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## Activity 1: Community Planning Event

### Objectives

- To engage students, parents, teachers, staff, and other community members in planning the garden.
- To increase and strengthen support for the school gardening program to ensure its sustainability.

### Central Concept

- By facilitating a planning event, students will see the benefit of collective brainstorming and develop connections in their community. It will also help foster ownership in all program participants.

### Materials

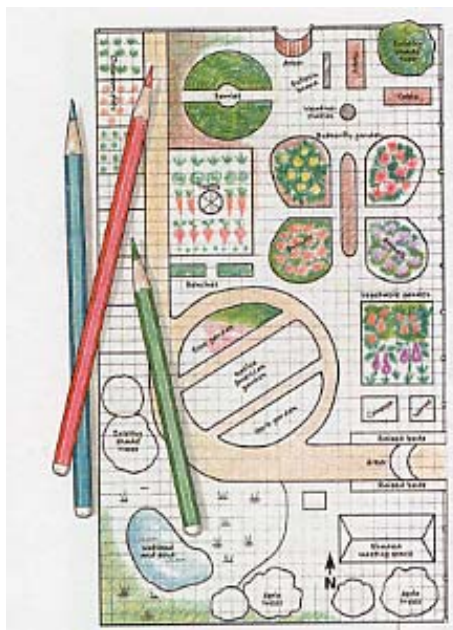
- Paper
- Pencils
- Easel Paper
- Markers
- Small dot stickers
- Refreshments (optional)

### Discussion Topics

- Who should we invite to a planning event for the garden?
- How can we contact them?
- Why do we want to include a lot of people in the planning process?
- What are some of the benefits of asking other people for their ideas?

### Activity

1. Begin by making a list of everyone you think might have an interest in the garden, including students, teachers, staff, parents, volunteers, neighbors, and other community members.
2. Choose a date, time, and place for the event. Schedule 1.5 to 2 hours for this initial brainstorming meeting. Give yourselves at least three weeks to notify everyone. Make sure your space is large enough for the anticipated crowd, and that you have enough chairs and tables for everyone.
3. Create an announcement inviting people to the event. Send it to local newspapers and parents; add it to your school and community Web sites; and post it on a sign in front of the garden. Contact people directly by e-mail or by phone.
4. Recruit student and adult volunteers to help on the day of the events. Have some serve as greeters to welcome attendees and show them where to go. If you plan to serve refreshments, ask volunteers to prepare them for attendees.
6. Begin by asking attendees to introduce themselves and to briefly talk about their interest in the garden.
7. Next break the attendees into groups of six to eight people. Make sure each group has at least one student, a parent, a community volunteer, a teacher, and so on.
8. If you are creating a new garden, ask each group to brainstorm a list of all the features they would like to include in the garden. If you have an existing garden, ask for ideas for additions and new garden projects.
9. Bring the groups back together to share their ideas. Ask someone to write a master list of the suggestions on easel paper. Eliminate duplicates and group similar suggestions together. Invite people to mingle, chat, and enjoy refreshments while you group ideas into categories on separate sheets.



**April 2006  
Kids Garden News**

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**COMMENTS?**

**10.** Time to prioritize! Post the master list of ideas around the room. Give each participant five to 10 dot stickers, and ask them to place the dots beside the features or ideas they think are most important. They can use all their dots on one item or spread them out across several suggestions.

For example, perhaps one suggestion was to create a kitchen garden to grow vegetables for cooking demonstrations. The school nutritionist might really think this idea and is important and choose to place all of his/her dots beside that idea.

**11.** Conclude the planning session by summarizing the findings and thanking everyone for attending. Make sure they know it may not be feasible to implement all the suggestions immediately, but that their input will help with long-term planning.

Ask them to provide their names and contact information if they would like to be notified of the next meeting or workday. Also have them note if they have any special skills they'd like to offer the project, such as gardening, design, landscaping, carpentry, or fundraising.

**12.** After the session, work with students to recap and summarize the planning event. Share the summary with participants via e-mail and publicize it in newsletters, newspapers, and on community Web sites.

### **Extensions**

**English:** Ask students to write a paper about the community planning event and what they learned from participating.

We welcome your questions and comments about this newsletter or your membership. Please reply to: [NGA editor](#).