



# NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT 25 YEARS

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



## FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Lynn Kelly

When I began the role of Executive Director at New York Restoration Project in February 2020, I could not have imagined what would follow just one month later when COVID-19 hit—a crisis that continues to this day. As a life-long New Yorker, I was deeply struck by the impacts of the pandemic to my home and felt the loss on a personal level. I made it my goal to ensure that NYRP was an active part of local recovery and that we would continue to provide essential resources and services to the communities who have been hit hardest.

This past year has only underscored how critical access to quality open space is for our mental and physical health. Since the pandemic struck, New Yorkers have been relying on open space more than ever before, with city parks now seeing pre-COVID weekend levels of use on a daily basis.

Despite this dramatic increase, as of May 2020, open space nonprofit organizations like NYRP—which collectively support 50 percent of the city's public parks and green spaces—suffered a devastating revenue loss of \$37 million dollars due to the pandemic. This translates to 40,000 lost hours of maintenance citywide, 110,000 lost hours of horticultural care, and numerous lost jobs.

In April 2020, to address this emergency, I helped form NYC Parks and Open Space Partners. This diverse coalition of over 30 parks conservancies and advocacy groups have since worked together to mitigate the impacts of our public health crisis and advocate for increased funding of open space. In May, we issued the remarkable “Report on COVID-19 Impact on Public Spaces” that garnered national press.

Amidst the pandemic, NYRP has also celebrated our 25th anniversary. Our work has left an indelible mark on New York City and our success to date is a testament to the strength and integrity of the organization, which will carry us forward into the next quarter century.

Our work is possible because of the generous support of our donors. On behalf of the entire NYRP team, thank you for standing with us during this unprecedented time to ensure that all New Yorkers can experience the critical benefits of nature.

I look forward to working with you in 2021.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Kelly', followed by a long horizontal line.

**Lynn Kelly**  
Executive Director



## FROM OUR CO-CHAIRS

For over 25 years, New York Restoration Project has pioneered a model to turn underutilized public spaces into beloved community assets, making our city cleaner, greener, and healthier for 8.6 million residents.

The past year has been unique in so many ways—some expected and others not. Early in the year, we kicked off our 25th anniversary by welcoming Lynn Kelly as NYRP's new Executive Director. Unfortunately, just one month later, COVID-19 hit and devastated many of the communities where NYRP works. The immediate impact of the pandemic prompted NYRP to adapt and innovate like never before.

As New Yorkers, we understand how essential open space is to a thriving city. Community parks and gardens support mental and physical health, offer a safe place for children to play, and provide fresh, locally grown food. For all these reasons, New Yorkers need the respite of open space now more than ever. In particular, the pandemic has exacerbated the existing food insecurity crisis throughout the city, underscoring the importance of NYRP's work in urban agriculture.

Despite the incredible challenges of this past year, we found many reasons to celebrate this milestone for NYRP. In 2020 alone, we:

- Removed **120,000 pounds of trash** from parks
- Composted **43,000 pounds of organic material**
- Helped gardeners grow **90,000 pounds of fresh produce**
- Built or transformed **18 shared green spaces** throughout the city
- Completely renovated **2 community gardens**
- Reintroduced **an oyster reef** to northern Manhattan

Thanks to strong leadership, strategic management, and our dedicated donors, NYRP has been able to persevere and deliver essential services throughout this crisis. As the city begins the long process of rebuilding, NYRP will be a vital part of that recovery, working at the intersection of environmental and social justice to make communities safer, healthier, and happier.

Thank you for standing with us to ensure that all New Yorkers can access the critical benefits of green space. Your support has already made such a difference, and it is what will carry NYRP's mission forward into the next 25 years.

With gratitude,



**Darcy Stacom and Helena Durst**  
Co-Chairs, Board of Trustees



Darcy Stacom

Helena Durst





# MISSION AND VALUES

**New York Restoration Project believes that access to nature is a fundamental human right.**

We work to ensure that all New Yorkers have equitable access to green space. For 25 years, NYRP has invested in and stewarded parks and gardens throughout the city's five boroughs to strengthen communities, promote food sovereignty, and counter environmental and social injustice.

Effectively carrying out our mission requires collaboration, synergy, and understanding of the communities we serve on many different levels. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are embedded into our core identity and we deeply value the unique perspectives, knowledge, and resources that each member of our team and extended community brings to NYRP.



**Alejandro Campos**  
Clinton Avenue  
Community Garden



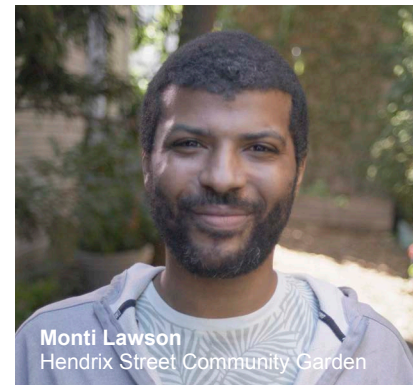
**Gwendolyn Breland**  
Williams Avenue  
Community Garden



**Taji Riley**  
Willis Avenue Community Garden



**Amy and Maya Martinez**  
Clinton Avenue Community Garden



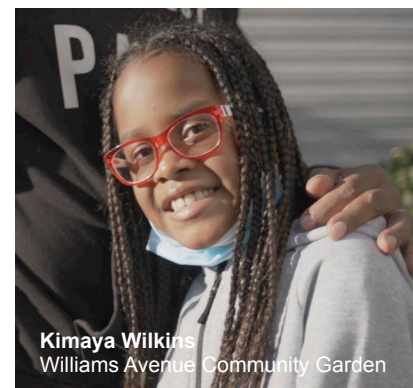
**Monti Lawson**  
Hendrix Street Community Garden



**Mary Johnson**  
Willis Avenue  
Community Garden



**Greg Todd**  
Imani Community Garden



**Kimaya Wilkins**  
Williams Avenue Community Garden

Some of the many community gardeners who are active in NYRP's green spaces citywide.

PHOTOS: JONAH MARKOWITZ



# REVITALIZING OPEN SPACE

This past year was always going to be busy for NYRP's Operations and Capital teams: we began 2020 with ambitious plans to renovate over

15 green spaces for community partners and totally overhaul two of our biggest gardens, all while continuing our routine maintenance rounds throughout the city.

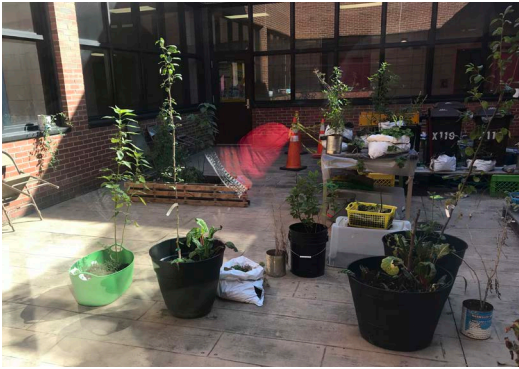
When COVID-19 hit in March, priorities across the organization shifted immediately to protect the

health and safety of our staff, partners, contractors, and communities. With stringent public health protocols soon in place, our crew began the spring season as truly essential workers responsible for stewarding 52 parks and gardens across all five boroughs. We've always known our work's value, but almost overnight, it became vital for a city on lockdown.

It was clear by late spring that operating under the pandemic was our new normal, and empowered by a deep sense of purpose, our team remained committed to finishing as much of our original 2020 plan as possible.

"I really wanted to complete the new raised bed and urban agriculture projects so our partners would still have a food growing season," says Director of Garden Horticulture and Citywide Greening Projects Jason Sheets, who oversees our Gardens for the City (GFTC) program. After revamping Poppa and Momma Jones and Davidson Avenue Community Gardens in a little over two weeks, our GFTC staff kicked off the season by building 24 new raised beds—without their usual volunteer assistance and while wearing masks.

While projects with local partners forged ahead, continuing major renovations in two of our own community gardens, Bathgate and Aberdeen, presented different challenges. A mandatory work stoppage in March paused contractor construction jobs and sent many plans back to the drawing board. Once work could continue to complete



A highlight of the year was a Gardens for the City (GFTC) build at P.S. 119 in the Castle Hill section of The Bronx. A teacher from the school applied to our GFTC program to install raised beds in the building's underutilized inner courtyard.



On site, NYRP built six raised beds, two picnic tables, and three benches. All of the beds are ADA compliant and double as seating; three of them have trellises.



Teachers were overjoyed with the new space and look forward to using it for outdoor learning throughout COVID and beyond.

PHOTOS THIS PAGE: JASON SHEETS

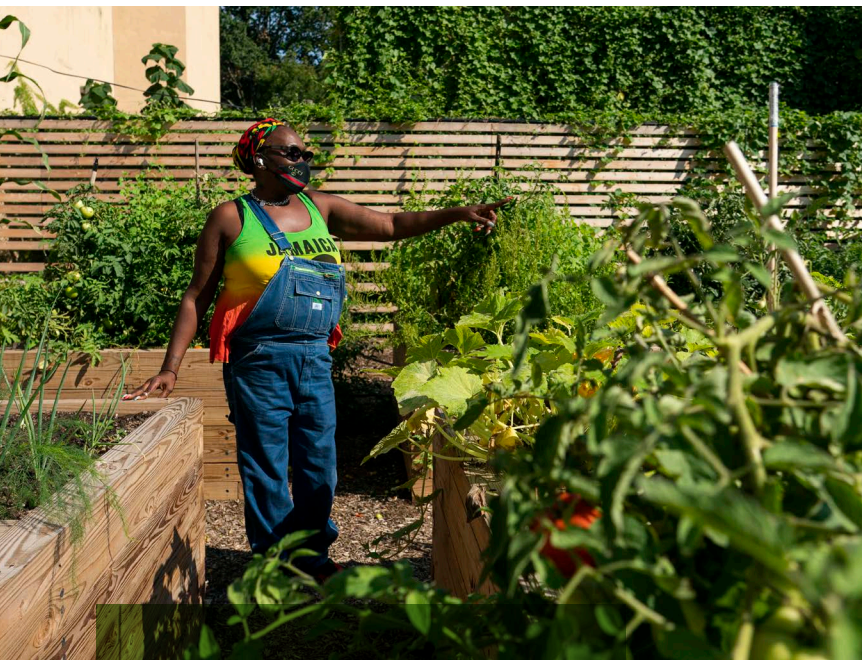




raised beds, wide lawns, picnic areas, and other state-of-the-art garden elements, all systems were go. “Even though they became more complicated, these projects focused my team on tangible, positive work in the midst of everything,” says Chief of Capital Gary Dearborn. “We’ve made real improvements in our small piece of the world that will help people for years to come.”

Looking back, 2020 may have been our busiest year to date, and under extreme conditions no less. Bathgate—our largest, most complex garden design so far—finished under budget. Aberdeen is nearly complete. “What we built is truly optimal for everyone,” says Dearborn.

As for Gardens for the City, despite having to start weeks behind schedule, the crew completed 18 green space transformation projects at sites including schools, rehabilitation centers, and harm reduction facilities. In fact, many partners who were forced to pause their in-person programs because of COVID gained an outdoor venue for safely restarting their services thanks to our support. “I’m still hearing from our partners that before we arrived, they didn’t realize that they had an outdoor space at all,” says Sheets. “It feels great to do projects like this in a normal year,” he adds, “and much more in a time when parks and community gardens are some of the few spaces New Yorkers have to feel safe.” 🌱



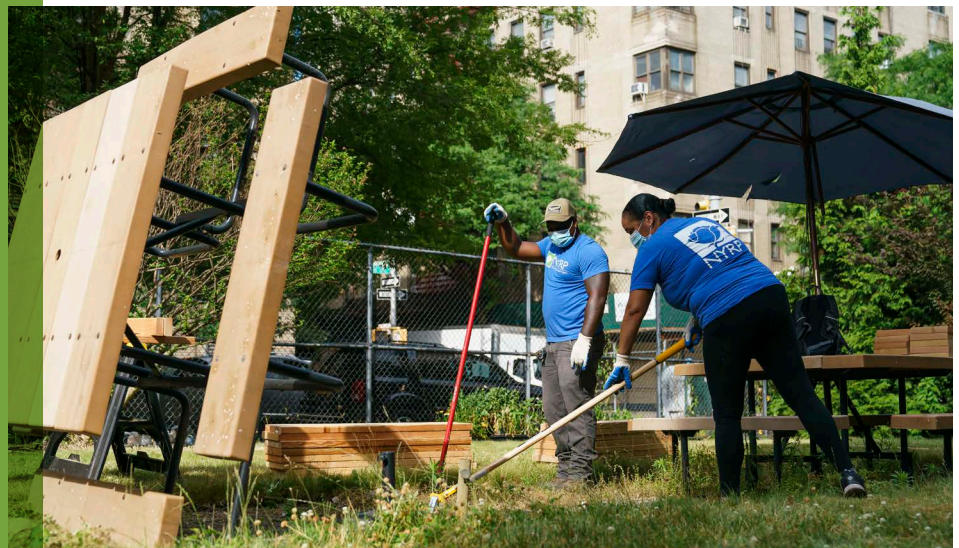
Our Capital team was able to complete the first phase of Bathgate Community Garden in The Bronx in time for the gardening group to still have a food-growing season.



NYRP Chief of Capital Gary Dearborn (left) and Director of Construction Tayyab Buksh (right) survey construction at our Aberdeen Community Garden in Brooklyn.



One of our first GFTC projects of the season was renovating the Davidson Avenue Community Garden in The Bronx. Without volunteer help and while wearing masks, we prepared the garden in time for the growing season.





# CULTIVATING ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS

**COVID-19 fundamentally reshaped many of NYRP's core programs in 2020:** in-garden events, tree giveaways, and nature education moved online immediately for the health and safety of all involved. Although we continue to miss our in-person gatherings, growing new platforms and developing digital communication skills has allowed us to not only stay connected to our community, but reach a whole new audience as well.

Social media was an actionable outlet early on. While we had to cancel all tree giveaways, we had a mail-friendly alternative: seed-to-tree kits. Our Engagement and Programming team had already been working with some gardeners to grow

native pawpaw trees from seed, and with a captive Instagram audience, we gave away over 140 tree seeds, showed recipients how to use them, and eventually even received a mention in *The New York Times*.

These and other online tutorials have been a logical format for our environmental curriculum. Our educators honed their video recording and editing abilities and adopted new tools like Padlet to share their expert guidance on everything from building bug hotels for pollinator habitat to starting indoor windowsill gardens from food scraps. They've swapped resources with like minded organizations and translated our popular field trips into virtual experiences via videos, readings, and at-home activities for a wider reach than is usually possible in a single class visit. "The over 30 videos and virtual field trips the educators made allowed

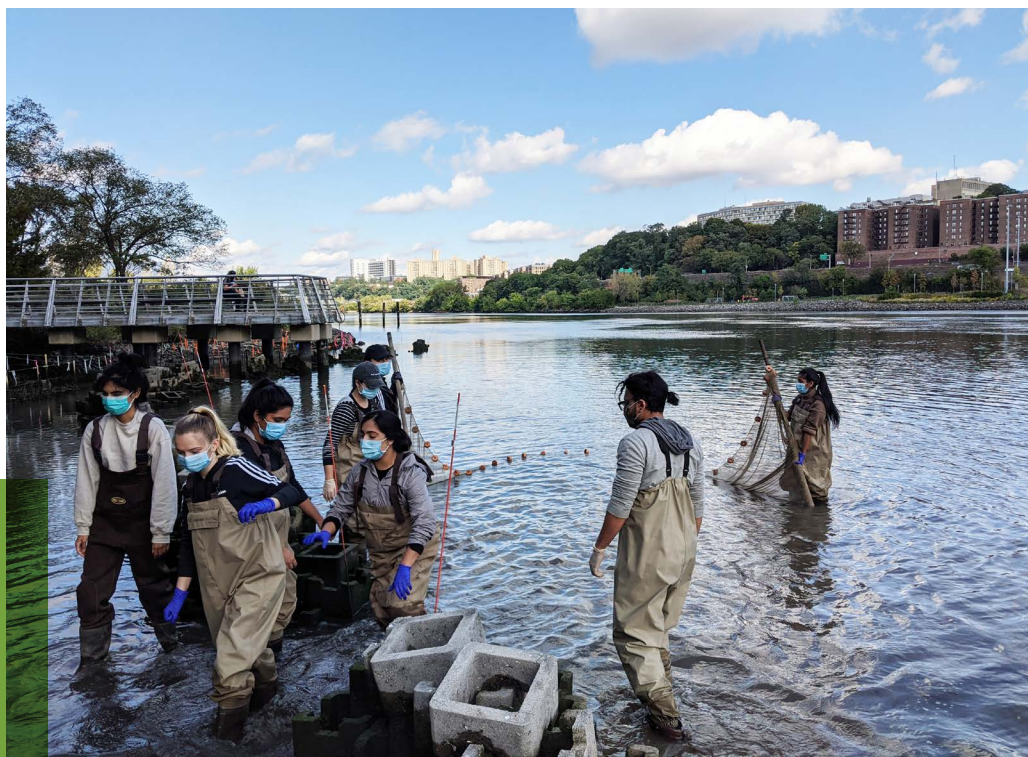


**GOTHAMITIS:** On March 4, 2020, we hosted acclaimed landscape architect and MacArthur Genius Walter Hood in conversation with WNYC reporter and host Arun Venugopal for our annual Gothamitis lecture series. The two toured a selection of NYRP gardens and spoke about the future of urban environmental justice. Here, Walter (left) convenes with NYRP founder Bette Midler (center) and Executive Director Lynn Kelly (right).

PHOTO: CLAY WILLIAMS

**SHORELINE MONITORING:** We partnered with Dr. Chester Zarnoch's environmental science students at Baruch College to monitor and measure the impact of our living shoreline at Sherman Creek Park.

PHOTO: CHESTER ZARNOCH





us all to still be outdoors, and while differently, still maximize the power of open space,” describes Senior Director of Engagement and Programming Annel Cabrera-Marus.

We were also able to broaden the influence of our thought leadership events by converting them to webinars. Beginning with the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, we kicked off a Building Urban Resilience series with four timely topics central to our work: Understanding Climate Change and Wetlands, Lead’s Legacy in New York City Soils, Why We Need Green Infrastructure, and The

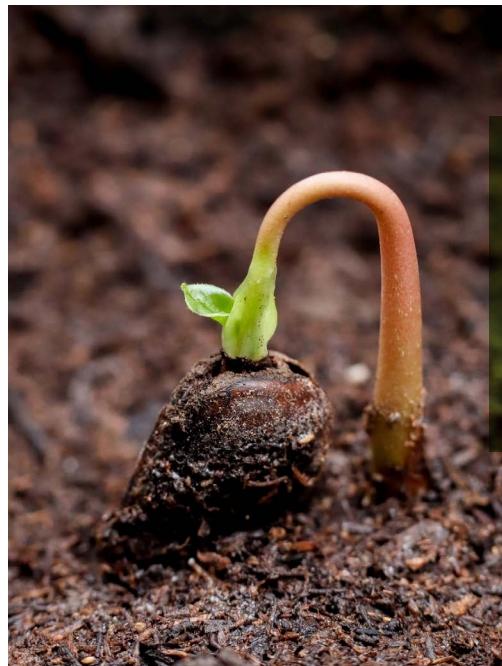
Promise of Blue Carbon. These sessions convened experts in each of their fields and as well as targeted and engaged audiences. With over 100 attendees for each event, we reached significantly more interested individuals than we might have been able to host in person. 🌱

**EDUCATION:** Our environmental educators created an online curriculum including nature-based activities that students could do at home such as building bug hotels with found objects and recycled materials, pictured here.

PHOTO: SARA SPODEN

**TREE GIVEAWAY:** On March 9, 2020, we hosted a tree giveaway in front of the Brooklyn Barclays Center in partnership with the Brooklyn Nets and National Grid. We gave away saplings including persimmons and black gums.

PHOTO: ARIEL LAUREN WILSON



**PAWPAW SEED GIVEAWAY:** We took our tree giveaways online with seed-to-tree kits that included the basic materials recipients would need to start their own pawpaw tree indoors, from seed, at home.

PHOTO: MATTHEW DAIN



# BUILDING URBAN RESILIENCE

**When lockdown began in March, the essential nature of our parks and gardens became immediately clear.** Spring was around the corner and New Yorkers needed to get outside safely. NYRP community garden members—volunteers who work together to steward each garden—doubled down on using their spaces to serve their neighbors.

Our Engagement and Programming team instituted regular online meetings to help identify and solve common challenges and amplify best practices across our 52 community gardens. Garden groups in turn increased food production, distributed fresh produce, supplemented non-perishable food giveaways, and stocked nearby free food fridges. They joined local partners and elected officials to give away essential supplies including homeschool materials and PPE.

“Our gardens are fully ingrained in community,” describes Senior Director of Engagement and Programming Annel Cabrera-Marus, “Having a garden in a community is not a luxury; it serves a purpose.”

NYRP’s Operations team supplemented these garden group efforts by distributing over 300 plant starts and 400 seed packets throughout the season.



Bathgate gardener Nicole N'diaye prunes garden beds before the fall's first frost.



Williams Avenue gardener Kimaya Wilkins harvests collard greens. PHOTO: ARIEL LAUREN WILSON



Target Bronx garden member Miriam Tabb helps collect potatoes to distribute to community members. PHOTO: MIRIAM TABB







Fresh food donations from Riley-Levin Children's Garden throughout the season included tomatoes, beans, eggplant, squash, carrots, basil, peppers, and cucumbers. CREDIT: RENA LEE



In the fall, NYS Assemblywoman Latoya Joyner partnered with Wellness in the Schools to host a school supply giveaway and cooking demo at Target Bronx. PHOTO: MIRIAM TABB



Unable to host students, our gardeners harvested Riley-Levin Children's Garden produce and donated it to a weekly food giveaway with Children's Aid at P.S. 5. PHOTO: JASON SMITH



Several of our gardens donated fresh produce to the city's network of free food fridges. PHOTO: MIRIAM TABB



They also built over 30 new garden beds and consulted with garden groups to maximize vegetable growing capacity, all while providing necessary tools and water access to help them maintain their crops.

### The Living Shoreline

Meanwhile our parks in northern Manhattan experienced their highest level of usage since we began overseeing them in partnership with the City in the nineties. Sherman Creek Park is a cornerstone of the Inwood neighborhood that is threatened by climate change-induced erosion and sea level rise. We've been researching ways to protect it for years and 2020 was when we had planned to introduce an ecosystem-based solution called a living shoreline.

Integrating native plantings and an artificial oyster reef, our living shoreline design aims to not only attenuate waves that wash away sediment but also enhance the native wetland habitat—one of the last of its kind in all of Manhattan. By stacking specialized concrete blocks called Oyster Castles, its design helps build new habitat for marine species that, over time, could transform the dynamics of a park that we might otherwise lose.

Pandemic-related mandatory work stoppages and permitting complications put the start of the project in question. The necessary pieces eventually aligned, however, and by summer our Operations team and a handful of volunteers began the project with full force, all while wearing masks and social distancing. They were able to complete the installation in phases and by the fall, wild juvenile oysters arrived on their own, proving both the improving health of the Harbor and the suitability of the habitat.

We continue to monitor the shoreline's evolution in partnership with Dr. Chester Zarnoch and his students at Baruch College to better understand and quantify the ecosystem services that urban wetland restoration projects like ours might offer. "We know that, acre per acre, wetlands are better than forests at fighting climate change," says Director of Northern Manhattan Parks Jason Smith. "It just requires shifting our relationship with the landscape and realizing it's not about building a big project and walking away; it's about staying engaged, stewarding it, and learning from it." 🌱





## THE LIVING SHORELINE

In the 1990s, prior to the development of Sherman Creek Park, NYRP began restoring the heavily eroded and polluted shoreline.

2

Much of the wetland NYRP initially created when we built the park could not withstand the strong currents of the Harlem River. Eventually the erosion, driven by sea-level rise, moved further inland. As seen here, the ground is actually washing out from under Sherman Creek's trees.



3

To preserve the park and enhance the wetland ecosystem, our Capital and Operations teams collaborated to design a living shoreline that incorporated native grasses and an oyster reef.



4

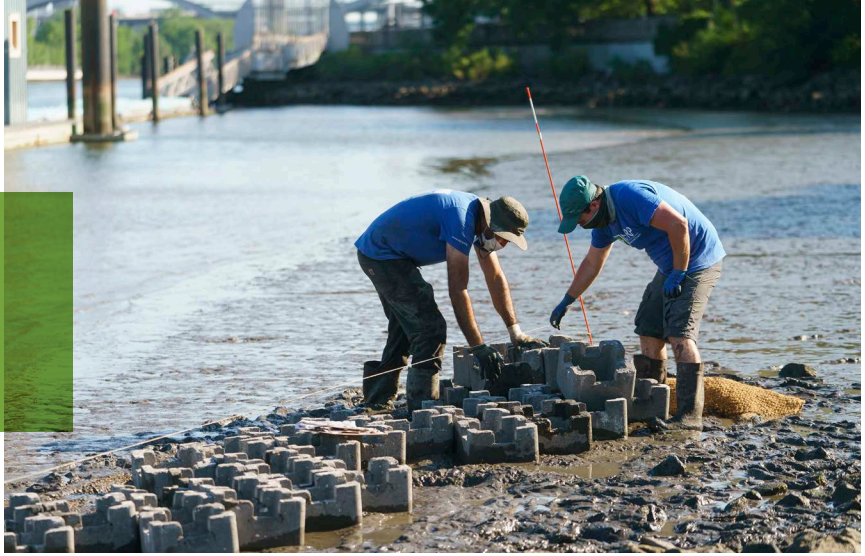
Despite COVID-related setbacks, the living shoreline installation began with enough time to complete the project in full.





5

Stackable concrete blocks called Oyster Castles form an artificial reef suitable for local marine species to colonize.



6

NYRP staff and local volunteers completed the installation by planting native grasses adapted to the intertidal zone including *Spartina alterniflora*.



7

After completing installation, the living shoreline has shown early signs of success including the new deposition of sediments, which is a prerequisite for the development and expansion of more resilient coastal wetlands.



8

The project has also succeeded in creating new habitat. Juvenile wild oysters, pictured here, are now growing on the reef.

PHOTO: CHESTER ZARNOCH







In December, we installed our largest, most mature trees to date at Bathgate Community Garden in The Bronx.



Fresh produce grows on into the fall and winter at Bathgate.



Assistant Director of Operations  
Yessenia Santiago helps renovate  
Davidson Avenue Community Garden  
in The Bronx.



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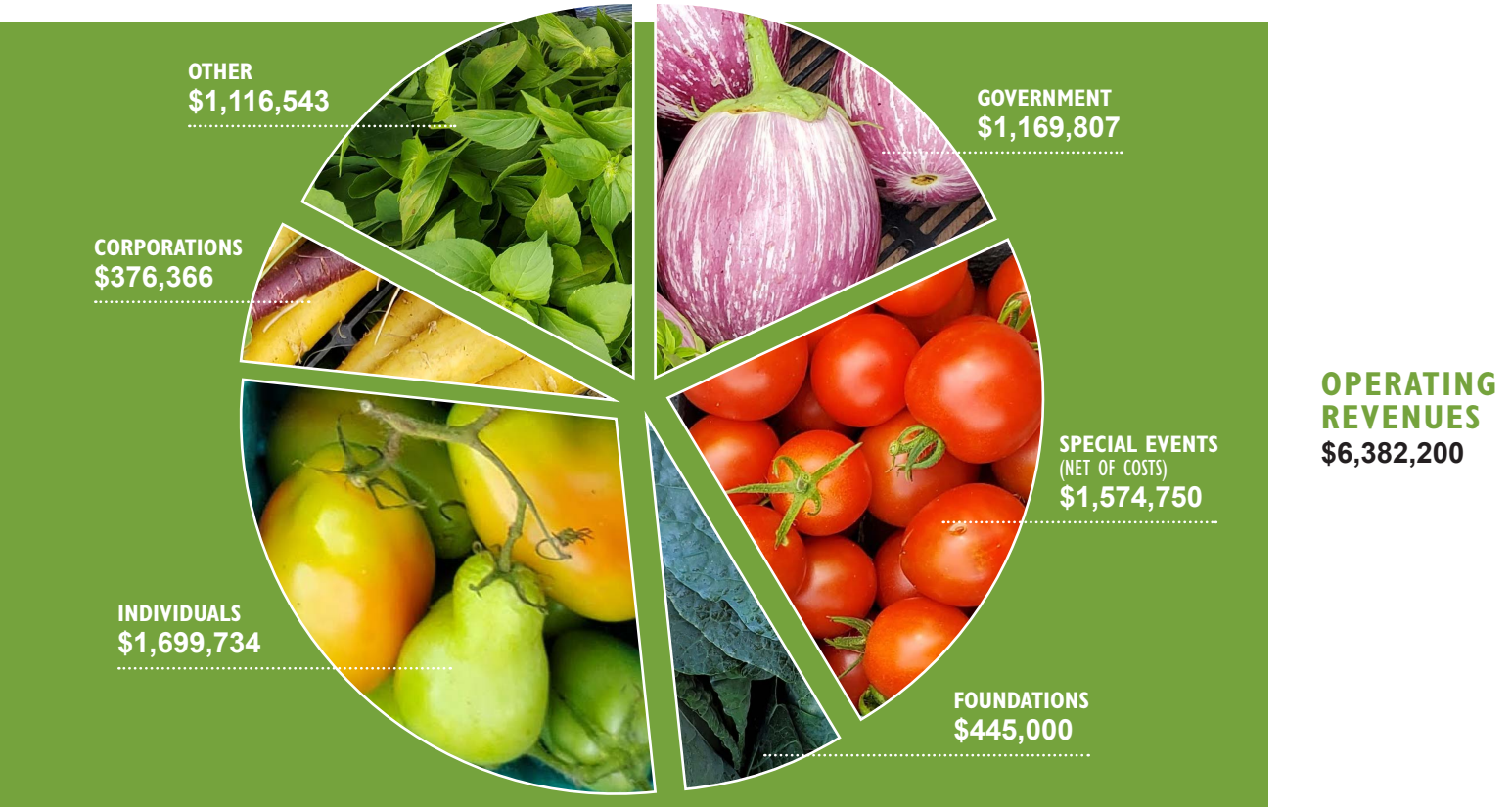
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# 2020 FINANCIALS



All figures are based on audited financials.

## OPERATING EXPENSES \$6,012,462

*This statement of functional expense does not include work that has been capitalized. In FY20, NYRP made renovations and improvements valued at \$1.4 million to our community gardens and parks. As described in this report, these capital improvements are designed to ensure that NYRP's green spaces will be functional, accessible, resilient, and beautiful for years to come.*





# SUPPORTERS

**This past year was truly like none other.** We are grateful for our generous donors who ensured that we could continue working when our city needed us most.

*This alphabetical list includes donors who gave \$1,000 or more between October 1, 2019 and September 30, 2020. This list has been prepared with care but if there is an error, please notify us at [development@nyrp.org](mailto:development@nyrp.org)*

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For our 25th Anniversary, city landmarks including the Empire State Building turned NYRP green in honor of our environmental justice work.



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With COVID-19 safety  
protocols in place,  
we hosted some of  
our longest standing  
corporate volunteers to  
help build a pollinator  
garden along the  
Harlem River Greenway.

PHOTO: MICHAEL YERDON



In October 2020,  
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