

Neighborhood Green





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Children celebrating the ribbon cutting at the Pulaski Street Garden, Brooklyn.

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The Enterprise Foundation

The mission of The Enterprise Foundation is to see that all low-income people in the United States have the opportunity for fit and affordable housing and to move up and out of poverty into the mainstream of American life. As the nation's leader in community development, Enterprise cultivates, collects, and disseminates expertise and resources to help community-based organizations across the United States revitalize their neighborhoods. To find out more about The Enterprise Foundation, visit www.enterprisefoundation.org or call 800.205.5122.

The Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit organization that conserves land for people to improve the quality of life in urban, suburban and rural communities and to protect our natural and historic resources for future generations. For over 20 years, TPL's New York City Program has worked to protect and strengthen community gardens and create new playgrounds and school gardens. To find out more about TPL, visit www.tpl.org.

The Council on the Environment of New York City

The Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC), formed in 1970, is a privately funded citizens' organization in the Office of the Mayor. CENYC promotes environmental awareness among New Yorkers and develops solutions to environmental problems. Plant-A-Lot, a project of the Open Space Greening Program, provides major material and technical assistance to community groups that participate in HOSI. To find out more about CENYC, visit www.cenyc.org.

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Foreword

Neighborhood Green: A Guide for Community-Based Organizations was published with the participation of the Housing and Open Space Initiative (HOSI), a partnership involving the Trust for Public Land, the Council on the Environment of New York City and The Enterprise Foundation. We created this publication with two chief purposes in mind.

First, we want to illustrate and document successful community garden projects generated by community-based organizations (CBOs). Second, we want to highlight the tools and resources behind these best practices to help organizations like yours develop open-space projects.

Much of the best-practices material here comes from HOSI's experience in New York City. However, we are confident that *Neighborhood Green* will serve as an informative and inspiring resource for organizations in New York City and beyond.

Introduction

New York City's community gardens first emerged during the early 1970s in low and moderate-income neighborhoods challenged by vacant lots and abandoned buildings. The gardens grew out of the determination of community residents to reclaim small parcels of land and to improve and anchor their neighborhoods.

"Most of the people who got involved weren't gardeners," says Michael O'Connor, former director of Bronx Green-Up, a community-outreach program of The New York Botanical Garden. "They got involved because they were tired of seeing drug dealing on the corner of littered vacant lots."

Since the '70s, the community garden movement has worked in tandem with the community-development movement to generate significant private and public neighborhood investment — as well as countless hours of "sweat equity." Community-based organizations (CBOs) have made tremendous strides in revitalizing communities in distressed neighborhoods throughout New York City and across the United States. While they typically focus on housing development, many are involved in social services, economic development, child care, neighborhood planning and advocacy. With roots in community organizing, CBOs bring together energy, activism, technical expertise and resources to reverse the deterioration of some of the country's most disinvested communities.

In 1991, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) began the Housing and Open Space Initiative (HOSI), a program to develop new community-managed gardens and open spaces in conjunction with housing rehabilitation efforts in the Bronx. TPL's goals were to encourage permanent community open spaces in conjunction with housing redevelopment, and to build and foster the growth of community action to sustain these activities. TPL, in cooperation with the Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC), began the second phase of the initiative in 1993 and extended the program citywide. In 1996, The



JDD Garden, Bronx.

Enterprise Foundation, a national housing and community development nonprofit with an active office in New York City, joined the collaborative to help identify CBO partners for the initiative and to help these organizations incorporate garden projects into their larger mission.

HOSI recognizes the intrinsic link between people and their physical environment. It builds on the successful physical and social impact of housing redevelopment to address vacant-land issues in low-income communities. The initiative's three-part mission strives to expand usable open space in New York City, extend redevelopment in low-income communities, and serve as an organizing tool for tenants of newly renovated buildings. HOSI works with CBOs to ensure that housing redevelopment projects include open space and that the planning, construction and long-term maintenance of new community-managed

gardens benefit from community involvement. Since its inception, HOSI has developed 10 new community open spaces in redeveloping neighborhoods in the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn and upper Manhattan. In addition to financial resources, HOSI provides assistance with community organizing, technical expertise, and site improvements.

As Gerald Lordahl, director of the Open Space Greening Program for CENYC, has observed, gardens often spark a positive chain reaction of community building: Residents strengthen relationships with their community board, attend more neighborhood meetings, and become familiar with their parks department and the sanitation team. Before you know it, says Lordahl, "Resources start coming in, and all of a sudden, these original gardeners find that the garden project has expanded into a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization project."

There were 11 active HOSI sites — 10 completed sites and one under development — when this manual was published:

- Oceanhill Brownsville, Oceanhill Brownsville Tenants Association, Brooklyn
- Ujima I, East New York Urban Youth Corps, Brooklyn
- Elton Court, East New York Urban Youth Corps, Brooklyn
- Cheryl's Villa, Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Corporation, Brooklyn
- Pulaski Street, Pratt Area Community Council, Brooklyn
- Spencer Place, Pratt Area Community Council, Brooklyn
- The League Garden, The Community League of West 159th Street, Manhattan
- Jacqueline Denise Davis Garden, Morrisania Revitalization Corporation, Bronx



Birds-eye view of the League Garden, Manhattan.

- Sheridan Manor, Sparrow Construction Corporation, Bronx
- Bonner Place, Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council, Bronx
- Hull Street Garden, Settlement Housing Fund, Brooklyn

Impact of Community Gardens

“There's a quote that gets used a lot and it is really accurate: ‘It's more about community than gardening.’”

– Michael O'Connor, Bronx Green-Up

Community gardens bring a range of noticeable changes to a neighborhood. They enhance the physical environment, promote safety and increase residential engagement in the community.

Consequently, community gardens help CBOs to address their mission by improving the community's physical surroundings as well as its social fabric. Residents who volunteer to clear vacant lots and to design, plant and tend gardens help build community networks, develop local leadership, strengthen community identity and encourage a shared sense of responsibility and stewardship over previously neglected urban spaces. Garden projects can also give CBOs a new perspective on their neighborhoods and strengthen their reputation within the community.

William Miller, executive director of the Morrisania Revitalization Corporation, a Bronx community development corporation (CDC), points out: "We've been able to use the garden as one of the strengths of the community. It's enhanced our application for other projects. The garden has become a centerpiece of the community, a source of pride."

Wide-Ranging Neighborhood Improvement

Property Values

By improving a neighborhood's overall appearance and developing a public amenity, a community garden can boost the property values of surrounding buildings. The transformation of a block in Lower Washington Heights illustrates this impact.

For years, the W. 158th Street lot was filled with debris and trash and adjoined by dilapidated houses that were frequently vandalized and broken into by individuals

seeking a place to hide or sleep. After the Community League of 159th Street initiated efforts to clean up and replace the lot with a community garden, "contractors purchased two of the adjacent houses and fixed them up beautifully," says the league's Dorothy McGowan. "Now, they're in the process of selling them."

At the Pleasant Village Community Garden in East Harlem, gardeners saw that the surrounding buildings were being rehabilitated and that one of the selling points of the newly renovated buildings was the feature "overlooking a garden."

"As a photographer, it's been an absolutely amazing experience for me to witness these changes," says Diane Downs, a gardener and former *New York Times* photographer.

Empowerment

A community garden may serve as a focal point for community revitalization and planning efforts. By harnessing the frequently overlooked energies and talents of local tenants and residents, CBOs can motivate residents to take action and make a difference in their communities. According to Miller of the Morrisania Revitalization Corporation, the process of developing and establishing a garden provides community residents and associations with a sense of empowerment.

"One tenants' association was able to say, 'This is what we want to do, to work through the community board and get community board support.' It was their project and it really strengthened the tenants' association in the minds of tenants here," said Miller. "The association showed that it could be effective and really have an impact on what's going on in the community."

Safety

Residents at a garden project in San Francisco's Mission District reported a 28 percent drop in crime after the first year of their garden project. – "What Good is Community Greening?" 1995.

A recent study found that green common spaces enhance inner-city residents' sense of safety by increasing neighborhood social ties. – "Fertile Ground for Community: Inner-City Neighborhood Common Spaces," 1998.

Many community gardens are located in neighborhoods plagued by crime. Likewise, vacant lots often attract illicit activities — such as drug use and dealing, illegal dumping



JDD Garden, Bronx.

and vandalism — and serve as a vivid reminder of neighborhood disinvestment and abandonment. By cleaning up these lots and creating a community space in their place, residents can significantly improve the safety of their communities. The land is reclaimed for positive and legal uses — and the block, and even the neighborhood, can be transformed into a place where the community is watching and has a stake in what happens on its streets.

"Our garden is located on a block that had been a heavily drug-trafficked area," says McGowan of the Community League. "We even had concerns that they would take advantage of our garden and try to grow marijuana or hide their stashes."

But the garden has generated a force of caretakers. "My son is very protective of the garden," says McGowan. "Once, he went out to the garden to make sure everything was all right and one of the dealers asked him: 'What are you looking at?' And my son replied, 'Hey man, I'm just looking after the garden. Don't get excited. My mother works at this garden. She's the one who asked me to come and check out the garden.' "

Educational Tool

A community garden can enhance a CBO's ability to deliver educational programs by providing an outdoor space where youth and adults can learn from formal instructors and, informally, from each other. Community garden settings have been used for a wide range of educational activities, from workshops to environmental education to peer tutoring. They are especially beneficial to urban youth, who have few opportunities to experience the natural environment.

The Success Garden in East New York was developed through a collaboration between East New York Urban Youth Corps, a CDC, the Parks Council, and a local school, P.S. 174. Serving as both a community park and an outdoor learning center, the garden contains an ecologically sustainable pond, barbecue pits, a stage area, and toddlers' play area.

Located near Jamaica Bay Estuary/Gateway National Recreation Park, the garden is home to a horticultural science program and a habitat-restoration program involving local school children in the restoration of a migratory bird habitat. The garden also serves as a community site for health fairs, after-school programs, day-camp activities, staff events, and seasonal celebrations.

Recreation

Many low-income urban neighborhoods lack access to traditional parks and open space. This is particularly true in New York City, where communities like Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn are served by only less than one-half acre of open space per 1,000 residents —

well below the Department of City Planning's recommended minimum of 2.5 acres of open space per 1,000 residents. Moreover, community gardens tend to be more accessible than public parks because parents and caretakers aren't always able to bring their children to larger parks. Having a garden on the block or in the immediate neighborhood brings recreation space closer to home.

Unlike public parks, community gardens also reflect the communities in which they're located, providing an outlet for community expression. Many community gardens contain murals or amenities designed by local youth and residents. Unlike parks, the gardens can also serve a food-production function when used by individual gardeners and families for growing fresh produce, which is sometimes donated to those in need.

Quality of Life and Sense of Community

"The community garden started a chain of community involvement. I got to know our politicians, our community board, and the people who work for the Parks Department and the Department of Sanitation. Without the garden, I would still be a 9-to-5-come-home-and-close-the-door-and-that's-it type of person." – Karen Washington, gardener at the Garden of Happiness in the Bronx (*Just Food*, 2000)

Community gardens represent resident-focused efforts to improve the quality of life in the community. Gardens provide open and recreational space, local activities and programming, and opportunities for resident engagement and action.

"The community wants somewhere with a safe, clean environment where they can bring their children," says Freda Hooper, a founding gardener at Jacqueline Denise Davis Garden in the Bronx. "This garden serves that purpose, and people are just happy to be associated with it because of that. Residents gather together, they bond, and it brings the community together."

Many gardens become focal points of community activity, fostering informal social interaction among neighbors, whether they come to garden or to enjoy a seasonal festival. As Briggs and Mueller (1997) write,

"Social relationships among residents enrich their psychological sense of connection to others and promote involvement in collective activities." In addition to activities involving the development and maintenance of the site, events such as birthday celebrations, block parties, and barbecues also strengthen neighborhood ties.

Economic Development

By growing produce for market, community gardens can provide entrepreneurial opportunities.

In East New York, local organizations have formed a farmers' market and garden-assistance program named ENY Farms! It is designed to help resident-gardeners grow fresh, nutritious food and sell what they produce at a neighborhood market.

More than 25 local gardeners participate in the market every Saturday from June through November. The program provides training, technical assistance and material resources such as seeds, lumber and equipment. Participating members also attend horticultural and business-basics workshops. Youth interns work with the gardeners and receive a stipend for their commitment to the project.

Like other markets around the city, ENY Farms! is certified by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Established in 1992, the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) provides additional coupons to WIC participants for purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers' markets. While the program's subsidies are modest (about \$20 per recipient annually), the total amount of revenue generated from this program is substantial: In 1999, more than \$3 million worth of coupons were redeemed in New York State alone.

Clearly, farmers' markets and other entrepreneurial activities can help enhance a community garden and the benefits it brings to a community. However, additional resources are often needed to initiate such a project, including additional funding and individuals willing to oversee the project. Securing enough land to cultivate market-quantities of produce can also present a challenge, particularly in New York City.

Community-Based Organizations: Good Greening Partners

“Our goal is to improve the quality of life of the neighborhood and community gardens are a very direct way to do that. They build our relationship with the residents and offer additional open space for community residents to meet and gather, develop leadership skills, or offer more services to kids. It's a win-win situation.”

– **Deb Howard, Pratt Area Community Council**

As housing developers, community organizers and service providers, CBOs represent excellent partners in community garden development efforts. Community gardens supported in collaboration with CBOs can benefit from the organization's experience in property management and development, community organizing and fundraising. Moreover, CBO-managed housing is often a valued asset within the community and organizations typically have strong links to local educational and community institutions. From this base, the continued development of high-quality, community-managed spaces and sustained community garden efforts becomes an achievable goal.

Isles Inc. is a Trenton, N.J.-based CBO that addresses issues of food, housing and the environment by fostering neighborhood-based "islands" of development. Isles has four focus areas: urban greening and land recovery, environmental education, affordable housing, and job training and development. The organization has created 65 community garden and beautification sites designed, constructed and maintained by local residents. Isles has also constructed more than 200 units of affordable housing in Trenton, while providing homeownership training and mortgage counseling to local families and residents.

Community Roots

CBOs address broad-based community concerns. They understand the neighborhood dynamics and they have won the community's trust. As a result, they are often well

positioned to tackle open-space issues in their neighborhood.

In addition to providing housing and services, many CBOs have worked with local residents to form tenants' and block associations and have community organizers on staff who play an active role in the neighborhood. These resources streamline a CBO's efforts to create a community garden. They also help outside technical assistance or service providers to direct their resources into the community in a targeted way. An established CBO can also lend credibility to outside agencies, making it easier for them to reach out to community residents.

Tenant Base

Community gardens require significant people power.

Depending on the size of the garden, upwards of 25 people may be needed to spend ongoing time developing and caring for the space. In many low-income communities, CBOs have rehabilitated hundreds of apartment units, giving them a very large tenant base.

Therefore, the organization may already have established a relationship with hundreds of local residents. By targeting these residents, organizers can tap into an existing network of community people to identify interested participants. Beyond housing, CBOs often provide other services to community residents through which they can recruit potential gardeners.

Staff

CBOs have staff members who can make valuable contributions to open-space projects. Community organizers, for example, often play a significant role in CBO-initiated open-space projects by mobilizing local residents and encouraging continued community involvement in the maintenance and use of a garden.

The CBO staff person is critical, says Alban Calderon of the Trust for Public Land: "You really need to have somebody on the ground, in the community, who already has an existing relationship with community residents and can be there on a regular basis."

Many CBOs also have the services of an architect or a landscape architect at their disposal to assist with the development of a garden design. Staff members at the Pratt Area Community Council were even instrumental in starting a community garden coalition to tackle garden preservation and open-space issues in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant.

Meeting Space and Office Use

A place to gather, especially at the beginning of a garden project, is crucial.

Many CBO-developed buildings have community rooms in which residents can meet to plan their garden project in its initial stages or for meetings once the garden has been developed. Once the garden is in development, storage space for tools is important; an adjacent basement can provide a safe and accessible place. For community gardeners interested in publicizing garden events and activities, access to office equipment, such as copiers, fax machines and computers, can be another asset.

Financing

CBOs often have expertise in identifying public and private sources of funding for community development projects and may also have staff with grant-writing skills. Furthermore, many funders prefer to finance open-space projects as part of the fabric of overall community revitalization, rather than a stand-alone activity.

By incorporating the garden project into a larger community effort, such as a neighborhood-planning initiative, CBOs can provide a community-revitalization context. CBOs like Pratt Area Community Council have been able to include fencing and preliminary site development in the scope of work for housing development.

Acquiring Land

CBOs may be able to draw upon their housing contacts and relationships to secure land for community garden projects. In New York City, vacant lots may be included in the consolidation of lots for housing development projects. In general, CBOs also can access their contacts within various city agencies (departments of city planning or housing, borough and county leaders, etc.) to acquire city-owned property for free or at below-market rates, or to find out about privately owned sites. In New York City, where site acquisition is currently one of the largest hurdles facing those interested in developing open space, such contacts and relationships represent a significant advantage for CBOs.

Linkages

As established members of a community, CBOs have connections to other neighborhood groups, local schools, social service providers, senior centers, faith-based organizations, local politicians and others. These ties can help provide community support for the development of a garden project as well as ongoing use and maintenance.



Site of the JDD garden in 1997.

Getting Started: Step by Step

Site Control, Taxation and Liability

The primary consideration in developing a community garden is site security: A CBO must have site control over the proposed garden space before it can be considered as a potential garden site. Because the development of the garden will require investments of time, labor and energy by community residents and others, it is important to assure that the results of this effort can be enjoyed for the long term.

In 1998, after the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) took over jurisdiction of all GreenThumb gardens (city-owned sites leased by community gardeners), the program stopped leasing new sites. At the present time, there is no process in place by which neighborhood organizations or volunteers can lease parcels of city-owned land in New York City. Greening organizations are working to enact legislation that would define the process for temporary leasing and permanent protection for community gardens.

However, New York City programs, such as the

Neighborhood Redevelopment Program and the Neighborhood Entrepreneurs Program, currently present opportunities to acquire land for open space. Both programs transfer city-owned buildings to community-based nonprofit and for-profit organizations. At times, some of these parcels may contain vacant lots that are too small or otherwise unsuitable for development as housing and can be used for open-space development.

Other important factors to consider are insurance and taxes (property, water, sewer, etc.) Both can be costly. In this area, CBOs have a potential advantage over other gardening groups. By incorporating the garden project into their housing development, they may be able to avoid these costs. If the garden site is adjacent to a housing project that will receive tax abatements and the two tax lots are merged, the garden lot becomes a part of the housing development project and is thus also exempt from some taxes (depending on the abatement program). Merging tax lots, however, is not a simple process and, if the housing is subsidized (e.g., through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program), timing may become an issue. Therefore, CBOs should consider adjacent vacant lots as early as possible in the housing development timeline and work with their architect and other partners on merging the projects.

Similarly, CBOs may be able to add the garden to their housing insurance coverage for a lower premium, rather than buying insurance separately for the garden. However, the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition does provide low-cost insurance for community gardens. (See Resource Guide).

Assistance in developing neighborhood open-space management plans is available through the Council on the Environment of New York City's Citywide Community Garden Mapping Project at www.cmap.nypirg.org/cenyc/cenycmapsearch.asp. Similar resources are available from other community-mapping assistance groups.



Children from the after-school program at the nearby Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center learn about tree planting in the JDD Garden, Bronx.

Identifying a Site

Size

Generally, the site should be a minimum of 5,000 square feet, or 50 feet x 100 feet. As community-managed spaces, they should be able to accommodate a fairly large number of people. Smaller sites are still beneficial but provide less flexibility in design and usage.

Adequate Sunlight

If vegetable or flower beds are planned, the site should receive a minimum of six hours of direct sunlight. A sun study should be conducted during the spring or summer (after March 15) at three times during the day — 8 a.m., 12 noon, and 3 p.m. — marking where the shadow lines fall and determining the total direct hours of sunlight.

Water Supply

Reliable water sources are a must for a community garden. The simplest way to access water is through a nearby outdoor faucet. A water hook-up to an adjacent building owned by the CBO is also an option. Fire hydrants may be available for watering with a special permit. In New York City, the Department of Environmental Protection allows gardeners to use hydrants through an arrangement with GreenThumb. Local firehouse stations can provide access to hydrants as well. Closed barrels of water nearby planting areas can be used as alternatives to hoses when needed. A permanent water supply should be included in long-range plans for the garden.



The League Garden, Manhattan.

Site Accessibility

The site must be located in close proximity to its users to prevent lack of use. Pathways, entrances, and exits should allow for wheelchair accessibility.

Slope

The site should be relatively level. Extreme slopes are expensive to develop and can pose difficulties and danger to seniors, children and people who are physically challenged.

Soil Quality

Soil is an important component of any garden. Many sites in New York City, however, lack appropriate topsoil for gardening, in which case the group will need to bring soil onto the site. Plants such as annuals require, at a minimum, 6 inches to 8 inches of topsoil. Even if the site does contain the appropriate soil, the group should research past land uses to determine the potential for contamination. Buildings once stood on most vacant lots in New York City and thus some lots may be contaminated with heavy metals such as lead, mercury and cadmium.

If potential contamination from past land uses is suspected, the soil should be tested, preferably by an environmental company. Gardeners should also have their soil tested for pH (the ideal pH for most gardens is slightly acidic — levels of 6.0 to 6.5). Nutrient content (to determine nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium levels) also can be tested for a fee by contacting your local cooperative extension office. (See Resource Guide.)

Creating a Vision

A key component of a successful community garden is "a clear vision of what you want to do on the site and in the community," says Erika Svendsen, former director of the New York City Parks and Recreation's GreenThumb Program. With vision, "there's buy-in from the beginning. It doesn't have to be specific and may include only general principles."

The vision for the garden should come from within the community. Or, it should at least be shared jointly by the community and the sponsoring CBO to ensure that community residents become active participants and take at least partial responsibility for the garden's maintenance.

Designing Your Garden

The vision for the garden is implemented through the design process.

The garden design is often a product of collaboration between a landscape architect (or a design expert) and community residents. Current conditions, available materials, volunteers for planting and maintenance, cost and other resources should be considered in drafting a design. The key to a successful design, however, is incorporating significant levels of community participation in the design process. HOSI does this by having community residents meet with the designer to incorporate community interests into the design and asking the designer to draft several designs from which a final selection is made.

The design should also consider programming interests and be able to accommodate special events, if that is a community goal. By working with community groups or institutions such as a school or a day care center, the organization can also incorporate programming by including a stage, gazebo, picnic area or other features.

Assembling Your Garden Team

A successful community garden requires a well-organized and committed group of residents to assume responsibility for the garden on a long-term basis. Many greening



Jacqueline Denie Davis Court, developed by Morrisania Revitalization Corporation and adjacent NYC Partnership Homes.

organizations recommend starting with a group of at least five to 10 committed people.

A garden committee is also recommended. It should represent a cross-section of the community by including local residents, a CBO representative, the local business community, local church groups or a faith-based group, and a representative or two from the community board, school district or police precinct. Greening organizations can also play an advisory role to the garden committee.

If subcommittees are formed, they should focus on issues such as fundraising, design, garden maintenance and outreach. A membership committee can also make decisions about garden dues and hours. The committees should meet regularly to resolve any problems that arise early in the process, while the garden committee should develop garden rules and bylaws.

Site Preparation

If a site has not already been cleared, several steps are usually required before site development can begin:

1. Remove any abandoned cars or other large obstructions from the site.
2. Contact health officials to have the site baited for rats or other vermin.
3. Clear the site of all debris, trash, rocks, etc.

4. Clear the site of any weeds to minimize plant competition.
5. Before you start, remove any broken glass, rusty metal and other hazards to make the site safe for children and adults.
6. Make sure the site does not have any poison ivy or other poisonous plants.

Ideally, you should have a fence installed before beginning site development, or even preparation, to prevent any further dumping. A double gate measuring at least 10 feet wide is recommended to allow trucks and backhoes onto the site. Local community groups can work with their community board or borough president's office to acquire fencing.

Vacant lots are sometimes adjacent to structures that are abandoned and imminently dangerous to the future users of the open space. Walls might be crumbling, hazardous debris may exist, and the structure might be used for illegal activities. Such conditions must be resolved before people can safely use the site.

Developing Your Garden

Developing your garden will require workdays during which community residents and others come together (usually on a Saturday, Sunday or summer evenings) to clear, prepare and plant the garden. In the case of HOSI sites, the Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC) coordinates these workdays with the garden committee.

At the same time, the garden committee should continue to hold administrative meetings to make decisions about site development and to allow for flexibility in the design. The actual completed garden rarely follows the initial vision exactly.

If any heavy excavation work is undertaken or structural walls are needed (rare in site development of a community garden), be sure to acquire all necessary city permits and approvals.

Multiple Gardens

Several of the CBOs profiled here began with one site and then expanded their open-space development efforts. Some have even engaged in neighborhood open-space planning efforts.

In 1995, the tenants' associations of Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Corporation (NEB) in Bedford-Stuyvesant formed a coalition to share ideas and concerns about the neighborhood and work together to bring about positive changes. A garden committee was formed as a

subcommittee of the coalition to plan and care for a new garden on Kosciusko Street. Nearly 21 percent of the lots in the neighborhood focus area were vacant. At the same time, only 1.5 percent of the land in the area was usable open space. The community board reported that all area parks and playgrounds were heavily used.

After developing Cheryl's Villa Garden (a HOSI site), NEB, in conjunction with several other organizations, completed the Kosciusko Garden Learning Center with a federal Urban Resource Partnership grant administered by the CENYC in 1998.

Located on three previously vacant, trash-strewn lots, the garden includes a gazebo, tree nursery, pond, benches, lawn, chess

tables, and planting beds. The tree nursery produces trees for planting along Kosciusko Street.

Hundreds of adults and children living in the neighborhood and attending five nearby schools were involved in clearing the lot, planting and labeling flowers and trees, and constructing tables and benches. School classes adopted sections of the garden to plant, maintain and label with signs indicating the types of plants in each section. The garden also contains a large mural painted by a local artist. The largest of five such murals in the area, it depicts children learning and discovering through reading and exploring nature. To date, NEB has developed three gardens and plans to develop three more.



A young gardner at the Pulaski Street Garden, Brooklyn.

Putting All of the Pieces Together

Is your CBO equipped to handle an open-space project? Long-term success often hinges on several factors: a CBO's capacity, role, and ability to build a volunteer base and develop an ongoing commitment.

A CBO's commitment is especially important for getting a project off of the ground and building community interest. The organization can help secure funding for garden projects and spearhead the design and development process. As residents develop the skills and capacity to manage the garden, the CBO can act as a coordinator and advisor, providing assistance and resources on an as-needed basis, whether it's funding, contact with greening groups, or programming advice from staff members.

At the very least, the CBO should provide one dedicated staff person who can devote a quarter or third of his or her time on the project in the beginning. Less time may be required after the project is completed. The CBO should provide as much assistance as the tenants require but encourage them to take on responsibilities and make decisions early on and throughout the process.

Funding

The cost of a community garden depends on a number of factors: size, amenities, donations received, etc. A number of greening organizations offer both material and technical assistance to community gardens that should be considered. Donations from local vendors and neighborhood associations should also be pursued.

Fencing often represents the most expensive item in any garden. However, a garden with sparse amenities can be developed without costly fencing for about \$10,000 to \$15,000. A GreenThumb garden site, measuring about 5,000 square feet and created using all the free materials available, costs from \$3,000 to \$5,000. Gardens with amenities such as extensive plant material, paving, edging, lawn or sprinklers can cost between \$20,000 and \$25,000.

Finally, gardens with more permanent features such as in-ground benches, picnic tables, barbecues, concrete walks and paving can cost between \$50,000 and \$75,000.

Capital construction is not an insignificant cost. But dedicated, hard-working volunteers — as well as assistance from outside groups — can significantly reduce labor costs. Some gardens, however, have paid individuals to help maintain the garden and to ensure its upkeep.

Money for programming can also make a big difference in a garden's success. Many organizations hold activities and celebrations in their gardens to bring the community together and money for food and refreshments is often needed for these events.

Potential roles for CBO sponsors include:

- Providing the land
- Coordinating and supervising special work projects
- Establishing connections with in-kind donation



Neighborhood youth in Brooklyn lend a hand at a Pulaski Street Garden workday.

- sources for plant materials and other resources
- Bringing water to a site or setting up a water system
- Documenting the garden's activities and progress
- Providing insurance coverage
- Funding staff positions, site improvements, operating expenses and mailings
- Providing nonprofit status to the garden group
- Providing some office and meeting space, administrative support and use of phones and photocopier
- Publicizing the project
- Assisting with fundraising and donations
- Providing refreshments for events

Time and Labor

"Taking care [of the garden] can be time consuming if the site was not properly designed for low maintenance." – Alban Calderon, the Trust for Public Land

Once the garden is developed, maintaining it requires an ongoing commitment. Volunteers provide an important foundation for any garden effort. They support regular garden maintenance such as watering, weeding, mulching, clean up, and replacement plantings. Greening organizations suggest charging one person or a regularly scheduled team with the responsibility of watering to provide consistent attention. Other jobs, according to the Minnesota State Horticultural Society, can be covered through weekly scheduling or by rotating groups for monthly blocks of time.

Beginning the maintenance cycle early prevents more intensive work later. Recording activities in an onsite maintenance guidebook makes planning ahead for the next year easier. A maintenance manual and garden-maintenance activity calendars are available from the Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC). (See Resource Guide). Along with providing better results, well-kept sites increase community acceptance and interest new gardeners.

The Right Stuff

A successful garden features several important elements, including:

- A strong institutional or community-based organization that establishes "stewardship" over the garden
- Consistent staffing, even at a minimum level
- An educational or other community-based institution adjacent or in close proximity to the site that actively incorporates the garden into its activities and programs
- Community access

At a minimum, gardeners will need the following tools:

- Sturdy metal garden rake (also called a grading rake)
- Leaf rake for raking up leaves (also called a fan rake)
- Sturdy, long-handled, round-ended shovel
- Hand cultivator
- Hand trowel
- Wheelbarrow
- Strong rubber garden hose with nozzle
- Garden hoe
- Good pair of by-pass pruning shears
- Several pairs of garden gloves

Expertise and Planning

The expertise of both the CBO and outside greening organizations often plays an important role in any community garden project — especially around fundraising, design and development. Advanced planning by the CBO can help determine how open-space management fits into its operations, a timeline for the project and initial space development needs. Once the project is underway, the CBO can also assist residents in forming a garden committee and ensure that ongoing maintenance, garden rules and other issues are addressed early.



The JDD Garden in 1997. Neighborhood residents were instrumental in getting this vacant, dangerous building torn down.

Community Participation

Maintaining community participation and involvement should be a high priority for any CBO-initiated garden project. Community participation is important for providing community residents with a sense of ownership over the project.

"Our experience over the past 15 years is that, if there isn't any sense of 'I did this,' or 'This is mine,' then the project will fail because no one really has a sense of ownership. We feel pride in the fact that our sidewalk is cleaner, that we painted the fire hydrants, that we swept the street, and planted flowers in the tree pit," says Gerard Lordahl of CENYC.

"It's the same thing with a community garden," adds Lordahl. "Whatever amount of work a volunteer does in the community space, there's a sense of pride that's instilled and that will help protect that space."

Programming

Active gardens need active programming.

Programs bring the community into the garden and, conversely, make the garden feel like a part of the neighborhood, according to Judith Fagin, author of *Greening: Growing Community Parks and Educational Gardens*. Moreover, educational programs and other activities provide learning opportunities for local youth.

"Educational programs provide supervised, meaningful after-school activities for the youth who frequently visit the garden," says Rene Muir, assistant executive director of East New York Urban Youth Corps.

These programs are crucial for older youth, who might otherwise use the garden for illicit activities. Older youth are often asked to become program leaders, overseeing the activities of younger youth, an empowering experience for many adolescents. According to Muir, the garden-based educational programs help organizations identify youth with particular challenges so they can be connected to social service programs. The programs also encourage parents to become more involved in their children's lives and provide them with opportunities for interaction.

Conclusion

Our experience in the HOSI program and the interviews we conducted for this publication underscore a number of key elements related to effective CBO involvement in community gardens.

First Things First

It is important that CBOs enjoy a positive relationship with their tenants before undertaking an open-space project. For example, buildings should be maintained and tenants should be satisfied with their homes. If not, they are more likely to ask for building improvements before participating in an open-space project. In addition, the CBO or a partner organization should have a site secured prior to initiating the project.

Valuing Volunteers

A CBO should start out promoting resident engagement in a garden project to develop the capacity to sustain it. Internal staff changes can undermine a project if there are no other leaders in place to assume responsibility or maintain momentum for it. Keeping local volunteers engaged and personally invested in the project also helps relieve the CBO of maintenance duties.

It Takes Teamwork

Staff capacity — including motivated resident staff with experience in community organizing — is essential.

Keeping Your Balance

The role of CBO staff must be evenly integrated with community participation. Although sometimes it can be difficult to strike that balance, it is essential for the CBO to support and assist the community garden effort without taking it over.



Pulaski Street Garden, Brooklyn.

Maintenance — or Mayhem?

Planning and carrying out ongoing maintenance is crucial, not only to protect the physical space but to maintain community support and involvement. CBOs should think about garden maintenance in the same way they approach building operations after construction completion.

Cultivating Supporters

Establish connections to in-kind donation sources (such as greening groups and local businesses) for plant and other garden materials that can help keep the costs of a garden down.

Resource Guide

New York City is fortunate to have access to numerous greening and open-space organizations that provide a wide range of assistance to community gardens. The resources and support they offer are essential for keeping the costs of developing a community garden relatively low.

Housing and Open Space Initiative (HOSI)

c/o Trust for Public Land (TPL)
666 Broadway, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10012
Contact: Alban Calderon
212.677.7171

HOSI is co-sponsored by TPL (a national nonprofit land conservation group), the Council on the Environment of NYC (CENYC, a nonprofit environmental organization operating out of the Mayor's office), and The Enterprise Foundation (a national nonprofit housing and community development organization). The initiative is tailored toward CBOs interested in incorporating open space in their housing development and rehabilitation activities. Participants receive ongoing support from project partners,

including technical assistance, materials, help with site development, and assistance with fund-raising and site-control issues.

Horticultural Technical and Material Assistance

GreenThumb

City of New York/ Department of Parks & Recreation
49 Chambers Street, Room 1020
New York, NY 10007
Contact: Edie Stone
212.788.8070
Fax 212.788.8052

Provides assistance and training in design, construction and planting. Supplies tools, fencing, soil, orchard and ornamental plants, seeds, and bulbs. Services and materials are free. Referral services, workshops, literature and library material available. A grant program is available to gardens registered in the GreenThumb program.

Bronx Green-Up

The New York Botanical Garden
Snuff Mill Offices
Bronx, NY 10458
Contact: Dara Barr
718.817.8026
Fax 718.817.8018

A community outreach program of The New York Botanical Garden. Provides free on-site technical



Pulaski Street Garden, Brooklyn.

assistance, workshops, resource referrals, compost information, wood chips, seeds, shrubs, and other plant materials as well as compost and soil when available. Offers special events for Bronx gardeners.

Brooklyn GreenBridge

Brooklyn Botanic Garden
1000 Washington Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11225
Contact: Ellen Kirby
718.623.7200

The community horticulture program of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Offers free workshops and provides free plants, trees, bulbs, compost and seeds. Its Urban Composting Project, supported by the New York City Department of Sanitation, provides technical assistance and information on composting.

Open Space Greening Program

Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC)
51 Chambers Street, Room 228
New York, NY 10007
Contact: Gerard Lordahl
212.788.7923

Provides material and technical assistance to community gardens and other open-space greening projects through Plant-A-Lot, Grow Truck and annual plant sales. Resources include: technical assistance, on-site visits, pH soil testing, insect and pest identification, open-space planning, community garden fact sheets, and community garden mapping projects.

Green Guerillas

151 W. 30th Street, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10001
Contact: Steve Frillman
212.594.2155

Member-supported resource center for community gardening groups in every New York City borough. Staff

and volunteers provide phone consultations, site visits, and workshops to help gardening groups get organized, increase youth involvement, engage in preservation activities, create compost bins, and grow food.

Cornell University Cooperative Extension - NYC

16 East 34th Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10016
Contact: Linda Ameroso
212.340.2967

Works with CBOs that want to sponsor educational forums on issues such as air quality, pest control, lead, and environmental health hazards present in the home and garden.

Magnolia Tree Earth Center

677 Lafayette Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11216
Contact: Arthur Sheppard
718.387.2116

A CBO in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Provides horticultural, educational, and technical assistance. Offers workshops for school classes and sponsors local garden clubs and seasonal special events.

Funding & Financial Assistance

In addition to HOSI (see above), a number of organizations offer financial assistance or grants to community gardens. Organizations should also investigate other sources of funding, including the local city council and borough president's office, which often have discretionary funds at their disposal. Many banks also have small grants programs for community projects.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently announced a Community Gardens Initiative as part of its Community Food Security Initiative, which promises increased support for community gardening for food production at the local, state and national levels.

Neighborhood Open Space Management (NOSM) Grants

Trust for Public Land, NYC Programs
666 Broadway, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10012
Contact: Alban Calderon
212.677.7171

NOSM grants are available for community gardens to enhance membership or leadership through cultural and horticultural community events, workshops or celebrations. Grants range from \$500 to \$2,500 and cannot be used for capital improvements or one-time events. Workshops for NOSM applicants are usually held in November and the NOSM deadline is usually in late January.

Green Bank

Open Space Greening Program
Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC)
51 Chambers Street, Room 228
New York, NY 10007
212.788.7923

Green Bank is a project of Plant-A-Lot at CENYC's Open Space Greening Program. Green Bank provides dollar-for-dollar matching funds to well-established community-managed open spaces for the purchase of materials to improve community gardens, parks and playgrounds. Community groups are encouraged to submit organizational letters describing project need, identify organizational funds available to contribute to the project, and provide three community-based references other than the applicant's own organization.

Neighborhood Environmental Action Program (NEAP)

Citizens Committee for New York City
305 Seventh Avenue, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212.989.0909

Established in 1987, NEAP provides financial and technical support to volunteer-driven neighborhood groups working to preserve, protect and improve the urban

environment in New York City's low-income communities. Grants range from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

The Mollie Parnis Dress Up Your Neighborhood Awards

Citizens Committee for New York City
305 Seventh Avenue, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212.989.0909

Provides small cash grants of up to \$500 to gardens that have made a recognizable difference in their neighborhoods.

Youth Garden Grants Program

The National Gardening Association
180 Flynn Avenue
Burlington, VT 05401
800.538.7476

The National Gardening Association awards 400 youth-garden grants to schools, neighborhood groups, community centers, and intergenerational programs throughout the United States. Each grant includes an assortment of quality tools, seeds, and garden products valued at more than \$750. To be eligible, groups must plan to garden with at least 15 children between the ages of 3 and 18 years. Selection of winners is based on demonstration of a child-centered plan that emphasizes children directly learning and working in an outdoor garden. Selection criteria include leadership, need, sustainability, community support, innovation and educational, environmental and/or social programming. Applications may be obtained by calling the number above or online at www.kidsgardening.com/grants.asp.

Community Food Projects

Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES)

USDA
Stop 2241
1400 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington, DC 20250-2240
202.205.0241

www.reeusda.gov

The 1996 Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act (FAIR) established new authority for one-time federal matching grants to support the development of Community Food Projects. The projects are designed to meet the needs of low-income people by increasing their access to fresher, more nutritious food supplies; increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs; and promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm and nutrition issues. Sponsored by the USDA, these grants are intended to help nonprofits that need a one-time infusion of federal assistance to establish and carry out multi-purpose community food projects. Projects supported include entrepreneurial community-based garden projects. Projects are funded from \$10,000 to \$250,000 for one to three years.

Food Production/Entrepreneurial Gardens

The City Farms

Green Guerillas, Cornell Cooperative Extension-NYC (see above) and Just Food

307 Seventh Avenue, Suite 1201

New York, NY 10001

212.645.9880

A collaborative project of five New York organizations working with community gardeners to foster urban agriculture. The project brings food to those most in need and promotes community-based entrepreneurship and economic opportunities. With the help of the City Farms partners, community gardeners have boosted food production and developed strong partnerships with local food pantries and soup kitchens.

Garden Insurance

Neighborhood Open Space Coalition (NOSC)

356 Seventh Avenue

New York, NY 10001

212.352.9330



Hull Street Garden, Brooklyn.

Provides liability insurance at a cost of \$260 per year for gardeners. Works to promote a gardens and parks agenda within city government. Publishes several electronic newsletters and hosts several listserves related to open space and community gardening. For more information, go to www.treebranch.com/tbnetwork/listservs.htm.

Labor

Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES)

346 Broadway, 3rd Floor West

New York, NY 10013

212.732.0076

Supervised crews available to help with garden tasks such as cleaning, painting, installing fences, building beds and structures, and planting.

New York Cares

116 East 16th Street, 6th Floor

New York, NY 10033

212.228.5000

Facilitates volunteerism in New York by matching volunteer teams with organizations seeking assistance. Groups

needing volunteers to accomplish specific projects should call the office to begin application and screening process.

Abandoned Car Removal

Sanitation Action Center

137 Center Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10013
212.219.8090

Refers abandoned-car reports and other requests for service to borough offices. To qualify for removal, a car must not have license plates and should not have any apparent value. (Stripped, burned, or wrecked cars qualify).

Pest Control

Central Complaint Office NYC

Department of Health
253 Broadway, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10007
212.442.9666

To register a complaint, remain on the line until you get an operator, then request rat or vermin control. Make sure you have the site address before calling.

Published Materials, Publications & Printed Resources

Creating Community Gardens, 2nd Ed.

Minnesota State Horticultural Society
1755 Prior Avenue North
Falcon Heights, MN 55113-5549
651.643.3601
800.676.6747

New York's Community Gardens – A Resource At Risk

The Trust for Public Land
Mid-Atlantic Region Office
666 Broadway, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10012
212.677.7171
fax: 212.353.2052

Growing Communities: How To Build Community Through Community

American Community Gardening Association
100 N. 20th Street, 5th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1495
215.988.8785
fax: 215.988.8810

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