Questions to consider when starting a Community Food Project

Community Food Projects are volunteer-led initiatives that require internal processes and communication systems to function well. These questions will help you develop a framework for working together to manage the project long-term. It is important that as many stakeholders as possible contribute to the formation of this framework to ensure that it represents the collective wisdom of the group. The resulting document will be something that is updated over time as the group learns and evolves.

Vision/purpose

Goal: Allow every participant to voice their ideas and hopes for the space – what is calling each person to participate? This will inform the way you develop the project.

- What type of community project does the group want to create?
- What is the purpose of the project?
- Who will the project serve?

Organizational structure and leadership

Goal: Agree upon a system for how participants will work together to manage the project and make decisions into the future.

- What type of organizational and leadership structure makes sense?
- What type of decision-making structure will we use? Who makes decisions?
- If we form a leadership team or committee, which decisions are made by the smaller group and which decisions are made by all gardeners?
- How will we change the rules once you've made them?
- How will we ensure that maximum participation is encouraged to shape the garden moving forward?
- What roles do we need to be successful? (people can perform multiple roles)
    Common Examples:
    - Site Coordinator (point person for entire project)
    - Maintenance Coordinator (keeps an eye on physical site)
    - Plot assignment and management of a waiting list (if appropriate)
    - Communication (keeping participants in the know about events, etc.)
    - Money management (collecting fees, managing budget)
    - Additional roles (you can come up with your own, too!)
        - Food bank plot coordinator, Education coordinator, Children's area coordinator, Outreach/Events coordinator, Compost coordinator
- How will leadership be transitioned over time (and new leaders encouraged to come forward?)

Participation/Maintenance

Goal: Clarify systems for maintaining the site and how that work will be accomplished – make sure to be specific about standards of care at both the individual and communal level.

- What level of participation do we expect at both the individual level (maintaining individual plots weed free) and the communal level (participating in the maintenance of communal areas)
- How will we provide opportunities to participate (assign tasks, work parties)?
- How will we manage if people don't participate at the expected level? What are the consequences?
- How will we manage the site in times of high demand as well as low demand (how are extra plots assigned?)

Communication

Goal: Successful projects maintain maximum participation in decision making. Agree upon tools and practices that the group will use to make sure that all participants and stakeholders are able to communicate so this can happen easily over time.

- What is the best way for the group to communicate and ensure no one is left out?
- When should meetings take place? How often? Where?
- How will other people and organizations know about the group and the garden? How do we involve the neighbors that aren't here? How do we maintain communications with the non-participants stakeholders over time (i.e. neighbors)

Conflict Resolution

Goal: Develop a system for managing conflict so that disagreements can be processed in a way that strengthens the group.

- How will we handle issues where people do not agree? Some ideas are to meet in a smaller group with the interested parties and a neutral facilitator, or to reach out to Harvest Pierce County staff for support.
- How we will ensure that our garden is a welcoming place for all to contribute ideas?
- How will we ensure that our decision making process is transparent?

Group processes

Goal: Develop any necessary procedures for managing the administrative or other supportive processes.

- Tracking money – will we collect money from participants? How will we make decisions about spending it? How will we maintain transparency in the management of money? Will there be a sliding scale or other system to ensure money is not a barrier to participation?
- Fundraising - Will we write grants or request donations to support projects at the site? How will the grants be processed (who is your 501c3?) How will the money be managed?
- Water access - How will we gain access to water and who will be responsible for the bill?
- Insurance – is additional insurance necessary? Who will be responsible?
- Neighbors – developing and maintaining good relationships is critical. Think also of local business and community groups as well – they often have resources and ideas to contribute.