



Garden Sharing Network Toronto

Pilot Project Report

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With thanks to:

Ontario
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Fondation
Trillium
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Land acknowledgement

The partners of the Garden Sharing Network Toronto would like to acknowledge that the land on which we work is the historical territory of the Wendat, Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit Indigenous peoples. The territory is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this territory.

Background

Growing food is a powerful tool for engaging diverse community members in environmental action, yet there is a severe shortage of land for would-be growers and long wait lists to join community or allotment gardens. Sharing yard space is a method for involving both landholders and gardeners in practical actions that support local food production while achieving environmental goals such as storm water management, reducing pesticide/fertilizer pollution, boosting pollinator habitat corridors and enhancing biodiversity.

Garden sharing is a popular initiative whether it is web-based with little other supports provided or a more comprehensive program with matching services and resources provided to gardeners.

The Stop Community Food Centre ran a highly successful YIMBY (Yes In My Back Yard) program for many years with workshops, garden inputs and social gatherings. The Stop also provided support to other organizations (such as Greenest City and Access Alliance) to start their own programs. Access Alliance further developed garden sharing tools in the context of their community. All of these organizations struggled to find a sustainable model for supporting safe, successful matches between landholders and growers.

Toronto Urban Growers joined with the three agencies to apply for an Ontario Trillium Foundation Seed grant to explore the potential of a Garden Sharing Network to support each local initiative in a one-year pilot project.





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Toronto Green Community brought their expertise at operating an ecological landscaping social enterprise to test out whether this model could add a revenue generation component for economic sustainability.

Lessons learned from the pilot are documented in two ways:

1. A garden sharing manual, geared to people who want to start a garden sharing program in their neighbourhood, and
2. This GSN pilot project report, which addresses the functioning of the network intended to support the local programs.

Garden Sharing Network Toronto mission statement and structure

Vision

- Community members will have greater access to fresh, local food that reflects their culture and values
- Growers will have more options for income generation
- Communities will have more green spaces that support healthy watersheds (reduced stormwater runoff, increased pollinator habitat)
- The organizations supporting the GSN will offer stable, financially viable programming

Goal: to increase access to land for growing food and increasing food security and sovereignty

Objectives

To establish a network of organizations running garden sharing programs that supports members to:

- Initiate effective matches between landholders and gardeners
- Support garden matches where possible
- Develop financially viable operational models



Network structure

The Garden Sharing Network (GSN) consisted of:

- **Toronto Urban Growers (TUG):** a city-wide network,
- **Greenest City, Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services (Access Alliance), The Stop Community Food Centre (The Stop):** three neighbourhood-based non-profit organizations running garden sharing programs, and
- **Toronto Green Community (TGC):** a non-profit organization running a social enterprise based on ecological landscaping services in various neighbourhoods throughout the city.

Greenest City acted as trustee for the Ontario Trillium Foundation grant and employed the GSN Coordinator. The Coordinator worked three days a week for one year, working one day each week in each of the three sites: Parkdale (Greenest City), Taylor-Massey (Access Alliance) and Wychwood (The Stop).

See the GSN Partnership Agreement (Appendix A) for a detailed breakdown of roles and responsibilities.

What we learned

Integrating a social enterprise



GSN members anticipated that integrating a revenue-generation aspect to the project would help with long-term viability, specifically to support the time-consuming process of site assessment. Toronto Green Community joined the project to bring expertise on developing an ecological landscaping social enterprise (RAIN) and training gardeners to do site assessments while further developing a customer base for RAIN. Aside from building economic opportunities for community members through developing site assessment skills and receiving honoraria for their work, GSN members thought it would be possible to advertise RAIN consulting, design and installation services to landholders while promoting garden sharing.

In the case of the GSN pilot, the work required to develop the network, toolkits, site assessment training and garden sharing matches took greater priority and the social enterprise aspect became secondary. Despite the original division of labour, there was no one person or organization to drive revenue generation. The following factors contributed:

- The community-based organization partners in GSN had little to no experience or mandate on social enterprises. RAIN was brought into the pilot project to fill this gap.
- As one RAIN representative pointed out, landscaping businesses are difficult to manage as it is. Working with staff from marginalized communities who face several challenges increases complexity. RAIN was already working at maximum capacity and couldn't actively drive the customer development and revenue generation aspect.
- Small business owners have a strong stake in the success of the business. It was difficult to replicate that commitment in a short-term contract position in a non-profit structure. Future projects may need to incorporate profit-sharing mechanisms for the GSN Coordinator, such as performance bonuses to build that sense of ownership.

Recommendation

GSN members need to decide at an early stage if revenue generation is a priority for the project. If so, a commitment to an entrepreneurial approach is required, such as hiring a Coordinator with business development skills for a longer-term contract with incentives that foster a sense of ownership. More exploration of how to promote this sense of commitment to supporting revenue generation in a non-profit, community-based context is needed.



Different partners, different approaches

The non-profit agencies and the social enterprise demonstrated different approaches to the work on several aspects. Agencies focused primarily on building relationships with the gardeners. The entrepreneurial client-centred approach focused on building relationships with the landholders as customers.

Agency members were concerned that adding messaging about ecological garden consulting for a fee would confuse landholders about the nature of the program and discourage them from participating. Would landholders be put off by feeling they were getting a sales pitch from responding to a free program? They also felt that landholders in their neighbourhoods were also economically constrained and would not be interested in paying for ecological landscaping. As a result, promotional materials downplayed the garden consulting aspect and only one question on the intake form explored potential interest.

In reality, all of the landholders who submitted intake forms were interested in learning more about ecological services. As there was no follow up, it's difficult to know if the cost would have been a barrier, but future initiatives should allow for the possibility that landholders are open to hearing more information.

Network members later agreed that it was important to be clearer about the fee-based options, as it would be more likely for landholders to trust the project when the enterprise was named.



Differences also emerged around establishing a safe and non-discriminatory environment.

Agency network members expected that everyone involved (including landholders) would sign anti-discrimination agreements and that people conducting site assessments would be trained on discrimination and harassment issues. Initially one business partner didn't see this as a priority and raised concerns that it would hinder building a relationship with the landholder. Specific examples of unsafe conditions raised by the GSN Coordinator while doing site visits clarified the value of anti-discrimination measures and all members of the network came to agree that the practices were important.

Overall, network members felt they learned a great deal from hearing varied perspectives and being exposed to issues they hadn't encountered before.

Expectations of landholders and gardeners

At the outset of the pilot, GSN members began with the assumption that there was an abundance of gardeners looking for space (based on the number of people on garden wait lists) and that the challenge would be to find landholders willing to share their space. For the most

part, landholder response was quite positive and enthusiastic. The greater challenge was to find gardeners who fit well with the opportunities that arose¹.

GSN partners were surprised to discover that a significant number of the people on the waiting list for community gardens didn't want to share a private garden even if they couldn't get a garden plot². Further conversations revealed that some wanted the experience of gardening with a group. Others found the cost and logistics of travelling by transit to a garden to be a barrier, or they weren't comfortable going to an unfamiliar space. Some weren't sure they could bring their children or dogs to someone else's home.

While the response of landholders was predominantly positive, there were some responses that should be addressed in future garden sharing initiatives. Some landholders assumed that services provided by a social enterprise should be cheaper than strictly for-profit businesses or should be provided for free. This perception needs to be countered in order to generate revenue to support the project.

Based on their experience with for-profit landscapers who will do the work with minimal personal contact, landholders may be surprised at the level of involvement of site assessments and agreement negotiations that are required. They may need to hear why it's important for the garden sharing program staff and gardeners to meet with them personally.



Landholders may ask that gardeners contribute to the cost of gardening, such as paying for soil amendments or water. It is worth talking about the fact that the landholder benefits from

¹ Of 20 landholder intakes received, 6 successful matches were made, 5 sites were not accepted (due to distance or site conditions) and 9 sites were deemed suitable but remained unmatched due to a lack of gardeners interested in the opportunities offered.

² Access Alliance contacted 62 gardeners on their waitlist for community garden plots for 2018. Staff recorded the responses of 12 gardeners asked for their interest in garden sharing. Of the 12, 7 gardeners indicated an interest and 5 were not interested.

improvements to their garden. The work and growing skills contributed by the gardener are valuable and should be counted in any division of benefits.

While the circumstances around gardeners and landholders had the greatest impact on the number matches completed, the decision of the GSN to focus outreach on landholders also contributed. Outreach to gardeners who are a good match for the program will need to be included in future projects.

Recommendation

The value of garden sharing to landholders, gardeners and the organizations running the program should be articulated more clearly. Consider trying to quantify the value of the improvements made to garden areas and the resources invested, both in dollar terms and in measurable benefits (size of space converted to plantings that sequester carbon and reduce storm water runoff, amount of food grown, number of people receiving food).



Roles of Garden Sharing Network and local sites

Clarifying the roles of each partner was more involved than originally anticipated. A strong tension emerged when it was clear that a role should be fulfilled by local partners as an outside organization would not have the on-the-ground knowledge (such as conducting outreach, managing volunteers and liaising with gardeners). Yet the network pilot was initiated specifically to fill in the gaps where local sites didn't have the necessary resources. Members met and worked remotely on an agreement with detailed task assignments until the division of labour was approved by all. The resulting delineation of responsibilities is included in the GSN Partnership Agreement (Appendix A).

Recommendations

- The community-specific knowledge of local non-profit organizations cannot be replaced easily by external network staff. The role of community-based agencies in outreach, volunteer management, engagement of gardeners and connecting network staff needs to be valued and resourced adequately.
- GSN can effectively create shared tools by obtaining input from member sites. Outreach tools in particular may need to be adapted by local sites to meet their specific needs. For instance, some sites found a website and online tools were not as useful as in-person connections, while other sites found online tools valuable.

Staffing

The model of one Coordinator hired by one organization working across three sites was developed with the following assumptions:

- The Coordinator needs to be physically present in the community long enough to connect with residents and become familiar with the neighbourhood culture
- One person should hold a coherent understanding of the program and the tools to implement it, reducing the need to orient different staff in different locations
- The Coordinator reports to only one supervisor to maintain clear accountability to the project
- The Coordinator shouldn't be expected to travel to multiple communities in one day
- Establishing regular days for each site facilitates communication and fosters clear expectations

This model proved to be difficult for a 0.6 FTE position to maintain without strong support from local sites. Each site had a different organizational culture, approach to outreach and work load expectations for the Coordinator. Local contacts for the Coordinator juggled many responsibilities and couldn't always provide resources or information that were needed. Community members didn't understand that the Coordinator wasn't working in each location full time and became frustrated with delayed responses to their enquiries.



Supervision and continuity were further complicated by staff turnover in two of the three local sites, making it difficult to establish a work plan for the GSN Coordinator. This reinforced the need for one coherent work plan with one supervisor who would communicate with GSN partners about different expectations.

Recommendations

- Each site should commit to a 0.2 FTE position responsible for local outreach and acting as liaison between GSN Coordinator and site staff.
- GSN Coordinator hired for 0.6 FTE to maintain and share toolkits, administer program, train and supervise site assessment staff and develop relationships with landholders.
- GSN Coordinator should be based out of one central location with one supervisor.
- In addition to non-profit organization skills (working with marginalized community members, community building, partnership development and working effectively in an agency), the GSN Coordinator should have a strong entrepreneurial focus to recruit landholders, develop client-centred relationships and drive development of the program.



Conclusions

A Garden Sharing Network did provide value to neighbourhood-based member organizations by helping the partners to share tools for their programs, and it can be useful for supporting other neighbourhoods that wish to start a new program. The Network was less successful at supplanting the need for local staff on the ground or developing a social enterprise approach that would make a network and local programs financially viable. Reflecting on their experience of the pilot, network members didn't dismiss the possibility that a network could



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generate revenue for the project and economic opportunities for community members. A greater commitment to the *enterprise* aspect of social enterprise, reflected in hiring a network coordinator with a business development focus and skills, would ensure that the sustainability component would be more successful. This must be combined with a community development skill set that supports the involvement of marginalized gardeners so that the original mandate of the programs - to increase food access, food sovereignty and community resiliency – is not lost.

Appendix A – Garden Sharing Network Partnership Agreement

Partnership Agreement

Between

Greenest City, The Stop Community Food Centre, Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services, Toronto Urban Growers and Toronto Green Community

Greenest City, The Stop Community Food Centre (The Stop), Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services (Access Alliance), Toronto Urban Growers (TUG) and Toronto Green Community (TGC) agree to form a partnership to plan and implement a project that supports existing programming at Greenest City, Access Alliance and The Stop to make growing space available to gardeners. The purpose of the agreement is to clarify our relationship, to enable us to work together in a cooperative manner and to use the respective organizational strengths of both partners to increase community access to food-growing opportunities and urban agriculture programming.

The partnership will be for the period from September 1, 2017 to November 30, 2018. The agreement may be modified at any time if all parties agree to the changes (conditional upon program requirements). A 30-day notice of cancellation will be served, in writing, by either partner organization. Evaluation data collected to date will be shared.

1) Garden Sharing Network Project Description:

Project Objectives:

To test the effectiveness and viability of a network of organizations running garden sharing programs that supports members to:

- Initiate effective matches between landholders and gardeners
- Support garden matches where possible
- Develop financially viable operational models

For the Trillium Foundation grant supporting the project, an additional goal is to encourage community members to take action on environmental issues.

Project Activities:

- Outreach to identify potential landholders and gardeners
- Assess potential spaces and landholders, including training and supporting a team of gardeners to do site assessments
- Match landholders with gardeners and support them to develop a garden sharing agreement
- Conduct follow-ups to ensure matches are successful and, at the end of the season, determine whether landholders and gardeners intend to continue the following season
- Develop garden sharing tools
- Provide supports and networking and learning opportunities to gardeners within available resources
- Develop a sustainability plan for the Garden Sharing Network and the individual neighbourhood programs

- Identify other neighbourhoods that may be interested in initiating a garden sharing program
- Evaluate and report on the outcomes of the project

2) Duties and Responsibilities of the Partners

Garden Sharing Network Management model				
Greenest City: employs and supervises Garden Sharing Network Coordinator				
GSN Coordinator works 1 day per week in each neighbourhood				
Task	Garden Sharing Network Coordinator	Local Sites: Access Alliance, Greenest City, The Stop	TUG	Toronto Green Community
Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop outreach materials • Collaborate with local sites on outreach efforts • Respond to city-wide enquiries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify outreach venues • Identify volunteers for outreach • Respond to local inquiries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on intake tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop online intake tool
Matching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage landholder intake process • Manage site assessment team to assess viability of potential spaces • Ensure landholders and growers are a good fit and understand program expectations • Provide support to negotiations and ensure participants complete required documents • Respond to questions and concerns • Early in season follow-up • End of season follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have access to intake data • Assist GSN coordinator in identifying growers and ensuring they are a good fit for the program. Maintain a wait list. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on site assessment tools • Assist with training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have access to intake data • Develop site assessment tools and training • Support GSN Coordinator and site assessment team in conducting site assessments

Task	Garden Sharing Network Coordinator	Local Sites: Access Alliance, Greenest City, The Stop	TUG	Toronto Green Community
Maintaining and distributing toolkit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage requests • Update toolkit as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide locally relevant updates for toolkit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate toolkit production • Develop toolkit for larger scale land agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop intake and site assessment tools, training package
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with TUG to evaluate project • Maintain statistics • Work with TUG to ensure communication between GSN partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain communication with GSN team • Share success stories from participants for reporting and promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and coordination between GSN partners • Develop evaluation plan, work with GSN Coordinator to implement 	
Additional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain database of workshop providers • Organize one annual gathering of GSN partners for info sharing and planning • Budget for seed/plants • Let each local network know about events that are happening in other neighbourhoods • Organize workshops and networking events as resources permit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to existing garden supports • Ongoing communication with local participants when GSN coordinator is not present 		

Task	Garden Sharing Network Coordinator	Local Sites: Access Alliance, Greenest City, The Stop	TUG	Toronto Green Community
Network development		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with TUG to approach larger scale landholders (condo/apt property managers, faith groups, businesses, schools, City divisions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify new neighbourhoods and build relationships • Develop and implement sustainability plan (fundraising, integrating new partners) • Work with local partners to approach larger scale landholders (condo/apt property managers, faith groups, businesses, schools, City divisions) • Work with TGC to develop role of social enterprise in GSN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with TUG to develop role of social enterprise in GSN

All partners agree to:

- Meet on a regular basis to ensure consistent communication
- Work collaboratively to create an effective and meaningful program for program participants.
- Communicate regularly and share information freely about matters arising in the GSN project.
- Alert one another and problem solve any issues arising in a timely and cooperative manner.

3) Information Collecting, Sharing and Confidentiality

Partners shall only collect participants' information that is relevant to the project in this agreement. Sharing of participants' information shall only happen in consultation with the appropriate local site (Access Alliance, Greenest City, The Stop) and only for relevant project purposes. Wherever the

participants' information is shared between partners, both parties agree to comply with all relevant laws and regulations pertaining to privacy and their own policies on confidential information.

4) Dispute resolution

The partners are committed to working together in a cooperative manner and recognize that this requires a commitment of time and energy. Where differences arise, partners agree:

- to address their differences in a timely, open and honest manner
- to attempt to resolve issues at the appropriate level and through the appropriate channels

For Greenest City

Name and Position

Signature

Date

For Access Alliance

Name and Position

Signature

Date

For Toronto Green Community

Name and Position

Signature

For Toronto Urban Growers

Name and Position

Signature

Date

For The Stop

Name and Position

Signature

Date

Date