



Arlanza Community Garden Expands to Grow the Capacity and Coordination of Gardeners

Intervention Summary

In order to implement and sustain fruit and vegetable production and garden-based nutrition education, a community garden requires strong leadership, organized participation activities, and authentic community engagement. These elements require a level of investment from gardeners themselves, and from local cooperative partners, stakeholders and allies.

In 2012, Arlanza was an unused garden lot owned by the City of Riverside, adjacent to the Arlanza Elementary School. In response, Child Leader Project (a youth development organization) convened local students to envision and redesign Arlanza as a vibrant community garden. Despite the infusion of youth energy, Arlanza struggled with engaging residents from the surrounding neighborhood; they could not effectively organize a group of committed garden members.

Recently, the city partnered with From Lot to Spot, a Los Angeles-based non-profit focused on increasing access to green space, such as community gardens, in neighborhoods of high-need. The goal was to build the capacity of existing gardeners, incorporating NEOP-funded nutrition education within an organized communication system at a community garden. Ultimately, gardens should foster and unite new garden members for garden expansion and sustainability, while increasing fruit and vegetable access and consumption in low-income neighborhoods.

In 2014, Arlanza hosted their first garden elections with support of From Lot to Spot. From this process, 5 out of the 6 elected leaders were bilingual in order to enhance participation from the Latino community at the garden. Despite language and cultural differences, garden leaders were able to communicate with each other to set guiding rules for the garden, including yearly elections. Throughout 2015, the NEOP-funded staff continued to build capacity and leadership at Arlanza. They facilitated a garden design and visioning workshop in order to increase the number of assigned plots while adding space for education and training. Arlanza leadership also incorporated systems

such as a current roster of gardeners, a waiting list, and gardener rules with the expertise of From Lot to Spot staff.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Proposed Solutions

A common issue in most community gardens is the lack of strong management structure. Though garden spaces were available, residents were not empowered or informed on how to utilize, maintain or manage it adequately. From Lot to Spot recommended monthly garden leadership meetings to maintain accountability and develop a compilation of garden management tools such as gardener rosters, waiting lists, watering guidelines and garden rules. These management tools, incorporated with a new layout, made it easier to allocate parcels to new gardeners. In April 2015, Arlanza held their second election to elect a new leadership committee who would address these issues. During this time, From Lot to Spot worked with garden members to communicate effectively in order to execute elections democratically and be inclusive of all members.

Another underlying challenge was an ineffective layout of usable space, and designation of established garden plots. The garden plots were very large, and it was unclear which spaces were available. In response, From Lot to Spot and the city hosted a conceptual design workshop in which over 30 gardeners, experts and volunteers planned a new garden layout.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

In 2015, the partnership has served to build leadership capacity of the gardeners, who can now manage their own garden effectively and cultivate their membership to keep the plots active. With the compilation of garden management tools, Arlanza gardeners (with support from NEOP staff) plan to mentor other community gardeners throughout the city, to assist in establishing a system for garden organization and communication.

Arlanza schedules regular garden workshops, community workdays and hosts two annual events to celebrate cooperation and unite garden members. During every garden workshop, From Lot to Spot provided garden members with Harvest of the Month (HOTM) education materials. HOTM was especially useful during seasonal changes to guide new garden members as to what crops to grow in order to maximize their harvest. In 2016, NEOP staff plans to strengthen the garden-based nutrition education component through the Arlanza Garden events and workshops. Gradually, Arlanza is becoming a fully self-sustained garden and a beacon in the community.

Although not adopted by gardeners yet, From Lot to Spot has suggested that Arlanza consider establishing a small fee for membership - in order to finance small garden expenses such as water bills, tools and community building events. Funding for materials could be provided by donation or grants, but a minor investment from members ensures their commitment and accountability to the garden, and ultimately greater care and sustainability of shared equipment and the entire garden.

Contact information about this Narrative

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