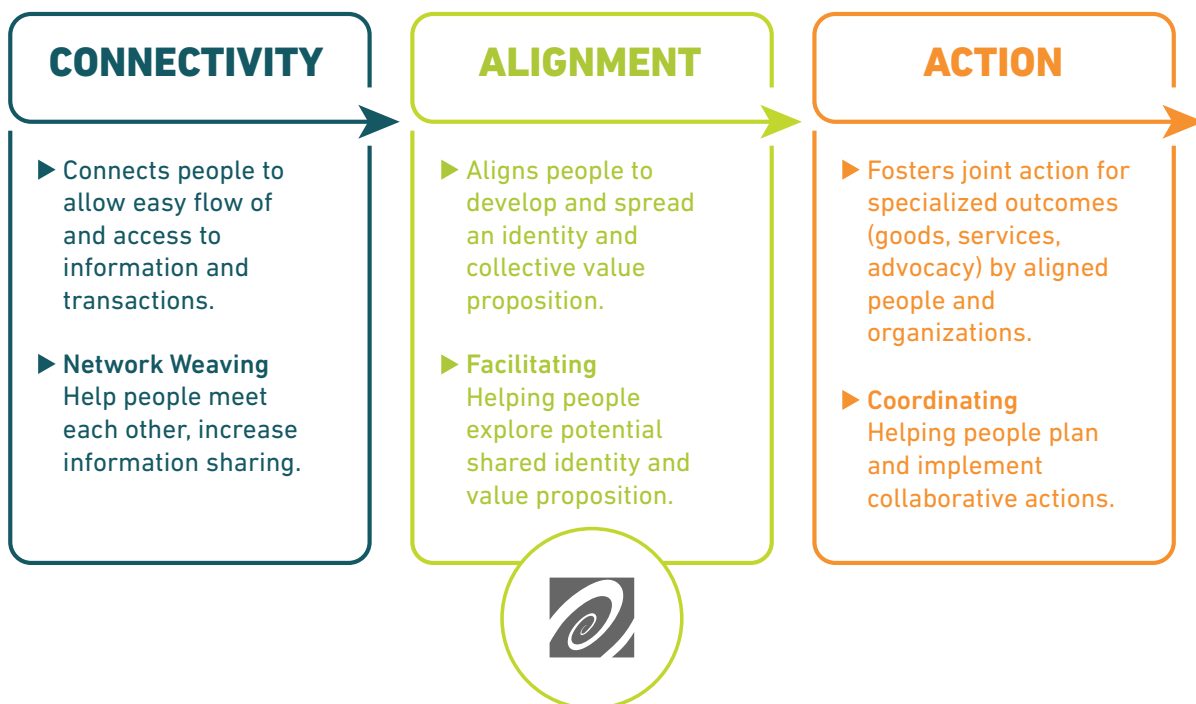
murals; thousands of children and youth engaged in the arts, media, and mentoring, and layers of protection for refugees, immigrants, the homeless, working poor, and survivors of domestic abuse, among many innovative projects.

The foundation decided to move forward with the consulting team's key recommendations – network leadership training, regular convenings, and formation of a Fellows strategy group. Now, after five years, the foundation and the Fellows have deepened their understanding of how networks flourish and what feeds their potential for lasting change.

**LESSON #1: To build collective power, invest in network training, structure, and strategy.**

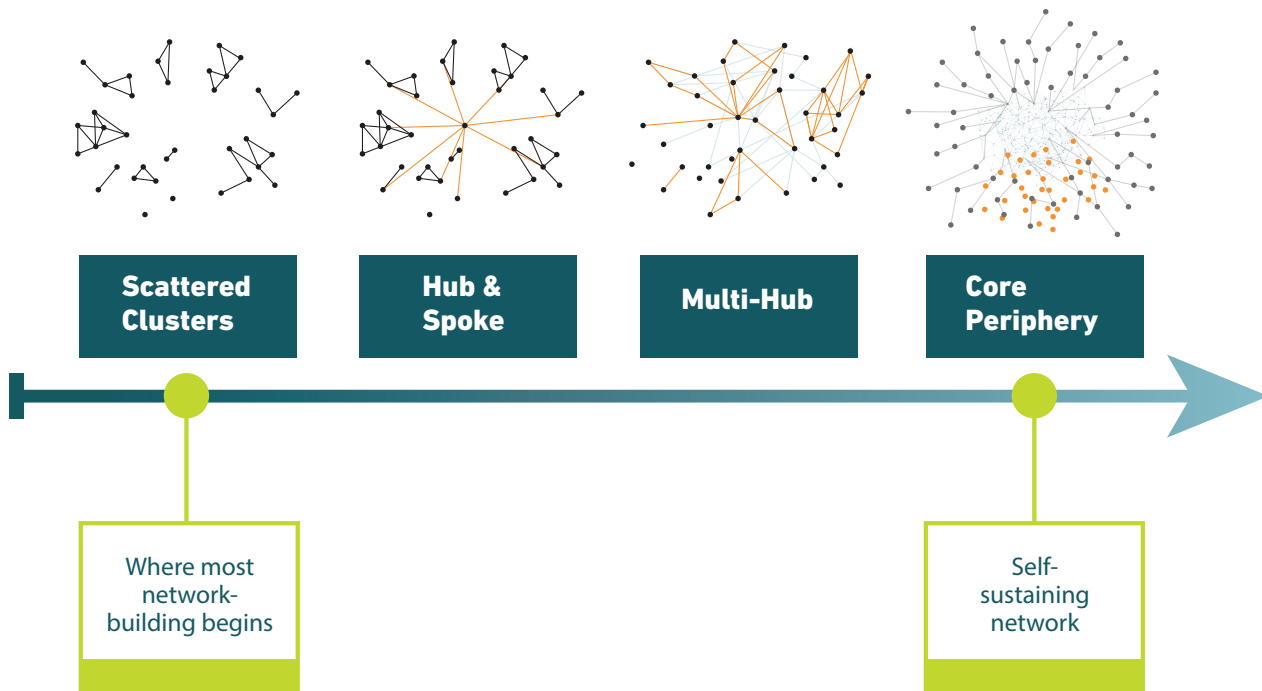
The language of networks permeates the nonprofit sector. Indeed, the continuous rebirth of American democracy is about collective action, from the

## TYPES OF NETWORKS





# STAGES OF NETWORK DEVELOPMENT



abolitionists and Civil Rights movement to Black Lives Matter and the Women’s March. Networks bound by common vision and purpose motivate individuals and groups to take to the streets. However, without structure, networks dissipate quickly. Turning demonstrations into movements requires training, organizing, and strategy.

**Network leadership training** was OSI-Baltimore’s first investment. During Orientation Week, new Fellows spend a day with Marianne Hughes, learning the fundamentals of network theory. Her core lesson is that “relationships are the unit of change *and* the measure of success in networks. Your collective strength is in your diversity and your social capital is the network.”

The Fellows learn about types of networks – connectivity, alignment, and action. At the twenty-year mark, the Fellows Network is a **connectivity network**

in which relationships weave continuously and information flows freely. In terms of network evolution, the Fellows Network is a **hub-and-spoke network** in which the Foundation serves as the primary hub.

**Strategy** was the foundation’s next investment. In 2017, Pamela King assembled a Strategic Advisory Group—later renamed Fellows Advisory Board—selecting ten alumni Fellows who had been identified as “Connectors” – those cited most frequently as “work partners” and “trusted advisors” by their peers in the social network analysis. Connectors bring unquenchable appetite for “closing triangles” – network-speak for opening doors and making introductions. Facilitated by Marianne Hughes, the Strategic Advisory Group would serve as the “center-holding force” and meet quarterly over the

next two years, receiving modest stipends for their service. Their mandate was to develop strategies for weaving relationships and to articulate a vision of citywide impact, aligning Fellows across issues and neighborhoods.

During their first year together, the Strategic Advisory Group crafted two pathways. **Elevate and Amplify** would raise the Network's public profile and generate excitement. **Gather, Learn, and Grow** would build community, nurture peer learning, and integrate new Fellows into the Network.

As for structure, OSI-Baltimore would serve as the hub or "backbone organization" to scaffold the work of the Strategic Advisory Group. Pamela and her program associate Katy Caldwell managed communications, coordinated meetings, and convened larger Network gatherings. Evan Serpick, OSI's director of strategic communications, identified opportunities for public relations and media coverage. The Network Newsletter, published by the foundation, served as a clearinghouse for local, regional, and national resources while the Fellows' listserv provided an online venue for peer advice and activism, as when veteran organizer Betty Robinson called on Fellows to rally workers' rights at the downtown

luxury hotels and David Hornbeck, a seasoned education leader, called on the Network to advocate for new state guidelines for K-12 school funding.

In 2017, the foundation launched **Alumni Action Grants** which invited proposals from three Fellows (at least) for collaborations dedicated to network weaving or specific social justice issues. Several partnerships had already been launched, including "Mi Dinero, Mi Destino," a financial literacy workshop for the Latino community, co-created by 2013 Fellow **Lanaea Featherstone**, whose fellowship project helped Latino families bridge the economic divide (a mission she now pursues at her eponymous foundation) and 2014 Fellow **Agatha So**, whose fellowship guided Latino Immigrants seeking homeownership.

***LESSON #2: For network-building, convening is the glue—especially in a city like Baltimore.***

From the program's early days, Pamela King recognized the adhesive value of bringing Fellows together. Over the 18-month period, each new cohort meets for monthly gatherings to learn from each other and share progress



2017 OSI-Baltimore Fellows (left to right) **Eric Jackson, Shantell Roberts, and Eric Fishel** showing their images of thriving Baltimore at Network Leadership Training. **Photos by Didi Goldenhar**



on projects. Starting in 2015, the foundation fortified this investment with annual Network convenings where Fellows break bread, counsel each other, and brainstorm ideas for collaboration.

One tipping point was the 2016 Summit on Maryland’s Eastern Shore attended by thirty “Connectors” who percolated ideas about how they might tap into each other’s skills and spheres of activity to craft policy and build power. The Connectors gathered again in 2017 to deepen relationships and build commitment. High points included storytelling about what called them to social justice and the creation of a mural, led by Shawn James whose Mural Masters fellowship project in 2003 had provided young people with business skills. For Shawn, the collaboration required for making a mural was an apt metaphor for weaving the Fellows as a Network: “We need to make our lines intersect more often instead of running parallel.”

The desire for a like-minded family of change agents was palpable. **Brian Gerardo**, whose 2015 fellowship supported his **Baltimore Dance Crews Project**, which

uses hip-hop to help young people navigate the wider world, is now program manager at Business Volunteers of Maryland. “As a lifelong Baltimorean, I want a strong network of Fellows who are rooted here,” he said. “We need people on the same wavelength. We won’t move the needle unless we work together.”

For 2002 Fellow **Jacqueline Robarge**, who launched **Power Inside**, a grassroots network for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women, relationships are resources. “When this process began, I didn’t think of myself as a network person,” she said. “The concepts seemed a bit removed from me. But I’m a survivor. Survivors and people without resources handed to them have to be clever. Relationships are a way to move in the world and build power.”

Social network theory teaches that networks typically default to one of two patterns: “Birds of a feather fly together” and “Those close by, form a tie.” In other words, people gravitate to those who seem similar or because they live nearby. The Baltimore Farm Alliance is a good example of the first trend. In Spring, 2019, the

**Filbert Street Community Garden**, launched by 2011 Fellow **Jason Reed**, was about to be displaced by the Department of Public Works, with plans to install a water filtration system. The Farm Alliance mobilized quickly. A petition demanding community ownership of the site after years of environmental injustice in South Baltimore, quickly garnered 1100 signatures. The value of the second trend is showcased every day in Upton as **Wanda Best** works closely with **Halstead**, 2012 Fellow **Lawrence Brown**, 2014 Fellow **Dwayne Johnson**, 2015 Fellow **Lady Brion**, and other Fellows on housing, education, youth development, arts and culture, and public health issues.

For broader systemic change, people need to stretch beyond similar “feathers” and “those close by” to weave ties across neighborhoods and issues. **Patrice Hutton**, a 2012 Fellow, recognized this challenge when budget cuts to the student bus pass program threatened attendance at her afterschool program, **Writers in Baltimore Schools**. She brought her concerns to a City Council meeting. “I never thought of myself as a public transportation advocate,” Patrice said, “but speaking up was better than trying to raise money for private transportation. However, if we had reached out to all the Fellows in education and environmental sustainability, we would have made an even stronger case. I’m beginning to see how our issues connect. If my kids don’t have transportation, they won’t show up. If they live in a food desert, they’ll miss school more often. What we’re trying to do with the Fellows now is create networks of empathy.”

**Lawrence Brown**, whose 2012 project, **You’re the Quarterback: Gameplan for Life**, used the football team as an organizing tool to help men secure jobs in central Baltimore, teaches public health at Morgan State University and is a renowned advocate for housing equity. He cites OSI convenings as the most important benefit of his Fellowship. “Because of our hyper-

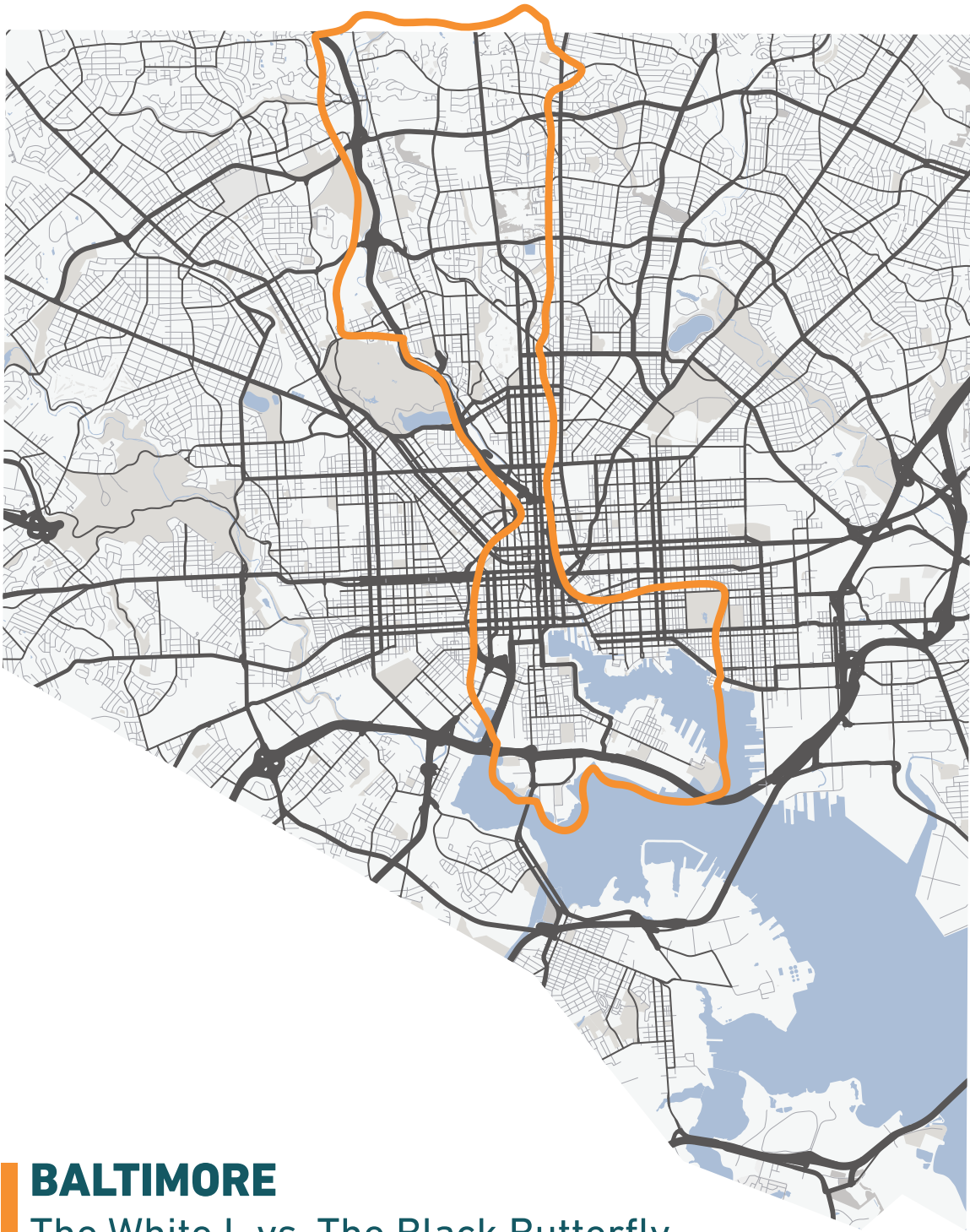
segregated reality in Baltimore, we don’t meet anyone out of our circles. Without my cohort, I would not have met [2012 Fellow] **David Hornbeck**, a respected elder in public education, or known about [2012 Fellow] **Lauren Goodsmith’s** counseling work with refugees.”

As Marianne Hughes frequently reminded the group, the impact and resilience of a network is determined by the depth of relationships among its members and its density; that is, people criss-crossing neighborhoods and issues to connect with each other. This is why convenings matter. The interpersonal work is the work. One outstanding example is the collaboration between 2009 Fellow **Sarah Hemminger** and 2016 Fellow **J.C. Faulk**. Sarah directs **THREAD** which surrounds underperforming high school students with a “family” of mentors. J.C. directs **Circles of Voices** which facilitates conversations about the impact of racism, sexism, patriarchy, homophobia, and other forms of bias. Together, they designed and launched dinners throughout the city of Baltimore, engaging more than 1000 people and helping, as J.C. says, “to diminish the impact of -isms.”

### ***LESSON #3: Networks need to see themselves – and the bigger picture.***

For the Strategy Advisory Group, the idea of mapping became a resonant theme. When designing Network Summits, they reviewed the social network maps to identify the Connectors among them. They pored over lists of Fellows organized by issue area, imagining how to connect people with similar or complementary passions and projects.

The Fellows also explored the larger “map” or context for their work, to understand how the “macro” view might inform strategy for organizing around “micro” targets for change. At one meeting of the Strategy Advisory Group, **Lawrence Brown** presented his slide



## **BALTIMORE**

### **The White L vs. The Black Butterfly**

Morgan State University Professor Lawrence Brown, a 2012 OSI-Baltimore Community Fellow and a member of the Fellows Advisory Board, has shown how two spatial geographies emerged from Baltimore's history of residential segregation policies – the White L and the Black Butterfly – leading to the current state of "Baltimore Apartheid": "White neighborhoods accumulate structured advantages while Black neighborhoods accumulate structured disadvantages," says Brown, author of the forthcoming book, "The Black Butterfly — Why We Must Make Black Neighborhoods Matter."

deck, “The Black Butterfly – Why We Must Make Black Neighborhoods Matter,” adapted from his forthcoming book. Through maps, newspaper articles, and census data, Lawrence tracked Baltimore’s history of residential segregation, from 1910 when the city enacted the nation’s first Comprehensive Racial Zoning Law, to the present day. He showed how two spatial geographies emerged from these policies – the White L and the Black Butterfly – leading to the current state of “Baltimore Apartheid”:

“White neighborhoods accumulate structured advantages while Black neighborhoods accumulate structured disadvantages,” he said. “Subsequently, huge investments in policing and incarceration impose social control and address social pathologies caused by those same decades of disinvestment and displacement.”

Brown underscored restorative justice as the guiding principle for developing solutions. By way of example, he introduced Equity Baltimore’s online PowerMap tool which displays current community data across seven metrics, including housing, health, transportation access, and education readiness. He pointed to tangible policies in development, like Baltimore’s Clean Air Act and Housing First, both arising from local mobilization and advocacy. “Progress is being made,” he said, “There is a path to equity. Empathy is not equity, helping is not equity. Equity is about repair, restore, and heal.”

At another meeting, Lanaea Featherstone presented Baltimore’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), based on global goals passed by the United Nations in 2015. Baltimore’s seventeen SDGs goals address urgent challenges around economic equity, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion, with local indicators and partnerships among government agencies, foundations, higher education, nonprofits, and business entities.

As a professional journalist and founder of the Featherstone Foundation, which advances economic outcomes of immigrant families, Featherstone brought multiple hats to her presentation, infused with her enthusiasm about the Fellows. “We are a carefully selected group of thought leaders and newsmakers in Baltimore. We are everywhere! Let’s harness our collective power as leaders to make Baltimore thrive.”

The Strategic Advisory Group discussed the benefits and risks of aligning the Fellows Network with the Baltimore SDGs. Should they join this existing coalition and create a unified force for social and economic



White neighborhoods accumulate structured advantages while Black neighborhoods accumulate structured disadvantages.



equity? Or would the Network be “shoehorned” into a top-down initiative, with little say over methodology or metrics? The group ultimately decided not to align with the Baltimore SDGs.

Pamela King calmly took the long view. “There will be a coming-together of the trickle-up – like happy hours and peer coaching – and the trickle-down from options like the SDGs, before the Network decides to join a city effort or move collectively on its own. We don’t know yet when the bottom and the top will meet.”

Her comment underscores the delicate balance at play between foundation staff and the Network. As Diana Morris observed, “As a former community organizer, Pam has the wisdom to know that people have to do this work in their own time and their own way. She has the patience and the discipline to let that happen, knowing it will speed up and slow down as the group works through the ideas.”

***LESSON #4: Engage the healthy tension in social justice networks – between weaving relationships and taking action.***

In March 2019, the Strategic Advisory Group reflected on their two years of working together. **Elevate and Amplify the Network** had resulted in a new logo and a tip-sheet for incoming Fellows about how to describe their OSI affiliation in interviews and presentations. **Gather, Learn, and Grow Together** had created new spaces for connection and learning. Informal events like happy hours at 2015 Fellow **Dave Eassa’s** art studio and with **Dwayne Hess** at Clay Pots had “built the habit of wanting to show up,” just as Brian Franchoise had anticipated. “The quality of these events is measured by the quality of our attention to each other. People show up in places where they feel good.”



The quality of these events is measured by the quality of our attention to each other. People show up in places where they feel good.



Dwayne noticed how the **Peer Coaching Initiative** and **Closing the Circle**, a ritual of transition to complete Fellows’ 18-month fellowship, “reframes the invitation to new Fellows, from joining a cohort to being part of a Network. I now see how offering the Network immediately could make a long-term difference.” From her seat in the OSI offices, Katy Caldwell noticed that current Fellows seemed “ahead” in their projects which she attributed to peer coaching. She spotlighted the progress of 2019 Fellow **Ava Pipitone** and her project **HostHome**, an online platform to address housing instability in the transgender community. As a peer mentor, 2016 Fellow **Melissa Badeker** of Baltimore Teacher Supply Swap might seem an unconventional match. However, as Ava pursues early stage venture funding, she benefits from Melissa as a role model and how she operates as a “resource hound” to find and re-purpose school supplies.

What about the larger goal of lifting a collective voice and building political influence? The Network seemed





ready to evolve from a **connectivity network** – with sturdy relationships across issues, neighborhoods, and generations – to an **alignment network** with a common vision and set of goals. At the same time, the Strategic Advisors found themselves in the push-pull between taking action and the weaving underneath, a tension common to many social justice networks. Some cautioned against being too results-oriented and favored the “organic gestation” of trust-building as the foundation for mobilizing the Network. Others emphasized their responsibility as “actors and implementers” who must move beyond the theoretical, sharpen their goals, and craft a scope of work with tangible measures for success.

Another debate centered on their internal structure. After two years of facilitation and network training with Marianne Hughes, the group seemed ready to step into their own leadership and wanted to invite more Fellows into their “energizing conversations.” This generated thoughtful discussion and debate. Some opted for one Fellow to take the helm and maintain

momentum and accountability between meetings. Others sought to preserve the group’s collaborative grassroots structure. After one such conversation, Wanda Best commented, “Did you see us squirming? We know how to do our own thing, but now we have more responsibility. We’re getting caught up in the messy.”

The process of weaving and cohering is messy, especially given the many hats the Fellows already wear as organizational leaders, activists, professors, artists, small business owners, partners, and parents. Maya Kosok drew on her experience at the Baltimore Farm Alliance, when she stepped down as executive director. “There will be growing pains,” she said. “The urban farmers had to step up and take ownership instead of outsourcing to me. But we seem ready to step up.”

### ***LESSON #5: Go deep before broad. Right action emerges from trusting relationships.***

By late spring 2019, the Strategic Advisory Group moved toward self-governance, reconvening as the **Fellows Advisory Board (FAB)**, led by its first co-chairs, Lanaea Featherstone and Dwayne Hess. Their mandate would be to “articulate and communicate a vision of impact for the OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows Network and to serve as weavers and connectors within the Network and across the city.”

The group acknowledged that their vision of a “healthy, equitable Baltimore” might take twenty-five years or more, given the history of structural segregation, forced displacement, economic destruction, and other forms of oppression. To approach that vision, the FAB crafted a Roadmap for 2020, drawing on the work already in progress and proposing an emergent strategy for growing the Network’s collective voice and capacity:

The first strategy – **Elevate the Network** – will promote recognition of the Fellows Network in the media,

**Far-Reaching Fellows:**  
All of the organizations represented on the opposite page were founded by OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows.

government sector, and grant making community, by highlighting Network stories that validate the Fellows' work and positive contributions to the City.

The second strategy – **Deepen Connections** – will grow relationships among the Fellows and encourage collaboration, from happy hours and potluck dinners to storytelling workshops and wellness activities. This work will be supported by a visual, interactive database categorized by cohort, issue, and other useful filters.

The third strategy – **Support Incoming Fellows** – will provide peer coaching and connections to tangible resources within the Network, starting with the welcoming event and through the Closing Circle at the end of the 18-month fellowship, to knit each new cohort into the larger Network.

The fourth strategy – **Build a More Equitable Baltimore** – will leverage the collective power of Network members for grassroots change, using affinity groups organized around such issues as education, racial justice, housing, health care, and investment in the city. By focusing on issues rather than constituencies, Fellows will share solutions across disciplines, foster collective learning, and mobilize from the grassroots to the ballot box. In 2020, the Network will select its first issue and encourage as many Fellows as possible to participate.

## CONCLUSION – By Their Own Agency, A Network Emerges

In October 2018, at the celebration marking OSI-Baltimore's 20th anniversary, OSF President **Patrick Gaspard** spoke of his deep affinity for Baltimore, “where Frederick Douglass learned to read and write in defiance of the slave codes, escaped bondage and set his path. This is where my American story takes hold. When the excluded weave their own way into the quilt ... through their own agency.”



We are always moving forward. Don't give up when you have something to give. Don't be afraid to admit you are less than perfect. OSI is a family of connections.



*Through their own agency.* This sense of agency is much in evidence on a glorious Spring day in 2019 as the Fellows of the 2017 Cohort gather for the Closing Circle.

The event is hosted by 2009 Fellow **Dwayne Hess** at **Claypots: A Place to Grow**, a gathering place he started twenty years ago “to form meaningful community” on West Pratt Street in Southwest Baltimore. Most days, Claypots hums with the energy of GED classes, computer workshops, coffee houses and support groups. In a brownstone renovated by mostly volunteer labor, the rooms glow in the afternoon light – mauve, turquoise, yellow, green – punctuated by paintings and kanga cloths. The atmosphere is festive. The Fellows arrive, accompanied by partners, children, and friends.

Babies crawl toward bouquets of bright tulips just picked by Maya Kosok at her Hillen Homestead Farm as a gift for each Fellow.

To begin, 2017 Fellow **Amy Bliss Tenney** leads the Hope Choir of Nations, comprised of refugees and asylum seekers. This is one of several groups, including Congolese children and Bhutanese teenagers, to whom Amy has provided classes and music therapy while also training other music therapists. “I have come this far. We have come this far,” reprises their original song. “Sometimes easy, sometimes hard.”

Each Fellow steps to the front and reflects on his or her experience. **Eric Jackson** on the community-owned food initiatives in Poppleton and Cherry Hill. **Matthew Burke** on giving away 5,000 pounds of rescued food every week. **Munib Lohrasbi** on bringing his advocacy for disability rights to Maryland’s correctional facilities. **Shantelle Roberts** on her distribution of nearly 7500 portable box-like cribs, designed to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. **Alex Long** on how his boxing program that helps young people “take those reactionary emotions and channel them into something positive.” Artist **Kim Loper** speaks about giving young people a stake in economic development by making T-shirts, greeting cards, jewelry and other items for sale. **Ryan Flanagan** traces the “fateful steps” from the upholstery trade to creating a community land trust in Remington that would “de-commodify housing.”

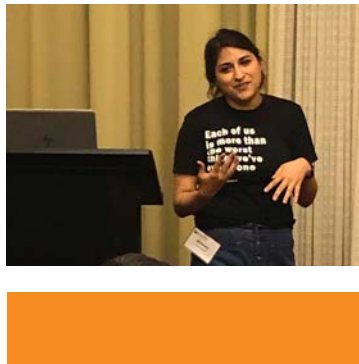
The Closing Circle also includes an opening – a welcome into the OSI-Baltimore Fellows Network, delivered by **Shawn James** who describes his early days before creating Mural Masters, “afraid of heights, sitting on a scaffold,” an artist who wanted his voice to be heard. He speaks to the special alchemy of the Fellowship, where “passion and ignorance become effective agents for achievement. But what makes

a successful program venture is that people can see themselves in you.” He acknowledges the obstacles and self-doubt, how all OSI Fellows question whether what they do is having an impact.

“But we are always moving forward. Don’t give up when you have something to give. Don’t be afraid to admit you are less than perfect. OSI is a family of connections. To build off one another, to lean on, to learn from, and to teach.”

*To build off one another, to lean on, to learn from, and to teach.*

As the OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows Network moves forward, this is a deeply felt and nutrient instruction. In the next chapter, as the Network shapes policy, nudges systems, reframes practice, and generates resources, they will show how Baltimore can be done differently, by transforming their beloved city from the bottom up.



Top: OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows, left to right, Munib Lohrasbi, Aarti Sidhu, Jacqueline Robarge, and Gianna Rodriguez, listen to a presenter at the Soros Justice Conference in Atlanta; Bottom, left to right, Rodriguez at a session, OSI Community Fellow Jennay Ghowrwal leading a session on “The Criminal Justice System as a Public Health Threat,” Lohrasbi leading a session on “Combating Solitary Confinement and Restrictive Housing.”

Photos by Evan Serpick

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# OSI COMMUNITY FELLOWS JOIN OPEN SOCIETY COLLEAGUES FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY IN ATLANTA

**I**n July, five OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows joined Open Society Foundations' Soros Justice Fellows in Atlanta to share knowledge and develop connections. But before the Soros Justice Fellowships Conference got underway, this impressive group of 200 advocates from around the country boarded buses for a two-hour ride to the Equal Justice Institute's National Memorial for Peace and Justice and National Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama.

The sites, both of which opened last year thanks to the relentless efforts of author and civil rights activist Bryan Stevenson, a former member of Open Society-US's Advisory Board, document the United States' history of lynching and racial terror.

"Coupling the conference with a trip to EJI's museum and memorial was a wonderful way to ground us and begin the conference," says Aarti Sidhu, a 2018 OSI Community Fellow and founder of Represent Youth: Baltimore School Justice Initiative. Sidhu works out of the Clinical Law Program at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, directly representing students facing exclusionary school discipline—suspensions or expulsions.

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“ Coupling the conference with a trip to EJI's museum and memorial was a wonderful way to ground us and begin the conference. ”

Grounded by the emotional experience of the trip to Montgomery, Fellows from around the country spent the rest of the conference talking about their work, making connections, and hearing from powerful speakers, including Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, and criminal justice reform advocate Yusef Salaam, a member of the Central Park Five.

While OSI Community Fellows work on a wide range of projects serving underserved communities in Baltimore, the Soros Justice Fellows—there were 16 new ones this year—are specifically focused on “projects that advance reform, spur debate, and catalyze change on a range of issues facing the U.S. criminal justice system.” Past Soros Justice Fellows have included author Michelle Alexander (“The New Jim Crow”), filmmaker Eugene Jarecki (“The Trials of Henry Kissinger,” “Why I Fight”), and Vanita Gupta, former head of the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division in the Obama Administration.

“What excites me about being at the Soros Justice Conference is seeing Baltimore in the national context,” says Jacqueline Robarge, a 2002 OSI Community Fellow and Founder of Power Inside, a holistic harm reduction program for women in Baltimore. “Stepping back from the day-to-day and local policy work, I can re-calibrate to the larger justice movements that intersect at the conference. I left with new strategies and solidarity from other Fellows that will benefit our police accountability, human rights, and decriminalization work.”

Two of the OSI Fellows joining the conference led sessions. Munib Lohrasbi, a 2017 OSI Fellow who works with Disability Rights Maryland to improve conditions for people with disabilities in prison around the state, led a session on “Combating Solitary Confinement and Restrictive Housing.” Jennay Ghowrwal, a 2018 OSI Fellow working to improve the experiences of indigent criminal defendants facing mental health challenges by training defense attorneys, led a session on “The Criminal Justice System as a Public Health Threat.”

“The programming at the Soros Justice Conference was outstanding,” says Lohrasbi. “But the open and creative atmosphere throughout the weekend is what made it such a special experience. I enjoyed the opportunity to learn from advocates who are so passionate about creating a more just society. I left the conference feeling inspired and motivated to address the systemic issues impacting our community here in Baltimore.”



OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows Gianna Rodriguez, center, and Jacqueline Robarge, right, with OSI-Baltimore staff member Priscilla Newton, left. **Photo by** Evan Serpick



# BLUEPRINT FOR BALTIMORE WILL LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR ACCOUNTABLE, RESPONSIVE, TRANSPARENT LEADERSHIP FOR BALTIMORE CITY

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n September, OSI-Baltimore launched **Blueprint for Baltimore: 2020 and Beyond**, a collaborative effort that is designed to lift up community voices and support a process to elect competent, accountable, transparent leadership for Baltimore City.

Photos by Colby Ware

As part of the process, OSI is partnering with grassroots community groups, conducting a citywide survey of more than 10,000 residents, and using that data as the basis for a series of Mayoral and City Council forums in the lead-up to the primary election in April, 2020. After the general election in November, OSI and community partners will monitor leadership's adherence to community priorities and engage business and philanthropic leaders to explore how they can also respond to community priorities.

Soon after the launch, OSI and community partners Black Leaders Organizing for Change, CASA, Baltimore Votes, Black Girls Vote, and the No Boundaries Coalition held a series of Survey Design Workshops where community members identified the subject areas that the survey should focus on. HR&A Advisors, a national organization that specializes in creating surveys designed to leverage municipal change and has conducted similar surveys in Houston, New York, and other cities, consulted on the process.

Each community group recruited ten local residents to be Data Fellows, who HR&A trained in principles of data equity and ways to leverage data to shape public policy. The Data Fellows conducted the survey in October and November through house-to-house canvassing, community meetings and other gatherings, and online outreach. The results will be reported publicly by January, 2020. Importantly, this data will be community-owned and available for the public to use as a resource. OSI and the community partners will host forums where Mayoral and City Council candidates will answer questions based on the survey results.

“Baltimore’s talented, passionate people are its greatest asset,” says Tracy Brown, acting director of OSI-Baltimore. “As we tried to imagine a process that would lay the groundwork for accountable, responsive city governance, we knew we needed to start with the people and the trusted, on-the-ground organizations that can tap into their collective insight.”

After the 2020 elections, OSI and community partners will monitor city leaders’ adherence to their promises and convene business and philanthropic leaders to explore ways they can address community priorities.

“The ‘and Beyond,’ is an important part of the project’s name,” says Brown. “We want to make sure that this process builds community power and accountability far beyond the 2020 elections.”

Information about Blueprint for Baltimore will be available online at [osibaltimore.org/blueprint](https://osibaltimore.org/blueprint). Support for the Blueprint for Baltimore comes from Open Society Institute-Baltimore and the T. Rowe Price Foundation.



Data Fellows from Blueprint for Baltimore community partner CASA canvassing in East Baltimore  
**Photo by** Colby Ware



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## OSI'S SAFE CITY BALTIMORE INITIATIVE HAS HELPED HUNDREDS OF BALTIMORE IMMIGRANTS FACING DEPORTATION

**T**wo years after OSI-Baltimore and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs officially launched the **Safe City Baltimore** program, designed to provide education and legal representation to immigrants facing deportation, the impacts are very real. Service providers educated a total of 1,650 people—most of whom were parents—about services and resources available to them. More than 1,500 received legal consultations. Thirty-six residents detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—61% of all Baltimore City residents arrested by ICE—were assigned an attorney. Many of these cases are still working their way through the courts, but we know that detainees with representation are 10 times more likely to have a positive outcome.

"I am grateful to OSI-Baltimore for having the vision to support Safe City Baltimore," says **Catalina Rodriguez Lima**, director of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and a member of OSI-Baltimore's Leadership Council. "Thanks to the program, thousands of residents have been educated about their rights and many have been able to access critical legal services that would have been inaccessible. The benefits extend to the thousands of children who fear being separated from their parents. More importantly, the program sends a clear message to our communities that they are not alone and that Baltimore stands with them."



Baltimore City Councilman Zeke Cohen speaks at the launch of Safe City Baltimore in 2016, alongside OSI-Baltimore founding director Diana Morris, left, and Catalina Rodriguez Lima, director of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, right.

**Photo by** Evan Serpick

The impetus for the program was an executive order President Donald Trump signed on January 25, 2017, five days after he took office, which vastly broadened the categories of immigrants to be detained and deported and called for ICE to expedite enforcement.

Subsequent raids in Baltimore resulted in parents being separated from their children—sometimes while the children were at school—and deported without due process. Since immigration offenses are civil, not criminal, those threatened with deportation are not entitled to representation and more than 80 percent of immigrants detained in Baltimore had none. Even though many detainees have claims to stay in the US, those without lawyers are only successful in their cases seven percent of the time. People with lawyers were 10 times more likely to have successful outcomes.

Soon after the executive order and raids, Rodriguez Lima approached **Diana Morris**, then the director of

OSI-Baltimore, and asked OSI to partner on a project to provide educational resources to immigrant communities in Baltimore and legal representation to local immigrants facing deportation.

Three months later, Morris and Rodriguez-Lima stood on the steps of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Southeast Baltimore to announce the launch of the \$500,000 Safe City Baltimore initiative.

**Open Society Foundations and Baltimore City** each contributed \$100,000 to the fund and the city's contribution was matched by the Vera Institute of Justice, which added Baltimore to its SAFE Cities Network. OSI-Baltimore raised the additional funds from a wide range of local foundations, including the Abell Foundation and Baltimore Community Foundation, and more than 50 individual donors.

“This was truly a city-wide effort,” says OSI’s Acting Director **Tracy Brown**, who oversaw the grant-making process for Safe City Baltimore. “At Open Society, we pride ourselves on being able to respond to emerging needs. In this case, we were able to do that particularly well because so many from the funding and advocacy communities and individual donors stepped up to make it happen.”

In November of 2017, the two-year Safe City Baltimore grants were announced to the following organizations:

- Catholic Charities Esperanza Center would provide immigrants legal consultations about their rights, legal representation to access available remedies, and family safety planning.
- Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland would provide consultations and referral services at the Baltimore Immigration Court and recruit, train and coordinate pro bono attorneys.
- The University of Maryland Carey School of Law Immigration Clinic would provide representation in immigration bond hearings and develop a statewide immigrant legal defense fund.
- Capital Area Immigrants’ Rights (CAIR) Coalition would provide legal representation to immigrants facing deportation hearings.

The Safe City Baltimore grantees began delivering services in March, 2018 and hundreds of Baltimore residents have benefitted from them, including more than 1,600 children recorded during intakes.

In August, 2019, Baltimore Mayor Jack Young announced that Baltimore will continue to fund legal education and representation when the Safe City Baltimore grants expire, which, as Brown notes, is crucial.

“Immigration policies continue to threaten and scare immigrants and, thanks to these services, more people are aware of their rights and there is a more robust infrastructure to provide legal representation,” she says. “OSI was happy to provide the support and funding to help city government and legal advocates respond to a community need in a timely and lasting way.”

**SAFE CITY BALTIMORE**

**An Immigrant Education & Defense Fund**

The Safe City Baltimore Fund was established by the Open Society Institute Baltimore (OSI) in partnership with the Baltimore City Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) in 2017.

Safe City Baltimore expands services and resources in order to educate immigrant communities in Baltimore about their rights, provide access to lawyers for individuals with viable claims to remain in the United States, and connect individuals facing deportation with defense attorneys. Safe City Baltimore also coordinates existing pro bono resources to make these critical resources more easily accessible, all of which help to **#KeepFamiliesTogether** in Baltimore.

**Safe City Baltimore & its Partners can help you!**

<p><b>COMMUNITY EDUCATION</b></p> <p><b>Do you want to learn about your rights and create a Family Safety Plan?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learn what to do if ICE agents come to your home or arrest you or a loved one.</li> <li>- Plan for who will take care of your child(ren) if you become detained or deported by immigration authorities.</li> </ul>	<p>Call Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (PBRC) at <b>443-703-3054</b> to learn about events near you.</p>
<p><b>IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES</b></p> <p><b>Do you want to learn about your options for staying in the United States?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attend an immigration screening clinic to learn if you qualify to remain in the United States &amp; obtain legal status.</li> <li>- Get referrals to pro bono resources or other legal service providers.</li> </ul>	<p>Call Esperanza Center at <b>667-600-2941</b> or PBRC at <b>443-703-3054</b> to request more information.</p>
<p><b>DEPORTATION DEFENSE SERVICES</b></p> <p><b>Are you or a family member detained and in need of a free lawyer to help with your deportation case?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connect with legal counsel for detained Baltimore City residents who cannot afford legal representation.**</li> </ul> <p><b>**This service is available only for Baltimore City residents.</b></p>	<p>Call CAIR Coalition at <b>202-331-3320 Ext 7027</b> to determine eligibility for legal representation. Call CASA at <b>1-866-765-2272</b> if you believe a family member has been detained and need immediate assistance.</p>
<p><b>BOND REPRESENTATION</b></p> <p><b>Do you or a family member need representation at a bond hearing?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Obtain a free lawyer for a bond hearing</li> </ul>	<p>Call the MD Carey Law School Immigration Clinic at <b>410-706-3916</b>.</p>

Return Service Requested

**AUDACIOUS THINKING FOR LASTING CHANGE**

OSIBALTIMORE.ORG



Photo by Colby Ware

## RESCUING FOOD IN BALTIMORE

Matt Burke, a 2017 Open Society Institute Community Fellow, started the Baltimore Free Farm Food Rescue as an expansion of the Baltimore Free Farm, an established collective of gardeners and activists who want to provide access to healthy food for everyone.

“There are a lot of people in our communities who are forced to buy over-priced, unhealthy, processed foods from gas stations and take-out restaurants,” Burke said. “Meanwhile, just miles away from any of these neighborhoods there’s a high volume of wasted food.”

Burke decided to establish a network of 12 give-away sites throughout Baltimore that will distribute free nutritious, repurposed food. The model is simple. “By distributing repurposed food to under-served communities, we can avoid putting perfectly good food into landfills to rot,” says Burke.

Here, people gather food at the Dovecote Café giveaway in Reservoir Hill.

Open Society Institute-Baltimore focuses on the root causes of three intertwined problems in our city and state: drug addiction, an over-reliance on incarceration, and obstacles that impede youth in succeeding inside and out of the classroom. We also support a growing corps of social entrepreneurs committed to under-served populations in Baltimore. Before we make a single grant, we analyze the root causes of a problem, cull research and examine current practices. Because we aim for lasting sustainable solutions, we engage public and private partners from the start. It is only then, with a clear picture of the problem, that we begin to focus our approach and diligently craft a roadmap for change. Support our efforts at [OSIBaltimore.org/donate](http://OSIBaltimore.org/donate).