



Grantee Highlight: Innovation Grant

Community Composting

**New Haven Land Trust
(Renamed, Gather New Haven)**

New Haven, CT

Organization Overview

As Connecticut's first urban land trust to preserve open land in New Haven, the New Haven Land Trust, (now Gather New Haven) focuses on land conservation, community gardening and environmental education. With over 50 community gardens, and 6 nature preserves, the New Haven Land Trust (NHLT) impacts the community, environment, and foodshed of New Haven. Their mission seeks to engage people in stewardship and cultivation of the land for a healthier community and healthier environment.

NHLT employs New Haven high school youth in a program called "Growing Entrepreneurs" where students learn tangible life and professional skills while earning income and developing their own business ventures related to carpentry, the environment, gardens or agriculture.



Bradley Fleming, former Garden Manager for the NHLT, checking one the aerated static compost bins.



High School students from New Haven, participating in the NHLT Growing Entrepreneurs program, helping build the aerated static compost bin system.

How has RecycleCT helped?

NHLT oversees 50+ community gardens, which includes a constant need of compost, which entailed paying a source outside the City to have it brought it at a cost of more than \$2,000 annually. At the same time, the community space to compost and recognized without citywide food scrap collection, there was plenty of food waste scraps and other resources to develop an on-site community composting project. This project linked the need for compost with the Growing Entrepreneurs students to create a closed-loop system of food scrap waste with amending community gardens with nutrient rich compost.

NHLT built a four-bin aerated static pile community composting system, which uses solar energy to provide its forced air at one of their community garden sites. Creating the system also reduces CO₂ by not shipping in compost. The intention is that students will collect food scraps by bicycle as the program grows.

High school students from New Haven schools, participate in the Growing Entrepreneurs programs helped build the bin, gaining carpentry and customer service skills in addition to learning the science of composting. Fourteen students from the program learned how to process food scraps and other raw

materials in this unique system, maintaining the system, and benefits of finished compost. In addition, NHLT held four community composting workshops, each with over 20 people in attendance to learn more about how this compost systems operates.

Since the project began, over 3,000 pounds of food scraps have been collected from the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen (DESK) and provided by community gardeners which resulted in about 9.5 cubic yards of finished compost.

In addition to working with community gardeners and students, the Community Compost project expanded or deepened connections with other New Haven organizations; Peels and Wheels for their technical training; Common Ground High School who also recently developed an aerated static pile system to share new ideas and work on problem-solving; Haven's Harvest who recovers edible food for people, but also has food that cannot be eaten and the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, who feeds community members and has food scraps from their kitchen.



Finished four-bin aerated static compost bin system

It's exciting that DESK are feeding people and then we're picking up their food scraps and then we're making compost, which is then going back to community gardens, which are growing food to feed people in New Haven.

-Esther Rose-Wilen

The community gardens are places of environmental and social justice, where people are organizing in their neighborhoods, said Esther Rose-Wilen, NHLT Garden Education Coordinator. "They're growing food...for themselves, their neighbors, their families, for donating, whatever it might be, and, [...] connecting with each other and learning together at the same time."

The community composting project has provided a closed-loop food system in the New Haven community. Through community composting the Growing Entrepreneurs students are learning skills that have practical and professional application. They are learning everything from community engagement to budgeting. This project expanded the community impact of the organization and of their gardens.

Future Plans

Receiving the funding support from RecycleCT allowed NHLT to build capacity and leverage other funding streams for additional projects. NHLT hopes to increase the amount of food scraps they are collecting through increasing the number of food scrap pick up sites for the Growing Entrepreneurs, which will be collected by bicycles. NHLT are working to secure funding to pay for a compost sifter and a bobcat to help sort and move the compost they produce, currently this work is being done by hand. The community composting system has afforded many opportunities for the organization and the community at large, the continuous opportunities for education and business ventures will only strengthen these connections and their impact on food waste recovery in New Haven.