

# grounded ANNUAL REPORT 2024



# CHANGE ROOTED IN COMMUNITY



**grounded**  
strategies

6401 Penn Avenue | Floor 3 | Pittsburgh, PA 15206

[www.groundedpgh.org](http://www.groundedpgh.org)

412.361.2099

Dear Friends, Partners, and Neighbors,

As I wrap up my first year as Executive Director of Grounded Strategies, I am filled with deep gratitude for the opportunity to lead an organization with such a rich history, a powerful mission, and an unwavering commitment to equity.

Stepping into this role in 2024, I was immediately struck by the depth of Grounded's relationships and the trust it has earned over many years of showing up alongside community members. The work Grounded does—reclaiming vacant land, supporting neighborhood leadership, and building capacity with and in communities working to overcome a legacy of disinvestment—is transformative. And it's not new. It's rooted in decades of care, creativity, and collective action.

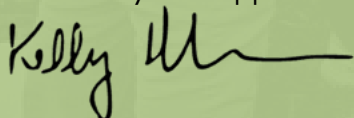
This past year, I've had the privilege of witnessing the strength and resilience of our team, the residents we collaborate with, and the many partners who make our work possible. From co-designing a meadow with residents in the Mon Valley to building the membership of the Vacant Land Advocacy Network, to continuing the CommunityCare program that compensates residents to be caretakers of land and community—2024 was a year of deep listening, reflection and building the foundation for what's ahead.

We also faced setbacks, including the theft of our truck and critical tools. It was a tough blow, but our community stepped up. Thanks to generous support, we were able to recover and continue our work. The experience was a powerful reminder of both the challenges we face and the strength we draw from our larger network of supporters and stakeholders.

Looking ahead, I'm honored to deepen and expand the legacy that has brought Grounded to this moment. With our 2024-2028 Strategic Plan as our guide, we remain focused on transforming vacant spaces into vibrant places, and doing so in ways that advance health, sustainability, and race equity.

Thank you to every steward, partner, supporter, and staff member who makes this work possible. I am honored to lead this work with Grounded and our community partners, and I'm looking forward to what's next.

In solidarity and appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kelly Henderson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kelly Henderson  
Executive Director  
Grounded Strategies

# 2024-2028

# STRATEGIC PLAN

The board approved our new strategic plan this year, but with new leadership, we plan to revisit the strategic plan once a quarter to see if anything in it needs to change. In 2025, we will be hosting community dinners in the neighborhoods where we work, in part to get wider community feedback on this working draft. Stay tuned for a full, public version of our new strategic plan in 2025.





# EXTERNAL OBJECTIVES

- Be a trusted technical assistance & community engagement partner
- Foster consistent partnerships for site transformation and maintenance
- Provide guidance on collective ownership pathways to help generate wealth
- Advocate for policy changes to help reduce and prevent vacancy
- Advance community transformation through youth-centered initiatives



# INTERNAL OBJECTIVES

- Identify and pursue new and varied funding sources
- Expand development opportunities for staff
- Explore new opportunities for board engagement
- Enhance impact measurement system
- Enhance organizational and operational structure and collaboration
- Increase innovative solutions by leveraging strengths
- Explore opportunities for enhanced office and storage space



2024

# BY THE NUMBERS

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8  
Projects  
Supported

519  
Volunteer  
Hours

27  
Community  
Partners

33  
Ambassadors  
& Stewards

906  
Stewardship  
Hours



## WHERE WE WORK

### CITY

The Hill

Bedford Dwellings

Crawford-Roberts

Hill District

Middle Hill

Upper Hill

Uptown

Homewood

Larimer

### COUNTY

Braddock

East Pittsburgh

North Braddock

Wilkinsburg



## REVENUE

**Foundation** \$275,000

**Earned** \$2,500

**Government** \$40,160

**Corporate** \$3,200

**Other Non-Profit Organizations** \$57,445

**Individual & Board** \$23,725

**Other** \$18,150

**\$420,180**

## EXPENSES

**Personnel** \$395,730

**Program** \$68,740

**Professional Fees** \$39,820

**Offices & Facilities** \$57,920

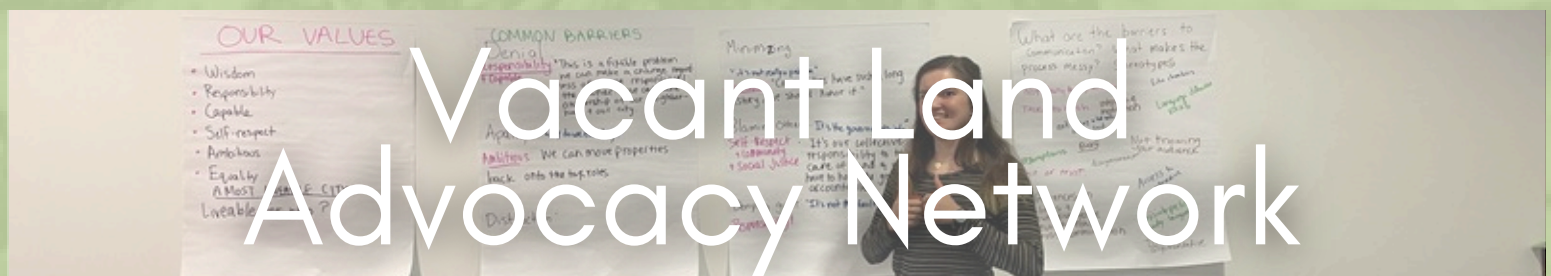
**Other** \$13,170

**\$575,380**

All numbers are unaudited at the time of publication

2024 Net Loss was funded from Net Assets available at 12/31/23 and a one-year loan from a community development organization

# 2024 PROJECTS









# COMMUNITY CARE

A woman wearing a black long-sleeved shirt, a black cap, and white gloves is working in a field of tall, dry grass. She is bent over, possibly pulling weeds or planting. In the background, there is a brick building with a chimney and some trees.

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 and opportunities to expand social, civic, and professional networks. Stewards report their care and beautification activities to Grounded’s Resident Resources Manager and are compensated for their time on an hourly basis.

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

In 2024, Grounded operated CommunityCare with residents from the following communities involved: the Hill District, Larimer, Homewood, Wilksburg. We hosted workdays to maintain specific past project sites in the Hill District, thanks to generous funding from McAuley Ministries.

In December we celebrated CommunityCare Stewards and volunteers with a festive gathering to show our appreciation for their dedication to Grounded's mission. During the celebration, several Stewards talked about how long they have been connected to Grounded and their dedication to reclaiming and maintaining vacant land in their communities.



# LOTS OF WILDFLOWERS

Lots of Wildflowers intends to beautify communities while exploring wildflower meadow and shrub/tree border plantings on urban vacant lots. This project entered its 5th year in 2024 and expanded to Braddock, North Braddock, and East Pittsburgh, commonly abbreviated as BEN.

A group of 10 residents from BEN participated in a six-month conservation program. From May to October, they attended monthly sessions on water conservation, biodiversity, and land recycling. They also joined two workdays in August and October.

Two community meetings in June and July gathered input from 25 attendees on project plans and site selection.

In August, a 13-foot-radius plot at 728 Braddock Avenue was covered for two months to prepare the soil. In October, the group planted 5 pounds of native wildflower and grass seeds mixed with biochar. A 3x26-foot mulch pathway was added, creating a 450 sq. ft. micro meadow to support pollinators.

Additionally, 10 lbs. of crimson clover and winter rye were planted on a nearby lot to restore compacted soil. The Penn State University Extension donated the seeds as part of their conservation education efforts.

In October, we began planting the initial seeds at a new meadow in Braddock. We also worked on a path that will bisect the circular meadow and connect an existing dog park. Our summer AmeriCorps intern, Claire, worked with Braddock residents to brainstorm site designs. Comprehensive site design work with residents is continuing into 2025.





# PGH MOBILE TOOLBOX

When it comes to community projects, we find that there is often a lot of motivation, resources for events, and partnerships with service providing organizations. However, there is a shortage of tools available to communities to sustain the care taking and stewardship of their green projects.

The PGH Mobile Toolbox provides tools to keep green space in Allegheny County vibrant and maintained. Grounded provides these tools at no cost to non-profit organizations, public schools, volunteer groups, and other groups that do not profit from this work. It is provided at cost to folks who wish to utilize these tools for private gardens, private schools or land inaccessible to the public. This cost goes towards fuel and keeping the tools in tip-top shape for everyone!





Although 2024 was a slower season for the PGH Mobile Toolbox due to a challenging year, it still supported 180 volunteer hours across community workdays. Looking ahead, 2025 is already shaping up to be a busy and exciting season, with the toolbox available a month earlier – launching in April instead of May.



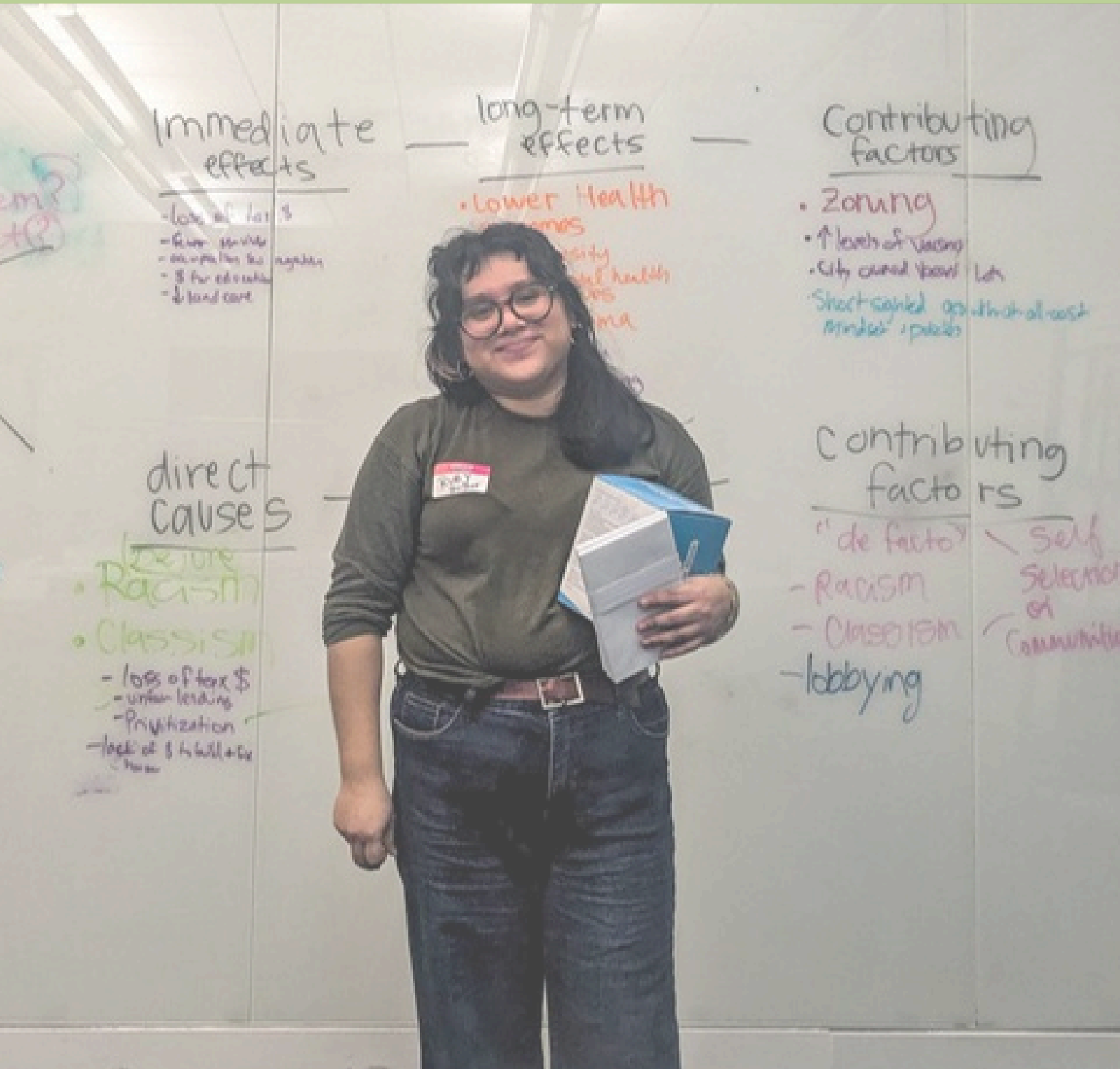
# VACANT LAND ADVOCACY NETWORK

The Vacant Land Advocacy Network (VLAN) is a coalition of resident advocates who champion solutions to vacant land issues in the Pittsburgh area. With over 100 active members, VLAN aims to harness our collective power to advocate for meaningful change. Through VLAN's workshops, calls to action, and events to speak to policymakers, Grounded will provide members with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities to participate in policy-making and development that shape their neighborhoods and communities.

Grounded believes that residents in hypervacant communities have the best insight on what changes will be most effective in addressing vacant and abandoned properties in their neighborhoods. With Grounded's expertise in urban vacant land reuse and our connections to residents across the city and county, we believe that the Vacant Land Advocacy Network can create catalytic change in the communities that have been most impacted by hypervacancy.



In November we hosted our first VLAN workshop series. Together, residents from across Pittsburgh came to learn, share, and create a narrative to move publicly owned vacant land into community-led reuse. From mapping our communities' assets to deconstructing the "urban blight" narrative, this series showed the power of people-led advocacy in creating meaningful change.





# GROUNDING IN JOY





# ROOTED IN RESOLVE

In September, Grounded experienced a significant setback when our tool shed was broken into and essential tools, critical to our nonprofit's operations, were stolen – including our truck. Despite this, we were able to continue our work and finish the working season strong. With the help of generous individual, corporate and foundation donors, we were able to raise over \$25,000 as well as accept a number of tool donations.





# ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORTERS

## ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS

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Allegheny County Conservation District  
Allegheny Cleanways  
Allegheny Goatscape  
Allegheny Land Trust  
Braddock Youth Project  
Canopy Alliance  
Carnegie Mellon University  
City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning  
Duquesne Light Company  
EvolveEA  
Get The Lead Out  
Grow Pittsburgh  
Hill District CDC  
Hill District Consensus Group  
Landforce  
Larimer Consensus Group  
Neighborhood Allies  
Pennsylvania State University  
Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group  
Pittsburgh Land Bank  
Pittsburgh Operations Network of Nonprofits  
University of Pittsburgh  
UrbanKind Institute  
Wilkinsburg CDC

## ORGANIZATIONAL & FOUNDATION FUNDERS

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BNY  
Bureau of Land Management  
Colcom Foundation  
Duquesne Light Company  
Heinz Endowments  
Laurel Foundation  
McAuley Ministries  
Pittsburgh Foundation  
PNC Charitable Trusts  
Remake Learning  
Trace Brewing  
Women for a Healthy Environment

## INDIVIDUAL DONORS

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Aaron Gray  
Adam Aston  
Ali Greenholt  
Ann Brooks  
Anne Marie  
Autumn Walker  
Barrie Mars

Becky Hooman  
Beth Slagle  
Brett Kelly  
Brian D Smith  
Brian Lawrence  
Caily Grube  
Cathrine H Southworth  
Cheryl Chalmers  
Clark Outridge  
Covenant Fellowship RP Church  
Craig Brooks  
Craig Marcus  
Dana Kuhnline  
Danelle Ardell  
Danielle Crumine  
Dawn and Chris Fleischner  
Debra Stewart  
Denny Gonzalez  
Elena Swann  
Elizabeth W Mohsenian  
Frederick Thieman  
Gabrielle DeMarchi

Gordon Henderson  
Greentech Rising Org  
Ian Kane  
James Snow  
Jamil Bey  
Jennifer Schnakenberg  
Joel Prickett  
John Y Rhoades  
Julia Saintz  
Julia Tedjeske  
Justin Rothermel  
Kelsey Ripper  
Laura Almendinger  
Laura Nappi  
Lauren Sacha  
Marcia Thomas  
Maren Cooke  
Margaret Graham  
Mary Kate Bartley  
Miriam Parson  
Nancy Crouse

Nathan Wildfire  
Nicholas Pantalone  
Nicolette Garcia-Pawlowski  
Noam Fischhoff  
Patricia DeMarco  
Patricia V Harris  
Patrick Campbell  
Richard Brown  
Richard Stewart  
Sarah Hoover  
Sharon Adan  
Sherman Lam  
Shondricka Burrell  
Sidney Kushner  
Stephanie Dangel  
Teresa Mueller  
Tiffany Wilhelm  
Toni Felice  
Vicki Sheridan  
Virginia McGrath  
William O'Donnell  
Xander Orenstein

**A special thank you to Nathan Scigliano, Patrick Campbell, and Dusquesne Light Bridge BERG for donating tools after the Grounded shed was broken into in September and the majority of our tools were stolen.**

## BOARD MEMBERS

Beth A. Slagle  
Charles Goodwin  
Chris Koch  
Darnell Moses  
Dr. Danielle Andrews-Brown  
Dr. Shondrika Burrell  
Gordon Hodnett  
James Langton  
James Sheehan  
Nick Pantalone  
Teresa Mueller

## STAFF

Greg McAuliffe  
Kelly Henderson  
Khadiza Massey  
Leeretta Payne  
Lisa Blackburn  
Masoud Sayles  
Ruby Velasco  
Shequaya Bailey  
Skylar McGinley  
Sophie Smith

## INTERNS & FELLOWS

Alexis Kennedy  
Claire Sullivan  
Paige Johnson  
Ra Heggins  
Wise Allen

## **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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