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Growth. That’s the theme you’ll find in the following pages.

Last year was a tremendous period of growth for Urban Green Lab. From our staff and board to the programs we lead, our mission grew in new directions and helped make learning about sustainable living more accessible to all Nashvillians.

Of course, what this annual report can’t fully capture in pictures and words are the feelings of personal connection between all these educators and colleagues, residents and partners, and donors, especially in the way our staff works together every day. Inclusive, meaningful citywide relationships will remain at the heart of all we do in the years to come, especially as we work to achieve the city’s sustainability goals through learning and exploration.

Thank you for your part in helping us grow our mission in 2023. You are the champions we exist to serve, and we’re grateful for you.

Sincerely,

Todd Lawrence & Parry Healy

Todd Lawrence, Executive Director
Parry Healy, 2023 Board Chair
We extend a special thank you to Stephanie Swart for taking most of the photographs displayed in this report.
There’s never been a more critical time to teach Nashvillians how to live sustainably.

As director of sustainability and resilience for Mayor Freddie O’Connell and Metro Nashville and Davidson County, I am witnessing the opportunity to invest in sustainability like never before as our city experiences record growth that is impacting our vulnerable communities and more state and federal agencies look to invest in climate-related work.

We accomplished a lot as a city in 2023, but for the sake of space, I’ll share four energizing accomplishments.

1. **We published a climate adaptation and resilience plan for Nashville** that compliments our published climate action plan, detailing what we need to do to be responsive to the changing climate affecting Nashvillians today.

2. **After ten years of conversation, we solidified a partnership with Nashville Electric Service to retrofit all streetlights in Davidson County with LED light bulbs and technology to detect when a light is out.** This results in less greenhouse gas emissions, increased public safety, and cost savings through energy efficiency.

3. **The city launched a curbside food scrap pick-up pilot program for 750 residents.** Data from that pilot will be used to potentially deploy a citywide food scrap pick-up program in the future.

4. **We conducted a Metro property solar cost-benefit analysis** and identified 100 megawatts of solar that can be installed across 200 Metro-owned properties.

Interest in mobility, transportation, and decarbonization is at an all-time high; there is potential to increase connectivity between places where people live, work, and play while reducing our environmental impacts. There’s also a sense of urgency to solve our solid waste issues. If we can organize and focus hope and enthusiasm in the right places, we can accomplish our goals.

To reach our city’s goals, organizations and residents must understand the concept of sustainability and connect their everyday choices to the changes we see in our environment and the effects on their neighbors. Education is the starting point for achieving a more sustainable Nashville, and I am proud of the culture-shifting education Urban Green Lab brought to Nashville in 2023.

Let’s keep going,

*Kendra Abkowitz*

Kendra Abkowitz, Director of Sustainability and Resilience
We teach communities sustainably.
Urban Green Lab is making sustainability education a part of life in Nashville. That means ensuring all of us have access to the best solutions for making choices that protect our planet, people, and prosperity in all the places where we learn – our classrooms, households, and workplaces. To do this, we organize champions, train them on how to share resources, and connect them with each other for deeper, more collective learning.

Urban Green Lab also leads special initiatives that capture the imagination of Nashvillians around core current issues. Right now, that includes the Nashville Food Waste Initiative and the Nashville Environmental Justice Initiative.
Sustainability is for all of us.

Sustainability is a human right, and our work is for everyone regardless of race, place, and identity. To us, living more sustainably is a journey rooted in compassion, inclusion, and justice.

Education leads to action.

We believe education is the first step toward taking meaningful action and that learning to live sustainably can be simple and fun. We empower people to try little changes that make a big difference.

Collaboration makes us stronger.

Nothing is achieved alone. Our diverse partnerships allow us to work creatively, accountably, and in harmony. We believe we go further together.

We are good stewards of our organization.

Taking good care of what we have is at the heart of who we are and what we do. We are committed to using your gifts of support responsibly and transparently to deliver credible work toward our shared goals.
With input from our funders and stakeholders, we increased our staff 100%, growing our capacity to further support our mission. We launched new programs, reached exciting milestones in existing programs, and made an impact for the planet, people, and our prosperity, one Nashvillian at a time.

The following program accomplishments go beyond the singular person trained or engaged; they represent systemic change being made in 36 classrooms, 34 households, and 52 workplaces.

**Classrooms**

36 Educators trained on bringing a sustainable lens into their K-12 classroom and equipped with our Sustainable Classrooms Curriculum

**Households**

34 UGL Volunteers trained on sustainability and how to share sustainability with friends, family, or neighbors in the program’s pilot year

**Workplaces**

52 Businesses engaged across Middle Tennessee to create or improve a culture of learning about sustainability in their workplaces
Sustainability is for all of us.

Staying true to our value that sustainability is for all of us, we aim to bring sustainability education into all the places we live, learn, and work. The map on the following page showcases the schools and workplaces we have reached through 2023 and the distribution of our UGL volunteers throughout Davidson County. You’ll also see illustrations of key locations connected to our mission or organization. Due to space and geographic constraints, not all places we have reached are showcased on the following map. Please reference the table in the left corner of the map for a fuller picture of our reach.
Reach Through 2023

112 Classrooms
34 Volunteers
60 Workplaces

Due to space and geographic constraints, not all locations reached are shown on the map.
Urban Green Lab’s Classrooms Division trains educators of all kinds on sustainability and how they can bring a sustainable lens into their classrooms. Training educators creates opportunities for year-round learning about sustainability, empowering students to make lifelong sustainable choices.

2023 was a milestone year for the Classrooms Division. We surpassed over 300 educators trained in our Sustainable Classrooms program since its inception, providing the tools, resources, and community to bring a sustainable lens into their classrooms. We also launched a newsletter and online community for our trained educators to continue learning and connecting with their peers.

- Surpassed 300 educators trained in the Sustainable Classrooms program
- Launched our digital learning community of trained Sustainable Classrooms educators
- Partnered with Recycle & Reinvest and Imani Montessori School to create a sustainability rap song with students - Listen to the song by clicking here.
- Presented on sustainability and social-emotional learning at the Music City Social Emotional Learning Conference
- Hired our first sustainable classrooms coordinator, Erin Bloom

Key Successes

**36**
Educators trained in our Sustainable Classrooms program

**7**
New schools with Sustainable Classrooms trained educators

**94%**
Of educators trained in 2023 plan to integrate sustainability into their classrooms
Carlos Calderón believes that learning and teaching about sustainability enables him to develop knowledge, skills, values, and motivations for action, allowing him to maintain his own well-being and that of his students and school community. “Overall, teaching sustainability helps my students become responsible global citizens,” said Calderón. “They are able to consider the long-term consequences and outcomes of their actions to make better decisions, becoming better knowledgeable individuals in their life stages.”

This year, Calderón adapted the Home Investigations project-based learning assignment in our Sustainable Classrooms Curriculum for kindergarten and first-grade classes. He has found this assignment to be an excellent tool for engaging students and their families with sustainability. Teaching about sustainability in the classroom inspired his school to create an outdoor garden in partnership with the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture UT/TSU Extension.
The Households Division provides sustainability education, tools, and resources to Nashville residents through Sustainable in the City and the newly launched UGL Volunteers program.

Sustainable in the City is a monthly webinar presented with Zero Waste Nashville to educate residents on topics related to sustainability and waste. This year’s guests discussed everything from pollinators to the city’s curbside composting pilot.

Piloted this year, the UGL Volunteers program provides Nashvillians with the resources, tools, and training on sustainable practices to share with friends, family, and neighbors. The program equips volunteers with the knowledge and confidence to facilitate meaningful conversations on sustainability.

Key Successes

- Launched the UGL Volunteers pilot program, training 34 volunteers
- Hosted 20 experts in sustainability on Sustainable in the City
- Received an average of 39 attendees per Sustainable in the City episode
- Created an online community of tools and resources for UGL Volunteers to continue learning and connecting
- Hired and trained a sustainable households manager, Karissa Hampton
Maria Morales thinks learning about sustainability with friends and family is essential because we’re all on this Earth together, and having an action-oriented approach can make a significant impact. She became a UGL Volunteer because she was looking for a community of sustainability-minded people in Nashville, and she’s found that through Urban Green Lab. “It makes me happy that there is such a community of inspired people with the goal of making Nashville more sustainable on an individual and community level,” said Morales.

When she shared a video on food waste with some of her extended family, it created the opportunity for a meaningful conversation. They discussed how waste and sustainability are generally not something people talk about. They expressed appreciation for the space to discuss those topics because of the lessons supplied by the UGL Volunteers program.
Education leads to action.

Workplaces

Our Workplaces Division works with businesses, nonprofits, schools, and government offices to implement sustainability education for employees. We help workplaces organize green teams, teach them about sustainability, and connect them to community resources that make a difference for their business through B Tennessee, Urban Green Lab Certification, and the Nashville Sustainability Roundtable.

In 2023, our Workplaces division prioritized opportunities for education and community building. We hosted in-person events, like the Roundtables, for organizations looking to foster a culture of sustainability in their workplaces and spoke on multiple panels about sustainable business. We also piloted a New Hire Orientation learning module on sustainability to continue making sustainability education a part of workplace cultures, beginning at onboarding.

• Piloted a New Hire Orientation learning module on sustainability for seven organizations, including B Corps, nonprofits, and local government
• Co-presented the first in-person B Leadership Development (BLD) Southeast Conference in Raleigh, NC as the leader of B Tennessee
• Organized and led a panel at Bonnaroo with local ethical businesses to discuss sustainable consumption
• Hosted our first full calendar year of Nashville Sustainability Roundtable meetings
• Hired the first sustainable workplaces coordinator, Bethany Edwards

Key Successes

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<th>150</th>
<th>52</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nashville Sustainability Roundtable attendees</td>
<td>Businesses engaged to increase sustainable behavior</td>
<td>Of surveyed Roundtable attendees reported increased knowledge of sustainability</td>
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Greg Crofton is excited when he gets to learn how a workplace is conducting business sustainably. He believes sustainable practices increase the value of businesses - like the one he works for - exponentially. Greg is the General Manager at Bongo Java Roasting Co. and a proud member of the Nashville Sustainability Roundtable. “The Roundtable opened our eyes and helped us come to know other like-minded businesses in Nashville that care about how business gets done,” said Crofton. “There’s business as usual, and then there are those who come to the Sustainability Roundtable to see how it can be done factoring in true social responsibility.”

Urban Green Lab first engaged with Greg and Bongo Java in 2021. Since then, we have accomplished a lot together, including creating a permanent solution for composting their coffee grounds at the roasting co. They sought creative, cost-effective solutions by partnering with another local business they share an alley with to split the cost of compostable and recyclable waste pickup services.
The Nashville Environmental Justice Initiative (NEJI) is a partnership with Tennessee State University (TSU) that educates community stakeholders on environmental justice and collaborative problem-solving that protects and empowers Nashville’s most marginalized communities from environmental hazards.

This year, the NEJI began creating an oral history archive to document the lived experiences of Nashvillians experiencing the effects of climate change first, worst, and longest. The archive was born out of a desire to create opportunities for active community listening. It is intended to document and increase awareness of the challenges the Nashville community is experiencing due to a shifting climate.

Key Successes

- **33** NEJI steering committee members representing 25 organizations across Nashville
- **4** TSU students creating informative climate briefs for the oral history archive
- **3** Oral histories recorded, in 2023, documenting the lived experiences of Nashvillians

- Convened an advisory team for the oral history archive consisting of TSU faculty and Geographic Information Sciences students, academics, journalists, and oral historians
- Began recording the lived experiences of Nashvillians through the oral history archive project
- Organized and led a panel at Bonnaroo with local environmental justice leaders to discuss how everyone plays a part in justice in Tennessee
- Threaded education on environmental justice throughout programs in the Classrooms, Households, and Workplaces Divisions
- Hired an assistant director of special initiatives, Stephanie Roach, to lead the NEJI for Urban Green Lab
Aria McElroy believes bringing about environmental justice begins with listening to the needs of the people. A native of Detroit, Michigan, and a Tennessee State University (TSU) student, McElroy knew she wanted to get involved in TSU’s work in environmental justice after experiencing injustices in Michigan and learning about how environmental injustices have shaped Nashville communities.

McElroy’s student perspective brings a fresh lens to the oral history project that Urban Green Lab conducts in partnership with TSU. Applying what she has learned from living and studying in Nashville, she works to compose background briefs that deepen the interviewer’s knowledge base of climate science. She also identifies local empowerment resources of groups addressing environmental and social injustices in Nashville for participants. “I hope the archive will help establish a picture of how Nashville has changed over time,” said McElroy. “It will showcase how some people who have created lives and businesses here are being left by the wayside. I hope it will uplift those being left and help newcomers become aware of history that is worth protecting.”
The Nashville Food Waste Initiative (NFWI), in partnership with the Environmental Law Institute (ELI), drives citywide policies and strategies that reduce food waste through prevention, rescuing surplus food for those in need, and composting food scraps to build healthy soil.

In 2023, Urban Green Lab and ELI compiled and published a series of five resource guides with vetted, science-based resources and three videos showcasing our approach to food waste education to support others looking to educate communities on food waste. We also worked with Patagonia Nashville to install the second mural in our “Waste Less” murals project, sharing what food is and encouraging Nashville to waste less through the power of art.

Key Successes

• Compiled and distributed five resource guides with vetted, science-based materials for those looking to educate communities on food waste, with the partnership of ELI

• Developed three videos showcasing our approach to educating on food waste in classrooms, households, and workplaces

• Installed a mural about food waste at Patagonia Nashville in the Gulch

• Threaded education on food waste throughout programs in the Classrooms, Households, and Workplaces Divisions

• Hired an assistant director of special initiatives, Stephanie Roach, to lead the NFWI for Urban Green Lab

2nd Mural in the Waste Less mural series completed at Patagonia Nashville

24 Convenings of the NFWI steering committee with national and local thought leaders

100% Attendance for a Climate Week lunch at 1 Kitchen, featuring a local, low-waste meal
Matt Heinly believes that “the food waste crisis in Nashville won’t just be solved by bureaucracy and policy. It will be solved by individual contributors analyzing their operation and thinking ‘what can we do better?’” said Heinly. Heinly’s team at Patagonia Nashville continually sees edible food in dumpsters instead of feeding underserved and unfed neighbors, so they decided to do something about it. Patagonia urges stores to use the business to save our home planet, including everything living on it. As a result, the Nashville team adopted waste reduction as a core community cause to focus on.

Out of this activist spirit carried by their team came a mural urging passers-by to waste less food. “Our goal with this mural is to catch the attention of folks passing by and inspire them to think about what they can do right now to reduce food waste,” shared Heinly. “You can’t pass one of artist Nathan Brown’s installations without stopping to take it in.” As a consumer, Heinly believes behavior change has to begin at the point of sale. “The more we demand better from our food sources, the more the industry will be forced to adapt.”
Collaboration makes us stronger.

POSNER FOUNDATION of Pittsburgh

W.L. Lyons Brown Foundation

PACESETTER

SUSTAINER

American Association of Medical Colleges
Core Development, The Core Fund of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee
Deloitte
HCA Healthcare Foundation
The Memorial Foundation
Nashville Predators Foundation
Vanderbilt University Medical Center Office of Health Equity

Brian Bender  Heather Langford
Nakayah Box   Todd Lawrence
Melissa Cornejo-Nell  Bradley Pinson
Emily Davis  Lindsey Rueger
Mike Drongowski  John Sherman
Barbara Futter  Neely Tabor
Stephanie Gates  Jennifer Westerholm
John Harkey  Jenna Wolf

The Grateful Daniel Fund of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee
Mission North
patagonia

NISSAN

Kroger
Kristine Alpi  
Alvéole  
Lena Anthony  
Weronika Armstrong  
Deborah Aron  
Renee Barker  
Isaiah Beard Trust  
Kristen Bettin  
Kristin Brassel  
Jackalope Brewing Company  
Barbara Brown  
Emerald Built Environments  
Joseph Calabrese  
Ed Callaway  
Teresa Catignani  
Jay Clayton  
TrueNorth Companies  
Deborah Conway  
Carla Davis  
Lauren Decker  
Mark DeVries  
Nashville Earth Day Grant  
Karl Ebert  
Elizabeth Ellinas  
Nora Few  
Roshny George  
Raquel Givens  
Sandra Gold  
Bria Grangard  
Alliance for Green Hills  
Joel Griffith  
Talbott Grimm  
Paul Gross  
Jenn Harbin  
Natalie and Louis Harrison  
Parry Healy  
Brandon Hill  
Darby Hoover  
Lisa Howley  
Kenneth Hutchins  
Bearded Iris Brewing  
Elizabeth Jarrard  
Jack Johnson All at Once  
Shira Kaplan  
Elise and Patrick Karpinski  
Timothy Kembell  
Teresa Knott  
Tom and Carolyn Lawrence  
Winnie Lau  
Keith Loiseau  
John Luk  
Joseph Martinez  
Daniel McDonell  
McKesson  
Ross McKinney  
Julian Ernesto Gonzalez Medina  
Bonnie Miller  
Jocelyn Mitchell-Williams  
Meredith Montgomery  
Jennifer Nall  
Jennifer Neenan  
Kari Nelson  
Patrick Newton  
John Noel  
Jennifer Novo  
Michelle Oakes  
Amanda Osta  
Orion Pahl  
Geoffrey Parker  
Devang Patel  
Laurae Pearson  
McKenzie Poston  
Sabrina Powell  
George Rattin  
Linda Reimann  
Angie Renfro  
Elizabeth Rose  
Allison Scheflow  
Kevin Schiff  
Jennifer Schlener-Thomas  
Allison Serra  
Ana Serra  
PD Sharif  
Mary Sinclair  
Brian Smith  
Nathan Stuck  
Fifth Third Bank  
Jennifer Tribble  
Danielle Turnipseed  
Rockridge Venture Law  
Alexa Voytek  
Christa Wagner  
Amy Weber  
Julia Weber  
Larry Weber  
Karen Wieckert  
National Wildlife Federation  
Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency  
Kate Wingate  
Randy Woods  
Ellen Zimmermann
Collaboration makes us stronger.

“As a former board member, I know every dollar I donate is working harder and smarter to educate in classrooms, households, and workplaces across Nashville,” said Davis. She has witnessed how UGL programs bring excitement and hope, leading to more informed personal choices and leaders and better social and environmental outcomes.

“Time and time again, I have seen the need for information and resources met through UGL programs, like the Nashville Sustainability Roundtable,” shared Davis. “I encourage everyone reading to get involved with UGL too - donate, volunteer, and most importantly, educate.”

Emily Davis believes Urban Green Lab delivers vital information to address one of the most important issues of our time: sustainability.

Nissan North America has supported Urban Green Lab’s mission of teaching communities how to live sustainably since the beginning with our first education program, the Mobile Lab, a classroom on wheels driven to schools by a donated Nissan Titan XD truck.

Since then, Nissan has supported us in training teachers, coaching workplaces, and ensuring that sustainability becomes more accessible to all Nashvillians. Together, we have extended sustainability learning to some 30,000 Middle Tennesseans.

In 2023, Nissan donated a fully-electric LEAF as the latest mobile demonstration of the positive impact we can have for our environment and our city. Partnerships like these exemplify the power of companies and nonprofits working together on big problems and coming up with creative, community-driven solutions.
Collaboration makes us stronger. Creating a more just and sustainable Nashville is not something we can do on our own. That’s why we strategically partner with organizations working for a more just and sustainable society. This year, we’re highlighting our partners for the Nashville Environmental Justice Initiative and the Nashville Food Waste Initiative.

**Tennessee State University (TSU)**

TSU and Urban Green Lab work together through the Nashville Environmental Justice Initiative to educate community stakeholders on the tenets of environmental justice and collaborative problem-solving that protects and empowers Nashville’s most marginalized communities from environmental hazards.

**TSU and its Geographic Information Sciences Laboratory (GIS) have historically been champions for climate and environmental justice. Since its founding, GIS has provided technical assistance to environmental justice and community-based organization stakeholders in support of several community-based participatory research activities.**

**Environmental Law Institute (ELI)**

Through the Nashville Food Waste Initiative, Environmental Law Institute (ELI) and Urban Green Lab drive citywide policies and strategies that reduce food waste by preventing wasted food, rescuing surplus food for those in need, and composting and recycling food scraps to build healthy soil.

**ELI makes law work for people, places, and the planet. Since 1969, ELI has played a pivotal role in shaping the fields of environmental law, policy, and management, domestically and abroad. They are an internationally recognized non-partisan research, publishing, and education center working to strengthen environmental protection by improving law and governance worldwide.**
Collaboration makes us stronger.

Parry Healy
Louisiana Pacific Corporation
President

Alexa Voytek
Tennessee Department Of Environment And Conservation
Vice-President

Kristin Nelson
Parthenon PR
Secretary

Sabrina Powell
Kroger Companies
Treasurer and Finance Committee Chairperson

Neely Tabor
G7 Entertainment Marketing
Communications Committee Chairperson

Bradley Pinson
Fifth Third Private Bank
Governance Committee Chairperson

Jaz Boon
Bridgestone Americas

Ed Callaway
Holland & Knight

Melissa Cornejo-Nell
Metro Nashville Public Schools

Mike Drongowski
Nissan North America

Brandon Hill
Nashville Soccer Club

Ashford Hughes, Sr.
Metro Nashville Public Schools

Elise Karpinski
TrueNorth Companies

Jennifer Novo
Futuro, Inc.

Rae Oleshansky
Nurses For Newborns (YLC Intern 2023)

Ana Paula Serra
Nissan Americas

Erica Weeks
Hastings Architecture

Anna Weinroth Ward
McKesson
Urban Green Lab’s staff is a community of people who are passionate about creating a culture of sustainable behavior in Nashville. This year, we added five new members to our staff, hiring our first-ever assistant director of special initiatives, plus two coordinators for the Classrooms and Workplaces Divisions. We also added the Director of Education role to lead the direction of our educational programming to realize our collective goals.
We are good stewards of our organization.

In 2020, Urban Green Lab created its first five-year strategic plan looking at six broad goals for strengthening how we deliver our mission of sustainability education in Nashville. As described in the pages above about our programming in 2023, we're on the way to accomplishing these goals as a team.

1. Increase visibility in the community

2. Better respond to the needs of diverse communities

3. More clearly communicate our mission and impact

4. Collaboration
   Understand the field in order to catalyze change

5. Utilize technology to be innovative and efficient

6. Strengthen our business model to drive growth
We are good stewards of our organization.

This page reflects data from our most recently audited financials from the calendar year 2022. Urban Green Lab's fiscal cycle follows the calendar year. At the date of this report's publication, February 29, 2024, our 2023 financials have not been audited yet. For additional information, all financial reports are available on our website. Our audited 2023 financial report will be available on our website after May 15, 2024.

Our programs are led by a team of highly credentialed educators. Therefore, a majority of our expenses are investments in human resources to further our educational mission.
Support our Work

Share

Spread the word about sustainability and our mission.

Volunteer with us, join our board or staff or enroll in a program.

Invest in sustainability education for Nashville.