**Federation of
CITY FARMS
& COMMUNITY
GARDENS**

Factsheet

So you want to set up a community growing network?

A simple guide to choosing the right model for you and establishing links with others

With the massive groundswell in community growing the relevance of developing a collective voice is stronger than ever. This factsheet has been written to:

- help you establish a network in your area be it geographic or of interest

- illustrate some of the many benefits of networking

- offer some guidance by way of what others have done and appears to work.

Why are networks important?

The opportunity to share ideas, first-hand experience and support can be really invaluable to growing projects. Developing networks can help forge new links, save time, prevent reinventing the wheel, create new ideas, develop a stronger voice, decrease isolation and ultimately save money and human resource. They can also be useful to bring together a collective voice for decision making or campaigning.

Different ways to network

Some networks are resourced by paid staff or voluntary staff, others run on a more informal adhoc basis using social media or a reciprocal agreement between members.

There are many different models you can adopt to suit your needs and resources

- Face to face meetings: These are particularly popular amongst community growing groups where they have met to discuss ideas, share training and visit a project. One Highland meet up was held in a garden centre coffee shop!

- Social media- a number of groups across Scotland currently use Facebook, blogs and forums to share ideas and resources. Having a blog can also be used to spread the word, advertise events or write articles of interest.

- Events- these are a great way to bring people together share ideas, training and celebrate community growing.

Some examples of existing networks

Glasgow Local Food Network

"An informal network of community organisations and individuals from across Glasgow. We are passionate about local food and strive to produce more of what we eat and eat more of what we produce."

Established in 2012 the GLFN is a network made of community growing projects and interested individuals that meet to discuss local food, raise awareness through putting on events and network with each other.

In the early days they undertook a survey of those interested to research the model they wanted to adopt to drive their activity- opting for a membership organisation communicating to members who sign up to their aims and adopting an informal structure of organisation.

A few voluntary core members lead on organising events etc. remain fairly steady but events are well attended. They have also been involved in working with the Glasgow Food Policy Partnership.

More of their work and activity can be found here: *http://glasgowlocalfood. blogspot.co.uk/p/welcome. html*

Community Gardens Aberdeen City and Shire

An online network to help connect people interested in community, and therapeutic, gardens in Aberdeen City and Shire, and provide a virtual greenhouse for growing and sharing ideas, events, and enthusiasm!

Established at an FCFCG/Trellis network meeting people decided Facebook was possibly the best tool to maintain regional contact without using FCFCG as an intermediary.

Germinate

Established as a result of an open meeting with many emergent community growing projects in Edinburgh and with support from ELGT (Edinburgh Lothian Greenspace Trust),

Germination was established with a specific purpose of practical skill share and celebration in mind. The model, one of reciprocity, took one host project to hold an event with two 'supporters' from other projects supporting it.

To date four well attended and diverse events have taken place in different projects across the city.

At the same time the, widely used, Edinburgh Community Gardeners Facebook group was established and the two supported each other.

Questions to ask yourselves/some things to consider

- What is the need for the network?

- Is someone already doing this in a similar form?

- Who is going to drive the network?

- Do we need to pay someone to take things forward?

- How might this affect our group?

- How much time will this require?

- What is the best model for us to adopt to take things forward (eg constituted organisation, or more informal)?

- How do we make decisions together?

It is worth bearing in mind that, as with different seeds, some networks sprout immediately, others take considerable time to develop when the conditions are right and some don't make it.

Common to most networks, there does appear to be a 'critical mass' required to be successful.

Some networks thrive on having a structure in place be it formal or informal, whilst others take a much more organic nature but central to all; timing and the correct conditions for growth appear to be essential!

Resources

FCFCG can support you to set up a community growing network in your area. We can help to plan, and run a meeting, share our knowledge of other growing groups experience, and put you in touch with other useful groups.

There is a vast range of organisations and online resources available to help you decide on a model and get networking. In the first instance try these:

- **www.seedsforchange.org.uk** Lots of information for groups from running a successful meeting to consensus decision making.

- **www.resourcecentre.org.uk** The Resource Centre has lots of ideas for community groups from running meetings, fundraising to developing your groups legal structure (if that's the route you want to take)

- Community Learning Development Officers, and your local Third Sector Interface may also be able to support networking at a local level.

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