



## Circle Steering Committee Chooses Priority Focus Areas

The Baltimore Women's Giving Circle Steering Committee has chosen priority focus areas for the 2024-25 year.

These are based on discussions over the summer, and after the Committee reconvened in the fall, as well as on the full 2023 Circle Membership Survey and the supplemental Membership Survey in 2024. In addition, the Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion funders' interviews provided excellent feedback as to how the Circle is viewed in the broader community of funders in the Baltimore area. The result of this work is the focus on priority areas, which we are referring to as our Leadership Pillars:



**Building  
Membership**



**Strategic  
Planning**



**Circle Visibility/  
Public Relations**



**Leadership  
Development**

A fifth pillar, Advocacy, is of strong interest to the Circle but needs further study and definition. Expect to see more information on these key areas as this work develops.

## Circle Participates in Maryland Philanthropic Network Homelessness Project

An important piece of the Baltimore Women's Giving Circle's work is to engage in **community collaboration initiatives**. This year the Circle will participate in the Maryland Philanthropic Network (MPN) Homelessness Project.

MPN is gathering information from local community funders to compile a report on the collective impact on homelessness prevention in Baltimore City in 2023. Funders Together to End Homelessness is striving for 100% participation so that the report, as accurately as possible, determines the community impact funders are having and identifies next steps in the prevention process.

The Circle contributed information about funds distributed in grants year 2023, according to the criteria distributed to Baltimore funders. Ten of the 18 grantees for that year used a portion of their funding from the Circle for homelessness prevention, intervention, related services, or averting re-homelessness. BWGC will be receiving the community report upon the completion of the project, scheduled for late in the 2024 calendar year.

Beyond the study, BWGC hopes to learn about opportunities for collaboration with community organizations as more is learned about homelessness in Baltimore.

### *Inside:*

- **Co-Chairs message**
- **Grantee Profile**
- **Fall Full Circle**
- **Save the Date**
- **Circle Works Projects**
- **Grantee Connect Fall Forum**
- **Committee Updates**



## Co-Chairs Message

The fall season is something of a reawakening for many in the Circle, and we were pleased to see that the September 18 Full Circle event featuring Brooke Lierman included more than 100 members and guests, including, for instance, Michelle Weinstein from Baltimore Magazine. We are now preparing for our December 11 Full Circle, featuring Shanaysha Sauls, CEO of Baltimore Community Foundation, which is so important to the Circle. Be sure to register!

More than 40 members attended the Circle's first "informal member gathering" at the Church of the Redeemer in Baltimore. Members had an opportunity to catch up with each other and meet new members. Several new members attended and signed up for committee participation the same night. Those who attended were so enthusiastic about the event that we will continue these as a part of our Building Membership pillar.

We heard you! One of our key Management Pillars for the year is Visibility and PR, and the Circle was a participant in the Baltimore Magazine Baltimore Gives program this year. Several of our grantees appeared in the catalogue of nonprofits featured in the October issue!

Another program supporting the Visibility/PR pillar is our participation in the Maryland Philanthropic Network Homelessness Project. The Circle submitted data regarding our grantees' involvement in any aspect of homelessness as a stated goal: prevention of homelessness; emergency intervention; prevention of re-homelessness. Ten of our 18 grantees in grants year 2023-24 will be counted as MPN assesses what Baltimore has achieved, and more important, where to focus future efforts.

The Steering Committee orientation this year brought consensus on our four pillars of focus for the year: Strategic Planning; Visibility/PR; Building Membership; Leadership Development. We will be combing Circle Survey results from 2023 and 2024 as well as the REDI (Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) funders' interviews to plan our work as well, with Advocacy a strong interest, but yet to be defined.

The redesigned website is already garnering praise from members. It has involved a great deal of work from the team, which continues. Lisa Calixto, Renee Gordon, and Anita Pomerantz are the dream team, as internal expertise is superior to an external consultant and has saved the Circle financial resources. It is important for Circle members to understand that the website requires ongoing work to be most useful to all.

We are impressed with all that the Circle committees and functions have achieved—both quietly over the summer, and when Circle action began in full in September. For many, teams were as busy in the summer as they are all year long. The result of committees working together is seen in the Education Committee's choice of Brooke Lierman for the Fall Full Circle, Vincent DeMarco in October, and Odette Ramos in November as speakers open to all Circle members; Membership's securing the interest and participation of new members as we just achieved growth to almost 425 members; a scheduled Grantee Connect event on succession planning that drew raves in November; and a streamlined grants process beneficial to Grants team participants and grantee applicants is soon to be finalized! Thanks so much to all of you.

*Renee & Barbara*

Renee Gordon and Barbara Epke

## GRANTEE PROFILE

# St. Francis Neighborhood Center

The St. Francis Neighborhood Center (SFNC) has as its mission ending generational poverty in Reservoir Hill and Penn North neighborhoods. In these historically red-lined areas, half of the children live below the poverty line and the majority of households are headed by women.

For the past 60 years, SFNC has provided, at no cost, critical resources through interventions that meet the evolving needs of the community.

The range of services it provides is vast, including after-school and summer programming for K-8 children and paid internships for high schoolers. There is close collaboration between the children's schools and SNFC, and family needs are regularly assessed. To accommodate its long waiting list, SNFC is undergoing a much-needed expansion which will allow the center to double its student capacity.

There are also food giveaways, programming for seniors, computer literacy training, and emergency funding for families experiencing eviction.

SFNC has been designated a center to anchor resettled Afghan refugees. These families in crisis are welcomed with English classes and referrals to SFNC's working partners such as Women's Housing Coalition, Baltimore Peacekeepers, and the Public Justice Center.

SFNC partners with Friends of German Park, Art With A Heart, and Baltimore Peacekeepers to ensure a safe neighborhood with parks and safe places for children and their families to gather and relax and play.

The neighborhood center recently was awarded a \$2 million grant from Yield Giving, Mackenzie Scott's philanthropic foundation. Torbin Green, executive director of SFNC, said this "amazing" gift will help it meet the evolving needs of its community.

There is no doubt that St. Francis Neighborhood Center is the beating heart of its community.



## Did you know...?

The Circle has an endowment to ensure its sound financial future and to provide another vehicle for our members' generous giving. A donation of any amount during your lifetime or as part of your estate planning will enhance the philanthropic work of the Circle.

For more information go to the website ([thebwgc.org](http://thebwgc.org)) and click on "Make a Donation." Thank you for supporting the Circle's grantees now and into the future.

## Fall Full Circle: Brooke Lierman



More than 150 members who attended the first Circle meeting in person and by Zoom in the 2024-25 year gave an enthusiastic welcome to Brooke Lierman, Maryland's first female comptroller (and a Circle member).

In an impassioned talk, Brooke shared her background as an attorney, a state legislator, and as a working mother with two young children. Elected comptroller in 2022, she oversees a staff of nearly 1,100 employees managing the complex financial operation of Maryland.

Much of her talk focused on the impact of women in the workforce. Her vision is "We all do better when women do better." Citing statistics such as "women earn \$.84 for every \$1 men earn" and the issue of declining labor

force participation for women nationally and in Maryland after the pandemic, she identified possible reasons, including the cost of childcare and low pay. Through the newly established Research Division in the comptroller's office, she issues periodic updates on the state of the economy, including the impact on women. (More information can be found at [www.marylandtaxes.gov](http://www.marylandtaxes.gov))

## See the Circle in Baltimore Magazine

The Circle is in Baltimore Magazine's annual Give Baltimore Guide. The Circle's quarter-page ad appears in the special section of the October issue's print edition. The ad describes the Circle's mission, highlights what the Circle does, and invites women to join. The ad is part of the Steering Committee's strategy to develop greater awareness of the Circle in the Baltimore community.

### SAVE THE DATE

December 11  
Full Circle

At the next Full Circle meeting on December 11, Shanaysha Sauls, president and CEO of the Baltimore Community Foundation (BCF), will speak about the mission, goals, and impact of the foundation in the Baltimore community. While many members have worked with BCF as the Circle's fiscal agent, the organization has a broad impact in the community through "strategic grants, impact investments, and special initiatives to strengthen schools and neighborhoods." **The meeting will be held at Beth El Synagogue beginning at 11:30 A.M., and a Zoom option will also be available.**



## Circle Works Project: Winter Warmth

Circle Works is planning an event called “Winter Warmth” in partnership with Manna House. There will be activities intended to meet client needs and brighten the day of the homeless men, women, and children served by this recent grantee. Circle members will have the opportunity to learn more about Manna House and how Circle contributions have helped it fulfill its mission. Watch for more information in a BWGC e-alert!

**Update:** Circle Works’ call to establish a library in the pediatric clinic at Health Care for the Homeless resulted in more than 1,000 children’s books donated by Circle members and friends. Thirty-four Circle volunteers (and one spouse!) gathered at the downtown Baltimore Health Care for the Homeless site on June 26 to put bookplates in the collected books, shelve most of them in the clinic, and box the remainder for distribution at satellite locations, as well as stuff 100 “busy bags” with creative materials for children to take home. Health Care for the Homeless staff, doctors, and clinicians joined participants to answer questions about their work and provide insights into the organization’s changing role in the face of increased demand for services.



## Canticle Singers Partner with BWGC

The Canticle Singers of Baltimore is a 24-member professional-level women’s chamber choir with singers aged 16 and up. It is also now a partner of the Circle.

In the past, the Singers have supported OrchKids and other organizations focused on children but hope to broaden their reach.

“We have been looking to create a giving partnership with an organization that believes in empowering women,” says outreach coordinator Cécile Audette, “and I love the fact that you are dedicated to giving to women where you perceive the greatest need.”

The Circle’s grant pool will benefit from somewhere between 2% and 5% of the Singers’ ticket sales.

The Singers have three concerts in December; admission is free, but donations are accepted.

For more information, see <https://canticlesingers.org>

## Grantee Connect Forum: Leadership Continuity

At the November 13 Grantee Connect forum, 28 grantee partners and 12 Circle members gathered at the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation to hear Karen Schuler, managing director-nonprofit leadership at CBIZ, discuss the importance and value of succession planning.

Schuler says the term “succession planning” can cause anxiety for CEOs and boards, so she uses “leadership continuity,” asking: How does one manage smooth and easeful leadership continuity when a leader’s leave is either planned or unplanned? She then outlined why and how planning for these transitions supports an organization and its ability to thrive through changes in leadership.



Planning leadership change allows an organization to 1) work for a proactive position of strength, not a reactive scramble, 2) identify “org gaps” in coverage and expertise, 3) minimize the crisis of unplanned absence or vacancy, 4) build broad-based bench depth and internal capacity, and 5) mitigate risk and pave the way for successive and easeful leadership transitions.

After hearing the speaker, grantees had time to network. They applauded the topic and speaker. Comments included: “Great connections” [made at the table]; “Fabulous! Great topic and presenter;” “I very much appreciated that there were clear action items and strong takeaways;” “I will definitely be looking into the bylaws and updating job functions/descriptions for each role;” “both the board and staff need to have a succession plan.”

The recording will be available on the BWGC YouTube channel, and the slide show and other materials will be sent to all attendees.

---

### WHAT'S NEW IN THE COMMITTEES

## Communications

The Communications Committee recently produced the Circle’s Year in Review, its annual report. Printed versions were mailed to BWGC members, and electronic versions were distributed to members, past members, grantees, and other friends of the Circle. Social media activity has increased on our Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn platforms. The Circle is using this to strengthen BWGC’s presence and attract new members.

The group also assisted in the production of a quarter-page ad for the Circle in Baltimore Magazine’s October 2024 edition. This issue features a special non-profit giving section and the ad appears with those of other Baltimore organizations that have similar objectives. The ad focuses on the Circle’s mission and accomplishments and includes BWGC contact information.

## WHAT'S NEW IN THE COMMITTEES

### Education

The Education Committee met during the summer to discuss recruitment and retention of committee members and to establish subcommittee chairs for Circle Reads, Forum, and Study. The committee recommended and booked Brooke Lierman, Maryland comptroller and Circle member, to speak at the Full Circle meeting in September, and has arranged to have Shanaysha Sauls, president and CEO of the Baltimore Community Foundation, as the speaker for the December Full Circle meeting.

The Committee plans to expand Circle Study and have regular meetings with speakers. The theme for 2024-25 is "What's Working for Women." During the September meeting, subcommittee chairs were selected for Circle Forum, Circle Reads, and Circle Study. The Education Committee will meet monthly on the second Wednesday of the month at 4 p.m.

### Grants

This year, the Grants Committee is introducing a simplified grant application, making it easier for applicants to complete and for grant readers to review. Thanks to Jane Berkow, Ann Boyce, Mary Jo Wiese, and Katie Lekin for their work on this.

The committee has been busy recruiting grant readers and team leaders in the upcoming grants cycle. **HOWEVER, THERE IS STILL AN URGENT NEED FOR MORE VOLUNTEERS.**

Consider participating in the Circle's core activity. As committee members often say, reading grants may be the most rewarding and inspiring thing that you do all year. If you haven't done it before, give it a try. And if you have done it before, welcome back! To sign up, contact [grants@thebwgc.org](mailto:grants@thebwgc.org).

### Membership

The 19-member Membership Committee has planned a busy fall.

The prospective member social on September 11, hosted by Jane Rodbell, was attended by five prospective members who learned about the Circle and heard from Jennifer White, the executive director of Mission of Mercy, a 2023-24 grantee.

Another prospective member event was held November 2 at GEDCO and was hosted its CEO, Nichole Battle. This was the first time a prospective member event was held at a grantee's location.

The committee handled registration and the collection of items for Mission of Mercy at the September 18 Full Circle meeting.



*Jennifer White, Mission of Mercy executive director, speaks at the September prospective member event.*

## WHAT'S NEW IN THE COMMITTEES

### Post Grants

The Post Grants Committee has 40 members signed up for the new grant year, with a good mix of experienced and new liaisons.

At the Committee's October 7 Zoom kickoff meeting, liaisons met each other, learned about being liaisons to their assigned grantees, and met Post Grants Co-Chairs Mayer Martin and Bruce Webb. Co-Chairs from the PG Circle Works subcommittee, Grants, Grantee Connect, and Communications were invited to attend so that liaisons could learn about opportunities for the grantees in collaboration with these other committees.

Teams have been introducing themselves to their grantees, scheduling on-site visits, and working on the midyear reports, which are due in early January.

### Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI)

The Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) Committee hopes to build on last year's initiatives by continuing to gather information about the role the BWGC plays in the community and discovering best approaches for partnering with other organizations and Circle grantees. Interviews with area funders found:

The Circle's focus on women and children addresses often unmet needs (only 2% of all philanthropic dollars in the United States targets women)

Area funders recognize the important role the BWGC plays in launching and sustaining small organizations. Many larger funders are not willing to grant to these groups.

REDI will also continue its Conversations programs, possibly centering discussions around films that highlight crucial area issues such as *The Right To Read*, a film that explores the profound socio-economic and racial implications of effective reading instruction. Maryland has been slow to recognize the necessity of teaching phonics and has only recently returned to this approach.

## *New Members*

Susan Appling  
Sharon Benus  
Elizabeth Embry  
Kristen Ernst  
Debra Brown Felser  
Laurie Franklin  
Janice Gordon

Miranda Gordon-Zigel  
Amy Helsel  
Claudia Leight  
Mary Newman  
Nasika Pace  
Lucy Sarris  
Sue Schildwachter

Stephanie Shack  
Sharon Spira-Cushnir  
Kara Stambach  
Kathleen Tumbler  
Rose Viscardi  
Martha Whitty  
Susan Wiswell



## Dues reminder

Membership renewal reminders have gone out. We hope that you will renew your commitment to the BWGC for 2024-25.

Your membership contribution supports the Circle's mission, with at least 85% going directly to the grant pool.

Please send your renewal by December 31 so that your contribution can be included in this year's grant pool.

There are three membership contribution levels, with no special privileges or restrictions conferred by any of them, and you may adjust your contribution annually. The amount of your membership contribution will not be disclosed.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to the BWGC and for your dedication to improving the lives of women and families in Baltimore!

## Calendar of Events

12/11	Full Circle Meeting
01/21	Post Grants Midyear Review

## Contributors

Kelly Chew

Barbara Epke

Lisa Field

Renee Gordon

Sarah Grebow

Phyllis Kolman

Katie Lekin

Mayer Martin

Sharon Nathanson

Ellen Stifler

Jane Strausbaugh

Jaclyn Vorenkamp

Mary Jo Wiese