

Host a Community Planning Event

Overview: By facilitating a planning event, youth will see the benefit of collective brainstorming and gain connections in their community. Through this experience, they will understand the value of teamwork and collaboration.

Grade Level/Range: 6th – 12th

Objectives:

- To engage youth, parents, teachers, staff and other community members in planning the garden.
- To increase and strengthen support for your youth gardening program to ensure its sustainability.

Time: 2 hours

Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils
- Easel Paper
- Markers
- Small, dot stickers

Background Information: Establishing and maintaining a core group of supporters is key to developing a sustainable youth garden program. One way to create a strong support group is to give stakeholders a chance to share their ideas about the garden program and make them feel like an important part of the planning process. Hosting regular community planning events is one way to provide an opportunity to brainstorm together.

Laying the Groundwork: Ask youth to consider the following questions:

- Who should be invited to a planning event for the garden? How can we contact them?
- Why do we want to include a lot of people in the planning process? What are some of the benefits of asking other people for their ideas?

Exploration: The following steps outline the procedures for conducting a community planning event. To help maintain communication and build ownership in the garden program, an annual planning event can be held to brainstorm ideas for new and existing youth gardens. Explain to youth that by gathering input from everyone who has a stake in the garden, you will strengthen support for the program. To learn from the experience, involve your young gardeners in as many steps as possible.

1. Begin by making a list of everyone you think might have an interest in the garden including students, teachers, staff, parents, volunteers, neighbors and other community members.
2. Choose a date, time and place for the event. Make sure you have at least 3 weeks to notify everyone.
3. Create an announcement inviting people to the event. Send the announcement by email or contact local newsletters or newspapers. Add to local school or community websites or Facebook page. Post on a sign in front of the garden. Contact people directly by email or by phone.
4. Recruit student or adult volunteers to help on the day of the events. You will need people to serve as greeters to welcome attendees and show them where to go. Depending on the time of day, you may also want to prepare refreshments.
5. On the day of the event make sure your space is large enough for the anticipated crowd with enough chairs and tables for everyone to sit down.

6. Begin the meeting with introductions of attendees. Ask them to give a brief statement about their interest in the garden.
7. Next break the larger group into small groups of 6 to 8 individuals. Make sure that each group has representation from all parties present. For example, make sure each group has at least one student, a parent, a community volunteer, a teacher, etc.
8. If you are creating a new garden, ask each group to brainstorm a list of all the features they think should be included in the garden. If you have an existing garden, ask the participants to make a list of possible additions and potential new projects for the garden.
9. After they have time to discuss, bring the groups back together to share their lists. Ask someone to serve as a recorder to write down all the suggestions on easel paper creating a master list. Eliminate duplicates and group similar suggestions together.
10. Next post the ideas around the room. Give each participant 5 to 10 dot stickers. Ask them to place the dots beside the features or ideas they think are most important to include or add to the garden. They can use all their dots on one item or spread them out across several suggestions. As an example, perhaps one of the suggestions was to create a kitchen garden to grow vegetables for cooking demonstrations. The school nutritionist might really like that idea and think it is important so he/she can place all of his/her dots beside that idea. The intention of this activity is to help prioritize the needs and suggestions.
11. Conclude the planning session by summarizing the findings and thanking everyone for attending. Make sure they know it may not be feasible to implement all the suggestions immediately, but that their input will help with long term planning.

Making Connections: After the session, work with students to create a summary of the event and a listing of the top priorities identified. Share the summary with participants and also publicize in newsletters, newspapers and on community websites for those who could not attend. Your garden committee will then use the information collected to create a plan of action for your garden program.

Branching Out:

English: Ask students to write a paper about the community planning event and what they learned from participating.