Building Capacity for Urban Agriculture Programs:

Tools for Replicating the Windy City Harvest Model

CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

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Preface

Public gardens have incredible potential to connect people to plants in creative ways through urban agriculture. In response to growing interest in urban agriculture within the public gardens community[1], the Chicago Botanic Garden's Windy City Harvest department and the U.S. Botanic Garden partnered to provide hands-on, practical support for public gardens interested in developing or expanding urban agriculture programming.

The partnership began by surveying American Public Gardens Association member gardens about their urban agriculture programming and training interests. The U.S. Botanic Garden and the Chicago Botanic Garden used this feedback to design and offer three-day intensive urban agriculture workshops for public gardens and their partners. The workshops incorporated topics such as designing urban agriculture programs, developing community partnerships, selecting and establishing urban farm sites, cultivating donors and identifying funding opportunities, and evaluating and communicating program successes. During the workshops, participants engaged with these topics by sharing firsthand experiences, lessons learned, and tools and resources developed over nearly two decades of the Chicago Botanic Garden's work in urban agriculture.

Together, the U.S. Botanic Garden and the Chicago Botanic Garden created this toolkit to reach a broader audience with the ideas and resources presented in the workshops. Written from the perspective of the Chicago Botanic Garden's Windy City Harvest staff, this toolkit is a resource for public gardens and partnering organizations to use in developing, adapting, or expanding their urban agriculture programming. It provides tools for organizations working to engage with their communities through urban agriculture, and is intended to spark new growth and collaboration in urban agriculture within and beyond the public gardens community.

Introduction

Urban Agriculture Programs

Objectives

- Describe how urban agriculture programs can connect with and advance the missions of public gardens.
- After reviewing examples of urban agriculture programs, identify a variety of audiences that urban agriculture programs have the potential to serve.
- Provide examples of community needs and interests that urban agriculture programs have the potential to address.
- List factors that may prompt adjustments to urban agriculture programs once they are underway.

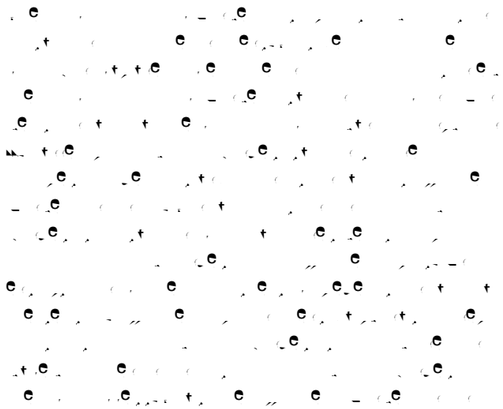
Introduction

Public gardens are uniquely positioned to attract a broad range of audiences through urban agriculture programs. Through examples from Chicago Botanic Garden's Windy City Harvest, this section describes a variety of urban agriculture program areas including community gardening, youth development, transitional job training, technical training in urban agriculture, business development, and community health and nutrition programs. Programs may develop curricula specific to the needs and interests of their participants, and also may incorporate curricular resources from other organizations. For example, Windy City Harvest incorporates resources and models from the nationally-recognized National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI); The Food Project, a well-established Boston-area youth farming organization, and Roots of Success, a career-preparation curriculum focused on environmental literacy.

Community Gardening

Community garden establishment, enhancement, and administration can be an effective gateway to establishing the kind of community trust and partnerships needed to grow an urban agriculture program.

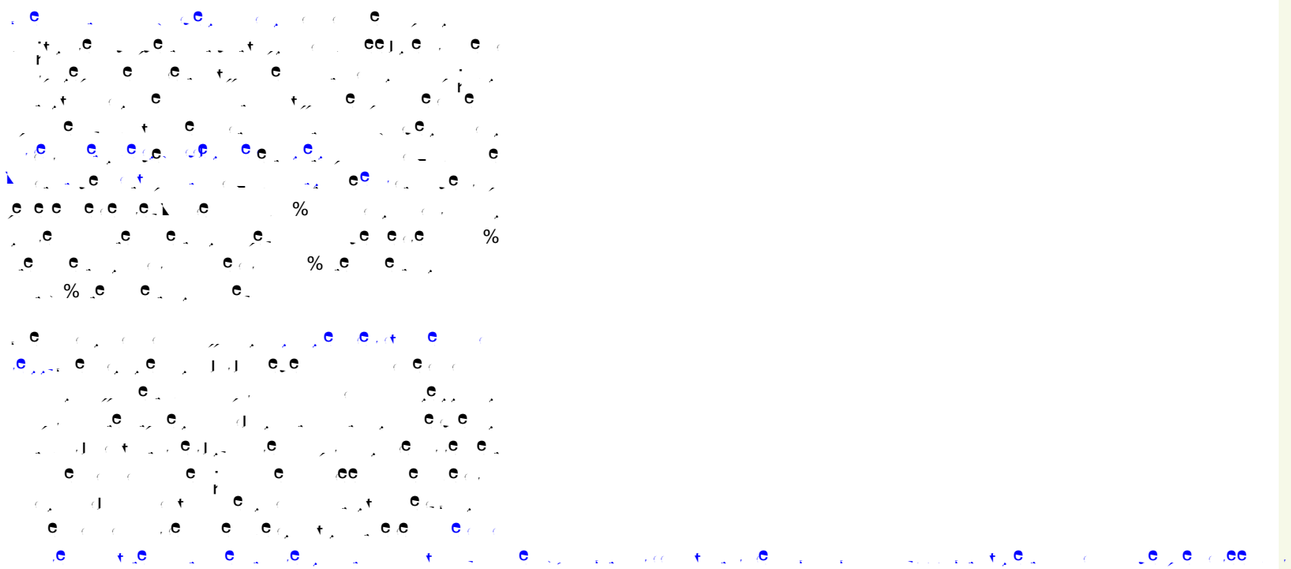
PROGRAM EXAMPLE:
WINDY CITY HARVEST'S ALLOTMENT GARDENS



Transitional job training

Transitional job training programs provide paid work, job skills training, and supportive services to help individuals facing barriers to employment succeed in the workforce. In operating such programs, public gardens can benefit from partnerships with organizations that can help facilitate activities such as participant recruitment and job placement.

PROGRAM EXAMPLE:
WINDY CITY HARVEST CORPS



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Building Efective Partnerships

Objectives

- Provide examples of various types of partners and their potential roles in supporting urban agriculture programs.
- Identify three key principles for effective partnership development.
- Describe strategies for building informal networks that lay the groundwork for potential collaborations.
- Describe factors to consider when deciding to enter into a new urban agriculture partnership.

Introduction

Successful urban agriculture programs often include partnerships that increase access to public gardens and opportunities for programming in local communities. They can facilitate relationship building between public garden staff, local residents, and members of community-based organizations. They can also function in more measurable ways by improving access to land and agricultural infrastructure, connecting a public garden with a program audience, and engaging communities in nutrition, health, and job skills programming. Partnerships, especially with community-based organizations, typically require a sizable investment of time and energy, but the payoff of increased program impact and community support is often well worth the effort. This section provides general principles on partnership development and outlines a set of practices for engaging potential partners.

Urban agriculture programs may have multiple kinds of working relationships: with community-based social service organizations, city or municipal agencies, advocacy organizations, community health centers, corporations, and school systems. Successful and enduring partner relationships depend on identifying who will be

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Key Takeaways

- There are a wide range of potential urban agriculture partners (e.g., community-based organizations, city or municipal agencies, advocacy organizations, health centers, corporations, school systems) that can connect urban agriculture programs with new audiences and resources.
- Effective partnership development takes time and attention. Cultivate strong community relationships, allow partnerships to grow organically, and recognize that relationships with partners grow stronger through shared experiences and successes over time.
- Building networks, by attending existing community

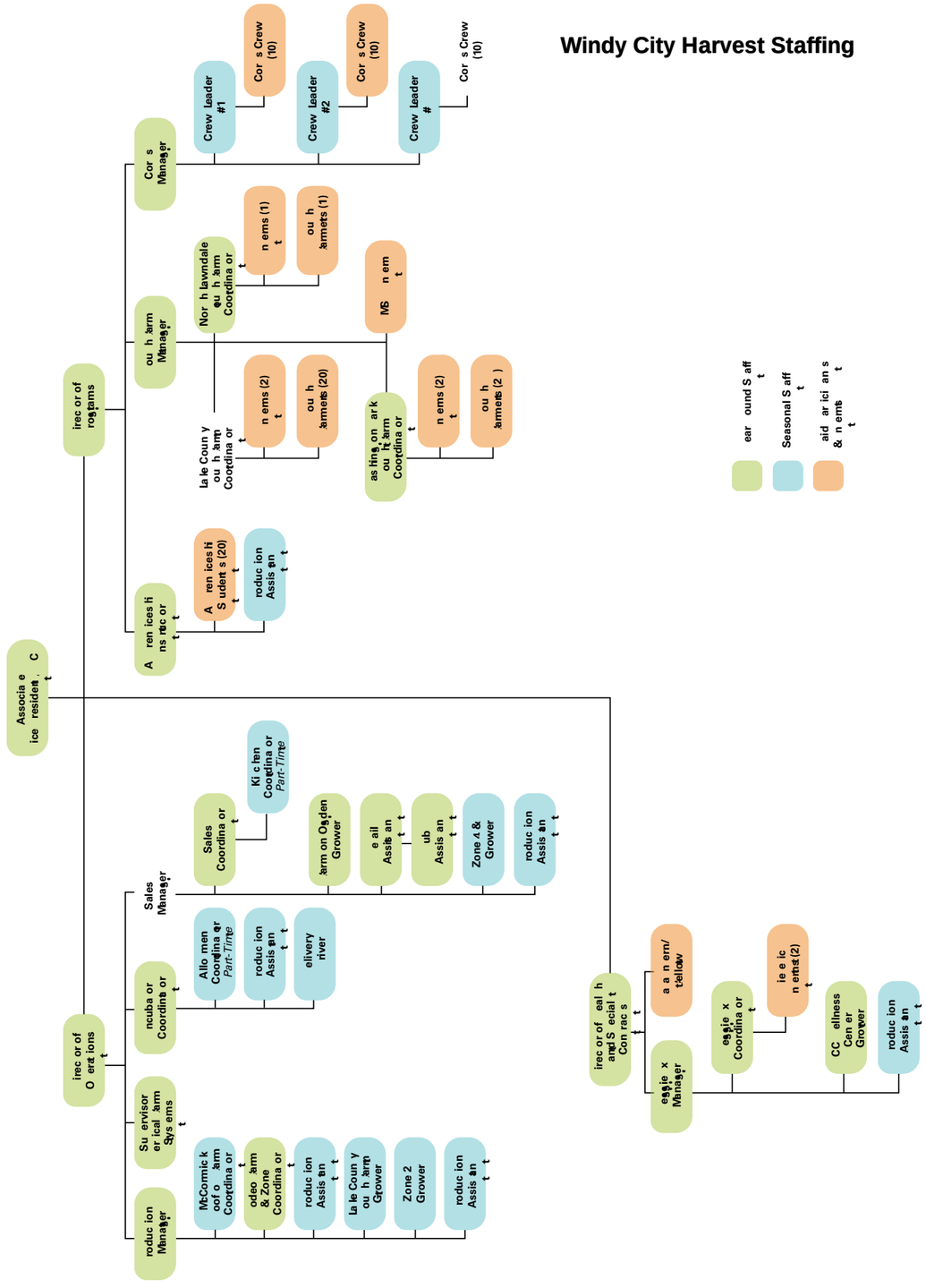
Soil management. Soil health is the heart of organic growing practices. The Chicago Botanic Garden's recipe for growing in raised beds is 1/3 topsoil and 2/3 organic compost. At sites where soil is mounded on geotextile fabric and edged with a wood retaining barrier—a technique sometimes called "windrow growing"—the mixture is roughly the same. Green manure and proper crop rotation are also important when growing intensively. Cover cropping provides organic matter and aids with soil structure, nitrogen production, soil microbial activity, nutrient enhancement, and weed suppression.

Composting. Composting is essential to healthy soils, and creating your own compost increases a garden's self-sufficiency. Some municipalities have strict guide-

Staffing

Organizationally, Windy City Harvest is situated in the

Windy City Harvest Staffing



Key Takeaways

- Establishing a new urban farm site requires consideration of physical factors such as soil health, water access, and shading, and sociopolitical factors such as zoning, support from elected officials, and relationship-building with local community members. It also requires consideration of hardscape requirements, including proper fencing; growing spaces; a water source and irrigation; and storage and food handling areas.
- Thorough record keeping is important for both program management and food safety. Urban agriculture programs may benefit from keeping records of purchases, crop plans and rotations, seed and supply orders, permits, certificates, and staffing schedules.
- Safe food production, handling, and distribution can be supported through voluntary audits (e.g., Good Agricultural Practices [GAP] and Good Handling Practices [GHP]); comprehensive staff training; and requiring staff to obtain relevant food safety and food handling certifications.
- Decisions about crop varieties and quantities for urban farm sites can be informed by factors such as feedback from prospective consumers, food storage capabilities, and food safety considerations. After establishing a baseline for sales in the first season, programs can use the last season's records to inform future sales targets and planning.
- Staff positions for urban agriculture programs typically require an understanding of food production or program coordination, and often both. When urban agriculture programs have the ability to hire program graduates for staff positions, new staff come to their roles already familiar with organizational culture, values, and programs. The practice of hiring from within creates a continuum of opportunity for program participants.

Reflection Questions

- Do you have a prospective urban farm site in mind? What questions will you need to answer about the physical site and the community in which it is situated before deciding how and whether to move forward with establishing a farm there?
- For your current or envisioned urban agriculture program, what types of records will be most important for staff to keep?
- Considering how you plan to use the food you produce in your urban agriculture program, what will you do to meet food safety requirements?
- Considering your goals for your urban agriculture program (e.g., sales to local community, training participants as skilled growers, addressing nutritional issues), what types of crops do you envision growing? What sources of information can help you with crop planning and with sales targets if you plan to grow food to sell?
- What knowledge, skills, and responsibilities are needed among your program staff?
- What could a staffing structure for your urban agriculture program look like? Are there opportunities to hire program participants for staff roles?

Fundraising for Urban Agriculture Programs

Objectives

- Describe roles and responsibilities for program staff and fundraising staff in collaborating to cultivate support for urban agriculture programs.
- Give examples of program data that may be of interest to funders, and explain how data can help demonstrate alignment between program outcomes and funder expectations.
- List potential sources of funding and income for urban agriculture programs.
- Describe how strategic communications and marketing can build internal and external support for urban agriculture programs.

Urban agriculture program development depends both on priority issues in the community and the extent of available assets. Stakeholders and partners, public and private funders, and program and fundraising staff all play a role in developing an urban agriculture program that can thrive as a community resource.

Critical Questions for Urban Agriculture Programs

Organizations interested in launching an urban agriculture program can benefit from careful consideration of some key questions.

Who benefits from this program and how? Answers to this question might include potential program participants and specific ways they could benefit from engaging in the program. This might include developing farming skills, gaining improved access to high quality food, developing social/emotional skills, strengthening work skills and employment history, and making connections in the community. Additionally, it can be useful to consider the ways the broader community can benefit from the program's presence in the neighborhood—for example, through improved access to healthy food or new employment opportunities. Other beneficiaries of a new urban agriculture program might include funders and partner organizations, who are able to achieve their goals or increase their reach by engaging with the program. Finally, launching an urban agriculture program can have benefits for the organization itself, such as a strengthened commitment to the local community and its interests.

What do we need for this program to operate? These considerations might include farm site needs such as growing space, greenhouses or hoophouses, equipment, water access, and restrooms. They might also include administrative and staffing considerations for the program, such as start-up and operational funds, office space, personnel, and training expertise. Importantly, to be able to operate, a new urban agriculture program will need relationships with potential participants themselves, or with organizations that can connect them with potential interested participants.

Can partners with underutilized resources find a mutually beneficial use for them by partnering with the program? Fundraising for an urban agriculture program may require seeking both funds, in-kind donations, or free expertise. For farm site needs, institutions such as schools, parks, churches, or healthcare facilities could be potential resources for accessing in-kind resources such as growing space, office space, access to water, and restrooms. Small businesses, companies, and real estate developers might also have the potential to provide access to land, equipment, materials and supplies, and funding. Other nonprofit organizations may be able to provide connections to potential participants or to expertise needed to run the program. Finally, foundations, government agencies, corporations, businesses, and individuals all can be potential sources of funding for urban agriculture programs.

Why should others care about this program? When introducing a possible program concept to potential stakeholders, it is useful to consider why these groups or individuals might be interested in getting involved. For new urban agriculture programs, these reasons might include that the program helps achieve stated goals identified by community members, offers expertise in a complementary field of interest, provides employment (e.g., for youth, for people with barri-

Where can we look for possible sources of support and examples? Sources of support for urban agriculture programs might include government funding (local, state, and federal), in-kind contributions, private foundations, businesses, small individual donations, and major individual gifts.

Importance of Teamwork

A team approach between program and fundraising staff generates the greatest probability of success. At the Chicago Botanic Garden, program staff implement program activities, collect and document important data, and communicate goals and plans to fundraising staff. Program staff are also responsible for earned income and in-kind support. Fundraising staff focus on securing grants and contributions to support program activities and plans. This includes cultivating and sustaining relationships with funders and identifying the limitations of funding, aspects that may have to be achieved by other means such as earned income, in-kind support, other community partnerships, or volunteers.

Good communication and teamwork between development and program staff can lead to opportunities that will benefit the program and participants even when monetary donation is not an option. For example, access to land presented an initial challenge for Windy City Harvest. Since the Chicago Botanic Garden is not positioned to purchase land, WCH program staff cultivated a diverse set of partners willing to provide access to vacant lots and suburban land, using various sustainable growing techniques to ensure food safety. The stability of the Chicago Botanic Garden plus an appealing program and shared goals made the partnerships attractive.

The success of program and fundraising staff working together requires open lines of communication and a collaborative culture. Communication and collaboration between fundraising teams will help ensure that programs meet community and fundraising objectives and that programs have the resources they need.

Occasionally, fundraising staff may have special requests from potential funders. Together, the program and fundraising teams determine how much variation is appropriate to meet funder interests. Primary considerations include:

- Is the change manageable within regular program activities?
- Does the requested addition enhance the program?
- Program staff and fundraisers should work together to determine how much flexibility is appropriate for a funder's requests. Sometimes, a funder's recommendations to change programming are appropriate, while other times, they may be difficult to comply with or make it harder for the program to meet its mission.

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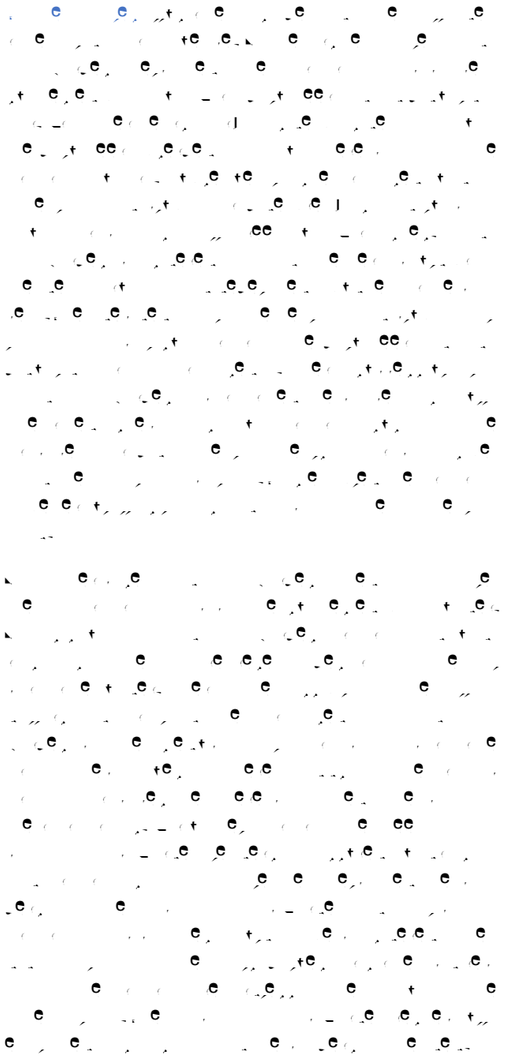
MANAGING DONOR INFLUENCE – TWO STORIES



Meeting Funder Expectations

Donor relationships begin with initial conversations and a proposal that sets standards and expectations. Articulating manageable outcomes is an important role of grant seekers, as it helps funders understand the realities of implementation. Outcomes focus on the program goals that are most important to the funder, determined through careful review of the published guidelines and candid conversations with funding staff.

Program and fundraising staff establish anticipated outcomes and metrics for determining success. Logic models that outline anticipated outcomes can be helpful and are sometimes required by private foundations and government agencies. This logic model example comes from Windy City Harx5tr3b.4 r()htipants b02 (ier Vls mapggieRx scn/GS10gicipaopose 0 10 5kutco0 (ate 99.5tr3b.4 r()htip4dinnd)d[(det2 s requirl-0.012 00 (v)fbtpriv)2ilnageabn out.1 (.)]T 54.375 Tw 0

ing and Urban Development, the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services continues to support Windy City Harvest Corps' work with transitional jobs programming.

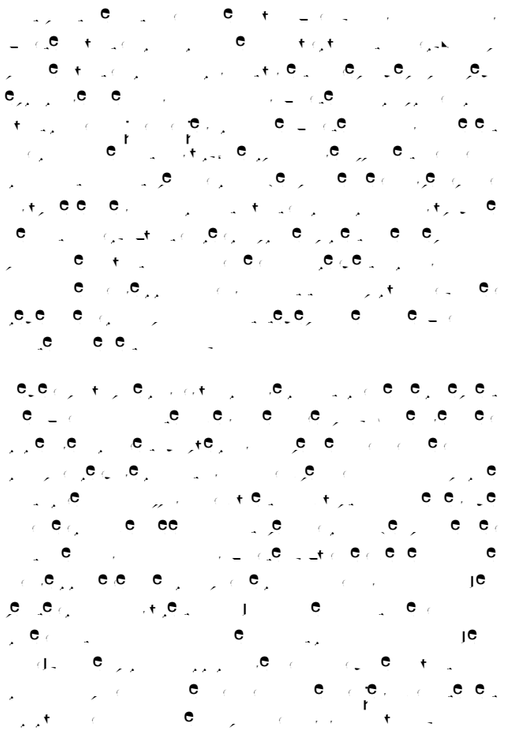
Finding sustained sources of support from government

Other

Rising demand for farm tours, workshops, and specialty classes led Windy City Harvest to offer these opportunities for a fee, with reduced rates for nonprofit organizations and some scholarships for individuals. Currently, Windy City Harvest offers a one-hour group tour and a two-and-a-half-hour farm experience that includes team-building exercises and farm work. Specialty classes are offered in a variety of subjects, including aquaponics, season extension, value-added products, and other related topics designed to help gardeners get the most production out of a small space. Windy City Harvest has changed the structure, content, and cost of these workshops over the years based on customer feedback. Windy City Harvest staff have found that offering workshops at a variety of levels of engagement and cost has been one way to engage a wide audience and supplement earned revenue.

Tours, workshops, and classes achieve two significant objectives for Windy City Harvest: they broaden its reach to younger and older audiences, and present a consistent yet informal way to engage partner organizations and individuals.

Windy City Harvest's earned income activities reflect a strong entrepreneurial spirit that emerged in the early days of Youth Farm. Participation in National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship programs, for example, led to money-making ventures such as tool-sharpening services. This outlook has served the program well, turning many situations into opportunities rather than obstacles. The number of requests for tours can be overwhelming, but staff have learned to balance these requests. Windy City Harvest now has one staff person who fields all inquiries for tours and works with Windy City Harvest staff to identify which site can host them. Windy City Harvest's flexibility, reliability, and the Chicago Botanic Garden brand have made it an attractive partner for businesses and organizations that can usinesponics, season ey, ay to e[(led0 (esepw0.5 (bummw)2ponics, season e)20o8-onizations)-20 suppl[(leissroduc are of)45 (f)ost0.5 (bu (that Td[(psops at a v)20 (alue-erson)]T-0.004 Tw 0 -1.4ed suppl[(l)0.id ossod((



Communications and Marketing

Communications and marketing staff are responsible for publicizing a brand identity that is consistent with the vision and mission of the institution. As public gardens diversify their programming, marketing and public communications materials should capture the entirety of these programs. Beyond the practical work of telling members and the public what the organization is doing—often beyond its home location—this communication helps attract more funding and builds the organization's overall image. That image may come in smaller pieces, describing individual programs and special events, but communications and marketing work to keep this curated image in the public eye.

An open and collaborative relationship between communications/marketing staff and program staff is paramount. Strengthening internal PR, and "selling" your program so it gets the institutional support it needs is an ongoing activity. This is particularly true for gardens that are admission-based and marketing staff's primary concern is getting people through the gate. Under these conditions, communicating the achievements of a program like urban agriculture training may take longer and not generate the crowds, but it is important to keep this communication on the front-burner.

As information is increasingly consumed in a digital format, marketing has become largely defined by digital media, where website development, social media presence, and even podcast communications are the primary means of communicating an institution's brand identity. On the one hand, this gives tremendous power to marketing and communications staff in terms of content control; on the other, it requires a larger communication staff to manage that media, increasing the potential for innovative storytelling that will stand out in the glut of digital content.

A program in a high-profile location with lots of foot traffic can powerfully communicate urban agriculture initiatives to a much broader audience. This, in turn, works to connect with potential funders and partners who can appreciate media buzz. For the Chicago Botanic Garden, the McCormick Place Rooftop Farm offered a compelling opportunity to showcase its urban agriculture activities broadly. The novel conversion of a rooftop to a food growing environment, news features on trainees who work the site, seasonal harvests, and interviews with the catering chef offered a continual stream of publicity opportunities.

Infographics as Storytelling Tools

Communications departments help tell the story and broadcast it to influential audiences through a variety of platforms. Infographics can be especially valuable for quickly communicating the program to all stakeholders. The Windy City Harvest infographic concisely describes program participants, program outcomes, locations of operations, and their relative geography.

Data Collection for Windy City Harvest's programs

Some of the measures that Windy City Harvest uses to determine strategic success are general measures collected across multiple programs and aligned with Windy City Harvest's strategic goals. Other measures are specific to individual programs, and reflective of particular program goals. Sometimes, measurement approaches developed for one program can be adapted for another. For example, Windy City Harvest's Youth Farm has developed a range of strategies for measuring success that have been adapted for the Windy City Harvest Corps transitional jobs program. Additionally, some of the tools that Windy City Harvest uses to collect or measure data have emerged through partnership activities. For example, aspects of data collection protocols for Windy City Harvest's Apprenticeship Program and VeggieRx Program reflect the programs' connections with the community college system and the University of Illinois, as well as Chicago's nutrition program. The following section takes a closer look at the measures collected by each Windy City Harvest program.

Windy City Harvest's Evaluation Tools and Measures

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Because the goal of Windy City Harvest's Youth Farm is youth development, the program uses weekly feedback protocols so that program participants track their own program success. Students agree to a set of standards at the start of the program that clearly outlines community expectations, such as showing up on time and what to do if that is not possible. Consequences of violations of these community expectations are spelled out. All students receive performance feedback by participating in weekly Straight Talk sessions.

At Windy City Harvest, growing data and sales data are carefully tracked, documented, and analyzed each year. At the close of one growing season and in preparation for the following, responsible staff for each of Windy City Harvest's 11 farm sites analyze results in the Windy City Harvest production review meeting. Each staff member notes favorite and most profitable crops and varieties; most essential tools; as well as pests, diseases, and best control methods. Crop plans and sales goals are assigned for the coming year, with expectations and due dates. Growers develop the crop plan with feedback from the production and sales team. Next, the crop plan is presented to staff. Once accepted, seed orders are placed. An outline for the Production Review process illustrates this analysis.

Connecting Program Goals with Data Collection

Gathering and documenting relevant data is key to understanding how well a program strategy is achieving its intended goals. It also keeps funders, partners, and institutional leadership abreast of their investments, and helps track unanticipated outcomes when they arise. Carefully tracked data embedded into program operations is a critical way to answer basic queries about a program, such as demonstrating

- whether program participants actually represent the program's target audience;
- which varieties of produce are best-performing and most in demand; and
- actual earned income versus projected earned income.

The role of mission in programmatic assessments is always considered. Invariably Windy City Harvest staff are asked why they do not sell at the popular Green City Market, located at the Lincoln Park Zoo and frequented by residents of a relatively affluent area of Chicago. The answer, carefully explained, is that part of the Windy City Harvest mission is to create access to high quality produce in communities that have experienced .4 Td[s in wh-

Citations

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