

Communities Creating Healthy Environments Executive Summary

Organization: Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

"Green and Growing in Garfield" is a proposed collaboration of three established local organizations serving Garfield, a lower-income, predominantly African-American community in the East End of Pittsburgh facing a major public health issue - lack of access to quality food, nutrition, and recreation. The Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), the lead organization, with a 33-year history of community organizing in Garfield, has been partnering for 3 years with Healcrest Urban Farm, and for 5 years with Wireless Neighborhoods (WN) to work with neighborhood public schools in support of local youths and their families around issues of health, nutrition, and recreation.

The inner-city neighborhood of Garfield, like other once-thriving working-class communities in Pittsburgh and the country, fell into serious decline following the exodus of residents to the suburbs in the 1960s. The neighborhood is plagued by blight, and there are no supermarkets or recreational facilities. The growing problem of childhood obesity has been noted with concern by the UPMC St. Margaret Health Partnership, a consortium of neighborhood schools and health-care providers working to identify the health disparities and gaps in services for area students.

"Green and Growing in Garfield" follows a two-pronged approach to the nutrition and recreation problems of the neighborhood. First, a new after-school program will bring nutrition and greening education to young people ages 14-18 in the neighborhood public schools. This after-school program will involve both actual farming, which provides youths with outdoor physical activity, and classroom study of how "food and health equality" in lower-income communities or color affect a neighborhood's long-term stability.

Also central will be a nutrition and health advocacy initiative that engages the entire community and serves as a pilot for other economically challenged neighborhoods. Staff will work with local grassroots greening agencies to connect with local and state government and economic development authorities to identify vacant lots that could be turned into additional green space for urban gardening and recreation. We will also advocate with school officials for the use of local produce in the local public schools. Through an active PR campaign and series of public events showcasing the work of the urban farming students, the program will engage the local community in ownership of the project and attract adult volunteers interested in both urban gardening and in advocacy work.

Grant funds will be used to hire an additional staff person for Healcrest Farms to work on the urban farming educational piece of the project. Part of the funds will also go toward the salaries of established staff at the BGC and Healcrest and toward fees for consultants and speakers. Additional funds will go for public

education and outreach efforts, including ads in the community newspapers, an informational brochure, and promotional materials for the community public events. Matching funds will come from the BGC's and Healcrest's operating budgets, primarily in the form of staff time for advocacy work, and from use of the BGC's and Healcrest's equipment and facilities.

The BGC - a community membership organization whose board of directors is drawn directly from its members - and its partner organizations bring a significant history of successfully working to strengthen educational, housing, economic, and health opportunities for area residents. All three organizations are deeply rooted in the community they serve, and their combined expertise - in organizing, in educational initiatives, and in greening efforts - make their proposed partnership powerful and well-seated for success.

Brief Proposal Narrative

1. The community's food and recreation environment and the needs/problems the project will address

The inner-city neighborhood of Garfield, like other once-thriving working-class communities in Pittsburgh and the country, fell into serious decline following the exodus of residents to the suburbs in the 1960s. The neighborhood is plagued by blight, with much of the aging housing stock in poor physical condition, with almost half of the land in Garfield either lying vacant or owned by the city's Housing Authority.

There are no supermarkets in Garfield, and no seasonal farmer's markets; the main sources of food are convenience stores that stock junk food and drinks, catering to youths in the after-school hours, and a few restaurants and pizza parlors on the commercial corridor. Although the area public schools offer a free hot lunch program, ensuring that young people in need will not go hungry, recent menus at local public elementary and secondary schools show a dearth of vegetable and fresh-food offerings, and a reliance on entrees such as "meat and cheese nachos" and "Philly steak and cheese wrap." Coupled with this nutrition data is the fact that there are no public parks or safe recreational areas in the neighborhood for children or adults. The growing problem of childhood obesity has been noted with concern by the UPMC St. Margaret Health Partnership, a consortium of neighborhood schools and health-care providers working to identify the health disparities and gaps in services for area students. What emerges from all these facts is a major public health issue - a neighborhood with lack of access to quality food, nutrition, and recreation.

2. The target community (demographics, socio-economic and political context, etc.) and how the project will engage and affect racial and ethnic communities

Figures for Garfield from the most recent national census paint a picture of a vulnerable population, in which over half of all households earn less than \$25,000 annually, and a quarter of all households consist of a single parent with children under 18. Fifty-one% of Garfield's residents are African-American (in the city, the percentage of African-Americans is 27%), and most occupy rental units. Unemployment rates are higher here than the city or country averages, and as a result, crime - particularly youth crime - constitutes a public safety threat.

But Garfield is also blessed with a number of strong, effective community groups and activists that have been working for years to strengthen educational, housing, economic, and health opportunities for area residents. Results have come slowly, but they have come: new and refurbished housing stock, results-driven after-school programs, an employment center for youths and adults, new businesses in the commercial district, a public safety task force, and a community health center.

In Year 1 of the proposed "Green and Growing" program, the BGC and WN will work with the Pittsburgh Public Schools to create a new curriculum-based after-school and summer employment program for 20 Garfield youths ages 14-18 to work at Healcrest Urban Farm under the supervision of a trained educator. The program will involve farming in the spring and fall, providing youths with outdoor physical activity. Throughout the year, they will also study how "food and health equality" in lower-income neighborhoods affect a community's long-term stability, and will hear from guest speakers on such topics as "green" jobs and the entrepreneurial skills required to run a farmer's market.

Staff will identify 2 to 3 young people from the program for potential leadership roles at the 2 community events that will be held at the farm during the year. Each event will attract 50-100 community residents, and will showcase the work of young people, mobilize community support around access to nutritional food and the cultivation of more green space in the community, and attract 10-20 adult volunteers interested in becoming active with community gardening. Articles and ads in the BGC's community newspaper (circulation: 20,000), *The Bulletin*, will publicize these events. The program will also begin to work with a BGC community development plan to identify 3 to 5 vacant lots in Garfield that can be transformed into green space - either community gardens or recreational areas.

In Year 2, the project will start to expand Healcrest Urban Farm's influence into the creation of additional green sites in Garfield. Staff will work with local grassroots greening agencies to connect with local and state government and economic development authorities, and will also engage in an active PR campaign - including outreach to media to cover public events - to engage the local community in ownership of the project. At this point, we will also begin to advocate with school officials to change policy so that they allow the use of local produce in the public schools as a means of supporting nutrition. Based on the

program's successes to date, a part-time development specialist will identify new sources of income to sustain the program past Year 3.

By Year 3, the "Green and Growing" initiative will be thriving, with new funding to support the program once the grant has ended. Produce from the urban farm will be available in the schools serving the neighborhood, and nutritional snacks will become a part of local after-school programs. Awareness of urban farming will spread in the Pittsburgh area, and the Garfield model will encourage other local schools to include greening initiatives. "Green and Growing in Garfield" will serve as a model for programs that support nutritional education and urban farming in other parts of the Pittsburgh region.

3. Project staff and leadership and their experience, skills and relationships with racial and ethnic communities

Since its founding in 1976, the **Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC)**, the lead partner in "Green and Growing in Garfield," has fought to bring greater stability and economic renewal to the community it serves and is well-respected as a neighborhood change agent. Whether through building new homes, fixing up old houses or commercial storefronts, guiding children through their formative years through after-school programs, or helping teens and adults to find jobs, the BGC has stamped itself as a major change-oriented, reformed-minded presence in the city.

The BGC is a membership organization, with a board of directors drawn directly from the membership, with people of color comprising 40% of the directors. Its staff is racially and ethnically diverse, with people of color constituting almost 40% of the staff. The three senior staff members have long histories working in the Garfield community, with a combined 70-plus years of community organizing experience.

The mission of **Healcrest Urban Farm**, founded in 2004 with fiscal advice and help from the BGC, is one of social justice and food equality - to advocate for people's power to grow and have access to fresh, affordable, nutritious food. Its vision is to eliminate disparities in the Pittsburgh food system by serving the direct needs identified by the Garfield community in the areas of food access and affordability, youth employment, neighborhood clean-up, community green space, and environmental education.

Through successful advocacy with school officials, Healcrest partners with the PPS and local charter schools, presenting hands-on educational programs that supplement students' in-class learning. Healcrest has spearheaded the construction by students of a greenhouse at Fort Pitt Accelerated Learning Academy, a public school serving Garfield, to allow access to greening education year round. In a public event at the end of the school year, the Fort Pitt students will move their plants to the Healcrest site and introduce the community to the

new greenhouse as a valuable community resource. Healcrest has also engaged high school students in urban farming education through a program with The Neighborhood Academy, a local charter school, that involves combining academic work with the construction of a greenhouse at the farm.

Wireless Neighborhoods (WN), formed as a non-profit corporation in December 2003, is an alliance of community and faith organizations committed to using partnerships, technology, and training to improve communities' capacities to support children's education, promote economic development, and address other social barriers facing residents. WN has its roots deep within the lower-income neighborhoods of the City of Pittsburgh, and its establishment as an independent entity was the culmination of years of cooperation among several of Pittsburgh's preeminent community organizations, including the BGC, Community House Church, and Hill House Association.

Given the low levels of academic proficiency for children in the city's African-American neighborhoods, Wireless Neighborhoods focuses its efforts and resources on improving the quality of after-school programming, helping to transform them from safe places with homework help and a snack into innovative, professional, youth-friendly instructional environments that are setting the standard for community after-school practices. Its programs reach more than 200 young people in the public schools serving Garfield and neighboring communities.

4. The applicant organization's history of policy advocacy work

Here are some highlights of the BGC's successes in advocacy and community organizing:

a. By the 1980s, most private physicians' offices had disappeared from Garfield, leaving the residents to rely on hospital emergency rooms. In 1984, the BGC persuaded the administration of St. Margaret Memorial Hospital (now UPMC St. Margaret) to open a family medical center in Garfield, easily accessible to residents. Twenty-five years later and still going strong, the center recently expanded into new, larger quarters.

b. In the 1990s, the BGC began advocating with the City of Pittsburgh for Penn Avenue infrastructure reinvestment to improve the economic outlook of Garfield. After a lengthy process, the BGC began to convene meetings on behalf of community representatives and public officials who want to leverage greater public investment in the avenue's commercial district. A multi-year plan has evolved that will utilize federal and local funds to upgrade the public infrastructure, reduce the number of nuisance properties, and attract new enterprise to the district.

c. In 2009, the BGC Youth Development Center staff embarked on important advocacy work that could help determine the long-term future of Pittsburgh Peabody High School, the school that serves Garfield families. A proposal to move the International Baccalaureate program to Peabody sparked interest in the formation of community stakeholder group to take on the challenge, which was convened and is being led by the BGC. The outcome was an initial stakeholder group of 55 community residents.

d. For 10 years, the BGC has played a key role in the implementation and program expansion of the UPMC St. Margaret Health Partnership, a consortium of neighborhood schools and health-care providers working to identify the health disparities and gaps in services for area students. Some of the Partnership's successes include bringing health programs into schools with students of low economic status, addressing such issues as asthma, dental care, physicals, and up-to-date vaccinations.

5. Assets and community relationships the group will bring to the initiative

Through its persistent efforts, the BGC has emerged as one of the more renowned community development organizations in the city of Pittsburgh, rooted in a strong partnership with dozens of other neighborhood organizations and with the community it serves. Residents and property owners have access to the BGC's staff on a daily basis in dealing with an assortment of problems that affect their everyday lives. Through regular community meetings, a community newspaper, and an open board process, the BGC maintains an active presence in its incorporated territory.

With "Green and Growing in Garfield," the BGC unites with two of its neighborhood partners who also have firm roots in the community and are dedicated to social justice for residents of the East End.