Attachment 4
PPBEP COMMUNITY GRANT FINAL REPORT FORM

Agreement No.:	FY2425-06		
Grantee Name:	University of West Florida		
Grantee Address:	11000 University Parkway, Pensacola, FL 32514		
Grantee's Representative:	Nicole Grinnan	**Telephone No.:**	850-474-3015
Project Title:	Heritage Roots: A Native Plant Garden Celebrating Culture and Ecology in Northwest Florida		
Please submit any high-resolution photos related to the project (include photo credit for possible use by PPBEP for use in our e-newsletter, annual report, social media, or website) with your report as image files to mbwalkinshaw@ppbep.org.			

RESULTS: Describe the progress made toward the goals and objectives as stated in the funded grant application.

The "Heritage Roots" project made substantial progress toward its stated goals of promoting native habitat restoration, enhancing cultural awareness, and fostering community engagement through the creation of an ethnobotanical garden at the University of West Florida (UWF) Archaeology Institute. While several components remain in progress, major milestones have been completed, and remaining items are scheduled for completion in the near future.

Some major accomplishments of the project include:

- Garden Design Finalized and Approved: A culturally informed garden layout designed by Emily Peterson (Garden Gate) was completed and approved by the project committee and UWF Facilities. The design incorporates both educational value and Muscogee (Creek) symbology, allowing the project to meet its mission in bringing awareness to the local area's cultural and ecological significance.

- Site Preparation and Pathway Installation: Hardscape and softscape pathways were installed in March 2025, with ADA-compliant paths providing access to all interpretive zones. Despite weather-related setbacks and UWF administrative delays, pathway installation was completed with support from UWF Facilities, who also provided irrigation infrastructure at no cost to the project.

- Plant Selection Completed: A final list of native plants was collaboratively developed and approved, representing species of ecological and cultural significance to the Pensacola and Perdido Bays watershed. Majority of the plants have already been delivered and planted, with final deliveries expected in late July and early August 2025.

- Interpretive Signage Designs Approved and in Manufacture: Signage designs for the garden trailhead and plant signs have been approved by PPBEP, the project advisory committee, and UWF. Sign content includes ecological, cultural, and linguistic information, with translations in the Mvskoke language provided by Chief Dan Helms of the Santa Rosa Band of the Lower

Muscogee. The signs are currently being manufactured by Pensacola Sign and will be installed in late July or early August 2025.

- Community Engagement and Education: Planning for a public open house is underway, tentatively scheduled for September 18, 2025, from 5–7 PM. Mike Thomin has developed an educational PowerPoint presentation for the garden to align with the Florida Master Naturalist Program and the UWF Archaeology Institute's public outreach efforts. Future outreach tools, including a self-guided GIS walking tour, will be in development following the open house. We plan for this walking tour to include additional information about the Mvskoke language and pronunciation, as well as additional local native plants resources.

- Volunteer Contributions and Local Buy-in: Community members, graduate students, and project partners participated in volunteer days organized to assist with planting and initial garden maintenance. These efforts not only supported the physical installation of native plants but also helped build local investment in the project. Volunteers contributed labor, received interpretive information about the plants, and engaged in discussions about the cultural and ecological goals of the garden. Additional volunteer opportunities are planned as new plants are delivered and as seasonal maintenance needs arise.

While delayed by factors such as institutional approvals, seasonal weather, and material sourcing, the project remains on track to meet its full set of goals by August 2025. Although this falls outside of the official grant period, every action was taken during the grant period to attempt to meet the original deliverable deadlines. The project team also deeply appreciates the no cost extension (NCE) granted to UWF for this project, which allowed us to make several final purchases once institutional approvals finally came through for landscaping, purchasing, and signage designs. The infrastructure and design phases are complete, and educational and interpretive components are progressing steadily. Overall, "Heritage Roots" has brought together an incredible team of people toward a common purpose. The project has transformed the Archaeology Institute's outdoor space and has provided a beautiful interpretive exhibit for the community.

IMPACT: Summarize the organization's key evaluation results related to the funded grant (number of people reached, samples taken, etc.):

The "Heritage Roots" project has already demonstrated significant impact through volunteer engagement, educational outreach, and ecological restoration. To date, over 100 combined service hours have been provided to the project for planting and initial garden maintenance. These hours have included UWF students, staff, and community members. These hands-on events have not only advanced the physical installation of the garden but also fostered some wonderful conversations about the benefits of utilizing native plants in at-home gardening, the significance of some plants to local cultures, and how others can help support the garden going forward.

Through volunteer workdays, collaborative planning meetings, and outreach by project partners, the initiative has reached an estimated 150 individuals, including members of the Santa Rosa Band of the Lower Muscogee, participants in the Florida Master Naturalist Program, and attendees of related UWF Archaeology Institute events. Approximately 0.2 acres of previously undeveloped space have now been transformed into a functional ethnobotanical garden. The garden currently includes more than 30 native plant species that hold ecological value and historical significance, many of which

have been used traditionally for food, medicine, crafting, building, or ceremony by a variety of cultures in Northwest Florida.

Partnerships with five key collaborators, including the UF/IFAS Escambia Extension, the Florida Public Archaeology Network, and the Santa Rosa Band of the Lower Muscogee, Emily Peterson, and Native Plants Co., have contributed to thoughtful plant selection, cultural interpretation, and community participation. A public open house event has been scheduled for September 18, 2025, and is expected to draw 50 to 75 attendees for guided tours and educational programming. Interpretive signage and self-guided materials, including information translated into the Mvskoke language, are currently being manufactured and, once installed, will provide long-term educational impact for garden visitors. Evaluation metrics such as volunteer logs, plant inventories, and visitor feedback will continue to be collected after the grant period to assess the garden's continued influence on community learning and environmental awareness.

SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES: Describe the significant successes and challenges the organization experienced related to the funded grant.

There is no doubt that a quick poll of the project advisory committee would result in resounding support for the success of the "Heritage Roots" project. Not only has the project advanced its goals of cultural interpretation and environmental restoration, but it has greatly enhanced public education through the development of a native plant garden at the UWF Archaeology Institute. A major success was the completion of (and UWF institutional approval of) a striking garden design by Emily Peterson that integrated both ecological and cultural components, including Mvskoke language and Muscogee (Creek) symbology. The project's strong partnerships with organizations like the UF/IFAS Escambia Extension, the Florida Public Archaeology Network, and the Santa Rosa Band of the Lower Muscogee greatly contributed to the plant selection process and the cultural interpretation of the garden. Another notable achievement was the enthusiastic involvement of volunteers and community members, who contributed time and effort to planting activities and who continue to show interest in the garden's future programming and maintenance. UWF Archaeology Institute staff have stepped up and adopted the garden space into their daily building activities, offering to do small maintenance as needed.

A major success that emerged during the project's implementation was the unexpected opportunity to collaborate with the UWF LEAD (Leadership, Enhancement, Activities & Development) program. At the same time the "Heritage Roots" garden was in development, the LEAD program selected the installation of an outdoor exhibit for an archaeologically conserved 19th-century ship anchor as one of its campus improvement initiatives. Recognizing the shared educational and interpretive goals of both projects, the two teams collaborated to envision a cohesive outdoor learning and exhibition space that integrates cultural heritage, ecological awareness, and student engagement. This partnership both enhanced the visibility and significance of the garden, and sparked a broader cross-campus conversation about the use of outdoor space for heritage interpretation, which has laid the groundwork for future interdisciplinary collaborations.

Additionally, although the original plan called for a single bench in the garden, the cost of installing a concrete pad and metal bench led the advisory committee to consider alternative options. Fortunately, the committee connected with a local milling company, Kelly Hickman's Reclaimed Dock Wood and Pilings, that was willing to create benches from reclaimed wood. Thanks to cost

savings and generous donations from the company's owners, the project was able to install four seating areas made from locally sourced hickory and pine, providing multiple inviting spots for visitors to sit and enjoy the garden.

In a further testament to the project's growing momentum, the Principal Investigator was awarded a $5,000 UWF Green Fee Grant in the final month of the reporting period. This competitive internal grant, administered by the UWF Student Government Association, is funded by student fees and specifically designated for projects that promote energy efficiency, renewable energy, or environmental sustainability on campus. The awarded funds will support additional planting and maintenance of the garden throughout fiscal year 2025–2026, helping to ensure the long-term vitality of the space and continuing student engagement. The Green Fee award reflects broad campus support for the garden and positions the project as a lasting component of UWF's sustainability and stewardship goals.

One of the primary challenges encountered during the project was the unanticipated complexity of navigating institutional approvals through UWF Facilities. Although the project involved outdoor improvements to an existing campus area, formal approval processes delayed early implementation steps. In particular, the university required that the garden's main pathways be as ADA-compliant as possible. While this goal was aligned with the project's values of accessibility and inclusion, the cost of achieving full compliance with paved pathways significantly exceeded the grant budget. In response, the project team worked with the UWF Facilities team and an external landscaper (Green Procedures, LLC) to revise the original plan, integrating ADA-compliant hardscape pathways alongside low-cost softscape routes to remain within budget while still prioritizing accessibility.

Additional delays stemmed from university closures, weather events, and a mid-project review by the UWF Office of the President, which temporarily paused progress. These events collectively slowed site preparation and infrastructure installation, ultimately impacting the original planting timeline. The team remained flexible and proactive, adjusting the scope and sequence of work, securing in-kind irrigation support from UWF Facilities, and maintaining consistent communication with partners and stakeholders. While some deliverables are still pending at the time of reporting (including final signage installation, some plant deliveries, and the public open house), the majority of our core objectives have been achieved or are in their final stages.

Overall, the project's successes, particularly in design development, partnership engagement, and community involvement, far outweigh the delays encountered. The experience has strengthened institutional partnerships, broadened community support, and laid a strong foundation for continued cultural and environmental educational programming and stewardship.

<u>LESSONS LEARNED:</u> Describe what the organization learned based upon the results, successes, and challenges reported. Address programmatic, evaluative, or organizational changes that will be made based upon these lessons learned.

The "Heritage Roots" project provided valuable insights into how interdisciplinary, community-focused initiatives can thrive within an academic institution; it also revealed the importance of early and ongoing coordination with internal administrative units. One of the most significant lessons learned was the need to more thoroughly anticipate institutional requirements, especially when projects involve physical changes to campus spaces. While our team was experienced in project

planning and external collaboration, we underestimated the time and complexity involved in obtaining formal approvals from UWF. In future projects, we will build in additional lead time for design reviews and compliance processes.

Another key takeaway was the importance of designing for flexibility. The initial plan had to be adapted in response to budget constraints and accessibility requirements, which resulted in a hybrid hardscape/softscape pathway model. This outcome, though different from the original vision, maintained ADA compliance and visitor experience goals while remaining within budget. It also taught us that creative compromises can still support the integrity of a project when framed by a shared understanding among partners and advisory committee members. The ability for our project team to have done this is also due to the professionalism and dedication of the people selected to participate in the project.

The project also underscored the value (and necessity) of respectfully incorporating tribal knowledge into public interpretation and heritage spaces. Through our close collaboration with Chief Dan Helms and members of the Santa Rosa Band of the Lower Muscogee, it became clear that cultural resource interpreters and archaeologists must think more intentionally about how to partner with tribal communities. These relationships offer perspectives that are not only historically grounded but also living and evolving. The guidance offered by tribal partners enriched the project significantly, and in future efforts, the project team will continue to explore ways to ensure that Indigenous voices are embedded in the development, implementation, and interpretation of cultural heritage projects.

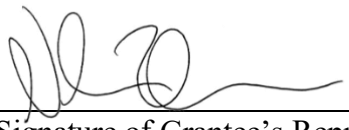
From a staffing and student engagement standpoint, another important lesson was learned regarding timing. While student volunteers played a meaningful role in planting and initial maintenance, we were unable to hire two planned graduate assistants due to the overlap with institutional delays and the beginning of the summer archaeology field school season. In the future, the PI intends to build in more flexible staffing models and consider ways to better integrate student involvement into the long-term use and stewardship of the garden, whether through research projects, coursework, or co-curricular programming. The garden offers a valuable platform for experiential learning, and we hope to use it as an ongoing tool for student engagement moving forward.

We also learned that collaboration can spark unanticipated opportunities. The joint development of an outdoor learning space with the UWF LEAD program, as well as the success in securing a UWF Green Fee Grant, demonstrated how strong partnerships and campus visibility can open doors to additional funding and long-term sustainability. Going forward, our team will seek to intentionally cultivate these types of cross-campus connections from the outset, both to build broader support and to align with other university priorities like sustainability, student leadership, and accessibility.

From an evaluative perspective, the project reaffirmed the value of multi-layered assessment strategies. Combining volunteer participation logs, feedback forms, and plant survival monitoring helped us better understand how the space is functioning and where additional investment is needed. These approaches will be carried into future community-engaged projects at the UWF Archaeology Institute.

Finally, this project reinforced the significance of cultivating a sense of ownership among community members and the UWF campus. Many of those who helped plant the garden have returned to visit or requested to be involved in the open house and future events. In response, we plan to create new outreach materials and recurring opportunities for volunteerism and stewardship as the garden matures, strengthening its role as a living, evolving educational resource.

This report is submitted in accordance with the reporting requirements of Agreement No. FY2425-06 and accurately reflects the activities associated with the project.



10 July 2025

Signature of Grantee's Representative | Date

Nicole Bucchino Grinnan
Assistant Director, UWF Archaeology Institute

Print Name and Title