

## TOOLKITS

## Education: Expand Access to Healthy Local Food

**COMMUNITY GARDENS****THE FACTS**

This summer, as President Obama and Congress work together to enact health reform that reduces health care costs for families, businesses, and government; guarantees choice of doctors, hospitals, and insurance plans; and assures quality affordable health care for all Americans, we hope that you will participate by promoting healthy lifestyles in your community – a key to avoiding costly disease and improving the nation's health.

In 2007, only 21.4% of high school students reported eating fruits and vegetables five or more times daily during the past 7 days.

Community gardens provide access to traditional produce or nutritionally rich foods that may otherwise be unavailable to low-income families and individuals.

Community gardens allow families and individuals without land of their own the opportunity to produce food. Oftentimes gardeners take advantage of the experiential knowledge of elders to produce a significant amount of food for the household.

In 1999, fifteen New York gardens that organized as the City Farms program of the group “Just Food” grew close to 11,000 pounds of fresh vegetables and fruits. Nearly 50 percent was donated to nearby soup kitchens and food pantries.<sup>1</sup>

*This summer, commit yourself and a team of your friends, family, and neighbors to help increase healthy eating choices for Americans and be part of United We Serve. This tool kit will give you the basics to plan a community garden activity, recruit a team, organize your group, and make an impact this summer.*

**GETTING STARTED**

While no two projects will be the same, successful projects will share a few common practices. We encourage you to incorporate the following elements into your service project:

- Create a team with your friends and neighbors to share the effort;
- Set outcome-based goals and track your progress to those goals;
- Celebrate your successes together.

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<sup>1</sup> (Just Food 1999 Summary Report, as cited by Englander, 2001, p. 14).

***The Challenge:*** Many community-based organizations do not have enough capacity to manage a large number of volunteers, so they need you to organize yourself in coordination with them. This tool kit is designed to either help you organize a group and be a positive addition to a community-based organization, or, if such an organization does not exist, to be a well-organized independently-run group that fills a needed gap in the community.

A step by step guide to getting started and executing service activities follows. Please let us know how your project goes and what you learn by telling your story at [Serve.gov](https://www.serve.gov).

### **STEP ONE: IDENTIFY LOCAL PARTNERS**

Check out the organizations already doing good work in your area. Many existing service groups have identified community needs and built the expertise to provide solutions.

- Search for a [community garden in your neighborhood](#) and ask how you can get involved.
- [“Get a guide to finding local partners”](#)
- Search online for local gardening groups working with low-income youth.
- If no community gardens exist in your community, [plant a new one](#) with your team.

### **STEP TWO: BUILD A TEAM**

Teams can help share the work, motivate members, and hold each other accountable. Teams build community. Ask your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and faith group members to serve with you.

- Host a house meeting or pot luck to choose a project, set goals, recruit volunteers and plan next steps.
- [“Get a guide for hosting a house meeting”](#)
- Post your service activity on [Serve.gov](https://www.serve.gov) to recruit new volunteers.

### **STEP THREE: SET A GOAL**

Set a service goal for June 22 – September 11 and hold yourself accountable. Find out what your partner organization needs and then work to fill that need. Commit as individuals and as a team to cultivating a certain number of square feet and bring a certain number of children into the garden. Set your goals high to stretch yourself. Then keep track of how you are doing and designate someone to be responsible for updating the group on how you are progressing toward your goals. You’ll be surprised at how much you can do when you commit, focus, and follow through.

- [“Get a goal-setting guide”](#)

### **STEP FOUR: SERVE YOUR COMMUNITY**

The key to effective service is planning. Organize your materials, make confirmation calls and, if you have time, read supplemental materials before you volunteer.

- [“Get a tip sheet for your service activity”](#)
- The American Community Gardening Association provides information on [starting a new community garden](#) and [gardening with kids](#).

### **STEP FIVE: REPORT AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSES**

Your team members, the community, and the President want to know about your successes and hear your stories. Share your accomplishments by reporting your results. We will highlight the best stories

throughout the summer. Tell us about your successes and what you have learned, or just tell your story of service at [Serve.gov](https://www.serve.gov).

## **FOLLOW UP**

### **SPREAD THE SERVICE**

- After every event, thank your volunteers and sign them up for the next event.

## FINDING LOCAL PARTNERS: COMMUNITY GARDENS

Check out the organizations already doing good work in your community. Many existing service groups have identified community needs and built the expertise to provide solutions. Get plugged in with them!

It will be helpful to provide background on the local service landscape to the attendees of your house meeting. A few phone calls can produce all the information you need to know your options.

For community gardens:

- Search locally for community gardens using the [ACGA database](#) or your yellow pages.
- Ask the garden how new additions can get involved (sample script below).

### SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT:

- Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm interested in working with your garden. May I speak with someone about opportunities?
- How can I sign up for a plot? (If there are no plots available, you can still get involved.)
- How many plots do you have available? If I have a group of friends interested in working in the garden, can we all share a plot or should we each get separate plots?
- In what other ways can I support the garden? Do you need volunteers?
- How many days a week do you need volunteers?
- Do you have any programs that work with children or local schools?
- What kind of training/background check do you provide?
- Are you the best person for me to contact?

Remember to keep track of who you have contacted so you can follow up as necessary. You can use the chart below or create one that fits your project.

Garden name	Contact name	Contact number	Plots available Y/N	Other volunteer opportunities

## House Meetings

### **Purpose:**

House meetings are a valuable tactic for recruiting volunteers and building a team. House meetings allow community members to share their concerns and join together to work for progress. Within the room, you already have all the tools you need to enact change on a local level. Every attendee can contribute time or resources or leadership abilities.

Your house meeting will help you identify your leadership team. The people that are committed enough to come to your house meeting should be considered potential leaders of the initiatives being implemented in their communities.

As a house meeting host, invite people from your social network to participate in a discussion about your community, pressing needs, and potential solutions. House meetings often engage people new to service and unclear about next steps. Serving with the support of a team will increase the ease and comfort of many new volunteers.

Building community through house meetings is a critical step toward the President's ultimate goal, which is to support everyday Americans in a grassroots effort to improve lives and strengthen communities.

### **A House Meeting**

#### **Goals**

- Choose and plan a service project for the summer.
- Set measurable group and personal goals for your United We Serve project.
- Identify 5 attendees to be team leaders.
- Plan the next meeting of the leadership team and identify next steps for each leader.
- Obtain commitments from all attendees to volunteer on a regular basis from June 22 – September 11.

#### **Host Duties**

- Before
  - To have **20** people attend, you will need to invite **50**. Brainstorm a list of **50** people to invite. Include your friends, family, members of your faith group, colleagues, book club attendees, etc.
  - Make calls to the **50** people on your list to invite them to your house meeting. Remember that phone calls are much more effective than a mass email.
  - Post your house meeting on Serve.gov and invite local residents interested in volunteering to attend.
  - Browse Serve.gov to see what needs in your community aren't being met and which organizations you might be able to partner with. Take some preliminary steps to identify local partners already working in the community.
  - Prepare necessary materials.

- During
  - Be prepared to give a short explanation of why you became involved/what inspired you to serve.
  - Consider how you most want to serve your community. President Obama has identified four target areas for summer service: health, education, community renewal, and energy and environment. What does your community most need?
  
- After
  - Thank attendees and get their pledge to serve this summer.
  - Organize a follow-up volunteer leadership meeting with your new team to take next steps.

**House Meeting Planner**

Use this brainstorm sheet to think of those you want to invite, including those who have never volunteered before or may be new to Untied We Serve.

Name	Phone #	Invited (Y/N)	Committed (Y/N)	Confirmed (Y/N)	Notes
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**Name:** Please print the invitee’s full name.

**Invite:** Please mark **yes, no, maybe** or **left message (LM)**. This will help you track who you need to contact and who you should be calling for confirmation. The only real invitations are when you speak with someone directly.

**Commit:** Please mark **yes, no** or **maybe**.

**Confirm:** Please mark **yes, no** or **left message (LM)**. You’ll need to call every invitee who said yes or maybe, and every invitee who only got a left message. Please do not assume that **anybody** will come without a confirmation the day before your meeting. It can’t hurt to give people a quick reminder, and you need to know how many people will be at your meeting to make that meeting as effective and enjoyable as possible.



## House Meeting Agenda

**\*\*\*Before starting the meeting, have everyone sign in and appoint a timekeeper who will keep each section running on time.\*\*\***

- 0:00-0:10 **Host welcome and introduction**
- Host of the meeting introduces themselves and welcomes attendees.
  - Host shares why (s)he was inspired to organize the house meeting and the purpose of the meeting.
- 0:10-0:25 **Attendee introductions**
- Go around the room and ask each person to introduce themselves and share their reason for wanting to serve this summer.
- 0:25-0:45 **Choose a project**
- Host introduces three or four project ideas and opens up the room for discussion.
  - Discuss what projects will work best in your community.
  - Group votes on project choice.
- 0:45-0:55 **Set goals and identify leadership**
- Ask which attendees are interested in being volunteer leaders – they should stay after the meeting for 15 minutes and commit to a weekly planning meeting from June 22 - September 11.
  - Ask each attendee to consider personal summer goals and make a realistic but ambitious summer commitment.
- 0:55-1:00 **Conclusion**
- At the end of the meeting, the group should have:
    - At least one project to commit to for the summer.
    - A leadership team.
    - Pledges from each attendee to participate.
- 1:00-1:15 **Leadership team meeting**
- Meet with volunteer leaders to set weekly meeting and divide responsibilities.
  - Fill out attached worksheets.

### Leadership Team Worksheet

The members of my team include:

Name	Phone Number	Email

Our weekly leadership meetings occur every \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Who are 5 other friends and family members who you will call to enlist in your group's project? Make these calls during the leadership team meeting, if possible:

Name	Phone Number	Email

## Setting Goals and Tracking Progress

### Breaking Down Your Goal

What is your group's project?

Who are your local partners?

What is your group's goal? (ie, how many lbs of donated food will you secure, how many hours will you spend reading to kids, how many homes will you audit?)

How many weeks do you have until the National Day of Service and Remembrance on September 11<sup>th</sup>?

What will you have to average per week between now and September 11<sup>th</sup> to reach your goal?

How many volunteers will you have to recruit on average per week to reach that goal? How many hours would you guess they have to work? If it's not clear at first, you should be ambitious and then adjust your recruitment goal as you go.

### Tracking Progress to Goals

Our team will report progress to goals every \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ will share our progress to goals with all team members by email/phone calls every \_\_\_\_\_.

We will also share our story and accomplishments at [serve.gov](http://serve.gov).

## SETTING GOALS: COMMUNITY GARDENING GOALS

Community gardens provide access to traditional produce or nutritionally rich foods that may otherwise be unavailable to low-income families and individuals.

Community gardens allow families and individuals, without land of their own, the opportunity to produce food. Oftentimes gardeners take advantage of the experiential knowledge of elders to produce a significant amount of food for the household.

In 1999, fifteen New York gardens that organized as the City Farms program of the group “Just Food” grew close to 11,000 pounds of fresh vegetables and fruits. Nearly 50 percent was donated to nearby soup kitchens and food pantries.<sup>2</sup>

*What will you do to help expand access to healthy local food?*

### SET CONCRETE GOALS

Setting goals helps you be accountable to yourself and also increases accountability within a group. Clear goals at the beginning of a project will also help you determine how your project will work and what role group members can play. Once goals are set, you can track your progress, compare your results with other group members, and figure out what works best so everyone can meet (or exceed) their goals.

Set a service goal for June 22 – September 11 and hold yourself accountable. Commit as an individual and as a team to volunteer a certain number of hours on public lands this summer. Then keep your commitment. Let’s see what we can do together!

- As an individual, I will cultivate \_\_\_\_\_ square feet of land this summer.
- As a team, we will cultivate \_\_\_\_\_ square feet of land this summer.
- As an individual, I will donate \_\_\_\_\_ lbs of produce to food banks this summer.
- As a team, we will donate \_\_\_\_\_ lbs of produce to food banks this summer.

Part of setting good outcome goals is thinking about how you will achieve them. As a group or an individual, think about process-based goals as well to map out how you will hit your goals above:

- As an individual, I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ friends, family members, and colleagues to join our service group to support community gardening.
- I will recruit \_\_\_\_\_ volunteers to join our service group to support community gardening.

### TRACK PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS

- Set a weekly or biweekly deadline to report progress. For example, "Our team will report progress every Friday. The person responsible for reporting results for your team is \_\_\_\_\_."

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>2</sup> (Just Food 1999 Summary Report, as cited by Englander, 2001, p. 14).

- Make sure every group member is in the loop. Designate a group member to track and share the results. For example, “Our team will share our progress with all members by email/phone calls every week. The person responsible for sharing progress is \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Keep track of your progress. Score sheets like the one below can be helpful.

<b>Week</b>	<b># square feet cultivated</b>	<b># lbs donated to food banks</b>	<b># hours spent volunteering</b>	<b># volunteers active</b>
<b>June 22</b>				
<b>June 29</b>				
<b>July 6</b>				
<b>July 13</b>				
<b>July 20</b>				
<b>July 27</b>				
<b>August 3</b>				
<b>August 10</b>				
<b>August 17</b>				
<b>August 24</b>				
<b>August 31</b>				
<b>September 7</b>				
<b>Total</b>				

## TIPS: SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

*There are numerous ways to support a community garden, even if you don't have a green thumb!*

### TRADITIONAL SERVICE

#### **Adopt a plot and volunteer your time:**

- Each community garden has unique by-laws and requirements. However, most provide a plot of land and some training in exchange for a time commitment and a small fee. Find [the garden near you](#) and get involved. For first time gardeners, a wealth of information is available [on line](#).

#### **Donate harvested food to local food banks:**

- Many community gardens provide fresh fruits and vegetables to local food banks and churches. Find a [local food bank](#) and enlist others in [planting a row](#) for the hungry.

### WORKING WITH KIDS

#### **Work with skilled leaders to assist at children's or classroom gardens:**

- The effects of community gardening are particularly pronounced among low-income children with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Volunteer at an organization or a school garden that specifically targets youth. Once screened, volunteers help in the garden, offer nutrition courses, provide administrative support and more. To connect with the right group, call your local high school or search for community groups like Seattle-based [Cultivating Youth](#).

#### **Organize public education programs at your community garden:**

- Partnerships between local schools and community gardens are blossoming around the country. If you already work at a community garden, consider inviting local students in or running a free workshop over the summer for low-income youth. There are [resources](#) and [manuals](#) available to help design a curriculum.

### KEEP THE GARDEN GOING

#### **Create a monthly newsletter for the local community garden:**

- Sharing successes and identifying best practices will help foster the sense of community at your garden and keep people involved. There are many tactics, both high and low tech, for sharing information. Consider starting a [community notebook](#) at your school garden or creating an [e-newsletter](#) outlining opportunities for service and issues for advocacy.

#### **Help with grant writing or fundraising on behalf of the garden:**

- Fundraising can pay garden rents, buy new tools, support service projects and keep the garden growing. [Online resources](#) can help you navigate the world of private foundations, individual contributors, and old fashioned bake sales.

**START A COMMUNITY GARDEN**

For a step-by-step guide to getting started, visit [the American Community Garden Association](#).

**CELEBRATE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Your work this summer matters and should be celebrated. Remember to go to [Serve.gov](https://www.serve.gov) and tell us your summer story of service.

Also, be sure to keep track of what worked for you this summer and what could be improved. You can learn from this service project when you organize your next service project!