

Building Capacity for Urban Agriculture Programs:

Tools from the Windy City Harvest Model





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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 community¹, 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

The U.S. Botanic Garden and the Chicago Botanic Garden recognize that urban agriculture can play a unique role in helping public gardens meet their missions to connect people to plants. Urban agriculture programs offer opportunities for public gardens to expand their existing programmatic range and geographic reach. They can provide avenues for public gardens to address aims such as food justice, health education, and job skills training. This work is often made possible through partnerships with community-based organizations, enabling the garden to accomplish much more than it could on its own, and demonstrating the relevance of the garden in the wider community.

Another important dimension of urban agriculture programming at public gardens is its potential to contribute to environmental justice and a more equitable food system. Investing in individuals and communities who have historically been excluded from leadership roles in public gardens and environmental and food systems work can cultivate a more diverse generation of leaders in these fields. By offering a continuum of training opportunities from entry-level roles to advanced certificates and leadership development, public gardens can create pathways for participants who have been marginalized by structural inequities.



The Purpose of this Toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide an overview of institutional, physical, and programmatic considerations for public gardens and their partners interested in urban agriculture, using the Chicago Botanic Garden’s Windy City Harvest as a case example. It is not a comprehensive guide to the design and implementation of all types of food programs at public gardens, nor a survey of all successful urban agriculture programs implemented by public gardens nationwide. Further, its intent is not for public gardens to replicate the Windy City Harvest programs described. Urban agriculture programming defies a one-size-fits-all approach, emerging within local contexts and evolving in response to the needs of participants and changing organizational and community priorities.

Public gardens may focus their urban agriculture programming in a variety of areas. For example, Windy City Harvest provides paid training experiences for participants as they learn to grow food plants for sale and consumption in urban areas. Given this focus, the Windy City Harvest program examples included in this toolkit do not specifically address areas such as school gardening, vegetable display gardens at public garden campuses, or home gardening education programs. However, other public gardens can and do include such activities within their urban agriculture programming portfolios.

This toolkit describes key components of urban agriculture program development from a public gardens perspective. It includes a collection of resources and experiences that have the potential to be educational and useful for public gardens and their partners as they seek to create or expand their urban agriculture programming. The U.S. Botanic Garden and the Chicago Botanic Garden hope that this toolkit will serve to generate new programmatic possibilities in urban agriculture that fit the unique needs and interests of public gardens, their partners, and their local communities.



Windy City Harvest Origin Story

Windy City Harvest grew out of the Chicago Botanic Garden’s long-standing community gardening initiatives that began shortly after its founding in the 1970s. These community gardening efforts evolved to inform the School Garden Initiative (SGI), in partnership with Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District, Openlands Project, and the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance. SGI helped transform concrete campuses into school gardens and integrate gardening into the school day. In the early 2000s, the community gardening department transformed into its next iteration, which reflected the Garden’s interest in engaging youth, their need for summer jobs, and the natural appeal of edible plants. Quickly, healthy eating and improved access to affordable, fresh produce in low-income communities emerged as additional considerations.

Today, Windy City Harvest’s urban agriculture training programs encompass four program areas: youth development through urban agriculture, a transitional jobs program for justice-involved individuals, an urban agriculture apprenticeship certificate program, and a farmer incubator program for participants interested in starting their own farm business. All programs contribute to VeggieRx, Windy City Harvest’s Food as

Medicine initiative, a partnership with federally-qualified health centers serving SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)-eligible participants. In keeping with the Chicago Botanic Garden’s history of providing access to community garden plots, Windy City Harvest also works with partner organizations to support more than 100 families engaged in community gardening.

At each step in its evolution, Windy City Harvest has adapted in response to identified needs, demands, and opportunities in the communities it serves. In the process, program and fundraising staff have sought to consider the best interests of organizations, communities, partners, and participants. Initially dependent on public and private sector funding, Windy City Harvest increased its emphasis on earned income and developed an entrepreneurial spirit that inspired new approaches to solving problems. As a social enterprise within a nonprofit organization, Windy City Harvest does not have to rely on one revenue stream, operating instead through a balance of in-kind, contributed, and earned income. This approach provides Windy City Harvest with improved financial sustainability and greater flexibility in decision-making.

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

The Chicago Botanic Garden has a longstanding history of supporting home growers. This began with the Chicago Horticulture Society, the organization that started the Chicago Botanic Garden, supporting Victory Gardens throughout the city of Chicago during World War II. Currently, Windy City Harvest supports more than 100 families on five of its urban farms through its Allotment Garden program. Through this program, Windy City Harvest staff support community residents in planting, maintaining, and harvesting in allotment plots. Growers also participate in on-site social events throughout the season. Allotment plot growers build trusting relationships with Windy City Harvest staff, and are introduced to other programs within Windy City Harvest that they can access. Thus, the Allotment Garden program often serves as an entry point for many Windy City Harvest program participants.

Youth Development

Youth development is one of the top focus areas for urban agriculture programming at public gardens. Their capacity to empower youth through training and experience can be meaningful for participants and their communities, as well as for funders and friends of the program.



PROGRAM EXAMPLE: WINDY CITY HARVEST’S YOUTH FARM

Windy City Harvest began its youth program in 2003, as a one-acre pilot program in Lake County, just south of the Wisconsin border. Its program design was based on [The Food Project](#), a Boston-area organization that employs teenagers for agricultural production, harvesting, and outreach to hunger-relief organizations during the summer season. Today, the [Windy City Harvest Youth Farm](#) educates and employs 80 to 90 teens each year.

Youth Farm has four farm locations. Three of the sites prioritize recruiting students who live near the farms, while the fourth site in downtown Chicago recruits youth from all over the city. In a typical year, each site seeks to hire a balanced number of students in each high school grade level and an even mix of male- and female-identified students. In 2019, Youth Farm students self-identified as 65% African American, 30% Latinx, and 5% white. Seventy-five percent of students self-reported that their families received some form of federal benefits, like SNAP or WIC. Each Youth Farm site offers a [spring, summer and fall program](#); sites with indoor teaching space offer programming March through December.

Youth Farm’s youth development approach combines a focus on [social emotional learning \(SEL\) principles](#)² with a [training program focused on sustainable urban agriculture practices](#). Program coordinators work with youth participants to complete [social emotional learning assessments](#) at the beginning and end of the program to gain insight into participant growth and program impact. Tools such as Straight Talk³, a performance feedback approach; a co-created and signed [Community Standards work contract](#); and a [Violations Chart Tracking Form](#) help establish and maintain open communication, accountability, and respect within the group. The Community Standards and Violations Chart are used together to set clear expectations for students. The Community Standards are written by students and set the tone for how we work together as a team, how to handle conflict, and what students expect from one another. The Violations Chart gives clear consequences for typical workplace expectations, which helps students weigh the potential impact of a decision. The Violations are designed to be forgiving and create space for students to learn from mistakes, but still hold students to high expectations. For example, students receive a violation for Inappropriate Language for swearing. Their site supervisor will give clear, direct feedback about the incident during Straight Talk and document the violation with the student. The student then knows that they will receive two more warnings for language before being dropped from the program. The violations chart helps prepare students for the workplace after Youth Farm.

While youth development is the primary goal of the program, the urban agriculture context also teaches students to work as a team, advocate for food justice, eat in a healthy way, and become accountable—to themselves, their fellow farmers, and their employers. Youth farmers also serve their communities by running a weekly farm stand that sells affordable produce and accepts all federal benefits, and by leading weekly gardening workshops for community members.

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

The [Windy City Harvest Corps](#) program employs 30 to 40 justice-involved individuals for 14 weeks each year in closely mentored, full-time, paid transitional jobs, and supports them in finding full-time, long-term employment. About one third of Windy City Harvest Corps participants have not attained a diploma or GED, one third have a diploma or GED, and one third have college experience. More than 90% of Corps participants since 2010 identified as male. Eighty-five percent (85%) identified as African American, 8% identified as Latinx, and 6% identified as white.

The Corps program follows a [six-step recruitment process](#). The first step is a kickoff event with partner organizations, followed by application information sessions, applicant deadlines, work shadow days, interviews, and background checks. Once applicants are accepted into the program, they join one of three 15-member cohorts working through the spring and summer. To stay in the program, crew members must adhere to [performance, attitude, and attendance standards](#), which are used to give clear feedback.

Crew members work on Windy City Harvest farm sites Monday through Thursday, gaining hands-on technical

training. On Fridays, they participate in [job development workshops](#) that integrate the [Roots of Success](#) curriculum⁴—a multimedia, activity-based, environmental literacy and work readiness curriculum. The job-development workshops provide an opportunity for staff to support crew members in developing resumes, preparing for interviews, and searching for jobs. Workshops also include [OSHA](#) (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) certification, [ServSafe food handling certification](#), resume development, mock interviews, and legal aid connections and assistance. Crew members also receive weekly feedback from crew leaders to help develop workplace readiness skills.

Graduates of the program work in many fields, including food service, commercial food handling, and urban agriculture. Corps graduates who wish to continue their education in sustainable urban agriculture and begin careers as beginning farmers can apply for the [WCH Apprenticeship Program](#). Corps graduates who are accepted into the Apprenticeship program can continue working at Windy City Harvest as production assistants. This work-study program allows participants to maintain their income while they earn their [Sustainable Urban Agriculture certificate](#) through City Colleges of Chicago and the Chicago Botanic Garden’s Apprenticeship program.



PARTICIPANT PROFILE: DANTRELL DEHART, WINDY CITY HARVEST CORPS

Dantrell Dehart (above right, with Artema Plunkett on the left) listened closely at a local job fair as Stacey Kimmons shared his story of working through the programs at Windy City Harvest: from Windy City Harvest Corps, to Windy City Harvest’s Apprenticeship Program, to being accepted into Windy City Harvest’s Incubator Program where he started his own business, Return to Life Farming. Dehart had just completed a composting program at Growing Power, a local urban agriculture organization, and was interested in learning more about agricultural training opportunities. He applied and was accepted into the Corps program and assigned to work from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. with the Kraft foods crew, which maintained a vegetable garden at the Kraft corporate office in Northbrook, Illinois. In addition to maintaining a corporate campus vegetable farm, Dehart engaged with staff and donated produce to WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children). The experience was transformational. “As I learned more,” says Dehart, “and got more involved with the tasks and was accepted to work study, I built a passion and my mind was made up to pursue the apprenticeship as a career.” The apprenticeship offered

hands-on learning in a variety of farming operations including a greenhouse, an aquaponics operation, and a hoophouse, which enabled Dehart to develop in-demand skills. “My internship [at Arturo Velasquez Institute] gave me the skills and ability to work with [urban agriculture enterprises] Herban Produce & Gotham Greens after completing the apprenticeship. I was even hired by Herban Produce in my neighborhood before I left the apprenticeship.”

Today, Dehart works on Windy City Harvest’s full-time staff as a grower for a farm on Chicago’s West Side that is run by the health clinic network PCC Wellness. He also runs a weekly farm stand and a VeggieRx program for clinic patients, where they learn healthy eating habits, attend weekly cooking and nutrition lessons, and receive farm fresh produce and coupons to come back to the farm stand. Dehart enjoys the work with community gardeners and is proud to support their activity. “I am setting the future for myself and my daughter,” he says, “by growing the field and awareness of sustainable urban agriculture.”

Technical training

The key to establishing and maintaining a sustainable urban agriculture program is to ensure that program participants are trained in best practices for growing, harvesting, and distributing their crops. This ensures that the program is an asset not only to trainees, but also to the surrounding communities.



PROGRAM EXAMPLE:
WINDY CITY HARVEST'S APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

The Windy City Harvest [Apprenticeship Program](#) is a hands-on, technical training program in sustainable urban agriculture offered through a partnership between the Chicago Botanic Garden and the City Colleges of Chicago. It runs for nine months, from February through October, and requires dual enrollment and tuition payments to both institutions. Graduates of the Apprenticeship program receive three certificates: a Certificate in Sustainable Urban Agriculture from the Chicago Botanic Garden, a Certificate in Sustainable Urban Horticulture from Richard J. Daley College, and a Certificate in Environmental Literacy from Roots of Success.

Windy City Harvest intentionally recruits students from a variety of backgrounds into the program, with a broad range of educational attainment, work experience, and life experience. Over this history of the program, students have ranged from ages 18 to 65. Some students come to the program with no college experience, and some have advanced degrees. About one third of alumni identify as African American, one-third identify as

Latinx, and one-third identify as white. A small number of students self-identified as Asian. Thirty-five (35%) of Apprenticeship program participants self-report that they have received some type of federal benefit (like SNAP, WIC, or Medicaid) within six months of enrolling in the program.

Participants spend the first two-thirds of the Apprenticeship Program learning components of annual vegetable production in classrooms and greenhouses at the [Arturo Velasquez Institute](#) (AVI) and Windy City Harvest farm sites. The spring and summer semesters are 75% hands-on learning during fieldwork days at Windy City Harvest sites and 25% classroom-based learning. The core curriculum of this program is based on the University of California Santa Cruz [Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems](#) (Teaching Organic Farming and Gardening, and Teaching Direct Marketing & Small Farm Viability); [The Market Gardener](#) by Jean-Martin Fortier; and [Growing for Market](#), which offers best practice recommendations on food and human safety precautions and record keeping. An updated [Apprenticeship Program syllabus](#) is offered each year and includes expected apprenticeship outcomes, a list of texts and materials required and provided, the grading system explanation, classroom policies, and a weekly schedule of learning components. During this period, Apprentices also engage with the [Roots of Success](#) environmental literacy curriculum to develop work-readiness skills and learn about green career pathways.

After completing classroom and growing instruction, Apprentices are assigned to a three-month paid internship starting the first week of August at a farm site, where they get relevant experience and close supervision. Apprentices are paid hourly for 30 hours per week and participate in regular check-ins from Windy City Harvest staff. The paid work experience is a critical part of the program model and allows Windy City Harvest to develop and strengthen working relationships with many local commercial and nonprofit operations that are part of the Chicago-area food hub.

Prior to the start date of the internship, Apprentices work with their instructors to determine two [S.M.A.R.T. Goals](#) for their internship. These goals focus on production or farm management skills they would like to develop during their internship. Apprentices also work with their internship supervisor to set a third goal that focuses on long-term professional growth. The instructor will touch base with an Apprentice on their S.M.A.R.T. Goal progress at each internship check-in. Apprentices complete a [Sustainable Urban Agriculture Skills and Knowledge Self-Evaluation](#) four times during the course of their

program. This evaluation helps Apprentices track their experience levels for discrete skills, identify a resource for learning more about these skills, and plot next steps for gaining further experience. This practice of defining and measuring both goals and skills development help Apprentices keep track of what they are learning and its contribution to their professional and personal outcomes. Instructor check-ins help Apprentices negotiate problems that may arise during the internship and reaffirm the program's commitment to individual learning and growth.



PARTICIPANT PROFILE:
CHEF MEL, WINDY CITY HARVEST ALLOTMENT GARDENS AND APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Chef Mel Carter began her relationship with Windy City Harvest in 2013 as a curious onlooker to the building of the Windy City Harvest's Legends South farm on the site of the former Robert Taylor Homes, a public housing project. Attracted by the security of the location

and the community of other gardeners, Chef Mel was soon working her own allotment. In 2018, after helping an apprentice with her harvest and learning about the program, Chef Mel entered the Apprenticeship Program with a fellowship from the [Chicago Housing Authority Partners in Education program](#). The program helped Chef Mel identify her professional passion:

"I realized that my role in agriculture was to combine my chef and urban agriculture training with horticulture therapy to bring my skills full circle to support kids eating what they grow. It becomes therapeutic for them, the sensation of growing, smelling, touching the food – a calming soothing, new environment – an amazing process for them."

Toward this goal, Chef Mel completed the Chicago Botanic Garden's horticulture therapy certificate program in 2019 with scholarship support from the Michaels Organization, Windy City Harvest's partner for Legends South farm. Now that her training is complete, Chef Mel wants to use her agricultural knowledge and therapeutic skills by working with youth:

"I hope to install sensory gardens at farms in underserved areas to serve kids that have been traumatized here in Chicago communities... I enjoy listening to the kids, explaining how I put meals together, what the meal is, where the produce and ingredients are from – I want the kids to feel important, I want their input, I want them to feel heard and to know how their day is going."

Urban agriculture business development

The USDA describes a “beginning farmer” as anyone with less than ten years of farming experience⁵. As farmers become more confident in their growing skills and strike out to start their own farm businesses, there are still many challenges, particularly in urban areas. Botanic gardens have the opportunity to continue to support small businesses with access to land, water, and markets that they might not otherwise be able to secure.



PROGRAM EXAMPLE: WINDY CITY HARVEST’S INCUBATOR PROGRAM

Graduates of Windy City Harvest’s Apprenticeship Program who wish to take the next step as beginning farmers can apply to the [Windy City Harvest’s Incubator Program](#) at Legends South, a three-acre farm site located on Chicago’s South Side next to a mixed-income housing development. The program reduces the risks of starting one’s own farming-related enterprise by providing land, mentorship, and shared tools for farmers launching a farm business. Incubator farmers are carefully selected each year from student applicants who have completed the Apprenticeship Program and a 10-week [Business and Entrepreneurship course](#) offered through a partnership between the Small Business De-

velopment Corporation (SBDC) of Illinois and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). Fifty percent of farm businesses accepted into the Incubator Program and 100% of the businesses that have stayed on the land for more than two years are minority-owned.

Farm businesses that are accepted into the program receive a two-year maximum low-cost lease, a 1/8- to 1/4 -acre of ready-to-farm land, access to tools and equipment, access to a GAP ([Good Agricultural Practices](#))-compliant processing facility and irrigation, and shared access to Windy City Harvest’s markets. In addition, farm businesses receive mentoring support and technical assistance from a small farm business consultant who partners with [Farm Commons](#), a national legal aid group for small farmers.



PARTICIPANT PROFILES: JUAN CEDILLO AND DULCE MORALES, WINDY CITY HARVEST’S INCUBATOR PROGRAM

In 2009, Juan Cedillo walked into the Arturo Velazquez Institute looking to continue his education and found the Windy City Harvest Apprenticeship program. Since graduating from this program, he has taken several short courses at the Chicago Botanic Garden and Windy City Harvest including edible landscaping, tree trimming, and season extension. Dulce Morales participated in the business and entrepreneurship course, now offered in partnership with the YWCA and a required course for all incubator farmers, to refine the business model for Cedillo’s Family Farm. Juan and Dulce began their farm business, Cedillo’s Fresh Produce, at the incubator farm at the Legends South urban farm site, and after one season, graduated to a partner organization’s site nearby to grow their business.

Although Juan’s family had been in the farming business for generations, his education at Windy City Harvest helped him and Dulce succeed as growers for

farmers’ markets. Learning to crop plan and learning alongside other incubating farms provided them with a community of practice and a network for accessing support that has helped them grow. In addition, their daughter Alex participated in the Windy City Harvest Youth Farm program for several seasons. Alex currently works as part of Cedillo’s Fresh Produce part-time.

“It has been hard to be successful, even if we are going into our fifth year,” said Dulce. “It’s hard to have a successful business, but we have found lots of support. Having that support has allowed us to commit.”

A big part of the incubating experience is about sharing knowledge, resources, and even helping hands when necessary. Cedillo’s Fresh Produce has benefited from what others have shared, and is now at the point of paying it forward: “We’ve received help, and now we want to help others who are incubating. We want to share tips, lend a hand, and attend meetings of new growers so that we can share our knowledge on how to navigate hiccups. We are the humans doing the work now, so we get to share our experience and help.”

Nutrition Programs

Teaching people how to grow and prepare fresh fruits and vegetables, and increasing access to healthy foods can be important goals of food programs at public gardens². Windy City Harvest frames food access in terms of five separate tenets, each of which is vital to all successful urban agriculture initiatives. These tenets are: economic accessibility, physical accessibility, cultural relevance, quality food preparation skills, and understood health value to the population served. All collaborative projects are designed with these five points in mind.



PROGRAM EXAMPLE: WINDY CITY HARVEST'S VEGGIERx PROGRAM

Windy City Harvest's [VeggieRx: Food as Medicine Program](#) works to increase food access in urban neighborhoods, and improve health outcomes for SNAP-enrolled individuals and patients at local community health centers. VeggieRx began in 2016 through a partnership with the [Lawndale Christian Health Center](#) (LCHC), a network of community health centers located on Chicago's West Side. Patients at the Center are referred by medical providers and VeggieRx prescriptions are integrated into their electronic medical records. Patients are referred if they have a diet-related disease, currently receive SNAP benefits, or are experiencing food insecurity. Participants receive a bag of seasonal produce that includes six to eight different varieties of produce, and coupons to shop at a nearby farmers' market. In addition, VeggieRx Program participants are invited to attend weekly community classes that include cooking demonstrations and nutrition education.

VeggieRx is made possible through its health provider partnerships, which have expanded with the success of the program to include an additional two community health networks, [PCC Wellness](#) and [Loyola Center for](#)

[Health](#). Funding for the program comes from the [USDA's Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program](#) (formerly known as the [Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive \(FINI\) Program](#)), which aims to: increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP recipients by providing incentives, encourage local stakeholders to collaborate around improved health and nutrition, and develop effective and replicable processes for benefit redemption.

Like any new program, VeggieRx has evolved over time to better meet the needs of participants. Early on, Windy City Harvest found that the program had a few champions at Lawndale Christian Health Center, but that most healthcare providers were confused by the program and reported that they often did not feel they had time during appointments to talk about nutrition. Windy City Harvest staff hosted information sessions over breakfast for providers, attended all-staff meetings at LCHC, and spent time at the clinics, informally meeting with LCHC staff to help familiarize them with the program. Windy City Harvest and LCHC were also able to work together to incorporate VeggieRx into their Electronic Medical Records system. The provider education plus an easy referral process were critical to increasing the number of providers who referred patients.

Evaluation and Program Growth

Urban agriculture programs at public gardens may grow and evolve in response to the interests of current participants, new partnership opportunities, and community priorities. This push and pull from both inside and outside the program is characteristic of site-specific urban agriculture programming. For example, an influence from inside a program would be participants in a transitional jobs training program expressing interest in learning to start their own farm businesses, leading to the development of a new program with a business-development focus. Influences from outside the program could include changing priorities of partners and community groups. Urban agriculture program staff at public gardens should pay close attention to existing strategic plans from local community groups. These plans typically outline community priorities and can shine a light on how resourced organizations can wrap those resources around community priority areas. Finally, funders and sponsors often challenge the program to grow in a specific way. Determining how funders' interests align with community priorities requires finesse, but the vision for growth should be based on the feedback provided by partners and participants.

Windy City Harvest created a values statement in 2015 as a way to guide the program's expansion before the construction of the Farm on Ogden. This values statement is more specific than the mission of the botanic garden, and gives employees an expectation of the organization's culture. Windy City Harvest's original values statement was drafted with input from staff and participants and is revisited annually.

Key Takeaways

- Urban agriculture programs have the potential to support public gardens' missions of connecting people and plants, by improving community access to nutritious food and by building skills for new audiences to enter a range of plant-related careers.
- Urban agriculture programs may serve a wide range of audiences, and offer opportunities for public gardens to connect with new audiences. Urban agriculture program audiences may include—but are not limited to—community gardeners, youth, individuals facing barriers to employment, prospective urban farmers and farm business owners, and individuals experiencing food insecurity or diet-related disease.
- Urban agriculture programs may address a wide range of community needs, including building job skills and addressing community health and food access challenges.
- Urban agriculture programs evolve over time in response to a variety of factors, including participant feedback about how well the program is meeting expressed needs and interests, changes in community and funder priorities, and new opportunities for partnership.

Reflection Questions

- How do you see current or future urban agriculture programs supporting your public garden's mission?
- What new audiences could urban agriculture programming help your public garden engage?
- What needs in your community might be addressed through urban agriculture programming? Who are potential partners that could help you understand community needs and interests?
- What resources and partners may be available to help you initiate or expand urban agriculture programming?

Building Effective 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 using the program, where the program is located, and developing relationships with community leaders who

help make appropriate connections among partners and between organizations and community residents.

Windy City Harvest relies on partnerships for all sites and programs. Windy City Harvest’s [Site and Programming Partners Chart](#) provides detailed information about partnerships across Windy City Harvest’s programs. Windy City Harvest’s partnerships are grounded in three key principles: meet the community where it lives, allow partnerships to grow organically, and build trust with smaller projects first, which will lead to deeper connections over time.

Community Relationships

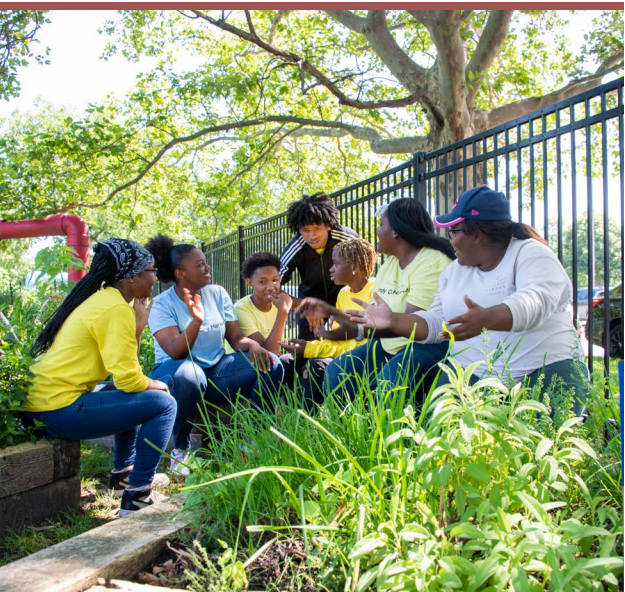
Neighborhood outreach and relationship building prior to initiating an urban agriculture program are essential to program success. An outside institution that enters a community without building bridges is not accessible and may be perceived as isolated and insular by valuable potential partners. Funders and foundation staff are critical networkers in this regard, and are often connected with organizations that might be interested in partnering with urban agriculture programs. Staff should strive to attend meetings that already exist rather than create a new set of meetings. This shows respect for the time and efforts that have already been taken, and an acknowledgment that you are a guest in the community.

Partnership Growth and Evolution

It takes time for organizations to build trust and evaluate the benefits of a partnership. Understanding “what I get out of it” is a process that requires partners to identify goals with tangible, measurable impacts as they negotiate different values and priorities, all of which takes time. Programs that emerge from partnerships will be unique, reflecting the assets, opportunities, and values of the partners involved. It is almost impossible to recreate a specific program’s success in one context just because it worked in another. Successful urban agriculture programming is not a formula, but taking the time and care to nurture partnerships and allowing them to grow organically is almost always an essential part of the equation.

Building Trust Over Time

The third principle of effective partnerships is that trust builds over time. Partnerships may start out relatively simple, but over time and with initial program success, the roles of partners may expand. It is not uncommon for expansive partnerships to start out on a trial basis and grow from there. Similarly, institutions can leverage initial successes of partnerships to expand their audiences and increase their fundraising asks, as well as to grow programs and add program sites. Partnerships offer many opportunities for learning and for discovering the benefits and limitations of an organizational relationship. They can also be invaluable resources for achieving program goals. Discerning approaches that work well (and not as well) in relationship with program partners is essential to the evolution and growth of urban agriculture programs, and critical to how institutions should consider program expansion. Finally, successful partnerships can help programs expand their reach to new communities, serving as a reference point that helps gain support for an institution’s presence elsewhere.



CASE EXAMPLE: LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROGRAM EXPANSION AT WINDY CITY HARVEST’S YOUTH FARM

Windy City Harvest’s first Youth Farm in Chicago was constructed in the North Lawndale neighborhood on the city’s West Side in 2005. Program staff had an interest in serving more communities, but it wasn’t until another community organization reached out to invite them to partner that they seriously considered expansion. They found that the Youth Farm program in North Lawndale had generated social capital, and were able to parlay the success of that location to the South Side Washington Park community. A manager at the Chicago Park District helped Windy City Harvest acquire space next to a high school located on park land, then successfully petitioned the local alderman for money to fence the site. Everywhere Windy City Harvest has expanded has been strategically aligned, and has only happened with community invitation.

Partnership Management

Managing partnerships takes time and consistent attention by program staff and public garden leadership. Potential partners may take the initiative in contacting public gardens with established urban agriculture programs, but that is not always the case, especially with smaller gardens. Public garden staff should carefully consider what a program needs to meet its goals, and how that aligns with the interests and goals of a potential partner. This type of strategic planning strengthens the foundation of a partnership. The next step is to broach the idea with the potential partner. The key, of course, is cultivating a contact within the community partner organization who can advocate for opening that door. Shared values and a mutual incentive in working together are the operating conditions for making the partnership work.



CASE EXAMPLE: INITIATING A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN WINDY CITY HARVEST AND CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO

Building informal networks and participating in community-wide conversations is an ongoing process that improves collaboration potential. Significant programmatic opportunities emerge from these conversations, involving partnerships that would not have otherwise been realized. Windy City Harvest’s partnership with the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) at the Arturo Velasquez campus is one such example. The Chicago Botanic Garden’s partnership with a local social service agency opened the door to a permanent location and partnership for Windy City Harvest’s in-city operations at the Arturo Velasquez greenhouse. At the time, the CCC recognized this as an opportunity to use a currently underutilized asset. The collaboration has been of lasting, mutual benefit to both the City Colleges and the Chicago Botanic Garden.

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 meetings and engaging in neighborhood relationship building, can improve collaboration potential with prospective community partners.
- Shared values and mutual incentive for collaboration are essential for successful partnerships.

Reflection Questions

- Considering your public garden’s vision for its urban agriculture programming, who are potential partners from various sectors (e.g., community-based organizations, city or municipal agencies, advocacy organizations, health centers, corporations, school systems) with complementary assets and expertise?
- How could you envision partnership choices influencing your urban agriculture program’s participants, location, and goals?
- What do you see as the key “dos and don’ts” for building collaborative relationships in support of your urban agriculture programming?
- What would a successful urban agriculture partnership look like to you?



Farm Design and Operation

Objectives

- Describe unique considerations for establishing a new urban farm site, including factors related to the site’s physical and social context.
- Provide a rationale for good record keeping in urban agriculture programs, and give examples of data that urban agriculture programs may track.
- Become familiar with guidelines and food safety resources that can facilitate the safe production, handling, and distribution of produce from urban farm sites.
- List factors that can inform the crop varieties and quantities that urban farms plan to grow and sell.
- Describe typical staff roles in urban agriculture programs and potential benefits of recruiting program participants for staff positions.

Farm Production Overview

Windy City Harvest sites have two primary functions: achieving program-specific goals related to participant growth and producing large quantities of high-quality produce. Windy City Harvest staff have found that maintaining high expectations for farm production and site aesthetics leads to better training for participants working at Windy City Harvest farms, and enables increased food production. Each site has a sales goal that is determined by reviewing the size of the growing space, the site’s primary market, and the intensity of educational programming on site. Site staff and participants complete a monthly walk-through of the site to review any issues with aesthetics, including ornamental areas, weed pressure, and site organization. Windy City Harvest’s production standards have evolved over the years and staff have found that setting production goals, like sales goals or pounds produced, is key to maximizing food production.

Windy City Harvest uses a wide variety of resources to inform growing, harvesting, and distribution of produce. For example, the Windy City Harvest program subscribes to [Growing for Market](#), an online publication for local food producers. Program staff also reference [The Market Gardener](#) and other print publications on technical topics (see Additional Resources).

Location and Site Considerations

Urban agriculture sites require careful analysis prior to design. In addition, depending on municipal regulations, urban agriculture sites may require additional zoning permits for infrastructure such as fencing.

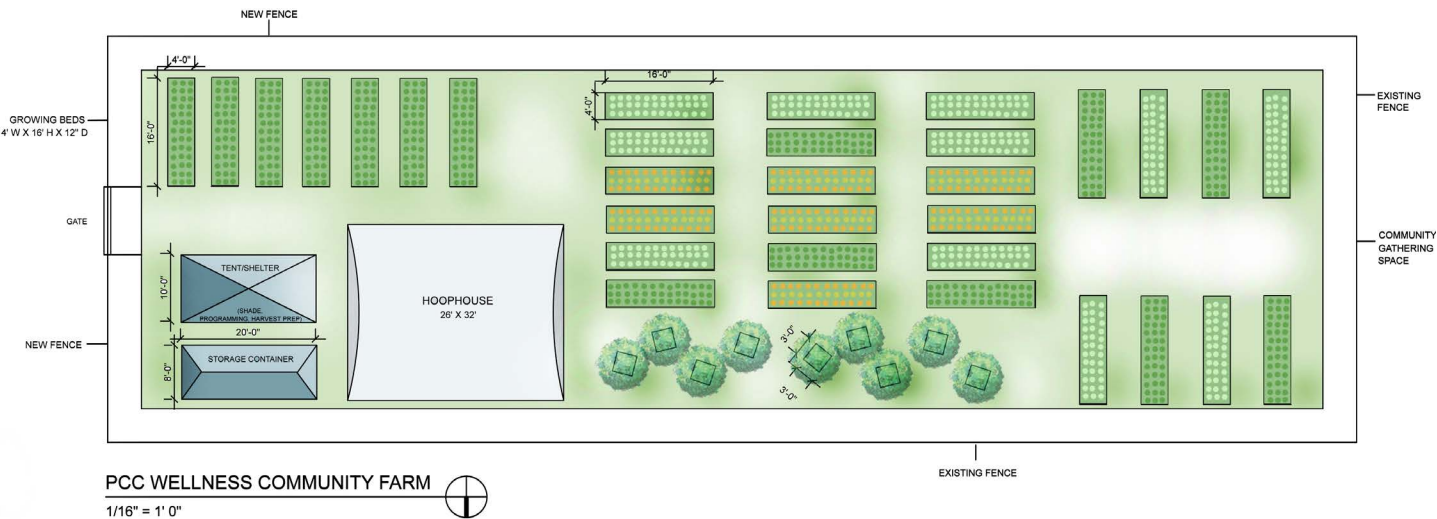
Shade, beyond what is required to keep program participants from being overheated, is undesirable for urban agriculture sites. When selecting a site, be aware of structures and objects that cause shade like buildings, trees, solid fences, dense hedge rows, and low-lying areas. It is also important to identify the remains of a building foundation, cement slabs, and low-lying areas that may collect water. A good initial task is to sketch where traffic flow is most logical, where parking will be most efficient, and where deliveries can be offloaded most easily. A sketch of the site should include all of these elements, and should ideally be created by a professional landscape designer. *See image at right*

Soil Considerations

Soil contamination. Heavy metals, like lead and other contaminants, are typical soil problems in urban areas. Program staff should know their site’s history and use a professional lab service to test the soil. Even if the plan is to grow only in raised beds, contamination of the existing soil must be properly mitigated. It is important to check with the municipality, as overall zoning varies city by city. The [Advocates for Urban Agriculture Resource Guide](#) offers an excellent overview of site selection considerations and soil contamination issues.

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.

Compost site. Composting is essential to healthy soils, and creating your own compost increases a garden’s self-sufficiency. Some municipalities have strict guidelines on composting, so be sure to check your local regulations. Reference books such as *The Rodale Book of Composting*⁶ can be helpful resources. Grass clippings, leaves, garden waste, and food scraps can all be used to make compost for your garden. A small-scale compost system can be easily constructed. The typical three-bin system works for small-scale sites, whereas a windrow system is more amenable to larger-scale operations.



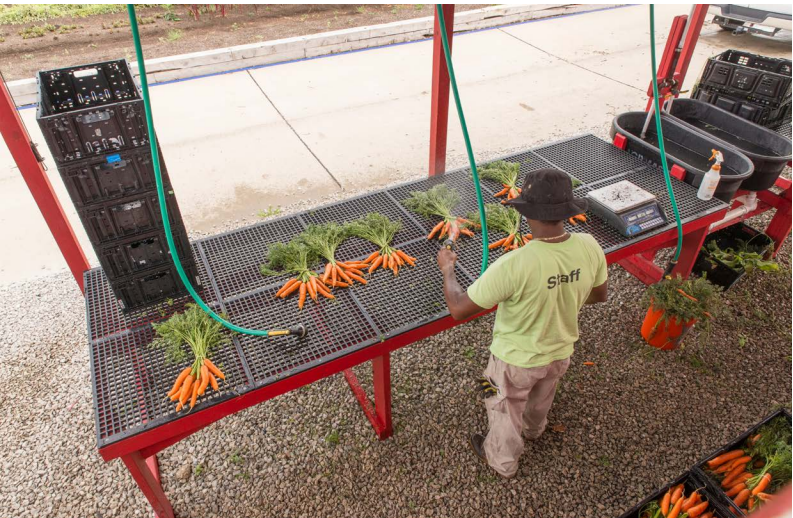
Hardscape Requirements

Once a site is identified, there are a variety of hardscape components to consider when designing the space.

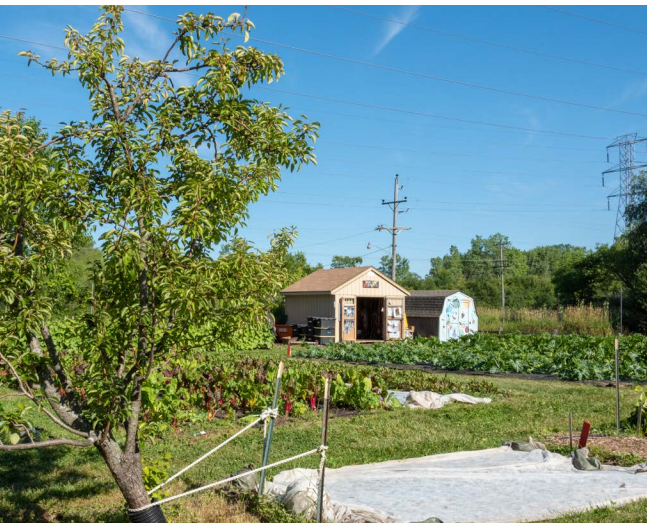
Water source. Decide whether you will be watering from a municipal source such as a fire hydrant, a lawn hydrant, or a regular water spigot. The difference in water pressure will vary depending on the source. The cost and availability of water varies from city to city, and many cities do not have permits designated for urban farms. It is important for programs to work closely with their water department to determine their options and the cost for water access.



Washpack station. A covered station to wash produce in a food-safe manner is necessary. Windy City Harvest uses [Produce Safety Alliance](#) training resources from Cornell University. Food-grade surfaces, overhead plumbing, and draining water are key considerations. The washpack station is often attached to a storage shed.



Storage shed. A simple, cost-effective way to store tools, equipment, and program participant supplies is a shipping container. These can be painted, and shade structures can be attached to make the units more attractive.



Irrigation. Drip-tape is recommended as a regular water source because it conserves both time and water. However, investing in a drip-irrigation system is a large up-front cost and may not be necessary for smaller sites, or when budgets are tight. Program participants should water intermittently by hand, which allows them to learn how to water and to observe how plants respond to different water levels.



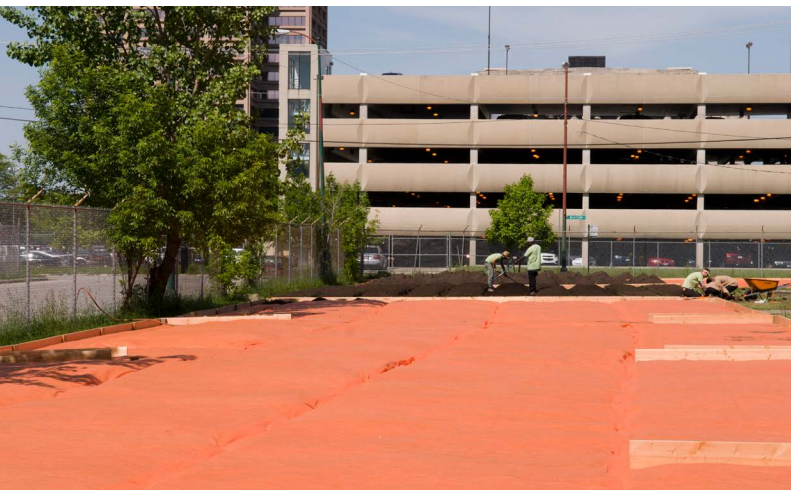
Fencing. Municipal codes may require a certain type or style of fencing, so check with the relevant city agency. A deer fence is necessary if deer are an issue. Besides keeping unwanted animals out, fencing helps create a sense of safety for the participants and a defined place where community and teamwork can flourish. Some community farming programs choose not to fence their sites if having an open, easily accessible site aligns with the mission and purpose of their programming.



Raised beds. For raised bed construction, Windy City Harvest uses untreated cedar timbers, typically measuring 6" x 6" x 8'. If beds are constructed at 4-foot widths, the timbers can be cut in half. Windy City Harvest uses this method without digging a trench or lining with rock.



Geotextile barriers. If the garden site soil test comes back with contaminants above 400 ppm of lead, it is essential to use a heavy-duty barrier between the existing soil and the soil in which vegetables will be grown, and as an underlayment on mulch-covered walking paths.



Greenhouse or hoophouse. These structures are typically considered permanent hardscape elements. Greenhouses are expensive because they require a poured foundation, water, and electricity hook-ups. Growers will often use a modified hoophouse as a greenhouse by adding propane heaters and fabric row covers.



Record keeping

Keeping accurate records of purchases, crop plans and rotations, seed and supply orders, permits, certificates, and staffing schedules is essential for a successful urban agricultural operation. Windy City Harvest uses both electronic and written [record keeping tools](#), and teaches the basics of record keeping in its programs. Food growing requires intensive record keeping to maintain safety standards for traceability.

Good Agricultural Practices, Good Handling Practices, and food safety

[Good Agricultural Practices \(GAP\)](#) and [Good Handling Practices \(GHP\)](#) are voluntary audits that verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored as safely as possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards. Local extension and USDA offices can provide information on GAPs and food safety.

Windy City Harvest has compiled a list of [food safety facts and standards](#) that cover food safety standards for personal hygiene, harvest and post-harvest handling, storage and transport, and in setting up farm stands. They also have established guidelines for harvesting and a set of [standards for running a farm market stand](#). These protocols are comprehensive and reflect practices developed over more than a decade of farm markets staffed by a variety of Windy City Harvest program participants.

Windy City Harvest staff receive extensive training in food safety annually. The team has two year-round team members who are highly trained in on-farm food safety. They train the year-round and seasonal staff annually in on-farm food safety best practices. Year-round staff then train each cohort of program participants.

All year-round staff have [Produce Safety Alliance](#) Grower certificates. Many year-round staff hold ServSafe Manager Certificates; this certificate is specific to commercial kitchen work and is not necessary for farms without a production kitchen. Windy City Harvest also offers ServSafe Food Handlers certificates for some program participants. This certificate trains in basic food safety

for kitchens and is an affordable option for introductory food safety that also provides trainees with a certificate for future employment opportunities.

Sales targets and crop planning

Setting appropriate sales targets serves multiple purposes; it is key to growing your market, it can be an effective and motivational training tool, and it helps beginning farmers know how to project income from future farm sites. To set an appropriate sales target, establish a baseline in the first year, and aim to increase your sales by 10% in year two.

Knowing your audience is a key consideration when planning which crops to grow for sale. Storage and contamination risks must also be considered. Creating a successful crop plan that also benefits the surrounding neighborhood requires growers to solicit community feedback. By simply talking to customers, growers communicate what they’re selling and pay attention to the demand that’s out there. Casual conversations help reveal what crops shoppers can’t find (or can’t find at the price they want). The [VeggieRx crop guidelines](#) have been developed over several years with feedback from Windy City Harvest customers. This list includes crops that store well and are not considered high-risk from a food safety perspective. A handful of fruits and vegetables are not accepted into VeggieRx boxes because they are not considered desirable, don’t store well, or are high risk in terms of food safety.

Staffing

Organizationally, Windy City Harvest is situated in the Chicago Botanic Garden’s Learning and Engagement department. Individual staff responsibilities are informed by departmental staff structure and determined by leadership based on what they think the enterprise needs to flourish and serve its stakeholders more fully. Volunteers can fill some of these positions. Many urban agriculture training programs rely heavily on volunteers to support both production and programming tasks. *See staffing chart on the following page.*

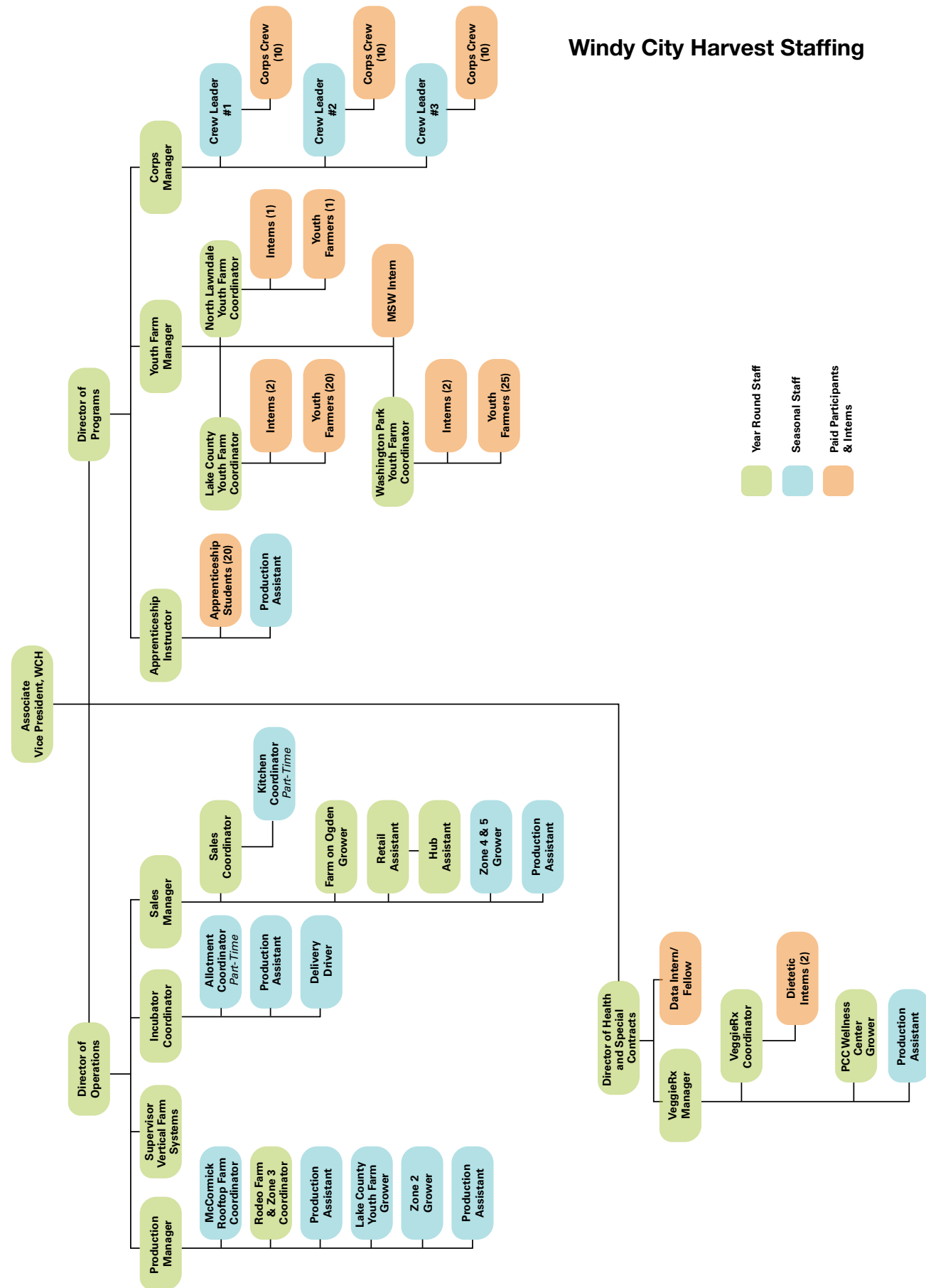
Initially, programs may hire for a primary need and then cross-train staff in other areas as needed. Some Windy City Harvest sites have the capacity to support both a grower and a program coordinator. A good grower is the foundation of a successful production garden, so their responsibilities are usually 80% production and 20% programming. The program coordinator’s job is more like 20% production and 80% programming. This model works well for sites that focus heavily on educational programming. Gaining experience outside a staff member’s main responsibility builds room for growth and promotes organizational sustainability. However, in a program’s early years, a full-time staff member may need to fulfill both of these roles. Windy City Harvest

has been able to hire more full-time staff over the years by leveraging added contracts, increasing sales, and increasing program capacity.

Windy City Harvest works to intentionally recruit program graduates into year-round and seasonal positions. Internal recruitment provides a continuum of opportunity for program participants. Further, by hiring staff who come up through programs, they are already familiar with organizational culture, programs, and values. About half of the year-round staff have graduated from a Windy City Harvest program. When recruiting for new positions, staff advertise directly to graduates and non-hiring personnel on the Windy City Harvest team will encourage qualified graduates to apply. Windy City Harvest advocated for changes to some position requirements to make them more accessible to graduates. For example, manager-level positions at the Chicago Botanic Garden used to require a master’s degree, which excluded most of the department’s most skilled supervisors. Public gardens must commit to evaluating their hiring practices at all levels to address any structural barriers that would prevent them from hiring graduates of training programs into leadership roles.



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 barriers to employment), improves access to affordable high-quality food, beautifies the neighborhood, or deepens institutional commitment and integration into the community.

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.

Special Requests

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.



MANAGING DONOR INFLUENCE – TWO STORIES

Two examples illustrate positive and potentially detrimental donor influence. In the first example, Windy City Harvest welcomed a new programmatic concept suggested by a Youth Farm volunteer and individual donor. From her years working side by side with youth, the volunteer observed that youth were coming to the program hungry. Subsequently, she proposed funding a healthy food club to provide breakfast and lunch to youth participants at all three Youth Farm sites. Windy City Harvest considered how and whether it could bring the idea to fruition, and developed a budget for the concept. They decided to pilot the healthy food club, initially with financial support from the volunteer and individual donor who proposed it. After a successful pilot, Windy City Harvest incorporated the concept as a fully integrated aspect of its youth program, sustaining the practice of providing healthy meals to participants beyond the initial financial gift. This enabled the program to better fulfill its long-standing commitment to healthy food.

In another case, Windy City Harvest opted not to implement a programmatic change suggested by a funder. In this situation, Windy City Harvest program and fundraising staff met with representatives from a potential corporate funder. Offering the possibility of one million dollars and farmland, they proposed that Windy City Harvest change its educational approach to incorporate growing techniques that were at odds with the organic growing practices they were committed to teaching in their programs. Fortunately, prior to the meeting, Chicago Botanic Garden leadership assured fundraising and program staff that while they welcomed the conversation, the Chicago Botanic Garden had a policy that programmatic changes would not be considered if they did not align with the goals, values, or strategic direction of the program, regardless of the amount of the potential gift. The Chicago Botanic Garden respectfully explained this position and the conversation ended.

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.

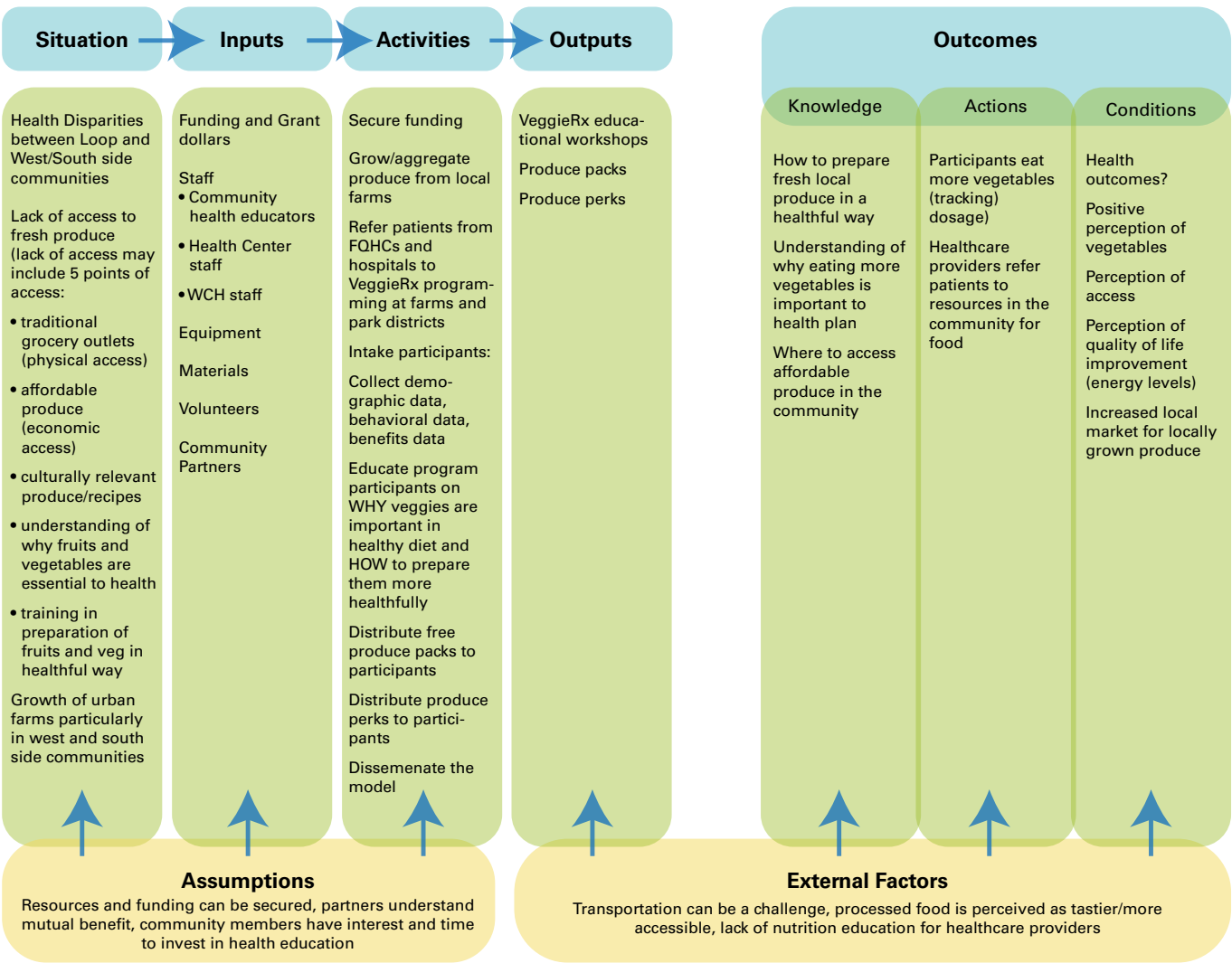
Program and fundraising staff establish anticipated outcomes and metrics for determining success. Logic models that outline anticipated outcomes can be helpful and are sometimes required by private foundations and government agencies. This logic model example comes from Windy City Harvest's VeggieRx; many other examples of logic models are available online.

“Never over promise; over deliver” is a generally accepted maxim. While difficult to predict in the first year of operation, figures in subsequent years are based on actual results of the previous year. Staff can strengthen cooperation by routinely apprising each other of new developments and potential opportunities. Annual meetings provide important opportunities to review and update goals, expectations, and time frames for implementation, as well as to determine which data are still relevant. It is critical for fundraising teams to work with program staff to determine reasonable expectations for data collection. Use measures that are straightforward to collect and provide meaningful data about the program. Other measures may take more legwork on the part of front-line staff and should be assessed for how well those data inform program evaluation.

Collecting Data for Fundraising

Data gathering to help determine success in achieving outcomes can be embedded into program operations. Specific to each program, important information may include data about participants, such as average daily attendance, demographics, program completion rates, social-emotional learning gains, certifications achieved, and employment status following graduation from the program. Data may also include production information, such as pounds of produce grown, sold, and distributed in the community.

Since fundraising staff regularly use this information in annual reports and proposals, recording the data in a shared online folder can make the process simpler for everyone. Fundraising and program staff should carefully consider the most secure way to share participant information and protect sensitive personal information.



Teams should consider what information is needed at an individual level versus what information can be aggregated and shared for the whole program.

Statistics are critical to reporting success, but so too are the many stories of lives changed through the programs. Fundraisers rely on program staff to suggest participants for interviewing and featuring in reports and pictures. Fundraisers and program staff should work with participants to clearly explain how their story will be used and give them the opportunity to approve or make changes to the final text. Informed consent is a prerequisite to publishing any personal stories. Programs should also take a critical look at what stories are being shared and how they are promoting the program to avoid tokenizing participants.

Cultivating Support

While annual reporting is required, site visits help potential and current donors gain a true appreciation of programs. Held either before or after a proposal is submitted, these visits are hosted together by program and fundraising staff who provide background information in their respective areas, answer questions, and offer opportunities to interact with participants, if possible. Additionally, leaving a visit with a sack of fresh vegetables gives donors a tangible reminder of their experience.

While not everyone will accept, all funders should be invited to visit annually. This is true for all levels of giving, from major government grants to small youth scholar-

ships. Additionally, Windy City Harvest hosts two open houses during harvest season for the youth and adult programs. Family, friends, and donors are invited. For donors who cannot attend a site visit or open house, Windy City Harvest delivers a bag of vegetables during harvest season.

What if outcomes fall short of projections?

Logical, and ideally verifiable, explanations are necessary when program outcomes fall short. Unforeseen circumstances are a likely contributor. For example, Windy City Harvest’s successful program component within the Cook County Boot Camp was suddenly halted by the Cook County Sheriff’s Office with little to no explanation. This event significantly affected participants, staff, and pounds of produce grown and donated to area food pantries and organizations. Every Windy City Harvest donor needed to be informed of the change. The resulting impacts were further explained in annual reporting. Ultimately, funders want a program to succeed, so unless unforeseen circumstances habitually sabotage anticipated outcomes, they are likely to forgive.

Potential Sources of Public and Private Sector Support for Urban Agriculture Programs

Urban agriculture programs appeal to an array of collaborators and funding sources. The in-kind assistance offered by partner organizations and businesses—in the form of land, water, office space, restrooms, participant recruitment, and food distribution networks—are as valuable as funding. The program’s mission—job training, youth development, and community access to healthy food—attracts public- and private-sector funders.

This section focuses on public- and private-sector contributed support. In general, the relationship between funder and grantee is symbiotic; funders offer essential support while providing perspectives from various areas of expertise in the philanthropic arena. Grantees contribute insights into what is possible and realistic. Both can offer big ideas and potential solutions. However, grantees assume the hard work of realizing common goals.

Determining the best avenues of support for a program requires an understanding of the surrounding philanthropic community—its interests, customs, and characteristics—as well as the regional and national conversations on the subject. Maintaining a balance among all possible sources of support reduces reliance on any one area, since funding is often dependent on a range of circumstances, funder interests, and the economy. Each of the following sources of funding may play a role in supporting an urban agriculture program.

For any funding source, important questions to ask include:

- What is the likelihood of success?
- Who is the competition?
- Do we have the ability to implement?
- Will it help us achieve our goals?
- How much will we have to spend to be proud of ourselves?
- Is it so prestigious that we cannot afford **not** to do it?

Government

Government agencies at local, state, and federal levels have historically supported urban agriculture programs. For example, at various points in Windy City Harvest’s development, the Chicago Botanic Garden has been awarded grants from each level of government. Several grants from the [Institute of Museum and Library Services \(IMLS\)](#) helped develop Windy City Harvest’s programs, including youth and adult training programs, and collaborations with healthcare agencies. [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#) grant programs help sustain farm training while broadening its continuing-education opportunities and food as medicine partnerships. In addition, Chicago Botanic Garden and the U.S. Botanic Garden—a federally-funded public garden—have co-developed a cooperative agreement that funds the creation of workshops and resources, including this toolkit, to help advance urban agriculture programs across public gardens nationwide. At the state level, Windy City Harvest received funding for several years from the [Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity](#) for its job training programming capacity. With funds from the [U.S. Department of Hous-](#)

[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 agencies—at the federal, state, or local level—is beneficial. Government grants are generally larger, often multiyear, and depending on the agency, sometimes renewable. A good place to start for mid- to large public gardens is the [Institute for Museum and Library Services](#). Their [Museums for America](#) program offers funding on a multiyear basis that can help launch a program or take an existing program in a new or expanded direction. The appeal of urban agriculture programs for this federal agency, where botanic gardens are considered museums, is the outreach provided to the broader community. Multiyear funding from IMLS can provide a stable base for the program and offer time to develop ongoing support at a local level. The IMLS website provides [sample applications](#) as guidance for prospective applicants.

The [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#) is another source of funding for urban agriculture programs. It is important to determine the appropriate category for your program. For example, while many urban agriculture programs have found support from the [Community Food Projects \(CFP\)](#) program, Chicago Botanic Garden fundraisers and program staff have submitted more than half a dozen proposals to this program, and discerned that Windy City Harvest’s initiatives fit better within the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program](#).

It is important to consider whether the cost of staff time spent pursuing a grant is worth the amount of funding available. For example, Windy City Harvest received workforce development support from a funder for several years at a time when this funding was critical to the program. Subsequently, the ceiling on the funding decreased, and Windy City Harvest support from other sources increased, leading staff to the conclusion that they should prioritize other funding sources.

Foundations, Corporations, and Businesses

A public garden’s urban agriculture program can draw the attention of local, regional, and national foundations and corporations. As with government agencies, the various capacities of urban agriculture programs—summer jobs for youth, job training for veterans and people experiencing barriers to employment, and access to healthy food—fit well with the interests of many private-sector funders. Funding can target the total program or specific components. In pursuing these funders, the emphasis is on how the program helps the funder meet their stated goals, which are usually well-defined in guidelines.

With shared commitments to common goals, foundation staff can be particularly valuable in providing guidance and answering questions. Corporate staff can assist in understanding how to meet corporate interests without excessively interfering in program implementation.

Local private foundations can be an excellent source of ongoing support. Dollar amounts are usually less than government grants, but may still be significant. Further, foundation staff can be helpful in providing guidance and assistance in cultivating additional funding sources.

For Windy City Harvest, support from businesses and corporations has been characteristically entrepreneurial. Midwest Foods, a Chicago-based food distributor, is not only a primary purchaser of Windy City Harvest produce, but it also contributes financially and has employed graduates of Windy City Harvest Corps. Brinshore Development, a Chicago-based real estate development firm, has not only provided land but also covered costs associated with garden installation. Kraft Foods, Inc., supported a garden installation at their suburban headquarters as well as the Windy City Harvest Corps crew who managed it, while the garden’s produce was donated to food pantries. The broad options available to businesses and corporations can be a significant asset for an urban agriculture program.

Individuals

Urban agriculture programs at public gardens can attract individual giving at various levels, from small annual gifts to major contributions. Individual gifts may be where an urban agriculture program will compete most for staff time and other projects within a public garden. Public gardens typically guard annual fund donations—large numbers of small gifts from individuals, since these unrestricted gifts can be used wherever funds are needed. Donors capable of giving major gifts are generally cultivated for the institution’s most pressing projects. However, as with foundations, corporations, and government agencies, urban agriculture programs can attract support from individuals who may not be likely to give to other projects.

The same principles of cultivating relationships with other possible funders apply with individuals. The donor boards of similarly sized organizations and institutions may be the only external indication of interest and capability. Without extensive publicly available information, conversations are the best way to discover individual preferences and giving capacity. A helpful approach to cultivating relationships with individual donors is an on-site visit to witness the program, often invaluable for cementing interest and commitment.

Other

Fundraising events can almost always be considered important “friend-raising” opportunities that increase the visibility of a program or organization. By inviting individuals and businesses to learn more about the program, such events can help broaden the family of people who care about it and subsequently give generously to support it. Coupled with follow-up cultivation, the fundraising event has an important place in an overall funding plan. In a large organization, an urban agriculture program may compete internally as a focus for event funding. Developing an alternative approach, such as Windy City Harvest’s Open Houses, may offer an effective way for fundraising staff to piggyback on a community event. For smaller organizations, such events may be very time-consuming, but also a primary source of funding.

Another new development in fundraising is the “shark tank” competition. This type of contest outlines a specific goal and asks nonprofit organizations to develop plans for realizing it. The winner receives a sizable one-time gift with the expectation of implementation. Significant marketing and elaborate presentations turn this type of funding into an event. The size of the prize and the accompanying rise in visibility for organizations are appealing. However, the investment of time and money to implement this approach can be significant, so some caution is advised.



Social Enterprise and Earned Income

Windy City Harvest’s earned income initiatives evolved during the last recession, when the Chicago Botanic Garden re-evaluated all areas of operation, increasing pressure to raise earned income wherever feasible. While Windy City Harvest programs sold produce at farm stands, the primary emphases were education and access to affordable produce in low-income communities. In fact, in Windy City Harvest’s early years, the demand for locally grown produce from small urban plots was not at all clear. This charge to increase earned income while retaining its mission presented Windy City Harvest with a conundrum.

In each of its earned income areas, Windy City Harvest is committed to generating funds to support three capacities. Most important are covering all operational costs; producing jobs for Windy City Harvest graduates; and contributing to overall Windy City Harvest operations. To date, the primary sources of earned income have been produce sales, contracts, classes, and tours.

Produce Sales

Windy City Harvest leadership found its champion in Midwest Foods, a Chicago-based food distributor. Already a contributor to Windy City Harvest, Midwest Foods expressed interest in a larger role—not only as a distributor, but also as a mentor and employer of Windy City Harvest graduates. Working with Midwest Foods as its primary distributor, Windy City Harvest focused the Apprenticeship and Corps programs on growing for this market. Youth Farm assumed primary responsibility for Windy City Harvest’s neighborhood market stands.

The Midwest Foods partnership significantly affected Windy City Harvest’s development. By assuming exclusive distributorship, the company guaranteed sales and mitigated the risks of expansion. By setting up food safety guidelines, Midwest Foods enabled Windy City Harvest’s access to commercial markets. This raised awareness of Windy City Harvest programs within the food industry, leading to additional markets and program partnerships. Midwest Foods has continued to hire Corps graduates and consulted with Windy City Harvest leadership on a regular basis.

Contracts

Windy City Harvest has pursued partnership contracts and has been approached by many other organizations for collaborations. Windy City Harvest’s relationships with SAVOR...Chicago and PCC Wellness stand out.

Windy City Harvest leadership sought out a collaboration that would allow the program to incorporate rooftop gardening in its curriculum. This specialty area has grown rapidly in recent years. With an eye on its broad, flat roof and an introduction by Midwest Foods, Windy City Harvest cultivated a relationship with McCormick Place—Chicago’s major exhibition venue for conferences—and sold the concept to SAVOR...Chicago, the primary restaurant venue on-site. Today SAVOR can boast the freshest produce anywhere in Chicago, with produce grown on demand. Windy City Harvest gains a teaching garden in an increasingly important growing technique, covers installation and operating costs, and employs program graduates.

Another contract originated as a Humana Foundation grant submitted by PCC Wellness for the Austin Family Health Center located on Chicago’s West Side. Seeking to improve access to fresh produce for residents, PCC Wellness asked to include Windy City Harvest in the proposal to install and supervise a community garden. The Humana Foundation awarded the grant to PCC Wellness, and Windy City Harvest realized their vision in an operation that covers a city block. Allotment gardens, nutrition and gardening classes, and farm stands serve the surrounding neighborhood. Windy City Harvest continues to oversee operations with a contract that covers costs and employs graduates.

Windy City Harvest’s partnerships with the healthcare community have strengthened over time and led to new opportunities. Windy City Harvest’s [VeggieRx program](#), introduced in collaboration with Lawndale Christian Health Center, was extended to PCC Wellness, which expressed interest in expanding its contract to another location. These relationships help Windy City Harvest achieve a significant part of its mission—access to fresh produce in communities that have experienced structural disinvestment, while opening up the possibility of funding from healthcare donors, a philanthropic segment that might not otherwise be interested in supporting a public garden.

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 reciprocate to help meet Windy City Harvest goals. Commitment to mission offers business partners a value-added element to their association with Windy City Harvest’s social enterprise.

Budgets

Program budgets developed for funders represent a numerical way of telling a program’s story. Programmatic budgets may not always mirror an organizational budget nor accounting statements. Funders may also create their own budget forms. While the format may differ, the figures should be as close to reality as possible. Budgets are best with some flexibility, so staff can use funds as needed, but must be specific enough to answer funder questions as to how money will be used.

Windy City Harvest uses a common [budget format](#) across its programs. On the expense side, a Windy City Harvest budget includes all direct staff and contract positions required for a program to operate. Since jobs and job creation are such a significant part of the Windy City Harvest mission, a large portion of expenses is for salaries. Every budget also includes 10-15% of direct costs for administrative expenses such as human resources, computer maintenance, and utilities. Budgets for many, but not all, federal government grants accept a negotiated indirect cost rate for overhead expenses.

The income side shows all committed and anticipated funds as well as earned income. The Chicago Botanic Garden strives to have as much funding as possible in place by the beginning of the year. Multiyear support and other known sources represent the committed funds. Anticipated funds may not be committed, but experience can help predict future support. Experience and contracts can help predict earned income.

The difference between projected Income and expense is the amount that needs to be raised in additional funds for the program or sustained through the institution’s unrestricted funds. In accounting, funding received specifically for Windy City Harvest is considered restricted support and cannot be used for any other purpose. The more that is raised in restricted support, the less the institution relies on its unrestricted funds to fill the gap.

Program Expansion and Growth

As programs evolve, next steps that depend on additional funding require staff to work together, developing parallel tracks to realize goals. Most often, program staff raise the initial flag about need and implementation strategies, while fundraisers ask questions and help flesh out answers for potential donors. A prime example of this process is Windy City Harvest’s Farm on Ogden, an adaptation of the food hub concept.



CASE EXAMPLE: WINDY CITY HARVEST’S FARM ON OGDEN—A FOOD HUB BORN OF PATIENCE, TEAMWORK, AND PARTNERSHIPS

Windy City Harvest program staff long talked about the need for a food hub, generally understood as a center for aggregating and distributing farm products. However, Windy City Harvest’s aspirations exceeded the typical understanding of the food hub concept. Windy City Harvest leadership envisioned a facility that could not only expand aggregation and distribution capacity but also house its aquaponics initiative, a grocery store for residents living in the surrounding neighborhood, cooking and nutrition classes, as well as job skills training, a commercial kitchen for urban farmers to develop value-added products, and offices to consolidate staff in one location. This broad, innovative vision demanded a multi-pronged approach and long-term commitment at leadership levels.

Finding a feasible partner was approved as the first crucial first step in realizing this goal. The possibility existed in an established relationship with the Lawndale Christian Health Center (LCHC) in Chicago’s North

Lawndale neighborhood, where a Windy City Harvest Youth Farm was located. The two organizations had already partnered on a garden installed on LCHC grounds, in addition to the Youth Farm site two blocks away. Lawndale Christian Health Center’s Green Tomato Café routinely purchased produce from the Youth Farm and hosted a weekly farmers’ market on site. Additionally, Lawndale Christian Health Center had been buying land and buildings along the Ogden Avenue corridor for several years, understanding that their healthcare mission extended far beyond their clinic walls. For Windy City Harvest and LCHC, the partnership recognized the potential to strengthen and advance its commitment to food as medicine.

Like in any good relationship, program staff were guided by steady patience and attention to detail in developing the partnership with Lawndale Christian Health Center. Roles and responsibilities were defined. Lawndale Christian Health Center purchased the building

and land next door to the Youth Farm. Chicago Botanic Garden fundraising staff began pursuing donors. Initially, the fundraising was conducted at relatively low levels, since the Chicago Botanic Garden was also raising funds for major projects at the Garden that competed for staff time and focus. The slow pace allowed program staff and Lawndale Christian Health Center to clearly articulate expectations, and fundraising staff to cultivate new donors. Fundraisers also enlisted the help of a longtime foundation partner who served as a champion in the process of attracting additional support. After seven years of planning and development, the Farm on Ogden opened in 2018.

Several qualities, circumstances, and strategies helped the Farm on Ogden become a reality. Patience, persistence, shared values, complementary rather than similar services, and comparable organizational size and strength—all contributed to building an effective partnership between Lawndale Christian Health Center and the Chicago Botanic Garden. Further benefiting the process were the similarities of approach among key leaders who focused on taking time to find the right answer and maintaining open minds on how to make it work. By enlisting assistance from private foundation staff familiar with the program, the project broadened its support within the philanthropic community.

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

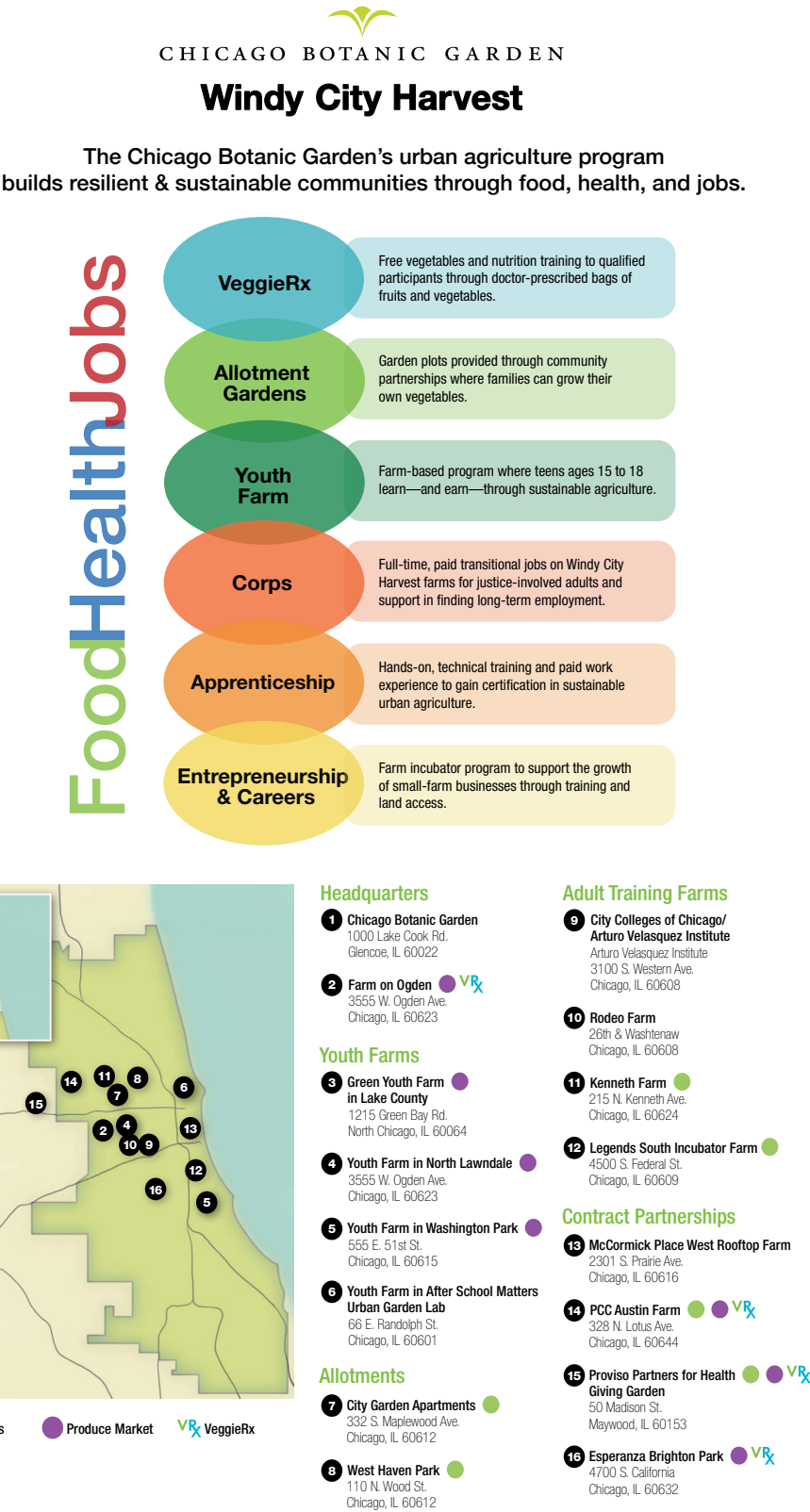
program so it gets the institutional support it needs is an ongoing activity. This is particularly true for gardens that are admission-based and marketing staff’s primary concern is getting people through the gate. Under these conditions, communicating the achievements of a program like urban agriculture 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.



Key Takeaways

- Teamwork and communication between program and fundraising staff are important for cultivating support for urban agriculture programs. Program staff can take the lead in implementing program activities, collecting and documenting important data, and communicating plans and ideas to fundraising staff. Fundraising staff can lead in securing grants and contributions to support program activities, by cultivating and sustaining relationships with funders and understanding the funding landscape.
- Data collection and reporting can help demonstrate how urban agriculture program outcomes align with funders’ expectations. Data that may be of interest to funders include, but are not limited to: participant demographics, program completion or graduation rates, employment outcomes for participants, and pounds of produce distributed.
- Some potential sources of support for urban agriculture programs include government funding (federal, state, and local); foundations, corporations, and businesses; and individuals. Urban agriculture programs can also support themselves, at least in part, through social enterprise and earned income strategies such as produce sales, contracts, classes, and tours.
- Strong communications and marketing strategies are crucial for raising awareness and support of urban agriculture programs. Digital media is often a primary means of communicating an institution’s brand identity and the achievements of its urban agriculture programs. In addition, a physical presence within the community, particularly in a highly trafficked or high-profile location, offers a unique opportunity to raise public awareness and support.

Reflection Questions

- What are the existing roles and responsibilities for program and fundraising staff in cultivating support for programs? Can you envision ways these could be changed to improve communication and teamwork?
- What kinds of program data do you already collect, if any? Are there additional kinds of data that might be helpful for illustrating program outcomes to current and prospective supporters?
- What sources of funding do you plan to pursue in support of your urban agriculture program? How could you learn about and access additional sources of support?
- What are some creative strategies you can envision for communicating about your urban agriculture program, both within your public garden as well as to outside audiences and potential supporters?



Program Evaluation

Objectives

- List possible benefits of monitoring and evaluating urban agriculture programs.
- Give examples of data that urban agriculture program staff may consider collecting and analyzing, depending on the goals of their programs.
- Describe the potential value of incorporating community feedback into a program evaluation process.
- Describe circumstances in which it may be useful to hire an outside consultant to evaluate an urban agriculture program.

Evaluating performance and measuring outcomes improves program efficacy and sustainability. Demonstrated success can attract funders, talented staff, and potential partners. Program success is an iterative process, facilitated by measuring progress toward goals. This work depends on a framework for systematic data collection and analysis, known as monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Collecting program data and making sense of it is critical to moving a program forward and assuring stakeholders that the program is on track. Developing a logic model can help this process. Many examples of logic models are available online. Windy City Harvest has found the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Logic Model Development Guide](#) to be a useful resource.

The first steps for creating a M&E framework require determining a program’s goals, considering what strategies the program will use to achieve those goals, and then developing measures that will provide insight into the effectiveness of those strategies. Measures like average daily attendance are standard indicators of program growth that can be collected starting on the first day. Other measures, like word-of-mouth referrals and number of returning students, take time to emerge and collect. It is important to keep in mind that the measures of interest to funders may change over time. Monitoring and evaluation require both immediate-term thinking about which measures make sense to track right now, and longer-term thinking about how those data will be managed and used over time.

The Role of Demographic Data

Demographic data is useful for understanding who a program is serving at an individual level, as well as establishing basic information about the community the program serves. Below is a list of demographic data types that organizations may want to collect at an individual or community level. Understanding community-level demographics gives an organization insight into how they are engaging the community. For example, if 70% of a food access program’s target community receives SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) assistance, but only 40% of recruited participants are eligible to receive SNAP assistance, the program may need to reevaluate its recruitment strategy. This list is not exhaustive and some measures may be irrelevant depending on the program model.

- Eligibility for federal benefits
- Zip codes (for determining service areas)
- Health demographics (e.g., percent of participants living with chronic illness)
- Percent incarcerated
- Employment rates
- Graduation rates
- School district data (e.g., percent of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch)

Staff should also consider the feasibility of collecting information, and whether they can collect self-reported information versus requiring documentation, which may depend on funders’ requirements. Data points should be evaluated annually to determine how they are being used. If frontline staff are collecting information that is not being reported to any funders and does not substantially affect their program evaluation, they may not need to collect that data anymore.

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

Windy City Harvest’s Youth Farm

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. [Growing Together](#), written by Greg Gale and [The Food Project](#), gives a detailed account of the Straight Talk process. During Straight Talk, the site leader gives personal feedback on job performance, for individual participants and as team members. All students and site staff are encouraged to share feedback for members of their team. Participants receive two positive comments

and one for change. Developed by the Food Project and adapted by Windy City Harvest’s Youth Farm, this technique helps students understand their strengths and how to manage emotions. Youth Farm also uses a [pre- and post-assessment](#) to help illustrate participants’ personal growth. These tools support the social/emotional learning that is key to the Youth Farm experience. Site supervisors complete this assessment for each student. It is adapted from the Social Emotional Learning assessment available through [Preparing Youth to THRIVE: Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning](#).

Windy City Harvest Corps

The [Windy City Harvest Corps](#) transitional jobs program uses similar tools to those used in the Youth Farm program. Employment expectations and consequences are made clear at the beginning of each 14-week session with a [community standards contract](#) and [violations chart](#). Every Friday, crew members meet with coordinators to receive performance feedback. Once participants find a job, they are tracked for 30, 60, 90, and 180 days, as required by the government grant that supports this component. Participants also complete a post-program survey, soliciting their feedback on various program components. The most important measure of success for the Corps Program is job placement rate, which has been shown to make a significant difference in recidivism.

Windy City Harvest Apprenticeship

Participants in [Windy City Harvest’s Apprenticeship](#) program receive community college credit for their work, which requires that formal assessments are a regular part of the experience. Primary tools for assessing student progress include quizzes, field/lab staff evaluations, supervisor reports, a final crop plan project, attendance, and adherence to community standards. In addition to program completion, measures of success include job placement and acceptance into the Windy City Harvest Incubator program. Job placement is measured by the number of students who are employed in the year following the Apprenticeship.



Windy City Harvest Incubator Program

For farmers in [Windy City Harvest’s Incubator program](#), the best measure of success is a viable business model that demonstrates revenue growth over time. Though the incubator provides access to land, water, and markets, it is up to the individual farm businesses to determine if they should continue. The Windy City Harvest Incubator program receives funding from the [USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program](#), which prioritizes historically underserved populations. This means that farm businesses who want to stay longer than the initial two-year incubator period have to be minority-owned. To date, Farm Incubators have primarily measured their progress by [tracking produce sales](#). However, additional criteria, such as pounds of produce sold in underserved communities, are also considered success factors.

Windy City Harvest’s VeggieRx Program

[VeggieRx](#) nutritionists from the University of Illinois, Chicago, graduate school lead the program and closely

track and document participation and distribution. Using surveys completed at every encounter, staff record participant demographics, number of produce boxes distributed, returning participants, use of coupons at farmers’ markets, most and least popular vegetables, rates of vegetable consumption, and barriers to consumption.

Production and Sales Data

Sales data remains a powerful measure of program success. It demonstrates that programs are addressing local demand for fresh food, and is an important performance measure for individual farms. Sales data is also a big motivator for program growth; it demonstrates product demand, which can snowball into a justification for a small nonprofit store like the market in Windy City Harvest’s Farm on Ogden. The success of one store helps demonstrate the need for more stores and the potential for a scaling up.

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 disinvestment. Windy City Harvest leaves the Green City Market to new and upcoming urban farmers.

Program Improvements Make Program Success

In the early years of the [Windy City Harvest Corps](#) transitional jobs program, staff held [Windy City Harvest Apprenticeship Program](#) slots available for Corps program graduates. However, none were accepting this opportunity for further education, because they needed immediate jobs. Subsequently, funds were shifted within the existing budget to employ Corps members who were accepted into the Apprenticeship program. These former Corps members continued to work part-time during the nine-month Apprenticeship period in traditional work/study positions. This change in approach made all the difference, and the work/study positions are now always filled.

Role of Community Input

Windy City Harvest evaluation looks not only internally but also externally to the surrounding community to determine efficacy and inform direction. In every case where Windy City Harvest has expanded to an additional farm site, it is at the request of and in partnership with an embedded community partner. For example, the Windy City Harvest Youth Farm in North Lawndale was developed in partnership with Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), a community housing development program. They had partnered with Neighborspace, an urban land trust, to preserve the vacant lot adjacent to their building for green space and were interested in providing opportunities for high school aged youth in the neighborhood based on community feedback they had received from their clients. NHS had heard of the Green Youth Farm in Lake County and invited the Chicago Botanic Garden to work together to bring the model to North Lawndale. In order to provide stipends for the Youth Farmers, a partnership with After School Matters was formed. By using strategic partnerships, expansion that was responsive to community needs happened relatively quickly and without enormous budget implications.

Questions considered during any program expansion conversation might include:

- What are the concerns and priorities of local community groups?
- How well does our program already meet these needs?
- Are there ways that Windy City Harvest can adjust its programming to help local organizations realize goals?

Working with Outside Entities to Examine Program Efficacy

Windy City Harvest program staff recommend that before contracting with an outside entity to examine the efficacy of an established program, all desired programmatic changes have been made, tweaked, and in operation for three to five years. Once program staff are comfortable with program components and ready to consider next steps, a fresh eye can be valuable to confirm direction or suggest changes. In addition to finding funding for the process, finding a compatible and qualified evaluator—one who understands program goals, intentions, and complexities—can be a challenge. Working with a consultant who is willing to get to know the program is ideal, as is having an established relationship with a university to help seize opportunities when they arise. Even if a public garden’s primary relationship to a university is with the life sciences faculty, they can make connections through interdisciplinary research models or through colleagues in other academic departments such as education, criminology, human development, or sociology.



Lessons Learned from Two Approaches

Windy City Harvest has had mixed experiences working with outside entities to examine program efficacy. However, these experiences have collectively underscored the importance of being thoughtful about the approach and the timing of the work.

In one case, an initial evaluation with an outside consultant in Youth Farm’s early years proved to be largely unproductive. The goal of the evaluation was to examine the efficacy of the newly established Youth Farm program. The evaluation approach utilized surveys and focus groups to gather data from Youth Farm students, but did not build in opportunities for the evaluator to spend time with students and gain their trust. Ultimately, student feedback was fairly generic, as if program participants were telling the evaluator what they thought she wanted to hear. While recommendations were made for program improvements, they did not provide Windy City Harvest staff and leadership with much new insight

on the program. The suggested changes were already evident to program staff, and the final reporting was not particularly useful for informing funders about the efficacy of the program or making significant improvements that weren't already apparent. In this situation, working with an outside evaluator to examine program efficacy may have been premature. In addition, failing to consider the importance of building students' trust in the evaluator and the evaluation process may have led to student responses that were not particularly candid, or useful for informing program improvements.

In another case, Windy City Harvest staff collaborated with a university researcher to examine how students develop skills in the Youth Farm program, and how these skills transfer to other parts of their lives. This work took place at a later point in time when the Youth Farm program was well-established. The approach embedded a graduate research assistant in residence at the North Lawndale Youth Farm site, who became part of the environment and built the trust of Youth Farm students, staff, and parents. The research team used interviews, questionnaires, and observations to understand the experiences of participants, staff, and parents and provided financial incentives to participants for their time outside of program. Final reporting provided insight into how and in what ways the Youth Farm program facilitated positive relationship building, skill development, and youth engagement. For Windy City Harvest Youth staff, funders, partners, and leadership, the collaboration provided meaningful feedback from program participants and useful information about the program that could inform future decision-making.

Key Takeaways

- Monitoring and evaluation have the potential to demonstrate progress toward program goals; elicit information about necessary program improvements; attract funders, staff, and partners; and contribute to programmatic sustainability.
- Depending on program goals, urban agriculture program staff may consider collecting and analyzing information such as demographic data about participants and their communities (e.g., eligibility for federal benefits, employment rates); participants' personal

growth in terms of social and emotional learning; job placement rates following the program; and farm production and sales data.

- By incorporating community feedback into program evaluation processes, urban agriculture program staff may gain new insight into community concerns and priorities, the extent to which programs are addressing them, and possible ways to adjust the program for better alignment with community needs and interests.
- When urban agriculture program staff are seeking to examine program efficacy, outside collaborators may be particularly helpful when program components are relatively well-established, and when program staff could benefit from a fresh perspective on their approach.

Reflection Questions

- Considering the goals of your current or envisioned urban agriculture program, what questions might you seek to answer through a monitoring and evaluation process?
- What kinds of program data have you collected in the past, and what did you learn from it? What kinds of data could you envision collecting for your urban agriculture program in the future?
- What experiences do you have with incorporating community feedback into program planning and evaluation? How do you think you could do this more effectively?
- What experiences do you have working with external program evaluators? What did you learn? At what point, if any, would you consider hiring one to evaluate your urban agriculture program?

Additional Resources

Curriculum and Background

Roots of Success

Environmental literacy curriculum with train the trainer opportunities

University of California at Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food System

Free sustainable agriculture curriculum

The Role of Public Gardens in American Urban Agriculture Programming

Program models in urban agriculture

Workforce and Social Emotional Development

The Food Project

Trainings, books, curriculum, activities

Susan Crown Exchange and David Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality

Field guide preparing youth to thrive; promising practices in social and emotional learning; free online resources

Homeboy Industries

Global network, program model

Technical Farm Skills

Growing for Market

Books, free online content, monthly online newsletter

The Market Gardener

Books, free online content, online newsletter

Four Season Farm

Books, free online content

Cornell Small Farms

Free online content, guides

Rodale Institute

Free online content, books, research-based guides/papers

Fair Share CSA Coalition

Community-supported agriculture support, resources

Pick Your Own: **County Extension Offices**

Growing resources, extension agents, volunteers

Organizations/Associations

Sustainable Agriculture Education Association

Conferences, listserves, free online content

National Young Farmers Coalition

Local chapters, trainings, networking

New Entry Sustainable Farm Network

Online resources, trainings, apprenticeship and incubator farm networks, includes National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI)

The Wallace Center at Winrock International

Networks, conference

Farm Commons

Information on starting farm businesses

National Aquaponics Association

Conferences, listserves, free online content

ATTRA

Internships, free online content

Citations

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