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ENVP 4900-R01

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## The Bronx River Alliance: A Model Community Action Organization

### And an Internship in Development

In looking for an organization to intern with, my initial thought was to head to a politicians office who was involved with environmental justice issues. However, when I learned of the Bronx River Alliance, and the local connection of the Bronx River, the New York Botanical Gardens, the Bronx Zoo and Fordham, it all interested me. After subsequent internet research and emails I knew that the Bronx River Alliance was a place that I would find both interesting and fulfilling.

The Bronx River once served as a vital resource for settlers in New York City who depended upon it for both food and waterpower. However industrial pollution from upriver in Westchester County and downriver in the Bronx rendered the river nearly uninhabitable for animal life around 1800. The river went from a beautiful resource to a contaminated conduit for industrial and residential waste. In 1974, a community based organization, the Bronx River Restoration, began the arduous process of cleaning up and restoring the river. The Bronx River Alliance, formed in 2001, has helped transform the river back to not only a thriving ecosystem but also a tool for inner-city education and recreation. In this paper I will examine community organization and action groups and use the Bronx River Alliance as a case study of how a determined group of people can be successful and not only accomplish a goal but become a

“Voice for the River.” Their website states, “The mission of the Bronx River Alliance is to serve as a coordinated voice for the river and work in harmonious partnership to protect, improve and restore the Bronx River corridor and greenway so that they can be healthy ecological, recreational, educational and economic resources for the communities through which the river flows.”<sup>1</sup> While some funding for the organization comes from NYC Department of Parks, a large majority of funding is self-raised through the Development Department. In my internship I was able to experience both the natural and business side of the Bronx River Alliance through working inside of Development.

The Bronx River is named after Swedish settler, Jonas Bronck, who purchased land from Native Americans and settled around the only fresh water river in New York City. Area surrounding the Bronx River was home to many species of mammals and birds, including a large population of beaver which appear on the official flag of the City of New York. The river was essential for survival of the early settlers, functioning not only as a freshwater source, but also by providing fresh fish, power for mills and as an area where large game animals would come to drink. As the Bronx developed, water quality started to decline as the area around the river industrialized with the construction of a railroad and businesses who used the river for dumping. In 1898 when New York City was incorporated, the country was named ‘Bronx’ after the river. In 1907, construction began on the Bronx River Parkway, and a Bronx River Commission Report

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<sup>1</sup> Bronx River Website. “What We Do.” <http://bronxriver.org/?pg=content&p=aboutus&m1=1> 17 December 2010.

in 1909 reported that the Bronx River and surrounding areas had sustained “considerably injury in its natural features.”<sup>2</sup>

The concept of community organizing to remedy a local issue is not a recent one, dating back to Biblical times when groups gathered to accomplish a common goal. Following the success of racial and feminist social movements in the 1960’s, the 1970’s included widespread interest in neighborhood organizing in the United States.<sup>3</sup> These were largely black, Hispanic and white-working class neighborhoods which had been in decline due to insufficient social services and nonexistent capital improvements. However, these neighborhoods contained citizens who were ready to attempt to improve their communities. While there were various goals, strategies and origins to these groups, they all felt that there was an issue in their community which needed to be addressed.<sup>4</sup> Following in line with United States history, people recognized that authority can be challenged and that there was power in numbers. They came to see that working together toward a common goal accomplished more than they set out for, and that ‘being political’ meant more than voting in local elections, but also taking responsibility for decisions that affect your daily life.<sup>5</sup> These neighborhood organizers realized that their success could be seen and “measured in tangible and intangible results.”<sup>6</sup>

The social justice waves of the 1960’s and 1970’s included the environmental justice movement. In the Bronx and other ethnic neighborhoods across the country, communities once considered as virtual garbage dumps which had suffered poor economic and racial issues were

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<sup>2</sup> Crimmens, Teresa. “Bronx River Restoration: Report and Assessment.” 11 December 2010. [www.fordham.edu/academics/programs\\_at\\_fordham\\_/environmental\\_policy/student\\_research\\_ess\\_34062.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs_at_fordham_/environmental_policy/student_research_ess_34062.asp)

<sup>3</sup> Fisher, Robert. “Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America.” Twayne Publishers. Boston, MA. 1984. p.126

<sup>4</sup> Fisher, Robert. “Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America.” p.142-3

<sup>5</sup> Fisher, Robert. “Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America.” p.149

<sup>6</sup> Fisher, Robert. “Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America.” p.164

uplifted and “stirrings of a new spirit became visible.”<sup>7</sup> During the era of Robert Moses, the Bronx fell into a period of urban decay. The quality of life, particularly in the South Bronx decreased dramatically as neighborhoods were fragmented by the construction of numerous highways.<sup>8</sup> The effects of transportation and industry had such negative impacts on the Bronx River that it was regarded by many as an open sewer. Marina Alberti, Professor of Urban and Environmental Planning at the University of Washington writes, “The loss of riparian habitats (natural bio-filters protecting aquatic environments) greatly increases runoff and makes watersheds less able to filter nutrients and sediments. As impervious surfaces increase, they affect the volume of water and sediment that streams can move...leading to many kinds of hydrologic, geomorphic and biological degradation in streams.”<sup>9</sup>

Environmental movements across the United States gained popularity in the 1970’s and 1980’s, as an extension of the civil rights movement. Understood as a way to recapture nature from negative human influence, the Society for Ecological Restoration International gives the official definition of “ecological restoration” as “the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed.”<sup>10</sup> William R. Jordan III, a founder of the ecological restoration movement comments that ecological restoration will prove to be one of the primary ways in which people interact with nature in the new century.<sup>11</sup> Ecological restoration by non-profits, community groups and volunteers allows a “learning by doing

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<sup>7</sup> Fisher, Robert. “Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America.” p.142

<sup>8</sup> Bronx River Website “Natural and Social History.”  
<http://bronxriver.org/?pg=content&p=abouttheriver&m1=9>. 11 December 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Alberti, Marina. “Advances in Urban Ecology: Integrating Humans and Ecological Processes in Urban Ecosystems.” Springer Press. New York, NY. 2009. p.152.

<sup>10</sup> Gross, Matthias. “Community by Experiment: Recursive Practice in Landscape Design and Ecological Restoration.” Vol. 10 of “Research in Urban Policy.” “Community and Ecology: Dynamics of Place, Sustainability, and Politics.” Eds. Aaron M. McCright and Terry N. Clark. p.51

<sup>11</sup> Friederici, Peter. “Engagement & Hope: An Interview with William R. Jordan III.” *Chicago Wilderness Magazine*, Spring 2004. <http://www.chicagowildernessmag.org/issues/spring2004/jordan.html>. 13 December 2010

strategy,” for real-world experimentation and interaction with the natural environment.<sup>12</sup> Urban greening movements are essentially asset-oriented, brining out the best in groups, celebrating local culture, volunteer action, and restoring or reclaiming community spaces or landmarks. They have the power to build social bonds which can often lead to other important local social issues.<sup>13</sup>

In 1974, Bronx resident Ruth Anderberg had tolerated enough abuse to the Bronx River and began to lobby police and sanitation officials to clean up Bronx County portion of the river. Ms. Anderberg and other supporters of the river clean-up effort got tow-trucks to pull illegally dumped and abandoned cars and refrigerators out of the River.<sup>14</sup>



A Submerged Car Pulled from the Bronx River\*      The Original Signage for the Restoration\*

Ms. Anderberg was just one of hundreds of working-class women community organizers across the country, making decisions, speaking publicly and assuming leaderships roles in

<sup>12</sup> Gross, Matthias. “Community by Experiment: Recursive Practice in Landscape Design and Ecological Restoration.” p’s. 51, 57

<sup>13</sup> Rubin, Victor. “The Roots of the Urban Greening Movement” *Growing Greener Cities: Urban Sustainability in the Twenty-First Century*. Eds. Eugenie L. Birch and Susan M. Wachter. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA. 2008. p.205

<sup>14</sup> Wheaton, Sarah and Nate Schweber. “Two Teenagers Drown in Bronx River.” *New York Times*. 14 December 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/19/nyregion/19drown.html>

organizations.<sup>15</sup> Residents formed the Bronx River Restoration Project, and Ms. Anderberg acted as its first director. The Restoration Project successfully improved the physical quality of the river by removing not only cars but also tires and other submerged and floating debris. The Project was strengthened in 1996 when the Bronx Riverkeeper program was developed by the City of New York Parks and Recreation Department, and later in 1997 by the Bronx River Working Group. The Working Group used the combined efforts of “over sixty community groups, government agencies, schools and businesses.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, in 2001 the Bronx River Alliance was formed and established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency to act as the “Voice of the River.” The Bronx River Alliance receives support from the New York City Parks Department by means of payroll and financial contributions. The Department of Parks provides funding for three members of the Conservation Crew, the Conservation Manager, the Community Outreach Coordinator and a portion of salary for the Bronx River Administrator.

One great set of accomplishments for the Bronx River Alliance has been improving water quality to the point where animal life has returned to the river. At one point in the river’s history, “beaver pelts drove the economy of the former New Amsterdam, when New York City was a Dutch trading post full of trappers.”<sup>17</sup> Two beavers appear on the New York City seal, however over hunting rendered the beaver extinct in the Bronx River. “Records show the Dutch purchased 7,246 beaver pelts in 1626 and that by 1671 the renamed New York of British rule

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<sup>15</sup> Fisher, Robert. “Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America.” Twayne Publishers. Boston, MA. 1984. pg. 149-151

<sup>16</sup> Bronx River Website “Natural and Social History.”  
<http://bronxriver.org/?pg=content&p=abouttheriver&m1=9>. 11 December 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Lorr, Samuel P. “Bronx River Alliance Internship: Natural River Restoration in Urban Ecology.” 14 Dec. 2010.  
[www.fordham.edu/academics/programs\\_at\\_fordham\\_/environmental\\_policy/student\\_research\\_ess\\_3406\\_2.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs_at_fordham_/environmental_policy/student_research_ess_3406_2.asp)

traded more than 80,000 pelts a year.”<sup>18</sup> By 1800, beavers were no longer seen in the Bronx River. In 2007, a beaver was spotted in the Bronx River, and it was later determined that its lodge is not far from the Bronx Zoo. The beaver was nicknamed ‘Jose’ in honor of Congressman Jose Serrano who has directed millions in federal funds towards river restoration. Congressman Serrano was surprised about the arrival of his namesake, saying that while he always advocated for the Bronx River’s cleanup, “I don’t know to what extent I imagined things living in it again.”<sup>19</sup>



Jose the Beaver in the Bronx River



Congressman Jose

Serrano

While ‘Jose’s’ appearance was unplanned, a River Alliance project re-introduced 201 alewife herring in 2006, some of which have returned to the river to spawn. Oysters were also re-introduced in 2006, and while not safe for human consumption they do function as a natural

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<sup>18</sup> Lorr, Samuel P. “Bronx River Alliance Internship: Natural River Restoration in Urban Ecology.” 14 Dec. 2010.

<sup>19</sup> O’Connor, Anahad. “After 200 Years, a Beaver is Back in NYC.” 14 December 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/23/nyregion/23beaver.html>



filter for pollutants in the river. The oysters also help create a ‘reef environment’ that provide a suitable habitat for fish, crabs and snails.<sup>20</sup>



Conservation Crew Member with an Alewife Herring\*



Students working with

oysters in Bronx River Classroom\*

Environmental issues have become much more political since 1960. Individual citizens and in groups, have begun to advocate for environmental issues like water quality, water quality, wildlife protection and recycling. These issues are now regular docket items on the political agenda of municipal, county, state and federal levels.<sup>21</sup> In the four decades since the first Earth Day, many environmental issues have been addressed through national policies such as the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Water Pollution Control Act, National Environmental Policy Act, C.E.R.C.L.A. (Superfund), and now energy and resource regulation. However, it most likely the local issue which has the ability to effect day-to-day life that will make the front page of a small town newspaper and inspire the most change. Citizens living in urban areas support environmental issues more widely and openly than people in rural areas because they generally

<sup>20</sup> “The Current.”(Bronx River Alliance publication). Winter 2009/2010

<sup>21</sup> McCraight, Aaron M. and Terry N. Clark. “Political Dynamics of Local Environmental Problems.” Vol. 10 of “Research in Urban Policy.” “Community and Ecology: Dynamics of Place, Sustainability, and Politics.” Eds. Aaron M. McCraight and Terry N. Clark. p.171

have greater environmental problems such as air pollution and poor water quality. Additionally, people in rural areas depend on their land for economic reasons and do not want to see heavier, and ultimately for them, more expensive regulations enacted.<sup>22</sup> Studies have shown that the environmental movement is more ambitious in communities where the Democratic Party and other progressive social movements are more ambitious, and where politicians are more responsive to individual citizens. Democrats are on the whole more sensitive to environmental issues and provide greater support for environmental policies than members of the Republican Party do.<sup>23</sup>

The specific movements and projects accomplished by the Bronx River Alliance show that the greening movement is beginning to generate a wider base of political and economic support in the Bronx, and that it is becoming allied with powerful forces for social change.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the Bronx River Alliance, their main political supporter is Congressman Jose Serrano who represents New York's 16<sup>th</sup> District, the entirety of which the Bronx River runs through. Serrano, a Bronx native himself, knew firsthand the poor quality of the River while growing up in the South Bronx, and has been integral in securing funds for the river restoration. Since 1999, Congressman Serrano has secured nearly \$25 million in federal funds for the restoration of the River. He worked with President Clinton's Council on Environmental Quality to designate the Bronx River as one of ten American Heritage Rivers, which would help secure future funding

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<sup>22</sup> Burns, Steven. Environmental Policy & Politics: Trends in Public Debates." *Natural Resources & Environment*. Fall 2008, Vol.23, Issue 2. p.8-12.

<sup>23</sup> McCraight, Aaron M. and Terry N. Clark. "Political Opportunity Structure of the Environmental Movement." Vol. 10 of "Research in Urban Policy." "Community and Ecology: Dynamics of Place, Sustainability, and Politics." Eds. Aaron M. McCraight and Terry N. Clark. p.213-214.

<sup>24</sup> Rubin, Victor. "The Roots of the Urban Greening Movement" *Growing Greener Cities: Urban Sustainability in the Twenty-First Century*. Eds. Eugenie L. Birch and Susan M. Wachter. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA. 2008. p.187

and services. Additionally, Serrano is known as a crusader for environmental justice and has earned awards from the National Parks Conservation Association and the League of Conservation Voters, in recognition for his 100% voting records for pro-environmental issues.<sup>25</sup> With environmental issues as such a tangible problem, effecting health and quality of life, the Bronx is lucky to have a Congressman who is so dedicated to correcting and reversing past harms done to his District by both industry and government.

In March of 1998, at Congressman Serrano's request, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee adopted a resolution to conduct a study on the Bronx River's wildlife habitats, water quality, and flooding. For the large project, the Army Corps of Engineers were brought in to evaluate the ecological health of the river and its watersheds in Bronx and Westchester counties. The result of the study would propose measures to restore and preserve the river and its watersheds. Congressman Serrano commented that restoration of the river, "Will also play a central part in the beautification and revitalization of all its surrounding communities including several in the South Bronx."<sup>26</sup>

Many community organizations disband once their cause has been achieved, or when interest dies out. When the Bronx River Restoration project began in 1971, the initial cause was to restore the river back to its original quality. As that goal was gradually accomplished, the mission of the organization gradually changed, but the heart of it is still alive and well for the Bronx River Alliance. Working at the heart of the Bronx River Alliance is its Conservation Crew, a group of about ten dedicated individuals who are a full-time presence on the river,

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<sup>25</sup> Velasquez, Carlos. "The Political Icon: Jose E. Serrano." Galos Publishing. New York, NY. 2007. p's 114-121.

<sup>26</sup> Velasquez, Carlos. "The Political Icon: Jose E. Serrano." Galos Publishing. New York, NY. 2007. p.114-115.

monitoring conditions and completing ecological restoration programs to improve water quality, stabilize river banks and improve river habitat for wildlife. Between 2007-2009 the Crew planted over 13,500 native trees, plants and shrubs, removed five cars, 150 tires, 150 cubic yards of invasive vegetation, restored five acres of park land, and completed a salt marsh restoration project (footnote bronxriver.org). The crew also removes river blockages and floating debris to make sure that kayakers have a smooth trip down the river. Since 2001, the Alliance has expanded their influence on the river beyond the Conservation Crew, and also now includes teams for Outreach, Education and for the completion of the Bronx River Greenway.

The Outreach Team organizes events to draw people to utilize the river for both fun and volunteer opportunities. Outreach coordinates the Alliance's two large paddling events, the Amazing Bronx River Flotilla in the summer and the Golden Ball Festival in the fall. The Education Team consists of one professional educator at the Alliance who coordinates the Bronx River Classroom program and adult volunteer education. Teachers from Bronx schools contact the Education coordinator if they would like to bring their students to the river for a hands-on lesson in ecology, wildlife, and water monitoring. Education also uses student interns to help teach due to the increasing demand for this program which works with over 40 schools and has had over 1,500 students either in, at, or paddling on the river between 2007-2010.

The Greenway Team focuses on a major project which hopes to create a continuous chain of parks connected with a bike and pedestrian path along the Bronx stretch of the Bronx River. The overall goal is to connect the Bronx portion of the Greenway with the already existing portion of Greenway in Westchester County, stretching the Greenway from its start at the Kensico Dam to its termination at the East River. The Greenway was a project imagined by

Executive Director Linda R. Cox, and designed by architects and ecological experts; the groundbreaking for this project came in 2004 and more projects are in the design state now.<sup>27</sup>

The Greenway hopes to reclaim the waterfront and improve quality of life for Bronx residents, and includes a significant amount of community input for ideas and design. The original funding for the Greenway came as a grant from the Ford Foundation.

The idea of greenways and expanding open green space in urban areas has been increasing in recent years. More local governments and advocates have begun to support parks and open space by raising public and private funds and directing it to areas most in need.<sup>28</sup> Since the 1987 President's Commission on Americans Outdoors stated that greenways were a way "to provide people with access to open spaces close to where they live and to link the rural and urban spaces in the American landscape threading through cities and countrysides like a giant circulation system."<sup>29</sup> The concept of a natural corridor on the local scale provides a great contrast to the 18<sup>th</sup> century concept of the National Parks, which are an unreachable vacation spot for many urban families.<sup>30</sup>

Like the original grant which started the Greenway Project, much of the Bronx River Alliance's funding for Education, Greenway and river improvement projects comes from grants. The Development Department at the Bronx River Alliance researches, coordinates, and writes grant applications, along with coordinating the writing and mailing of fundraising letters and

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<sup>27</sup> Bronx River Alliance Website "Greenway."

<http://www.bronxriver.org/?pg=content&p=aboutus&m1=1&m2=3>

12 December 2010

<sup>28</sup> Growing Greener Cities, pgs. 201-203

<sup>29</sup> Ahern, Jack. "Greenways in the USA: theory, trends, and prospects" "Ecological Networks and Greenways: Concept, Design and Implementation." Eds. Ron Jongman and Gloria Pungetti. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, U.K. 2004. p.35

<sup>30</sup> Ahern, Jack. "Greenways in the USA: theory, trends, and prospects" "Ecological Networks and Greenways: Concept, Design and Implementation." p.34

works with corporate sponsorships. During my time as an intern at the Alliance, I worked in development and learned about the process through which grants are developed.

Development, fundraising, and grant writing for a non-profit organization such as a charity or community action group requires establishing different connections than for a school or hospital. While a school or hospital has immediate connections in their graduates or patients, a non-profit charity or community action group only can reach out to groups or individuals who have shown an interest in them in the past, or an interest for the cause which they advocate for. Leads for new funders come from many different places. They can be found through online searches, suggestions or networking done on the organizations behalf by its Board of Directors, leads from fellow non-profit organizations, politicians or suggestions from friends of the organization. The River Alliance, through networking and past grants has a significant amount of connections at foundations and grant-giving organizations, so my initial task was to identify new possible funders.

I started off by meeting with the Director of Development, and learned about the basic aspects of grants. After familiarizing myself with the Alliance's past funders, the first step that I took was to utilize an internet program which lists past grants given to organizations nationwide according to different subject areas. I searched for grants given in support of: ecological restoration, environmental clean-up, environmental justice, brownfield restoration, water-way cleanup, animal life reintroduction, and water quality assessment. I researched all of these topics because they are pertinent to the mission or projects that the Alliance works on.

I then narrowed the results of the search to funders who gave to organizations on the east coast. The next step was to look at past organizations funded. While many foundations have

four or five areas which they provide equal percentages of their funding to, the organizations which have been funded in the past can also give a Development office a good idea if an application will be selected; if they should even spend the time to draft the grant application. In the case of some of the larger funders, they choose to only fund other large or national environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, National Resource Defense Council or World Wildlife Federation. If a foundation has given to small non-profits before, a good sign to see is if they had funded similar groups, who also work on issues like environmental restoration, environmental education, and water quality improvement.

Some funding organizations, such as the Ford Foundation, require a Letter of Intent before they will send you their application packet. Large organizations receive thousands of applications per year and simply need a way to weed out grant requests which do not match their funding categories. Applications for other organizations must be completed in full, with essays, a detailed spending plan, past successes and financial information. Development committees must sometimes make tough decisions of whether to send out thirty Letters of Intent, or to write ten full grant proposals. Deadlines are also important to take into consideration: does an application have quarterly deadlines in January, April, July and October? or are grant applications considered on a rolling admission?

While there are hundreds of foundations and funders across the country, many give to only specific causes and in one area of the country. Target, for instance, is very committed to environmental responsibility yet funds environmental issues only in Minnesota. In a case like this, the River Alliance applying for an environmental grant from Target would be wasting the Development department's sparse time. Some west coast organizations take an interest in more

than one specific part of the country. Such was the case with the Schmidt Family Foundation, a funding organization which the River Alliance had not filed for a grant with yet, for which I drafted a full application from start to finish.

I found the Schmidt Family Foundation in my initial search for new funders. The Foundation is funded by the personal fortune of Eric Schmidt, an engineer and CEO/Chairman of Google; the foundation is run by his wife, Wendy Schmidt.<sup>31</sup> After establishing that a grant from The Schmidt Family Foundation could fund General Operating Funds, and did not need us to specify a project that the grant would go towards, I took the grant application to the Director of Development who thought that it was a viable application to work on. I identified the Schmidt Family Foundation as potential funders because they address issues of sustainability and the responsible use of natural resources, and are sympathetic to overall environmental issues. Although they are headquartered in California, they have funded east coast issues in Nantucket and had previously funded organizations similar to the Bronx River Alliance.

In addition to the Schmidt Family Foundation grant application, I also established leads for the Development department to follow up on. I was able to find eight to ten solid leads for future grant applications with instructions as to when they needed to be scheduled into the 'time-line'. At the time my internship ended, I was working on a grant through Costco focusing on the Education team's need for additional resources. Since the Education team began in 2004, their great hands-on programming has become very popular with South Bronx educators. The grant with Costco is for \$50,000 of additional funding for a part-time education professional and paid student interns to take over coordinating the Bronx River Classroom and teaching at the river. I was also in the process of re-establishing contacts at the Ford Foundation and submitting a Letter

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<sup>31</sup> The Schmidt Family Foundation. <http://theschmidt.org/site/about/index.html> 14 Decemeber 2010.



of Intent about additional funding. The Alliance had prior contacts at Ford in 2004 which lead to the funding of the first Greenway Coordinator, however those contacts have moved on from Ford.

The application itself, like most applications, wanted us to relate the Alliance's mission and projects to its own mission. I looked to publications from the Alliance's website and pamphlets for general information, and also wrote about the education program and how our Bronx River Classroom brought an experience to inner-city students which they would be able to have no where else. I also emphasized "in teaching environmental awareness, we show students about recycling, reducing pollution, reducing emissions and how their carbon footprints affects the global community...Recent efforts with Fordham University and Lehman College have also provided college students the opportunity to intern for an organization with many practice areas in which they can gain experience for careers in the environmental field."\*\*<sup>32</sup> While the Alliance will most likely not hear a response from the Schmidt Family Foundation for another few months, my experience with the application taught me first hand how to craft a grant application in a warm manner and in the best way possible to achieve a positive result.

Another facet of Development is fundraising through mailings. While new at the Alliance, I was given a shot to write the Annual Fall Appeal Letter. I decided to write about John Muir's concept of 'wilderness,' Romantic concepts of 'the sublime,' and Gifford Pinchot's utilitarian concepts along with other academic ideas. My letter crashed and burned; well, maybe not so much crashed and burned, but it was not what would have gone over best with those reading the letters. Appeal letters, I was taught, need to do just that – appeal to their readers. They need to emphasize what the organization has done since the last letter was sent, who the

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<sup>32</sup> \*\*See the attached Bronx River Alliance Application to Schmidt Family Foundation.

organization personally effected, what was restored, what was introduced, and needs to stick to the organization's mission. Getting back to the limited audience mentioned earlier, while the more academic letter may appeal very well to a small group of people, the majority of the letter needs to show to those who have supported you before that you are still striving to accomplish the goals which they support, and are making strides towards new initiatives, like the reintroduction of species, development of the Greenway, 'Jose' the Beaver, and a fish-ladder to help the alewife herring migrate upriver to spawn. After the letter is written and proofread by every set of eyes in the office, it needs to be sent out to the perfect conglomeration of people. While at the Alliance, we mailed not only the Fall Appeal Letter, but also a letter to Prior Paddlers and a thank you letter to people who had attended the Upstream Soiree. Address spreadsheets had to be created and proofread, duplicates for spouses had to be eliminated, zip-codes checked, and finally formatted to fit labels.

I found that in working to be a great Development agent, one needs to truly understand and care about the organization they work for. The amount of work that goes in to Development, between fundraising, letter writing & mailing, grant writing, and event organization requires someone who cares for and has an interest in the goals of their organization. Coordinating all of these factors and writing high quality grant proposals while balancing other fundraising events, like the Bronx River Alliance's Upsteam Soiree along with mailings makes for a full-time effort which needs a truly dedicated staff, which the Alliance is blessed to have at this time. Without a dedicated staff, an organization would otherwise be forced to outsource grants to professional grant writers who lack a personal connection with the organization. I think that my time working in development allowed me to experience the side of a non-profit organization which many do

not, the side which is relied upon in order to provide funding in order for the rest of the organization to be able to keep running their valuable programs for the public.

The Bronx River Alliance and the organizations that it evolved from have been vitally important not only to the communities through which the river runs, but also to environmental policy in the Bronx. Work that the Alliance has done towards furthering environmental justice in the South Bronx has acted as a model for later environmental based community organizations. An example of the policy work the River Alliance has been able to accomplish so far is changes initiated in the community districts through which the river runs. The parkland along the river is being consolidated into a single park district, rather than the 5 community districts it overlaps with. Linda R. Cox, the Bronx River Administrator comments, “So far, we’re in phase 1, which blends parkland from two northern districts into one Bronx River Greenway district – District 14. In future phases, when contiguous parkland has been achieved, we’ll consolidate the riverside parklands in the districts south of Pelham Parkway into District 14 as well.” The consolidation of the community districts allows for, “more integrated park management, better ability to focus on ecological practices on land that are good for the river, and better linkage between the Parks Department & the Alliance.”

Feelings from administrators inside of the Alliance are that the future holds great things for the Bronx River and those who live in communities around the river. The current main project is the completion of the Greenway links and improvements on the existing parks, Shoelace Park, Bronx Park East and others. More policy work will also take place about ensuring continuous water quality, regulations to help further animal habitat, and a large push for storm water capture in areas around the river. Fostering community outreach to instill a sense of

ownership in the river, parks and Greenway is essential. Additional free programming for recreation, performance, arts & culture and health are projected to draw large crowds especially in the low-income communities which surround the river. Director of Development Ivan Braun sees, “Promoting environmental education and outdoor recreation and health programs” in the future of the Alliance after Greenway completion and river clean-up has been accomplished.

My time at the Bronx River Alliance provided me with a great experience to learn about environmental action groups and to work inside of a non-profit with a diverse and dedicated group of individuals. While I feel that my future in the environmental field will be on the prosecuting side as an environmental attorney, my experience at the Alliance allowed me to see environmental policy from the point of an organization that gets to work *with and within* the laws. The Alliance is able to, as a product of the Clean Water Act and Congressman Serrano’s financial efforts, work inside of the laws and environmental policy to restore what was once a great resource to the Bronx community. I believe that my experience at the Alliance will allow me in the future to look at hundreds of pages of legislation and know from experience the effect which they are able to have on the environment and will change my outlook on the laws as a prosecutor. When I started looking for the internship which lead me to the Alliance, I wanted to experience environment and politics. Thanks to my experience at the Alliance, I am heading to an internship with Congressman Serrano’s office as the Environmental Policy Intern for next semester. I will be able to walk into Serrano’s office with firsthand knowledge of the issues affecting his district, and with ideas and contacts to help improve life in the 16<sup>th</sup> District for his constituents.

The Bronx River Alliance and its predecessors are an example of a community action group which has succeeded in uniting a neighborhood, accomplishing its mission, and evolving into a better version of its original self. The Alliance's main projects would not be possible to fund without the dedicated work of Development staff who through draft letters, write grants and facilitate fundraising events. I think that the Alliance continues to meet its goals and expand that it will once again become a vital asset to the Bronx communities.

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\*All photos are courtesy of the Bronx River Alliance's website. 17 December 2010.  
<http://bronxriver.org/?pg=content&p=abouttheriver&m1=11>

**\*\*Bronx River Alliance's Application to the Schmidt Family Foundation,**

Prepared by: John F. Hinck

Approved by: Ivan Braun, Director of Development

Submitted: November 17, 2010.

**Please select the type of funding you are requesting:** "General Funding"

**Organization/Project Description: Please briefly describe how your project or organization advances the creation of an increasingly intelligent relationship between human activity and the use of the world's natural resources.**

The Bronx River once served as a vital resource for settlers in New York City who depended upon it for both food and waterpower. However industrial pollution from upriver in Westchester County and downriver in the Bronx rendered the river nearly uninhabitable for fish by the mid 1800's, while over hunting eliminated the beaver population by 1790. In time almost all other creatures were wiped out from New York City's only freshwater river. In 1974, a community based organization, the Bronx River Restoration, began the arduous process of cleaning up and restoring the river. Partnerships for Parks convened the Bronx River Working Group in 1997 and brought together more than 60 community organizations, public agencies and businesses committed to reclaiming the river and improving access to it throughout the Bronx. The Bronx River Working Group created the Bronx River Alliance in 2001 as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization to be an overall "Voice for the River," and to create a Greenway path alongside the river.

While originally starting with river clean-up and restoration efforts, the Alliance has now developed an education program using the Bronx River as a teaching resource for school children in the borough. The education program takes to heart teaching our Bronx youth about climate change in their surrounding environment and improving their environmental education. We focus on teaching students about physical biological issues through firsthand ecological experiences of taking water samples, studying macroinvertebrates and educating about the larger ecosystem before them. Emphasizing environmental awareness, we show how students' actions in recycling, reducing pollution, reducing emissions and their carbon footprints affect the global community. Recent efforts with Fordham University and Lehman College have also provided college students the opportunity to intern for an organization with many practice areas in which they can gain experience for careers in the environmental field.

Using hands on, experimental learning techniques, the education program exposes local youth to the natural ecology that surrounds them even in a very urban environment. By making this connection in a personal setting, the youth gain a sense of place and responsibility for the effects their actions have on the world around them. We demonstrate the ways that their actions have on the world and offer ways in which they can effect positive change. Through small scale restoration projects, water quality study, fish monitoring, and oyster re-introduction, youth become active participants in the improvement of their own community and their surrounding environment.

The opportunity for residents of a densely populated urban community to experience what Muir referred to as 'the sublime' has become rarer and rarer over time. The Bronx River Greenway allows the public to step into a green corridor, enjoy a walk, and reconnect with nature. Our paddling trips provide access for both adults and children in the urban Bronx who would otherwise not be able to experience a canoe trip, venture into the woods for a hike, or learn about the environment first hand. As the "Voice of the River," we strive on a daily basis to restore the physical quality of the Bronx River, and also use our programs and teams to improve the environmental future of not only our Bronx community but also the environmental community at large.

**Time Period Covered by the Funding?:** (May 2011-June 2012)