Inspiring Resident Engagement: Identifying Street Tree Stewardship Participation Strategies in Environmental Justice Communities Using a Community-Based Social Marketing Approach

Edith de Guzman, Rachel Malarich, Lori Large, and Sharon Danoff-Burg

Abstract. Tree-planting municipalities and organizations face multiple challenges to achieving thriving urban forests, among which is providing establishment-period care to young trees. In arid and semi-arid regions in particular, delivering water to trees is a resource- and time-intensive activity often not covered by funding specified for tree planting. This study sought to address the need for establishment-period care by producing a replicable approach to engaging residents in environmental justice communities to actively care for young street trees planted in front of their homes. Using community-based social marketing in the community of Huntington Park (Los Angeles County, California, U.S.), researchers investigated socioeconomic and cultural characteristics to barriers and motivators regarding tree stewardship (i.e., watering, mulching, and weeding) and developed an outreach program strategy accordingly. The program was pilot-tested and evaluated for effectiveness in changing behaviors. Active, in-person outreach (door-to-door engagement with residents using program materials and demonstrating tree care actions) was tested against passive outreach (program materials were left at the doorstep); both were compared to baseline conditions. Evaluation of soil moisture, tree health, and presence of mulch was conducted over a six-week period after program outreach. Trees at homes in the active outreach group had significantly higher soil moisture, more mulch, and better observed health than trees at homes in the passive outreach group. Both groups had better outcomes as compared to pre-outreach baseline conditions. Results indicate that tree planting programs with limited resources for maintenance may find success in fostering tree stewardship among residents through active engagement.

Key Words. Behavior Change; California; Community Forestry; Community-Based Social Marketing; Environmental Justice; Environmental Psychology; Los Angeles; Nonprofit Organization; Resident Engagement; Social Marketing; Stewardship; Watering.

Newly planted urban trees face multiple challenges, including restrictively small tree wells and risk of damage in high-traffic areas. Trees that reach maturity also face threats from pests and diseases, such as polyphagous shot hole borer and *Xylella fastidiosa*, as well as ongoing challenges of funding adequate for maintenance and pruning cycles in cities like Los Angeles (City of Los Angeles 2015; University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources 2017). In many cities, trees also lack protection in the face of redevelopment trends, which favor larger homes and higher ratios of hardscape, all while tree canopy cover inequity persists between higher- and lower-income neighborhoods (Pincetl 2010; Lee et al. 2017). In arid and semi-arid regions like Southern California, U.S., tree planting program managers must also contend with the question of how trees will be watered during the multi-year establishment period. Watering is not the only tree maintenance activity required in the establishment period of young trees, but is a frequent action and a determining factor in the ultimate success or failure of a planting program. While establishment is inconsistently defined and measured in the literature, for the purposes of this study researchers define an established tree as one that becomes fully connected to the hydrologic cycle of the growing site and does not need further irrigation, except
in severe drought (Levinsson et al. 2017). In
temporal terms, the City of Los Angeles refer-
cences a three-year watering period, while its
permitting process has historically required a
five-year watering commitment from home-
owners (Pincetl 2010; City of Los Angeles 2015).

Limited funding is a major obstacle to
providing establishment care; deliver-
ing water to trees is time-intensive and
requires sufficient funding resources
(Jack-Scott et al. 2013). Because urban
tree planting locations are often scattered
over large geographic areas rather than
concentrated in smaller areas, the task
of watering can be logistically complex.

Tree-planting municipalities and organiza-
tions operate with limited resources, calling
for effective solutions for establishment-period
tree care to be identified and adopted. In the
absence of readily viable solutions for providing
stewardship of young trees, engaging commu-
nity members emerges as a critically impor-
tant possibility, which encourages researchers
to ask whether behavior change strategies
can be used to involve residents in the care
of trees so as to allow a larger proportion of
resources to be allocated to tree planting. If
behavior change strategies prove effective,
tree-planting municipalities and organiza-
tions may have a choice other than paying for
regular rounds of watering, which results in
less funding available for new trees. Instead,
municipalities may be able to engage in creat-
ing a social norm around tree watering and care
among residents in the communities they serve.

Social and stewardship factors, including a
neighborhood’s sociability and signs of direct
tree care actions, such as weeding, are predic-
tors of a young tree’s success or failure (Lu et
al. 2010), and increased tree stewardship by
residents is regarded as necessary to sustain
potential benefits of tree planting programs
(Moskell and Allred 2013). The role of tree
care in establishment care of residential trees,
too, is well understood (Roman et al. 2014).
This study explored the viability of engaging
residents in urban tree stewardship by inves-
tigating their perspectives, which tree care
actions lie within the realm of reasonable
expectation, and which strategies organiza-
tions and municipalities can use to support
residential participation in tree care. The selec-
tion of Huntington Park, an under-resourced
city in Los Angeles County, California, was
deliberate so that viable strategies could
be explored for increasing tree canopy and
associated benefits in an area disproportio-
nately burdened by environmental inequities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Community-Based Social Marketing
A commonly used approach to fostering pro-
environmental behaviors is marketing cam-
paigns aimed at increasing awareness through
media efforts, but a growing body of scientific
research demonstrates that provision of infor-
mation rarely results in the adoption of such
behaviors (McKenzie-Mohr 2011). Community-
based social marketing (CBSM) has emerged
as an effective alternative to traditional edu-
cation campaigns (Schultz and Tabanico 2008;
McKenzie-Mohr 2011; McKenzie-Mohr et al.
2011). CBSM is based on social science research
that demonstrates behavior change can be ef-
effectively achieved through initiatives delivered
at the community level and focused on remov-
ing barriers to an activity while simultaneously
enhancing its benefits. CBSM brings together
knowledge from the field of social market-
ing with a variety of behavior change “tools”
drawn from social psychology, environmental
psychology, and other behavioral sciences.

CBSM has been used by nonprofit organi-
zations to create socially desirable behavior
changes to support areas such as safe driv-
ing and healthy lifestyles, and by government
agencies to increase compliance with environ-
mental laws, where it has been shown to be
effective in increasing understanding and com-
pliance with such laws, and in improving cost-
effectiveness of programs (Kennedy 2010). Dil-
ley and Wolf (2013) used CBSM to understand
homeowner attitudes toward residential trees,
but to date it has not been used to investigate
residential participation in street tree stew-
ardship. CBSM involves five steps (Figure 1).
Huntington Park is an incorporated community located in southeast Los Angeles County, California. With a population of 58,114, this 3 mi² (7.77 km²) city has one of the highest population densities in the county, as well as one of the highest percentages of Latinos: 97.1% of residents identify as Latino, predominantly from Mexico, and many are recent immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau 2010; Los Angeles Times 2017a; Los Angeles Times 2017b). The median age is 24, young compared to the rest of the county (Los Angeles Times 2017c). Almost 60% of households have children under 18, and nearly 95% of residents speak Spanish, with more than half having difficulty with English (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). About 60% of adults have not obtained a high school diploma, and only one in 20 adults has a four-year degree (SCAG 2015).

The median household income is USD $34,887, lower than the county’s median of $56,196 and the state’s median of $59,540 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Nearly three-fourths of homes are renter-occupied (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Average household size is 3.9 people, which is high for the county, and over one-third of households have five or more occupants (SCAG 2015; Los Angeles Times 2017d). It is not uncommon to have up to 10 people in a home, with multiple generations in a household; non-relatives may also live in the household (C. Basurto, personal communication). As in other parts of southeastern Los Angeles County, concerns over gentrification exist. Huntington Park has no rent control ordinance, and with rent and property costs rising throughout the county the prospect that low-income residents could be priced out of their neighborhoods looms large.

With regard to the study topic, there exists within the community a general appreciation for plants, caring for land and community, and enjoying parks and public outdoor spaces, which are frequently used for a range of family and community celebrations (C. Basurto, personal communication). Huntington Park is subject to a number of environmental inequities relative to other communities in the region and state, and has a history of activism aimed at addressing environmental injustices, led by such groups as Communities for a Better Environment. Cal EnviroScreen, a tool developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) on behalf of the California Environmental Protection Agency to help identify communities disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution and with population characteristics that make them more sensitive to pollution, classifies Huntington Park’s neighborhoods in the 81%–85% and 91%–95% groups for experiencing high levels of pollution and vulnerability (OEHHA 2017). Huntington Park is the site of several brownfields, a result of both heavy manufacturing in the community until the 1960s and a proximity to the industrial city of Vernon (U. S. Environmental Protection Agency 2015). Huntington Park has an estimated 15% canopy cover, lower than the county’s overall number of 28% (TreePeople 2011). This is consistent with the inequitable distribution of tree canopy in the region, with research confirming that lower-income communities of color, especially those in arid climates, experience disproportionately low levels of canopy cover (Schwarz et al. 2015).

Health and environmental conditions made Huntington Park a compelling candidate for this study. Additionally, City staff was supportive, collaborative, and responsive. As community interest grew in the tree planting program, the City partnered with TreePeople, an urban forestry organization, to plant hundreds of street trees in residential areas and make space available in a Public Works Department yard for trees, mulch, stakes, and secure tool storage for TreePeople staff. Founded in Los Angeles in 1973, TreePeople helped launch a city-based...
voluntary urban forestry movement through its signature Citizen Forestry approach of equipping communities to take on planting and caring for trees (Lipkis and Lipkis 1990; Johnston 1996). TreePeople’s partnership with the City presented an opportunity to build on its history of shaping the urban forestry movement by testing whether social norms around resident tree stewardship could be fostered.

In the past decade, the City of Los Angeles has been the subject of urban forest efforts, research, and evaluation, particularly connected with the Million Trees Los Angeles initiative (McPherson et al. 2008; Pincetl 2010), but the City of Huntington Park and other neighboring cities lag behind. TreePeople’s work in Huntington Park began in 2010 with an opportunity to partner with the nonprofit organization Communities for a Better Environment to quickly bring about tangible improvements as they also worked on longer-term goals to improve air quality and public health. Communities for a Better Environment invited TreePeople to use its Citizen Forester en Español program to teach community members how to plan a neighborhood tree planting. Several volunteer planting events were subsequently held, with one of the first projects initiated over community concerns that the City was slated to pave empty tree wells due to an insufficient planting and tree care budget.

In 2014, TreePeople appointed a staff member and Huntington Park resident to the role of Regional Manager for this community. She built an on-the-ground program, starting with five students and growing to 30 eager participants in its first season. At summer’s end, some students noted that without their continued volunteering the trees would suffer in the lingering heat, which prompted them to meet regularly to care for the trees. The youth program has since grown to more than 60 regular volunteers, with 30 trained and committed as TreePeople Volunteer Supervisors, and as many as 6 interns at one time. Most volunteers come from two local high schools, which have been instrumental in organizing numerous plantings since the program began. These efforts by the City of Huntington Park, Communities for a Better Environment, TreePeople, and dozens of regular volunteers point to a commitment for planting public spaces in the community. This commitment has resulted in nearly $1 million in funding and is poised to receive more, making this study’s findings immediately applicable to current and future planting efforts.

Research Methodology
TreePeople undertook the responsibility of directing the study’s multiple phases of research. Research phases included a literature review, focus groups, a survey, development and implementation of a pilot program, and evaluation of the pilot program.

Literature review
A literature review was conducted and its key findings informed subsequent research through focus groups and surveys. The review pointed to research gaps that warranted further inquiry, such as more granular characterization of attitudes toward trees, perceptions of who should be responsible for trees, and perceived benefits and barriers to tree care within a predominantly Latino, environmental justice community like Huntington Park. The literature shows that, while trees are not seen as problem-free, public perception of trees is generally highly positive both among a volunteering public and a general public (Lohr et al. 2004). Opinions toward trees are more positive for residents who have a tree planted in front of their property (Gorman 2004), and while urban residents may have varying willingness to donate or volunteer in support of urban tree programs, the notion that the government is ultimately responsible for public trees holds strong (Zhang et al. 2007). Volunteer motivation aligns with the desire to improve one’s neighborhood, and personal satisfaction is more strongly tied to tree care with existing volunteers and tree planting with potential volunteers (Still and Gerhold 1997). Also relevant was the finding that intervention-focused programs designed to make environmental behaviors easier to engage were more effective than ones focused on consciousness raising and attitude change (Summit and Sommer 1998).
Focus groups
Informed by the literature review, two focus groups were conducted with the aim of uncovering benefits and barriers to stewardship of trees—specifically young street trees in front of residential parcels. Two distinct groups were targeted: Group 1 was a “Tree Care Group,” in which people currently or had recently stewarded trees; Group 2 was a “Non-Tree Care Group,” in which people had not recently or were not currently conducting such stewardship, either at home or as part of volunteering or work. Holding separate focus groups allowed questions to be tailored for addressing motivations versus barriers in meaningful ways to participants. Further, participants who did not perform tree care could speak freely and not feel social pressure from those who had.

The number of attendees ranged from 8 to 12, and focus groups were conducted largely in Spanish with semi-structured interview questions. Attendees were recruited by TreePeople’s regional manager for this community, herself a resident of Huntington Park. Care was taken to include attendees representative of the greater community: a mix of working-class men and women of varying ages, mostly of Latino descent. Most Group 1 attendees had a history of involvement with TreePeople, either as volunteers or educational workshop participants. Many attendees in Group 1 knew one another, whereas Group 2 attendees did not. The two focus groups were held at a community recreation center on two consecutive Thursday evenings in October 2015. Focus groups were facilitated by bilingual anthropology students of California State University Northridge, an advanced graduate student in applied anthropology from California State University Long Beach, and TreePeople staff. Compensation to participants was offered in the form of $25 gift cards to local restaurants and markets. The themes discussed in each focus group are summarized in Table 1.

Surveys
Surveys informed by focus group findings were conducted door-to-door by youth volunteers from the community and while under the supervision of TreePeople’s regional manager. Homes on streets with young trees in the parkways were targeted, and pre-notification postcards were sent to alert residents that a survey team would be visiting on a specific date. The survey was crafted to identify barriers to, and motivations for, caring for trees and assessed attitudes toward trees, barriers to caring for trees, yard infrastructure, current plant- and tree-care habits, and demographics. Attitudes toward trees were measured by a series of eight statements (e.g., Having a tree in every yard is good for my neighborhood). Barriers to caring for trees were assessed by a series of 10 statements (e.g., Carrying a 20-L bucket of water would be difficult for me). For both sets of statements, respondents rated their level of agreement using a scale from 1 to 7 (where 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree). Infrastructure and current plant- and tree-care behaviors were measured by asking if respondents had currently cared for plants or trees by mulching, watering, or weeding (each asked separately), and if they had water hoses, the location of spigots, and the type of irrigation system in the yard. Lastly, respondents were asked about demographic classifications, such as age, educational attainment, number in household, home ownership, and income.

A total of 88 households participated in the survey. Respondents who completed the survey were offered a $10 gift card to a neighborhood store or restaurant. Survey teams represented TreePeople; it is thus possible that responses were more favorable toward trees as a result. Results are shown in Figure 2 (Attitudes Toward Trees), Figure 3 (Infrastructure for Watering), Figure 4 (Current Plant-Care Behaviors), Figure 5 (Barriers to Caring for a Tree), Figure 6 (Benefits to Caring for a Tree), and Figure 7 (Likelihood of Watering Their Tree). Additionally, when asked if they currently had plants they took care of, 77% of respondents stated that they did. Those who answered yes were then asked if they used mulch or compost, to which 58.2% answered yes.
Table 1. Focus group themes and outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Tree care group (Group 1)</th>
<th>Non-tree care group (Group 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban forests</td>
<td>Urban forests seen as beneficial. Activity of tree care only mentioned by tree care group; both groups mentioned planting trees. Benefits cited include shade, aesthetic value, climate change mitigation/adaptation, stormwater capture, improving air quality, and providing oxygen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience with trees</td>
<td>Mentioned rural experiences in which tree care was common; mentioned community programs.</td>
<td>Mentioned recent tree planting community programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sufficiency of trees and tree care</td>
<td>Respondents do not believe there are enough trees in their area or sufficient tree care. Do not think it is a priority of the city to care for trees.</td>
<td>Do not believe there are enough trees in their area. It is often too hot due to lack of shade, so people stay indoors. Do not believe the city takes care of the trees well; youth vandalism of trees is a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positives about community</td>
<td>Central location. Sociability of people in community</td>
<td>Trees. Residents (calm, safe community).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why care for trees?</td>
<td>Childhood memories, connection to nostalgia.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges/barriers</td>
<td>Knowledge transfer—too few parents know or care about trees, so this is passed on to children; lack of land for trees (renting); false idea among residents that city will take care of trees; lack of help or support from city; lack of awareness about which trees to plant that have non-invasive root systems; expense (tree trimming and root damage to pipes can be expensive); city owns trees but does not care for them, which limits what residents feel they can do; lack of time.</td>
<td>City does not care about trees; trees get entangled in power lines; trees leave droppings on sidewalks, cars; trees take more water to care for; residents are lazy; there is a lack of space for new trees; potential danger (possibly in tree trimming); residents believe it is the city's responsibility to care for trees</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Figure 2. Results of 88 survey responses in Huntington Park. The question asked was: "Using a scale from one to seven, where one means strongly disagree and seven means strongly agree, please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements." Response means and distributions are represented.
Figure 3. Results of 88 survey responses in Huntington Park. Participants were asked if they have the infrastructure necessary to water a tree. The figure shows the percentage of respondents who answered yes.

Figure 4. Results of 88 survey responses in Huntington Park. When asked if they currently had plants they took care of, 77% of the respondents stated that they did. Those that answered yes were then asked if they used mulch or compost, to which 58.2% answered yes. Participants who stated that they take care of plants in their yard were asked who takes responsibility for water and weeding. The percentages for the response categories are displayed in the figure.

Figure 5. Results of 88 survey responses in Huntington Park. Respondents were asked about a number of barriers to tree care. The question was asked: "Using a scale from one to seven, where one means strongly disagree and seven means strongly agree, please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements." There were no notable differences between owners and renters. Response means and distributions are represented.
Developing Program Strategies

The literature review, focus groups, and survey findings informed the development of the pilot program and related materials. Researchers first identified a short list of non-divisible, end-state behaviors to target. Non-divisible behaviors are actions that cannot be divided further. For example, “caring for a tree” can further be divided into watering, mulching, pruning, and weeding. End-state behaviors are those that produce the desired environmental outcome. Using this approach, care for young trees was defined as performing four distinct actions at specific frequencies, with actions simplified as easy-to-follow instructions: 1) Weekly – Assess the need to water by placing index finger approx. 7.5–10 cm, or 3–4 in, into the soil; 2) Weekly – If needed, use approx. 57 L, or 15 gal, of water delivered by hose, and while on a slow stream, run the water for approximately 15 minutes; 3) Monthly – Remove weeds as needed; 4) Every six months – Spread 10 cm, or 4 in, or the length of an index finger, of mulch from the base of the tree outward to the root line, as needed.

Addressing barriers and leveraging benefits

Next, researchers outlined findings and strategies to address practical and perceived barriers to mulching, watering, and weeding young trees, as identified in the survey. Among these barriers, three findings emerged as most significant:
• Finding 1: “It is the responsibility of the city to care for trees”
• Finding 2: “I don’t want to pay for water needed to care for trees.”
• Finding 3: “Carrying a bucket is difficult.”

Numerous strategies were identified to address each of these findings, including:
• Demonstrating a social norm by showing the high percentage of residents currently caring for plants.
• Using testimonials to communicate that residents value the trees and want to take care of them.
• Educating residents about what it takes to care for the tree and that the responsibility for taking care of the trees is consistent with community values.
• Utilizing vivid communication (an educational strategy that uses graphics) to demonstrate that watering a young tree costs less than $5 per year annually, using local water rates. The cost was compared to that of a common, relatable grocery item—in this case a dozen eggs, so that the per-month cost was the equivalent of one egg.
• Using a hose to water the tree, or if using a bucket is desirable, filling the bucket at the tree with a hose so carrying a full bucket is not necessary.

In addition to these strategies, a prompt was developed to help remind residents to check their tree weekly. A weekly activity that occurs commonly in the community, and to which a tree care prompt could be tethered, was identified: street cleaning. Most Huntington Park residents do not have private parking and are prompted to move their cars to avoid a ticket, and so associating tree care with this weekly behavior was logical.

In addition to barriers, Huntington Park residents widely associate many benefits with performing tree care. To leverage this finding, commitment was used to encourage engagement in tree care, coupled with self-perception language that explains how tree care behaviors are consistent with current community plant-care behaviors and values. CBSM posits that commitment is a powerful tool to encourage behavior change, especially when the commitment is visible to others (McKenzie-Mohr 2011). Residents were asked to commit to taking care of their trees and make their commitment public by placing a static-cling sticker in their front window to display their commitment.

Another consideration was to determine which entity would be the face of the program. Surveys indicated that “the city” (City of Huntington Park) and a “community group” (TreePeople) would be equally good messengers. The project team made the decision to use TreePeople in the branding of the materials so they could be used in communities outside of Huntington Park if the program was found to be successful.

Testing Outreach Methods: No Outreach Versus Passive Versus Active
The study tested whether outreach produced better results than no outreach, and further, whether in-person, active outreach was more effective than passive outreach. Both outreach strategies included distribution of program materials between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. on a Saturday in March 2017, but differed in the approach used. Three neighborhoods in the area were identified as having recently-planted parkway trees. One had been targeted for surveys and thus residents were potentially influenced, leaving the two remaining neighborhoods available for the pilot.

Neighborhood 1: Active outreach via in-person engagement. An effort was made to speak in person with residents in the area assigned to receive active outreach (36 homes). Pre-notification fliers were left on the doors of the homes prior to the pilot outreach date to alert residents in advance. During outreach, teams knocked on doors or spoke with residents if they happened to intercept them outside, delivered a script verbally, offered and explained the materials package, and invited residents to observe a demonstration of tree care. Outreach teams were bilingual, and conversations with residents were held in either English or Spanish to accommodate resident preference. If residents did not answer, an outreach package was left at the door containing an instructional magnet (Figure 8a), air freshener prompt (Figure 8b), commitment sticker (Figure 8c), and a letter that reinforced the messages delivered in the in-person script. Teams performed tree care whether the resident was present or not.
Neighborhood 2: Passive outreach via a package of materials left at the door or doorstep, with no effort to engage with residents. This group also consisted of 36 homes. Teams left a package containing the same materials listed for Neighborhood 1 at the door or doorstep. Teams made no attempt to interact with residents. Residents did not receive in-person engagement and teams did not conduct tree care activities.

Evaluation Methodology
Baseline observations were collected at each site prior to the pilot program launch, and evaluation of the two program strategies was conducted over a six-week period following outreach. Evaluation consisted of: 1) moisture meter readings taken every other day; and 2) weekly observations made on presence of mulch and weeds, as well as tree health (using observations of trunk, branch and leaf health). Photos were also taken to document tree health and any other observed issues were noted. The same teams conducted the observations throughout the period for consistency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Findings
Data analyses of the three outcomes—soil moisture, tree health, and presence of mulch—were conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between the two outreach methods. Baseline data were collected at only one time-point and thus not included in the statistical analyses but are nevertheless presented in the figures for visual contrast to the evaluation data. In addition to the three outcomes listed above, observations were made regarding the presence of weeds, but those data were not ultimately reported in analyses because weeds were removed by outreach teams on the pilot launch day for the active group but not for the passive group sample, making the data inconclusive.

Sixteen of 36 households in the active outreach group opened their doors and received the communication in-person. At six weeks following outreach, trees at homes in this outreach group had significantly higher soil moisture, more mulch, and better observed health than trees at homes in the passive outreach group. However, as some residents in this outreach group were not reached, two sets of analyses were conducted. A set of primary analyses compared all residents in Neighborhood 1 in the active outreach group (N = 36) with all residents in Neighborhood 2 in the passive outreach group (N = 36). A set of secondary analyses excluded from the active outreach group the 20 residents in Neighborhood 1 who did not answer their doors. Treatment of those 20 residents resembled that of the passive outreach group in that they had no in-person interaction. Treatment of these residents differed from the passive outreach group in that they received pre-outreach notifications, so data from this subgroup were thus excluded from the analysis rather than combined with data from the passive outreach group. Consequently, the secondary analysis compared the original passive outreach group (N = 36) with a smaller active outreach group (N = 16). Results of the primary analyses are shown in Figure 9 (soil moisture), Figure 10 (mulch), and Figure 11 (tree health). Results of the secondary analyses, excluding residents who did not answer their doors in Neighborhood 1,
resulting in a small active outreach group (N = 16), are shown in Figure 12 (soil moisture), Figure 13 (mulch), and Figure 14 (tree health).

While members of the evaluation team were trained to conduct standardized observations on mulch and tree health, it should be noted that observations may nevertheless be subject to observer differences. The soil moisture metric is thus a more objective form of measurement. There was a statistically significant difference in soil moisture between the active group and the passive group at both three weeks and six weeks following outreach. Like many studies, the scope of this project was limited by available resources. The evaluation period was limited to six weeks, and observations on whether outreach materials were used as intended were not included. Observing these behaviors would inform which outreach materials better resonate with the target community, and thus which materials tree-planting municipalities or organizations would be advised to select. Such observations should be included as part of an evaluation plan in future behavior change efforts.

**Broad Implementation and Transferability to Other Communities**

A modification that could be adopted in future implementation of the study’s strategies is that active, in-person engagement with residents could be tested on planting day rather than in the days or weeks following a planting. On planting day, community members may already be participating in planting and may be even more receptive to in-person interaction. Given the effective use of peer-to-peer, community-based communications observed in the pilot, this model will continue to be used and expanded to support the growth of Huntington Park’s urban forest.

Transferability to communities beyond Huntington Park can be tested if, at a minimum, the necessary infrastructure and barriers to engagement are identified as similar. The following characteristics were among the factors identified in the pilot neighborhoods of this study: residents have water spigots and hoses; the cost of watering trees is perceived as a barrier; trees are seen as important and desirable neighborhood components; city government is seen as responsible for tree care; and many residents already provide care for other trees and plants. These factors were used to craft messages and develop program elements. To apply this same program approach, a next step would be to confirm that these and other elements are relevant in other target communities. If these elements are found to be relevant, widespread implementation is simplified. If there is a potential mismatch, a next step would be to gather additional data to provide direction for retooling messaging or program elements.

![Soil Moisture](image)

*Figure 9. Soil moisture as volumetric water content following outreach (active, N = 36; passive, N = 36) (primary analysis).*
The study findings indicate both active and passive outreach produced better soil moisture and tree health outcomes than no outreach, with trees at homes in the active outreach group showing significantly higher soil moisture, more mulch, and better observed health than trees at homes in the passive outreach group. Results suggest that tree planting programs with limited resources for maintenance may find success in fostering tree stewardship among residents through active engagement. As of the writing of this article, several major urban forestry projects are in planning or implementation phases in Southern California and may provide opportunities to test the transferability of the strategies and approaches developed for this study. Projects of
Figure 12. Soil moisture as volumetric water content following outreach (active, N = 16; passive, N = 36) (secondary analysis).

Figure 13. Presence of mulch following outreach (active, N = 16; passive, N = 36) (secondary analysis).

Figure 14. Tree health following outreach (active, N = 16) (secondary analysis).
the City of Los Angeles City Plants collaborative and those funded through CAL FIRE Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds, as well as other efforts in the region and beyond, should be considered as opportunities to advance, refine, and improve upon the approaches presented in this study.

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TreePeople: Cristina Basurto, Regional Manager, TreePeople; Edith de Guzman, Director of Research, TreePeople; Rachel Malarich, formerly Director of Forestry, TreePeople; currently Environmental Services Manager, Koreatown Youth and Community Center.


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Edith de Guzman (corresponding author)  
TreePeople  
Beverly Hills, California  
United States  
and  
University of California, Los Angeles  
Institute of the Environment & Sustainability  
Los Angeles, California, U.S.

Rachel Malarich  
Koreatown Youth and Community Center  
Los Angeles, California, U.S.

Lori Large  
Action Research  
Oceanside, California, U.S.

Sharon Danoff-Burg  
Action Research  
3630 Ocean Ranch Blvd.  
Oceanside, California 92056, U.S.