

Community Foods Partnership: Model Proposal

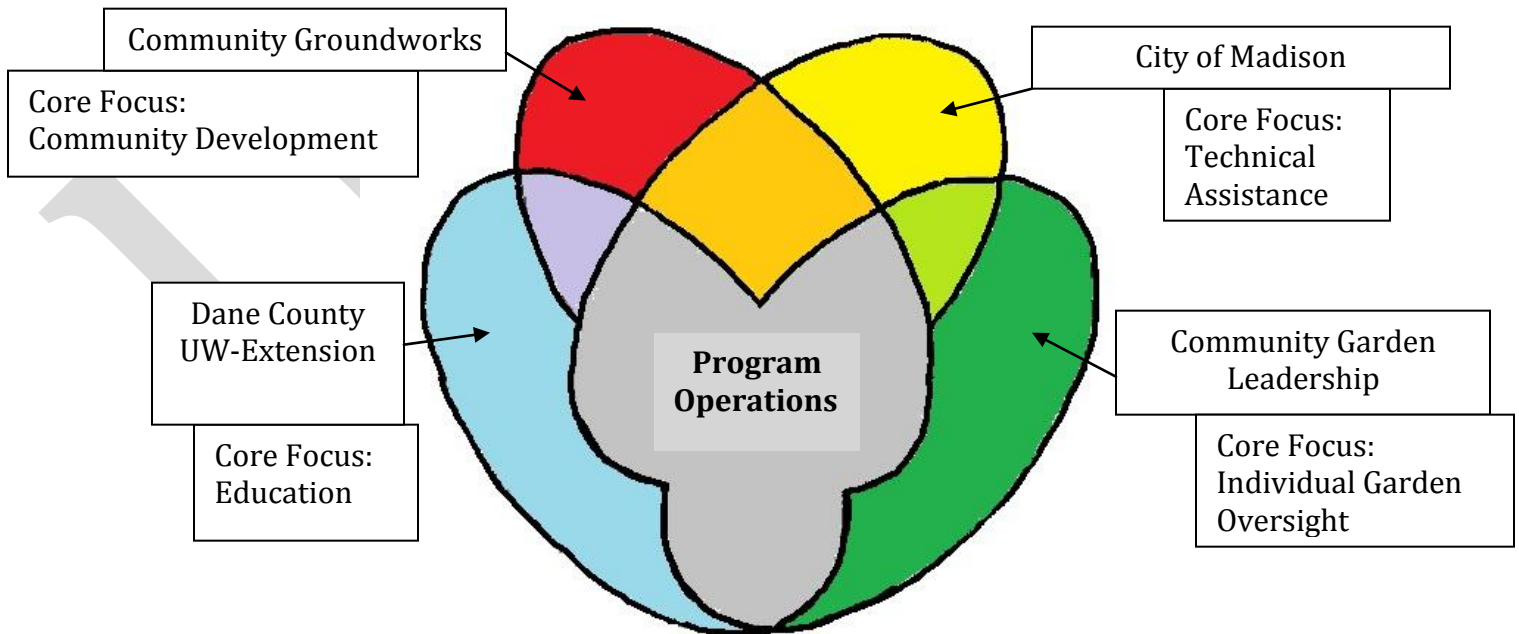
Community-based food production, especially within community gardens, is a uniquely important function within neighborhoods in Madison and Dane County. For over twenty years, the Community Action Coalition operated the community gardens program offering technical assistance to communities in establishing and maintaining gardens. As CAC hands the program off after many excellent years of operation, it is up to the community, including garden leaders and the many stakeholders surrounding them, to take ownership of the program and design one that mirrors the values held within our neighborhoods.

This proposal briefly outlines the formation of a Community Foods Partnership. The Community Foods Partnership would consist of three core partners: Dane County UW Extension, the City of Madison, and Community GroundWorks. The initial goal is to build the framework for a deep and participatory collaboration that is well designed and healthy. To that end, a strategic planning process will be initiated around July 2014.

The Community Food Partnership would reach far beyond the core partners to include the vast array of organizations, systems, municipalities, initiatives, and programs working on community food issues. As the partnership expands, the participation and scope would expand.

The three organizations would be responsible for guiding the partnership in education, technical assistance, and community development efforts, and for the “care and feeding” of the Community Foods Partnership by sharing responsibility for the overall operations and administration of the partnership.

Preliminary Partnership Graphic:



Components of operational responsibilities would consist of tasks such as:

- Initiating a facilitated process to construct a strategic plan, including identifying mission/vision/values, and developing work plans in the core focus areas (education, technical assistance, and community development).
- Fiscal oversight, accountability, legal assistance (leases, insurance), structure, operations engaging other municipalities, visioning and expanding from gardens to edible landscape, orchards, farming, and communication related to partners (i.e. quarterly meetings) and sustainability.

The three organizations would be responsible for identifying and engaging other partners, stakeholders, and participants in the planning process, as well as to meet the goals and intentions set in the planning process for a responsive, empowering, and sustainable gardens program. They would assure that communication, collaboration, and direction were all moving forward and tied back to the plan set by the overall partnership.

Examples of responsibilities organized by function are:

- **Access/operations**
 - Siting new gardens
 - Registration/equal access to garden plots
 - Universal design
 - Culturally appropriate
- **Community Development**
 - Garden leadership
 - Advocacy
 - Youth development
 - Neighborhood engagement
- **Technical Assistance**
 - Legal assistance
 - Tilling/plowing
 - Compost
 - Water
 - Equipment – mowers, tractors
- **Education**
 - Gardening
 - Nutrition
 - Leadership development

Our approach will be flexible, nimble, and forward thinking. The model will explore expanding the definition of “community garden” to include, for instance, developing edible landscaping, community beekeeping, and other ways to make food available without having to garden. An approach might be developing alternative food access points through gardens that serve broader communities to work towards assuring safe, healthy food sources.

The partnership would be dynamic. For example: Dane County Extension would provide oversight on all things related to education, but they would be engaging organizations who are already developing, or who are well positioned to develop, educational models and programs related to food.

As far as crossing core focus areas, Dane County Extension could include educational relationships and programming that Community GroundWorks and the City of Madison (or other municipalities) are involved in, or could expand to include those components.

No organization will “own” a functional area, but the core groups will be responsible for keeping their focus area on the radar.

Communication and planning would be essential to the entire partnership because a key to sustainability would be building and embracing the expertise and experience we all bring to the table, as well as building a shared vision and action plan.

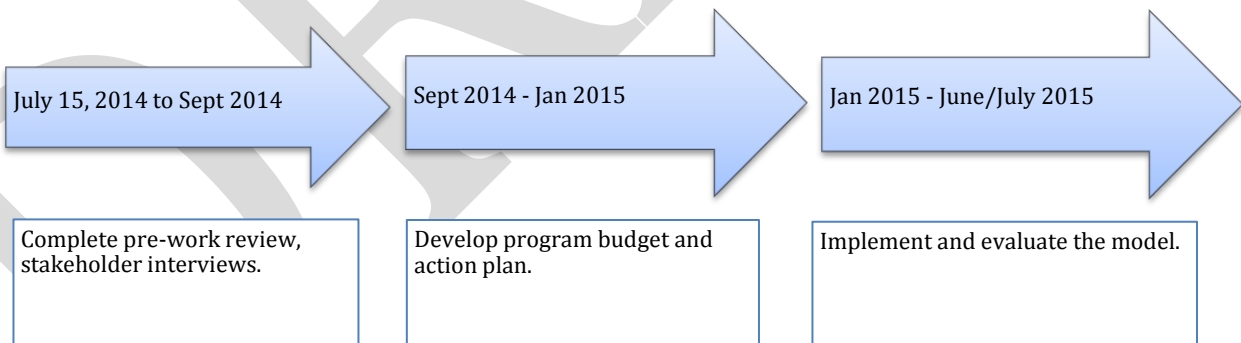
Planning Process

It is clear that in order to establish a deeper collaboration and “ground rules” for an operations structure, a facilitated strategic planning process is necessary. A hired facilitation would include a review of the pre-work (goals, preliminary structure, other documents) already conducted by the current partners, meetings with stakeholders including garden leaders, and development of an action plan and operations budget all completed prior to the end of the year. Thus, the majority of the facilitated work will be in 2014.

A strategic planning process is also key for engaging other potential funders before a program is established. An outside facilitator will have the flexibility that the three partners don’t in convening other stakeholders and evaluating the strengths of each partner organization in order to develop a funding and action plan.

The last phase of the facilitation process will be to evaluate the model and structure early in its existence to allow for program calibration. This will enable the partners to come together and evaluate with the assistance of an expert.

The proposed time frame is as follows:



The strategic planning process will take the core values and functions that the current partners have developed as the general mission of any programming. The partners are in agreement that the following are central to any programming developed in the future:

- ❖ Self-Sustaining Gardens
 - Critical to this mission is the development of leadership at the individual garden level. This includes fostering leadership skills for individuals interested in taking a larger role within their gardens. This also includes developing strategies for how garden leadership extends beyond the garden fences and into the neighborhoods and community.
- ❖ Productive Gardens
 - While there are hundreds of garden plots in the city, and the demand for more plots remains high, it is clear that the current garden could produce higher yields and serve more as a food access point, especially within underserved neighborhoods. This only happens through deliberate education which must be a part of the garden programming. Woven into the production education could easily be nutrition education, which is essential in learning how to cook and eat the food being produced in the gardens.
- ❖ Developing Community
 - Community gardens have proven to be some of the most diverse spaces in the entire city. There is little doubt of the gathering power of food in this world. There is an amazing opportunity to capitalize on that energy within our neighborhoods. Gardens are a wonderful space to bring folks together and bridge generational gaps, transcend cultural differences and language barriers, making our communities stronger as a whole. This goal should be paramount within any garden programming.
- ❖ Connections to other food-based programs
 - Community-based food production is not limited to community gardens. There are many programs within Madison and Dane County that use the production of food as a way to educate and empower. A few examples are the Gardens for Empowerment program in the Meadowood and Brentwood neighborhoods, connecting youth to jobs, the GROW coalition, responsible for coordinating school gardens, and the Silverwood Park Farm, which is connecting young adults in need of a second chance to work. There should be a close connection between these types of programs and the partners believe a new structure should be central to that collaboration.
- ❖ Moving needles
 - It is extremely important to evaluate the aspects of the program to determine if the goals listed above are making their desired impact. Public Health Madison and Dane County will be heavily involved in the strategic planning process and assisting in setting up the evaluation metrics of the program. Metrics may include food insecurity, median distance to community gardens, number of low-income users of gardens, amount of food produced, among many others.