

## An Adaptive Framework to Assist in the Development of Sustainable Community Food Systems

### Executive Summary

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### Project Introduction

The sustainability challenge that this project seeks to address can be summed up in “lack of access to nutritious food.” Eden Institute LLC, a local edible landscape consulting company, does not currently have a clear path forward in working with communities to assist in the development of sustainable community food systems. The organization is therefore looking for a set of co-creative interventions which may ultimately be handed off and managed by the community.

The food system is an extremely complex network of interacting entities, products, systems, and technologies. Unfortunately, it also exhibits many negative externalities. Some parts of North America still face hunger and malnutrition, evidenced by food deserts, but such challenges may actually be directly attributed to systemic flaws in the current food system. Changing the existing system however, is not generally considered pragmatic. Any approach to create a sustainable intervention would be more effective if directed instead towards creating a simultaneously existing sustainable food system. The targeted sustainability problem for this project therefore is the lack of universal access to healthy, nutritious food.

Intervention points that were identified at the project outset include community organizations, aggregated, small-scale production systems, edible landscaping, and local market channels. Community organizations provide a unique structure in which a community food system can be built in an aggregated manner. Edible landscaping and methods of sale are seen as essential features to making the system work.

Eden Institute sees this as an opportunity to help build resilience in communities through strengthening social cohesion and local economy. The medium of this process being

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food production via residential edible landscapes. The goals of the project are primarily to develop a tool that will provide a clear, but adaptive path in working with communities to assist in the co-creative development and interdependent management of their own sustainable food systems. The desired outcomes and future states include aggregated micro-production systems through aesthetic, edible landscaping as the mechanism for developing truly sustainable community food systems. This stems from the belief that such systems provide the most powerful mechanism for sustainability intervention.

## Methods and Interventions

The tools that I used to advance the project included interviews, site visits, and webinars, as well as a comparative analysis of research into existing protocols, frameworks, case studies, and community engagement strategies, and finally, community mapping through the use of graphic design. They were adapted from existing protocols and frameworks, which allowed for simple comprehension of how these systems were structured and where necessary interventions needed to take place. This also provided an easy foundation to be able to determine what would work best for the application of an adaptive framework that needed the features of a co-creative community system. The tools were primarily only put to use in the research and design portion of the process during the comparative review, which was conducted to see cross comparison of how they would best fit into the new framework. Benchmarks for successful interventions focused on a co-creative aspect of community development at every phase of the projects. Also essential were the three pillars of sustainability, and a focus on assets of networks, capital, and capacities, rather than on “solving” problems.

## Summarize the Project Outcomes/Results

The framework was organized using other frameworks as a foundation that exhibited co-creative and relationship building aspects, an emphasis on sustainability, and a focus on assets, rather than having a problem/solution approach. Ultimately, using these benchmarks, the project was a success, though information that met all of that criteria was not as common, and non-existent in regards to community food system development. Most powerfully was that the framework was fairly comprehensive, with six phases of intervention and thirteen subcategories in each of three nested systems of intervention, the community system, the food system, and the edible landscaping system. The remaining challenges are related to using the framework to develop a customized protocol of action for each community. All community work using this tool remains yet to be implemented. Eden Institute’s initial objectives with building the framework were realized, but implementing it to the full realization of a plausible community food system has yet to take place. Additional research into the design of a community food system may prove useful to inform this framework further in the future. Anyone wishing to expand upon this project should contact Jason Tibbetts at [jasonstree@gmail.com](mailto:jasonstree@gmail.com) for further information.