# Learning Module: Key Indicators for Eliminating Neighborhood Disparity

### Module Adapted from [Introduction to Vital Signs 18](https://vital-signs-bniajfi.hub.arcgis.com/apps/cd6576dfdfd1438883eee719485f2d34/explore)

**PRE-LEARNING (recommended):** This learning module builds from skills learned after completing the Introduction to [*Vital Signs* Module](https://bniajfi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Learning-Module-Vital-Signs.docx).

In this module, you will be examining data from the *Vital Signs* indicators produced annually by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA) at the University of Baltimore to understand the links between poverty and education. You will then answer the six questions in the Assignment section.

**What You’ll Need to Complete This Learning Module**

* Access to the Internet (either desktop, laptop or phone)
* The latest version of Chrome or Safari browser
* A place to write down your thoughts/answers

**Topic Background Information**

Over the years, Baltimore communities have asked staff at the [Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance](http://www.bniajfi.org) (BNIA) to both offer **more** indicators in the annual release of *Vital Signs* (which now has more than 110 indicators!) but also to distill them down to the **most important** indicators. To do the latter requires us to clearly state a point of view about what the indicators represent and how they can be used to improve quality of life in all neighborhoods. This is a step that many “data intermediary” projects like BNIA’s do not take. But the need to communicate key indicators became especially urgent in the wake of the civil unrest that occurred in Baltimore in 2015. If we truly care about our city and the people in the neighborhoods we serve, we cannot just release the *Vital Signs* report and let the results fall where they may. We must clearly articulate how the indicators can be used to ensure that all of Baltimore’s policies and programs not only remove barriers for people, but also promote equity across all neighborhoods. Neighborhoods cannot be “separate but equal” with respect to the indicators in *Vital Signs* if we ever want to be a just and equitable city.

After 2 decades of preparing community-based indicators, [conducting research](https://bniajfi.org/bnia_projects/) about Baltimore’s neighborhoods, going to neighborhood meetings, [training residents and other stakeholders](https://bniajfi.org/data_day) on how to use the data, our work has shown that to achieve a more equitable and just city overall, disparities among neighborhoods themselves must be addressed and eliminated. Neighborhood disparities contribute to every other dimension of inequality that we all care about including racial disparity, health disparity, educational disparity, income disparity and on and on.

By synthesizing and learning from our work and other research about neighborhoods, we hope to provide a voice to the structural issues within neighborhoods that maintain the status quo or worse. There is a critical urgency to ensure that all of Baltimore’s policies and programs not only remove barriers for people, but also promote equity across all neighborhoods. Our framework has developed to focus on key indicators for four goals: 1) housing diversity and affordability; 2) building occupancy and vacancy; and 3) neighborhood accessibility and mobility and 4) neighborhood connectedness to opportunity. To aid in the local discourse on the conditions of Baltimore’s neighborhoods, BNIA-JFI has identified the key indicators that all communities should track to help achieve these 4 objectives.

**Step 1—Understanding Indicators**

There are more than 100 indicators in [*Vital Signs*](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/all). This website lists all the indicators and their definitions [www.bniajfi.org/indicators/all](http://www.bniajfi.org/indicators/all). Each of the goals listed below has key indicators associated with them.

**Step 2—Community Demographics**

For this learning exercise, choose one of the 55 Communities from the Vital Signs community profiles. <https://bniajfi.org/vital_signs/cprofiles/>. Click on any of the communities on the map and then click on “More Info”. What are the demographics of the community you have chosen?

Median Household Income \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Percent of Children Living Below Poverty \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Percent of Residents—Black/African American (Non-Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Percent of Residents—White/Caucasian (Non-Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Percent of Residents—Asian (Non-Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Percent of Residents—Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Step 3—Tracking Key Indicators for Communities**

## Goal #1: Increase housing diversity and affordability in every neighborhood

The most stable housing markets in the Baltimore region are characterized by housing diversity and have moderate use of housing choice vouchers. However, only 1 in 4 households who are income-eligible for a housing voucher receive one; in Baltimore, while more than 15,000 households have access to a housing voucher, more than 25,000 households are on a waiting list. Providing more realistic housing options for a range of household incomes in Baltimore’s most stressed communities as well as its strongest markets will increase housing diversity in every neighborhood. Ultimately, housing diversity matters because the strength of the housing market is correlated with better educational outcomes for children.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Key Indicator  (Find data by clicking on each link below) | Find the value of each for Baltimore City | Find the value for a specific Community Statistical Area |
| [Percent of Housing Units that are Owner Occupied](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Housing%20and%20Community%20Development/ownroc) | ? | ? |
| [Affordability Index – Spending more than 30% of Income on Rent](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Housing%20and%20Community%20Development/affordr) | ? | ? |
| [Rate of Housing Vouchers per 1,000 Rental Units](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Housing%20and%20Community%20Development/hcvhouse) | ? | ? |

## Goal #2. Reduce or maintain vacant and abandoned housing below 4% in every neighborhood

When a community losses population, the most evident result is the increase in vacant and abandoned housing. These buildings represent the physical vestiges of population decline, and their negative consequences rest on the shoulders of the people who currently deal with that loss every single day. Based on the experience in Baltimore neighborhoods, nearly all communities that grew between 2000 and 2010 had vacancy rates at or below 4%. Homes that are habitable but still do not have anyone living in them are less obvious from appearance alone but are a growing concern for many neighborhoods.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Key Indicator  (Find data by clicking on each link below) | Find the value of each for Baltimore City | Find the value for a specific Community Statistical Area |
| [Percentage of Residential Properties that are Vacant and Abandoned](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Housing%20and%20Community%20Development/vacant) | ? | ? |
| [Percent of Residential Properties that Do Not Receive Mail](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Housing%20and%20Community%20Development/nomail) | ? | ? |

## Goal #3. Ensure access to and mobility within every neighborhood

If neighborhoods are the “muscles” of our city and region, the transportation and transit system are like the “arteries” and without good circulation, neighborhood will atrophy. The impact of long commute times on urban neighborhoods is highly detrimental to population growth. A successfully employed resident is either more likely to move out of the neighborhood to be closer to a job or will not be able keep a job, remaining in the neighborhood unemployed. Neither outcome contributes to the quality of life in the neighborhood itself. High number of bus loads is also a sign that a neighborhood is a destination for others to come into for working or shopping or recreating.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Key Indicator  (Find data by clicking on each link below) | Find the value of each for Baltimore City | Find the value for a specific Community Statistical Area |
| [Percent of Employed Population with Travel Time to Work of 45 Minutes and Over](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Sustainability/trav45) | ? | ? |
| [Number of Daily Bus Stop Loadings per 1,000 Residents](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Sustainability/busload) | ? | ? |

## Goal #4. Neighborhood Connectedness to Opportunity

All the data in Vital Signs contributes to a new and growing field of “urban science” that not only aims to use data to observe what’s going on in cities, but also help predict what will happen in the future. One of the major insights coming from this new field is that because cities function as unique, complex, and adaptive systems, they tend to realize strong and predictable “network effects”—the more and more people or participants in a network the more valuable (and potentially more costly) a neighborhood or city becomes. While many of the existing *Vital Signs* indicators reflect the situation within neighborhoods, measuring how connected neighborhoods are in terms of digital, social and financial infrastructure is required to truly understand the strengths and accruing network effects of communities. Neighborhood isolation across any of these domains results in the lack of resources to communities today and in the future, but lack of access to networks is often difficult to assess when looking only within neighborhoods.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Key Indicator  (Find data by clicking on each link below) | Find the value of each for Baltimore City | Find the value for a specific Community Statistical Area |
| [Percent of Households with No Internet at Home](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Workforce%20and%20Economic%20Development/nohhint) (Digital) | ? | ? |
| [Total Dollar Amount Invested in Small Businesses per 50 Businesses](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Workforce%20and%20Economic%20Development/smlinvst) (Capital) | ? | ? |
| [Number of Event Permits Requested per 1,000 Residents](https://bniajfi.org/indicators/Arts%20and%20Culture/artevnt) (Social) | ? | ? |

**Step 4—What Do the Indicators Mean?**

Answer the following questions to address the issues of the community you chose data about:

1. How does the community compare with respect to housing diversity?
2. How occupied or vacant is the community? What does this mean for the community?
3. How accessible is the community?
4. How connected is the community?
5. What would you recommend are the top priorities to make the community more just and equitable?
6. How do you think these indicators might be different in a community with a different demographic profile?