SEEDS April 2026 Newsletter

Sustainable Energy Education & Development Support of NEPA

*Community Energy * Lasting Change*

Good News from the SEEDS Community

SEEDS Launches a New 5-Year Strategic Plan

SEEDS is excited to share a new 2026–2030 Strategic Plan that looks ahead to the future of sustainability in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Approved by the Board in March 2026, the plan reflects input from community members, volunteers, and supporters, and responds to growing local needs — from rising energy costs to increased interest in practical, everyday sustainability solutions.

Over the next five years, SEEDS will focus on strengthening the organization behind the scenes, expanding outreach to new communities and younger voices, and offering programs that connect sustainability with real-life economic and environmental challenges. This plan helps ensure SEEDS remains a trusted, accessible resource for our region — today and into the future.

To read the entire 5-Year Strategic Plan, click here.

Most importantly, get involved! Attend an event, volunteer your time, share your ideas, or support SEEDS as we work together to build a more resilient and sustainable community.

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2026 SEEDS Sustainability Scholarship Available

SEEDS (Sustainable Energy Education and Development Support) is offering a $1,000 scholarship in memory of Michael “Jake” Burkhardt who was a student intern with SEEDS. Jake loved life, his family, his community and the environment and worked with SEEDS as a high school student. Jake was a graduate of the Western Wayne Class of 2015.

Eligibility extends to local high school seniors from Western Wayne High School, Honesdale High School, Wallenpaupack Area High School, Damascus Christian Academy, Canaan Christian Academy, Delaware Valley as well as home-schooled seniors who reside within the areas covered by those high schools. Each student must submit an essay to be considered, and essays must be submitted via email to director@seedsgroup.net by 8pm on Thursday, April 30, 2026. For details click here.

Image by Freepik.

Renewable & Sustainability News
Our monthly feature on what's happening here at home and around the world.

AI's Hidden Toll on You
How the booming data center industry impacts your energy bills, water supply, and local environment in Northeast Pennsylvania.

By Adam Freedgood
SEEDS Volunteer & Board Member

The source of the information in this article is a live presentation by Penn State Extension "Data Centers: Land, Water, Energy, and Economics Overview" attended by SEEDS in March 2026.

Artificial intelligence often feels like magic — a weightless "cloud" that instantly answers questions, generates images, and writes code. But this cloud is actually grounded in massive physical buildings called data centers.

Because Pennsylvania is a top global natural gas producer and a leader in nuclear power, our state is uniquely positioned to become a powerhouse for the AI revolution. Tech giants have already pledged over $90 billion in investments in the state to build AI and energy infrastructure.

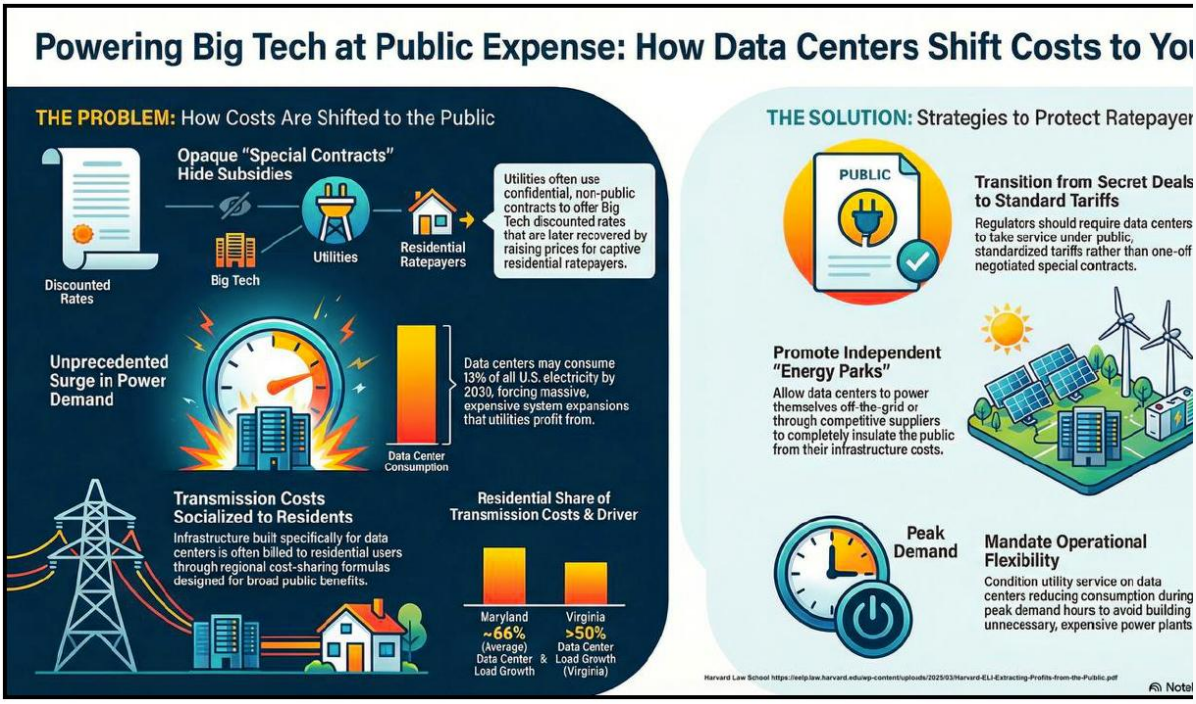
While this brings economic development, it also introduces significant challenges for individual ratepayers and environmental advocates in Northeast PA. Here is what you need to know about the true cost of AI and how it impacts your wallet and our natural resources.

The Energy Grid and Your Wallet

The U.S. electricity demand is tripling, largely driven by data center expansion. To put this in perspective, a single AI query consumes up to 10 times more power than a traditional search engine request. Driven by AI workloads, data centers could consume up to 17% of all U.S. electricity by 2030. A single new 1,000-Megawatt data center uses as much electricity as a large city, capable of powering 800,000 homes.

If you are a residential ratepayer, you might be wondering who pays for the new power plants and transmission lines required to support this massive surge. Unfortunately, the costs are often shifted to the public.

Utilities sometimes use confidential "special contracts" to offer Big Tech discounted electricity rates, which are later recovered by raising prices for everyday residential ratepayers. Furthermore, the expensive transmission infrastructure built specifically to serve data centers is often billed to residents through regional cost-sharing formulas. In some neighboring states, residents have absorbed over 50% of the transmission costs driven by data center load growth.

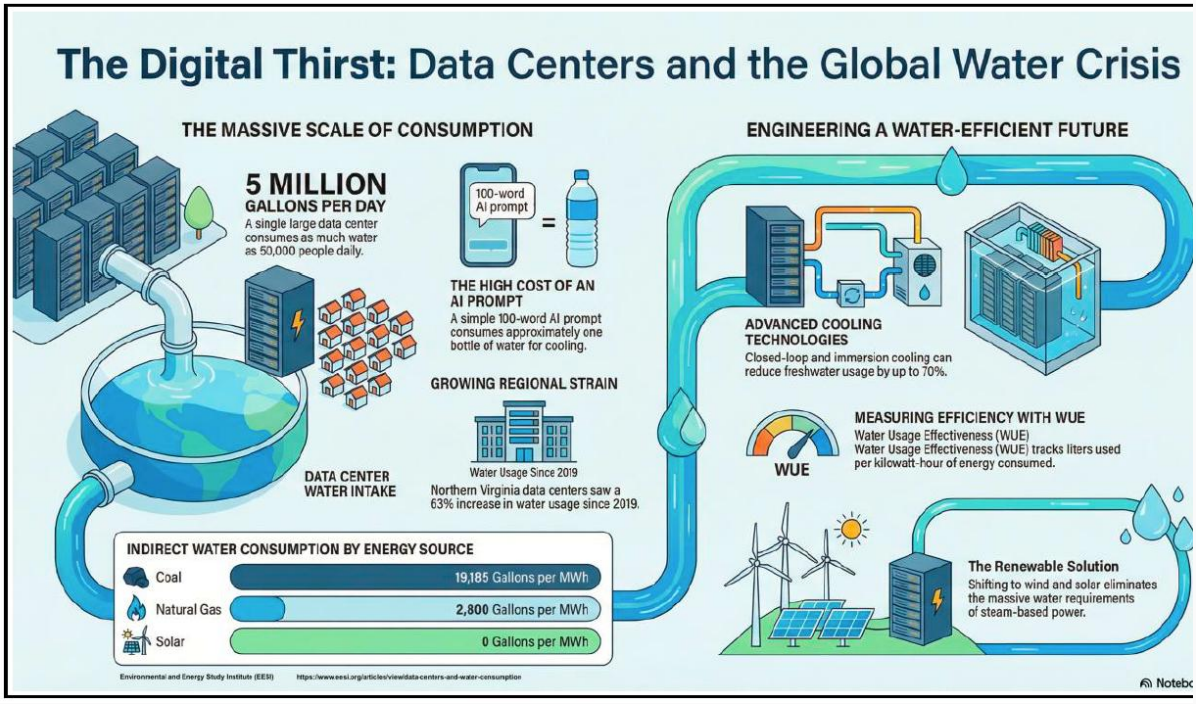


The Environmental Toll: Water, Air, and Land

Beyond electricity, data centers require staggering amounts of resources, posing severe challenges to our environmental sustainability:

Water Consumption: Servers generate an enormous amount of heat, and cooling systems account for 40% of a data center's energy use. To cool this equipment, facilities often rely on water. A single large data center can consume 5 million gallons of water every day — the equivalent daily usage of 50,000 people. To bring it down to a personal level, generating a simple 100-word AI prompt consumes approximately one bottle of water for cooling.

Additionally, the source of our grid's electricity creates "indirect" water consumption. For example, coal power requires over 19,000 gallons of water per Megawatt-hour (MWh), and natural gas requires 2,800 gallons per MWh. By contrast, shifting to renewable energy like solar and wind eliminates these massive water requirements, using 0 gallons per MWh.



Land and Air Quality: Hyperscale data centers require massive footprints, often spanning hundreds to thousands of acres. This development raises concerns about local topography, erosion, natural habitats, and the visual impacts of massive buildings and security fencing. Furthermore, when data centers rely on fossil-fuel energy sources or use on-site gas generators, they contribute to local air pollution and global greenhouse gas emissions.

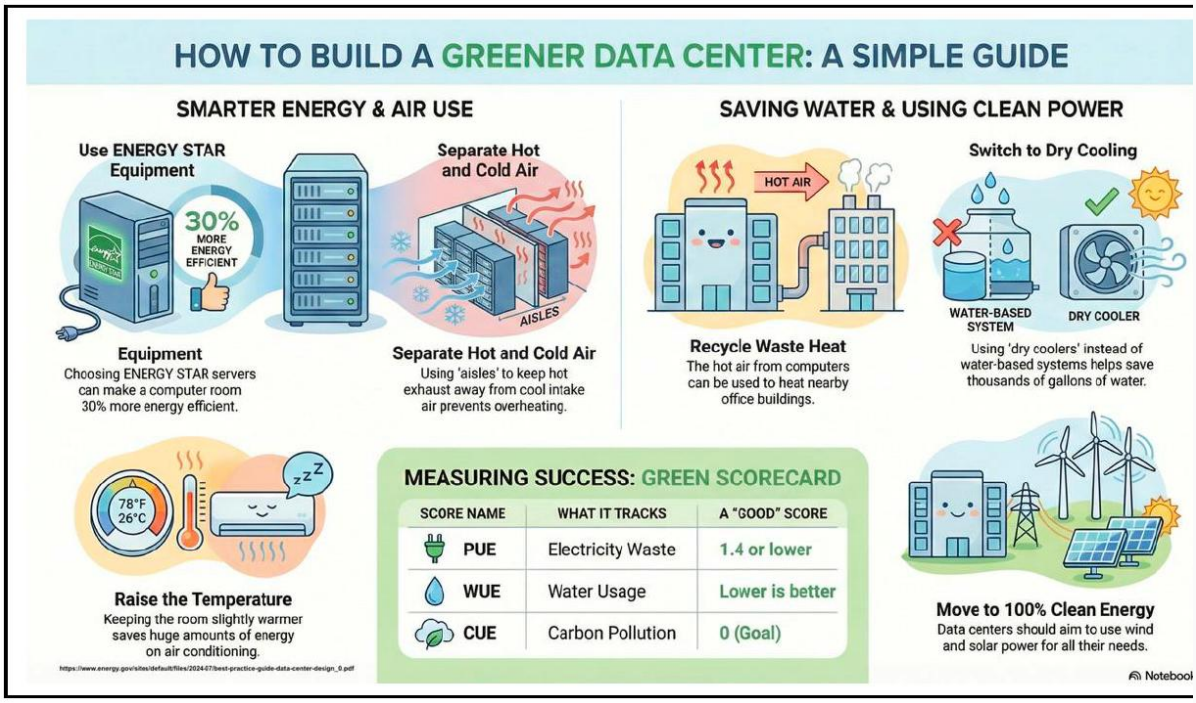
What Can Be Done?

The AI genie is out of the bottle, but communities are not powerless. Rather than relying on tech companies to voluntarily adopt green practices, residents and local governments can demand robust protections:

1. **Leverage Local Zoning Laws:** Municipalities hold significant power over land use. Communities can proactively update local zoning ordinances to establish strict setbacks, limit building heights, enforce noise ordinances, and require extensive visual screening. Zoning can also steer data centers toward already developed lands (like brownfields or old industrial parks) rather than prime farmland or sensitive ecosystems.
2. **Demand Standardized, Transparent Rates:** Residents can advocate for the PA Public Utility Commission (PUC) to ban opaque "special contracts." By

requiring data centers to take service under public, standardized tariffs, regulators can ensure that massive tech companies pay their fair share and do not pass the costs of new transmission lines onto captive residential ratepayers.

3. **Push for Independent "Energy Parks":** To completely insulate the public from grid infrastructure costs, communities can demand that data center developers build independent "energy parks." This forces operators to bring their own power generation to the project rather than draining the local grid.
4. **Support State-Level Protections:** Advocate for legislation and state initiatives, such as the proposed "GRID" (Governor's Responsible Infrastructure Development) standards. These state-level guardrails aim to condition expedited permitting on developers committing to strict transparency, high environmental and water protection standards, and robust community engagement.



Learn More

To dive deeper into the impacts of data centers and how communities can advocate for sustainable infrastructure, check out these resources:

- Penn State Extension - Water Resources & Data Centers: Educational resources exploring the intersection of data center development, community impact, and water usage in Pennsylvania.
  URL: https://extension.psu.edu/water
- U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) - Data Center Efficiency: Information on how data centers can optimize energy use, reduce their carbon footprint, and transition to renewable energy sources.
  URL: https://www.energy.gov/eere/femp/data-center-energy-efficiency
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - Green Power Partnership: A program supporting organizations, including tech companies, in using green power to reduce the environmental impacts associated with conventional electricity use. URL: https://www.epa.gov/greenpower

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Updates from the 12th Annual PA Renewables Summit

By Daniel Berg
SEEDS Volunteer

I was fortunate to attend the 12th Annual PA Renewables Summit in Harrisburg on March 16, 2026, organized and hosted by the PA Solar Center and the PA Solar & Storage Industries Association. More than 100 participants joined, including lawyers, consultants, installers and lobbyists. The purpose was to renew connections and create enthusiasm.

Highlights included:

Bipartisan Momentum for Solar for Schools
In her opening address, State Rep. Elizabeth Fiedler, chair of the PA House Energy Committee, described strong bipartisan backing for the Solar for Schools grant program, now funded for a second year at $25 million. She emphasized how the initiative delivers immediate savings on school energy bills — freeing up funds for classrooms — while creating local construction jobs, appealing to both rural fiscal conservatives and urban climate advocates. At the same time, she admitted that reaching consensus on the benefits of expanded renewable energy projects was a daily struggle.

Legislative Review
Sharon Pilar, Founder and Executive Director of the PA Solar Center, and Ron Celentano of Celentano Energy Services provided an update on key legislative developments. On March 17, following the conference, many conference participants attended Capitol meetings with over 25 legislators and key staff.

Key laws under review include:

HB 1260 **(Solar-Ready Tax Exemptions)**

- Key Provisions: Grants property tax exemptions for "solar-ready" features in new warehouses and distribution centers.
- Solar Impact: Lowers barriers for commercial rooftop solar in logistics hubs, potentially unlocking gigawatts of capacity.

SB 349 **(Solar Farm Decommissioning)**

- Key Provisions: Requires solar developers to post decommissioning bonds or funds equal to 110% of estimated removal costs (e.g., panels, foundations, fencing). Triggers at end-of-life (25-30 years) or abandonment; funds revert if site is restored. Exempts rooftop/small projects under 1 MW.
- Solar Impact: Raises upfront costs (est. 5-10% of project CapEx) but provides landowner/ratepayer assurances; critics say it duplicates local zoning.

HB 1792 **(Residential Solar Tax Credits)**

- Key Provisions: Expands PA Tax Reform Code credits to 30% of residential solar costs (capped at $5,000/year). Includes battery storage; phases out for high-income filers. Funds via Alternative Energy Investment Fund.
- Solar Impact: Directly subsidizes homeowners post-IRA changes.

PJM Lags on Grid Integration
Many speakers, including Shay Barton from the Interstate Renewable Energy Council, called out PJM for falling behind peer grid operators in areas such as hosting capacity analysis, transparent interconnection queues, and distributed energy resource (DER) participation. The lack of infrastructure and poor performance of PJM creates bottlenecks for solar development, including the potential for community solar and storage projects.

Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards (AEPS) / Pennsylvania Solar Targets
Pennsylvania still gets only a very small share of its in-state generation from solar and renewables generally, and state law sets relatively low requirements for solar although debates continue over raising AEPS targets.

A 2025 electricity update from the PA Independent Fiscal Office reports that solar provided about 1% of total Pennsylvania generation in 2024. Other renewables (wind and hydro) together add several additional percentage points, but the Commonwealth ranks near the bottom nationally in renewable growth.

PJM operates a regional wholesale market, dispatching generation and managing power flows across 13 states and D.C. Pennsylvania utilities are meeting AEPS obligations by buying alternative energy credits (AECs/SRECs) from both in-state and out-of-state projects. Pennsylvania customers effectively consume more renewables than the state currently produces.

The current AEPS requires electric suppliers to procure specified shares of sales from “Tier I” and “Tier II” resources, with a small solar PV carve-out in Tier I. As of 2025, Tier I requirements reach 8% renewables and the in-state carve-out is just a fraction of this, at 0.5%.

Clean-energy coalitions continue to work with Governor Shapiro and legislative

leaders to act on AEPS expansion, arguing that delays in adding clean energy will increase ratepayer costs and leave Pennsylvania at a competitive disadvantage. It is also worth noting that SREC pricing has begun to fall given the availability of small amounts of local and imported renewables to meet the current AEPS targets.

Data Centers: Real Load Growth, Tempered Projections
Panelists are concerned that policy makers are pushing PJM to bring on line large scale fossil fuel generation capacity in order to respond to alleged demand from future data centers (data centers are considered to increase peak load forecasts toward 250 GW by 2046). However, the projections may overstate likely capacity requirements — some participants felt that only 25% of centers will materialize. In either case, it was argued that accelerating renewables and storage projects was the only way to maintain affordable energy pricing.

Financial Innovation Post-IRA
With federal policy uncertainty around Inflation Reduction Act extensions, developers and financiers discussed state-level tools to bridge the gap: enhanced net metering, property tax exemptions for solar + battery, low-interest PACE financing, and performance-based incentives tied to local hiring and community benefits agreements. Andy Posner (Capital Good Fund), Elizabeth Friend (Reinvestment Fund) and Maryrose Myrtetus (Philadelphia Green Capital Corp) discussed creative structures to bring creative funding, especially in underserved populations.

The Importance of the Clean Energy Co-op (CEC)
Honesdale's Clean Energy Co-op (CEC) continues to fund renewable, clean energy, including offering an innovative structure for developing small-scale solar projects — an important mission given there are very few providers in this niche which can combine technical, legal, financial and management support. I personally alerted the summit's participants to the potential new chapter in southwest Pennsylvania, and emphasized the need for working together between all stakeholders — financial, policy, donor, government — to support innovative solar structures.

Upcoming Events

Back to Basics Series:
Say Yes to Recycling
Date: Wednesday, April 22, 2026
Time: 6:30 PM
Where: Stourbridge Tech Hub, 646 Park Street, Suite 2040, Honesdale, PA 18431
Come prepared to learn about how to recycle with confidence! Our presenters, Corporate Waste Consultants, will review the basics of recycling (the why, what, how, and where to recycle), including those hard to recycle items. This will be an enlightening and interactive presentation designed to encourage and empower all of us to continue to say YES to recycling. You will leave feeling lighter knowing WHAT YOU DO MATTERS and IS making a difference for our planet. Register HERE!

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PEEC Earth Day Festival
The Pocono region offers some of the most beautiful nature on Earth, so let's celebrate it! Bring yourself and the family for hands-on activities, conservation exhibits, vendors, crafts, food, music, and more!
Date: Saturday, April 25, 2026
Where: Pocono Environmental Education Center, 538 Emery Road, Dingmans Ferry, PA
For all the details visit: Pocono Environmental Education Center | Earth Day Festival - Pocono Environmental Education Center

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Eco Voices!
Date: Friday, May 1, 2026
Time: 7:00 PM
SEEDS of NEPA is launching Eco Voices, a collaborative online program where young people in high school and college share concerns, brainstorm solutions, and work with SEEDS of NEPA to turn their ideas into meaningful projects. Ongoing meetings will provide support, guidance, and accountability as your vision grows.

Eco Voices First Zoom Meeting | SEEDS Group

Image by Vecteezy.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

This month's tip is: Use Smart Power Strips and Unplug Devices!

Many electronic devices continue to draw power even when they are turned off, a phenomenon known as "phantom load" or "standby power." Over time, this hidden energy use can add up and increase your electricity bill. Using smart power strips or unplugging devices when they are not in use helps eliminate this unnecessary energy consumption without requiring major lifestyle changes. This simple habit is an easy and effective way to improve energy efficiency in your home. Reducing phantom load not only lowers energy costs but also decreases overall electricity demand, supporting a more sustainable energy system.

Read more and learn how to choose the right power strip for your

needs: Department of Energy

SEEDS Reads!
Looking for your next read? Check out the book recommendations below from our Volunteers. These titles support curious minds and sustainable futures.

CHILDREN'S PICK

My First Hike by Catherine Maria Wolf
What can be discovered on a first hike with Grandpa? Everything! Follow a young boy and his grandfather as they encounter so many wonderful things on their nature journey, including birds, frogs, waterfalls, and trees with branches ideal for swinging.

ADULT PICK

The Forgotten Pollinators by Stephen L. Buchmann and Gary Paul Nabhan
Pollinators are vital to the environment and our existence — this book invites readers to discover how bees, birds, bats, and countless other creatures and their intimate partnerships with flowering plants make it possible to create the food we eat. By traveling around the world and measuring human impact on various regions, the book exposes how our actions are interrupting the pollinator-to-plant harmony — actions that could harm species, including ours, beyond the point of return.

Message Board Info

Subscribe to the SEEDS new online message board to ask questions, share expertise, and get alerts on upcoming learning opportunities! Have a specific question about solar, energy efficiency, or clean tech? Want to promote an upcoming event or resource? SEEDS is building an online forum to serve as a center of knowledge on all things clean energy!

Visit https://groups.io/g/NEPA-solar-and-energy-efficiency or send an email to NEPA-solar-and-energy-efficiency+subscribe@groups.io to subscribe!

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES!

Pike County Volunteer Expo - April 11th
SEEDS representatives will be in attendance at the Pike County Volunteer Recruitment Fair and Expo at the Delaware Valley High School Cafeteria on April 11th from 11-2 PM. Come learn what SEEDS has to offer for volunteers as well as other organizations in our area. For more information visit: Volunteer Recruitment Fair & Expo

PEEC Earth Day Festival Tabling Event - April 25th
Join our staff and Board while we greet guests and provide hands on activities and information to attendees.

SEEDS Seeks Felt for a Project – Can You Help?

We are working on a project that requires various colors. We need light blue (for sky – a total of 4 panels, each 18"x 24"), brown (for ground – a total of 4 panels, each 6" x 24"), tan or beige (for roots), darker brown (for tree trunk), 2 different greens (for flower stems, tree leaves, and carrot and tomato plants), yellow (for flower petals), orange (for carrot), and red (for tomatoes). Please reach out to info@seedsgroup.net if you can help with any of these supplies!

There are a number of activities in April and May so keep an eye out for announcements!

Contact Development Director Michele Long if you are interested in any volunteer opportunities at director@seedsgroup.net

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