

Groundbreaking Transformations

State of the Network 2022



GROUNDWORK
USA



“There is no panacea for solving the environmental crisis facing our planet. The pathway to safer, healthy, and more resilient communities requires sustained action at every scale that collectively moves the needle closer to justice. Groundwork Trusts are demonstrating that transformative action can happen anywhere when community voices are prioritized, and residents come together to bring their vision to life.”

Cate Mingoya-LaFortune
Chief Officer of Climate Resilience and Land Use



Our Vision

We envision a world where everyone can live in a community that is healthy, green, just, and resilient.

Our Mission

We bring about the sustained regeneration, improvement, and management of the physical environment by developing community-based partnerships that empower people, businesses, and organizations to promote environmental, economic, and social well-being.

Our Network

Groundwork USA is a national network of 21 place-based environmental justice organizations, Groundwork Trusts, working hand-in-hand with their community to restore the urban environment and create healthier, more just, places to live, work, and play. While we share a mission and vision, the work in each Groundwork community is shaped by local needs.

Collectively, we work to:

Improve Access to Parks, Trails, & Open Outdoor Spaces



Transforming vacant, contaminated, and neglected land and waterways into community assets like parks, trails, community gardens, urban farms, and greenways to increase access to the outdoors.

Mitigate the Impact of the Climate Crisis through Green Infrastructure



Reducing the harm caused by climate-related extreme heat, poor air quality, and flooding by installing green infrastructure and advocating for systems change.

Increase Access to Healthy Foods



Creating healthy, local food systems through a wide variety of programs, including community and school gardens, urban farms, local and mobile farmers markets, community-supported agriculture shares, healthy corner store campaigns, and culturally relevant nutrition and cooking classes.

Cultivate the Next Generation of Environmental Leadership



Preparing the next generation of environmental leaders by engaging community members in paid, age-appropriate education, stewardship, and career training programs.

From Our Chief Executive Officer

Dear Groundwork Community,

I've been part of the Groundwork story for almost twenty years, and while I've been through multiple stages of growth and transformation, there is something uniquely energizing and inspiring about where we are at this moment.

Right now, there is tangible energy behind the groundswell of momentum uniting everyone from the smallest resident-led neighborhood coalition to the federal government in the demand for a more environmentally just future. There is an urgency behind the movement, a shared belief that change cannot wait, and a growing commitment to investing in, and supporting, grassroots leadership.

This is the moment Groundwork Trusts have been working towards for decades alongside other grassroots organizations, residents, and partners. This past year, by leveraging deep community connections and broad collaborative partnerships, we have seen the Network move forward on increasingly bold and ambitious projects and programs.

Across the country, Groundwork Trusts broke ground on extensive land revitalization projects—transforming brownfields into accessible, healthy greenspaces, expanding greenways and trails, and installing green infrastructure to increase climate adaptation. Our youth programs continued to grow, both in size and the depth of training provided, as we prepare youth and young adults for careers in a greener economy. In 2022, we improved more than 12,500 acres of open space and parkland, planted 8,550 new trees, engaged 25,500 community members in climate resilience efforts, and employed more than 4,500 youth and young adults in environmental leadership programs and jobs.

At the root of this success is a commitment to our core philosophy of “Local Roots, National Impact.” While we know the most impactful and sustainable change begins locally, embedded in our model is the shared recognition that collectively, we are so much greater than the sum of our parts. In these pages, I'm proud to share with you stories that show how the Groundwork Network is improving communities through hyper-local partnerships and shifting the narrative about what is possible when working hand in hand with residents on the frontlines of the environmental justice movement. And how we're coming together through collaborative national initiatives that scale impact far beyond what any Trust could accomplish alone.

As always, none of this would be possible without the passion and support of all of the staff, board members, youth, residents, partners, volunteers, and donors that make up the Groundwork Community. To all those working to bring us closer to a world where everyone can live in a neighborhood that is healthy, green, just, and resilient – thank you.

Here's to another year of groundbreaking progress for people, places, and prosperity.

Heather

Heather McMann
CEO, Groundwork USA



By The Numbers

Groundwork USA's 2022 Impact

Improve Access to Parks, Trails, & Open Outdoor Spaces

12,440

Acres of Brownfields,
Parkland, and Open Space Improved



90

Miles of Sidewalk,
Paths, and Trails
Improved

9,000

Feet of River Habitat
Cleaned, Restored,
or Conserved

Mitigate the Impact of the Climate Crisis through Green Infrastructure

325

Properties
Retrofitted with
Climate Resilience
Infrastructure

130

Green
Infrastructure
Projects Completed

8,550

Trees Planted



25,500

Community Members
Engaged in Climate
Organizing, Education,
and Advocacy

Increase Access to Healthy Foods

2,063

Garden Beds and
Urban Farms Built,
Maintained,
or Supported

6,516

Families Benefiting
from Produce
Grown in Urban
Farms and Gardens

14,022

Meals Donated
to Community
Members

44,801

Pounds of
Food Produced



Cultivate the Next Generation of Environmental Leadership

4,534

Youth and Young
Adults Employed

359

New Jobs
Created

277,700

Hours Engaged in Education,
Recreation, and Stewardship





Local Roots

The strength of our network is in our deep local roots and commitment to supporting the vision of local leadership. In 2022, Groundwork Trusts launched and expanded ambitious land revitalization efforts that leveraged creative partnerships and resident leadership to shift the narrative about what is possible when working hand-in-hand with communities on the frontlines of the environmental justice movement.

Improving Health Through Nature-Based Solutions



With an oil refinery, port, and transit infrastructure surrounding the neighborhood, it's not surprising that 27% of children aged 2-17 in Richmond, CA, have been diagnosed with asthma. While an infrastructure overhaul is the long-term hope, Groundwork Richmond (GWR) is laser focused on leveraging the myriad benefits of an expanded tree canopy to improve air quality and health in the region now. With tree canopy cover in Richmond at only 12.7%—half the recommended amount for urban areas—GWR is working with public agencies, businesses, and residents to get trees in the ground as quickly as possible in the neighborhoods where they are needed most. In 2022, they planted 220 new urban trees along public and private property across the city. As the Urban

Forestry Administrator for the city, GWR leads extensive efforts to plant trees along the Richmond Greenway Trail and other public green spaces. This year, that included planting more than 100 new trees and native plants along the first-mile segment of the Wellness Trail, a planned 2.6-mile pedestrian and bicycle trail through the city. In addition to planting on public lands, GWR has an ongoing Adopt-a-Tree Program, which provides free trees to residents. As part of this program, GWR identifies the best tree for each property and helps residents learn how to care for their new tree so that it can thrive. While there is a long way to go towards tree equity in the city, each year of this program, GWR brings the community hundreds of trees closer to their goal.



Restoring Access to Historic Spaces



Located in the gateway to Near Northwest Indianapolis is the Burdsal Fire Station—the first racially integrated fire station in the city. Despite its important cultural significance, the station has sat vacant for the past thirteen years. That changed in mid-2022 when, after a lengthy advocacy process with the City of Indianapolis, Groundwork Indy was granted a 20-year lease and permission to restore the fire station—and the three acres of surrounding open green space—into their home base and an active community gathering space.

The restoration of the site is a full team effort. Groundwork Indy's GroundCorps team, young adults engaged in a paid, part-time environmental stewardship, landscape design-build, and maintenance service training program, and corporate volunteers led selective demolition work inside the firehouse. Groundwork Indy's Green Teamers, high-school-aged youth, cleared several dumpsters worth of

trash from the site, removed invasive honeysuckle, installed a chicken coop (a gift from Indiana University), and painted murals on shipping containers to brighten up the space. This transformation is just the start. When the redesign is complete, the site will include a brand-new nature trail, with a prominent 100+-year-old Hackberry tree as the centerpiece, an on-site bike repair shop, an urban garden, and a new food pantry.



Creating Healthy, Local Food Systems



Access to fresh food is an essential part of a healthy, safe, and environmentally just community. In cities like Denver, CO where entire neighborhoods exist without a supermarket, fresh produce is extremely limited. Through a growing urban agriculture program, Groundwork Denver (GWD) is intervening at multiple points in the food system to produce, rescue, and redistribute healthy, locally-grown food, delivering lasting benefits that resonate far beyond the garden.



At GWD's 1,800 sq. ft. hydroponic greenhouse, called Groundwork Greens, the youth Greenhouse Apprentices support the year-round cultivation of fresh produce to distribute to local residents. Given Colorado's relatively short outdoor growing season, the team can grow a lot more food in the greenhouse—nearly 4,000 pounds annually—while the hydroponic technology uses 70% less water than traditional farming. Through their year-round CSA program, GWD provides produce grown in Groundwork Greens to their neighbors with pricing scaled for all different income levels—about 30% of CSA members receive weekly produce at no cost.



The food connections don't stop there. As a founding member organization of Fresh Food Connect, a national non-profit working to rescue and distribute produce grown in backyard gardens, GWD bridges the gap between food waste and food security by creating opportunities for home gardeners and community growers to easily donate their surplus produce to food-insecure neighbors. Through this multi-pronged strategy, they are building stronger community connections while increasing access to healthy, nutritious food!



New Partnerships for Climate Resiliency



Too often, the map of affordable housing is nearly identical to the maps of the hottest and most flood-prone neighborhoods in any city. This is not an accident. Historical race-based discriminatory housing and zoning policies led to the siting of public housing in under-resourced neighborhoods lacking in tree canopy and green space, and often located near high-polluting industry and transportation infrastructure, such as highways, ports, and refineries. This places the people least able to afford the social, health, and economic costs of the climate crisis in the neighborhoods hit first and worst. Across the country, Groundwork Trusts are teaming up with housing agencies, neighborhoods groups, and affordable housing nonprofits to undo past harms and create safer places to live, work, and play for all residents.

In Yonkers, NY, Groundwork Hudson Valley is partnering with the Municipal Housing Authority of the City of Yonkers and Westhab, an affordable housing nonprofit, to retrofit affordable housing properties with green infrastructure, including

trees, bioswales, and rain gardens, that not only reduce the impact of extreme heat and flooding, but also create new gathering spaces for tenants and increase the sense of community across each property. In Jacksonville, FL, Groundwork Jacksonville is launching a home repair program in partnership with the North Riverside Community Development Coalition and Local Initiatives Support Coalition to help low-income homeowners in the historic North Riverside community to keep up with property maintenance as the area becomes increasingly hard hit by hurricane winds, humidity, and rainfall. In Richmond, VA, Groundwork RVA is teaming up with the Better Housing Coalition as they start construction on a new 125-unit affordable housing complex to ensure that green infrastructure and climate safe infrastructure is a priority and not an afterthought. The work looks different in every city, but the end goal is the same: reducing the social, economic, and health impact of the climate crisis at home.



Deepening Resident Leadership



As shifting weather patterns have caused an increase in heavy rainfall across the Chollas Creek Watershed in San Diego, CA, aging infrastructure has been pushed beyond its limits. In Southcrest, a neighborhood within the watershed, every rain-storm brings the threat of backyard flooding, road closures, and property destruction. To raise awareness about the the urgent need to invest in infrastructure upgrades, Groundwork San Diego-Chollas Creek (GWSD) launched the Southcrest Resident Advocacy Group in 2022. The group brings together residents and community organizations to align on community priorities, identify the best opportunities to engage their local officials, and advocate for infrastructure investments and policy changes. With a growing roster of more than 30 members, most of whom are long-time Southcrest residents of all ages, including working parents, retirees, and young people, the group has worked together to circulate petitions around the neighborhood, write letters, and make calls to city hall. As a result of their advocacy campaign, twelve city officials came to Southcrest in 2022 to see firsthand the impact of flooding in

the neighborhood. Shortly after the visit, the city set aside funding for flood management system upgrades that will happen over the next two years. In 2023, using the Southcrest Resident Advocacy Group as a model, GWSD is expanding the program into Webster, an adjacent neighborhood with similar needs. Additionally, the whole program will get an upgrade with the launch of an expanded resident leadership program to train community members in the core skills needed to lead organizing efforts and self-advocate for change.



Changing How Decisions Get Made



With temperatures rising and extreme weather worsening, the City of Cincinnati has made climate adaptation and environmental justice a top priority. To help raise awareness about the impact of the climate crisis in the most disproportionately vulnerable neighborhoods, and put equity and justice at the top of the agenda, Groundwork Ohio River Valley (GWORV) teamed up with Green Umbrella, Greater Cincinnati's regional sustainability alliance, to build resident capacity to self-advocate for change.



Together, they organized three climate advisory groups, consisting of residents of diverse ages and backgrounds, paid to participate in a 6-8-week intensive training. During this training they learned about redlining, climate change adaptation, and green infrastructure solutions while engaging in community outreach activities like canvassing and surveying to collect climate observations. At the end of the training, each advisory group created a community resilience statement outlining their collective priorities and a neighborhood-level climate resilience plan to support and guide their community vision for climate resilience. Leveraging these plans, the community advisory groups have already secured several tangible wins for climate equity. Advisory group members were selected to serve as equity liaisons throughout the creation of the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan, to make



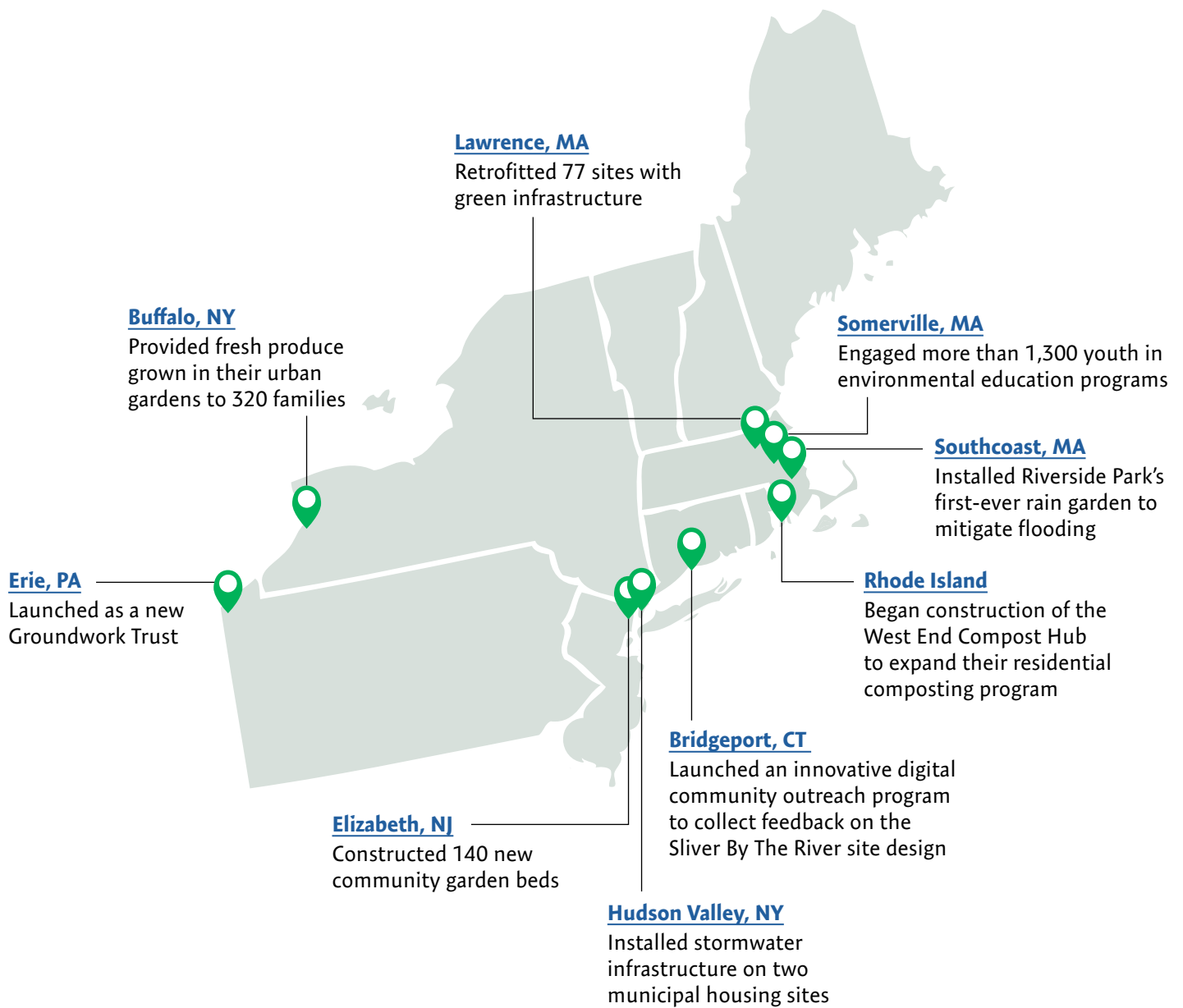
sure community voices were included at the decision-making table. This climate action plan was recently accepted in full by the City of Cincinnati, with \$700,000 of the \$4 million earmarked for equitable investments in priority communities.

This is a huge shift from the original proposal of an unfunded climate action plan and speaks to the power of resident advocacy in pushing equity-based climate resilience plans at the neighborhood and city levels. With this proven track record, GWORV and Green Umbrella will be expanding this climate advisory group structure to the regional level, with plans to bring the model to Northern Kentucky in early 2024.



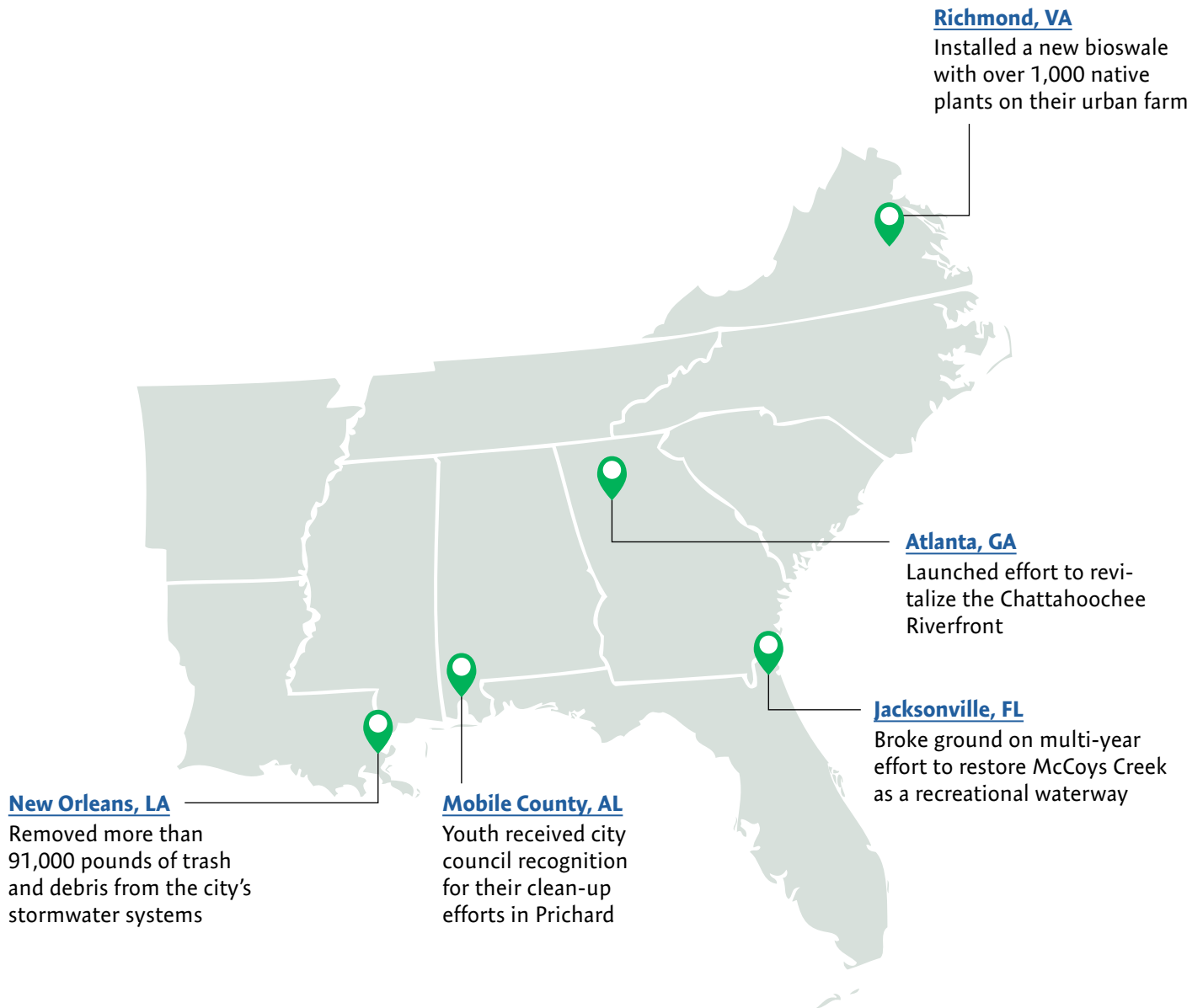
Local Impact

Northeast



Local Impact

South



Local Impact

Midwest

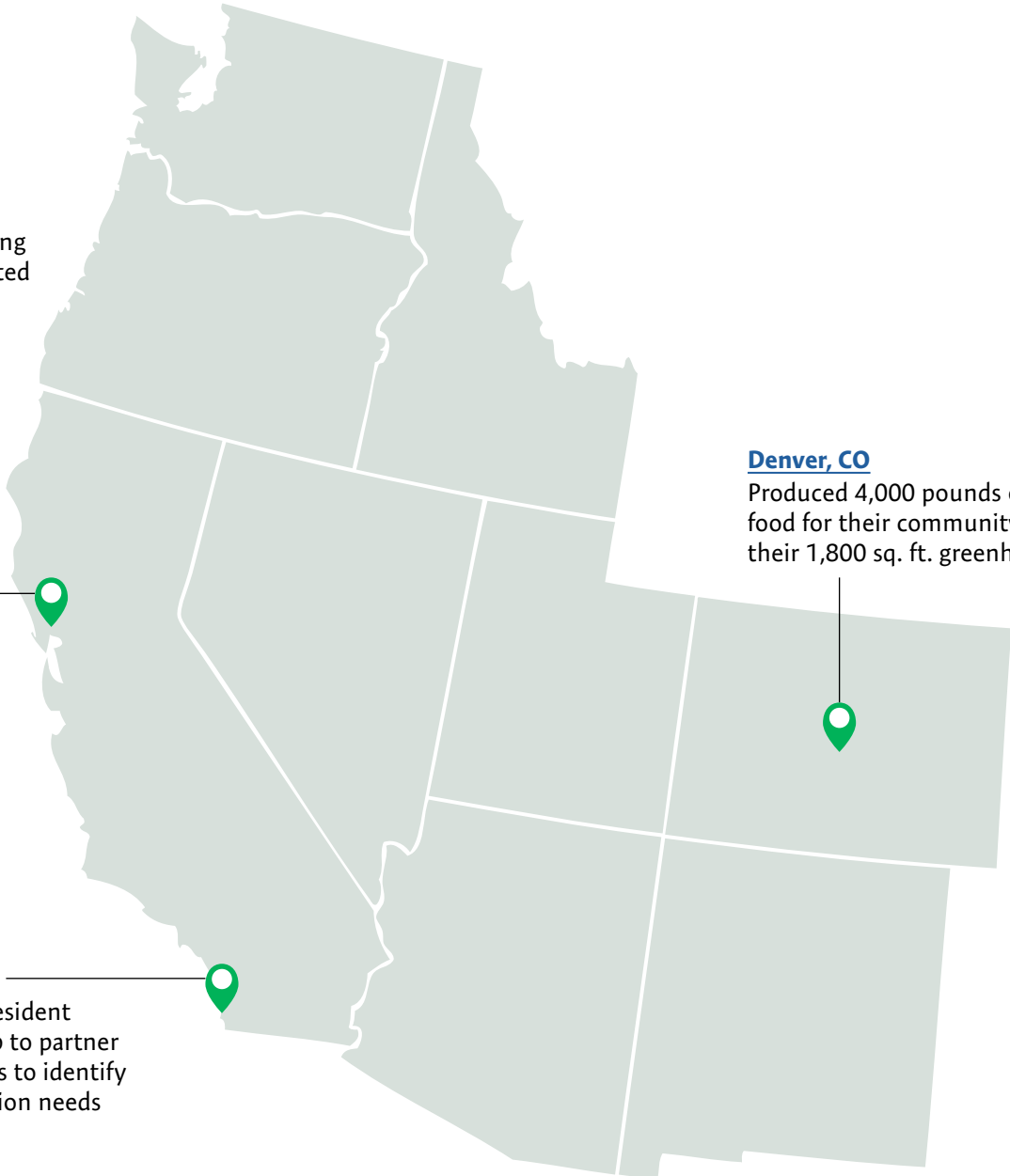


Local Impact

West

Richmond, CA

Planted 100 trees along their newly constructed Wellness Trail



Denver, CO

Produced 4,000 pounds of food for their community in their 1,800 sq. ft. greenhouse

San Diego, CA

Established a Resident Advocacy Group to partner with city leaders to identify climate adaptation needs



National Impact

Through national partnerships and initiatives, Groundwork Trusts come together to share their learning, harness collective experiences and expertise for innovative solutions, and help shape the national conversation.



Climate Safe Neighborhoods Partnership

Building climate resilience through community-led systems change organizing.

Through the Climate Safe Neighborhoods (CSN) Partnership, Groundwork Trusts come together to explore the relationship between historical race-based housing segregation and the current and predicted impacts of the climate crisis. Over the past five years, we've worked with fifteen Trusts to co-create a model for building resident capacity to

prioritize climate needs and self-advocate for a more equitable distribution of adaptation infrastructure. Groundwork USA supports Trusts as they organize cross-sector partnerships, catalog resident priorities, and strengthen the capacity of residents to organize for investments in their vision for their neighborhood.

2022 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Groundwork Hudson Valley

To increase the role of community members in climate resilience planning, Groundwork Hudson Valley launched a Climate Safe Yonkers Task Force (CSYTF) through which community members receive extensive training in community organizing, climate adaptation, and climate policy. The CSYTF members promote climate justice through outreach, education, and policy advocacy, and by providing critical grassroots feedback for the development of the city's first Climate Action Plan.



Groundwork New Orleans

In 2022, Groundwork New Orleans launched the New Orleans Green Infrastructure map to help visualize infrastructure gaps across the city. When complete, the map will help ensure the most climate-vulnerable blocks and neighborhoods are prioritized for future GI installations. An additional component will allow for mutual aid or crowd-funding of residential projects for low-income residents living in priority zones.

Groundwork Elizabeth

Through a youth-led organizing and outreach effort, Groundwork Elizabeth (GWE) has prioritized the expansion of the tree canopy as an important climate adaptation tool to mitigate extreme heat and flooding while improving air quality. To make the best use of limited space, GWE is planting microforests—densely planted forests specially designed for accelerated growth in degraded soil. In 2022, they planted 2 microforests which include almost 400 new trees.

Learn how you can jumpstart climate action in your city in our [Taking Action Guide!](#)



Climate Preparedness and Land Restoration Initiative

Accelerating climate adaptation and land restoration projects

In response to the urgent need for climate adaptation across the Groundwork Network, Groundwork USA, in partnership with the Bezos Earth Fund, launched the Climate Preparedness and Land Restoration Initiative in the spring of 2022. Through this initiative, Groundwork

Trusts pursue large-scale, equity-driven land restoration projects that help alleviate the human impacts of the climate crisis through the creation of new green spaces, expansion of the urban tree canopy, and installation of green infrastructure.

2022 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Groundwork Southcoast

Groundwork Southcoast (GWSC) is working to increase climate resilience across New Bedford, MA one Resilience Zone at a time. In each Zone, a small geographic area with shared climate resilience needs, the GWSC team collaborates with residents to identify the solutions that best address their concerns and consolidate multiple infrastructure investments on a single site. In 2022, GWSC finalized the Riverside Resilience Zone plan and began work on a riverbank restoration, rain gardens, and a new tree grove.



Groundwork San Diego

Groundwork San Diego (GWSD) is working to create new greenspace in one of the area’s most “park poor” neighborhood by transforming an old parking lot into a climate resilience park. Throughout the past year, they have worked closely with residents to integrate recreation and climate adaptation infrastructure into the new park’s design. With the permitting process nearly wrapped up, GWSD is gearing up to break ground in 2023.

Groundwork Ohio River Valley

As part of their multi-pronged climate resilience strategy for Cincinnati, Groundwork Ohio River Valley (GWORV) is working to remove as much pavement as possible and replace it with active green space. As part of this strategy aim to increase the tree canopy from 21% to 40% and install a 8,500 sq. ft. green roof on the Oyler School to provide much needed cooling infrastructure to the public school. In 2022, they reached 50% of their tree planting goal and finalized plans for the green roof project.



Land Use Innovation Initiative

Advancing environmental justice through community-driven land revitalization

Brownfields, derelict land suspected of being contaminated by hazardous substances or industrial pollutants, are a common challenge in Groundwork Trust communities. In neighborhoods with limited open green space, they also provide a significant opportunity to create new outdoor recreation spaces. Groundwork USA, in partnership with NPS-Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

and the EPA's Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization, established the Land Use Innovation (LUI) Initiative in 2022 to help Trusts engage residents in the design and launch of new brownfields reuse projects. Through this initiative, Trusts pursue projects that spark innovation, leadership, and long-term investment in land transformation across Groundwork communities.

2022 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Groundwork Lawrence

Groundwork Lawrence (GWL) is working to transform the former Cyr Oil property—currently a parking lot—into a greenspace that extends active transportation opportunities in the neighborhood. To help residents envision a new use for the space, GWL transformed the site into a pop up park compete with hay bales, pumpkins, seating, and fall activities. Originally intended to be set up for a few days, the park was so popular that it was kept open through the winter holidays.



Groundwork Rhode Island

Groundwork Rhode Island (GWRI) has begun the state-funded remediation effort to transform two brownfield lots in Pawtucket, RI into a medium-scale composting facility that will process food scraps and yard waste into nutrient-rich compost. When complete the West End Compost Hub will be a vital community resource that will provide community education on climate resilience, composting benefits, urban agriculture, and brownfield remediation.

Groundwork Bridgeport

Groundwork Bridgeport (GWB) is using an innovative hybrid approach to community outreach to inform the design of the new Sliver By The River park site. Along with frequent community meetings, they are using a coUrbanize site to post updates and collect feedback and ideas for reimagining and reactivating the space. To date, they've received input more 350 community members to help inform site development.



National Youth Initiatives

Providing young people with experiences and skills to pursue environmental careers

Low-income youth and youth of color from urban environmental justice communities face many barriers to accessing living-wage careers in the fields of green infrastructure and conservation. Groundwork USA's National Youth Initiatives aim to address this gap by bringing young people from our Trust communities to National Parks and Wildlife Refuges across the country to learn new skills,

strengthen their connection to each other and to public lands, and learn about employment opportunities in the field. Through exposure to, and experience in, construction, trail maintenance, and historic preservation, alumni of the National Youth Initiatives have gone on to access careers in the National Park Service, the trades, environmental sciences, politics, and policy.

2022 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Experiential Learning

Each summer, youth and young adults from across the country travel to some of our nation's most iconic National Parks for a week of camping, recreation, environmental stewardship, and learning. In 2022, more than 100 young people had the opportunity to experience the wonders of national parks in Yellowstone, Gateway National Recreation Area, and Paterson Great Falls.



Traditional Trades Advancement Program

Through a 20-week immersive program, TTAP offers young people (ages 18 – 30) a paid opportunity to gain practical conservation and historic preservation skills by working side-by-side with current national park employees. Through maintenance and restoration projects, they learn everything from woodworking and masonry to construction math and project management. In 2022, Groundwork USA supported nine individual placements in parks across the country.

Mountains to Main Streets

The Mountains to Main Street program brings together young adults to strengthen their skills as youth leadership professionals. During a week-long retreat in Grand Teton National Park, participants learn how to build relationships with public parks and how to engage with the parks' educational and experiential resources. During the training, they receive support and feedback to design a program for their youth to connect with nearby public lands and then implement the program when they return home. In 2022, 13 ambassadors from six cities participated in the leadership development program.

From Equity to Justice

A Note from Our Chief Officer of Climate Resilience and Land Use

Dear Friends,

As the scale of the climate crisis becomes impossible to ignore, calls for urgent action on environmental justice and climate adaptation have grown rapidly. In response, the past year has seen historic investments in green infrastructure, urban environment restoration, and the reprioritization of people and nature over pavement, parking, and industry.

There is so much to celebrate about this moment. Groundwork Trusts have leveraged this momentum to translate community-developed climate strategies into reality. They have broken ground on new parks and trails, expanded the tree canopy, installed green infrastructure, and have improved air quality, reduced flooding, and created cooler spaces to escape the heat. Our impact can be measured in stormwater catchment and in the reduction in ambient air temperatures. It can also be measured in the number of community members that will spend afternoons connecting with neighbors in the shade of new parks instead of sifting through their basements for salvageable items after a flood.

While we are making a tangible difference in how communities experience the climate crisis, addressing environmental and climate inequalities is the work of generations. The greatest risk that this moment of unprecedented investment brings is that we treat it as just a moment, losing momentum toward meeting our responsibility to ourselves, our communities, and future generations. **Sustaining momentum will require intentional investments in justice as much as in the environment. That means repairing existing environmental harms, addressing the root causes by changing systems, and ensuring that the harm can't reoccur in the future.**

Through our work, we know wise, stable, lasting change is only possible when we:

- ▶ Center an understanding of why our communities look the way they do in our planning, and engage residents in the process of defining what they want their neighborhoods to look like in the future.
- ▶ Build the capacity of community members to self-advocate and lead this change.
- ▶ Honor the strength and expertise of community members by engaging in authentic shared leadership and decision making on topics that directly impact investments (or lack of investment) in their neighborhoods.

We are using this moment to recommit ourselves to a belief that the most sustainable way to achieve environmental justice is by investing deeply in residents living on the frontlines. As we look ahead to the coming year, across the country we are piloting new ways to build community leadership, change the built environment, and create new and better decision-making systems that embed justice as a priority now and into the future.

This journey is long and difficult, but we do not walk it alone. I am deeply appreciative of the thousands of people that make up the Groundwork community and dedicate their time and energy to this pursuit. I invite you all to recommit to that belief alongside us as I'm confident, with this groundswell of support, that the pathway to a more equitable and just future is possible.

Be well, and I'll see you out there!



Cate Mingoya-LaFortune



Join the Movement

The momentum we've gained this past year in our pursuit of environmental justice and improved health outcomes has been gained on the foundation of 20+ years of grassroots organizing and engagement. Our achievements show what is possible when we are able to bridge the power of grassroots action and national collaboration—and this is just the start. We are deeply appreciative of the support and generosity of our partners and donors that choose to invest in equitable environmental justice improvements, building the capacity of the grassroots leadership, and transforming the conversation about what is possible nationally. This support is essential to bring our shared vision of a more resilient future to life.

Join our growing community of supporters and help make healthy, green, just, and resilient communities a reality for all. groundworkusa.org/donate-to-us/



Groundwork USA is a national nonprofit that supports a network of 21 place-based people-centered environmental justice organizations—Groundwork Trusts—working hand-in-hand with their communities to undo the legacy of environmental harm and create healthy, green, just, and resilient communities. We believe in collaboration and building community-based partnerships that empower people, businesses, and organizations to promote environmental, economic, and social well-being.

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