

One River for All

***Creating a Complete Los Angeles River Greenway:
Stories and Guidance***

ABOUT AND AUTHORSHIP

The UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation presents *Creating a Complete Los Angeles River Greenway: Stories and Guidance* (Guide) to recognize the achievements of those who have successfully developed portions of the LA River greenway as well as to provide advice to those interested in promoting a continuous greenway in their community. This Guide features 14 case studies of small and large projects that have improved community access to the LA River and/or created parks, pathways, or bridges along it. We include considerations for how to: develop clear project goals, strategic partnerships, and reasonable timelines; engage and empower community members; develop creative project designs; determine accurate project costs; consider funding options; effectively coordinate with numerous permitting agencies and private land owners; and sustain long term project operations and maintenance.

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DISCLAIMER

The UCLA Luskin Center appreciates the contributions of the many project proponents and reviewers that we name in the acknowledgements sections. This Guide does not, however, necessarily reflect their views. Any errors are those of the authors.

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Logo of Luskin Center and Natural Resource Strategies

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Summary

Quietly pulsing through 51 miles of residential neighborhoods, industrial back lots, railyards, open space areas, as well as communities with a wide range of income levels and ethnic groups, the Los Angeles River (LA River) is a vast natural resource with unrealized potential to benefit the public. Long hidden in plain sight, the LA River is now center stage in discussions of open space and recreation, active transportation, regional watershed management, ecosystem restoration, climate resilience, and public art transforming the Los Angeles region.

INSERT IMAGE OF ENTIRE LA WATERSHED, HIGHLIGHTING THE LA RIVER

Enthusiasm among a broad group of stakeholders is growing around visions for the LA River, including for a continuous, comprehensive, and accessible greenway. This Guide defines a complete LA River greenway as an active transportation, open space, and recreational corridor involving a network along both sides of the 51-mile LA River of: 1) community access points, 2) parks and other green spaces, 3) pedestrian, bike, and equestrian paths; and 4) bridges for non-motorized use.

People of all ages can enjoy the LA River and its greenway. There are parks and trails for exercise, bike paths for commuting, bridges for connecting communities, and places to stop, meet friends, or observe wildlife. An expanded greenway network could result in numerous social, health, transportation, and environmental benefits for the region.

Greenway projects have been and will continue to be forged by the initiative of local communities, nonprofits, and local governments. Several grassroots and government organizations have already blazed a trail to build greenway projects along the LA River, yet the documentation of their stories and lessons learned has been limited until now.

UCLA's Luskin Center for Innovation presents *Creating a Complete Los Angeles LA River Greenway: Stories and Guidance* (Guide) to recognize the achievements of those who have successfully developed portions of the LA River greenway and to provide advice to those interested in advancing a continuous greenway in their community. This Guide features 14 case studies of small and large projects that have improved community access to the LA River and/or created parks, pathways, or bridges along the LA River. We identify commonly reported development challenges and offer suggestions on how to overcome them. We include considerations for how to: develop clear project goals, strategic partnerships, and reasonable timelines; engage and empower community members; develop creative project designs; determine accurate project costs; consider funding options; effectively coordinate with numerous permitting agencies and private land owners; and sustain long-term project operations and maintenance.

Background

For thousands of years, before being settled by the Spanish in the late 1770s, the lands surrounding the LA River was home to the Tongva people, who benefited from the rich wetland, marsh, and forest habitats. Before the 20th century, the LA River naturally ran wild and unpredictable, changing course over time and regularly flooding. Seasonal flooding supported a thriving agricultural sector through natural irrigation and the deposit of rich sediments from the San Gabriel Mountains. Historically, the simplest and most effective approach to avoiding flood

damage was to locate infrastructure and development outside a river's floodplain. However, once the LA Aqueduct was completed in 1913, the city of Los Angeles no longer depended on the LA River as a main source of water and by the 1930s, housing development began to encroach upon the floodplain, increasing flood risk from the often meandering river.

In response to devastating flooding in 1938, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers straightened, deepened, paved, and channelized the LA Riverbed and banks, creating a "water freeway," for transporting storm water and treated wastewater to the sea. During the following decades, the LA River was viewed merely from a flood control perspective, rather than as a resource for the public's use and enjoyment.

An Alternative Vision to Reconnect with the Los Angeles LA River

Since the mid-1980s, an alternative vision of the LA River has emerged: one that seeks to reclaim its potential as part of the public commons and a recreational asset that should be accessible to all. However, it was not a new idea. The Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan was released in 1930. It charted how the city lacked parks and laid out detailed plans for parks, pathways, and other open space that Los Angeles could grow around. Among other things, the Plan proposed protecting the still living river as a part of a network of connected open spaces. However, the Chamber of Commerce, which commissioned the study, never made the report widely available.

Fast forward to 1985, when poet and environmentalist Lewis MacAdams and a few friends cut a hole in a chain-link fence and descended into the LA Riverbed, beginning a crusade to bring life back to the LA River. In the decades since, community, nonprofit, and government entities have worked in various capacities to transform the Los Angeles LA River from a single purpose infrastructure—as a flood-control channel—to a public amenity that generates many other benefits. Community leaders, such as Lewis MacAdams as well as Dorothy Green, helped instigate the resurgence of environmental work along the LA River and in the region. Dorothy Green, a water quality activist, formed the nonprofit Heal the Bay while Lewis MacAdams established the nonprofit organization Friends of the Los Angeles LA River (FOLAR). FOLAR, North East Trees, The Trust for Public Land, The River Project, and other nonprofits have contributed to neighborhood-scale projects along the LA River. Local, regional, state, and federal agencies—including the City of Los Angeles; Los Angeles County; State Coastal Conservancy; the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority; and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—have also made significant contributions to greenway development.

Importance of Overcoming Challenges

In recent years, progress toward revitalization of the LA River has gained tremendous momentum. However, obstacles continue to impede the transformation. Attempts to propose, design, and implement projects within the LA River corridor are constrained by physical barriers, use agreements, and complicated ownership structures. For over seven decades, LA River-adjacent development has involved heavy rail and highway transportation, major drainage and sewage conduits, electrical utility infrastructure, and industrial activities. This infrastructure cannot be easily moved, making greenway development challenging. The LA River runs through more than a dozen municipalities, and intersects with many county, state, and federal government easements. The puzzling assemblage of title ownership, leases, rights-of-way, and use agreements reflects the geographic complexity of the Los Angeles region. For more information, see the section below on governance and jurisdictional issues.

LA River revitalization has been implemented to date on a project-by-project basis, with temporary coordination between project proponents, due to the physical and administrative fragmentation of the LA River described above. This piecemeal approach and complicated patchwork of property entitlements constrains the size and scope of potential public benefit projects within the LA River corridor. This is reflected in the current status of the greenway: linear pathways along the LA River are divided into discontinuous segments with varying degrees of public access, landscaping, and recreational amenities.

Our focus in this document on individual projects is not an endorsement of a project-by-project approach to LA River revitalization, which can sometimes feel piecemeal. Instead, our aim is to accurately document what has happened in the past to help inform and inspire future efforts that over time may become even more transformative. In addition, organizing our research and the Guide by four project archetypes provided a helpful, logical structure in our goal to make the Guide reader-friendly, but we recognize that this organization requires a simplification of reality in which projects involve a combination of improvements rather than merely one type of feature. We emphasize that importance of integrative efforts that include a multitude of features, including access points, parks, pathways, and bridges, as part of a comprehensive greenway for a wide range of community benefits. We also emphasize the importance of a continuous network of these features.

To kick-off this research project, UCLA created a comprehensive database of existing access points, parks, pathways, and bridges along the LA River. To do so, we extensively analyzed sites using Google Earth and conducted site visits for verification. We also incorporated information from various LA River greenway project mapping and database resources provided by the City of Los Angeles' LARiverWorks in the Office of Mayor Eric Garcetti.

Insert map

Equitable Access to the LA River

This map underscores that while there have been many greenway projects implemented to date, there are also many gaps that underscore inequities. For instance, all bridges for non-motorized use and the majority of parks are located in the “upper” half of the LA River, in places such as northeast Los Angeles. While substantial work has taken place here, within the boundaries of the City of Los Angeles, the “lower”, southern segment of the LA River has not shared a similar level of grassroots, municipal, state, or federal attention and resources. This is despite that fact that many communities along the lower portion of the LA River have a disproportionate need for more park and open space. This has created the problem of unequal access and use of the LA River as a community asset.

In the transit-poor, notoriously decentralized context of Los Angeles County, an uninterrupted greenway would link diverse neighborhoods and provide an active transportation and recreational corridor that people of all income levels can use. Specifically, the greenway would create feasible and cost effective alternatives to automotive travel and improve local connectivity to transit. It would also create new recreational opportunities in park-poor areas and connect to historically separated destinations, such as parks and playgrounds. Businesses would be drawn to these amenities, spurring economic development opportunities along a community destination hub.

Equitable Access to the Table

To date, a lot of river revitalization work has taken a collaborative but top-down approach, much of which is necessary given the highly technical and expensive nature of the work. But a lot of stakeholders would like to see improved processes whereby the public can better engage and influence big decisions. This Guide is designed to educate and empower community members to help take river revitalization into their own hands. We underscore the importance of holistic and collaborative planning that is community-driven. Community-driven planning can ensure that local projects maximize benefits to the local community. It could also help to avoid potential unintended consequences, like housing displacement. In particular, this is a topic of fierce debate in an 11-mile stretch of the LA River just north of downtown LA expected to receive a large infusion of public investment that could increase property values surrounding the investment area.

We also underscore the importance of collaborative planning that brings together leaders from public health, transit, affordable housing, and more to work on shared goals for livable river communities. This would include preserving and building more affordable housing along the river, ensuring residents benefit from the jobs that will be created with infusions of public investment, and linking the greenway, as an active transportation corridor, to transit.

Opportunities: Current River Revitalization Initiatives

Visions of a transformed LA River corridor are documented in two master plans: the *Los Angeles River Master Plan* completed by Los Angeles County in 1996 and the *Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan* completed by the City of Los Angeles in 2007. In 2007, the City of Long Beach also released their *RiverLink* plan. The plans prioritized many of the specific projects featured in this Guide and provide guidelines for future project development.

Greenway project inclusion in master planning documents provides a foundation of general development support which can be leveraged during partnership building, fundraising, land use negotiations, and other development steps. The *Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan* is a particularly comprehensive plan for efforts in the City of Los Angeles but it also includes information relevant for all greenway development. It contains a robust set of priorities that have helped result in myriad projects in the upper segment of the LA River.

The nonprofit organization River LA (formerly known as the Los Angeles River Revitalization Corporation) recently launched a collaborative initiative, called *Greenway 2020*, to complete a continuous, safe, and well-designed greenway along the entire LA River by the year 2020.¹ Their vision is to use the riverbank as a continuous 51-mile active transportation and recreational corridor, and be the “spine” of the larger bike and pedestrian networks within the County and LA River-adjacent cities to enhance regional public transportation networked systems. This would generate significant transportation, health, social, environmental, and economic benefits on both a local and regional scale.

The *Emerald Necklace Forest to Ocean Expanded Vision Plan*, produced by the nonprofit organization Amigos de los Rios and The Conservation Fund, aims to bring back the vision outlined in the Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan from 1930. The Plan recognizes all of the existing LA

¹ For more information, visit <http://www.laRivercorp.com/greenway2020>.

River master plans and acknowledges that many of the same challenges and recommendations highlighted in the Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan are relevant still today. For example, Los Angeles today still struggles with growing pains and a lack of green and open space. Amigos de los Rios's plan looks at opportunities to implement green infrastructure to connect people and wildlife to the county's lands and waters. This plan focuses on more than just the LA River: 1,500 acres of parks and open spaces that are interconnected along a greenway around the Rio Hondo River, San Gabriel River, and the lower Los Angeles River.²

Myriad other inspiring visions and innovative ideas are continuously forming to bring both people and nature to the LA River. It is beyond the scope of this Guide to highlight all of the visions and current efforts.

In particular, many efforts are centered on ecosystem restoration of the LA River. Given the scope of this document, we focus on LA River-adjacent spaces, not the LA River itself, but recognize that they are intrinsically linked. For example, storm water capture and infiltration in the LA River greenway and larger watershed may reduce risk of flooding from the LA River, which in turn can support additional LA River-adjacent greenway projects.

We recognize the importance of efforts to address these types of issues. In addition to supporting important ecosystem and water system goals, work in the LA River channel can also support the success of projects adjacent to the LA River, in the greenway. Current efforts to bring nature back to the LA River also can complement goals to bring people to the LA River. See the About this Guide section for more details about the scope of this Guide.

While we focus on the LA River, we also recognize that it is part of a larger watershed and network of rivers that are connected hydraulically and ecologically. There are other relevant plans related to these other rivers such as the *San Gabriel LA River Corridor Master Plan* from 2006, which helped inform the *Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan*, and the *Compton Creek Regional Garden Park Master Plan* from 2011, which also contains recommendations are applicable generally to other rivers.

Fortunately, there are new opportunities bringing attention and resources to LA River greenway projects, with a particular focus on the lower portion of the LA River. For instance, Assembly Bill 530, sponsored by Assemblyman Anthony Rendon and signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown in 2015, establishes a local working group to develop a lower LA River revitalization plan. The planning process recognizes that LA Rivers flow across jurisdictional boundaries and a collaborative master plan could leverage much needed greenway development funding for underserved communities in the Gateway Cities and southeast Los Angeles region. The San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles LA Rivers and Mountains Conservancy will staff the working group, which will be eligible for state funding under Proposition 1, the 2014 water bond authored by Rendon. These funds could also be used for specific LA River greenway projects identified as a priority by the working group.

To support the work to be conducted through AB 530, in January 2016, LA River LA launched the creation of a 51-mile integrated design study of the LA River that can be built upon by the Working Group in its process of establishing a formal Lower LA River Master Plan. The organization partnered with Geosyntec and architect Frank Gehry and his team, Olin Studio, to

² To access the plan, visit

https://issuu.com/amigosdelosrios/docs/adlr_and_tcf_en_forest_to_ocean_exp

conduct a data-driven study of the LA River and to create a digital platform that will make the findings accessible to the public for future design planning.

In partnership with North East Trees, the Watershed Conservation Authority—a local public entity exercising joint powers of the LA Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District—recently launched plans to develop a visionary *Gateway Cities and LA Rivers Urban Greening Master Plan* for the Gateway Cities and Lower LA and San Gabriel Rivers. The goal is to develop a plan that serves to guide greening projects in the Gateway Cities. It will identify opportunities for new and improved parks, trails and bikeways, as well as places to implement living streets and green infrastructure—including water conservation and capture features—within the 26 cities and unincorporated areas that make up the Gateway Cities in southeast Los Angeles County.

The projects profiled in this Guide identify past and current projects but there are several new and potential funding opportunities on the horizon. In addition to Proposition 1 mentioned above, community advocates are asking the California Department of Transportation to fund transportation improvements along the portion of the LA River that runs near Interstate 710. Advocates are also pushing the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority to include money for active transportation and green infrastructure projects, including LA River greenway projects, in Measure R2, which is likely to appear on the November 2016 ballot. Early estimates predict this new 45-year half-cent sales tax would raise about \$100 billion.

Jurisdictional and Governance Overview

In order to leverage these opportunities and advance Los Angeles LA River greenway projects, it is important that any potential project proponent understand some key details about the complex jurisdictional and governance issues affecting LA River greenway projects.

There are two main management areas of the LA River that affect issues of ownership, easements, and maintenance responsibilities. The first is the flood control right-of-way in the LA River itself and on the immediately adjacent land. The other is the greater LA River corridor. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, which is operated by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, own part of the LA River right-of-way and are responsible for maintaining the LA River and its banks. See below section on Easements and Maintenance for details. Cities, federal agencies, the State of California, public utility districts, railroads and private interests such as homeowners, and other companies own or have other associated rights to portions of the LA River corridor. They may hold fee titles or easements on land adjacent to the LA River. For example, a utility company may have an easement on a piece of property owned by a private entity allowing them to enter at any time to maintain equipment, such as power lines, even though the utility company does not own the property.

Several areas along the LA River have overlapping easements by agencies providing distinct services.³ For example, the stretch of LA River between Los Feliz Boulevard and Colorado Boulevard is owned by the City of Los Angeles; the city has granted a flood control easement to the USACE for maintenance of the flood control channel; and the City of Los Angeles

³ Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (1996) *Los Angeles LA River Master Plan*. Jurisdiction and Public Involvement chapter. <http://ladpw.org/wmd/watershed/LA/LARMP/>

Department of Water and Power has an easement to provide maintenance of their transmission towers.

Jurisdictions

While the LA River lies entirely within Los Angeles County, thirteen different cities and the unincorporated areas of LA County have authority over the land adjacent to the LA River. These cities are responsible for land use decisions and providing services to their residents. As such, LA River projects must abide by city specific codes and regulations, such as building and safety codes, to receive city approval. The following cities have jurisdiction along the LA River:

- Bell
- Bell Gardens
- Burbank
- Carson
- Commerce
- Compton
- Cudahy
- Glendale
- Long Beach
- Los Angeles
- Lynwood
- Maywood
- Paramount
- South Gate
- Vernon

Ownership and Governance

The Los Angeles LA River and adjacent land is owned by an array of public and private entities. This includes ownership by city, county, and federal government agencies as well as other agencies and organizations, homeowners and businesses (see map below).

INSERT MAP

Easements and Maintenance

The LA River is governed not only by ownership rights but also by easements and their corresponding regulations. There are a number of rights-of-way along the LA River including easements for flood control, transportation, and utility maintenance. While the property owner still owns the entire property, he/she must adhere to the restrictions and/or requirements outlined in the easement document.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District are responsible for the operation and maintenance of the LA River. (Each is responsible for portions of the LA River based on when each reach was channelized.)⁴ The agencies are

⁴ City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works Bureau of Engineering (2007) *Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan*. LA River Management chapter. http://boe.lacity.org/laLA Riverrmp/CommunityOutreach/pdf/10_Chapter_9_LA_River_Management_050107.pdf.

tasked with ensuring safety and serviceability of the area to prevent/prepare/respond to a flood. The USACE and the LA County Department of Public Works Flood Control District maintain the LA River through debris, weed, and vegetation removal; repair of damage caused by erosion, storm runoff, and other forces; repair of concrete; rodent control; roadway maintenance access; landscaping; etc.
(see map below).

INSERT MAP

The USACE was authorized in 1941 to construct and operate major flood control facilities along the LA River after the passage of the Flood Control Act of 1936. Typically, USACE passes along maintenance duties of flood control projects to local jurisdictions, like the LA County Flood Control District. However, in the case of the LA River the USACE shares responsibility for maintenance with the Los Angeles County Flood Control District.

The USACE is generally associated with building dams, canals, and other flood protection infrastructure. They are also involved in a wide range of public works, specifically providing outdoor recreation opportunities for the public. Additionally, they work to ensure adherence to environmental regulation and ecosystem restoration.

The LA County Department of Public Works is responsible for construction and operation of Los Angeles County's roads, building safety, sewerage, and flood control. While mostly providing services to the unincorporated county, they provide flood control and watershed management as the operator of the Flood Control District for the entire County (except for portions of the Antelope Valley and Catalina Island). The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, as operator of the Flood Control District, maintains the District's reaches of the LA RiverLA River.

Permits

The permitting process for any project along the LA River is lengthy and complex. Projects that modify the LA River or immediately adjacent land must submit a permit to either the County Department of Public Works or the USACE depending on where the project is located (permits are administered through whichever agency maintains the reach on which a project is located). Permits are typically granted if the proposed project does not alter the capacity of the channel or impede the efforts by the USACE and County to ensure flood protection.

For projects in a Flood Control District-maintained reach, proponents should first contact the LA County Department of public Works Watershed Management Division.⁵ Each project will be assigned a liaison and this liaison will help shepherd the project through the development and permitting processes. If a project will impact the infrastructure built by USACE, the Watershed Management Division liaison will help project leads obtain a 408 Permit and any other permits required by USACE. The County recommends project leads approach them early in the development process, even before starting to seek funding.

Before contacting the County, project proponents should:

⁵ Project proponents can call 626-458-4300 to reach the Watershed Management Division. A project liaison for either the Upper or Lower Los Angeles River, depending on where the proposed project is located, will be assigned to the project.

- Identify general project goals,
- Create a visualization of the proposed project (a simple sketch is sufficient),
- Draft a concept plan for the project, and
- Review the County's *Los Angeles LA River Master Plan Design Guidelines* and Maintenance sections.

The permit process can be expensive and typically takes four to six months. Therefore, project leads should plan accordingly.

Projects located on land maintained by USACE will go through the Army Corps' permitting process. However, project proponents may have to obtain an additional permit from the County if their project impacts a side drain that connects with other Flood Control drains.

It is recommended that project leads contact USACE early in their process. The Army Corps can identify if and what permits will be needed and advise project proponents accordingly. Generally, if projects have any impact on the River's channel, they will need to acquire one or two different permits from USACE. The first type of permit is a regulatory permit, which is governed under the statutory authority of sections from three different pieces of legislation: The Rivers and Harbors Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Sanctuaries Act. Regulatory permits are required for a variety of reasons including work in, over, or under the River; any type of bridge construction; and discharge of fill material into the River (this can mean any type of material that is deposited into the River channel temporarily or permanently during project implementation). The Army Corps requests project leaders submit a permit application after which, the Corps will provide guidance regarding next steps, i.e. no action necessary and the permit is granted, modifications to the project are required to receive a permit, etc.

The second type of permit is an engineering permit, called a section 408 permit. This permit is required for projects that modify, alter, or occupy an existing Corps-constructed public works project, such as the LA River's concrete channel. Project proponents must submit a written request for a 408 permit and will grant the permit if the proposed alteration is deemed not injurious to the public, will not impair the usefulness of the project, and is not in conflict with any known laws and/or regulations.⁶

The permit process for both County and USACE maintained land has changed dramatically over time. While this document intends to provide the best information possible, we recognize that processes may change again in the future. Project proponents should remain flexible and investigate the most up-to-date permit processes early in their project development.

For projects on land next to the LA River, permits are additionally administered through the appropriate City agency. Some cities, such as the City of Los Angeles, have multiple departments involved in permitting for projects within their jurisdiction.⁷

⁶ For more information, visit: <http://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks.aspx>

⁷ To streamline the permitting process for applicants within the City of Los Angeles, proponents are encouraged to submit their plans to the Los Angeles River Cooperation Committee. This Committee is a joint working group of the County and City of Los Angeles, with the USACE serving in an advisory capacity. They meet at least twice per year to share information, evaluate and make recommendations about proposed projects along the River. Project proponents can present project ideas to the committee and receive feedback regarding permitting and other issues.

About this Guide

Purpose and Scope

This Guide walks the reader through the aforementioned project steps by documenting specific LA River greenway projects and how community-based organizations and government agencies developed them. It is designed to be an application-oriented guidance document to reduce uncertainty and lower the barrier-to-entry for future greenway projects driven by community leaders, nonprofit organizations, and local governments. We present techniques for navigating through a challenging urban planning environment by distilling past development experiences into practical lessons for application to future community-driven projects. By probing into the project planning process, we present common project obstacles and how to overcome those obstacles and seize opportunities.

The 17 stories in this Guide of completed projects and current projects, which are far enough along to enable retrospective analysis, are meant to inform and support future efforts to complete the LA River greenway. While this documentary-style Guide focuses at the project level, we recognize the challenge of operating on a project-by-project basis as part of a somewhat piecemeal approach to LA River revitalization. We share the hope of LA River revitalization leaders that efforts will continue to become more and more transformative and integrative over time. This Guide is meant to complement and support bigger visioning efforts, integrative plans, comprehensive projects, and active programming. While again the scope of this Guide is focused on the project level, we acknowledge that visions, policies and plans are critical foundations to advance and support change around the LA River.

We also recognize that the work does not end at the ribbon cutting ceremony for a newly built project. Community events, educational experiences, and other types of programming bring people to the LA River. Programming can ensure that the LA River greenway is actively used as a community asset.

Another important point about the scope of this document: we focus on LA River-adjacent spaces, not the LA River itself. Yet as aforementioned, work in the LA River channel is important for the success of projects adjacent to the LA River and vice versa, projects along the LA River greenway can impact the LA River itself. Current efforts to bring nature back to the LA River are critical to supporting goals to bring people to the LA River. As illustration, who would not prefer to be on a bike path with views of a vibrant wetlands ecosystem rather than a concrete stormdrain with little vegetation or wildlife?

Finally, an important point about the term “greenway.” “Greenway” is commonly used to describe the area adjacent to the LA River envisioned as an active transportation corridor and the LA region’s version of a linear Central Park. Yet unlike Central Park in New York City, the LA River greenway exists in a much more arid climate. Adding vegetation along the LA River requires climate-appropriate planting decisions. As a result we are seeing more use of native plants and trees and other ways to minimize or eliminate irrigation.

Organization and Methodology

The Guide is organized by project type into the following four chapters:

Chapter 2: Community Access to the Los Angeles LA River

Chapter 3: Parks along the Los Angeles LA River
Chapter 4: Pathways along the Los Angeles LA River
Chapter 5: Bridges across the Los Angeles LA River

Chapter 2 features projects that created or improved safe community access to the LA River. These projects provide entry to areas that would otherwise be closed off or hidden to the public and thus segregate communities, dissect transportation networks, and impede wildlife. The access points highlighted include entryways (e.g. gates, stairs, ramps) and visual markers (e.g. signage, public art), and other inviting features to help people safely find their way towards, along, across, and away from the LA River and its amenities.

Chapter 3 highlights LA River-adjacent parks ranging in size from small, community-based pocket parks to large, regionally significant parks with multiple amenities such as playgrounds, sports fields, picnic areas, educational facilities, and nature trails. Some projects include native habitat, best management practices for storm water management, and other ecological and environmental improvements. One project, Maywood LA Riverfront Park, is an example of how to remediate hazardous sites to create a safe public park in a severely park-poor, underserved community.

Chapter 4 features linear pathways and trails along both sides of the LA River for pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians, and those with limited mobility. Complete pathway projects include adjacent greenway space with landscaped mini-parks, native habitat, meandering nature trails, and amenities, such as pleasant places to sit and rest. Linear pathways serve as a backbone of the greenway allowing commuters and recreationalists to access the LA River, parks, and bridges over the LA River channel.

Chapter 5 focuses on bridges across the LA River and its tributaries specifically for pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians. Some cross the main channel, connecting communities on either side of the LA River, while others pass over a tributary that flows into the main channel, thus providing continuous movement on one side of the LA River. Bridges can improve mobility between historically disconnected neighborhoods and be landmarks strengthening community identity and pride.

Each chapter begins with definitions, benefits, context, and the distinguishing elements of each project featured. We then present the case studies using the following sections: origins, goals, and timeline; project proponents and community collaborators; site selection and design; cost and funding; permitting and use agreements; as well as operations and maintenance. This is followed by a guidance section highlighting specific lessons learned and solutions for overcoming common development challenges. We end each chapter with a list of references that informed the case studies and resources that may be helpful to readers interested in learning more about greenway development. We also acknowledge the project proponents who generously contributed their time and expertise to help inform an accurate portrayal of case study stories.

Given the interconnected nature of the four main types of greenway features in this Guide, many projects represent a combination of improvements. For example, a park may include a new pathway and improve access to the LA River. In those case studies, we highlight their comprehensive features when describing project proponent's key design considerations. Additionally, some of the projects we feature are just one component of a larger multi-phase or multi-segment development effort.

While the 14 case studies featured do not represent all Los Angeles LA River greenway projects, three to four were selected for each chapter to represent a diverse range of project proponents, collaborators, project sizes, budgets, and design approaches. In addition to collective diversity, another criterion for selecting case study projects was the availability of project information. Some greenway projects were developed so long ago or in such informal ways that finding project leaders—who may have moved, changed jobs, or retired—proved to be an impossible task. As a result, this document tends to feature relatively large and more recent projects. Another reason we emphasize more contemporary projects is because over the years, greenway projects have become more innovative, comprehensive, and complete.

These stories have never been told, at least not in a format that distills key steps and lessons learned. To collect information about each project, UCLA researchers used a combination of primary and secondary sources. As such, researchers conducted two dozen interviews with project leaders, visited numerous sites, and collected countless project documents through extensive on-line searches and in-person meetings. These documents included budgets, preliminary designs, meeting notes, presentations, maps, community outreach materials, workshop minutes, and more. Experts involved in project development reviewed the draft text for accuracy.

In August 2015, the UCLA Luskin Center organized a Lower LA River Workshop. Co-hosted with the Watershed Conservation Authority and a myriad of partners, the event brought together over 100 community members and organizations interested in participating in the greening and public space development along the lower LA River. We introduced the concept for this Guide and through an interactive group activity, participants mapped out where they would like to see improvements to the LA River greenway, they also recorded how the Guide could be most useful to them. All of the considerations covered in the guidance section of the four main chapters of this Guide are specific considerations that the public requested. The UCLA Luskin Center also plans to hold future workshops to share this Guide and to provide support on its use.

Our hope is to empower LA River-adjacent communities to take Los Angeles River revitalization into their own hands. Through strategic partnerships, community engagement, and using the best practices presented here, what may at first seem like a daunting project, may end up successfully realizing accessible, healthy recreation and active transportation opportunities for underserved communities along the LA River.