

NEW YORK
RESTORATION
PROJECT



Annual
REPORT
2024

MISSION

Everyone deserves access to high-quality public green space.

NYRP works collaboratively with residents in communities across the five boroughs to renovate gardens, restore parks, plant trees, promote urban agriculture, and build partnerships that transform the city's landscape. We value the unique experiences, knowledge, and resources that each community member brings to our work. We are committed to creating a greener, more resilient city for all.

New York Restoration
Project Founder,
Bette Midler



Leadership

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**Joined January 2025*

from our **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

In 1995, New York Restoration Project emerged in response to chaos. Our city's green space had suffered from years of budgetary austerity and many neglected areas laid buried under garbage as a result.

Many would—and still might—tell you that there was no hope for New York City's parks and gardens, but our visionary founder Bette Midler believed differently. She rounded up the first dedicated NYRP crews to help reclaim and restore acres of Northern Manhattan parkland, and now three decades later, **more than 1.6 million New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of a NYRP green space.**



These beloved community hubs provide essential access to nature in some of our city's least-green neighborhoods. In my five years at NYRP, I've seen them be safe havens throughout the pandemic, provide shady respite during heatwaves, and yield pounds of produce to ease food insecurity. No matter what threatens our way of life in New York City, NYRP's spaces have and will continue to welcome everyone.

In 2024, we saw the number of people using our spaces more than double. Our free tree giveaways were more popular than ever and we celebrated giving away more than 75,000 free trees citywide since 2008. People flocked to our gardens to eat tomatoes, bananas, hibiscus, and ginger, and to our parks to see native pawpaws and functionally extinct hybrid American chestnut trees bear fruit again.

New Yorkers can always depend on us. We are committed to making this city cleaner, greener, and more resilient, and nothing will stop us from fighting to make sure every New Yorker has a place they can go to enjoy nature, grow fresh and nutritious food, and connect with their community.

We couldn't do this critical work without the support of our committed donors. Thank you, as ever, for helping us make nature accessible to all New Yorkers. I look forward to working together towards a greener, healthier, and more resilient city in 2025.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "L. Kelly".

Lynn Bodnar Kelly
Executive Director



from our **BOARD CO-CHAIRS**

For nearly three decades, New York Restoration Project has worked to make nature accessible to all New Yorkers.

In 2024, we continued our work stewarding community parks and gardens and building new green spaces throughout all five boroughs. Working in collaboration with local schools, health clinics, and food banks, NYRP turned underutilized outdoor spaces into productive new gardens providing fresh produce and urban agriculture education in the city's least green and underserved neighborhoods.



This year, with the generous help of our partners and over **1,300 dedicated volunteers**:

- **116,000 pounds of trash** were removed from parks;
- **98,000 pounds of organic** were composted;
- **4,500 trees** were planted and distributed, **22 free tree giveaway events** were hosted;
- **200 skill shares, workshops and technical consultations** were hosted for over **1,175 gardeners**;
- **15 new green spaces** were built at schools, community organizations, and public libraries;
- **340 public programs** and events were hosted in our parks and gardens for over **14,350 New Yorkers**.

In the coming years, we will continue to work and support our communities to ensure that our city is resilient in the face of the climate crisis. Thank you for championing our mission to ensure that all New Yorkers can access the critical benefits of green space.

Your donations continue to make a difference every day, in the areas of our city that need it most.

With gratitude,

Darcy Stacom and Samuel M. Ashner
Co-Chairs, Board of Trustees

NYRP's 2024 CLEANING & GREENING WORK

- COMMUNITY GARDEN
- PARK
- FREE TREE GIVEAWAY
- GARDENS FOR THE CITY BUILD



Stewarded 80+ acres of Northern Manhattan parkland



Provided free programming in more than 50 NYRP community gardens



Distributed 3,500 free trees citywide



Built and renovated 15 gardens throughout the city

Restoring PARKLAND

Since the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, the NYC Parks Department has received less than one percent of the entire city budget. These severely inadequate operating funds have restricted Parks operations for decades, while also incentivizing nonprofit groups like New York Restoration Project to help fill the resource gap.

NYRP has partnered with NYC Parks since 1995 when our founder, Bette Midler, began picking up trash in Northern Manhattan. We have since initiated and overseen the transformation of dozens of acres of parkland in Washington Heights and Inwood including the Harlem River Greenway, Sherman Creek Park, and the northern section of Highbridge Park for almost three decades.

An aerial view of NYRP's Sherman Creek and Highbridge Parks.



One of our most dynamic restoration projects is on the Harlem River shoreline at Sherman Creek Park. In response to years of erosion, NYRP collaborated with NYC Parks in 2020 to successfully install a living shoreline: a 500-foot artificial oyster reef with expanded marsh grass plantings. This project helps protect the park from sea level rise and wave action, provides habitat for wildlife, and is an example of nature-based climate adaptation along a densely populated New York City waterfront.

The experiment continues to thrive: the new marsh stabilizes sediment and has matched the existing marsh in its capacity to remove a variety of pollutants. “For a newly restored marsh to have this level of function is genuinely surprising,” observes Jason Smith, NYRP’s Director of Northern Manhattan Parks.

Another cutting-edge restoration project continued to bear fruit this past year in nearby Highbridge Park. Since 2017, NYRP has overseen the largest urban trial to help restore the functionally extinct American chestnut to its historic range. Before a catastrophic blight hit North America in the early twentieth century, scientists estimate there were 4.2 billion chestnut trees in the Eastern United States, making the tree a critical part of native forest ecosystems.



The Sherman Creek Park shoreline in the mid-1990s, before NYRP's renovation.



Volunteers help maintain the living shoreline at Sherman Creek Park in 2024.

Highbridge Park in the mid-1990s before NYRP's renovation.



TD Bank volunteers assist NYRP plant trees in one of Highbridge Park's most challenging landscapes.



Since 2023, NYRP's blight-resistant hybrid American chestnut trees have produced nuts, which indicates significant blight resistance. "This is a critical conservation threshold," says Jason Smith, NYRP's Director of Northern Manhattan Parks.



NYRP crews spotted a new population of the threatened Northern Dusky Salamander near the Dyckman Street entrance of Highbridge Park in 2024. The salamander's presence shows that the park is a suitable habitat for the native amphibian.

2024 IMPACT

1,378
trees and shrubs
planted

811
volunteers

91,350
pounds of
trash removed

Working in partnership with NYC Parks and The American Chestnut Foundation, NYRP has planted and monitored over 300 blight-resistant American chestnut tree hybrids, which began producing nuts in 2023. This past year marked the first when NYRP could begin propagating the Highbridge-grown chestnuts for future tree planting in the park.

"Seeing the trees starting to reproduce on their own is a great sign of their health," explains Chris McArdle, NYRP's Deputy Director of Northern Manhattan Parks. "The nuts also show that the trees have sufficient blight resistance in this highly disturbed urban environment," adds Jason. "It's a critical conservation threshold."

Another major 2024 restoration milestone in northern Highbridge was nearly completing the planting of one of the steepest and rockiest sections of the park. The daunting site near the park's Amsterdam Avenue entrance has been a large gap in the native forest canopy until this past year when NYRP staff and volunteers planted hundreds of trees, sometimes needing support from ropes.

"It's amazing to put this planting work in the context of our long-term restoration that began in the mid-1990s," reflects Jason. "The big ecological picture is that NYRP is succeeding in creating intact native canopy on a large scale in Manhattan, which feels like a heroic achievement considering how severely neglected and barren this park once was." 🌱

Stewarding GARDENS

New York Restoration Project owns and operates more than 50 community gardens throughout all five boroughs of New York City. We provide regular, year-round maintenance to ensure that all our spaces are consistently clean, safe, accessible, and programmed with community-driven events.

This includes making weekly rounds to all our gardens to clean up litter, care for street trees, and maintain essential infrastructure. Additionally, our Engagement & Programming team works directly with our more than 700 gardeners to offer community engagement support; provide equipment as needed; and help organize meaningful public events.

Last year alone, NYRP helped welcome over 14,350 community members to more than 340 events including everything from live music performances and free back-to-school giveaways to fitness events and art classes. “We do our best to pay attention to both what kinds of programming communities want, as well as what kinds of events are generally the most popular,” describes Public Programming Coordinator Mike Horwitz.

One of the greatest achievements of the 2024 season was completing the renovation of Members Garden/Dahlia Group Community Garden in Melrose section of The Bronx. Originally founded in 1994, this South Bronx

2024 IMPACT

51
community
gardens

340+
public
programs

14,350
event
attendees



NYRP partners with Make Music New York to host live concerts throughout our gardens. Here, Bed-Stuy band Cliff's Garage performs in Brooklyn's Greene Acres Community Garden.



At the end of every event season, NYRP hosts Fall Fest at Sherman Creek Park in Inwood. The event features a magic show, pumpkin decoration, a haunted garden and more for over 700 community members.



In September, our Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson Community Garden in Jamaica, Queens hosted an outdoor pop-up dinner organized by Judeen’s Juices.



In the Longwood section of The Bronx, our Paradise on Earth Community Garden hosted The Baby Meetup: a weekly community playdate providing outdoor activities for babies and their caregivers.

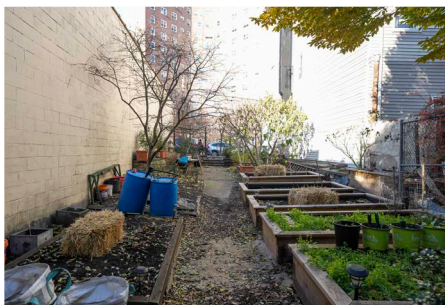
In East Harlem, NYRP's Rodale Pleasant Park Community Garden hosted its Summer Fair featuring gardening workshops, street tree care, a scavenger hunt, and more free public activities.



community garden received major upgrades last year to improve its accessibility and more than double its food production capacity. This included regrading the garden to ensure ADA accessibility; installing an in-ground water and irrigation system; constructing a central patio with a shade structure; building a new storage shed; installing new raised gardening beds with clean soil; and preserving existing fig, persimmon, and magnolia trees. “The renovation has attracted more community interest in the garden,” says gardener Jose Ramos. “We’re looking forward to using the garden to show our neighbors what we’re all about this coming season.” 🌱

Thank you to the Ashner Family Evergreen Foundation, the New York State Parks Environmental Protection Fund, and the USDA-NRCS for making the Members Garden transformation possible.

Members Garden in Melrose section of The Bronx before NYRP's renovation.



Members Garden after NYRP's renovation. The new design and infrastructure improves the garden's accessibility and more than doubles its food production capacity.



Last year, NYRP distributed more than 1,000 free backpacks as part of our annual back-to-school supply giveaway series supported by Citizens Philanthropic Foundation.

For a full list of NYRP parks and gardens, visit nyrp.org/gardens



2024 NYRP COMMUNITY GARDEN ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At the end of every season, NYRP's Engagement & Programming team acknowledges the groups that went above and beyond to serve their communities. We were proud to recognize the following gardens this past year:

GARDEN OF THE YEAR

Cooper Street Garden
34 Cooper St., Brooklyn (Bushwick)

BEST PROGRAMMING

Aberdeen Community Garden
91 Aberdeen St., Brooklyn (Bushwick)

URBAN AGRICULTURE ACHIEVEMENT

Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson Community Garden
117-15 165th St., Queens (Jamaica)

MOST IMPROVED

Eastchester Road Community Garden
3634 Eastchester Rd., The Bronx (Eastchester)

Free Tree GIVEAWAYS

2024 was a significant milestone for NYRP's free tree program: we gave away our 75,000th free tree since the program began in 2008. That's more than four times as many trees as there are in Central Park, distributed mostly in areas of the city that lack canopy including the Rockaways, South Bronx, and East New York.

With the generous support of Bloomberg Philanthropies and Citizens Philanthropic Foundation, NYRP hosted 22 individual giveaway events last year to distribute 3,500 trees across the five boroughs from mid-April through May. We continued to rely on strong relationships with grassroots organizations—including gardens, museums, nature conservancies, and libraries—to help give out the saplings.

"New York City has fewer trees per capita than many other major cities around the world," describes NYRP's Public Programming Coordinator Mike Horwitz. "The trees we distribute at NYRP are helping build our urban forest over time."

By explicitly focusing on the city's least-green neighborhoods, the program aims to use trees to help mitigate environmental risks including rising temperatures, polluted air, and extreme weather events.

Another mission of the program is to help increase the city's biodiversity by distributing 30 different native tree species best suited for our changing climate. Trees like the American Persimmon, Sycamore, and White Fringe Tree, for example, are not only great for pollinators and birdlife, but also well-equipped to thrive as our city becomes hotter and wetter.

We are grateful to the following elected officials who joined us in the field: Congress Member Grace Meng, State Senator Jabari Brisport, State Senator Jamaal T. Bailey, State Assembly Member Nily Rozic, State Assembly Member Marcela Mitaynes, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine, City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, Council Member Shekar Krishnan, Council Member Rafael Salamanca Jr., Council Member Chi Ossé, Council Member Kamillah Hanks, Council Member Sandra Ung, Council Member Selvena Brooks-Powers, Council Member Lincoln Restler, and Council Member Farah Louis.

In 2024, NYRP gave away its 75,000th free tree since the program began in 2008. Council Member Chi Ossé presented the tree to the Kosciuszko Block Association at the Marcy Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library on May 11, 2024.



In The Bronx, NYRP distributed free trees from Bissel Gardens—the city's largest community garden—in partnership with State Senator Jamaal T. Bailey.



With the support of National Grid and the NY Islanders, NYRP partnered with RISE Rockaway and Council Member Selvena Brooks-Powers to distribute free trees in the Rockaways.

2024 IMPACT

22
free tree
giveaway events

30
native
tree species

3,500
trees distributed

Urban AGRICULTURE

2024 IMPACT

202

*workshops,
skill shares,
and technical
consultations*

1,175+

*urban growers
helped*

10,000

*seedlings
distributed*

The Urban Agriculture team uses our Riley-Levin Children's Garden in Inwood's Sherman Creek Park as a best-practices demonstration garden. Here, they host weekly volunteer events and collaborate with local community members.

Since 2021, NYRP's Urban Agriculture program has helped our citywide gardener network grow to their greatest potential. This community includes over 1,175 gardeners who engage with the program as either public program attendees, volunteers, portfolio garden members (pg. 7), or partner garden members (pg. 11).

Thanks to generous grants from the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, and other supporters, NYRP provided 190 food production classes, skill shares, and hands-on technical consultations in 2024 alone (the team translates materials as needed). Our team also hosted 12 community volunteer days and distributed nearly 10,000 seedlings to growers in all five boroughs.

The season kicked off with our first-ever Winter Academy, which included a series of workshops

and classes to help prepare gardeners for the growing season. In addition to learning how to make a crop plan and propagate seeds among other best practices, the experience for Urban Agriculture Manager Genevieve Harding was a great way for fellow New York City gardeners to connect.

"Having everyone in the same room was a great reminder that no matter where someone might be trying to grow something in the city, there's probably another person out there facing similar challenges," she says. "Being together is a great opportunity to explore these needs as a united and supportive group."

The relationships forged as part of Winter Academy grew throughout the season, with our partners finding new opportunities for collaboration between their different groups. Gardeners exchanged mushroom logs, rooftop farming knowledge, and pest treatments among other learned skills. They also connected with some of NYRP's expert partners who specialize in different aspects of urban agriculture production.

"In 2024, we could really feel the momentum we've built with our gardener community since the program first began in 2021," describes Director of Urban Agriculture Corey Blant. "NYRP is uniquely positioned to bring different groups together for mutual benefit. Thanks to our programming this past year, we witnessed how fruitful these connections can be." 🌱



In early May, the Urban Agriculture team distributed nearly 10,000 seedlings to 65 different gardens. These included annual vegetable seedlings as well as culturally relevant plants our gardeners requested like aji dulce peppers, lemongrass, callaloo, tomatillo, and three different kinds of hibiscus.



The NYRP Urban Agriculture team completed their first Winter Academy at the beginning of the 2024. This series of classes and workshops—including crop planning, plant propagation (pictured here), and more—helps prepare participating gardeners for the growing season ahead.

Building GREEN SPACES

Since it began almost fifteen years ago, NYRP's Gardens for the City (GFTC) program has completely renovated or built over 300 green spaces throughout New York City. This includes 15 new gardens in 2024 alone, with at least one in every borough.

The program is community-driven: interested groups with available open space can apply to NYRP for free garden design consultation, materials, and labor to help achieve their vision. Then, prioritizing applications from the city's least green and historically most underserved neighborhoods, NYRP selects partners and gets to work. Groups who want to can also opt-in to receive a year of free urban agriculture consultation from NYRP experts (pg.10).

2024 IMPACT

15
new gardens

89
new raised
beds

372
volunteers
engaged

Viking Global Foundation volunteers revisited Bissel Gardens—the city's largest community garden—to help clear and prepare a new area for additional raised beds.



The property types we've partnered with span almost every gathering space imaginable including existing gardens, schools, parks, courtyards, houses of worship, assisted living facilities, and even rooftops.

For Jason Sheets, NYRP's Director of Garden Horticulture & City Greening Projects, this ability to customize green space for a wide selection of partners is a key strength of the program. "Of course we can install raised beds, but that's not always what a community needs to make the most of their shared outdoor space," he says. "Green spaces in a place like New York City aren't only for gardening or food production; at the end of the day, the projects we complete are spaces to build and sustain community."

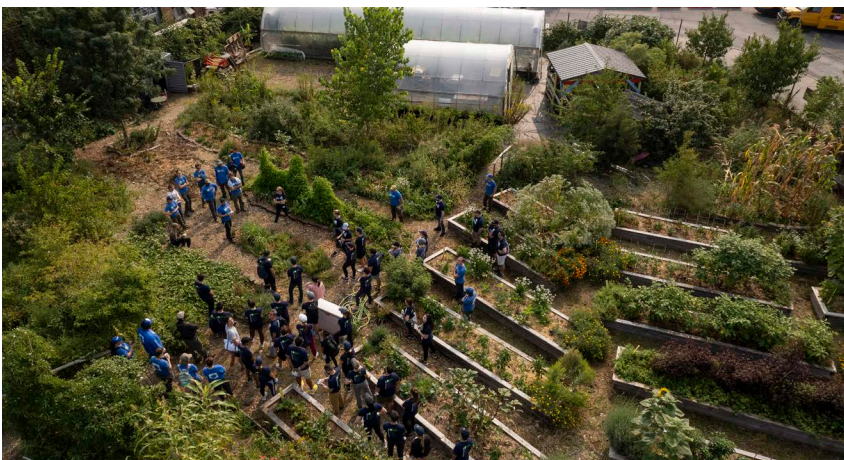
In this spirit, we were proud this past year to both bring and enhance green space for a range of different partners including an East Harlem community health center wanting a garden for therapeutic practice; a Staten Island artist collective seeking to improve public access to their free outdoor programming area; and a Bronx special education school enriching their outdoor engagement opportunities.

"Our gardens are community assets," reflects Jason. "In addition to gardening, there's so much that happens in our spaces to benefit local communities." 🌱



The final project NYRP revisited with Viking was the sprawling garden at Union Settlement, the largest service-providing non-profit in East Harlem.

With Viking volunteers, NYRP returned to New Roots Community Farm on The Bronx's Grand Concourse to reinforce pathways and expand planting areas.



2024 GARDENS FOR THE CITY PROJECTS

NYRP's Gardens for the City program worked with the following community partners to revitalize their outdoor spaces in 2024:

THE BRONX

Bissel Gardens (Wakefield)
The Christopher School (Williamsbridge)
Kelly Street Garden (Longwood)
New Roots Community Farm (Concourse)
PS 48 / SBxSGOC (Hunts Point)
Seneca House - Lutheran Social Services (Hunts Point)
Van Cortlandt Park Alliance (Northwest Bronx)

BROOKLYN

Riverdale Avenue Community School (Brownsville)

MANHATTAN

Food Bank for New York City (Harlem)
Garden of Love (Harlem)
Settlement Health Inc (East Harlem)
Union Settlement (East Harlem)

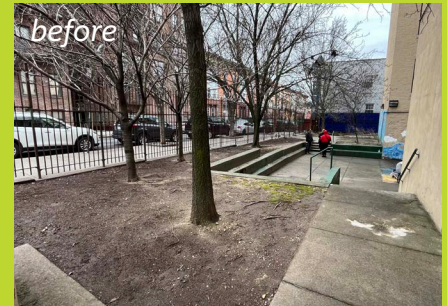
QUEENS

Jamaica Children's Magnet School (South Jamaica)
PS / IS 102Q Parent Association (Elmhurst)

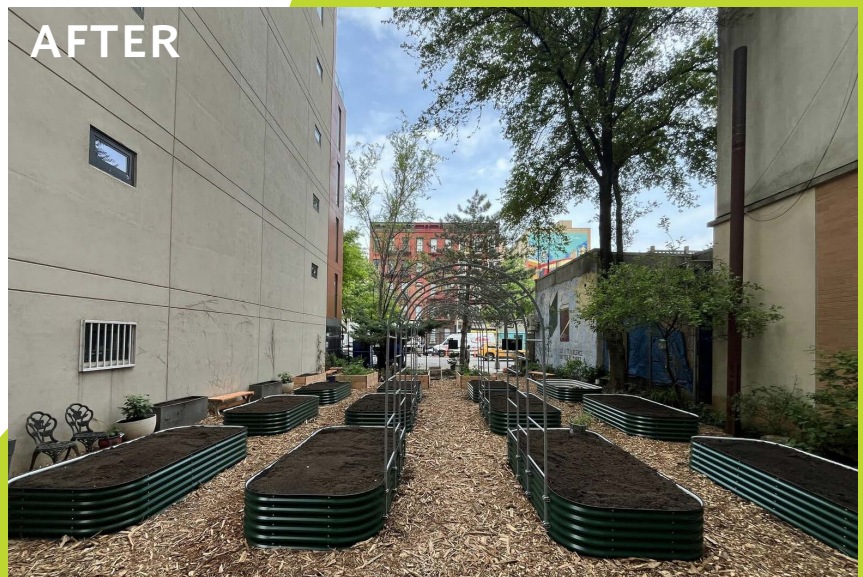
STATEN ISLAND

Maker Park (Stapleton)

In Hunts Point, Seneca House-Lutheran Social Services before and after NYRP's renovation



Harlem's Garden of Love before and after NYRP's renovation



Corporate VOLUNTEERING

In 2024, more than **1,100 corporate volunteers** donated **over 3,700 hours** towards the care and construction of NYRP's green spaces.

BLOOMBERG

In early spring, volunteers from Bloomberg joined NYRP at Sherman Creek Park to inoculate shiitake mushroom logs to be cultivated in NYRP's Northern Manhattan edible food forest.



DELTA

Volunteers from Delta Air Lines helped NYRP staff and community members build a school garden at PS/IS 102Q, one of NYRP's Gardens for the City partners in Elmhurst, Queens.



BNP PARIBAS

In August, volunteers from BNP Paribas put on waders and got into the Harlem River with NYRP staff to help clean up and restore Manhattan's largest remaining wetland, located in Inwood's Sherman Creek Park.



VIKING GLOBAL FOUNDATION

Viking Global Foundation, a longstanding NYRP partner, always supports our largest and most ambitious garden transformations each year. In 2024, they returned to projects from prior years to provide upkeep, stewardship, and maintenance. At New Roots Community Farm in The Bronx (first renovated by Viking Global Foundation volunteers in 2022), volunteers returned to refurbish the farm's pathways, repair their infrastructure, and install additional food-growing components like seed-starting trays.

CON EDISON

In May, volunteers from Con Edison joined NYRP's Forest Crew to restore a native shade garden in Northern Manhattan's Highbridge Park.





CITIZENS PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATION

Each year, Citizens hosts several of NYRP's popular free tree giveaways. This year, volunteers joined forces with NYRP staff to give away hundreds of free trees at their Avenue U (Brooklyn) and Fordham (The Bronx) bank locations.



UBS AMERICAS

Over the summer, volunteers from UBS Americas planted native vegetation along the Harlem River Greenway to absorb stormwater runoff, mitigate erosion, and enhance biodiversity.



BLACKSTONE

Blackstone returned to volunteer at 103rd Street Community Garden, one of NYRP's gardens in East Harlem. Volunteers planted shrubs, built several new garden beds, painted fences and tables, spread fresh soil, cleared trash from the space, and weeded garden plots.

GIC

In April, volunteers from GIC joined forces with high schoolers from Monsignor Scanlan High School in The Bronx to plant 40 flowering trees across the campus in celebration of GIC's 40th anniversary in New York.

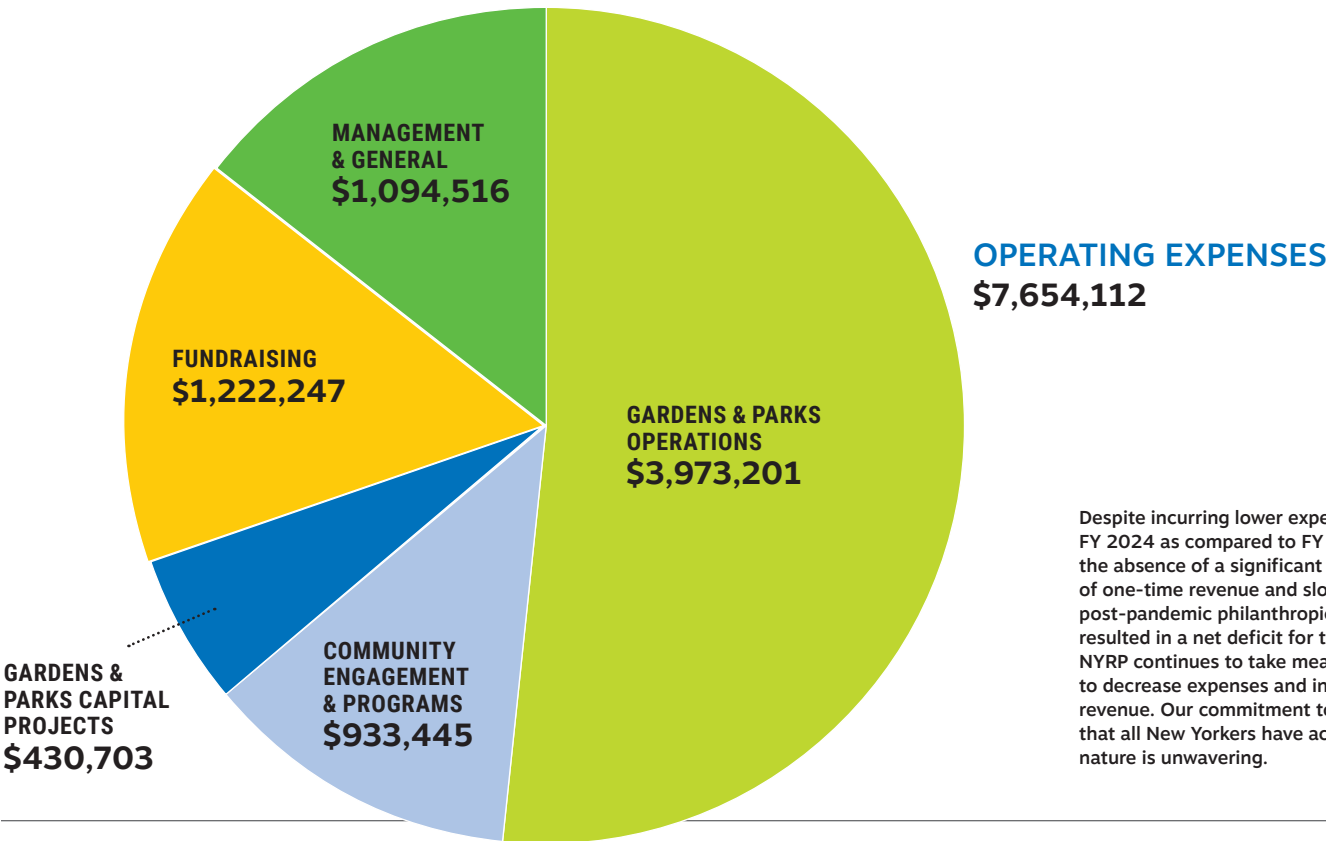
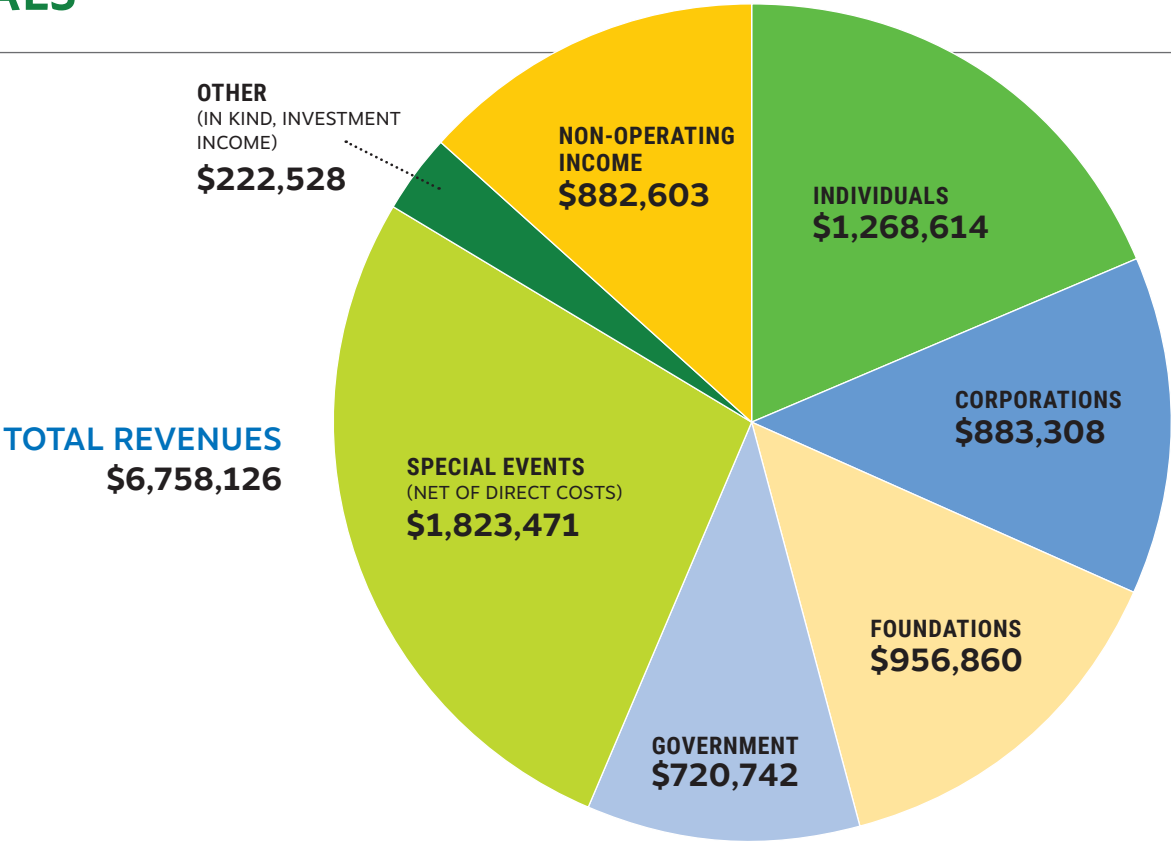
NATIONAL GRID

Volunteers from National Grid helped NYRP prune trees, clear pathways, spread fresh wood chips, and weed garden beds at our Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson Community Garden in Jamaica, Queens.



We could not build, maintain, and activate these green spaces without the philanthropic partnership of our many valued corporate partners. To explore our corporate volunteer opportunities, visit nyrp.org/corporate

2024 FINANCIALS



Despite incurring lower expenses in FY 2024 as compared to FY 2023, the absence of a significant amount of one-time revenue and slowdown in post-pandemic philanthropic funding resulted in a net deficit for the year. NYRP continues to take measures to decrease expenses and increase revenue. Our commitment to ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to nature is unwavering.

All figures based on audited financials.

2024 SUPPORTERS

Equitable access to green space has never been more important. We are grateful for our many generous donors who hold this conviction as strongly as we do.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: NYRP Founder Bette Midler (left) at Hulaween with Wind Beneath My Wings Honoree Robert De Niro; Cassandra Clark accepts the Joan Kors Green Champion Award at Hulaween; Trustee and Joan Kors Green Champion Honoree Joshua Sirefman (right) with Dan Doctoroff at Hulaween





Board Treasurer Erhard Marius and Ruth Marius attend NYRP's Spring Picnic at the New York Botanical Garden



Board Co-Chair Darcy Stacom (right) attends Hulaween with Adria Petty (center) and Anna Marie Gabriel (left)



Trustee and Chairman's Council Chair Janice Parker (center) attends Hulaween with Trustee Kelebohile Nkhereanye (right) and Renee Boyd (left)

Daniel Doctoroff
Dean Dolan
Beatrice S. Domingo
Roxanne Donovan
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Hulaween Costume Contest
 Judge Jordan Roth (right)
 with Trustee Todd DeGarmo
 and STUDIOS Architecture,
 the Best Group Costume
 winner

Doris Johnson (left) with Board
 Co-Chair Samuel M. Ashner
 (center) and Board President
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Trustee Sophie von
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 Hulaween with Best
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 Thomas Brown (center)
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Executive Director Lynn Bodnar Kelly (center) with Trustee Michael Kors (left) and Lance Le Pere (right) at Hulaween



Bette Midler with Trustee Bruce Bozzi (left) and Mario Cantone (right) at Hulaween

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