



Developing Diverse, Accessible Environmental Education Partnerships on an Organic Farm near Ann Arbor, MI

Client:

Nature and Nurture Seeds

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Abstract

This master's practicum is focused on helping Nature and Nurture Seeds (NNS), an organic seed farm, develop partnerships with environmental education organizations that will improve the client's ability to facilitate educational opportunities at the farm. The practicum team has used virtual interviews to learn from environmental and agricultural education practitioners in the southeast Michigan area. In particular, interviews have explored potential collaborations between NNS and the other organizations. The team has compiled the information we acquired about these organizations in a thorough reference guide, easily usable by the client when considering future collaboration. Furthermore, we have provided consultation on pathways to expand diversity, equity, and inclusion at the company. We hope that all of these efforts will not only create useful resources for the farmers at NNS, but also serve to introduce NNS to other organizations, beginning conversations that can lead to fruitful partnerships. Furthermore, we hope that the reference resources will be useful to organizations invested in environmental education across the region of Southeastern Michigan.

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Executive Summary

Through a comprehensive interview process, work with clients and advisors, and supplementary research, we have developed recommendations that will help Nature and Nurture Seeds (NNS) grow their educational reach with emphasis on the elements of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). To accomplish this, NNS staff should *soon* (1) join the local chapter of the Stewardship Network, which will help them develop partnerships; (2) reach out to stand-out interviewees to build relationships, particularly N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit, Hazon Detroit, and Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision; (3) implement a new tip option for customers at checkout to fund an expanded seed donation program; and (4) develop a DEI statement that can be shared with their community to broadcast their values and commitments. In addition, in the longer term we suggest (1) renovating the farm site to develop a sheltered classroom space with basic amenities like a restroom and kitchenette to expand partnership possibilities; (2) increasing the diversity of staff and volunteers through partnerships with key organizations, shifting recruitment platforms, and collaborative reflection on removing barriers; and (3) maintaining existing and exploring new partnerships to build a robust community of education and action around the farm.

Looking back to the beginning of 2021, our practicum was tasked with helping NNS expand their educational programming with particular attention to DEI. After speaking with farm staff and owners, we realized that the financial costs and development time of delivering self-produced educational programming could be prohibitive for the farmers. Because of this, we decided to pursue the goals of this project via collaboration with other organizations instead of the curriculum development requested in the initial proposal.

To find those organizations, our first task was interviewing people involved in environmental (and especially agricultural) education in the Southeast Michigan area. These interviews were designed for us to learn more about the practices of those organizations and to determine whether there existed potential for partnership between them and NNS. We reached out to a list of candidates found via internet research and suggested by our client and advisor, and used snowball sampling to expand that list based on interviewee recommendations. In total, we interviewed twenty-four of the approximately fifty candidates we reached out to over the course of the summer of 2021.

There were a number of common themes among these interviews, particularly related to partnerships, DEI, and funding. In general, the most common pathways for NNS to collaborate with interviewed organizations were by acting as expert guest speakers for programming hosted by others, to donate seeds to organizations positioned to distribute them based on community needs, and to serve as the host site for educational programming run by other organizations. The principles of DEI were almost universally stated to be a high priority among interviewees, and in fact many stated that it was important for potential collaborators to value those principles similarly. Finally,

we found that funding was the most common limiting factor for educational programming, and when it was removed or reduced it often resulted in program suspension or alteration.

From these commonalities and from direct interview questions, we developed general guidelines for pursuing collaborative relationships with interviewed organizations. In addition, we share a list of some of the standout interviewees who may merit immediate outreach, including SDEV, N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit, Hazon Detroit, Neha Shah, and the Stewardship Network. All of these interviewees expressed enthusiasm at the prospect of collaboration, identified productive pathways to partnership, and center DEI principles in their work. In addition, the Stewardship Network is a key to developing more partnerships--their mission is to connect environmental organizations and facilitate collaboration between them based on mutual exchanges that meet both partners' needs. In other words, we found a professional nonprofit that specializes in the work we set out to accomplish.

Because our practicum was tasked with centering DEI throughout our work, we also provided recommendations for how to expand the already impressive work of NNS to reach and support underserved communities. This is particularly important given the collaborative focus of this report--building a reputation for commitment to DEI can open doors to partnerships with similarly-minded others, and supporting organizations involved in DEI actions is a great way to have an impact beyond the capability of one's own sphere of influence. First, we provided guidance on how and why to develop a DEI Statement, which will allow NNS to refine and share its commitments and values. This section may also be useful to other organizations seeking to craft a DEI statement. Next, we suggest adding an option to allow online customers to donate a small sum toward a new seed donation fund. This would allow NNS to expand their existing seed donation program in proportion to customer support without significant cost. Finally, we suggest different avenues to increase the diversity of NNS staff and volunteers, including a shift from Handshake to other recruitment platforms, advertising positions through partners embedded in diverse communities, and reflective sessions with NNS staff to identify key barriers that could discourage diverse candidates from applying.

The second half of this report is composed of "directory" entries. For each interview we conducted, we synthesized key details about the organization's work, funding, audience, challenges, and potentials for partnership. It is our hope that this section in particular will be useful to the broader environmental education community of Southeastern Michigan, who may use it as a reference when considering forging their own collaborative relationships.

Introduction & Background

Section Overview

- Environmental and agricultural education are critical tools in addressing the environmental crises our world faces.
- Nature and Nurture Seeds, an organic seed company, is seeking to expand their educational programming through partnerships with other organizations, allowing them to reach broader audiences without costing the time and financial resources needed to run programs independently.

Environmental & Agricultural Education

Humans have severely degraded the planet's resources, and as a result, we face an uncertain future characterized by anthropogenic environmental challenges such as climate change, fossil fuel scarcity, and soil erosion (Parry et al., 2001). These issues require concerted action in all sectors of human life so that we can ensure the health of future generations (Weir, 2019). One critical theater of future work is on a local level, where communities must become resilient to the impacts of our climate emergency. Education is a central part of that effort, necessary for building awareness, motivating action, and providing procedural knowledge on how to move forward sustainably (De Young and Princen, 2012).

Environmental education is a field focused on cultivating a more sustainable world, mainly through encouraging systems thinking, lifelong learning, and interdisciplinary approaches to problem-solving. Environmental education comes in many forms, and can be conceptualized as including three pillars: environmental integrity, social equity, and shared prosperity ("About EE and Why It Matters," 2015). Environmental education aims to promote connectedness with nature by developing a deeper understanding of it, which is especially powerful in the case of youth education (Liefländer et al., 2013). Agricultural education is one sector of environmental education which narrows its scope to focus on teachings surrounding crop production, land management, and soil sciences (Barrick, 1989).

Agricultural education has a long history in America. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 allowed the establishment of Land-Grant institutions in each state, encouraging, among other things, agricultural education (Duemer, 1862). Although agricultural education is prominent in traditional academic settings, outdoor informal agricultural education is also recognized as a powerful form of learning (Meals & Washburn, 2015). Agroecology education is another subset of environmental education that is focused on the ecology of food systems. It is interdisciplinary and draws upon the fields of sociology, anthropology, environmental sciences, ethics, and economics

(Francis et al., 2003). Virtual agricultural education is another growing form of learning, especially useful in the context of disruptive events that limit in-person education like the contemporary Covid-19 pandemic. (Dahiya et al., 2016; Onyema et al., 2020).

The field of agricultural education lacks diversity from many racial, ethnic, cultural, and gender identities (Esters & Bowen, 2004). Increasing participation in agricultural education programs from people who have historically been left out of such programming is critical to navigating the coming climate crisis for two reasons. First, it will ensure that more communities have access to knowledge essential for self-sustenance. Second, it can create a forum for the cultural exchange of agricultural knowledge, so that communities can share and build upon the knowledge they hold.

Nature and Nurture Seeds

Nature and Nurture Seeds is an organic seed farm focused on producing heirloom seeds suitable for the Midwest region while incorporating agroecological practices into their work. The farm was founded and is owned and managed by Erica Kempter and Mike Levine. These two bring a rich variety of relevant experience, including ecological restoration, collegiate teaching, landscape architecture, and more. In addition to its founders, a dedicated team helps keep the farm running, including farm manager Michael Lordon and a team of interns and volunteers. The farm primarily grows crops for seeds, producing a wide range of fruits, vegetables, and grains, although the farmers have other projects ongoing at any given time like shiitake mushroom growing. The company has seen a recent expansion of its seed business in line with wider industry patterns of increasing seed sales in the wake of the Pandemic (Timmins, 2020).

Today, small agricultural companies often struggle to remain profitable, or even break even. In a 2012 United States Department of Agricultural census 75% of family owned small farms reported less than \$50,000 in gross income (USDA, 2012). It is generally more expensive to grow food using organic, ecologically-informed practices than it is to rely on industrially-produced fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery (Dayan & Duke, 2010). Running a small organic farm is already a major challenge in the modern U.S. Even more challenging is the prospect of incorporating environmental education, which is generally conducted by non-profits that rely on grant or foundational support (Thomson et al., 2003).

When we initially interviewed our clients at NNS, they expressed a desire to give back to their community and support or participate in environmental education. At the same time, they emphasized their limitations of time and financial resources, and so we decided together that it would be most useful for our practicum team to focus on developing partnerships with other organizations that might allow for mutually

beneficial exchange. The idea behind these partnerships is that organizations have particular expertise, tools, or other resources needed by other organizations, and that working together could allow both organizations to meet their needs better than they could alone.

In addition, NNS staff expressed a particular interest in reaching audiences that are typically underrepresented in the field of agricultural education. For this reason, we prioritized reaching out to organizations involved in environmental education and food growing for communities of color.

Methods

Section Overview

- To explore potentials for collaboration, we developed and iterated upon a questionnaire that was customized for each interview.
- To find interviewees, we used a combination of client and advisor recommendations, internet research, and snowball sampling.

We designed a semi-structured questionnaire of 14 questions for environmental education leaders in the Washtenaw County area. This questionnaire was revised numerous times, and our final version is found in Appendix 1. Key to developing the questionnaire was interviewing the owners of Nature and Nurture, Erica Kempter and Mike Levine, as well as Michael Lordon, our client liaison. Our advisor Ray de Young also provided input on building questionnaires and how to adapt them as we interviewed more folks. These questions were adapted for each interview based on feedback from previous interviewees and research on the specific individual or organization we spoke to. The interview questions revolved around three subject areas: the organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion practices; their current environmental education programs; and their interest in partnering with NNS. We planned for each interview to last between thirty and sixty minutes. We received approval through the University of Michigan's Internal Review Board to conduct this research; our ID is HUM00196428.

We received an initial list of interviewees from our advisor and client. Near the end of each interview we asked a question designed to support a respondent-driven or "snowball" sampling technique, asking about other individuals and organizations who were involved in environmental education in the Southeastern Michigan area.

Interviewees were offered a \$50 dollar gift card for an hour's worth of their time to be interviewed. All interviews were conducted on Zoom. We received permission from participants to record interviews. One researcher led each interview while the other took notes, with roles switching for each interview.

Results

Section Overview

- We reached out to approximately 50 interview candidates and conducted 24 interviews.
- There were several common themes across interviews, including the importance of funding, taking action in the realm of DEI, collaboration between organizations that share goals, lack of substantial monetary compensation for partners, and common focus on youth programming.
- This section includes tables and maps that identify and visualize interviewed organizations.

We reached out to approximately 50 potential interviewees. Some of this outreach did not result in interviews because interviewees had scheduling conflicts, did not believe they would be helpful, or did not respond to our requests.

We conducted 24 total interviews with environmental education leaders in the Washtenaw County area (Fig. 1). Interviews were conducted on zoom between June 3rd and August 18th. Interview durations ranged from fifteen minutes to an hour. Some organizations were represented by two interviewees, since our contacts believed that both individuals had important thoughts and experiences to share.

Qualitatively, there are few key takeaways from our interviews: (1) funding is an important indicator of an organization's ability to provide consistent environmental education programming, (2) many organizations make diversity, equity, and inclusion a focus by providing pathways for people with underrepresented identities to receive environmental education programming, (3) inter-organization collaboration is common in environmental education, and often manifests as sharing event space and guest speakers, (4) stipends for guest speaking or hosting events is uncommon and small when available, since local environmental education organizations often view this type of work as a community effort, and (5) the majority of organizations we spoke to put more emphasis on childhood environmental education than on programs for adults.

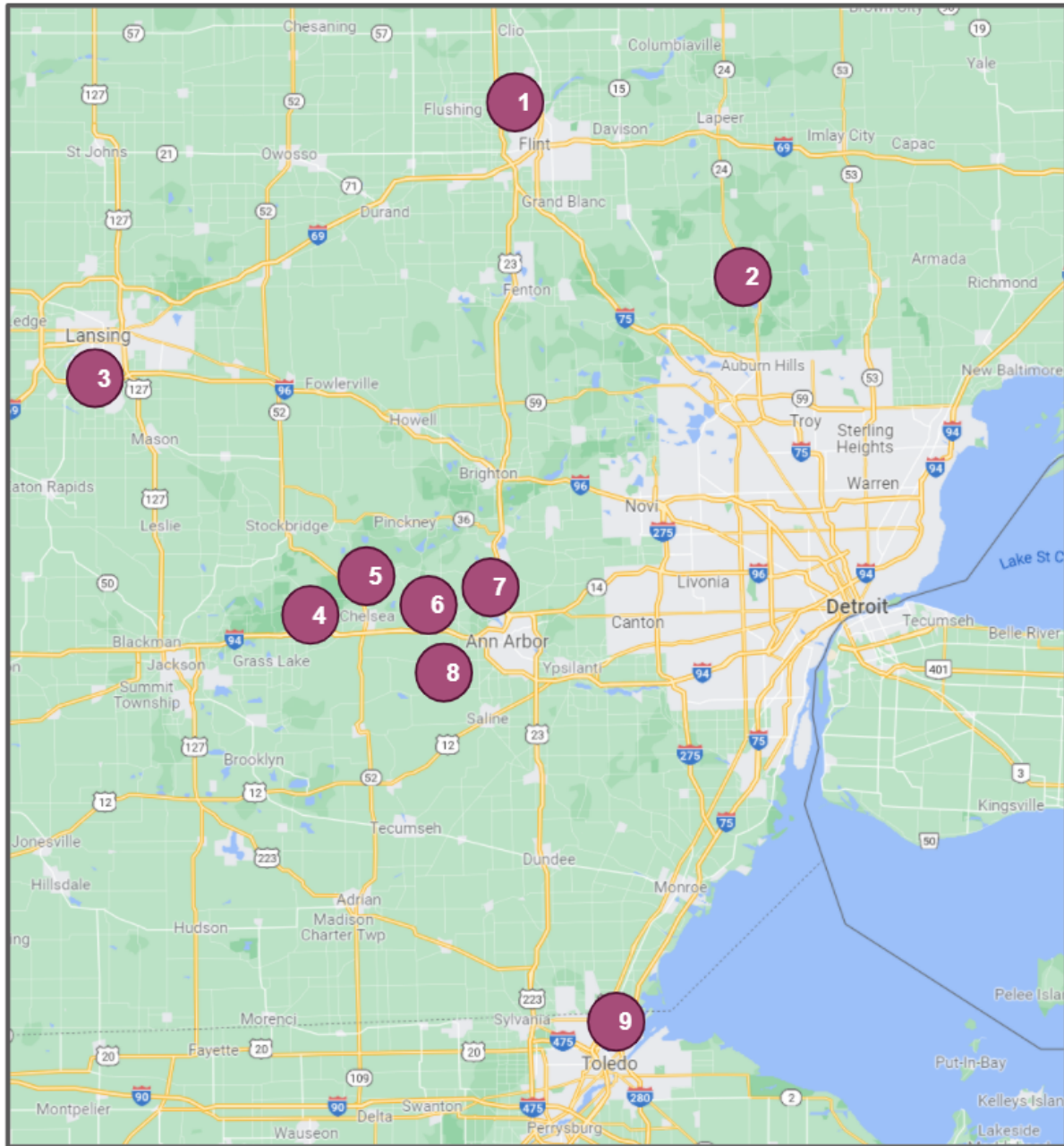
Fig. 1: The names of interviewees and the organization they were associated with for interviews conducted between June 3rd and August 18th.

Individual(s)	Organization
Mackenzie Munro	The Ecology Center
Jeff Tenza	Agrarian Adventure
Lisa Brush	Stewardship Network
Rowena Conahan	Nature Learning Community
Royer Held & Kirk Jones	Project Grow
Sarah Halson	Detroit Audubon
Deborah Fredericks	Dexter Garden Club
Kelly McClelland	Edible Flint
Shaun McKeon	MUCC Camp
Neha Shah	Ann Arbor Public Schools
Dolores Perales	Southwestern Detroit Environmental Vision
Kevin Frailey	MI Dept of Natural Resources
Wren Beaulieu-Hack	Hazon Detroit
Mary Hutka	Tollgate Farm 4H Club
Yvonne Dubielak	Toledo Grows
L'Oreal Williams	N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit
David Szczygiel & Coert Ambrosino	Freeman Center (AAPS)
Natalie Jakub	Green Living Science
Deanne Bednar	Strawbale Studio
Juliet Berger and Victor Chen	Washtenaw Audubon
Adam Kovsky	Robin Hills Farm
Laura Meisler	St. Joe's Farm
Amanda Lodge	Apple Play Schools
Summer Roberts	Washtenaw County Conservation District

Geography of Interviewees

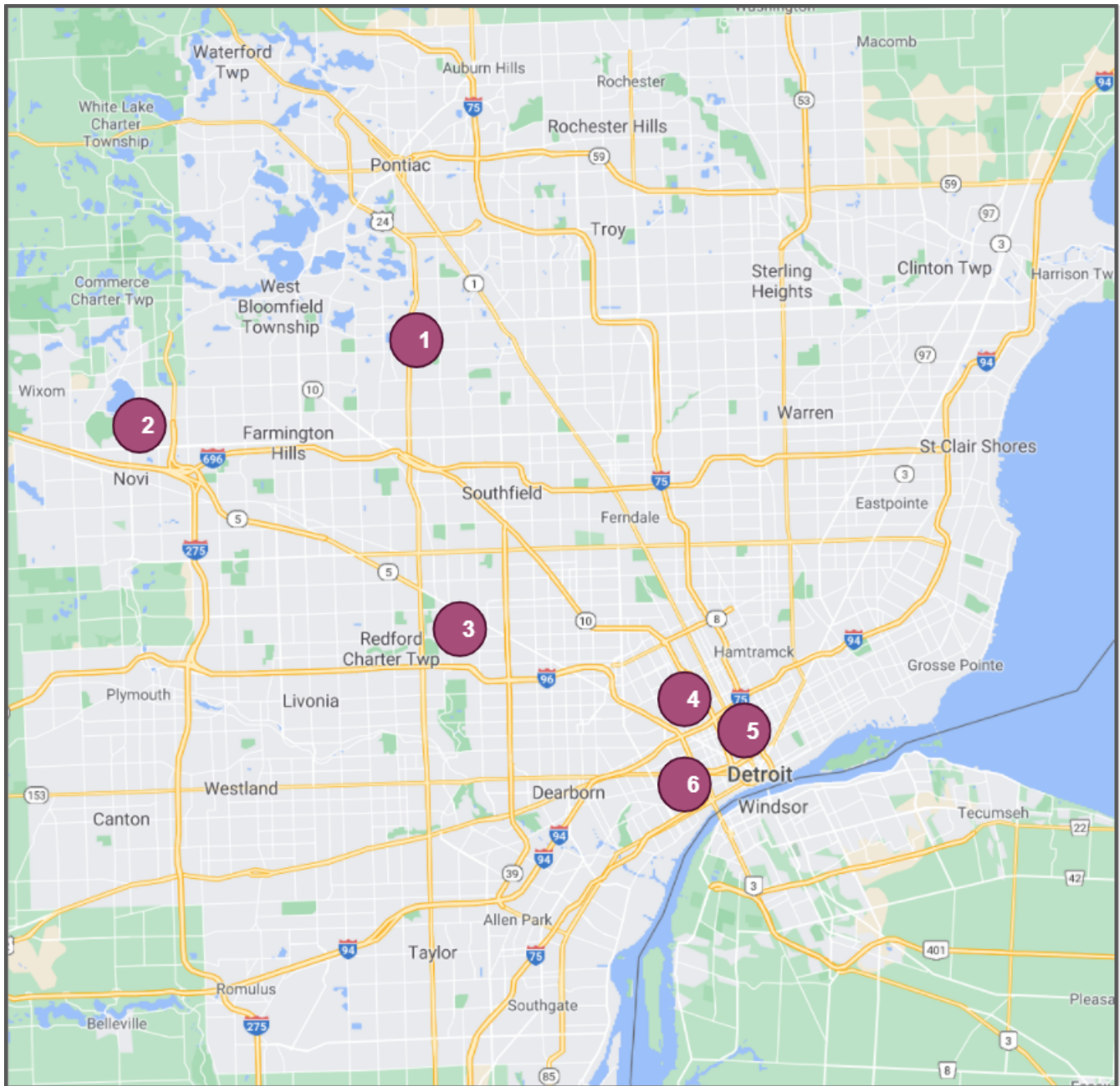
In the next few pages are maps representing the locations of organizations and individuals that we interviewed. These were primarily concentrated in Southeast Michigan, with clusters in both Ann Arbor and Detroit, so we have represented this information through three maps of varying scale. When reading these maps, note that their central purpose is to provide a general idea of an organization's location or where much of its work happens. However, some organizations run programming at multiple sites, and for others it was difficult to pin down a precise location. For those reasons, and also due to the difficulty of legibly representing closely-clustered groups, the numbers on the map should be understood as loose approximations of locations. Please also note the page numbers corresponding to each organization or individual's directory entry.

Southeastern Michigan



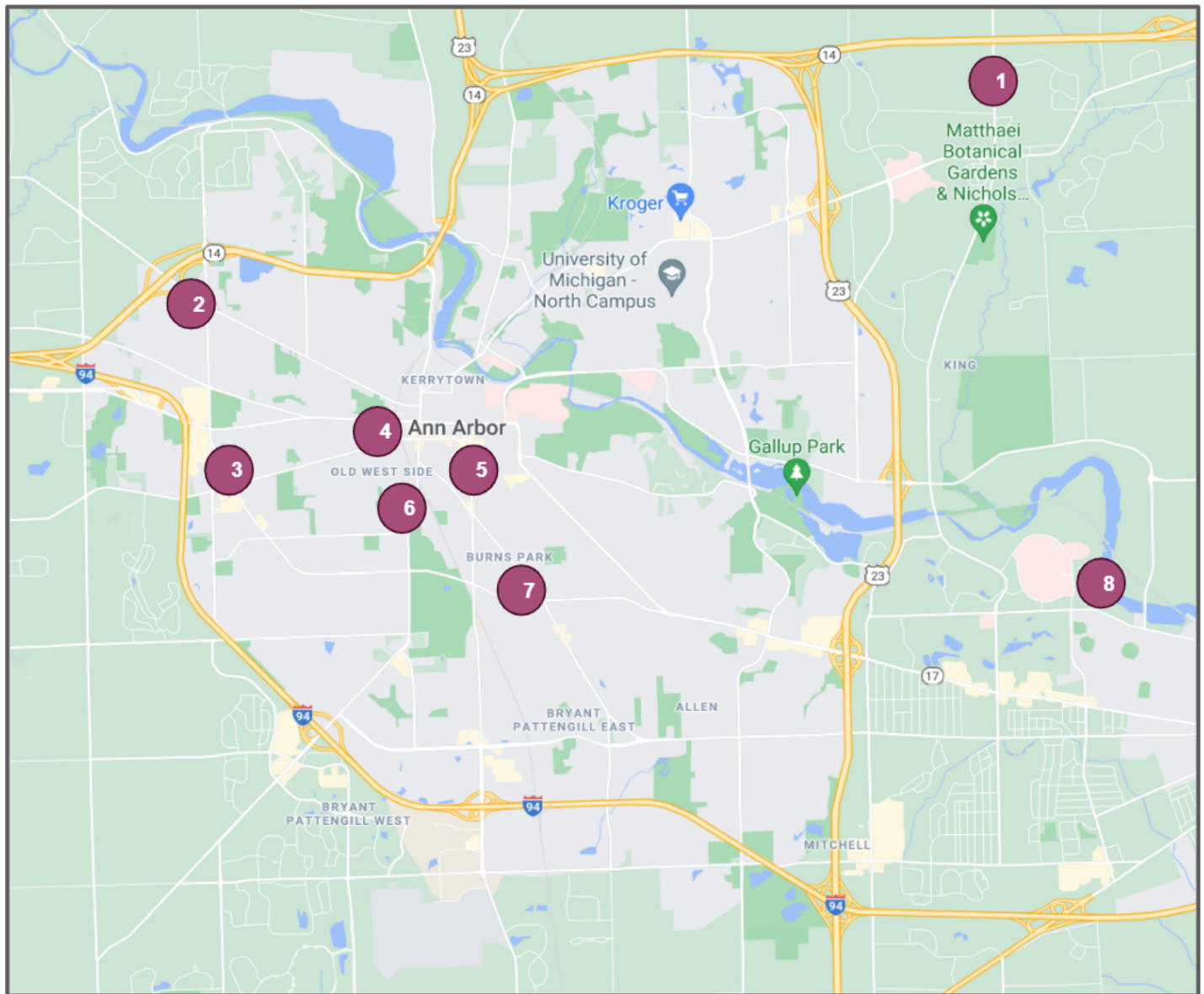
- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 1. | Edible Flint | pg. 40 |
| 2. | Strawbale Studio | pg. 54 |
| 3. | Michigan Department of Natural Resources | pg. 45 |
| 4. | MUCC Camp | pg. 46 |
| 5. | Robin Hills Farm | pg. 51 |
| 6. | Dexter Garden Club | pg. 38 |
| 7. | The Nature Learning Community | pg. 47 |
| 8. | Washtenaw County Conservation District | pg. 58 |
| 9. | Toledo Grows | pg. 55 |

Detroit Metro Area and Suburbs



- | | | |
|----|---|--------|
| 1. | Hazon Detroit | pg. 44 |
| 2. | Tollgate Farm 4H Club | pg. 56 |
| 3. | N.E.W.L.E.A.F. Detroit | pg. 49 |
| 4. | Green Living Science | pg. 43 |
| 5. | Detroit Audubon | pg. 37 |
| 6. | SDEV (Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision) | pg. 52 |

Ann Arbor



- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 1. | Freeman Center for Environmental Education | pg. 42 |
| 2. | Apple Play Schools | pg. 36 |
| 3. | Project Grow | pg. 50 |
| 4. | The Ecology Center | pg. 39 |
| 5. | Washtenaw Audubon | pg. 57 |
| 6. | Agrarian Adventure | pg. 35 |
| 7. | Neha Shah (Burns Park Elementary School) | pg. 48 |
| 8. | The Farm at St. Joe's | pg. 41 |

Discussion

Section Overview

- In this section we highlight certain findings, including details about how organizations fund their educational programs, why DEI efforts are important in this field and how they can facilitate collaboration, and the primary pathways we identified for NNS to use partnerships to expand their educational reach.
- We then identify four organizations or individuals that stood out should be reached out to soon: The Stewardship Network, Hazon Detroit, N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit, SDEV, and Neha Shah.
- Finally, we discuss the enormous impact that the Covid-19 Pandemic has had on interviewed organizations, including funding disruption, barriers to in-person programming, and even program suspensions.

Highlighted Findings

A key finding from our interviews is that an organization's funding structure has a major influence on its capacity for environmental education and the style of programming it is able to provide. Environmental education programming is rarely profitable (Thomson et al., 2003). Organizations generally have to rely on external funding sources in order to remain viable. Some organizations rely on grant funding from either their parent organization, the government, or non-governmental organizations (Hazon Detroit, Ecology Center, Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision). Other organizations may support themselves through registration or tuition fees for folks who attend events (Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Toledo Grows). Some organizations choose to profit indirectly from environmental education events by selling food and drinks or plants and produce near the site of education (Robin Hills Farm).

The topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have become more prominent recently as companies recognize their role in creating positive change and consumers look to support organizations that share their values (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). This trend persists in environmental education, which has historically lacked strong diversity, particularly in the areas of racial and ethnic diversity (Lewis & James, 1993; James, 1995). Among the organizations we spoke to there are varying levels of commitment and action under the DEI umbrella. Some organizations choose to provide environmental education to people of specific identities, like N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit which focuses on programming for Black and Indigenous People of Color. Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision meanwhile focuses on providing environmental education

and support to the Latinx and Black communities in Detroit. For many organizations we spoke to, a commitment to action in the space of DEI is not only appreciated but a prerequisite to successful partnership.

There are three key ways in which our interviewees thought they would like to collaborate with Nature and Nurture Seeds: (1) hiring NNS staff to speak as experts in the field of agriculture and ecology; (2) using the farm space for events; and (3) receiving donated or shared supplies such as seeds. Many organizations we spoke to host guest speakers who are experts in the areas of agriculture, ecology, and seed saving. Some of these organizations may be able to offer a stipend (Agrarian Adventure, Washtenaw County Conservation District), while others might ask for their speakers to donate their time as a form of service (Edible Flint, Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision). Although some speaking events do not directly provide stipends, these acts of service enrich partnerships and may lead to greater collaboration and advancement toward the collaborators' mutual goals. Some organizations we spoke to were interested in hosting events at the NNS farm space; these events may come in the form of a dinner (Farm at St. Joes, Green Living Science), walk about the farm (Ann Arbor Audubon Society, Detroit Audubon), or educational program (Hazon Detroit, N.E.W. L.E.A.F Detroit). Many interviewees spoke to the importance of having dedicated learning facilities (including a bathroom, heating and cooling, and a kitchenette) on site at NNS (Neha Shah, Washtenaw County Conservation District). Some of the organizations we spoke to were interested in working together to share resources and ideas (Stewardship Network, Hazon Detroit). Many organizations were interested in NNS's seed donation program since they already work to distribute seeds to folks who use them either for education (Apple Playschools, Tollgate Farm 4H Club) or for subsistence (Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision, Edible Flint).

Standout Interviews

We interviewed a large number of organizations who appeared to us to be a great fit for partnership with NNS and encountered a few who seemed like shoe-ins. While we encourage reading the directory entries to get to learn more about each of the organizations we interviewed, here we will include information about the organizations that clearly stood out as “no-brainers” for collaboration, focusing on mutual compatibility and how partnerships might function.

The Stewardship Network (Directory pg. 53)

When we began our project, we hoped to find passionate organizations involved in environmental education, but never expected to find a non-profit whose mission aligned exactly with the work of this project. The Stewardship Network is a national organization based in Ann Arbor that focuses on helping other environmental

nonprofits build cross-boundary collaboration to overcome challenges--the same strategy we took in trying to expand NNS's educational reach. Because of this surprising overlap, we want to particularly emphasize the potential that could come from working with this organization. We have already started lines of communication between NNS and the Stewardship Network, so the next steps would be joining their "Huron-Arbor Cluster" to make or deepen connections across the local environmental field.

Hazon Detroit (Directory pg. 44)

Hazon Detroit was recommended to us due to its existing connections to one of NNS's farmers. This is an organization that specializes in partnering with others, and has a long history of rich collaboration. Hazon brings to its partnerships a network of environmentally engaged citizens and a breadth of environmental education programming. Working with them could involve: sharing resources like seeds; serving as the home base for Hazon's biofuel bus program when it comes to Ann Arbor; or serving as the site for other environmental education programming. Our interviewee, Wren, expressed deep enthusiasm at the prospect of collaboration, which is another sign of how promising this partnership could be.

N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit (Directory pg. 49)

Our interview with L'Oreal was also characterized by promising enthusiasm as she presented a number of possibilities for working with NNS. She already has a strong connection to the farm as a teacher for the resident Nature Learning Community, and expressed personal interest in learning more about farm practices like seed-saving. N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit had already caught our attention as an organization invested in connecting Black and Indigenous people of color (BIPOC) to the environment, which aligns with NNS's goals to expand the DEI reach of their work. L'Oreal identified different levels of collaboration, from simpler tasks like getting advice from the farmers on improving N.E.W. L.E.A.F. 's urban farms to helping develop a summer camp or ongoing ecological experiment at NNS for children from her community. This is a partnership that we feel strongly could benefit everyone involved.

Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision (Directory pg. 52)

Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision (SDEV) is an institution in the city of Detroit which has provided after-school programs, education, and fresh produce to the community for over twenty years. While speaking with Dolores Perales it became clear that a partnership between SDEV and NNS would be mutually beneficial. Dolores shared that SDEV would be interested in hosting NNS for educational events (especially focused on improving the farm's yield) and partnering with NNS to donate seeds to

locals. Dolores spoke to how SDEV is trying to shift the local narrative away from the pervading belief that agricultural work is dirty and undesirable and toward a vision of health, community, and economic empowerment. She believes that hosting the farming from NNS could help community members reconsider their preconceptions. In addition, NNS could work with SDEV in the future to share resources, provide volunteer and job opportunities to SDEV youth, and educate the young farmers on best practices on their urban farm. Partnering with SDEV is a good example of how NNS could expand DEI at the farm through partnerships with organizations embedded in diverse communities.

Neha Shah (Directory pg. 48)

Our interview with Neha was unique because she is involved in multiple environmental education spaces around Ann Arbor. Working directly with Neha's students, like through Agrarian Adventure's farmer in the classroom program, could be an excellent opportunity to participate in agricultural education. We also see great potential in growing professional relationships for collaboration on program development. Neha is an expert teacher, and her years of experience working with different environmental education organizations and teaching about farming herself give her an amazing perspective on what helps educational programming succeed. Although NNS staff have expressed some hesitancy at developing their own youth programming, should they decide to pursue this course of action we would encourage them to reach out to Neha for consultation to ensure that the work is optimized for children.

Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic

One of the most common themes we found in our interviews was that the Covid-19 Pandemic had radically changed and in many cases reduced the scope and method of programming for organizations. For many organizations, this was due to the logistical challenges of keeping programs in agreement with federal and local rules and guidelines, particularly in regards to physical distancing and the gathering of large groups indoors. Another challenge that accompanies this is the shifting in cultural norms around in-person gathering, which has decreased participation for in-person events or programs (Alvarez et al., 2020). This is especially true in areas dominated by leftwing politics, like Ann Arbor, where the response to the Pandemic is often characterized by greater caution and urgency (Corder et al., 2020). Another major issue brought about by the Pandemic was a loss of funding sources as much of the country's economy closed down (Maher et al., 2020). This is particularly problematic since many organizations within the field of environmental education were already funded tenuously before the Pandemic (Thomson et al., 2003).

The above impacts of the Pandemic have been met with a variety of responses. One common response we heard during our interviews was that organizations have either suspended or downsized the programs they offer as they wait for the effects of the Pandemic to lighten (Dexter Garden Club, Project Grow, Michigan United Conservation Clubs). Many of these organizations were planning at the time of interview to resume more robust programming with the start of the 2021-2022 school year (Washtenaw County Conservation District, Freeman Center). There were also many organizations that had significantly adapted their programming to meet community needs while maintaining safety and compliance with regulations. One common method of this was a shift to virtual programming, which interviewees experienced differently. Many interviewees found the educational experience of virtual programs to be subpar due to the difficulty of socially connecting across screens and technological barriers to participation (Dexter Garden Club, Detroit Audubon).

Listening to our interviewees, it became clear to us that organizational resilience is an important quality for any organization, particularly those engaged in environmental education. Disruptions of different kinds are likely to increase in frequency and severity as environmental issues like climate change increase in intensity (IPCC, 2019). Maintaining a strong sense of purpose and the flexibility to pursue that purpose in the most effective manner possible will be essential to continue this important work in an uncertain future.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Section Overview

- NNS has a long history of deep commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in their work to provide cultural rich, honored heirloom seeds to the local community.
- We provide guidance on the process and standards to use when writing a DEI statement, which can be a great way to communicate an organization's commitments and refine its goals related to DEI.
- NNS's seed donation program could be expanded by providing customers an option to support it at checkout.
- If NNS seeks to increase the diversity of its staff and volunteers, it may be helpful to shift recruitment platforms, develop partnerships with organizations that serve diverse communities, and reflect upon potential barriers to employment or volunteering.

One of Nature and Nurture Seeds's primary goals is to ensure that its seeds and programming are reaching the entire community, including people whose identities are either underrepresented or excluded. A commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has been at the heart of NNS' mission since its inception. Just over 20 years ago, Erica discovered 'Renewing America's Food Traditions: *Place-Based Foods at Risk in the Great Lakes*' (CITE). Compiled by Gary Nabhan, this book helped Erica discover her passion for food heritage and seed saving, which works to protect culturally significant and nutritious seeds that uplift communities. Soon after, Erica and Mike founded Nature and Nurture Seeds. As NNS has grown, so has its commitment to DEI, which is seen in several commitments and actions taken over the twenty-year history of NNS.

NNS intentionally sells their seeds at places such as Argus Farm Stop and local farmers markets, where folks can use Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to purchase seeds. NNS also has a robust seed donation program, where organizations can request seed packet donations to distribute to underserved communities and individuals, increasing the reach and impact of their seeds. These initiatives help make NNS's seeds available to people who would otherwise be unable to attain nutritious and culturally significant seeds due to limitations such as limited finances.

More generally, NNS is committed to growing a network of local-heirloom seed growers and distributors, so as to increase the availability of these culturally-rich and nutritious seeds for as many people as possible. NNS does this by partnering with farmers from other Midwest states who grow their seeds and also collaborating with

organizations such as the Central Michigan Seed Swap to promote seed sharing and environmental stewardship.

NNS works to preserve and honor heirloom seeds through the “Seeds of our Ancestors” series which highlights the stories of seed varieties in a narrative form, and the “Slow Food Ark of Taste” which is a national effort by Slow Food USA to protect unique and culturally valuable seed varieties from extinction. NNS have also signed and posted the Safe Seed Pledge, which is a commitment to not buy or sell genetically engineered plants or seeds run by the Council for Responsible Genetics. NNS is also a company partner of the Open Source Seed initiative, which commits to protecting fair and open access to plant genetic resources and education worldwide in an effort to provide nutritious seeds to all.

NNS has exemplified a commitment to DEI throughout its history being a part of several national and regional initiatives and programs to provide culturally rich, honored heirloom seeds to local communities. NNS now aims to improve upon their commitment to DEI through partnerships with local environmental education organizations.

To that end, in our interviews we paid close attention to our interviewees’ commitments and approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and included some of our findings in their directory entries. In addition, we are including below some broad suggestions for expanding NNS’s reach. These include some actions that are relatively quick and simple, as well as others that might take more time and care to fully implement. (This timeline will be further elaborated upon in our “Recommendations for the Future” section of the conclusion.) We believe strongly that all of these options can help NNS fulfill its mission and connect with a broader community than it has traditionally.

DEI Statements

One way in which organizations can both develop and communicate their commitments to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion is through DEI statements. This broad category can include a variety of content, such as the organization’s history of prior relevant work, actionable commitments, central values, and the power to make a difference in their community. DEI statements are generally agreed upon as an effective way for organizations to publicly position themselves on critical social issues like racism or transphobia, *although they are never sufficient alone*. DEI statements should be adopted because they reflect the organization that developed them, but an additional benefit is that consumers tend to prefer supporting businesses that share their commitments to shared values (Hajli, 2014; Wu et al., 2010).

There are a wealth of resources available on what makes a “good” DEI statement, although we have attempted to distill the commonalities among those resources that we find are *most relevant to Nature and Nurture Seeds*. Readers should note that fully developing a DEI statement requires deep reflection, many conversations, and consistent revision. This task demands significant time investment, and should not be rushed in order to avoid potential oversights. When NNS is ready for this work, below are the key characteristics we identified that can help make DEI statements work.

When developing the DEI statement, it can be helpful to make the process collaborative and iterative. Try hosting brainstorming sessions in which different employees contribute ideas that they think should be included in the statement. Review example statements from similar organizations, and continue to improve the statement draft through intra-organization meetings. If possible, it is encouraged to seek feedback from outside of the organization. This is particularly important if those involved in discussions do not reflect diverse identities.

Structurally, a DEI statement usually begins with a key paragraph that connects the organization and its mission to the principles of DEI, sharing a broad message of support and solidarity with marginalized groups. This is a good opportunity to explicitly identify those different groups. It is also important for this paragraph to include language of and examples of commitment to action, to avoid perceptions that the text is “all talk and no walk.”

This initial paragraph may stand alone, although it is generally strengthened by longer text that illustrates an organization’s commitments in greater detail. In this section, it is important to provide concrete examples of DEI-relevant practices that are already underway or that are planned for the future. For instance, this section might include a paragraph describing NNS’s seed donation program. Additionally, it is common practice to include a “land acknowledgement” that identifies the Indigenous people from whom an organization’s land has been appropriated. All of the content that is included here can be organized in a variety of ways, although some possibilities are dividing content according to different core values, initiatives at work or how the organization is addressing each letter of the DEI acronym.

One element that can make DEI statements feel more action-oriented is the inclusion of relevant external resources. In the table below, we include different types of supplementary resources that an organization like NNS may want to include in their DEI statement. Many of these were drawn from the exceptionally well-curated resource list of the [Oregon Farmer’s Market Association](#) (Oregon Farmers Market.). Note that this list is not meant to be exhaustive, but instead serve as a foundation for continued development.

Type of Resource	Example and Link
Historical Context	US Food System Timeline by Tracy Gagnon, Oregon Food Bank
Contemporary Context & Call to Action	“4 Not-So-Easy Ways to Dismantle Racism in the Food System” by Leah Penniman, Yes Magazine
Historical & Contemporary Context	“New Research Explores the Ongoing Impact of Racism on the U.S. Farming Landscape” by Megan Horst, Civic Eats
Website of Relevant Charity to Use or Support	Washtenaw County Black Farmers Fund

There are some more general principles to consider when crafting a DEI statement. Strong DEI statements will be different depending on the kind of organization they represent, reflecting the company and broader industry’s unique connection to DEI. In addition, DEI statements must be written using inclusive language, which means ensuring that all terms used to identify marginalized groups are up-to-date and that linguistic choices don’t accidentally exclude people. The National Assembly of State Art Agencies’s [“Inclusive Language Guide”](#) is an excellent nexus of links to resources that can help make language more inclusive. The [“Diversity Style Guide”](#) is a searchable encyclopedia that includes information on the inclusivity of different terminology.

Once the statement is complete, it will be important to make it highly visible to customers and community members. We suggest that the statement should have its own section on the website (either tab or sub-tab) that includes everything mentioned above. In addition, all transactional emails to customers and to newsletter subscribers should include a brief (one sentence) summary of the statement that hyperlinks to the website tab. This could be part of an email signature, a sub-header, or text somewhere else that would be appropriately visible.

If readers are interested in more information about developing strong DEI statements, here are links to guides that we found illuminating:

- [“Crafting the Right Diversity Equity and Inclusion Mission Statement:”](#) This article provides a helpful framework for the process of writing a DEI statement.
- [“5 Don’ts in Writing Your DEI Statement:”](#) This short article cautions against common mistakes companies make in writing DEI statements, like hesitating to make real commitments or portraying themselves as saviors.

- [“25 Examples of Awesome Diversity Statements:”](#) The beginning of this article includes style and formatting insight. However, the examples included later are of large corporations, and thus place public relations perceptions at the forefront.

As mentioned earlier, it is useful to consider DEI statements already published by similar organizations. Here are links to some of those statements:

- [Oregon Farmers Market Association](#): This statement is also from the agricultural field, and excels as an educational tool with a wide variety of well-selected internal and external resources.
- [Farm to Institution New England \(FINE\)](#): This is an extremely thorough statement, although the amount of information on one page may be overwhelming. This illustrates the importance of adapting web design to the individual statement.
- [The Oakland Museum](#): This statement is well-rounded, including proclamations of values and commitments, a timeline of activism, and relevant internal resources. They also acknowledge their institutional imperfection by framing this as a journey.
- [MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources](#): This page includes both a short and long statement, which may be a helpful way to organize communications.

Seed Donation Expansion

Nature and Nurture’s seed donation program is a fitting way for the organization to uplift underserved communities. Seeds have power, and providing subsistence and resources (in the form of seed packets) to those who need them is a great charitable endeavor. We understand that traditionally the seed donation program is organized logistically by quantifying how many ‘leftover’ seeds they have. However, instead of using this program to handle extra products, we would aim to leverage community support to elevate the program. Here we will provide ideas for how NNS could further expand and publicize this program, helping more folks and growing their commitment to DEI themes.

One way in which the program could be expanded would be to offer customers at checkout an option to add x number of seed packets for donation to their order. Similar to how there is a ‘tip’ option, customers could choose to donate 1, 5, 10, or a custom amount of seed packets to local organizations. It may be helpful to list some specific organizations or link to the tab on the website where organizations can request seed donations.

NNS may also consider adding a question in the seed donation request form that asks applicants to state what their organization does in the area of DEI. If NNS is only

able to distribute a set number of seeds, the company may want to grow their impact by prioritizing organizations that have a strong commitment to DEI.

Additionally, NNS could implement a ‘tracker’ on its website that states how many seed packets are donated yearly, and to which organizations. Just as NNS asks applicants to publicize that they received donated seeds, they could also publicize this charitable program. This may also contribute to growing partnerships with select organizations, as mutual recognition and publicity could help the organizations grow together.

Workplace Diversity

Two paths through which almost every organization can improve their contributions toward DEI are in improving the diversity of staff and volunteers and in making the workplace more welcoming to people of all backgrounds and identities. This kind of work is longer-term, but that does not mean that it should be a low priority. Experts attest that a coordinated effort is necessary to significantly improve institutional diversity and equity (Olsen & Martins, 2012). Because of how systems of power and oppression work, institutions are unlikely or very slow to change without strong initiative (Harrison et al., 2002).

For small businesses like NNS, improving racial diversity can seem especially difficult. The fields of small agriculture and environmental education have traditionally been and continue to be made up by majority white employees (Esters & Bowen). However, in this section we hope to make a case for why the work to improve diversity is worthwhile and we will provide some concrete ways to make this task less daunting and more systematic.

Improving workplace diversity might seem arbitrary or unnecessary, but a large body of research points to its benefits. Scientists have found that diverse teams tend to produce higher returns and engage in more innovative thinking than non-diverse teams, in addition to many other benefits (Rock & Grant, n.d.). On top of that, diverse staff tend to bring in more diverse staff in a ripple effect (Myers & Dreachslin, 2007). In addition to these business benefits, improving workplace diversity is one step to combat society-wide systems of oppression like racism. Offering career opportunities to diverse candidates can provide an avenue to economic empowerment which can help reduce financial disparities between racial, gender, and other identities (Kabeer, n.d.; Doede, 2016).

Our recommendations for improving the diversity of staff and volunteers are to (1) develop partnerships with organizations directly connected to diverse communities, (2) shift the platforms used to reach out to candidates, and (3) reflect upon ways to reduce the obstacles candidates face in choosing to work or volunteer at Nature and Nurture Seeds. This practicum team has been focused on developing partnerships with other organizations, and we have been grateful to connect with many currently engaged

in work within diverse communities. From our experience, we are confident in recommending the following organizations that staff should cultivate relationships with in order to reach more diverse candidates: SDEV (Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision), N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit, and Edible Flint. Establishing lines of communication with these and other organizations could also help advertise job postings without additional fees.

NNS currently relies primarily on Handshake, a job-searching platform aimed at college students, in order to advertise position openings. Because colleges and universities underrepresent people of color, especially Black and Indigenous people of color, this can create an unintentional selection bias. There are outreach platforms that could ameliorate this by directly targeting diverse candidates, such as [Diversity for Social Impact](#) (\$69 per posting) and [Pink Jobs](#) (free posting). Alternatively, choosing to use publicly accessible job boards like [Indeed](#) (free posting) can likely reach wider and more diverse audiences than Handshake.

However, just as important as connecting to diverse candidates is ensuring that the workplace meets their needs and does not have too many barriers to their participation. We do not have insight into details of positions at NNS, but research suggests that organizations that seek to improve diversity may need to make changes to organizational culture, position pay, and benefits in order to make the workplace attractive and welcoming to diverse candidates (Rock & Grant, n.d.; Myers & Dreachslin, 2007). To address this, we suggest that NNS staff and volunteers brainstorm together about what obstacles might make it harder for diverse candidates to work on the farm, and what solutions could help reduce these barriers.

With the three above strategies employed, we expect that NNS will enjoy greater diversity of staff and volunteers and the myriad associated benefits elaborated above. Furthermore, engaging in this work is likely to make the company a more attractive partner for other organizations.

Recommendations

From the above report, we have distilled several recommendations that can help Nature and Nurture participate in environmental education, build partnerships with similar organizations, and support DEI in their community. We have divided these recommendations into those feasible to begin immediately and those with more logistical barriers that are best tackled on a longer time horizon. Please refer to the associated part of the “Discussion” section above for more context on any of these recommendations.

As Soon as Possible

- Join the Huron-Arbor cluster of the Stewardship Network to enter into a community of partnership and explore opportunities for collaboration.

The Stewardship Network is a national organization that focuses on growing partnerships between like-minded organizations in the environmental space. The Huron-Arbor cluster is a collective of non-profit organizations, businesses, and government organizations that are all working to promote pro-environmental behavior and conservation, including through environmental education. In July, we connected Michael Lordon to the Huron-Arbor cluster leaders, Jason Frenzel and Michael Benham. We recommend this communication is maintained and grown, since organizations within the cluster are expected to be active to improve their chances at collaboration with and support from fellow members.

- Reach out to stand-out interviewed organizations to build relationships, such as N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit, Hazon Detroit, and Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision (SDEV).

These three organizations were especially enthusiastic about partnering with NNS to grow environmental education programs and work toward mutual goals in the context of DEI. All three organizations make DEI an integral part of their operations, often focusing on specific identity groups when providing environmental education. We recommend NNS increases their communication and involvement with these organizations which are exemplary environmental education providers in the area. If NNS is able to begin regular communication with these groups immediately, the relationships that arise could prosper and help NNS reach their goals related to DEI and educational reach.

- Implement new online routes for customers to donate funding that can expand NNS’s seed donation program.

We recommend growing NNS's seed donation program to allow for customers to donate x number seed packets at checkout. By providing a quick and easy way for customers to add a donation of seed packets NNS can grow their impact in the DEI space, while prioritizing donating seed packets to organizations with a strong DEI mission. To help decide what organizations to donate seed packets to, we recommend adding a question about the organization's commitment and actions related to DEI in the seed donation request form. To further the impact of the seed donation program NNS could implement a 'tracker' on the website that states how many seed packets have been donated year to date. Similar to how NNS asks donated seed packet recipients to publicize their gift, NNS could have a page describing the program, gift recipients, and packets donated yearly.

- Develop a DEI Statement for NNS that can be linked to in all communications to customers and on the website.

The first step in growing NNS's commitment to growth in the space of DEI is creating a statement that is visible on the website and linked to in communications with customers. DEI statements are strongest when they acknowledge both the organization's specific role in creating positive change and examples of actions that are currently being taken. In the section on this topic, we provide several resources that can help NNS craft their DEI statement, including vocabulary to include or avoid, specific examples of actionable steps that are good to highlight, and information on how to publicize the statement. We recommend NNS make this statement clearly visible on the website and linked to in all communications to customers (such as through email) so as to ensure that customers know NNS's stance on and commitment to DEI themes.

Over the Coming Years

- Continue to develop partnerships with interviewed organizations and meet new ones by engaging with the local community through attendance at community events and membership in community organizations.

Cultivating partnerships takes time and energy, especially when the end goal is not always clear. We recommend that NNS staff take time to review which potential collaborators they are most interested in building relationships with, and initiate regular communication. NNS already attends and hosts several public events yearly, which are great places to grow bonds between organizations, which NNS may be able to build financial and mission-related partnerships with. Environmental education work is rarely profitable, so NNS may have to be willing to share their time without immediate

compensation from partners, though this may create positive momentum that results in partnerships that are sustainable for all parties.

- Consider renovating property on the farm to be used as an indoor classroom or event space, including a bathroom and kitchen or kitchenette.

One of the most frequently asked questions we were asked from interviewees was what type of facilities for events were available at the farm. It became clear that amenities such as an indoor classroom, bathroom, and kitchen or kitchenette were either preferred or needed for certain organizations to host events on site. Part of the reason for this is access, as some groups need temperature-regulated spaces or accessible bathrooms to accommodate people with disabilities. For events that have a longer duration, having a public kitchen space to warm or prepare meals is ideal. We recommend NNS think about renovating space on the property to accommodate the needs of organizations that would be interested in hosting regular events at the NNS farm. If NNS is able to provide proper facilities, it will open the possibility for greater collaboration because NNS will have more resources to share with its partners.

- Increase staff and volunteer diversity through partnerships, shifting job search platforms, and reflection on workplace-specific barriers to employment.

Increasing the diversity of identities represented in the staff and volunteers at NNS is a long term goal that requires sustained commitment. There are three ways we recommend NNS act to improve the diversity of staff and volunteers: (1) develop partnerships with organizations directly connected to diverse communities, (2) shift the platforms used to reach out to candidates, and (3) reflect upon ways to reduce the obstacles candidates face in choosing to work or volunteer at Nature and Nurture Seeds. It will take time and effort to increase the diversity of staff and volunteers, but research has shown it is one of the greatest ways an organization can combat the systems of oppression that exist in America.

Conclusion

Opportunities for Further Research

Section Overview

- If NNS ever desires to further develop their own educational programming (not based in partnership), we suggest using future master's projects that include students with business experience who could provide financial planning.
- If NNS pursue partnerships as suggested in this report, staff may find useful a future master's project that delves into the science of collaboration, and particularly how it can be used to build sustainability and resilience.

Through this master's practicum we have discovered two main areas of research for students and researchers alike that could be studied in future master's projects. First, it would be helpful to NNS and similar organizations if students were to outline the business and economic side of environmental education. Organizations involved in environmental education often struggle financially, relying on grants, donations, and small revenue streams to keep afloat. As seen above, we have discovered a variety of ways in which environmental organizations finance their operations, though there is more research to be done. A future masters capstone that involved business-minded School for Environment and Sustainability students may find researching the profitability and economic viability of environmental education in Southeast Michigan to be a fulfilling project. Specifically, students could generate a list of grant-providing organizations, opportunities for funding through local, state, and federal programs, as well as more practical on-site profit making opportunities. We would only recommend this project to future masters students if NNS were interested in attempting to grow their own, original environmental program rather than pursue ones that are based primarily upon partnerships.

Secondly, it would be useful to NNS and other environmental education collaborators if students were to work on a project that studied the science of partnerships and collaboration. This project would be more research oriented than our project; it's scope could evolve to be wider than just environmental education since students would be studying how partnerships and collaborations originate, grow, and benefit multiple organizations. A mental models approach may be useful in studying partnerships and collaborations, as this qualitative work would allow students to base their findings in a growing field of psychology whereas partnerships is only one sub-subject (McComb & Simpson, 2014). This would be especially helpful because collaboration is critical to community resilience, in the face of climate change and greater disruptions to our systems (Harris, 2007).

Final Thoughts

Throughout the interview process we were heartened to get to know the passionate, dedicated, and innovative community of environmental and agricultural education in Southeastern Michigan. We also found that many organizations faced similar challenges to Nature and Nurture Seeds, and we believe strongly that by joining and growing this network, everyone stands to benefit. We understand that the above recommendations require time, energy, and other resources, but hope that this report will be useful to NNS staff as they consider different paths forward in their journey to support a healthy, equitable world. Furthermore, we hope that this report can help all interested organizations connect to the vibrant network we have become acquainted with.

Directory Entries

Section Overview

- The bulk of our report is dedicated to what we call “Directory Entries,” which are brief summaries of what we learned from each of our interviews, particularly related to potential avenues for collaboration.
- We hope this will be a useful reference not only for NNS, but also for the broader environmental education community of Southeastern Michigan.

This section comprises the bulk of our report and what we hope will be a very useful resource. As described above, we took notes during each interview. About halfway through the interview process, we began to convert those notes into more formal “directory entries” for each interviewee, using interview recordings supplementarily. Our primary aim is for this directory to serve as a quick reference for learning more about similar organizations and the potential for Nature and Nurture Seeds (NNS) to partner with them. However, we also hope that this will prove to be a useful reference for the organizations and individuals we interviewed, as well as the broader community of environmental and agricultural educators in Southeastern Michigan.

Our entries are broken down into sections for ease of reference. In our “Summary” section the reader can learn more broadly about the work and history of an organization. The “Funding” section describes the sources and in some cases the stability of funding. The “Audience” section details the demographics of an organization’s audience, with particular attention to age ranges and racial diversity. Our section “Barriers to Programming” describes current or possible barriers the interviewees face, particularly those that NNS might be positioned to assist with. Finally, our “Partnership Potential” section includes our takeaways regarding potential routes of collaboration between NNS and each organization. Within these entries we have focused on simply sharing what our interviewees shared with us, using neutral language. However, in this last section of each entry we will sometimes include our personal opinions when we believe that an organization is an especially strong fit for collaborating with NNS, or if the interviewee expressed enthusiastic interest in the possibility of working together. Please see the table below to find a specific organization.

Organization	Contact	Page
Agrarian Adventure	Jeff Tenza	35
Apple Play Schools	Amanda Lodge	36
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The Ecology Center	Mackenzie Munro	39
Edible Flint	Kelly McClelland	40
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Washtenaw Audubon	Juliet Berger and Victor Chen	57
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Agrarian Adventure

Website: <http://www.agrarianadventure.org/>

Location: Ann Arbor

Contact: Jeff Tenza

Position: Board Member



Summary:

Agrarian Adventure is a local nonprofit organization that aims to connect students with the food systems they rely on through agricultural education. Their flagship program is “Farmer in the Classroom,” which supplies farmers with integrated curriculum materials to go into elementary school classrooms and teach students about various topics in agriculture. The farmers receive a stipend for their participation. In addition, Agrarian Adventure supports school and community gardens in different ways, such as by starting seeds for them.

Funding:

Agrarian Adventure relies primarily on fundraising, such as through a harvest brunch event, to support their programs. They also receive grants for certain projects, like the Rotary Club’s grants to fund hoopouses at a middle school.

Audience:

Most programs are aimed at reaching students in Ann Arbor public schools, grades K-5, although they sometimes reach higher grades too. The racial diversity of their audience reflects the racial diversity of the various schools. One goal of this organization is to learn more about how to effectively reach more diverse students.

Barriers to Programming:

The volunteer board of a small non-profit organization often has high turnover, which can make it difficult to pursue new projects, like a virtual farmer engagement which could have continued programming during the pandemic. Another challenge is that farmers may either be introverted or inexperienced at education, which can prove a barrier to their participation in “Farmer in the Classroom.”

Partnership Potential:

Agrarian Adventure and NNS already have partnership experience through the Farmer in the Classroom program. In addition to that, Jeff had a variety of ideas about ways that the two organizations could partner. One was the co-development of a standards-aligned curriculum focusing on topics of NNS’s expertise, like seed-saving. Broadly, Jeff thinks that Agrarian Adventure could leverage Mike and Erica’s skills and personalities, their cooking recipes, and their interns, though further conversation is needed to determine specifics. One possibility was using the farm site as a location for the harvest brunch fundraiser, although Agrarian Adventure currently relies on free locations for this event, so an arrangement that would encourage attendee donations or purchases from NNS would likely be necessary to make this a mutually beneficial exchange. One long-shot idea was a program that would teach students how to sell or market seeds from NNS.

Apple Playschools

Website: <https://www.greenapplegarden.org/>

Location: Ann Arbor

Contact: Amanda Lodge

Position: Environmental Education Coordinator

**Summary:**

Apple Playschools has two locations in downtown Ann Arbor that provide environmental education to kids ages five to six. As a Reggio-inspired school, students are outside as often as possible. Anti-bias education is also central to the school's mission.

Funding:

Apple Playschools is funded primarily through tuition from its students. They aim to provide scholarships when possible, these are often paid for by the tuition of other students.

Audience:

Students attending Apple Playschools are from the Ann Arbor area, thus their demographics are representative of the area. The school puts effort and resources into providing scholarships to students who would otherwise have difficulty accessing environmental education.

Barriers to Programming:

One of the challenges Apple Playschools deals with is transporting students to field trip locations. Right now they walk to all field trips, which limits their ability to reach sites such as NNS easily. Amanda also explained that many of the teachers are not experienced in subjects related to environmental education (such as composting, seed saving, gardening), which they hope can be improved.

Partnership Potential:

There are a few ways in which NNS and Apple Playschools may collaborate. Amanda expressed interest in hosting family events at NNS, where it would be the family's responsibility to get to the site. Apple Playschools could also host NNS educators to teach teachers or students about topics like seed saving, gardening, and composting. In addition, Amanda was interested in working with NNS to improve their outdoor play space, involving more elements of permaculture and gardening to facilitate sensory stimulation.

Detroit Audubon

Website: <https://www.detroitaudubon.org/>

Location: Downtown Detroit

Contact: Sarah Halson

Position: Previous Program Coordinator



Summary:

Detroit Audubon is a local chapter of the national nonprofit that seeks to connect people with local birds and encourage participation in conservation of bird habitats. One core program they offer is the guided birding walk. Detroit Audubon also hosts workshops that are comparable to lecture series, which have recently been available as webinars. In addition, the organization hosts a weeklong youth birding program in partnership with Belle Island Nature Center.

Funding:

Detroit Audubon relies on the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan, as well as member support to fund their programs. Many of the programs are designed to minimize cost, so they generally occur on public, freely accessible land.

Audience:

Detroit Audubon serves people of all ages, with programs aimed at youth and adults. The organization is based in an area of high racial diversity, and it has recently focused more on reaching communities of color who have not been proportionately represented in program participants. Staff also hope that their own demographics can change to better reflect the racial diversity of Detroit.

Barriers to Programming:

This organization has had high staff turnover due to the nature of the positions it can fund, which makes programming challenging. We did not identify any key challenges that NNS is positioned to assist with.

Partnership Potential:

Sarah thought that hosting a birding trip on NNS's farm site could be a fun occasional way for the organizations to work together. Since Audubon relies on access to free space, this would be unlikely to be a paid trip, although Sarah also offered to share resources and advice on programming, and perhaps a "barter-style" exchange would be possible. Her main suggestion was reaching out to Washtenaw County Audubon, since the geographic proximity would make them easier to work with. Since Sarah will have left the organization by the time of this report's publication, she provided another contact, Ava Landgraf, who is the research coordinator at Detroit Audubon.

Dexter Garden club

Website: <http://www.dextergardenclub.org/>

Location: Dexter

Contact: Deborah Fredericks

Position: Club President

Summary:

The Dexter Garden Club is a community group that connects residents of Dexter through events and helps maintain gardens throughout the town. Activities include special workshops, volunteer gardening opportunities, and a large annual plant sale fundraiser.

Funding:

The club's primary source of income is through plant sales, which they use to fund scholarships for Dexter High School students. They hope to expand this program and increase the number of scholarships they can offer.

Audience:

The club's demographics are dominated by older women, although recently membership is adding younger members in their forties. In addition, the club has small but significant representation from Dexter's LGBTQ+ community. The club wants to recruit new members, since other, similar clubs have "aged out" of consistent activity.

Barriers to Programming:

The club is consistently exploring ways to maintain strong, active membership, but it can be challenging to recruit new members, especially during Covid when in-person gatherings have been limited and social norms have shifted. Having more programming to offer through partnerships with organizations like NNS can help keep members engaged and maybe even draw new members.

Partnership Potential:

Deborah was very enthusiastic about partnering with NNS in a few different ways. One form of collaboration she mentioned was developing a regular relationship in which the club would hire farmer-educators to visit and provide an update on current events or special topics in agriculture. The club has previously hosted local seed farms, and had great success with seed sales to club members. In addition, the club's plant sale would welcome NNS if they wanted to sell seeds at the event. If NNS were to develop on-site programming, Deborah thinks that club members would be enthusiastic about visiting, participating, and purchasing seeds. Finally, the club runs a "Green Thumb" program for elementary and middle school students that would be thrilled to receive any seed donations from NNS.



Ecology Center

Website: <https://www.ecocenter.org/>

Location: Ann Arbor

Contact: Mackenzie Munro

Position: Education Programs Coordinator



Summary:

Ecology Center is a mid-size nonprofit organization that seeks to advance environmental goals through policy change, education, and research. Our focus was on the education programs, which are currently focused on waste-management, including composting, reducing, and recycling. The programs can have interesting angles, like looking at how composting intersects with other environmental issues, or how capitalism and consumerism interact with environmental justice. There are two people on Ecology Center's education staff, and they generally hire a part-time environmental educator during the school year.

Funding:

The reason that Ecology Center focuses on waste management programs is because of their contract with the city of Ann Arbor. Most of their programs are funded by grants or through the city, although sometimes private foundations will seek to fund specific initiatives or projects.

Audience:

Programs are taught mostly at public and sometimes at private K-12 schools in Ann Arbor and around most of Washtenaw County. In addition, the team conducts a small amount of adult and community outreach to help provide guidance on proper waste disposal and to answer questions about recycling. While most students are white, the racial diversity of learners depends on each school's population. The team is looking at reforming hiring practices to recruit more diverse staff, and they also include social justice as part of their work at Ecology Center.

Barriers to Programming:

Access to funding is a major determinant of what types of programming staff can offer. Because, during our interview, Ecology Center's contract with Ann Arbor was set for renegotiation, the future of offerings was not confirmed.

Partnership Potential:

Education staff at Ecology Center have not recently partnered with other organizations, and so any collaboration would require in-depth development. Mackenzie was hesitant to consider using the farm for events, since Covid-19 had made in-person gatherings more difficult. Additionally, she asked for more context as to what exactly the farmers are available for. Still, she was open to the idea of collaboration. She mentioned the homegrown festival and the Earth Day committee as good ways to connect with the community. Our impression after this interview is that Ecology Center and NNS could potentially partner on programming related to compost, however it would be significantly challenging to manage logistics and funding.

Edible Flint

Website: <http://www.edibleflint.org/>

Location: Flint

Contact: Kelly McClelland

Position: Program Director

**Summary:**

Edible Flint is a nonprofit focused on bringing gardening education to all members of the Flint community. Its primary staple is the Garden Starters Training Program, which is a ten-to-eleven-week series of classes with guest presenters. They also sell garden kits, and used to host a food garden tour around Flint.

Funding:

This organization's income derives from fundraising, both with individuals and businesses, and through grants. Because grants are not the most stable funding source, the staff at Edible Flint tends to fluctuate according to budgetary constraints.

Audience:

Edible Flint reaches people who live in and around Flint, though they prioritize the population within the city. Participants and volunteers are highly diverse, although their demographics are not quite proportionate to that of Flint. Programming tends to be dominated by women, and many volunteers are retired. This organization connects to diverse audiences both through in-person, in-community networking and through existing community groups like churches and neighborhood associations.

Barriers to Programming:

In addition to the challenges of adapting to variable funding, during the pandemic, access to and familiarity with technology like Zoom has been a substantial barrier to participation in virtual programs.

Partnership Potential:

Kelly would love to learn from the farmers at NNS, whether this would be through guest lectures in Flint or through a trip for members to take to the farm. In terms of programming topics, Kelly was interested in niche workshops, like ones on growing mushrooms, seed-saving, beekeeping, and local, heirloom plants. Any programs would need to be offered on a volunteer basis, but Edible Flint hopes to be able to offer speaker stipends in the long run. In addition, seed donations are in high demand, since this organization already has a method of distributing seeds to people who need them but are limited primarily by funding. Edible Flint is also connected with some local community centers that have specific seed needs.

The Farm at St. Joe's

Website: <https://stjoesfarm.org/>

Location: Ypsilanti

Contact: Laura Meisler

Position: Education Coordinator

Summary:

The Farm at St. Joe's is a community garden run by a hospital system. The Farm hosts the public and hospital staff for educational programming, often focused on combating food insecurity. The programming is diverse, with youth classes, hospital department events, as well as agricultural-science-based classes.

Funding:

The Farm at St. Joe's is primarily funded by the hospital system it is a part of. They also have direct contact with a grant writer at the hospital that assists them in securing funding.

Audience:

Educational programs used to be exclusively for children, though today several groups of hospital staff, local residents, and visitors from the public visit the farm. The Farm at St. Joe's aims specifically to educate and assist families battling food insecurity.

Barriers to Programming:

Laura is the only staff member at the farm focused solely on educational programming. Other staff members are educators and assist with events, but are limited in the time they have to provide educational programming. Transportation to the farm is also a difficulty, especially because folks experiencing food insecurity may also face obstacles in accessing convenient transportation.

Partnership Potential:

The Farm at St. Joe's was excited at the prospect of working with NNS in several areas. They expressed interest in visiting the farm for educational events or field trips, bringing in NNS educators for programs, and receiving donated seeds in an effort to share them with families battling food insecurity. Laura also talked about a fundraising event they hope to plan in the future that could be hosted by NNS. The event would be a potluck style dinner in which people celebrate food and agriculture.



The Freeman Center (Ann Arbor Public Schools Environmental Education)

Website: <https://sites.google.com/a/aaps.k12.mi.us/enved/>

Location: Ann Arbor

Contact: Dave Szczygiel; Coert Ambrosino

Position: Environmental Education Consultant;
Environmental Education Teacher



Summary:

David and Coert work for Ann Arbor Public Schools, coordinating a variety of environmental education for students and professional development resources for teachers. Programs for students generally include field trips to natural locations, short trips to areas near school sites, and usually involve teaching by staff and volunteer naturalists. Something special about this programming is that students will often attend scaffolded programs year-after-year, helping build deeper understanding and stronger stewardship. During the Covid-19 pandemic, in-person programming has been replaced by virtual education.

Funding:

Ann Arbor Public Schools has delivered funded environmental education programming for the past sixty years, although recently this organization received an endowment that brings in additional funding for certain projects. AAPS Environmental Education also relies on substantial volunteer labor to teach their programs.

Audience:

This organization reaches highly diverse students from across Ann Arbor Public Schools, since participation in their program is mostly mandatory. Right now AAPS Environmental Education is working on improving strategies for teaching English Language Learners and on providing translations of educational materials.

Barriers to Programming:

The shift to virtual programming has been challenging for AAPS Environmental Education, as it has been for the broader field. Also, reliance on volunteers can be tenuous, although this organization has enjoyed high volunteer loyalty over the years.

Partnership Potential:

One exciting challenge for AAPS Environmental Education is the opening of the new Freeman Environmental Education Center, which may precipitate the development of new programming and opportunities for collaborating on program design or delivery. One potential program would be starting a plant nursery program for students in the summer, which could produce annuals for school gardens. This organization is also interested in transitioning a program about plants to focus on edible plants and crops, which could use input from NNS staff. In general, staff are hesitant about immediate collaboration given the uncertainty of how Covid-19 might impact learning this year, but would love to develop relationships with NNS that can grow over the years. They extended an invitation to host NNS staff at the Freeman Center.

Green Living Science

Website: <https://www.greeningdetroit.com/community/organizations/green-living-science-gls/>

Location: Detroit

Contact: Natalie Jakub

Position: Executive Director

Summary:

Green Living Science provides recycling and resource conservation education to students and sometimes adults in Detroit. It is an extension of Detroit Department of Public Works, and is contracted by the city to enter schools and communities to provide education. Their main programming is school assemblies and classroom lectures, though they provide education to people of all ages and work directly with small businesses to help them improve their waste management practices.

Funding:

Green Living Science receives most of their funding from a contract they have with the city of Detroit to provide education on recycling and resource conservation. They also receive funding from small grants, individual donors, and small organizations they do programming for such as the Girl Scouts.

Audience:

The audience of Green Living Science's programs are primarily school-aged children. Recently they have focused on pre-K students, as they seem to be the most interested in recycling education. The diversity of these students is representative of the city of Detroit.

Barriers to Programming:

The main barrier Green Living Science faces is their limited staff of two employees. They want to reach more classrooms and hold more school assemblies, and can bill the city directly for them, but are limited in their capacity.

Partnership Potential:

Hosting NNS staff as guest speakers, providing seeds for programs, and opening up the farm as a camping site are some of the ways in which collaboration can happen. Green Living Science sees a clear connection between farming and responsible waste management, guest lectures focused on this connection would be welcome. Green Living Science runs annual camping trips with adolescent youth from inner city Detroit, and having the NNS farm site as an option for these trips would be helpful. Recently Green Living Science started a "10 Dinners for 10 Years" fundraising event. Natalie thought that NNS farm may be a good site for one of these dinners.



Hazon Detroit

Website: <https://hazon.org/detroit/>

Location: Bloomfield Hills, Detroit

Contact: Wren Hack

Position: Hazon Detroit Director

Summary:

Hazon Detroit is one chapter of a national Jewish environmental network, with an emphasis on climate activism, the outdoors, and sustainable food systems. The organization runs a variety of programs, like distributing gardening supplies to community members, sending out a cooking oil-powered educational bus, and overseeing a “Seal of Sustainability” program to help businesses run more sustainably. Although the chapter is small, with four employees, they are engaged in a lot of work and are part of a large, national network. One of their specialties is partnering with other organizations with which their expertises are complimentary.

Funding:

Hazon secures funding primarily through three foundations, and also engages in a great deal of grant-writing to support various initiatives.

Audience:

Hazon reaches a variety of audiences through their myriad programs, with particular focus on Jewish communities and communities of color. Since some of their programs are aimed at businesses, others at students, and others too at families and households, they connect to a wide range of learners.

Barriers to Programming:

Since Hazon relies heavily on external funding sources, when a source becomes unavailable, their programming capacity can become limited. For example, their JOFEE fellowship has been unfunded recently and thus temporarily discontinued. Another challenge is that Hazon is a small organization trying to exercise wide institutional reach, so partnerships with similar organizations are key to fulfilling their mission. Hazon’s biofuel bus, while an important part of programming, is challenging to transport, and so NNS can help with programming and materials distribution in Ann Arbor by acting as a “base” for Hazon.

Partnership Potential:

There are a variety of potential partnerships discovered in our interview with Hazon Detroit. If NNS is able to increase the volume of seed donations, this organization is well-positioned to distribute those seeds to individuals who would otherwise not be able to access them. Additionally, Hazon organizes a food festival each fall that NNS could participate in, although fall can be a hard time of year to sell seeds. The organization would also love to take advantage of Mike and Erika’s niche expertise for workshops or lectures. Wren noted that Hazon also conducts a compost and seed drop-off program, which runs in Ann Arbor--perhaps NNS could serve as a hub for that program, since the biofuel bus that Hazon normally uses for the program is slow and



challenging to transport out to Ann Arbor. If Hazon’s JOFEE fellowship receives funding again, NNS could incorporate that into their existing internship program. When it comes to making these partnerships work, Hazon seemed to be interested in “barter-”style service exchanges--for instance, if NNS were the site for materials distribution, Hazon might run educational programs on the farm. Overall, Wren seemed very excited about any potential collaboration with NNS, and so we highly recommend developing this relationship further.

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Website: <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/>

Location: Statewide

Contact: Kevin Frailey

Position: DNR Education Services Manager

Summary:



The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) hosts two main types of educational programming across the state. The first is park and fish hatchery interpretation, which is usually at visitor centers. This includes public and school programs. In addition, they teach a “Salmon in the Classroom” program, in which students get to raise their own salmon, and eventually release the survivors into local bodies of water. Programming has shifted due to Covid, with virtual programs covering some new topics like resource management, watersheds, and invasive species.

Funding:

Most of the DNR’s income is self-driven through selling fishing and hunting licenses, lumber rights, and through driver’s license renewals. In addition, around 15% of its funding comes from tax revenue.

Audience:

The DNR’s programming has not traditionally reached highly diverse audiences, although they recently hired an employee specifically to reach the communities in Detroit. In addition, field trip pricing can prevent schools with fewer financial resources from participating in programs.

Barriers to Programming:

Since Michigan’s natural resources are primarily located away from developed regions, particularly Southeast Michigan, it can make it hard for the DNR to reach all of the learners that it wants to.

Partnership Potential:

Kevin was excited about the possibility of collaborating with NNS, though he wanted more information before discussing specifics. One idea he did mention was using the NNS site as a site for events that are part of the conference the DNR hosts with the Michigan Alliance for Environmental and Outdoor Education. Unfortunately, the plans for this event were mostly set in stone by the time of our interview, but this type of opportunity could arise again. Finally, Kevin mentioned that the Michigan Department

of Agriculture has wanted to develop educational programming similar to that of the DNR, so beginning conversations with them may be worthwhile.

Michigan United Conservation Clubs

Website: <https://mucc.org/>
Location: Statewide; Youth Camp in Chelsea
Contact: Shaun McKeon
Position: Education Director
Summary:



Michigan United Conservation Clubs, or MUCC, is a statewide nonprofit that connects people of all ages with the outdoors and conservation. MUCC facilitates a wide range of activities, although this interview focused on the organization’s youth summer camp.

Funding:

MUCC is primarily a membership-funded organization, although certain programs draw funds from other sources. For example, the youth camp is funded by tuition, and some organizations, like gun clubs, will sponsor educational experiences for students.

Audience:

MUCC’s youth camp includes children ages 5-16, although they offer a variety of programs to both kids and adults. Around 80% of program participants are white, which is reflective of Michigan’s racial makeup. MUCC is trying to improve the diversity in its programs, like through offering targeted scholarships for students of color.

Barriers to Programming:

MUCC has operated successfully for many years, although one recent challenge was posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. During normal years though, this organization appears to be quite self-sufficient, and we did not identify any significant challenges to which NNS could lend its skills and resources.

Partnership Potential:

For MUCC, it is important that any potential partners align themselves more with principles of “conservation,” than “preservation,” or in other words support actively engaging with and extracting from nature in a sustainable way. Shaun thought of two ways that NNS and MUCC could partner, the first being bringing farmers out to the summer camp as guest teachers. This would focus on a topic that the farmer-educator had particular interest and experience in. Another idea was using the NNS farm site as the location for a family day event, which would entail hosting multiple organizations that could share what they do with interested families.

Nature Learning Community

Website: <http://naturelearningcommunity.org/>

Location: Ann Arbor

Contact: Rowena Conahan

Position: Founder

Summary:

Nature Learning Community is a youth education not-for-profit that helps to connect kids to nature and help them find belonging, self-sufficiency, and personal growth there. This is primarily through after-school classes and supplemental homeschool classes. In addition, they host a small amount of programming designed to help adults connect to the natural world and build life skills. Nature Learning Community already rents space on the NNS farm site for their programming.

Funding:

The organization draws around 95% of its funding from tuition and the remainder from fundraising and donations.

Audience:

The programs include children ages 3-12, although most students are 6-12. Most learners come from the Ann Arbor area, and they are mostly white and middle class. Nature Learning Community does offer scholarships to encourage diverse learner participation, and Rowena stated that she is continuing to work more on ways to improve diversity.

Barriers to Programming:

An ongoing challenge for the Nature Learning Community is taking care of people in the full range of Michigan's weather, which can pose difficulties at temperature extremes. Another challenge lies in being renters on the farm site, which means that the groups have to work around the farm's needs. For instance, evening programming can sometimes be disturbing for the farmers.

Partnership Potential:

There is already a highly effective partnership between NNS and Nature Learning Community, although our interview revealed a few ways to improve upon or expand that partnership. One idea is for youth programs to occur in a more remote space on the property, so that students need not worry as much about disturbing the farmers. Finding a new location for youth programs could also allow NNS to rent out better locations to commercial campers. Rowena identified the key needs of a camp center as proximity to forests, shade, and fields, storage space for gear, and driveability. This is important if considering a new "home base" for students.

Partnership Lessons:

When interviewing Rowena, we also made a point to learn more about what drew them to NNS's site. The move was inspired by a desire for more independence than NLC experienced while operating on co-op land. The farm property is large and diverse, which made it a great spot for learning.



Neha Shah

Website: <https://slowfoodnations.org/participant/neha-shah/>

Location: Ann Arbor

Position: Elementary Teacher, AAPS

Summary:

Neha Shah is an elementary school teacher who has a long history of running school gardens and bringing outdoor, agricultural education to her students. At the moment, she is teaching either fourth or fifth graders, and most of her environmental education happens in the classroom. This is often incorporated into lessons about math or history.

Funding:

Shah's work is within Ann Arbor Public Schools, and so any special programming she conducts must be developed on her own time. In addition, she has applied to grants and requested pro bono work for certain projects like building structures in school gardens.

Audience:

Shah currently teaches fourth and fifth graders and her classes are mostly white, although in the past she taught classes to kindergarteners and 8th graders with higher racial diversity. In general, her classes tend to reflect the demographics of the local community.

Barriers to Programming:

In order to deliver the hands-on, outdoor learning that she provides to her students, Shah has to go above-and-beyond in a job that is already demanding.

Partnership Potential:

Shah has already used the "Farmer in the Classroom" program from Agrarian Adventure, and would always love to host NNS farmers in her classroom through that program, which offers a \$30 stipend. Overall, we found most useful her advice on how to develop education programs for students, which we will share here. She would be open to bringing her students on a field trip to a farm, but mentioned how important it was that the farm facilities include shelter, shade, water, hand-washing stations, and accessibility for students with disabilities. Ideally, environmental education should be layered and allow students to build upon their knowledge year-after-year, not just in a single trip. In addition, staff should consider the diversity of identities of students, including accessibility for English language learners and addressing preconceptions some students may have about farming and the outdoors. We highly recommend developing a professional relationship with Shah, who is well-connected and knowledgeable in the field of youth environmental and agricultural education.

N.E.W. L.E.A.F. Detroit**Website:** <https://www.newleafdetroit.org/>**Location:** Detroit**Contact:** L'Oreal Hawkes-Williams**Position:** Executive Director**Summary:**

New Leaf Detroit conducts a variety of programming aimed at helping Detroit BIPOC communities learn more about ecology and sustainability while building meaningful relationships with their environment. This programming includes sustainable gardening classes, an ecology club for youth, community dinners with sustainable chefs, and sustainability demos provided by external organizations. This organization also grows crops for the Brightmore Connection Food Pantry.

Funding:

New Leaf Detroit funds its program on a “shoestring budget” that requires frugal reuse of resources and taking on paying jobs. Funds are derived primarily from suggested donations for participation in certain programs like the youth club and the community dinners.

Audience:

This organization’s audience is primarily composed of BIPOC living in Detroit, reaching people of all ages in programs directed at both children and general audiences.

Barriers to Programming:

Access to funding and necessary resources for programming are the primary limiting factors for New Leaf Detroit. These barriers provide a number of opportunities that NNS is well-suited to assist with, like offering professional expertise for maintaining a farm, seed donations, and volunteering as educators.

Partnership Potential:

L'Oreal was very excited at the possibility of working with NNS to strengthen both organizations. She was interested in hosting the farmers as guest speakers for her community, using the farm site for events or field trips, and distributing seed donations and crops grown from seed to her local community. In addition, she was interested in learning more about NNS’s specific seed varieties from the farmers as well as receiving broader advice on the urban farming site she oversees. As a bigger, longer-term goal, L'Oreal would love to help set up a summer camp or something similar for students on the farm, giving learners new access to wild space. Another idea was developing an ongoing ecological experiment on the farm site that would allow children to participate in real ecology and spark the young scientists and environmentalists in them. L'Oreal’s enthusiasm and drive have led us to strongly recommend pursuing a collaborative relationship with New Leaf Detroit.



Project Grow

Website: <https://projectgrowgardens.org/>
Location: Ann Arbor
Contact: Kirk Jones; Royer Held
Position: Managing Director; Board Member
Summary:



Project Grow is a local nonprofit whose core work is facilitating community gardens within Ann Arbor. In addition, this organization hosts classes and events designed to teach learners how to garden organically as well as how to grow specific crops.

Funding:

Project Grow currently receives most of its funding through plant sales from its gardens. It supplements this with donations, which allows the organization to offer pay-as-you-can financial assistance. The organization used to receive funding from the city of Ann Arbor, but this diminished and was completely cut during the 2009 economic recession. Project Grow depends heavily on volunteer labor and active board members and site coordinators.

Audience:

Project Grow serves people of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, proportionately similar to the demographic makeup of Ann Arbor. Their classes are, however, dominated by women. Some gardens are hubs for specific ethnic communities, like a plot tended by Ugandan gardeners and another by Korean- and Mandarin-speaking gardeners.

Barriers to Programming:

Project Grow, like other organizations, has had to adapt to operating in the pandemic, and also faces the typical struggles of a nonprofit operating on limited funding. However, we did not identify any key challenges faced by Project Grow that NNS is positioned to address.

Partnership Potential:

Our interviewees expressed hope that Erica, and maybe other NNS staff, could return to a prior arrangement by working with Project Grow to teach an Organic Gardener certification program. They were hesitant to use the NNS farm site as an event location based on past experience. Project Grow does host a seed swap / share that involves sending gardeners the seeds they ask for, which NNS could supply. However, these seeds are not distributed according to need. One idea that an interviewee had was creating an experience that allowed learning gardeners to work alongside experts, perhaps maintaining a plot alongside them. Overall, we did not identify any strong potential for partnership that NNS has not already explored with Project Grow.

Robin Hills Farm

Website: <https://www.robinhillsfarm.com/>

Location: Chelsea

Contact: Adam Kovsky

Position: Managing Director



Summary:

Robin Hills Farm is a large property that hosts events such as weddings, concerts, and educational programming. Previously Robin Hills Farm had an education coordinator position, though for the past couple of years that role has been void. Today Robin Hills Farm hosts environmental education events at their site through collaborations with local individuals or organizations.

Funding:

Adam explained that most of Robin Hills Farm's funding for educational programs comes through the sale of food and drinks during or after events. They also have deals with some educators to profit depending on the number of people that participate (\$10 per person for example).

Audience:

The audience of educational programs at Robin Hills Farm is composed of folks living in the surrounding area. Robin Hills Farm does not make a concerted effort to involve individuals who historically are not represented in environmental education spaces.

Barriers to Programming:

Previously Robin Hills Farm had an environmental education position, though since that person left a couple of years ago they have not coordinated their own programming. They now rely on collaborations with other individuals or organizations to plan and execute environmental education programs. This design allows them to serve as a host and not have to worry about the content of programming and instead focus on providing a good space for education and accompanying amenities and refreshments.

Partnership Potential:

Adam is interested in hosting environmental education events that are planned and executed by NNS staff. There are no particular limitations on the types of subjects that educators could teach. It would mostly be the responsibility of the educators to recruit participants for the events, and Robin Hills Farm may request a portion of ticket sales per person. The farm has several large buildings and outdoor spaces that would be ideal for programming.

Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision

Website: <https://www.sdevweb.org/>

Location: Detroit

Contact: Dolores Perales

Position: Environmental and Community Sustainability Specialist

Summary:

Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision (SDEV) oversees a few community areas, including a large garden, a park, and an orchard. They run educational programs in these, like a garden leader program for college students and mentorship programs that support intergenerational learning. All of the crops that SDEV grows are provided for free to the community, and this food may be a primary source of produce for community members.

Funding:

SDEV relies heavily on donations and grant support, which can be challenging given that grants are often in support of initiatives rather than long-term maintenance. In addition, they host an annual garden party fundraiser, in which participants can enjoy a delicious dinner with entertainment.

Audience:

SDEV's audience reflects the demographics of southwest Detroit, composed mostly of Latine and Black community members. This audience also includes many undocumented folks, and a wide age range from babies to seniors.

Barriers to Programming:

Maintaining consistent funding takes a lot of staff time and energy, so partnerships that allow for exchanges or donations are greatly helpful to SDEV. In addition, within the Latine community there exists some negative perceptions of farming, since many community members have previously worked as farmers and migrant workers and do not want their children to engage in agriculture.

Partnership Potential:

Dolores mentioned that seed donations would be extremely helpful to SDEV, and that they would ensure that those seeds grow into crops that feed the local community. In addition, she would love to host farmers from NNS and hear their thoughts on ways to improve the yields of the community garden. It would also be useful to have farmers share how growing food and spending time outdoors can be fun and healthy in order to combat some of the negative connotations associated with agricultural work. Finally, Dolores mentioned that SDEV volunteers may be interested in NNS's internship program, and so NNS should be sure to communicate those opportunities to SDEV.



The Stewardship Network

Website: <https://www.stewardshipnetwork.org/>

Location: Ann Arbor / National

Contact: Lisa Brush

Position: CEO & Founder



Summary:

The Stewardship Network is a national nonprofit organization based in Ann Arbor that focuses on helping other environmental nonprofits build cross-boundary collaboration to overcome challenges. It includes a number of community clusters, one of which is the “Huron Arbor Cluster.” These clusters are composed of people deeply invested in the sustainability and wellbeing of local communities and the environment. A variety of organizations, including government agencies, nonprofits, consultants, and pertinently farmers and educators are all members of these groups.

Funding:

Although we did not get a chance to ask about specific funding sources, we learned that the Stewardship Network has been nationally recognized, and appears to be a well-established, sustainable business. Here, we focused our questions on what the Stewardship Network asks of organizations that join its communities. The Stewardship Network provides its services to cluster members for free, and only asks for organizations to keep doing what they do and help other organizations in the clusters.

Audience:

The Stewardship Network seeks to include as many organizations as possible, as long as they are involved in the community. We did not ask for any demographics information, since we thought it would be unlikely for Lisa to have specific data on the demographics of partner organizations. However, they do make clear that diversity and inclusion are central aspects of their mission and values.

Partnership Potential:

If NNS wants to expand the environmental education opportunities it offers through partnerships with other organizations, joining the Stewardship Network seems like an excellent first step. This organization is focused on helping businesses like NNS overcome the challenges of limited time and resources. Lisa also thought it would be feasible for a more direct relationship--the Stewardship Network may be interested in using land on the farm site for retreats or events.

On top of being able to facilitate connections with a number of similar organizations, Lisa offered perspective on what could help NNS develop more successful partnerships. She suggested hosting a brainstorming session to identify the resources and abilities NNS can offer to other organizations. She also emphasized the importance of patience, since good programs and partnerships often take years to fully bloom. In addition, Lisa has offered to serve as a resource for further questions about developing relationships between organizations. We highly recommend continuing the

conversation with her, as she brings experience and knowledge in an area to which we are newcomers.

Strawbale Studio

Website: <https://strawbalestudio.org/>
Location: Outside Oxford
Contact: Deanne Bednar
Position: Workshop Leader & Coordinator
Summary:



Strawbale Studio, run by founder Deanne, is an ecological-living center that provides space for community gatherings, teaching, and cultural events. Deanne and Strawbale's interns travel across the country or state periodically to build ecologically friendly buildings or devices like earth ovens. The organization is based on a large forest site where interns live, summer camps adventure, and people learn survival skills.

Funding:

Strawbale Studio is funded by Deanne's personal savings, workshops, internships, and other small events that create revenue. Strawbale Studio does not aim to be very profitable--instead they create enough revenue to persist and complete projects.

Audience:

Strawbale Studio draws a diverse crowd of participants, with kids of all ages attending programs. The Studio makes events celebrating cultural diversity a focus, attracting people of all identities to the site.

Barriers to Programming:

One of the barriers to programming at Strawbale Studio is that their capacity is limited, with Deanne being the only full-time employee. However, interns provide a lot of work-hours and they are compensated for these with room and board based on a rent-to-work hours agreement.

Partnership Potential:

The main way in which NNS could collaborate with Strawbale Studio is by being a guest speaker at one of Strawbale's events. Though the Studio is focused on ecological building, they have a small permaculture garden and value eating sustainability. Additionally, Deanne and staff would be excited to visit NNS to help install some sort of ecological building or device, such as an earth oven.

Toledo Grows

Website: <https://www.toledogrows.org/>

Location: Toledo, OH

Contact: Yvonne Dubielak

Position: Executive Director

Summary:

Toledo Grows is an organization concerned primarily with supporting community gardens in the Toledo area in order to help people learn to grow and eat healthy, delicious food. Their youth programs include visits to schools and field trips for students with topics like pollination, gardening, and keeping chickens. Additionally, they run workshops for adults on specialized topics, like harvesting honey, and host a seed swap and other community events. Additionally, volunteers on the farm have a chance to learn less formally over time.

Funding:

This organization draws funding from diverse sources. They host one large fundraiser, the Crosby Festival of Arts, as well as five harvest dinners throughout the year. In addition, they charge participation fees for most workshops and classes, though grants fund participation in low-income communities. They apply for grants for certain projects, like building structures on the farm, and also sell the products they grow on the farm through a CSA. Finally, they seek sponsorship from local businesses, particularly banks that have a legal obligation to invest in the local community.

Audience:

Toledo Grows reaches a diverse audience of all ages with programs aimed at youth, adults, or the general public. Of the approximately 125 community gardens they support, about 80% of them are in low-income communities. Around 50% of the formal education for youth they conduct reaches students from low and moderate income families.

Barriers to Programming:

In our interview we did not identify any significant barriers Toledo Grows is facing that NNS is positioned to assist with. However, there are still opportunities to collaborate enumerated below.

Partnership Potential:

Yvonne mentioned that in the approximately 25 years Toledo Grows has been around, it has developed a variety of partnerships that have helped it grow into a strong organization. She would love to host NNS staff in Toledo, or to visit the farm in Ann Arbor to share ideas and brainstorm together. In addition, she liked the idea of hosting the farmers as workshop presenters in Toledo. However, the hour-long drive between the sites does provide a substantial barrier to direct, consistent collaboration. One remedy to this might be distanced partnerships, focused on ideas, curriculum development, or something else.



Tollgate Farm 4H Club

Website: <https://www.tollgatefarm4h.com/>

Location: MSU, Novi

Contact: Mary Hutka

Position: Club Leader



Summary:

Tollgate Farm 4H Club is an organization that teaches children how to grow crops and raise animals and also gives them business experience selling at farm stands. They host a daycamp, master gardening classes, and maple syrup tapping programs. The club places particular emphasis on developing teamwork skills and connecting children to food systems and the outdoors.

Funding:

The 4H Club relies on their “symbiotic” relationship with Tollgate Farm. For example, the club helps take care of livestock, and in return the students learn and have fun experiences. The MSU Extension also supports the club with material and resources, and the club is staffed by volunteers like Mary.

Audience:

Participants in the program can be from ages five through nineteen, although most are between twelve and fifteen years old. The club does not have substantial racial diversity, which is reflective of the community it is located in.

Barriers to Programming:

Overall, we did not identify significant barriers faced by the Tollgate Farm 4H Club. Mary mentioned that they need more seeds for their distribution projects, and that she in general wants the group to do more but is sometimes limited by people power or logistical challenges.

Partnership Potential:

The 4H Club already runs an annual community service project in which they ask for unsold seed packets from local seed companies, which they then distribute to people, organizations, and farms in need. Through this program they support about forty local farms! NNS seed donations could be a major asset to the 4H Club in this way. In addition, Mary was interested in having guest speakers to teach about seed saving or other special topics. The club has also struggled to find teachers for a “Junior Master Gardener” class, if NNS staff or interns are interested in that kind of opportunity. Finally, Mary encouraged us to reach out to the Washtenaw 4H Club, which runs similar programming but is much closer and thus might allow for easier collaboration. However, we were unable to connect with them.

Washtenaw Audubon

Website: <https://washtenawaudubon.org/>

Location: Ann Arbor

Contact: Juliet Berger; Victor Chen

Position: President; Education Chair

Summary:

The Washtenaw Audubon Society is a longstanding branch of the Audubon Society that is tied to Michigan Audubon rather than the National Audubon Society. Juliet Berger (President) is involved with birding and ecology at many levels, as she is also the Ann Arbor Ornithologist and holds positions on several boards around the area related to wildlife and ecology. The Washtenaw Audubon Society holds regular meetings where they host guest speakers, as well as frequent birding field trips to local natural areas. The group's in-person meetings are at the Matthei Botanical Gardens.

Funding:

The Washtenaw Audubon Society relies on individual donations to fund their programs, including bequests that provide long term stability. They do not receive funding from the national or regional Audubon offices.

Audience:

The audience of Washtenaw Audubon's programming is primarily older folks. The audience is not particularly racially diverse, though improving diversity of participants and board members is a new focus of the organization.

Barriers to Programming:

The Washtenaw Audubon Society is limited in their ability to provide stipends for guest speakers, which shrinks the pool of speakers they can host. Another barrier for the Society is transporting folks and providing birding equipment for their field trips.

Partnership Potential:

The two main ways in which NNS could partner with the Washtenaw Audubon Society are by being guest speakers and hosting a field trip on the farm. As guest speakers, Mike and Erica could speak on topics of ecology which relate to birding. The farm site may also be a good location for regular field trips, as farmland provides unique habitat for bird species. One difficulty with a potential partnership is that the Audubon Society rarely provides stipends for either guest speakers or field trip hosts.



Washtenaw County Conservation

District

Website: <https://www.washtenawcd.org/>

Location: Ann Arbor

Contact: Summer Roberts

Position: Community Forester

Summary:

Washtenaw County Conservation District is a county-based nonprofit organization that provides environmental education programming to businesses, community members, and school-aged children. A lot of the programming falls within the environmental sciences (sustainable agriculture, gardening, pollinator education), though they aim to expand their offerings to nature walks, yoga, and meditation events.

Funding:

Recently, WCCD has begun to receive funding from the county government to provide expanded programming. Traditionally, native plant sales, consultation revenue, individual donations, and grants provide funding.

Audience:

The audience of WCCD programs is primarily white, older folks in the Ann Arbor area. WCCD has recently taken steps to measure and improve the diversity of participants at events.

Barriers to Programming:

Because of the recent influx in funding, some of the barriers WCCD previously faced while scheduling programming have diminished. One difficulty WCCD has is reaching a large audience for their events, particularly in reaching diverse audiences. WCCD does have an office space, but they rely on public lands or the generosity of locals (such as NNS) to open up their land for events.

Partnership Potential:

Because of the recent influx in funding for WCCD, this is a great time for NNS to build a relationship with WCCD. Summer expressed interest in bringing in NNS folks as educators for events, or having NNS be the host for farmer-centered educational events. Typically, WCCD does not provide stipends for guest speakers, but they can provide honorariums or reimbursements for traveling expenses.



Appendix. 1

Interview Questionnaire Example: Natalie, Green Living Science

START:

1. We are thrilled to get to talk to you today--let's start by sharing our name, pronouns if you like, and our favorite natural place to explore.
2. We are master's students at the University of Michigan, and are working with Nature and Nurture Seed Farm to expand their environmental educational offerings, particularly through partnerships with other organizations. Because of this, we are particularly excited to speak with you, to learn more about your work with Green Living Science.
3. In order to have a reference when reflecting on this interview, we hope to record it via Zoom. The recording will only be used by the two of us, and will be deleted once our project is over. Do you consent to be recorded? If you are uncomfortable with recording, we would still love to interview you. We'll have to ask you once more after recording has begun.

PRESS RECORD

Do you give your permission for us to record this interview?

Potential Collaborator Interview Questions

1. We know Green Living Science provides a wide range of educational programs, could you describe those educational programs, and your role in delivering or planning them?
2. I understand that educational programming has evolved to reach more than just schoolchildren, have the topics also grown from originally being focused on recycling and natural resources conservation education?
3. While reviewing your site we learned about the Green Living Science certificate for businesses, can you tell us more about that and if you ever work with businesses outside of Detroit?
4. What are some of the core educational messages or lessons Green Living Science seeks to share with its students?
5. Can you describe the audience of your educational programs? (Age range, racial diversity)
6. How does your organization reach more diverse audiences?
7. What are some of the challenges and successes associated with reaching people who are underrepresented in agriculture or environmental education?
8. In what physical settings are your educational programs conducted?
9. How does your organization fund its education programs?

10. Share: Nature and Nurture Farm is a large property 5 minutes (?) outside of Ann Arbor, with farmland, orchards, forest, a creek, and other potential settings for education and exploration. It is run by two expert farmers and agro-ecologists.
11. Are there ways you could imagine partnering with a small, organic, family-owned seed farm such as Nature and Nurture? Some examples may be having the farmers as guest speakers, utilize the farm space for events/trips, or work with NNS to help distribute seeds to those who have a difficult time obtaining seeds?
12. Is there anything we haven't discussed that you would like to share?
13. Do you have any questions for us?
14. We are students new to interviewing, and so we would love to hear your feedback on how this experience was. Is there anything we could have done differently to make this a better process?

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