COMMUNITY GARDEN ROUNDTABLE

Session 3

Date: November 18, 2024
Location: Hybrid (Online and In-Person)
Attendance: 25 Participants

Purpose of the Roundtable

The roundtable aims to convene leaders, participants, and initiators of community gardens and organizations that support them, in the Capital Region to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and discuss tools and strategies for enhancing community gardens. The roundtable has been meeting in the hopes of developing a network of support and will continue to meet quarterly.

Key Highlights

On November 18, 2024, the Capital Region Community Garden Roundtable brought together 25 participants in a hybrid format to discuss strategies for enhancing community gardens. The event featured presentations from Michael Ip, who shared insights on using social media for garden engagement, and Cenit Munoz , who introduced "Building a Just and Equitable Community Garden in Greater Victoria. . After the presentation we held a roundtable discussion. conversation highlighted the importance of integrating equity frameworks in community gardens and community spaces. We also learned about the challenges of securing funding and resources for the work.. Participants committed to sharing resources, advocating for municipal funding, and fostering a culture of change within community gardens. The roundtable underscored the vital role gardens play in building equitable and resilient communities.

Honoring the Land
led by: Ruba Elfurjani (CRFAIR)

Ruba opened the meeting with an acknowledgment of the traditional lands on which the gathering took place, recognizing the vital relationship between land and the communities cultivating it, as well as the ongoing impacts of colonization and genocide in Palestine.

Participants
Participants included representatives from community gardens, urban food initiatives, and support organizations, such as CRFAIR, the Victoria Urban Food Table, Compost Education Centre, and many local community gardens.

PRESENTATIONS

1. **SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY GARDENS**

Presenter: Michael Ip

Michael Ip's presentation, Social Marketing is a Breeze, focused on leveraging social media to enhance engagement and community participation in garden projects. He provided practical tips and strategies for using digital platforms to connect with current members, attract new participants, and amplify the broader impact of community gardens.

KEY THEMES AND STRATEGIES:

1. Telling Your Garden's Story:
- Emphasized the importance of storytelling to make the garden relatable and engaging.
- Suggested sharing personal stories from gardeners, including their challenges and successes, to humanize the space and inspire involvement.
- Highlighted the role of visuals, such as photos of thriving plots, harvests, or community events, to create emotional connections with the audience.

2. Content Creation and Scheduling:
- Recommended maintaining an active presence on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.
- Shared tips on content planning, including:
  - Using a mix of educational posts (e.g., gardening tips), event announcements, and celebration of milestones.
  - Scheduling posts consistently to maintain follower interest.

3. Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion:
- Encouraged gardens to use social media as a platform to showcase cultural diversity within their membership.
- Suggested highlighting seasonal events, cultural traditions, and recipes that reflect the backgrounds of garden participants.

4. Engaging with Followers:
- Stressed the value of responding to comments and messages promptly to build trust and a sense of connection.
- Proposed using polls, question boxes, and live videos to interact with followers in real-time and gather feedback.

5. Partnerships and Cross-Promotion:
- Highlighted the benefits of partnering with other organizations or local businesses for cross-promotion.
- Encouraged tagging partner organizations and using community-specific hashtags to increase visibility.

Tools and Resources
Michael provided a downloadable guide with templates for planning social media campaigns, including:
- A monthly content calendar template.
- Example post ideas tailored for community gardens.
- Links to free tools for graphic design (e.g., Canva) and scheduling posts (e.g., Hootsuite).

Resources:

🔗 **Link to Michael Ip's Presentation**

2. EQUITY TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS

Presenter: Cenit Munoz

Cenit's presentation focused on fostering equity in community gardens using practical tools and frameworks to identify and address systemic barriers. The session provided a detailed introduction to the Equity Toolkit and its accompanying assessment tools, emphasizing their role in creating accessible and inclusive garden spaces.

To begin her presentation, Cenit showed a video, you can click the link below to watch it

🔗 *Video: Unconscious bias is often the most impactful form of microaggression*

Cenit then introduced the Equity in Community Gardens Toolkit. You can access the toolkit below

🔗 *Equity in Community Gardens Toolkit*

The toolkit comes with a self-assessment document to determine the equity 'score' of your community garden. You can access this self assessment below

🔗 **Equity in Community Gardens: Self-assessment**

KEY THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS:

1. Unpacking Equity in Community Gardens
- Defining Equity vs. Equality: Cenit highlighted the distinction between equity (providing tailored support based on individual needs) and equality (treating everyone the same), stressing the importance of recognizing unique challenges faced by equity-denied groups.
- Microaggressions and Bias: Discussed how unconscious bias often manifests in subtle ways that can impact individuals' experiences in shared spaces like community gardens.

2. The Equity Toolkit
The Equity Toolkit was presented as a resource for community garden leaders to evaluate and improve their garden's accessibility and inclusivity.

Core Components:
- The Wheel of Power framework to understand dynamics of privilege and oppression.
- Strategies for reducing barriers to access, such as providing tools, education, and support for underrepresented groups.

Practical Applications:
- Guidance on creating garden agreements that reflect diverse needs.
- Suggestions for improving physical, financial, and cultural accessibility.

3. Assessment Tool Overview
Cenit introduced an accompanying assessment tool to help garden coordinators evaluate their spaces and identify areas for improvement.

Sample Questions:
- Are the application and selection processes inclusive and equitable?
- Does the garden provide accessible pathways and facilities for people with disabilities?
- Are policies in place to address conflicts or incidents related to bias or discrimination?

Value of Data Collection:
Encouraged participants to use the tool to collect feedback and make informed decisions based on measurable outcomes.

4. Allocating Resources Fairly
Cenit addressed the complex issue of resource allocation:
- Recommended frameworks that allow participants to self-identify needs without compromising their privacy or dignity.
- Suggested setting aside specific plots for equity-denied groups or collaborative community use, such as women's organizations or newcomer collectives.
- Shared examples of gardens that had successfully implemented such policies and the positive impacts they observed.

Cenit emphasized that creating equitable community gardens requires adequate funding, accountability, and representation in leadership. They highlighted the importance of collaborating with local governments to secure resources, implementing mechanisms like training and equity-focused leadership to maintain accountability, and ensuring that equity-denied groups have a voice in decision-making roles. In their final reflections, Cenit underscored the transformative potential of gardens to foster inclusion and urged participants to start with small, consistent actions to create lasting change. This inspired attendees to consider both immediate steps and long-term strategies to make their gardens more welcoming and representative.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Fostering a Culture of Change
Community Gardens as Catalysts for Equity and Resilience:
Cenit emphasized that community gardens serve as microcosms where systemic change can begin. By modeling equity and inclusion at a grassroots level, these spaces can influence broader societal attitudes and practices. Participants noted that gardens often bring together individuals from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and generational backgrounds, providing a natural platform for dialogue and collaboration.

Understanding Barriers to Access:
Participants discussed the importance of recognizing that equity-denied groups may face unique challenges, including limited access to resources, differing gardening practices, or social exclusion. Addressing these barriers requires intentional policies, such as:
- Providing Tools and Training: Offering workshops, mentorship, or subsidized resources for individuals
- Allocating Plots Inclusively: Creating application processes that encourage self-identification of needs while ensuring privacy and dignity. For instance, reserving plots for specific community groups (e.g., women's organizations or cultural collectives) or for shared use can enhance inclusivity.

Building Awareness and Accountability:
The group reflected on how tools like the Wheel of Power and the Equity Toolkit can help garden coordinators and members examine their own assumptions and inherited power dynamics. These tools also encourage leaders to consider accessibility from multiple angles, such as physical accessibility, language barriers, and financial constraints.

Challenges in Implementation:
- Capacity and Funding: Many gardens lack the resources or infrastructure to implement and sustain equity-focused initiatives. Compost Education Centre shared concerns about balancing aspirational equity goals with the practical challenges of limited staff and funding.
- Community Buy-In: Some participants noted that gaining support for equity initiatives from existing garden members can be challenging. Education and clear communication about the benefits of these changes are essential.

Fostering Belief in Change:
Cenit encouraged attendees to view community gardens as spaces for fostering long-term change. The group discussed how small actions, like diversifying leadership teams or integrating cultural celebrations into garden activities, can ripple outward to create a broader culture of inclusion.

Collaborative Learning and Sharing:
Participants identified knowledge-sharing as a critical component of fostering change. The Compost Education Centre, for example, requested examples of inclusive agreements and policies from established gardens to guide their development process. Attendees agreed on the importance of creating a repository of best practices and resources that all gardens in the region can access.

By building a belief in the power of collective action and equity, the discussion concluded with a shared commitment to ensuring that community gardens are welcoming, accessible, and representative of all who wish to participate.

ROUNDTABLE ACTION ITEMS

1. Landing Page and ways to continue communications
- Participants discussed the benefits of different platforms and wanted to strike a balance for a "go to" landing page for information and resources, as well as ways to communicate amongst themselves including potentially a Facebook group. CRFAIR will be working to establish this and have it ready for the new year.

Resource Sharing:
   - Participants to share examples of garden agreements and policies with Compost Education Centre to aid in the development of new agreements. It was agreed that this would be a great use of our landing page on the CRFAIR website.

2. Advocacy for Funding:
- Stay informed on municipal budget discussions and advocate for dedicated funding for community gardens.

3. Toolkit Utilization:
   - Community gardens to explore integrating the Equity Toolkit into leadership practices. Interest in a potential workshop was suggested in follow up conversations.

4. Continued Collaboration:
   - Participants to engage in ongoing knowledge exchange through the roundtable network.

For questions or to access additional resources from the roundtable, please contact CRFAIR at engagement@crfair.ca