

I. PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title*	Community Ownership Model for the Design of Nature-Based Solutions Along the North Claiborne Corridor
Project Director*	Dr. Angela M Chalk
Project Location*	North Claiborne Corridor, New Orleans, Louisiana
Project Summary*	<p>Our project proposes to convene community-based organizations in at-risk communities and partners across local government agencies to develop a replicable, scaleable community-led model of envisioning and designing nature-based solutions (NBS) along the North Claiborne Avenue Corridor. Our chosen area includes the under-resourced communities that are connected by North Claiborne Avenue. We have begun building a network of engaged residents educated about NBS, creating a solid foundation for further catalyzing partnerships. The area is an economic, social, historical, and cultural thoroughfare, and heavy floods there often negatively impact the daily life of community members. This corridor is a major hurricane evacuation route for residents of Orleans, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines parishes. Through collaborating with our community organizations in our Water Wise Collective, we have created neighborhood networks to envision designs to alleviate flooding, reduce the urban heat island effect, and implement highly beneficial nature-based projects. We plan to expand our efforts and broaden our vision, networks, and access to resources by educating and engaging new community organizations in the targeted area and government stakeholder partners. Through hosting a community-led summit, we will facilitate a process for sharing our collective's community visions and broadening the vision through collecting, compiling, and synthesizing data from community members and partners. Additionally, we intend to craft a proposal and identify a team to support Phase 2. We are ready to scale our efforts to recruit a diverse team to collectively address a widespread issue that plagues communities and government centering the community in the process.</p>

II. PROGRESS REPORT QUESTIONS

1. Please revisit your proposal and review your goals and the outcomes you were seeking to achieve through this grant. How successful were you in meeting your goals? Please assess your success against the criteria you set in your proposal and use any combination of anecdotes, stories, graphs, charts, visuals as well as data to explain your success. Upload supporting files if you choose.*

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[NAS GRP Final Narrative 7.13.23.pdf](#)

Filename: NAS GRP Final Narrative 7.13.23.pdf **Size:** 2.5 MB

2. How has your work benefited your organization, professional field, community, or other stakeholders?*

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3. Are there any other successes related more broadly to this project that you would like to share with us?*

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4. What did you learn (positive or negative) as a result of this grant? What lessons would you share with other organizations or the field at large?*

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5. How do you characterize your relationship with GRP and what suggestions do you have for improvement?*

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6. Please provide any other feedback or comments you have for the GRP.*

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7. If applicable, please identify and describe the ways you or your organization leveraged GRP's grant (e.g., other funders, volunteers who worked on the program, in-kind donations etc.) Please specify the value and/or number/hours of volunteers if possible.

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Our project proposes to convene community-based organizations in at-risk communities and partners across local government agencies to develop a replicable, scaleable community-led model of envisioning and designing nature-based solutions (NBS) along the North Claiborne Avenue Corridor. Our chosen area includes the under-resourced communities that are connected by North Claiborne Avenue. We have begun building a network of engaged residents educated about NBS, creating a solid foundation for further catalyzing partnerships. The area is an economic, social, historical, and cultural thoroughfare, and heavy floods there often negatively impact the daily life of community members. This corridor is a major hurricane evacuation route for residents of Orleans, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines parishes. Through collaborating with our community organizations in our Water Wise Collective, we have created neighborhood networks to envision designs to alleviate flooding, reduce the urban heat island effect, and implement highly beneficial nature-based projects. We plan to expand our efforts and broaden our vision, networks, and access to resources by educating and engaging new community organizations in the targeted area and government stakeholder partners. Through hosting a community-led summit, we will facilitate a process for sharing our collective's community visions and broadening the vision through collecting, compiling, and synthesizing data from community members and partners. Additionally, we intend to craft a proposal and identify a team to support Phase 2. We are ready to scale our efforts to recruit a diverse team to collectively address a widespread issue that plagues communities and government centering the community in the process.

1. Please revisit your proposal and review your goals and the outcomes you were seeking to achieve through this grant. How successful were you in meeting your goals? Please assess your success against the criteria you set in your proposal and use any combination of anecdotes, stories, graphs, charts, visuals as well as data to explain your success. Upload supporting files if you choose.*

We were very successful in meeting our goals of the proposal. The main goal of this Planning Project is to bring together community partners and government stakeholders to begin to develop a community ownership model around implementing nature-based solutions along the North Claiborne Corridor. We accomplished this through hosting a multistakeholders Nature Based

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Solutions/Green Infrastructure Summit and hosting a series of one on one stakeholder meetings to plan the Summit. Both of these exercises exceeded our expectations.

This process has furthered the Water Wise Collective's (of which Healthy Community Services is a part) mission to advance community driven green infrastructure and stormwater management projects in order to help alleviate chronic flooding, subsidence and the urban heat island effect. Prior to this grant, our work was well underway as we have an established model of engaging and training community residents around Green Infrastructure (GI), implementing projects on their properties, and identifying areas and large scale GI installations within their communities that would help to alleviate flooding. To date, we have built a network of 175 neighborhood residents, Water Wise Neighborhood Champions (WWNCs), we have implemented over 160 projects that manage about 200,000 gallons of water per rain event, and our WWNCs have envisioned over a 100 priority projects that we have compiled into Lookbooks. Our goals for this process included fine tuning our education and implementation model and to expand our network to include stakeholders and experts as well as to build stronger relationships with government partners and include them in the process of getting our Lookbook projects implemented. We have realized that in order to be successful in securing funding to implement our Lookbook projects, we must get the projects to a shovel ready state by securing designs and being ready to receive any funding that might be available. During this grant period, in order to further this effort and begin we engaged in community led democratic process of hiring landscape designers to prepare designs for one project in each of our neighborhoods. Government stakeholders are key to helping identify sources of funding and will need to be partners with community in applying for most federal funding which requires a government entity or government agency to apply. In building relationships with government, we have been able to position ourselves to scale up our efforts with our projects and to apply for the historic infrastructure funding that is coming from the federal government to the states.

Our WWNCs were an integral part of this grant execution in several ways. Firstly, we selected 15 WWNCs who make up our Water Wise Policy and Advocacy Committee (WWPAC) to be the Planning Process Steering Committee (Committee). With their support and participation in the process aligned with the goal of keeping community at the center of our efforts and was key to us successfully preparing for and planning the multi-stakeholder summit that we envisioned as part of the Phase I proposal. The Committee was able to plan, prepare for, and host a 100 person full day Green Infrastructure Summit that was attended by state, local, and regional government agency leaders, contractors, academia, funders, and our Water Wise Neighborhood Champions.

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After envisioning and deciding on logistics for the Summit, our Collective leaders along with a representative from the WWPAC created an industry wide invite list of over 200 people. We identified key government stakeholders that we work with, that we would like to work with, and that we feel are integral to our work. We had well established relationships with some and some we decided we needed to connect with and invited them to one on one stake holder planning meetings. Our goal of these meetings was to invite the stakeholders into the process in order to begin building working relationships and exploring potential avenues of collaboration to meet our goal of broadening our network. As we hosted these stakeholder meetings and began to gather information, we solidified the focus of our Summit, building bridges between community and government. The stakeholder meetings served the purposes of

- 1) extending a personal invitation to the leaders and in some cases, inviting them to be a presenter as part of the program;
- 2) helping us to identify key staff people in their agency with whom we should be in touch as well as indentifying any additional invitees to the summit from their agency or other agencies;
- 3) Asking questions about how the agencies were incorporating President Biden's Justice 40 Initiative into their funding discussions/efforts; and
- 4) beginning to gather data to help inform our agenda and conversation for the content of the Summit, most importantly, identifying barriers between community and government working together and how they experience working with community.

We hosted meetings with:

- 1) Leaders from four local government agencies
- 2) Leadership of a city council member's office and a congressman's
- 3) Leaders from four state government agencies as well as the governor's liaison for all state agencies
- 4) Program officers from two of our funders
- 5) Water wise Neighborhood Champions

The feedback we received from these meetings was incredibly helpful to our everyday work, in preparing for the GI Summit, and in realizing where we need to focus our efforts to scale up our projects and include government stakeholders in the process. We learned that:

- 1) Agencies aren't sure how to engage community and are open to receiving support with that;
- 2) Agencies need community partners to work with and don't have those relationships in most areas of the State;

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- 3) When getting a lukewarm reception from one State agency, we asked about their appetite for NBS and the agency representative said they didn't have one as they felt they had to focus on other things;
- 4) When responding to RFPs for grant applications that require community engagement, one agency said about working with communities that they have to "get creative" with the language to make it seem as though they meet the requirements (implying they are merely making efforts in a check the box approach).

The Summit focused on community engagement around our work in green infrastructure. We hosted an engaging, informative, interactive event that focused on community ownership and keeping community at the center of the process of educating, envisioning, and implementing nature based solutions in the communities we work in. To kick off our program, one of our youth committee members shared an introductory green infrastructure presentation that she created followed by two of our other youth committee members sharing a presentation they created about the work the youth committee has done over the last two years. From there, we gathered information about who was in the room and what community meant to them. Next, we introduced the community engagement spectrum (which we have uploaded to the portal) and explained what each level of the spectrum is and shared our goal of moving us towards the highest level of community ownership, away from excluding and tokenizing community. Thereafter, a representative from the Partnership for Southern Equity spoke about Justice 40 and the importance of the initiative for "disadvantaged communities" to receive 40% of federal funding in order to bring equity into how federal funding is distributed and who the funding will benefit. That was followed by a presentation from a representative from Earth Economics who presented a valuation analysis of the eco services benefits of our Lookbook priority projects. The report showed that our Lookbook projects would have \$19 million in benefits per year for the city. In addition, three organization leaders from our collective each presented a case study of one of their completed Lookbook priority projects and then moderated a panel of the projects' participants which included in each case, a resident who inspired and helped envision the project, the contractor who installed the project, the government partner who helped facilitate and overcome any roadblocks in the process.

We realize that the Summit overall, the case studies therein, and the exercise of the engaging with the stakeholders was a demonstration of how to successfully engage with communities. It was our hope and intention that this exercise served as a roadmap to government to engage with other communities with potential benefits extending beyond our Collective. Additionally, our hope is that this demonstration would begin to have the effect of normalizing meaningful community engagement as a standard process rather than a performative exercise of checking a box.

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As part of our engagement process, we asked a series of questions following each part of the agenda and, using Mentimeter, we gathered information and feedback from participants about their experience with and opinions about similar situations. We have incorporated that data and feedback into our Phase II proposal and circulated to the Summit participants the results we collected from the surveys (which we have uploaded as an attachment).

To document the day, we hired a photographer and videographer and had a member of our youth committee prepare interview questions and we filmed testimonials about flooding and green infrastructure with a few of our participants (we uploaded the video to the portal).

Following the Summit, we are re-engaging with community members to update our lookbooks projects- adding new projects, prioritizing existing projects, and modifying projects we already have in the Lookbooks, as needed. We will then meet with the designers we engaged during this phase to create designs for the projects. In Phase II, our plan is to secure additional analysis for our projects to show effectiveness of the projects.

In April, a month after the Summit, the core leadership team that participated in planning the summit went on a three day retreat to focus on assessment of the Summit, plan for next steps, and generate ideas for Phase II.

Currently, we are following up with the government stakeholders in order to explore possibilities of partnering or securing funding from their agencies or other sources.

2. How has your work benefited your organization, professional field, community, or other stakeholders?*

Organizational Benefits

- Our Collective has received recognition from local, regional and national organizations in the field of Green Infrastructure
- We have received opportunities to speak to audiences of peers, community members about our GI experience (which benefits our organizations and the field of GI)
 - Thomson Reuters interview

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- Invitation from NAS to present to a group of community leaders in Houston
- We received offers from two city agencies, Office of Hazard Mitigation and Office of Resilience and Sustainability, to work with us by reviewing our priority projects and determining whether there are funding opportunities that are a good fit for our projects from city funds that we would not otherwise have access to.
- We have an Invitation from the State Department of Transportation and Development to have standard quarterly meetings for the purpose of identifying projects on state property as well as to receive technical assistance opportunities and possibly work toward partnering on a federal grant
- We received an offer to work with the State Resilience Office to receive technical knowledge support around H&H modeling in order to strategically plan the implementation of our Lookbook priority projects.
- We have solidified our place as a leader in the field of GI and community engagement.
 - Contacted by a city agency to lead community workshops
 - Contacted by one of our funders who shared that they are trying to replicate our work
 - Large state facility looking to replicate our work on their property
- The exercise of meeting with the government and industry stakeholders for one on one meetings as well as with our Water Wise Neighborhood Champions and contractors was a great strategic planning opportunity and it helped us to get clear on our message, the direction we're going, and how to share about the community engagement spectrum to work towards supporting stakeholders to take a community ownership approach to Nature based solutions in addressing flooding in our neighborhoods.

Professional field

- We were invited to speak to a peer group where we shared our Summit findings and some of the suggestions from our expert speakers at the summit. We were told by a few of our peers that they have implemented a similar educational process to our model with their constituencies. We also offered suggestions around codifying some of the changes that they would like to see with their local governing agencies.

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- We were interviewed by Thomson Reuters to share about our work and the story had national and international reach.
- With stakeholders engaged and a more coordinated effort among industry, government, and community, we feel better equipped with greater capacity to start expanding our efforts towards getting our Lookbook priority projects to a shovel ready state to scale our work.
- Other organizations are beginning to realize the importance of community engagement and are seeking out our collective for that purpose.
- We are being seen as leaders in the community and receiving offers to apply for funding, accelerators, leadership/ professional development trainings, and to speak at conferences.

Community members

- With added attention to our completed projects that were showcased and our neighborhoods, we are primed to ask for/direct more funding towards projects in the neighborhoods we work in. We are getting the WWNCs re-energized around the visioning process to identify additional projects and to prioritize which projects to get designs for in their communities, furthering the process of getting our lookbook priority projects to a shovel ready state.
- Post-summit, we have had an increase in engagement through webinars, workshops, work n learn sessions, and tours.
- Members of government agencies now see themselves as part of the community because of our engaging them as community members as well reminding them that they live in the community. It's not just their jobs, they are also residents which further bridges the gap between their roles as government employees and their role as community members.

Stakeholders

- During the planning process for the Stakeholder summit, we held over 13 stakeholder meetings to talk about challenges the government and community face when engaging with each other. We asked the government leaders about challenges and barriers to working with the community as well as how the Justice 40 Initiative was being talked about and implemented in their agencies. Some of the things we heard were that the government agencies were not in relationship with community

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organizations, did not know how to identify community organizations to work with, and did not know how to engage with the community. In addition, it became apparent to us that the government agencies often were not communicating or working together. Our Summit gave them a chance 1) to hear about the work that we've been doing with other agencies, 2) to understand how we work with different agencies, 3) to sit at tables with other agencies and begin to open the lines of communication and realize where their work and projects may overlap.

- We provided a print out of the community engagement spectrum to the stakeholders to introduce them to the concepts related thereto. We stressed the importance of working towards a process of community ownership in implementing Green Infrastructure around our city. We gave government stakeholders an opportunity to talk with other agency leaders, industry leaders, as well as community members about what community ownership means and what it looks like.

3. Are there any other successes related more broadly to this project that you would like to share with us?*

- We are receiving recognition from our industry as experts in our field.
- We were awarded a grant from a funder that previously denied our application twice.
- The release of our Earth Economics report showed the return on investment of our projects is being realized. With that information, Government officials and industry stakeholders now have a renewed interest in our work and organizations outside of our collective are seeking partnership with us.
- We have had opportunities to showcase our work to other industry participants (the Funders Network, Water Alliance through tours of our projects and invited to offer other tours in the future.)
- We secured a partnership with an important state agency to apply for federal funding as well as similar interest from local agencies.

4. What did you learn (positive or negative) as a result of this grant? What lessons would you share with other organizations or the field at large?*

We learned:

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- With more resources and a focused plan of action, we can better engage and activate our network around projects.
- Staying focused on our mission and consistently inviting people in, sharing about our work and having open one on one dialogue about issues that are arising on all sides is very effective.
- One unexpected thing we realized is that not only do we need a bridge between government and community, but also the interagency and intra-agency communication was lacking so inviting them to all be together in one place was eye opening and sparked interest in removing silos and demonstrated how to effectively do that.
- that we are very well positioned in doing the work we're doing, in building relationships and in bringing people together in the way we did at the summit given the large influx of federal money coming to the States.
- The Relationship we have with our collective is unique and has been able to grow organically and sustain our work because we are focused on building a movement and we are moving at the pace of community.
- With a broader network, we are tapped into more expertise within our communities and we have very talented and skilled people.

We would share with other organizations that with community as the focus and at the center of our process, we are able to accomplish so much and increase our capacity and our reach.

5. How do you characterize your relationship with GRP and what suggestions do you have for improvement?*

Our relationship is in the beginning stages and we hope it will continue to grow. We were in touch with our program officer during the grant and met her at the Louisiana state of the coast convention. A local NAS representative came to our GI summit and thereafter invited two members of our collective to speak at a community organization gathering in Houston.

We look forward to a continued working relationship with GRP.

6. Please provide any other feedback or comments you have for the GRP.*

We would love to have peer to peer learning workshops and more connection to build working relationships with other grantees. We suggested to our program

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officer that we'd like to have zoom gatherings to hear about the other grantees' projects. We find that we learn a great deal from this type of sharing with one another. It's very inspiring and motivating to learn from fellow grantees who are in the field doing projects and programs. It gives us ideas for strategic planning from people who have experience. It helps us to direct our efforts in better ways through our learning from them.

7. If applicable, please identify and describe the ways you or your organization leveraged GRP's grant (e.g., other funders, volunteers who worked on the program, in-kind donations etc.) Please specify the value and/or number/hours of volunteers if possible.

We were able to draw on the structures we have in place from two other grants. Our Water Wise Neighborhood Champions are an integral part of our model which is funded by Kresge. They represented the community during our Summit. Each of collective leadership selected a few WWNCs to become members of our Water Wise Policy and Advocacy Committee who help move our work forward through grant writing, building our youth efforts, relationship building with stakeholders, and other special projects that arise. The PAC members were integral in planning and staffing the Summit. Their time planning and staffing the summit was funded by Kresge and an EPA EJ grant. This was about 10-12 people meeting for 90 minutes every other week for three months and all of them staffing the event the day of for 10 hours. We compensated them on an hourly basis two times the amount of living wage. A few of them also had specific roles in the planning and preparing for the Summit and were paid the same hourly rate from the aforementioned grants for about 30 additional hours total for special sessions to plan the content and logistics of the summit.

In addition, about 12 of our youth committee members attended the Summit and participated in conversations at their tables as well as the aforementioned members that gave presentations, conducted interviews, and shared about their experiences. We paid them \$150 for 8 hours at the Summit including three meetings to prepare for their presentations. This cost came out of our EPA EJ grant. Four of our collective organizational leaders and one member of the Policy and Advocacy Committee participated in 13 stakeholder calls and preparations for the summit program and were paid a flat fee from our EPA grant.