State of the Network

the green infrastructure leadership exchange

A project of Global Philanthropy Partnership
WHO WE ARE

The Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange ("the Exchange") is a highly connected, member-driven peer network where local public sector practitioners share experiences, circulate ideas, and solve problems together toward delivering more equitable and sustainable water infrastructure solutions. We focus on three areas: 1) Creating new tools, resources and innovations that support equitable implementation of GSI, 2) Building the leadership skills of current and future leaders, and 3) Making the case for GSI.

OUR MISSION
To activate local governments in North America to equitably implement GSI.

OUR VISION
Communities have thriving water systems that further social equity, public health, and climate resilience.

OUR VALUES
Connection, Inspiration, Collaboration, Leadership, Community, Equity, Innovation
BY THE NUMBERS

65  |  380  |  06  |  18
---|---|---|---
Member cities | Individual members | Peer Learning Circles | Grants Awarded to Date

NEW MEMBERS IN 2022 - WELCOME!

6  |  8  |  13  |  16  |  10  |  14
Canada  |  Northwest  |  Midwest  |  Southwest  | Southeast  | Northeast

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District Department of Transportation  
Lakewood Community Resources  
MARC
NEW & NOTEWORTHY

01 STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The Exchange completed a strategic refresh during the last year with help from Onside Partners. Below are some of the key outcomes:

We met with practitioners and partners to revisit the needs of the field:
» Evidence-building and case-making
» Supportive policies and systems
» Case studies of successes and failures
» A focus on leaders
» Community and equity
» Funding pathways

We refreshed our Vision and Mission:
» Vision: Communities have thriving water systems that further social equity, public health, and climate resilience
» Mission: Activate local governments and water agencies to equitably implement green stormwater infrastructure (Draft)

We refined our audience:
» Current: Emerging leaders at water agencies who are advanced or intermediate in GSI
» New: Emerging and senior leaders from water agencies at any stage of GSI implementation

02 GRANT RENEWAL UPDATES

The Exchange secured funding from five foundations within the last year, including four renewals and one first time award from JPB Foundation. The Exchange has increased its revenues by 75% since its inception, allowing us to expand grants and other services to members and to create new knowledge for the field. The Exchange is extremely grateful to all of its funders for their support and partnership.
FINANCIALS

Annual Budget: $897,000

FUNDING SOURCES

- 29% Kresge
- 15% Pisces
- 16% JPB
- 13% Summit
- 6% Dues

EXPENSE CATEGORIES

- 31% Innovation
- 28% Knowledge Creation
- 23% Peer Learning
- 12% Communications
- 6% General Operating
FOSTERING PEER LEARNING TO ADVANCE GSI

In 2021-22, we facilitated six Peer Learning Circles focused on enhancing member’s GSI knowledge and capacity through examination of best practices and challenges, exchange of information and resources, and collaboration to create better solutions faster. Highlights from the past years’ learning are below.

Placing Equity At the Center
This year, the Equity Learning Circle had several main focus areas: first, the group spent two meetings sharing their biggest obstacles and successful strategies in the realm of advancing equity in their work, which set a baseline for the group’s learning and discussion throughout the year. The group did a three month deep dive into examining the relationship between GSI and gentrification as well as anti-displacement strategies, including a pilot workshop with the Preventing Displacement chapter of the Guide. They also turned a lens to equity within their own organizations with a discussion around bridging disconnects and amplifying the needs of frontline staff. Lastly, the group experimented with a peer resourcing meeting, enabling one of its members to crowdsource solutions to increasing equitable access to their GI grant program.

Planning & Resilience
The main learning theme for this year was resiliency, which the group examined through various lenses. Early in the year, the group spent time examining definitions of and approaches to building resiliency in their communities, and group members gave presentations on this over a series of meetings. They also focused on strategies for aligning GSI with other community priorities, including the role and impact of GSI in working towards broader equity goals. Lastly, they heard presentations about projects and approaches to planning in uncertainty and predicting future climate scenarios, including urban flooding and cloudburst storms.
Innovations in Funding & Financing

Building on the previous year’s learning, this Learning Circle explored new strategies for funding & financing GSI including environmental impact bonds, monetizing co-benefits, and federal and state funding opportunities. They spent several months on a deep dive into various approaches to monetizing co-benefits, including leveraging health benefits of GSI, using a triple bottom line framework, implementing cost-benefit analyses with a GI specific cost calculator, and a values-based approach being piloted in Seattle.

Innovations in Design

This group covered a number of topics this year. Early in the year, they looked at best practices for design, as well as barriers to and opportunities for innovation. Throughout the year, they brought in presenters to speak to both of these areas. Learning about new tools included CAD block tools and carbon footprint calculation. In terms of innovations, the group learned about innovative new soil media, planting strategies for functionality, and the role of GSI in placemaking.

Asset Management

This group had two main learning tracks this year. Firstly, they utilized the recently developed GI Asset Management Toolkit throughout the year, inviting the Toolkit’s authors to present on its contents and share case studies with the group. Secondly, they shared their experiences and approaches to asset management with one another throughout the year, observing that while some municipalities are making headway in this arena, asset management for green infrastructure is a relatively new area of learning for most communities. This has led to initial discussion about future project work that may build on the body of knowledge captured in the Toolkit.

Maximizing GSI Performance

In its first year, this group focused on learning about one another’s approaches to and progress in the realm of performance measurement for GSI. In the first half of the year, co-chairs facilitated an in depth process of surveying, synthesizing, and generating learning and discussion on topics such as performance metrics and monitoring technologies. In the second half of the year, the group heard presentations from various members about their experiences with performance monitoring and analysis.
NEW RESOURCES DEVELOPED

The Exchange has developed a number of unique practitioner-oriented resources to guide, inform, educate, and prepare our members and professionals field-wide in their efforts to advance GSI implementation. A comprehensive list of Exchange resources can be found here. Below are the resources produced over the past year.

**State of Equity Practice in Public Sector Report:** Drawing mainly from a comprehensive survey issued to capture equity-focused experiences, this Report is an attempt to develop a national baseline understanding of the extent to which equity considerations are being centered within GSI planning, implementation and monitoring and are contributing towards achieving the equity objectives of communities.

**Equity Guide for GSI Practitioners:** The Equity Guide for Green Stormwater Infrastructure Practitioners is a comprehensive guide to advancing and measuring equity within public sector stormwater management organizations’ green stormwater infrastructure policies, programs, and projects. It offers an action and evaluation roadmap that defines long-term equity goals, best practices, and sample metrics.

**GSI Right Sizing Standards:** Led by the City of Kitchener, Ontario with support from Lotus Water and Jacobs Engineering, this project developed a tool for non-modelers to predict the volume capture and water quality benefits of various GSI design scenarios, as well as a report containing recommendations for GSI modeling standards.

**Asset Management Resources and Toolkit:** Led by the City of Toronto, Ontario and with support from Southwest Environmental Finance Center (SWEFC), this project developed a framework for high-level management of green and grey infrastructure assets. The Toolkit is focused entirely on green assets and provides practical challenges and lessons learned, as well as case studies and examples developed or obtained through the Exchange.

**The GSI Library:** Led by the City of Gresham, OR, members of our Details & Specifications Workgroup spearheaded the creation of a GSI Library to share GSI details, specifications, and policies. Since its launch in June 2020, the Library has been populated via uploads from over 100 Exchange members and will continue to be updated with new content moving forward. Recently, the GSI Library was updated to accommodate resources related to all six priority focus areas of the Exchange.
NEW RESOURCES DUE OUT IN 2022-23

Round 5 of our Collaborative Grant Program funded the four projects that follow. The resources being developed under each of these projects will be released in the late 2022 and early 2023, so keep an eye out on our website and LinkedIn page!

**Overcoming Barriers to Equitable GSI Implementation ($18,275):** A project that aims to overcome the identified financial barriers of NEORSD’s Green Infrastructure Grants (GIG) Program to intentionally promote equitable GSI investments in Cleveland’s historically disinvested neighborhoods.

**Bioretention Plant Selection Tool Phase I ($46,725):** A project to develop a plant selection tool focused on identifying attributes appropriate to functions needed in bioretention and green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) facilities.

**Climate Resilience Resources Guide Part I ($40K):** A project to develop Part I of a resource guide to help agencies advance planning, implementation and long-term operations and maintenance of GSI with respect to modeled climate change impacts.

**MWRD Green Infrastructure Maintenance Consortium ($50K):** A project that aims to establish a program where neighboring municipalities with varying income levels pool funds to equitably share a green infrastructure maintenance crew, reducing costs for all.

COLLABORATIVE GRANT ROUND 6

The Exchange is offering more grant opportunities under the Round 6 Collaborative Grant Program RFP. This funding will support projects that share knowledge that can creatively improve the speed, cost, and/or effectiveness of local GSI programs through collaborative ventures. The RFP will be released in June 2022.

WHAT OUR MEMBERS SAY ABOUT THE VALUE OF MEMBERSHIP

“It has been really helpful to hear people in other parts of the country speak honestly.”

“Connecting with GSI leaders in other areas has been a great benefit. Ideas from these connections have inspired us to recently pursue grant funding to implement tactical GSI in disadvantaged communities. I was able to get feedback and direction from network partners on a project I was working on.”

“The expertise of other communities has helped our office develop our own GI standards.”

“The Exchange has always done an excellent job of seeking and listening to feedback from its members - creating a true member-led and engaged community.”

“I feel that the monthly Equity meetings provided excellent resources and discussions for GI practitioners. As a new member of the working groups, I felt welcomed to the meetings and encouraged to share thoughts, successes, and challenges that my team had experienced.”
2021 ANNUAL MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS

Participating in the network has helped members...

- 94% Gain valuable knowledge & resources
- 87% Develop leadership skills within their organization
- 72% Solve an important problem faced in their program
- 72% Make progress on addressing equity in their organization and community

- 92% of members made at least 1 new connection this past year
- 55% of members collaborated with at least 1 and up to 10 other members this year

2022 ANNUAL MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS FORTHCOMING

Stay tuned to see the most current feedback from our members in June!
A LOOK AHEAD

We consistently review and refine our strategies in response to member and field-level needs. In the year ahead, we will specifically prioritize the following three key activities:

**01 DEVELOP THE STATE OF THE FIELD REPORT**
This project aims to create a shared vision for the future field investments needed to accelerate equitable implementation of GSI through telling a data-informed story about the national state of Public Sector GSI, and proposing standardized high-level metrics to better measure ongoing progress.

**02 CONTRIBUTE TO THE 2022 ONE WATER SUMMIT**
In order to connect GSI practitioners and leaders in the water sector more broadly, the Exchange will be collaborating with the US Water Alliance on this year’s One Water Summit, which will be held from September 12 – 15, 2022 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

**03 ADVANCE OUR THREE PILLARS OF WORK**
To increase our impact, we will be expanding our work to focus on three areas, newly adopted: 1) Build the leadership capacities of current & future public sector water leaders; 2) Support the implementation of affordable equitable GSI; 3) Make the case for GSI supportive policies, and funding.
JOIN US

Exchange members include public utilities, municipalities, cities and counties who are implementing infrastructure at scale. Whether your GSI program is entry-level or advanced, if GSI is a priority and you intend to channel time, staff and resources into pursuing its implementation, you will find that membership in the Exchange brings multiple benefits and opportunities that support and enhance your efforts.

CHECK OUT OUR MEMBER DIRECTORY

To see who else is an Exchange member from your region or nationwide, click here for a full member list.

WANT TO BECOME A MEMBER?

If you are interested in joining the Exchange, you can visit the membership page on our website to review eligibility and participation requirements, and the steps for becoming a member. To get started, please complete our membership application.

With questions, please reach out to Kasey Armstrong at kasey@giexchange.org.