

Growing Together: Community Engagement Strategies for Farmers Market Development



Challenges Facing Farmers Market Development

Starting and sustaining a farmers market can be difficult. Challenges communities face with any farmers market initiative can be a lack of sufficient demand, a lack of farmers and vendors, and a lack of capacity to fund and operate a farmers market. However, a farmers market can be a viable option for communities facing food insecurity and having limited access to fresh produce. A farmers market can also be a tool to promote community engagement, tourism, entrepreneurship, and small business growth.

Communities and groups looking to start or support local food development can apply community development capacity-building strategies to help meet their goals and address these issues. This publication outlines simple steps that have been proven effective at increasing farmers market capacity.

Steps for Community Engagement

Getting Started

In starting a farmers market, the community must first identify a person or a group with an interest and a commitment to bringing the idea to life. This is a crucial step in any community development project because to be sustainable, the project needs to align with the values of those involved. This interested party could be a community member, an Extension agent, a farmer, an educator, or even someone responsible for the local area's community and economic development. A representative from one of these organizations could potentially be the market manager.

Situational Analysis

The next step is understanding why a farmers market is needed in the community. Potential reasons could be a community's lack of healthy food options or a lack of local events that bring people together. Another reason for

establishing a farmers market could be to support farmers who want to sell products locally. It is also important to assess whether there is sufficient demand within the community which would make the market worthwhile for farmer vendors. Data regarding the local population, income, and education can be found at [census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

Additional resources regarding employment and consumer preferences can be found by visiting the state's economic development agencies or reaching out to an Extension economist in the state in which the farmers market will be located. Identifying clear and compelling reasons for starting or supporting a farmers market is crucial to creating a focused action plan that includes identifying stakeholders, building support, and securing funding.

Stakeholder Engagement

Once there is an interested group and a clear need for a farmers market has been identified, the next step is to engage community stakeholders who can support the initiative. To identify stakeholders, the market organizers need to consider the key motivations behind the market. What community need do they hope to fill or address with a farmers market? What people or groups will have a common interest or value addressing this need? For example, if the reason for the market is to provide healthy food options, then some of the stakeholders who might share this value could be healthcare workers, parents, civic leaders, educators, health departments, and insurance companies.

Create a list of potential stakeholders. Reach out to these stakeholders and let them know why you or your group would like to start or grow a farmers market. Invite them to a community stakeholder interest meeting.

Additionally, it is essential to identify an organization to lead the farmers market's development. This organization will help provide a financial and/or governing structure to keep the market in place and handle management decisions. Some options for leading the market development and management could be downtown development organizations, community-based health organizations, the city's leadership, established volunteer organizations such as Master Gardeners, various agriculture groups, or local civic clubs.

Interest Meeting

The next step is to hold an interest meeting in a neutral, easily accessible location. Invite stakeholders along with representatives from the organization that may manage the market. Invite stakeholders who have a vested interest in the market, but also invite stakeholders who have the skills needed to effectively operate the market. In addition to a basic knowledge of agriculture and farming, these skills include marketing, knowledge of food safety regulations, knowledge of agricultural production, and budgeting or grant writing. A city or county official may also attend the meeting to help identify potential locations for the market if a location is not already available.



To ensure the meetings stay focused, an agenda should be developed. The agenda should include a list of items that will need to be discussed. Inviting an experienced facilitator to help lead the first meeting can help the meeting be more productive and organized. Potential items on the agenda should be:

1. Why does our community need a market?
2. What are the challenges that the market may face or has faced in the past?
3. What resources are needed to make the market successful?
4. Who will manage the market?
5. Where will the market be located, and when will it be open?
6. Which community partners do we need to include and why?
7. How will we establish market rules and regulations?
8. How will we fund the market?
9. How will we recruit vendors?
10. How will we promote the market?

Once these items have been discussed, the facilitator can lead the group to create a simple action plan for the market. The plan should include goals for addressing the market's challenges and identifying assets and resources that are

needed. Other discussion items should be identifying who is responsible for leading a particular goal and establishing a timeline.

Before leaving the interest meeting, the group should establish clear next steps, addressing questions 2–10 above. The group will also need to set a date, time, and location for the next meeting where progress on each action step can be reported.

Table 1 is an example of how the group can develop a short action plan for starting their farmers market.

Conclusion

A farmers market can be a tool to address community issues such as a need to support farmers, food insecurity, or a lack of community engagement. However, for a market to succeed, organizers must have a clear action plan, a well-defined structure, a suitable location for the market, and a committed team to sustain and support the market.

Table 1. Short action plan example.

Challenge: Need to start a market for farmers to provide more healthy food options in our community.

Short-term Goal or Strategy 1. Determine the location and time for the market.

Action Step	Person(s) Responsible	Locations and Completion Dates	Resources Required	Collaborators (who else should know about this)
Evaluate possible locations.		January 1	land, parking, safety, police, accessibility, shade or a pavilion, farmers, market manager, and managing organization	stakeholders interested in the market
Meet with the city leadership about possible locations.		January 30		city, Department of Health, agriculture organization, and downtown development organization
		February 15		
Report to the group and determine the best option.		March 1		community, farmers, educators, and business owners

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