

Site Coordinator Manual

Project Grow Community Gardens

As a Site Coordinator you make it possible for Project Grow to manage the many sites it oversees well. You will be the regular point of contact for your gardeners, who will look to you to facilitate their success as gardeners with Project Grow. While that does not include weeding and hoeing their plots, you should orient them to the site as well as to Project Grow, be available to answer questions and deal with problems, and help develop a sense of community and responsibility among them. You will also be the eyes and ears of the director, who depends on you to maintain the smooth functioning of the site and to inform him of problems, needed materials, and any other issue requiring administrative attention. A regular level of contact between you and him will ensure that your garden runs well, its needs are met, your gardeners are happy, and your role as site coordinator is a fun.

Every Site is Unique

Each Project Grow garden site is different. Our sites range in size from 5 plots at Wines to more than 80 at County Farm. Some sites have sheds for storage of tools and hoses while others do not. Some sites are required by the landowner to have a single uniform fence around the entire garden rather than individual fences around plots. Some sites are entirely perennial, some have both perennial and annual plots and some have only annual plots.

Because of all the differences, this manual outlines some tasks which mainly apply to very large sites such as County Farm, Greenview and Matthaei. For example, there is a detailed discussion of stake out, but a small site which is entirely perennial such as Hillside or Clague never has to deal with this at all. However, many other things such as encouraging community and staying in touch with the gardeners are true for all sites.

Responsibilities of the Job

On-site Manager

Project Grow encourages you to function as an organizer or facilitator and include your gardeners in carrying out tasks, rather than just doing them yourself. Involving the gardeners can sometimes be more work because you need to organize what needs to be done, think ahead to bring equipment, and be prepared to put volunteers to work quickly. If someone shows up to help and is not given something to do fairly quickly they assume you didn't really need their help! However, involving the gardeners is very important because it helps create a sense of ownership and community among them, makes the work seem less less overwhelming and more fun for you and everyone involved.

Specific aspects of being the on-site manager are described below:

Staking out the Garden

Staking out is the first significant task of the season and involves the measuring and marking with wooden stakes of the four corners of individual annual plots in newly tilled sites. If your site is entirely perennial (Buhr, Clague, Hillside, Lakewood and Wines) then the most that is required is sometimes placing stakes on the corners of a plot if there is a new gardener.

Stake out is important because until the garden is staked out, members cannot know the location and size of their plots. Until this step is completed, the gardens cannot be opened. Therefore, it should be done as soon as possible after the tilling is completed. Tilling is weather dependent and made more

unpredictable by the kind of soil that exists at your site. Sites with areas of heavy clay occasionally have had to delay their opening day because their soil was too wet to be tilled. Should this happen, we ask that you and your gardeners be patient – the sites will be tilled as soon as possible and you will be told of its completion immediately thereafter.

Some preparation needs to be done before the site can be staked out.

1. Download the map of your site to see how the plots are aligned and how they are numbered. Print out several copies while you are at it, for use on the actual day.
2. Print out the plot assignment sheet that the director will be sending you, telling you which of the rented plots have been divided into halves and which remain whole.
3. Know the directional alignment of your plots, to know whether half plots are to be identified with an E(ast) and W(est) or N(orth) and S(outh), as in 2W and 2E or 9N and 9S.
4. Know the plot size for your site. This is listed on the page for your site on the Project Grow website. Plots are *generally* 25' x 30', but some are 25' x 28', others 24' x 30'.
5. Estimate the number of stakes you will need for the stake out. The number is reached by realizing that the first plot in a row, whether whole or half, will require four stakes, while remaining plots in that same row will only need two; and that the first plot in an adjoining row will need two stakes, while the remaining plots in that same row will only need one.
6. Look over your supply of stakes from last year and see how many more you will need. Gardens with on-site storage will usually have their stakes stored there. Five sites without any storage facilities (Northside, Greenview, West Park, Hunt Park, and Clague) have their stakes, tools, and hoses stored elsewhere and will need to be hauled back to site. The director will be setting up a pick-up date for Leslie and County Farm, which coordinators for sites using those places for storage should attend, along with any others needing more stakes and other equipment. Try to inform the director of your needs beforehand, to be sure that such equipment is available.
7. Contact your gardeners for help with the stakeout. The date of the actual stake out depends on the tilling schedule. The director will inform you when it occurs, after which you can set and inform your volunteers of the actual date of the stake out. In a typical year, this occurs around the end of April, with approximately a May 1 opening of the gardens.
8. Finally, if you don't feel comfortable handling it on your own, let the director know. There are other gardeners and volunteers who have done this many times and can give you a hand.

Stake Out Tools and Tasks

1. You need a few more tools: a long measuring tape (or two, if your site is large), some hammers or mauls, to pound in the stakes, and a few black permanent markers, to number the stakes.
2. Once on site, assemble the volunteers and assign them jobs.

Measurers: You will need two people per measuring tape: one to set the first point, the second to stretch out the tape to the requisite length and mark the second point, etc. until the row is completed. Measurement people need to be sure to consult the plot assignment sheet, to know when half or whole plots need to be measured out.

Pounders: It also helps to have two people per maul/hammer, one to set up and hold the stake, the other to pound it in. Stakes should be only tapped in at the beginning, until it is agreed that lines are straight and the plots are adequately measured out, after which they can be fully pounded in.

Distributor: To make it easy for the pounders, it helps to have another person or two to haul stakes out to the plots and place them approximately at their 4 points.

Scribe: Finally, when the stakes are in and everyone agrees that the row lines of stakes are straight and the plots about equal in size, stakes denoting each plot need to be numbered. In the

event of half plots, the plot number plus appropriate direction of each half has to be written down (it also helps if an arrow points to each half plot). This job of numbering the stakes is very important and care must be taken to include all plots and in the proper order.

Other Tasks: If you have a lot of volunteers, you might also consider setting up the hoses for your site. Otherwise, this task can be postponed until Opening Day.

Opening the Garden

Once the stake out is complete, your site can be opened. Contact all of your gardeners and the director to inform them that the garden is now staked out and ready to go.

At larger sites, we urge you to set up an Opening Day Kickoff meeting of all your gardeners. Evenings, if during the week, or mornings, if on the weekend, are good times for such a gathering. Members are very excited and eager to start gardening, so attendance is usually high at such meetings. It allows everyone to introduce themselves, gives you a chance to go over policies, especially those pertaining to organic gardening (consult Project Grow's Member Handbook for an overview) and to your site, stress the need for community involvement and attending work parties, answer questions from gardeners, and set in motion orders for marsh hay (see below).

Marsh Hay Orders

Marsh hay in this area is harvested annually in August from land which stays wet for most of the year. Many people think it makes a superior mulch because

- The field has never been used for farming so it is totally organic
- It is composed of grasses and weeds which prefer wet conditions so their seeds will be less likely to successfully germinate in the garden.

All the local marsh hay is grown by Kevin Ernst who also does our tilling. At many garden sites, the site coordinator collects marsh hay orders from the gardeners and then places a single order with Kevin. He is familiar with all the garden sites and will deliver the entire order to your site. You can reach Kevin at 734-845-0368 or email at kernst@a2gov.org.

Please do not contact Kevin directly about tilling. He is a nice guy and will try to tell you whatever he can but with the huge number of sites, it really is not fair or efficient for him to respond to calls from all the site coordinators about tilling.

Fencing

Hunt and West Park are required to set up a uniform fence around the whole site. This large task should be planned for this first meeting, too, so it can be done as a group before anyone starts gardening and avoid having to work around plantings.

Water and Hoses

Project Grow uses several different water sources at its sites. Some use water from nearby schools, other landowner buildings, and some are connected to hydrants. County Farm has a well water system supplied by the County.

All these outdoor water connections are removed or turned off for the winter and must be turned on or reconnected in the spring. The director deals with the city for all the hydrant connections and will try to get them all going by early May. The County turns on the water at County Farm and this can

sometimes be delayed if the water lines have been damaged over the winter.

When setting up your site's hoses, first check that the hoses are in good repair. If you find a crack or hole, please repair it before placing the hoses in the garden. With the pulling, hot sun, and high pressure that our hoses endure, small holes become gushers in less than a week! As you set out the hoses, make sure that every plot can be reached with at least one hose line. If you need more lines, secure the needed lengths from the director.

One last word about water: it is a precious resource and we urge you and your gardeners to water effectively (deeply and infrequently vs. often and superficially) and to mulch your beds to retain moisture in the soil.

Monitoring the Garden

Once gardening starts, it is useful to take a stroll throughout the site every so often, to see what condition it is in. How does it appear? Weedy? Great? Are there sufficient numbers of tools for gardeners to use? Are the hoses all fine or do some need repair? Does a plot look like it needs more care? Is the gardener away on vacation, ill, or in need of help?

If more tools or hoses are needed, contact the director for more. If a plot looks in need of more work, get in touch with the gardener to get him to do more. If something is preventing him from starting, you may suggest that he contact the Gardening Angels Program of Project Grow, whose mission is to provide limited gardening services free of charge to those needing it. This bit of help might be just enough to stave off the weeds and save the season for him. If common areas of the garden need mowing or trimming or if the hoses need many repairs, then a work party should be scheduled and gardeners requested to attend.

Organizing Work Parties

Work parties are a means of dealing with problems that arise in the common areas, such as aisles, perimeters and watering areas, which belong to no one but used by all. Tools and hoses also enter this common domain. If work is needed, organize a work party to put things right. Set a date and time (weekend mornings are best; 2 hours of work time will usually do it), email your members, requesting their attendance to undertake the necessary work.

It also helps to post signs about the work party at key bulletin boards and sites where notices are placed at your site. Some preparation for the work party may be required:

1. Tools and materials need to be assembled, depending on the work required. It might involve purchasing hose repair kits or borrowing a lawn mower and/or weed whip, if you don't already have them on site (members will often volunteer to bring along their mower or weed whip; talk to the director otherwise).
2. Project Grow will reimburse you for any reasonable expense incurred in garden maintenance. Send an email with your name, address, phone number, purchase made, purpose and amount spent, to our treasurer, Eric Meves, at ericmeves@gmail.com and a check will be mailed back to you.
3. Finally, just because it is a nice thing to have after a morning of work, refreshments might be offered. Request donations of cookies, cold water, cups and such, and members will usually respond well.

Interacting with Members

This part of your job can be fun: you get to talk with your gardeners, find out how they are doing, see

what they are growing, answer questions regarding gardening, organics, policies, or problems, and talk about yourself and what you are doing in the garden. Don't feel that you must know everything. If you don't, probably another gardener down the row does or it can be looked up on the Internet. What is important is the interaction. Encouraging them to socialize with one another and with you makes gardening at your site enjoyable and satisfying for everyone.

Closing the Garden

Inevitably the season will come to an end, for both annual and perennial plots. The date for closing gardens is set by the Project Grow. It is usually the third Saturday in October and all sites are expected to comply, in order that the fall plowing can take place efficiently. Extensions are given only in rare cases when individual sites were late in

opening because of flooding or some other problem. Unless your site is one of them, you are expected to hold

firm with the official closing date. Steps that will facilitate the closing of your site are:

1. Warn your gardeners of the impending closure early, starting about a month before the official closing day. These e-mails should list the closing day, Project Grow's policies on garden closing (which are listed in the Members' Handbook), and notice of a final work party, which is often held the very next day after the closing or at a time convenient for the site members.
2. A notice should also be posted on the bulletin board or area where it will be seen by your gardeners.
3. Further reminders might be sent out in early October, with a final and more dire warning a week before the closing date.
4. Observe the garden in the meantime and see who is making progress and who is not. The latter individual may need more or stronger e-mails--keeping on top of these slow members will make the final work party easier, especially if they do eventually clean up their plot. At the end of closing day, the annual site should be ready for plowing. It seldom is, so a final work party is probably needed.

Holding the Final Work Party

In the ideal world, the final work party will mainly deal with putting away hoses, tools, stakes used to number plots, cutting down weeds or removing inorganic items from aisles, the garden perimeter and around faucets and sheds. In real life, that seldom happens. Instead, clearing out abandoned plots is usually the major task. If there are sufficient numbers of volunteers, the job isn't overwhelming. But if gardeners weren't notified or a sizable number didn't take heed or volunteers do not show up for the final work party, the job can be daunting. It behooves you, as site coordinator, to get ahead of the job and warn gardeners, monitor the progress of clearing the gardens, and recruit workers to the party.

The final work party will require some preparation. Presumably you have contacted your gardeners about garden closing and the work party. Additionally, equipment needs to be assembled: hedge shears or loppers, to cut down plant material to 1 foot lengths; twine, to tie up stakes, fencing or rolled up hoses; masking tape and felt-tip pen, to label things; garbage or composting bags, to remove trash or organic waste; and hose repair kits, if you have the volunteers to make repairs.

Final Work Day

The goal of this work party is to make the site ready for plowing, by clearing it of all obstacles that could impede that process. Be the organizer of this event and assign volunteers tasks to help you achieve that goal.

1. If an annual plot has not been cleared, it must be taken down by volunteers, following the policies set by Project Grow.
 - Fencing, stakes, non-organic material need to be taken down or removed.
 - Vegetation within the plot should be cut down to 1-foot lengths or less and strewn around the plots.
 - If possible, diseased plants and members of the Solanacea family (chiefly potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants) should be removed from the garden, to minimize infestations next year.
 - Large rocks need to be removed, especially if they have been used to demarcate plot borders. Bound hay bales should be opened and spread around the plots, too.
 - Finally, remove all trash from the site so that it looks clean and neat for the winter.
2. All other plots should be checked to see if they are plow-ready also. Follow Project Grow's guidelines to get them to the desired stage.
3. Hoses need to be detached from spigots, drained, checked and repaired (if possible), coiled up, tied (and labeled with the site's name, if storing them off-site), and put away. For those of you with no shed, it means hauling things back to their winter storage site. Contact the director in this case, so that space and access can be arranged.
4. Project Grow stakes need to be collected, the serviceable ones tied into bundles and put away for the winter.
5. All Project Grow tools (most of them have a red handle tip and name painted in black) should be cleaned and wintered as well.
6. The common areas need to be cleared of tall weeds and trash.

Eyes and Ears of the Director

The director tried to regularly visit all the sites through the growing season, but will never be spending as much time on site as you will. He depends on you to ensure that policies regarding organic gardening with Project Grow are followed and that the garden is running smoothly. However, the director is also there for you, to support your actions and intervene on your behalf if necessary. Feel free, therefore, to ask him questions, request materials, and to involve him when his input is required

Use of non-Organic Products

In most cases, non-organic practices are used because the gardener does not know the proper procedures to follow or acceptable gardening aids to use. It is important, therefore, that the policies and practices advocated in the Member's Handbook are familiar to your gardeners. Quickly review them during your kickoff orientation; have a copy of the manual on site, so members can consult it when needed; and gently correct them if necessary, focusing more on the acceptable than on the misdeed.

Occasionally, you may run into someone who does not choose to garden organically, despite being informed of preferred ways to do so. At this point, feel free to call on the support of the director. If his intervention does not resolve the matter, expulsion is a real possibility. Project Grow firmly believes in being stewards of the land, a central part of which includes the observation of organic practices at our sites.

Failure to Start in May

Most gardeners will enthusiastically start working their plots as soon as the garden is open. Occasionally, however, a gardener doesn't. About two weeks after the gardens have opened, if any rented plot is not worked, please contact that gardener (and include the director, so he is informed of the situation) and urge him to start. He should also be told that all gardens must be "seriously worked"

by June 1 or the gardener risks being evicted. He could also be told of the Gardening Angel Program, that will provide some limited support to get him on his feet. Keep monitoring the empty plot and emailing the absent gardener (and copying the director). If, despite contacts with the gardener, the plot is still not "seriously gardened" by June 1st, please report this fact to the director. Based on discussions with you and possibly the gardener himself, the director might declare it as abandoned and another gardener assigned to it. If no new gardener is available, and only after discussions with the director, you might informally assign the plot, free of charge, to a gardener already working at the site. Should this occur, please inform the director, so he knows who is newly responsible for the plot. If no other gardener is interested in the empty plot, it will still need to be dealt with, so as not to become an eyesore and problem for neighboring gardeners. Mowing the plot when the weeds get 18" tall is the solution. Finally, at a few sites, a plot or two may not have been assigned at all. In this case, and only after discussion with the director, empty plots can be awarded to other gardeners on site, free of charge. Again, it is preferable for a plot to be gardened than to sit untouched and soon to be covered with weeds.

Weedy or Late-Season Abandoned Plots

As you monitor the site, note the general state of the other plots. If you see a lot of weeds over 18" in height in a garden, please contact the member to come in and deal with them as soon as possible. Weeds of that height will soon go to seed, generating many future offsprings. As you look further, you may see a garden that has not been worked for weeks or months, with the plants dying and weeds thriving. These are signs of abandonment: the gardener has gotten too busy to maintain the site, the weeds have overwhelmed him, and he has walked away from the problem. Long before it has gotten so thoroughly out of hand, try to contact the gardener to urge him to continue working his plot. If no action takes place, despite your efforts, try to verify if he has indeed abandoned his plot. If so, get in touch with the director, where again, after discussions with you and possibly the gardener, the plot might be formally declared as abandoned. In that case, weed-whacking or mowing during a work party may be the only recourse for maintaining the plot. Other gardeners are typically not willing to take over an abandoned plot late in the season, since the amount of work required is not balanced by the amount of harvest possible before closing day.

Contact with Director

The director needs to maintain contact with you, to learn how things are going and whether his intervention is needed. Please keep in touch with him. He is the person to go to for equipment that your site needs. He is the person to consult when problems arise that require administrative input. He is aware of past and current problems across all of the sites and can suggest solutions. He knows Project Grow's policies and what can be implemented. He even has the authority to remove a gardener as a last resort. Make use of him and contact him early if a situation arises, before it gets more difficult.

Compensation for the Job

Project Grow can not afford to pay you what you deserve for doing this job. Income from plot fees barely cover the expenses that must be met in order to run the gardens well. However, volunteers such as you provide the essential and crucial services that make it possible. In recognition of your work, however, Project Grow wishes to compensate you by refunding a portion of your plot fee. To equalize the payment, since our sites vary so much in size and work required, payment is based on \$4.00 per plot under your care. Refunds are sent in December, once the gardens are closed.