

A photograph showing a person from the side, wearing a black zip-up jacket and tan cargo pants. They are reaching down towards a bed of leafy green vegetables, possibly lettuce or kale, in a field. The background shows a clear blue sky and a white fence.

Fertile Ground Project

**Final Evaluation Report
Center for Research Evaluation**

Overview

Fertile Ground: Inspiring Dialogue About Food Access is an award-winning public art project in Jackson, MS spanning three years and culminating in a two-day Expo in October 2021.

Originating in the City of Jackson's Department of Planning and Development, *Fertile Ground* brought together artists, residents, farmers, gardeners and landscape architects to promote dialogue and inform policy related to urban food access. The project features 15 permanent installations across the city and leverages unique public-private partnerships to address food insecurity, such as Fertile Ground Farm, a regenerative urban farm.

Work on the project began in November 2018, when Fertile Ground was selected as one of five winners of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge, a national competition launched in 2014 to provide cities with a grant of up to \$1 million to support innovative projects that tackle civic issues through collaborative work by artists, city government and communities.

In mid-2019, Fertile Ground commissioned the University of Mississippi's Center for Research Evaluation (CERE) to conduct an evaluation to capture the impact of the Public Art Challenge project. This report provides a summary of our findings. Overall, data suggest five high-level findings:

1. Fertile Ground enabled conversations that led to tangible policy change.
2. Fertile Ground supported substantive changes in comfort, protection and enjoyment of public spaces.
3. There have been increases in public and private conversations about food access and security. This is driven in part by the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on food systems.
4. Fertile Ground created opportunities to reorient people's views about food and farming.
5. Fertile Ground served as a catalyst to additional community investments and opportunities.

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EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. What did the Fertile Ground project look like?
2. What did people experience?
3. What changes did we see regarding policy and practice? What didn't change?
4. What changes did we see in terms of place? Where didn't we see change?
5. What changes did we see in the realm of people and community? What didn't change?

EVALUATION METHODS
Our evaluation focused on five key evaluation questions and combined seven different data sources.



Jackson community survey: Baseline (n=152); Final (n=140)



Observations:
People Moving Count, 12 Urban Quality Criteria, Event Observation Protocol



Case study interviews: 4 projects (n=6 interviews)



Content analysis of news articles



Economic benefit analysis utilizing program records



Expo post-event exit tickets (n=35)



Participant interviews (n=54) 5

Fertile Ground Project Timeline

Phase 01
Award Announcement
November 2018



Phase 02
Pre-COVID-19 Project Activities
January 2019-April 2020



Phase 03
COVID-19 Project Activities
March 2020-September 2021



Phase 04
Fertile Ground Expo
October 8-9, 2021



Data & Findings



1. What did the Fertile Ground project look like?

The purpose of the Fertile Ground project was to promote dialogue about food access and food security. The program originally created public art installations at four primary sites throughout the City of Jackson: a mural and garden at Galloway Elementary; an installation at Smith Park; an installation at 'the Slab' (a skate park); and an installation at Farish St. The primary project activity was intended to be a three-day expo held from April 9th to 11th, 2020. The expo schedule included a series of workshops, public discussions and art showings across the three days at the sites (and other sites across Jackson). However, plans were adjusted due to COVID-19.

Fertile Ground produced a documentary on food security that was aired on Mississippi Public Broadcasting and received a Southeastern Emmy Award. The Fertile Ground team also adapted by developing a mural competition, hosting a small number of socially distanced events and creating a three-part series of virtual workshops on fermentation.

The rescheduled Fertile Ground Expo occurred on October 8th and 9th, 2021 and included the Galloway Elementary Learning Garden opening, a self-guided driving tour of Fertile Ground exhibitions, a cultural arts market, workshops series and documentary screening/dinner.

"Ambitious. The project is... quite inclusive, which is what excited me about being involved."

-Landscape Architect

Key Statistics

- **28.4 million views** of Fertile Ground installations across Jackson, MS over two years¹
- **\$1.9 million** catalyzed for the local economy, including
 - \$1 million Bloomberg Philanthropies' Public Art Challenge grant
 - \$102,800 local project funding
 - \$639,700 in-kind contributions
- **1 Emmy award** winning documentary
- **1 nonprofit** established to sustain efforts to bring awareness to food access and insecurity
- **36 partners** across Mississippi helped implement Fertile Ground encompassing:
 - 6 community organizations
 - 4 education organizations
 - 3 local businesses
 - 6 government departments
 - 17 nonprofits and individuals
- **26 artists** commissioned
- **2,482 event attendees**
- **542 participants**
- **18 exhibits**
- 145 articles appeared in local and national print and online press, including Los Angeles Times
- **47 programs and activities** were held in conjunction with the project, including:
 - **18 workshops**
 - **26 community events**
- **10 city officials** engaged across 3 departments
- **24 local businesses** employed
- **800 cubic yards of soil** donated for urban farming

¹ Estimate is based on Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) count database for classified roadways in the Jackson Urbanized Area. These data is collected in coordination with the Mississippi Department of Transportation, on a three year rotating schedule. <https://gis3.cmpdd.org/transportation/traffic%20count/aboutTrafficCounter.html>

2. What did people experience during the Fertile Ground project?

In phases 1 & 2 of the the Fertile Ground project, Jackson residents had the opportunity to engage with the project through three main opportunities including community engagement at Galloway Elementary, viewing of initial installations and attending the City of Jackson Park(ing) Day Event.

During phase 3 of the Fertile Ground project, Jackson residents had the opportunity to view the Fertile Ground documentary on Mississippi Public Broadcasting, watch virtual fermentation workshops held in partnership with the Mississippi Museum of Art and attend socially distanced art events including viewing Figa and Common Ground.

Phase 4 of the Fertile Ground project, the Fertile Ground Expo, is detailed on pages 11-17.

Fertile Ground Expo

Event Summary



Event	Details	Participants
Galloway Elementary Learning Garden opening	Ribbon cutting ceremony for the Galloway Learning Garden	100+ attendees, mixed ages, homogenous groupings
Fertile Ground exhibitions	Self-guided driving tour of Fertile Ground installations	Varied
Magnolia Sunset Market	Small business pop-up evening market at Belhaven Heights Park	50-100 attendees, mixed ages, heterogenous groupings
Workshop series	Workshops on meditation, nutrition, plantscaping, urban farming, fermentation, mural techniques and flowers.	5-10 attendees per workshop, ages 18-60, homogenous groupings
Documentary screening and dinner	Farm-to-table dinner by Chef Enrika Williams and screening of Emmy award winning Fertile Ground documentary	50-100 attendees, ages 18- 60, heterogenous groupings

FG Expo: Learning Garden Opening

The first event of the Fertile Ground Expo was the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Galloway Elementary "Living Room" Learning Garden. This event brought together community, civic and education leaders from Jackson, MS alongside the design team for the Learning Garden installation. This event served as the official start of the Expo and included the official ceremony and the hands-on planting of the garden beds by students from Galloway Elementary school.

"This Learning Garden is helping Jackson build a vision for a new economy, based on sustainable development goals, quality of education, equity of infrastructure, and providing fresh fruits and vegetables to people... I'm proud that Jackson is providing leadership to Mississippi, and to the world, with this art project."

-Mayor

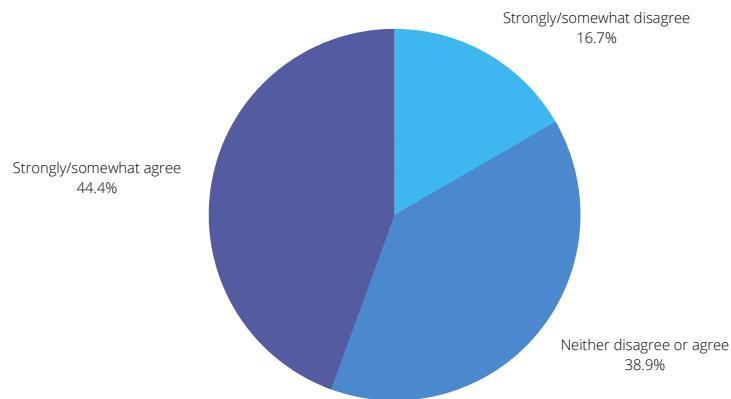


FG Expo: Magnolia Sunset Market

Fertile Ground hosted the Magnolia Sunset Market at Belhaven Heights Park on the evening of October 8, 2021. The market consisted of a mix of black and minority vendors with artisanal goods, music and food. During the event, CERE conducted one-minute interviews with market attendees.

Attendees were asked to describe what they had learned from the Fertile Ground Expo in one word. Overwhelmingly, responses were positive with *community* (n=36%) emerging as a dominant theme, along with *access* (n=19%) and *unity* (n=13%).

However, when asked whether the event (Magnolia Sunset Market) made them think differently about food access/food security in Jackson, a large portion of respondents were ambivalent or strongly/somewhat disagreed with the statement.



93%

of attendees said they would definitely share what they learned at the event with others.

FG Expo: Workshop Series

Fertile Ground hosted seven workshops as part of day 2 of the Expo. Themes observed across the sessions included food access/insecurity, nutrition, entrepreneurship, art/design and farming in urban spaces. Most participants engaged in more than one workshop session. Nine out of ten (89%) respondents indicated that they would definitely share what they learned at the workshops with others. Four out of five (85%) indicated that they were inspired to change their behaviors as a result of the session.



FG Expo: Workshop Series

Below is a sample of the responses provided when asked "How, if at all, do you think you will change your behaviors after attending this session":





FG Expo: Burnt Sienna Dinner & Documentary Screening

The culminating event for Fertile Ground Expo attendees was a screening of the Fertile Ground documentary and the Burnt Sienna dinner which brought together the project team, artists and community members around a farm-to-table dinner at Foot Print Farms. Seating at the event was assigned to stimulate conversations around food access and security inspired by the documentary.

When asked what "they think city leaders should do to improve food security in Jackson?" after watching the documentary, responses reflected complex solutions with an emphasis on economic incentives to encourage development:

"Develop more urban farms and farmers. Use Vacant lots for Community Garden's as well as setting up a business enterprise. A value added makers center is needed to be put in place where entrepreneurs can have a place to create and develop more value added foods. There is an urban farm in the city of Jackson that could be a better resource to the city if the city would reach out to them. There needs to be more access for land that the city has to be used by a new business that is being created for growing up healthy foods."

"Create a fund or initiative and partner with non-profits, CDFIs, etc. to fund projects such as grocery stores."

"Possibly creating incentives for grocery stores to move back into the city... creating gardens around the city to provide fresh produce at a free or reduced cost to consumers. Creating an incentivized and educational program for residents to learn to grow their own food in their yards."

"Incentivize grocery stores to establish their stores in Mississippi. Non-Kroger options would be fantastic. A grocery store in downtown Jackson would be a game-changer."

3. What changes did we see in policy and practice?

For those with proximal contact to the Fertile Ground project:

1. Fertile Ground enabled conversations that led to tangible policy change.
2. Within the Department of Planning and Development, Fertile Ground helped to embed the view that art can be a tool that "carries forward" and public art can be used as a tool for urban regeneration.

Across the project more broadly:

1. We didn't see shifts in priority people placed on food security, but did see greater complexity in the way community members talked about how to address the issue.
2. We did see stark differences in attitudes towards (trust in) city government when comparing responses across income brackets.

1. Fertile Ground enabled conversations that led to tangible policy change.

The Fertile Ground project positively influenced public policy in the City of Jackson, MS and has created future development opportunities. The city's Department of Planning and Development is significantly revising its transit plan to include access to at least one grocery store on every bus route. Development of the ConnectJXN: Transit Plan was supported by early findings from the Fertile Ground documentary and Fertile Ground community survey which highlighted barriers to food access that could be reduced by route revisions.

"We previously had a very difficult path to get to any of the larger grocery stores on the bus system, and now every route will directly access one of them."

-City official

The work of Fertile Ground complemented the transit study that Planning and Development undertook from 2020-2021. Director of Planning & Development, Jordan Hillman, states, "the survey work done at the very beginning of Fertile Ground was very helpful in understanding our community's desires and led us to prioritize, which we had been already talking about a lot of food related issues, but led us to prioritize a grocery store on every route, and really change how our bus routes served those needing to get to groceries. We previously had a very difficult path to get to any of the larger grocery stores on the bus system, and now every route will directly access one of them".

Hillman also shared, "...One of the most impactful moments in the Fertile Ground documentary was a gentleman describing how he rode the bus to the grocery store, and hearing about our policies of bag limits" led us to seek answers to the question, "How would I get my groceries if I rode the bus?" The answer to this question is a piece of the long-term transit plan to add an on-demand network which would create on-demand zones to respond to resident needs when there is not the volume to run the bigger buses. The on-demand zones create hubs around grocery stores where riders will be able to get into a regular vehicle and bring more items with them than currently allowed on the buses.

When asked about the benefits of Fertile Ground originating in the Department of Planning and Development, Hillman identified the ability to directly impact policy. "Sitting in the policy seat is huge. I think that's a really good model for these types of projects being married to a nonprofit that can handle the finances, money and procurement, and not have to deal with the government side of those things, but having the policy people at the table that can make the change."

One or more grocery stores will be on every bus route.

New Bus Network Benefits

More Convenient Access
One or more grocery stores on every route.
Three buses per hour serve the Jackson Medical Mall.
Four new routes connect South Jackson neighborhoods with the Hwy 18 Wal-Mart. No transfer.

Faster & More Direct Trips
Straighter routes/fewer loops mean you get to your destination faster.
Direct connection between Union Station, Jackson Medical Mall, UMMC, and VA Hospital.
Direct connection between Downtown + North Park Mall, every 30 minutes. No transfer.

Reliable Schedules
Most routes start and end at the same time each day. Only 1 route has reduced service in the middle of the day.
More Saturday service. Two more Saturday routes and 30 minute headways on State Street.

CONNECTJXN TRANSIT PLAN

Example of how new bus route will allow an additional 15,000 people to access Walmart for groceries within an hour.

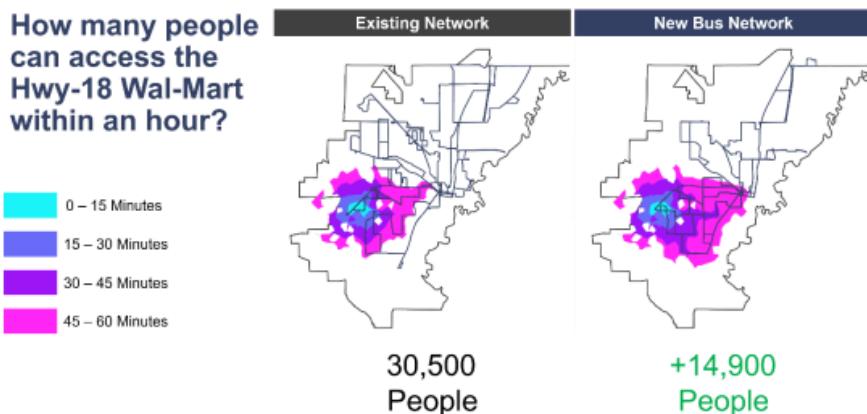


Image from ConnectJXN: Transit Plan. Retrieved from <https://www.jtrantransitplan.com/final-report>. 2 Feb 2022

2. Within the Department of Planning and Development, Fertile Ground helped to embed the view that art can be a tool that "carries forward" and public art can be used as a tool for urban regeneration.

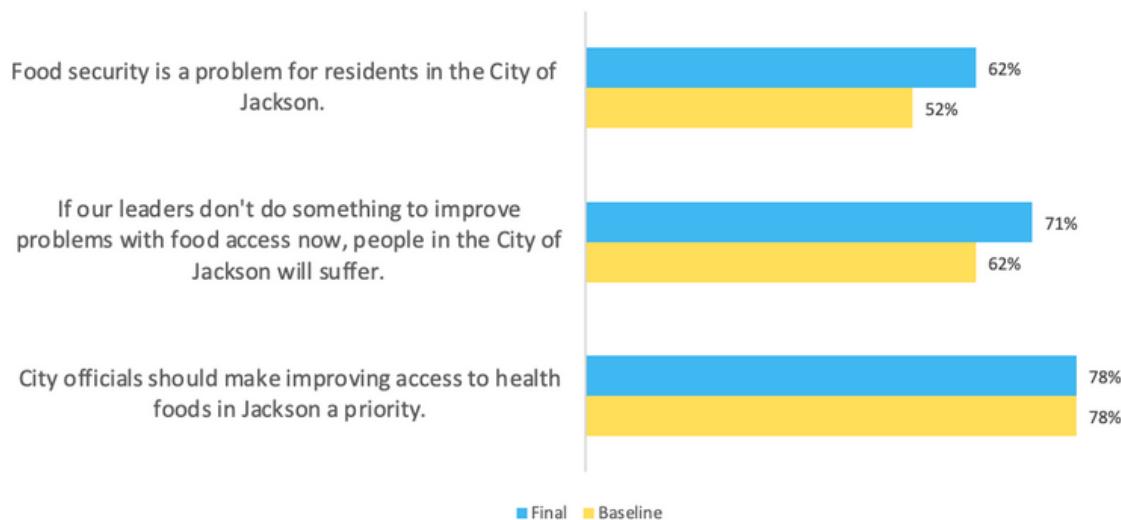
Fertile Ground invested in projects that would have a lasting impact on the City of Jackson and help serve a larger purpose beyond only artistic merit. An example of this is the Galloway Elementary School Learning Garden which is beautiful, educational and has a long-term partnership established to keep the project manageable for Jackson Public Schools and to keep it programmed for the teachers to have the resources to use it. Another example is the murals on Farish Street which helped contribute to a space that the City is trying to repurpose and helps support additional work in that neighborhood.

"A lot of the artwork that was chosen as part of the project, isn't just artwork, it's art but it lives on. One of the things we talked about, is how do we program artwork that also solves a problem and gives us longer-term solutions rather than just a temporary [conversation starter]."

-City Official

3. We didn't see significant shifts in the priority people placed on food security, but did see greater complexity in the way community members talked about how to address the issue.

We didn't see significant shifts in the priority people placed on food security over time. (% strongly agree/ agree)



These data was obtained during the community survey of Jackson residents that was conducted via Qualtrics panel in December 2019/January 2020 and again in December 2021.

When asked what local and state leaders should do to address issues related to food access, most participants from the final community survey said they did not know what should be done (55%). The next most common suggestions were increasing access to healthy foods (25%)—either through different places where people could purchase healthy foods (e.g., more Mom and Pop stores, better grocery stores, more farmers markets)—or by reducing the cost of healthy food. Four percent of participants felt that increased safety (e.g. stronger law enforcement, safer streets) would help to address the issue. These themes were present in similar instances to the baseline survey data. One new theme emerged in the final survey—government support of innovation in farming practice as a means of addressing food access and insecurity.

When comparing baseline and final survey data, responses suggest that residents are thinking more deeply about the complex issues and solutions to food access and security in Jackson. Baseline responses suggested simple solutions such as community gardening or adding a farmer's market. Post-survey responses identified the need for multi-faceted approaches to addressing food access that identified broader, more systemic solutions. Example quotes from the survey's are highlighted below:

Baseline Community Survey

"Create places for community gardens."

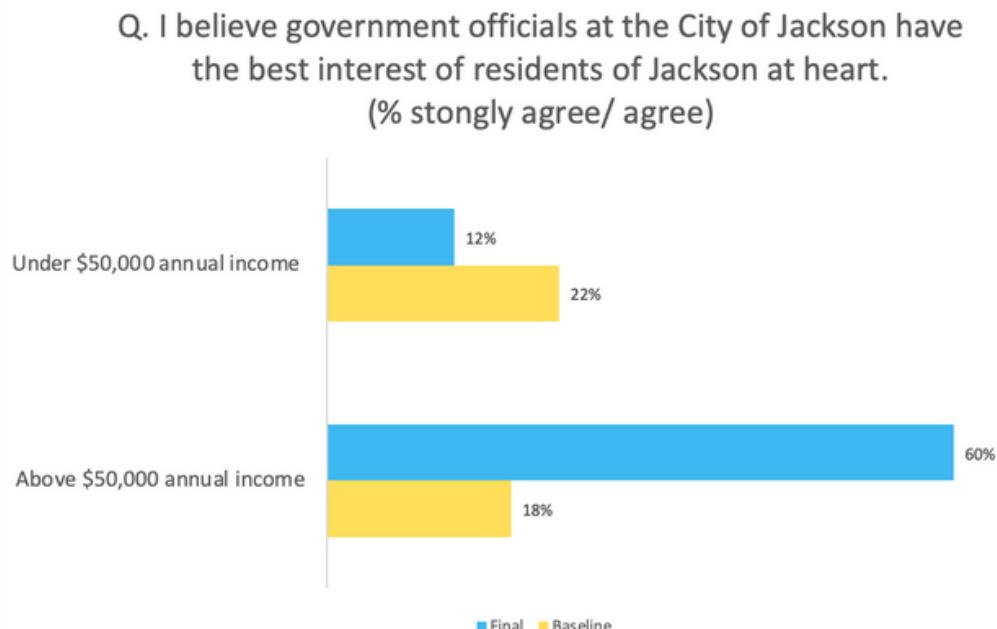
"Improve public transportation options."

Final Community Survey

"Incentivize business and cooperative development with an emphasis on racial and economic justice for Black residents in Jackson. Ensure that all Jacksonians no matter their class status have access to healthy, food choices, education, and nutrition. Develop more community centered urban gardens, local and farm to table food products, a wider array of restaurants in South and West Jackson, and access to equitable transportation/delivery services. Strengthening workers' rights and passing a livable wage! Reviewing the processes for business loans and grants for minority owned business and offering programming for holistic development for entrepreneurs."

"Redesign the JaTran system to eliminate the hub-and-spoke nature of it. Jackson isn't a town where folks who would most benefit from transit need to necessarily get downtown. Therefore, the system as it's designed now doesn't serve a lot of needs. To get to a grocery store, from West Jackson, it takes two bus rides that run on thirty- minute headways. That's not viable for someone with a full-time job and a family to get fresh food without driving a car on roads filled with money sucking potholes."

4. Interestingly, we did see stark differences in attitudes towards (trust in) city government when comparing responses across income brackets.

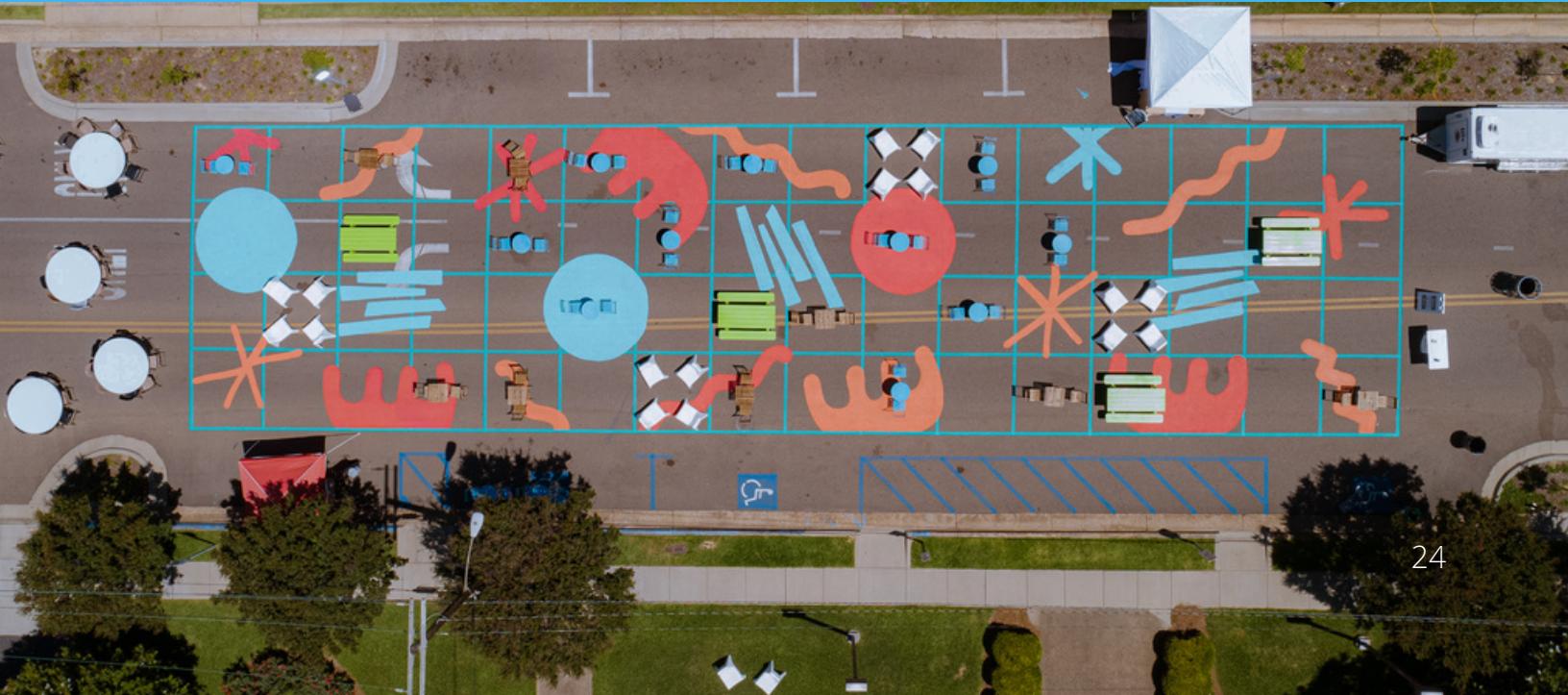


This provides evidence of increased negative perception of city officials in Jackson among those making less than \$50,000 per year. This is a stark contrast to perceptions held by those earning more than \$50,000 per year, which have seen a substantial (42%) increase in people agreeing that City officials have the best interests of residents at heart.

United for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) identifies the annual household survival budget for Mississippi households with 2 adults and 2 children as \$51,972. This is important because those below the ALICE threshold are likely to have a greater need for supports related to food access and insecurity.

4. What changes did we see in terms of place?

1. We saw substantive changes in comfort, protection and enjoyability of public spaces.
2. These were investments that will have long-term benefits and will "live on" and may change the way spaces are used (e.g., lighting, benches).
3. Across the community more broadly, public spaces where Fertile Ground made investments are seen as safer, more unique and more beautiful.
4. Installation sites experienced increased foot traffic, suggesting that public art increases "visibility" of spaces.
5. However, across the community more broadly, we didn't see substantive shifts in the way people view the "livability" of Jackson. This could be due to the limited scope of the survey or the influence of the pandemic.

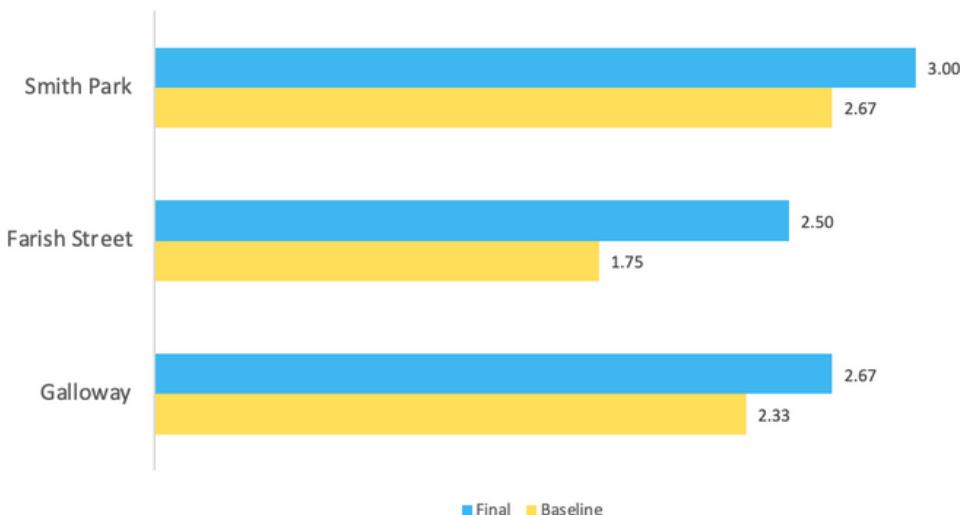


1. We saw substantive changes in comfort, protection and enjoyability of public spaces.

Twelve Quality Criteria is a tool for researching how public spaces are experienced by their users. More specifically, it is used to evaluate whether different features of a public space are protective, comfortable and enjoyable for people spending time there. Each criterion is scored on how well the space lives up to the criterion: 3, 2, or 1 (meaning yes, in between, or no, respectively).

CERE used the Twelve Quality Criteria to assess three of the Fertile Ground sites at two points in time. CERE conducted observations at Smith Park, The Slab, Galloway Elementary and Farish Street prior to installations being placed in Fall 2019. In October 2021, CERE returned to conduct observations to assess the impact of the Fertile Ground installations on the spaces. Observations occurred at eight sites post-installation, however, only three locations - Smith Park, Galloway Elementary and Farish Street - were able to be matched from pre-to-post. Fertile Ground added additional sites as part of the mural series in response to COVID-19.

Observed sites experienced gains in features related to comfort, protection and enjoyability.



Across the three sites, increases in mean scores occurred from baseline to final observation. This means that observed sites experienced enhancements in features related to comfort, protection and enjoyability.



Galloway Elementary Pre-Installation Photo



Galloway Elementary Post-Installation Photo

For example, at Galloway Elementary, enhancements were seen primarily in the area of comfort and enjoyability with increased accessibility features, seating options and visually appealing features such as the raised bed planters and fruit and vegetable graphics. Previously, this space was a slab of concrete behind the school.



Galloway Elementary Pre-Installation Photo



Galloway Elementary Post-Installation Photo

At Farish Street, enhancements were seen across all three areas (i.e., protection, comfort and enjoyability). The space was well maintained and landscaped, and offered protection from unpleasant sensory experiences. New benches provide seating in the space, along with a mural for visual appeal. Previously, the area was a poorly maintained part of Downtown Jackson.



Farish Street Pre-Installation Photo



Farish Street Post-Installation Photo

At Smith Park, enhancements were seen across all three areas (i.e., protection, comfort and enjoyability). New features include raised bed planters for an urban garden, along with long bench seating and a ground mural. Previously, the space had been identified as a place where the homeless congregated.



Smith Park Pre-Installation Photo

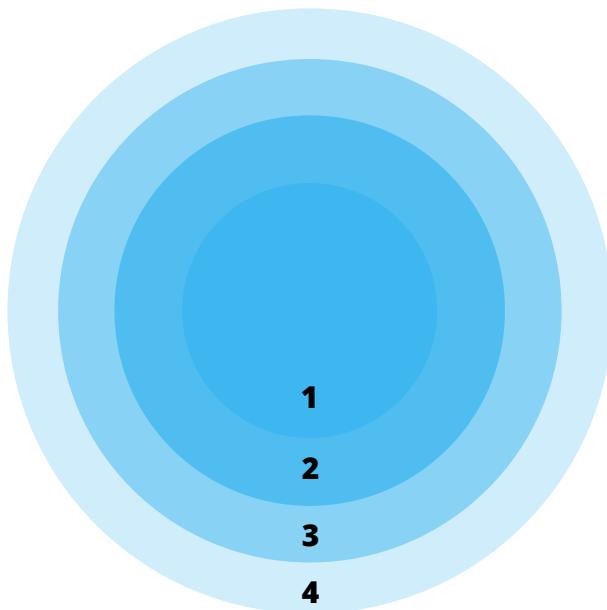


Smith Park Post-Installation Photo

2. These were investments that will have long-term benefits and will "live on" and may change the way spaces are used.

In addition to collecting data to determine the impact of Fertile Ground, we analyzed project-level data to help assess the economic benefits of the project on the City of Jackson. Utilizing the framework provided by the Public Art Challenge national evaluation team, benefits were categorized at four levels: beneficiary benefits (i.e., direct benefits for cities and partners), supplier benefits (i.e., benefits received by artists), user benefits (i.e., direct benefits received by community, businesses as results of project) and spillover benefits (i.e., benefits for other businesses in local area not directly attributed to project).

In mapping these benefits, the grant award from Bloomberg Philanthropies was seen as the initial input, which drove the generation of other benefits, much like ripples when a stone is thrown in a pond. The visual below shows the model onto which benefits were mapped.

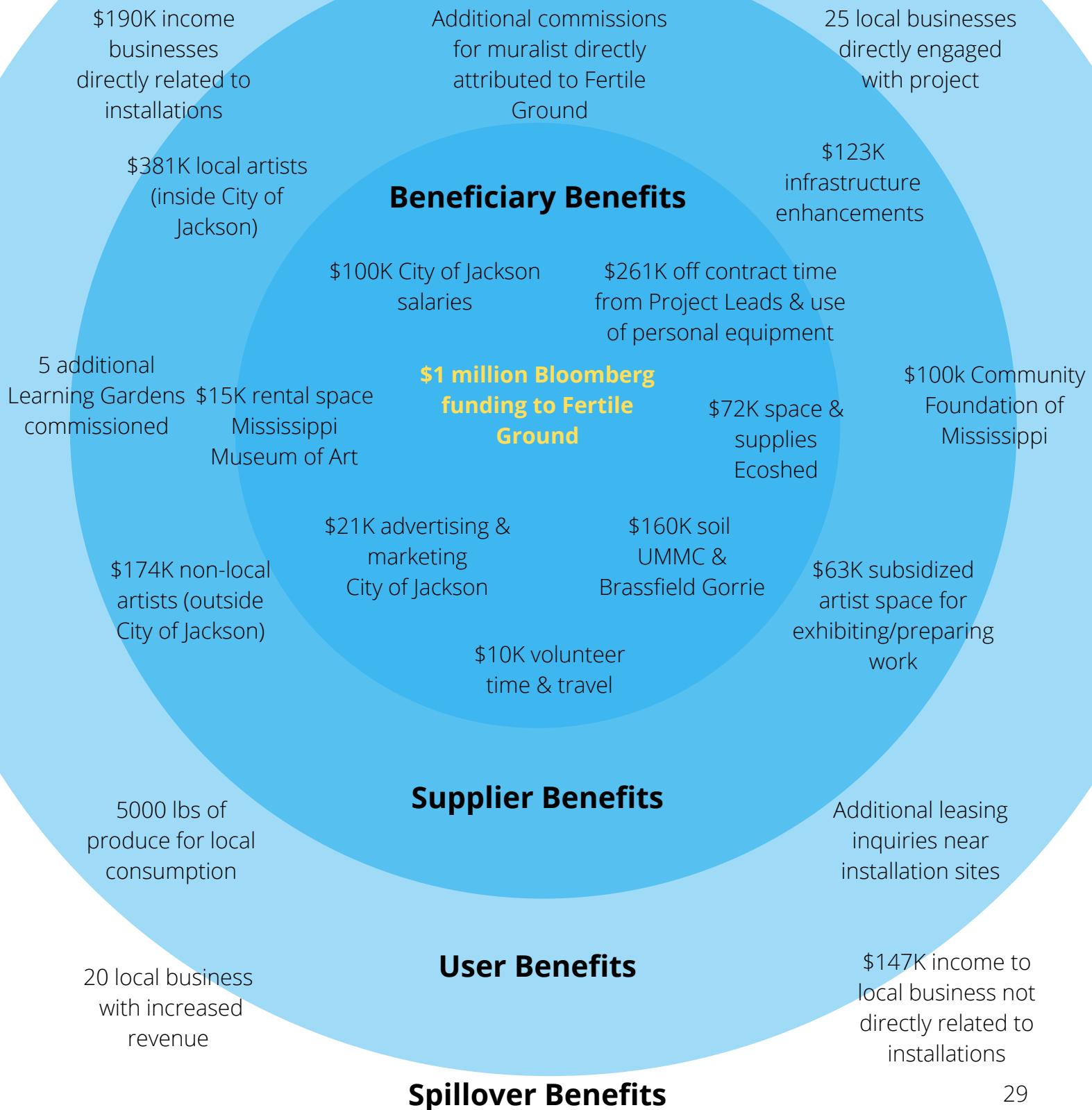


1. Beneficiary Benefits
2. Supplier Benefits
3. User Benefits
4. Spillover Benefits

The primary source of data for this analysis was project-level financial reports. Income, expenses and in-kind contributions were categorized and sorted using the national evaluation framework. A secondary data source was qualitative interviews (used for identifying some user and spillover benefits).

Also, for the purpose of this analysis, local is defined as a business/entity within the City of Jackson.

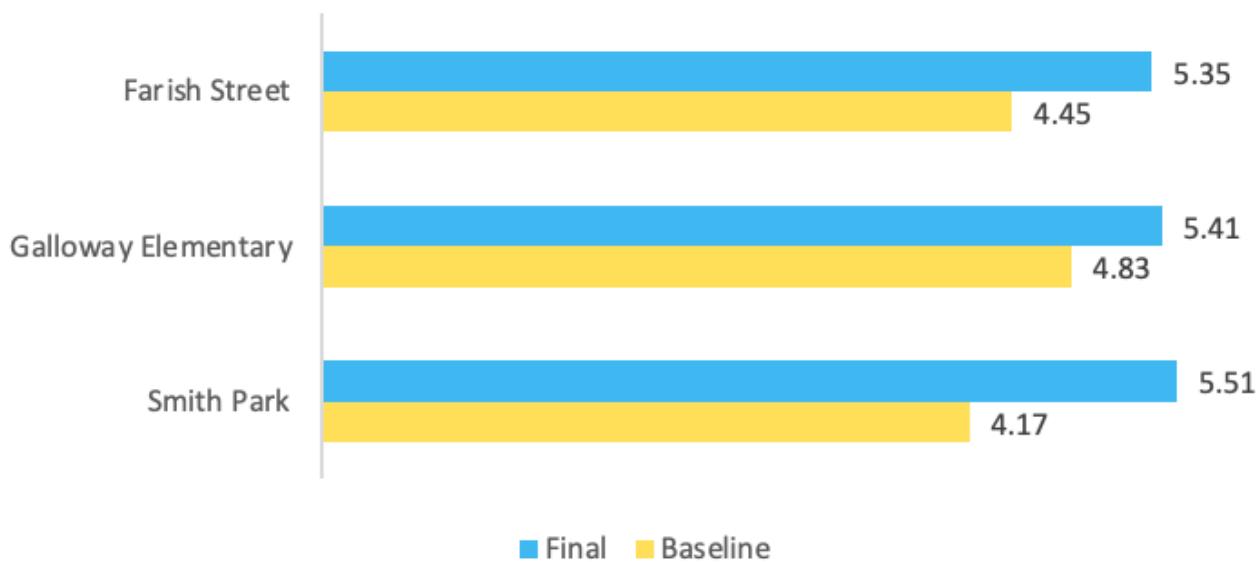
Economic Benefits of Fertile Ground



3. Across the community more broadly, public spaces where Fertile Ground made investments are seen as safer, more unique and more beautiful.

Across those visiting the sites, overall perceptions (a combination of safety, beauty and uniqueness) of the three sites improved in all areas (mean of 5.42 on a 7-point scale where higher scores reflect more positive views as compared to baseline of 4.48) as reported on the baseline and final community survey.

Overall perceptions of the three sites have improved.



Each individual location also reported increases in overall perception of the sites. While this reflects a small sample ($n=2-51$), these data support the observation data collected by evaluators at pre- and post-installation observations.

4. Installation sites experienced increased foot traffic, suggesting that public art increases "visibility" of spaces.

**Baseline Observation
(Fall 2019)**

80

Average people moving count at project sites pre-installations

**Final Observation
(Fall 2021)**

480

Average people moving count at project sites post-installations

During the baseline observation, the weather was cold and wet as compared to the final observation where the weather was sunny and hot. This may have had an impact on foot traffic.

Anecdotally, public art sites have also seen increased economic interest.

"Four business reached out about leasing on property on Farish Street last month. All mentioned Fertile Ground as a motivating factor. There is more excitement about that area now."

-Community Partner

5. Across the community more broadly, we didn't see substantive shifts in the way people view the "livability" of Jackson.

Jackson residents earning under \$50,000 per year have maintained consistent views regarding the livability of Jackson. These views express neutrality/dissatisfaction with living in the City of Jackson. Only one in ten residents would encourage a friend or family member to move to the area.

Baseline

33%

...of people agreed that they are satisfied living in/near the City of Jackson.

Final

34%

...of people agreed that they are satisfied living in/near the City of Jackson.

11%

...of people agreed that they would encourage friends/family to move to Jackson.

12%

...of people agreed that they would encourage friends/family to move to Jackson.

5. What changes did we see in the realm of people and community?

1. Fertile Ground served as a catalyst to additional community investments and opportunities.
2. There have been increases in the frequency of community conversations about food access and food security. These conversations have taken place both privately and publicly.
3. Across the community more broadly, we saw increases in the level of engagement towards food access and increased willingness to take part in food access events.
4. Fertile Ground activities created opportunities to reorient peoples views about food and farming.
5. During the Fertile Ground Expo, we observed an emphasis on black entrepreneurship across the events.
6. We did not see changes in the frequency of community members' conversations about food with colleagues.

1. Fertile Ground served as a catalyst to additional community investments and opportunities.

During the case study interviews with the Galloway Learning Garden team, CERE discovered that the Fertile Ground project has served as a "seed" for additional learning garden projects. Since the installation at Galloway Elementary School, five additional learning gardens have been planted throughout the state. The build of each additional learning garden has in turn led to the next in the series—Galloway to Starkville, Starkville to Leland, Leland to the additional Delta sites. The map below highlights the initial (blue) learning garden and the subsequent (yellow) learning gardens installed.

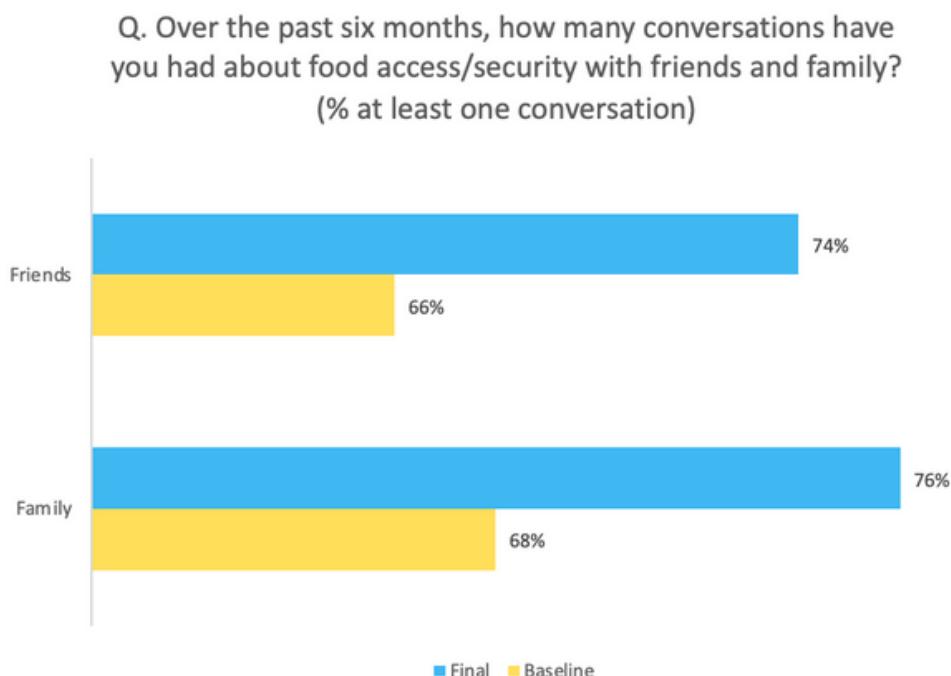
"Fertile Ground was definitely a catalyst that launched the other projects and gave us a model, a prototype to share with others".
- Architect



A Galloway Elementary school teacher serves as the lead on the campus focused on modeling ways to incorporate the learning garden into instruction for his peers. Plans include growing crops that can be donated back to the Galloway neighborhood. Learning gardens in Jackson have historically been unsuccessful due to lack of resources, technical support and community ownership. At Galloway Elementary, Fertile Ground Farms is managing the learning garden for a two-year period. During this time, teachers will be trained on how to teach students using a learning garden.

2. There have been increases in frequency of community conversations about food access and food security. These conversations have taken place both privately and publicly.

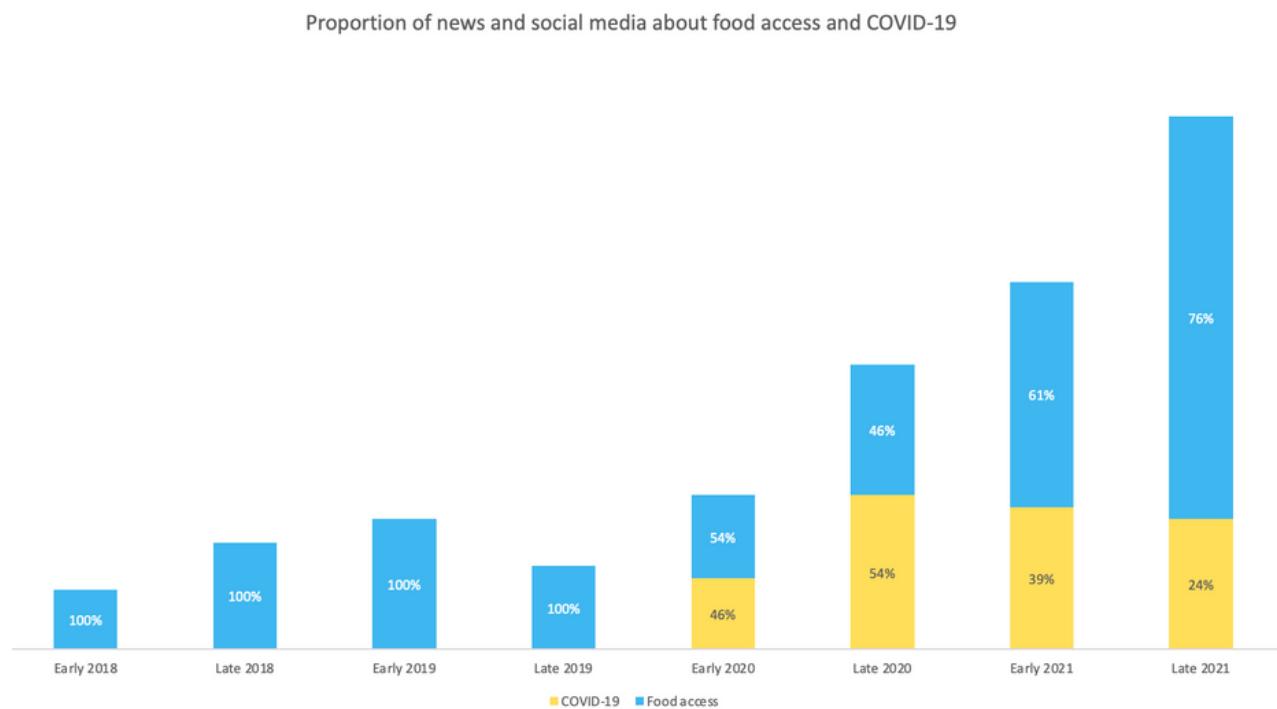
During the survey of Jackson residents, participants were asked how many conversations they had had about food access and security with friends and family during the last six months. In both categories, participants reported increased conversations. COVID-19 may have influenced this increase as it brought increased awareness to issues of food access and security.



Additionally, these data about private conversations are mirrored in data regarding public conversations about food access and security. The evaluation team conducted a content analysis of news and social media to determine whether there was a change in the frequency and nature/content of public discussion related to food access and food security in the Jackson area between 1/1/2018 and 12/31/2021. The content analysis also sought to explore how, if at all, Fertile Ground and COVID-19 led to conversations about and public awareness of food access and insecurity. This analysis coded Mississippi-based news (e.g., Clarion Ledger) and social media (i.e., Twitter) on "food access," "food security," "food insecurity" and "fertile ground."

Fertile Ground Content Analysis

The greatest intensity of articles related to the search terms occurred in Late 2021 with 76% focused on the search terms alone and 24% referencing the search terms and COVID-19. Articles from the late 2021 time period, which coincided with the Fertile Ground Expo, accounted for a third (31%) of the total relevant articles generated during the search. As expected, COVID-19 did not emerge as a secondary theme until Early 2020 and peaked in Late 2020. As time progressed, COVID-19 contributed to a smaller percentage of the articles.



Ultimately, there were more public conversations about food access over time.

3. Across the community more broadly, we saw increases in the level of engagement towards food access and increased willingness to take part in food access events.

Baseline

60%

...of people had not been involved in any community activities related to food/food access.

Final

64%

...of people had been involved in any community activities related to food/food access.

54%

...of people believe they are likely to be involved in any community related activities related to food access security in the next six months.

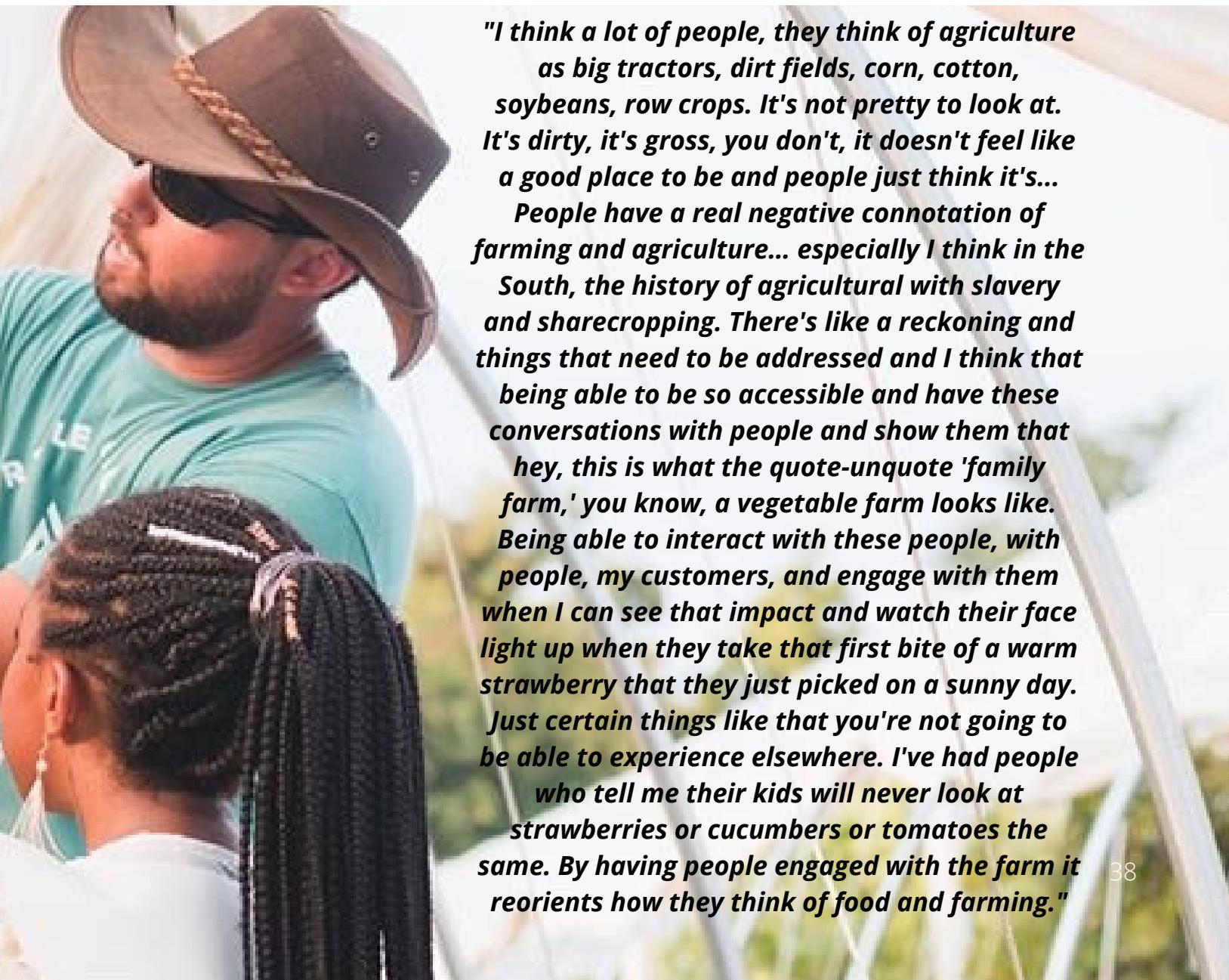
75%

...of people believe they are likely to be involved in any community related activities related to food access security in the next six months.

These findings provide further evidence of increased community engagement in issues of food access.

4. Fertile Ground activities created opportunities to reorient peoples views about food and farming.

Fertile Ground Farms proprietor, Sam Humphrey, serves as the farming contractor for multiple Fertile Ground Project installations. His role is to start plants from seed, install plants, manage the beds and help train students and community members at each site on how to grow food sustainably. He provides technical assistance for farmers within Jackson to grow produce using sustainable agriculture practices. The Fertile Ground project provided him with an urban location for the farm and resources to rapidly start the farm. A key theme throughout his case study interview was the goal of having people engage with the farm as a tool to expand views of food production.



"I think a lot of people, they think of agriculture as big tractors, dirt fields, corn, cotton, soybeans, row crops. It's not pretty to look at. It's dirty, it's gross, you don't, it doesn't feel like a good place to be and people just think it's... People have a real negative connotation of farming and agriculture... especially I think in the South, the history of agricultural with slavery and sharecropping. There's like a reckoning and things that need to be addressed and I think that being able to be so accessible and have these conversations with people and show them that hey, this is what the quote-unquote 'family farm,' you know, a vegetable farm looks like. Being able to interact with these people, with people, my customers, and engage with them when I can see that impact and watch their face light up when they take that first bite of a warm strawberry that they just picked on a sunny day. Just certain things like that you're not going to be able to experience elsewhere. I've had people who tell me their kids will never look at strawberries or cucumbers or tomatoes the same. By having people engaged with the farm it reorients how they think of food and farming."

Muralist Ricardo Moody sees public art as a means of enabling conversations and experiences that help reorient peoples views about food and farming. Moody's artwork, Seeds of Change, was inspired by a conversation in the Fertile Ground Documentary when Dr. Cindy Ayers of Footprint Farms (an urban farm in Jackson, MS) explains if "they can just plant seeds in people's minds to help change their mind to see that they have the power in their hands to help change the community for the better and to create their own food security where they live."

"We're creating a visible message for people that's always the goal for art, or in my opinion, at least mural art. I mean, it should help either generate conversation or jump on the bandwagon of conversation that's already happening. And it should definitely create a safe, inviting space."

-Artist



5. During the Fertile Ground Expo, we observed an emphasis on black entrepreneurship across the events.

Over the course of the Fertile Ground Expo, a distinct theme naturally emerged from field observations of events—an emphasis on black wealth/entrepreneurship. This theme first emerged at the Ribbon Cutting for the Learning Garden at Galloway Elementary, but rippled across the series of events. At the Magnolia Sunset Market, the theme was prevalent as over 30 BIPOC vendors were present; during the workshop series, four of seven sessions touched on entrepreneurship as a means of decreasing food insecurity; and Jackson Chef Enrika Williams raised the issue of black entrepreneurship in her closing acknowledgements during the Burnt Sienna dinner.

6. We did not see changes in conversations about food with colleagues.

While increasing public and private conversations around issues of food access and food security were observed through Jackson resident survey data and analysis of news articles, one public realm that did not see changes was the workplace. The number of residents reporting conversations with co-workers was consistent from baseline (49%) to final (48%) resident survey.

**Q. Over the past six months, how many conversations have you had about food access/security with friends and family?
(% at least one conversation)**



Lessons Learned/ Recommendations

1. Exploring the benefits of private-public partnerships in future grant making should be a priority of Bloomberg Philanthropies and Public Art Challenge grantees.

Utilization of the Community Foundation of Mississippi as the fiscal agent expedited the financial processes related to management of the grant. This was highlighted as an advantage during the case study interview with Jordan Hillman of the Planning and Development Department of the City of Jackson and by Fertile Ground program staff during meetings with the national evaluation team.

"If we had had to handle the money as the city, we would've had to follow all of our state procurement laws, which means we wouldn't have been able to hand-pick projects, we would not have been able to just pick our artists and our partners... And that would've just really probably taken our capacity away. I don't think we could have been able to do it without that public private-partnership. It also kept the politics out of it."

2. Embed future Public Art Challenge projects in policy making departments of city government.

Having grant awardees housed within the Planning and Development Department meant that the public art-public policy connection was more tangible. This meant that policy changes could be affected more directly. This is a model that could be replicated with success. Jordan Hillman highlighted the importance of having people in place who can directly influence policy change:

"There are a lot of nonprofits and activist groups that have really good understandings of issues, but don't have the policy seat to change it. So sitting in the policy seat is huge. I think that's a really good model for these types of projects being married to a nonprofit that can handle the finances and the money and the procurement, and not have to deal with the government side of those things, but having the policy people at the table that can make the change."

3. Evaluation results need to be shared throughout the grant implementation.

Early findings contributed to policy changes that will have lasting positive effects for Jackson residents. Use of an "evaluation advisory group" can be a tool to help disseminate findings to a larger group of stakeholders. For the CERE evaluation team, hearing Jackson city officials share the significance of the baseline community survey data in understanding community needs affirmed the value of communicating findings throughout the project and in user-friendly ways.

4. The Fertile Ground project maximized project impact by approaching the issue of food access and security from a myriad of artistic lens and having project leadership that could connect with the artist experience.

Throughout the success case interviews, the value of project leaders who had both experience in the field and the ability to allow the artists to be experts was repeated. Salam Rida and Travis Crabtree's backgrounds in urban design were pivotal to the success of the project. Case study interview participants involved in the murals, Galloway Elementary Learning Garden and Fertile Ground Farms each highlighted the importance of project leaders who had the ability to relate to the artist experience on a professional level and see ways to approach the project from different lens.

"I think even the fact that Travis and Salam their background in architecture and urban design has been super beneficial to the overall project. They're coming at the issue from a bunch of different directions, which is pretty neat. It's not just painting, but it's holistic."

"But I think the structure and the teams that they put together allowed for that kind of multifaceted, multi-pronged approach to be undertaken by the appropriate investigators and artists to be able to manage those things. And it was, I'm sure, a huge amount of organizational effort on their side to keep everything rolling, but it's always a good idea to get other interested, smart people involved and let them do what they're good at."

Conclusion

The Fertile Ground Project, a Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge awardee, served as a catalyst for change across the City of Jackson.

In regards to policy and practice, Fertile Ground enabled conversations that led to tangible policy change. Government officials see public art as more than just a conversation starter, and now view it as a resource that can lead to long-term solutions for problem facing the city. Community members are thinking more deeply about the complex issues and solutions to food access and security in Jackson.

In terms of place, Fertile Ground supported substantive changes in the comfort, protection, and enjoyment of public spaces. Public spaces are now seen as safer, more beautiful and more unique. Fertile Ground stimulated additional community investments and opportunities.

In the realm of people and the community, Fertile Ground created opportunities to reorient peoples views about food and farming. There have been increases in frequency of community conversations about food access and food security, both publicly and privately. Across the community more broadly, there have been increases in the level of engagement towards food access and increased willingness to take part in food access events.

