

# ACTION AGENDA

## Investing in Neighborhoods and Education

Thanks to all those who support our Civic Leadership Fund and who have established Funds for Baltimore at BCF, we are currently focusing investments in neighborhoods and education, because they are at the core of Baltimore's economic vitality and civic health.

### Investing in Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods are at the heart of our city and region's success. We use a mix of strategies to encourage neighborhoods to become and remain safe, clean, green and vibrant.

#### TARGET NEIGHBORHOODS

BCF is concentrating investments in two target neighborhoods, Reservoir Hill and Greater Highlandtown, each of which has developed and is following an individual plan for its work with BCF. BCF is investing \$1 million in these target neighborhoods, including \$600,000 in grants, plus staff time and other resources to help carry out their goals.

Reservoir Hill is focusing on re-designing its school and recreation center as a community hub and anchor institution, on increasing access to healthy food and on improving walkability in the neighborhood. Greater Highlandtown's plan focuses on designing and building safe, attractive and comfortable streets and public spaces for all, with a strong commitment to using arts projects and events to create a cleaner, safer and more welcoming neighborhood. Both neighborhoods are also working to increase the involvement of residents who aren't typically included in community decision-making, crossing racial, ethnic and generational boundaries.

#### NEIGHBORHOOD GRANTS PROGRAM

Where our Target Neighborhoods investments give us depth, our Neighborhood Grants Program gives us breadth. In 2013, we distributed nearly \$100,000 in small grants to 31 neighborhoods across Baltimore City and County. These grants support community projects that serve as a hook to get more residents engaged in their neighborhoods, projects that develop leadership within neighborhoods, and partnerships among local artists, arts organizations and neighborhood residents that make their communities more vibrant.

### Investing in Education

Our investments in education target school readiness, school leadership, and school effectiveness.

#### SCHOOL READINESS

We know what works, and it's called a Judy Center—a

neighborhood hub that connects young children and their families to a broad array of services. Of children with a year or more at a Judy Center, 91% are ready for school at age 5, while citywide the number is 76%. BCF donors' commitments to invest half of the start-up operating costs for three new Judy Centers enabled us to design a funding mechanism with the Maryland State Department of Education and Baltimore City Schools to ensure ongoing funding. Our donors' investments are matched on a 1:1 basis in the first three years, then operating costs are assumed by public funding permanently. In addition, the Weinberg Foundation has funded capital improvements for the first three new Judy Centers.

At the same time, we advocated successfully at the General Assembly for expanded State funding for pre-Kindergarten across Maryland.

#### SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

BCF is the lead local funder of and an active partner in Baltimore City Schools' "Growing Great Leaders Initiative," which identifies and works to retain talented educators with leadership potential. Participants in a pilot effort now underway are expected to demonstrate increasing leadership and management skills, and to synthesize their experiences into problem-solving action, and be prepared to assume principal positions.

BCF also proposed and is funding an analysis of City Schools' support structures for principals, in order to pinpoint ways to retain the most effective school leaders.

#### SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

Baltimore needs a way to measure the effectiveness of schools, both to drive school improvement and to inform parents' choices. We have supported an objective analytical tool called the School Effectiveness Review (SER) to measure schools' individual progress. Firsthand experience by BCF staff members with the two-day SER process provided an insight: once the review was complete, there was no mechanism for discussing the findings or implementing any recommended changes. We funded a "prioritization day" with school leadership in eight pilot schools to identify action steps from their SER reports. Baltimore City Public Schools is now exploring how to institute a prioritization day with every School Effectiveness Review.