



G.R.A.C.E. Community Engagement Toolkit

Growing Resilience and Cultivating Equity

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How will the G.R.A.C.E. Model for Community Engagement support you?

The G.R.A.C.E. Model is designed to address community issues with community members who have experienced injustices and inequities and have traditionally been denied a platform for their needs and ideas to be heard and realized. The model aims to help you and your neighbors leverage the assets and strengths in your neighborhood to create equitable and sustainable solutions that positively impact your community, group, and lives.



Recognizing that every community and neighborhood is unique, we encourage you to take the pieces of this toolkit that are relevant for your work and adapt them to fit the needs of your own community engagement project. The G.R.A.C.E. model was created based on our work in a specific community that was seeking to address issues of food access and food sovereignty. While the framework for community engagement and empowerment is something we believe can be helpful to other communities, we also recognize that YOU are the experts of YOUR community and should use this tool as a guide, not as the end-all-be-all. We also want to point out that the model can be used to address any number of issues facing your community; it is not limited to food access work. This model is all about identifying and bringing together the assets in your community and the most important of those assets are the neighbors themselves. As long as there are people willing to participate, this model can span any number of topics and be used as an advocacy tool to create equity and empowerment in any community.



In the next sections of the toolkit, we will dive into specific topics that we have found helpful to our own community engagement work. These topics cover the importance of self-care when doing this type of heavy and emotionally taxing work, as well as some of the logistics and administrative elements that come with community organizing and advocacy. Please feel free to jump around in the toolkit to review the sections that are most relevant to you. We know it is a lot, so do not feel the need to take it all in at once. Community-based work is a process... and a long one at that. Grab a cup of coffee and enjoy!

Who is Grace Grows?



Grace Grows began in 2015 and officially incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2018 to empower individuals experiencing food insecurity and homelessness through therapeutic horticulture, community development, and education. Grace Grows originally began as a garden at a housing-focused shelter for people who are experiencing homelessness. Grace Marketplace, located in East Gainesville, provides low-barrier shelter, food, and wrap-around services for adults experiencing homelessness. Grace Grows gardening programs are currently housed on two acres at the Grace Marketplace campus.

The garden was built with and for people who resided there and supplies healthy food to the shelter's kitchen. Impacted individuals helped design the garden and the affiliated programs every step of the way. Through successful training, education and therapeutic programs that work directly with impacted people, Grace Grows participants graduate from a credentialed horticulture training course that has led to job opportunities. Grace Grows also teaches participants to grow food for themselves, formerly homeless participants, and the shelter kitchen on the campus of Grace Marketplace.

Since the inception of Grace Grows horticulture programs, they have expanded to work with other communities who experience food insecurity. This expansion came as a direct result of working with individuals who had been housed after participating in Grace Grows programs at the shelter. It was clear that there was a need for empowering and holistic solutions to address many intersecting disparities that existed within the community. Inspired by conversations in the Gainesville Food Systems Coalition of Greater Gainesville meetings and conversations with many other people who work within the spheres of food systems and community development - as well as many impacted people - Grace Grows received funding to initiate the Community Food Project. This effort has since led to the creation of the G.R.A.C.E model for community engagement.

Background on the G.R.A.C.E. Model

This work is not easy, and it cannot be done alone. It also cannot - and should not - be done only on a volunteer basis. The G.R.A.C.E. model values the contributions of community members like you and recognizes the need for compensation of your time and expertise.

For decades, community members and leaders have been requesting support to improve food access and food sovereignty in SE Gainesville, an area of the city that has historically experienced some of the most profound economic disparities. Through funding from USDA's Community Food Project Planning Grant, Grace Grows facilitated a process of working with community members in SE Gainesville to create a plan for increased food access and food sovereignty for that area. One of the ultimate goals of the USDA funded project was to generate a plan that can guide local institutions (i.e. City of Gainesville, Alachua County, University of Florida, Santa Fe College) around providing resources to address community-identified needs and support community-driven solutions to improve food access and food sovereignty. However, through the duration of this project, it became evident that conducting a community-driven, participatory action research process **together** with those most impacted by the issue at hand is essential to ensure equity, empowerment, and longevity of any solution created. With this awareness, the Growing Resilience and Cultivating Equity (G.R.A.C.E.) Model was born. This model aims to amplify the voices of community members who have traditionally been denied a platform for their needs and ideas to be heard and realized.

Community members like you have the best ideas on how to create the change you want to see in your community. You also deserve the space, support, and opportunity to be the drivers and leaders of positive change. However, knowing where to start can be difficult. This toolkit is designed as a tool to help empower and guide you through that process. The G.R.A.C.E. model builds on the social networks, cultural roots, and assets already existing in your community. These assets may include knowledge, skills, people, and programs that - when brought together under a shared mission - have the ability to unite the community toward creating truly community-driven positive change.

Background on the G.R.A.C.E. Model

This work is not easy, and it cannot be done alone. It also cannot - and should not - be done only on a volunteer basis. The G.R.A.C.E. model values the contributions of community members like you and recognizes the need for compensation of your time and expertise. (See “Financial Resources for the Project”) One way that the G.R.A.C.E. model exemplifies this value is through the compensation of Community Advisors to be the drivers of equitable change in their community. Through a lengthy process of engagement with the community, the community advisors are equipped with the resources and support needed to build capacity among their neighbors. The outcomes of this process not only produce a tangible plan that can be used by local institutions to support grassroots-led change in the community, but also improves the overall resilience of the neighborhood by empowering individuals to become leaders of impact-oriented positive change beyond the scope of the project.

Grace Grows acknowledges the need to share their process with other organizations and institutions seeking to include community-engagement in their projects. Through the process we used, we learned what worked well and what the challenges were, and wanted to share those ideas with others. By documenting the strategic steps included in the methodology, the rationale for creating such a framework, and the lessons being learned through piloting, Grace Grows created this community engagement model to benefit community members, organizations and institutions throughout Gainesville and beyond. The methodology - termed now as the “G.R.A.C.E. Model for Community Engagement” - is not specific to one topic or geographic area, and thus has the ability to be scaled and shared across any manner of projects and locations seeking to improve their community engagement practices.



**Community
Advisors:**
Residents, leaders,
and business owners
who should be
regarded as having
expertise based on
their lived
experience.

Self-Care

Generally, creating any project requires pouring yourself into something you are passionate about and willing to invest a great amount of energy. This is no different when partnering in community-driven projects, things don't always go as planned. Many community partners may already be juggling the stress of working a job, caring for kids at home, and day-to-day living when they decide to commit to the project. Regardless of how well a project is planned, there will be unforeseen setbacks and/or moments when it's necessary to pivot, postpone and/or abandon parts of a project as information is gathered, input is given, more is learned and understood. Stress arises for many reasons and displays itself differently for everyone. Self-care is maintaining your well-being inside and out. Maintaining a healthy relationship with yourself is vital for your happiness, success, peace of mind, and survival. It's normal to struggle with proper self-care; everyone does from time to time. Taking care of your physical, mental, and emotional health helps you to maintain a positive attitude and healthy outlook. Self-care is highly personal and over time you'll develop self-care techniques that are customized to meet your specific needs.

Here are a few suggestions of techniques to improve your well-being:

1. Doing Something You Enjoy (Mental and Emotional Self-Care)

Practicing a hobby or healthy pastime that you enjoy is essential in self-care. It's you giving back to yourself. Expressing yourself in a creative way is a manner of practicing mental and emotional health/wellbeing, it's acknowledging that you are important and matter. Allotting yourself time to do something that you love to do boosts happiness and productivity in other areas of your life, as well.

2. Exercise (Physical Self-Care)

Daily physical activity is an important part of self-care and may vary depending on age, health, and physical condition. Find or create an exercise routine you enjoy that is suitable to your lifestyle and physical condition. Practicing that routine at least 20 - 30 minutes a day can significantly improve your physical and for some, emotional well-being. Examples (there are many other forms of exercises outside of the ones listed): bike riding, yoga, swimming, running, walking, dancing.

Self-Care

3. Meditation (Mental, Physical and Spiritual Self-Care)

Meditation is considered the practice of a set of techniques that help you quiet the mind in order to achieve a heightened state of focus and awareness. For some, it's a therapeutic method of assisting in relaxation. There are many different types of meditation that can be found on various apps if meditation is a method of self-care that appeals to you.

4. Positive Affirmations (Mental and Emotional Self-Care)

- I am kind
- I am powerful
- I am happy
- I am supportive

5. Boundaries (Mental and Emotional Self-Care)

Ensuring there is a healthy separation between one's personal life and work life. It can be helpful to remind oneself that as individuals, we are more important than the labor we perform. We are valuable as people, simply for being who we are.

6. Social Support (Mental and Emotional Self-Care)

Spending time with family and friends



Self-Care



7. Journaling (Mental, Emotional, and Social-Emotional Self-Care)

In community-based work, the lines between personal life and advocacy work can become blurred. This is another reason self-care is important. Keeping a journal is a great tool for self-care and personal growth. Some people keep two journals, a personal and a professional journal. Documenting your day-to-day experiences in writing can be therapeutic in mental, emotional well-being, and social-emotional growth. Not only are you recording details of moments that have impacted your life; you're also creating a tool that can be used to track your own personal growth and healing. Keeping a journal allows you to look back on those moments to see how you changed over time from having those experiences. Here are some things many people say when looking back through their old journals:

- How have they grown (or not)?
- What they would do differently (personally and/or professionally) going forward?
- Who touched their lives and how?
- How their thoughts/beliefs have changed?
- How resilient they are?
- What areas of one's self could benefit from improvement?

8. Healthy Diet and Rest (Mental, Emotional, and Physical Self-Care)

Schedules can be all over the place when you're advocating for a cause that impacts you and your community. There will always be another meeting to attend, an event to organize, and/or phone call to make. All of these things take energy to accomplish and it's important that you take time for proper nourishment and rest. If you're not feeling well it will be difficult to focus on the things necessary to accomplish your goals. A healthy diet means different things for different people. Research options that are best for you. Some ways to improve sleep quality are:

- Reduce phone usage within 30 minutes of bedtime
- If you find yourself awake for more than 15 minutes in the middle of the night, get up and do something relaxing - get a drink, stretch, deep breathe - and lay back down to sleep
- Avoid caffeine within 6 hours of bedtime
- Stay as consistent as possible with sleep and wake times to keep your body on schedule

What is Assets-Based Community Engagement?

Community engagement is about cultivating relationships and involving those relationships in the process of creating community solutions to systemic problems. Assets-Based Community Engagement (ABCE) is an approach that prioritizes the strengths, and resources that are already a part of the community. ABCE engages the community in recognizing and using community assets that have been constructed and sustained by community members. This approach is more empowering than typical extractive models, recognizing that all people and cultures have gifts. Some examples of these gifts are the individuals and groups in the impacted community who have created resilience within their community like the “the fish man” or the farmers or “church ladies” who feed their neighbors when access to resources were limited. Supporting the assets that already exist in the community will empower the community and acknowledge the efforts they have implemented into the community that kept them alive. This in turn reinforces that the solution is to generate power in the impacted community.

Creating an asset map will identify the assets that exist within the impacted community. Using these existing assets to drive the project’s objectives are vital in recognizing the community’s work and what they have done to survive. The assets already existing are the building blocks the impacted community utilizes to address inequity and the lack of crucial resources, honoring the work that was done before. Community engagement projects honing in on the details of these assets tell a story of relevancy, resiliency, and community togetherness.

Going into a community as an outsider and implementing or creating assets for the target community is assuming what the community needs and wants. Assumption should never be a part of any community engagement project. If we want to be mindful of the power dynamics that perpetuate the issues that we are trying to address, there are tools that we can use to do that. When using an assets-based approach, appreciative inquiry is a communication technique that can be helpful, as it uses an empowering approach.

Traditional Communication	Appreciative Inquiry
What is wrong with you?	What do you envision?
Where is your community lacking?	How can we support the ongoing efforts in your community?

Community-Driven Action Planning

Community members' lived experiences should drive:

- Identifying the needs and issues to be addressed by a project
- Identifying the knowledge, skills sets, and other resources that exist in the community that can help address the needs
- Strategizing solutions that empower the knowledge, skills, resources and voices of the community
- Prioritizing possible solutions based on what is feasible and culturally appropriate for the community.
- Bringing in other community members to be a part of the process

To be community-driven means to put people who are directly impacted by a challenge in the driver's seat when planning and designing solutions for how to address the challenge. A community-driven action plan is a plan that is developed by the impacted community. This plan is constructed to map out the methods of implementation and priority outcomes. **Community-Driven refers to the ideals, processes, and solutions as the creation of the impacted community. The experiences, knowledge, and actions of the impacted community are what guide the development of the project.** Engaging the community in the process of developing a community-driven action plan creates a network of involvement that entices workable solutions. Community engagement fundamentally impacts the project as a whole, as the input and insights shared from the impacted community serve as the foundation for project development and implementation. Community engagement will identify the issues affecting the community that will be addressed through the project. Members of the impacted community are best positioned to determine which possible solutions are most viable, as there may be unforeseen consequences associated with different solutions, as well as layers of complexity to the issues themselves as experienced by neighbors in the community. Community members are able to use their day-to-day lived experience to guide the project towards success, basing their input on both past and current experiences of living in the community. Lived experience should be the driving force in project planning.

Community-Driven Action Planning



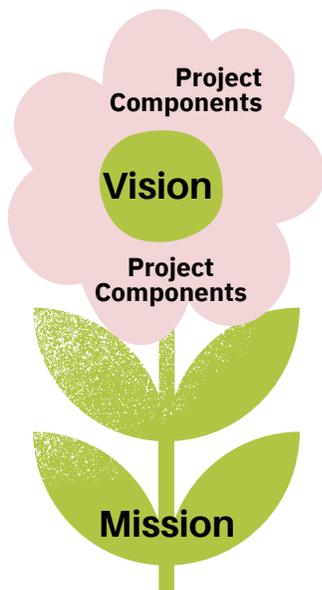
Community-driven action plans should include concise and thorough objectives. These objectives could include convening stakeholders from all sectors of the influence of your project. For example, Grace Grows' Food Planning Project convened stakeholders from the local food system including consumers living in the low-income Southeast Gainesville neighborhoods, local farmers, business owners, churches, employees, academia, government entities, people not traditionally represented in positions of power, and non-profit organizations. Another objective of the plan could include collecting information around concerns through **community-based participatory action research** and creating solutions from the findings of that research. Each project will have objectives relevant to the issue their community seeks to address, and community engagement will help to identify those objectives. Lived experience should be the driving force in project planning.

Community-based Participatory Action Research:

An approach to research that involves collective, reflective and systematic inquiry in which researchers and community stakeholders engage as equal partners in all steps of the research process with the goals of educating, improving practice or bringing about social change in a way that centers the voices of the impacted community and improves upon accountability measures.

In order for community engagement to be truly successful, those doing the work must be truly invested in the project. You may find that impacted community members frequently have had adverse experiences with inauthentic community engagement. It is possible that those engaged at the beginning of projects are not provided the opportunity to engage with the program implementation in the same way, resulting in decreased involvement from and demoralization within the impacted community. Even with these experiences in mind, your intentions for this project do not have to dwindle. Your hopes for community engagement have not perished, but more so your plan must expand and grasp the community in a way that works for them. **Meet the community where they are** and understand that building trust takes time.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process



Mission and Vision Statement

The intention of your mission statement is to articulate the goal of your organization, project, or program. The mission statement should also address a specific audience that the target service will impact. It is imperative that the mission statement lays the foundation of the organization, project, or program’s purpose. The mission of Grace Grows is to empower individuals who are experiencing homelessness or food insecurity through horticulture. One way that Grace Grows does this is through the southeast Gainesville Community Food Planning Project. The mission of this project is to “create a plan for increased food access and food sovereignty for that area.”

Following the creation of the mission, the project team can work to establish the way that mission will be carried out. One way you can do this is through visioning sessions. In these visioning sessions, folks from many parts of the project can work together to choose the values that will be upheld during the project. This could include being community-driven, assets-based, justice-minded, and accountability-focused. These project values should be based on the **systemic solutions** on which your organization, project, or program is founded. The mission is the root from which the rest of your project and initiatives stem.

Systemic Solutions address the fundamental ways that systems work in order to solve the problem rather than employing temporary solutions.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process



Financial Resources for the Project

Funding is a major source for development and movement for any idea or plan. For community engagement projects, funding provides support for not only the creation of the project but also the compensation for community members' knowledge, time, and resources. Allocating funds in the form of fair wages to the community members who are doing the work can make your project more equitable by acknowledging the pre-existing economic burden already experienced by impacted people. Often these people are already doing the work and are doing so without compensation. In budgeting, it is important to be mindful of putting resources into the impacted community rather than investing only in communities that have more economic power. For example, in the Grace Grows Community Food Project, the Community Advisors were given stipends to compensate them for their active participation in the project.

Project funding sources should be consistent with the mission of the organization or project. For example, the Grace Grows' Food Planning Project received funding from the United States Department of Agriculture due to the shared focus on agriculture, food insecurity, and food disparity. Multiple diverse funding streams are needed to increase project sustainability. Some grants and financial support will be funded in different stages of the project.

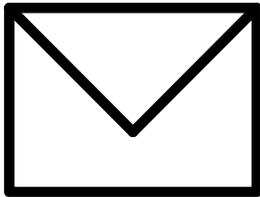
Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

As your project continues to grow, different objectives will be added, which may require additional funding opportunities. This could include grant funding, donors, and collaborations and partnerships. By bringing in additional resources to support the project, such as knowledge, volunteers, or collaborations, the internal capacity of the project as well as the capacity of the impacted community are enhanced. Through building capacity, project sustainability will likely be strengthened. The solutions generated through this work should be a shared responsibility through many facets of the community, as community-based projects generate power for organizations in the community working toward solutions. The Grace Grows' Food Planning Project required extensive multi-institutional collaborations concerning food insecurities, food disparities, and lack of healthy food access in the southeast region of Gainesville.

Things funders usually want to know:

- What is the impact on the target community?
- Was your project funded prior to this grant?
- What is the purpose of your project? What are its goals? What is the intended outcome?
- Describe the target audience. What are the categories and roles of the target audiences?
- Describe the impact on the target audience.
- Describe the partner benefits.
- Describe the project activities.
- What are the specific objectives, terms, and conditions of the project/grant agreement?
- Include the breakdown of your budget with the inclusion of rewarded funding. Also, include a budget justification overview.

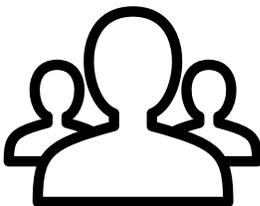
Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process



Letters of Support

When starting a new project and gaining buy-in from the community and external partners, letters of support can be very helpful to your outreach process. They can demonstrate validity, reliability, and buy-in when advocating for resources. Such letters of support may come from your local leaders, local organizations, businesses, and the local government.

You will increase the likelihood of broader community participation when you can demonstrate that trusted community leaders are your collaborators and will vouch for you. Be discerning about which community organizations and members you garner letters of support from. Request support from organizations that are authentically community embedded and consider providing a template letter with the proper addresses and formatting to make the task of drafting a letter seamless. When requesting letters of support, ensure that the team dedicates adequate time to necessary community conversations in order for all interested parties to be well informed. This is also part of the trust building which is essential to community engagement.



Developing Your Project Team

There are many different versions and structures to project teams. In the G.R.A.C.E. model, the overall Project Team is composed of a Logistics Team, Community Advisors, Project Advisors, and a Research Team, all of which work together to plan, implement, and report on the project. The roles of each of these teams are detailed below.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

Logistics Team

A Logistics Team is composed of individuals with the necessary skills or expertise to execute the project from an operational standpoint. Members of the Logistics Team should ideally have experience working with impacted communities. These individuals share the same passion for community change and progression. The team is ultimately responsible for communications, overseeing the process, fiscal management, coordination of the larger Project Team, and implementing the project plan in an efficient manner. Your Logistics Team could include the following:

Role	Skills	Example Tasks
Project Coordinator	Systems thinking, organization, verbal and digital communication	Facilitate meetings, track and delegate tasks, assess progress toward goals
Project Assistant	Organization, verbal and digital communication	Schedule meetings, follow up on action items
Research Assistant	Data collection and analysis techniques	Develop and conduct surveys, report results in accessible formats
Project Advocates	Systems thinking, relationship building	Hold one-on-one conversations with community members and local leaders

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

Logistics Team (Continued)

In order to recruit Logistics Team members, reach out to community partners to be a part of a dedicated core Project Team that will commit to providing support throughout the duration of the project. The Logistics Team is a diverse team of individuals who believe that impacted community members have the greatest awareness of the issues at hand as well as the most relevant lived experience to determine viable solutions. Your members being connected to different organizations and institutions can supply support, communication, advocacy, and representation in diverse approaches. This advocacy can identify how the project connects with the entire city in which the target community is located. Including someone that is directly connected to the local government body in a community engagement project can create a stream of communication between the project and local policymakers.

Potential responsibilities of the Logistics Team may include:

- Recruiting additional Community Partners
- Planning and Coordinating meetings.
- Disseminating project information to the public. (For example, press releases, flyers, marketing material, and communications with stakeholders.)
- Coordinate the logistics of the project's Community Engagement strategies for example;
 - Establish Project Advisory Board
 - Determine qualifications for and role of potential Project Advisory Board
 - Decide on a process for selecting Project Advisors
 - Selection of Project Advisory Board

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

Logistics Team (Continued)



Potential responsibilities of the Logistics Team (continued):

- Establish Community Advisory Board
 - In collaboration with Project Advisory Board determine the Spheres (qualifications including lived experience) for Community Advisory Board
 - Request nominations/recommendations for Community Advisors
 - Selection of Community Advisory Board
- Create a project timeline
- Seek out sources of support such as funding, additional organizational and community partners, and volunteers
- Fiscal Management
- Delegating tasks
- Coordinating the research component with tasks such as data management, data collection
- Provide training for community partners, allies, and additional project teams

Having a Project Coordinator ensures a holistic approach by having someone that evaluates all the moving parts of the project. They organize and facilitate project team meetings. The Project Coordinator works closely with the Logistics Team to prepare an agenda. The agenda relates to the project mission, links to relevant documents, lists the agenda items to be discussed, and tracks information and tasks, and tracks information and tasks. The Project Coordinator also ensures accountability and harmony amongst the team. They often will be the first person to initiate conversation surrounding logistical and intrapersonal issues that will inevitably arise through the duration of the project. For example, the Project Coordinator may contact people to ensure they remain engaged when engagement has been reduced or they may redirect objectives based on new feedback or information.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

Project Advisory Board

The Project Advisory Board is a group of individuals who are well versed in the socio-economic statuses and history of the community on which you are focusing. Ideally, this group would include impacted individuals and start out with principles of equity and inclusion. Often project designs address diversity and inclusion on the back-end, still perpetuating problematic power dynamics. The members of the Project Advisory Board have established lasting relationships with members of the community and are well aware of the issues that are prevalent within the community. These individuals are respected, known, and acknowledged by the community.

The Project Advisory Board should be able to:

- Connect with the community
- Help recruit your Community Advisory board from the impacted community
- Prioritizes the voices of the Community Advisory Board (to ensure an equitable approach)
- Use their voices and their social power to create opportunities for members of the impacted community to engage in the decision-making progress. For example, the Grace Grows Food Planning Project directors created space for the Project Advisory Board to bring in the voices that are not always heard but are meaningful to the Grace Grows Food Planning Project.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

Community Advisory Board

Equitable selection: The fair and nondiscriminatory stance of determining the community advisors, volunteers and other participants from the community who will potentially be impacted by the research and action plan.

Community Advisors are residents, leaders, and business owners who have expertise based on their lived experience. They are integral to ensuring the project incorporates the voices of all members of the impacted community. Through an **equitable** community-driven nomination process facilitated by the Logistics Team and Project Advisory Board, Community Advisors are recruited and selected. The Community Advisory Board selection process should have a distinct focus on spheres, or areas of lived experience. In identifying the spheres criteria for your project, it is important to focus on those who are impacted by the systems that are in place both directly and indirectly. They may not be as visible as the project advisory board, but they hold influence and range on the purpose of the project. For the sake of equity, certain spheres may be prioritized above others based on power differentials that exist even within that community, so that people that are not typically represented in positions of power may have an equal voice in the process.

The community driven action plan is essentially derived from the consultation, guidance, and instruction of the Community Advisory Board. They are required to be engaged in leading all aspects of the process from planning through implementation. Community Advisors will be responsible for attending meetings, deciding on research methodology and plans, advocating for the research plan in their communities and driving the visioning process toward desired outcomes for the project. Including influential community members that showcase influential awareness and intentional advocacy can build rapport within the impacted community.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

The Research Team

To learn more about research ethics, read the Belmont Report:

www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report

THE BELMONT REPORT

Office of the Secretary
Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research
The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research
April 18, 1979

AGENCY: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

ACTION: Notice of Report for Public Comment.

SUMMARY: On July 12, 1979, the National Research Act (Pub. L. 96-341) was signed into law. One of the purposes of the Commission was to identify the basic ethical principles that should underlie the conduct of biomedical and behavioral research involving human subjects and to develop guidelines which should be followed to assure that such research is conducted in accordance with those principles. In carrying out the above, the Commission was guided by the following: (1) the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice; (2) the role of assessment of the benefits versus the determination of the appropriateness of research involving human subjects; (3) appropriate guidelines for the selection of human subjects for participation in such research; and (4) the nature and definition of informed consent in various research settings.

The Belmont Report attempts to summarize the basic ethical principles identified by the Commission in the course of its deliberations. It is the judgment of an intensive two-day period of discussion that were held in February 1979 at the Eisenhower Institute's Belmont Conference Center supplemented by the monthly deliberations of the Commission that were held over a period of nearly four years. It is a statement of basic ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical problems that surround the conduct of research with human subjects. By publishing the Report in a Federal Register, all government agencies which receive the Belmont Report that it may be made readily available to scientists, members of Institutional Review Boards, and Federal employees. The Belmont Report, containing the lengthy words of reports and supporting data received by the Commission, following this part of its charge, is available as DHEW Publication No. (OS) 78-0012 and No. (OS) 78-0014, for sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20540.

Unlike most other reports of the Commission, the Belmont Report does not make specific recommendations for administrative action by the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Rather, the Commission recommended that the Belmont Report be adopted in its entirety, as a statement of the Department's policy. The Department requests public comment on this recommendation.

When conducting research, the ethical principles of **beneficence, justice, and respect** for persons must be upheld. People who participate in a study need to be able to give their consent to the process freely, fully informed, and end their participation whenever they choose. If collaborating with an academic institution, Community Advisors and the Research Team will likely need to be trained by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a training that educates a research team on those principles. In addition to the ethical principles, the Research Team must also be aware of the historical trauma which often exists between academic institutions and impacted communities.

Beneficence:
Do not harm. Maximize possible benefits and minimize the risks of possible harms.

Justice:
Equitably distribute the risks and burdens of the research based on who is most likely to benefit.

Respect:
Acknowledge personal autonomy & protect those with diminished autonomy (e.g., children)

Those involved in the Research Team should have expertise and training in working with the type of information that the project is looking to collect. These individuals also need to have experience and access to the appropriate software/platforms to process and analyze the information gathered. The information gathering and processing can be complex and laborious, so a team of 3-8 people may provide enough support without creating difficulties with coordination.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

Volunteers

The role of a volunteer is to help support the project. For example, Grace Grows' Food Planning Project received doctoral student support from the University of Florida, different professionals offered in-kind services, and volunteers were sought from the existing Grace Grows network. Volunteers should be respected and held to appropriate standards of accountability. It's important to make clear and define expectations and in order to be able to have the desired level of accountability. Volunteers should be equipped with the training and knowledge of what it means to be engaged in a community driven decision making process as well as any other necessary skills. This can make it a more enriching and reciprocal experience for volunteers. Use different outlets to recruit volunteers. You can use your online resources, team members can potentially use their connections to bring in volunteers. Volunteers should share the same values of the project. Making a mental map of the resources and connections available to you can make the process of recruiting volunteers easier.



Determining Effective Method(s) for Reaching Out to the Community

Objectives for the planning process could include assembling and including stakeholders, and gathering information that informs your method of engagement. This can help you to comprehend the barriers and opportunities for the group your community engagement project is focusing on. Effective methods of reaching out to the community are plentiful. Even though the methods are plentiful, choosing the method that is culturally relevant to the community is imperative.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

Some ways of engaging the community and gathering feedback are as follows:

Engaging the Community

- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Town hall meetings
- Community events
- Oral history projects
- Door-to-door

Gathering Feedback

- Presentations
- Direct phone calls
- Paper mail
- Personal meetings
- Social media
- Email



Out of these approaches, the Logistics Team should garner extensive feedback with the impacted community to help determine what would be the most effective and appropriate ways to reach out. Bear in mind that an equity minded approach prioritizes accessibility for communication platforms. Community Advisors can provide insight on the methods that they suggest would engage the target community best. For example, Grace Grows' food planning project's Community Advisors analyzed the questions that were created by the Logistics Team. They critiqued those questions and created a new list of survey questions that directly focused on community members' experience with food insecurity and food assets. Relying on Community Advisors for support when generating a community engagement tool is what makes this project community driven. Community Advisors using their expertise to perfect the community engagement tool that directly impacts community members is a respectful and precise method.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

Community engagement tools are methods used to include feedback from members of the community in the process of gathering data. The community engagement tool serves as an integral instrument that allows community members to participate in decision making. This tool should be intentional in creating a platform that amplifies the voices of community members who have gone unheard. These tools are one of the most important components of a community engagement project due to the potential direct impact it will have on community members. The tools should be created by community members for community members and must never be performative. There should always be clear expectations explained to participants about the benefits and limitations to the benefits. There should always be follow up throughout or at project completion in order to continue to build trust with impacted communities.



Planning Project Team Meetings

Planning project team meetings entails the collaboration of the advisory boards and the Logistics Team. The Logistics Team discusses what has been accomplished, what needs to be accomplished, and what the next steps will be. The project coordinator utilizes the information provided by each team to compile the meeting materials and form a specialized agenda that focuses on the objectives of the project. During the meetings, there should be opportunities to designate responsibilities in order to accomplish the tasks meant to complete the objectives of each goal.

Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process

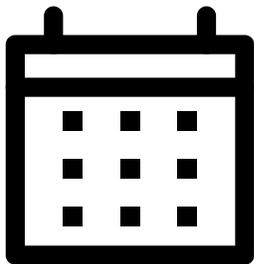
It is important to set expectations for communication by creating a culture of respect and equity in the meeting planning process. Subject matter is often very personal to impacted people and may take more of an emotional toll. Therefore, this needs to be taken into consideration during communications processes. Meeting planners should always be mindful to not overburden people who may already be experiencing economic and time inequities. The Logistics Team needs to be keenly aware of their role in reducing labor for those who do experience those disparities. This meeting process is essential to incorporating equity into communications.

Questions to Consider:

- Is there a digital divide?
- What time should the meeting be? How long?
- What should the order of the agenda be, in order to prioritize people's ability to participate?
- Is childcare needed?
- Do folks have varying abilities? (physically accessible, visual auditory)
- Is there educational equity?
- What are the preferred methods of communication?



Components to a Strategic Community-Driven Planning Process



Setting a Timeline

A timeline for the project is a necessity to ensure that the funding needs are met and that the project objectives are accomplished. Essentially, timelines are a monitoring tool that helps to propel the project forward and ensures that the work gets done in a timely manner. The project timeline will give a detailed look at what has been accomplished and what needs to still be accomplished. A timeline should be set in the beginning stages of the project. When managing a project with multiple teams and components, it can be helpful to identify a tool that works for your team. These tools can help to provide structure to the roles and responsibilities of each member of the project team. For example, a tool that is often used to view the timeline of a project in its entirety is the GANTT chart. This tool helps you to plan tasks around deadlines, match each Logistics Team member with their appropriate responsibilities, manage project objectives, and organize hours. When creating your timeline, it is important to leave abundant time for instrument design and data collection, as these can be extremely time consuming due to the consensus or democratic nature of any community effort. Throughout the duration of the project, timelines will invariably change, but setting a timeline in the beginning allows for a more birds-eye view approach to task completion. For difficult tasks, it can be helpful to factor in an additional 20-25% more time that you expect something to take. In doing this, if you do not use the time, you have it back in your schedule. If you do use the time, you have already considered it in your overall plan.

The Research Process



The purpose of including a research process in your community engagement project is to help you answer questions you have about the issues facing the community and possible solutions. It can also generate more resources by generating social capital in the larger community because of the cultural context that requires “evidence-based inquiry.” This is not to say that prior community feedback is not valid. It is only to recognize how allocations of funding are determined. These systems are frequently structured in ways that are inequitable. In particular, the research process will help you to systematically and intentionally find those answers so that your results accurately reflect the different perspectives and lived experiences of community members. There are many different approaches you can take to collecting the data you need, but they typically involve the same stages: 1) planning and design; 2) data collection; 3) data analysis; and 4) dissemination of findings.

Planning and Design

The first step in any research process is to identify your research questions. In other words, start by writing out specifically what you need to know about how the issue you are focusing on is affecting your fellow community members and about possible ways to address that issue. Generally, it’s best to use “why” and “how” questions to guide your overall research process. By contrast, questions starting with “what,” “where,” “which,” or “how much” can make good sub-questions and/or data collection questions to help you answer your bigger research questions. The reason for this distinction is that “how” and “why” questions invite more in-depth, complex, and varied answers, while the other kinds of questions often have a straightforward but limited answer. It is the research team’s job to make connections between those more straightforward answers and piece together the larger puzzle to answer the more complex research questions. This helps to make your findings more insightful and, ultimately, useful to the community. See the table below for examples of effective research questions, compared with questions that are better suited for the data collection tool you use, such as a survey.

Sub-questions
ask about
specific aspects
of your larger
research
question to
help you
understand the
whole picture.

The Research Process

Once you have decided on your research questions, the next step is to consider what tools and approaches will be most likely to 1) reach all the different people you need to hear from, and 2) give you reliable results. This sounds like a more complicated task than it actually is. You will just need to combine the deep knowledge of the community that you and your team already have with careful thought and planning. For example, if your research question is, “Why is it difficult for folks in Southeast Gainesville to access the foods they want,” a data collection process that only includes talking to people who visit a particular grocery store will likely mean missing out on hearing from the folks who avoid or cannot get to that store.

Effective Research Questions	Possible Data Collection Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why is it difficult for folks in Southeast Gainesville to access the kinds of foods they want?• How do these challenges or barriers differ based on people’s lived experiences?• How are members of the community already working to surmount those barriers?• Why are community members pursuing those particular solutions?• How would community members like to see their local food system changed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What kinds of foods do community members most want?• What challenges or barriers do they face in obtaining groceries?• Where do community members shop for groceries most often?• Which food access programs do community members use most?• What strategies are folks using to access foods?• What resources, infrastructure, or programs do community members feel are most needed?

The Research Process



Here are some questions to consider when deciding what approach to use to answer your research questions:

1. What specific information do I need in order to answer this question? This might include:
 - a. Stories of lived experiences
 - b. Personal opinions
 - c. Descriptions of particular actions or patterns of behavior
 - d. Context about the local social, infrastructural, or policy environments
2. Who has this information?
3. Where can I find them and how do I contact them?
4. What are the potential challenges of getting in touch with them?
5. Are there any barriers or other factors that could affect the kinds of answers they give? This could include:
 - a. Lack of time to talk or answer questions (in general or in a specific context)
 - b. Mistrust of researchers or particular institutions
 - c. Sensitivity to topics that are private, stigmatized or potentially uncomfortable (e.g., having a criminal background, sexual orientation, experiences with poverty, traumatic experiences, generational trauma, medical conditions)
 - d. Lack of access to technology used to collect data
 - e. Language differences
6. What steps can I take to anticipate and address those challenges and barriers?

Once you have considered these questions, you can start thinking about data collection techniques. Before we dive into a description of the data collection process, it's important to acknowledge that becoming comfortable with these concepts takes a lot of practice and repetition. Entire graduate school courses exist that focus only on one aspect of what we will be covering! Therefore, keep in mind that this guide will not be able to tell you everything there is to know about conducting a research study. But this does not mean you shouldn't do it! By leaning on your team and your collective wisdom you'll be able to get answers to your questions.

The Research Process

Another important factor when considering a research process is the availability of resources to conduct all the steps needed. Each of these steps takes considerable time and resources, and sometimes your team may prefer to use more affordable and faster ways of data collection methods. For example, a few in-depth interviews with key stakeholders may be preferred over a wide-community survey if you don't have the resources needed, as long as you are addressing the team's research questions.

Finally, another important consideration is the research design to be used to identify and contact potential participants. If a community survey is conducted, think about how you will collect this information. It is often very difficult and expensive to conduct a randomized survey of the community. A convenience or snowball sampling may be the most feasible method.

Convenience sampling involves reaching a conveniently available pool of participants

Snowball sampling happens when current participants recruit new participants

Data Collection

Any form of primary research involves data collection. For community engagement projects, it is important to collect data from the people who have first-hand experience with the phenomenon or topic studied. Data can be either quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative data is information expressed numerically. Some examples of techniques that can collect quantitative data are questionnaires, surveys, and tests. By contrast, qualitative data reflect non-numeric information such as words, sounds, or images. Some examples of techniques that can collect qualitative data are surveys, interviews, and focus groups. In some ways, quantitative methods answer the "what" or "how much" questions, while qualitative methods answer the "why." and "how." When you can use multiple techniques to get both qualitative and quantitative data, often called mixed methods, you will have a more accurate picture of the community situation.

The Research Process

The same tool or technique you use to collect data can give you both quantitative and qualitative data. In other words, you can ask both closed-ended and open-ended questions. For example, you might want to include the following questions on a survey focused on food access:

Type of Question	Open- or Closed-ended?	Definition	Example
Quantitative (numerical)	Closed	Information expressed in number format	On how many days in the last month were you unable to afford a healthy meal?
Quantitative (categorical)	Closed	Information expressed in number format according to a set of pre-determined categories or options	How often do you use public transportation to get groceries? A. Always B. Most of the time C. Sometimes D. Rarely E. Never
Qualitative	Open	Information expressed non-numerically, such as words, sounds, or images	What ideas do you have for improving food access in your neighborhood?

For a community engagement project, collecting demographic data and socio-economic data is important. Demographic data and socio-economic data are usually expressed quantitatively. These data provide important context about the community. However, they leave out significant historical and social contexts that can be explored qualitatively through focus groups, oral history projects, and interviews. Collecting both kinds of contextual data will give you a much deeper understanding of the issue you are focusing on.

Demographic and socioeconomic data include information about specific attributes of person or group of people, such as age, gender identity, racial identity, income level, and highest level of education.

The Research Process



The Do's and Don'ts of Collecting Data

Compile a list of do's and don'ts for the community engagement project to follow when conducting research. A few do's and don'ts are as follows:

DO'S

- Always get consent. Be sure to fully explain the purpose of the research, what will be expected of participants, any potential direct benefits and risks, and participants' rights with respect to the research.
- Always keep data confidential. Be very careful with protecting the information that participants contribute. This includes handling copies of raw data such as completed surveys and securely storing data files both in physical and digital formats. If you are working with an academic institution, be aware of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol that is approved for the study.
- Make sure you have a backup of your data files so that you don't lose all of your data through computer or human error.
- Respect participants' right to say no to beginning or continuing their participation.
- Be reciprocal. When asking community partners for help with your data collection process, be sure to offer support for their own efforts in return.
- Interact with participants in a respectful and non-judgmental way.

DON'TS

- Do not try to force people to give you information. Consent to begin and continue participation must be freely given.
- Do not make any promises as to the outcomes of the project. Be specific about the purpose of the project, without making any guarantees.
- Do not make assumptions about participants or their potential responses. If you are unclear about something a participant has said, ask clarifying questions.
- Do not falsify responses.
- Do not approach people who give indications that they do not want to be approached.
- Do not give up if you experience challenges. Know that the research process is difficult, complicated, and often unpredictable. Encountering a challenge does not mean you are doing it wrong.

The Research Process

Compiling Data

The Logistics Team of your community engagement project should include some members who are experienced in compiling and working with data. Those specific logistic team members can select a compiling system that also serves as a community engagement tool. For example, Grace Grows' Food Planning Project uses the Qualtrics data system. The questionnaire can be filled out directly into the online Qualtrics system. Another alternative is to print paper copies of the instrument while collecting data, and then transfer it to the online system. Some participants may be able to fill out the instrument on their own at home, but they will need an internet connection and a way to access the link to the instrument. The data from the Qualtrics system is able to be downloaded to an excel spreadsheet. Of course, there are different systems that are available to compile data. Choose the system that is best suited to the approach you have chosen and the needs of the project. Also, the community engagement tool may be showcased using that system.

Data Analysis

Above, we described the difference between qualitative and quantitative data. It's also important to keep in mind that there are qualitative and quantitative approaches to data analysis, regardless of the kind of data you've collected. When thinking about how best to answer your research questions, keep the following chart in mind:

	Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
Quantitative Analysis	Example: Statistical analyses like (regression, t-test, ANOVA, Chi square, etc.)	Example: Frequencies for how often specific words are mentioned in participants' responses.
Qualitative Analysis	Example: Descriptive interpretations of patterns in numerical data	Example: Synthesis of recurrent themes or topics participants discussed

Especially if you are planning to use your results to advocate for particular solutions in the community, it is advisable to have a community member with research experience on your team. The person who fills this role should be knowledgeable about research methods and comfortable with guiding the team on key decisions regarding data collection and analysis. Importantly, they should be able to consider various factors that can threaten the integrity and reliability of a dataset and plan proactive steps to ensure the results are reported accurately and in a trustworthy manner.

Reflection

The relationship between the goals, the objectives, and the community members is a critical part of the evaluation process concerning the success of the project. Community engagement projects' action plans should entail community-driven tools. Participatory action research is just one example of these tools. The action of the project should be constructed to prioritize generating power for impacted community assets and use community participation as guiding principles. Some questions to consider are:

- Were community stakeholders effectively and respectfully involved in creating the action plan?
- Was their adequate representation of members of the impacted community?
- Were community members' experiences a part of the action that was executed?
- Were the solutions provided by the community members validated in an evidence-based way?
 - Having many voices represented strengthens the argument for specific solutions.
 - Evidence-based methods are a universal and respected standard which opens the door for access to resources.
- Is there an actionable plan for implementing the solutions identified?
- Does this project address the root causes identified by impacted community members?
- How does this work generate power with the impacted community?
 - Often members of the impacted community have worked and advocated for implementation of solutions for a long time.
 - For example, the Grace Grows Community Food Planning Project bridged the gap between what the determined solutions from the impacted community were and institutions that can provide the resources in a community-driven way.
- Did the goals and objectives include community assets that already exist?

Based on the answers to those questions, you will be able to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the action plan implemented.



Because whoever does a program like this has to have the true patience of a farmer. Of a gardener. Because, you're going to sow a seed, but it's going to take awhile to really really set in. So you have to have that patience - well, whoever organizes something like this is going to have to have that patience and that understanding that this is not going to be an overnight thing... So if it really is to be a lasting success, it's going to have to be a long-haul commitment.



- Focus Group Participant

Challenges

Keeping the idea that no project is without challenges will help the project set reasonable expectations and be aware of possible setbacks that may occur. Reflect on the challenges that were encountered during the duration of the project. One of the challenges experienced in the GG CFP were necessary shifts in the timeline. You can create great timelines and have great project management skills, but the nature of this work necessitates pivoting and adapting to external factors and the changing needs and circumstances of those involved. Assess how the challenges impacted the project in any way. For example, Grace Grows' Food Planning Project experienced the challenge of low interview rate during a time-sensitive part of the project, partially due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Grace Grows met this challenge by identifying alternative methods to gather the information. Also, as a result of the pandemic, engagement with the larger project team was impacted as a result of competing priorities. The team reassessed the needs at this point in the project and determined that volunteers would increase the capacity to keep the project on track. This point is important to the project's success, as it altered the overall timeline. If operating using grant funding, this could result in the need for an extension from the funding source.

Conclusions

"One of the things you hear about decision-making processes in the community - you will hear people say 'you are going to do what you are going to do anyways', and this was nothing like that."

- Latashia Brimm (GG CFP Project Coordinator and Impacted Community Member)

Looking back on the GG CFP, it was perceived to be respectful and impactful because of the methods delineated in the G.R.A.C.E. Community Engagement Model. Some of the feedback received was about how inclusive and thoughtful the project was conducted. This went a long way towards generating trust with impacted community members who have expressed frustration at the way community engagement is usually done. And those ways result in solutions that are not sustainable because they are not fully informed by the impacted community. The impacted community is not asking for solutions that put a bandaid on a historical wound. They want equitable resources so that they can improve sovereignty in their community and honor their own cultures. In addition to building trust in order to hash out the solutions, this model can create partnerships that can more equitably distribute resources. This can create an atmosphere of shared goals and help guide the larger community towards equitable solutions by amplifying the voices of those most impacted. There is a great deal of pain associated with people's experiences of inequity. It is not an easy task to do community work addressing that. But, there is always hope. That hope is found by working in ways that change the pattern—ways that interrupt white supremacy culture.

Tema Okun' s equity work: www.whitesupremacyculture.info

Resources



Assets-Based Community Engagement (ABCE)

Assets-based community engagement is a key component to emphasizing and prioritizing existing resources that were created by the community for the community. Creating an assets map can ensure that your project is empowering existing community resources and the impacted community. An assets map entails the components you'll find in the template below. Use this template to create an assets map detailing the existing resources that are implemented and used by the impacted community your project focuses on. Use it to drive your project's objectives, and add any other components you find essential.

Organization	Type	What They Do	Service Location	Website	Address	Phone Number

Mapping Resources:

- www.policymap.com
- www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas
- Guides @ UF: Geography, Map, and Geospatial Information Resources: GIS Resources
- Participatory Asset Mapping Methods:
 - www.communityscience.com/knowledge4equity/AssetMappingToolkit
 - ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/identify-community-assets/main

Project Management Tools:

Logic Model

<https://templatelab.com/logic-model/>

Gantt Chart

<https://templatelab.com/gantt-chart-templates/>



Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to express gratitude and the utmost respect for the community members who have been impacted by injustice. We want to thank them for trusting us and using their voices even when some felt justifiably skeptical or tired and had insights to share when the solutions for these disparities have been so long overdue. One of the most impactful moments during this project was when our Project Advisory team reviewed the list of people who community members nominated to be Community Advisers from the impacted community. The list was long and consisted of elders and leaders and every day people who it was so apparent to each of us how much of their lives they spent on making things better and helping one another. Many of these people are not traditionally recognized for the great work they do. Those are the people who we believe hold the answers and deserve the resources and support and agency to realize the dreams the impacted community has for themselves.

Additionally, we are so grateful to the thousands and thousands of hours of work that volunteers put in to make this project possible, especially those already impacted by disparities that may create more challenges to their ability to volunteer. We know that for some folks, this is personal. Volunteers contributed on every level, to helping us define our intellectual and ethical values, to performing the research, helping to garner funding, reaching out to community members and going door to door. We were so lucky to have so many volunteers who understood what it meant to do the work in action, that change does not just come with good intentions, but often slowly and over long periods of time that require sustained commitment and humility. We thank our volunteers for understanding whose voices should be at the center of this work and for the hours of their lives that they dedicated to moving forwards in solidarity.

Thank you to all the collaborating organizations and community members who gave valuable input and shared resources over the years that directly influenced Grace Grows' initiative to begin the Community Food Project that led to this Community Engagement Toolkit. Grace Grows acknowledges that this work has been in the making for many years and that our organization is just a piece of the community mosaic working towards these solutions and without the work of so many others that came before, this would not be possible. We thank the people in the community that know that, "all the flowers of all the tomorrows are in the seeds of today," and we thank them for planting and cultivating the seeds of a more just future for everyone.

Lastly, thank you to our funding organizations, The Partnership for Reimagining Gainesville, and the USDA. Without their support we would not have been able to perform this work in an equitable manner. Thank you to the City of Gainesville's collaboration team and the University of Florida Department of Agriculture Education and Communication for the enormous amount of in-kind professional hours and services donated to make the Grace Grows work that led to making this project so effective.

Everyone deserves a chance to grow.



Want to dig deeper?

If you or your organization would like to have a workshop pertaining to the G.R.A.C.E Model please reach out to gracegardenproject@gmail.com or call 352-386-1684. Sliding scale rates for workshop facilitation will be determined on a case by case basis.

www.gracegrowsgnv.com

