

## Section Two:

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### Getting Started

#### *Resources for Housing Providers:*

- ⑤ *Outreach techniques*
- ⑤ *Community consultation*
- ⑤ *Finding a site*
  - *Starting a resident-led garden committee*

## Step 1: Outreach

***How to get people involved in your project: make contact, invite everyone, celebrate diversity and be persistent!***

Outreach will be an important part of your community garden the whole way through, from your first meeting to your first harvest and beyond. Engaging many different people is the best way to make sure that the **community** stays front and centre in your community garden. People will have many different opinions, ideas, and concerns about community garden projects. It's important to connect with as many supporters as you can and have good information about why a garden will benefit your community. (See APPENDIX A for more info). The first event you should hold is a community meeting/consultation (step 2). Planning for this event will be the focus of your initial outreach efforts.

Remember, the process of engaging people in your garden will be slow – often, community gardens don't reach their full capacity until their third year! Many people are hesitant to commit to a project until they can see how it works in practice. You don't have to win over everyone right at the beginning, focus on building a small, committed group while remaining open and welcoming to people who are slower to join.

### **Reaching out**

Every community is different, and different methods will work to engage different people. When planning your outreach strategy, remember:

10% of people will always come out to all meetings and events.

10% of people will never come out to any meetings and events.

80% of people will come out if they are personally asked, generally because they have real interest and they have a relationship with one of the organizers.

The key to outreach success is building relationships with people and speaking with them face-to-face. Here are some basic ideas for community outreach:

#### *Make contact*

Think about what brings people out in your community – do people read posters and emails, or do they need a phone call or visit? Use the method that has worked best for other groups.

#### *Invite Everyone*

Reach out to many different people and invite them to participate. Make sure housing staff, residents and helpful community groups are all invited to participate so all voices can be heard.

#### *Celebrate differences*

A community garden can engage people with all different skills and interests, and will be stronger because of them. Make sure people understand that whatever they can offer, be it time, knowledge, advice or connections is valuable and valued by your group.

### *Be Persistent*

Explain why the garden is relevant to different people's interest. Ask them to be involved in an inviting way, honoring a "no," without accepting it as a final answer. Some people need to be asked a few times. Stop when it's clear they won't participate.

### **Engaging Property Managers and Staff**

It is critical to engage your property managers and on-site staff at the very start of your project. Community Gardens are a great tool for building goodwill between property managers and residents, but only if they are both involved from the beginning. If property managers are not informed of the project and aware of its benefits, conflict between residents and staff can arise. However, when a property manager is on side with a community garden, they can be extremely valuable, potentially contributing funds or expertise and increasing security. Below is a simple process for engaging with your property manager and on-site staff – this should happen early on, before the first community meeting.

- ⑤ Arrange a meeting with the property manager before you begin promoting the community garden. If possible, prepare for this meeting by researching examples of successful gardens in rental properties in other local communities.
- ⑤ Have a discussion about some of their concerns about the community, for example poor maintenance of the site, frequent complaints from residents, crime, and lack of community cohesion.
- ⑤ Provide some information about how gardening initiatives can address these issues (see APPENDIX A for resources). Emphasize that these initiatives build community capacity to address issues by establishing community networks, and build ownership and pride in the community which leads to better maintenance of yards and common areas.
- ⑤ Have the Property Manager identify any lingering concerns and commit to integrating them into the planning for the project. For example, a concern about how the general areas of the garden will be maintained could be addressed by having all gardeners sign a contract saying they will devote one day a month to cleaning up the communal areas (See APPENDIX I for more sample garden rules).
- ⑤ Ask for a formal endorsement of the garden plan, and a clarification of what support (if any) they can offer to the initiative.
- ⑤ Invite Property Managers, on-site staff, agencies and all other identified stakeholders to attend the upcoming community meeting in order to show their support to residents and be part of the planning process.

## Step 2. Community Meeting

### ***How to prepare for and host an enjoyable meeting to kick off your garden plan***

One of the best ways to start planning a garden is to hold a community meeting or consultation. The resource in APPENDIX B will give you a clear idea of how to plan a community consultation and what questions to ask. If you've never hosted a meeting before, look at APPENDIX G for tips on how to be a good facilitator.

Your first community consultation should have 3 goals:

- 1) To share the benefits of a garden and get people excited
- 2) To identify possible concerns
- 3) To find a group of people who are interested in helping start a garden

Before the meeting, be prepared that there may be concerns about the project. Make sure there is room for these to be heard and that you have the background information to address them (Find some information on addressing concerns in APPENDIX A). If concerns persist, don't bulldoze ahead with the project. In the long-term you will need the support and goodwill of everyone in the community in order to get the best possible outcomes. It is best to take a little time working with the people concerned rather than assuming the problems will go away by themselves.

Hold your meeting at a time when most people will be able to attend, probably an evening or weekend. Think about possible barriers to attendance (need for childcare, mealtime, etc.) and see if the housing provider can address them by providing childcare or snacks.

### Step 3. Finding a Site

***How to find a suitable garden site: Looking for the right sunlight, soil, slope, shade and other considerations.***

Once you've had the first meeting, the next step is to find possible sites for your garden. You may already have a site in mind, or be starting completely from scratch. Either way, take a careful look at any potential site to make sure it will be adequate for gardening and community access. The basic process for assessing whether or not a site is suitable for a garden is known as the 4 S's: **Sunlight, Soil, Slope and Shade** (see below). For sites that meet the requirements of the 4 S's, it's also important to consider water access and current use in order to avoid future issues.

A good way to find a site is to gather a few members of your gardening group together for a site tour, keeping the 4 S's in mind. Once you've found all the possible sites, report back to the larger group to pick a site using the resources in APPENDIX E and F. If you realize that you don't have a site that meets all the criteria, that's ok. Focus on finding a place with good sun, as the rest of the factors can be addressed through smart design.

#### The 4 S's of site assessment

- **Sunlight:** Most garden vegetables require full sun (at least 6 hours of direct light). This usually means good southern exposure, so if there are tall trees or large buildings along the south end of the site you may want to look elsewhere. However, some crops can be grown in as little as 3 or 4 hours of sun. If you can, observe the site in the morning and afternoon to determine whether or not it receives adequate sunlight. Remember, trees viewed in the winter will create more shade in spring when their leaves emerge.
- **Soil:** Finding urban land with healthy soil can be a challenge. Often sites will be on disturbed land where the topsoil has been removed, leaving behind the layers of sand, gravel or clay.
- You should also be aware of potential soil contamination problems when siting your garden. Depending on what the land was used for in the past, some urban soils might be polluted with heavy metals (such as mercury, arsenic and lead), pesticides, or other harmful chemicals. If you are unsure about the history of your site, consider having a soil test done to look for contamination (see "Soil Assessment").
- **Slope:** While flat land is preferable for a garden site, it's also possible to create beautiful gardens on sloped land. Garden plots on hillsides can be terraced and held secure with wooden or stone frames, similar to raised beds. Sites on hills too steep for regular gardening may be put to better use as community orchards by planting fruit trees (see "Next Steps" for more).
- **Shade:** On a hot afternoon, tired gardeners will need somewhere shady to relax and enjoy the garden atmosphere. Look for trees near the site for shade. Placing benches or café style tables and chairs underneath them creates a place where gardeners and community members can enjoy the garden in comfort.

- **Water Access:** Where will gardeners get water for the site? Is there a nearby backyard with a faucet you can use? Can your housing provider arrange to install piping for a water source? Is there a rooftop nearby from which you could collect rainwater? Figuring out a watering plan up front can make the difference between a successful garden project and one where watering becomes a constant source of argument and struggle.
- **Current Use:** This is an important factor to consider with the broader garden committee and community. When selecting a site, be sure to think about who currently uses it, and for what purpose. If it's an area where kids play, a major path or a space used for sports, you may receive backlash from the community for trying to build a garden there. However, spaces that are currently used for unwelcome behavior, such as loitering, drugs or crime can often be rehabilitated by the construction of a garden nearby as the continual presence of gardeners can discourage this behavior.

## Step 4. Create Your Committee

*How to design your garden and build a strong coordinating group. Roles of different committee members and guidelines for creating garden rules and regulations.*

### Planning your garden

Before you start to design and build your garden, you should have set down some guidelines for how your garden will work, and how your committee will be organized. You may have answered some of these questions in your initial meeting, or you may already have a site picked out but be unsure how your garden will work. Answering the 6 questions in APPENDIX D, part 1 with your garden group will give you the answers you need to get your design rolling. Your group should hold regular meetings while the garden is starting up and throughout the season. The remaining questions in APPENDIX D can be answered in your initial meetings, either before or after the garden is built.

### Planning your committee

The final question in Appendix looks D at how your garden committee will be organized. Establishing a garden working group or committee that makes sure the garden runs well, looks good and supports its volunteers is a very important part of having a successful garden project. A committed working group can turn your garden into a unique community space where residents of different ages, backgrounds and cultures can learn, eat, and grow together.

It is best to decide upon roles and responsibilities in your committee from the very beginning. Remember, you can always change how your committee operates if you realize it isn't working, but it's easier to start with structure than to put it into place once there's a problem. Below are some recommended positions for your garden committee. You may find that they aren't all useful in your garden, and that's fine. Just remember that it's important to divide up responsibilities whenever possible. This makes everyone feel involved and committed, and avoids one or two people being overworked.

All of these positions, including the garden coordinator should have a fixed term, for example one year, after which other people are free to apply for them. This prevents newcomers from feeling like they don't have decision-making power. For more tips on how to make sure that your meetings and organizational structure are welcoming, take a look at APPENDIX G.

**Garden Coordinator:** The role of the garden coordinator depends upon what responsibilities are assigned to other members. The coordinator is not the "boss" of the garden; this is the person responsible for seeing that the agreed-upon rules are followed, and that any conflict is addressed as it arises. The garden coordinator also supports other members of the committee and makes sure they are able to fulfil their roles. As this can be a lot of work, the coordinator may sometimes be additionally compensated, either by receiving a small honorarium or a larger garden plot – this is something to discuss with your committee.

**Communications Officer:** Shares information with gardeners, by phone or by email. They will take minutes at any garden meetings and ensure that all gardeners hear about any news. They will also be the contact person for outside groups who want information about the garden.

**Treasurer:** Accepts registration fees and provides receipts. They will be responsible for proposing a budget to the committee that will pay for all required supplies: tools, plants, soil, and any garden celebrations. This person can also work on fundraising if needed.

**Youth Outreach:** If your garden wants to involve young people, it is good to have a specific youth engagement person. Children require supervision and guidance in the garden, so the youth engagement person can offer a weekly kids' hour where children can come in and learn. This person can also sign off on volunteer hours for young people who need community service time.

**Grounds Officer:** organizes group work days to make sure that paths, common areas, hoses, fences, compost, greenhouses and other common resources are in order.

**Training Officer:** Coordinates training and workshops for gardeners and possibly the wider community. The training officer should speak to gardeners at the beginning of the year to find out what kind of workshops they'd like, and then find community partners to host them.

**Events Officer:** A good way to engage the rest of your community in the garden and gain more support is to host fun garden events for the neighbourhood. This can include community meals, seed exchanges, movie nights or harvest festivals. If your garden will host lots of events, it is good to have an Events Officer who organizes materials, outreach and logistics. (See step 9 for more detail about garden events)

### **Sample garden rules and agreements**

The committee roles organize who is responsible for leading the garden. It is also important to organize how the gardeners will interact with the space, and with each other. When problems arise in community garden projects, it is often due to unclear expectations or lack of communication. Having clear rules set out from the beginning can be an effective way to avoid these issues. Have your committee agree upon a set of garden rules and expectations, and then share these with all new gardeners as they join. This list can then be referred to if any issues arise. See APPENDIX I for example garden rules and use these as a guideline to create your own. For templates for an entire gardener's welcome packet that you can hand out to new volunteers, see -

<http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/miscpubs/mp0906welcome.pdf>

You may also want to outline roles and responsibilities for the garden committee, the housing provider and the property manager. This is especially important if this is the first time these groups have collaborated on a project. This could be as simple as a Memorandum of Understanding, a letter that outlines what each group is responsible for and when permission must be requested from each group.

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