



California ReLeaf 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



ES DREAM TREE PLANTING
I'm a new tree!
People in the neighborhood
gave me love for me.
I clean the air, capture carbon,
take sun out of the atmosphere,
and cool nearby buildings.
Learn more
from the back or visit our website.



Dear Friends of ReLeaf,

Many thanks for your steadfast support to plant more trees in all communities, so that everyone enjoys cleaner, cooler air and the feelings of well-being that urban trees provide. We need trees and greenspace now more than ever to help us deal with the isolation and stressors caused by COVID-19.

Despite the challenges brought by COVID, Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) was successful in many ways at ReLeaf. Indeed, the fast ramp-up to working remotely via new technologies has made it possible for greater connection with the ReLeaf Network members and our grantees located throughout the state. It has been truly inspiring to learn about the creative solutions the urban forest community is implementing to respond to this crisis.

Our first two large California Climate Investment (CCI) grants closed smoothly in December 2019. These CCI programs were historically significant due to an exclusive focus on trees in disadvantaged communities. ReLeaf and our grantees forged many great partnerships with community groups in underserved neighborhoods over the last four years. A storyteller helped us capture the unique challenges and successes of these projects. Two excerpts of those stories are included in this report. [You can also read it here.](#)

We dramatically expanded our educational program through webinars and interactive online meetings as

well as hosting our first-ever Virtual ReLeaf Network Retreat in May 2020. Recognizing that Network members missed having a chance to chat over coffee during the retreat or have time to share all the issues they're dealing with during COVID, ReLeaf kept the Zoom ball rolling with a monthly Learn Over Lunch program launched in June.

Looking to the future, we'll continue to support the Network and grantees on how to manage urban forestry programs during a pandemic. Our Urban Forest Leadership Training program was postponed in 2020 and will launch in 2021 to support the next generation of tree champions. Last but definitely not least, thanks to securing CAL FIRE funding, we'll release our next grant program with over \$1M for tree projects.

In this report we highlight four areas of focus for us — climate resilience, environmental justice, strengthening nonprofits, and engaging new urban forest advocates — and the progress we made toward these goals this year.

Take really good care,

Cindy Blain
Executive Director

Please note that this report covers the fiscal year from July 2019 to June 2020. Photos of people without masks are from events prior to the onset of COVID-19.



Empowering grassroots efforts and building strategic partnerships that preserve, protect, and enhance California's urban and community forests.

OUR PROGRAMS



NETWORK

Convening a Network of urban forest nonprofits and CBOs for collaboration and peer-to-peer learning.



OUTREACH & ED

Sharing resources and research to support healthy urban forests through local activism.



GRANTS ADMIN

Seeking and providing grants to local groups to plant and care for trees in their communities.



ADVOCACY

Speaking for trees in state legislation and providing resources for community groups to find their voices.

Creating Climate Resilient Communities

Climate resilient communities depend on both mitigating further climate change as well as beginning to adapt to its effects that have already arrived. Urban trees play a role in both mitigation and adaptation efforts: trees capture the greenhouse gases that exacerbate climate change, while also helping communities guard against extreme heat, flash flooding, and pollution.

The majority of our grants are funded by the California Climate Investments program and thus have targets to meet for greenhouse gas capture. We meet these targets while also maximizing co-benefits to the communities where the trees are planted, working with local groups to implement projects in their neighborhoods.

AMIGOS DE LOS RIOS

5,259 trees were planted by the grants that closed in FY20. These trees will provide the following benefits in the next 40 years:



23,987
METRIC TONS
OF CO₂ CAPTURED

416
ACRE-FT OF
STORMWATER
INTERCEPTED

and

213,200 LBS
OF AIR POLLUTANTS
REDUCED

including O₃, NO₂, SO₂, VOC, & PM_{2.5}.



This tree count also included nearly

200 SPECIES
OF TREES

This diversity will support an urban forest that is resilient in the face of pests, disease, and climate change.

2020 HIGHLIGHTS



Facilitated six of our Network members' participation in urban heat island effect research with CAPA Strategies. This citizen science study provides localized data and helps us understand the small changes that affect the heat experienced by urban residents, including differences in tree canopy.



Offered webinar topics focused on sharing tools, research, and resources to help groups effectively address, measure and communicate about climate resilience. These included "New Urban Greening Research," and "New Urban Tree Canopy Interactive Map."



Provided technical assistance to help developers incorporate urban greening and urban forestry into their projects, through a partnership with Strategic Growth Council's Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) program. In 2020 this included a webinar, informational primer, and individual guidance.



Awarded 14 more grants across eight counties through our Social Equity Forest Improvement Program and Urban Forest Management Program. These grants support projects that help us meet our GHG reduction targets (mitigation) and maximize co-benefits to communities (adaptation).



Initiated projects in our "Relief through ReLeaf" grant program – funded by Prop 68 revenue – in Ventura, Guerneville, and Redding. This program targets areas affected by extreme weather events due to climate change, helping communities adapt and become more resilient through urban reforestation.



Co-authored a detailed letter to the Governor on "Recommendations for a Just COVID-19 Response & Recovery to Support Resilient Communities." Over 100 organizations signed, advocating for a COVID economic recovery that simultaneously prepares the state for climate-related impacts.

“Trees, tree-planters, and everyone who breathes oxygen has a good friend in California ReLeaf.”

-THE C.R.E.W.
OJAI, CA

Grantee Story: Growing Together

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

It's a concrete jungle in some of Oakland's poorest neighborhoods. Many schools, homes, and businesses sit in close proximity to freeways. It's hard to breathe, heat wafts off stinky concrete, and water can't return to the ground and recharge. People suffer. The nonprofit, Growing Together, wanted to change the environmental and human impact of choosing concrete over dirt. With its Root to Rise program, they removed over 10,000 square feet of asphalt, creating conditions where trees and people can flourish

While reducing pollution, beautifying learning spaces, and educating the next generation on the importance of trees.

Collaborating with Oakland Unified School District, Trust for Public Land, and over 20 school communities, Growing Together has been a founding leader in Oakland's Living Schoolyard Initiative, which mitigates the environmental burden felt at five public schools flanked by congested Bay Area freeways and traffic. Two schools had absolutely zero green space, but all that changed with an investment from a Green Innovations grant from California ReLeaf. For example, Prescott Elementary is situated by a nearby BART station, a busy transit area for commuters. They engaged the entire school campus to redesign and install two new outdoor learning areas by removing 8,000 pounds of concrete. Students, educators, parents, and volunteers created a new garden-based classroom, planting sixteen fruit and 25 native trees, and installing irrigation to keep them growing. The school district also invested in hiring a garden and nutrition teacher to oversee the new space and its corresponding classes. School staff were also taught how to care for the trees and improve their maintenance and irrigation strategies to support the new growth.

Three other schools also received "urban forests and orchards," and again the school district invested in sustaining these efforts by providing outdoor plumbing, irrigation systems, and full-time garden and nutrition teachers to regularly hold outdoor learning classes. Collaborating closely with school staff, volunteers, and allied CBOs,

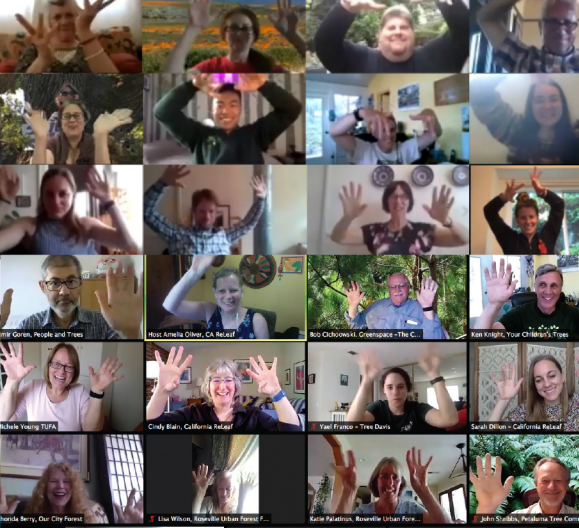
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All in all, Growing Together not only reduced greenhouse gases by sequestering carbon, they impacted the overall health of students by increasing access to healthy food, improving outdoor conditions for exercise and play, and offering vital education programs that prioritizes hands-on, project-based learning. Approximately 850 students will benefit annually from Growing Together's efforts. By collaborating in the design phase with Oakland Unified School District, Growing Together strategically ensured that the co-benefits felt by this grant will be sustainable and replicable because they heavily focused on the infrastructure needed to support the Living Schoolyard Initiative. ●

"I can't wait until my tree gets nice and big so that I can bring my family here and tell them that I did this."





Strengthening Nonprofits and Community Groups

The heart of California ReLeaf is our Network of nonprofits and community groups who are on the ground creating change in their neighborhood. California ReLeaf was founded to connect and strengthen these groups, and this remains central to our mission. 2020 showed us this was as important as ever, and the Network rallied together to share resources and information while they adapted their programs and persevered.

When we survey the Network about the issues affecting their capacity, funding regularly shows up at the top of this list. In response, we continue to advocate for multiple state programs to include funding for Urban Forestry and Urban Greening and seek out private foundations to sponsor grants, as well as offer education opportunities for our Network to strengthen their own fundraising skills. Here are a few of the ways we focused on strengthening these groups in 2020, and helped them navigate the challenges of 2020:



53% of the Network surveyed **collaborated with another Network group** in FY2020.

\$933,934

of state & private funding was accessed by nonprofits statewide through our grant programs. And 25% of Network members reported receiving funding directly from a state program we advocated for.

71% of Network groups say the **capacity of their organization is significantly strengthened** through participation in the ReLeaf Network.

“The COVID impact webinar helped RUFF strategize/organize to get through difficult times. We started looking at alternate sources of income not previously available.”

-ROSEVILLE URBAN FOREST FOUNDATION

42% of Network groups said they **advocated or worked with their local government** after learning about advocacy best practices through ReLeaf webinars and workshops.

2020 HIGHLIGHTS



Hosted a virtual Network retreat. In lieu of our annual in-person May gathering, nearly 100 participants joined a six-hour virtual retreat to learn and connect.



Launched our monthly “Learn Over Lunch” sessions, **leveraging the uptake of Zoom usage to connect Network members from across the state** to learn from one another and build connections. More about that in 2021!



Offered webinars aimed at strengthening the skills and capacity of the Network, including “**Storytelling for Impact**,” “**Working with Foundations**,” “**Reducing Stress with Meditation**,” and a panel about responding to COVID.



Created a **new grant program that will focus on post-pandemic “capacity rebuilding,”** by allowing increased personnel expenditures and overhead rates, as well as continuing to offer support during the application process.



After the pandemic and economic turmoil shifted priorities in the State Legislature and Administration, quickly pivoted to support nonprofits and CBOs, **quickly pivoted to support nonprofits and CBOs.** We advocated for **legislature support to extend CAL FIRE grants, improve prompt payment to grantees,** and ensure any prospective legislative bond contained sufficient urban forestry funding.



Monitored state and federal COVID policies and relief packages, **sharing developments and opportunities pertinent to nonprofits, and communicating immediate and long-term impact** on programs and funding.



“California ReLeaf truly helps small nonprofits that are formed by citizens who see a need in their community. Many towns and cities across the state don’t receive the attention and funding they deserve. The guidance and grant opportunities ReLeaf provides allows small organizations to carry out the work they need to do. I’m convinced many projects throughout the state would remain undone without ReLeaf’s advocacy and support.”

-A CLEANER GREENER EAST LA (GRANTEE)
WHITTIER, CA

“California ReLeaf provides essential advocacy in the field of Urban Forestry as well as critical nonprofit resources, ensuring our success. Our typical funding does not allow for us to engage in advocacy around Urban Forestry and Urban Greening, so California ReLeaf fills this essential role. Without them, we would not have as robust public funding options, and we would not have made the progress that we have in terms of making nonprofits more competitive for State grants”

-JOE LASKIN
NORTH EAST TREES

65,000+
TREES CARED FOR
REPORTED BY THE NETWORK



CANOPY



CLIMATE
ACTION NOW!



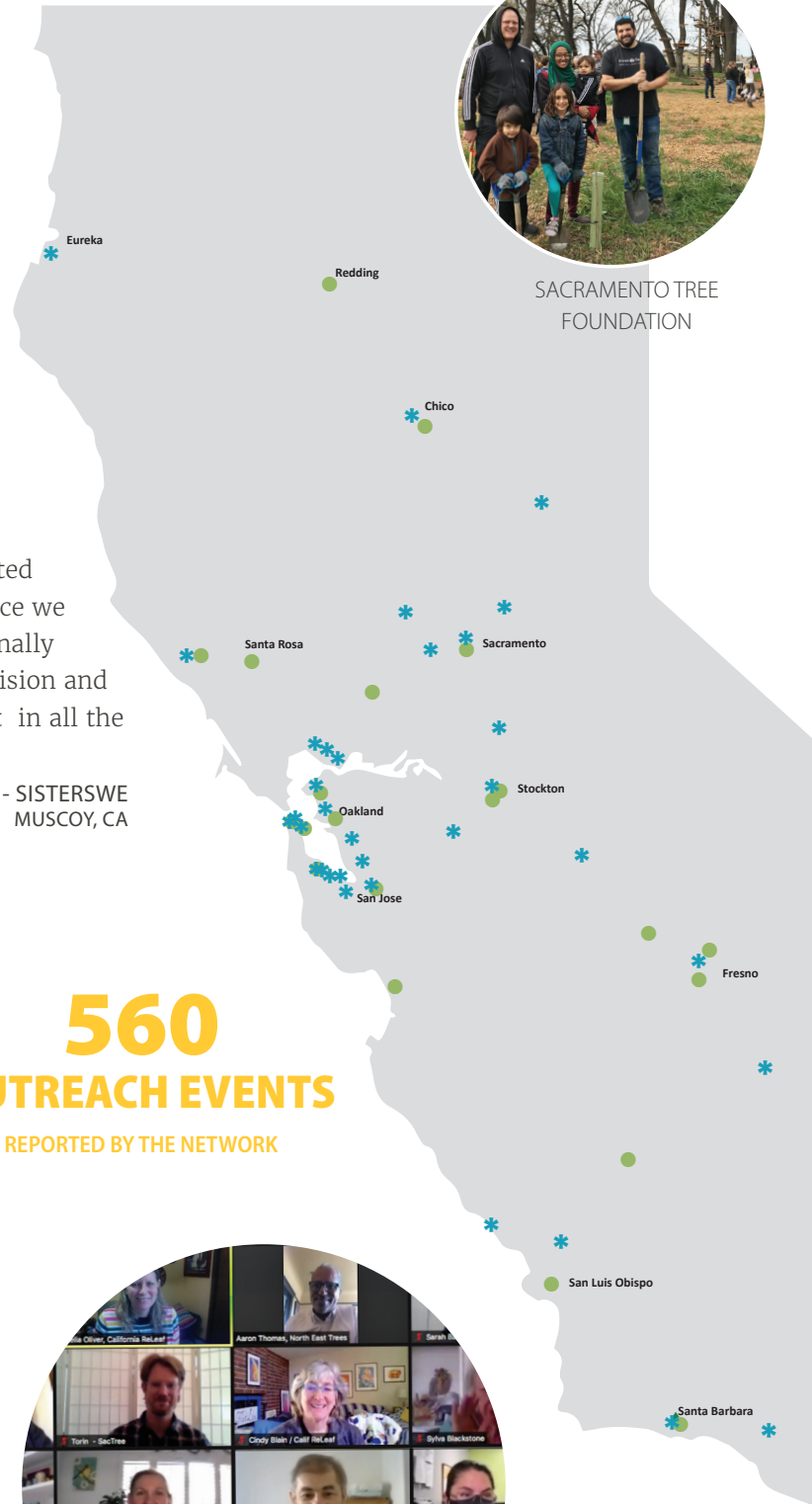
FOUNTAINGROVE II OPEN
SPACE MAINTENANCE
ASSOCIATION

“California ReLeaf has believed in and supported SistersWe activities since we began, and we are eternally grateful for that. The vision and commitment is evident in all the opportunities provided to grantees.”

- SISTERSWE
MUSCOY, CA



SACRAMENTO TREE
FOUNDATION



560
OUTREACH EVENTS
REPORTED BY THE NETWORK

2020 Statewide Impact

- * **Active 2020 California ReLeaf Network Members †**
- **Active Publicly Funded Grants**
 - Relief through ReLeaf (2019 - 2021)
 - Urban Forest Management (2018 - 2022)
 - Forest Improvement (2017 - 2020)
 - Social Equity (2016 - 2019)

- ▲ **2020 Arbor Week Grantees**
Sponsored by Edison International

† To see a list of our over 100 Network members, visit www.californiareleaf.org/network



NETWORK “LEARN
OVER LUNCH” SESSION

49,000+
TREES PLANTED
REPORTED BY THE NETWORK



CITY PLANTS

“California ReLeaf is helping change the world for the better by connecting small communities like mine to the resources and support we need. With their support, we have been able to plant over 300 trees and educate more than a thousand students on the importance of environmental justice”

- SUMAYYAH DIN
COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

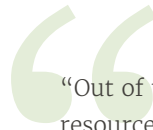
113,000
VOLUNTEER
HOURS
REPORTED BY THE NETWORK



SUSTAINABLE SOLANO

“Thanks to California ReLeaf, City Plants was able to develop a new tree nursery pilot program and connect with network members who have experience and knowledge in nursery and workforce development programming. We are so grateful!”

- CITY PLANTS
LOS ANGELES, CA



“Out of the knowledge that came from the numerous resources California ReLeaf provided, we are now incorporating large shade trees into our designs when feasible. And with some advice from CAL FIRE and California ReLeaf, we performed a canopy gap assessment in central Solano County, as part of EPA’s Environmental Justice Small Grants Program.”

- SUSTAINABLE SOLANO



YOUR CHILDREN’S TREES



ECOSLO

140,000
COMMUNITY
MEMBERS
REACHED
BY THE NETWORK



THE WATERSHED PROJECT



“We are in constant contact with ReLeaf. We know we can come to them with any questions or ideas pertaining to Urban Forestry”

-ANONYMOUS
NETWORK FEEDBACK

Bakersfield



Championing Environmental Justice

Disadvantaged communities (DACs) bear the brunt of environmental hazards and the associated poor health outcomes. In addition to experiencing poor air quality and proximity to polluting industries, DACs are almost always under-canopied. They lack the urban trees that can improve air and water quality, support physical and mental health, and mitigate the urban heat island effect and extreme heat events.

California ReLeaf believes that tree plantings should not just be happening in these communities, but by these communities. Local ownership for projects leads to lower mortality rates in trees, and community involvement in decision-making allows the trees to maximize benefits to the neighborhood.

However, many of the requirements for accessing funding are prohibitive for small community groups. Addressing these administrative challenges has been the impetus for ReLeaf's subgrants program for many years. We also incorporate environmental justice priorities into our policy and outreach, centering our values of community building and human health for all Californians in every area of our work.

“California ReLeaf has been a great partner over the years. They have partnered with us to learn more about environmental justice and environmental equity, and they have consistently demonstrated their commitment to learning, growing, partnering and centering equity in their work... California ReLeaf skillfully threads managing a network of urban forestry folks from across the state with Sacramento-facing advocacy.”

-EMI WANG
THE GREENLINING INSTITUTE

2020 HIGHLIGHTS



Continued making our Network dues optional in order to **ensure the Network remains an accessible resource for all**, and allowing smaller groups to connect with and learn from the larger and more experienced nonprofits across the state.



Continued to **collect and share diversity, equity and inclusion resources**, on our website and with our Network.



Offered a **“Job Pathways and Tree Care Careers” webinar** as part of our ongoing efforts to cultivate economic opportunity through the tree care industry.



Prioritized grant funding to disadvantaged communities and projects that would maximize co-benefits to the communities. **Worked with applicants to make projects eligible to foster an equitable application process.**



Co-authored Recommendations for a Just COVID-19 Response and Recovery to Support Resilient Communities in partnership with the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, SCOPE LA, and The Greenlining Institute. These recommendations **emphasized meeting the immediate needs of our most vulnerable populations.**



Met the moment around social and racial justice by **supporting legislation that would have provided redlined communities with more access to open space, and decision-making** with regards to oil drilling safety and responding to domestic violence.



A CLEANER GREENER
EAST LA



9 out of 10

TREES PLANTED
BY GRANTS CLOSED IN FY20
ARE IN DACS

35% of Network groups surveyed reported that they **addressed diversity, equity, and inclusion practices** in FY20 using tools learned from California ReLeaf workshops and/or online resources.



139
JOBS CREATED
By the grants that closed in FY2020.

Grantee Story: Fathers and Families of San Joaquin County

STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA

Stockton is a city struggling with excessive violence in the streets, and lack of access to healthy food and active living. The City's charter states 15% of the land should be dedicated to parks and green spaces, but less than 6% has been allocated. In past years, the City also declared a moratorium on tree planting on city-owned property, making it difficult to bridge the gap between those two numbers. However, advocating for a better tree canopy and way of life in neighborhoods affected by "The Green Divide" in Stockton is paramount to residents' overall health and livelihood. Environmental burdens in too many Stockton-based zip codes register in the top 10% on the CalEnviroScreen 3.0. Two nonprofits, PUENTES and Fathers and Families of San Joaquin County secured Green Innovations grants and partnered with landowners to figure out ways to increase Stockton's tree canopy, improve air quality, and begin healing racial and social injustices.

Father and Families' program, Healing Roots, offers a sense of social justice as it pertains to violence and the environment. Stockton residents, like Beatriz Barajas who lost her 24 year-old daughter in 2016 to gun violence, wish to find peace. She was able to plant a beautiful tree in honor of her lost child through Healing Roots, a program of Father and Families. The program focuses on transforming pain from losing loved ones to violence by creating tree memorials and dedications at Brandon Harrison Memorial Garden and sometimes

where the violent act occurred. "A lot of the time, people go to the park and there's always violence or they go to a family's house and there's violence, this is a place where we want people to come and feel peace and feel love and honor," said Raymond Aguilar of Brandon Harrison Memorial Park, who works in the youth and justice department at Fathers and Families.

The garden is also culturally relevant, as it is home to indigenous healing plants and is a place dedicated to holding healing ceremonies, community workshops, and rites of passage events for youth. It's where Beatriz was able to further her healing process by honoring her daughter with a planted tree. Seven other mothers followed suit, beginning the healing process, and together they have vowed to care for the trees and visit them often in the future. "It's as if I'm watching her grow again," Beatriz said of her daughter.

"It's as if I'm watching her grow again,"
Beatriz said of her daughter.

When vandals threatened the long-term care of those trees, Fathers and Families empowered a small but mighty transient population to protect them. Along with Beatriz and many others, this population also learned about the environmental and health impact of shade trees and why they deserve extra care and attention.



Another Fathers and Families program, Seeds in Concrete, is an environmental justice and stewardship program that helps the formerly incarcerated and youth gain valuable leadership, interpersonal, and workforce skills to care for themselves, the environment, and their communities through tree planting. This education effort showcases how disadvantaged communities suffer from The Green Divide, fueling citizens to take action and reverse compounding damages to their health and neighborhoods. They hired three full-time environmental justice organizers to assist with creating "a constituency of green thumbs in impacted communities to take back parks and green spaces." *Story continues...*

Engaging New Urban Forest Advocates

We believe everyone can participate in urban forestry, and that a thriving urban forest depends on a community that feels a sense of ownership for their trees. California ReLeaf focuses a portion of our outreach and grants on engaging new groups, and activating the community to plant and care for trees. We are committed to assisting groups in the application, implementation, and reporting phases so that the process itself is a barrier to none.

At the Capitol, we build strategic partnerships, including groups focused on natural resources, environmental justice, community health, and more. Urban trees impact myriad issue areas, so we cultivate new partners inside and outside the legislature, helping them see the value that urban forests have in their sector as well as to their constituents.



ARBOR WEEK POSTER CONTEST WINNER



17
FIRST-TIME
GRANTEES

5
NEW NETWORK
MEMBERS

70% of Arbor Week subgrantees said that tree-planting was new to them or good practice.

29% of Arbor Week subgrantees reported that applying for grants was a learning experience for them.

65% of Arbor Week subgrantees said the project provided an opportunity to practice building partnerships and collaboration.

“We have definitely learned quite a bit thanks to the Arbor Week grant. When we first started considering starting a community garden space at our arts center, we did not know where to start. It has been truly encouraging seeing all the support from the community.

-SAN BERNARDINO VALLEY CONCERT ASSOCIATION

“California ReLeaf empowered our organization in a new and different way of serving the community. We really enjoyed this project. The [Arbor Week] grant that you provided also empowered those in the community that helped, and it will be part of empowering others in the future.”

-HIGHLAND LIONS CLUB
HIGHLAND, CA

2020 HIGHLIGHTS



Continued outreach across the state to **connect new organizations, or those new to planting trees, to the California ReLeaf Network.**



Distributed funds to 22 Arbor Week grantees for tree planting celebrations in their communities. These beginner grants are small by design with limited, straightforward deliverables for a group new to planting trees. 2020 grantees included faith-based communities, an art gallery, recreation centers, and more. Though community events were canceled due to COVID-19, these groups rallied and found creative ways to continue planting.



Hosted the annual **Arbor Week Poster Contest, engaging kids across the state and cultivating tomorrow's tree heroes.** Our 2020 theme, “Trees Create Cool Communities,” sparked these young minds to think creatively about trees and how they affect their neighborhoods.



Accepted an invitation to **join a collective of environmental justice advocates dedicated to supporting a just recovery from COVID and the economic downturn.** The group formalized as the Just Recovery Network later in 2020, supporting bond and budget language that lifted up redlined communities through investments in community resilience hubs, workforce development, urban forestry, and more.



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A Cleaner Greener East LA, Avenal Historical Society, Caltrans, Canopy, City Plants, City Trees, ECOSLO, Green Tech, Harrison House Music, Arts & Ecology, Hole in the Ground Art Studios, People and Trees, Sustainable Solano, The Watershed Project, Watsonville Wetlands Watch, Your Childrens' Trees.

CCI GRANT STORIES WRITTEN BY KATIE MCCLEARY

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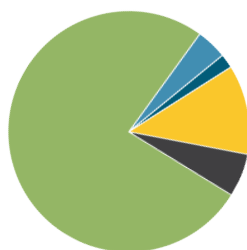
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FY2020 Expenses:

\$1,752,499



79% GRANTS
3% NETWORK
2% ADVOCACY
10% OUTREACH & ED
6% MANAGEMENT



CALIFORNIA
Releaf

Empowering grassroots efforts and building strategic partnerships that preserve, protect and enhance California's urban and community forests.

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