Chapter Two: Organizing for a Green and Equitable Future

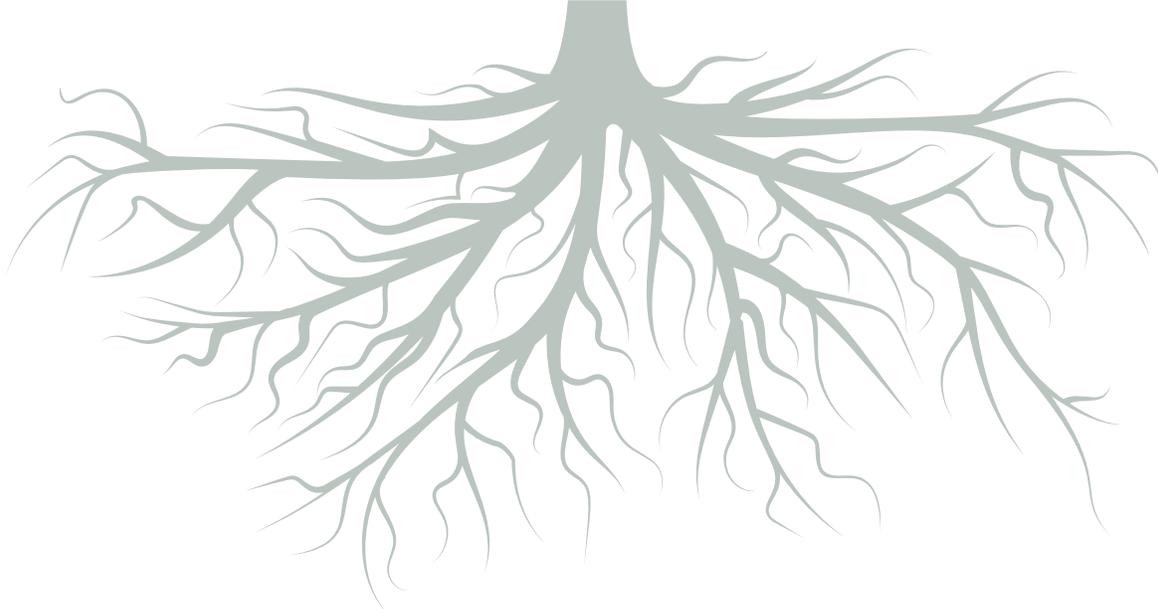# Pre-Training Activity: What Makes Your Community Unique?

Your experience as a member of your community is important. With this in mind, let's explore what makes your corner of Los Angeles unique! Create a short presentation about your community or neighborhood. Use the websites and resources provided below, or use your own resources. In your presentation, think about the following:

- Who lives there?
- Who are the Indigenous communities of the land you live on?
- Who are the local, state, and federal political representatives in your area?
- Where's the place you'd take someone in your community if they came to visit?
- What do you love or take pride in about your community?
- What would you like to see change about your community?
- What are the resources and barriers to healthy trees in your community?
- Is there a park within walking distance from where you live?
- How does climate change impact your community? How might these impacts be addressed?

In your presentation, feel free to speak from personal experience and the experiences of others in your communities to include diverse opinions and feedback. Create your presentation using whatever medium feels most comfortable (e.g., PowerPoint slides, photos, drawing, just speaking, etc.). The goal is to share about your community and learn from one another. Presentations should be 3 - 5 minutes long, and be prepared to present at the next workshop. Reach out to your organization leads for any questions. Helpful resources include:

- US Census Bureau - QuickFacts
- Find Your CA Representative
- Los Angeles Times Mapping L.A. Project
- Los Angeles Public Library Photo Archives
- Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land
- Neighborhood Info

Growing Roots

Trees can build safer, healthier, and more equitable communities in Los Angeles. All communities have unique challenges and strengths that shape how we can engage with our shared urban forest. Our goal is not only to support successful tree planting and care projects but also to support community leaders and advocates like you in growing healthier communities.

As residents and members of your neighborhood, your lived experiences and understanding of your community are essential to the work of Tree Ambassadors. You and your neighbors are the ones who best understand where trees are most needed, which barriers prevent you from planting or having healthy trees, and more. Your established relationships within your community oftentimes allow you to be more approachable and personable than City Officials or nonprofit organizations. Your leadership role will encourage the participation of community members who might feel uncomfortable. Through welcoming, encouraging, and listening to the voices in your community, you will amplify the needs of your friends, family, and neighbors and empower them with the tools to grow a healthier future for generations to come.
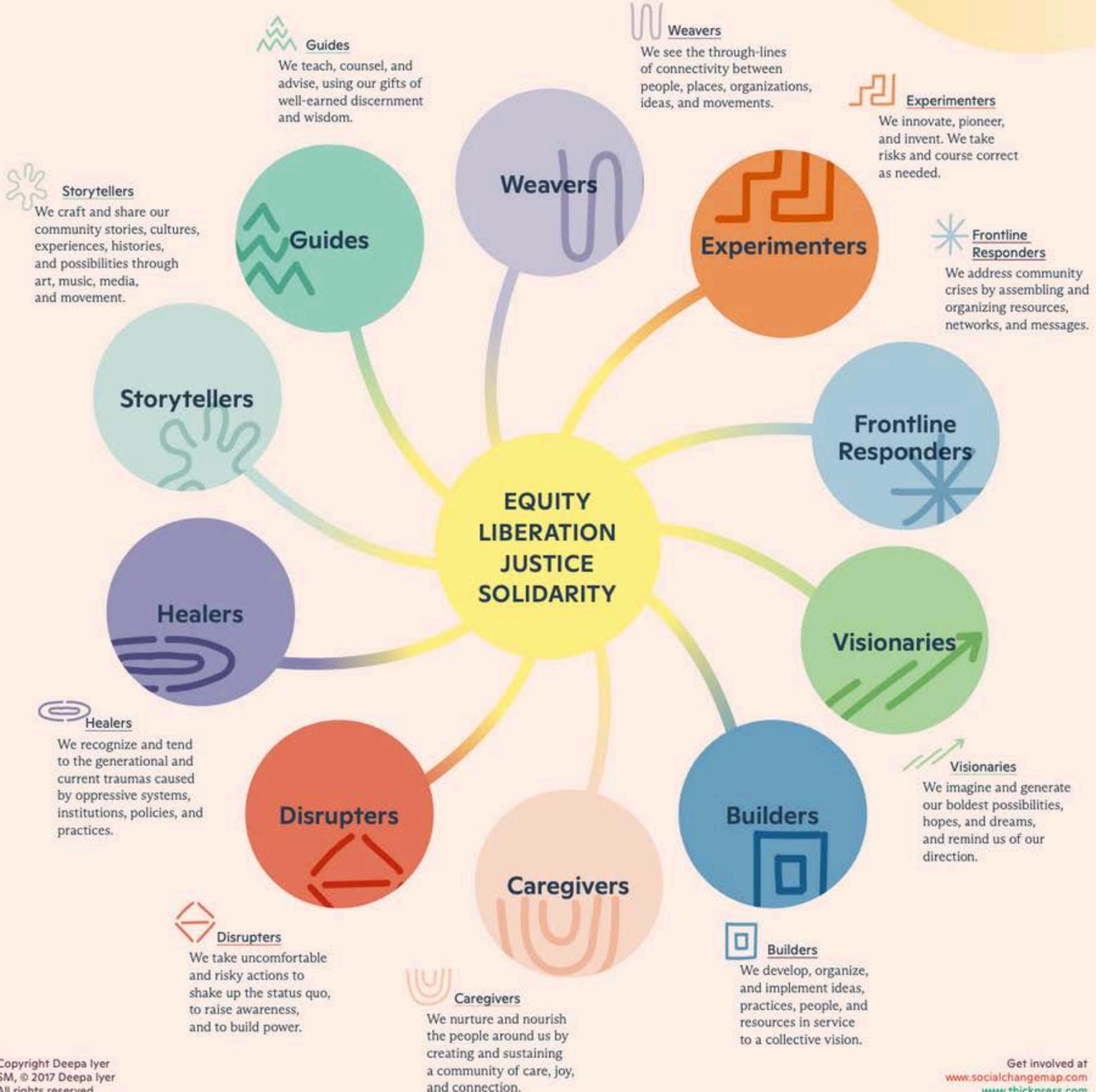
To be a leader, you don't have to be well-connected or know all of the answers — all you need is a willingness to engage with and actively listen to others. After all, community organizing happens when people come together to create change. Sometimes, your role as a Tree Ambassador will ask you to do work that stretches you outside of your comfort zone, and we hope to support you through that. Let's explore different roles in community organizing, tap into your strengths as a leader, explore data tools to empower your organizing, and begin community asset mapping.

Equitable: distributing resources based on the needs of the recipients (vs. equality: giving everyone the exact same resources).

WHAT'S YOUR SOCIAL CHANGE ROLE?

SOCIAL CHANGE ECOSYSTEM FRAMEWORK

The social change ecosystem framework is a tool to clarify values, identify roles, and support organizations, campaigns, and networks committed to solidarity, justice, and equity. Learn more at socialchangemap.com.

Guides
We teach, counsel, and advise, using our gifts of well-earned discernment and wisdom.

Weavers
We see the through-lines of connectivity between people, places, organizations, ideas, and movements.

Experimenters
We innovate, pioneer, and invent. We take risks and course correct as needed.

Storytellers
We craft and share our community stories, cultures, experiences, histories, and possibilities through art, music, media, and movement.

Frontline Responders
We address community crises by assembling and organizing resources, networks, and messages.

Healers
We recognize and tend to the generational and current traumas caused by oppressive systems, institutions, policies, and practices.

Visionaries
We imagine and generate our boldest possibilities, hopes, and dreams, and remind us of our direction.

Disrupters
We take uncomfortable and risky actions to shake up the status quo, to raise awareness, and to build power.

Caregivers
We nurture and nourish the people around us by creating and sustaining a community of care, joy, and connection.

Builders
We develop, organize, and implement ideas, practices, people, and resources in service to a collective vision.

Center
Weavers · Experimenters · Frontline Responders · Visionaries · Builders · Caregivers · Disrupters · Healers · Storytellers · Guides

EQUITY LIBERATION JUSTICE SOLIDARITY

Get involved at
www.socialchangemap.com
www.thickpress.com
www.buildingmovement.org

Mapping Your Role in the Social Change Ecosystem

By Deepa Iyer, SolidarityIs, and Building Movement Project

1 What role(s) do you feel comfortable playing and why?

Locate yourself on the map and identify the role(s) you find yourself playing most frequently. Recognize that you can be playing multiple roles and that these roles can even shift depending on the context and capacity. What role(s) make you feel alive? Are there any differences between these two responses for you?
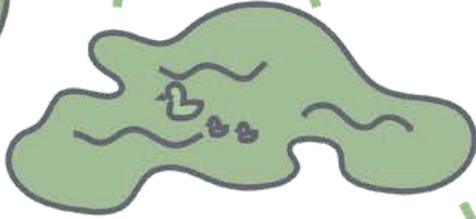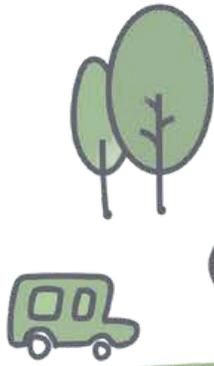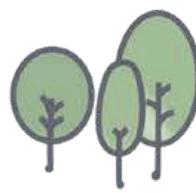
2 Where are there opportunities for growth?

Are there any roles on the social change ecosystem map that you hope to grow into? How would growing into these role(s) serve you and your community? What steps can you take to push for that growth?
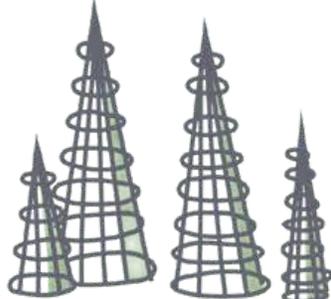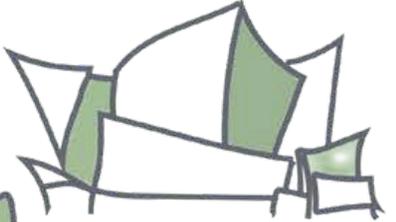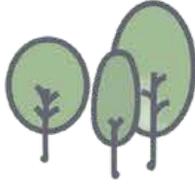
3 Who and what sustains you?

How does entering these spaces affect you - physically, energetically, emotionally, financially, or spiritually? Who or what sustains you in when you are challenged or drained? What support system do you have in place to ensure you are taking care of yourself?

In asking these questions, we hope to support your alignment in a thoughtful relationship with social change values, individual roles, and the broader ecosystem.
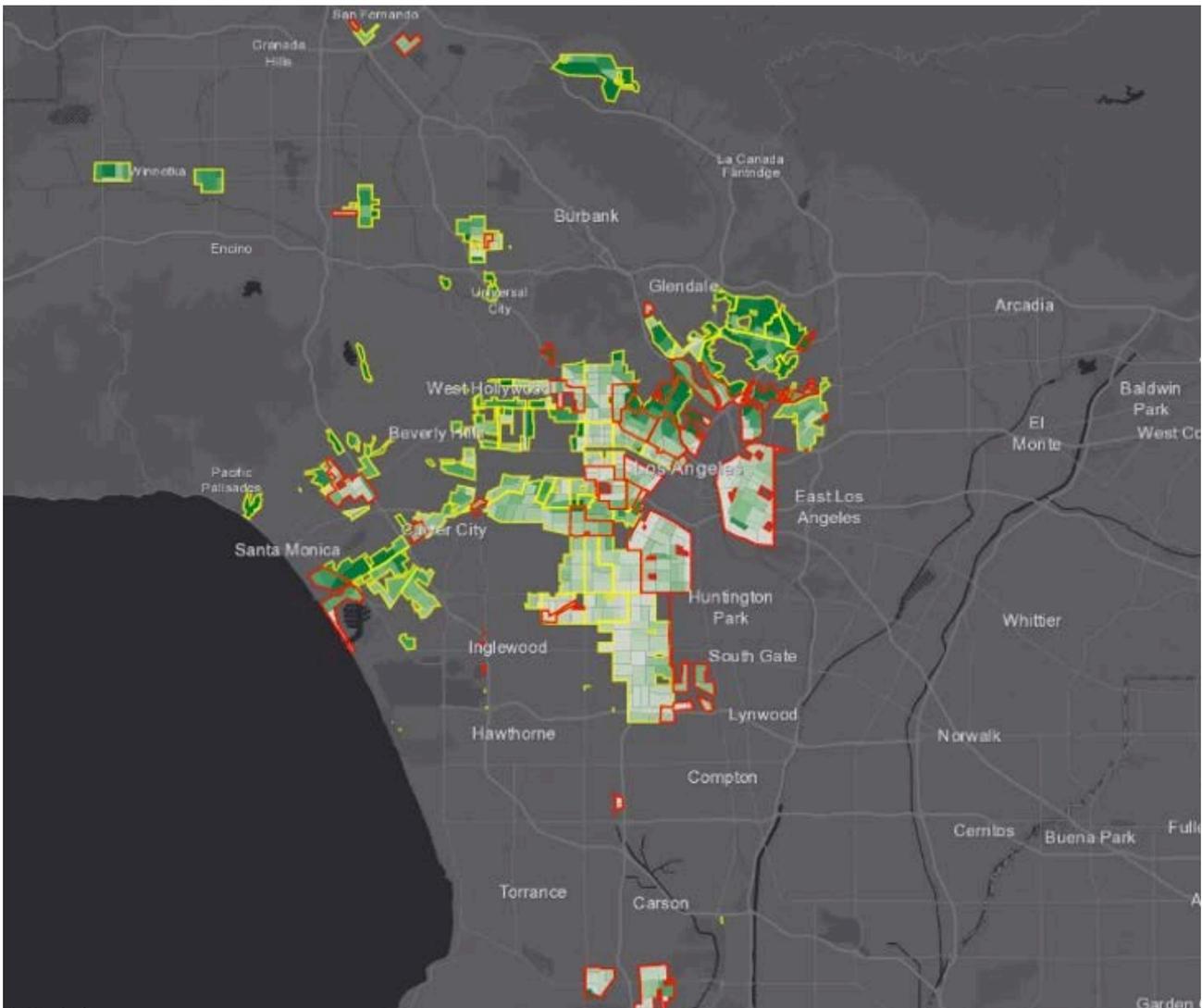
HOLLYWOOD

Group Activity: What Makes Your Community Unique?

The first step to community organizing is understanding the social, political, economic, and environmental landscape of your community. As a Tree Ambassador, this understanding stems from your personal lived experience.

Presentations: Each of you are coming into the Tree Ambassadors program with a wealth of knowledge and experiences. Use each other's presentations as a chance to learn from one another.

Connecting the Dots: As you listen, consider if there are any overlaps in your experiences. Are there any areas where you can collaborate or relate with a fellow Tree Ambassador? In what ways can you support each other in your efforts to reach out to, learn from, and collaborate with your communities?

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The Power of Data

Have you ever heard the phrase, "you can't manage something until you can measure it?" Data plays a critical role in deepening our understanding of our communities, identifying needs, and finding solutions to pressure points and urgent issues. Diving into data is a necessary starting point to better understand, advocate, communicate the social, political, and economic issues facing your community, and it often forms a foundation for community organizing. At institutional and societal levels, a strong data — and solid communication of that data — can drive social change. Environmental data will answer questions like "How many trees does my city have?" and "Where is there available or potential space to plant more trees?" Community data may focus on factors that impact how vulnerable a community is to environmental pollutants. In the activity below, use the tools provided to explore data for your community.

Redlined neighborhoods given "C" and "D" HOLD grades overlayed with canopy cover data; Map created by Cindy Chen, GIS Specialist, City of LA, StreetsLA, 2021

Group Activity:
Empowering Community Through Neighborhood-Level Environmental Data & Socio-Economic Demographics

As a Tree Ambassador, you'll want to be equipped with data in order to mobilize community members. In the urban forestry and environmental sector, various tools are used to help assess community needs. The goal of this activity is to get familiar with just some of the datasets practitioners use to identify need, and in some cases, determine where funding should be prioritized based on that need.

Use CalEnviroScreen 4.0, the Los Angeles Urban Tree Canopy tool, Google's Tree Canopy Lab, and the Mapping Inequalities tool to find the following information about your community. Start by locating your community using your zip code in each of the tools listed above.

Indicator	Statistics
CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Percentile: What is your community's percentage in this tool? What indicators are used to create this percentage?	
Existing Tree Canopy Percent: What is the % of land that has tree canopy coverage in your community?	
Possible Tree Canopy Percent: What is the % of available green space for planting new trees in your community?	
Redlined: Was your community a formerly redlined community? If so, was it rated a "C - Declining" or "D - Hazardous" neighborhood?	

Does the information you found reflect your own lived experience as a resident in your community? If so, how? If not, in what ways do they differ? These are just some of the tools used to help identify need on a neighborhood level, but there are many more, and we'll share additional resources with you along our journey.

Understanding Community Perceptions of Trees

It can take one bad experience to ruin a person's perception of the urban forest. While we keep the benefits of trees in mind, it is also important to recognize that the wrong tree in the wrong place for the wrong reason can leave community members feeling frustrated. Here are some examples of common perceptions, the negative experiences that created them, and the core values reflected.

Preception	Negative Experience	Core Value
Dangerous	Trees can provide cover for felons to hide or can drop branches/fall over causing damage to private property.	**Safety**
Expensive	Large tree species with extensive root systems led to busted pipes inside of their home and lifted sidewalks in front of their house.	**Fiscal Responsibility**
Allergies	Spring is beautiful, but it's also a key time of year for seasonal allergies. As plants release pollen, people with allergies sniffle and sneeze.	**Public Health**
Messy	Dropped leaves, flowers and fruit may create a mess. Birds resting in branches above your car may cover your parked car in bird poop.	**Neighborhood Aesthetics**

Remember these perceptions are based upon real, lived experiences and offer insight into community values. For example, someone who does not want to plant a tree due to leaf litter cares about the aesthetic of their home and may benefit from adopting an evergreen rather than deciduous tree. When speaking with people with negative experiences with trees, listen to their concerns and validate their experiences. Everyone in your neighborhood deserves to be heard.

Building Bridges

Urban forestry patterns across California reveal that underserved cities and neighborhoods correlate with socioeconomic status. In many communities, the historic trauma imposed by redlining and other racist policies has led to a mistrust of the government. In some cases, the perceived correlation between canopy cover and crime has led to the removal of trees to facilitate an increased presence of police surveillance in neighborhoods of color. Research shows that more trees can improve neighborhood safety by eliminating precursors to violence. These misperceptions can influence community members to be hesitant to join urban forestry movements or agree to plant and care for a tree.

Overcoming centuries of discriminatory urban planning and investment decisions cannot be done overnight. Rectifying the current socio-political landscape of Los Angeles requires deliberate and concerted actions. As a Tree Ambassador, your goal is to foster connections between your community and the urban forest. Rather than leading with what we individually may believe to be the most important reason to support urban greening, we suggest creating the space for a collective and co-managed approach. Meet the needs of the community first and discuss the role that greening the neighborhood might offer.

WILDLIFE CROSSING AT LIBERTY CANYON

Community Organizing Conversations
Core Principles & Tips to Keep in Mind

Deep & Active Listening

The key to working with communities is listening to its residents beyond the words that they are saying. In deep and active listening, we also listen for unspoken words by creating a mutual space of respect and non-judgment that will allow others to express themselves. When conversing with the community, be mindful of their tone, pitch, and body language. They help paint the message more than words.

"Affirm, Answer, Redirect."

Sometimes people bring up a lot of tough questions and perspectives that might take the conversation off track and distract from your goals. "Affirm - Answer - Redirect" is a good tool to make sure the person you're talking to feels like you have heard and addressed their concerns while getting back to why you're talking in the first place.

Affirm: Let them know you're listening, you understand, and their feelings are valid — yes, even if they think trees are a problem, not a solution! Even the "nos" will tell you something about the person you're talking to, and perhaps even reveal the issues that matter most on a community or neighborhood level or scale.

Answer: Address questions to the best of your ability, and remember, you do not need to have all the answers! It's perfectly OK to say "I may not know, but I can commit to finding out or investigating that more deeply."

Redirect: But once you've answered the question, don't get bogged down in too much back-and-forth about it. Instead, be ready with a question that brings the conversation back to your message and points

Not everyone will care or say "yes" — and that'a perfectly OK!

All information is data! Again, even the "nos" will tell you something about the person you're talking to or reveal issues that matter most to a community or neighborhood. What underlying value does each refusal communicate? How could you use "Affirm-Answer-Redirect" to recenter, refocus, and guide the conversation using the scenarios presented below?

Remember — the end goal is community empowerment!

Building connections with folks is the foundation of your work as a Tree Ambassador. That said, one of the biggest challenges when working with a community, even if it is your own, is to understand the needs of all community members as much as possible. There are some members that are able to communicate more clearly and more often with tree planting organizations, while others are left unheard. As Tree Ambassadors, how can we ensure that we are actively listening so that members of our community feel empowered and heard?

"Trees create litter in the community and the city doesn't even take care of the trees we have!"

"Taking care of a tree takes too much time and money, besides, aren't we in a drought anyway?"

"Trees create cover and shelter for criminal activity..."

"Trees are cool and all, but I care about homelesness more..."

"Trees lift sidewalks and eat away at underground pipes. How am I supposed to pay for that damage?"

Practicing Conversations

Grab a friend, family member, or fellow Tree Ambassador and practice how you might talk with your neighbors about the Tree Ambassador program. This is a sample script for the role play. It is provided here as a guide, but feel free to make it your own:

"Hi, my name is... And I'm a neighbor trying to get free trees planted in our community because of the environmental and health benefits they bring. To do this, we need support from community members to care for and water the trees planted. Do you know anyone who might be interested in taking home some free trees?"

Once you're more familiar and comfortable with talking about the program, feel free to ditch the script and say what you think would be most effective.

Roleplaying is a great way to practice!

Grab a friend, family member, or fellow Tree Ambassador and practice how you might talk with your neighbors about the Tree Ambassador program. What are some other scenarios you've encountered or think you may encounter? Feel free to reach out to your program leads and your fellow Tree Ambassadors to brainstorm scenarios and potential solutions together.

Building relationships within your community includes holding conversations and making sure to listen to your neighbors. Engaging with your community is a two way street that requires respect, honesty, and trust. Try volunteering at non-urban greening events within your neighborhood such as local food drives and non-profit fundraisers. Here you'll meet passionate individuals who are already dialed into the social network of your community. Speak with them to learn about the success of their volunteer efforts and gage opportunities to grow in your capacity to be a Tree Ambassador. Through dialogue, you can begin to learn core values and highlight tree benefits that directly address or align with those values. Your outreach can build long-lasting connections beyond the physical tree and tap into existing neighborhood assets.

If you ever encounter any problems in the field that make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, get to a safe space and let your program leads know immediately. In case of an emergency, call 911.

Community Organizing Strategies

Attend local community meetings & present

By going to meetings (PTA, local civic group, Neighborhood Council, community association) and sharing your ideas, the group may join in with your efforts or connect you with others who are interested.

Use Social Media

Using local Facebook pages and websites like Nextdoor is wonderful for connecting with others.

Host a Neighborhood Walk

Centering neighborhood walks around the specific interests of your community can help you bring people together.

Hold an informational session

Informational sessions are a great way to share your ideas and ask others for feedback. This is also a way for you to connect with folks who have or are currently doing similar work.

Attend local events

Local events like fairs and markets are where you can identify and connect with others who are active in your neighborhood.

Lead project-related workshops

Workshops like tree-care workshops are a great way to connect with people interested in your project. Be sure to follow-up with attendees to recruit their support.

Connect with churches and other community hubs

Churches and community hubs like libraries and neighborhood recreation centers are public spaces that bring people together. These are lovely spaces to share your ideas and connect with others.

Host a tree adoption event or "block party"

Partner with us to host a tree adoption event or a "block party" for your neighborhood! These are great in-person ways to raise excitement about your project.

Identifying Community Assets, Strengths & Resources

Adapted from the Center for Community Health and Development. (n.d.). Chapter 3, Section 8. Identifying Community Assets and Resources. University of Kansas. Retrieved February 2023 from the <u>Community Tool Box</u>

Now that we've unlocked your role in the social change ecosystem, investigated the power of neighborhood-level data, considered the basic community organizing tactics, methods, and strategies, let's take a look at community asset mapping.

A **community asset** (or community resource, a very similar term) is anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life. And this means:

- **It can be a person** - Residents can be empowered to realize and use their abilities to build and transform the community. The stay-at-home mom or dad who organizes a playgroup. The informal neighborhood leader. The firefighter who risks his life to keep the community safe. These are all community assets.

- **It can be a physical structure or place** - a school, hospital, place of worship, library, recreation center, social club. It could be a town landmark or symbol. It might also be an unused building that could house a community hospice, or a second floor room ideal for community meetings. Or it might be a public place that already belongs to the community - a park, community garden, wetland, or other open space.

- **It can be a community service** that makes life better for some or all community members - public transportation, early childhood education center, community recycling facilities, a faith tradition, a cultural organization.

- **It can be a business** that provides jobs and supports the local economy.

You and everyone else in the community are potential community assets. Everyone has some skills or talents, and everyone can provide knowledge about the community, connections to the people they know, and the kind of support that every effort needs - making phone calls, stuffing envelopes, giving people information, moving equipment or supplies - whatever needs doing. This suggests that everyone in the community can be a force for community improvement if only we knew what their assets were, and could put them to use.

A **community asset map** is a tool or exercise to visualize and draw connections between community assets.

Community Asset Map Template

How can you deepen and build on what's already working in your community?

Individuals

Gifts, skills, capacities, knowledge of:
- Youth & students
- Adults, parents, or seniors
- Neighbors
- Artists & musicians
- Religious leaders
- Workers
- Entrepreneurs

Associations

- PTAs
- Block-Clubs
- Community groups
- Advocacy groups
- Nonprofits
- Civic groups
- Health / wellness
- Disability groups
- Youth groups

Government

- City Councilmember
- Neighborhood Council
- Mayor
- Government agencies
- State Assemblymember
- State Senator
- Federal representatives

Your Neighborhood

Institutions

- Schools & colleges
- Social service agencies
- Nonprofits
- Museums
- Hospitals
- Businesses
- Unions

Other

- Community or cultural stories, myths, & legends
- Community pride
- Community history
- Regular community events (block parties, festivals, concerts, clean ups)

Physical Spaces

- Gardens
- Parks / skate parks
- Libraries
- Transportation hubs
- Places of Worship
- Performance venues
- Natural areas
- Historical sites
- Grocery stores
- Restaurants

Post-Training Activity: Create Your Own Community Asset Map

As a Tree Ambassador, creating your own Community Asset Map for your specific neighborhood will serve as an important tool for your organizing and help you answer the question, "How can you deepen and build on what's already working?" You will have time later to design a Community Impact Project and set specific goals and metrics, but determining the strengths and resources already in your community is the first step. Take a stab at creating your own Community Asset Map on the blank template on the next page, or feel free to draw it out on a larger piece of paper. Here are a few questions to support your brainstorming:

- **Individuals**: Are there individuals in your community who are vocal and passionate about neighborhood well-being — Perhaps someone you admire or would like to get to know? Are there individuals with gifts, skills, knowledge that you think would be important to connect with?

- **Physical Spaces:** Where do people in your neighborhood gather, or where are the natural community hubs?

- **Associations**: Are there parent groups, church groups, advocacy groups, other nonprofit organizations in different sectors that are already doing amazing work?

- **Institutions**: Are there specific schools, museums, hospitals, nonprofits, businesses that you think would be important to partner with or would be interested in supporting your Community Impact Project? Do they host events?

- **Government**:Who are your local, state, and federal representatives? What is your neighborhood council, and is it active? Can you get in touch with them? Are there City of LA agencies already working in your neighborhood?

- **Other:** What community resources can you identify that might be aligned with urban greening and nature-based solutions? What are your community's strengths? What assets and resources are already in place? Think about the people, places, organizations, services, and policies already in your community.

It's perfectly OK if the same "asset" shows up in multiple categories — This framework is designed to get you thinking and cross-pollinating. After identifying and mapping community assets in your neighborhood, the next step is identifying individuals connected with each of these community assets and reaching out to them, which we'll work on next.

Tools for Action

Center for Community Health & Development, University of Kansas, Community Tool Box
ctb.ku.edu/en

Maps
California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment - CalEnviroScreen 4.0
https://tinyurl.com/bdhk3et4

LA County Tree Canopy Map Viewer
https://tinyurl.com/2w3bk9v8

Mapping Inequality Project
https://tinyurl.com/Inequalitymaps

Risk Factor™ find property's risk from environmental threats such as flooding, wildfires, and extreme heat
https://tinyurl.com/34npm5t7

News Articles, Podcast & Studies
The Effects of Air Pollution on Human Health - Sustainability for All
https://tinyurl.com/2p99pbaw

Reclaim The Los Art of Deep Listening - Forbes
https://tinyurl.com/yc2n5rp7

Understanding Community - South Los Angeles is the Future
https://southlaisthefuture.org/podcast

Websites
LA City Neighborhood Info
https://tinyurl.com/yte8xjsd

The Art of Listening by Simon Sinek
https://tinyurl.com/3f2rmy2v

How to actively listen to others by Scott Pierce
https://tinyurl.com/ar97bryd

Building Movement Project by Deepa Iyer and Anna Castro
https://tinyurl.com/2pfnk3j9

My Tree - Tree Benefit Tool
https://tinyurl.com/3n8nw79v

Your city. Your voice. Your urban forest.
Tu voz. Tu ciudad. Tu bosque urbano.