# ENVIRONMENTAL DEMONSTRATION HUBS – ORIENTING CONCEPTS AND APPLIED EXAMPLES

## JANUARY 2014

Doran Hoge* and Elizabeth Jackson**
*Research Shop Intern
**Research Shop Project Manager

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

**RESEARCH GOALS**

This research aims to provide a compilation of working models, central concepts, and promising practices related to environmentally oriented community hubs. The research is intended to assist planners of the Yorklands Green Hub to orient themselves within the community of existing sustainable environmental hubs and to make informed decisions as they develop a plan for the design, implementation, and funding of the proposed Yorklands Green Hub.

**BACKGROUND**

Based on the purpose, vision, immediate goals and envisioned outcomes outlined in the Yorklands Green Hub briefing, found on the Yorklands Green Hub website, a number of functional and sustainable models have been identified, which would be useful in the decision-making processes moving forward in establishing the proposed Yorklands Green Hub. The following is a compilation of information from these examples.

The space proposed for the Yorklands Green Hub holds great potential for a variety of community projects. As such, information has been drawn from number of community organizations including: community resource centers, community gardens, gardening and sustainability hubs, artist resource centers, and permaculture design groups. The organizing committee for the Yorklands Green Hub could apply elements from these organizations toward the further development of the Yorklands Green Hub. We hope this will contribute toward the organizing committee's vision to "create for Ontario's public domain a self-sustaining education, demonstration, and research hub"[i].

# METHODS

**SOURCES**

A literature scan was performed in the preparation of this report, drawing on a combination of scholarly (e.g. academic journals) and grey (e.g., web-based, governmental resources, organizational websites) resources. With the short timeline in mind, research aimed to provide a snapshot of relevant concepts, organizations, and centres that could helpfully inform the work of the Yorklands Green Hub organizing committee. The sources of all information are cited in footnotes, and a list of further resources is attached as an appendix.

# FINDINGS

## ORIENTING CONCEPTS

### Living Lab

A Living Lab is generally agreed to be "a research concept. A living lab is a user-centred, open-innovation ecosystem, often operating in a territorial context (e.g. city, agglomeration, region), integrating concurrent research and innovation processes within a public-private-people partnership.

The concept is based on a systematic user co-creation approach integrating research and innovation processes. These are integrated through the co-creation, exploration, experimentation and evaluation of innovative ideas, scenarios, concepts and related technological artefacts in real life use cases." 'Use cases' involve user communities as a source of creation. This approach allows involved stakeholders to consider both the performance of a product or service and its potential adoption by users. "A Living Lab constitutes an experiential environment, which could be compared to the concept of experiential learning, where users are immersed in a creative social space for designing and experiencing their own future. Living labs could also be used by policy makers and users/citizens for designing, exploring, experiencing and refining new policies and regulations in real-life scenarios for evaluating their potential impacts before their implementations." ("Living Labs")

### Permaculture Design

"Permaculture design is an ecological design system for sustainability in all aspects of human endeavor. It teaches us how to design natural homes and abundant food production systems, regenerate degraded landscapes and ecosystems, [and] develop ethical economies and communities[…] As an ecological design system, permaculture focuses on the interconnections between things" ("Permaculture – Key Concepts"). The following concepts provide valuable insights into fundamentals of permaculture and permaculture design, which could be useful to the Yorklands Green Hub.
*Each of the following definitions is drawn directly from permaculture.org.

### *Food Forests and Guilds*

Food Forests mimic the architecture and beneficial relationships between plants and animals found in a natural forest or other natural ecosystem. Food forests are not "natural", but are designed and managed ecosystems (typically complex perennial

INSTITUTE for
COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
University of Guelph  Guelph, Ontario Canada  N1G 2W1
phone: 519 / 824.4120 Ext. 53829  |  email: ices@uoguelph.ca
www.theresearchshop.ca

p.4

polyculture plantings) that are very rich in biodiversity and productivity. Guilds are a combination of plants, animals, insects, fungi, and even people. Guilds can be found in healthy ecosystems, and can be designed and planted to make your food forest, garden, pasture, woodlot, or community healthier and more productive. Each guild participant contributes something valuable to the entire composition. For example, most plants need nitrogen, phosphorus, other nutrients, and pest control for healthy growth. By combining food plants with nitrogen fixing plants, nutrient accumulators, and beneficial insect attractors, one can design and build a thriving edible ecosystem that reduces work and inputs on behalf of the gardener.

### Poultry and Backyard Animals

Animals (including birds and wildlife) are a critical component of any sustainable ecosystem, as without their participation and contribution ecological integrity is diminished. In this context, animals are in a central role. Foraging is needed to cycle nutrients, clear fallen fruit, keep weeds down, eat and spread seeds, and eat pests. It turns out food gardens need similar services, and by building timely and creative relationships between domestic/wild animals and food plants, much of the work of producing food can be accomplished through good design.

### Rainwater Harvesting

Permaculture includes the design of landscapes to absorb rainwater. Rainwater is best maximized when allowed to infiltrate into the soil. There it is available to plants, is naturally cleansed and filtered by soil biology, and enters the groundwater to enrich the hydrological cycle. Rainwater harvesting is an alternative to designing outdoor environments to shed [or redirect] runoff, where it rushes down hillsides, streets, and roadways, causing erosion and carrying pollution directly into waterways.

### Designing for Multiple Functions

Everything should serve multiple functions through design. It can be as simple as a water collection cistern creating a warm microclimate or as complex as a road channeling cooling winds toward a home, while draining runoff to an orchard, simultaneously acting as a fire defense line, all the while providing access to a property.

### Heirloom Plant Varieties and Animal Breeds

Due to industrialization and centralization of agriculture we are losing significant amounts of plant varieties and animal breeds at an alarming rate. Permaculture design for gardens and farms takes a particular focus on utilizing and preserving heirloom plants and animals to keep them thriving through use. Permaculture, when applied to agriculture, creates complete systems where seeds are saved on-site and animals are

allowed to breed to reduce reliance on increasingly conglomerated agricultural suppliers.

*Watershed Restoration*

Permaculture addresses the health of watersheds, as clean and running water is a primary necessity of human culture. Reversing the process of landscape degradation and pollution, permaculture design strategies repair watersheds, purifying water, reducing flood danger, slowing erosion, and increasing water availability.

*Natural Building*

Permaculture proposes to design and build structures that improve the ecological health of the ecosystem. Permaculture has a solid foundation in climate specific design, using biological resources before technological solutions; designed structures often use the sun for heating, and breezes and vegetation for cooling. A permaculture-designed building might feature a wind blocking woodlot to assist in heat retention (through slowing wind speeds), or orienting buildings that take advantage of passive solar heating.

*Waste Management*

Waste is turned from pollution into a resource through permaculture design. Often, waste is a resource whose functions have yet to be uncovered. This is the attitude of the permaculture designer, as she creates composting systems for kitchen waste or human waste. Beautiful homes can be built from reclaimed and recycled materials, and wastewater is returned to the landscape for food production.

*Ecological Economics*

Since permaculture focuses on the connections between things more than individual parts, the design of resilient economies relies on each contributor to build a strong network. Many small businesses and contributors are valued over a few larger corporations. Decentralization of money flow allows money exchange a chance to slow, spread, and infiltrate into the local community. Strong economies are built from empowered individuals who supply needs of the local community, while meeting many of their own needs in the same community. Local business alliances and alternative currencies are sometimes used to facilitate this web weaving.

*Biodynamic Agriculture*

Biodynamics is a spiritual-ethical-ecological approach to agriculture, food production and nutrition. Biodynamics was first developed in the early 1920s based on the spiritual

INSTITUTE for
COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
University of Guelph  Guelph, Ontario Canada  N1G 2W1
phone: 519 / 824.4120 Ext. 53829  |  email: ices@uoguelph.ca
www.theresearchshop.ca

p.6

insights and practical suggestions of the Austrian writer, educator and social activist Dr. Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), whose philosophy is called "anthroposophy." Today, the biodynamic movement encompasses thousands of successful gardens, farms, vineyards and agricultural operations of all kinds and sizes on all continents, in a wide variety of ecological and economic settings.

Biodynamic farmers strive to create a diversified, balanced farm ecosystem that generates health and fertility as much as possible from within the farm itself. Preparations made from fermented manure, minerals and herbs are used to help restore and harmonize the vital life forces of the farm and to enhance the nutrition, quality and flavor of the food being raised. Biodynamic practitioners also recognize and strive to work in cooperation with the subtle influences of the wider cosmos on soil, plant and animal health.

Most biodynamic initiatives seek to embody triple bottom line approaches (ecological, social and economic sustainability), taking inspiration from Steiner's insights into social and economic life as well as agriculture. Community supported agriculture (CSA), for example, was pioneered by biodynamic farmers, and many biodynamic practitioners work in creative partnerships with other farms and with schools, medical and wellness facilities, restaurants, hotels, homes for social therapy and other organizations. Biodynamics is thus not just a holistic agricultural system but also a potent movement for new thinking and practices in all aspects of life connected to food and agriculture.

**APPLIED EXAMPLES**

**Social Justice and Community Wellbeing.**

**The Hub Halifax (www.thehubhalifax.ca)**
According to The Hub Halifax, "the future is about thinking and acting locally and regionally, collaborating in different ways and supporting the emergence of an ecosystem that inspires and equips people to take their big ideas to the next level" ("About").

The Hub Halifax is a workspace where people from various fields, from start-ups, creative, developers, social enterprises, law, marketing, non profits, meet to collaboratively think, plan and work toward launching start-up businesses. The objective of the hub is to encourage people at the leading edge of their respective fields to come together and foster the conditions for organic social innovation to occur with a positive impact on local and global community ("About").)

The Hub Halifax is equipped with a printer, scanner, photocopier, and wireless Internet connection. The Hub also hosts a diverse array of innovative learning and networking events. ("About")

**Working Women Community Centre (www.workingwomencc.org/)**
"Working Women is a charitable organization that provides a variety of programs and services, which help immigrant women adjust to living in Toronto" ("What we do").

The foundational principle of the Centre is to treat the people who access their services with dignity and respect. When women who come to one of the hubs or locations for settlement services (language instruction or housing, or job training), staff make a point of learning about each woman's life: The skills they have besides their formal training, the connections they have with people outside of their family, whether they have children and their recreational interests. "By understanding the individual as a whole, the Hub seeks to encourage each immigrant woman as an individual to participate in a variety of programs thereby ending their isolation and dependency. This in turn, allows the women to not only help themselves and their families but also to contribute to their community" ("What we do").

**United Way Toronto (UWT) (www.unitedwaytoronto.com)**
UWT works with frontline agencies, community partners, the private sector, and all levels of government to ensure people have access to help when they need it most. The long-term strategies of UWT work to create lasting changes that will improve whole communities by targeting the conditions that lead to social challenges. (unitedwaytoronto.com)

Financial support for the UWT goes directly to a Community Fund, which supports strategies aimed at improving the social conditions in Toronto. In the short term, this is done by meeting immediate needs, and in the long term, by addressing the root causes of social problems through a systemic approach that works to change whole communities. By supporting a network of member agencies, United Way Toronto focuses efforts on the three main areas that are essential to creating opportunities for a good life. These include: 1) helping people move from poverty to possibility, 2) building healthy people and strong communities, and 3) helping kids be all they can be. (unitedwaytoronto.com)

**INSTITUTE for COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP**
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
University of Guelph  Guelph, Ontario Canada  N1G 2W1
phone: 519 / 824.4120 Ext. 53829  |  email: ices@uoguelph.ca
www.theresearchshop.ca

p.8

UWT also "engages the community, bringing together people from all walks of life in a common purpose and to build an understanding of the city's challenges, and then mobilize people, ideas and resources to achieve shared aspirations" (unitedwaytoronto.com).

As part of its work to support its mandate of increasing access to needed services and resoures, The United Way has created Community Hubs, which they define as: "local infrastructure with health services and social programs targeted to local needs, all under one roof—which means that services are easy to get to and people can access the supports they need. By building Community Hubs, United Way has improved access to essential social services—creating a foundation for a healthy neighbourhood" ("Community Hubs"). UTW points out that these hubs are also "centres of engagement and capacity building where residents can participate in community activities. By bringing health services right into the inner suburban neighborhoods, we are connecting residents with the tools they need to lead healthier lives" ("Community Hubs").

**Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) (www.socialinnovation.ca)**
"The Centre for Social Innovation is a social enterprise with a mission to catalyze social innovation in Toronto and around the world. We believe that society is facing unprecedented economic, environmental, social and cultural challenges. We also believe that new innovations are the key to turning these challenges into opportunities to improve our communities and our planet. We're a coworking space, community, and launchpad for people who are changing the world, with three locations in Toronto and a location in New York City. We provide our members with the tools they need to accelerate their success and amplify their impact. Together, we're building a movement of nonprofits, for-profits, entrepreneurs, artists, and activists working across sectors to build a better world ("About CSI").

The CSI operates based on a specific theory of change related to the concept of social innovation. The CSI is motivated by the theory that social change is the result of a tremendously complex mix of ingredients. Environmental conditions, social conditions and individual actors collide to spark world-changing ideas. Social innovations come from individuals, groups or organizations, and can take place in the for-profit, nonprofit and public sectors. Increasingly, they are happening in the spaces between these three sectors as perspectives collide to spark new ways of thinking. The CSI operates in the spaces between sectors and among a vibrant mix of people, projects and organizations. Social Innovation refers to new ideas that resolve existing social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges for the benefit of people and planet. According to the CSI, "a

true social innovation is systems-changing; it permanently alters the perceptions, behaviors and structures that previously gave rise to these challenges" ("Social Innovation").

According to the CSI website, social innovation occurs in contexts with the right combination of ingredients. Namely; diversity, a conducive environment and time for ideas to incubate and grow. With relation to diversity, they believe that social innovation rarely occurs within homogenous or staid structures. "It happens at the peripheries, where differing approaches bump up against each other and stimulate new ways of thinking.". The diversity of this system leads to new opportunities and robust and flexible responses to common challenges. This means doing away with the silos that keep sectors and structures apart. Based on the principle of diversity, CSI members include nonprofits, charities, for-profits, entrepreneurs and activists working in areas from health and education to arts and environment. As mentioned, the CSI promotes the notion that social innovation needs a conducive physical environment in order to occur. Social innovators need actual spaces to spark, develop and apply their ideas. As a space-based organization, the CSI "helps to find ways to create and curate spaces that foster social innovation." The CSI also promotes the importance of unstructured social space. "There is far more serendipity around the kitchen table than the boardroom table." By balancing these characteristics, the CSI creates a dynamic that stimulates new ideas to germinate and blossom ("Theory of Change").

Lastly, the CSI attempts to bring innovators together with capacity-building workshops, informal social mixers, and an intranet network. In doing this, the CSI "fosters individual and collective growth and creates an environment that produces original action" [ii]. The CSI does not program with an expectation of uniform engagement, but "offers opportunities for individuals to find their own level; to dip in and dip out of the community in a way they find comfortable and natural. And when a new idea begins to surface, that same gentle touch helps it to grow".  The role of the center is to animate the ideas that have developed in the space provided and "nurture a participatory culture where all members feel welcome to bring their ideas and to leave their fingerprints" ("Theory of Change").

**Environmental Justice and Food.**
**The Stop Toronto (www.thestop.org)**
The Stop "strives to increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds health and community and challenges inequality." The Stop provides frontline services to community including; a drop-in, food bank, perinatal program, community

**INSTITUTE for**
**COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP**

College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
University of Guelph  Guelph, Ontario Canada  N1G 2W1
phone: 519 / 824.4120 Ext. 53829  |  email: ices@uoguelph.ca
www.theresearchshop.ca

p.10

action program, bake ovens and markets, community cooking, community advocacy, sustainable food systems education and urban agriculture. The Stop's Green Barn is a sustainable food production and education centre which houses a greenhouse, food systems education programs, a sheltered garden, Global Roots Garden, community bake oven and compost demonstration centre.

The Stop's operations are based on the belief that healthy food is a basic human right. The ability to access healthy food is often related to multiple issues and not just a result of low income. The Stop therefore, "takes a holistic approach to achieve real change in our community's access to healthy food." It does this by striving to meet basic food needs of community members, fostering opportunities for community members to build mutual support networks, connecting community members to resources and enabling community members to advocate on their own behalf regarding the underlying causes of hunger and poverty."

A key tenet of The Stop's approach is that community members must be involved in making decisions about how the organization operates. When program participants are involved as front-line volunteers, program advisory committee members, gardeners or cooks, the stigma associated with receiving free food is often diminished. "While food access programming helps confront the issue of hunger, it also creates opportunities for community members to forge their own responses to hunger."
("Mission")

**Local Food Resource Hubs (LFRH) ([http://www.gardeningmatters.org/hubs](http://www.gardeningmatters.org/hubs))**
The LFRH supports residents to grow their own fresh produce, helping to ensure greater food security and healthy food access. LFRH members are part of neighborhood gardening networks who support each other through the growing season. By joining, one has access to free or low-cost classes led by other members, volunteer opportunities and social events. LFRHs are community based networks of residents, organizations, and businesses supporting each other to grow, cook, and preserve fruits and vegetables and increase health and access to fresh food.

Members of LFRH become part of a network of people building a vibrant and inclusive local food system. There are many opportunities to participate, including social events, workdays, classes, and connecting one-on-one with other members. ("Local Food")

Each Hub operates individually but collaborates with other Hubs across the Hubs Network. Gardening Matters facilitates this collaboration. Members are encouraged to get involved locally. Once a year, all members gather to give feedback and plan the

next year. LFRH is "committed to making the Hubs Network inclusive, democratic, and welcoming, and the program is constantly evolving to best meet the needs of members and the community." Each neighborhood hub may have different local components, based on each community's interests and needs.

According to LFRH, "members help create healthier, more resilient communities by giving residents better access to fresh produce and opportunities for exercise through gardening. Gardens improve the local environment by reducing pollution, preventing erosion, and increasing biodiversity."
**("Local Food")**

**Foodshare Toronto ([www.foodshare.net](www.foodshare.net))**
FoodShare Toronto is a non-profit community organization whose vision is Good Healthy Food for All. FoodShare takes "a unique multi-faceted and long-term approach to hunger and food issues by working to empower individuals, families and communities through food-based initiatives, while advocating for the broader public policies needed to ensure that everyone has adequate access to sustainably produced, good healthy food."

Working "from field to table," Foodshare focuses on the entire system that puts food on tables: from the growing, processing and distribution of food, to its purchasing, cooking and consumption. Foodshare also facilitates empowerment and community development from the ground up, cultivating awareness, building citizenship and enhancing individual and community participation, while striving to improve access to good healthy food. Develops programs to address the direct needs of low-income communities in Toronto, implementing these solutions universally to remove stigma. FoodShare's community development partnership model means that work is leveraged exponentially, garnering impacts that reach far beyond Toronto and even Canada.

Foodshare programs include Student Nutrition, Field to Table Schools, the Good Food Café, Focus on Food youth internships, the Good Food Box, Good Food Markets, Fresh Produce for Schools and Community Groups, Baby and Toddler Nutrition, Community Kitchens, Field to Table Catering, the FoodLink Hotline, Power Soups, Community Gardening, Composting, Beekeeping and Urban Agriculture.
("About Us")

FoodShare partners with community leaders, organizations and schools in Toronto to increase access to and knowledge of sustainably produced Good Healthy Food. They function as social entrepreneurs, by striving to work innovatively by promoting

operational excellence and fiscal sustainability, and as social justice advocates, as they prioritize working with underserved communities, sharing tools and expertise to build a just food system. (foodshare.net)

FoodShare innovates "by creating empowering tools and scalable solutions, sharing freely these resources in an "open source" approach. Staff work to support and mentor communities in drawing on their strengths to adapt and grow solutions." This community development partnership model means that work is leveraged exponentially, garnering impacts that grow as information and skills are adapted and passed along to others, ensuring that each dollar invested in programs multiplies, impacting the greatest number of people, providing tools and support that continue giving. (foodshare.net)

A Community Development Partnership Model supports communities with information and tools, honors neighborhood leadership and strength to adapt and grow, and creates long-term solutions with ever-increasing impacts. Sustainable Social Enterprise Programs pay farmers fairly while making quality produce and home cooked meals accessible to all through subsidized food distribution models, the Field to Table Community Food Hub and Field to Table Catering.
(foodshare.net)

### Sole Food Street Farms (solefoodfarms.com)

"Sole Food transforms vacant urban land into street farms that grow artisan quality fruits and vegetables, available at farmer's markets, local restaurants and retail outlets.

Sole Food's mission is to empower individuals with limited resources by providing jobs, agricultural training and inclusion in a supportive community of farmers and food lovers. Individuals are given basic agriculture training and are employed at the farm based on their capability."

"Sole Food now includes a network of farms throughout the city that are providing meaningful employment to 25 individuals who are dealing with drug addiction and mental illness. The farms are supplying fresh food to city residents, and presenting a successful credible model of high quality innovative agriculture within the urban context."
("About")

**INSTITUTE for COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP**
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
University of Guelph  Guelph, Ontario Canada  N1G 2W1
phone: 519 / 824.4120 Ext. 53829  |  email: ices@uoguelph.ca
www.theresearchshop.ca

p.13

Sole Food recently partnered with the Delta school district and the Kwantlen Polytechnic Sustainable Agriculture program "to develop a curriculum for the district's elementary and secondary students in every aspect of agriculture, from soil science to marketing" – and to create working farms or mini-farms at each school in the district ("Mini Farms Sprouting").

**Environmental Education**

**The Kortright Centre (www.kortright.org)**
**\*The following text is drawn directly from the Kortright Centre's website.**
The Kortright Centre for Conservation is an environmental and renewable energy education and demonstration centre. The Centre is situated 10 minutes north of Toronto, on 325 hectares of pristine woodlands. The Kortright Centre combines a natural oasis with some of the most leading edge sustainable education programs and events in Canada. The centre hosts 135,000 visitors annually and offers over 50 environmental education programs for schools and 30 sustainable technology workshops for the public, trades and professionals.

The Kortright Centre offers sustainable technology education programs, which are based around The Power Trip Trail, a 1.6 kilometre trail, which links a variety of demonstrations on renewable energy, energy efficiency, wastewater treatment and sustainable building design.

Based on the Kortright Centre's website, some of the renewable energy activities that you can take part in include:
- Participating in an intensive workshop.
- Taking a stroll on the Power Trip Trail to watch the windmill and the wind turbine in action.
- Viewing displays of solar shingles, hot water showers and water pumps.
- Visiting the Renewable Energy Cottage to learn what life would be like if you were not hooked up to the grid.

The mission of the Kortright Centre works with individuals and communities to "accelerate the adoption of sustainable technologies and practices by providing educational programs, demonstrations and partnerships." This involves:
- Instilling an awareness and appreciation of the natural world;

**INSTITUTE for**
**COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP**

College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
University of Guelph  Guelph, Ontario Canada  N1G 2W1
phone: 519 / 824.4120 Ext. 53829  |  email: ices@uoguelph.ca
www.theresearchshop.ca

p.14

- Developing an understanding of the relationships between healthy ecological systems and our lifestyles;
- Demonstrating practical, relevant and leading edge sustainable technologies and practices;
- Motivate and support individuals, organizations, government and business to adopt sustainable options and actions; and
- Developing leaders, champions, projects and programs in the community that accelerates the transformation of the Toronto region into the most sustainable community in the world.

("About Kortright")

**Everdale Organic Farm and Environmental Learning Centre ([www.everdale.org](www.everdale.org))**
Everdale's mission is to be a "farm-based organization that provides hands-on, solution-based food and farming education to build and engage healthy local communities" (About Us" Everdale).

Everdale delivers a wide range of hands-on learning programs on food and farming to people of all ages and backgrounds. This includes hands-on, curriculum-linked workshops that foster a development of environmental literacy and stewardship. These programs are based on the belief that "farm-school programs provide meaningful learning for children and are essential in helping to create innovative solutions for an ecologically sustainable future."

From early May through late October, Everdale farm serves as a living classroom, offering a series of farm trip workshops for preschool, elementary and high school students and other youth-based community groups. ("Kids and Schools.") Everdale also offers a wide range of workshops to help [people] learn basic farming and homesteading skills (everdale.org).

**Earthwalk Eco Education Center ([www.ecoearthwalk.ca](www.ecoearthwalk.ca))**
Earthwalk Eco Education Center provides educational experiences throughout Eastern Ontario. Earthwalk's mission is to "raise consciousness about sustainable solutions to our social and environmental issues." They do this by offering educational workshops, seminars and courses and share information and techniques for healthy and environmentally responsible living via an online information hub. Workshops and seminars offered by Earthwalk range from ecohome design and construction, healthy home solutions, renewable energy, organic food production, eco gardens, natural health strategies, eco transportation, and more.

**INSTITUTE for COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP**

College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
University of Guelph  Guelph, Ontario Canada  N1G 2W1
phone: 519 / 824.4120 Ext. 53829  |  email: ices@uoguelph.ca
www.theresearchshop.ca

p.15

Earthwalk was conceived in response to a growing need in this country to move towards a more sustainable and healthy society. According to their website, "creating a sustainable life now is not only critical to our quality of life of this generation, but also that of our children and our children's children." A dedicated group of eco educators have pooled resources at Earthwalk to bring together tangible and practical solutions to many of our sustainability issues. Though their educational programs, they are attempting to facilitate the creation of a new and more sustainable culture. (ecoearthwalk.ca)

## STEPS TOWARD ESTABLISHING AN ENVIRONMENTAL HUB

These steps were consolidated from a number of resources related to the development, implementation, and longevity of a number of community gardens and not-for-profit organizations. They are not prescriptive, but offer an encapsulation of promising practices from other hubs and organizations in the field.

*The information and text below draw heavily from the Vancouver Community Agriculture Network (http://vcan.ca/) and the American Community Gardening Association (http://www.communitygarden.org/about-acga/).

**Step One: Identify Organizing and Interest groups**
The first step is to let people know about the plan to have a community project and gauge the level of interest, support, and commitment from potential community members and other stakeholders.

Some community organizations may already have a group of people who are interested in participating in a similar project, such as members of a youth group, community centre, school, senior's complex, or church. These and groups could serve as a source of support, resources and organizing expertise.

It is a good idea to hold introductory community meetings to discuss the potential of a community project and to recruit participants if they are not already identified. At these meetings identify who the project will involve, who it will benefit.

When scheduling a public or community meeting, think about other events or meetings happening that you could partner with or attend to promote the project. Send personal invitations to anyone you know who may be interested in being involved.

**Step Two: Form a Dedicated Committee**
Once the community is engaged, form a committee of volunteers to help establish the project. Many hands make lighter work. This committee can be made up of people who feel committed to the development of the community project and have time to devote to it.

The committee should host regular meetings during the year to make plans and decisions about the project, and will help organize harvest celebrations and fall closing days. The committee may also have working groups within it that manage particular aspects of the project, such as education, youth activities, or construction.

It is important to match volunteers with duties that suit their level of interest, time commitment, and skills, so that they enjoy the volunteer experience and continue to be involved. Sharing responsibilities equally will increase member engagement and prevent volunteer burnout. Some volunteers may want to contribute their labor without participating as organizers, while others may prefer administrative tasks.

*Coordinator*
The committee may choose to select a coordinator to lead the development process and to advise and update the committee. The coordinator should have project management and leadership skills. The coordinator can be a volunteer or paid staff depending on the group's available finances. The responsibilities of a coordinator could also be divided among several organizers focused on managing different areas.

**Step Three: Establish Partnerships**
It will be important to establish partnerships with people or organizations that can help bring together the resources needed to successfully start the project. Examples of potential partners for the project include:

- Horticultural organizations such that can provide valuable knowledge on growing agricultural, education processes.
- Regional Nutritionists (Dietitians) with your Regional Health Authority can help select the most nutritious foods and activities that the project could provide and provide information on the benefits of healthy eating.
- Local businesses such as hardware stores and gardening stores may be able to donate items to the project such as tools, materials, and seeds. Consider asking

local trades people to donate some of their time to offer advice and work on building, landscaping, and other projects.

- Seniors centres, residences, and organizations may be interested in participating. Don't underestimate the knowledge and experience of community members,
- Universities and colleges may be able to offer educational workshops for participants on a range of related topics.
- Funding agencies can cover expenses for materials, programming, or staffing.
- Churches, service clubs and non-profit organizations can offer resources, guidance, donations, and networking opportunities.

**Step Four: Select/Survey the Site.**
There are many factors to keep in mind when selecting surveying site. Keep in mind the kind of community activities the space leads itself to; such as, ease of access, proximity to resources, visibility from pathways and streets.

When visiting potential sites, be prepared to draw simple site maps to help in the planning processes. The more information that is gathered about the site, the easier it will be to plan, design the space. The clearer a plan you have, the more likely that decision-makers will accept it. A site map will also be an important communication tool for use with community volunteer recruitment.

*Liability Insurance*
Insurance is important to protect the community organization against liability for injuries or damages that may occur in the space. It may also be required to receive support from local governments. Determine if the landholder already holds liability insurance that would cover the community space. If not, the landholder may wish to expand their coverage or the community organization may wish to secure its own. Speak with the landholder and a local insurance company to determine the appropriate coverage for the organization.

**Step Five: Look for Funding & Sponsorships.**
There are a number of different ways community groups can get the resources they need. Some operate without external funding and depend on membership fees alone, while others actively pursue corporate sponsorship or government funding. External funding can be helpful, but is not always required depending on the scale of the project's activities.

**INSTITUTE for COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP**
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
University of Guelph  Guelph, Ontario Canada  N1G 2W1
phone: 519 / 824.4120 Ext. 53829  |  email: ices@uoguelph.ca
www.theresearchshop.ca

p.18

Prior to seeking funding, it may be beneficial for the group to develop a community 'wish list' that can be distributed to members, partners, and potential donors and sponsors.

- Annual membership fees are rental fees access to space that can help cover the operating costs of the space. It is important that membership fees reflect the purpose of the space, needs of its members, and resources it will offer.
- Community businesses, such as hardware stores or garden centres, can provide in-kind support, donations, expertise and labor.
- Corporations can provide support in the form of donations and sponsorship.
- Fundraising can raise money for start-up expenses, one-time purchases, or support the annual operations of the project. Flea markets, raffles, or craft and bake sales are good examples of successful fundraising initiatives.
- Municipal, provincial, and federal governments offer a variety of grants that could support a community project. These opportunities generally require an organization to submit an application for funding, maintain financial and activity records, and provide a final report at the end of the funding period.
- The public meetings, promotions and networking activities that have taken place to this point will have helped build relationships that can assist in the search for funding and sponsorships.

**Step Six: Determine Guidelines**
Guidelines should be established through consultation with users of the community space, committees, coordinator and other key stakeholders and funding groups. Guidelines are an excellent way to ensure that everyone understands how the space will operate and what is expected of participants.

Guidelines could include information about:
- Health and safety guidelines for the project to ensure safe practices by participants and volunteers occupying the space. These will also include guidelines for working with others, sharing space, and treating others with respect.
- Guidelines provide a place to record procedures to ensure that from year-to-year new volunteers and participants know how to operate to space, and maintain valuable operational institutional knowledge.
- Information that is only passed on by word of mouth can be lost, so recording it in the guidelines will store it for future years.

Generally, guidelines highlight and elaborate on the following important areas:
- Volunteer and participant responsibilities and expected conduct;
- Agreements, fees, waivers, and other forms;
- Safe handling of tools, materials, and chemicals;
- Garden procedures; and
- Important contacts.

**Step Seven: Start the Community Space.**
Once the group has determined *whom* the space is for, what principles will be applied, you have secured community support, funding, a space and a plan it is time to start using to space.

Good communication with participants and outreach into the community is important for a successful community project. The committee, with input from participants, should determine how to communicate information both to volunteers and gardeners, as well as to the general public. Effective communication can help increase participation and enjoyment of the space.

It is important that all participants are included and up-to-date with activities, and are given the opportunity to provide input. Some successful approaches committees use to communicate with participants include on-site bulletin boards, group email updates, newsletters, and websites. These communication tools can also be used to help participants arrange resource sharing and carpooling. Regular meetings with participants are another effective way to engage participants in planning activities.

*Events*
Hosting events can help participants get to know each other, build support networks, and promote activities within the space. Events can be as simple as a potluck or as elaborate as education events such as full days of themed workshops.

*Ongoing Community Outreach*
Ongoing community outreach is a valuable way to maintain valuable, ongoing community support. The following are useful methods to communicate activities to the public:
- Announce news with public bulletin boards and community newsletters
- Create a website and social networking accounts
- Hold public tours open days

- Celebrate the harvest as a community event
- Host educational activities for all ages
- Document activities with photos, videos, and annual reports
- Hold work days and invite the community to lend a hand to accomplish bigger projects
- Promote the project through public announcements that go out over local radio, television, newspapers, and free local publications.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The information and resources presented here provide an overview of existing environmental hubs and centres across Canada, and of the guiding concepts and practices that sustain them. We hope they will prove helpful as Yorklands Greeen Hub organizers consider their next steps and organize plans to implement the hub. It is worth noting that, while core commitments and values may have much in common, the particularities of each project vary widely; for this reason, we recommend that diligent care be given to evaluating and navigating the specific context of this project. Specifically, organizers are wise to continue to attend to the specifics of the Yorklands site (legally, at various levels of government, culturally in Guelph); the methods by which other hubs have achieved financial sustainability and community support; and possible linkages to educational and other systems that might have a stake in the development of such a hub. A final note: our research for this project suggests that there is a great strength in forming partnerships and collaborations with other groups whose mandates overlap. In a difficult funding and political climate, collaborative ventures show flexibility and endurance that could serve Yorklands Green Hub well.

**Works Cited**

"10 Steps to Starting a Community Garden." American Community Gardening Association. http://communitygarden.org/docs/10stepsstart.pdf

"About." The Hub Halifax. http://thehubhalifax.ca/video/

"About." Centre for Social Innovation. http://socialinnovation.ca/about

"About." Sole Food Farms. http://solefoodfarms.com/about/

"About Kortright." Kortright Centre for Conservation. http://kortright.org/about-kortright/

"About Us." Everdale. http://everdale.org/about-us/

"About Us." Foodshare. http://www.foodshare.net/about-us

"Community Hubs." United Way Toronto.
http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/whatWeDo/communityHubs.php

Growing Community Gardens: A guide to farming food in Vancouver. Vancouver
Community Agriculture Network. http://vcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/cg-guide-
lowres.pdf

"Kids and Schools." Everdale. http://farmkids.everdale.org/

"Living Labs." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_lab

"Local Food Resources Hubs." Gardening Matters.
http://www.gardeningmatters.org/hubs

"Mission." The Stop Community Food Centre. http://www.thestop.org/mission

"Permaculture - Key Concepts." Permaculture Institute.
http://www.permaculture.org/nm/index.php/site/key_concepts/

Shore, Randy. "Mini-farms sprouting across Delta school district:
'Project Pickle' teaches growing, harvesting, cooking to elementary and high school
students." Vancouver Sun. Dec. 29, 2013.
http://www.vancouversun.com/life/Mini+farms+sprouting+across+Delta+school+district/
9332469/story.html

"Social Innovation." Centre for Social Innovation. http://socialinnovation.ca/about/social-
innovation

"Theory of Change." Centre for Social Innovation.
http://socialinnovation.ca/about/theory-of-change

"What we do." Working Women Community Centre.
http://www.workingwomencc.org/about-us/what-we-do/


**Key Resources**

Key Concepts
http://www.openlivinglabs.eu
http://www.permaculture.org

Social Justice
http://thehubhalifax.ca
http://www.workingwomencc.org
http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com
http://socialinnovation.ca

Environmental Justice/Food
http://www.thestop.org
http://www.cfccanada.ca
foodshare.net
http://www.gardeningmatters.org

Environmental Education
http://www.kortright.org
http://everdale.org
http://www.ecoearthwalk.ca

*Steps for getting going.*
*http://www.communitygarden.org/learn/starting-a-community-garden.php*
*http://vcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/cg-guide-lowres.pdf*

Other Interesting Sources.
http://ogph.ca
https://belongingcommunity.wordpress.com/tag/community-hubs/
http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/news/2012/09/14/gardening-hubs-bring-northeast-and-southeast-minneapolis-community-members-together
http://www.greenhub.org.au
http://nyc.socialinnovation.org
http://www.microskills.ca

http://www.studentsgreenfund.org.uk/nav/the-projects/bedfordshire-green-hub
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fab_lab
http://www.eonpermaculture.ca
http://www.planetfriendly.net/learn.html#centres

Heirloom/Organic Seed Saving
http://www.seedsavers.net
http://www.seeds.ca/en.php
http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/food-and-wine/food-trends/how-farmers-are-saving-seeds-and-building-a-canadian-collection/article13098425/
http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-08-06/pot-s-bitter-cousin-hops-thrives-in-michigan-as-craft-beers-boom.html

## FURTHER READING & WORKS CONSULTED

Bursik, Robert J., Jr. and Harold G. Grasmick. 1993. Neighborhoods and Crime: The Dimensions of Effective Community Control. New York: Lexington Books.

Kummer, Corby. 2002. The Pleasures of Slow Food: Celebrating Authentic Traditions, Flavors and Recipes.

McDonald, Bryan L. 2010. Food Security. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McMichael, Philip. 1994. The Global Restructuring of Agro-Food Systems. London: Cornell University Press.

Miller, Sally. 2008. Edible Action: Food Activism and Alternative Economics. Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.Pawlick, Thomas F. 2006. The End of Food: how the Food Industry is Destroying Our Food Supply – And What You Can Do About It. Fort Lee: Baricade Books Inc.

Petrini, Carlo and Gigi Pandonavi. 2005. The Slow Revolution. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc.

Petrini, Carlo. 2007. Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should Be Good, Clean, and Fair. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc.

Soja, Edward W. 1999. Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places. Blackwell: Oxford.

---

[i] http://www.yorklandsgreenhub.ca

[ii] http://socialinnovation.ca