

GROUNDWORK USA

Changing Places Changing Lives

June 2001

A CALL FOR ACTION

Despite a decade of unparalleled economic expansion, hundreds of inner city and rural communities across America remain mired in poverty and blight. In both inner cities and rural areas, quality of life depends on the health of their natural environment as much as housing, education, jobs and health care, yet it receives less attention. Tattered playgrounds, derelict vacant lots, asphalt covered school grounds and chain-linked brownfields continue to take their toll. They sap the optimism and vitality needed to attract new investments and sustain on-going rejuvenation efforts. With scarce resources, public agencies are less able to care for the public landscape, let alone those areas abandoned by the private sector. Few community-based organizations have the expertise or resources to help out. A new approach is needed.

GROUNDWORK USA, a national non-profit corporation, coordinates and promotes the network of Groundwork Trusts. It provides the Trusts with needed services, including staff development, funding support and technical assistance, to ensure each Trust is an effective, credible and valued partner within their community.

The mission of the Groundwork USA network is to bring about the sustained regeneration, improvement and management of the physical environment by developing community-based partnerships which empower people, businesses and organizations to promote environmental, economic and social well-being.



GROUNDWORK ANSWERS THE CALL

Groundwork USA is filling the void by establishing a network of independent, not-for-profit, environmental businesses called **Groundwork Trusts**. Locally organized and controlled, Groundwork Trusts provide cost effective project development services focused on improving their communities' environment, economy and quality of life through local action. Services include community planning, project management, design and construction, fundraising, and support for maintenance. Each Trust represents a strong partnership between government, business, foundations, community groups and residents. Projects serve a common agenda and are designed to accomplish other goals such as job training and environmental education. All projects and activities of Groundwork are carried out through a creative mix of staff and volunteers to leverage resources and engage businesses and residents in the transformation of their own communities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE GROUNDWORK USA NETWORK

1. Increase the capacity of communities to improve and care for their local environment.
2. Reclaim vacant and derelict lands for conservation, recreation and economic development.
3. Clean up and care for neglected areas to signal community pride and rejuvenation.
4. Return brownfields to economically productive use while restoring blighted landscapes with healthy environments.
5. Integrate environmental education and job training into projects it undertakes.
6. Engage business, government, non-profits and communities to work together for sustainable environmental care and enhancement.
7. Support business, nonprofit, government and community efforts to improve their local environment.
8. Raise the profile of urban environmental improvements as part of a comprehensive approach to smart growth strategies and rejuvenation of inner city communities.
9. Insure projects look as good or better in five years as they do on the day of completion.



GROUNDWORK USA AT A GLANCE

What we do

Groundwork's purpose is to help communities build upon their existing assets to eliminate environmental poverty and become vibrant, healthy and safe places where individuals and enterprise prosper. We believe people, places and prosperity are inextricably linked. We work with our partners to develop projects, which bring benefits to all three areas.

- ❖ **For people** – *creating opportunities for people to learn new skills and take local action*
- ❖ **For places** – *creating better, safer and healthier neighborhoods*
- ❖ **For prosperity** – *helping business and individuals fulfill their potential*

Where we work

Groundwork Trust projects and activities are organized into six program areas as part of our integrated approach to community rejuvenation.

- ❖ **Land** – *We help people transform derelict land and wasted public space into valued community assets such as pocket parks, community gardens, recreation facilities and nature preserves.*
- ❖ **Brownfields** – *We partner with government agencies and the private sector to engage residents in the remediation of brownfields to build consensus on reusing these sites for community benefit.*
- ❖ **Education** – *We work with schools to improve their outdoor facilities for recreation and education. We help provide after school activities, which engage students in improving their community.*
- ❖ **Business** – *We work with businesses to enhance their sites, improve their environmental performance and involve them in volunteer service days benefiting their community.*
- ❖ **Youth** – *We work with young people to develop job and leadership skills by engaging them in our projects and programs as staff and volunteers.*
- ❖ **Communities** – *We make a long-term commitment to specific neighborhoods and work closely with other organizations and initiatives in those areas to maximize impact and improve quality of life.*

THE ROLE OF GROUNDWORK USA

Groundwork USA, our national office, coordinates the network and provides needed services to support the work of the Groundwork Trusts. It:

- ❖ **establishes** and oversees standards for the operations and activities of the Trusts,
- ❖ **builds** the capacity of local Trusts through technical assistance, staff training, program development, and networking,
- ❖ **engages** in creative new alliances and broadens partnerships on the national and regional level, and
- ❖ **creates** new public and private funding opportunities for the establishment new local Groundwork Trusts and to provide ongoing support for existing Trusts.

Groundwork Trusts provide cost effective project development services focused on improving the environment, economy and quality of life through local action.

BACKGROUND ON GROUNDWORK

In 1996, the National Park Service Rivers & Trails Program launched the **Groundwork USA** initiative recognizing its potential to build upon the human and environmental assets that can be found in every community. They were joined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Program to establish Groundwork pilot programs in three communities; Bridgeport, CT, Lawrence, MA and Providence, RI. Based on their success, three more pilots were established in Concord, NH, Somerville, MA and Yonkers, NY. In 1999, the Regional Plan Association joined the partnership to help establish the Groundwork USA national office to support the growing network of Groundwork Trusts.

THE US EXPERIENCE

Despite a decade of unparalleled economic expansion, hundreds of inner city and rural communities across America remain mired in poverty and blighted by decades of isolation and despair. Collectively, these residents share an inordinate burden of America's contaminated sites, substandard housing and blighted public spaces. Further, these communities often lack the tax base and public resources to support reinvestment and quality public services. Continuing disinvestment in these urban and rural places have left them increasingly isolated from the nation's economic and social mainstream.

Federal and state policies and civic efforts have long attempted to address the needs of these inner-city communities. Beginning in the mid-1990s the US Environmental Protection Agency and a number of states initiated "brownfield" reclamation programs designed to clean up and reuse contaminated sites. However, most clean ups have occurred, not in the neighborhoods most in need, but in downtown or suburban sites with strong market potential. This is a perfectly logical outcome, since private developers have ignored areas where the market for new development is weakest and the risks the greatest.

Over the past few years, there has been real momentum in these areas as businesses, community residents and city officials recognize the need for alternative strategies to address population shifts, the loss of industry and severe budget shortages. With small but critical first steps, Groundwork pilots are emerging throughout the country as a leading model to work as an ideal partner with business, government and the public to restore vitality and livability to our cities.



Groundwork USA is modeled after the successful British Groundwork movement. Since 1982, our British counterparts have transformed hundreds of blighted urban neighborhoods and the lives of hundreds of thousands of their residents.

Groundwork UK was established by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to promote local partnerships that could rebuild Britain's bypassed urban communities through community-led strategies. Today, there are 44 Trusts working to improve the environment, business climate and public spaces of Britain's urban communities. This network is coordinated by Groundwork UK, a body chartered by the British government, led by an influential board of directors, and supported by public, business and foundation funds. Groundwork UK has endorsed the establishment of **Groundwork USA** and the Groundwork USA network in an agreement signed on April 21, 2000 and is ready to assist.

OUR NATIONAL PARTNERS

Many different organizations and agencies are working together to develop the Groundwork USA network. Our national partners include:

- ❖ **US Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Program**
- ❖ **The National Park Service - Rivers & Trails Program.**
- ❖ **Regional Plan Association**



Get Involved in Groundwork

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