

Community Growing Projects

Community Growing Projects in universities and colleges are inherently valuable for social inclusion, outdoor space, biodiversity, sustainable food, health and wellbeing, and building a community. However, there is hugely beneficial secondary value in the opportunities growing projects pose for collaboration and partnership with other organisations or internal groups, strengthening the reach of sustainability activities and teams.

Starting out

- Scoping out interest with staff and students will ensure everyone is involved with the journey, and will secure volunteers and interested parties from the beginning who can champion the project with their own peer groups

Finding space

- Unused spaces can often be freed up for projects by liaising with grounds teams. Creating a positive ongoing relationship is key. Defining responsibilities to relieve concerns about maintenance is important to break down barriers with involved departments
- A spot with sunlight but that is sheltered from the elements will not only encourage growth but also participation in gardening activities, and use of the garden as a social space
- Locating the garden in a space enclosed by campus buildings will help discourage vandalism



Cost

- Costs can be relatively low (£1,000-£2,000) as maintenance should be volunteer driven. Grounds and Estates Teams will usually have the equipment to get a site up and running, and following maintenance costs such as seed buying tend to be low
- As the project involves both enhancing campus biodiversity and staff/student engagement there may be opportunities for funding, although this may require monitoring volunteer hours and food produced

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Staff and Student Involvement

- Student involvement could come from interested individuals, societies or students of related courses. However, due to the work load being Spring and Summer based it is difficult for students to see out the full growing cycle
- Student engagement can be started with a Fresher's Week 'Sustainability Campus Tour'
- Staff involvement has the potential for longer term champions who can form the basis for the community with students. Staff are more likely to be around throughout the year, and so can see and support the full growing cycle - and enjoy the summer harvest!
- Creating a platform for disseminating news or information and to facilitate discussion from the engaged community will be essential, especially for sharing rotas or growing schedules
- Holding open days where interested parties can come with enquiries about how to get involved and what to do will facilitate wider involvement, as many people won't come with the skills and knowledge they need to get stuck in straight away
- The key to the community is that participants need not be expert gardeners. The project can be a process of knowledge sharing and community learning



Partnerships

Partnerships can enhance the reach of the positive impacts of having a community garden, and some partnerships may ensure the space is maintained year-round. Examples of partnerships are:

- Charities or social enterprises (potentially providing food for community meals)
- Internal HR, health and wellbeing departments or interested parties
- Local schools and nurseries
- Teaching staff and researchers may be interested in outdoor learning or growing-related projects for students
- As growing projects tend to be very visual, corporate communications departments could be keen to share or highlight the work done through their main channels

All photos from University of Strathclyde's Community Garden, 2017

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