

Economic Mobility Catalog: Case Study

Urban green space: Washington, D.C.



Housing & Community Development



Supportive Neighborhoods

MORE ABOUT THE STRATEGY USED IN THIS CASE STUDY: [Parks and public spaces](#)

At-a-Glance



Summary

- In 2009, Washington, D.C.'s Department of Transportation began planning to replace the 11th Street bridge, which connected the Washington Navy Yard to Anacostia, a neighborhood that had long suffered from disinvestment. The City's Director of Planning, Harriet Tregoning, proposed rebuilding the bridge as a public park. Longtime Anacostia residents were skeptical of whether they would benefit from the development.
- To address residents' concerns, leaders of the nascent Bridge Park deeply engaged with community members to create an equitable development plan. First released in 2014, the plan included strategies to reduce the risk of displacement and provisions to support local businesses and entrepreneurs. After extensive community feedback, an expanded and refined plan was released in 2018.
- Keys to the project's success included a commitment to increasing opportunity for all and community engagement, which built trust with residents and informed the project's direction; delivering small wins early in the process; sustained efforts to convene existing community leaders and groups to share knowledge and ideas; and securing strong financial support from [LISC](#) to help fund the project.
- Obstacles the project faced included addressing initial skepticism from residents about the development, facilitating collaboration across a wide range of stakeholders with varied objectives, engaging residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, and counteracting the impact of large-scale private investment on housing prices in the surrounding area.

Results and Accomplishments

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| <p>\$76M</p> <p>11th St. Bridge Park's equitable development activities have shepherded over \$76 million into neighborhoods around the park to date. These include investments in affordable housing, workforce development, small business support, and arts and culture.</p> | <p>96</p> <p>Bride Park's equitable development plan has helped increase rates of homeownership in communities around the park. Bridge Park's partnership with <u>MANNA</u>, a local organization, has helped 96 low- and moderate-income residents purchase homes.</p> | <p>79</p> <p>Bridge Park's equitable development plan has also created lasting jobs in construction. In partnership with the Skyland Workforce Center, 79 individuals have earned OSHA credentials and were placed in full-time construction roles.</p> |
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- **Tens of millions invested in surrounding neighborhoods:** Since its inception, Bridge Park has shepherded over \$76 million in housing, workforce development, small business, and arts and culture investments into Anacostia and nearby communities. Funds for these investments have largely come from philanthropic and non-profit contributions, with over \$63 million coming from LISC DC. The District government has also made significant contributions to the construction of the physical park.
- **Giving community members and community organizations a voice in the development process:** Since 2011, Bridge Park has hosted over 1,000 meetings with local stakeholders, continually bringing together community leaders, organizations, and ordinary citizens to solicit their ideas on how Bridge Park should be developed. This has taken a variety of forms, including the creation of an Equitable Development Task Force which convened more than 60 local nonprofits to numerous community meetings to discuss the future of the project.
- **Becoming a national leader in equitable development:** Bridge Park's path breaking approach to equitable development has made it a national leader among organizations around the country seeking to ensure that longtime residents benefit from new development projects. For example, Bridge Park has been advising members of the Highline Network, a group of organizations leading infrastructure reuse projects. Bridge Park leaders have also been providing pro bono guidance to a project in Los Angeles and another consortium in the city of Southgate, California.
- **Advancing the Community Land Trust model in the DC area:** In 2015, after discussing several potential models for expanding affordable housing, many residents voiced support for a Community Land Trust (CLT). Bridge Park partnered with City First Enterprises to develop the Douglass Community Land Trust (DCLT), which now holds more than 250 units in its portfolio and is guided largely by community members (two-thirds of the DCLT Board are Ward 8 residents). The effort has prompted Bridge Park to become a leading voice and educator on community land trusts in Ward 8 and the District as a whole.

- **Expanding equitable development into a range of ambitious programs:** Bridge Park leaders have helped facilitate programs that go well beyond the park and exhibit innovative approaches to community development. For instance, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Bridge Park leaders partnered with community organizations Martha's Table, Bread for the City, and the Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative (FSFSC) to create THRIVE East of the River, the largest privately funded unconditional cash transfer program ever created in the United States. Bridge Park also created the Community Leader Empowerment Workshop (CLEW), an ongoing series which provides 30 hours of training to provide tools to city and community leaders in personal leadership, community organizing, and understanding the urban planning process.

Overview



What was the challenge?

- **Severe disinvestment east of the river:** Washington, D.C.'s 11th Street Bridge was a deteriorating piece of public infrastructure that spanned two vastly different neighborhoods. The Washington Navy Yard, on the west side of the Anacostia river, is a former industrial district that is now one of the fastest-growing residential neighborhoods in the District of Columbia. In contrast, the Anacostia neighborhood, on the east side of the river, is 97 percent Black and has suffered from a long history of disinvestment. Today, the neighborhood has more than double the city's average poverty rate.
- **The city conceives of a Bridge Park development:** When Washington D.C.'s Department of Transportation began replacing the 11th Street vehicular bridge in 2009, the District's Director of Planning, Harriet Tregoning, came up with the idea to repurpose the old bridge as a new park. She shared her idea with Scott Kratz, then the Vice President for Education at the National Building Museum, who began to pitch the idea in community meetings. The goals for the project from the beginning were to reconnect residents with the Anacostia River, improve public health, reconnect long-divided neighborhoods, and become an anchor for equitable and inclusive growth.
- **Bridge Park leaders recognize that the park must benefit current residents:** Bridge Park leaders understood that the construction of new amenities like parks often increases surrounding land value, accelerates gentrification, and displaces longtime residents. New developments had already been slated to replace affordable housing units in Anacostia with market-rate housing, which many residents saw as a harbinger of displacement. Many Anacostia residents had seen and experienced this process firsthand and therefore viewed new development with a skeptical eye.
- **Urgent need for a community-informed, partnership-driven equitable development plan:** Local leaders recognized that the racial and economic disparities Bridge Park hoped to address are complex and interrelated. Creating true equitable development would require building trust with community residents and forging partnerships across numerous organizations.

What was the solution?

- **Creating a multifaceted equitable development strategy:** To ensure that longtime residents would benefit from the Park's development, Park leaders deeply engaged with community members to create an equitable development plan, which would guide a range of investments to ensure that longtime residents would benefit from the park's construction. This approach of deep engagement also guided the plans to develop the physical park. The initial equitable development plan was first released in 2014 and has been revised continuously over the years.
- **Investments in several affordable housing efforts:** To address residents' acute concerns about gentrification and displacement, Bridge Park created a multi-part strategy to ensure housing stability for current residents and create more affordable housing in Anacostia. This strategy included partnering with city agencies and nonprofits to host workshops on tenants rights, providing down payment assistance via the expansion of a local homebuyers club, and establishing a Community Land Trust to secure permanent affordable housing.
- **Support for neighboring small businesses:** Bridge Park's equitable development strategy also included several components to invest in current and future local businesses. This included reaching out to entrepreneurs who could establish businesses in the park or serve as contractors for park services, partnering with local organizations to rehab and establish businesses in the park's surrounding neighborhoods, and advocating for policies that would benefit local businesses.
- **Strategic efforts to preserve and invest in local culture:** Based on feedback from residents, Bridge Park leaders released a second equitable development plan in 2018. The updated plan emphasized cultural preservation and support for the arts, among other changes reflecting community preferences. The arts and culture strategy aimed to respond to residents' wishes that new development would maintain, celebrate, and invest in numerous forms of Black culture and ensure that residents would feel community ownership of 11th Street Bridge Park and the surrounding area.

What factors drove success?

- **Building equity and community voice into development from the beginning:** Bridge Park leadership incorporated equity concerns into the planning and implementation process from day one. Beginning with feedback sessions in 2011, Bridge Park leaders have continuously engaged with community members and the information they gathered guided the strategy at every level. This process has continued throughout the project, with over 1,000 meetings held to date.
- **Engaging a network of local partners and holding multiple parties accountable:** Prior to the development of the Equitable Development Plan, one of Bridge Park's first activities was creating an asset map of the people and organizations who were already active in the community in hopes of ultimately strengthening, rather than duplicating, their efforts. Then, they used the process of creating the Equitable Development Plan as a vehicle to regularly convene those local organizations and stakeholders to share knowledge and ideas. This asset-based approach built relationships and led directly to several projects, like the expansion of the Home Buyers Club.

- **Securing strong financial support from a community-based institution:** LISC DC's Elevating Equity Initiative, a 2016 commitment of \$50 million to nonprofits that support low-income residents east of the river, was a crucial source of support to expand the Bridge Park's efforts. Gaining support from LISC DC was the result of longstanding efforts to engage and partner with organizations and institutions that had a long record of service in Anacostia. LISC's investment in the neighborhoods around the Bridge Park now exceed \$63 million.
- **Building in early wins to generate credibility and momentum:** Bridge Park recognized that many of the plans proposed for residents of Anacostia had never been implemented. With that in mind, Bridge Park developed strategies that could be implemented right away. For instance, Bridge Park announced its Homebuyers Club strategy in December of 2015 and it began in January 2016. These early wins helped the project gain credibility, buy-in, and momentum.

What were the major obstacles?

- **Overcoming initial skepticism and cynicism from residents toward development:** Washington, D.C., like many other cities, has a long history of racism in zoning, development, and other policy decisions. This meant that many residents first reacted to the idea of Bridge Park with skepticism. Anacostia residents understandably feared that the park's development would likely benefit wealthy White residents and developers from the west side of the river at the expense of Black residents on the east side. By building equity considerations into the park's development from the beginning, park leaders aimed to bring the benefits of a significant urban amenity to the community while mitigating the displacement risks associated with development.
- **Facilitating broad, cross-sector collaboration and navigating varying perspectives and priorities:** Initial meetings with the Equitable Development Task Force (EDTF) convened more than 60 nonprofit and community leaders and experts on housing and workforce development. Each of these organizations had differing visions of success and priorities, which made it challenging to ensure that all were working in the same direction. To ensure a cohesive approach, the EDTF first facilitated group discussions led by experts on key issue areas (housing, workforce development, small businesses, and arts and cultural equity). Then, on a later date, the EDTF held smaller meetings to refine and improve on the ideas. This collaborative approach helped Bridge Park identify shared goals and establish a plan that could secure wide stakeholder buy-in.
- **Confronting the larger market forces at work:** Washington, D.C.'s housing supply is deeply constrained by height and jurisdictional restrictions. As the city's population has boomed over the past decade, this has accelerated the pace at which investment has flowed east of the river. Nearly \$1 billion in private investment is due to occur east of the river in the next several years. Despite the unprecedented scale of Bridge Park's investments in equitable development, these market forces are impossible to fully counteract.
- **COVID presents engagement challenges:** Over the course of the pandemic, Bridge Park has pivoted largely to virtual events and public meetings to engage residents. While many of these events have been effective, Bridge Park leaders report that in-person gatherings are better for building engagement, trust, and consensus.

Timeline



PROGRAM LAUNCH

2009

City leaders conceive of repurposing the 11th Street Bridge

DC's Department of Transportation begins replacing the 11th Street vehicular bridge that connects DC's Capitol Hill and Anacostia neighborhoods. Harriet Tregoning, the city's director of planning, conceives of the idea to turn the bridge into a park and shares her idea with Scott Kratz, then the Vice President for Education at the National Building Museum. From the beginning, the project seeks to reconnect residents to the Anacostia River, improve public health, reconnect long-divided neighborhoods, and become an anchor for inclusive growth.

2011-2013

Leadership begins collecting feedback on Bridge Park

Scott Kratz begins presenting and collecting feedback on the idea for Bridge Park, hosting and attending over 200 community meetings. Kratz and Tregoning identify and select Building Bridges Across the River, an organization that houses 14 local non-profits, as a key local partner for the project. By the end of 2013, the project is officially housed at Building Bridges.

DECEMBER 2013

Bridge Park begins fundraising and hosting design charrettes

Bridge Park leaders begin collecting feedback on park design in charrettes on both sides of the river. The project begins fundraising and raises \$1 million from public and private sources for the first two full-time staff and a website.

FALL 2014

The park's design is selected and equitable development efforts are launched

Following feedback, the park's design oversight committee and a formal selection jury select the winning park proposal, submitted by an architectural and urban design firm (OMA) and a landscape architecture firm (OLIN). Bridge Park also launches its Equitable Development Task Force (EDTF) to begin developing the project's Equitable Development Plan (EDP).

MAY - JUNE 2015

Bridge Park conducts major outreach and community input efforts

Building from community feedback, EDTF convenes stakeholders to refine equitable development ideas and recommendations. Bridge Park also invites feedback from residents on both sides of the river, heavily investing in outreach.

NOVEMBER 2015

The first Equitable Development Plan is launched

Bridge Park releases the 11th Street Bridge Park Equitable Development Plan, the first of two EDPs, with a focus on workforce development, small business development, and housing.

FALL 2015

Park secures resources and partnerships to score early wins

Bridge Park leaders solicited and secured resources from a variety of organizations for early wins. One is the park's tenant advocacy strategy in collaboration with local non-profit Housing Counseling Services, which created workshops to inform renters about their rights under local tenant-protection legislation such as the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA), which gives tenants the right of first refusal when their landlord puts the building up for sale. The Park also created a Community Land Trust Action Plan, and conducted outreach to assess nearby tenant needs.

JULY 2016

Major funding to support efforts that serve Anacostia residents is announced

LISC DC announces their \$50 million Elevating Equity initiative, which invests in nonprofits that support residents near the future park through loans, grants, equity, in-kind services and technical support.

2017

Bridge Park holds the Anacostia River festival

As part of the effort to support and celebrate local arts and culture, Bridge Park holds its first Anacostia River Festival, attracting 9,000 visitors from across the area.

SEPTEMBER 2017

Another significant investment is awarded for housing, local businesses, and jobs.

Bridge Park is awarded a \$5 million implementation grant from JPMorgan Chase's PRO Neighborhood Initiative to support the Douglass Community Land Trust, minority-owned small businesses, and workforce development.

OCTOBER 2018

The second Equitable Development Plan is released

After receiving extensive community feedback on the initial Equitable Development Plan, Bridge Park releases the second version of the Equitable Development Plan, which now includes strategies to preserve, celebrate, and invest in Black-led arts and culture.

JANUARY 2019

The community land trust moves toward its first purchase.

The Douglass Community Land Trust sends a letter of intent to purchase the land under a current 65-unit rental apartment building.

DECEMBER 2020

A guaranteed income program is launched in response to COVID-19

In response to the COVID pandemic, BBAR partners with Martha's Table, Bread for the City, and the Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative (FSFSC) to create THRIVE East of the River, a guaranteed income program for residents of Wards 7 and 8. The program supported 565 families with \$5,500, one of the largest emergency cash relief programs ever offered in the United States.

OCTOBER 2021

Community engagement continues

After holding its first in-person programming since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2021, Bridge Park holds a large virtual public meeting and receives positive feedback on the most recent version of the Equitable Development Plan. To date, over 1,000 meetings with stakeholders have shaped the design of the park and the specifics of equitable development strategies. Bridge Park plans to continue extensive community outreach until the physical park is completed in 2025.

Implementation Process



How did leaders confront the problem?

- **Rapid gentrification threatens to displace Anacostia residents:** For many years, the cost of land, housing, and rents in the District of Columbia had been on the rise, creating a shortage of affordable housing and a high proportion of rent-burdened residents. While neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River had seen less upward market pressure than neighborhoods west of the river, there was a growing sense in the community that they would be the next to experience displacement.
- **An idea to connect Navy Yard and Anacostia with a new city park:** In 2009, Harriet Tregoning, the Director of City Planning for the District of Columbia, conceived the idea of developing the 11th Street Bridge into a publicly owned, privately managed park that would span the Anacostia River and connect the two disparate neighborhoods. She shared her idea with Scott Kratz, then the Vice President for Education at the National Building Museum.
- **Gathering input from the community:** Kratz presented the idea of the park and solicited feedback at over 200 community meetings between 2011 and 2013. These meetings, along with later efforts to gather community input, provided an opportunity for Anacostia residents to voice their skepticism toward development, their concerns over the potential for displacement, and the need for meaningful investments in the neighborhood's immediate needs. This input informed Bridge Park's decision to place equity at the forefront of the development process and create an Equitable Development Plan.

- **Anchoring the execution of an equitable development strategy in a trusted community institution:** Local leaders identified Building Bridges Across the River as the institution best positioned to lead the execution of the equitable development plan. Building Bridges' location on the east side of the river, demonstrated record of service to low-income community members, and desire to pursue equitable revitalization projects made the organization an ideal partner and trusted messenger. In 2013, management of the project was officially transferred to Building Bridges, marking the creation of an organization that could hire a staff, fundraise, and carry the project forward.

How was the strategy designed?

- **Committing to a community-driven process and following through with early action:** The concerns raised by residents at the beginning of the project made clear that equity and resident input would be critical to Bridge Park's success. In light of this, Bridge Park focused their efforts on Anacostia residents' immediate concerns. In a significant departure from typical public amenity revitalization projects, Bridge Park focused on investing in the community first and planned to break ground after these immediate needs were addressed.
- **Directly addressing residents' housing concerns with a multi-pronged affordable housing strategy:** Given the threats posed by development and potential displacement east of the river, Bridge Park invested heavily in protecting and expanding affordable housing in Anacostia. To do this, Bridge Park partnered with city agencies and nonprofits to lead workshops on existing housing legislation, provide down payment assistance through MANNA (a local homebuyers club), establish a new community land trust that would create permanent affordable housing, and build partnerships with city agencies to preserve affordable housing and advocate for more.
- **Workforce development and jobs for local residents:** Recognizing the importance of creating jobs for neighborhood residents, Bridge Park leaders used their First Source agreement to set local hiring goals and create opportunities for harder-to-employ residents, beginning with construction jobs. They also prioritized these residents on post-construction jobs and have continued to invest in local employment opportunities through a range of events and programming.
- **Investing in neighborhood small businesses:** Following feedback from residents, Bridge Park has worked to support small businesses in several ways. Park leaders conducted outreach to entrepreneurs who could establish businesses in the park itself or serve as contractors for park services, partnered with local organizations to rehab and establish businesses in the park's surrounding neighborhoods, and advocated for policies that would benefit local businesses. Bridge Park's community partner, the Washington Area Community Investment Fund (WACIF), has served 104 entrepreneurs and dispersed \$888,220 in loans to small businesses east of the river.
- **A community institution in the driver's seat, with key contributions from local partners:** Bridge Park leaders knew that Building Bridges could not achieve the project's goals alone. Following community feedback, Bridge Park brought in well-established DC service providers MANNA to provide home buying assistance, Housing Counseling Services (HCS) to offer tenants' rights workshops, and Building Bridges' Skyland Workforce Center to lead vocational training, among many other community organizations.

How was the approach funded?

- **Public and private funds to launch the project:** Once Bridge Park was installed as a project with Building Bridges Across the River, Bridge Park raised more than \$1 million from the DC Office of Planning, various foundations, and private sources to hire initial staff, build a website, and launch a design competition.
- **Investments in personnel, project management, and technical assistance:** An early and crucial partner, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation in DC (LISC DC), agreed to provide funding for personnel as well as project management, research, and technical assistance on inclusive development. This support grew to include LISC DC's Elevating Equity initiative, launched in July 2016 with a commitment of \$50 million.
- **Resources targeted at equitable development strategies:** Bridge Park has raised \$75 million to support its equitable development strategies. Larger, multi-year funding has ensured support for buildings and operations, while park leaders have directed one-time gifts toward small-scale programs. Major funders included JPMorgan Chase, who provided a \$5 million implementation grant in 2017, as well as the JPB Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, and others.
- **Public and philanthropic resources for park construction:** Once the project was established, the District Department of Transportation committed \$11.35 toward the park's five-year capital budget. In total, Bridge Park plans to raise \$139 million for the construction of the bridge and equitable development strategies, and to date has secured more than 88 percent of those funds.
- **Long-term operational funds:** In September 2017, Bridge Park secured a \$5 million grant from the JP Morgan Chase PRO Neighborhood initiative. This provided \$3 million to establish the Douglass Community Land Trust, \$1 million in capital for minority-owned small businesses, and \$1 million for workforce development and an evaluation study by the Urban Institute.
- **"Opportunity funds" for unanticipated future needs:** Bridge Park intentionally set aside grant funding for unforeseen opportunities. These funds supported the Community Leadership and Empowerment Workshop (CLEW) and support for local businesses impacted by the pandemic.

How was the plan implemented?

- **Bridge Park begins collecting feedback on park design and features:** Once Bridge Park was established at Building Bridges Across the River, the organization began collecting community input on how the park should be designed. The process informed the selection of a park design proposed by an architectural and urban design firm (OMA) and a landscape architecture firm (OLIN).
- **Creating an Equitable Development Task Force with a local partner:** Bridge Park looked to Local Initiatives Support Corporation in DC (LISC DC) to help develop an equitable development strategy. LISC DC's program officer Adam Kent worked with Bridge Park to establish the Equitable Development Task Force, made up of community stakeholders, which informed Bridge Park's Equitable Development Plan.

- **Identifying the community's priorities and presenting the plan:** Once the Equitable Development Task Force was formed, it conducted an analysis of the geographic area surrounding the park, collecting information on demographic trends, land-use, and other factors. This analysis, in addition to resident feedback, led Bridge Park to identify housing, workforce development, and small business development as the highest priorities. The task force then held a convening of more than 60 DC-based nonprofits to discuss equitable development. By 2015, Bridge Park had held hundreds of conversations with community stakeholders, residents, and experts and prepared its first Equitable Development Plan. Bridge Park then presented the plan to community members in a public meeting to gather input on how it could be put into action, and in November the plan was published.
- **Moving from planning to partnerships and action:** Once Bridge Park released its Equitable Development Plan in November 2015, park leaders began reaching out to community groups and nonprofits to form partnerships and begin making progress on the plan's goals. These early efforts resulted in expanding the homebuyers club and providing down payment assistance in partnership with MANNA, developing a Community Land Trust action plan, creating a tenant advocacy strategy in partnership with local organizations, and more.
- **Significant investments in first few years:** By October 2018, Bridge Park had marshalled \$56 million in housing, workforce development, and small business investments to neighborhoods around the future site of the park, nearly matching the capital costs of constructing the park itself.

How was the approach measured and refined?

- **A third-party analysis as part of the project:** Bridge Park's 2017 grant from JPMorgan Chase included funding for an implementation study by the Urban Institute. The study, which has published two reports and several briefs, examined the origins of the project, developed a logic model for its inclusive development efforts, and evaluated progress. The research team found that Bridge Park "produced notable results" and was "well on their way to achieving their goal that Bridge Park be a 'driver of inclusive development' for the surrounding neighborhoods."
- **Following feedback from residents, centering arts and culture:** Bridge Park initially focused on "brick and mortar" priorities such as housing, jobs, small businesses, and planning the development of the park itself. As the project progressed, however, Bridge Park leaders learned that residents were acutely concerned about how gentrification threatens to displace not only people, but also culture. To address this, Bridge Park began developing strategies aimed at cultural preservation, such as hosting a market for local artists from Anacostia and providing funding for local schools and youth programs. Bridge Park also started an annual Anacostia River Festival, which centered local arts and cultural programming and attracted more than 9,000 visitors. All of this work fed into the Bridge Park's revised equitable development plan, released in 2018, which lays out a strategy for cultural preservation.

- **Developing a pipeline of community-based development talent:** After seeing that many of the community leaders who contributed to Bridge Park had left to pursue new opportunities, Bridge Park leaders decided to invest in the next generation of local leaders with a new program called the Community Leader Empowerment Workshop (CLEW). CLEW provides 30 hours of training to provide tools to city and community leaders in personal leadership, community organizing, and understanding the urban planning process. CLEW is currently training its fourth cohort and recently launched a cohort in Dallas.

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This case study was written by Jonathan Timm and Ross Tilchin.

Learn more

- [Bridge Park Equitable Development Plan](#)
- [Equity tools and explainer videos from Bridge Park](#)