

Planning

Lessons from the Field on Vacant Lot Greening

Respondents reported that inclusive planning and establishing a reasonable project scope were among the top factors contributing to their success. Organizations need to work with communities to create a long-term vision for the maintenance and greening of sites, build on that work incrementally in sustainable ways, and create systems for ongoing vacant land stewardship.

Why Planning Matters

1. Builds Collective Buy In

Engaging the community in visioning through land use and organizational planning can help build awareness of community needs, establish shared priorities, and increase community buy-in.

"The Land Use Plan built a lot of awareness of vacancy—it communicated that we have to do something about this. We realized that we shouldn't be expanding or developing outside the city or at the city limits, because then you overextend."

"Our annual plan was produced with input from a community advisory group, which helped get buy-in from stakeholders early on the process. We highly encourage organizations to plan strategically, with community input, early and often."

2. Determines Achievability

To ensure that a project helps rather than harms the community, organizations need a feasible project scope—one that ensures sufficient capacity and resources for implementation.

"Take your ideas and put them through a litmus test, think long and hard about what is possible and what is a 'skylark.'"

"Our top practice was to take our time to wait until we knew we had the capacity to succeed, because our communities don't need more failed ideas."

3. Builds a Foundation for Success

A broad, unfocused project scope limits success. In contrast, small wins, grounded in a realistic vision, build interest and show people what is possible.

"We concentrate our programs in a defined footprint. Having different programs addressing different problems in a large undefined area can cause the success to be too diluted."

"Begin small. An overwhelmed project is likely to be an incomplete project. Small victories build encouragement, interest and compounding effects on future projects."

4. Enables Project Longevity

Organizations are responsible for the long-term effects of their projects. Incorporating continued maintenance into project planning ensures projects reach their full potential. Additionally, well-organized internal processes make it possible to grow without jeopardizing the quality of new projects or the maintenance of past sites.

"You need to think ahead to when the grant money runs out and you still hold title."

"Maintenance is important and needs to be thought about before the project happens and needs to be budgeted for. What happens after you stabilize it? Who maintains it? How often are they maintaining it?"

"You can't scale up without having good systems in place. Follow your policies and procedures. Document everything from start to finish. Make sure all players understand their roles. Plan as if you will repeat that process 1,000 times."



Practitioner Insights

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Set Realistic Goals

Be honest and realistic about capacity constraints before taking on complex programming.

“Do your homework on what it will cost and how long things take. It takes more money and time than you think.”

“Our top practice is setting reasonable goals based on project size, level of community support, and volunteer commitment.”

Leverage Shared Interests

Multipurpose projects that serve the needs of multiple groups can increase long-term support and engagement.

“We use the work of reclaiming vacant land to meet multiple needs –such as food access, interest in public art, and youth programming. All of these needs can be met in one space if designed properly. These dynamic spaces are more likely to be programmed and maintained because multiple partners share the responsibility.”

Examine Operations Regularly

Conduct a big-picture assessment of overall operational efficiency. This can free up capacity for program growth.

“Inventory all of your organization’s assets. Identify duplication, conflicting efforts, and bottlenecks in your processes. For example, combine mowing into one project area with a single point of contact to coordinate all mowing efforts. Make your operation transparent and accountable.”



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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