

GREENEST CITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM - 2014 PROJECT

Project title

More than vibrant green spaces: Improving access to community gardens as a source of local healthy, fresh, and low-cost food for ethno-cultural residents

Greenest City goal(s) supported

Local Food

Long Term Goal: Increase neighbourhood food assets by 50% over 2010 levels

Project context, scope, and value to City

Community gardens are highly valued local food assets that form an integral part of the lungs of our city. In recent years, the City of Vancouver has seen tremendous success in increasing the number of community gardens that residents enjoy. Since 2010, the number of community garden plots have increased from 3,260 to 4,166. Community gardens contribute to enhancing biodiversity, greening the environment, as well as improving air quality by reducing the distance that food travels from field to fork. In addition, they serve as vibrant gathering places that promote social inclusion, community cohesion and improved food security.

In spite of these successes, challenges remain. Recent research (Seto, 2011) shows that visible minority, non-English language speaking, lower-income, and lower-educational status individuals are disproportionately under-represented as participants in Vancouver's community gardens. This has important implications not only for promoting equitable access to green space and recreation, but equally when we consider that research findings reveal lower income participants place a high level of importance on using their garden plot to save on food costs. This means that for many of Vancouver's most vulnerable and isolated groups, barriers exist in relation to accessing green space and recreation, but also when it comes to enjoying the benefits of a community garden plot as a source of fresh, healthy, low-cost, and culturally-appropriate food.

Building on 2012 Greenest City Scholar's work, Engaging Vancouver's Chinese community achieving one-planet ecological footprint, this Research Project will seek to further understand the barriers preventing participation of ethno-cultural communities in local food systems and community gardens in particular, and design an outreach and engagement pilot to begin to address challenges. The overall aim is to increase the benefits of community gardens beyond valuable green space alone, by improving access to local, healthy and affordable food for all residents, particularly the most vulnerable.

Deliverables

- Summary of best practices from other jurisdictions

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- Summary report of interviews with stakeholders, including gardeners, community garden groups, and ethno-cultural serving organizations
- Summary of Greenest City actions that have implications for or could benefit from such research
- Participation in the design and execution of an outreach and engagement pilot
- Summary of recommended strategy and actions based on research and pilot findings

Mentor department

Social Policy, Social Development

Candidate skill set/background

- Excellent research and writing skills
- Excellent communication and inter-personal skills
- Demonstrated interest in local, sustainable food systems
- Experience conducting stakeholder engagement is an asset
- Experience in inter-cultural settings is an asset