

Partners for Places Project Lessons Report

Project Name: *Green Infrastructure and Water Conservation for Low-Income Neighborhoods*

- **Year Complete:** 2019
- **Local Government:** City of Grand Rapids, MI
- **Local Foundation:** The Wege Foundation

Project Purpose

To develop a strategy for implementation of residential green infrastructure practices and reduction in water utility costs.

Key Lessons Learned

Lessons learned about tools and tactics through the project that other sustainability directors could use to advance their work.

- The proposed project audience needs to be at the table from the very beginning of the project, ideally at the grant-writing stage. Invite additional community representatives to be a part of the internal partner meetings and help guide the conversations, questions, and decisions.
- Strive to prioritize process over implementation and take a more bottom-up approach by focusing on community-oriented organizations and learn from how they engage with communities in the area. Navigating the expectations of environmental/water-focused organizations while maintaining a focus on successful bottom-up engagement strategies can be tricky. Questioning how to approach each step of the process, how to conceive of engagement, and who to have at the table was instrumental in helping to build a new way forward. Ongoing communication with partners is key.
- A holistic approach means that the project needs to look at the community as a whole, not just the community leaders. It's important to connect to the neighborhoods and residents. If you want to build relationships within neighborhoods and communities, it is important to have a presence at community events. Connecting with one or two leaders is not a substitute for authentic relationship-building. Neighborhood leaders are important resources, but an approach that doesn't include broader community participation is going to struggle to build relationships and momentum within neighborhoods.

Additional Information and Resources

Learn more about the City of Grand Rapids sustainability efforts [here](#).