

# Community Centered Initiatives

*A selection of facts and resources supported by research*

2024

## Overview

Community involvement for initiatives to enhance trees, green spaces, and nature (TGN), can range from discrete community input opportunities to **robust community centered approaches**. **Community centered** approaches are especially important when collaborating with under-resourced communities disproportionately impacted by less access to quality TGN and with a long history of marginalization.

### Community Input

*Community input* involves getting feedback from community members at some points 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.

### Community Centered

Securing community input alone is insufficient for creating vital projects that have **community ownership, on-going support and are grounded in their real needs and concerns**. *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).

### 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 for action. **The experience of agency and action** around a community concern can often be as important as the specific project itself.

### Focus on Real Needs

Community centered initiatives involve those who understand the real needs of the community. Community members **understand their neighborhood's unique challenges, preferences, and cultural context**. These initiatives can offer tailored solutions that resonate with the community (Doan et al., 2020).

### Holistic Goals

Many TGN 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 enduring, sustainable, and socially acceptable solutions (Reidman, 2022).

### 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. These initiatives **build capacity for leadership, problem-solving and collective action** (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. 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, **the risk of green gentrification, and fear of financial burdens** due to tree roots and limbs damaging property (Myers, 2023) (Oscilowicz, 2023) (Eck, 2021).

### **Toolkit Resources (Additional Resources are Listed on the Website Toolkit Page)**

Collective Impact Forum - [Community Engagement Toolkit - Collective Impact Forum](#)

University of California - [Explore our Toolkit | Community Engagement Toolkit \(ucsf.edu\)](#)

City of Philadelphia - [Tools - Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit \(phila.gov\)](#)

### **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.

## References

Campbell, L. K., Svendsen, E. S., Johnson, M. L., & Plitt, S. (2022). Not by trees alone: Centering community in urban forestry. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 224, 104445.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2022.104445>

Doan, D., & Fifiend, M. (n.d.). *What does it mean to be community led*. Globalgiving.org.

WhatDoesItMeanToBeCommunityLed\_Nov2020.pdf (globalgiving.org)

ECK, E. (2021, March 30). The perils and promises of urban greening. *Yale Environmental Review*.

<https://www.piqsels.com>

Grinspan, D., Pool, J., Trivedi, A., Anderson, J. L., & Bouyé, M. (2020, September 29). *Green space: an underestimated tool to create more equal cities*. WRI. <https://www.wri.org/insights/green-space-underestimated-tool-create-more-equal-cities>

<https://www.wri.org/insights/green-space-underestimated-tool-create-more-equal-cities>

Myers, G. C., Mullenbach, L. E., Jolley, J. D., Cutts, B. B., & Larson, L. R. (2023). Advancing social equity in urban tree planting: Lessons learned from an integrative review of the literature. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 89, 128116.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2023.128116>

Oscilowicz, E., Anguelovski, I., García-Lamarca, M., Cole, H., Shokry, G., Del Pulgar, C. P., Argüelles, L., & Connolly, J. J. (2023). Grassroots mobilization for a just, green urban future: Building community infrastructure against green gentrification and displacement. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 1–34.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2023.2180381>

Riedman, Elizabeth; Roman, Lara A.; Pearsall, Hamil; Maslin, Mindy; Ifill, Tim; Dentice, Dana. 2022. Why don't people plant trees? Uncovering barriers to participation in urban tree planting initiatives. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*. 73(3): 127597. 10 p.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2022.127597>.

