

Dedicated Capacity

Lessons from the Field on Vacant Lot Greening

Publicly held inventories of vacant lots are growing in communities across the country. Despite this, organizations remain understaffed to effectively address the issue. Over half of organizations reported that increased dedicated staff capacity was among their top three organizational needs.

Why Dedicated Capacity Matters

1. Ensures a Response Equal to the Problem

Organizations need dedicated staff to handle maintenance, greening, and other vacant land needs. Yet a majority reported inadequate funding for operations, expenses, and staffing.

"Tackling blight elimination and remediation across the city is a challenging task with a staff of three."

"We need funding to cover staff time coordinating volunteer days, tools, programming, planning, engagement, etc. But it's easier to raise funds for tangible items than it is for staff time."

2. Provides Technical Expertise

Stewarding vacant land effectively requires more than mowing lawns. This work requires a diverse staff with a variety of skills, rather than trying to make an individual team member an expert on multiple topics. The ability to recruit and hire qualified staff makes all the difference in ensuring positive community outcomes.

"Our top practice is working as a team with staff members across departments who have various types of expertise - grant writing, code enforcement, landscape/tree expertise, planning, etc."

3. Promotes Consistent Service through Staff Retention

To maintain consistent service that addresses community needs, organizations must retain dedicated staff. While volunteers and temporary placements can provide useful support, short-term workers do not build institutional knowledge.

"We need to identify sustainable sources of funding for full time (long-term) personnel. We believe the community deserves consistency in the people they are working with to support their communities."

"We need funding for staff time to develop capacity with community groups and coordinate between neighborhood associations and other organizations that have skills in greening, landscape, arts, etc."

4. Strengthens Local Knowledge and Commitment

Whether greening programs succeed or fail depends in large part on their ability to earn the trust of residents. Trust is developed by being embedded in the community and spending the time needed to know and be known.

"When engaging with a community, it helps to have staff who are not only knowledgeable about the community but also representative of the community and able to identify with the lived experiences of community members."

"We build trust by showing up, listening, and ensuring designs are community-led and community-implemented."



Practitioner Insights

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Take a Skill Inventory

It is important to understand the skills you already have at the table and what skills you need to move your work forward. This can help your team be intentional and creative about leveraging existing assets and identifying opportunities to build needed skills through hiring, partnering, or training.

"When we hire any position, even new interns, we have them take a DiSC assessment to understand their competencies and natural tendencies. During the hiring process, this gives us a sense of how they may fill gaps on the team, and helps the team be more aware of everyone's preferred communication and management styles."

Create Opportunities for Professional Development and Cross-Training

Providing training opportunities, including cross-training between departments can increase versatility and longevity of staff and programming, support staff retention, and increase investment in the work.

"We are committed to providing opportunities for growth. Our management team identifies one professional development (PD) opportunity to build up weaker skills that staff are expected to attend and is fully covered by our organization. Additionally, we provide each team member with a stipend to select their own PD opportunity each year and we accommodate flexible time for that."



Hire locally

Residents understand the needs of the community and are highly invested in seeing the success of greening projects. Actively engaging community residents in leadership roles supports development of more responsive programming.

"One of our top practices is having community members and leaders represented in the organization's work groups and leadership roles."

"We recruit people who continuously engage with our work because they have demonstrated their interest and gained experience in how we operate as a team. These team members bring new ideas and a commitment to work hard because they recognize the need and the impact our work has in their community. It's a win-win since the jobs remain local and accessible and we gain knowledge and relationships that would otherwise take years to build."



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The Keys to Success guides are companion products to *America's Vacant Lot Landscape: Insights from the National Survey on Greening*, which can be found at www.communityprogress.org/vacantland.

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