



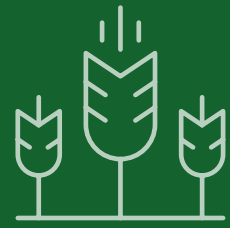
National Park Service
Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

Groundwork Partnership Report



AT A GLANCE

Groundwork Accomplishments from 2000-2020



961

acres of brownfield & derelict lands reclaimed and/or improved



3,367

local schools involved



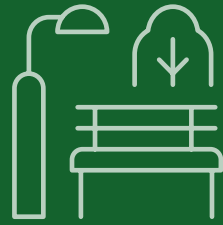
4,728

jobs created



11,623

community partners engaged in projects



14,276

acres open space & parkland improved



139,385

youth actively engaged



1,091,688

community volunteer hours



8,300,829

feet of river habitat cleaned, restored or conserved



\$156,227,320

public, private & in-kind resources leveraged



Groundwork

Groundwork is an urban environmental justice program that aims to improve the environment and social well-being of neighborhoods struggling with a history of disinvestment. The program accomplishes this by supporting locally-led nonprofit organizations, called Groundwork Trusts, that work with residents and community partners to achieve a healthy, green and resilient vision.

At the local level, Groundwork Trusts work hand-in-hand with residents and community partners to transform brownfields and neglected lands and waterways into community assets that improve quality of life.

Modeled after Groundwork United Kingdom, the U.S. Groundwork program started in the 1990s as a partnership between the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS-RTCA) and the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization. The first Groundwork Trust was established in 1998. Today, there are 22 Groundwork Trusts across the country.

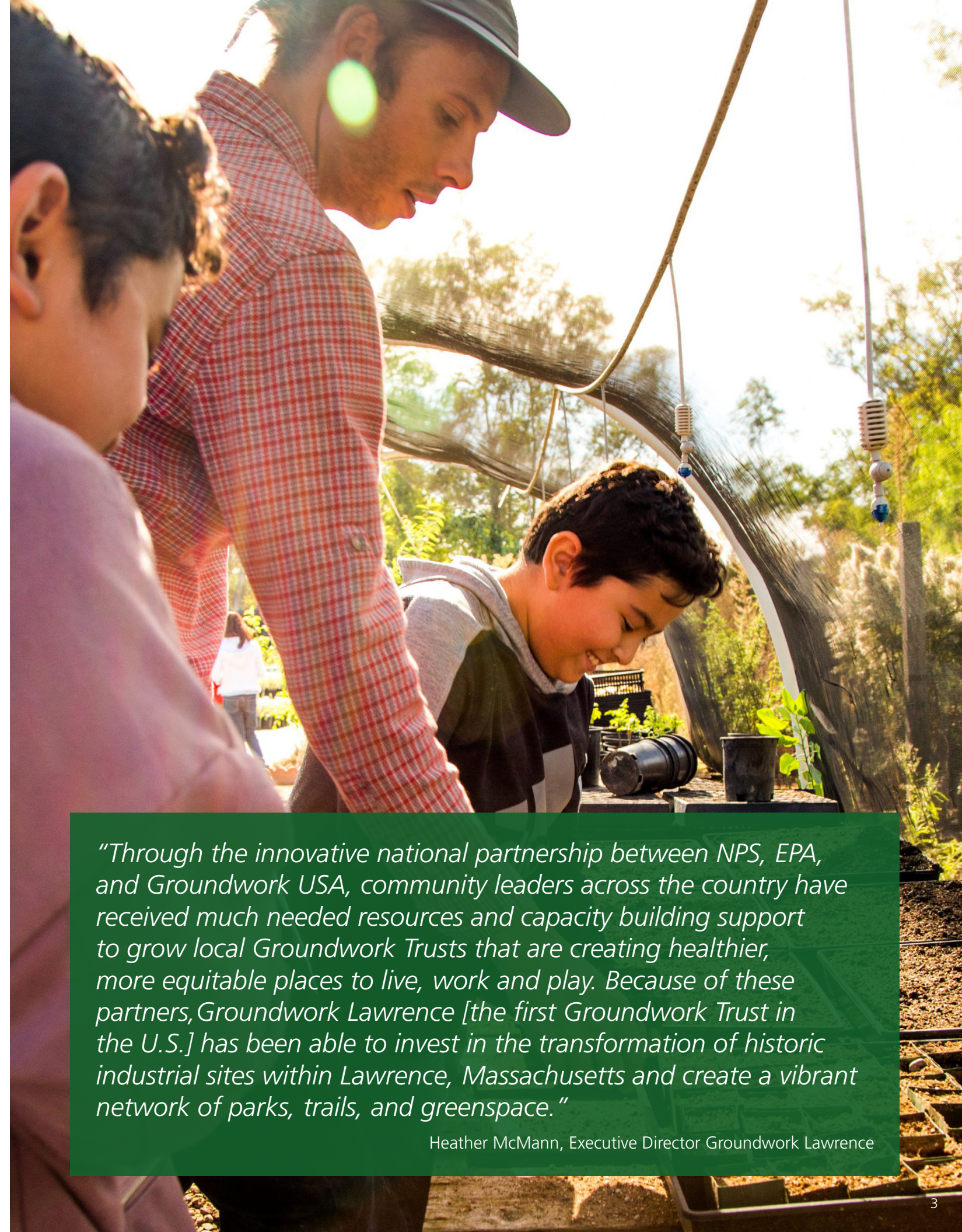
NPS-RTCA partners with the EPA and the national nonprofit Groundwork USA to support the planning and launch of new Groundwork Trusts. These partners also provide funding and capacity building assistance for the Trusts to develop successful operations and community projects and programs.

Throughout this 20-year partnership, NPS-RTCA has increased its ability to implement its conservation and outdoor recreation mission in underserved communities. The partnership empowers local leaders to advance their environmental justice agenda and implement solutions to some of the country’s most difficult societal challenges such as neighborhood pollution, disinvestment, lack of access to green spaces and fresh foods, and insufficient opportunities to engage in policy development and decision-making.

Groundwork Trusts change places and lives by:

1. Transforming Brownfields and Neglected Land and Waters into Community Assets
2. Improving Resilience to Climate Events
3. Cultivating the Next Generation of Environmental Leaders

Groundwork furthers the mission of the National Park Service by extending the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation to underserved areas of the country.



“Through the innovative national partnership between NPS, EPA, and Groundwork USA, community leaders across the country have received much needed resources and capacity building support to grow local Groundwork Trusts that are creating healthier, more equitable places to live, work and play. Because of these partners, Groundwork Lawrence [the first Groundwork Trust in the U.S.] has been able to invest in the transformation of historic industrial sites within Lawrence, Massachusetts and create a vibrant network of parks, trails, and greenspace.”

Heather McMann, Executive Director Groundwork Lawrence

1. Transforming Brownfields and Neglected Land and Waters Into Community Assets

Integrating nature, parks and fresh food into the urban fabric improves the health and quality of life of residents. These amenities also alleviate urban heat and flooding and allow for higher rates of physical activity that result in improved mental and physical health.

Since 2000, Groundwork Trusts have worked with community partners to transform 961 acres of brownfields and vacant lands into parks, greenways and community gardens. Collectively, the Trusts have developed more than 14,000 acres of open space and parks in communities that lacked green spaces and quality recreational amenities.

Groundwork Denver

Platte Farm Open Space

A core value of Groundwork is to ensure that under-resourced urban neighborhoods are involved in the co-creation of accessible and high-quality green spaces. Platte Farm Open Space is an example of one such redevelopment project led by Groundwork Denver.

Platte Farm Open Space is a community-led open-space project in the Globeville neighborhood of north Denver, Colorado. Over the course of 14 years, neighborhood residents, the city, and Groundwork Denver secured funds to purchase the former 5.5-acre brownfield site, remediate the soil, and transform the site into a public park with walking trails, native gardens, stormwater management green infrastructure and a play area.

A neighborhood coalition established a vision for the site in 2006 – which at the time was a site

that attracted illegal dumping – before engaging Groundwork Denver to help bring that vision to life. Groundwork Denver helped with the planning and implementation of that vision, acting as a liaison among the Platte Farm Open Space Steering Committee, property owners, and Denver’s Department of Parks and Recreation, engaging volunteers in tree plantings and implementing other park improvements.

Now complete, Platte Farm Open Space is a success story showcasing the power of community-led park planning and implementation projects. Globeville residents were at the table from start to finish, even helping decide which kinds of trees to plant at the site. The site also addresses a handful of neighborhood issues including an overwhelmed stormwater system and limited access to natural open spaces.



The Sugar Hill Mosaic is located along the S-Line Rail Trail. In 2015, NPS-RTCA and the American Society of Landscape Architects, in partnership with Groundwork Jacksonville and the City of Jacksonville, facilitated a two-day community workshop and design charette to transform a 4.8-mile stretch of abandoned railroad line into the S-Line Rail Trail.

Groundwork Jacksonville

Emerald Trail System

Groundwork Jacksonville has a bold vision for urban neighborhoods in Jacksonville, Florida. Their vision celebrates the city’s African American history, provides residents with access to quality recreation and green spaces, invests in flood mediation and water quality improvements, and addresses equitable development in low-income neighborhoods. The implementation of Groundwork’s vision promises to be transformative.

In partnership with the city and a network of community partners, Groundwork Jacksonville adopted the Emerald Trail Master plan in 2018 after years of intentional community engagement. Projected to be completed by 2029, thanks in part to a gas tax that earmarks \$132 million to Groundwork Jacksonville and the Emerald Trail, the Emerald Trail system will include more than 30 miles of trails and parks connecting 14 neighborhoods to downtown Jacksonville and the St. Johns River.

An innovative outcome of Groundwork’s community engagement process for McCoys Creek’s restoration design – one of the urban creeks along the Emerald Trail – was the creation of the Community Restoration Environmental Stewardship Training program (CREST). CREST trains residents to be environmental stewards through workshops, creek clean-ups, field trips and a workforce development initiative.

Groundwork Jacksonville is committed to engaging residents in every step of the planning and implementation process. Community members have been significantly involved in designing and implementing projects like the Sugar Hill Mosaic and the S-Line Biodiversity Corridor. They created an equitable development strategy – a plan to address affordable housing, small business resources, economic opportunity, infrastructure improvement, and workforce development targeted to under-resourced neighborhoods. Groundwork is currently working with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Jacksonville, a community development corporation, to bring together the resources and partners to invest in and work with residents on implementing the plan.

Groundwork Milwaukee

Milwaukee Grows Community Gardens

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for healthy and affordable food throughout the United States. Groundwork Trusts, which already lead the way in creating urban farms and gardens, ambitiously worked to increase production and identify new ways of getting much needed produce into targeted communities. Groundwork Milwaukee, located in a city where one in seven people face hunger, is a national leader in removing barriers and coordinating resources that lead to improved access to fresh food for city residents.

Groundwork Milwaukee's flagship program, the Milwaukee Grows Garden Network, is a constellation of more than 80 active community gardens, each one started and maintained by ambitious residents with a desire to activate unused spaces in their neighborhoods. Groundwork Milwaukee col-

laborates with resident gardeners to provide legal and safe access to city-owned vacant lands, materials and labor to construct and maintain gardens, and plan health-based educational and recreational programming. Developing successful community gardens in these diverse neighborhoods across Milwaukee has contributed to positive health outcomes for residents.

With more than a decade of success in developing community gardens, Groundwork Milwaukee began to pilot urban garden programs like the Community Garden Health Hub – a program where participants attend workshops about planting, harvesting and preparing fresh foods. Through this program, Groundwork Milwaukee increases access to foods that help combat chronic diseases.



Groundwork Elizabeth

MicroFarm and Environmental Center

Elizabeth, NJ is a densely packed 12 square mile community and home to 137,298 people. With limited access to fresh food and space to grow it locally, Groundwork Elizabeth is using innovative growing techniques to make the most of their limited space. Its flagship urban agriculture initiative, Come Grow With Us!, was catalyzed in 2009 by New Jersey State Assemblywoman Annette Quijano and a steering committee of community partners including Groundwork Elizabeth, who recognized the need to improve resident's access to fresh food in Elizabeth and Union County, New Jersey.

The initiative includes several projects, programs and weekly volunteer opportunities, including 200 community gardens located at senior centers, public housing, schools and other neighborhood sites. A mobile food market distributes fresh produce at affordable prices, in addition to the new MicroFarm and Environmental Center offering access to food and program opportunities.

The 3/4-acre MicroFarm and Environmental Center, located on a former industrial site behind the Elmora Library, demonstrates urban growing strategies including raised beds, in-ground gardens, an apiary, a library of flowers, two greenhouses and a food forest. Thirty-thousand public school students from Elizabeth and neighboring communities have participated in educational programs at the MicroFarm. Through these programs, students learn about urban growing strategies and conservation best practices that improve food production, water quality, urban heat and flooding.



2. Improving Resilience to Climate Events

Climate-related extreme weather events like hurricanes, heat waves and wildfires are increasing in frequency and intensity. Low-income neighborhoods in urban communities are often lacking climate resilient infrastructure such as urban trees and rain gardens, making them vulnerable to the health and economic impacts of extreme weather.

Groundwork Trusts across the country are working to change this by investing in parks and greenways and by leading urban forestry and sustainable design programs. In 2020, 70% of Groundwork Trusts completed climate and green infrastructure projects that include green streets, bioswales (channels designed to concentrate stormwater runoff while removing debris and pollution), rain gardens, and solar arrays which will help mitigate the effects from future storms.

Groundwork Lawrence

Green Streets Program

Not all neighborhoods experience the impacts of climate change equally. Communities with fewer trees and green spaces are more vulnerable to urban heat and flooding, and those communities are often home to low-income residents and people of color. This is why Groundwork Lawrence created the Green Streets program in 2007, an urban forestry program with the goal of increasing the urban canopy in Lawrence, Massachusetts, by providing free trees to residents and businesses.

By 2015, Green Streets was responsible for planting more than 1,200 trees in Lawrence, a milestone that led to a partnership with the Massachusetts Greening the Gateway Cities (GGC) program with an ambitious goal of planting 2,800 trees within 560 acres.

The partnership between Green Streets and GGC focuses on producing neighborhood-scale cooling services that reduce energy usage, combat air pollution and promote climate resiliency in Lawrence neighborhoods. Since 2016, Groundwork Lawrence and community partners have planted more than 2,300 trees.

In 2016, with the success of the Green Streets program, the neighboring City of Haverhill reached out to form a partnership with Groundwork Lawrence. Since then, Groundwork has provided outreach and community engagement support for Haverhill's program. This partnership has been so successful that Haverhill's Mayor and Groundwork Lawrence expanded the program, adding more than 300 trees in the fall of 2019 to the 2,528 trees planted under the GGC program.



Lawrence's trees prevent nearly 523,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from being released due to energy consumption per year; absorb over 550,000 pounds of carbon dioxide annually; and reduce flooding and combined sewage overflow events by intercepting more than 3.3 million gallons of stormwater runoff each year.

The Solar Power ECO Bench provides energy from solar panels and captures water runoff in flow-through planters.



Groundwork New Orleans

Green Infrastructure and Earth Lab

After Hurricane Katrina, few residents returned to the Lower 9th Ward, a predominantly African American neighborhood in New Orleans, Louisiana, and many lots stood vacant for years, some with weeds and trash, and others with dilapidated buildings. To help with recovery efforts, Groundwork New Orleans assessed the Lower 9th Ward's needs and found that residents had simple requests like planting flowers to attract butterflies and to beautify the neighborhood, as well as more challenging requests like mitigating future flooding events and creating jobs so that youth could stay in the community.

To address residents' needs, Groundwork New Orleans structured programs around sustainable design and workforce development and launched the Green Team and Ground CREW programs.

The Green Team, a paid job training program for high school-aged youth, teaches research methods, including water quality testing, public speaking, community engagement and construction skills. Participants gain valuable life skills while making critical improvements to their community such as installing drainage systems and documenting

water quality. Additionally, the Green Team works on installing Solar Power ECO Benches, one of Groundwork New Orleans' flagship projects which provides clean energy from solar panels and captures water runoff in flow-through planters.

Green Team participants also benefit from Groundwork New Orleans' youth home base, the Earth Lab – an outdoor environmental education classroom in the 7th Ward, developed in partnership with Tulane University's Small Center. The Earth Lab contains green infrastructure demonstration projects such as a 38,000 gallon per rain event bioswale, native plant propagation including Louisiana irises, and educational signage explaining these nature-based features.

As a scientific laboratory, Earth Lab allows Groundwork staff to teach youth and neighborhood residents about green infrastructure practices that support water filtration, pollution remediation, soil health, food systems, integrated water resource management and ecosystem regeneration. More than 300 youth and 3,000 residents have participated in learning activities at the Earth Lab since 2016.



Groundwork Hudson Valley's Science Barge is a floating environmental education center on the Hudson River serving 1st -12th grade students during the week and the public on the weekends. The Barge supports an abundance of fresh produce with zero net carbon emissions, zero pesticides and zero runoff. All of the energy needed to power the Barge is generated by solar panels, wind turbines and biofuels, while the hydroponic greenhouse is irrigated solely by collected rainwater and purified river water.

3. Cultivating the Next Generation of Environmental Leaders

Groundwork Trusts are cultivating the next generation of diverse environmental leaders through education and conservation programs aimed at ages 14 to 35. Groundwork Trusts operate unique youth programs, often referred to as Green Teams and GroundCorps, that combine hands-on conservation work, environmental education, leadership development and paid employment. Since 2000, Groundwork Trusts have engaged 139,385 youth leaders in community projects.

Groundwork Rhode Island

GroundCorp

While the environmental sector is rapidly creating new local jobs and supporting widespread community benefits, Groundwork is making a concerted effort to make sure low-income communities are the beneficiaries, and leaders, of this growing industry. One of the most effective environmental leadership programs is run by Groundwork Rhode Island, which trains and employs adults facing barriers to employment – including having prior conviction records or no college degree – to work on community landscape design and installation projects.

Groundwork Rhode Island's GroundCorp program is a landscape design-build and maintenance service that is fully insured and licensed as a contractor in the state of Rhode Island. Starting out in 2010 as a temporary apprenticeship program for graduates of their adult job training program, GroundCorp has developed into a standing crew made up of training graduates who have honed their skills working with Groundwork Rhode Island. GroundCorp is now sought-after by residential, commercial, nonprofit and municipal clients looking for high-quality landscape design, construction and maintenance services while supporting the social mission of hiring local residents who have faced barriers to employment.

For example, Javon Threats was unemployed for two years before joining GroundCorp. "Once I took this program, they gave me an opportunity that changed my life. Now I'm back to work, doing good service to the community, and I'm enjoying it," Threats said.

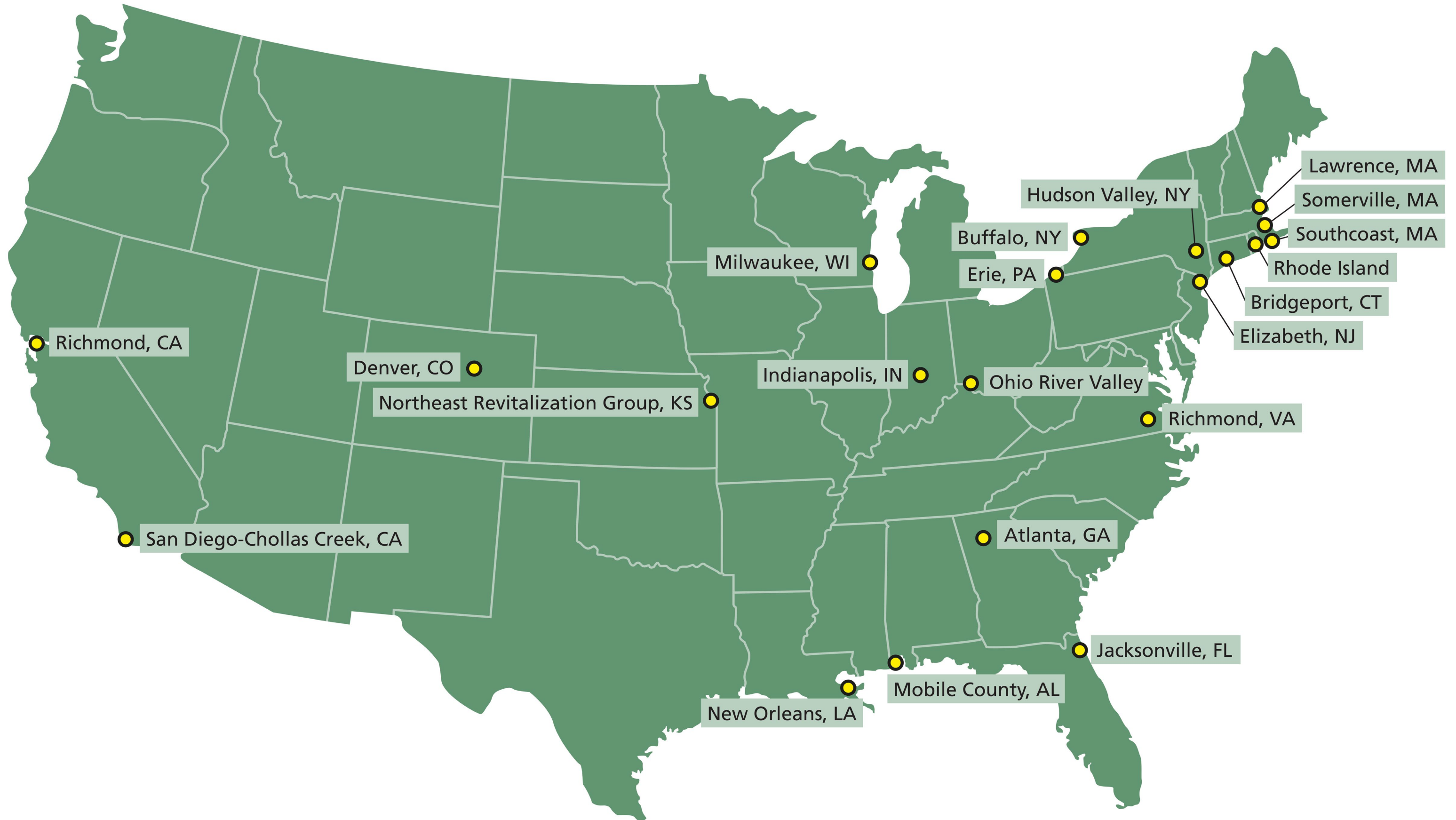
Tetee Kromah, who used to be homeless, credits this program as a turning point in her life, as she now works in some of the same sites where she used to sleep, and can now afford a home and provide for her children. "All I needed was that one break, and Groundwork gave it to me," Kromah said.



Groundwork Rhode Island has received funding from the EPA Southern New England Program and the Brownfields Job Training Grant Program to train up to 56 people in important skills needed to work in the environmental remediation field, to assist local economic development, and install 48 curb-cut bioswales across Providence. The latter large-scale project will employ GroundCorp crew members while improving places where people live and work by capturing and treating stormwater runoff. Groundwork Rhode Island will also use these bioswale installations and future maintenance to train up-and-coming adult job training students – with GroundCorp as the instructors – creating an opportunity for GroundCorp to demonstrate their leadership and expertise while providing hands-on experiences that new participants need to become more competitive job applicants.

Groundwork Network

The Groundwork Network includes 21 Groundwork Trusts that share a mission and common approach.





Changing Places, Changing Lives

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Heather Passchier
Groundwork Program Manager
Heather_Passchier@nps.gov