

WI CAN CASE STUDY: HABITAT FOR HUMANITY RENEW THE BLOCK

JUNE 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Habitat for Humanity of the Greater La Crosse Region is a nonprofit organization that expands affordable housing opportunities and strengthens communities through home construction, repairs, and neighborhood revitalization. The organization developed ReNew the Block to create visible, lasting improvements by combining stormwater management, urban agriculture, home repairs, and community engagement in one neighborhood. The program has prevented stormwater runoff, planted trees, improved homes, and strengthened community partnerships. Challenges included building trust, securing funding, and adapting to changes in partner involvement. To replicate or expand the model, organizations need strong partnerships, community engagement, flexible funding, and the ability to adapt to changing conditions.



[Habitat for Humanity of the Greater La Crosse Region](#) is a nonprofit organization serving La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties in WI and Houston County in MN. Their mission is to bring people together to provide and preserve affordable housing opportunities and create a community where all feel they belong. They do this through new homes construction, but also through innovative programs that focus on repairing existing homes, reclaiming and reselling building materials, and making neighborhoods more resilient.¹

ReNew the Block is a neighborhood revitalization initiative developed by Habitat La Crosse. It grew out of an earlier program called ReNew La Crosse, which provided minor exterior home repairs across multiple neighborhoods. Program leaders wanted to create a more visible and lasting impact, so they narrowed their focus to a single block and expanded the scope of activities. The idea was also influenced by Habitat for Humanity International's Rock the Block model and a desire to address environmental issues such as stormwater management while strengthening community connections.

ReNew the Block operates as a collaborative neighborhood improvement program that

¹<https://www.habitatlacrosse.org/who-we-are/about-us/>

concentrates resources and activities within a neighborhood. The program brings together homeowners, residents, schools, local government, businesses, and volunteers to create visible, block-wide transformation. It began by building partnerships and engaging residents to identify community needs. Habitat La Crosse then coordinated activities across its four core pillars: stormwater management, urban agriculture, critical home repairs and weatherization, and community engagement.

Projects have been implemented through a combination of volunteer events, contractor support, resident participation, and grant-funded improvements. Examples include installing rain gardens and drainage improvements, planting trees and community gardens, and repairing homes. Local students are involved through landscape planning, planting projects, and sustainability curricula. Funding comes from a mix of city, school district, foundation, government, and individual donor support. A key feature of the model is its emphasis on relationship-building and collaboration, which helps generate community ownership.

ReNew the Block's achievements to-date include:

- Diverting or preventing over 758,000 gallons of stormwater annually from reaching the Mississippi River.
- Planting 74 trees to reduce urban heat and increase neighborhood biodiversity.
- Completing critical home repairs and weatherization projects for residents.
- Engaging students, teachers, residents, and volunteers in hands-on activities.
- Strengthening partnerships among schools, local government, nonprofits, and community organizations.

The project has had its challenges. Developing the ideas and gaining committed partners took several years. The budget has also shifted throughout the process. Habitat La Crosse adapted by scaling the project, pursuing diverse funding sources, and remaining flexible. The team notes that building partnerships takes time. They have focused on developing relationships and maintaining consistent communication with partners. The Wisconsin Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy's statewide climate action network WI CAN supported the project both by supplying funding and by working with the team to host a regional WI CAN meeting in La Crosse.

Working on ReNew the Block has brought key lessons. First, being adaptable is necessary, along with finding champions across sectors. Involving residents, students, volunteers, and local organizations increases project ownership. Combining stormwater management, urban agriculture, home repairs, and community engagement produces benefits larger than any single intervention. Demonstrating these results helped attract additional funding, partners, and opportunities to expand the model to other neighborhoods. For communities wanting to replicate the model, organizations need strong partnerships, community engagement, flexible funding, and the ability to adapt to changing conditions.



“ReNew the Block has components that resonate with almost everyone - we're talking about youth, sustainability, outdoor spaces, access to food, safe housing. This project touches everything you'd want to be a part of.”

Kahya Fox

Executive Director

Habitat for Humanity of the Greater La Crosse Region



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