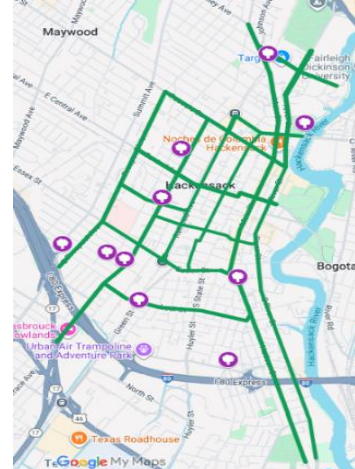




2025 Impact Report



A fiscally sponsored project of the
Northern New Jersey Community Foundation





In honor of the 250th anniversary of the United States, here is the Northern New Jersey Community Foundation's Declaration of Interdependence:

We hold this truth to be self-evident: that when people of differing views come together with a spirit of curiosity, patience and grace, they can free themselves from the shackles of intolerance and tyranny of custom to make the places they inherit fundamentally better for themselves and their posterity. More prosperous, green, beautiful, clean, resilient, fun, inspiring, secure, inclusive, and supportive for all.

In 2025, the Northern New Jersey Community Foundation continued to broaden its impact around the region by building the capacity of those who want to support their communities and deepened its impact in and around Hackensack.

The Northern New Jersey Community leverages the power of creativity and collaboration to help make North Jersey a better place for everyone here to live, work and thrive. We focus on four intersecting areas that collectively and significantly affect the places that the people of North Jersey share:

Belonging and Opportunity: NNJCF works to build more prosperous communities where everyone has greater opportunities to enhance their standards of living and helping leaders make places feel more welcoming and inclusive.

Community Philanthropy: Philanthropy is about more than giving money. It is about sharing many kinds of resources that improve lives and enhance communities. NNJCF provides community philanthropy by helping generous donors achieve greater impact with their charitable dollars, helping people who want to benefit their communities by connecting them to valuable resources (i.e., knowledge and allies), and building alliances to address critical quality of life issues.

Creative Communities: Art is powerful – when it is engaged strategically. Art – and the people who produce it – can make individual lives much better and communities stronger and more resilient. Our work leverages the power of art and engages creative people to tackle critical issues in our region.

Green and Healthy Places: NNJCF works with residents, municipalities, and partners to address climate change, promote environmental justice, protect local ecosystems, and reduce public health risks caused by pollution and environmental harm. Our work recognizes that environmental challenges are also social challenges, and that solutions must be community-driven, equitable, and collaborative.

Through partnerships, education, advocacy, and creative approaches, we help communities build greener, healthier places where people and nature can thrive together.

Achievements in Belonging and Opportunity

- Made noteworthy progress on the [North Jersey National Heritage Area Project](#), an initiative that seeks to leverage the power of historic preservation and heritage tourism to support small businesses and cultural organizations, particularly in smaller communities with larger concentrations of low- and moderate-income people. This robust initiative will also celebrate the region's diverse communities and cultures. Over 90 allies from organizations, colleges, universities, and public agencies spanning Bergen, Hudson, Essex, Union, Morris, and Passaic counties, have enthusiastically expressed interest in this trailblazing initiative. We started creating a cultural asset inventory for the six counties to support cultural heritage tourism and research efforts.

We also contracted with a consultant team led by Acorn Hill Strategies to begin working on a Feasibility Study. The Study is a critical step toward getting the National Heritage Area designation. It is presented to the National Park Service, which then makes a recommendation to Congress about the suitability of our region as a National Heritage Area.

- Continued focusing attention on mental health issues in communities by producing **Mind Your Feelings**, an interactive art installation that encouraged users to describe their emotional state and physical feelings. The installation, which was at the Johnson Public Library in Hackensack from December 2025 to May 2026, provided valuable information on the public mood in the Hackensack community.

Achievements in Community Philanthropy



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- Established the **Montclair Bridge Fund**, a new sponsored project that will help affordability and educational issues in Montclair, NJ. The Fund has, as of June 2026, distributed \$15,000 in grants in the town.
- **Helped dozens of nonprofit leaders** around New Jersey better understand community foundations through a panel discussion NNJCF produced at the Center for Nonprofits' annual conference.
- **Facilitated a session with dozens of environmental leaders** at the Jersey Water Works conference to explore how to partner with communities to advance environmental protection.
- Produced the free webinar, ***What is Your Theory of Change?***, to help nonprofit leaders advance their missions. It helped participants understand and explain their Theory of Change, a strategic

tool vital for service providers and often required by funders. The webinar, led by Dr. Lisa Gale, Principal of the LVG Strategy Group, drew nearly 40 registrants.

Achievements in Creative Communities

- Produced several public art projects:

- Luminous Passage: Nocturnal Migration**, a light projection by artist Ann LePore, that transforms an alleyway in downtown Hackensack reflecting migratory bird data from the Hackensack River watershed. The projection art piece, which pointed to the ground, came on automatically at night and turned off during the day. This also helped promote a greater feeling of safety in the alley.



- An environmental art installation by artist Suzie Gerace of **painted bird houses, pollinator houses, and clay garden markers** installed in the Hackensack Community Rain Garden at Hackensack High School. The installation is designed to demonstrate the garden's value in supporting biodiversity, and to encourage more people – particularly students – to spend more time around the garden. Public art that is inviting, whimsical, or inspires reflection also demonstrates to users of a space that they, and the space they are in, are valued.



- Mind Your Feelings**, an interactive public art and community engagement exhibit at Johnson Public Library in Hackensack to raise awareness of the mind/body connection and help destigmatize the conversation around mental health. More than 800 people interacted with the installation between December 2025 and May 2026, producing valuable information about public moods in Hackensack. Users could provide information in English or Spanish, and the results showed distinct differences in how English-dominant and Spanish-dominant users were feeling over the time period. Spanish-dominant users expressed more feelings of anxiety. Also, Spanish-dominant users tended to use different colors to express their feelings.



- Produced the inaugural **New Jersey Creative Communities Conference**, in partnership with Hudson County Community College. The conference engaged more than 120 people from the worlds of the arts, community development, public health and more.

The conference focused on four themes:

*** Art and Community Health**

– How art and artful environments benefit mental and physical health and well-being.

***Community Economic**

Development – How arts and placemaking boost local economies, create jobs and support cultural entrepreneurship.

***Empowering and Supporting**

Public and Social Practice Artists – Training and supporting artists and emerging artists wanting to help communities.

***Inclusive and Accessible**

Communities – How the arts can help make places more welcoming and comfortable for everyone.



- Conducted a free webinar, **Making Life Better through Creative Placemaking**, to help artists, community leaders and others explore ways to leverage the power of the arts to improve health and well-being in their communities. The webinar, led by NNJCF Executive Director Leonardo Vazquez, attracted nearly 60 registrants.
- Led a collaborative effort that resulted in a \$500,000 grant from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority ART II grant program. Funding is being used to create *Illumination 250*, which will be Bergen County's (and perhaps North Jersey's) largest public art and immersive art festival.

- Welcomed a new donor-advised fund, **The Edward Decker Memorial Fund**, which provides scholarships to high school students pursuing college degrees in music. The Memorial Fund provided it's first scholarship.

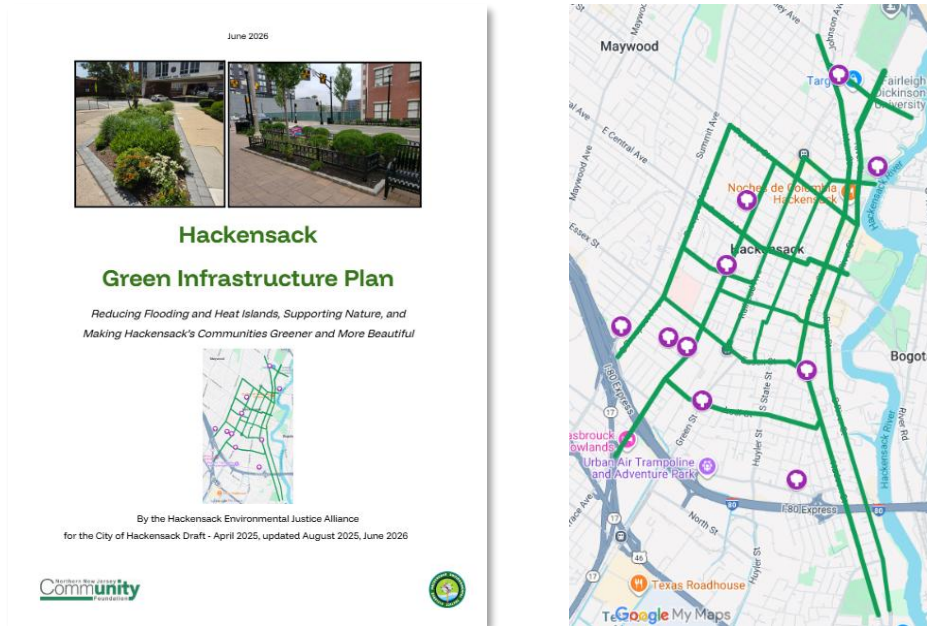


Achievements in Green and Healthy Places

- Produced the first **Hackensack River Nation Summit**, which brought together about 70 public officials, environmental leaders, scientists, and students to enhance stormwater management and address other environmental issues. The Summit featured workshops and presentations on:
 - Cleaning up the Hackensack River Superfund site
 - Stormwater management planning
 - Building strong watershed alliances
 - Building trails in urban and suburban communities



- Completed a draft of the [Green Infrastructure Plan for Hackensack](#), which was submitted to the City Council, and is being reviewed by City leaders.



- Launched the [Pathways to the River](#) project. Pathways, a community-driven effort, reconnects people in Hackensack to the Hackensack River through trails, public art, and more.



2025 Supporters

NNJCF greatly appreciates the individuals and organizations who supported our programming through grants, donations, or volunteer support. The following is a partial list of NNJCF supporters in 2025.

Funders and donors (cash and in-kind)

- Bergen County Division of Cultural & Historic Affairs
- Cate & Abby's Bakery
- Citizens Philanthropic Foundation
- Dimension Energy
- Dublin Pub
- Fairleigh Dickinson University
- Hub Realty Management LLC
- Hudson County Community College
- Investors Foundation
- Just Jersey Goods
- LISC New Jersey
- Madame
- Mayo Performing Arts Center
- Medusa/Miti Miti
- M&T Charitable Foundation
- Montclair Art Museum
- Nimbus Dance Works
- Nishuane Group
- Seton Hall University
- South Orange Performing Arts Center
- Sprout Farms & Gardens
- Topology, Inc.
- Westy Hackensack

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Stephanie Hartman, Foundation Coordinator	Joyce Luhrs, Media Consultant	
Rosell Russell, Foundation Assistant	Maureen Vanacore, Arts Human Resources Consultant	

About the Northern New Jersey Community Foundation

Since 1998, NNJCF has distributed more than \$1.1 million in grants and scholarships, produced nearly 30 public art and environmental projects, and engaged more than 800 people throughout North Jersey to address critical issues in their communities throughout North Jersey.

Our investment of collaboration, expertise, connections, and other resources into the City of Hackensack has brought in more than \$700,000 in new grant funding, helped revitalize the downtown, and built collaborations to address critical issues such as flooding and economic development.

This report was created in August 2026 by Leonardo Vazquez. Questions? Comments? Please contact Leo at leo@nnjcf.org

