

The Impact of Long-Term Partnerships in Advocacy Efforts

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS & SUSTAIN YOUR PARTNERSHIPS

This case study focuses on the coalition-building initiatives of ECO-Action, Dirty Truth Campaign, and Georgia State University to mobilize community action against environmental hazards in South Atlanta, resulting in successful projects like the TIRED campaign and ongoing efforts to improve public health and safety in underserved neighborhoods.

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[ECO-Action](#) is an organization that focuses on the intersection of environmental and social justice with the goal of promoting a safe and healthy environment by helping Georgia communities organize to address environmental health hazards and pollution. ECO-Action partnered with the Dirty Truth Campaign, a community-based group, to create the South Atlanta for Environment (SAFE) Coalition in Atlanta's Neighborhood Planning Unit-V (NPU-V, which comprises Adair Park, Peoplestown, Mechanicsville, Summerhill, Pittsburgh, and Capitol Gateway). This project brought community, private, and public stakeholders together to identify, prioritize, and reduce exposures to environmental hazards in NPU-V.

The initial problem was the indiscriminate dumping of tires in low-income communities, African American communities in particular. This includes NPU-V (Adair Park, Capitol Gateway, Mechanicsville, Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, Summerhill) and NPU-L (English Avenue, Vine City). This illegal dumping had public health implications for the communities involved; for instance mosquito-borne diseases were increasing.



Tires found in NPU-V's Mechanicsville Neighborhood
Credit: ECO-Action

The goal of the project was to reduce and eliminate illegal dumping so that it would not have any public implications. The action of the campaign was three-fold. First, we plan and organize. This involves mobilizing and organizing faculty, students, and the communities. Georgia State University (GSU) was our partner in doing this. Community members, faculty and students were able to have a collaboration with GSU School of Public Health Center for Excellence. Together, we strategize on how to go about this. Additionally, we increase community awareness by having community meetings and sharing flyers. Second, we collaborated with Liberty Tire Recycling. This company was able to remove and recycle the tires. Normally they charge for this service but in this case, they were willing to do it without a charge. Lastly, we let the City of Atlanta know about what we're doing at that time. So, the City Council eventually created an ordinance § 130-32 which states "It is unlawful to cause, suffer, or allow the dumping of scrap tires within the City of Atlanta". This campaign, which we called TIRED- The Initiative to Reduce and Eliminate Dumping, is a visible impact of the SAFE Coalition.

Given the success of the TIRED project, we applied for the EPA's CARE grant. The relationships we built through the TIRED project were transferred to the SAFE coalition, which was put together so that we'll be able to increase not just awareness around the issue that TIRED addressed but also other environmental issues in NPU-V.

Another environmental issue was flooding. Flooding became a recurrent issue in the Atlanta neighborhoods of Peoplestown, Mechanicsville, and Summerhill. I met Mr. Columbus Ward, Community Leader and Director of Peoplestown Revitalization Corporation on the street when we were working with the SAFE coalition. He really helped us move the coalition to a higher level. There was a point where we were meeting almost every week. ECO-Action collaborated with community groups and partners in helping to develop the vision, strategy and tactics of the Turner Field Community Benefits Coalition. To protest redevelopment plans that were unresponsive to community needs, the Coalition established a tent city outside the former Turner Field in demand of a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with GSU and developer Carter Associates.

A CBA is a legally binding contract between developers and community groups that outlines specific commitments and benefits provided to the community in exchange for support of a development project. The Coalition did not get a CBA, but the City of Atlanta created a \$5M neighborhood fund for the NPU-V communities. The seed money is intended to help grow community capacity for addressing environmental issues in NPU-V, which benefited grassroots groups. The community is now trying to amplify that to get additional funding from the city and other sources to sustain this investment.

LESSON LEARNED

“Start with building strong relationships before seeking funding. Successful projects are grounded in genuine connections and collaborative planning. For instance, our work began with the TIRED project, where we established valuable relationships and partnerships and identified key environmental issues. Rather than waiting for a grant to dictate our actions, we sought funding to support the plans and solutions we had already developed through these relationships. The success and momentum of the TIRED project laid a solid foundation for the SAFE coalition, enabling us to expand our focus and address additional environmental challenges. Building and leveraging relationships first creates a strong base that enhances the effectiveness of subsequent projects and funding opportunities.”



Illegal Tire Dumping Press Conference
Credit: ECO-Action

Principles in Action

- » *C1 - Trust:* Build long-term, mutually respectful relationships with community partners; show up for each other to build trust, meet people, and see where things lead. Be an octopus: grow your tentacles.
- » *G1 - Sustained Relationships:* Continue to show up: responsibilities and relationships should not end just because a project does.
- » *G2 - Connectivity:* Maintain communication and connection to partners in between projects and funding cycles so as to build long-term, trusting relationships.

This project started with three partners and ended with dozens. It is a good example of how community engagement brought all kinds of people together. In the end, we were able to not only increase awareness of environmental issues but have a tangible impact on certain places we helped to clean up - to make it better than how it was. Additionally, we provided space for collaboration and capacity-building to happen.

Even though the EPA Community Action for Renewed Environment (CARE) grant ended, the impact was present. Building and sustaining relationships was a focus in this project, and they continued. We were meeting with people in Peoplestown - we started meeting, training, showing them the value of green infrastructure. In 2015, ECO-Action received an EPA Urban Waters Small Grant to integrate green infrastructure into the Atlanta University Center system, focusing on stormwater management in Proctor Creek watershed communities. By 2017, ECO-Action expanded

its efforts through the Conservation Fund's project, developing community engagement around green infrastructure in parks. They also contributed to the creation of the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN) with partners West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA) and American Rivers, addressing flooding and public health issues. The AWLN provided training on watersheds, stormwater solutions, and green infrastructure, culminating in community action projects aimed at practical environmental improvements.

Building long-term sustainability was a priority for ECO-Action. Beyond the initial grant, the organization sought equitable development and embraced new opportunities to advance their work. This included collaborating with Professor Andrea Winqvist at Emory University, leading to [HERCULES](#) funding for Proctor Creek Collaborative Health Study. These efforts exemplify how maintaining communication and supporting ongoing projects helps sustain relationships and build trust with partners, ensuring that progress continues even between funding cycles. The goal is to build sustainability over time, not just for a single project.

Related Resources:

- [Key Elements of Engaging, Building, and Sustaining Partnerships in South Atlanta for the Environment \(SAFE\) Coalition](#)
- [Celebrating 30 Years of Leadership for Environmental Justice in Georgia](#)