

What Are Local Urban Agriculture Hubs?

We envision these hubs as neighbourhood-based centres where multiple UA projects form synergies with each other and with non-UA activities. Hubs connect to each other and the city-wide UA movement to form a community of practice that promotes knowledge exchange and innovation. Hubs can support different types of UA initiatives, including non-profit, commercial and hybrids that combine elements of both.

Due to their multifunctionality, UA hubs can fulfill a wide range of objectives:

- Provide education and training
- Augment green infrastructure and environmental protection
- Increase food literacy and access to healthy, local food
- Promote social cohesion across diversity
- Create safe, vibrant public spaces
- Increase citizen engagement and support emerging leaders
- Build community capacity to take action on local issues
- Strengthen community and individual resiliency
- Improve physical and mental health outcomes
- Leverage funding from multiple sources for community projects
- Provide economic opportunities and pathways to employment in the food sector
- Position Toronto as a leader in the field of social, environmental and economic innovations

The following is a menu of the kinds of interconnecting activities that a UA hub may offer. Activities at each site should be determined by a program/business planning process involving consultation with relevant stakeholders.

1. Providing resources

- Extension support
 - Workshops
 - Library/internet resources
 - Collective work sessions
 - Support people to become mentors/champions
 - Demonstration sites
 - Bring info from broader network
 - Visits from/to other projects, peer exchanges
 - Staff to answer questions
- Land access – negotiating relationships, implementing policies (zoning, hydro, city land)
- Tool library
- Seed bank/exchange
- Seedlings (production or distribution point)
- Bulk purchases (mulch, rainwater barrels, compost)
- Value-added/connection to other programs – preserving, cooking, health/education programs, vending opportunities

2. Developing Human Capital

- Negotiating relationships – conflict resolution, setting up good process/structures
- Training programs

- Identifying & supporting local leaders
- Volunteer coordination
- Connection to broader UA/food security community and issues
- Organize local/regional events – potlucks, open houses, seed & knowledge swaps, harvest festival, field trips

3. Promoting UA

- Demonstration/innovation/inspiration
- Integrate UA into other programming (internal & with local partners)
- Accomplish broader goals thru UA programming (such as green initiatives, ESL, job training, public space, settlement integration, storm water management, citizen stewardship)
- Promote UA in community (local events and media)
- Conduct outreach to engage a broad range of participants
- Track impacts of UA and contribute to broader pool of data
- Document best practices and share with other practitioners

4. Entrepreneur-specific supports

- Foster and support grower collectives
- Marketing opportunities – fresh food markets, farmers' markets, linking to convenience stores, institutional purchasing (internally and through local partnerships)
- Kitchen incubator
- Cold storage
- Business development & training