

Groundwork 2020 *State of the Network*

Connection, Community, Change



Groundwork USA

The Groundwork USA network strives to create a world in which everyone lives in a community that is healthy, green, and resilient. Groundwork USA supports a network of 21 Groundwork Trusts working hand-in-hand with their communities to restore and revitalize urban neighborhoods and make this vision a reality.

Our Vision | We believe that everyone deserves to live in a healthy, green, and resilient neighborhood environment.

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 Values

- **Equity & Justice |** Countering systemic disparities while seeking fairness in all spheres.
- **Diversity & Shared Leadership |** Embracing our differences while working collaboratively towards shared goals.
- **Holistic & Local Solutions |** Striving for community-driven transformation by addressing the whole system with an understanding of the inextricable connection between all spheres.



A Message from the Executive Director of Groundwork USA



Between the pandemic, heatwaves, hurricanes, wildfires, and stark reminders of how deeply embedded racial injustice continues to be in the fabric of our country – 2020 highlighted exactly what is at stake in our fight for environmental justice. While the year challenged us all in different ways, these crises hit Groundwork communities particularly hard. Already struggling with poor air quality, food insecurity, and a lack of open green space – our communities were hit first and worst by the compounding economic, health, and climate crises.

Through one of the hardest years we've yet to face, I was endlessly inspired by the ability of the Groundwork network to adapt, connect, and lead their communities through these unprecedented times while continuing to champion a long-term vision of resilient and equitable communities. This year, Groundwork Trusts worked not only to face the challenges of today, but to ensure that we build back stronger for the future.

I'm not surprised. This commitment to creating a more just, equitable, and resilient world is at the heart of who we are as a network. For over two decades we have made significant strides against social and environmental inequities by working hand-in-hand with community members to define and create a more just future. The pandemic added a new level of urgency to this work.

Through the nimbleness, creativity, and passion of our network, we stepped even more fully into our mission to meet this moment. I am so grateful to all the Groundwork staff, directors, board members, community partners and supporters for their commitment to our mission and shared belief that social and environmental equity is not only possible – it's essential.

What we accomplish together is so much more than the sum of our parts. Each Groundwork Trust is changing places and changing lives in cities across the country, and collectively we are changing systems and redefining what is possible. The true scale of our impact only emerges when we look at what we have accomplished together. That's why I'm excited to share our first ever State of the Network report with you! What we have accomplished together this year is extraordinary, and I am honored to be part of this community.

Onward –

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen P. Burrington". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Stephen Burrington
Executive Director, Groundwork USA

The State of the Network

Changing Places, Changing Lives, Changing Systems

Launched in the late 1990's through a partnership between the National Park Service and the US Environmental Protection Agency, Groundwork USA is a national nonprofit that supports a network of place-based environmental organizations – Groundwork Trusts – working hand-in-hand with their communities to address the legacy of environmental injustice and revitalize urban neighborhoods.

In 2020, there were 21 Groundwork Trusts changing places, changing lives, and changing systems in more than 30 cities across the country. We share a vision and mission, but each Trust is as unique as the community it calls home. Collectively we work to:

- **Transform Neglected Land & Waterways into Community Assets:** Centering community voice and collaborative partnerships, we are transforming contaminated and neglected land and waterways into community assets like parks, community gardens, urban farms, and greenways.
- **Increase Resilience To Climate Change & Environmental Crises:** Addressing the disproportionate vulnerability to extreme heat and flooding experienced by low-income communities – particularly communities of color – by installing green infrastructure and advocating for systems change.
- **Increase Access to Healthy Food:** 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 Leaders:** Building the capacity of the next generation of environmental leaders by engaging young people aged 14 -35 in age-appropriate environmental education and conservation activities.

Like so many others, this year challenged us to approach our work in new ways and furthered our commitment to ensuring long-term, sustainable change. Groundwork Trusts across the network rose to that challenge in incredible ways – spearheading mutual-aid efforts, growing and donating healthy produce, creating business partnerships to distribute hot meals, connecting neighbors to utility and housing subsidies, spearheading public health campaigns, and so much more. We're excited to share the impact of our work with our growing community of champions.

5,463

Trees Planted

**Our 2020
Impact
by the
Numbers**

336

Jobs Created

130

Miles of Sidewalk,
Paths, and Trails
Improved

2,074

Number of
Garden Beds
Built, Maintained,
and/or Supported

822

Community
Organizations and
Businesses Engaged

846

Miles of River Habitat
Cleaned, Restored,
or Conserved

2,860

Families Benefiting
from Produce Grown
in Urban Farms
and Gardens

3,902

Youth Engaged

2,489

Acres of Brownfields,
Parkland and Open
Space Improved

52,027

Pounds of
Food Donated

85,713

Hours of Environmental
Education and Civic
Engagement Training
Delivered

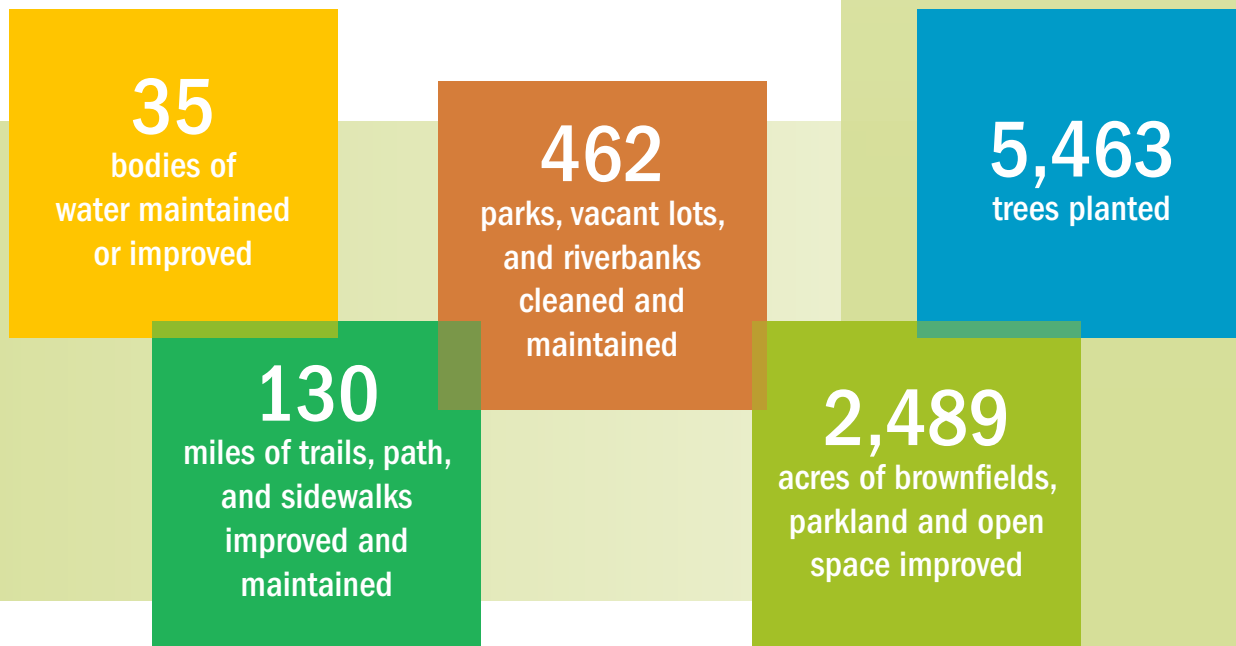
Transforming Neglected Land and Waterways into Community Assets

This year brought new attention to the importance of parks, trails, and open spaces as more people than ever turned to the outdoors for respite and connection. Once in the spotlight, we saw just how inequitably these public spaces are distributed across cities. By centering community voice and collaborative partnerships, the Groundwork network is working to ensure everyone has access to green, healthy spaces. Groundwork Trusts are transforming contaminated and neglected land and waterways into community assets like parks, community gardens, urban farms, and greenways. Utilizing equitable development best practices, we aim to ensure that these efforts lead to revitalization and not displacement.

Highlights from 2020:

- **Groundwork San Diego** secured significant funding to construct a trail connecting the eastern urban neighborhoods of the Chollas Creek Watershed to San Diego's coast.
- After fourteen years of resident-led transformation, **Groundwork Denver** opened the **Platte Farm Open Space** as an official Denver park.
- Led by **Groundwork Dallas**, the Fraiser Dam Recreation Area – a site once used as a dumping ground – was transformed into an open, public green space.
- **Groundwork Atlanta** received the 2020 River Sustainability Award from the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper for their work in the Trash Free Waters program in Proctor Creek.
- **Groundwork New Orleans** spearheaded a Gulf of Mexico Trash Free Waters partnership with **Groundwork Mobile County** and **Groundwork Dallas** to strengthen the watershed by keeping trash out of the water and installing green infrastructure.

Our Impact By The Numbers



OUR VALUES IN ACTION Amplifying Community Voice in Jacksonville, FL

In 2020, Groundwork Jacksonville, in partnership with the City and a network of community partners, finalized plans for the completion of the first phase of construction on the Emerald Trail. When completed in 2029, the Trail will include 30 miles of trails, greenways and bike paths. More than a beautification project, the Emerald Trail is a social and environmental justice project with the opportunity to bring improved health and economic opportunity in its wake. **Groundwork Jacksonville is committed to ensuring this leads to revitalization and shared prosperity – not displacement.**

The process is led with community voice and vision is at the heart. Community members are involved in every step of the process from shaping the equitable development strategy – a plan to address affordable housing, economic opportunity, infrastructure improvement, and workforce development needs – to participating in the implementation and stewardship of the revitalized areas.

In 2021 Groundwork Jacksonville will officially break ground on the first mile of the Trail.

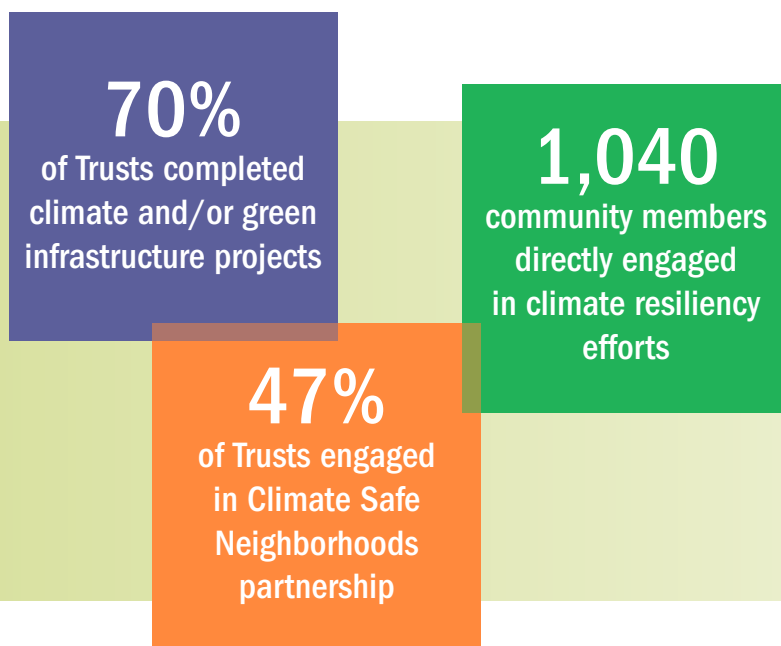
Improving Neighborhood Resilience To Climate Change & Environmental Crises

Climate-related extreme weather events like hurricanes, heat-waves, and wildfires are increasing in frequency and intensity. Low-income urban communities – particularly those with a legacy of housing discrimination and divestment – are often lacking in climate resilience infrastructure – like trees, parks, and rain gardens – and are left disproportionately vulnerable to the social, health, and economic impact of these crises. Groundwork Trusts are working with their communities to understand the root causes of this inequity, advocating for a more equitable distribution of resilience investments, and installing green infrastructure to increase neighborhood resiliency to extreme heat and flooding.

Highlights from 2020:

- Nine Groundwork Trusts participated in the **Climate Safe Neighborhoods partnership** to build the capacity of community members to self-advocate for investments in climate resilience infrastructure.
- Youth at **Groundwork Ohio River Valley** partnered with NASA to use satellite data to visualize the disproportionate climate vulnerability experienced in several neighborhoods in Cincinnati, OH.
- At **Groundwork San Diego**, Green Team youth program participants learned how to monitor surface land temperatures and used their new skills to report on the urban heat island effect to city officials.
- **Groundwork Hudson Valley** began work with the Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers (MHACY) to address extreme heat on MHACY housing properties by installing green infrastructure.
- The **Climate Safe Elizabeth Taskforce** transformed the Elmora micro-farm into a green infrastructure learning lab to inform future investments in stormwater management.

Our Impact By The Numbers



OUR VALUES IN ACTION

Democratizing Data for Shared Leadership

The Climate Safe Neighborhoods partnership, now in its third year, brings together Groundwork Trusts to understand the link between historic housing policies and modern day vulnerability to climate-related extreme heat and flooding. **The project has two goals: mitigate the risk of heat and flooding in the most vulnerable communities and build the capacity of community members to participate in local political processes.**

Groundwork Trusts pull together data related to housing policies, demographics, tree canopy, pavement, extreme heat, flooding risk, and other social indicators and create easy to navigate digital maps. **Then they put community members in the driver's seat.**

The maps draw visual connections between infrastructure and vulnerability – and highlight differences between neighborhoods. Maps in hand, **community members are able to visualize what they'd like their communities to look like in the future, create a compelling case why the investment is necessary, and self-advocate for improvements.**

In 2020, several communities achieved major wins. In Richmond, VA the city's new master plan prioritizes investments in green infrastructure in formerly redlined neighborhoods. And, in Denver, where program coordinator Jasmin Barco led a year-long resident capacity building training program, of the 10 community members that completed the program, four were selected to serve on the municipal board that funds green infrastructure projects in the city and one was nominated as co-chair.

Creating Healthy, Local Food Systems

In 2020, the need for healthy and affordable food grew exponentially. Groundwork Trusts, already leading the way in the creation of urban farms and gardens, worked ambitiously to increase production and identified new ways of getting much needed produce into the community.

Highlights from 2020:

- **Groundwork Indy** opened and operated an emergency food pantry to meet the growing need for healthy food in their neighborhood.
- With a growing need for access to affordable foods in their city, the **Groundwork Somerville** team grew and donated over a ton of food at their South Street Urban Farm.
- **Groundwork Milwaukee** actively stewarded 85 community-run gardens providing healthy food to 750 individuals and families.
- **Groundwork Southcoast** opened the first community garden in New Bedford, MA.
- **Groundwork Buffalo** built 15 new raised beds and donated hundreds of pounds of food to the surrounding areas.
- **Groundwork Rhode Island's** composting program diverted over 8,400 pounds of food waste and produced 27.5 yards of finished compost.

Our Impact By The Numbers

184

acres of urban farms built, maintained, and/or supported

2,074

garden beds built, maintained, and/or supported

52,208

pounds of food produced

2,860

families benefiting from urban agriculture programs

OUR VALUES IN ACTION

Holistic and Local Solutions

Lawrence, MA is a densely populated city home to nearly 100,000 residents. With only three local grocery stores, many residents lack easy access to affordable, healthy foods.

To meet this critical community need, Groundwork Lawrence runs extensive and multi-dimensional healthy food programs that leverage community assets to increase the availability of nutritious foods. At Costello Urban Farm and their network of community gardens, Groundwork Lawrence produces thousands of pounds of culturally-relevant produce each year. Through their Healthy on the Block Bodegas program, they help local bodegas and corner stores – which are the primary grocery store for many residents – stock and sell affordable healthy food options. They complement their growing efforts with nutrition and cooking classes.

Collectively, these programs are transforming the entire food system in Lawrence to increase community health and well-being.



Groundwork Lawrence's Urban Farm at Costello Park had a record breaking year this year, harvesting almost 9,000 lbs of fresh fruits and veggies. Photo credit: Groundwork Lawrence

Cultivating the Next Generation of Environmental Leaders

To sustainably tackle environmental injustices and build more resilient communities, we need an environmental and conservation sector that is reflective of our country’s diversity. Groundwork cultivates a more diverse generation of environmental leaders by engaging young people aged 14-35 in age-appropriate environmental education and conservation activities. Groundwork Trusts run local Green Team programs that combine hands-on conservation work, environmental education, leadership development, and paid employment. Groundwork USA’s National Youth Programs enable youth to continue to expand their skills further afield in National Parks across the country.

Highlights from 2020:

- **Groundwork Mobile County** launched their first Green Team crew with a focus on supporting community gardening efforts to meet growing food needs in Mobile County.
- **Groundwork Jacksonville’s** Green Team Youth Corps created two radio shows for Timucuan National Park honoring the voices of the enslaved at Kinsley Plantation.
- **Groundwork Bridgeport** completed three youth-led landscape design concepts for sites throughout the city of Bridgeport. One of the three concepts was selected for installation in 2021.
- **Groundwork RVA’s** Green Team member, Asia Goode, spearheaded the growth of a ½ acre urban mini farm in Richmond’s hottest and most troubled public housing community.
- **Groundwork Richmond’s** Green Team unveiled a new mural “The Essential Workers of the Pullman Portal” recognizing the heroic work of essential workers during a global pandemic and fire season.

Our Impact By The Numbers

3,902
youth participating
in programs, projects,
and events

28,833
hours of
environmental and
science education
completed

21,749
hours of community
outreach and
civic engagement
conducted

35,131
hours spent
restoring the
physical environment

OUR VALUES IN ACTION Youth Leadership

Youth have an interest in the future of their communities but are often overlooked in municipal planning processes. **Groundwork Elizabeth is changing the narrative by propelling youth voices into policy making.** With a grant from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation’s Civic Spring Project, Groundwork youth – aged 15-19 – conducted research, advocacy, civic engagement, and outreach to stakeholders and policymakers in Elizabeth around the creation of a new 10-year municipal plan. The goal was for youth to learn about civic engagement, but the reality is that policy makers learned as much from the youth. In conversations with policy-makers, youth offered realistic and actionable solutions to pressing neighborhood challenges. **Next year, the Mayor is relaunching the Youth Advisory Council and Groundwork youth will have an important seat at the table.**



Groundwork Elizabeth’s Green Team at work with Groundwork USA at Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park.

Responding to COVID-19

“I was proud of leading the team and being able to create work and projects during a pandemic, which helps youth support their families and feel a purpose.”

–Youth Leader, Groundwork Denver

The social, health, and economic consequences of the pandemic hit Groundwork communities particularly hard. The impact was felt across every aspect of life directly and indirectly. Groundwork Trusts responded to this unprecedented crisis with unprecedented creativity – teaming up with partners to offer innovative solutions to mitigate the worst impacts of the pandemic.

High-Yield; High-Reward in Yonkers, NY

Most of the time, Groundwork Hudson Valley's Science Barge is a hands-on, floating education lab used by schools and community groups. When COVID-19 closed the Barge, Groundwork Hudson Valley repurposed the entire space to grow high-yield crops and, through a new partnership with the YWCA of Yonkers, donated all the fresh produce to women in need.

Supporting Local Business, Decreasing Hunger in Lawrence, MA

Lawrence, MA was hit particularly hard by the pandemic – at one point over 30.9% of the city was unemployed. As unemployment soared, so too did the need for immediate hunger relief. To meet this escalating need, Groundwork Lawrence partnered with eight local businesses, funders, and other community organizations to coordinate the purchase and delivery of 27,775 meals to individuals and families in 2020. Not only did the program provide meals to people experiencing food insecurity, but the additional support provided the businesses with enough income to keep their doors open and their staff employed.

Everyone Gets A Garden

Access to fresh, healthy, affordable food has never been more important. With demand at food banks skyrocketing and social distancing requirements keeping people away from grocery stores, farmer's markets, or even community gardens, Groundwork Trusts got creative about bringing growing programs right to homes instead. They delivered free seed kits, garden boxes, and all the materials necessary to start a brand new urban garden. They organized virtual check-ins and distributed how-to guides to support their growers. Collectively, Groundwork Trusts helped hundreds of new urban gardeners nurture and grow their own food at right at home.

Counting Every Voice in Kansas City, KS

The effects of the pandemic were felt across every sphere of life this year. In Kansas City, KS, Groundwork Neighborhood Revitalization Group (NRG) noticed that with so many competing priorities, participating in the census and registering to vote wasn't even making the list for many of their community members. Community voice is essential, so the team at NRG used their ongoing food drives to distribute information about the significance of the census and voting and even set up the technology for community members to register right on site. Groundwork NRG and other partners signed up members of the community that had never previously thought about voting or participating in the census.

Growth and Celebrations!

Despite the challenges, 2020 was a year of growth and transformation for the Groundwork network.

We welcomed a new Groundwork Trust in Kansas City, Kansas....



And two new Groundwork USA Board Members!



Amy Stitely
Chief of Programs
MA Department of Housing
and Community Development



Todd Reynolds
Executive Director
Groundwork New Orleans

Groundwork Somerville turned 20 and Groundwork Richmond and San Diego – Chollas Creek celebrated their 10th anniversaries!

Thank You!

Our work building healthier, greener, more resilient communities is only possible through the generosity of our partners and supporters. Please consider making a gift today so that we can continue our important work changing places, changing lives, and changing systems!

Groundwork USA

Groundwork USA is a national nonprofit that supports a network of 21 place-based environmental organizations – Groundwork Trusts – working hand-in-hand with their communities to address the legacy of environmental injustice and revitalize urban neighborhoods. We believe in collaboration and building community-based partnerships that empower people, businesses, and organizations to promote environmental, economic, and social well-being.

The Groundwork Network

The Groundwork USA network was launched in the late 1990s through a partnership between the National Park Service and the US Environmental Protection Agency. Groundwork Trusts transform neglected land and waterways into community assets, increasing environmental, social, and economic well-being while building community capacity. Each Groundwork Trust is an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit entity with the ability to engage and influence that comes only with local roots. Our Trusts are invested in long-term, visionary community building, recognizing that true societal change comes with deep connection and long-term commitment.



Stay in Touch:

22 Main Street, Second Floor | Yonkers, NY 10701 | 914-375-2151

www.groundworkusa.org | info@groundworkusa.org



Facebook: @GroundworkUSA

Instagram: @groundwork_usa



Twitter: @GroundworkUSA

LinkedIn: @GroundworkUSA