URBAN WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2018, Surdna's Sustainable Environments program announced two refined strategies: *Environmental and Climate Justice* **and** *Land Use Through Community Power.* **Grantmaking going forward will build on the lessons of prior next-generation infrastructure strategies and invest in the capacity of environmental and climate justice frontline and grassroots movements, particularly led by people of color. Surdna strives to support communities' control, ownership, and stewardship of land and infrastructure assets.**

For six years, one of the Sustainable Environments grantmaking strategies supported cities' efforts to manage stormwater with green infrastructure. It invested over $10 million toward this end; worked with 30+ grantee partners; saw a new national professional network flourish; and celebrated the successes of on-the-ground pilot projects across various regions. This paper recaps a few of the lessons learned.

The context

In 2012, dozens of U.S. cities were facing a daunting problem: wastewater and stormwater flowed directly into rivers and lakes, untreated, during times of heavy rainfall. This issue – known as *combined sewage overflow* – and other deteriorating urban infrastructure were drawing attention. The EPA began issuing consent decrees to cities that mandated water system improvements, enforced by hefty fines. At the time, most federal and state infrastructure resources were earmarked toward *grey infrastructure*, replicating the same kinds of pipes and roads always used. But a handful of city officials and advocates were experimenting with **green infrastructure**. Green infrastructure – capturing stormwater where it falls – brought multiple local benefits, such as brownfield remediation, new open space, and opportunities for communities to generate economic value.

The goals

Alongside partners, Surdna developed a strategy to help cities and towns across the country utilize green infrastructure tactics to manage stormwater. The program invested in local pilot projects, city officials adopting green infrastructure and their networks, and innovative financing methods. It was especially interested in approaches with co-benefits – such as improved quality of life, asset building, and participatory decision making – in low-wealth communities and communities of color.

Photo: PUSH Buffalo

> ### Surdna's urban water portfolio
> 2012-2018
> - 56 grants to 33 grantee partners
> - $10.5M total grant investment
> - Selected grantee partners: Foundation for Louisiana, Pittsburgh United, Climate Interactive, Greater New Orleans Foundation, PUSH Buffalo, Center for Neighborhood Technology, and Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange

What the field accomplished
A snapshot

Advocates and practitioners – across the country in places such as Portland, Oregon; New Orleans; Pittsburgh; and Buffalo –implemented **trend-setting projects**, with **local decision-making power and benefits** in low-wealth communities and communities of color.

Surdna's partners have developed ways to **measure** the multiple benefits of green infrastructure and made them **widely known.** These benefits include open space and other assets, reducing the ambient temperature, reducing flooding, high-road job creation, and community connections.

In Philadelphia, New Orleans, Seattle, and elsewhere, using green infrastructure for water management is **best practice.** And local government leaders from across the country are **networked** and spreading their ideas.

> *What is green infrastructure?* For Surdna, this refers to any receptacle, natural or built, that captures rainwater where it falls, rather than directing it into a local wastewater system.
> Examples include: bioswales, rain gardens, green roofs, and semi-permeable concrete surfaces.

Urban water infrastructure: What the field learned

• The power of networks: At the local and regional level, as well as nationally, strong networks were key to professionalizing a field and spreading practices.

• Change the story: Conventional grey infrastructure once seemed like the obvious solution. Decision makers now routinely talk about green infrastructure's multiple benefits.

• Technical fixes aren't enough: These challenges require groups and institutions to change practices and policies.

• Water and climate: Green infrastructure is a climate justice solution; new partnerships can advance both goals.

• Reveal power structures: Staff started asking, "Who benefits? Who makes decisions? Who has ownership?"

• Every water project, especially in environmental justice communities, is an opportunity to close racial and economic disparities and to shift power.

• Tangible solutions inspire: Local demonstration projects have a ripple effect. Once communities see what's possible, change can move from the ground up.

• Financing remains a barrier to scaling up.

• Create the container: Collaborative efforts that center disinvested communities and build trust, if resourced and maintained, can lead to transformative change.

Photo: PUSH Buffalo

▲ Grantee spotlight: PUSH Buffalo

Buffalo residents have known for years that the city's outdated gray infrastructure was affecting them; sewage periodically contaminates areas of the river and canal where families play, swim, and fish. Because of resident interest in addressing the environmental justice challenge of combined sewage overflow, PUSH Buffalo (People United for Sustainable Housing) launched a program in 2013 to implement green stormwater infrastructure solutions. PUSH's social enterprise landscaping business builds structures that capture rainwater where it falls, creating local jobs. The project has trained a dozen Buffalo residents; installed over 200 stormwater retention systems across the city; and made numerous vacant sites usable for recreation in the process. All of PUSH's programs advance community ownership and control of infrastructure.

▼ Grantee spotlight: Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange

"In 2012, there was no real template to follow," says Paula Connolly, Director of the Green Infrastructure Learning Exchange. Early adopters – like Paula, who was working with the City of Philadelphia at the time, and her colleagues – knew that green infrastructure could address the water management challenges that many municipalities were facing, while creating multiple benefits in communities. But the list of questions was still a mile long. Planners, policy makers, and engineers were working together to build new partnerships, protocols, and financing arrangements from scratch. There were design details, implementation plans, and maintenance best practices to write. Everything was new and there was nowhere to look for answers.

A few years later, 150+ green stormwater infrastructure practitioners from 45 municipalities came together for the first time to share their technical and policy solutions, and a network was born. At first, the Exchange was a loose and informal set of peers swapping ideas. In 2018, it is a formal, highly connected, highly effective group, whose members are committed to learning from each other and spreading green stormwater infrastructure practices.
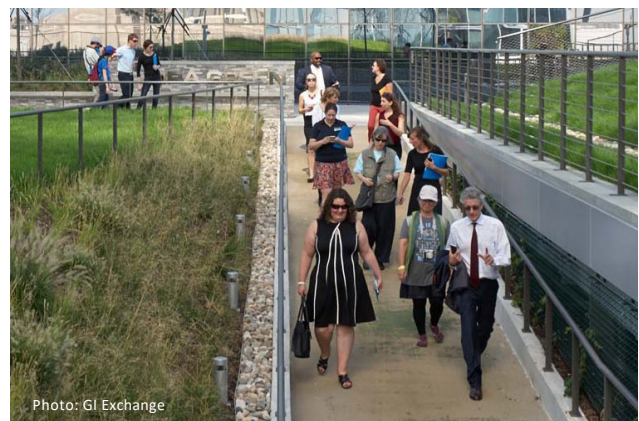

Photo: GI Exchange

What's next for Surdna

Surdna's Sustainable Environments program launched two refined strategies in the summer of 2018. *Environmental and Climate Justice* will support power building in low-wealth communities and communities of color to pursue a just transition from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy, encompassing a range of climate solutions. *Land Use Through Community Power* will increase control, ownership, and stewardship of land and infrastructure. While the Foundation has transitioned away from its prior urban water strategy, the new direction builds on the lessons from six years of green stormwater infrastructure partnerships.

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

In 2018, Surdna's Sustainable Environments program announced two refined strategies: *Environmental and Climate Justice* and *Land Use Through Community Power*. Grantmaking going forward will build on the lessons of prior next-generation infrastructure strategies and will invest in the capacity of environmental and climate justice frontline and grassroots movements, particularly led by people of color. Surdna strives to support communities' control, ownership, and stewardship of land and infrastructure assets.

As one pathway to just and sustainable communities, Surdna launched a Regional Food Systems grantmaking focus in 2012. For close to six years the institution invested $7+ million dollars; collaborated with 24 grantee and borrower partners; and helped food hubs in at least 5 cities expand their reach, connecting regional supply with urban demand. This summary describes what Surdna and its partners learned.

The context

When Surdna began researching sustainable and equitable food systems, it was an exciting moment in the field. Michelle Obama had a healthy food agenda and was drawing attention to the issue. Urban planners were starting to consider food systems, regionally. A handful of mayors had full-time food policy advisors and were making transformative investments. Decision makers were becoming aware of *food deserts* in communities of color.

At the same time, food still took long journeys from soil to plate, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Food supply chains were convoluted, small farmers faced steep barriers to entry, and inequity was baked in at every step.

Photo: SAAFON

What the field accomplished
A snapshot

Food hubs flourished, connecting small and mid-sized farms and other suppliers to a market that was ready for more local, fresh, affordable options. Projects in Philadelphia and Detroit grew.

Financial resources flowed in new ways. The USDA made **more investments in low-wealth farmers and farmers of color**. And philanthropy and private capital provided loans to budding food hub enterprises.

Advocates created **on-the-ground solutions in communities of color** and low-wealth communities. Black and indigenous farmers grew their businesses and expanded ownership.

Values-driven food hub practitioners connected with each other, shared ideas, and built new **networks** to improve their process and results.

Surdna's regional food portfolio
2011-2018

- 48 grants to 24 grantee partners
- $7.3M total in grants
- $1.25M in two Program-Related Investments
- Selected grantee partners: The Reinvestment Fund, RSF Social Finance, Corbin Hill Food Project, Land Loss Prevention Project, Southeast African American Farmers' Organic Network, Center for Heirs Property Preservation

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The goals

Surdna aimed to advance food aggregation and distribution patterns to **better connect regional food growers, producers, and processors to regional markets**. The vision was strong urban-rural connections and short food supply chains. The program's primary approach to that end was investing in food hubs. It partnered with advocates, cities, and economic development agencies.

What is a food hub?
A food hub is a business or organization that manages the aggregation and distribution of food from regional producers to meet the demand from both retail and institutional consumers.

Regional food systems:
What the field learned

- Fostering engagement: Food hubs in their best form are more than efficient spaces and truck routes; they are civic leadership spaces that can confront barriers to building a sustainable, just food system.

- Food and equity: The food system has disparate impacts on people of color. Race plays a historic and current role in healthy food access and land ownership.

- Revealing power structures: After considering both supply and demand, Surdna went deeper. Staff started asking: Who benefits? Who makes decisions? Who has ownership?

- Geography matters: Small farmers in the South – particularly Black farmers – have a unique history and face specific barriers to building wealth.

- Funders working together: In New York City, a regional funder group (Community Food Funders) strengthened partnerships with grantee organizations and impact.

- Racial equity in everyday practice: An implementation guide, developed collaboratively, helped food hubs consider race and equity in operational decisions.

Grantee spotlights: The Common Market

Haile Johnston and Tatiana Garcia Granados were initially leading programs for local youth in Philadelphia to explore healthy, sustainable food options. But the city's public health challenges demanded a more systemic approach to increase food access. "We realized that the best place to reach people who needed food the most was through the institutions that serve them in our communities," says Haile. Together, they created The Common Market, to aggregate food from local, sustainable growers and producers and make it available to schools, universities, hospitals, and elder care facilities – institutions that collectively serve several million meals per year in the metro area alone.

Since 2016, The Common Market has extended its footprint. Its Mid-Atlantic chapter reaches institutions and communities from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. And Common Market Georgia, which has replicated the food hub model in Atlanta, is on a trajectory toward becoming financially self-sustaining. In both regions, food access, public health improved and small, family-owned farms became stronger. ▼

Grantee spotlight: SAAFON

In 2006, when there were only a handful of certified organic Black farmers in southern states, two organic farming experts offered a training. The workshop was well received, demand shot up, trainings continued, and, eventually, the facilitators formed the Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON). Now a membership organization of 120 across eight states, SAAFON builds the capacity of Black organic and sustainable farms through technical assistance, certification, alternative financing, and advocacy. It strives to support Black organic farmers' financial success and to benefit Black communities by increasing their access to healthy foods and to greater economic opportunities through jobs and contracts in the food supply chain. ▶

Photo: The Common Market

Photo: SAAFON

What's next for Surdna

In 2018, Surdna's Sustainable Environments program announced two refined strategies. Its *Environmental and Climate Justice* grantmaking will include power building in low-wealth communities and communities of color that are expanding food justice, among other issues. Investments in *Land Use Through Community Power* promotes control, ownership, and stewardship among Black, indigenous, and other low-wealth farmers. Lessons learned from food hub partnerships shaped this next phase.

TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS AND EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

In the 1990s, Surdna was one of a few foundations that recognized that people's lives are at the center of environmental issues and that the environment is a determinant of how people thrive. It supported, for example, transforming transportation and development patterns as an essential step to curb climate change, as well as improve people's access and mobility options. Between 1989 and 2018, the foundation's approach to transit and land use investments adapted to an evolving field – encompassing investments in smart growth, multi-modal transportation, next-generation infrastructure, and transit justice movement building.

Surdna's Sustainable Environments program has two refined strategies as of 2018: *Environmental & Climate Justice* and *Land Use Through Community Power*. The lessons of its years of transportation and equitable development investments shaped both focus areas. Going forward, Surdna will support the power of communities of color and low-wealth communities and increase community control, ownership, and stewardship of land and infrastructure.

The context

The U.S. made substantial infrastructure investments in the 1950s, primarily in highways, which connected the country – but putting more cars on the road led to increased carbon emissions and other air pollutants with them and cut countless communities of color off from social connection and economic opportunity. Decades of government-spurred disinvestment in urban cores have only heightened racial segregation and poverty. More recently, rapid reinvestment in some cities is again displacing low-wealth residents and those unable to own. Federal funds still follow out-of-date rules, going primarily to unhealthy, unsustainable transportation and development practices.

The goals

Building on a history of funding in smart growth and transit, Surdna launched its Transportation Networks and Equitable Development Patterns portfolio in 2012. Its long-term goals, then, were efficient, affordable, and accessible networks in all major metropolitan areas. Through the foundation's investments, it aimed to support equitable, low-carbon development patterns in cities and inner-ring suburbs; planning and policy decisions that would lead to community and economic benefits; and increased quality of life in transit-dependent communities.

Surdna's transportation networks and equitable development portfolio

- 1989-2018: $85M+ to 200 grantee partners across transportation, land use, development
- 2012-2018: 50 grants totaling $10M+
- Selected grantee partners: ISAIAH, Jobs to Move America, Partnership for Southern Equity, Public Advocates, Right to the City, Smart Growth America, Transportation Choices Coalition, Transportation for America
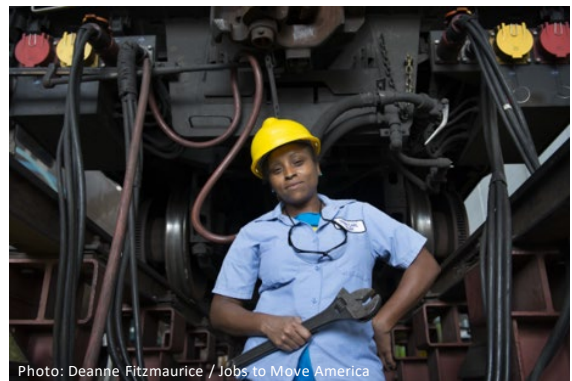

Photo: Deanne Fitzmaurice / Jobs to Move America

What the field accomplished
A snapshot

Far-reaching **movement building** – including faith-based organizing – shored up a base to advocate for sustainability and equity provisions in federal transportation bills and public sector practice. Organized communities are now better poised for action at the local and regional level.

Community members and practitioners – including in Seattle, Boston, St. Paul, the Bay Area, and Atlanta – led **advocacy** to transform outdated transit policies and practices, resulting in lower greenhouse gas emissions and more transportation options.

Voters educated on the issue weighed in and were strongly in favor of resourcing sustainable, equitable transit, via **local ballot measures**.

In the San Francisco area, the Six Wins for Social Equity Network ensured that **local investment decisions** would **advance equity**; 30+ community organizations from different fields contributed to its equitable regional transportation and land use platform.

With federal encouragement, cities prioritized domestic purchasing and local labor in **transportation manufacturing** contracts.

Transportation and equitable development:
What the field learned

•Climate: Transit and development solutions reduced greenhouse gas emissions and increased access to opportunities in some communities. Often, these benefits didn't reach communities of color.

• Unintended consequences: Well-intentioned *smart growth* policies contributed to gentrification and displacement.

•Many low-wealth communities are tackling multiple issues at once: Where people live and how they get around are components of multi-issue campaigns.

•Movement building beyond the bill: Organizing communities to voice views on a particular policy issue has lasting, multi-issue benefits, locally and regionally.

•Measure to ensure equity: Project performance standards can be a powerful tool, shaping where federal transportation and local infrastructure dollars go.

•Large-scale systems require large-scale manufacturing: Leverage the purchasing power of transit to keep manufacturing jobs local.

•Act local: Municipal ballot measures are valuable levers for resourcing transit.

•Lack of control and ownership of land: Communities of color and low-wealth communities are often severely limited in their ability to self-determine and influence development and infrastructure investments.

Photo: Right to the City Alliance

What's next for Surdna

Surdna's Sustainable Environments program announced, in 2018, an *Environmental and Climate Justice* strategy, which will include efforts to reduce carbon emissions and co-pollutants. The complementary strategy, *Land Use Through Community Power,* has at its center the lessons learned from this transportation and equitable development portfolio. Through it, Surdna will support the power of communities of color and low-wealth communities and increase control, ownership, and stewardship of land and infrastructure. The Foundation has transitioned away from its prior transportation and development strategy; its new priorities will reflect decades of insights from the transportation infrastructure field.

Photo: Bruce Englehardt (SounderBruce)

▲ Grantee spotlight: Transportation Choices

Transportation Choices and partner Futurewise are part of a statewide Washington coalition working to bring residents more opportunities to take a bus, catch a train, walk, and bike—real transportation choices that connect people with jobs, housing, and each other. Working with other organizations, Transportation Choices and Futurewise shaped a substantial rail and bus transit expansion package, incorporating equity and sustainability priorities. After an intensive community engagement and communications push, the $54 billion plan appeared on the ballot in 2016 and voters approved it. This transit expansion – Washington State's biggest infrastructure investment ever – will connect the region's major cities and job centers, increasing accessibility, building equitable economic opportunity, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

◄ Grantee spotlight: Right to the City Alliance

In cities all over the country, low-income families and communities of color are being displaced by an influx of unaffordable housing. An onslaught of disinvestment, rezoning, and land use policy decisions is restricting communities' ability to thrive. And in the face of these challenges, neighbors are banding together. In city after city – San Francisco, St. Louis, Detroit, and Jackson – residents and organizers are responding to gentrification, displacement, and affordable housing crises. These groups share a belief that everyone in the city, particularly the disenfranchised, has a right to it—to shape it, design it, and put a social justice agenda into practice. Right to the City Alliance connects these racial, economic, and environmental justice groups, nationally, to accomplish more together. Calling this approach "trans-local," Right to the City promotes a national vision and narrative of equitable and democratic community development; deepens and grows models for community control and stewardship of critical infrastructure; and builds regional and state-level power to drive change.