

NEIGHBORHOOD-LEVEL CLIMATE ACTION PLANNING

in Watts, Los Angeles, California

a holistic approach to building decision-making capacity for adaptive climate solutions in disadvantaged communities



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INTRODUCTION

As the effects of climate change are becoming significantly more palpable, solutions are becoming increasingly experimental and accessible. The Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) Grant Program is a novel strategy used by Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) to address interrelated environmental injustice issues through the communities' creation of engagement, workforce development, and displacement avoidant plans. In the South LA neighborhood of Watts, residents have been surrounded by air pollution, burdened by extreme heat, neglected access to fresh food and affordable housing, and endured political challenges. Since Watts Rising's grant award in 2018, the collaborative has supported a total of 23 projects. Their Urban Greening projects aim to increase tree canopy, improve mobility, and empower residents with applicable skills.

Research Questions

- How effective is the Transformative Climate Communities grant program, specifically the Watts Rising Urban Greening program in addressing climate change, environmental justice, and community engagement in Watts, CA?
- How can the structure and organization of the TCC Grant program serve as a reference for other environmental-justice-focused climate action plans?

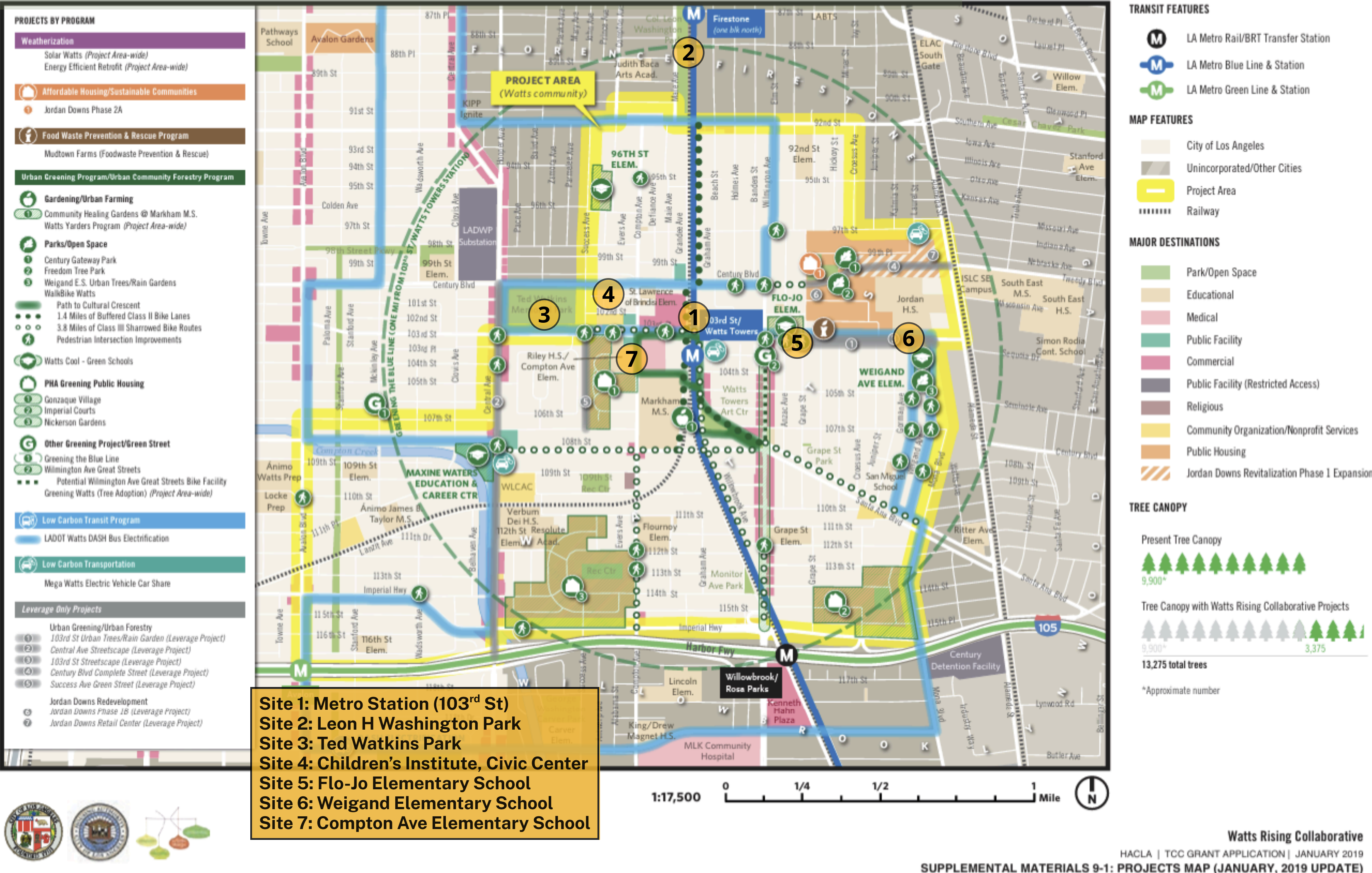
METHODOLOGY

Mixed-Methods Research

- Document analysis of annual Progress Reports from UCLA's Luskin Center for Innovation
- Site visits and grading through criteria rubric
 - Locations included schools, parks, and other community amenities.
 - Criteria included tree canopy and vegetation, vegetation maintenance, availability and accessibility of green open space, daily amenities and resources, and pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure.
- Community surveys
- Semi-structured interviews with community leaders
- Supporting data from CalEnviroScreen 3.0 and 4.0 and the LA County Tree Canopy Basic Viewer GIS Map

Primary collected data was referred to Progress Report data and analyzed to gauge the success of implementation projects at meeting their goals. This study evaluated where there are missing gaps in considerations of implementations and missing gaps in current research to identify areas of improvement for future projects within Watts.

WATTS RISING PROJECT LOCATIONS AND STUDY SITES



FINDINGS

TCC-Funded vs. Leveraged Projects

TCC-funded projects have longer lifetimes, while projects with leveraged funding were completed more quickly and tend to be focused on streetscape improvements.

CalEnviroScreen Percentiles

Pollution burden, toxic releases, diesel, drinking water, hazardous waste, asthma, and cardiovascular rate/disease percentiles increased. Ozone, traffic, groundwater threats, solid waste, linguistic isolation, and unemployment percentiles decreased.

Established areas of community and recreation

Many survey respondents frequented parks or communal areas multiple times a week (79% of respondents), expressing a goal to be active or connect with their community.

Awareness of hardships and available opportunities

46% of respondents were aware of extreme heat's effects in urban neighborhoods. 61% believed these effects applied to their community. On average, respondents ranked extreme heat effects a 7.8/10. Many were long-time residents had strong opinions about climate change and other changes within their neighborhood, while few were aware of the existing educationally and economically supportive opportunities.

Long-term education for long-term success

A strong majority of respondents believed in the importance of support, empowerment, and training. Few expressed the need to provide the younger generations with more applicable skills and technical educations related to finance, investing, and politics.

Targeted interventions

Watts Rising's projects are centered in the more active community areas and have noticeable benefits, but lack connection to other areas throughout the neighborhood. Despite efforts, there is still high pollution burden and related health issues.

Care and maintenance

54% of respondents felt newly planted trees were not being maintained. People expressed the continuous need for more vegetation, shade, adequate lighting, and rest areas/benches around public transportation and walkways, even more permeable pavement. Despite small improvements, the community believes there is still much work to be done.

Face-to-face interaction and engagement

Respondents that were surveyed/interviewed in person were engaged and grateful to have someone listen to their thoughts and experiences. Surveys began conversations.

Urban Greening as a symbolic community effort

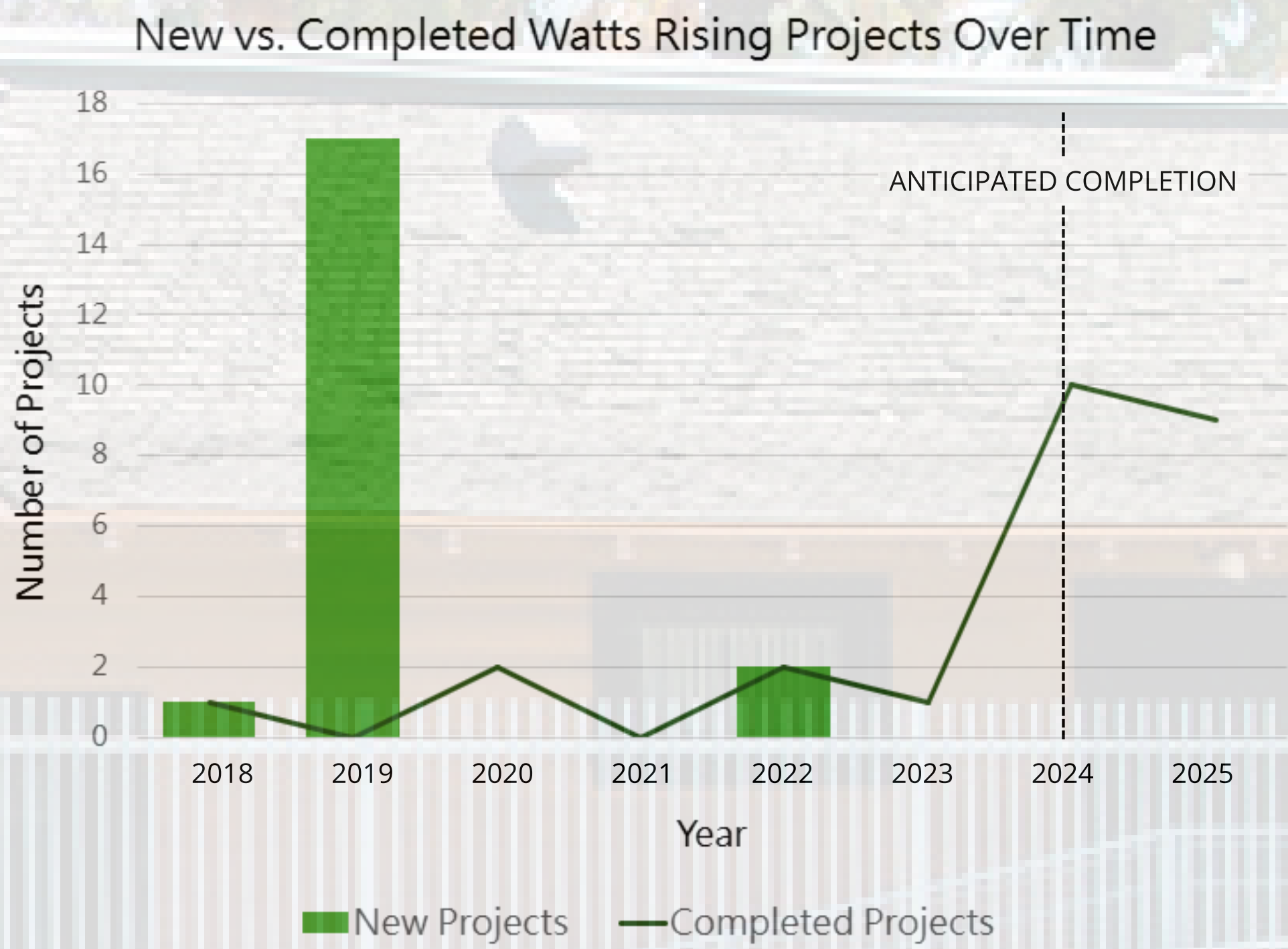
Trees and plants have more than just physical benefits. Respondents compared this to therapy. Tree planting is a "visual representation of change" that allows people to have a tangible impact on their community.



GRADED SITE ASSESSMENT

Site	Amount of tree canopy and vegetation	Vegetation maintenance	Availability and accessibility of green open space/school/communal area	Availability and accessibility of green open space to daily amenities/resources	Pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure prioritization over car-centric infrastructure	Pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure maintenance
Metro Station (103rd St)	3	2	4	4	3	2
Leon H Washington Park	4	3	4	4	2	3
Ted Watkins Park	4	4	4	4	3	4
Children's Institute, Civic Center	2	4	4	4	3	3
Flo-Jo Elem	2	3	3	3	2	1
Weigand Elem	2	3	2	2	1	1
Compton Ave Elem	3	3	4	4	3	3

Needs Improvement (1): Greatly lacking implementation
Adequate (2): Implementation in progress with some benefits
Good (3): Mostly meets goals
Excellent (4): Meets and exceeds goals



4.5/10

for resident satisfaction of government efforts to improve health and safety in their neighborhood

82%

of survey respondents believe it is necessary to train people in their neighborhood on professional tree care and maintenance

96%

of survey respondents believe it is necessary to support and empower residents to do community work

CONCLUSIONS

Limited grant funding and decentralized systems

fail to address more wide-scale systemic issues. Reliance on grant funding is not the most sustainable approach, but it has proven success in historically underserved and pollution-burdened communities. This concern regarding segmented approaches does not take away from the local benefits and opportunities they provide.

The experimental nature of the program reveals novel methods of community climate planning.

DACs are not only structurally disadvantaged to climate change, but to climate adaptation and action. There is great potential in giving community members more responsibility and agency. Locals are the neighborhood experts and are invested in seeing their and their neighbors' lives improve. There are many passionate community leaders currently working to do so. Supporting the decision-making of young adults empowers them to continue their work.

There is great power in green design, increased vegetation, and community planting. Green open space creates a welcoming and active atmosphere. Though the Urban Greening projects are of a smaller scale, they combine with other programs to make a well-rounded effort in strengthening a neighborhood's socioecological health

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand funding opportunities and decision-making capacity of DACs. Strengthen viability of opportunities during economically challenging times.
- Support economic sustainability by avoiding displacement, supporting local business, and creating long-term education and career programs.
- Approach community engagement and build awareness of available support with care and diligence.
- Monitor implementation and follow-through with community feedback regularly.
- Build collaborative relationships between sectors, departments and levels of government, and frontline communities. Connect and ensure consistency between local plans and programs.



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