

# grounded ANNUAL REPORT 2023







# CHANGE ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

**grounded**  
strategies

6401 Penn Avenue | Floor 3 | Pittsburgh, PA 15206

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Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to share with you just a snippet of the accomplishments and achievements from an exciting year at Grounded Strategies for 2023. This past year, we were able to flourish as we continue our efforts to become more and more engaged with assisting our friends understand the land upon which they live and begin the process to reclaim it.

In 2023, we have begun the process of embarking upon some amazing work that will catapult Grounded to new heights in furthering of reclaiming vacant land. We began to work in earnest with our partners in the Hill District on a collaborative effort to not only reclaim vacant land in the community, but also understand how land was taken initially. Armed with this information, residents will now have data to share with key stakeholders as planning efforts take place to redevelop that historic neighborhood. And there's more! Work in the Mon Valley will continue with the Lots of Wildflower program which will again, engage our community members in land justice which is so vitally important for communities that have been historically neglected.

Although my tenure will be brief, I am so proud to be a member of this wonderful team of caring and dedicated staff. As a former board member, I saw the amazing work done by staff from a distance, but seeing the work of the group through the lens of the Interim Executive Director, I am blown away at what we are able to accomplish.

I am so excited for what 2024 has in store and not just for Grounded; but for the communities in which we work. The excitement is building as Spring is upon us, so let's get to work!!!

Sincerely,

Darnell Moses  
Interim Executive Director





# 2019-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

## STAY LONGER

Sustainable change is not instantaneous, but rather gradually picks up momentum over time.

Grounded plans to deepen and develop authentic community relationships in every community we serve, committing to at least three years of programming on the ground. This will require more proactive and long-term funding partnerships and committed partners. This will enable us to reach more people, incorporate inter-generational learning, and seed long-term habits and framework for growth.

## DO MORE

Communities are complex. They require interdisciplinary, collaborative, and comprehensive strategies for change. Grounded will expand our team expertise to increase the positive impact of our investment in communities, expanding and formalizing new services to ensure the gaps are filled.

We are also committed to building relationships to new partners ensure a robust approach is taken.





## CHANGE THE SYSTEM

The processes, policies, and programs that govern community need to be accessible and responsive. Grounded will advance policies and investments that reduce the impact of neglected and vacant land in the region.

We will focus on the level of municipal leadership and analyze budgeting, maintenance, as well as access policies and strategies to increase consistency, accountability, and transparency.

## REFLECT THE COMMUNITY

Building trust requires connecting with, listening to, and addressing the needs of people on the ground. Grounded will continue to prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion in our services and staff and board representation.

We continue to examine our processes and strategies to ensure they are equitable and will seek support to help remove institutional barriers from our methodology.

*Over the next 5 years, Grounded will become the “go-to” organization for residents, non-profits, and municipalities working on vacant and underutilized land issues in Allegheny County.*



2023

# BY THE NUMBERS

## PROJECTS

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11

Projects  
Supported

3000

Volunteer  
Hours

32

Volunteer  
Workdays

35

Ambassadors  
& Stewards

2641

Stewardship  
Hours



## ORGANIZATION

**17**  
Community  
Partners

**1**  
Report  
Produced

**11**  
Conferences/  
Summits

**11**  
Staff  
Trainings

## WHERE WE WORK

### CITY

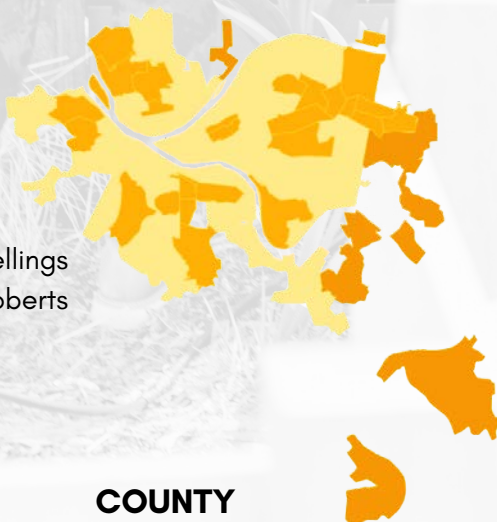
Braddock  
Carrick  
Fineview  
Hazelwood  
The Hill

Bedford Dwellings  
Crawford-Roberts  
Hill District  
Middle Hill  
Upper Hill  
Uptown

Homewood  
Larimer  
Manchester

### COUNTY

Duquesne  
Wilkinsburg



## REVENUE

**Foundation** \$738,815

**Earned** \$43,805

**Government** \$11,500

**Corporate** \$46,150

**Events** \$2,076

**Individual & Board** \$6,248

**Other** \$2,136

**\$860,343**

## EXPENSES

**Personnel** \$522,491

**Program** \$118,000

**Professional Fees** \$35,625

**Offices & Facilities** \$57,621

**Other** \$18,093

**\$751,830**

\* All numbers are unaudited at the time of publication

\*\* Annual surpluses are restricted for mission-related expenditures in the future



# 2023 PROJECTS







# ECS Community Co-Design Studio



## Gaining Ground



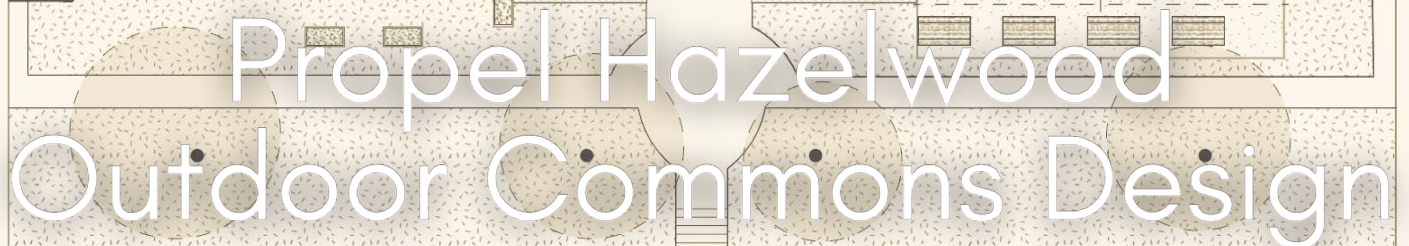
## Ground Truthing



## Lots of Wildflowers



## "The Nook" at Oasis Farm & Fishery



## Propel Hazelwood Outdoor Commons Design



# GROUND TRUTHING

Hypervacancy, or concentrations of vacant land that lack investment, have marked health impacts on the residents.

Urban planning policies and discriminatory lending practices have systematically harmed Black residents and led to hyper vacancy.

Children living in neighborhoods with hyper vacant conditions are shown to achieve less academically, are chronically sicker, and earn less over their lifetime.

Grounded Strategies, de-bias, and Resident Data Collectors are working with residents to collect information on how the vacant land around them became vacant.

Every lot has a different story and history that we want to acknowledge. We are building out an accurate vacant lot database created using community knowledge around land loss in order to create a racially just land recycling process.

We know land has a deep history other than it being seen as vacant, abandoned, or deteriorated. By working with residents to learn about the history of the land and injustices that have left the land vacant, we are able to collect valuable information that will enable us to create this database.



In January, Becca Simon presented with keynote speaker, Amber Thompson of *de-bias*, about our Ground Truthing project at the 2023 Pittsburgh Racial Justice Summit.

During the session, our Resident Data Collectors met with residents to collect information and stories about the history of land loss of vacant lots in their neighborhoods.





# LOTS OF WILDFLOWERS

Grounded is working in partnership with The African Healing Garden and the Larimer Consensus Group to conduct a two-year study of a vacant lot in Larimer, exploring ways to use this space (as well as others in the future) to improve the ecological health and wildlife habitat of such spaces.

The project intends to beautify the community while exploring wildflower meadow and shrub/tree border plantings on urban vacant lots. The project will help to establish new best practices for mid-term and long-term treatment of vacant land in the urban setting, with the potential to influence policy and maintenance practices at a systems level.

The proposed plan for the site includes (3) meadow test plots 30'x60'insize, separated by grass and clover pathways. The plots will test for variables including seed mixes, and maintenance intensity. Additional small trees and shrubs are planned for the front of the site to increase habitat, biodiversity, seasonal interest, and shade along the road.

Site preparation activities completed in May 2021 after several delays in obtaining site access, and a necessary pivot to a new location. These included the rehabilitation of several vacant parcels along Meadow Street in Larimer, in coordination with a local contractor, nearby residents, and the local community organizing group.



In June, Grounded's PGH Mobile Toolbox traveled to the Lots of Wildflowers site, affectionately named "The Magical Garden." The Duquesne Light Company Finance Team helped with weed removal, installing native pollinator plants, mowing paths, and string trimming borders.





# THE NOOK AT OASIS FARM & FISHERY

The Nook Project at Oasis Farm and Fishery (Oasis) was a design intervention that concluded this year. This project addressed vacancy and public space concerns in Homewood.

Oasis' Tacumba Turner collaborated with architectural designer and Carnegie Mellon University graduate, Ever Clinton, and The Falk School of Sustainability at Chatham University to initiate a community charette series. This last year, Oasis partnered with Grounded to implement changes to the site according to resident feedback. Our team constructed an intergenerational, outdoor educational space where residents of Homewood can learn about medicinal plants.

Contributions from the Richard K. Mellon Foundation made this partnership and work possible. The bulk of the budget for this project was contributed by an individual donor who was interested in improving health outcomes for young children through creating more healthy green spaces in high-vacancy urban neighborhoods.



On Earth Day, Grounded partnered with Tree Pittsburgh to plant trees and mulch at The Nook at Oasis Farm & Fishery. Volunteers from University of Pittsburgh, La Roche University, and Alpha Alpha Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. joined us as we spent the day working hard bringing even more love to this space.





# COMMUNITY CARE

The Grounded CommunityCare Program works to inspire and support cohorts of residents to care for vacant lots and urban greenspace. Program participants, or 'stewards', receive tools and training to develop local capacity, incentives to recognize their accomplishments and relieve financial pressure, and opportunities to expand social, civic, and professional networks. Stewards report their care and beautification activities in exchange for credits that can be redeemed for a variety of safety net resources, including meal services, bus passes, and utility payments.

CommunityCare stewards take care of vacant land for various reasons. Some hate litter, some have public health concerns, and others want to uplift their community. Regardless of personal reasons for taking action, all stewards take pride in their work. Proactive vacant land maintenance impacts us all.

To date, CommunityCare stewards have collectively invested more than 5,000 hours across Allegheny County to stabilize and beautify their neighborhoods.

At the end of the 2023 CommunityCare stewardship season there were 21 active and official stewards in the Hill District, Homewood, and Wilkinsburg cohorts. These Stewards contributed a combined 2,641 hours of clean-up and beautification activities.



Volunteers from BNY Mellon assisted two of our CommunityCare Stewards at the Beech Street Garden in Wilkinsburg in August. The simple act of maintaining green space is associated with significant improvement in mental health. It contributes to an overall healthier and more resilient environment which is better for everyone.





# GEARED UP & GROUNDED



Every year, Grounded hosts a bike tour highlighting the community champions and their efforts to reclaim abandoned spaces, and turn them into vibrant community assets for everyone to enjoy.

We see these sites firsthand and meet the neighborhood advocates making it happen, learning about their journey and the transformation of vacant spaces into activated places. This year, we visited sites in Wilksburg and Larimer, including The Nook, The Magical Garden, and our Propagation Yard.



We were honored with a Vibrancy Award for Sustainability by  
New Sun Rising in May.

Through the Vibrancy Awards, New Sun Rising lifts up  
organizations doing work to promote and increase Culture,  
Sustainability, and Opportunity in our region.



# NEW SUN RISING VIBRANCY AWARD



# ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORTERS

## ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS

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Black Environmental Collective  
Center of Life  
Duquesne University  
Grow Pittsburgh  
Get the Lead Out, Pittsburgh  
Larimer Consensus Group  
Lincoln-Lemington Belmar Consensus Group  
Local Roots Landscaping  
Mission Continues  
Negley Run Watershed  
Neighborhood Allies  
Pennsylvania State University  
Pittsburgh Major Taylor Cycling Club  
Pittsburgh Operations Network of Nonprofits  
Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy  
TriCOG Land Bank  
Wilkinsburg CDC

## ORGANIZATIONAL FUNDERS

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Allegheny Health Network  
Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield  
Local Roots Landscaping  
Trace Brewing

## INDIVIDUAL DONORS

---

Alexa Deluca  
Anna Archer  
Anna Kochersperger  
Anna Carbino  
Ashley Seiler  
Autumn Walker  
Beth Slagle  
Chad Greenlee  
**Charlie Goodwin**  
Christine Brill

Cynthia Closkey  
**Dr. Danielle Andrews Brown**  
**Darnell Moses**  
David Lassman  
David Stasenko  
**Gordon Hodnett**  
Hana Uman  
Joan Bowser  
Katherine Copic  
Kenneth Levin

Leeza McGowan  
Leonard V Amato Jr.  
Linda Malinowski  
Michael Shaughnessy  
Michael Zimmerman  
Nancy Latimer  
Nathan Porter  
**Nick Pantalone**  
Rebecca Mizikar  
Renee Pusey

## BOARD MEMBERS

---

Ashley Jones  
Ben Mileville  
Charlie Goodwin  
Dr. Danielle Andrews-Brown  
Darnell Moses  
Dora P. Magovern  
Gordon Hodnett  
Nick Pantalone  
Sarah Williams Willson  
Dr. Shondrika Burrell  
Teresa Hammond

## STAFF

---

Ariam Ford  
Ashley Seiler  
Becca Simon  
Eleni Contis  
*Interim Executive Director* Darnell Moses  
Kelsey Small  
Khadiza Massey  
Masoud Sayles  
Ruby Velasco  
Shequaya Bailey  
Skylar McGinley  
Sophie Smith  
Tom Mulholland

**Sarah Williams Wilson**  
Shequaya Bailey  
**Dr. Shondricka Burrell**  
Staci Egan  
Stephen Tirone  
Tammy Bowers  
**Teresa Hammond**



## **Thank you to all of our supporters!**

Your generous funding, donations, and assistance contributes to Grounded's work of inspiring, supporting, and reinforcing people coming together to care for vacant lots and urban greenspace.







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