



A GUIDE TO
SOCIAL IMPACT
THROUGH  URBAN
FARMING



This Guide to Social Impact through Urban Farming was created to help steer organizations through the process of establishing an urban farming program that strives to feed, educate and empower their communities and drive positive social change. Informed by a year-long case study of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVdP) Urban Farming Program (UFP) in Phoenix, this guide will assist nonprofit organizations nationwide in the development of a program that integrates urban agriculture and social sustainability initiatives. It is necessary to develop a careful plan that addresses the needs, desires and goals of the community that it seeks to serve. The primary component of this guide is the Urban Farming Program Planning Tool, which was created to help organizations to design and implement their own urban farming program through a four-step process. In addition to the planning tool, this guide provides information on the key actors involved in founding an urban farming program, the characteristics of a successful urban farmer and advice on common problems that may arise during this process.

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This report was prepared by the following ASU Rob and Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Service staff:

Madeline Mercer, Urban Farm Researcher, Author
Kelly Saunders, Program Manager
Patricia Reiter, Executive Director
Jason Franz, Strategic Marketing Manager
Ashley Quay, Graphic Design Specialist

And special thanks to Erica Hodges, Program Manager at Arizona State University

The partnership and leadership of St. Vincent De Paul's Urban Farm team was vital to the development of the Guide to Social Impact through Urban Farming:

Jessica Berg, Chief Program Officer
Shannon Clancy, Associate Executive Director and Chief Philanthropy Officer
David Smith, Director of Urban Farm Program
Nika Forte, Urban Farm Program Coordinator and Urban Farm Manager
Mary Ann Ricketts, Manager of the Mesa Campus Urban Farm
Taylor Scarpelli, Urban Farm Assistant
Charlie Kohlrabi, Celebrity Farm Cat

MEET THE AUTHOR



Madeline Mercer, the author of *The Guide to Creating Social Impact through Urban Farming*, is a student in Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University (ASU). A double major in Sustainability and Psychology, Madeline's primary areas of interest include urban food systems, community well-being and social equity. Madeline's background in food system sustainability began with research on the effects of food insecurity on children's physiological and psychological development, and this foundation has since led her to examine the social drivers and impacts of both local and international food insecurity. As Madeline's interests in sustainability and psychology have led her to the field of environmental psychology, her focus has evolved to examine how people's interactions with nature—specifically through participation in urban agriculture—can improve both their access to food and their overall well-being. As a recipient of two undergraduate research fellowships, Madeline has designed several studies to assess the effects of urban agriculture on individual and community well-being. As a member of ASU's Sustainability and Happiness Lab, she's combined these research studies with her interest in asset-based community development strategies, leading her to examine urban agriculture as a tool for expanding food security and promoting community connectedness and well-being. This research has culminated in her honors thesis project, in which she is working to help a local community garden to better connect with its local community by identifying and applying practices that promote social connectedness. It has also driven her to pursue her master's degree in Sustainability Solutions (MSUS) from ASU's School of Sustainability.

In addition to writing the "Guide to Social Impact through Urban Farming," Madeline designed the Garden in a Box Project, which is an extension of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's Urban Farming Together initiative. This project seeks to promote food security and nutrition among Title I schoolchildren by creating raised bed gardens and establishing garden and nutrition education programs. The Garden in a Box Project is supported by ASU's Woodside Community Action Grant and Valley of the Sun United Way.

SOCIAL IMPACT IN ACTION

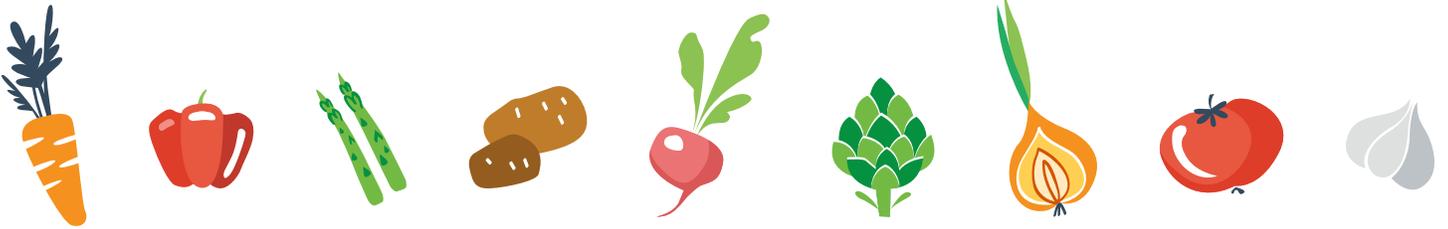


In 2018, the Rob and Melani Walton Urban Farm at the St. Vincent de Paul in Phoenix harvested more than 48,000 pounds of fresh produce, in addition to several hundred pounds of mushrooms, tilapia, and microgreens produced by on-site aquaponics and hydroponics systems. All of this food was brought directly to St. Vincent de Paul's onsite kitchens, where it was prepared and served to individuals and families experiencing homeless and food insecurity.

However, the Urban Farming Program's social impact extends far beyond food production.

- Since 2017, the Urban Farming Program has been working with St. Vincent de Paul's Family Wellness Program to instill a culture of health by creating monthly, bilingual recipes that feature produce grown by the Urban Farming Program. These recipes are accompanied by free cooking classes where participants learn the skills and confidence they need to prepare nutritious meals using freshly-harvested produce from the Rob and Melani Walton Urban Farm.
- During 2018, seventeen of St. Vincent de Paul's client volunteers donated more than 2,060 hours of service to the Urban Farming Program. These seventeen volunteers each began their volunteer experience homeless. Since then, eleven individuals are either in housing or close to housing, at least two are working, and one has entered to substance abuse rehabilitation and achieved sobriety.
- In 2018, the Urban Farming Program's compost initiative diverted more than 150,000 pounds of food waste from entering landfills and has transformed these food scraps into a nutrient-rich growing medium.
- In 2019, the Urban Farming Together initiative, which provides free, nutrient-rich compost and soil cultivated at the Urban Farm to local organizations that are interested in developing gardens was expanded to include the Garden in a Box Project. This project seeks to promote food security and nutrition among Title I schoolchildren by helping several local schools to establish gardens and gardening/nutrition education programs.

These are just a few examples of how an urban farm can drive substantial social impact and create healthier, happier and more mindful neighborhoods and communities. We hope you will share your experiences and impacts with us and others looking to create urban farming programs in their communities.



THE FOUR STEPS TO GROWING AN URBAN FARMING PROGRAM

The Urban Farming Program Planning Tool identifies four main steps in the process of establishing an urban farming program. These steps include: 1) Assess: reflect on organizational purpose, strengths and existing resources; 2) Engage and Envision: collaborate with community members and other stakeholders to jointly envision program goals; 3) Plan: incorporate existing resources, future goals and ideas to overcome potential barriers into a comprehensive action plan; and 4) Integrate and Enact: after integrating existing organizational practices, implement the new program, reflect on its progress and adjust its practices as needed. Because each social impact-oriented urban farming program will likely have varying goals, resources and organizational structures, this tool is meant to provide a flexible framework for the development of a variety of different programs.

STEP 1: ASSESS

The first step of the Urban Farming Program Planning Tool focuses on the assessment of your existing organization and its current mission, practices, resources and strengths. Alternatively, if you are using this guide to structure a new organization, this section may be helpful when crafting a mission statement and deciding upon its practices. Through a series of guiding questions, this section is meant to facilitate the process of reflection by offering a framework for assessing your organization. During this step, it is important to consider your organization's financial and physical assets, which may include grant funding, an existing garden space, tools, etc. It is also important to reflect upon the intangible assets of your organization and its members, which may include strengths like an abundance of gardening knowledge, nonprofit leadership skills or a strong support system within the organization.

In addition to reflecting on your organization, a crucial part of this first step includes a similar assessment process that focuses on the community that your organization serves. Before beginning the ideation process it is essential to learn more about the community, whether that be through individual interviews, focus groups or town hall meetings with residents and other community stakeholders. This stage is meant to increase your organization's understanding of community strengths, values and goals, which will help you to better tailor your initiative in the later steps of this planning process.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR
COMMUNITY IS ESSENTIAL

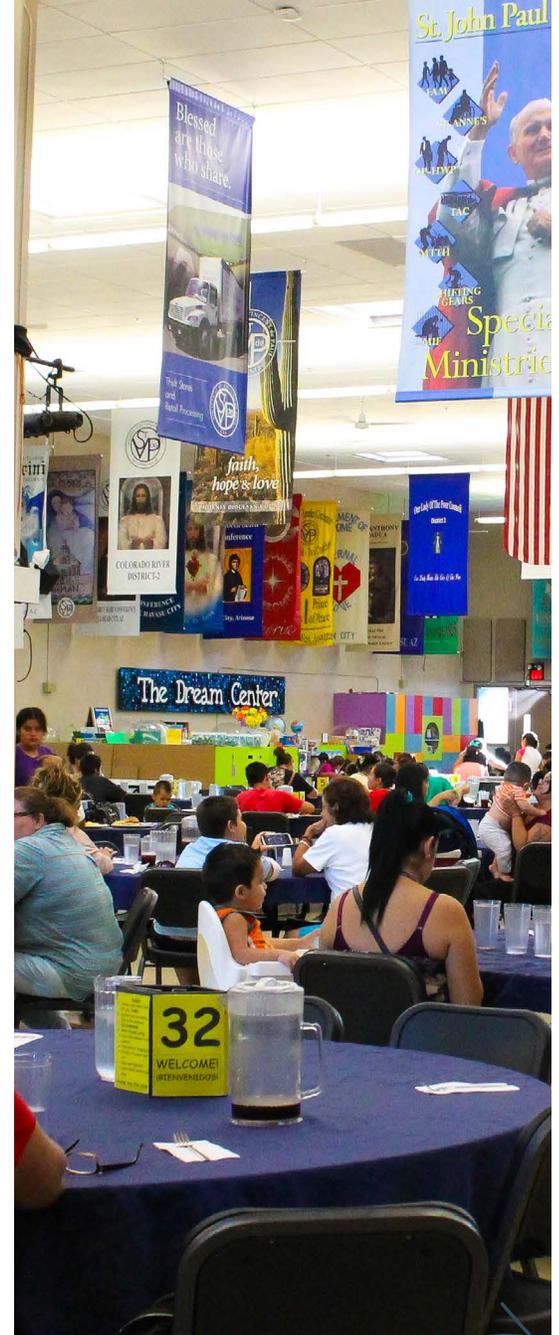


THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF DURING STEP 1:

- » What is your organization's mission?
- » What kind of resources do you currently have? (e.g. physical, social, monetary)
- » What are your organization's strengths?
- » Do you have any existing infrastructure? (e.g. a pre-existent garden or social programs)
- » What kind of community connections do you have? (e.g. volunteers, donors, local businesses, schools, other non-profit organizations)
- » Who are the key stakeholders in your community?
- » What kind of strengths and assets does your community have?
- » What does your community value?
- » What kind of social impact projects does the community currently have, and what types of goals are they trying to achieve?
 - » What kind of social issues do these projects address?
 - » How can you support and expand upon pre-existing community initiatives by offering additional resources and insight to help achieve community goals?
 - » How can you fit your project naturally into the existing social fabric of the community?



Worksheets for each step are available at the end of this guide.



STEP 2: ENGAGE AND ENVISION



This step marks the beginning of the planning process of your organization's social impact-oriented urban farming program. The two main aspects of this phase are engagement and ideation. The main purpose of this step is to begin to collaborate with community members and other stakeholders to envision program goals. By working closely with community members from the beginning of the planning process, your organization can tailor its practices and programs so that they are more relevant and better received by the community that you serve. Within this step,

one thing to consider is how your program can build upon community assets and strengths in order to help community members to achieve their goals.

When designing the program, it may be helpful to hold a workshop or several workshops with community stakeholders (e.g. leaders of community associations, local businesses, collegiate partners, community members, etc.) to identify the project's direction and goals. While working directly with the community, your organization must decide upon the specific impact

that it wishes to make through the establishment of an urban farming program. The organization must reflect on how this desired impact ties into the overarching organizational mission and community goals. This phase utilizes the information and reflections gathered in the first step, which serve as reference points during discussions of the specific program focus. This step likely requires a robust ideation process involving the creation of several potential ideas (e.g. based on the community's goals and needs, social impact-oriented urban farming programs may address topics like environmental education, nutrition, well-being, etc.) that are then narrowed down by a group selection process.

The program design process is also a fitting time to decide upon the program's participation structure and leadership practices. At this time, it is helpful to establish a committee that is comprised of both members of your organization and the local community who are willing to help manage the urban farm. Depending on the structure of your organization, this group of committed volunteers may be charged with leading volunteer groups or other day-to-day activities, which is essential for the upkeep of urban farms with limited numbers of paid staff.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF DURING STEP 2:

- » What are your organization's specific goals for its urban farming program?
 - » What kind of impact does your organization hope to make?
 - » How do these project goals align with your organization's mission?
 - » What existing social problems (e.g. food insecurity, homelessness, etc.) does this project seek to address?
 - » Who will benefit from this project, and how?
 - » In which areas will your project be implemented?
- » How do these programs build upon your organization's existing resources?
- » Are these goals aligned with the goals of the community and stakeholders/Do they have the approval of community members and stakeholders?
 - » How are you addressing conflicting visions in the envisioning process?
 - » Is there any opposition to the project? If so, how are you addressing it?
 - » How will community members engage with your organization's urban farming program? (e.g. what will participation in the program look like--volunteering, holding leadership positions, etc.)
- » What types of programs would your organization incorporate to help your community to achieve these goals?

Worksheets for each step are available at the end of this guide.

THINK ABOUT YOUR GOALS





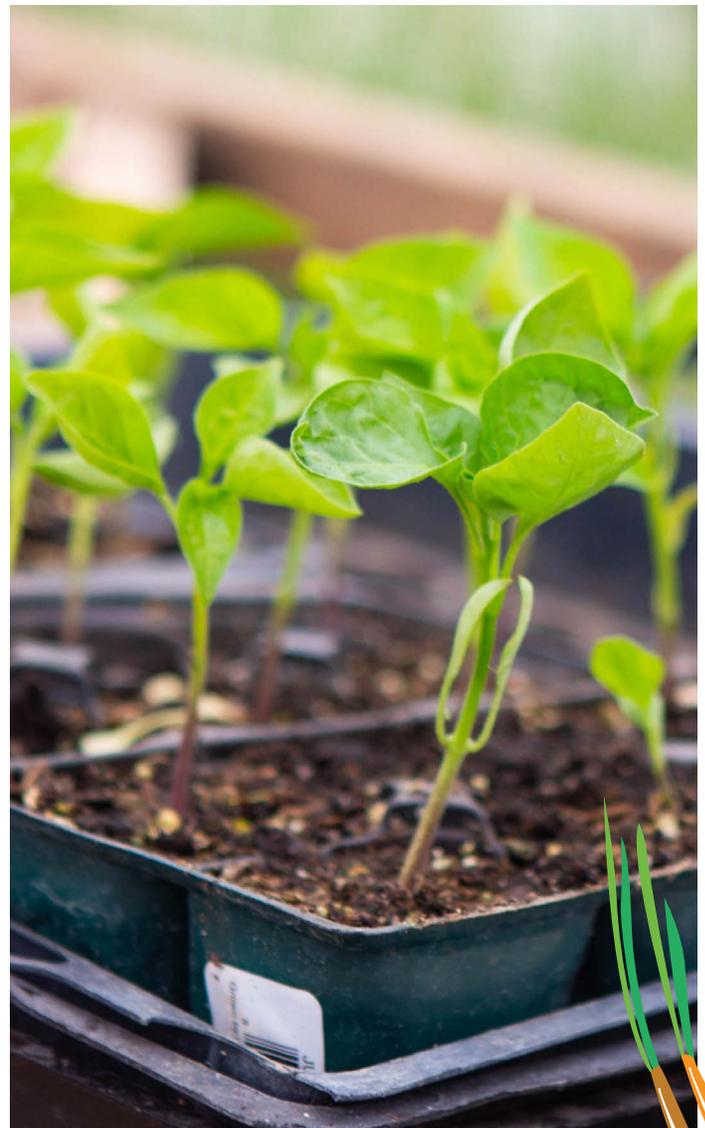
STEP 3: PLAN

This step focuses on the logistics of establishing an urban farming program, including the creation of a budget, determining a garden site, establishing program leadership and addressing any barriers that may otherwise inhibit the implementation process. This phase also focuses heavily on the establishment of community partnerships, as these relationships are crucial to the development and implementation of the urban farming program.

BUDGET AND FUNDING

To begin this stage, one of the first issues that should be addressed is the project budget and funding strategies. During this phase, it is necessary to consider your organization's budget as well as your organizational model (e.g. non-profit, charity, for-profit, etc.), as this may affect the type of funding that is available to you. Now that the plan for your organization's urban farming program has been solidified, it is also a key time to establish partnerships with local, regional, or national businesses and organizations who are willing to sponsor the project through monetary or in-kind donations. These partnerships may grow from the coalition building process that began during the second step and community partners may include local businesses, other community associations, local educational institutions, sports teams and any other members of your organization's community. See the next section of the guidebook –Key Actors in Establishing an Urban Farming Program– for more information

on establishing and maintaining relationships with a variety of community partners. In addition to pursuing partnerships and donation-based funding, it is also possible to obtain funding through various regional and national programs that support community agriculture initiatives.



SITE SELECTION & MUNICIPAL BARRIERS

The next phase of the planning process consists of two parts: site selection and identification and mitigation of potential municipal barriers to the development of an urban farming program. These processes must occur simultaneously, as zoning laws and other municipal land/water restrictions may affect site selection. The selection of a garden site is a crucial step in the planning of an urban farming program, as the growing space and its layout can affect the type and amount of produce that your organization can grow (e.g. a heavily-shaded space may not provide enough sunlight for some plants), and it will likely influence the implementation of your organization's connected social programs (e.g. a site near a busy street might be dangerous if your organization seeks to engage with young school children). Formerly vacant urban sites may include other potential hazards for garden site selection, such as soil contamination, which need to be addressed in the context of zoning regulations. The best way to overcome these potential barriers is by identifying and speaking with other urban agriculture initiatives in the area to understand the specific

local processes that they went through during the implementation of their program. For help locating nearby urban agriculture initiatives, try the American Community Garden Association's Garden Finder Tool.

The final portion of this step is to design the layout of your organization's urban farm. This step is largely dependent on your organization's garden site, as the size and topographical features of the site are likely to influence the design. In addition to being influenced by the site itself, the design of the urban farm will need to take your organization's intended growing strategy into account (e.g. traditional, in-ground garden beds; raised garden beds; aquaculture/hydroponics systems; etc.), as this alters the way in which the space is set up. In order to successfully integrate the urban farm into any existent social programs, it is also necessary for the design to reflect your organization's goals and all of the space's intended uses (e.g. if your organization's urban farming program seeks to promote mental health by providing spaces for wellness workshops in the urban farm, then the design must include a space for meditation, education and group activities).



Watch the full site transformation of the Rob and Melani Walton Urban Farm >>>

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF DURING STEP 3:

- » What is your organization's budget for its urban farming program?
 - » How is the project being funded?
 - » What kind of community partners have committed to helping to establish this project?
- » Where will your organization's urban farm be located?
 - » Does your organization own or rent this land?
 - » Are there any zoning laws or other restrictions that may prevent your organization from growing food here?
 - » Are the physical characteristics of your site suitable for gardening?
- » Does your organization face any apparent obstacles (ex: zoning laws, high rent/purchase prices for land, limited budget, etc.) in the implementation of its urban farming program?
- » What are the different components of an urban farming program that your organization lacks (e.g. physical spaces, such as a gardening space, demonstration kitchen for nutrition classes, meditation space; tools and gardening supplies; gardening knowledge, etc.), and how can your organization work with community partners to obtain and/or create them?
 - » Does your organization need the help of any experts (e.g. Master Gardeners, landscape architects, community organizers, etc.) to implement any aspects of your organization's urban farming program? If so, how is your organization getting them involved in its project?
- » How can your organization alter and/or build upon its existing infrastructure in order to fulfill its goals for its urban farming program?
 - » What types of spaces does your organization already have, and how suitable are they for the programs encompassed by the urban farming program?
- » Will the layout of your organization's chosen garden site assist with the facilitation of the urban farming program's initiatives and their overarching goals?
 - » What type of growing strategies will your organization employ and why?

Worksheets for each step are available at the end of this guide.



STEP 4: INTEGRATE AND ENACT

The final step of this process includes the integration of existing social programs into the urban farm program, followed by the implementation of the newly-coupled program and an assessment of its results. The most important part of this stage is the integration of the physical urban farming initiative into the existing social programs of an organization, as the urban farm is meant to support these social programs by serving as a tool for the creation of positive social impact. This process may involve the creation of new programs that specifically are designed to bridge the preexisting programs with the urban farm (e.g. the creation of a new “fresh from the garden” nutritional snack program to connect the urban farm with an ongoing nutrition initiative or after school program). It may also involve the modification of existing programs to incorporate the urban farming initiative (e.g. if your organization featured an initiative to encourage people to walk more steps per day, the urban farm could be featured as a track around which people could walk).

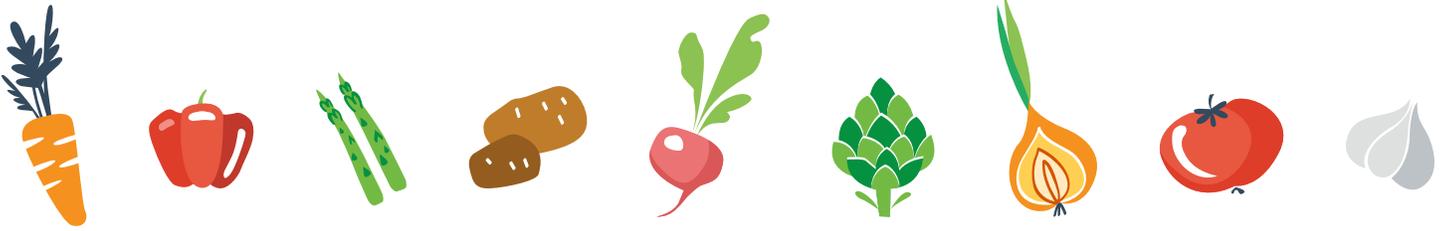
These types of inter-departmental collaborations have the potential to create multi-level benefits by enabling program participants to experience elements from both programs at once. Collaborations such as these help participants to make connections between their local food system and individual well-being while participating in projects and activities that focus on topics like wellness, education and community connection. With the overarching guidance and support of the leadership of both departments, as well as other members of your organization, collaborative efforts like social impact focused urban farming programs can enrich participants' experiences by exposing them to a wider variety of services and activities.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF DURING STEP 4:

- » What are some examples of ongoing initiatives within your organization that share similar social impact goals with your organization's new urban farming program?
- » How do your organization's existing social impact programs connect to its urban farm and its practices and layout?
 - » Which elements of the urban farm overlap with your organization's social programs (e.g. the produce is grown to increase food security, the garden space is used for educational purposes, etc.)?
- » Did the integrated programs which were designed specifically to help connect the efforts of your organization's urban farm to its other initiatives succeed in creating a positive social impact?
- » What types of difficulties has your organization encountered during the implementation process?
- » Are community members and other stakeholders supportive of the urban farming program's results?
- » How can your organization expand its urban farming program so that it engages and benefits more people?
 - » Which other populations are affected by the social problems that your organization seeks to address through its urban farming program?
 - » How could your organization expand its urban farming program's volunteer base?

Worksheets for each step are available at the end of this guide.





KEY ACTORS IN ESTABLISHING AN URBAN FARMING PROGRAM

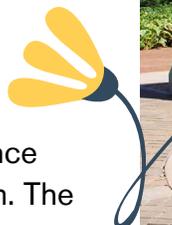
When establishing a social impact-focused urban farming program, it is essential to develop a strong support system with both local and regional partners. This section describes these different actors and their roles and discusses the importance of coalition building for a coupled urban farm and social impact program.

FOUNDING ORGANIZATION

The management of its founding organization plays a crucial role the success of any urban farming program. This founding organization – which may be focused solely on its urban agriculture program or may house a variety of different initiatives – is directly responsible for helping the new program to obtain support while working to integrate the program into its existing practices. In the case of St. Vincent de Paul’s Urban Farming Program, the program was created as a new initiative within a large nonprofit organization. Because the Urban Farming Program was an additional program for St. Vincent de Paul, it enjoyed the benefits of well structured upper management and direct financial support; however, the process of integrating the program into the larger organization still required constant adjustment and communication, especially as the initiative began to collaborate with other programs within the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The founding organization's roles include responsibility for the management, maintenance and expansion of their urban farming program. The

structure and mission of the founding organization plays a key role in defining the urban farming program’s practices and initiatives, as different organizational structures (e.g. small, non-profit organization vs. well-funded private school, etc.) affect the initiative’s social impact goals, their participant demographics and their organization of program leadership. While factors such as organization size, funding type, mission and location will shape each initiative into a unique urban farming program, the type of guidance and support that the founding organization provides plays the largest role in a program’s success.





COMMUNITY LEADERS

Community leaders and other well-known members of a community serve as liaisons between the founding organization and the community that it serves. Sometimes community leaders hold formal positions in local leadership organizations, such as being members of the city council or nonprofit boards; in other cases, their prominence within the community derives from their entrepreneurial success, their long-time residence within a community or their roles within other community associations such as churches or sports clubs. Due to their position of respect among other community members, they often serve as representatives of community interests, which makes them key stakeholders in the project planning process. By incorporating community leaders into the initial ideation and goal-setting processes, an organization is more likely to reflect the goals of the community that it seeks to serve.

Within urban farming programs like that of St. Vincent de Paul, involved community leaders often take on the role of a volunteer group leader, or they assist in the process of connecting interested volunteers and sponsors to the urban farming program. At St. Vincent de Paul, community leaders often serve as a point of connection for new partnerships and volunteer groups; this type of partnership is demonstrated by several leaders within the local Girl Scout community, who now participate in annual tours and regularly scheduled service days at the Rob and Melani Walton Urban Farm at St. Vincent de Paul.

REPRESENTATIVES OF COMMUNITY INTERESTS



BUSINESS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS

When establishing an urban farming program, strong relationships with local businesses and other nonprofit organizations can be an essential component of an organization's success. Local businesses may become key supporters of an organization's efforts, especially those of nonprofit organizations, through mutually beneficial partnerships. By partnering with local businesses and other nonprofits, organizations may receive a variety of benefits, such as monetary or in-kind item donations, free advertisement to promote program participation or increased volunteerism among that business's employees. The St. Vincent de Paul Urban Farming Program has experienced each type of these interactions, whether it be in the form of juice pulp donations from local juice bars, discounted or donated gardening supplies from local hardware stores, or individual business owners who sponsor the farming programs efforts.

One of St. Vincent de Paul's most prominent partnerships is that with Sustainable Integrated Farms (SIF), a locally-based hydroponics grower that maintains a large hydroponics system at the Rob and Melani Walton Urban Farm. This partnership is mutually beneficial, as the Urban Farming Program provides SIF with the space and utilities that it needs to grow in exchange for a weekly selection of highly nutritious, hydroponically-grown produce.

Another community partnership was formed when a member of a local agricultural lab began volunteering at St. Vincent de Paul's Urban Farming Program (UFP), which has resulted in the donation of several organic soil additives and nutrient tests for the three farms' soil and compost. A third significant partnership has grown between St. Vincent de Paul and Bonnie Plants, which has made a large donation of vegetables to the Urban Farming Program for the past several years as part of the Rob and Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Service Festival.

As seen with the UFP, these types of partnerships enable your organization to expand upon its programs or implement new practices. Oftentimes, partnerships with businesses or nonprofit organizations will involve not only a transfer of funds but also a transfer of expertise, as this type of relationship enables skilled and/or connected community members to support your initiative in a unique way. Ultimately, these kind of partnerships also help to root your organization's program within its local community, as the support of local businesses and other organizations demonstrate that the members of the local community support your efforts.



BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

UNIVERSITY PARTNERS

When establishing a social impact-focused urban farming program, a deeply embedded relationship with a local university or other educational institution will likely play an instrumental role in ensuring the program's success. By partnering with a nearby university, urban farming programs can reap the benefits of the latest research – such partnerships often provide small-scale farming programs with the opportunity to pilot new, innovative growing strategies – and of an easily accessible large population of student volunteers, many of which may be looking for internships or other opportunities to become involved. This is especially true of land grant universities with agricultural programs, which feature a vast network of educators, researchers and farming cooperative extension staff who are dedicated to the sharing helpful resources and advice with local farming programs.

The Urban Farming Program at St. Vincent de Paul has continuously benefited from its deep-rooted partnership with Arizona State University (ASU). While the UFP has only existed for about five years, St. Vincent de Paul's partnership with ASU began over 20 years ago and has been growing ever since. Both ASU students and faculty routinely become involved with Urban Farming Program and a variety of other initiatives at St. Vincent de Paul, and this has resulted in countless collaborations, which have taken the form of internships, new initiatives (e.g. the food scrap collection program in the St. Vincent de Paul kitchen was started by an ASU intern at the Urban Farming Program) and hundreds of service-related opportunities.



The most prominent collaboration between ASU and the Urban Farming Program has been its connection to the Rob and Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Service, which was established following an investment from the Rob and Melani Walton Foundation. This partnership includes the creation of this guidebook, as well as the co-creation of methods and targets to guide the UFP through its grant-funded expansion to increase the program's social, environmental and economic impact. Additionally, this partnership with the Rob and Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Service has connected the Urban Farming Program with a variety of other partners within its nonprofit, for-profit and university networks. One example of this is the UFP's partnership with ASU's Limitless Greenhouses, which are climate-controlled growing spaces that help to increase growing productivity by decreasing exposure to harmful climatic variations.



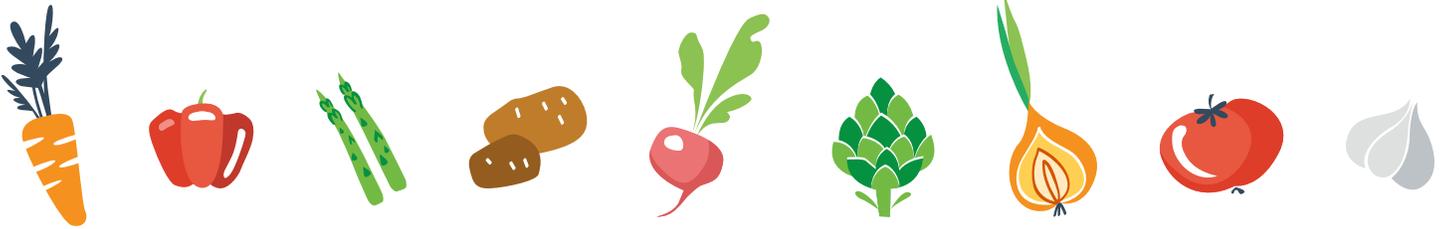
MASTER GARDENERS, FARMING EXTENSION SERVICES AND OTHER URBAN FARMS

Knowledgeable external sources of information, such as Master Gardeners, other urban farmers, and members of farming extension service, can serve as extremely helpful guides in the development of new urban farming programs. Members of organizations such as Master Gardener programs and cooperative extension programs are extensively trained in the fields of agriculture and gardening, meaning that they are excellent sources of knowledge and advice for a new agricultural project, especially if the members of your organization have limited gardening knowledge. In addition to connecting with a Master Gardener and farming cooperative extension in a county near you, it may be helpful to reach out to other urban farmers in your area. Building a network of fellow urban farmers is one of the best ways for an urban agriculture program to be successful, as it connects programs with similar goals and allows them to share best practices.

This has proved to be a helpful tactic for St. Vincent de Paul's Urban Farming Program. At St. Vincent de Paul, the UFP's expert farmers have connected with a variety of different urban agriculture organizations and experts in the Phoenix Metropolitan Area, which has enabled them to form a robust network of mutual support. Urban farmers within their network provide one another with physical resources (e.g. seeds, tools, soil, etc.), share planting strategies and irrigation advice and present workshops and tours at each others' garden sites in order to promote each urban farming program. From these three types of partnerships – with Master Gardeners, members of farming extensions and fellow urban farmers – the UFP has developed an Urban Farm Advisory Team, which was created to help the program to increase its productivity and develop its adaptive management strategies. This team consists of local urban agriculture experts, including Greg Peterson, the creator of Urban Farm U; irrigation professionals, who are currently

helping the Urban Farming Program to develop a water run-off collection system for the nearby buildings; several ASU professors in the School of Sustainability, who were connected to the Urban Farming Program through its partnership with the Rob and Melani Walton Sustainability Solutions Service; and several Phoenix-based, large-scale organic farmers, who are advising the Urban Farming Program on how they can increase their production.





PORTRAIT OF AN URBAN FARMER

In St. Vincent de Paul's Urban Farming Program, staff members exhibit the following qualities and values which have contributed to the program's success:



CREATIVITY. Urban farmers need to be able to come up with solutions to address an array of potential problems, both proactively and reactively.

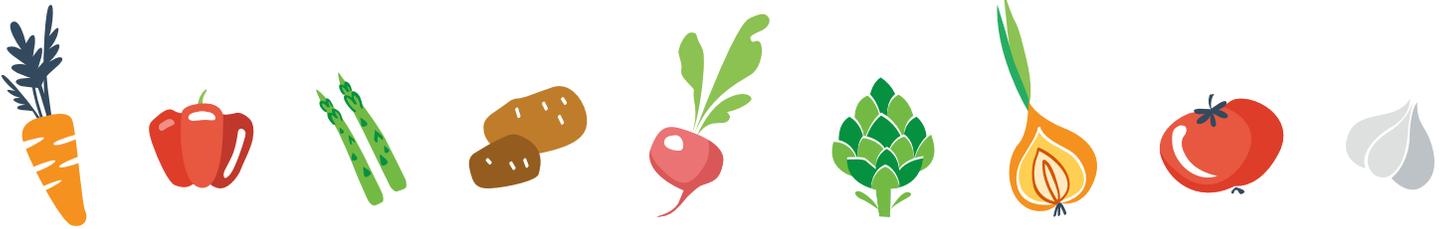
PERSEVERANCE. Even though urban farming can sometimes feel like you're fighting a losing battle – especially during the heat of the Arizona summer – urban farmers can't simply give up when faced with challenge. However, this doesn't mean that they have to do everything alone.

ABILITY TO COLLABORATE WITH OTHERS. Urban farmers need to be able to work effectively and graciously with others. Urban agriculture initiatives will often be almost completely reliant on community donors and volunteers for support, so it is essential for an urban farmer to possess strong communication and networking skills.

HUMILITY. Urban farmers – especially those who are coming from outside a community rather than from within – must actively demonstrate respect for the selected piece of land and for the community of people to whom it belongs. Urban farmers must remain open to new ideas and community perspectives, as the ones whose community is being “developed” ought to have a significant say in its development.

FLEXIBILITY. Urban Farmers need to be flexible and willing to experiment, as successful urban agriculture initiatives are dynamic and resilient in the face of a wide variety of potential problems.

ABILITY TO PRACTICE SELF-CARE. Urban farmers need to know when to ask for help. Support from others is essential, as having help from others enables one to sustain themselves. If an urban farmer can't maintain their own health, they will be unable to grow food and positively impact the health of others.



GROWING PAINS: POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WHEN STARTING AN URBAN FARM

When establishing a coupled urban farming and social impact initiative, there are several potential problems that could arise and complicate the process. This section outlines several types of common and recurring problems that have been experienced by the St. Vincent de Paul Urban Farming Program and it details several ways in which to avoid and address these issues in your urban farm for social impact.

THE PROBLEM: A CLASH OF GOALS

When developing a collaborative program that spans across multiple organizational departments and reflects the input of a variety of community stakeholders, it is likely that some difficulty will arise when deciding upon project goals. This may be especially true during Step 2: Engage and Envision, when the stakeholders involved in the process are tasked with defining the project's overall mission and sub-goals. However, as an urban farming program continues to grow and evolve, this type of conflict may reappear. An example of this type of conflict may include a disagreement over the primary purpose of an urban farm. For example, some members of an organization may feel that food production should be the primary focus of an urban farming program and thus may not place much importance on the site's aesthetics or the development of educational programs. Other members of the organization may see the urban farm as more of a learning space, where teaching others transferable garden skills is the number one priority.

THE FIX

#1: To navigate differences like these, the best course of action is to openly communicate, determine and document organizational/project goals before advancing to the next steps of the implementation process. By determining project goals through interactive, community-based workshops that engage a variety of stakeholders, it may be possible to avoid such conflicts by addressing any trade-offs early in the planning process through compromise and the integration of ideas. By being proactive and seeking consensus early on, your organization will develop a strong foundation of understanding among the different groups involved in your urban farming program.

#2: If your urban farming program is experiencing a conflict over project goals, it may be helpful to hold a meeting with your organization members, community members, and other stakeholders (e.g. community business partners, university partners, etc.) to discuss and renegotiate the goals that you set during the first and second steps of the planning process. During this meeting or goal



redefining workshop, it may be helpful to return to your organization's planning documents (e.g. from Step One and Step Two of the Urban Farming Program Planning Tool) to reflect upon the original mission and goals of your organization's urban farming program. These goals may have shifted throughout the process of implementation, and it may be necessary to readjust your group's goals as a result of difficulties, successes, or new ideas that your urban farming program has encountered. At this meeting or workshop, encourage open communication surrounding any points of

opposition and work to reach a consensus by integrating formerly conflicting goals. Returning to the previously given example of conflicting goals, one possible solution may be to select certain garden beds to be educational spaces, with the remaining beds serving as highly-productive grow spaces. Another solution may be the creation of an urban farm beautification committee or a community-driven project, such as an art installation created by local school children to be placed in the urban farm.





THE PROBLEM: NOT ENOUGH HANDS

Another common problem that is faced by urban farming programs, including that of St. Vincent de Paul, is a lack of the labor that is needed to maintain the urban farm. This problem can take several forms, such as a lack of consistent volunteers or having too few staff members to maintain the operation on their own. At St. Vincent de Paul, this problem has been most prevalent during the summer months, when the UFP has only a few volunteers due to the Arizona summer heat. This loss of consistent volunteers and volunteer groups causes the few paid staffers to become overworked and makes the UFP's goal of year-round growing difficult to maintain.

THE FIX

Assess the reasons behind this labor deficit. Here are several guiding questions to help identify potential sources of this issue:

1. Is this a seasonal problem, like at St. Vincent de Paul?
 - » Is it possible that the number of volunteers are diminished due to temperatures, holidays, etc.?
2. Is this problem the result of the farm's current volunteer hours being too limited?
 - » Are people within your community able to access the farm during its current hours of operation?
 - » Do the current volunteer hours reflect community members' availability in their work, school, and family schedules? (Ex. If your organization seeks to engage local parents in gardening and nutrition education, are there opportunities for people to get involved after the typical workday is over?)
3. Is there a lack of community interest in the project?
 - » Has the number of volunteers/program participants diminished only recently, or has this been an on-going problem for your organization's urban farming program?
 - » Did community members support this project, or was there a lack of community interest from the early stages of implementation?

After identifying the underlying causes of the lack of involvement in your organization's urban farm, it is possible to address this issue in a variety of ways.

1. If the lack of volunteers is a seasonal problem (e.g. due to high/low temperatures that discourage volunteering, or breaks in-between sessions of local organizations – such as schools' summer break – that cause them to stop bringing volunteers), it may be helpful to alter your urban farm's hours of operation to



reflect temperature changes or to reach out to other community groups that are not taking a break.

» For example, if the mission of your organization's urban farming program is to provide gardening and nutritional education for local school children, it might help to reach out to ongoing community associations (e.g. Girl/Boy Scout troops, children's sports teams, church youth groups, etc.) that do not break for the summer session in order to maintain urban farm and program participation.

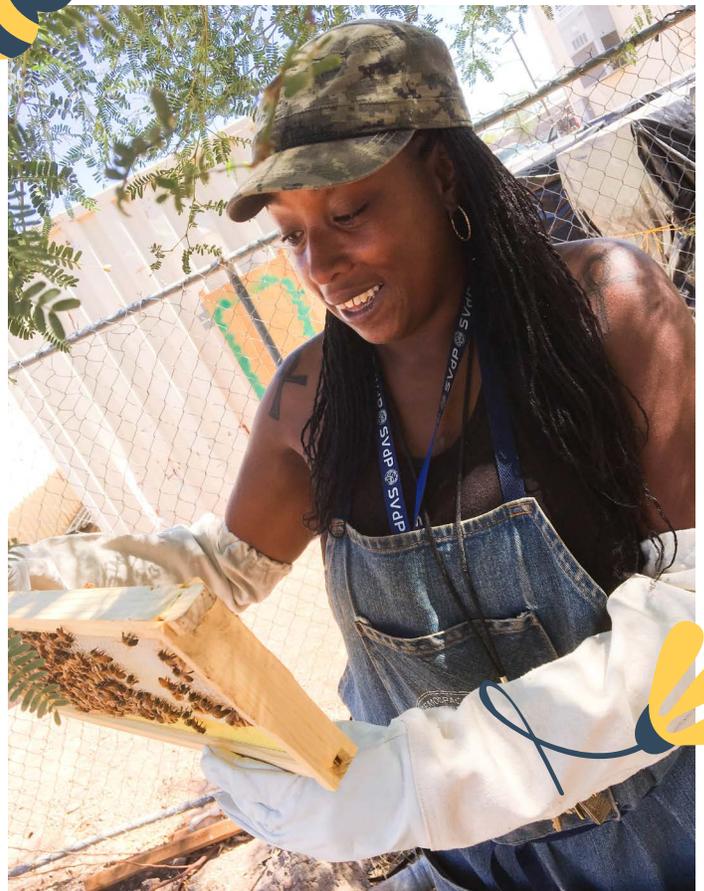
2. If the lack of participation is due to limited availability during your urban farm's hours of operation, your organization may need to adjust the times/days that it is open to the public and/or when it offers volunteer shifts and programs. To determine the best times/days for your urban farm to operate, it may be helpful to have a meeting with the local groups that your organization wishes to engage (e.g. whoever your urban farming program seeks to serve) in order to determine the times that they are most available. Since it is unlikely that one time/day will work for everyone, it may be helpful to extend the hours and/or days that your urban farm operates in order to attract more volunteers.

» For example, if your organization's urban farming program seeks to promote intergenerational connections within your community by pairing school-aged children and elderly volunteers to work in your urban farm, it might be helpful to offer volunteer opportunities on weekdays in the afternoon, after children get out of school.

3. If the lack of volunteers is due to a lack of community interest, it may be necessary to reevaluate your urban farming program's goals and methods. Reach out to your organization's community connections, such as community leaders, local business partners and local university partners, to gauge community

interest, and consider holding a neighborhood/community meeting at your organization's urban farm to get residents' perspective on your program's goals. If your organization's urban farming program is not meeting community members' needs or advancing their goals, then it may be necessary to alter the program to better appeal to community interests. Another method to increase community participation is to advertise your organization's urban farming program and incite community interest by holding an open house; your organization could also do this by sponsoring other community organizations by holding their events (e.g. holiday events, youth events, concerts, community picnics, etc.) at the urban farm.

» For example, one way to increase community involvement and support of the project might be to offer your organization's urban farm as a venue for a widely-attended community event such as an Easter egg hunt or a summer barbecue. This will help your organization to build local partnerships while also helping to build trust and rapport with community members.



THE PROBLEM: INTEGRATION FRUSTRATION

Another type of difficulty that your organization may encounter when implementing an urban farming program are the challenges that accompany the integration of a new program into an existing organization. This may take the form of differing goals (see Growing Pain Problem #1), or it may include errors caused by miscommunication or challenges with collaboration between departments. These types of issues are typical during the integration process, as it takes constant adjustment to successfully merge the efforts and goals of two or more programs. The St. Vincent de Paul UFP faced a variety of these types of challenges, especially in its initial collaboration with the SVdP kitchens. One of the earliest challenges that the programs faced involved the transportation of the fresh produce from the farm to the kitchen, as no one had thought to purchase wheelbarrows for that purpose! Over the years, other challenges in collaboration have arisen during the adoption of new initiatives, like when the urban farm began to compost kitchen scraps, which have required both programs to adjust their existing practices.

THE FIX

The best way that St. Vincent de Paul has found to address difficulties with interdepartmental collaboration is to promote immediate open communication and flexibility within partnerships. This involves addressing problems within shared initiatives as soon as they arise through clear and respectful discussion between program leaders. This will likely include a discussion that brings the problem to the attention of all of the programs involved, followed by a collective brainstorming session to determine a solution. During the process of implementing an urban farming program, it is likely that your organization will have to readjust its practices and initiatives in order to account for any difficulties that it encounters. Since it is impossible to plan for everything, the best way to approach issues such as these is to remain flexible and willing to cooperate with other departments to resolve them together.

PROMOTE IMMEDIATE OPEN COMMUNICATION AND FLEXIBILITY



THE PROBLEM: AGRICULTURAL ISSUES

A fourth common set of problems that budding urban farming programs face are agricultural issues that disrupt their urban farms' production. These types of issues are often the result of unforeseen circumstances, whether they be climatic challenges (e.g. droughts, high temperatures, late frosts, etc.), sudden plant afflictions (e.g. pests or plant diseases) or infrastructure issues (e.g. irrigation problems, etc.). The St. Vincent de Paul UFP has dealt with its share of these types of issues. Last summer, the program faced record-high summer temperatures, a broken irrigation system and a squash bug infestation. These issues have limited their urban farms' productivity and diminished their harvest. While these problems can be difficult to predict, there are several ways in which urban farming programs can try to prevent them.

THE FIX

#1: The best course of action to prevent agricultural problems is to work proactively to increase the resilience of your organization's urban farm. These type of preventative measures may take a variety of forms depending on which agricultural issues they seek to address, so this section will offer several potential actions that your organization can take.

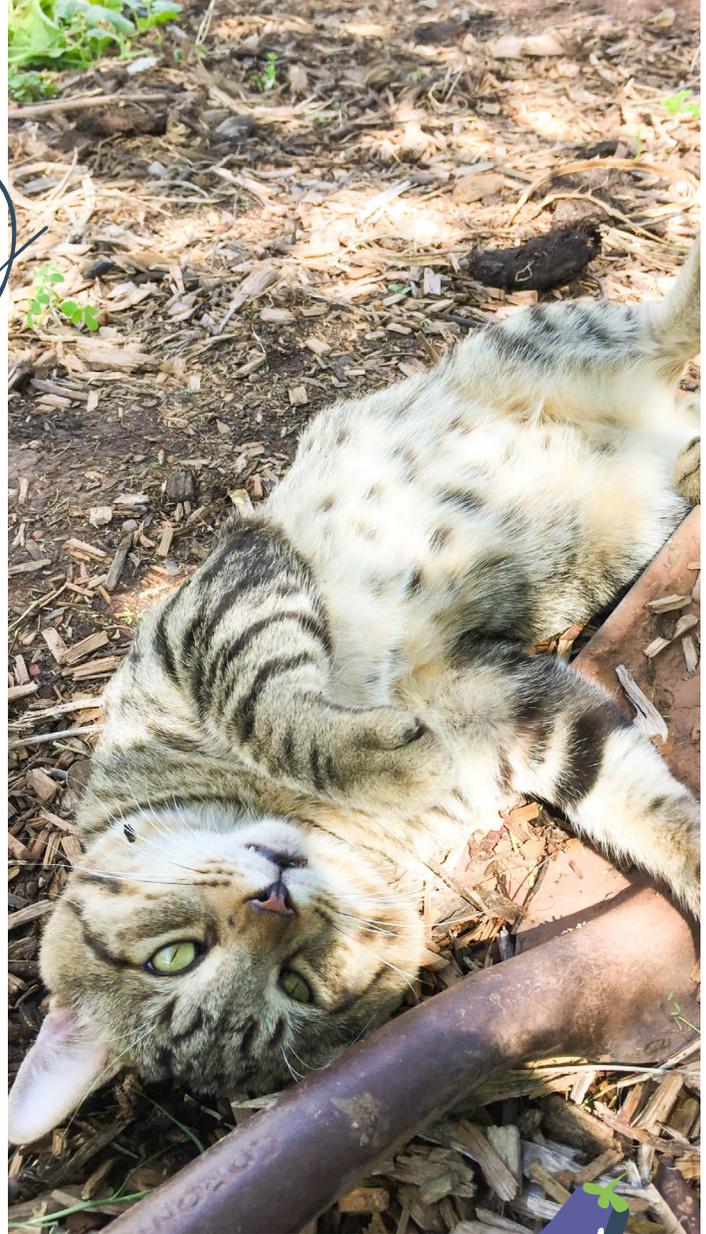
1. To prevent climatic challenges: When working to prevent damage to your urban farm's crops, one of the best ways to be proactive is to anticipate climatic changes, such as high temperatures or frosts, and implement preventative protections. These protections may include the construction of shade structures or the addition of row covers to your garden beds, which may help to protect your urban farm's produce. At St. Vincent de Paul, the UFP has constructed several retractable shade structures that protect the crops from the harsh summer sun.
2. To prevent plant afflictions: To prevent plant afflictions, it may be helpful to first research the varieties of plants that your organization intends to grow. This will enable your urban farmers to identify their plants' ideal growing conditions and the warning signs of potential problems that may occur (e.g. how much sunlight certain types of plant need, what are some of the indicators of nutrient deficiencies are in these types of plants, etc.). This background research is extremely helpful during the garden planning process of each season, especially if your organization's members have limited knowledge of gardening. This can help your urban farmers to certain address issues early on (e.g. identifying a plant disease and removing infected plants before it spreads). Another way to prevent plant afflictions is through the promotion of soil health, which can be done through the regular assessment of one's soil nutrients and through preventative practices such as crop rotation.



3. To prevent irrigation challenges: One way to prevent failing irrigation systems is to conduct regular checks for leaks and blockages. However, because these types of issues may occur suddenly, it is best to have a watering back-up plan (e.g. on-site hoses and a hand-watering schedule) in case the irrigation system at your organization's urban farm fails. Additionally, it helps to have a regular relationship with a local irrigation repair company, as a connection with someone who is familiar with your urban farm's irrigation system will better enable them to fix any damage that might occur.

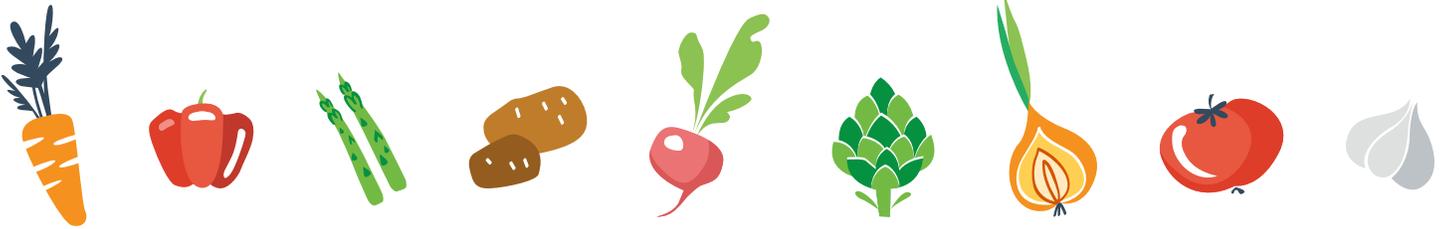


#2: For any unexpected problems that do occur, the best fix is to be flexible and have perseverance. While preventative measures such as those listed above may help to limit the agricultural problems that your organization's urban farm might face, farming can be highly unpredictable and, thus, requires the commitment and knowledge to overcome any challenges that do occur. For information on how to address specific climatic concerns or plant blights, local farming cooperatives, Master Gardeners and other sources for gardening information will likely serve as the best resources.



CONCLUSION AND FINAL ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

While most social impact-oriented urban farming programs are likely to vary in form and in focus, there are several common features that enable initiatives such as these to thrive. More specifically, this type of program will grow in the presence of three main components: 1) a clear, community-supported vision; 2) a group of dedicated individuals; and 3) a collective mindset of perseverance and creativity to overcome any potential challenges. These three aspects have been essential to the abundant success of SVdP's Urban Farming Program, and they are reflected in the final words of advice offered by its expert urban farmers. David Smith, Director of the Urban Farming Program, often quips, "farming is hard" as a way of explaining the commitment and creativity that is necessary in the growing process of produce and programs alike. Nika Forte, the Urban Farm Manager/Program Coordinator, emphasizes the importance of embracing failure and using it to foster future growth, since, in her words, "failure brings lessons, and anything worth having is worth the hard work." Mary Ann Ricketts, the co-founder of the Mesa Campus Urban Farm, considers persistence and social support to be the most important aspects of SVdP's UFP. Ultimately, it is her vision of a successful urban farming program that encapsulates that of St. Vincent de Paul: "here, everyone is busy and works hard, but they all come together at the end to enjoy their place of food, community and peace."



HELPFUL GUIDES

WORKING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

For more information on identifying community resources through asset mapping, see pages 14-16 in the Community Garden Management Toolkit, which explain asset-based community development and offer an example of a community garden asset map. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

For additional information on asset-based community development, review the Clear Impact Asset Mapping Toolkit [>>>](#)

To assess community interest in a social impact-oriented urban agriculture project, try the community readiness exercise on page 6 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

For a list of common community concerns with urban agriculture projects (as well as tips on how to avoid them), see page 71 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

To facilitate effective and compassionate communication between community stakeholders, consider holding a meeting in which stakeholders can interact and share ideas. For assistance creating a stakeholder meeting agenda, see pages 58-61 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

CREATING A BUDGET

For assistance developing a budget for your urban agriculture project, see pages 40-44 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

For additional information, see the Partnership for Sustainable Communities' Urban Farm Business Plan Handbook [>>>](#)

DEVELOPING THE FARM

To assess the chosen site of your urban farm, complete the Site Assessment Exercise on pages 17-19 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

For a sample list of urban farm tasks, see page 45 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

For a sample list of tools and supplies needed for an urban farm, see page 13 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

For an introduction to sustainable growing practices, see pages 74-75 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

For information on companion planting, see pages 78 and 83 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit. [Community Garden Management Toolkit >>>](#)

For a more comprehensive list of companion planting combinations, see the Urban Farmer's Companion Planting Chart [>>>](#)

For information on composting, see pages 76-77 of the Community Garden Management Toolkit [>>>](#) and the Institute for Local Self Reliance's Guide to Community Composting [>>>](#)

For information on soil testing, see the University of California Cooperative Extension guide [>>>](#)

For information on identifying and utilizing microclimates, see Klamath Knot's page on macro and micro climates [>>>](#)

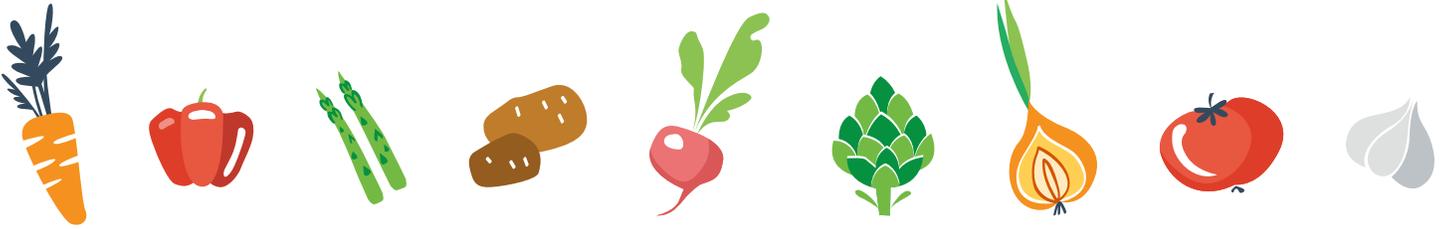
For more guidance on microclimates, see the following webpages:

- [GrowVeg Microclimates Page >>>](#)
- [Learning with Experts Microclimates Page >>>](#)
- [Tree Yo Permaculture Handbook >>>](#)

For help selecting an irrigation system, see Gra-Mac Distributing's Irrigation Guide [>>>](#)

For additional resources, visit the FAO's guide to choosing an irrigation method [>>>](#)





GET STARTED

STEP 1: ASSESS

What is your organization's mission?

What kind of resources do you currently have? (e.g. physical, social, monetary)

What are your organization's strengths?

Do you have any existing infrastructure? (e.g. a pre-existent garden or social programs)

What kind of community connections do you have? (e.g. volunteers, donors, local businesses, schools, other non-profit organizations)

Who are the key stakeholders in your community? _____

What kind of strengths and assets does your community have?

What does your community value?

What kind of social impact projects does the community currently have, and what types of goals are they trying to achieve?

– What kind of social issues do these projects address?

– How can you support and expand upon pre-existing community initiatives by offering additional resources and insight to help achieve community goals?

– How can you fit your project naturally into the existing social fabric of the community?



STEP 2: ENGAGE AND ENVISION

What are your organization's specific goals for its urban farming program?

– What kind of impact does your organization hope to make?

– How do these project goals align with your organization's mission?

– What existing social problems (e.g. food insecurity, homelessness, etc.) does this project seek to address?

– Who will benefit from this project, and how?

– In which areas will your project be implemented?

How do these programs build upon your organization's existing resources?

Are these goals aligned with the goals of the community and stakeholders/Do they have the approval of community members and stakeholders?

– How are you addressing conflicting visions in the envisioning process?

– Is there any opposition to the project? If so, how are you addressing it?

– How will community members engage with your organization's urban farming program? (e.g. what will participation in the program look like--volunteering, holding leadership positions, etc.)

What types of programs would your organization incorporate to help your community to achieve these goals?



STEP 3: PLAN

What is your organization's budget for its urban farming program?

-
- How is the project being funded? _____
 - What kind of community partners have committed to helping to establish this project?

Where will your organization's urban farm be located? _____

- Does your organization own or rent this land? _____
- Are there any zoning laws or other restrictions that may prevent your organization from growing food here? _____
- Are the physical characteristics of your site suitable for gardening?

Does your organization face any apparent obstacles (ex: zoning laws, high rent/purchase prices for land, limited budget, etc.) in the implementation of its urban farming program?

What are the different components of an urban farming program that your organization lacks (e.g. physical spaces, such as a gardening space, demonstration kitchen for nutrition classes, meditation space; tools and gardening supplies; gardening knowledge, etc.), and how can your organization work with community partners to obtain and/or create them?

-
- Does your organization need the help of any experts (e.g. Master Gardeners, landscape architects, community organizers, etc.) to implement any aspects of your organization's urban farming program? If so, how is your organization getting them involved in its project?

How can your organization alter and/or build upon its existing infrastructure in order to fulfill its goals for its urban farming program?

-
- What types of spaces does your organization already have, and how suitable are they for the programs encompassed by the urban farming program?

Will the layout of your organization's chosen garden site assist with the facilitation of the urban farming program's initiatives and their overarching goals? _____

- What type of growing strategies will your organization employ and why?



STEP 4: INTEGRATE AND ENACT

What are some examples of ongoing initiatives within your organization that share similar social impact goals with your organization's new urban farming program?

How do your organization's existing social impact programs connect to its urban farm and its practices and layout?

- Which elements of the urban farm overlap with your organization's social programs (e.g. the produce is grown to increase food security, the garden space is used for educational purposes, etc.)?
-

Did the integrated programs which were designed specifically to help connect the efforts of your organization's urban farm to its other initiatives succeed in creating a positive social impact?

What types of difficulties has your organization encountered during the implementation process?

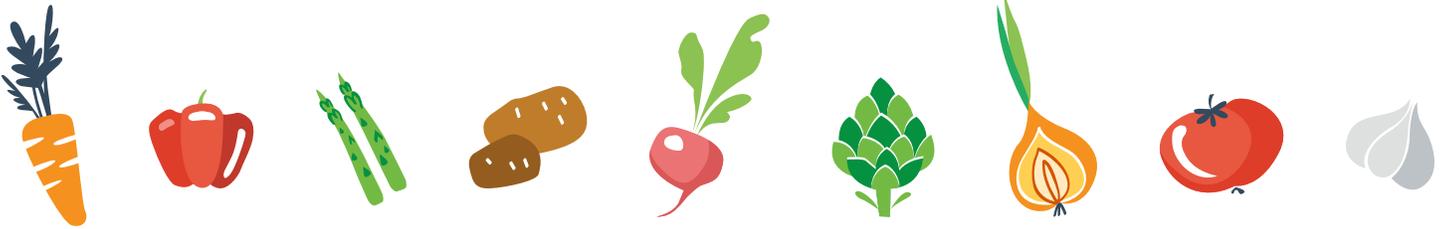
Are community members and other stakeholders supportive of the urban farming program's results?

How can your organization expand its urban farming program so that it engages and benefits more people?

- Which other populations are affected by the social problems that your organization seeks to address through its urban farming program?
-

- How could your organization expand its urban farming program's volunteer base?
-
-





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