OVERVIEW

Water Wise NOLA—Dana Brown & Associates Landscape Architects, Global Green, and Recharge NOLA—is an environmental outreach collaborative devoted to advancing and promoting green infrastructure and its associated benefits through education, events, tours, do-it-yourself workshops, demonstration projects and leadership training.

Founded in 2014, Water Wise has received funding support from several sources, including the Greater New Orleans Foundation, U.S. Department of Environmental Protection Agency Urban Waters Program, New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board, the Foundation for Louisiana, and the Kresge Foundation.

Dedicated to reaching those who would otherwise be left out of the conversation, Water Wise engages with city residents through a variety of programs and activities involving improvement of the city’s drainage, protection of Lake Pontchartrain water quality, and beautification of neighborhoods. Between 2014 and 2017, Water Wise has engaged directly with over 3,500 residents around green infrastructure. A key initiative of Water Wise is to work with and train Water Wise Neighborhood Champions. These champions are residents who have been meaningfully engaged with Water Wise, and are, or could be, civic leaders in furthering management of stormwater in their neighborhoods.

From its beginnings, Water Wise has understood that in order to realize its goals, it must build strong relationships with community based organizations, volunteers, school groups, city agencies, and peer organizations. Water Wise looks forward to furthering its mission by nurturing old relationships and building new partnerships with individuals and groups dedicated to community development.
PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

Neighborhood Water Wise Workshops:
These 90-minute workshops are designed to provide an overview of New Orleans’ current water management system, introduce green infrastructure, and to share “Do-It-Yourself” green infrastructure techniques. Workshop participants receive educational materials, along with an evaluation form. At the end of the session these forms are collected and a drawing is held. Two winners are selected to receive either a rain barrel or a home assessment. Water Wise has held over a dozen workshops across the city, including three in Gentilly.

Home Assessments:
Led by Dana Brown and Associates, with additional guidance from the Water Wise team, the home assessment provides an onsite consultation with a homeowner to learn specific green infrastructure features that can be implemented to improve drainage on their property. These one-on-one consultations serve as educational opportunities where at least 10 additional guests are invited, including neighbors, friends, and family of the property owner and workshop participants.

Demonstration Projects and Rain Barrel Workshops:
Water Wise has found that educating residents through hands-on projects is necessary to grow support for green infrastructure at the crucial grassroots level. To this end, Water Wise has organized and managed community-driven green infrastructure demonstration projects—installing rain gardens, planting trees, and de-paving sidewalk areas—in the 7th Ward, Lower 9th Ward and Treme. It has also hosted rain barrel workshops in Treme, 7th Ward, Lower 9th Ward, and Gentilly. All of these demonstration projects and workshops involved coordination of volunteers and a variety of partners.

Tabling and Neighborhood Presentations:
To engage the larger community, Water Wise tables at various events—including health fairs, church markets, tree and plant sales, and neighborhood and citywide festivals. Water Wise also offers a brief slide presentation that provides an overview of green infrastructure specific to New Orleans and information on ways to become involved. To date, Water Wise has tabled and presented at over 150 events and neighborhood meetings.

Water Wise Neighborhood Champions Training:
The Water Wise Neighborhood Champions Training brings together city residents who have been meaningfully engaged previously with Water Wise. Selected through an application process, and awarded a modest honorarium (green infrastructure seed money), these residents attend a two-day training in green infrastructure concepts and techniques. This interactive program includes a green infrastructure tour to eight different sites across the city, supplemented with brief presentations by site representatives. A civic leadership training module and a neighborhood-based green infrastructure planning exercise wrap up the workshop activities.

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