

Keys to success: how to develop a sustainable school, youth, or community-based garden project

ASPIRE:

Know your **A**udience, start **S**mall, make **P**lans, create an **I**dentify, establish **R**oles, celebrate with **E**vents

- Get to know your audience by soliciting ideas and feedback. Keep people in the loop as plans develop. Consider developmental needs, ability levels, and cultural backgrounds.
- Start small so that you can balance garden programming (educational and fun activities) with garden maintenance (work projects and upkeep – which can also be fun!)
- Develop a long range maintenance plan that covers the entire growing season and includes annual soil amendments
- Plan to stay involved in the project; don't assume that another group will jump in to take care of the garden during school vacations
- Create an identity and engaging name for your project. Be inclusive and provide opportunities for participants and community members to have input on themes, activities, and designs.
- Define roles and ground rules for participants; plan ahead as much as you can before breaking ground, then adapt and be flexible as new situations arise.
- Organize an annual Planting Celebration to begin your garden year and a Harvest Festival to celebrate the end of the growing season. Include hands-on activities, garden foods, music, and the arts.
- Turn work into fun with Bucket Brigades and Mulching Parties. Treat volunteers like “gold” and show your appreciation before, during, and after the project. Take time for a refreshment break or potluck lunch.

TOOLS:

- Promote **T**eamwork, define **O**bjectives, instill **O**wnership, cultivate **L**eadership, **S**hare your success
- Develop a team approach (**T**ogether **E**veryone **A**ccomplishes **M**ore) in planning, programs, and events. Posting a calendar of meeting dates and group work projects is helpful for attracting new participants.
- Successful garden programs are based on clear goals and objectives and a group consensus to achieve them. Establish favorite traditions that are repeated from year to year; add new activities as your program grows.
- Consider who “owns” your project. Provide stakeholders with progress reports so that there is a shared sense of ownership. Use signage to create an atmosphere that is welcoming, demonstrates ownership and community pride, and serves as a vehicle for thanking sponsors and contributors.
- All community-based projects need effective facilitative leadership to become sustainable. Facilitative leaders help to draw out and cultivate leadership from within participants and volunteers.
- Sustainable organizations recognize the need to rotate, acknowledge, and transition leadership from year to year to keep the garden program strong and to avoid “volunteer burnout.”
- Successful garden projects share their success by thanking sponsors, cultivating new partnerships, giving garden tours, generating media publicity, and sharing gifts from the garden with the community.