

Brief for Workshop Sessions

Walworth Community Gardening Network

1. Context

The Walworth Community Gardening Network (WCGN) aims to bring together the wealth of growing and gardening talent that exists across our area so that everyone can learn from each other and help each other grow. The Network encourages and supports neighbouring gardening groups to come together locally for joint on-site training, celebrating community gardening, sharing resources, and expanding the network of local volunteers.

There are currently 26 gardens signed up as members. Membership is open to all gardens, is free, and involves a simple signup. The current constitution was agreed in 2019. We are currently funded through a series of small project-based grants of approx 5-10K with an average turnover of approx 24K.

Our steering group includes 3 long-standing steering group members with officer roles (Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer) and 4 other members who have joined the steering group this year. We employ a freelance coordinator (two days a week on a seasonal basis: mid-February to mid-June and mid-September to mid-December) who deals with network administration, fundraising, reporting on grants, organising activities, and web site management. She also oversees a freelancer officer role (ad-hoc depending on funds, approx one day a week, seasonally) who is available to help with on the ground events, training, and social media.

We regularly apply for and are granted Southwark council's Neighbourhoods Fund small grants programme. Depending on the outcomes of the workshops we intend to discuss with Southwark council a more appropriate way for the group's administration to receive core funding from Southwark long term - potentially as part of a Southwark wide network of networks. We have also been offered core funding of 10K for 3 years by Eden Tree/Communities Fund on the condition that we adopt a new legal structure. (See Output Workshop 2).

We know from our network that new community gardens are best established with the help and support of other existing community gardens. Several of the community gardens in our network report that they would not exist if it were not for the support and skills and advice shared via WCGN.

"At its best WCGN has facilitated our skills and development, made things happen that wouldn't otherwise have happened, and given us rich and rewarding stories about the power of community gardening, to reinvigorate our sense that what we do is important and worthwhile." Richard Galpin, Community Gardener and Vice Chair.

WCGN's successes mean that we have been asked to share knowledge with other areas - with others looking to establish their own networks - notably Surrey Docks Farm as a host organisation for a network of community gardens and growing projects.

While our network has a great deal of experience and expertise to share, and we know the value of that to other emerging projects. What we are less clear on is how to sustain our network!

2. Key challenges

- **Clarity about what we are, and whether it is sustainable**

Are we a network or an organisation? Is it sustainable? How can we minimise the administrative burden on the membership, while maintaining the ethos and structure of a peer-to-peer network? Members are already heavily time-committed in their own community gardens. They value the network enormously, but also face challenges in contributing time to organisational administration. Burnout of key members is a risk.

The answer is often to fundraise for more paid support, but as a small organisation we still require input from the steering group to oversee and direct the work, and we risk becoming detached from the membership and treating the members as 'service-users'. We become an organisation, not a peer-to-peer network.

We think that becoming an organisation is not what we, as members, want. There are other effective organisations operating in this space already. If we could clarify our aims then that could help us to clarify what is really important to *do* - Are we trying to do too much? Perhaps we could do less?! And then what kind of organisational structure do we need to sustain or increase this level of activity?

- **Clarity about who we are**

What is our voice? Do we speak AS the network, as community gardeners, or as an organisation that offers support TO community gardens?

- **Clarity about what the offer is**

We struggle to explain effectively to new gardens what the network is for and what they can expect and contribute.

- **Clarity about which activities and tasks to prioritise.**

Available funding streams, or needing to spend money quickly, often begins to dictate activities, rather than being membership driven.

3. Our requirements

We would like to engage an experienced workshop leader to plan and facilitate 3 x 2hr workshops which would help us begin to address these issues. The workshops would be an opportunity to explore why we need a community gardening network, what the ultimate aims are, and what the best organisational structure is for what we want to achieve. Our ultimate aim is to build (and be able to share) the ingredients of a sustainable network. We appreciate that we may need different workshop leaders for different sessions, and are

reaching out to some workshop leaders that have more specialist subject knowledge in workshops 2 and 3, but we would welcome proposals for any/all the workshops in the series.

Specifically in the workshops we want to

i . Develop and articulate our purpose, vision and values

- What would Walworth look like if WCGN was successful?
- What do we need to build to achieve our purpose?
- What are the shared values that help to build trust, and inform the way that we will try to achieve things.

ii. Agree our activity priorities

- Can our purpose, vision and values help to tell us which of our activity areas are most important - (e.g: expanding the network, recruiting new gardens, running events that bring the whole network together, running events at individual members gardens?).
- Which of these activities are our core offer and which are aimed at getting us where we want to go?
- Are we best placed to deliver the activities? Which tasks are best undertaken by paid roles and which by members themselves?

iii. Decide the best organisational and legal structure for our network

- Getting the relationship and structure right between wider membership, steering group, and paid roles to achieve distributed decision making.
- Getting the structure right for the amount of time that members are willing to contribute to governance
- If we wish to continue at the current level of funding, or grow, we need some kind of change of legal structure. We are not a company 'limited by guarantee' so our current position is a risk to members. *We must also make a decision on this by April in order to obtain a core funding offer from Eden Tree Foundation of 10k per year for 3 years).*
- Understanding the pros and cons of establishing ourselves as a Company Limited by Guarantee, Community Benefit Society or other incorporated group,

iv. Prioritise our communication channels and 'find our voice'

- Agree who we speak as, and who we speak to. Can/should our comms speak as member-to-member of a peer-to-peer network, or as a service that is 'supporting' members?
- Which channels and tools should we prioritise? (E.g. Stalls at events, Garden visits, Blogposts, instagram, email newsletters, Whatsapp group, etc. Discuss why we are using them, and what are the specific outcomes we are looking for from the comms?
- What does our current use of photography & graphics communicate, and does it need any tweaks?

v. Build trust

- Through coming together to discuss all these topics we would also want to foster a shared sense of purpose, building trust and the strength of the group

4. Provisional Workshop Plan

Workshop 1: (or Purpose)Purpose (or Mission?), Vision & Values

Who: Core members, Steering Group & Paid Roles

Estimated group size: 10-12

Workshop Leader: TBC

Date: 15th March 7pm - 9pm

Venue: Newington Tenant's Hall, 77 Canterbury Pl, London SE17 3AD

Output: An articulation of our purpose, vision and values in draft form

Workshop 2: Priorities & Governance Structure

Who: Core members, Steering Group & Paid Roles

Estimated group size: 8-10

Workshop Leader + Expert on organisational structures

Date: 29th March 7pm - 9pm SE17 venue in person

Venue: Newington Tenant's Hall, 77 Canterbury Pl, London SE17 3AD

Outputs:

- *Chart of priority areas for activities (identify which are core offer & which are development)*
- *Group decision on best legal structure to support activities.*

Workshop 3: Communications

People involved: Steering Group + Paid roles

Estimated Group Size: 3-4

Workshop Leader: TBC

Date: April/May venue TBC daytime.

Output: A draft comms strategy. Decision on which channels we will use for comms, and a basic statement/guide which states what our comms should seek to achieve.

5. Budget & Arrangements

We have funding of £500 per workshop for the workshop leader.

We will arrange venue hire & refreshments.

For continuity we would like a workshop leader that can lead all three workshops, but are open to suggestions on what might work best.

We have links to organisations that can provide an expert on legal structure to be present for workshop 2. The steering group will work with them beforehand to find the best way to present information clearly to the group, based on the initial outcomes of workshop 1.