

ACTION-RESEARCH

Engaging Residents in Planning a Community Garden: A Strategy for Enhancing Participation Through Relevant Messaging

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Understanding residents' perceptions and preferences regarding health promotion and community development strategies is vital. Community gardens, often collaborative community-engaged projects, are designed to be healthy places where neighbors gather; however, they have the potential to be much more. The purpose of the study was to gauge public support for a community garden in South Omaha and prioritize messaging strategies regarding the potential benefits of a garden. To that end, a bilingual online survey that assessed interest in, perceived benefits of, purposes for, and functional attributes to co-locate in a community garden was conducted. Through this process, we learned about the value of developing local data, importance of using an asset-based framework, understanding community perceptions about potential benefits, balancing community research endeavors, and developing partnerships to expand the reach of a project. Developing community research strategies and appropriate messaging in collaboration with community members and partners is critical to the success of community health promotion initiatives.

Keywords: community engagement; community gardens; communication strategy; shared leadership; community development; urban agriculture

Background

One of the essential functions of a neighborhood is to enable health (McKnight & Russell, 2018). Neighborhood context affects its population's physical and mental health by providing access to affordable, healthy foods; promoting physical activity; and reducing exposure to stressors and environmental toxins (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). The places where people live, work, and play are essential starting points for designing and implementing health promotion strategies (Workman, 2013). For public health practitioners, understanding residents' perceptions and preferences regarding health promotion and community development strategies is critical because it can increase participation and sense of ownership in an initiative (Ramos, Trinidad, Correa, & Rivera, 2016). Unfortunately, communities are oftentimes the subject of development whereby outside forces impose their plans on the neighborhood, rather than having the community be a key partner in designing an initiative (e.g., business development or green space). By engaging residents early in the process, community planners and public health practitioners can gain a greater understanding of what the community perceives as benefits of a project and allow for resident input to shape the framing, implementation, and outcomes of that project. Research has shown that community engagement may lead to improvements in program design (e.g., scheduling, format, or cultural and linguistic issues), resource development (e.g., funding or partnerships), and uptake of positive health behaviors (e.g., self-management of chronic conditions, reducing exposure to secondhand smoke) (Allen, Colicchio, & Litchman, 2019; Dadwal et al., 2017; McGowan, Musicant, Williams, & Niehaus, 2015; Ramos, Correa, & Trinidad, 2016). Engaging with the community may also show respect, build community trust,

improve communication, and enhance transparency in how communities work together to create change (Clinical and Translational Science Awards Consortium, 2011). Community engagement that incorporates community involvement, shared leadership, and co-development are needed to address the larger issues that affect population health like the social determinants of health, which include social, environmental, economic, and political conditions that impact health (Allen, Colicchio, & Litchman, 2019; Dadwal et al., 2017).

Community engagement is critical in community-based participatory research. Previous work has shown that there are core principles for community-based participatory research (CBPR) such as ensuring participation through an empowering process; cooperation; co-learning; striving for a balance between research and action; and building local capacity (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). CBPR is a collaborative endeavor. As such, it is important to be clear about the purpose, goals, and expectations of all project partners (Dadwal et al., 2017). Furthermore, understanding the community's values, beliefs, history, current context, and social networks may aid the research partnership and its initiatives to have long-term benefits for all. Community engagement, shared leadership, and co-development are important in CBPR and can lead to enhancements in a community's collective efficacy to address its own health and social needs in a manner that is acceptable to residents (Cyril, Smith, Possamai-Inesedy, & Renzaho, 2015; Wiczorek Moreland, 2015). An analogous example of such a CBPR endeavor is the Building Healthy Communities program that aimed to promote positive health outcomes in fourteen disadvantaged neighborhoods across the state of California where neighborhood residents decided which community development and health promotion projects were most important to them (Pastor & Morello-Frosch, 2014). A community engaged approach such as this may help lead to sustainable programming after the external resources have been depleted because local residents have become invested in the success of the initiative.

Community Gardens

A community garden is "any piece of land where plants are grown and maintained by a group of individuals from the community" (Public Health Law Center, 2017, p. 5). Community gardening is a growing movement with over 18,000 gardens in the United States and Canada (American Community Garden Association, 2015). Community gardens are designed to be places where neighbors can congregated, interact, and learn from one another. They are prime examples of collaborative, community-engaged projects that are often a result of neighborhood residents working together to determine what is best for their community – in essence a form of asset-based community development, an approach to community development that builds on the assets that are already in the community and mobilizes people, associations and organizations to realize their potential. According to Middle et al., (2014), community gardens are built to satisfy the needs of the community, which has resulted in neighborhood gardens often including more than just fruits, vegetables, and other plants, but also including non-gardening elements such as educational opportunities, open recreational spaces, health programming, public art, and other functional attributes. Community gardens play an important role in beautifying neighborhoods, improving public safety due to more people being out watching over the neighborhood, developing sustainable local food sources, and building community by bringing neighbors together to foster social connections, which has been shown to have positive effects on both physical and mental health (Brown & Jameton, 2000; Holt-Lunstad, 2018; Okvat & Zautra, 2011; Tam, 2015). Community gardening can be a successful place-based, public health intervention that may improve dietary intake, increase physical activity, and enhance social connectedness between neighbors (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010).

The Neighborhood Context

The project described below takes place in South Omaha, Nebraska (zip code 68107; total population 31,548 in 2015; 50.8% female), a community that has a long tradition of being home to many immigrant groups who came looking for work in the nearby livestock market and slaughterhouses. Although the livestock market has closed, the meatpacking plants are still thriving and have a constant need for labor, which continues to be filled by immigrant workers. In fact, about 20% of the population are non-citizens, and 57.8% of the population is Hispanic/Latino, followed by 31.1% non-Hispanic Whites, and 7.6% non-Hispanic Blacks (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

History of Collaboration

Although community gardens had been developed in other parts of Omaha, there were no community gardens in South Omaha. Neighborhood leaders had discussed the idea of developing a community garden over the course of three years as they had seen the potential of community gardens in other areas of town and

throughout the country. A plot of public park land that had been designated a “natural environmental area” was eventually identified as a potential location for a garden. Neighborhood leaders believed that a garden would be a great opportunity to rehabilitate the space that had been blighted with trash and underused. They then reached out to a community gardening organization to bring stakeholders together to try to move the concept forward.

In January 2015, a representative from the University of Nebraska Medical Center was invited to a community planning meeting about developing a community garden in South Omaha because of her connections with many of the area organizations and her leadership role within the local neighborhood alliance. A neighborhood advocate and the president of the board of directors of a local community gardening organization led the meeting. The meeting included partners from various neighborhood-based non-profit organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Club, Intercultural Senior Center, the Learning Community Center, Avenue Scholars, and the Latino Center of the Midlands among others), adjacent neighborhood associations, youth, teachers, residents, and gardening advocates.

This first planning meeting focused on how to be able to grow food on the identified plot of land within one year. The group worked through several activities based on Technology of Participation (ToP), a structured facilitation method (Technology of Participation, 2019), to develop subcommittees and activities to be completed during the following months in order to achieve the goal of growing food on the land within a year. Meeting attendees could volunteer for the subcommittee(s) of their choice, and there was no specific eligibility criteria required for membership in these subcommittees.

One of the subcommittees that was formed focused on communication and messaging with stakeholders. The university representative (AKR) joined this subcommittee because she had experience with marketing, social marketing, and public relations. Others on this subcommittee represented a youth-serving non-profit organization, a Latino-serving non-profit organization, an afterschool program facilitator, a high school principal, an urban agriculture advocate, and some local residents. This subcommittee continued to meet for five months following the planning meeting, and one of the key actions of the subcommittee was the development of a survey to gain community input and to develop relevant messaging about the garden project to spark interest among the greater community and potential funders. Although other methods such as focus groups may have resulted in richer data, they would have been more time consuming to recruit for, conduct, and analyze. The consensus among the subcommittee was that a survey would be easier to administer and collect data.

Purpose of the Survey

The objectives of this survey were to assist the community garden planning team to: (a) gauge public support for a community garden in South Omaha, and (b) prioritize messaging strategies regarding the potential benefits of community gardens. The university representative (AKR)'s involvement with the project was at the request of the community partners, and this survey was co-developed with interested community members on the subcommittee who helped guide the planning and implementation of this community research initiative. Draft results were first presented to community partners in November 2015 where there was an opportunity to ask questions, request additional analyses, and verify findings. Community partners were invited to share in the writing process for this paper, but none chose to do so. Partners did, however, review and provide feedback on this paper prior to submission.

Methods

Participants

To be eligible to participate, respondents had to live in the Omaha, Nebraska metropolitan area and be at least 13 years of age. The survey was open to others outside of South Omaha but within the metropolitan Omaha area because they could provide valuable insights on what were the perceived benefits and purposes of a garden in this area, which could be used in outreaching to other potential partners. Youth were included in the survey because the subcommittee believed that youth brought a valuable perspective to this community development effort. A total of 218 people participated in the survey. Of the total respondents, 57.9% were South Omaha residents. This analysis focuses only on those who were South Omaha residents (N = 113).

Procedures

A bilingual survey in English and Spanish was developed collectively by the participating academic and community partners during the community garden planning sessions. The survey was developed based on University Extension materials and what other community garden collaboratives across the country had

used (Bauermeister, Swain, & Rilla, 2010; McReynolds, n.d.), and it was refined through discussion at a series of communication subcommittee meetings. The survey consisted of 10 questions that were designed to help inform a messaging for the community-led planning process to establish the community garden. Any person who met the inclusion criteria was eligible to participate in the survey, which was available online through Survey Monkey from April 1, 2015 through June 30, 2015. Convenience sampling methods were used. Information about the survey and a bilingual flyer with the survey link were shared through various planning committee member organizations including but not limited to: Boys and Girls Club, Latino Center of the Midlands, South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance, and university partners among others; word of mouth at neighborhood meetings; youth participants at their schools; and through social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter. The survey was promoted consistently during the first month, and reminders were sent to partners and posted on social media at 8 and 11 weeks after the survey opened. Surveys took approximately five minutes to complete. There was no incentive for completing the survey, and there was minimal risk from participating. The survey was anonymous and no personal identifiers were recorded. The study was approved by the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Institutional Review Board.

Measures

In the introduction narrative to the survey, we first explained what was a community garden to participants. Survey questions then assessed five key areas that the subcommittee felt were important: (a) interest in establishing a community garden in South Omaha, (b) perceived benefit of a community garden, (c) purposes for a community garden, (d) other functional attributes to co-locate in the garden, and (e) personal interest in participating in the garden. These areas were chosen because they could inform messaging about the project. For example, if neighbors believed that establishing a garden was very beneficial, then communications would not need to focus on the benefits of community gardens and could instead focus on other topics such as how to motivate people to get involved. Each key area is described below.

Interest in establishing a garden

Since we were in the process of developing a community garden, we wanted to assess community interest in a garden. We assessed this through a single question: "Would you be interested in a community garden being established in South Omaha?" Response options included: no (0), yes (1), and not sure (2).

Perceived benefit of a community garden

We wanted to know if a garden was something that community residents felt was beneficial to the community. Therefore, participants were asked: "How beneficial do you think a community garden would be for South Omaha?" Response options included: not at all beneficial (0), not really beneficial (1), mostly beneficial (2), beneficial (3), or very beneficial (4).

Purpose for a community garden

We wanted to gauge what participants believed were reasons for a community garden. Participants were asked: "What do you think would be the most important purposes for a community garden in South Omaha?" Participants had the option to choose as many of the following responses that they felt were important: growing food for personal use, growing food for sale, donating food for community needs, teaching gardening skills, meeting new people, building a feeling of community, fun, relaxation, beautifying the neighborhood, and environmental benefits.

Additional functional attributes/amenities in the garden

Because the location that had been identified was largely open green space, we wanted to know what other functional attributes community members would want to be co-located in the space. Participants were asked: "What other activities and/or amenities would you like to see in the park/garden space?" Participants could choose any of the following options that they felt were important: playground, fitness equipment, walking path, bike rack, benches to sit, or water fountain. Participants also had an option to write in any other functional attributes that they would like to see in the garden.

Personal interest in participating in the garden

Finally, because this was a brand-new community initiative, we wanted to know if there were people who wanted to get involved and help, and if so, how. Participants were asked: "Would you be interested in

personally participating in the garden?" If they responded "yes," they were then asked: "How would you like to participate in the garden?" Response options for this question included: planting a bed in the garden, sharing your expertise about gardening and agriculture, donating supplies, donating money, serving on a committee to help to plan and develop the garden, or other with the opportunity to specify how they would like to be engaged. If they responded "no," then they were automatically directed to the next question via a built-in skip pattern.

Demographic covariates

Demographic covariates included language preference and age. Language preference was dichotomous and options included English or Spanish given that the area was nearly 60% Hispanic/Latino. Age was a categorical variable and included the following age group options: 13–18 years old (youth), 19–24 years old (young adults), 25–40 years old (adults; may have young families), 41–54 years old (adults), 55–64 years old (older adults), and 65 or older (senior citizens). These age categories were based on the subcommittee feeling that participants may have different perspectives on gardening at different stages of their lives.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS, version 23. Descriptive and bivariate analyses were conducted. Frequencies were calculated for each variable. Chi square tests were used to assess significant differences in responses on functional attributes and preferences for personally participating in the garden by those age 40 and under and those over age 40 and by language preference (e.g., those who completed the survey in English vs. those who completed it in Spanish). A *p*-value of .05 was used to denote significance.

Results

Of the 113 respondents, 74 (66.1%) were between 13–40 years of age and 94 (83.2%) responded in English (**Table 1**). More than 90% were interested in a community garden being established in South Omaha. Only seven participants marked "not sure."

More than nine out of ten respondents (90.1%) believed that a community garden would be beneficial or very beneficial to the community. Only 11 participants responded that a community garden would be mostly beneficial, and no participants responded that it would not be beneficial.

Across all respondents, the five most important purposes of a community garden were to: (a) donate food for community needs (88 participants; 77.9%); (b) build a feeling of community (87 participants; 77.0%); (c) teach gardening skills (78 participants; 69.0%); (d) beautify the neighborhood (75 participants; 66.4%); and (e) environmental benefits (73 participants; 64.6%). **Figure 1** highlights the ranking of community garden purposes as identified by respondents.

Respondents wanted to see additional functional attributes and amenities in the community garden such as benches, a walking path, a water fountain, and a playground for children. Participants also wrote in that they would like to have picnic tables, additional lighting, a skate ramp, restrooms, a tobacco-free policy, compost facilities, and an outdoor classroom. Certain amenities were more popular among specific age groups. For example, those age 40 or younger were significantly more likely to report wanting a playground,

Table 1: Sample characteristics of respondents.

Variable	N (%)
Language of Response	
English	94 (83.2)
Spanish	19 (16.8)
Age	
13–18	10 (8.9)
19–24	17 (15.2)
25–40	47 (42.0)
41–64	31 (27.7)
65 or older	7 (6.2)

$\chi^2 = 4.09, p = .04$, and a walking path, $\chi^2 = 16.07, p = .00$. There were also differences based on language of survey response. For example, those who responded in English were more likely to report wanting benches, $\chi^2 = 12.44, p = .00$, and a walking path, $\chi^2 = 4.10, p = .04$ (**Table 2**).

Sixty-eight respondents (60.2%) were interested in personally participating in the garden in some form – either by planting a bed, serving on a committee, sharing expertise, or donating money or supplies. South Omaha residents were mainly interested in participating in the planning for the garden by serving on a committee (53 participants; 46.9%) and planting a bed (44 participants; 38.9%). Responses to how people were interested in participating also varied significantly by age. People age 40 or younger were significantly

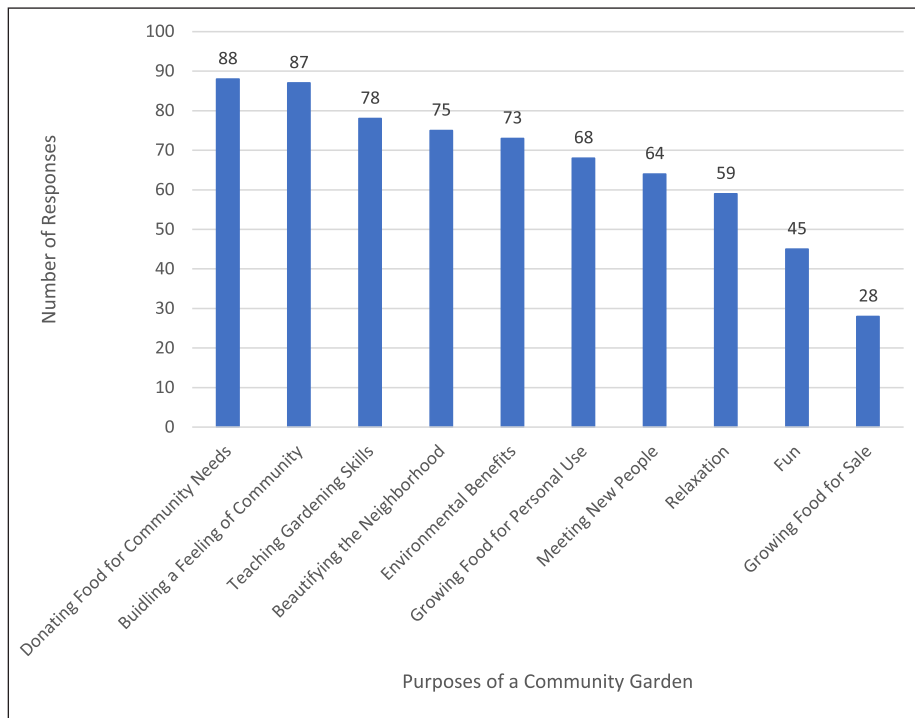


Figure 1: Ranking of participants' responses for the purposes of a community garden.

Table 2: Cross tabulation of respondent preferences for functional attributes to be co-located in the garden and method of participation by age and language of survey completion.

	Total N (%)	Age 40 or under N (%)	Over age 40 N (%)	<i>p</i>	Responded in English N (%)	Responded in Spanish N (%)	<i>p</i>
Functional attributes							
Benches	84 (74.3)	56 (75.7)	27 (71.1)	.60	76 (80.9)	8 (42.1)	.00
Walking path	76 (67.3)	59 (79.7)	16 (42.1)	.00	67 (71.3)	9 (47.4)	.04
Water fountain	70 (61.9)	48 (64.9)	21 (55.3)	.32	57 (60.6)	13 (68.4)	.52
Playground	63 (55.8)	46 (62.2)	16 (42.1)	.04	51 (54.3)	12 (63.2)	.48
Bike rack	44 (38.9)	30 (40.5)	13 (34.2)	.51	44 (46.8)	0 (0.0)	.00
Fitness equipment	42 (37.2)	30 (40.5)	11 (28.9)	.23	32 (34.0)	10 (52.6)	.13
Methods of participation							
Serving on the planning committee	53 (46.9)	41 (55.4)	12 (31.6)	.02	45 (47.9)	8 (42.1)	.65
Planting a bed	44 (38.9)	34 (45.9)	10 (26.3)	.04	35 (37.2)	9 (47.4)	.41
Sharing expertise	23 (20.4)	19 (25.7)	4 (10.5)	.06	17 (18.1)	6 (31.6)	.18
Donating supplies	23 (20.4)	11 (14.9)	12 (31.6)	.04	19 (20.2)	4 (21.1)	.93
Donating money	21 (18.6)	16 (21.6)	5 (13.2)	.28	20 (21.3)	1 (5.3)	.10

more likely to report wanting to plant their own bed, $\chi^2 = 4.06$, $p = .04$, and wanting to serve on a committee, $\chi^2 = 5.72$, $p = .02$. Those over age 40 were significantly more likely to report wanting to donate supplies, $\chi^2 = 4.30$, $p = .04$ (**Table 2**).

Discussion

Understanding community assets, needs, and appropriate communication messaging strategies is imperative for designing any community initiative, especially those that require community participation and engagement, such as establishing a community garden. Community perceptions influence the use or non-use of community spaces and resources (Wieczorek Moreland, 2015). A community garden is meant to be used, and through this survey we documented that residents perceived a benefit in developing a community garden. It also highlighted that residents were interested in growing food not just for personal use, but also for donating to alleviate community needs. Participants viewed the garden as an opportunity to build a sense of community, bring neighbors together, and help each other. Participants wanted additional functional attributes in the garden such as benches, a walking path, and water fountains. More than half of participants were interested in getting more involved with the garden project. Our findings highlighted that people in this neighborhood wanted to be active participants in this type of redevelopment initiative. Without this survey, it would have been difficult to quantify resident support or understand how residents would like to be engaged in moving the project forward.

The planning committee was ultimately able to establish a community garden on a portion of the Dorothy Patch Natural Environmental Area in South Omaha, a seven-acre parcel of city-owned park land. As a result of this survey, the group also developed a walking path around the exterior perimeter of the garden and a play area for children in the garden. From this experience, it is clear that gathering local data to guide community initiatives such as understanding what the perceived benefits of the project are is important before moving directly to implementation. The information that was collected through this survey was used by the planning committee to secure support from the city for use of the parcel of land as well as to draw in additional organizational partners. The group was also able to solicit local funders such as the local brown-field fund and the University of Nebraska Medical Center to support the launch and future expansion of the garden because of funders' interest in locally-led initiatives that focused on fostering positive uses of public space such as for health promotion. Furthermore, based in part on this survey, the planning committee was able to develop a logo and slogan for the community garden – "Grow with us/Crece con nosotros" that incorporated some of the key messages that were important to community members such as a building a sense of community, teaching skills, and growing food.

The community can be a wealth of information and resources; however, as academic partners we must be humble and realize that we need the community to share their perceptions, interests, and expertise with us. They need to be able to trust us and know that we care about the community long-term. In this case, the university representative (AKR) had worked in the South Omaha community for more than fifteen years and had a reputation of being a "good" and caring partner, which made the process move smoothly. For someone new to the community or a person without such long established relationships, the process to develop working trust with neighborhood leaders and organizational partners could have been more difficult and time consuming.

Community engagement may not always be easy, but strong partnerships with community members and local organizations may help to develop practical and effective solutions, validate local knowledge, and motivate action. By incorporating the best practices of community engagement such as listening to residents and users; gathering background information; and focusing on community, organizational, and individual assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), neighborhood residents may be more likely to participate in and contribute to community development initiatives. For example, because of neighborhood buy-in and support for this project, a community member donated his time and talent to build three large wooden picnic tables which have been placed in the garden for public use. Others have also volunteered their time for cleaning-up the garden space, mentoring new gardeners, and teaching workshops on healthy eating and composting.

Because community health and development initiatives require a variety of resources, it is important to assess the opportunities available for project support and collaboration across various sectors of the community. In our survey, we found that different age groups preferred certain functional attributes and programming. Community-based programs may consider designing activities for specific audiences to enhance participation (Ramos et al., 2016). Based on our findings regarding the primary purpose of the garden, the planning committee developed: (a) a series of collaborative workshops that focused on teaching gardening skills; (b) community celebrations in partnership with other community organizations that took place in the garden, which included meals and family activities (e.g., Trash-to-Treasure, Back to School Bash, and

Halloween Village); and (c) further environmental quality studies of the land. Fostering partnerships with organizations which serve diverse audiences such as youth, families, older adults, or various cultural groups may help to encourage participation, identify financial resources for moving a project forward, and assist in the development and deployment of programming for diverse ages, cultures, and linguistic groups.

Since the completion of this survey, the planning committee has developed local community-level indicators that are being used for evaluation purposes including process measures such as the number of adult and youth participants, volunteer hours donated, and pounds of food produced. Outcome measures have also been developed and include assessing satisfaction with programming, attitudes toward fruit and vegetable consumption, and sense of community in the surrounding neighborhood. The planning committee has also explored opportunities and began planning for sustainability including securing consistent funding, partnering with a non-profit organization to provide administrative infrastructure and oversight (e.g., insurance, management support, marketing, etc.), and creating a leadership pipeline for those who want to engage in the garden on a deeper level.

Documenting the progress of the community organizing processes and monitoring the development of such initiatives is beneficial to understanding what works within a given community, what does not work, and may assist with evaluating the overall efficacy of an initiative. Too often, community initiatives move forward, but their processes and stories are not documented, which may lead to duplication of efforts, engaging in ineffective practices, community distrust, and unnecessary expenditures of human, financial, and social resources.

Lessons Learned

Through our work with this survey and the community garden initiative, we learned some important lessons. These lessons may be transferrable to other projects and aid future community development and engagement activities.

Value of local data

Acquiring and using local data to drive decision-making in conceptualizing, planning, implementing, and evaluating community health and development projects is useful. The data that we collected has helped the planning committee to ensure that ideas related to communication, programming, and fundraising are relevant to neighbors.

Asset-based community development framework

Engaging neighborhood residents, not just community leaders or social service providers in community initiatives is important. Exploring community assets and factors that could be used to promote health and well-being, rather than solely diagnosing needs or problems, is valuable. As such, using an asset-based framework may increase engagement and participation. For example, we asked about benefits (strengths) of a garden and framed our questioning around positive opportunities that a garden could bring to the neighborhood, rather than asking about weaknesses and problems.

Understanding community perceptions about potential benefits and risks

Understanding what the community perceives as key benefits and risks of a proposed project can help in developing appropriate messaging. In some cases, health may not be the most important message to lead with in approaching community stakeholders. Focusing messaging on other topics may resonate better with certain stakeholders. As we saw, building a sense of community was an important purpose for a community garden and not necessarily one that the general public would associate with health. Regardless of the message used, the health benefits of a project remain.

Balancing community research endeavors

Although researchers may want to have detailed information and multiple data points on various topics, striking a balance between what is needed to answer the research question, what is feasible, and what is acceptable to community partners is critical when engaging in community-based research. From a research perspective, it would have been ideal to measure additional constructs in the survey, but the subcommittee members were adamant about keeping the survey short so that it could be completed in five minutes or less.

Developing partnerships to expand reach

Developing partnerships with diverse organizations across community sectors enhances awareness and support of the project, increases community participation, and assists in the development of culturally,

linguistically, and contextually relevant programming. In our case, we were able to engage with a number of different organizations including youth-serving organizations, neighborhood associations, and other social service agencies who promoted the garden project and this survey to their constituents.

Limitations

This study is limited by the small sample size and potential participation bias among respondents. Those who were most interested in the topic were probably those who responded thereby limiting the responses of those who were not interested in community gardening. Although our findings are limited and may not be representative of all South Omaha residents, they can be used as a foundation for current community planning efforts.

Conclusion

Gardens are a promising and powerful strategy for improving the physical and social characteristics of a neighborhood, improving health outcomes, and redefining the meaning of public space. Asking community members for their perspective about a community garden, how they would like to be involved, why they think a community garden is beneficial, and what types of functional attributes they would like to see helped the planning committee to frame messaging, encourage others to get involved in the planning process and solicit support for the project.

Although we are beginning to understand the principles of community engagement, community-based research, and community organizing, there is still much to learn about how such collaborations evolve and create public health impact. Although the lessons learned through this project may be transferable to other community health and development initiatives, future research might focus on evaluating the effectiveness of local data collection strategies and describing strategies to increase resident participation in community health and development initiatives, particularly those located in underserved communities. Additionally, research should explore whether participatory planning methods lead to higher sustained engagement over time compared to projects that are not as participatory in the planning stages. Next steps for the project involve increasing capacity of committee members to build partnerships, solicit funding, and develop programming; further assessing and refining community-level evaluation indicators; exploring and planning for sustainability through organizational and administrative measures (e.g., management support, marketing, training, additional facilities, etc.), and securing consistent funding.

Additional Files

The additional files for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendix.** Community Survey. <https://doi.org/10.33596/coll.24.s1>
- **Figure 1.** Most Important Purposes of a Community Garden in South Omaha. <https://doi.org/10.33596/coll.24.s2>
- **Figure 2.** Preferred Functional Attributes in Community Garden. <https://doi.org/10.33596/coll.24.s3>
- **Figure 3.** Percentage of Residents Interested in Participating in Community Garden by Method of Participation. <https://doi.org/10.33596/coll.24.s4>

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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