

Gardens Network Summary

Serving Madison and Dane County

June 2015

Overview

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 (CAC) operated the community gardens program, offering technical assistance to communities in establishing and maintaining gardens. As CAC handed the program off after many excellent years of operation, a new model needed to be developed to address the continued survival of community gardens in Dane County.

As the result of over a year of planning, the Gardens Network was formed and it consists of three core partners: Community GroundWorks (CGW), Dane County UW Extension, and the City of Madison. The Gardens Network will reach beyond the core partners to include an array of organizations, systems, municipalities, initiatives, funders, and programs working on community food issues. As the network expands, the participation and scope will expand.

Purpose

The relevant community challenge is threefold:

1. There is a lack of access to safe, healthy, and culturally appropriate food;
2. There is a lack of safe and available space and land for gardens; and
3. Community members are isolated, particularly lower-income, minority and immigrant community members.

Research indicates community gardens can support increases in social capital, foster health and well being, build on existing assets, and develop sustainable ecology. Community gardens create a range of benefits at the individual, family, and neighborhood levels.

Mission

The Garden Network connects people in Dane County with access to the space, education and resources to create and sustain gardens that foster food, engagement and opportunity.

Vision

We envision diverse, productive, self-sustaining gardens that have strong leaders, and communities connected by a shared purpose, a sense of belonging, and deep socio-cultural understanding.

Goals

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| 1. Greater access to healthy food | 2. Leadership development |
| 3. Community engagement and empowerment | 4. Sustainable land management and stewardship |

5. Neighborhood development
7. Placemaking¹

6. Youth development and employment

Structure

The structure of the Gardens Network is designed to facilitate communication, engage stakeholders, foster garden leadership development, and inform decision-makers. The intent is to strike a balance between program management and capacity, making certain effort is coordinated, developing garden resources, and receiving input. To that end, the partners have developed a model to include gardeners and other stakeholders on three teams – operations, administration, and advisory.

Although some of the partners and stakeholders are governmental organizations, the Gardens Network is not considered a governmental body, nor are WI open meeting laws applicable. However, at points in the process governmental stakeholders may use their processes to guide funding and other decisions.

Operations. The operations team is intended to support communication to and from gardens as resources (seeds, compost, plants, technical assistance), operations (water, insurance, leases, vandalism), and capacity (tilling, tools, staff/volunteers) are addressed. The format of the operations team is task-oriented and meetings will be documented in terms of tasks, assignments, and target dates. The intent is to set up procedures to mobilize volunteers, and move resources (seeds, training, etc.) throughout the gardening community. This team functions primarily around logistics and mobilization, which gives it a pre-season to mid-season workload focus. Capacity of staff and volunteers needs to be strongly considered when addressing issues.

UW-Extension will hold primary responsibility for educational efforts and the operations team will assist with coordinating educational programming offered in the gardens.

The operations team will consist of representatives from the partners (staff, interns, supervisors) involved in daily operations and logistics.

Administration. The administration team is intended to provide oversight and direction for the network. The administrative team will consist of assigned management staff from the three partners (Community GroundWorks, Dane County UW Extension, City of Madison) and two representatives from the Advisory Team functioning in an advisory capacity. The Advisory Team shall have two of the five seats, and will put forward candidate recommendations to Community GroundWorks, who will manage final assignments for filling seats and orientation.

¹ 'Placemaking' is both an overarching idea and a hands-on tool for improving a neighborhood, city or region. – Project for Public Spaces

The administration team is primarily focused on vision, planning, coordinating funding, budget, work plans, growing a stakeholder pool, leadership development and support, assuring that funder requirements are met, exploring funding opportunities, problem-solving, advising policy development and implementation, and overseeing functions across gardens (outreach/diversity, donations/solicitations, plot fee recommendations, cost sharing, new gardens, etc.).

Advisory. The advisory team has the primary focus of organizing and implementing an annual Garden Summit, engaging and expanding to encompass local municipalities through garden-related events (training, socializing), furthering gardening best practices (no till, composting) throughout the network, providing garden leadership development and support, recommending and planning cross-garden training in addition to the Summit, and emphasizing outreach efforts to actively support gardener diversity.

The advisory team consists of ten seats held by the three partners. The seats will be filled by the partners and will reflect the following:

- One CGW board member
- One Dane County Food Council member
- One Madison Food Policy Council member
- Seven At-Large members, to include at least two garden leaders (county and city of Madison)

Advisory team functions will be coordinated and staffed by Community GroundWorks, and the partners hold the sole discretion of recruiting members to the team. Final approval and orientation of invitees will fall to CGW, using an application process yet to be established.

Advisory team members will be recommended by the advisory team as representatives to fill two designated seats on the administration team. CGW will be responsible for final selection and orientation of the advisory team members filling the administration team seats.

Invitations to hold a seat are not subject to political appointment, public process, or open meeting laws, and are an informal attempt to engage stakeholders in a participatory process that is not binding.

Roles and Responsibilities

The overriding focus of the partnership is to represent an ethnically and racially diverse population of gardeners, to focus on food-related social justice issues, and to maintain and expand access to affordable, fresh, healthy food throughout Dane County. As the food system expands in Dane County, it becomes more incumbent upon the partners to assure that low income, minority gardeners have equal access to the food system.

The Gardens Network is organized into several tiers of roles, responsibilities, and risk:

Partners

The three partners are the risk holders and Community GroundWorks has been tasked to oversee the operations, administration, and management of the Gardens Network, including being the fiscal agent. The partners function together to assure that responsibilities related to program management, such as financial, legal, liability, and human resources, meet various requirements put forth by federal and state government, municipalities, funders, and other entities.

The partners are also responsible for assuring that Garden Network participation is reflective of not only the ethnic and cultural diversity of the gardening community, but operate from a core belief that the Garden Network will be enriched by expanding and growing stakeholders from throughout the county.

Through a formal agreement, the Madison Community Foundation Garden Fund is now being administered by Community GroundWorks in its role as fiscal agent. The Administrative Team, with the Advisory Team functioning in an advisory capacity, will make decisions regarding the fund.

Garden Leadership

Garden leaders participate in the Gardens Network in a supportive and advisory role with the partners. Garden leaders work in gardens to assure that gardeners are aware of the resources available to them, to coordinate resources, and to grow gardening competency within individual gardens and across the gardening community.

It is the intent of the structure to facilitate logistics, and to broker and mobilize resources, but not to be responsible for providing for or meeting the needs of individual gardens. Due to capacity and funding issues, the partners look to garden leaders to mobilize gardeners to organize, distribute, communicate, and procure resources such as seeds, wood chips, compost, etc. The partners also look to garden leaders to help identify struggling gardens, to help conduct deep and genuine diversity efforts, and to anticipate and help mitigate challenges in individual gardens.

Garden leadership may arise from a variety of groups and organizations and the Gardens Network will not limit itself to working with a restricted population of potential garden leaders. Engagement of a diverse group of gardeners is a primary goal of the program and the partners will operate from an inclusive rather than exclusive model in order to enrich participation.

Municipalities/Other Stakeholders

An important aspect of the Garden Network's future is engaging local municipalities and other stakeholders, such as funders, civic groups, corporations, utilities, food system components (FEED Kitchen, public market, advocacy groups), volunteers (Master Gardeners), and other groups. The vision regarding municipalities is to work at buy-in across the county so municipalities are contributing members of the Garden Network education, training, support, and mobilization efforts.