

STRENGTHENING THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Ideas for Cross-Sector Collaboration

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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
Landscape Architects



Barbara Deutsch, FASLA
CEO, Landscape Architecture
Foundation

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.

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
- Health and healthcare leaders
- Insurance leaders
- International organization leaders
- Municipal agency leaders
- Non-profit organization leaders

Roundtable with
a diverse community

21

LEADERS

3

COUNTRIES

11

STATES

- Real estate and economic development advisors
- Water management leaders

A guided discussion identified the top common challenges participants experience in making the economic case for nature-based solutions. 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

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



In Carmel, Indiana, landscape architects with Rundell Ernstberger Associates reimaged 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

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 quantification of benefits at the community and city scales:

Build a New Coalition

- Support development of a cross-sector community of practice and co-creation workshops.
- Develop shared language on economic benefits across sectors.
- Further explore the complexities of shared incentives.

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.
- Establish a case study framework for sharing economic lessons learned.
- Provide education to landscape architects and allies on how to measure economic benefits.

Enable Cross-Sector Research

- Develop a research grant program to advance cross-sector economic research.
- Co-develop a new research agenda with healthcare and public health organizations.
- Research effective advocacy strategies for shifting city policymakers towards nature-based solutions.
- Partner with civil engineers on nature-based solutions.

(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

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.