

Green Schoolyards as a Stormwater and Community Resilience Strategy

June 16, 2026



Meet Your Hosts



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TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND



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Agenda

5 min

Welcome + Introductions

30 min

National Landscape: Community Schoolyards

15 min

Advancing Utility Goals with Green Schoolyards

10 min

Moderated Q+A and Closing



**TRUST FOR
PUBLIC
LAND®**

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

Trust for Public Land

Climate Smart

Community Schoolyards

Photo: Andy Richter



Red Wing, MN

Access to the outdoors is a **fundamental human need** and essential to our health and well-being.

PEOPLE NEED PARKS AND GREEN SPACES



But great parks aren't created equal.
Today, one in three people, including 28 million children, don't have a park or green space within a 10-minute walk (half mile) of home.



Communities that value and invest in
OUTDOOR ACCESS
FOR ALL ARE...



HEALTHIER



MORE RESILIENT



MORE INCLUSIVE

WHO WE SERVE

69%

of our work directly supports Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other communities of color.

60%

of our work serves communities in the bottom quartile of household income.

Partnered with
70

Tribes and Native groups to date.



OUR IMPACT ACROSS THE COUNTRY

5,500+

Public outdoor spaces created
or protected

\$112+ Billion

Secured in public funding.

409

Community schoolyards created or in
progress in **26** States & Washington D.C.

4+ Million Acres

Protected from development.

OUR WORK ON THE GROUND



CONSERVING LAND AND CULTURAL SITES

Our parks and monuments tell the story of our past and present, but they're at risk. When we preserve them, we enshrine the full history that defines our nation and connects us to one another.



CREATING TRAILS

As the most prolific trail organization in the country in terms of miles created and protected, we establish carbon-free transportation networks that connect people to nature, recreation, schools, workplaces, and each other



CREATING PARKS

Did you know that 100 million people in this country lack a quality park close to home? To eliminate that gap, we listen to community members and leverage our relationships and expertise to help them create parks that serve and connect people to nature and each other.



CREATING SCHOOLYARDS

Community schoolyards are symbols of community empowerment. Our model allows students, parents, teachers, and residents to design these powerful resources that improve health and education outcomes and increase climate resilience.

Climate Smart Community Schoolyards

Danielle Denk, Trust for Public Land
Senior Director, Schoolyards Initiative





- **Children spend less than 7 minutes a day engaged in unstructured outdoor play.**
- **Children spend over 7 hours on screens.**
- **Rates of poor mental health are skyrocketing among youth.**
- **Activity levels among children are at an all-time low.**



HEALTH

- Spending time in nature can help relieve stress and anxiety.
- The presence of outdoor recreation spaces in children's neighborhoods **positively affects their well-being.**
- High-quality playground amenities are directly associated with **15%–28% higher levels of MVPA.**

AFTER: Elmhurst Pan Am, New York, NY



BEFORE: E.M. Stanton School, Philadelphia, PA

Parks serving communities of color are **half the size and 40% more crowded** than parks in predominantly white communities.

Parks and schoolyards serving communities of color receive **less investment and offer fewer amenities.**



AFTER: E.M. Stanton School, Philadelphia, PA

EQUITY

- If all schools in the U.S were transformed and open to the community after hours, **80 million residents would gain a park within a 10-minute walk of home**, including 20 million people who currently lack access.
- Meaningful community engagement fosters a **greater sense of ownership** over public space improvements.



BEFORE: Scott Elementary School, Atlanta, GA

Of the 95,000 public schools, most lack places for teachers to take students outside to learn.



LEARN- ING

- Community Schoolyards positively impact **mathematic scores by 6-7%**
- Access to nature improves **cognitive function, brain activity, blood pressure, mental health, physical activity, and sleep.**
- School students engaged in learning in natural environments have been found to have **higher achievement.**

AFTER: Scott Elementary School, Atlanta, GA



BEFORE: Winthrop Campus, Brooklyn, NY

Of the 2 million acres of school grounds, most in urban communities are **void of trees and covered with asphalt.**

Asphalt traps heat.

Asphalt floods during storms

Asphalt releases petrochemicals into the water and air.



CLIMATE

If all schools had a Community Schoolyard: **50,000,000 students and 80,000,000 community members would benefit** from increased tree canopy, improved air quality, reduced temperature and reduced flooding.

AFTER: Winthrop Campus, Brooklyn, NY

Managing urban flooding

Improved water quality



Reduced flooding



TPL renovated NYC schoolyards capture 67,585,000 gallons of stormwater annually



Tim Wimborne / Reuters

Impacts

Community Schoolyards deliver health, climate, equity, community and learning outcomes for students, the school and the surrounding neighborhood.

These impacts lead to thriving, resilient, just, educated and empowered students and community.

The evidence is clear. The opportunity is everywhere and the time is now.

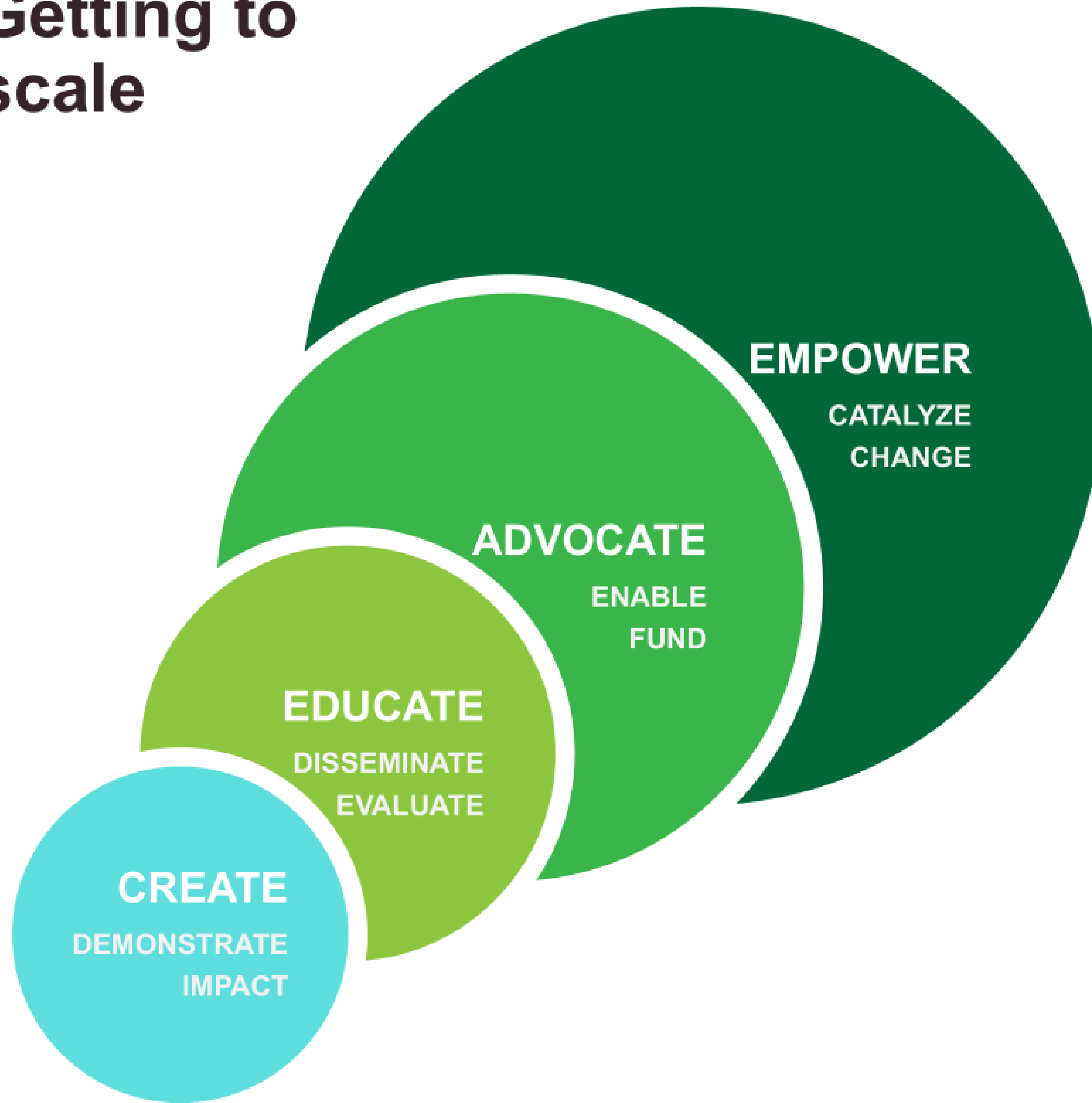




Community Schoolyard

*A healthy, nature-filled, outdoor learning space at school that is inclusively designed to advance health, climate resilience, outdoor learning and **open to the community** to enjoy after school hours.*

Getting to scale



To make Community Schoolyards the standard across the country, TPL has implemented a 4-part scaling strategy:

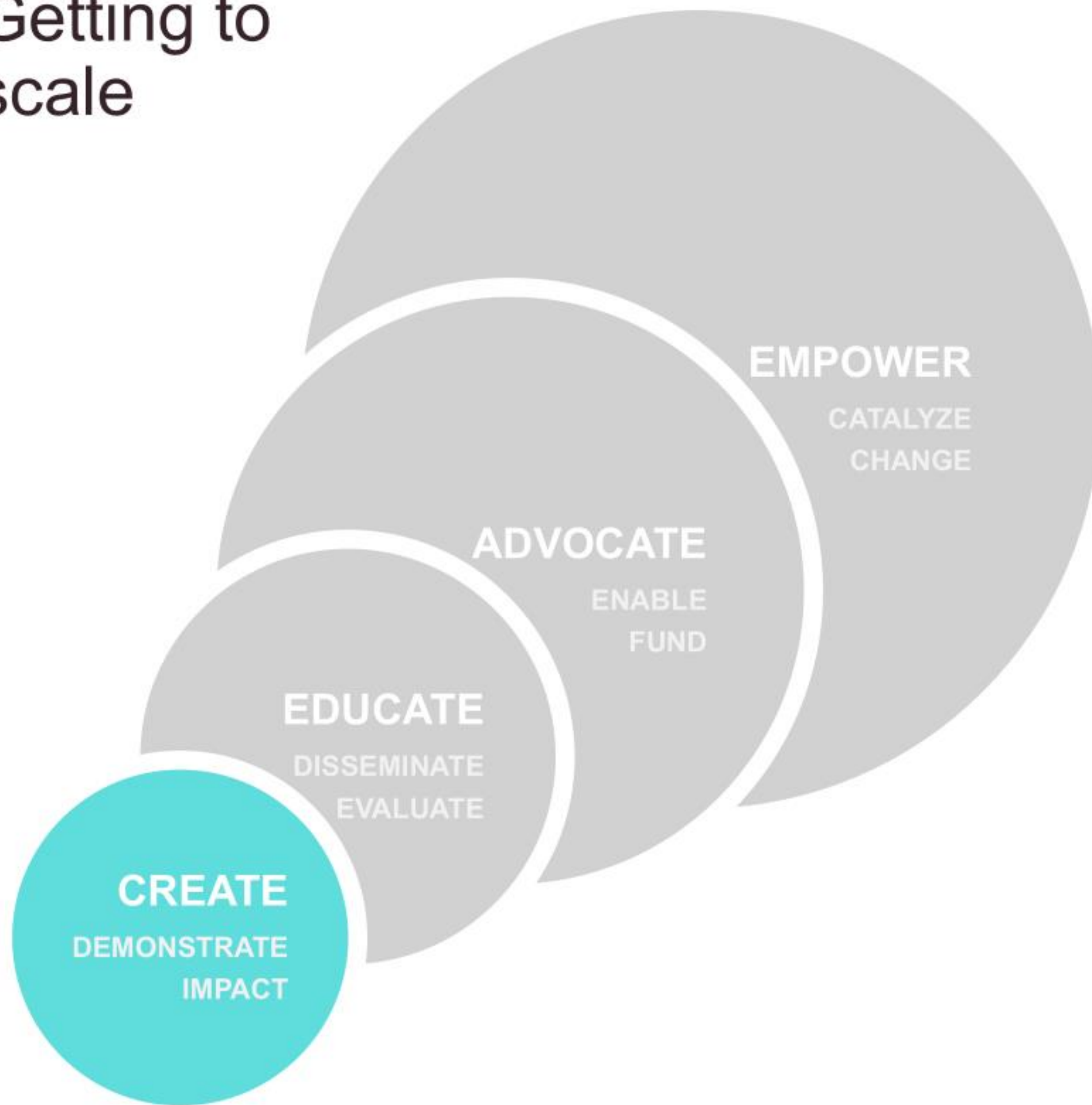
CREATE - Work with local school districts to create new Community Schoolyards to demonstrate impact.

EDUCATE - Conduct research and disseminate findings on the impacts of Community Schoolyards on health, social connection, learning and climate resilience.

ADVOCATE- Advance programs with federal, state, local, and Tribal governments to support enabling public policy and funding.

EMPOWER- Give governments, school districts and nonprofits the tools to transform schoolyards and open them to the community independently.

Getting to scale



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CREATE



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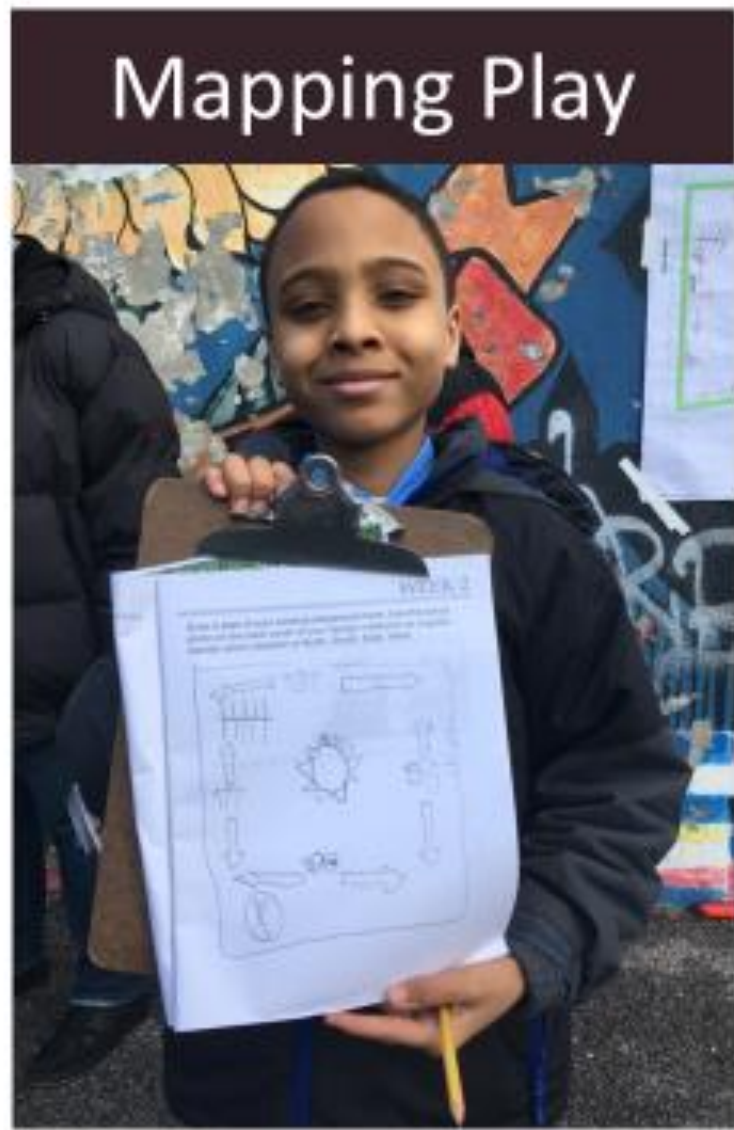


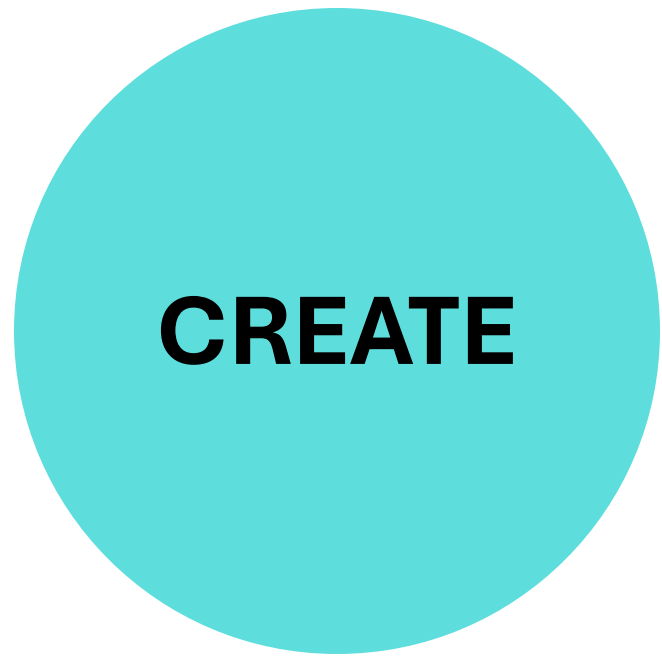
CREATE



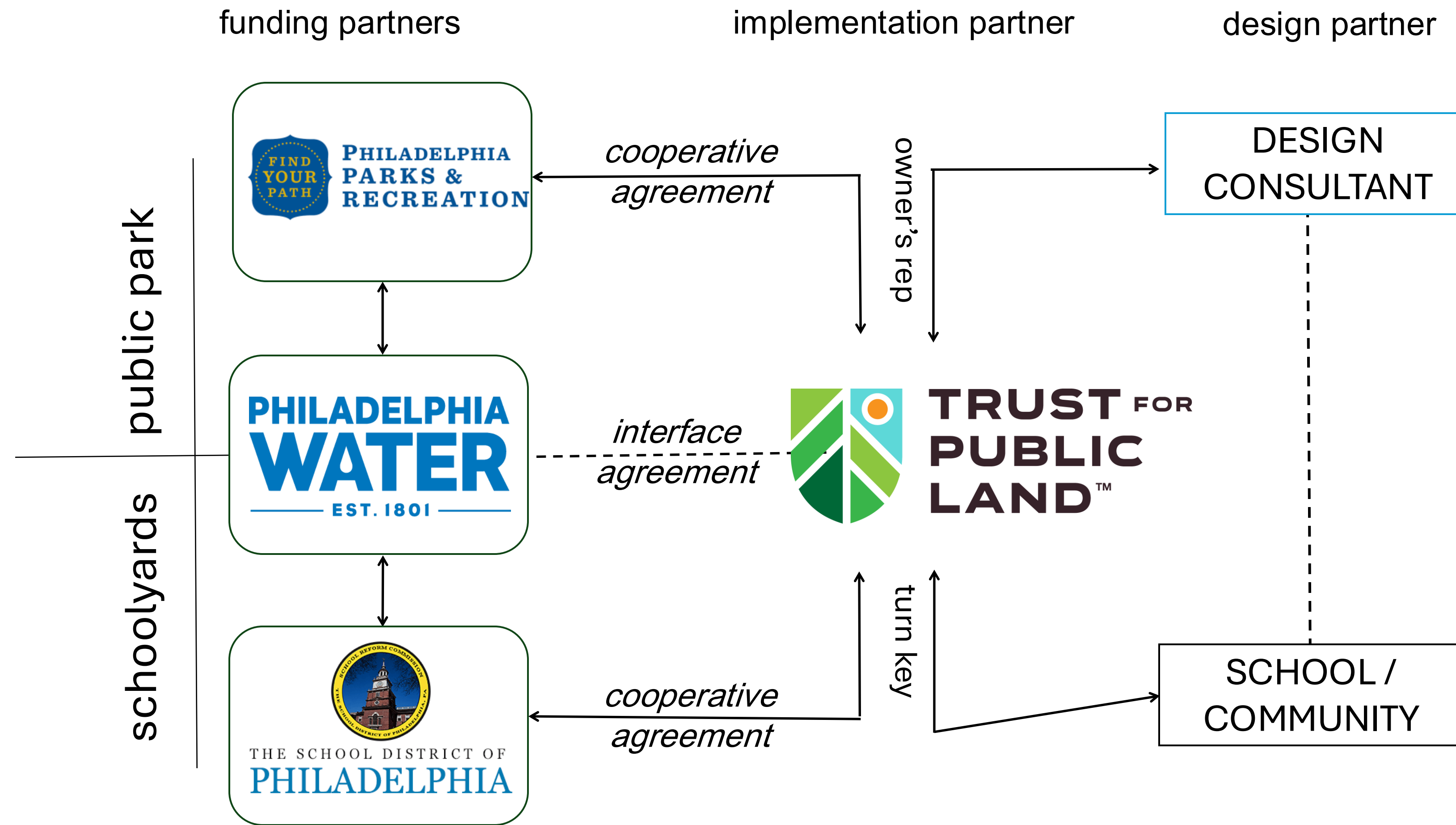
CREATE

Community Schoolyard Process





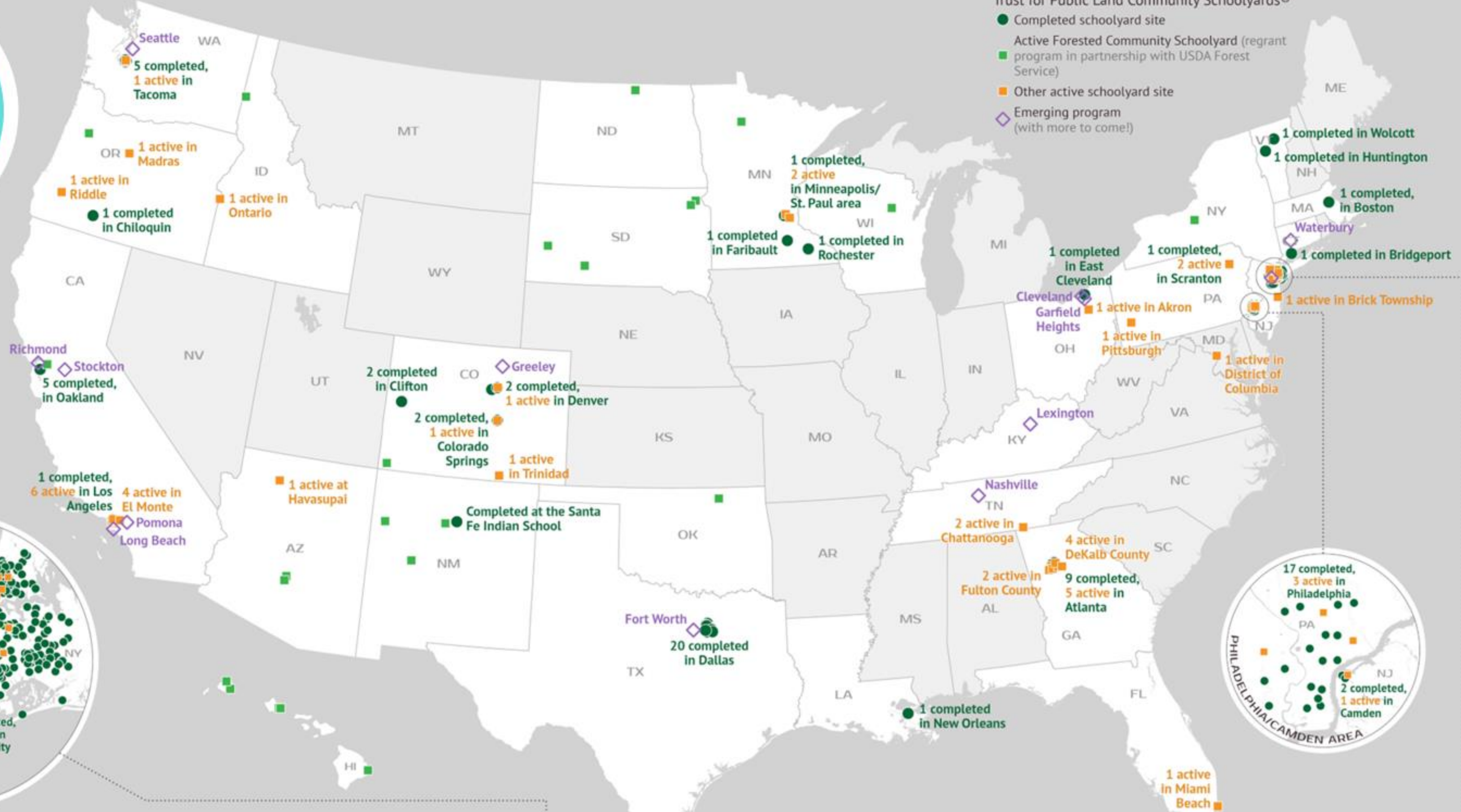
Public Private Partnership / Structure





Trust for Public Land Community Schoolyards®

- Completed schoolyard site
- Active Forested Community Schoolyard (regrant program in partnership with USDA Forest Service)
- Other active schoolyard site
- ◇ Emerging program (with more to come!)



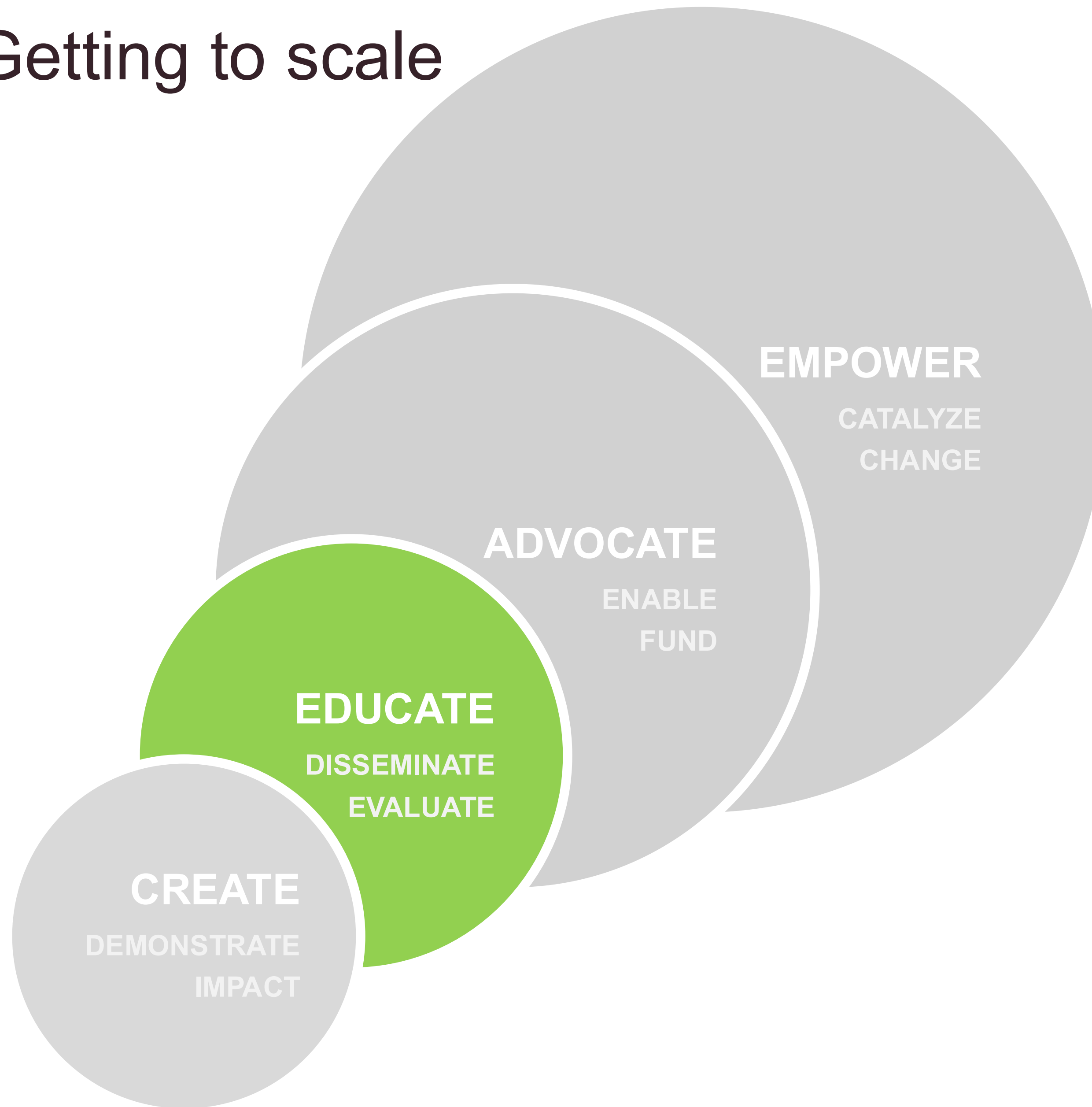
Community Schoolyards®

September 22, 2025. Copyright © Trust for Public Land. Trust for Public Land and Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of Trust for Public Land. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only. www.tpl.org

Note: This map is inclusive of Community Schoolyards in partnership with School Districts, Tribal and Indigenous Nations, The Bureau of Indian Education and the USDA Forest Service.



Getting to scale



EDUCATE - Conduct research and disseminate findings on the impacts of Community Schoolyards on health, social connection, learning and climate resilience.

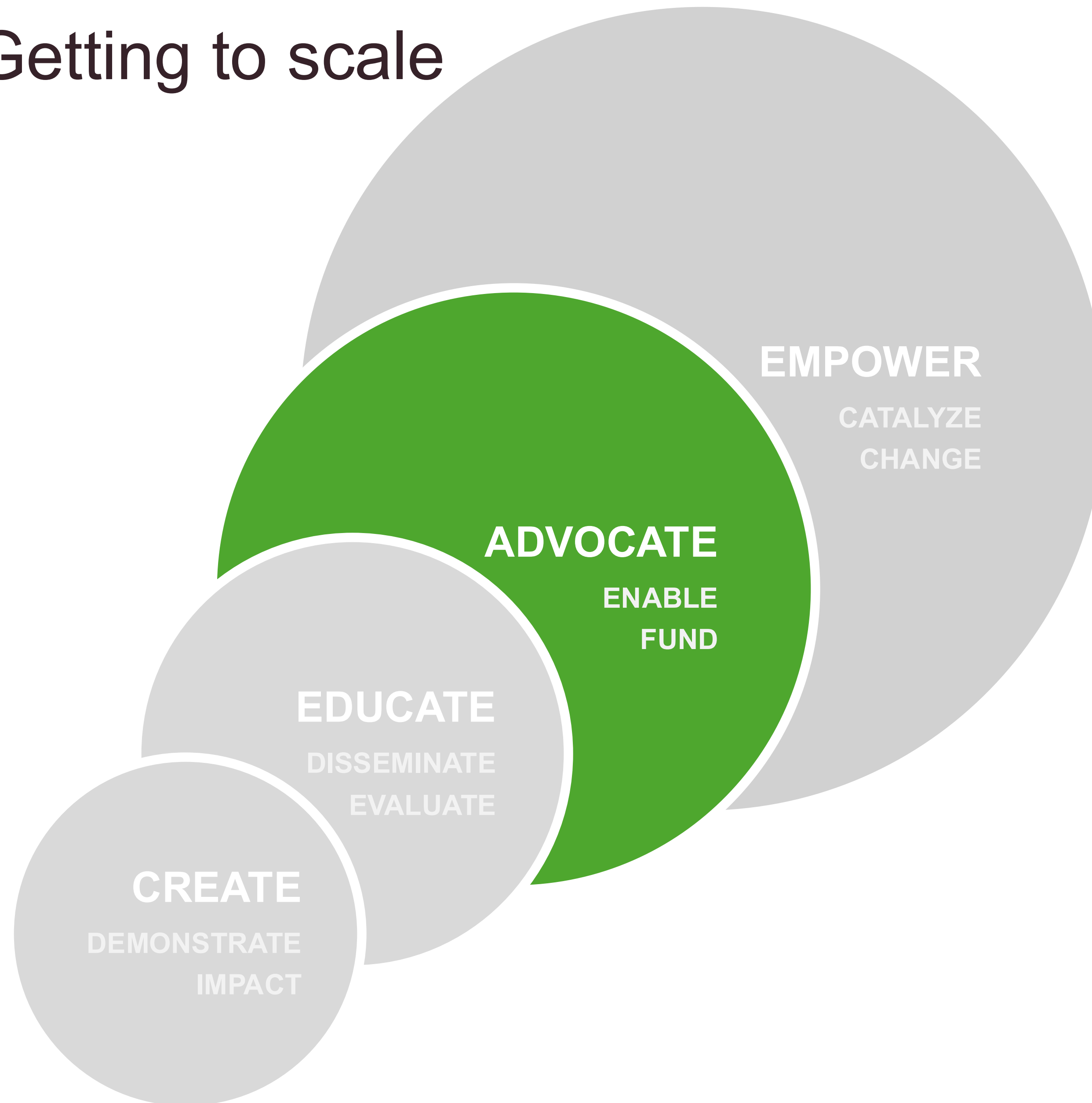
RECENT PUBLICATIONS:

- With University of Washington and others – **Increased Activity Levels** (Tacoma Schoolyard Study)
- With UCLA and others – **Heat mitigation impacts** (LA Schoolyards Study)

RESEARCH UNDERWAY:

- With University of Arizona – **Increased Academic Performance** (New York Study)
- With USFS, University of Arizona and others – **Return on Investment** (New York and Philadelphia)
- With Pew Charitable Trust - **Sense of belonging and community connection** (Philadelphia Research)
- With New York Presbyterian - Increased use of schoolyard after school hours (New York Evaluation)

Getting to scale



ADVOCATE - Advance programs with federal, state, local, and Tribal governments to support enabling public policy and public funding.

PASSED:

- CA Prop 2 / Prop 4 (\$10 B for school infrastructure / \$10 B for climate resilience)
- Los Angeles Unified School District – Bond Measure (\$1.25 B for green fund)
- CO – \$4 M new Schoolyards Grant Program
- PA DCNR expanded eligibility for schoolyards

WORK UNDERWAY:

- State Grant Programs: PA, MN, MA, WA
- Department of Education: Revitalizing American Schoolyards Act just introduced in the Senate by Martin Heinrich (D, NM).

Please Endorse the Revitalizing American Schoolyards Act

The Bill will create a \$1 M per schoolyard grant program to advance Green Schoolyards, Living Schoolyards and Community Schoolyards.

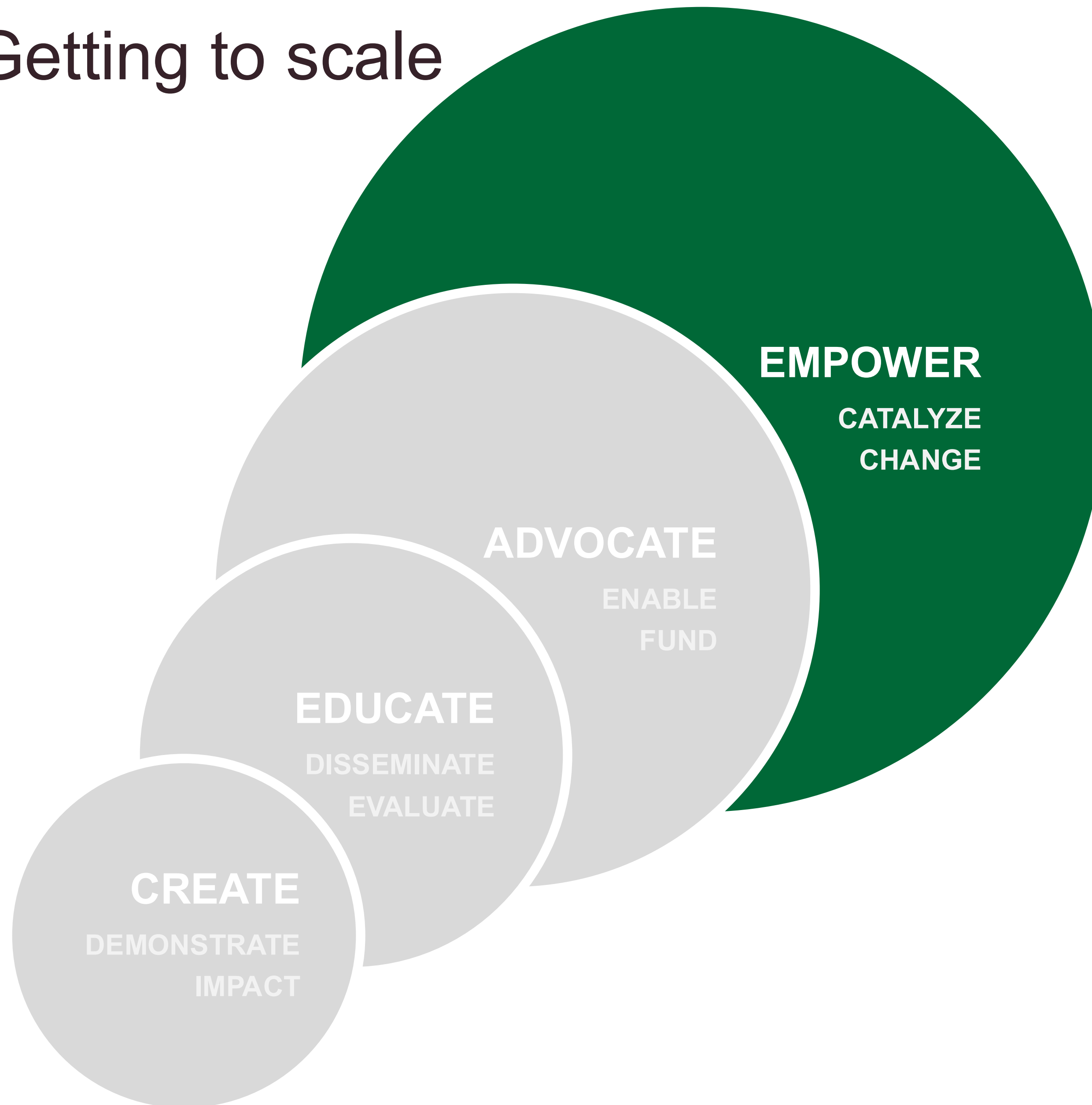
- House Bill (H. R. 8303)
- Senate Bill (S. 4258)

Please endorse this very important legislation.

-Thank you!



Getting to scale



EMPOWER- Give governments, school districts and nonprofits the tools to transform schoolyards and open them to the community independently.

RESOURCES/SUPPORT

- Forested Community Schoolyards Program - \$18 million to cities, schools and non-profits to increase tree canopy and nature access within schoolyards.
- Community Schoolyard Inspiration Video
 - <https://events.tpl.org/ncss26/registration/form>
- Equitable Community Schoolyards Decision Support Tool
 - www.tplgis.org/communityschoolyardsmap/
- How to Create a Community Schoolyards Toolkit
 - https://www.tpl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/011922_Community-Schoolyards_P2.pdf
- Turf in Parks and Schoolyards
 - <https://www.tpl.org/resource/artificial-turf-in-parks-playgrounds-report>
- Quarterly Community of Practice - Schoolyards Peer Learning Network

Park inequity by the numbers...

According to TPL's ParkServe analysis, how many people in the U.S. don't have a park or public greenspace within a 10-minute walk of home?

- A. 20 million
- B. 65 million
- C. 100 million
- D. 140 million**



Community Schoolyards

If all schoolyards were transformed and open to the public after school, how many people would gain access to a NEW park within a 10-minute walk of home?

- A. 1 million people
- B. 5 million people
- C. 20 million people
- D. 28 million people



Research shows that Community Schoolyards advance what kind of outcomes?

- A. Health
- B. Climate Resilience
- C. Learning
- D. All the above

We have an opportunity to transform vulnerable schoolyards into resilient infrastructure

Before...



After





Since 1972, TPL has protected 4 million acres of public land; created 5,364 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places; raised \$93 billion in public funding for parks and public lands; and connected nearly 9.4 million people to the outdoors.

To learn more, visit [tpl.org](https://www.tpl.org).

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Twitter: [@tpl_org](https://twitter.com/tpl_org)

Instagram: [@trustforpublicland](https://www.instagram.com/trustforpublicland)

Thank you!

A close-up photograph of several pink flowers with bright orange centers, likely Echinacea, set against a blurred green background. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others partially visible.

***Advancing
Utility Goals
with Green
Schoolyards***

Why are schoolyards a good opportunity for utilities to meet their stormwater / water quality goals?



Large impervious areas



**Centralized, district-level
program buy-in**



Educational opportunities

What factors contribute to successful programs from an implementer's perspective?

Strong support at the school site and school district levels



Supplemental funding for non-stormwater-related amenities



Public-private partnership program



*Utility Grant
Program
Participation*

**Manages 1.7 acres of
impervious area with GI**



**Green Luminary® awarded project
managing 70K gallons of stormwater
during major rain events**



SLIDE

BALANCE & CLIMB

WITH YOUR SENSES

1 **WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE COLOR?**

RED **ORANGE** **YELLOW**

GREEN **BLUE** **PURPLE**



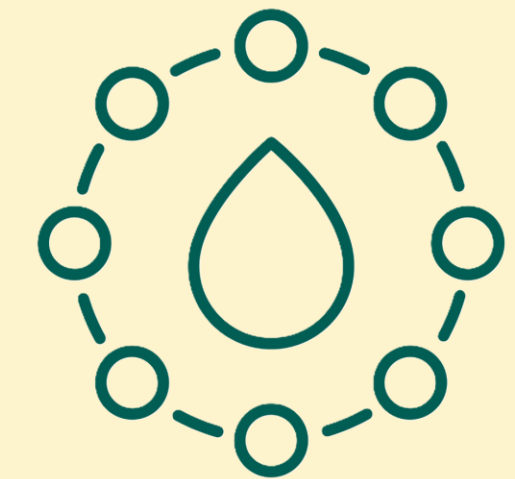
*School-Targeted
Program:
Vermont Green
Schools Initiative*



Over \$30M in financial + technical assistance



Program Manager



Local Watershed Advocacy Groups



American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)



Lake Champlain Basin Program

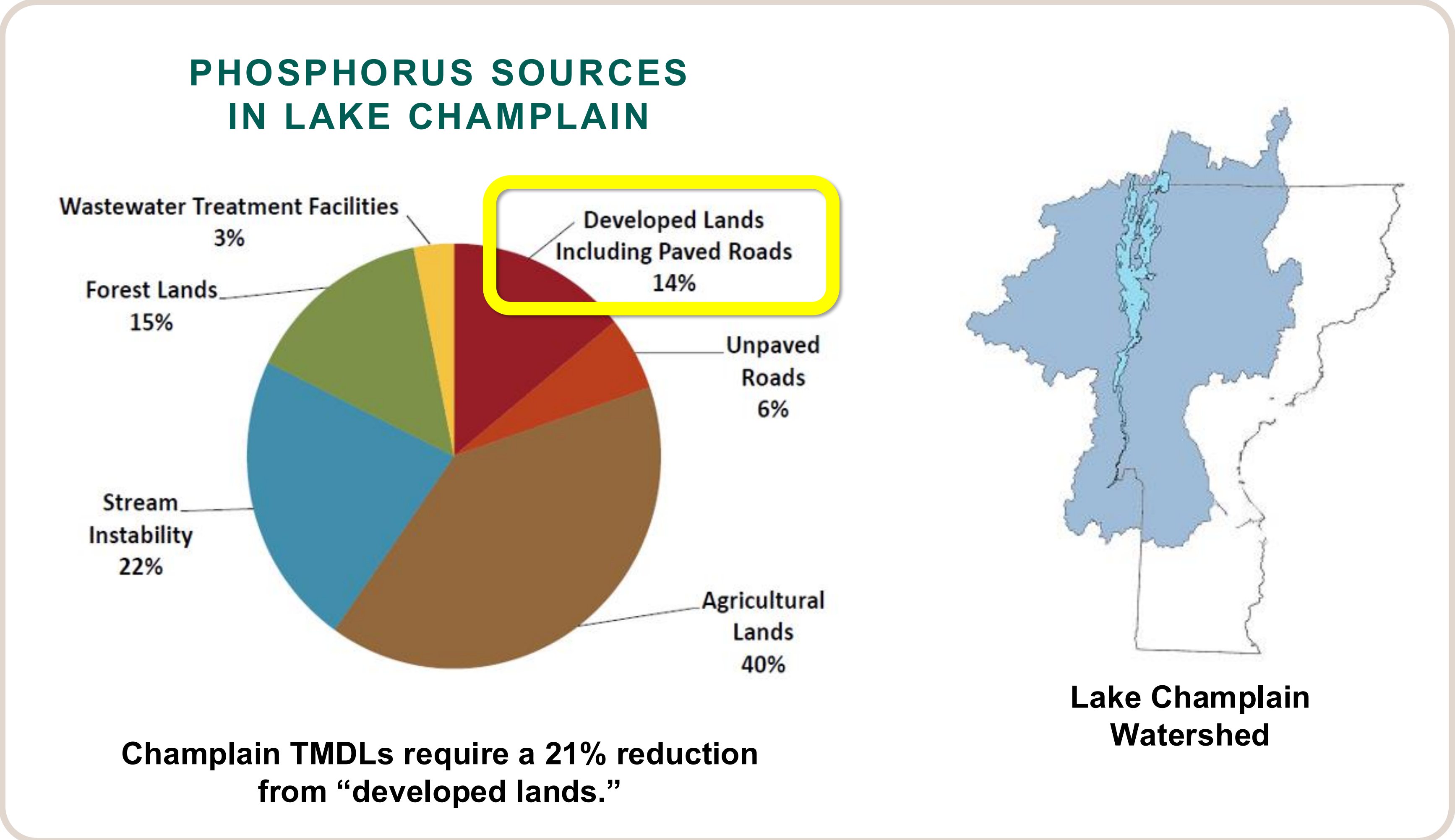


Stormwater Education, Outreach Activities, Capacity Building

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Phosphorous Total Maximum Daily Loads



Vermont Green Schools Initiative



Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation

Western VT

Program to help 60+ public schools comply with stormwater regulations under the Vermont Clean Water Act

61 schools

constructed STPs across VT

457 acres

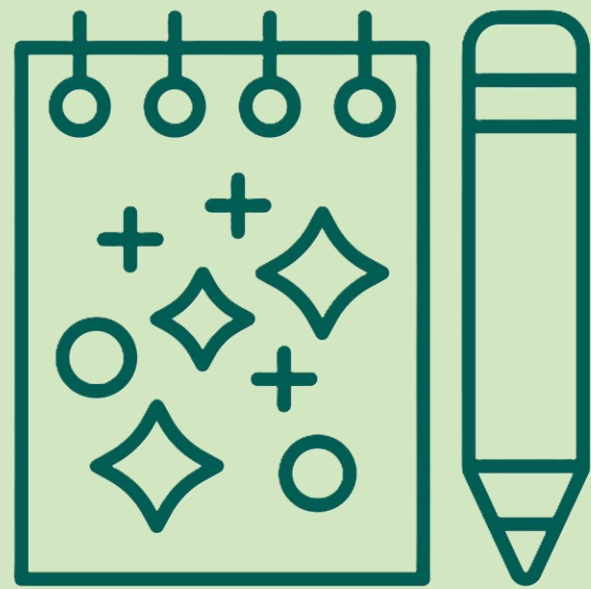
of impervious surface treated

221 kg/yr

of phosphorus removed from waterways

Program Process

PHASE 1



Educate and Design

- Educate schools about the program
- Enroll schools
- Subcontract to local design engineers for each school
- Obtain permits

PHASE 2



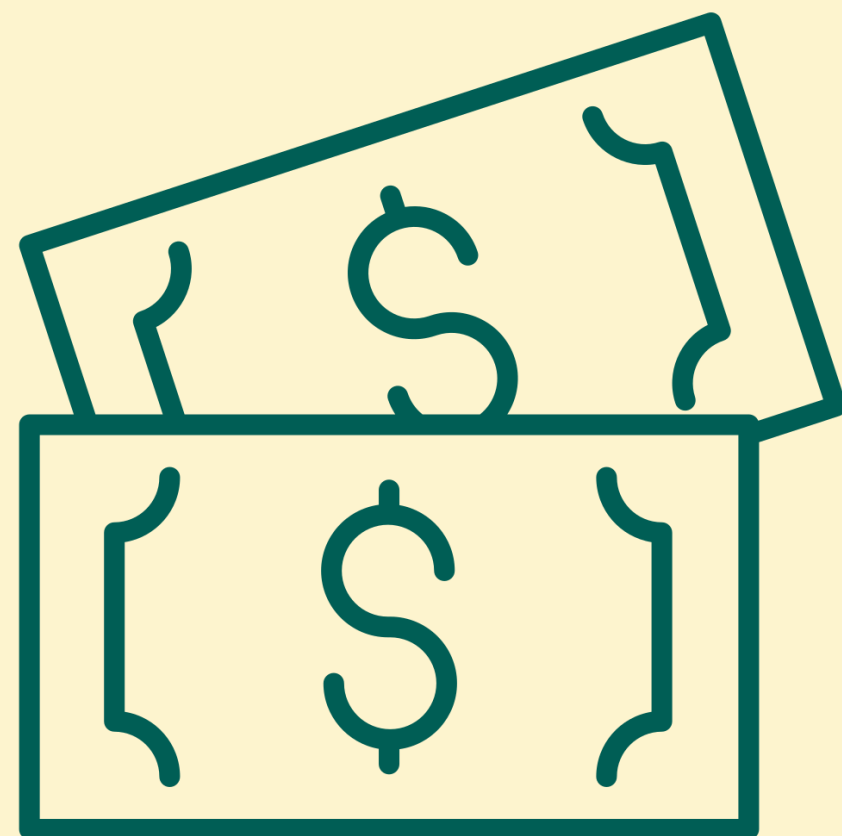
Bid and Build

- Publicly bid construction for each school
- Manage construction (with design engineers) and payments
- Obtain “Initial Statement of Compliance”

Leverage Requirements

10%

**of contract value
in cash**



OR

10%

**of contract value
via educational
opportunities**



- Student field trips
- Teacher education on stormwater management
- Tree plantings at school
- Maintenance staff training
- Hosting a guest speaker
- Conference attendance
- Ribbon cutting event
- Creation of an Ecology Club
- Educational video
- Outdoor classroom design





Structuring Green Schoolyard Programs for Long-Term Impact

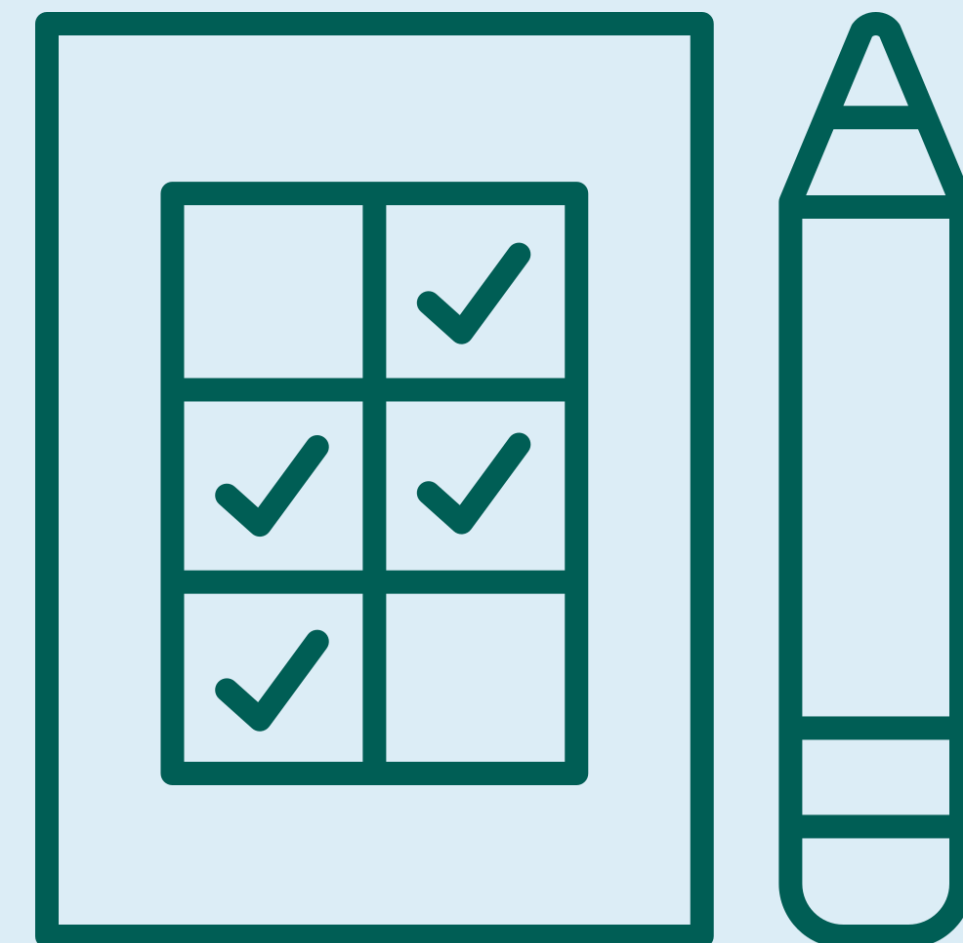
Incorporate outside funding for non-stormwater infrastructure



Leverage educational opportunities



Remove administrative burden from participating schools



Upcoming Webinars

Green Schoolyards in Milwaukee

July 9, 2026

Green Schoolyards in Chicagoland

July 28, 2026



**Follow EFCN on LinkedIn
for registration info!**

THANK YOU!

Questions?

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