



INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP

Rachael Meyer, Weber Thompson

The verdant Washington landscape is what initially drew Rachael Meyer to the Seattle area, and she has since built a career out of infusing it back into the region's urban areas.

Her projects as a landscape architecture engineer and director of sustainability for Weber Thompson balance the practical with the environmentally conscious. Along with aesthetic benefits from their biophilic landscape design, they have fused functional enhancements for their users with ecological benefits for their communities.

Chief among those projects is the Aurora Bridge Swales, a substantial stormwater capture system that diverts more than 2 million gallons of urban runoff away from Lake Union annually, and McGilvra Place Park in Seattle, which converted a half-acre traffic median into a pocket park, keeping building materials out of landfills and using native plants to boost the area's biodiversity.

Achieving those kinds of compound benefits required convincing several parties "to allow unconventional solutions," Meyer said, including navigating thorny issues like liability and maintenance. Ultimately, the process helped Seattle Public Utilities create a new incentive program for other private developers to create stormwater management projects and establish a replicable model for other communities.

"I strive to find opportunities that benefit more than just landscape design," she said. "As a leader, I facilitate these opportunities to ensure that we are always working toward the most sustainable solutions possible. Building consensus through facilitation of open-ended questions gets to the heart of our collective priorities."

Participating in the Living Building Challenge, a program with some of the strictest environmental standards in the world, pushed her to integrate ecological benefits directly into her designs, while her training in the Pomegranate method of community engagement has centered equitable community input in her projects.

How have you demonstrated leadership in sustainability? My focus has been on fostering a servant leadership style, meaning I'm trying to bring value to clients and teammates in a way that elevates everyone to



WEBER THOMPSON

Weber Thompson Director of Sustainability Rachael Meyer conducts a tour of the Aurora Bridge Swales, a project that helps divert stormwater runoff before it enters Lake Union.

About Rachael

Title: Director of Sustainability

Company: Weber Thompson

Headquarters: Seattle

Select sustainability stats:

2 million: gallons of water cleaned annually by the Aurora Bridge Swales

.5 acres: size of McGilvra Place Park in Seattle's Central District. The triangle-shaped plaza features native plantings, reclaimed wood benches and features that promote root growth and stability.



be successful and find as many opportunities for growth as possible. My experience with deep green design has shown me the value of starting with the subtraction of nonessential elements rather than proposing new technologies. It is important to question what is necessary and challenge the need for anything that does not serve a project in multiple ways. The effectiveness of planting areas to filter pollutants from water and the air adds a layer of purpose, boosting the value of an area that also connects users with nature (biophilia) and supports biodiversity and pollinator species.

What actions have you taken to educate people about the importance of sustainability? As a model to teach professional designers about ways to incorporate green infrastructure as standard practice, a case study of the swales has been included in a United Nations Guide for Sustainable Practices. It's also been recognized by the U.S. Department of the Interior as a model for protecting and cleaning urban waterways. In 2024, I presented

the Aurora Bridge Swales and the Northlake Commons Swales to Green Build. Practicing eco-revelatory design, the Aurora Bridge Swales is a verdant visual marker in the Fremont neighborhood. A foundational principle of stormwater design is to make it visible to someone passing by. If you can see it, you can understand the benefits.

How does your personal commitment to sustainability show up in your life and work? My job allows me to tackle different challenges every day. By solving problems that are different day in and day out, I've become comfortable with unknowns and inconsistency. I've found balance in staying aware of the different scales of my work, from big picture and visionary thinking to still being able to dive into the details to get something implemented. Part of how I measure success is if I'm challenged by the work I'm doing. If I have all the answers, then I need to expand the challenges at hand.

– Marissa Nall, associate editor