Gratitude Report
Thank you for being part of our community
2014-2015
After 5 years of dramatic growth, our Board, staff and community took time last year to reflect on where we started, where we have been, and where we hope to go. This effort articulated a set of core values around which the “Putting Our Values to Work” section of this gratitude report is organized.

In the coming months we will finalize a set of strategic priorities focused on ensuring that we remain a strong and effective organization. In particular, we have committed to developing the knowledge, self-awareness, skills and systems that are foundational to a cohesive, inclusive, just, equitable, and responsive community. This work has taken on broader and deeper significance as events in Ferguson and communities throughout the country have focused attention on the injustices perpetrated by systems and institutions that disadvantage communities of color.

The work of “digging deeper” into our own organizational norms, assumptions, attitudes and behaviors will help us realize the value of cultivating a diverse human community that thrives within an environment of trust, equity, dignity, and interconnectedness. On its face this value is about addressing inequity. Just as important, it is about making Common Ground even more effective, more relevant, and more impactful. This is the promise we have made to you, our friends and supporters: to work hard, to do good, and to thrive. We are grateful to have you with us on this journey. Thank you, and may we all “dig deeper” together.
Common Ground finished the fiscal year in strong financial shape, and began the construction of the new energy-efficient building that will be a model for urban sustainability and education.
Starting in 2012, we asked you to help us live according to our sustainability values.

We did it together!

- A super-insulated structure fabricated using innovative timber and engineered wood products that store enough carbon to offset the annual emissions of 77 cars.
- Geothermal wells serve heat pumps that will provide efficient heating and cooling.
- Day-lighting minimizes the need for artificial lighting.
- A native landscape provides habitat for birds and pollinators while capturing and cleaning storm-water before it enters the city’s storm sewers.
- Built to last generations to come, our building will provide opportunities to teach and learn about sustainable systems and green design into the next century.
- Arriving in May, 2016: The New Building!

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Digging Deeper: How is your support growing mission impact?

Five years ago, Common Ground’s Urban Farm produced just over 5,000 pounds of sustainably grown, fresh food.

Last year, Common Ground grew 8,200 pounds of vegetables, more than 1,000 dozen eggs, and approximately 1,000 pounds of sustainable, local meat. The harvest from our production garden went to feed

The average Common Ground High School student gained 1.79 grade levels in reading last year—building on the 1.84 grade levels they grew the year before.

Last year, Common Ground’s 4-year graduation rate was 90%. African American students (100%), Hispanic students (92.3%), and students who qualify for special education supports (100%) all graduated at higher rates than the school average. State-wide, 87% of high school students graduate in four years.

Common Ground's 4-year graduation rate: 90%
African American students: 100%
Hispanic students: 92.3%
Students who qualify for special education: 100%

In the class of 2015, 92% of students were accepted to college. African American (93%) and Latino (93%) students were admitted to college at rates just above the school average.

Common Ground’s college acceptance rate: 92%
African American students: 93%
Hispanic students: 93%

We are pleased but not satisfied with these results, and will continue to work to close internal achievement gaps.

Before joining in our Kids Unplugged and after-school programs, 41% of participants were healthy, adventurous eaters. After participating, an additional 46% of families report that their children try new, healthy foods at home.

Before: 41%
After: +46%

Before Kids Unplugged, 63% of participants chose to play outside on their own time. After Kids Unplugged, an additional 30% of families report their kids choose outdoor exercise.

Before: 63%
After: +30%
72% of our high school students agreed or strongly agreed that they are more aware of what they eat, and 69% said they are more likely to spend time outdoors, as a result of being students at Common Ground.

Last year, 100% of Common Ground seniors demonstrated growth and competency as environmental leaders—defending a portfolio of work before an audience of staff, peers, and families. They proved their leadership through experiences related to:

- **Environment and Sustainability — 94%**
  Such as interning with The Nature Conservancy and conducting ocean research in the Dominican Republic

- **Food Systems and Sustainable Agriculture — 78%**
  Such as operating small farm-based business ventures and building dozens of educational gardens

- **Social and Environmental Justice — 72%**
  Such as correlating water quality and neighborhood income in New Haven rivers and presenting air and water quality efforts to the EPA

- **Paid Environmental Jobs — 60%**
  Such as planting hundreds of street trees & leading environmental programs for thousands of children

Over the last five years, the number of people who join in Common Ground’s programs has more than doubled—from 5,723 in 2008-09 to more than 14,000 in 2014-15. The racial diversity of this community has also grown:

- **5,000**
- **4,000**
- **3,000**
- **2,000**
- **1,000**
- **0**

Participants

- **Participants of color**

We know we can do more to create a truly inclusive, equitable community—and we are ready to step up to that challenge.
Putting Values Into Action

A year ago in our gratitude report, we asked you to tell us what you value most about Common Ground, and how we should deepen our work. Your answers came together with those of our students, staff, board, and community members to form new organization wide values. A year later, we want to share some ways that we are putting these values into action.

Our place & people
We are rooted in our place.
Our work starts here, and ripples outward.
Under route 91 in Fair Haven, photos of our students stand 8’ tall looking down on a neighborhood park they helped restore. At Common Ground, an educational wetland dedicated to Javier Martinez, a senior lost to gun violence in 2013 creates a lasting oasis for people and wildlife. At 5 city schools, kids explore new nature trails and outdoor classrooms. In Newhallville and Fair Haven, West River and Long Wharf, youth and adult volunteers create habitat for people and all living things. Together with the City, Audubon, Urban Resources Initiative, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and others, Common Ground is building one of the nation’s first urban refuges.

Learning & Growth
Learning and leadership take many forms and everyone can be a powerful learner and leader.
Each year, at least 92% of Common Ground graduates are accepted to college. But do they enroll and persist? In the class of 2014, about 60% of grads enrolled immediately after graduation slightly below the state average of 62.5%. This number was not good enough so we followed up, connected students with caring adults, even hired three to work in our children’s programs and on the mobile market. The result: 86% of students had enrolled by the end of the school year. They are choosing many paths, and here are three:

Linnette Mendoza is majoring in urban planning at the University of Connecticut, Charlie Dow is studying chemical engineering at the University of New Haven, Miranda Bailey-Russoman is studying outdoor education at Green Mountain College.

A year ago in our gratitude report, we asked you to tell us what you value most about Common Ground, and how we should deepen our work. Your answers came together with those of our students, staff, board, and community members to form new organization wide values. A year later, we want to share some ways that we are putting these values into action.
Commitment & Joy:
Commitment, passion, and creativity inspire everything we do.
Common Ground ran its largest summer ecology camp ever in 2015. Each day, 275 kids experienced the exhilaration of outdoor exploration. Whether picking and eating blueberries from our garden, catching and studying tadpoles in our wetland, or building a fort, campers returned home tired, dirty and full of stories. While there are a growing number of studies demonstrating that contact with nature has a powerful, measurable impact on a child’s social, emotional, and physical well being, at Common Ground we have always known that kids are healthier and happier when they play outdoors!

Diverse, Connected Community:
Diversity is essential to healthy, resilient ecological and human communities.
Last spring we reflected with our Environmental Leader in Residence, Akiima Price, that building bridges between the natural world and people living in cities is deeply important. She asked us: “What new opportunities are presented when we understand that ‘environment’ is as much about neighborhood safety as it is about habitat for wildlife?” We found new opportunities in our high school classrooms, in a restorative justice model for student discipline, and in partnerships offsite with the New Haven Housing Authority and local libraries.

Sustainable Change:
We embrace change that is sustainable positive, measurable, just, and lasting.
A dream becomes reality this year, as one of the greenest buildings in Connecticut rises on Common Ground’s site. By using state-of-the-art renewable timber and wood fiber products, investing in cutting edge technologies to heat, cool and light the building, and efficiently utilizing renewable energy, Common Ground is modeling the future of sustainable construction. Our effort to create a beautiful, enduring, and efficient structure speaks to the optimism we want to instill in the next generation of environmental leaders. They will inherit responsibility to care for their communities, conserve the world’s resources, and catalyze the sustainable change necessary to ensure buildings like this one will be enjoyed by generations to come.
Common Ground Annual Fund Supporters

July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015

This is a list of people and households who gave $50 or more in our last fiscal year. We apologize for not having room this year to list everyone and thank you for pushing us to make more room for donor listings next year! The accuracy of these listings is very important to us. Please let us know if you can’t find your name or if you are listed incorrectly so that we can correct our records. Thank you all!

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2. Answer the question (see the envelope flap): “Why does Common Ground matter to you?”