



Who We Are

Grounded is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the social, economic, and environmental health of distressed and transitional communities of Allegheny County by building capacity to reclaim vacant and underutilized land. We invest in people and the places they live, work, and play, using the process of transforming blight as a platform for engagement, education, and building trust among communities. This “people and places” approach acknowledges that any physical interventions will need to be sustained by passionate and prepared individuals and that in order for residents to thrive in all aspects of their lives, they must find support, safety, and pride in their physical environment. Our work is often a catalyst for greater change.



In addition to our 12-year history of programs that engage individuals, communities and youth-focused groups, Grounded provides “first touch” design and planning services to communities that may not otherwise have access to professional design. With team expertise that includes landscape architecture, planning, geobiology, public policy and social work, we are poised to compliment the private sector design community by sparking new project work, preparing communities for greater participation in design and planning and by implementing volunteer-built design/build projects to activate and educate.

How Our Non-profit Work Compliments the Private Sector

Pre-engagement services - *Laying the groundwork*

We thrive in the boots-on-the-ground immersive experience of working with communities. Every strong community design process benefits from the real engagement of resident stakeholders. Though critical, this is something that takes time. We can supplement the ‘outreach’ line item of any design project by providing more capacity and increasing meaningful engagements by making the information and process more accessible and more transparent.

- Community outreach: building excitement around an upcoming project or planning process
- De-mistifying technical aspects of design and planning, increasing design literacy
- Preparing individuals in regards to the power of their voice, and realistic outcomes
- Community design/build projects where an “I can make a difference” experience is a great precursor for a larger project or planning process

We also offer data collection services that can establish a baseline for the current state of vacancy and blight:

- Lot-by-lot data collection by Grounded staff or by training community members
- State of vacancy reports, utilizes cloud-based platforms for data storage, GIS mapping
- *Vacant Lot Playbook*, analysis of options and tools available, includes local, county and state regulations/programs

During a planning project

Outreach and engagement, data collection, and design/build experiences can all be valuable during a design process. Whether a regional comprehensive plan or the redevelopment of a single site, we can help ensure maximum participation and engagement.

Post-engagement opportunities

Are there small projects that Grounded can help to drive implementation? Resident-driven change demonstrates that a plan is not just going to sit on a shelf and keeps momentum alive. A volunteer-built play space, rain garden, or vacant lot transformed into a community gathering spot can be a visible first step to a larger implementation plan.