

STRENGTHENING THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Ideas for Cross-Sector Collaboration

Summary of roundtable discussion hosted by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) and Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF)



Foreword

Communities around the world are grappling with the increasingly high costs of extreme heat, flooding, sea level rise, and drought. Biodiversity and ecosystem loss continues unabated, threatening our economies and livelihoods. And there is a growing public health crisis because of the lack of exercise and community connection.

We brought together this roundtable to help us understand why more money isn't going to nature-based solutions to these challenges – solutions that landscape architects know work so well. Nature-based approaches still receive a very small fraction of the global funds allocated to climate mitigation, adaptation, and community health. And ecosystem conservation and restoration continue to be vastly underfunded.

From our discussion, we learned that policymakers, developers, economists, water utilities, the insurance sector, and the healthcare sector are all dealing with a similar challenge from different angles – how to best package the many co-benefits of nature-based solutions for public and private investors.

We need to continue to work across sectors to figure this out. Our hope is this roundtable leads to a new collective agenda and a dynamic community of practice. We encourage landscape architects, educators, and organizations interested in the ideas in this report to join our effort. Let's all reach out across sectors and disciplines.

People invest when they see value.

Landscape architects create tremendous economic value for clients and communities— from local neighborhoods to the highest levels of global decision-making at the United Nations and COP.

Yet demonstrating that value has long been a challenge. As participants in this roundtable recognized, landscapes are inherently complex systems, shaped by interconnected natural and cultural processes that unfold across multiple spatial and temporal scales. Their benefits are significant but difficult to measure, communicate, and compare using conventional economic frameworks.

We must do better. Demonstrating the economic value of landscape solutions is essential to ensure they are prioritized and funded at the scale today's challenges demand. However sustainability is defined or measured—Zero Carbon, Zero Waste, Sustainable Water, Biodiversity, or Livability—these goals cannot be achieved without fully utilizing landscape solutions.

This imperative brought together an exceptional group of leaders from across sectors to explore how to better quantify and communicate the economic value of landscape approaches to planning, design, development, and stewardship. The findings in this report will inform an agenda to strengthen collaboration, inform policy decisions, and increase resources for landscape-led solutions that will achieve the future we all envision: where people and planet thrive together by design.



Torey Carter-Conneen, Hon. ASLA
CEO, American Society of
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Landscape architects plan and design nature-based solutions at all scales. These projects create significant economic, ecological, health, and social benefits for communities.

The [American Society of Landscape Architecture \(ASLA\)](#) and [Landscape Architecture Foundation \(LAF\)](#) seek to advance multi-sector programs and research collaboration on the economic benefits of nature-based solutions. ASLA and LAF also seek to align with and strengthen global and national efforts to advance the integration of nature's benefits into the built environment. However, there are challenges in measuring and reporting on the economic benefits of these solutions that require further cross-sector work.

To identify cross-sector challenges and solutions, ASLA and LAF brought together a diverse community of 21 leaders from 11 states and 3 countries in March 2026 for a half-day virtual roundtable discussion on the economic benefits of nature-based solutions.

This report summarizes the outcomes of the roundtable and outlines ideas for future cross-sector research, partnerships, and programs for roundtable organizations, including ASLA and LAF, along with other potential organizations not represented by the roundtable.

Roundtable participants were familiar with or have conducted economic research on nature-based solutions and landscape architecture. They included:

- Landscape architecture educators
- Landscape architecture practitioners
- Developers
- Environmental economists

Roundtable with
a diverse community

21

LEADERS

3

COUNTRIES

11

STATES

- Health and healthcare leaders
- Insurance leaders
- International organization leaders
- Municipal agency leaders
- Non-profit organization leaders
- Real estate and economic development advisors
- Water management leaders

The goals of the roundtable were to:

- Understand existing landscape architecture project data sources and gaps, and obstacles to collecting, analyzing, and communicating data.
- Identify opportunities to expand the collection, analysis, and communication of economic benefits data and align with and support emerging global goals and standards.
- Develop new relationships and a community of practice that spans design and economics.

This work is built on the synthesis of applied evidence developed by the University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center (UMD EFC) for ASLA, which used real world project data from LAF case studies:

- [Landscape Architecture: Maximizing the Economic Benefits of Nature-based Solutions Through Design](#)
- [An Analysis of Benefit Values: 175 Landscape Architecture Case Studies in the U.S.](#)
- [Making the Economic Case for Nature-Based Solutions in Climate Projects](#)

If you are interested in joining on-going cross-sector roundtable discussions, please let us know. Send us a note introducing yourself and your work on the economic benefits of nature-based solutions to climate@asla.org.



In Carmel, Indiana, landscape architects with Rundell Ernstberger Associates reimagined an industrial area to create the [Monon Boulevard and Midtown Plaza](#), which uses permeable paving and a 300,000-gallon underground cistern to manage stormwater. The new boulevard is a multi-modal corridor that provided the foundation for a new urban district. It catalyzed \$167 million in private investment.

Image credit: Monon Boulevard and Midtown Plaza Phases 1 and 2, Carmel, Indiana. Rundell Ernstberger Associates / Hadley Fruits and Rundell Ernstberger Associates

(Cover Image) Landscape architects at David Rubin Land Collective designed [Grand Junction Park and Plaza](#) in Westfield, Indiana to safely store more than 65,000 cubic feet of stormwater as part of a restored creek system. Since 2021, the 8-acre park has contributed to Westfield's economic development by supporting \$125 million in applied investments and \$364 million in proposed investments within a half mile of the site. It also indirectly supports more than 130 local businesses. Image credit:

ASLA 2023 Professional General Design Honor Award. Grand Junction Park and Plaza. Westfield, Indiana. DAVID RUBIN Land Collective / Alan Karchmer

Roundtable Participants



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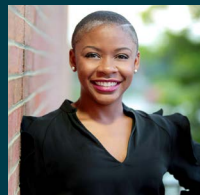
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Organizers

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Challenges



In Hoboken, New Jersey, the 1.25-acre **Southwest Resiliency Park, Phase 1**, designed by landscape architects at Starr Whitehouse, can store nearly 72,000 gallons of water – or 100 percent of a 10-year storm event – in underground cisterns. The park's flood protection capabilities provide economic benefits to the city and nearby property owners from avoided flood damages.

Image credit: Southwest Resiliency Park, Phase 1, Hoboken, New Jersey. Starr Whitehouse Landscape Architects and Planners / Francine Fleischer

A guided discussion identified the top common challenges participants experience in making the economic case for nature-based solutions. Roundtable participants said some economic benefits – improved stormwater management, increased property values – are easier to quantify. But other important benefits — such as health, social cohesion, and climate resilience — remain difficult to measure.

Despite a strong and expanding evidence base for the benefits of nature-based solutions, there remains a lack of:

- Accessible data
- Useful metrics
- Standardized valuation approaches
- Clearly defined, monetizable benefit categories

Across roundtable discussion groups, participants identified three key challenge areas:

- Challenges in measuring economic benefits and translating them into investment decisions
- Gaps in the scale of analysis and data availability
- Challenges in making the policy and funding case

CHALLENGES IN MEASURING ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND TRANSLATING THEM INTO INVESTMENT DECISIONS

Some key health and well-being benefits of nature-based solutions are not well captured through economic methods. Roundtable participants discussed the lack of economic evidence for the benefits of green space on mental and physical health, including stress recovery, social ties, and long-term health outcomes like reduced heart disease. These benefits are preventive or therapeutic and are recognized in the nature and health research literature but the economic benefits are not captured in ways landscape architects can communicate in the planning and design process. One challenge is that some health and well-being benefits can be quantified but not monetized. Developing ways to measure and describe benefits that can't be monetized is still important to support policy goals.

“There is this middle space between design and economic benefits that we don’t measure, like how quickly people recover from everyday stressful experiences.”

WILLIAM SULLIVAN, FASLA, PHD, PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, AND DIRECTOR OF THE SMART, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

“The recreational and social value generated by green spaces are important. People are separated, on their phones. Events and programs in these spaces that bring people together improve health and physical activity. The benefits of bringing people together is not measured well. It would be great to be able to measure that in economic terms.”

DR. DEBORAH COHEN, MD, MPH, KAISER PERMANENTE DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH & EVALUATION

There is a lack of standard methods for translating some benefits into trusted dollar values and then into investment decisions. Participants noted a persistent gap between being able to measure some benefits (biodiversity, heat reduction) and translating them into actionable metrics that decision-makers, financiers, and federal agencies can use for decision-making. For some categories of benefits, such as climate resilience or biodiversity, there is no standardized methodology and specificity for the benefits that can be translated into monetary values that show the impact of design decisions.

“What are the types of data that incentivize decision-makers to invest toward specific outcomes? There is a hierarchy of investment in nature-based solutions and a wide range of decision makers, all with different motivations and who respond to different data.”

MAMI HARA, CEO, US WATER ALLIANCE



In Nanchang City, China, landscape architects at Turenscape transformed a heavily degraded landscape into the 126-acre **Fish Tail Park**, a model of stormwater management and habitat restoration – and they accomplished this with a modest budget of \$4 per square foot. The park created 20-30 full-time operational and maintenance jobs. Image credit: ASLA 2025 Professional General Design Award of Excellence. A Floating Forest: Fish Tail Park in Nanchang City. Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, China. Turenscape

Research methods also need to account for local conditions. Building on this challenge of translating benefits into economic terms, participants emphasized that nature-based solution valuation cannot rely on one-size-fits-all metrics. Although certain methodologies, assumptions, and indicators can be transferred across projects and regions, the actual economic outcomes of projects vary substantially by geography, climate, land markets, and community conditions.

“There is not a standardized operational framework on these issues. For every project we do, we customize the estimation of benefits and what’s monetizable for whom.”

ERMAN ERUZ, DIRECTOR, HR&A

GAPS IN THE SCALE OF ANALYSIS AND DATA AVAILABILITY

There is a gap between project-level and system-level analyses. A recurring theme was the gap between individual project analyses and broader community-wide or city-wide analyses. Measurements of benefits are mostly at the property or project level but may provide community benefits that aren’t well captured.

Decision-makers like state and local governments, insurers, and some large-scale developers also need community-wide data to show a return on investment. Landscape architects may not be able to provide the information needed for capital investment decisions. Insurance markets provide an example of this mismatch: participants noted that the industry is structured around individual loss events, which makes it difficult to capture the community-wide risk reduction that specific nature-based projects may provide at scale, cumulatively, and over longer time horizons.

“Wetlands, retention areas, and green corridors are most effective when planned as part of a wider flood management system rather than as stand-alone interventions. There is a need to better capture the economic value of nature-based solutions as part of broader urban systems, not just at the isolated project level.”

PALLAVI SENGUPTA, URBAN DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST, WORLD BANK

Data and models across markets and geographies differ and may be proprietary. There are some nationwide models and datasets that provide ways to estimate benefits (e.g., iTree, Green Values) but without a framework to map specific indicators and retrieve geography-specific datasets, every project requires “bespoke” analysis, which can be expensive and is often not conducted for smaller-scale projects.

The detailed and specific data required by insurers, catastrophe models, and federal funders, particularly around avoided damages, health outcomes, and climate risk are often difficult to find, unavailable, inconsistent, proprietary, or protected (e.g. health data). For example, catastrophe models are proprietary and landscape architects do not have access to the models or inputs.

Also noted by the groups: valuation approaches developed in one city may provide useful methodology guidance elsewhere, but project outcomes and data inputs remain highly dependent on local climate, economic, and regulatory conditions. These challenges are increasing with the growing complexities of climate risk and long-term modeling.

“The economic values associated with an intervention in the Boston market is different from the Austin and Denver markets.”

DIANA FERNANDEZ BIBEAU, ASLA, COMMISSIONER, BOSTON
PARKS & RECREATION

“Because there will be so many co-benefits, we should consider how to really make it meaningful for a community and make the business case. The challenge is, of course, that means every project analysis needs to be customized. We’ve developed 50 cost benefit analyses, and they are all different, even though we try to standardize them. They differ based on what matters to communities — what they want to see there and where we can find data. Data scarcity is a major issue for us; it can take very long to find the data or make robust assumptions.”

RONJA BECHAUF, POLICY ADVISOR, IISD

“There’s something to be said about the bespoke nature of the work we do in this space. So much of it has to be locally crafted. The financial sector is looking at what the standard is they can point to and say this is going to be effective. They don’t necessarily have the resources to be looking at every individual localized project. They want some kind of rubber stamp. We don’t necessarily have a lot of rubber stamps for these projects yet.”

TALLEY BURLEY, SENIOR MANAGER OF CLIMATE RISK & INSURANCE, ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND

CHALLENGES IN MAKING THE POLICY AND FUNDING CASE

There is a disconnect between who bears the costs of developing nature-based solutions and who experiences the benefits of the solutions. While developers or public agencies bear the initial development costs, the economic and environmental returns are largely socialized, flowing

directly to the general public. Communities may experience reduced flood risk, improved public health, increased resilience, and enhanced quality of life, but those benefits frequently accrue across multiple sectors and stakeholders rather than returning directly to the public agency or developer paying for the project. This disconnect can make it difficult to build a conventional business case or secure investment for projects that broadly distribute value. That being said, participants also noted there are financing structures that can bring together diffuse beneficiaries and route value back to public or private investors in an integrated way. These include tax increment financing (TIF), environmental impact bonds, and insurance premium mechanisms.

“The costs and the benefits are not necessarily always harvested by the same people or borne by the same agency.”

YUJIA WANG, ASLA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PRACTICE,
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN

“Almost every single thing we do to make a city or community more sustainable also has co-benefits that are almost never measured directly.”

WILLIAM SULLIVAN, FASLA, PHD, PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT
OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, AND DIRECTOR OF THE SMART,
HEALTHY COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Budgets for nature-based solutions often don’t adequately account for long-term operations and maintenance.

Several participants highlighted that project elements — porous pavements, biodiverse plantings — are often adopted without adequate operations and maintenance funding or training for maintenance staff. The resulting underperformance, visible deterioration, and maintenance challenges can lead to lack of willingness on the part of public and private clients to implement more nature-based solutions. Construction, operations, and maintenance budgets for nature-based solutions need to factor in the full life-cycle of these projects, which includes the initial planning, design, and construction along with long-term operations and maintenance.

“Green stormwater infrastructure has been widely adopted but they’re failing because of the lack of operations and maintenance support.”

DIANA FERNANDEZ BIBEAU, ASLA, COMMISSIONER, BOSTON
PARKS & RECREATION

Nature-based solutions are absent from or inadvertently constrained by municipal codes. Participants noted that nature-based solutions remain insufficiently embedded in municipal code frameworks, including zoning and regulatory systems. Implementation still depends on client alignment or isolated municipal requirements rather than systematic incorporation into all codes and standards that guide and regulate development. Incremental changes are happening, just not at scale.

“Integrating nature-based solutions into code is still a challenge. New tree planting requirements are integrating more green infrastructure functions and that is just becoming standard practice and city requirements.”

DIANA FERNANDEZ BIBEAU, ASLA, COMMISSIONER, BOSTON
PARKS & RECREATION

Opportunities



At the Rainier Beach Urban Farm and Wetlands in Seattle, Washington, landscape architects with Berger Partnership created a new green stormwater management system, which included restored wetlands, new rain gardens, and more than 700 new trees. The project provides a community-wide economic benefit by reducing the cost of locally-grown organic produce.

Image credit: Rainier Beach Urban Farm and Wetlands, Seattle Washington. Berger Partnership / Built Works Photography

The second guided discussion sought to identify opportunities to address the challenges through new cross-sector programs and research collaboration.

Conversations focused on the opportunities that would come from:

- Updating traditional approaches to redirect existing funding
- Blending finance
- Creating alternate investment incentives
- Implementing risk models that fully account for the long-term value nature-based solutions can provide

Participants identified potential ways to align government policy, public and private finance, and the measurement and communication of benefits across sectors to enable nature-based solutions to become a solid choice, alongside gray and hybrid solutions.

Across discussion groups, participants identified three key opportunity areas:

- Standardize measurement and improve data availability
- Better leverage policy and leadership to make the case
- Tell a more complete story of the economic benefits of nature-based solutions

STANDARDIZE MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVE DATA AVAILABILITY

Develop a standardized pre- and post-project approach for measuring outcomes. Codify a standard process at the project scoping stage to forecast expected benefits, including heat reduction, flood protection, and property value impacts. Build frameworks and cross-disciplinary partnerships for scoping and measuring outcomes. Outcome evaluation is a missing piece not just in the assessment of nature-based solutions but across infrastructure and capital investment planning overall.

“With better data and capacity, a city should be able to make a first-pass estimate of a project’s benefits itself, enough to prioritize investments. Today, that requires hiring a consultant every time, which keeps it out of reach for many communities.”

ERMAN ERUZ, DIRECTOR, HR&A

“Too often, big savings numbers get thrown around with no way to confirm them. Landscape architects need better tools to see the economic case clearly — every site is different, and right now it’s not clear how to measure the benefits.”

JIM BURNETT, FASLA, PRESIDENT, OJB LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Develop better outcome measures, focused on people.

Expand and develop a small, consistent set of metrics that focus specifically on the benefits nature-based solutions provide to people, including heat reduction, stress reduction, improved social cohesion, and increased sense of safety. Use these metrics to strengthen the economic case of projects to communities.

“If you have a physical or mental health problem, then your health insurance might go up. And then there’s the economic cost of people not going to work because of a health problem and the cost of needing more social services. So much of this can be tied to a lack of connection with nature. We focus on economic benefits from the developer’s point of view, but what about the people? How do we measure the economic benefits that go to people and communities?”

AIDA M. CURTIS, FASLA, PLA, PRESIDENT, CURTIS + ROGERS DESIGN STUDIO AND CHAIR, ASLA CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY ACTION COMMITTEE



Town Branch Commons in Lexington, Kentucky, designed by landscape architects at SCAPE and Gresham Smith, is a 2.2-mile-long linear park and complete street, with stormwater management systems and walking and biking trails. The project has led to more than \$110 million in municipal and philanthropic investments in nearby parks and schools. Image credit: ASLA 2023 Professional Urban Design Honor Award. Town Branch Commons: An Urban Transformation in Lexington, Kentucky. Lexington, Kentucky. SCAPE, Gresham Smith / SCAPE & Ty Cole

“Measuring and reporting benefits from nature-based solutions has been a regulated field for a long time in other countries. There’s so much guidance we can get from what we call a natural capital perspective in the UK and EU specifically.”

KATRINA KELLY-PITOU, VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF ADAPTATION AND ECONOMICS, SMITHGROUP

Foster better economic impact data availability and access. Granular data (rent values, leasing rates, café revenue in green spaces, unit-level housing data) is often proprietary, commercially confidential, fragmented across agencies or not collected consistently. Participants identified the need for local governments and private entities to make more data available. Simple, accessible data and tools would improve the ability to make economic impact analyses without requiring predictive models.

“If you want to see how well a nature-based solution impacts leasable spaces, we need to have detailed data sets on the rent of individual units and their characteristics. Sometimes this data is confidential. The availability of data is not consistent.”

YUJIA WANG, ASLA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PRACTICE, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN

BETTER LEVERAGE POLICY AND LEADERSHIP TO MAKE THE CASE

Embed nature-based solutions into policy. Policymakers play an outsized role in setting the goals that establish how return-on-investment (ROI) is calculated. Cost-benefit analyses of projects can support the inclusion of nature-based solutions into Federal, state, and local policy frameworks so they become standard practice, as has been accomplished in several European countries. Participants discussed how landscape architects need to work with allied planning and design professions and policymakers to create supportive policy frameworks, backed by publicly available data and analysis. For example, one U.S. state requires waterfront developers to offset impacts to public access, and those offsets are evaluated in monetary terms. More requirements like this will increase accountability and a growing data set for future research.

“Massachusetts’ Public Waterfront Act requires developers on tidelands to provide public access in exchange for the right to build, which creates a need to value the access they’re affecting. We worked with the Conservation Law Foundation to build a Tideland Development Calculator that quantifies that value, turning the policy requirement into a standard way to articulate and compensate for those benefits.”

ERMAN ERUZ, DIRECTOR, HR&A

“In Europe, the evidence base for nature-based solutions is already strong, and confidence in their performance and benefits has grown significantly. What has helped move these approaches from individual projects to widespread practice is the integration of nature-based solutions into policy and regulatory frameworks. In the U.S., a similar shift could help make nature-based solutions a standard part of planning and investment decisions.”

RONJA BECHAUF, POLICY ADVISOR, IISD

Model public sector leadership. Rather than focusing exclusively on creating new funding streams, participants discussed the opportunity to better align currently siloed investments across city and state parks, transportation, water and stormwater, public health, and infrastructure departments. Several participants described how siloed municipal structures often prevent integrated landscape-based solutions from being implemented effectively, thereby undercutting the economic case for them. There is an opportunity to highlight and model public sector leadership that enables successful cross-agency planning, design, and implementation of nature-based solutions.

“The parks and stormwater departments in many jurisdictions don’t know each other. We have an opportunity to redirect some of the money and change some of the rules and regulations around development.”

STEVE NYGREN, FOUNDER, SERENBE AND NYGREN
PLACEMAKING

Support the integration of nature-based solutions into insurance models. Participants discussed working with insurers, financial institutions, and risk analysts to better incorporate the long-term performance of nature-based solutions into insurance and catastrophe modeling. Insurance and financial sectors now rely heavily on proprietary catastrophe models that may not factor in nature-based solutions.

“We need to work with people who have deep expertise in risk assessment and already have credibility in this area.”

WILLIAM SULLIVAN, FASLA, PHD, PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT
OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, AND DIRECTOR OF THE SMART,
HEALTHY COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

“We can think through the household benefits of nature-based solutions. In East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, a park system was built to accommodate flooding. Nearby residents understood that their house was now protected because of the system. Research can look at the benefits for people and communities.”

JENNIFER CLINTON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CONSERVATION
ECONOMICS, TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

TELL A MORE COMPLETE STORY OF THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Document the full story of how projects are championed, financed, and delivered — not just the economic outcomes.

Participants pointed out that literature on the economic benefits of nature-based solutions can be criticized as lacking rigor and depth. There is an opportunity to systematically capture how projects come together — who drives them, what economic barriers arise, and what economic strategies prove effective.

“There needs to be a conversation about what it took — what some of the struggles were, what some of the strategies were associated with the creation of those projects. If we peel back the layers of each of these projects to understand those hurdles, that’s where the learning actually happens.”

LUCINDA SANDERS, FASLA, CEO AND PARTNER, OLIN

Reframe nature-based solutions as local jobs creators.

Instead of viewing nature-based solution maintenance as a cost burden, reframe maintenance as a source of sustained local green jobs and community investment. Participants noted this will help foster a sense of engagement and community pride. Participants saw opportunities in workforce development, operations and maintenance best practices, and collaboration and peer learning.

“Mayors are looking at how they can bring people back to their cities and generate more revenue for services and create more local jobs. Parks are key to achieving all of this. Regardless of political context, there’s a practicality to that, which resonates.”

CATHERINE NAGEL, ASLA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CITY PARKS ALLIANCE

“You may not have a workforce or a pipeline of folks who can do this work within your municipalities. We’ve been doing a lot of work on green jobs and trying to build that pipeline.”

DIANA FERNANDEZ BIBEAU, ASLA, COMMISSIONER, BOSTON PARKS & RECREATION

Ideas



Landscape architects at the Office of James Burnett capped a highway to create the 5-acre Klyde Warren Park in downtown Dallas, Texas, a green space rich with newly planted trees that significantly reduces the urban heat island effect. Studies have found that the park had a positive economic impact of \$1.3 billion and has generated significant new tax revenue for the City of Dallas.

Image credit: ASLA 2017 Professional General Design Award of Excellence. Klyde Warren Park - Bridging the Gap in Downtown Dallas. Dallas, Texas. Office of James Burnett / Liane Rochelle Photography

ACTIONS TO ADVANCE CROSS-SECTOR PROGRAM AND RESEARCH COLLABORATION

Roundtable participants suggested short-, medium-, and long-term actions to advance the measurement of the economic benefits of nature-based solutions at the site scale while moving towards the estimation of benefits at the community and city scales.

Participants emphasized throughout the discussions that the challenge is how to move beyond studies of single projects. The greater need is to institutionalize nature-based approaches in policy, planning, investment, finance, and insurance.

“One way to think about this is building a stronger chain of collaboration — from design to community outcomes to economic valuation to finance and policy.”

WILLIAM SULLIVAN, FASLA, PHD, PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, AND DIRECTOR OF THE SMART, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

The gaps currently undervaluing nature-based solutions include:

- Inconsistent outcome measurement
- Limited access to data, predictive models and analysis
- Fragmented governance across agencies and sectors, resulting in inconsistent economic data
- Lack of standardized methods for translating project outcomes into decision-ready information

The groups identified that partnerships and a “chain of collaboration” is needed to span the design and finance life-cycle.

The following ideas build on the challenges and opportunities identified across the discussion and provide an outline of possible actions for roundtable organizations to pursue.

BUILD A NEW COALITION

Support development of a cross-sector community of practice and co-creation workshops. Enable informal networking and knowledge exchange among roundtable and other organizations through a web-based platform. Collaborate regularly with cross-sector organizations on specific data and metrics challenges to avoid duplicating work and reveal cross-disciplinary perspectives.

Action: Establish a network basecamp group. Support organization and hosting of co-creation workshops.

Develop shared language on economic benefits across sectors. Build a glossary of terms to facilitate discussion between sectors (insurance, finance, planning, design, environmental science, etc) about benefits for particular projects, so terms like “avoided losses” and “risk” and “nature-based solutions” mean the same thing to everyone.

Action: Share draft glossary at future conferences and fora for community input.

Further explore the complexities of shared incentives. Connect landscape design decisions to measurable economic and community outcomes by bringing together landscape architects, resilience planners, and impact finance-practitioners to describe and explain benefit mapping. This connection should begin at project initiation and provide shared goals about which entities pay and which entities capture the benefits. This process was described by the roundtable as benefit mapping.

Action: Host meetings with project developers and experts in insurance, environmental finance, and outcome-based finance to identify strategies for creating shared incentives and innovative project finance.

MAKE ECONOMIC BENEFITS EVALUATION MORE ACCESSIBLE TO LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

Co-develop standard, accessible approaches for measuring the economic benefits of nature-based solutions, including a new pre-project measurement framework.

Participants stated that the lack of uniform approaches to measuring the benefits of these solutions serves as an obstacle to more widespread evaluation of these solutions by city governments, firms, and organizations of all sizes. Approaches are also changing as the understanding of the economic benefits of climate resilience, health, biodiversity, social cohesion, and other considerations evolve.

Action: Co-develop a more standard measurement approach with roundtable organizations that can be publicly shared and updated on a regular basis. Co-create guidance that landscape architects can use before and during the design process to ensure that baseline data is collected, design intent is documented, and protocols are established to be able to show the economic value of the project once it is built and operating.

Establish a case study framework for sharing economic lessons learned. Build on the Landscape Performance Series and other case study work to develop a long-form narrative format that includes how economic challenges and opportunities shape nature-based project design, operations, and long-term maintenance.

Action: Create series of economic lessons learned case studies and case study template for landscape architects to use.



In San Francisco, California, Mission Creek Stormwater Park, designed by CMG Landscape Architecture, uses bioretention basins to capture and clean stormwater run-off and provide habitat for birds and insects. The project contributed to a 40-fold increase in annual tax revenue collected from this city block. Image credit: Mission Creek Stormwater Park, San Francisco, California. CMG Landscape Architecture / Sam Oberter Photography

Provide education to landscape architects and allies on how to measure economic benefits. Continue the ASLA webinar series Making the Economic Case for Nature-Based Solutions, which has received approximately 1,100 registrations to date. Potential topics based on this roundtable discussion include:

- Difficult-to-measure health benefits
- Difficult-to-measure climate resilience benefits
- European approaches to valuing economic benefits of nature-based solutions
- World Bank and international organization methodologies and resources
- Market-based methods for measurement of outcomes
- Role of water utilities and departments
- Challenges with benefit transfer and non-market methods
- Code reform advocacy
- Workforce development
- Policy success stories

Action: Survey ASLA members to identify new topics of interest and plan new webinar series for 2027.

ENABLE CROSS-SECTOR RESEARCH

Develop a research grant program to advance cross-sector economic research. Create a grant program that will require landscape architecture educators and practitioners to collaborate with other disciplines on the economic benefits of nature-based solutions. The goal would be to publish the research in peer-reviewed journals and professional publications.

Action: Establish and fund a research grant program with donor support. Promote the grant to landscape architecture educators and academic researchers in these disciplines:

- Public health, medicine
- Environmental, urban, real estate economics
- Urban planning
- Engineering
- Public policy
- Sustainable development and climate policy
- Ecology
- Insurance

Co-develop a new research agenda with healthcare and public health organizations. Connecting improved health outcomes to investments in nature-based solutions could unlock health insurance providers as funders of these solutions and incentivize public and private developers through a new ROI lens. Health insurers were described by roundtable participants as a “sleeping giant” that needs to engage with the growing evidence of the health benefits of nature-based solutions. Establish partnerships with healthcare and public health organizations to identify cross-sector research opportunities. For example, healthcare and public health community data can be used to produce a new series of case studies.

Action: Build a community of practice with public health agencies and organizations to address specific health concerns and identify a broad research agenda.

Research effective advocacy strategies for shifting city policymakers towards nature-based solutions. Landscape architects are often brought into projects after major funding decisions have been made. Policies, codes, and standards that influence the use of nature-based solutions are decided well outside of project development. Help landscape architecture practitioners better use economic arguments to advocate for integrating nature-based solutions across local government departments (parks, public works, water and stormwater, planning, health, and financial). More research is needed on successful strategies for encouraging government-wide integration of nature-based approaches and standard ways to measure the economic benefits of these solutions.

Action: Through case studies, narrative accounts, and profiles, highlight examples on effective advocacy by landscape architects on city policy and project funding.

Partner with civil engineers on nature-based solutions. In 2024, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) adopted a Nature-Based Solutions policy and defined these solutions as the alignment of natural and engineering processes to deliver infrastructure providing economic, environmental, and social benefits. ASCE recognizes the work needed from other disciplines and sectors to provide guidance to facilitate planning, design, retrofitting, permitting, and implementation. A Natural Infrastructure Engineering

Hub (HUB) is in development and will serve as a voluntary, cross-disciplinary, cross-geographic collaborative dedicated to curating and sharing state-of-the-art information on these projects, serving as a document library with engineering details, plans, specifications, and permits — and explicitly calling for collaboration across engineering, landscape architecture, ecology, economics, and hydrology. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers initiated the Engineering With Nature (EWN) Program. The EWN-Landscape Architecture Project Delivery Team (EWN-LA PDT) is piloting the program with landscape architects in Galveston, Texas.

Action: Establish a formal partnership with ASCE and USACE to advance cross-disciplinary collaboration on nature-based solutions and policy goals.

RESOURCES ON THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Guides

- [Guide to Evaluate Performance](#), Landscape Architecture Foundation

Case Studies

- [Benefits of Pittsburgh's Park System](#), HR&A, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, 2019
- [The Case for Resiliency: A Benefit-Cost Analysis for Battery Park City Resiliency Projects](#), HR&A, AECOM, New York State Battery Park City Authority, 2025
- [Economic Value and Benchmarking Study of the Dallas Park System](#), HR&A, City of Dallas, Dallas Parks & Recreation, Verdunity, Trust for Public Land, 2016
- [Landscape Performance Series](#), Landscape Architecture Foundation
- [Origin Park Benefits Case](#), HR&A, River Heritage Conservancy, 2021
- [Projects](#), Nature-based Infrastructure Global Resource Center, International Institute of Sustainable Development
- [The Value of Dallas Parks](#), HR&A, Dallas Parks & Recreation, 2023

Research

- [Adaptation Insights – Pathways to scale investments in Nature-based Solutions for Climate Adaptation](#), Global Center on Adaptation, 2025
- [Doubling Down on Nature: State of Investment in Nature-based Solutions for Water Security](#), The Nature Conservancy, 2025
- [Financing Climate Adaptation and Nature-Based Infrastructure](#), World Bank, 2025
- [Nature-based Solutions in Nationally Determined Contributions](#), International Union for the Conservation of Nature, University of Oxford, 2019
- [Nature's Dividends](#), The Nature Conservancy, 2026
- [Nature for Insurance and Insurance for Nature](#), Environmental Defense Fund, 2025
- [Nature Positive: Financing the Transition in Cities](#), World Economic Forum, 2025
- [State of Finance for Nature](#), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), 2026

Resource Centers

- [Conservation Economics](#), The Trust for Public Land
- [Global Program on Nature-based Solutions for Climate Resilience](#), World Bank Group
- [Nature-based Infrastructure Global Resource Center](#), International Institute for Sustainable Development
- [The Economics of Ecosystem and Biodiversity](#), United Nations Environment Program

Appendix A: Overview of Roundtable Process

The participants were divided into three groups and had two guided one-hour discussions – one on the challenges in capturing the economic benefits of nature-based solutions and one on new opportunities for cross-sector research and program collaboration to address the challenges.

ASLA, UMD EFC, and LAF provided overviews of their past analyses and acknowledged that not all benefits of nature-based solutions can be quantified and monetized.

They introduced benefit categories – from those that are more readily quantified or monetized to those that are challenging to evaluate. Some benefits of nature-based solutions are relatively easy to estimate in economic terms because they offer physical quantities to measure (gallons saved) and have standardized accounting options (e.g., reused and recycled materials quantification and reporting).

Benefits that are challenging to measure because of lack of physical quantities, data, or standardized metrics also result in them being undervalued. These difficult-to-measure and therefore undervalued benefits were the initial proposed focus of further research and collaboration. From the perspective of ASLA, UMD EFC, and LAF, these benefits could include:

- Habitat creation
- Preservation and restoration
- Health & well-being
- Temperature & urban heat island
- Flood protection

They also asked participants to provide broad input into the 35 co-benefit categories of LAF's Landscape Performance Series.

In the breakout group discussions on challenges, the groups were asked the following questions:

- When making the economic case for projects, what are the easiest benefits for you to identify and describe?

- When making the economic case for projects, what are the biggest obstacles and gaps for you?
- How do you think economic considerations affect what nature-based solutions are planned and designed?

In the breakout group discussion on cross-sector opportunities, they were asked the following questions:

- Given our understanding of the obstacles and gaps, what new cross-sector research and program collaborations are needed to get to a fuller economic case for nature-based solutions?
- What kinds of cross-sector collaborations are most effective at yielding new opportunities?
- What is the #1 priority cross-sector collaboration for you?

The sessions were recorded via Zoom and transcribed with Panopto. Two of three breakout groups were recorded. Facilitator and participant notes were used for the unrecorded breakout group. Participants were anonymized and then first draft summaries of the discussions were developed with the assistance of AI. Participant quotes have been edited for length and clarity.