

Zorah Bowman Trust: Goals & Budget Outline

Departmental goals for these funds center around rebuilding park infrastructure with a focus on equitable investment across the community, revitalizing programmatic offerings through strategic partnerships, and establishing stable funding into the future. The three components outlined below are reflections of the City's stated goals.

Natural play spaces create a sustainable infrastructure that provide central city children with access to a natural experience that is also ecologically responsible. Done deliberately, professionally, and with a great deal of community engagement, these spaces will transform the traditional experience of steel and plastic play structures typically installed in city parks into experiences that will buoy the health and wellness of the entire neighborhood, as well as the creative expression of its children.

The "Building Parks, Building Ownership" Program will engage youth in rebuilding their neighborhood park. In our experience this transforms the park into sacred space, reducing vandalism and engendering a protective spirit for what has been built. It is THEIR park. One specific project is the crafting of a peace and healing plaza inside a park that is in neutral territory for local gangs. This initiative has the possibility of breaking down barriers, reducing violence, and reinforcing the healing power of greenspace.

Finally, the work involved in researching and establishing a more stable funding source for Parks and Recreation operations is critical to the long-term viability of our parks network. It will dramatically change a system who's fund structure has contributed to a precipitous decline in parks and recreation spending by the municipality. When economies are challenged, people lose sight of the fact that parks are an upstream solution to a downstream problem.

Challenges

Each of the three components are grounded in the critical need to pursue equity in the Toledo community. Our city parks are almost exclusively located in neighborhoods filled with individuals and families that have suffered because of systemic racism, so these parks become a powerful platform upon which to pursue this important work. These projects will only be effective if we consciously and deliberately seek the engagement of those we serve. How can we possibly actually serve them if we don't know what they want, or what they value? It's about dialogue. We continue searching for hidden and missing voices. And we will remain faithful to the priority of exploring new, meaningful ways to seek out those voices.

Community Prioritization

Three engagement events were hosted at elementary schools in the area surrounding the first proposed natural play site. We received input, both explicit and subtle, from the children who will use this new space, through their play with natural materials being delivered to the school. They drew their "dream" natural play space. When the space is built it will reflect their ideas, engendering a pride of ownership. This same process will be mirrored for the additional parks identified for nature play installations.

By default, the children participating in the engagement events represent the diversity present in that neighborhood. In addition, Toledo Public School teachers who helped coordinate these events, worked with us to identify engaged parents whose involvement we will nurture.

Both the Peace & Healing project, and the Junction Park J.O.Y. program give us authentic and meaningful input on the "Building Parks, Building Ownership" initiative. Initial meetings and events, organized by the gangs, have started a dialogue that steers all of our activity for the Peace & Healing project. This dialogue will continue in whatever way the gang members find most comfortable. The Junction Corridor Coalition is identifying young people who will participate in a building project. In addition, we will be supporting the Junction Coalition to develop a plan to activate their new park. These parks belong to the people in these neighborhoods. We will continue building these bridges through intense listening and deliberate verification to make sure there is both continued dialogue and authentic engagement.