

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

A national, nonprofit, membership organization
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Note for reporters: During the event, please check in at the conference registration desk at the Key Ballroom Foyer of the Baltimore Hilton Hotel to obtain a media credential.

Making Smart Growth Work for Everyone

National conference explores practical strategies for equitable economic growth and community revitalization

Smart growth and environmental justice both strive for development that creates healthy, vibrant places that give people greater opportunity and choice. Equitable development is increasingly included in broader strategies for creating strong and livable communities throughout the nation, and ensuring that lower-income residents and communities of color are central participants in and beneficiaries of the decisions that shape their neighborhoods.

As President Obama said in his State of the Union address earlier this week, "This country does best when everyone gets their fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules. We don't just want everyone to share in America's success – we want everyone to contribute to our success."

In Baltimore next week (Jan. 29-31), the 14th annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference – the largest and most comprehensive smart growth/sustainable communities conference held in the U.S. – will explore these critical issues and showcase practical tools and strategies for greater collaboration among smart growth, equitable development and environmental justice advocates. [For agenda: NewPartners.org]

"The growing divide between the most affluent Americans and working families – struggling to cover their most basic needs – threatens the stability and prosperity of our communities," said Kate Meis, executive director of the Local Government Commission, which is organizing the conference. "By pursuing equitable development strategies that 'lift all boats', we can provide opportunities for those that need it most and make our communities stronger and more resilient."

"It's exciting that Baltimore is the site of this year's New Partners conference because in many ways it is the embodiment of the long evolution of equitable development and the inclusion of environmental justice in these important disciplines – a fitting setting to continue that work by focusing on real-world implementation of equity and justice in the development of our communities," said Matthew Tejada, Director of the U.S. EPA's Office of Environmental Justice.

The conference's Equitable Development track of sessions will highlight a wide range of equity and environmental issues, including environmental-justice approaches to redevelopment and economic opportunities; business perspectives on creating markets for equitable development; leveraging transit investments to support business growth and vibrant neighborhoods; "fair development" that combines economic and community development; revitalization strategies that reuse vacant lots; and regenerating America's "Legacy Cities" to foster inclusion. Equitable-development successes will also be showcased during several of the conference's dozen tours of model projects in the Baltimore region.

On Thursday (Jan. 29), a half-day workshop on "**Equitable Development: Tools and Strategies for Making a Visible Difference in Communities**" will examine how to make our communities more sustainable and viable now – and for generations to come – through active promotion of equitable development. In an era of rapid change and funding constraints, equitable development can be an effective investment that stabilizes communities and provides vulnerable populations with a pathway out of poverty.

Rather than divide the pie into more pieces, equitable development strives to expand the size of the pie through wealth-building strategies, entrepreneurship, accumulation of assets and financial intelligence. The workshop will also consider success stories and lesson learned for how to actively "manage" gentrification rather than passively subscribe to letting the market solve the problem.

Cities large and small are finding ways to make equitable development work even with limited resources. At the workshop, the nation's leading equitable development experts will discuss solutions for remaining productive, being creative, and stretching dollars further and local leaders will explain how they've successfully navigated financial hurdles in their communities.

GENTRIFICATION AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Smart growth seeks to improve communities and the quality of life for residents. Unfortunately, the key elements of smart growth don't always provide equal benefits and opportunities to community members. Transportation investments and community amenities don't always serve residents most at need, and revitalization efforts can have the unintended consequences of displacing residents and gentrifying neighborhoods.

Addressing these challenges, the conference will kick off with a plenary on "**Making Development Work for All**," featuring a provocative conversation among leaders who will share diverse perspectives on the housing affordability crisis and how to create public dialogue to develop promising solutions. The panelists, including Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, will explore the connections that can deliver on our promises – integrated investment and planning practices that combine equitable strategies for affordable housing, economic development, access to transit, schools and community amenities, and preservation of the community character.

"To make smart-growth development work for everybody, it must be equitable, accessible and affordable, not just economically and environmentally viable. We must practice what we promise – to improve communities for all residents," said Scot Spencer, one of the plenary's speakers and Associate Director for Advocacy and Influence at The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY: More than 45 million Americans – and one in five children – live in poverty. To help explore these conditions, the conference has created "**Understanding the Challenge: A Poverty Simulation Experience**," a unique, 3.5-hour eye-opening experiential setting that will help conference participants step into the shoes of low-income families, in trying to meet the daily challenges of providing food, shelter and basic necessities while dealing with "community resources."

"The participants will feel poverty from a new perspective, and take home a deeper understanding that can make them more effective in their work," Meis said.

In addition, a pre-conference workshop on "**Advancing Local and Regional Food Systems: Opportunities to Grow Resilient, Equitable Communities**" (Jan. 28) will explore ways to these food production, processing or distribution activities create economic opportunities, foster environmental sustainability and promote community health and how to improve food access for their most vulnerable residents.

A group of foundations are providing support for a diversity scholarship fund to allow more participants from lower-income and underrepresented communities to attend the conference.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE: With a dynamic mix of over 300 speakers and 80 sessions, the New Partners for Smart Growth conference will draw a national audience of more than 1,200 elected officials and government agency leaders as well as developers, builders, bankers, realtors, and advocates and professionals in planning, transportation, public health, landscape architecture, architecture, housing, parks and recreation, public works, crime prevention, education and the environment. For a full list of sponsors and more details about the conference agenda and special features: NewPartners.org

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