

# Supporting Cultural Equity in Community Development in DC

Wednesday afternoon 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.

The DC metropolitan area is one of the most diverse in the country, and few jurisdictions epitomize that diversity more than its principal city – Washington, DC. With its moniker of “Chocolate City,” DC has been a symbol of Black culture and political power since becoming a majority-Black city in the late 1950s. But in a reversal of trends dating back to the Great Migration, 9 of the 10 US cities with the largest Black populations saw significant Black population loss since 2000. DC is no exception, and, in fact, Black population loss here began even earlier. Between the 1970 and 2000 censuses [DC’s Black population fell by nearly 200,000 people](#), and by 2011 Chocolate City was no longer majority Black. Though there are myriad causes, a central driver of demographic change has been decreasing housing affordability. In DC, nearly 50 percent of Black and Latine renter households are cost burdened. However, even in majority-Black sections of the city, such as Ward 8, many residents report feeling like strangers in their own neighborhoods, as storefronts, amenities, and people begin to change around them.

As this local session will explore, neighborhood change is more than a question of economics. The discussion, which will focus on supporting and evaluating cultural equity in community development work, will be heavily informed by [Urban-Greater DC’s collaboration with Building Bridges Across the River \(BBAR\)](#), the DC-based nonprofit organization responsible for the Town Hall Education Arts Recreation Campus (THEARC) and the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park project. BBAR and its collaborators have centered equitable development in both projects, including making arts and culture a standalone strategic category of the Bridge Park Equitable Development Plan. Urban-Greater DC [released a discussion paper in 2021](#) exploring how cultural equity cuts across all aspects of the park’s strategic planning – a focus that has involved all three of today’s panelists.

This session will be moderated by Peter Tatian and Sonia Torres Rodríguez and will be a mix of moderated discussion with the panelists and Q&A with the audience. It will begin with a discussion to set the table for what cultural equity means in the context of community development. The conversation will then explore the importance of cultural equity for preserving small business and for uplifting community power and history in gentrifying places. It will conclude with how NNIP partners can help communities to measure cultural equity and track progress.

## Speaker Bios

**Peter Tatian** (co-moderator) is a senior fellow at the Urban Institute and research director for Urban–Greater DC, Urban’s initiative focused on DC and the Washington region and an NNIP Partner. He is an expert on US housing policy, particularly in the areas of housing assistance and affordable housing preservation. He advises nonprofits on performance management and evaluation and heads Urban’s work providing technical assistance on data collection and use to grantees of the US Department of Education’s Promise Neighborhoods initiative.

**Sonia Torres Rodríguez** (co-moderator) is a research analyst in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute. Torres Rodríguez’s research interests include racial equity, neighborhood change, equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, equitable development, econometric analysis, and community-engaged methods. Before joining Urban, Sonia was a research fellow for Stanford’s Center for Poverty and Inequality, supporting a national qualitative and ethnographic study of poverty and inequality in the United States. Sonia graduated from Rice University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematical economic analysis and will be graduating with a Master of Science in applied economics from Johns Hopkins University in May 2023.

**Harold Pettigrew**, Wacif’s CEO, leads one of the Washington, DC, metropolitan area’s leading Community Development Financial Institution’s focused on access to capital products and services, and capacity building technical assistance to low- and moderate-income entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs of color.

Harold has spent his career in economic development, with nearly 20 years of experience in small business development, venture capital investing, transportation and transit, workforce development and public sector management. Prior to joining Wacif, Harold was the director of entrepreneurship at Prosperity Now, where he led the organization’s national efforts to advance policies and programs that increase business success for low-and moderate-income microbusiness owners throughout the United States. In addition, Harold has served as an advisor to the World Bank on private sector, small business development, and business licensing strategies in Somaliland and greater Somalia, and served as an advisor to National League of Cities advising cities across the country on equitable development strategies. Harold has a Master of Urban Planning from New York University, and a B.A. in Political Science from North Carolina State University, where he has also served as a member of the university’s board of trustees.

**Vaughn Perry** is the Director of Equity for the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park. His role is to oversee and implement the deliverables for the Equitable Development Plan. A D.C. native,

Vaughn has been a resident and homeowner in Ward 8 for over 16 years. Vaughn's research interests focus on ecojustice pedagogies, community engagement and green job/skill development.

Previously, Vaughn worked for the Anacostia Watershed Society, where he led the National Capital Region – Watershed Stewards Academy providing community leaders with the resources to serve as a point in their community on storm water issues. Vaughn holds a bachelor's degree in IT from Strayer University and a Master's Degree in Project Management from George Washington University.

**John A Johnson** is a Poet/Playwright and native Washingtonian. He is the founder and creator of Verbal Gymnastics Theater Company. Mr. Johnson holds a B.A in Theater Arts from The University of the District of Columbia. He has worked as a drama therapist in partnership with the District's Youth Services Center. Mr. Johnson is a published author, who has written and produced six plays that reflect and celebrate the culture of his native city Washington, DC. He is a three-time Artist Fellow of the DC Arts Commission. His most recent contribution is to a radio project at American University WAMU 88.5 in conjunction with the Association of Independent Radio call "Anacostia Unmapped", which captures the narratives of local residents in rapidly changing communities "East of the River" in Washington, DC. Mr. Johnson uses innovative forms of theater and storytelling to foster meaningful discussions about race, cultural preservation, and the effects of economic development in Washington, DC.