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BALTIMORE CROSS-COMMUNITY RECONCILIATION PROJECT

Evaluation Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The Global Peace Foundation (GPF) is an international nonprofit organization that promotes an innovative values-based approach to peacebuilding guided by the vision of our shared humanity. Influenced by the May 2020 murder of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black male in Minneapolis, Minnesota by a white police officer, GPF convened a Committee on Racism and Justice in 2021 to address the challenges of racism in the U.S. Comprised of a national team of key stakeholders, the Committee members recommended establishing a pilot peacebuilding committee in the U.S. with members dedicated to building relationships and trust among diverse community members.

After reviewing several locations, GPF determined that Baltimore City would be a good fit for a pilot cross-community engagement project due to its racial history and its close proximity to GPF's headquarters in Lanham, Maryland. The Baltimore Cross-Community Engagement Project (BCCEP) was launched in December 2022 with the goals of reducing racial bias and discrimination, increasing understanding and empathy, and strengthening connections among Baltimore's diverse community members. To deliver it, GPF collaborated with Project Pneuma, a Baltimore-based non-profit organization founded by Damion Cooper in 2014 to help young Black males in Baltimore City's fourth through eighth grades reach their fullest potential.

Following the successful completion of the BCCEP in May 2023 with twelve graduates, GPF partnered with the United Way of Central Maryland in April 2024 to launch its second cohort, the Baltimore Cross-Community Reconciliation Project (BCCRP). Like the pilot project, the initiative brought together Black and white residents from Baltimore City and surrounding areas to engage in meaningful dialogue around race, aiming to foster long-term relationships and reduce racial bias.

While the project recruited over 20 participants who began sessions together, 8 participants ultimately graduated after completing 10 bi-weekly, 2-hour sessions requiring a 6-month investment of time, effort, and energy from influential individuals preoccupied with their jobs, families, and community leadership. The BCCRP culminated in a multicultural event that involved significant community effort on October 12, 2024, at the Eastern United Methodist Church in Baltimore's diverse Hamilton neighborhood.

The eight participants graduated as recognized peacebuilders at a ceremony on October 23, 2024. A Baltimore Community Peacebuilding Committee will continue to support participants' efforts through fellowship, learning, and community engagement. Additionally, as a project outgrowth, the project team provides recurring two-hour "Our Shared Humanity" sessions for new Baltimore City Police Department recruits every ten weeks. Three sessions have been held through April 2025, with over 150 police trainees participating.

Problem

The BCCRP successfully facilitated relationship-building among diverse participants through dialogue focused on Baltimore's racial history—housing, education, and community policing—as well as identity-based conflict, reconciliation, and conflict transformation. The key question it raises is whether such relationship-building can serve as a foundation for racial reconciliation in divided communities.

Key Findings

Dr. Shelly Clay-Robison from the University of Baltimore and Project Director Robin McDonough conducted research throughout the project and for three months beyond. Using interviews, surveys, and observations, they explored changes in participants' attitudes on race and conflict.

Before the project, many participants reported feeling unwelcome in their daily lives due to race, and some had experienced direct racism. Still, most expressed belief in cross-racial empathy and a willingness to act as allies. Key themes that emerged included:

- **Having Productive Conversations Around Race:** All participants emphasized the value of face-to-face, facilitated dialogue, especially when discussions became emotionally charged. One participant noted, “We need safe and brave spaces so that we can have deeper conversations.”
- **The Emotional Journey of Racial Reconciliation:** Emotional vulnerability was essential to growth. Participants shared that feelings like fear and guilt often hindered honest conversations, but that openness helped transform conflict into connection.
- **New Relationships and Expanded Networks:** The project fostered cross-racial friendships and collaborations. Participants emphasized the power of sharing meals, stories, and time together in building trust.

Lessons Learned

Participants concluded that reconciliation requires both structural opportunities and emotional safety. Safe and brave spaces, where ideas can be exchanged empathetically and without fear, are essential. Deep listening and willingness to share lived experiences were seen as critical components of progress.

Recommendations

Future peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in Baltimore should *continue* to focus on:

- Connecting Across Cultures and Generations
- Creating Opportunities for Storytelling
- Prioritizing Empathy and Accountability
- Creating Opportunities for Facilitated Face-to-Face Dialogue
- Utilizing Community Leaders
- Developing and Reaching Common Goals

Additionally, they should include:

- Exploring opportunities to recruit participants from established organizations
- Devoting more time to small group discussions with optional carryover time

Conclusion

Participants noted that reconciliation is less about always finding agreement and more about building honest, respectful relationships across lines of difference based on our shared humanity. Through deep listening and empathy, individuals can challenge assumptions and foster understanding. There was a strong desire to broaden dialogues to include others facing layered forms of marginalization.

Rather than seeking instruction, BCCRP participants came looking for meaningful engagement. The project gave them a platform to connect, grow, and act. For racial reconciliation to continue in Baltimore, citizens need regular opportunities to build relationships that transcend identity and strengthen the social fabric.

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BALTIMORE CROSS-COMMUNITY RECONCILIATION PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

The Global Peace Foundation (GPF) is an international nonprofit organization that promotes an innovative values-based approach to peacebuilding guided by the vision of our shared humanity. Influenced by the May 2020 murder of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black male in Minneapolis, Minnesota by a white police officer, GPF convened a Committee on Racism and Justice in 2021 to address the challenges of racism in the U.S. Comprised of a national team of key stakeholders, the Committee members recommended establishing a pilot peacebuilding committee in the U.S. with members dedicated to building relationships and trust among diverse community members.

After reviewing several locations, GPF determined that Baltimore City would be a good fit for a pilot cross-community engagement project due to its racial history and its close proximity to GPF's headquarters in Lanham, Maryland. The Baltimore Cross-Community Project (BCCEP) was launched in December 2022 with the goals of reducing racial bias and discrimination, increasing understanding and empathy, and strengthening connections among Baltimore's diverse community members. To deliver it, GPF collaborated with Project Pneuma, a Baltimore-based non-profit organization founded by Damion Cooper in 2014 to help young Black males in Baltimore City's fourth through eighth grades reach their fullest potential.

The BCCEP was led by a diverse leadership team that encouraged meaningful relationships and long-term friendships through values-based dialogue, leadership, and action. GPF staff members led the project with assistance from local facilitators. In addition, stakeholders from various backgrounds, such as education, law enforcement, religious organizations, and local community groups with an inherent interest and keen desire to improve race relations in Baltimore, guided the project.

Ten bi-weekly, in-person sessions were held starting in December 2022 and ending with a community service project at the Nexus-Woodbourne Family Healing Center at the end of May 2023. The BCCEP concluded with twelve participants graduating in June 2023. Following the successful completion of the BCCEP, the Baltimore Cross-Community Reconciliation Project (BCCRP) kicked off in April 2024. Convened by GPF in partnership with the United Way of Central Maryland (UWCM), the BCCRP was designed to continue the work started with the pilot project.

Like the initial project, the BCCRP was supported by stakeholders from various backgrounds. Session content was based on GPF's foundational principle of our shared humanity, where all human beings have innate dignity, are treated with respect, and are valued for their diversity. Project support was provided by GPF and UWCM, including three participants from the pilot project who used their experience and expertise to facilitate the in-person sessions.

Relationship building is a central BCCRP tenet. Throughout the ten bi-weekly sessions, the last one held on September 4, 2024, participants engaged in meaningful dialogue as they participated in various interactive activities and discussions led by in-house and external experts. Participants selected the histories of housing, education, and community policing in Baltimore, which were

supplemented with discussions on identity-based conflict, racial reconciliation, and conflict transformation.

Through their open and honest dialogue, the participants worked to better comprehend racial dynamics (histories, grievances, incidents, policies, etc.) and provide a platform for reconciliation and change. They learned and grew together by sharing personal experiences, discussing their racial history, developing a vision of the future, and conferring on how the vision will be realized.

As a final activity, the participants collectively designed and delivered a community service project featuring a multicultural event that was held on October 12, 2024, at the Eastern United Methodist Church in Baltimore's diverse Hamilton community. This event continued the participants' journey to deepen their bond as they worked together as a team and achieved the heart of reconciliation with each other. This activity also provided them with an opportunity to experience the value of service to others on both an individual and group level.

The BCCRP concluded on October 23, 2024, with a graduation ceremony honoring the eight participants who completed the peacebuilding program. Family members and friends joined project stakeholders and team members to support the participants and celebrate their achievements.



BCCRP Graduation – October 23, 2024

The BCCEP and BCCRP graduates, stakeholders, and other interested community members have been invited to join a sustainable Baltimore Community Peacebuilding Committee (BCPC). The BCPC will continue the work started with the two projects and allow participants to continue their community peacebuilding efforts through fellowship, learning, and engagement.

Following the conclusion of the BCCRP, the project team partnered with Gary Cordner, Academic Director of the Baltimore City Police Department's Education and Training Division and a BCCRP stakeholder, to deliver a peacebuilding training session to about 40 recruits on November 13, 2024. The session on "Our Shared Humanity" was well received by the trainees and leaders, and the project team was asked to continue to present the two-and-a-half-hour session to future recruits at their orientation training, which occurs every ten weeks. Three sessions have been held through April 2025, with over 150 police trainees participating.

Research Problem

Can relationship building among Black and white community members create a foundation for bridging the racial divide in a community?

Purpose of the Study

During this project, community members will gain knowledge and increased awareness of the impacts of racial and ethnic bias in the community, as well as resources and opportunities to strengthen community resilience. Participants will also build personal connections with diverse community members and community leaders, including law enforcement, educators, and faith leaders. Diverse community members and leaders will have learned a new set of interpersonal skills that will empower all participants to be more willing to work collaboratively to solve community problems.

PROJECT OVERVIEW**Project Goal**

To increase community resilience by reducing racial bias and by strengthening connections among community members from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Project Design

The Baltimore Cross-Community Reconciliation Project is designed to bring together diverse participants from Baltimore City and surrounding areas to engage in meaningful dialogue and build long-term relationships based on mutual respect and trust.

Target Audience

The project was created for Black and white adults ages 18 and over.

Geographic Focus

The geographic focus was Baltimore City and the surrounding areas.

Project Duration

The initial pilot project, Baltimore Cross-Community Engagement, started in December 2022 and ended in May 2023. Following the successful completion of the pilot project, the BCCRP was the second cohort, which started in April 2024 and ended in October 2024.

Project Partners and Stakeholders

GPF partnered with the United Way of Central Maryland to convene the BCCRP. Following is a list of the project's key collaborators and stakeholders:

Dr. Shelly Clay-Robison, Asst. Professor, School of Public and International Affairs
University of Baltimore

Dr. Samuel Collins, Professor of Cultural Anthropology
Towson University

Damion Cooper, Founder & Executive Director
Project Pneuma

Gary Cordner, Academic Director
Baltimore City Police Department Education and Training Division

Dr. Margaret Cyzeski, Obstetrician
Greater Baltimore Medical Center

Imam Earl El-Amin, Resident Imam
Muslim Community Cultural Center of Baltimore; Vice President

Rev. Father Canice Enyiaka, Ph.D.
St. Mathias Catholic Church
International Program Development Specialist, Africa - Global Peace Foundation

Dr. Fatimah Fanuisie, Scholar of American History
Islam Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies (ICJS)

Sue Fothergill, Senior Fellow
Attendance Works

Peggy Meyer, Outreach Coordinator
Saint Vincent de Paul Catholic Church

David J. Smith, President and Founder
Forge Center for Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Education, Inc.

Dr. Claudia Thorne, Asst. Professor
Coppin State University

John-Paul Ubah
Police Officer—Glen Burnie, Baltimore

Mr. Micky Wolf, CEO
Dent Education

Project Objectives

Community members will gain knowledge and increased awareness of the impacts of racial and ethnic bias in the community, as well as resources and opportunities to strengthen community resilience.

- Participants will build personal connections with diverse community members and community leaders, including law enforcement, educators, and faith leaders.
- Diverse community members and leaders learn a new set of interpersonal skills that will allow all participants an increased willingness to work collaboratively to solve community problems.
- Reduce racial bias and discrimination and increase understanding and empathy within Baltimore communities by creating a successful working model that can be replicated and implemented elsewhere.
- Identify best practices and lessons learned that can be used for other communities seeking to build relationships that will reduce racial bias and discrimination.
- Provide a document that reflects the impact of GPF's engagement and partnerships and serves as a basis for building upon these relationships and in other communities in the future.

Project Implementation

Ten in-person sessions were held at the University of Baltimore Learning Commons in space leased by the Baltimore City Police Education and Training Center. For many of the sessions, participants were assigned suggested readings, podcasts, and/or videos on topics of interest. In addition, participants designed and delivered a community service project.

Sessions 1 to 3 were designed for participants to get to know each other and begin to develop relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

Session 1 focused on building the foundation, including setting the stage, housekeeping, and initiating connections among the participants. After introducing themselves, participants completed the "Where I'm From Poem," designed to provide a unique way to describe themselves based on where they grew up.

Session 2 focused on "Drawing the Circle Wider," designed to deepen connections and create trust among the participants. Activities began with the nonverbal interactive exercise "Sharing Circle," which is a profound exercise that introduces the group to each other on a human level to build solid relationships. Participants placed a small item of personal significance on a table covered with blank paper. Once all items were placed on the table, all participants quietly viewed the items on the table and wrote questions related to other participants' items. Each participant then had the opportunity to discuss their item and answer questions.



BCCRP Session 2 – May 8, 2024

Session 3 focused on “Our Shared Humanity/Identity” to bring participants to a vision that, regardless of differences, everyone has a shared humanity as their foundation. In this session, we identified our common ground of universal principles and shared values, which gave us a platform to agree, work together, respect each other, and build relationships going forward as we create a new history together. A facilitator discussed the role of identity in conflicts and shared GPF’s four universal principles, after which the participants selected the universal principle that had profound meaning for them. Four groups were formed, one for each universal principle. Participants selected a scribe, joined in an interactive discussion, and then summarized their discussion to the larger group.

Sessions 4 to 6 were designed to give participants a platform to discuss “What does race mean to you?” Participants selected topics to learn about Baltimore’s racial history in three specific areas: housing, education, and community policing. Facilitators led panel discussions with internal and external subject matter experts on the selected topic, who presented relevant information and shared their personal experiences. Participants were engaged in an interactive group discussion during each session, where they were also encouraged to discuss their personal experiences on the selected topic.

Session 4 focused on Baltimore’s housing history. A facilitator led a panel discussion with panelists who were experts in the participant-selected topic of Baltimore’s racial history in housing. Participants participated in a Q&A discussion with panel experts during which they were encouraged to share their personal experiences related to housing in Baltimore.

Session 5 focused on Baltimore’s education history. A facilitator with many years of experience in the Baltimore City school system, including the role of principal, opened the discussion via a pre-recorded video. Following a presentation by a Baltimore City educator and activist, participants engaged in a Q&A discussion on their personal experiences related to education in Baltimore.

Session 6 focused on Baltimore's community policing history. An external guest speaker from the Baltimore City Training and Education Center presented information on the history of policing in Baltimore. Following the presentation, participants engaged in a robust discussion on community policing in Baltimore.

Sessions 7 and 8 were designed for participants to gain knowledge on current peacebuilding activities and tools to plan action steps for moving forward, including beginning to design their community service project.

Session 7 focused on participants engaging in deeper conversations while reflecting on topics discussed in earlier sessions and learning about a recent peacebuilding activity in Africa. The session opened with a "virtue card" activity that provided the opportunity for participants to deepen their relationships by discussing personal experiences related to a selected virtue card. Following this interactive activity, participants shared their thoughts on the earlier sessions. In addition, GPF facilitators discussed their recent peacebuilding experience during a demonstration in Kenya that threatened escalating violence due to planned tax hikes.

Session 8 focused on racial reconciliation and the design of a community service project. Participants engaged in an interactive activity where they discussed "How can reconciliation between races be achieved?" This was followed by an external guest speaker, educator, and collaborator sharing his personal experience regarding racial reconciliation with white people, followed by a Q&A session. Participants ended the session discussing the selection of a community service project.

Sessions 9 and 10 were designed for participants to gain additional knowledge about peacebuilding theories and tools and continue designing a community service project.

Session 9 focused on participants engaging in an interactive activity about the role of trust in reconciliation. An external guest speaker presented "Transforming Conflict in Baltimore," including sharing her personal experience in Indonesia. Participants ended the session by selecting their community service project and developing initial plans.

Session 10 focused on participants finalizing their plans for their community service project and reflecting on their BCCRP experiences, including recommendations for improving the process moving forward.

Community Service Project

As a final activity, the participants collectively designed and delivered a community service project featuring a multicultural event that was held on October 12 at the Eastern United Methodist Church in Baltimore's diverse Hamilton community. This event continued the participants' journey to deepen their bond as they worked together as a team and achieved the heart of reconciliation with

each other. This activity also provided them with an opportunity to experience the value of service to others on both an individual and group level.



BCCRP Multicultural Event – October 12, 2024

BALTIMORE CITY POLICE ACADEMY SESSIONS

Description of Program

Over the course of several months during 2024, Alan Inman and Gail Hambleton, BCCRP coordinators, and Gary Cordner, the Academic Director of the Baltimore City Police Department's Education and Training Division and a project stakeholder, discussed a scaled-down project session that could be delivered to the department's recruits. As a result, the project team designed a two-and-a-half-hour session focused on "Our Shared Humanity" to be delivered during the recruits' orientation week.



The initial session was held on November 13, 2024. Well received by the department's trainees and leaders, the project team was invited to present the session to future recruits at their orientation training every ten weeks. Subsequent sessions were held on January 22 and April 2, 2025, with future sessions to continue every ten weeks thereafter. Through April 2025, over 150 police trainees have participated in the training sessions.

Activities

The "Our Shared Humanity" session opened with a connection-before-content interactive exercise designed to build relationships and trust before engaging in the learning exercises. Initially, there was only one connection-before-content exercise; however, an additional deeper virtue card activity was added to the April 2, 2025, session. It was a very moving activity in which the trainees paired off and shared their selected virtues and related personal experiences.

Baltimore City Police Academy – November 13, 2024

Following the connection-before-content activities, a brief GPF overview was provided. This was followed by a presentation on Identity-Based Conflict, which led into a discussion of Our Shared Humanity and GPF's four universal principles:

1. All people have intrinsic value, dignity, and fundamental rights, as endowed by the Creator.
2. Every person has, as his or her highest attribute, a spiritual and moral essence.
3. Our human nature finds its fullest expression and meaning in relation to others.
4. People develop their innate potential through their choices and actions. Freedom and responsibility are intrinsically linked.

After the formal presentation, the trainees selected a universal principle that had a personal meaning for them and joined in a small group discussion on why they selected the universal principle and their related experiences. The trainees then joined in a small group report-out where a spokesperson from each group provided a summary of their discussion.

Each session ended with a large group discussion with the trainees providing responses to the following questions and input on the overall value of the session:

1. How does recognizing the value and dignity of every individual influence the way you interact with those who hold differing values?
2. How can building relationships within the community enhance your potential to perform your job?
3. What is your experience of the unique culture of Baltimore?
4. How will what we discussed today impact your job?

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In order to evaluate the outcomes of the BCCRP, University of Baltimore Professor Dr. Shelly Clay-Robison and Project Director Robin McDonough conducted qualitative research for the duration of the BCCRP and three months after the conclusion. The research and evaluation aimed to determine attitudes and beliefs around race and conflict in Baltimore and looked to see how they may have shifted over the course of the facilitated dialogues and beyond. Research methods included:

1. Participant observations during meetings where researchers not only observed interactions between participants but also took part in discussions and activities,
2. Individual interviews with participants during and after the conclusion of the project, and
3. Surveys given both before the start and at the completion of the project.

Before the program began, half of the participants reported feeling unwelcome in areas of their lives or at least uneasy due to their race. Many had been targeted by racist comments and behavior, and there were expressions of fear of retaliation for speaking out about racism. Most participants came into the project believing that cross-racial empathy was possible and that they could develop relationships with others. Many also indicated a strong willingness to act as an ally for others experiencing racial injustice. Several themes emerged when participants shared their thoughts and reflections:

Having Productive Conversations Around Race: “We need time to gather. Being in the same room with each other is so important.”

Dialogue as a cornerstone of reconciliation was emphasized throughout the project. This is the power of authentic human connection and effective communication, which was not always easy. Each participant came to the project with their own histories and worldviews, but it became important for them to address their own racial biases and preconceived ideas in order for them to have productive conversations. Often, it was reported that they wanted more time for discussion on issues like housing, redlining, access to resources, and the racial history of Baltimore. There was a sense that they wanted to go deeper and make the conversations “messier” in order to learn and grow as individuals and as a community.

All participants agreed that discussions around race relations are necessary in Baltimore, but that they need to be facilitated and mediated by an experienced person who knows how to handle group dynamics when topics and conversations become emotionally charged. One participant noted, “We need safe and brave spaces so that we can have deeper conversations.” Another agreed, “We need someone to ask us hard questions about ourselves and about race.” Participants indicated that they worked to balance their desire to learn with the fear of making mistakes and feeling the discomfort of knowing they may have said something perceived as “racist.” During the session conversations, it was reported that true learning happens when people feel safe to ask questions and engage, even if they might initially get things “wrong.”

“We need to build a collaborative safe zone in Baltimore. Some people are afraid to look at another perspective. And it can be easier to blame others. But we need to be able to talk about these things without worrying that we’ll be scolded.” Having these discussions not only gave participants confidence to pursue relationships across the divide, but they also brought real perspectives and lived experiences into the open when they might have otherwise gone unheard.

The Emotional Journey of Racial Reconciliation: “Fear and guilt are what is keeping us from talking to each other. We’re territorial in Baltimore, so we need to expose ourselves to each other.”

While many discussions and presentations were intellectual, sessions also included opportunities for participants to investigate their emotional reactions to discussions around race in Baltimore. It was noted that moments of silence and reflection provided during the program may have initially felt uncomfortable, but the experience helped participants see the value in allowing time for contemplation and processing their feelings and thoughts before talking. This is not something that regularly happens in everyday life, and they recognized how critical that is for reconciliation efforts. Another participant drew a connection between racial conflict and grief, noting that both involve being able to accept change. This kind of personal growth requires letting go of past expectations, beliefs, and biases, similar to the grieving process. Conflict is an inevitable part of life, but how it is handled can be transformative.

Participants noted that having opportunities for authentic human connection and acknowledgement of their lived experiences were critical during polarized times. They saw that the tolerance and acceptance shown in the sessions helped to dismantle stereotypes and inspire small acts of kindness, which can have a profound impact on people who may be struggling individually.

New Relationships and Expanded Networks: “We have to be with each other and rub elbows and share food and have tea. That’s where the change happens.”

A realized goal of this project was to see participants develop relationships with new people, especially across the racial divide. Several participants reported that the project provided a safe space for them to be vulnerable and authentic, which they found helpful in developing friendships

and professional connections during and after the project's conclusion. Almost every participant reported that having specific opportunities for personal connections was critical for a successful project, but also for long-term reconciliation

It was noted that personality and generational differences can make it difficult to build relationships, but that the shared desire for change was a unifying factor. Participants actively engaged in change through new relationships, taking responsibility for creating the world they envision. One participant noted, "A barrier to reconciliation is identity groups. When I reach out to help others, it's based on who I'm familiar with, so we need to expand who we're familiar with if we want to break down these barriers."

LESSONS LEARNED

After months of working together, reflection, and discussion, participants reported that reconciliation efforts in Baltimore should include creating safe and brave spaces for vulnerable conversations and increasing empathy for others through shared experiences. These safe and brave spaces are ones where individuals are dedicated to creating a positive and progressive community for all people, and one in which ideas and beliefs can be shared and considered with empathy and without fear. There is a desire for spaces where people can ask questions and make mistakes without fear of being labeled offensive or wrong, and where individuals can hold each other accountable. It was hard work at times. People got frustrated. Many asked, "What's next? How are we keeping this going?" Project facilitators saw this desire to continue as evidence of a successful project, but one that is not finished.

RECOMMENDATIONS

More specifically, future peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in Baltimore should *continue* to focus on:

Connecting Across Cultures and Generations: Perceived differences between racial groups play a significant role in how participants communicate and how they interact with others. These differences can lead to frustration, but they can also lead to opportunities for learning and mentorship across the divide. Creating face-to-face spaces for inter-community engagement is central to alleviating racial tensions from segregation and fostering long-term reconciliation.

Create Opportunities for Storytelling: People want and need to tell their own stories about race so that they can challenge the feeling of being pigeonholed. Facilitating opportunities for people to tell their stories about race creates opportunities for nuance and embracing complexity.

Prioritize Empathy and Accountability: While empathy is important, barriers to fully understanding others due to differing lived experiences exist. Opportunities for cross-cultural engagement should prioritize accountability and empathetic listening within groups.

Creating Opportunities for Facilitated Face-to-Face Dialogue: Effective mediation and facilitation are essential to ensure that all voices are heard and that discussions remain productive without becoming entrenched or one-sided.

Utilize Community Leaders: Outreach to community leaders for participation in future cross-cultural engagement is a key way to break down barriers while fostering inclusion. Social change

happens at the grassroots level, with individuals engaging with their own communities to shift perspectives.

Developing and Reaching Common Goals: The final group project allowed participants deeper access into each other's lives and to see how others operate in the world when tasked with specific actions around a collective plan. It was in the making of the final community service project that mattered, not the project itself. The purpose of the final community service project was to create the energy of a team so that all the talking, trust, and relationship building can then express itself through a project with everyone participating.

Additionally, they should include:

- Exploring opportunities to recruit participants from established organizations
- Devoting more time to small group discussions with optional carryover time

CONCLUSION

Participants occasionally mentioned how sharing and understanding commonplace experiences with each other can be difficult. However, when it comes to peacebuilding efforts, it is not necessarily about finding agreement but about finding a variety of ways to form a relationship, even if we cannot understand each other's experiences and worldviews. Common ground is a goal that requires actively, authentically listening to each other so that we can question our own assumptions.

Participants agreed that risk-taking is important here and that learning about each other's families and cultures is a way forward to reconciliation. There was an increasing interest in expanding discussions to include people experiencing multiple injustices or marginalization. Participants became frustrated when discussions would include generalizations about race and socioeconomics, in particular, and they came to want more nuance and complex discussions.

At the BCCRP graduation, participants invited their families to join them in celebrating their work and the conclusion of the project. They were proud of what they had done and wanted to share food as well as the larger experience with their loved ones. Participants came to the BCCRP not necessarily to be taught, but for the speakers, the other participants, and the facilitators to give them something to talk about. The wisdom to connect, grow, and reconcile was already inside them, but the project gave them the platform to carry it out. In order for racial reconciliation to continue in Baltimore, citizens need opportunities to develop familiarity, empathy, and bonds that transcend identity groups.