

Environmental Resilience Institute

Bedford Community Garden

Bedford, Indiana Increases Access to Healthy Food and Spurs Neighborhood-Level Social Change with Community Garden

Project Summary

In 2017, the Bedford Parks and Recreation Department partnered with Live Well Lawrence County to open Bedford Garden Park, a community garden. The project was supported by local agencies, a crowdfunding campaign, and an extensive network of community groups and individuals. The resulting park is now a space that produces food, brings people together, and offers activities that improve physical and mental health.



Many hands make light work on the United Way Day of Caring to conduct the initial landscaping for the Bedford community garden. Photo Credit: Lorri Hamer.

How did they do it?

Action

Applicable Resources

Secured donated land for garden and implementation partners

- A local association donated a plot of land for the future garden.
- The City of Bedford organized a community garden support committee and identified future implementation partners and best practices for future gardens.
- The [Best Practices Handbook for Creating and Sustaining Community Gardens](https://dug.org/growing-community-gardens/) [<https://dug.org/growing-community-gardens/>](https://dug.org/growing-community-gardens/) helps guide communities in developing a sustainable community garden.

Created incentives for buildings and developments to incorporate urban gardens and farms

- The community garden support committee worked to coordinate donations from local sources and matching funding from local funders and crowdsourcing.
- The [Sample Community Garden Start-Up Cost Estimate](https://vcgn.org/garden-organizer-toolkit/start-a-garden/) [<https://vcgn.org/garden-organizer-toolkit/start-a-garden/>](https://vcgn.org/garden-organizer-toolkit/start-a-garden/) helps communities develop a comprehensive community garden plan.
- [Patronicity](https://www.patronicity.com/#!/) [<https://www.patronicity.com/#!/>](https://www.patronicity.com/#!/) is a crowd granting platform for communities.

Action

Applicable Resources

Collaborated with community groups to design and implement

- The City leveraged local groups to support the initial design and continuing construction of the garden.
- The [Local Foods, Local Places Toolkit](https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places-toolkit) <<https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places-toolkit>> is a guide to help communities revitalize using local food systems.
- [Urban Agriculture Toolkit](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/landuse/urbanagriculture/) <<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/landuse/urbanagriculture/>>

Background

In 2015, the City of Bedford retired its first community garden due to the landowner's intent to sell the property. Determined to recreate the space, the Parks and Recreation department developed partnerships throughout Bedford and successfully organized a donation of land, funding contributions, and community volunteer efforts to open a new garden in 2016.

The Importance of Community Gardens

Community gardens provide many positive economic, environmental, and social impacts including physical and mental health benefits, opportunities for diverse social interaction, and no or low cost space to grow nutritious foods. Importantly, gardeners can grow what they eat most and use the community garden to cut household food costs.

By creating new pathways for healthy food, gardens can address *food insecurity* in communities—the 'state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food' (USDA, 2018). This is an important issue to Bedford—according to [Feeding America](http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/indiana) <<http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/indiana>>, 12.8% of residents in Lawrence County (home to Bedford) were considered food insecure in 2016. This is above the national average of 12.3%.

Implementation

After Bedford's first community garden closed, the Director of Parks and Recreation approached the Bedford Urban Enterprise Association about a three-acre undeveloped plot (according to [Denver Urban Gardens](https://dug.org/growing-community-gardens/) <<https://dug.org/growing-community-gardens/>>, community gardens should be at least 3,000-3,500 square feet with 10-12 plots to maintain a critical mass of gardeners). The Association donated the land and start-up funds in support of the new garden. The project manager organized a committee with members from Indiana University Health, Purdue University, and United Way to design the garden. The committee collaborated with local Master Gardeners, 4-H, Boys and Girls Club, Radius Indiana, and community at-large in the design process.

Through a 'Day of Caring' with United Way, the project team partnered with local school football teams that helped with initial landscaping after the park groundbreaking. Working closely with the Bedford North High School career center, the park incorporated students in many aspects of the project—for example, a construction class built the park's picnic pavilion. Today, the park is regularly maintained by community members and the Parks and Recreation Department.

Timeline

The project began in 2016 and its first gardens were planted in 2017. Several new elements were added to the park in 2018 and more are coming in 2019.

Funding

The initial budget for the project was \$135,000 (note: this is a relatively large community garden project. According to the Vermont Community Garden Network <<https://vcgn.org/garden-organizer-toolkit/start-a-garden/>> , the average start-up cost for a community garden is \$2,500). The Bedford Urban Enterprise Association donated \$75,000 in start-up funds and the Bedford Parks and Recreation Department contributed \$20,000. The project participated in the CreatINg Places Campaign through a platform called Patronicity to crowdfund another \$25,000, which was then matched by the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority with another \$25,000. Due to the success of the crowdfund campaign—the effort surpassed the \$25,000 goal and raised \$30,900—the final budget totaled \$140,000. The old community garden plot is for sale and the proceeds will be forwarded to the deed holder, Green Hill Cemetery.

[Patronicity <https://www.patronicity.com/#!/>](https://www.patronicity.com/#!/) is a civic crowdfunding and crowd-granting platform. Indiana communities are able to participate in the [CreatINg Places Campaign <https://www.patronicity.com/creatingplaces#!/>](https://www.patronicity.com/creatingplaces#!/), which is a collaborative effort with the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority. Local governments and non-profit organizations with either 501(c)3 or 501(c)4 status can submit projects.

Outcomes and Conclusions

Garden Park is larger than Bedford's original community garden and is only two blocks away from a previous pocket park that has since had its playground equipment relocated to the new Garden Park. It has been in use for two years, and is home to 72 active plots and eight raised beds. Many plots are used by gardeners to grow food for their own households, and some are used to grow for enjoyment—food from these plots is donated to households or shelters in need.

After the garden was established, the community got creative. The park now also includes a quarter mile walking trail, 40x80 foot greenhouse, tool shed share program, bee hive program, and several bird and bat houses. There is also a community orchard with apple, pear, and peach trees, and a wild berry patch. An Americans with Disabilities Act compliant playground and restroom were constructed. The Park partnered with United Way to build a Born Learning Trail, which includes a series of interactive signs with learning activities for young children and their families. In 2018, the Park decided to honor local Rosie the Riveters—women who worked in factories and shipyards during World War II—and created a memorial rose garden. The entire property was fenced in to protect from deer. In the coming year, local Master Gardeners will be planting a native flower garden, incorporating native corns and hops for local breweries throughout the park, and constructing a garden bed solely dedicated to feeding and raising worms. The Gardeners also plan to build a Native American medicine wheel.

Beyond offering this new infrastructure, the Park engages with a wide range of community groups and hosts events. Volunteer days and educational activities have been held with Purdue Extension, the local 4-H Club, the Boys and Girls Club, Boy and Girl Scouts, the public schools, and more. The Master Gardeners also use the space regularly for educational programming.

Challenges

The project manager from Bedford Parks and Recreation, Barry Jeskewich, reflected that there were not many challenges during this project, but there was one outstanding factor that led to its success:

“Networking and partnerships were the backbone of the success of this project. We grew Bedford’s social resilience by tapping into the sense of ownership and buy-in from community members and partnering organizations. This is what made Garden Park exceed expectations.”

Questions for discussion

These questions are designed to inspire readers—especially those wanting to learn broadly about climate change solutions—to think critically about the case study on this page and encourage deeper, more meaningful conversations. A list of ERIT case studies that include discussion questions can be found on the Resilient Communities Case Studies <<https://eri.iu.edu/who-we-work-with/educators/resilient-communities-case-studies.html>> page.

1. Why is it advantageous for the sustainability of the community garden to have many investors, stakeholders, and supporters in the community?
2. Explore the Map the Meal Gap <<https://map.feedingamerica.org/>> tool. Find information for your hometown. How does it compare to the national average?
 - a. What is something that you learned from this map and the accompanying data that surprised you?
3. Besides increasing food security, what other benefits might a community garden offer?
4. Suppose there is high demand for plots in the community garden. What policies could be implemented with the new community garden to make sure access to the plots is equitable?

Project resources

- See the levels of food insecurity and food cost in "Map the Meal Gap 2018, Feeding America <<http://map.feedingamerica.org/>> ."
- For a better understanding of what food security is, read the United States Department of Agriculture's definitions of food security <<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>> .
- Learn some community garden best practices by reading "Growing Community Gardens: A Denver Urban Gardens' Best Practices Handbook for Creating and Sustaining Community Gardens <<https://vcgn.org/garden-organizer-toolkit/>> ."

For more information about Bedford's community garden, contact:

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