



Engaging your Neighborhood in your Community Garden

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Community outreach is an integral part to the revitalization of established gardens and the development of new gardens. The following document includes some steps to take prior to beginning an outreach campaign and then is followed by some tips on finding and engaging specific groups in a community garden.

Before you “Pound the Pavement”

Develop a Case for Support

Meet with fellow gardeners to outline your case to describe why individuals or groups haven't been previously engaged and what types of efforts would engage them.

- Mission – describe why your garden exists and the activities you do to achieve your vision
- Achievements – establish your garden's personality (e.g. is it a children's garden or is it more suited to elders?), describe your past achievements and reveal how they impact the neighborhood
- Problem – convey why and how you want to do outreach and to which specific populations
- Trends affecting the problem – demonstrate your knowledge and insight into the myriad of cultural, economic, geographic or other reasons why these people aren't already involved
- Response to the problem – unfold the answer, determine how will your outreach effort respond to the need
- Needed resources – describe what you have and what you need to make outreach possible

- Role of the prospective gardeners – discuss how the target groups can help, how you can help the gardeners achieve his or her goals
- Summary- describe how success will be evaluated, and how the situation will be addressed in the future

Define the Image of the Garden

The garden's image will ultimately influence its ability to recruit and retain gardeners. For established gardens try to determine what type of image does the garden currently convey to the general public? To gardeners? To P-Patch staff? What type of image do you want the garden to convey? For prospective gardeners, get a feel of the perception of community gardening in general and about the P-Patch program.

- An image is a perception...and perception is reality for most people
- An effective image is communicated verbally...and non-verbally
- An effective image says that the initiative is willing and able to create change, empowers the people to make the necessary changes to solve their problems

A garden's image can be changed or enhanced through advertising and outreach. There are a myriad of vehicles, a few possibilities include: print ads, articles/profiles on program or gardeners, posters, flyers, bumper stickers, group presentations, one-on-one recruitment, phoning, internet, workshops/programs, and fairs. A thorough understanding of the target population will dictate which methods will be the most effective.



Hidden pockets of people

One of the foundational aspects of outreach is determining who is in the neighborhood of the garden. This can be teased out through conversations with current gardeners, a look at a community resources map, or simply by walking the sidewalks and

knocking on doors. Don't discount nearby social service agencies which may be in your neighborhood:

- At-risk youth, programs and shelters
- Mental illness housing and service centers
- Elderly homes and senior service centers
- Domestic violence shelters
- Ethnic service centers
- Homeless shelters, services, soup kitchens
- AIDS/HIV patients organizations
- Family services organizations
- Drug/alcohol recovery programs
- Schools and universities
- Business owners
- Church congregations and groups

These groups could be engaged in a communal plot. Many of these organizations have activity coordinators who will be your focal contact for engaging these groups.



Tips for Involving and Engaging Under-Served Populations

Community gardens by their nature contribute to social equity by trying to unite people of different backgrounds in a shared interest and promoting collaboration in the name of a common goal. Gardens empower people by having them take part in the garden. There are several obstacles to engaging these populations which range from practicalities such as transportation, feelings of incompetence, lack of communication and isolation. Specific challenges are included with each sub-set.

Children and Youth

- Children and youth need specific projects in gardens that will connect youth with the community. There are several youth-only volunteer organizations in Seattle which are often an excellent source of volunteers.


- Connect with schools – gardens are ideal classrooms for children to develop a “sense of place” in their local environment.
- Work in collaboration with teachers in the garden classroom on many subjects including: garden science of learning about compost, animals, and plants; entomological study of beneficial insects; garden art. Gardens provide an outdoor, hands-on setting in which students can learn through exploration, observation and experimentation.

Seniors and People with Disabilities

- Carefully consider the layout of the garden and the types of beds that will be in the garden. Raised beds and table-top beds are two options for increased accessibility and gardening ease.
- Make sure all paths are wide, level and smooth – grades should not exceed 2% and should be at least five feet wide
- Ensure the watering system, compost bins and shed are easy to manage and accessible
- Place water systems in well-draining paved areas
- Plan ahead to avoid heavy labor requirements upon the gardeners
- Benches and shade are valuable areas for rest
- Tables should permit wheelchairs to roll under
- Invest in some ergonomic gardening tools
- If possible, have designated handicapped parking

People of Racial and Ethnic Minorities

- Be flexible with traditional P-Patch requirements. Each garden should develop their own system of work parties, gardener gatherings, celebrations and expectations
- Be open to a variety of gardening styles and techniques. Share seeds, crops and ideas.
- Learn how people prepare and eat different plants and different parts of plants
- Develop relationships with all of the


Ana Maria Saquiy Davis
 ~Guatemala

To supplement what she cultivates, Ana gathers two plants from the wild. “You call them weeds,” she said, “because they grow up between the rows of corn.” She collects pigweed and a member of the nightshade family, yerba mora. Amaranth a good spinach substitute, has a long and distinguished history as a food crop, wild and cultivated, and has been eaten in various forms by people all around the globe (Growing Home Stories of Ethnic Gardening 93).

gardeners

- Educate yourself and the gardeners of the different cultures represented in the garden. Learn about their customs, land, language, cultural mores, food, climate and the ways they celebrate
- Connect with folks at ethnic-service agencies who may offer useful advice and criticism on our current outreach efforts
- Design the structure of the garden so it doesn't depend solely on P-Patch staff or one person to make it happen i.e. involve as many people and agencies as possible to create community ownership and sustainability
- Cultivate leadership among your gardeners—all gardeners to take on certain responsibilities of the garden, everyone has something to offer (Sandy Pernitz, P-Patch).
- To encourage cross-cultural communication, don't block gardeners by cultural group
- Post a map of the garden site with photos and names of gardeners in a private secure place, such as the tool shed. This facilitates communication by matching a face and a name to a specific plot (Barbara Donnette).
- Whenever possible, translate instructions and rules into written work since providing clear information facilitates learning (Ralph Colman).
- Speak to people in their language—learn some garden-related words in their native

 *John Maire*
~Sudan

Harvest Festival, Golida, is a high point of the year in the Sudan, John said. "Every day you will hear drum beats," he said. "Every day you will see dancing. We will be making a thanksgiving to God for the food. Then the village eats and celebrates for days and days. It is a time of recuperation after the exhaustion of harvest." (Growing Home Stories of Ethnic Gardening 145).

language or learn to speak English to match their “style” of English

- Speak face to face when possible, people can use body language to help understand (Julie Bryan, P-Patch).
- Allow for misunderstandings and have patience with the communication process. Remember that the non-English speaking person doesn't have the total responsibility for the lack of communication (Julie Bryan, P-Patch).
- Use an interpreter to help with a controversial topic, if possible try to find a trained, objective person. Family members may put a “spin” on the

interpretation. The interpreter rate will depend upon experience and may cost \$30-40/hr for a certified interpreter down to \$10-15/hour for less experienced. Interpreters may be found through churches, DSHS, courts, hospitals, the P-Patch office, or a community center. It is essential to find a person who works for you (Julie Bryan, P-Patch).

- With formal discussions, use an adult instead of a child. Children can be used informally, but in using solely the children for interpretation, elders lose responsibility, thus a position of respect (Julie Bryan, P-Patch).
- When using an interpreter, direct listening and talking to the person with whom you are conversing not at the interpreter (Julie Bryan, P-Patch).
- Take turns celebrating in different ways, offer the gardeners several options, find what opens people up, or what would they do traditionally (Julie Bryan, P-Patch).

Artists

Gardens are an outdoor place to experiment with creativity and a place for inspiration from nature. Art in the garden moves us closer to uncovering the true artistic and cultural resources that can be found in local communities.

- Invite professional or budding artists to display their work in the garden which may be a day show of more delicate art or a longer show which is less weather-sensitive.
- Plan a garden art workshop and invite an artist to display their skill e.g. painting murals, flag making, laying brick or stone, found object sculpture

No- to Low-Income

Although they are frequently lumped together as a group, people living on a small income include a wide variety of individuals whose specific assets can make significant contributions to gardens.

- Offer a variety of gardening options including communal gardening or sharing a plot.
- Have a list of local low-income housing, shelters, food banks, and counseling on hand
- be careful of privacy issues-engage them,
- Be flexible to the schedules of the gardeners. They may not show up for weeks or they may be in the garden all of the time.

- Build relationships with them as much as possible
- Discover their skills and gifts and encourage them to be used in the garden

These tips are just a few of the possible ways to engage these specific populations. As you work through your outreach campaign, be sure to record your observations to pass on to successive garden leaders and the wider community garden community.

Other Resources

Growing Home *Stories of Ethnic Gardening* Susan Davis Price, University of Minnesota Press, 2000. The excerpts included in this document are from this book which gives accounts of a diverse population of gardeners.

“Outreach Tool Set” manual distributed by the Neighborhood Planning Office, which is now the Department of Neighborhoods, covers all of the nuts and bolts of outreach.