![spreading roots logo]

# Community Centered Initiatives – The Why - DRAFT -

**2024**

## Overview

Initiatives to enhance trees, green space (TGN), and nature are most effective when they are community centered. This is especially true in under-resourced communities disproportionally impacted by less access to quality TGN and with a history of marginalization and powerlessness.

*Community input* involves getting feedback from community members at some point in the process of investing resources or developing activities but ultimately not letting community members have the last word on deciding which priorities to set and what actions to take. Securing community input alone is insufficient to create vital projects that have community ownership, on-going support and are grounded in real needs and concerns. In contrast, *community centered* initiatives involve the community from defining goals and priorities to developing and implementing an action plan. Community centered initiatives ensure that the power dynamics put the community in the driver's seat (Doan et al., 2022).

## Interesting Information

**The Process is an Important Outcome**
The process of being community centered can be as important as any outcome. Change happens when people come together and realize their collective strength and act. The experience of agency and action around a community concern can be as important as the specific project itself.

**Ownership and Agility**
Community centered initiatives involve those who understand the real needs of the community and are more nimble and able to respond to changing circumstances. Community members understand their neighborhood's unique challenges, preferences, and cultural context. These initiatives can offer tailored solutions that resonate with the community. They capitalize on grass roots innovation recognizing that communities are hubs of creativity and innovation (Doan et al., 2020).

**Holistic Goals**
Many tree, green spaces, and nature initiatives focus on quick, tangible changes to an urban landscape rather than adopting the slower, more difficult process of true community centered processes that bring systemic change and more enduring, sustainable, and socially acceptable solutions (Reidman, 2022). It is important to create and target holistic goals that address multiple dimensions: environmental, social, and economic.

**Emphasis on Connections and Resiliency**
Community centered initiatives build relationships based on care, trust, and shared goals. Being community centered is not about who is in charge, but about how people work together. It is a practice learned through doing, fostering relationships, and mutual accountability. These initiatives build

capacity for leadership, problem-solving and collective action. They contribute to long-term, sustainable improvement without continued direct intervention (Doan et al., 2020).

**Global Impact**
Community centered projects start locally but their impacts ripple globally. Collective action of small-scale initiatives creates large-scale change.

**Address Equity Goals**
Community centered initiatives build understanding about the power dynamics and historical legacies around urban forestry. Who has gained; who has lost in past urban greening initiatives? This knowledge is crucial in identifying priorities for managing the urban forest with an eye towards equity and ensuring that initiatives truly benefit under-resourced communities (Campbell et al., 2022).

**Understand and Address Hesitancies around Green Initiatives**
Community-centered approaches can potentially address common hesitancies and obstacles to green initiatives such as:
- Historical distrust and negative and traumatic lived experiences involving government, NGO's, business, and developers.
- Fear of future financial burden caused by tree disservices to residential or business properties - structural damages, such as roots damaging sewer line and sidewalks, or fallen trees, leaves, or branches on buildings (Myers, 2023).
- The risk of green gentrification - residents who historically have not had access to green spaces are also those most likely to be displaced when new green spaces are created in their neighborhoods. (Oscilowicz, 2023) (Eck, 2021).

## Case Studies

**Transformative Climate Communities**
The Greenlining Institute finds that an innovative California program, Transformative Climate Communities (TCC), could be a national model for climate action. Unlike most government programs, TCC puts communities in charge, giving them the power and resources to fight climate change and build stronger, healthier, more economically resilient communities.

**Greening NYC Project**
The Greening NYC project in New York City is an ongoing program focused on creating urban green spaces in densely populated neighborhoods. Community-led efforts, such as rooftop gardens and pocket parks, aim to enhance the city's green infrastructure, mitigate the urban heat island effects and provide residents with accessible green areas for recreation and relaxation. This initiative extends to greening historical buildings throughout the city.

**Groundwork USA**
Operating in dozens of cities across the country, Groundworks USA--which has taken a community forestry approach since its founding--has now developed a Climate Safe Neighborhoods project via a climate justice approach and collaborates with residents and stakeholders to contextualize uneven climate impacts in their historical and racial context and to mobilize for change.

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