



# GROWING EDUCATION

COMMUNITY GARDENS BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

WITH EDUCATION PROVIDERS





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Produced as part of the *Growing Communities WA* project (2008 – 2010) with funding support from Lotterywest, City of Swan and Town of Cambridge.

This resource was informed by action research carried out for the Growing Communities WA project with Perth City Farm from October 2009 to June 2010. Special thanks to the garden for partnering in the research. City Farm Perth is located beside Claisebrook Railway Station at 1 City Farm Place, East Perth ([www.cityfarmperth.org.au](http://www.cityfarmperth.org.au)).

Cover Photo: Anne Goodall

Citation: Mitchell, G. and Goodall, A. (2010). *Growing Education: Community gardens building effective partnerships with education providers*. Perth: Growing Communities WA.

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## INTRODUCTION

Community gardens are strengthened through having partnerships with a diverse range of organisations and groups. Partnerships help to bring in additional people and resources and expand the supporter base for gardens. Community gardens offer almost never-ending opportunities for learning across a wide range of areas and for putting knowledge and skills into practice. This makes them great 'outdoor classroom' venues for informal learning, school-based learning, formal education and training courses, and lifelong learning. This resource offers some tips to assist community gardens in building effective partnerships with education providers.

The resource was informed by action research carried out for the Growing Communities WA project with Perth City Farm from October 2009 to June 2010. It aims to complement other resources designed to assist gardens in developing partnerships with schools. The resource is designed specifically for community self-managed gardens, but may also be relevant to agency-managed and Local Council-managed. Whilst it draws on the experience of community gardens in Western Australia in particular, most of the information and tips provided will be relevant for community gardens anywhere.

## POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

Education partnerships with community gardens can include provision of formal or informal learning opportunities. 'Informal' may be one-off workshops, courses without assessment, garden tours, children's sessions, arts sessions and so on. 'Formal' are accredited courses run through TAFE or other private education providers. Learning opportunities can be for all age groups, abilities and backgrounds – pre-school, school, teens, families, adults, seniors, cross-cultural groups, or people living with mental health or disability issues. Partnerships can generate a range of benefits for gardens and education providers.

## BENEFITS OF EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS (FOR GARDENS)

- Enables gardens to provide learning opportunities to specific target groups in the community
- Provides a way for gardens to focus on a particular project and get assistance with the development or implementation of a project
- Brings new people (students, teachers) into the garden who may not otherwise engage with it
- Funds educational activities through the provision of lecturers, course coordinator hours, venue hire, catering and/or materials
- Provides educational infrastructure such as course advertising, enrolment, assessment, certificates and student insurance
- Raises the profile of the garden with government bodies and other stakeholders in the community sector
- Provides healthy, flexible, sustainable, nurturing learning opportunities for all the community, including marginalised groups and those who are disengaged from more traditional educational settings
- Enables gardens to educate their community on sustainable relevant topics such as composting, permaculture, food security, vegetable gardening, organic methods, recycling, or photovoltaics.

## BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GARDEN PARTNERSHIPS (FOR EDUCATION PROVIDERS)

- Enables appropriate provision of flexible learning opportunities for marginalised groups and those who are disengaged from more traditional educational settings
- Provides a conduit for the education provider to access and engage new target groups within the community
- Provides a relevant and stimulating setting for courses in sustainability, arts, horticulture, landscaping, small business enterprise or other cutting-edge topics
- Demonstrates an education provider's social and environmental consciousness
- Enables education providers to address literacy, numeracy and access issues in creative and effective ways outside a classroom setting

## TYPES OF EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of different types of education partnership opportunities available to gardens. The following examples drawn from the experience of Perth City Farm may be helpful in identifying education partnership opportunities for your garden.

OPPORTUNITY	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Existing short courses offered at garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courses on permaculture, worms, composting, sustainable lifestyles</li> <li>• delivered by environmental groups, garden staff, or TAFE staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permaculture sessions at City Farm</li> <li>• Professional development days for teachers at City Farm</li> </ul>
Student placements* at garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAFE students working at garden on a project of value to garden, under supervision of garden staff / volunteers and with guidance from TAFE lecturer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colour Sound Harmony Peace Festival at City Farm</li> <li>• Self-guided tour pamphlet for City Farm</li> <li>• Nursery manual for City Farm</li> </ul>
TAFE courses focussed on a particular project identified by the garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular courses adapted to deliver in the context of a project of value to garden</li> <li>• Literacy, numeracy and other competencies built into the course</li> <li>• Funding obtained by TAFE</li> <li>• Courses delivered at garden by TAFE staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NOW* course around an Organic Fruit and Vegetable Box Project for City Farm</li> <li>• GATE* course around a Men's Shed Project at City Farm</li> </ul>
High school students (16 yr olds) doing TAFE course* at garden 1 day/per wk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students identified by high schools</li> <li>• Course delivered by garden staff for TAFE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work/study in garden nursery</li> <li>• Small construction projects</li> <li>• Some students choose to volunteer extra time on other days for work experience</li> </ul>
TAFE students from garden involved in external projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students gain extra experience through garden partnership with other projects</li> <li>• Garden/TAFE staff go offsite with students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Farm students to be involved at various stages with City Orchard being constructed at Perth Cultural Centre in Northbridge</li> </ul>
School programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short visits of 1-4 hours</li> <li>• Organised by individual primary and high school teachers</li> <li>• Garden tour or educational element delivered by garden staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tour on aspects of City Farm</li> <li>• Topics linked to science or environment curriculum areas</li> <li>• Worm farms, biology of worms, growing things, composting</li> </ul>

External grants for facilities tied to educational outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garden is funded to build/ purchase an asset</li> <li>• Garden arranges for courses to provide employment and training outcomes from the asset</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Farm Café built and equipped by large Federal Government grant with proviso that garden organises TAFE and/or private provider to deliver training in hospitality, business and employability skills</li> </ul>
Disability groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner organisation provides transport, carers, activities</li> <li>• Delivery by partner staff and/or garden staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular weekly group from Nulsen Haven attend art-based program working on mosaic tiles and colourful vegetable box gardens</li> </ul>
Educational opportunities with business and community links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links with service clubs, businesses, cultural groups, or health services provide valuable learning opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual rotary club breakfast at City Farm with garden speaker</li> <li>• Gull staff day out on 'Sustainable Quiz' with stops at City Farm and other sustainable contexts</li> <li>• Mental health agency participants in courses and projects</li> </ul>
Festivals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run on a theme or topic</li> <li>• Group uses/hires garden venue</li> <li>• Provide creative and vibrant learning opportunities</li> <li>• Bring public into contact with garden and sustainable issues</li> <li>• Raises funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eco Fairy Festival at City farm in partnership with Eco Fairy team</li> <li>• The Great Re-skilling Day at City Farm in partnership with Permaculture Association of WA</li> </ul>

\* TAFE courses run at City Farm October 2009 – June 2010:

- **NOW** - New Opportunities for Women (18 weeks)
- **GATE** – Certificate I in Gaining Access to Training and Employment (8 weeks)
- **High school students** – Certificate I in Horticulture and Certificate I in Construction
- **TAFE placements** – from Certificates III and IV in Community Work (3-4 weeks), Diploma of Community Services 'Live Project' (3 weeks), Diploma in Welfare Studies (300 hours)

## CHOOSING PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Education providers increasingly see community gardens as useful and relevant settings for their programs. Providers may have responsibilities to provide flexible learning settings, engage marginalised participants, develop sustainable/environmental programs or provide community placements for their students. Gardens can be ideal settings to meet all of these goals, but at times it may not necessarily be in the best interests of gardens to enter into education partnerships. Partnership activities need to be a suitable fit for the timing, resources, structures and current goals of the garden. In order to help your garden sift through the various opportunities and make good decisions about which to take up, it's useful to have some processes in place for weighing up the options:

- A checklist to help decide whether the conditions for an effective partnership exist (see Conditions for Effective Education Partnerships section for ideas)
- An agreement amongst members of the garden as to how final decisions about entering into partnerships are made (who makes the decision? who is accountable? who makes it happen?)
- Clarity about expectations, roles and responsibilities of the partnership members
- Willingness and strength to say 'no' to partnership opportunities when necessary

## CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

- There is a good relationship with one or more key people in the partner organisation, with a shared interest and excitement, to generate specific opportunities.
- Gardens see the value that they're offering and are able to demonstrate this value to potential partnerships through: feedback received from garden members, previous students at the garden or existing partner organisations; photos; local newspaper articles; and garden newsletter items.
- Gardens see themselves as equal in the partnership, not taking a passive role in relation to partner and instead being proactive where appropriate.
- There is recognition and acknowledgement of any differences in the contexts that the partners work within (i.e. if partners come from the government or private sectors there is likely to be differences between them and gardens in terms of areas of skills and knowledge, resources, priorities, timelines and so on) and acknowledgement of the skills and positives contributed by both sides.
- Agreed and effective communication processes are put in place such as: alternate chairing of meetings; use of preferred contacts e.g. email, landline or mobile; and inclusion of all key players in the exchange of information.
- Both partner organisations see that there's clearly something of value for them in the partnership and both are clear on the purpose and approach to be taken.
- Other members or groups within the garden are kept aware of the nature and progress of the partnership, to maintain overall garden support and interest in what's happening.
- It's vital to have a connection with someone in the education organisation who listens, is prepared to advocate for and be an ally within their organisation and who has a flexible approach. You'll recognise these people because they: make it happen at their respective levels; are keen; are community people at heart; have a genuine interest in the community garden; are open to the community approach; and are able to take potential and put it into action.
- The garden has the systems and people in place to be able to deliver the agreed partnership outcomes.
- There is regular feedback between partners about the progress, glitches, achievements and next steps for the partnership.

## OTHER TIPS FOR BUILDING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

- It takes a reasonable amount of time and a strong commitment to make partnerships work.
- Have projects in mind of various size and content so that, when an opportunity arises for a learning partnership, some of the thinking and planning has already been done.

- Find ways to embed partnership arrangements so that they can live on after individual staff, for example:
  - Document agreed ways of working together (e.g. protocols)
  - Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the roles and responsibilities of project partners in relation to specific projects
  - Keep a record of specific strategies and structures that have worked well
- Keep evidence of successes and of how they were achieved through photos, email exchanges, flyers, newsletter articles
- Start with small initiatives and build up to bigger ventures
- Set initial partnerships up as 'pilots'; that way, if it doesn't work out you won't feel like a failure and you aren't seen as a failure
- Establish timelines / deadlines as early as you can (your own and theirs)
- Involve and inform other garden members at all stages of the partnership to avoid treading on anyone's 'patch' and to ensure their support

#### CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO WORK OUT WHEN NEGOTIATING A NEW PARTNERSHIP

- What's the project?
- Is there sufficient lead-in time to negotiate an effective partnership?
- What's the benefit for the garden?
- What's the resourcing / input required by the garden (in terms of staff time and financial resources)?
- What is each partner contributing?
  - Who will do what?
  - Who will pay for what (e.g. insurance, phone calls, photocopying)
- Who are the students? What is the nature of their study, skills, communication, interest and/or attitude?
- What are the skills of the lecturer and will they be flexible enough for a community garden setting?
- Who, within the garden, will be responsible for managing the partnership?

#### THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND GARDEN MEMBERS/VOLUNTEERS

Each community garden has its own unique culture, history and approach. Gardens are flexible, community-based outdoor spaces with varying levels of access by the general public, large volunteer input, practical rules and minimal formal procedures. Students may come from TAFE settings, schools, mental health agencies, corrective services, migrant settlement agencies, seniors groups, service clubs or simply arrive off the street. Given the lack of formal policies, procedures and structures in most garden settings, there is room for misunderstandings, inappropriate responses and challenging situations to arise within or between garden groups and individuals. Here are some suggestions that your garden could put in place when considering an educational partnership:

- Identify, record and prepare for risks involved in any program at the outset. 'Risks' may be occupational, health, safety, financial, emotional, or reputation related.
- Ensure all students take part in an orientation session, which clarifies the values and approach of the garden, the expectations of students and the appropriate lines of communication and support.

- Develop a Code of Conduct to be signed by students which could include:
  - Respect, tolerance and acceptance of others
  - Use of appropriate language and humour towards others
  - Use of any garden computers, phones or other equipment only for project, study and/or garden purposes
  - Appropriate dress code (OH&S, professionalism and/or public space issues)
  - A breakdown of garden values into practical points or examples
  
- Ensure lecturers, garden staff and agency personnel have all discussed and agreed on strategies for formal or informal screening of students, appropriate supports in place, and consistency of responses to inappropriate behaviour.