

network stories

Baltimore's Promise - Baltimore, Md.



actions

Baltimore's Promise has been working toward closing the literacy gap, particularly for two focus populations: current high school students and Black women ages 16 to 24 who are pregnant or parenting, and their families. Low literacy levels combined with the declining opportunity landscape are severely limiting postsecondary options, earnings, and individual and family stability; the COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly exacerbating this crisis. Baltimore's Promise is also seeking to address resource inequities in the city. In recognition of its role in local COVID-19 rapid response work, Baltimore's Promise received a \$1 million grant from IKEA in 2020, which they are using to deeply examine and eliminate disparities through models that rely on community- and youth-led decision-making structures for fund distribution.

results

Through the IKEA grant, Baltimore's Promise is advancing two innovative grantmaking strategies that replace traditional philanthropic practices with community-led decision-making structures, understanding that traditional funding practices have directly contributed to the racial disparities evident in youth outcomes. Baltimore City neighborhoods that are less than 50% African American [receive nearly four times the investment](#) of neighborhoods that are over 85% African American.



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results cont.

One of the new grantmaking strategies will be youth-led, with an explicit focus on funding efforts to improve literacy outcomes for older youth. The second strategy is B'More Invested, a pooled funding strategy developed in partnership with Open Society Institute-Baltimore to invest in efforts led by communities of color that address disparities rooted in structural racism that have been disproportionately exacerbated by COVID-19. This initiative is anchored by a Grant Advisory Committee with a 2:1 ratio of community leaders to funders. Both funding structures ensure that lived experience and resident expertise drive decisions around how best to distribute money within communities.

takeaways

Baltimore's Promise is ensuring that youth, community and practitioner expertise are at the center of initiative co-development and resource allocation efforts poised to impact Baltimore City's youth at a population level. Literacy data showed which populations are most affected by low literacy rates and declining opportunities. To develop targeted recommendations, Baltimore's Promise is working alongside youth ages 14-24 and focusing efforts on current high school students and Black women ages 16-24 who are pregnant and parenting. Local resource allocation data showed that private and public funding follow the same boundaries as official redlining maps from the 1930s. The partnership recognizes that lived experience is the needed expertise to develop interventions that achieve results. The long-term goals of these efforts are to demonstrate the effectiveness of community of color-led, community-based efforts and to redirect public funding streams to support their work.