

Equitable Development Scorecard Case Study: Business Evaluation Tool Metro Blooms



The Alliance partnered with more than a dozen community-centered local organizations to create the **Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard**, which helps communities ensure that the principles and practices of equitable development, environmental justice, and affordability are available to all residents. Intended to be a living document, adapted by communities to meet their needs, this case study series shares the many ways the scorecard is being leveraged and the lessons learned from the communities putting it to use.

Metro Blooms and the Glenwood Corridor Business Evaluation Tool

Based in Minneapolis, Metro Blooms provides business owners and surrounding communities with 1) water and environmental education; 2) stormwater management technical assistance, planning and implementation; 3) ecological design; and 4) sustainable landcare training and maintenance solutions. Informed by the Natural Resources Defense Council's *Green Edge: How Commercial Property Investment in Green Infrastructure Creates Value* report and in partnership with neighborhood groups and government agencies, Metro Blooms utilized the Equitable Development Principles and Scorecard to guide the design of a business evaluation tool to help determine the allocation of resources and funding to commercial and institutional property owners in the Glenwood Corridor interested in implementing environmental improvements.

Why the Scorecard?

Water resources have strategic importance in achieving economic growth, competitiveness, and high quality of life — and collaborative partnerships can improve community health and resiliency. But, as Kimberly Carpenter discovered in her role as Community Engagement Coordinator for Metro Blooms, those resources and partnerships **rarely center equity**. “Actualizing equity with diverse watershed stakeholders is really important because there’s **significant money for stormwater management** but I wasn’t seeing people of color and indigenous people in spaces where conversations about distributing those funds were happening,” she said.

For Metro Blooms an avenue to reverse that oversight and tactically integrate equity came through the **Glenwood Corridor Project**. Funded by Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission, Hennepin County Natural Resources, City of Minneapolis Great

Streets, and the Board of Soil and Water Resources Clean Water Fund programs, the project partners with private property owners, non-profits, businesses and institutions in the Harrison Neighborhood to install stormwater management practices.

In determining **how dollars would get allocated**, Carpenter wanted to ensure community engagement and equity were part of the equation. The Equitable Development Scorecard was a natural place to start. “Harrison Neighborhood Association had been involved with the scorecard and we wanted to support the work and time and energy that went into that,” Carpenter said.

Laura Jester, administrator for the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission, agreed: “Because there’s only so much grant funding available, we needed **some way to determine the best places** to implement projects.”



Adapting the Scorecard

By working with partners on the Glenwood Corridor Project, Metro Blooms **created a new tool** that adapted the Scorecard to squarely address a specific issue around water quality and management. As staff at Metro Blooms, Carpenter took the lead in drafting the language and scoring rubric, with consistent feedback from partners. Key steps along the way included:

Integrating new content

Given the specific focus and context of the Glenwood Corridor Project, they knew they needed to adapt and tailor the original Scorecard to meet their needs. **“Our focus is on water quality** and, in the original scorecard there isn’t a heavy emphasis around water,” Carpenter said. Similar to the work of Cycles for Change in creating a scorecard focused on transportation, Metro Blooms created metrics and benchmarks related to water quality and stormwater management.

Identifying racial disparities

In 2017, Metro Blooms and partners worked with 37 individual property owners to install 10,825 square feet of boulevard bioswales for clean water and pollinator habitat. For Carpenter, the demographic make-up of the beneficiaries highlighted a critical equity issue: “We worked in an environmental justice neighborhood where 80 percent of project participants were still Caucasian,” she said. “Why? Because we have huge homeownership disparities, so even though these water resource investments were going to an [EJ community](#)¹, who was benefiting?” This informed the approach as the project shifted from homeowners to businesses and commercial buildings.

Recognizing neighborhood assets

Because of the lack of public awareness around green infrastructure and stormwater management, and the diversity of businesses in the Harrison neighborhood, Metro Blooms recognized the need to include education in its outreach and be open to

feedback on the usefulness of the Business Evaluation Tool itself based on the types of businesses that are rooted in that community. That meant ensuring smaller businesses weren’t overlooked, and being open to adding or removing questions based on input from community stakeholders. It also meant balancing pushback from partners that were challenged by new ideas and approaches that integrated equity and engagement into longstanding practices around water management.

Centering equity and engagement

To center equity, authentic engagement with community was critical. Metro Blooms and partners participated in a wide variety of neighborhood events. “We were committed to working with the people most impacted, so they had power and leadership in pretty much every aspect of the project,” Carpenter said. “They played a really key role in targeted engagement around community assets along the Glenwood Corridor, as well as recruiting, connecting and promoting us to property owners.”

That engagement led to larger conversations, as well. “The community told us they wanted the project to create jobs in the community for local youth and contractors,” Carpenter said. Now, the Sustainable Landcare Training program is working with contractors from the Northside Economic Opportunity Network and youth from Wilderness Inquiry, Mississippi River Green Team, and Conservation Corps to install boulevard bioswales in the neighborhood.



Partners: Harrison Neighborhood Association, City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission, Clean Water Trust Fund, Metro Blooms

¹ Environmental justice communities are commonly identified as those where residents are predominantly people of color or low-income; have been excluded from the environmental policy setting or decision-making process; are subject to a disproportionate impact from one or more environmental hazards; and experience disparate implementation of environmental regulations, requirements, practices and activities in their communities.

Outcomes & Successes

As it evolved, the Business Evaluation Tool included questions in three areas: **water quality, equity and sustainability**. After a year of development, the tool was completed with 15 questions – six focused on water quality, six on equity, and three on sustainability. The areas add up to a possible 90 points, but given the funding streams for the project and the focus on stormwater management, the scores were then weighted more heavily toward the water quality responses (chart right).

In 2018, Metro Blooms and partners **utilized the tool** to evaluate interested businesses on the Glenwood Corridor. To engage community, they delegated scoring of the Equity section to their partners at the Harrison Neighborhood Association – and hosted in-person scoring sessions to make it more collaborative and accessible. With funding to implement stormwater management practices at a minimum of six sites, Metro Blooms is now moving forward with the locations that scored highest on the business evaluation tool.

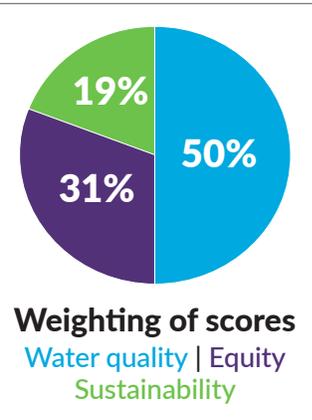
For Carpenter, a key outcome and success was intentionally incorporating principles and practices of equitable development and environmental justice into a process that has typically not included those considerations. “We’re calling it a business evaluation tool,” she said, “but it’s still **evolving to be more of an equitable engagement tool.**”

And for Laura Jester at the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission the process gave her new perspective on the pervasive environmental inequities that exist in underserved communities. “This project opened my eyes to a **problem that’s rarely discussed** among natural resources professionals,” she said.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Partners recognized through the creation of the evaluation tool the need for more **time and resources for community engagement**. Like the Scorecard itself, Carpenter views the evaluation tool as a living document. “How can we build relationships with other leaders in the community and get their input on this tool,” she said. “And how can they help us further refine it in terms of what’s missing, and what more we need to add around equity and sustainability?”

“We’ve also been learning a lot about the different ways we can use this tool to do more equitable engagement – for instance, being more intentional about **reaching renters in commercial sites**,” she said. While tenants can often feel disconnected from decision-making about the properties they call home, both nonprofit and for-profit property owners are seeing the benefit of tenant engagement around green infrastructure. “Involving residents in participatory landscape and planning processes builds opportunities for trust and relationships with management that keep renters in place,” Carpenter said. “And improved green space encourages them to spend more time outdoors.”



EQUITY QUESTIONS

included in the evaluation tool

1. Does the potential site advance the community’s goals, priorities, and criteria for growth and reinvestment?
2. Is the property owner/manager involved in the community?
3. Would they be willing to host community events at their site following installation?
4. Does the site hold racial, cultural or other historical significance to community members that should and will be preserved?
5. Does the site support a business owned by an indigenous or person of color?

Opportunities & Next Steps

Metro Blooms aimed to not only create the business evaluation tool but, through the process, build capacity within the community to address water quality and management issues beyond the scope and timeline of the Glenwood Corridor project. That includes incorporating **youth and job development into the concept of sustainability**. Metro Blooms is developing a sustainable land care training program to give local youth and residents the skills to maintain the green infrastructure once it's installed – and, ultimately, provide career and business pathways to join the network of contractors that install stormwater management projects across the region.

Metro Blooms is leveraging the work and learnings around the evaluation tool to engage with diverse businesses in other communities, for instance, along the Lake Street corridor. “We’re working with some **business projects in different corridors** now, which is an opportunity to learn how this knowledge can be replicated with other sites and other communities and how it changes based on culture and other aspects,” she said.

The conversation around **engaging renters** led to a successful collaboration with African Career, Education and Resource Inc (ACER) in Brooklyn Park that addressed livability concerns at a rental property and engaged tenants in a green infrastructure project on site. Now that conversation and potential model has expanded to rental developments in other communities, including Riverside Plaza.

Integrating equity into the Glenwood Corridor evaluation inspired **change within the Metro Blooms**, as well, with the staff and board recognizing the need to integrate equity into the organization’s goals and strategies moving forward. Ultimately, Carpenter hopes that shift will have a ripple effect. “There’s a huge opportunity to inform watershed districts about how they can apply an equitable lens to their process,” she said. “A lot of connections are being made. It’s exciting.”



Above: Renter engagement project in Brooklyn Park
Below: Carpenter (right) at Riverside Plaza

Learn more about Metro Blooms at www.metroblooms.org
Download the Business Evaluation Tool at bit.ly/MetroBloomsBizEvalTool



Download the Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard, along with videos and case studies at thealliancetc.org/our-work/equitable-development-scorecard