

Grassroots Gardens WNY: Part I

grassrootsgardens.org

Organization at a glance

Grassroots Gardens WNY (GGWNY) is a dedicated group of community gardeners and activists. Their mission is to share knowledge, power, and resources to grow healthy food, heal systemic harm, and strengthen neighborhood connections through community gardens.

GROWING GGWNY

2018

2022

Annual Revenue: \$180,000

Annual Revenue: \$625,000

Annual Appeal: \$5,000

Annual Appeal: \$22,000

Full-time staff: 3

Full-time staff: 8

Community gardens: 84

Community gardens: 107

BIPOC board members: 1/13

BIPOC board members: 4/12

Niagara Falls gardens: 4

Niagara Falls gardens: 14

NEEDS

Grassroots lived up to its name when Jeanette started as Executive Director in 2018. The organization was struggling with a tiny staff and ever-growing network of community gardens. Capacity was a constant struggle as was regular, stable funding. While beloved by many, Grassroots Gardens had a long way to go in terms of equity in operations. It had also just completed a merger and became a land trust with no strong plan to implement either goal in practice.

SOLUTIONS

1 Assess the gaps and stabilize with consultant support

1

The organization was in a cash flow crisis when Jeanette began as Executive Director. Additional financial needs were uncovered during her initial assessment. An independent bookkeeper was brought in to help identify areas of immediate organizational efficiency and the Board agreed to dip into rainy day savings to hire a contract grant writer to help grow revenue and secure multi-year grants.

2 Revamp mission, vision, and values

2

After undergoing a merger and expanding its geographic reach AND becoming a land trust, all in 2016-2017, it was clear that the organization had outgrown the mission of Grassroots Gardens of Buffalo and it was time to its mission, vision, and values. This process took a year because it was community-led and community-informed. As such, the new mission, vision, and values have guided the organization the last 5 years.

3 Initiate Equity in Operations, Policies, and Practices

3

By revising the Mission, Vision, and Values, it became clear that GGWNY was not meeting the needs of its least resourced gardeners. Both short-term and long-term changes were made throughout the organizations operations, policies and practices to support better diversity, equity, and inclusion.

4 Work the Strategic Plan Implementation Plan

4

By working with a consultant to identify how it would possibly achieve all of the big dreams GGWNY had in 2018, Jeanette, the Board and staff were able to see the way forward, step by meticulous step, using a strategic plan implementation chart to plot tasks. As a result, funding grew, the staff grew, and national accreditation was achieved in 2021.



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What GGWNY Board President Minesh Patel Has to Say About Leadership at Grassroots Gardens...



"Jeanette has taken the organization to a place beyond what the Board thought was possible. She not only achieved the original benchmarks the Board set for her but expanded and refined them in a way that has allowed Grassroots to have an even greater impact. Grassroots is now moving in a direction unlike any time in the organization's history. Jeanette has set the standard for the sort of leadership that Grassroots will continue to require moving forward and that is a testament to the impact she has had in her time with the organization. She has set the stage for what the future of Grassroots Gardens can look like."

PLANNING A THOUGHTFUL TRANSITION

When Jeanette decided it was time to leave GGWNY to grow Thrive, she wanted her transition to be thoughtful, careful, and as smooth as possible AND she wanted to make sure her successor was in a better position to have a work-life balance. After the Board decided to hire an internal candidate, Jeanette approached 3 of GGWNY's strongest philanthropic partners to secure such a transition.

Fulfilling Final Organizational Capacity Needs

1

Between 2020-2021, the staff grew from 3-4. And then in 2022, 4 new full time position were secured. Jeanette no longer needed to wear "all the hats" that Executive Directors often do, but it was important before she left to make sure everyone was onboarded in their new roles. Her final hire was the organization's first Development Director. The agency's first pickup truck was also secured in Jeanette's final quarter with the organization.

Planned Overlap for Onboarding New Executive Director

2

Jeanette waited until the natural cycle of the garden season slowed to begin a planned transition to the new Executive Director, which included onboarding him in all administrative, fundraising, and financial-related tasks of the organization's operations. This process was supported for 3 months, with Jeanette moving more into a coaching role over the last month of full-time work.

Step Down and Financial Review Coaching

3

To further support the success of the new Executive Director (who will also be a first time Executive Director), Jeanette agreed to stay on as a consultant for 10 hours a week throughout the first quarter of 2023. She will avail herself to the new Executive Director to support his questions in his first few months fully on the job. Jeanette will also support the initiation of the 2022 Financial Review and coach the new Executive Director in regard to the review process. This strong attention to the stability of the agency's finances through the leadership transition will reduce the likelihood of any disruption to cash flow or the organization's financial health.

