

LOWER EAST SIDE ECOLOGY CENTER

2023

ANNUAL REPORT



Outstanding Renewal Enterprises, Inc.
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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Through our day-to-day work as an environmental organization, we find ourselves with our hands and shovels in the dirt, transporting bins full of food scraps, sorting wires and cables for recycling, and working with the earth. But it's the people and our community connections that bring this important work to life. Not unlike a mycelial network, we support, share resources, and connect with our neighbors and partners to advance equity and sustainability.

This year, we celebrated 20 years of community-based electronic waste reuse and recycling. Since our program's inception, we have saved 11 million pounds of electronics from ending up in landfills and contaminating our soil, air, and water with toxic materials. Our e-waste collection events rely on partnerships with local elected officials and community-based organizations that are excited to host us and bring e-waste recycling to their communities.

Another way that we find ourselves in community partnership is through our environmental education programs. While we are still without an education program home base during the East Side Coastal Resiliency construction in East River Park, we've strengthened our relationships with neighboring organizations to collaborate on environmental education programs. One such example was our pilot program to train local youth on sustainable horticulture practices. The Lower Eastside Girls Club and Henry Street Settlement were immediately supportive of connecting youth in their networks to this opportunity.

The year ended on a somber note when, as a result of the City's budget cuts to the NYC Compost Project, we lost a significant amount of funding and were forced to lay off five of our talented and passionate collaborators, colleagues, and friends. The City fails to see the educational dimensions of community-based composting, which turns resources — food scraps — into soil amendment — compost — to rebuild depleted urban soils and create social and environmental benefits for all.

As we enter into a new year and advocate for this funding to be reinstated, we find ourselves not alone but in partnership with a network of collaborators working together in this fight to preserve city funding for community composting. I'm confident that with your help, we will find a way forward to continue the valuable contributions that our programs make to the health of our community and New York City.

I would like to thank our friends, supporters, and collaborators for supporting the work of the LES Ecology Center, allowing us to overcome obstacles and be resilient so we can continue on our path toward a greener and sustainable future.

-Christine Datz-Romero



MISSION

The Lower East Side Ecology Center has pioneered community-based models for urban sustainability since 1987. We provide unique e-waste and composting services, environmental stewardship opportunities, and educational programming for all New Yorkers to create an equitable, resilient, and sustainable city.



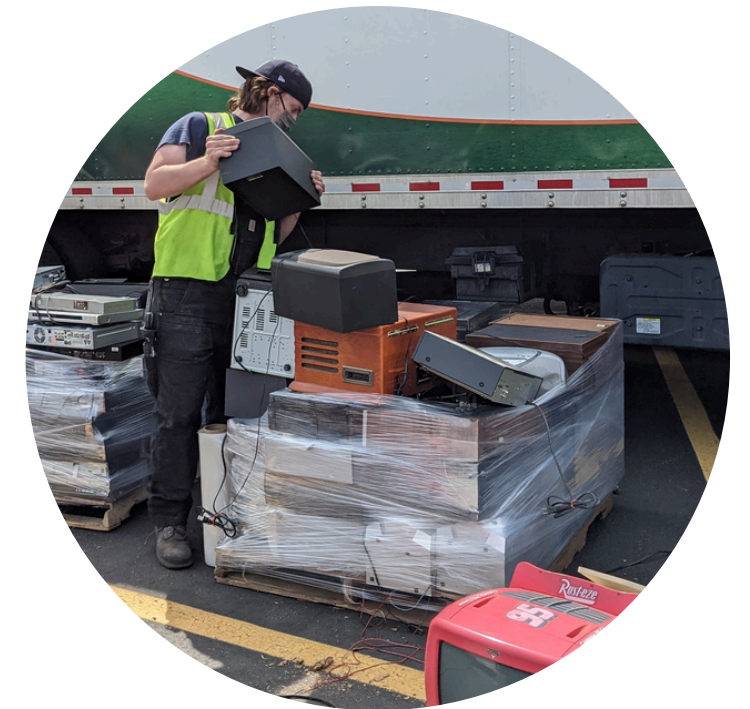
Community Compost



Stewardship



Environmental Education



Electronics Recycling

COMMUNITY COMPOST

In 2023, we:

- Composted 1,281,458 pounds of food scraps
- Operated 21 food scrap drop-off sites
- Provided technical support for 31 groups stewarding compost programs in their communities
- Contributed 109,990 pounds of finished compost to enrich the health of NYC's soils

While 2023 was one of our most expansive and successful years in community composting, the year ended with the elimination of our program funding from the City's budget. This has left our community composting program in a contracted state as we explore what our future program could look like without support from City funding.

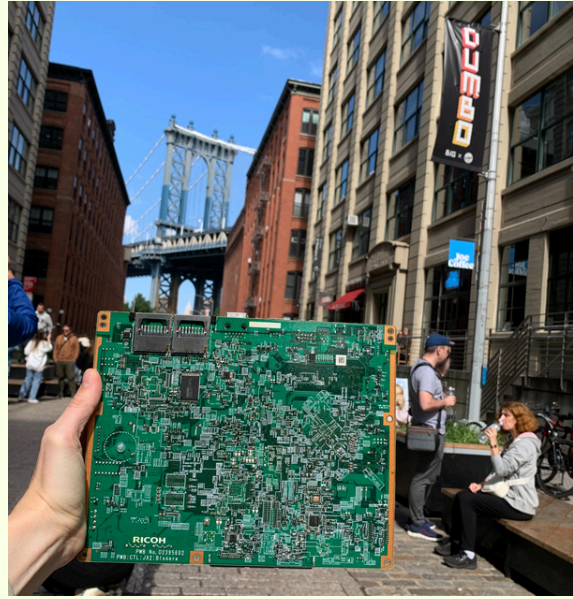
Before the program cuts took place, we were operating 21 food scrap drop-off sites, collecting on average about 25,000 pounds of food scraps each week and serving about 3,520 participants in Brooklyn and Manhattan weekly. We continued to deliver collected food scraps to the Staten Island Compost Site for processing while continuing to work on the development and construction of the Rockaway Avenue composting site. This site will serve as our processing site until our return to East River Park.

Throughout the year, we also worked with 31 community groups to help them expand or improve upon their own composting sites. What this typically looks like is providing groups with training, in-kind resources, and access to a food scrap hauling service if they are not able to compost their materials on-site. Last year, we supported seven community groups with food scrap pick-up services because their composting sites were so popular and successful.



Frank White Memorial Garden and the Brotherhood Sister Sol in West Harlem have had the pleasure of collaborating with the Lower East Side Ecology Center to advance composting in our community. Together, we've hosted compost volunteer workdays, constructed four HotBox composting systems for other compost sites, and hosted Community Composting tours, highlighting composting in Harlem. "Without LESEC I would not have found the motivation to bring back HotBox composting. They have inspired the [...] 1K Composting Systems in NYC campaign, where every borough of NYC [will] have local food waste processing sites that support community composting and complement community drop-off sites."

—Nando Rodriguez, The Brotherhood Sister Sol



“Tech Cleanse is one of the highlights of the services we provide the neighborhood — Dumboians set their calendars a year in advance! We are so grateful to the LES Ecology Center for their ongoing partnership, which makes this all possible. The team is a delight, and they make it easy for us all to do our part.”
 — Alexandria Sica, President, Dumbo Improvement District



ELECTRONICS RECYCLING

In 2023, we:

- Hosted 60 electronic waste recycling events
- Collected 330,882 pounds of electronic waste

The Ecology Center has diverted over 11 million pounds of unwanted electronics from the waste stream since the inception of this program 20 years ago. In 2023, we held 60 pop-up e-waste events and collected 330,882 pounds of unwanted electronics from 7,349 households. This year’s collection events took place across Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan in partnership with local elected officials and community-based organizations. To help our events succeed, we work with EcoTech Management and Walter as our recycling partners.

Free e-waste collection is a much-needed service, and we are committed to continue bringing this important program to neighborhoods across New York City. Our e-waste events also serve as important outreach opportunities to educate New Yorkers about the laws and responsibilities related to keeping e-waste out of landfills. Our staff gives New Yorkers tips on topics such as responsible disposal of other hazardous materials, the importance of keeping electronics out of landfills, and how to dispose of an air-conditioning unit. The answer to the latter is that residents can call 311 to schedule an appointment to have the freon removed, then the unit will be picked up curbside on the regularly scheduled recycling day.



STEWARDSHIP

In 2023, we:

- Engaged more than 1,368 volunteers in stewardship activities at East River Park, Tompkins Square Park, Luther Gulick Park, and Gouverneur Gardens
- Brought beauty and biodiversity to Tompkins Square Park by planting more than 14,000 bulbs and 324 native plants.
- Worked with 70 volunteers to care for over 100 street trees in the Lower East Side



The Ecology Center has always placed a high value on stewardship, as we believe that maintaining green spaces is essential to our city's health. Throughout 2023, over 1,368 participants volunteered with us in Tompkins Square and East River Parks, providing 4,104 hours of their time. Our volunteers join us in this work for many reasons — they might want to pitch in and get their hands dirty, learn more about native plants, or participate in community or team-building activities with their colleagues. Whatever the motivation, the result is better-maintained green open spaces and a growing awareness of our natural environment.

We also continued to be stewards of the COVID-19 Memorial Garden at Gouverneur Gardens in partnership with the Board of Gouverneur Gardens and Frank Avila-Goldman. Our Horticulture Youth Training Program participants and Mitchell Lama residents maintained the garden and added 2,000 spring flowering bulbs. The garden continues to be a vibrant and uplifting spot for the community and serves as a memorial to those impacted by COVID-19.

In 2023, we were awarded a grant through the City Parks Foundation to launch a pilot Horticulture Youth Training Program during the spring season. We partnered with Henry Street Settlement and Lower Eastside Girls Club to recruit five local youth participants. They were trained in horticultural aspects such as the importance of native plants, plant identification, green infrastructure, and careers in horticulture. Our participants also learned how to be stewards in public parks, local gardens, and urban farms and how to conduct street tree care workshops. This program would not have been possible without our collaborators: Solar One, Down to Earth, New Roots Community Farm, East New York Farm, Green City Force, and the Center for Anti-Violence Education.



“When our city’s skies turned yellow from pollution, we were proud to partner with Lower East Side Ecology Center to get boots on the ground to steward our local line of defense: our street trees. The LES Ecology Center identified an urgent need — the long-term care of our street trees — and a community-driven response, which manifested itself as our collaborative Tree Adoption program. For such an established organization to continue to be adaptable, grassroots, and ready to meet the moment is a testament to the Ecology Center’s dedication to their community, to environmental justice, and to the future of our planet.”

—Chris Marte; District 1 City Council Member

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

In 2023, we:

- Engaged 1,059 youth participants in environmental education activities
- Trained 30 participants through our multi-week educational programs in food justice and sustainable horticulture
- Had 2,129 attendees participate in 87 education and outreach activities
- Grew 70+ pounds of food for our community

The education programs at the Lower East Side Ecology Center aim to provide urban environmental education for New Yorkers of all ages through meaningful, hands-on learning opportunities. Throughout the year, we offered over 87 education and outreach activities, including new workshop topics such as food preservation, clothing repair, earth yoga, making fire cider, dyeing with leaf litter, and more.

2023 was another busy year for our food justice education programs. In the winter, in partnership with the NYU Center for Latin and Caribbean Studies, we hosted an important community conversation on equitable food systems featuring local activists, community composters, and urban farmers. In the spring, we hosted our first intergenerational gardening sessions in the Food Justice Garden at Henry Street Settlement (HSS), bringing together local youth and participants of the HSS Senior Companions Program. Together these groups learned about indigenous practices and planted a three sisters garden bed. In the summer, our Food Justice Summer Youth Employment Program cohort grew food for the community and prepared over 100 hot meals to feed migrants in partnership with Chefs for Impact and Artists Athletes Activists. The summer cohort also partnered with our neighbors at the Sixth Street Community Center's Teen Climate Justice Program to learn about mutual aid and food waste, participate in a food rescue, and host a climate change showcase.

Beyond the garden, we brought our community to local waterways and the marine ecosystem at nine public fishing events and social gatherings for femme and nonbinary anglers. This was a very successful fishing year – we caught fish at almost every event, including black sea bass, porgy, northern pufferfish, and a blue crab.



Josephine Young (pictured left): “I really enjoyed going to the garden with the LES folk. Planting in the garden with them reminded me of my very green childhood with my family in the South. I really appreciate LES Ecology for allowing me to experience the nostalgia of my childhood and picking some fresh vegetables as the fruits of our labor.”

Debre Green-Threat (pictured right): “We even had a class to teach us how to make pesto from scratch! And I’ll tell you, when I got home, I recreated it and enjoyed every bite. Programs like these really help to connect us to nature when living in the concrete jungle.”



MASTER COMPOSTER CERTIFICATE COURSE

The Ecology Center serves as the centralized administrator of the Master Composter Certificate Course, working closely with the Department of Sanitation on this. The NYC Compost Project Master Composter Certificate Course is an advanced compost education and outreach program. The course is designed to build a citywide network of educators, advocates, and community composters to support NYC Department of Sanitation composting initiatives and is open to NYC residents who are at least 18 years of age.

Over the year, we facilitated the scheduling of all Master Composter activities — tracking and communicating the progress of course participants and creating opportunities for Master Composters to connect through networking and graduation events. Besides the LES Ecology Center, project partners include Big Reuse, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Earth Matter NY, New York Botanical Garden, Queens Botanical Garden, and Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden.

Besides offering regular Master Composter activities such as workshops, field trips, and volunteer workdays, the program grew over the last year to include greater opportunities for volunteerism. We worked with community-led compost sites in need of volunteer support to connect them with Master Composters in training who were looking for places to volunteer their time. By connecting these two groups, the program has been able to better support the existing needs of community composting groups across the city. This expanded part of the Master Composter program has been a success!



In 2023, the Education and Outreach team at the Ecology Center carried out the following Master Composter activities:

- 22 workshops
- 10 field trips
- 53 volunteer activities



FALL SOCIAL 2023

The 2023 Fall Social was a special occasion marking two decades of our E-waste Recycling Program. We celebrated how the organization has been a leader in advancing electronics recycling legislation, operating the beloved E-waste Warehouse, and offering opportunities for New Yorkers to recycle their electronics.

Adding to the celebration, State Senator Brian Kavanagh presented Christine Datz-Romero with a Women of Distinction Award. This prestigious accolade recognizes women who have made remarkable contributions to their communities. Christine was honored for her tireless efforts in environmental justice, urban ecology, and community projects in the Lower East Side. Her work has truly made a difference in simplifying sustainability practices for countless New Yorkers.

Throughout the event, guests enjoyed a meticulously curated menu by Tessa Liebman featuring a vibrant selection of seasonal dishes. This culinary delight was made possible by collaborations with Union Square Greenmarket farmers, who generously donated fresh, local ingredients.

With a blend of celebration, recognition, and culinary excellence, the 2023 Fall Social left a lasting impression on all who attended.

The poster is split into two vertical panels. The left panel has a bright green background and features the text 'Fall Social' in a large, black, stylized font. A small graphic of a hand holding a leafy branch is positioned to the right of the word 'Fall'. Below this, in smaller black text, it says 'PLUG INTO A CIRCULAR FUTURE' and 'A Benefit Celebrating 20 Years of E-waste Reuse and Recycling'. The right panel has a dark background and features the text 'Essex Market Mezzanine' at the top in a light green, monospace-style font. Below that is a graphic of a laptop and a smartphone with a leafy branch, followed by the time '5-8pm' in the same font. At the bottom of the right panel, it says '88 Essex St, NEW YORK' in the same font, with 'MUSIC FEAST DRINKS' in smaller letters below.

SAFE SPACE COMMITTEE

The Safe Space Committee was created at the Ecology Center in 2022 to develop a more intentional approach to the organization's commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in both the workplace and the communities we work with.

In 2023, we embarked on a process of co-creating a shared vision and commitment to this work for the organization. Community Resource Exchange (CRE) facilitated four all-staff sessions to guide us through defining, discovering, dreaming, and designing our values regarding DEIA. At the year's end, we synthesized this work into a shared commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.



Lower East Side Ecology Center Mission and Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

OUR PAST & PRESENT

Since 1987, the mission of the LES Ecology Center has been to pioneer community-based models in urban sustainability by offering unique e-waste and composting services, environmental stewardship opportunities, and educational programming to all New Yorkers. To further our commitment to create an equitable, resilient, and sustainable city, we have embarked on a diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) journey.

DEIA AT THE ECOLOGY CENTER

We view all the work we do through an environmental justice lens. We recognize that by enhancing our efforts in DEIA, we can better fulfill our mission. DEIA means removing barriers to accessing our programs and creating opportunities for people to thrive.

OUR COMMITMENT TO REPRESENTATION

Our approach involves building a diverse team that mirrors the communities we serve and enhancing our capacity to implement DEIA principles. We acknowledge that this journey is ongoing.

OUR COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER

In our pursuit of a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable city, we pledge to support one another, ensuring that everyone can be their authentic selves. Diversity is our strength, and we collaborate in a safe space that nurtures individual growth and effective teamwork.

OUR COMMITMENT TO OUR APPROACH

We are deeply committed to a culture of collaboration, openness, and flexibility. We are committed to listening to community feedback and reflecting on opportunities for improvement. We champion the voices of the most vulnerable and proactively collaborate with community partners to create lasting change.

WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW

We are building internal capacity to put our DEIA learnings into practice. We value each individual's experience by actively listening and adapting to meet community needs. Together, we strive to strengthen our teamwork and communication, fostering an inclusive and resilient future.

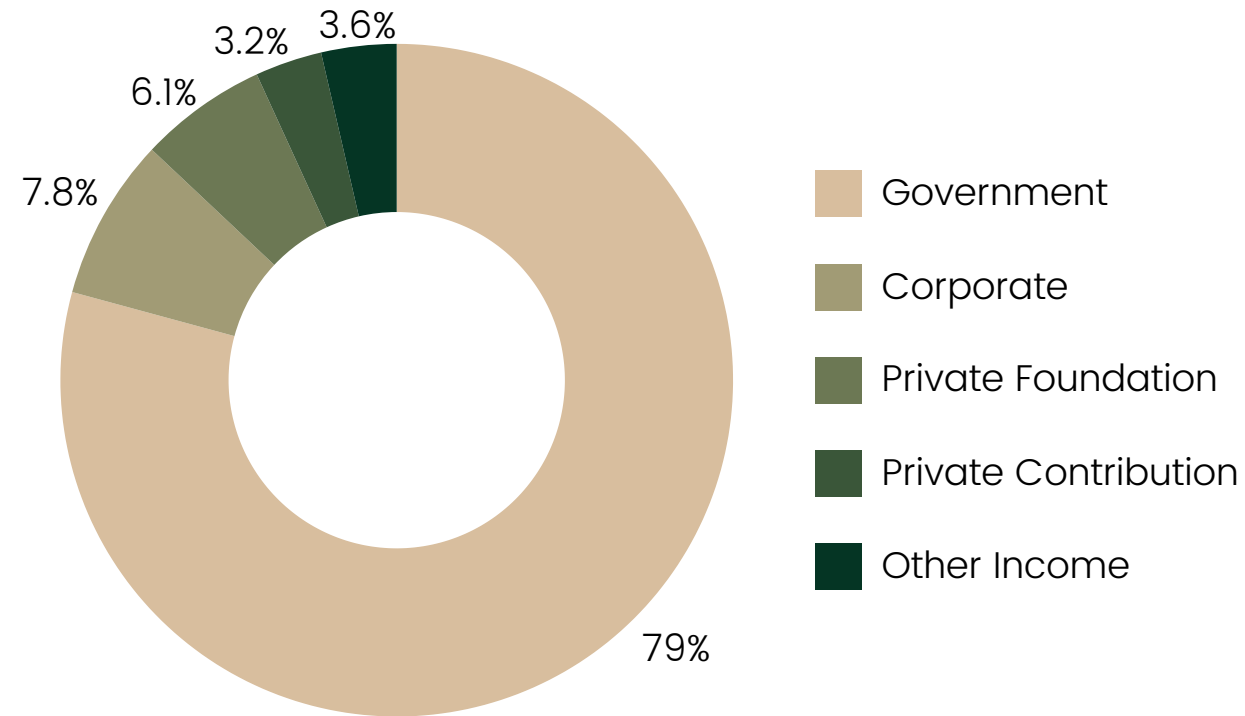
Since we began this intentional DEIA journey in the winter of 2022, we have:

- Established a Safe Space Committee to lead the organization on our DEIA journey
- Worked with consultants to engage the full staff in creating a DEIA vision to guide our future work
- Led all-staff dialogues that address a variety of DEIA-related topics
- Seen a majority of the staff participate in at least one DEIA-related training
- Reviewed and improved our hiring process to bring greater access and equity
- Created systems that support individual growth, including professional development opportunities and a holistic performance review process that brings DEIA values to the workplace
- Allocated organizational resources, such as budgeting funds and staff time, to support DEIA growth

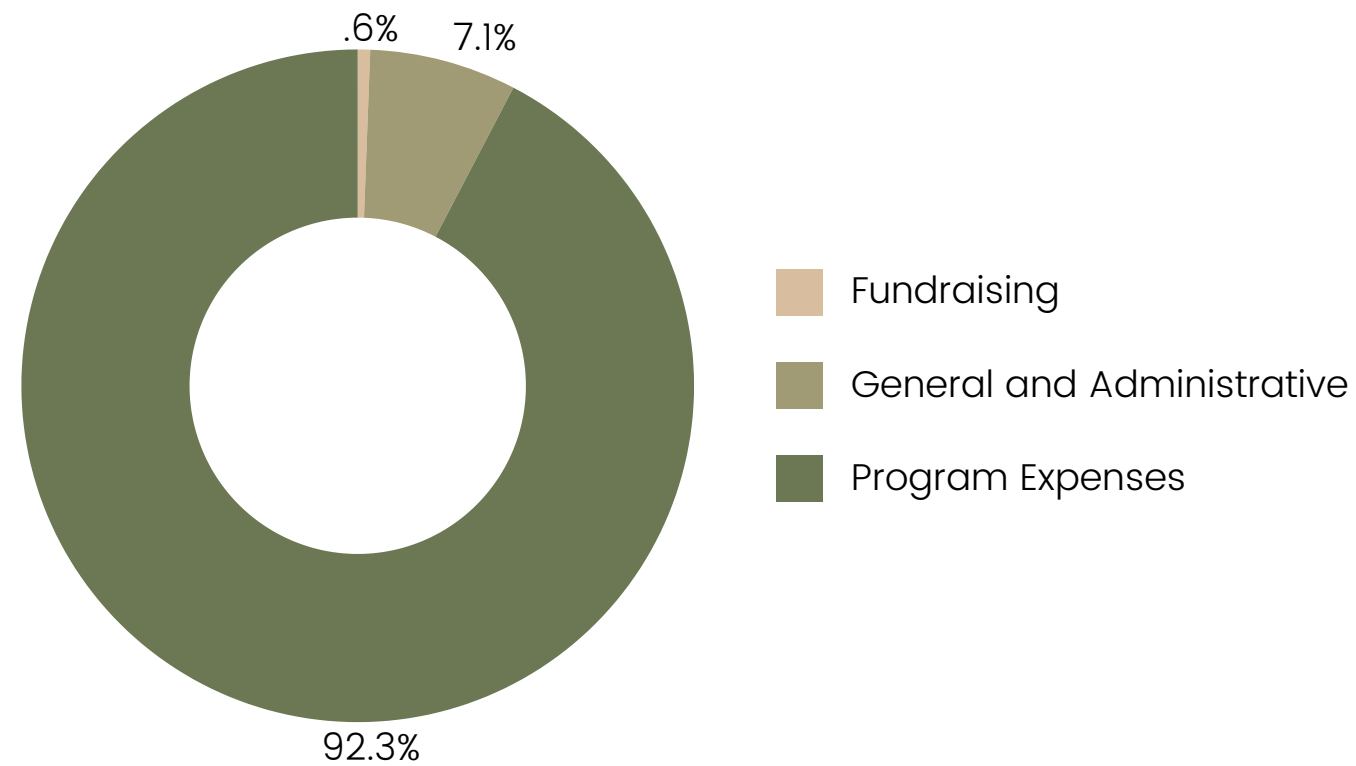
AUDITED 2023 FINANCIALS

January 1, 2023–December 31, 2023

Revenue



Expenses



Revenue

Government	\$2,190,666
Corporate	\$215,595
Private Foundations	\$169,994
Private Contributions	\$89,012
Other Income	\$99,933
Total Revenue	\$2,765,200

Expenses

Program Expenses	\$2,214,403
General and Administrative	\$169,431
Fundraising	\$14,241
Total Expenses	\$2,398,075

Change in net assets

\$367,125

SUPPORTERS

Elected Officials

New York City Council Members:

Adrienne Adams
Joan Ariola
Alexa Aviles
Justin Brannan
Gale Brewer
Erik Bottcher
James Gennaro
Jennifer Gutierrez
Shahana Hanif
Robert Holden
Linda Lee
Christopher Marte
Vickie Paladino
Keith Powers
Lincoln Restler
Carlina Rivera
Sandra Ung

New York State Assembly Member:

Harvey Epstein

New York State Senator:

Joseph P. Addabbo
Leroy Comrie
Brian Kavanagh

Foundations

Bloomberg Philanthropies
CT Charitable Foundation

Educational Projects Foundation
Esther & Morton Wohlgemuth
Foundation
Gramercy Park Foundation
Greenacre Foundation
La Vida Feliz Foundation
Moore Charitable Foundation
Rockefeller Foundation
Rohit & Katharine Desai Family
Foundation
Schulman Family Foundation
Shelburne Farms Resources

Corporations

BNY Mellon
Chanel
Chantecaille
Con Edison
Credit Suisse
David Zwirner Gallery
EcoTech Management
Edible School Yard
ELEMIS
Franklin Templeton
Gander
Gloat
Goldman Sachs
McKinsey & Company
Morgan Stanley
Nomad Marketing
NYC Ferry
NYCS Project

Pace Gallery
Patagonia
Riskified
Sasaki
Shiseido
Something Special Studios
Squarespace
VMLY&R
Yext

Program Partners

African Burial Ground National
Monument
Alliance for Kips Bay
Artists Athletes Activists
Battery Park City Authority
Big Reuse
Brooklyn Botanic Garden
Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy
Brotherhood Sister Sol
Bronx River Alliance
California Volunteer Fund
Center for Anti-Violence Education
Chefs for Impact
Common Ground Compost
Down to Earth Garden
Earth Matter NY
East NY Farms!
East Side Community High School
Essex Street Market
Friends of Corlears Hook Park
Green Oasis Garden

GrowNYC
Harlem Grown
Hell's Kitchen Compost Group
Henry Street Settlement
Institute for Local Self Reliance
La Plaza Cultural
Lower Eastside Girls Club
Maggie's Garden
Manhattan Plaza
Materials for the Arts
Nest+m
New Roots Community Farm
New York Botanical Garden
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation
NYC Department of Sanitation
NYC Parks GreenThumb
NYC Parks Super Steward
NYS Department of Environmental
Conservation
NYU Center for Latin American and
Caribbean Studies
Pleasant Village Community Garden
Queens Botanical Garden
Queens County Farm Museum
Riverside Park Conservancy
Rockaway Parkway Merchant Corridor
Association
Rodale Pleasant Park Community
Garden
Samuels Food Gardens
Save Our Compost Coalition
Scavenger Stories
Seward Park Conservancy
Sixth Street Community Center

Snug Harbor Botanical Garden and
Cultural Center
Solar 1 at Stuy Cove Park
Stuyvesant High School
Transportation Alternatives
Trinity College Dublin NovelEco Team
Waterfront Alliance



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 Oliver Clark, E-waste Associate
 Jimmie Costello, Outreach Coordinator

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 Alec Taylor, Operations Coordinator
 Peter Tzannes, Compost Operations Manager
 Gabby Torres, Compost Associate
 Jermaine Wilson, Operations Coordinator
 Shyanne Washington, Stewardship Coordinator



SUPPORT OUR WORK

Your help allows us to continue protecting, improving, and enriching the city's environment. As a community-based organization, we rely on support from our community of New Yorkers and those who believe in sustainable cities. Donations and financial support enable us to continue providing free and affordable programming for everyone in our diverse community. Our composting and e-waste programs, environmental education, and stewardship of public green spaces all rely on your contributions.

Support the Ecology Center with a contribution today and make your tax-deductible gift by visiting our website.

Thank you for being a partner in fulfilling our mission. We couldn't do it without you!

Sincerely,
LES Ecology Center Team

HOW TO DONATE
Visit www.lesecologycenter.org and select Donate on the main menu.

