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Project Abstract

Seeds For Change, a newly formed nonprofit organization, creates after-school and weekend jobs for youth in the city of Syracuse, New York. The project works with residents in the inner city Syracuse communities where they live, engages youth and volunteers in the improvement of city neighborhoods through physical improvements in greenspace and streetscapes, and works to reverse the trend of disinvestments in Syracuse city neighborhoods by enhancing the livability of neighborhoods.

To affect these changes, the project increases the household income of low-income youth employees, teaches employment skills, and fosters both the work ethic and civic commitment of participants. Through physical improvements, the project enhances the livability of neighborhoods while increasing property values and encouraging reinvestment in city neighborhoods. The success of the project will be determined by the participation of community residents in planning and operations, the total area of quality open space created for resident use, the performance of youth employed through the program with regard to attendance and productivity, a visual survey of community condition, and surveys of resident perceptions of their community before and after project completion.

Executive Summary

Seeds For Change, a newly formed nonprofit organization, creates after-school and weekend jobs for youth in the inner city community of Syracuse, New York. The project engages youth and volunteers in the improvement of city neighborhoods through physical improvements in greenspace and streetscapes, and works to reverse the trend of disinvestments in Syracuse city neighborhoods by enhancing the livability of neighborhoods.

The target community is composed of residents of Syracuse, New York's inner city neighborhoods, with a particular emphasis on the deteriorating neighborhoods of the south and near-west sides of the city. Of importance to the project, sufficient political and community will to address the issue appears to exist in these communities, with residents expressing the desire to address the issue of abandoned housing in their midst through community meetings and letters to local media. Specific groups targeted by the project are youth employed through the project, project coordinator/mentors employed through the project, and residents of the neighborhoods immediately surrounding our greenspace and streetscape projects.

Like many eastern rustbelt cities, Syracuse has suffered from a declining population and a long-term pattern of disinvestments in city neighborhoods. Syracuse's eroding neighborhoods are home to more than 1,000 abandoned properties and uncounted vacant lots. These properties provide a haven for pests, drug use and gang activity, providing a

poor quality of life for city residents and discouraging business investment. This vicious cycle perpetuates itself by ensuring low property values, a disinclination by landlords to invest in the quality of their rental properties, and a lack of convenient jobs for city residents. Meanwhile, more than 2,100 youth aged 16 to 19 are at loose ends – neither in school nor employed. This combination of factors can be a fertile ground for seeds of gang affiliation, violence, drug use and crime, fostering a cycle of hopelessness.

Alternatively, the Seeds For Change project exists to address these issues by providing positive employment while encouraging continuation of formal education for youth participants, providing a venue for civic engagement of neighborhood residents, and physically enhancing the appearance and desirability of city neighborhoods through greenspace and streetscape projects that improve the livability of neighborhoods while increasing property values and encouraging reinvestment in city neighborhoods.

If these projects are not undertaken, unemployed and unschooled youth will continue to populate a deteriorating community, the number of abandoned properties will increase, neighborhoods will continue to suffer a lack of local jobs and business and community residents will miss an opportunity for significant civic engagement and participation.

The most important goals and objectives for Seeds For Change are the formation and development of the organization, the creation of significant community partnerships and relationships that will position us for future effectiveness, the genuine involvement of community residents in the planning and decision-making processes of the organization

and the completion of at least one physical project to demonstrate our ability to positively impact the community and empower residents to improve their own communities. While the organization will continue, and is positioned to tackle larger community projects in the near future, this evaluation will be limited by time constraints to those activities completed by April 2005.

Significant strides have been made towards accomplishment of goals relating to organizational structure and development, the creation of community partnerships and relationships, and the genuine involvement of residents in the process. Completion of physical projects has lagged due to factors including the timing of grants and other financial support and weather considerations in the Syracuse area.

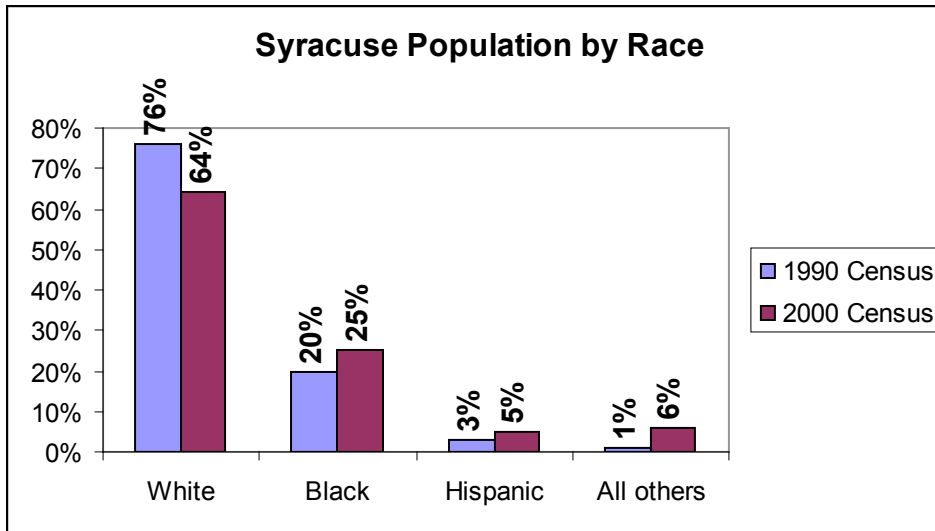
Conclusions to date include the recognition that:

1. Funding for a new organization can be both difficult to come by and slower than expected.
2. Genuine community involvement is a slow and labor-intensive process.
3. While the organization has received significant verbal support for our concept and plans, the mobilization of volunteer hours, commitment of Board members and availability of funding is limited.

Community Needs Assessment

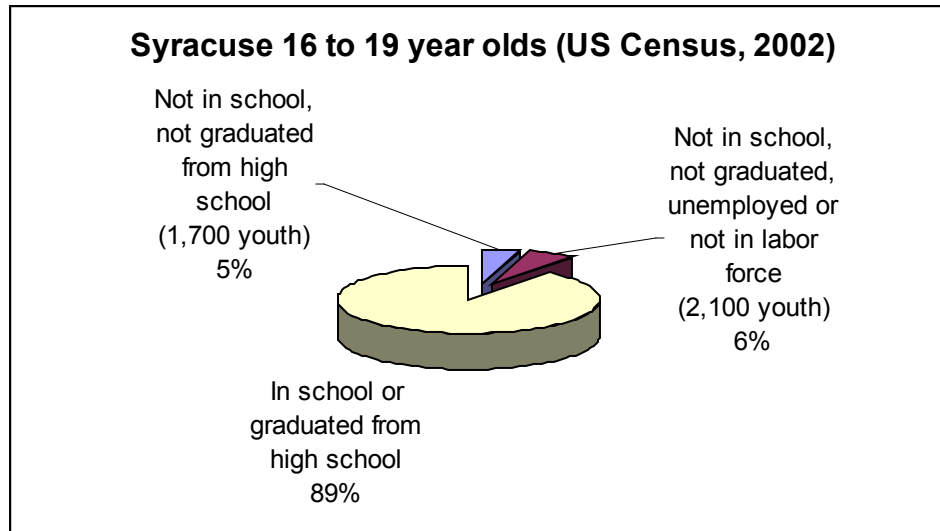
The city of Syracuse, New York enjoyed its largest population in 1950, according to US Census data, with a total of 220,583 residents. By 2000, the population had shrunk to just 146,435 individuals – a loss of more than a third of the city's residents. Between 1960 and 1990, Onondaga County's population, in which Syracuse is located, grew from 423,028 to 468,973, reflecting the suburban migration that was shared by most communities across the country. By 2002, Onondaga County's population had fallen to 447,124, paralleling a generalized outward migration from the Central New York area. This migration may, in part, be due to the fact that the Syracuse area has witnessed a decrease of approximately 22,000 manufacturing jobs over the past decade (Syracuse Consolidated Plan, 2002-2003). While new jobs are being created in the greater Syracuse area, many of these 8,200 newly created positions are relatively low-paying service sector jobs, according to the New York State Department of Labor as cited in the Syracuse Consolidated Plan (2002-2003).

Syracuse's population is predominately white, with the majority of minority residents clustered into a few distinct neighborhoods. Of the City of Syracuse's 65 census tracts, six have a minority population greater than 80% and 27 have a minority population less than 10%. In contrast, the surrounding areas of Onondaga County show a total minority population of just over 3% (US Census, 2000).



The 1999 median family income in Syracuse (with an average household size of 3.11 persons) was \$33,026. However, more than 22% of families subsisted on less than \$15,000 per year. More than 31% of families with children under the age of 18 lived in poverty, while more than 40% of those raising children under the age of 5 were impoverished. (Syracuse Consolidated Plan, 2002-2003). The unemployment rate for the Syracuse metropolitan area as a whole was 7.5% in 2002 (American Community Survey, 2002). By contrast, Onondaga County's median family income (in 2001), with an average family size of 3.21 persons, was \$54,646, according to the American Community Survey 2002.¹

¹ It should be noted that all income and housing cost data was compiled from two different sources with somewhat different time frames. Data for the City of Syracuse was collected from the 2000 US Census, while data for Onondaga County was gleaned from the American Community Survey of 2002 by the US Census Bureau. The variation in time frames should be taken into consideration throughout this document.



The population of 16 to 19 year olds living in Syracuse numbered 35,887 in 2002; it is noteworthy that *more than 3,800 of these teenagers were neither enrolled in school, nor a high school graduate at the time of the census; of these, more than 2,100 were also unemployed or not in the labor force* (American Community Survey, 2002). These teens can be a resource for improvement of the community, or fertile ground for seeds of gang affiliation, violence, drug use or crime.

Declining city population, development of desirable suburb areas on three sides of the city, and limited availability of well-paying jobs have resulted in disinvestments and a soft housing market within the city limits, and level or declining property values in many Syracuse city neighborhoods. *More than 1,000 city properties are abandoned* (Syracuse Consolidated Plan, 2002-2003), eroding the desirability of city neighborhoods and causing increasing disinvestments by absentee landlords. The resultant diminishing tax base further weakens the public schools, code enforcement efforts and city services. Since these properties are unfit for use, they do not even serve the purpose of creating a

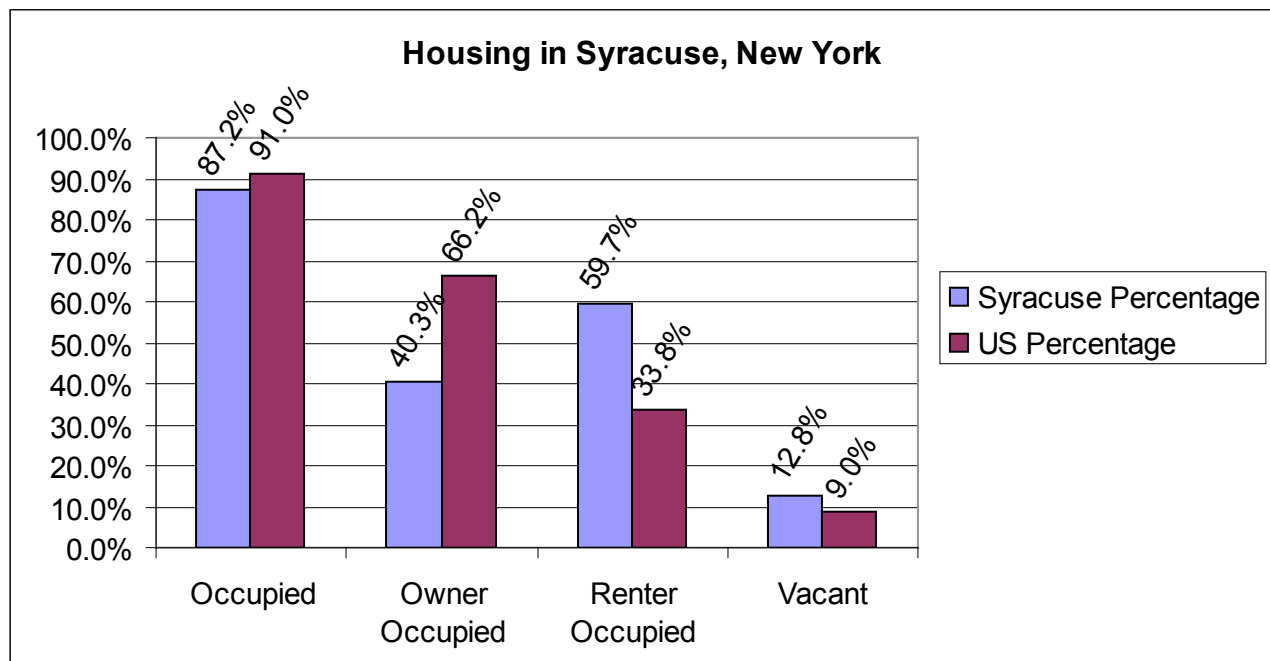
surplus of rental property which would effectively reduce rents for community residents and/or diminish homelessness. The negative condition of the neighborhood keeps business investment at a distance despite existing financial incentives through Empowerment Zone and Empire Zone programs. If these abandoned properties are not removed or rendered fit for use, the community will continue to deteriorate, the number of abandoned properties will increase and community residents will continue to suffer a lack of local jobs and business.

Ironically, purchasable housing in Syracuse is abundant and inexpensive, as compared to other cities in the northeast region. As described in the Housing Market Study section of the Syracuse Consolidated Plan (2002-2003), "the City of Syracuse's major issue of housing is not affordability. Syracuse ranked as the 49th most affordable housing stock out of 186 metropolitan areas nationwide. Even individuals earning between \$15,000 and \$25,000 a year could find a home they can afford in the City. More of an issue is decent affordable housing in neighborhoods with qualities homebuyers are looking for.

...Affordability is only a factor in home purchasing. Neighborhoods can be a driving force. A homebuyer has to see the neighborhood as providing the needed amenities; an affordable home is only one of those amenities." Increased desirability of city neighborhoods can potentially lure back residents who have moved from the city into Onondaga County. By effectively reversing the trend of population flow and bringing

*higher income households back to Syracuse, we can breathe new life into city neighborhoods.*²

The housing market of Syracuse is distinguished by both a lower than national average rate of home ownership and a higher rate of both vacant units and renter occupied units. Unless reversed, these facts contribute to the continued instability and deterioration of neighborhoods. The following chart, using 2000 U.S. Census, data clearly conveys these differences.



² Emphasis added.

The Problem

The existence of more than 1,000 abandoned properties in the city, low rates of home ownership, high rates of vacant and rental property, garbage filled vacant lots, and eroding neighborhoods keeps business investment at a distance and provides a poor quality of life for residents. Meanwhile, more than 2,100 youth aged 16 to 19 are at loose ends – neither in school nor employed. This combination of factors can be a fertile ground for seeds of gang affiliation, violence, drug use and crime, fostering a cycle of hopelessness.

If these projects are not undertaken, unemployed and unschooled youth will continue to populate a deteriorating community, the number of abandoned properties will increase, neighborhoods will continue to suffer a lack of local jobs and business and community residents will miss an opportunity for significant civic engagement and participation.

Alternatively, the Seeds For Change project exists to address these issues by providing positive employment while encouraging continuation of formal education for youth participants, providing a venue for civic engagement of neighborhood residents, and physically enhancing the appearance and desirability of city neighborhoods through greenspace and streetscape projects that improve the livability of neighborhoods while increasing property values and encouraging reinvestment in city neighborhoods.

Target community

The target community is composed of residents of Syracuse's inner city neighborhoods, with a particular emphasis on the south and near-west sides of the city. These neighborhoods are the most significantly deteriorating. More importantly, sufficient political and community will to address the issue is evidenced in these communities, with residents expressing the desire to address the issue of abandoned housing in their midst through community meetings and letters to local media, and focus on these neighborhoods by the Office of Community Development for the city of Syracuse.

Specifically, resident communities targeted by the project are youth employed through the project, project coordinator/mentors employed through the project, and residents of the neighborhoods immediately surrounding our greenspace and streetscape projects.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders in the project include direct participants, such as Board members, employees, volunteers and community residents. Also involved, or potentially involved, in the projects are partnering and supporting organizations such as:

- Syracuse Office of Community Development
- Syracuse Habitat for Humanity
- Local gardening clubs (Syracuse Men's Gardening Club, Spade & Trowel Gardening Club of Manlius)
- Cornell Cooperative Extension CommuniTree Stewards
- Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today (TNT) Planning

- CNY Works, a nonprofit employment services organization
- Syracuse Housing Authority
- Syracuse City Schools
- Syracuse University
- LeMoyne College
- Neighborhood faith groups and organizations

Project goals

Seeds For Change provides after-school and Saturday employment to youth (ages 15 to 18), with continuation of formal schooling or active pursuit of a GED as a prerequisite for employment. Youth workers and volunteers will create and maintain community gardens, parks or other open space that will enhance the image and livability of Syracuse's city neighborhoods while creating an environment more welcoming to business and private investments.

Dates for completion of objectives are detailed in the Gantt chart. The goals and objectives of the project are:

Goal: Formation and development of Seeds For Change as a functional nonprofit 501 (c) 3 organization

Objective: Finalize Board of Directors

Objective: Obtain 501 (c) 3 status with the Internal Revenue Service

Objective: Complete organizational guidelines and structural components including:

Drafting and approval of organizational by-laws

Creation of a short-term and long-term strategic plan

Design and implementation of fiscal safeguards and policies

Creation of financial and operational procedures

Drafting and approving a budget for the organization

Creating a development plan

Structuring and implementing a training program for employee/trainees

Goal: Establish significant community partnerships and relationships

- Objective: Ascertain community needs and opinions of type of project.
 - Conduct community meeting.
 - Discussion with church leaders, local business and others.
 - Survey community members and neighborhood condition/perceptions.
 - Resource: Undergraduate sociology students at Syracuse University and/or LeMoyne College.
 - Partnership with Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs has resulted in completion of the neighborhood survey as a class project. Data has been gathered, and is being analyzed by the students at this time. Additionally, some of these students have expressed an interest in continued volunteerism with the project.
- Objective: Create community partnerships
 - Meet with stakeholder organizations

- Explore common goals, challenges and tactics
- Come to agreement on areas of possible collaboration

❖ **Goal:** Employ a minimum of ten youth on a part-time basis, after-school and on weekends.

➤ Objective: Obtain funding for wages.

- Research and request funding through private foundations, Central New York Community Foundation, city government and others.
 - Funding proposals have been submitted to the JM McDonald Foundation, the Allyn Foundation, CNY Community Foundation, and the Rosamond Gifford Foundation. We have been denied by the Allyn Foundation; response pending from all others.
 - Seeds For Change has applied for Community Development Block Grant funding. While funds will not be available to assist before May 1, 2005, this is a potentially significant funding source for the project in the future.

➤ Objective: Identify, interview, hire and train appropriate youth staff.

- Potential partner: CNY Works, a local nonprofit which provides employment training and job search assistance to individuals in Syracuse, with an emphasis on those who face challenges in accessing employment.

❖ **Goal:** Employ a minimum of two part-time project coordinator/mentors.

➤ Objective: Obtain funding for wages.

- Research and request funding through private foundations, Central New York Community Foundation, city government and others.
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❖ **Goal:** Obtain at least one vacant lot or abandoned building which can be utilized as a site to develop a park, garden or playground – dependent upon the inherent qualities of the site, and the needs and wishes of local residents.

➤ Objective: Identify suitable sites through mapping, site surveys, and communication with city government and neighborhood churches.

- Partnership with Syracuse Habitat for Humanity has resulted in procurement of a vacant lot (approximately 180' x 42'), located in the midst of 18 lots that are

sites for Habitat homes. Construction of the homes will begin Spring 2005, although development of the greenspace may occur at a different time.

- Partnership with the City of Syracuse Parks Department has resulted in free access to virtually unlimited quantities of traffic medians, road shoulders and existing city properties. Additionally, this partnership may result in winter activities for youth in the project, who may be able to assist City workers in their greenhouse, growing plants for spring planting throughout the city.
 - We are discussing possible partnerships with Housing Visions and Jubilee Homes, both established nonprofits working to develop affordable housing in Syracuse.
- Objective: Research and request funding through private foundations, Central New York Community Foundation, city government and others to enable purchase or donation of property.
- Partnerships with other organizations diminish the need for funding somewhat as some property will be transferred without cost.
- Objective: Obtain legal title to property.
- Legal transaction of property ownership is in process at this time.
 - Resource: Attorney Holly Wallis, Melvin & Melvin Law Firm for possible pro-bono work.

❖ **Goal:** Completion of at least one greenspace project.

- Work plan will depend on the condition and limitations of the physical site, community needs, staffing levels, volunteers and funding.

Project Design

Review of the Literature

The popular notion of the “broken windows theory” posits that visible neighborhood disorder and neglect cause an increase in crime and violence, followed by more visible neighborhood disorder, followed by more crime - ultimately resulting in an increasingly negative cycle of community deterioration. While the theory that “broken windows” cause an increase in crime has been sharply challenged, there appears to be widespread agreement that “boarded-up buildings, blighted housing, and weedy vacant lots [are] sores on the body politic” and that these “open wounds [are] a breeding place of social infection that in time takes the whole community down” (Grogan and Proscio, 2000: 157). This is, in fact, the condition existing in many urban neighborhoods today.

Some argue that reducing physical disorder and enhancing the appearance of the neighborhood can help to end the process of neighborhood decay. “Reducing disorder may reduce crime...by stabilizing neighborhoods via collective efficacy” (Sampson and Raudenbush, 2001). Beyond reduction in disorder, the creation of shared community spaces, particularly greenspace, is attributed with reducing stress and enhancing quality of life (Malakoff, date?), reducing mental fatigue and increasing coping skills among impoverished residents (Kuo, 2001), increasing community involvement and life satisfaction (Blair et al, 1991), and even lengthening the lives of elderly urban residents (British Medical Association, 2003).

Unplanned and unsupported open spaces and parks, however, are not a panacea for urban ills. Despite recent efforts to renovate and revitalize rundown urban parks, many cities struggle to maintain parks with limited funds or to re-take community spaces from criminal or other undesirable uses (Bowen, 2003; Hargett, 2001; *"To Be Loved and Give Delight: City Parks"*, The Economist, 1996). Jane Jacobs, writing in 1961, recognized that for every treasured urban park, there are "dozens of dispirited city vacuums called parks, eaten around with decay, little used, unloved" (pg. 89-90). In fact, parks and open space that are unsupported and unused by community members can become simply another form of urban blight.

This proposal asserts that by incorporating local wisdom and leadership, and through employing the energy of local youth, the creation of urban parks and other community open space can effectively reduce disorder, increase investment in distressed neighborhoods, enhance the livability of the city, and galvanize the community by creating a venue whereby residents and youth can have direct experience in increasing their civic participation.

This paper will first review literature pertaining to the role of disorder in distressed urban communities. Second, we will consider the effect of coordinated community action on youth and community residents. We will then examine the role of open space and parks in improving quality of life for residents. Finally, we will set forth a coordinated approach for positively affecting communities through the creation and maintenance of appropriate greenspace projects.

Disorder in distressed urban communities

The first question that comes to mind is simply this – why does disorder exist in city neighborhoods at all? Don't all people desire the cleanliness and order visible in most suburban communities? And, if they do, why do urban residents not simply maintain their properties and neighborhoods as suburb-dwellers do? The answer to those simple queries requires a somewhat more complex answer. The abandonment of, and disinvestments in, city neighborhoods – now evidenced in most by boarded-up buildings and garbage-filled lots – is the end result of years of post-World War II policy and incentives designed to draw the middle class out to the suburbs, and simultaneous practices of red-lining by lenders, which resulted in the concentration of poverty and an increase in the need for services in the city while simultaneously losing the tax revenue needed to maintain an acceptable quality of life.

Grogan and Proscio, writing in 2000, cite the mileposts along the way to an abandoned city: middle-class flight to the suburbs, particularly by whites who then make increased financial strides through home ownership of appreciating property; the disappearance of inner-city businesses and jobs, driven away by the “discouraging physical and social environment”; and the continuing spread of blight from the city center outward which finally culminates in what they refer to as *social implosion*, a state of “social disintegration and deepening demands on public services...from a city that no longer has the tax base to provide any of these services effectively” (pg. 42). What ensues is a negative spiral of deterioration, dependency and hopelessness.

But how does this trend of white middle-class flight lead to physical disorder in the city left behind? At the most basic level, shrinking populations in city neighborhoods automatically result in surplus housing, with the least desirable housing being the most quickly abandoned. Absentee landlords may find their rental properties standing empty, unable to cover the costs of maintenance. Some may opt to let properties silently crumble and decay, while others may choose to forgo paying property taxes, preferring that the city take the property. Many argue that empty houses serve as magnets for crime or drug use. Others may simply find them depressing.

Grogan and Proscio's (2000) portrait the progressive abandonment of the city offers yet another reason for disorder. "The intensifying poverty, together with the discouraging physical and social environment it breeds, drives away not just businesses that employ residents, but those that provide essential goods and services" (pg. 38). Life becomes more of a struggle, needed services are farther away and more expensive to get to, work becomes harder to find. More residents turn to the government for needed services, income or benefits, but the shrinking tax base makes effective provision of those needs impossible. The services we expect from local governments, and which we support through taxes, such as sanitation and public safety as well as health and social services, become over-stressed under the load. Once cities find themselves in the social implosion stage described by Grogan and Proscio (2000), "The resulting squalor further undermines social structures already unsettled by abandonment and unemployment" (pg. 42). The social connections that create a community are further weakened under the strain.

As poverty and disorder increase, the community often loses the strength needed to protect even its environmental health. Drawing from the work of Bryant and Mohai (1992) and Bullard (1990, 1993), Campbell states that "Poor urban communities are often forced to make the no-win choice between economic survival and environmental quality, as when the only economic opportunities are offered by incinerators, toxic waste sites, landfills and other noxious land uses that most neighborhoods can afford to oppose and do without" (1996: 231). Campbell describes this reality as a form of "environmental racism" that further burdens poor and minority communities. As squalor increases and the environment becomes both less green and less attractive, community members actually find themselves emotionally and psychologically less able to deal with both the challenges of their personal lives and the disorder of their communities. Kuo (2001) found that residents of urban public housing without attractive greenspaces "reported more procrastination in facing their major issues and assessed their issues as more severe, less soluble, and more longstanding." Residents in this overwhelmed state are unlikely to be able to effectively address the physical deterioration of their neighborhoods.

Compounding the problem is the lack of a significant middle class. Referring to the work of William Julius Wilson, Grogan and Proscio (2000) cite the need for the middle class to act as what Wilson refers to as a "social buffer ... cushioning the effects of economic downturns by sustaining local businesses, churches, and other mainstream institutions" (pg. 43). Without this buffer, low-income households are left alone to deal with the worsening situation, without the financial or civic resources of the middle class.

However, disorder can have an unexpected and positive benefit. While increasing disorder often signals a breakdown of community, it can also serve as the pivot point for community change.

Coordinated community action and what it means to residents

Community change, when initiated by neighborhood residents, can begin a positive cycle of improvement and re-engagement in the life of the community, while increasing the value of the neighborhood and creating economic opportunity for community members. The transformation of the South Bronx from burned-out slum to a functioning (although still clearly low-income) community depended on the ground-up efforts of community residents themselves. As Grogan and Proscio (2000) describe, "What changed the attitudes, and therefore the odds, was neighbors' first-hand experience of rebuilding... The instigators of the Bronx miracle were the residents themselves..." (pg. 55-56). This hands-on experience builds hope and a sense of possibility in the community. "In neighborhoods that have had a few years' experience in rebuilding and solving local problems, that sense of possibility is reappearing, and it is making possible a much wider transformation than seemed even remotely possible when the prevailing attitudes were resignation and cynicism" (Grogan and Proscio, 2000: 55). In changing their neighborhood physically, they also changed its character. Crime rates dropped, property tax collections increased, residents' opinion of their own neighborhoods improved, and community members exhibited increased voting and other civic participation (Grogan and Proscio, 2000).

The engagement of community members in changing their own environment is critical and should include not only the adults of the community but also the youth. The current popular notion of inner-city youth is one of young people as either potential problems or the potential victims of a community awash in drugs, violence and poorly performing schools. Challenging this notion, Finn and Checkoway (1998) ask an intriguing question: "What would happen if society viewed young people as competent community builders?" Certainly, the work of YouthBuild USA and others should serve to open our eyes to the power of youth in transforming communities. Instead of seeing youth as "threats to be feared, problems to be solved, or victims to be treated", they should be perceived as "competent citizens with a right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and a responsibility to serve their communities" (Finn and Checkoway, 1998: 337 & 345). Re-engaging youth in their physical communities can increase their civic participation, while reaffirming their critical role as citizens.

The Pascua Yaqui Educational Group Effort (PYEdge) is a sterling example of the transformation that can occur simultaneously in both youth and place. PYEdge served young members of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe outside of Tucson, Arizona. Participants were high-school dropouts who "not only feel out of place in the traditional school system, but also lack roots in their own community" (Sandler, Vandegrift and VerBruggen, 1995). A significant number were teen parents, or had substance abuse or criminal histories. Youth in the program embarked on a gardening project designed to preserve traditional crops while developing their cultural knowledge. "As a result of this particular program, more than the earth was transformed: 13 Yaqui teens were recast from dropouts to successful

learners, from young people likely to use community services to those who provide services, from students who need help to those who help others. They reconnected with their community and, along the way, learned skills to help them in the world of work” (Sandler, Vandegrift and VerBruggen, 1995: 14 & 18). Not only did youth in the program begin to think of themselves as community members with an interest and investment in the community, but researchers also found that youth who had been most highly at-risk made the greatest attitudinal changes, significantly reducing the gap between the highly at-risk and their less at-risk peers in terms of community connectedness.

A sense of connectedness is a natural outcome of a community’s efforts in working together to improve their neighborhood. This sense of community, and the likely increase in the behaviors of good neighbors, in turn enhances a community’s ability to engage in discussion of issues, work with others, and engage elected officials in solving neighborhood problems (Bolland and McCallum, 2002). These efforts, when effectively combined, can help create a more livable city.

The role of open space and parks on quality of life

Creation of a more livable city neighborhood can depend on many types of projects – the removal or renovation of abandoned buildings, the establishment of a thriving retail area, the creation of greenspace and shared community spaces or the inclusion of the arts in everyday life. While each project has its own inherent value and contributes to the health of community life, the creation of greenspace and shared community spaces has a particularly immediate effect.

Urban parks can be more than aesthetically appealing; they can also make economic sense. In *Urban Economic Indicators for Green Development in Cities* (Rodenburg, Baycan-Levent, van Leeuwen and Nijkamp, 2001), the authors elucidate the economic benefits of urban greenspaces, including parks, community gardens and wooded areas. Beyond the immediate and obvious factors of fruit and vegetables from community gardens, or employment for the maintenance of park spaces, the authors explore the more indirect economic benefits of improving the urban climate by absorbing pollutants, regulating temperatures and acting as windbreaks; increasing the quality and value of neighborhood properties by acting as noise barriers and visual screens as well as adding to the aesthetic appeal of neighborhoods; and providing safe play and socializing areas for both children and adults. The authors find these functions even more valuable to less affluent areas, where residents may not have yards or gardens, access to a car to escape the city, or the financial means to join sports clubs or vacation in more scenic environments. For these residents, a beautiful neighborhood park that provides an experience of communing with nature may provide some relief from the daily urban environment.

DeKay, writing in 2001 (pg. 19 & 22), stresses the need for green relief from the “sprawling, gray metropolis” that is “noisy, congested, frustrating, and unhealthy.” While DeKay advocates for a *green city* in which “we would have frequent interaction with nearby nature...[which would] reconnect us with our innate biophilia”, his most basic claim is that “interaction with nature has a restorative power on our physiological and

psychological well being.” His argument would imply that people, and not only plants, grow best in a more natural environment.

Coming together, as a community, to garden can have a far more specific impact.

Community gardens have been found to “enhance nutrition and physical activity and promote the role of public health in improving quality of life” (Twiss et al, 2003). The Journal of the American Dietetic Association (2000) states that “low fruit and vegetable consumption is particularly prevalent among low-income families” (*“Overcoming Barriers to Increasing Fruit and Vegetable Consumption”*, Journal of the American Dietetic Association, pg.7) and finds that community gardening has a significant impact on that negative health behavior. Citing the Kane Street Community Garden project, conducted by low-income residents of La Crosse County, Wisconsin, they resolved that 71 percent of participants increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables. They also found that participants experienced other significant benefits. Community gardens are “civic spaces where people work and recreate to nourish themselves, their families and friends” (*“Overcoming Barriers to Increasing Fruit and Vegetable Consumption”*, Journal of the American Dietetic Association, pg. 7). Results from the Philadelphia Urban Gardening Project parallel these findings, finding that the average garden site produced \$160 worth of produce (providing direct economic benefits to gardeners), that gardeners ate significantly more vegetables and fewer sweets, and that gardening was positively associated with both life satisfaction and community involvement (Blair, Giesecke and Sherman, 1991).

A coordinated approach to transforming a community through greenspace projects

The aesthetic beauty of parks and gardens, the increased value of greener neighborhoods, and healthier lifestyles for residents can be achieved through community involvement in the development of greenspace projects. Of perhaps more lasting benefit, however, is the growth of a community that works together to bring such a project to fruition. While Finn and Checkoway (1998) are specifically addressing the issue of youth development, their findings sum up the possibilities when the residents of low-income urban neighborhoods work together to improve their community by “providing practical skills for effective, lifelong civic participation.” Residents become “active participants in a collective process of program planning, organizational development, and community change.”

Deciding what type of community space is needed or what elements should be included is a decision best left to the community members who will ultimately be users of the space. In *How to Turn a Place Around*, the Urban Parks Institute of Project for Public Spaces, summarizes, “In any community, there are people who can provide an historical perspective, valuable insights into how the area functions, and an understanding of the critical issues and what is meaningful to people” (as cited in Hargett, 2001: 39). Put simply, residents know best what they want and need.

Diversity of use is another important consideration. As Jacobs (1961) discusses, “Unpopular parks are troubling not only because of the waste and missed opportunities they imply, but also because of their frequent negative effects. They have the same problems as streets without eyes, and their dangers spill over into the areas surrounding,

so that streets along such parks become known as danger places too and are avoided” (pg. 95). The answer, according to Jacobs, is that a “mixture of uses...produces for the park a mixture of users who enter and leave the park at different times.” In parks, as in cities, “liveliness and variety attract more liveliness; deadness and monotony repel life” (Jacobs, 1961: 99). A diverse environment attracts a variety of peoples and activities, enriching the life of the park and the neighborhood.

By utilizing the wisdom of local residents, and the energy of community youth, community spaces can be developed that replace blight and grayness with lively activity in a natural, green environment. As residents nurture a new park or garden, they also nurture their community, their neighbors and themselves – creating an environment where not only trees, but people too, can grow and flourish.

The Program

By creating a forum in which community residents band together to reduce the disorder and increase the visual appeal and livability of their own neighborhoods, Seeds For Change also creates an environment that strengthens the collective efficacy of city neighbors. As described by Sampson and Raudenbush (2001), “Where there is cohesion and mutual trust among neighbors, the likelihood is greater that they will share a willingness to intervene for the common good.” Decreasing disorder also plays a role in reversing the trend of disinvestments in city neighborhoods. “Disorder triggers attributions and predictions in the minds of insiders and outsiders alike, changing the

calculus of prospective homebuyers, real estate agents, insurance agents, and investors” (Sampson and Raudenbush, 2001).

The 2003 National Main Street Trends Survey, released by The National Main Street Centre of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, would concur that improving the attractiveness of city neighborhoods leads to improved economic well-being in the community. More than 300 communities in 43 states and provinces in the United States and Canada participated in this eighth annual survey. Respondents evaluated 20 different economic indicators, and found that “Main Street” property values are rising, more than half report increases in ground-floor occupancy rates, three-quarters reported increases in special event and festival attendance, crime is decreasing, investment is increasing (80% of survey respondents stated that more building and improvement projects took place in 2002 than in 2001), and local and state governments continue to invest in these improved downtown and historic areas, with more than 60% reporting increased numbers of public improvement projects.

Out of recognition of the value of physical and visual improvements to the community, the value of open greenspaces and the need for employment and job training of disconnected city youth, Seeds For Change works to improve Syracuse’s city neighborhoods through the removal of abandoned homes, the clean-up of vacant lots – and through the creation and maintenance of community gardens, parks and playgrounds.

Participants

Community residents are key players in the project – as employees, volunteers, Board members – and through their input on surveys and at community meetings regarding their perceptions of community needs. The project seeks to employ a minimum of 12 community residents (10 youth and 2 adults), as well as to incorporate community residents on the Board of Directors, in at least half of all board slots.

Community Role

The community's role in the success of the project is critical. Not only will community members function as Board members, employees and volunteers, but will also serve a critical role as advisors to the project through community meetings and surveys of neighborhood residents. While firm commitments have not been made to or received from all of the stakeholders listed below, the mood among those with whom we have discussed the project is highly positive. Creation of more formal relationships still remains to be done in many cases. Stakeholders in the project include:

1. Syracuse Office of Community Development – We have met with Commissioner Fernando Ortiz, Jr. and discussed the project at some length. Seeds recently applied, by invitation, for Community Development Block Grant funding under new categories of “youth projects” and “special development projects.” Inclusion of these new funding categories makes it possible for us to apply to a different funding pool than our “housing project” partners. While funds will not be available until May 1, 2005, this is possibly a significant source of future funding for the program. Additionally, we have been invited to participate in the next

Consolidated Planning process that will result in the next five-year plan for the city of Syracuse.

2. Syracuse Habitat for Humanity - We have developed a partnership in which we will work alongside Habitat projects, share office space, and *potentially* share volunteers and submit joint funding proposals. Seeds Board is cautious, wanting to work in a truly collaborative fashion with Habitat, but not wanting to be perceived as working only with them. The Board is discussing the value of approaching all nonprofits working in housing in the area to establish partnering relationships, but is hesitant to do that until funding is secured and an initial project year (at least) is completed so as not to overextend ourselves.
3. Local Gardening Clubs - We have also met with several local gardening clubs and organizations that have made small donations and offered to work with our youth employees – Manlius Spades & Shovels and the Syracuse Men’s Garden Club.
4. Cornell Cooperative Extension CommuniTree Stewards Program – We are exploring some partnering activities and possibilities.
5. Tomorrow’s Neighborhoods Today (TNT) Planning Councils – represent a fairly good variety of neighborhood residents and are the most effective conduit for communication about needs and opportunities in various city neighborhoods, can provide a good source of guidance and feedback.

6. CNY Works – can assist with locating and training employees, may assist with a partial wage share for youth workers. We have discussed the project with CNY Works, which can assist us with the legalities and requirements of employing youth. In addition, we may have the opportunity to participate in an annual summer youth-employment project in which CNY Works contributes \$5 per hour per youth for the summer (assuming renewal of their government grant funding).
7. Syracuse Housing Authority – owns and manages large complexes of low-income and affordable housing, coordinates Section 8 program, and has expressed an interest in community gardening at low-income housing project sites.
8. Board members – including professionals and community residents, contribute through regularly scheduled meetings, sets policy for the organization.
9. Employees – both youth workers and project coordinator/mentors, whose participation is critical to the success of the project.
10. Syracuse City Schools – through assistance in locating, supporting youth workers and through requirement for youth workers to continue formal education. While their participation is not necessary, their support would be a positive contribution to the project.

11. Syracuse University/LeMoyne College – Partnership with Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs has resulted in the commitment of undergraduates to complete neighborhood surveys and evaluations as a class project. Additionally, some of these students have expressed an interest in continued volunteerism with the project. This will provide a good source of volunteers for these efforts as well as providing a 'real life' learning experience for students.
12. Neighborhood faith groups – Churches and temples provide, not only an excellent resource for publicizing the project and receiving feedback about community needs, but are also a source of volunteers and grassroots support for the project in the neighborhoods. We are currently exploring the best way to work with faith groups in the area.

Host Organization

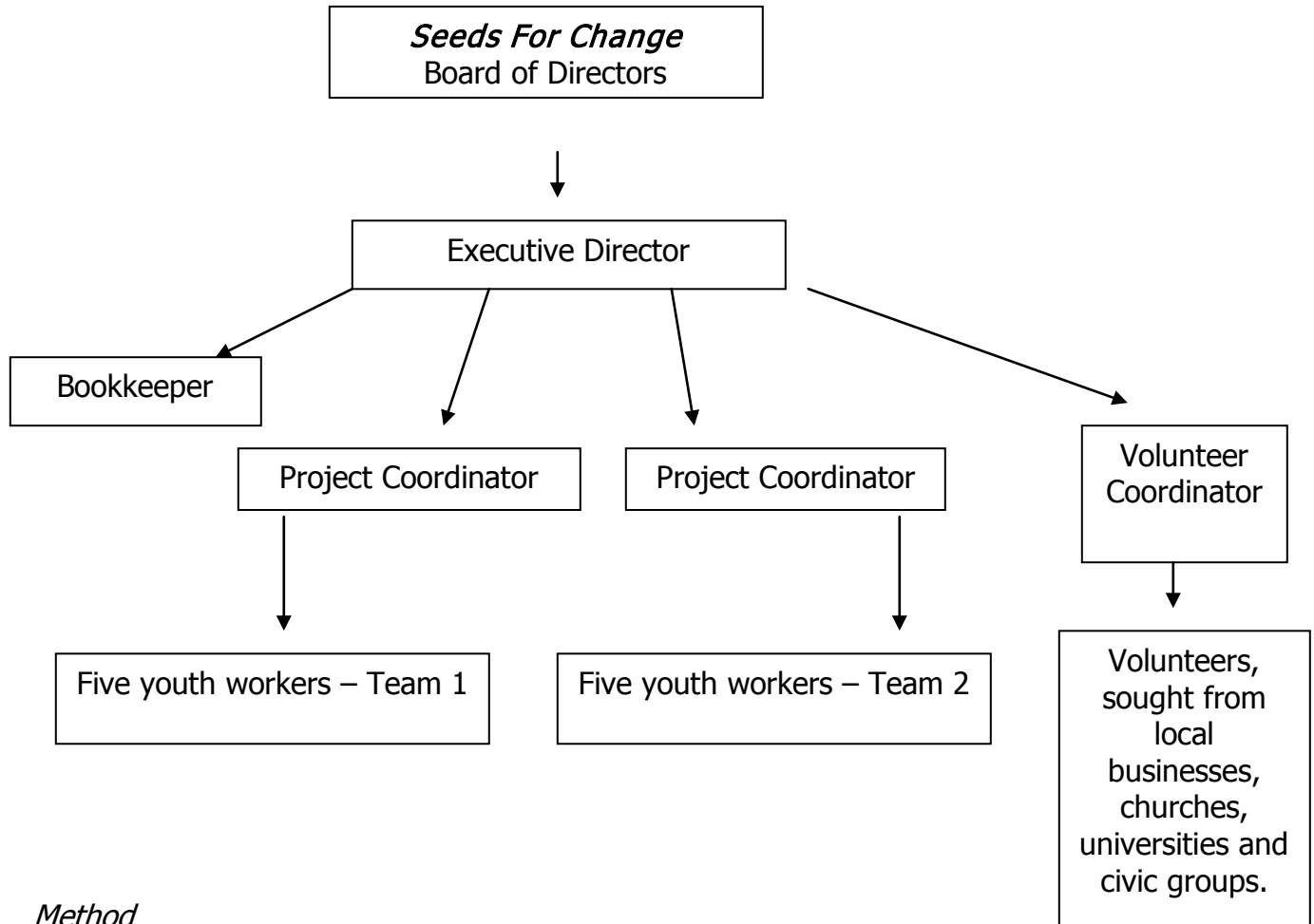
Seeds For Change is a new nonprofit organization committed to providing employment opportunities for youth, improving the livability of communities and encouraging reinvestment in distressed city neighborhoods in Syracuse, New York. This objective is accomplished through the demolition of abandoned homes, the creation and maintenance of community gardens, greenspaces (including "pocket" parks and playgrounds) and the improvement of neighborhood business districts through streetscape projects that enhance the appearance of local shopping areas. As the host organization, Seeds For Change proposes to employ ten youth (ages 15 to 18) during after-school hours and on weekends

to facilitate the development of community gardens and greenspace in deteriorating neighborhoods of Syracuse. The success of the program will primarily be determined by the total area of quality open space created for resident use, the performance of youth employed through the program with regard to attendance and productivity, and a visual survey of community condition.

Jo Halstead's role in the organization is that of founding director and currently the primary source of both funds and labor to formalize the project. While Halstead originally took the role of acting executive director, the organization is currently in discussion with a new potential director. As a member of the community with extensive experience in non-profit work, this individual has the potential to create more authentic community leadership in the organization. Should this transition occur, the new director will manage the daily operations of the organization and will be a non-voting member of the Board; Halstead will return to her role as a voting Board member.

Policy decisions are made by Seeds For Change's Board of Directors, which is composed of community members and local professionals. Each Board member has one vote in all Board decisions, and commits to serve on at least one standing committee (governance, finance/audit, development, communications, projects, and strategic planning).

Organizational chart



Method

Seeds For Change will conduct a series of greenspace and streetscape projects through a process including: identification of appropriate sites, obtaining community input, securing funding as needed, clearing and cleaning of the space utilizing youth staff and volunteer labor, construction of an appropriate project (garden, playground, etc.) as determined through community input, and continued maintenance of the completed project using both paid staff and volunteer hours. Using this approach we will impact the community in both the short-term and long-term by providing paid employment opportunities for both youths

and adults in the target community, encouraging reinvestment in the neighborhood and increasing property values.

The program will work cooperatively with other organizations that are either building, renovating or managing affordable or low-income housing in the city of Syracuse to enhance the livability of those projects through effective use of greenspace. To that end, Seeds For Change has established a partnership with Syracuse Habitat for Humanity in which we will share office space (reducing overhead for each organization), and work cooperatively on projects. Seeds will develop greenspace in conjunction with Habitat projects, enhancing the livability of local neighborhoods. As a result of this partnership, Seeds has procured a vacant lot (approximately 180' x 42'), located in the midst of 18 lots that are sites for Habitat homes on the near-west side of Syracuse. Construction of the homes will begin in Spring 2005, although development of the greenspace may occur at a different time. Additionally, Seeds has made an initial approach to Housing Visions and Jubilee Homes to establish a similar method of operations in conjunction with their housing projects.

Products and Outputs

The outputs of the organization will be after-school and weekend employment for neighborhood youth and the creation of community gardens and greenspaces to improve the physical appearance of the community. By April 2005, the project will have taken steps to address its goals and objectives in the following manner:

Goal: Formation and development of Seeds For Change as a functional nonprofit 501 (c)

3 organization

Outputs:

Finalized Board of Directors, organizational structure and guidelines

Obtained 501 (c) 3 status

Goal: Establish significant community partnerships and relationships

Outputs:

Coordinated and conducted a minimum of one community meeting to plan the project

Outreach and coordination of volunteer groups from churches, universities and area businesses

Performed publicity and promotion tasks

Goal: Employ a minimum of ten youth on a part-time basis, after-school and on weekends; employ a minimum of two part-time project coordinator/mentors

Outputs:

Solicited donations of cash, materials, volunteer hours, etc. to facilitate the project

- Employed ten youth on a part-time basis, (after school and on Saturday), and two part-time project coordinators

- ❖ **Goal:** Obtain at least one vacant lot or abandoned building which can be utilized as a site to develop a park, garden or playground – dependent upon the inherent qualities of the site, and the needs and wishes of local residents

- **Outputs:**

- Solicited donations of cash, materials, volunteer hours, etc. to facilitate the project
- Obtained one property for creation of a garden or greenspace project
- Conducted visual survey of neighborhood surrounding project site

- ❖ **Goal:** Completion of at least one greenspace project

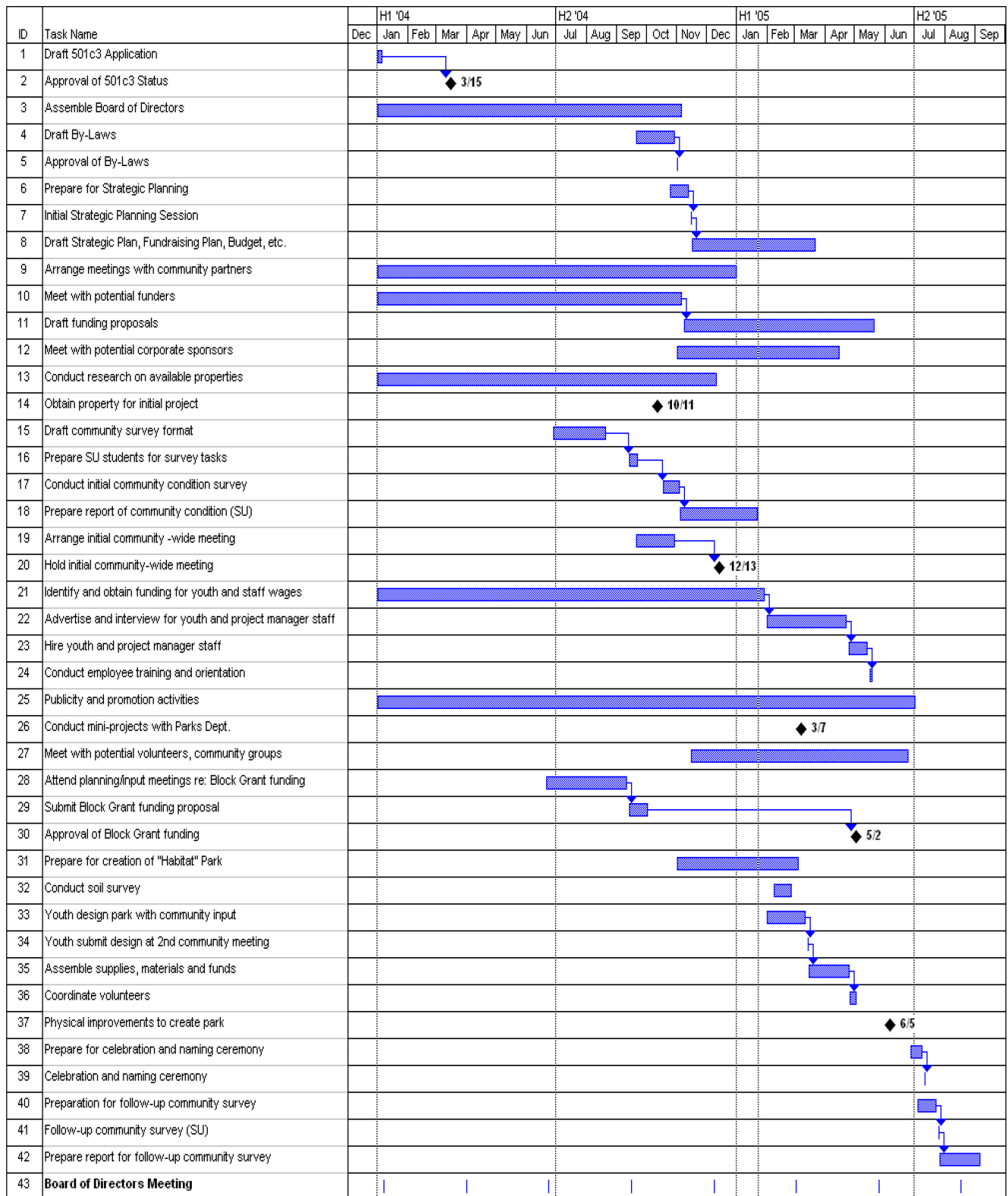
- **Outputs:**

- Undertaken small greening projects with the Parks Department or other city entities to improve the visual condition of city neighborhoods,

Analyzed site suitability for garden, park, or playground and determined the nature of the project

Implemented site improvements and completed one physical project

Conducted on going monitoring activities and evaluated the final project results.

Project implementation Plan

Budget

The preliminary budget for the program calls for an amount of just over \$173,000, with the primary expense being wages and fringe benefits. This amount can be substantially altered through the donation of property, supplies, equipment, planting materials and volunteer labor. The pro-forma budget (in full on the following page) also includes a modest amount for office overhead. No charges are included for consultants or outsourced services.

Salary Expense	<i>Base Rate</i>	<i>Detail</i>	<i>Total Salary Expense</i>
Director	40,000	1	47,200
Project Coordinator (.5 FTE)	15,000	2	35,400
Youth Worker	\$7 per hour	12 hrs/wk	43,680
Fringe			12,600
Total Salary Expense			126,280

Administrative/Overhead			
Rent and utilities	500	Monthly	6,000
Phone, Fax, etc.	100	Monthly	1,200
Equipment (computers, desks)	3,000	Once	3,000
Insurance (D&O, general liability)	3,000	Once	3,000
Supplies	50	Monthly	600
Printing and postage	2,500	Annual	2,500
Total Administrative/Overhead			16,300

Project Costs (any or all may be replaced with in-kind donations)			
Land costs	15,000	Annual	15,000
Equipment (mowers, edgers, etc.)	2,500	Once	2,500
Plants (shrubs, trees, sod, etc.)	3,000	Annual	3,000
Accessories (benches, picnic tables, playground equipment)	10,000	Annual	10,000
Total Project Costs (variable with donations)			30,500

Summary	
Total Salary Expense	\$ 126,280
Total Administrative/Overhead	\$ 16,300
Total Project Costs	\$ 30,500
Total First Year Budget	<u>\$ 173,080</u>

Staffing Pattern

Staffing the project will be the founding director (not compensated in the early stages of the project, becomes a non-voting member of the Board once compensated), two part-time project coordinator/mentors and 10 part-time youth workers. Once the size of the program warrants it, Seeds For Change will also hire a Volunteer Coordinator and a part-time bookkeeper. These job descriptions are attached in the appendices. The director will supervise the project coordinator/mentors, who will in turn supervise youth workers. Training will include landscaping skills and safe operation of equipment as well as training in basic job skills (i.e. reporting to work on time, working cooperatively with others, completing the task).

Monitoring and evaluation

While much of our on-going monitoring and evaluation will depend upon the systems and processes developed by the Board of Directors as discussed in footnote 3, the number of community park or garden spaces created and the number of young adult employee/trainees who leave Seeds For Change to gain employment or advanced education are more easily measured. The overall success of the program will be determined by the total area of quality open space created for resident use, the performance of youth employed through the program with regard to attendance and productivity, and a visual survey of community condition to determine changes in patterns of investment and/or maintenance of property in the impact community.

When considering the conceptual framework of the project, we can infer that the project will have several levels and domain of impact, comprised of the community level, the neighborhood level, the household/family level and the individual level.

At the community level, participation in the program:

1. Leads to enhanced physical appearance of neighborhoods through creation of park and garden areas, as well as by encouraging homeowners to undertake projects that improve the appearance of their personal property.
2. Leads to enhanced physical appearance of retail areas through streetscape and planting projects, as well as by encouraging business owners to undertake projects that improve the appearance of their business location.
3. Leads to increased civic participation by program participants and others in the community through participation in communal improvement projects, participation in open community meetings, communication with local media (letters to the editor, news releases or press conferences), and communication with elected officials.
4. Leads to increased participation in both formal and informal social networks through developed friendships, project working groups, Neighborhood Watch networks, community garden participant groups, and others.

At the neighborhood level, participation in the program:

1. Leads to increased participation in both formal and informal local networks through communal neighborhood work projects, development of Neighborhood Watch groups, community garden participant groups, and others.
2. Leads to increased informal social control in impact neighborhoods through increased neighbor-to-neighbor communication, shared interests and communal work groups, neighborhood goal setting processes and community-wide meetings.
3. Leads to increases in investment of both public and private capital and labor in impact neighborhoods through personal investments by home and business owners, financial support of local government, and investment by private and community foundations.

At the household/family level, participation in the program:

1. Leads to increases in household employment and income through both the part-time employment of youth members of the family or household as well as facilitating increases in employment or working hours of parents due to the existence of safe, supervised employment and activities for youth.

2. Leads to increased supervision and safety of youth through the replacement of previously unsupervised after-school and weekend hours with supervised employment and constructive activity.
3. Leads to increases in educational achievement through the incentive of mandatory continuation of formal schooling as a prerequisite for continued employment in the program.

At the individual level, participation in the program:

1. Leads to increases in employment and income through the immediate provision of a part-time job during after-school and weekend hours.
2. Leads to increased employability and enhances the work ethic of participants through training in basic job and employment skills, development of pride in a completed project, and provision of a recognized job reference after completing involvement in the project. Working with adult volunteers from a variety of businesses, church groups and civic groups will also provide both a limited mentoring experience and contacts for future employment searches.
3. Leads to increased self-discipline and self-control of youth participants through the development of reliable job and employment skills, the continuation of formal

schooling and the experience of working together as a team to accomplish a common goal.

4. Leads to an increased sense of empowerment among youth participants and community members actively participating in the project through the experience of setting goals as a group, coordinating and communicating about activities, sharing the experience of work and seeing the project through to completion.

Performance Indicators

The broad objectives we seek to achieve and evaluate, and the performance indicators that will be measured and assessed to determine the effectiveness of the program, are:

❖ Enhanced physical appearance of both neighborhoods and local retail areas:

- Quantity of open space and community space developed as a result of the project (i.e. parks, community gardens, playgrounds).
- Continued maintenance of above-developed areas
- Number of streetscape elements developed as a result of the project (i.e. benches, planters, flower borders, lighting elements)
- Continued maintenance of above-developed streetscape elements
- Visual assessment of neighborhood or retail area changes (i.e. are homeowners and business owners making repairs, removing garbage, painting premises, planting and improving yards or facades)

❖ Increased participation in formal and informal social networks:

- Community participation in planning meetings and program activities and work projects
- Establishment of related networks (i.e. Neighborhood Watch, community garden participant groups, social groups)
- Community use of above-developed open and communal areas
- Level of neighbor-to-neighbor communication

❖ Increased civic participation:

- Level of participation in communal improvement projects
- Level of participation in community meetings
- Level of communication with local media (letters to the editor, news releases or press conferences)
- Level of communication with elected officials
- Voter participation

❖ Increased public and private investment in impact neighborhoods

- Visual assessment of neighborhood or retail area changes (i.e. are homeowners and business owners making repairs, removing garbage, painting premises, planting and improving yards or facades)
- Level of foundation investment through grant making
- Level of business community investment through grant making, volunteer activities, in-kind donations and technical assistance

- Level of government investment
- Number of new businesses opening in impact neighborhoods
- Number of vacant houses sold and occupied in impact neighborhoods

❖ Empowerment of youth as individuals, family members and citizens

- Youth taking role in assisting family
- Youth continuing to achieve in formal education (i.e. attendance, changes in grades, participation in sports or clubs, participation in student government)
- Gains in employability and work ethic (i.e. work attendance, level of energy and participation, taking leadership roles, learning new skills and professional networking skills)
- Increased goal setting and strategic planning behaviors
- Increased communication skills
- Increased decision-making behavior
- Youth actively plan for their future achievement

While not all of the performance indicators above will be measured in the early stages of the project, we can anticipate that all will be impacted. Specific targets for selected performance indicators are being established and will form the basis for evaluation measures to be implemented by staff, Board members and Syracuse University students. Assessing our success in meeting our objectives will depend on measuring indicators through a variety of methods to include surveys and interviews with participants and community members, analysis of census data and local governmental statistics, visual

surveys of impact neighborhoods, observations of participant behaviors, interviews with teachers and parents, and tracking of employment and educational achievement.

Management Information System

Seeds For Change will utilize MS Project to coordinate the work of individual projects and MS Excel to produce budgets and spreadsheets, and to track donations of cash, in-kind and volunteer hours. Documents used to gather data and monitor performance will include:

- Employee time sheets
- Donation records
- Community surveys (both resident-completed and visual surveys conducted by Seeds For Change)
- Organizational budget and records of actual income and expenses
- Documentation of site acquisition
- Record of site improvements
- Site maintenance logs (records of mowing, watering, planting, maintenance and repair)

Evaluation Plan & Reporting

While some records will be kept on a daily, weekly or monthly basis (i.e. time sheets, records of income and expenses, and site maintenance logs), many will be kept on a per-project basis. At the onset of each project, we will conduct surveys, document site acquisition and keep a record of site improvements. At six-month intervals, we will re-

conduct physical surveys of both our project sites and the surrounding neighborhoods to ascertain changes. Both reports to funders and publicity to the community will be based on those findings and released at least semi-annually. Project manager/mentors will meet weekly with director, volunteer coordinator and financial officer to ensure that projects stay on track.

Achievements

To date we have accomplished the following:

- Drafted and filed articles of incorporation with the State of New York.
- Applied for and received 501 (c) 3 status with the Internal Revenue Service.
- Assembled a Board of Directors that includes community members.
- Established relationships with Syracuse Habitat For Humanity, the City of Syracuse Parks Department, Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, and local gardening clubs.

- Obtained one vacant lot for development of a park, in conjunction with a Habitat housing project. Unfortunately, for the purposes of this academic project, funding anticipated for this project is through the Block Grant program, which expressly states that projects cannot begin before May 1, 2005.

- Have been included in meetings and discussions relating to development of Syracuse's next 5 year consolidated plan.

- Have been invited to apply, and have applied, for Community Block Grant funding through the Syracuse Office of Community Development. During this funding round, new priority categories for greenspace development and for youth projects were added to the application criteria.
- Are prepared to begin mini-projects in conjunction with the Parks Department and volunteers from area churches and schools in the early spring – primarily with regard to after snowmelt clean up and early planting of roadsides, medians and city parks.
- Have conducted one well-attended community meeting (approximately 100 people) regarding the “Habitat Park” project.
- Have developed a community condition survey report format, which was used by undergraduate students at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School to evaluate the pre-project condition of the target community.

In assessing the projects performance to date, we must revisit the original goals and objectives, specifically:

Goal: Formation and development of Seeds For Change as a functional nonprofit 501 (c) 3 organization	
Finalize Board of Directors	Achieved
Obtain 501 (c) 3 status with the Internal Revenue Service	Achieved
Complete organizational guidelines and structural components	Partially achieved

including:	
Drafting and approval of organizational by-laws	Achieved
Creation of a short-term and long-term strategic plan	In process
Design and implementation of fiscal safeguards and policies	In process
Creation of financial and operational procedures	Achieved
Drafting and approving a budget for the organization	Achieved
Creating a development plan	In process
Structuring and implementing a training program for employee/trainees	Remains to be done

Goal: Establish significant community partnerships and relationships	
Conduct community meeting	Achieved
Discussion with church leaders, local business and others	On-going
Survey community members and neighborhood condition/perceptions	Initial achieved Second to be done
Create community partnerships	On-going, with some achieved
Goal: Employ a minimum of ten youth on a part-time basis	
Obtain funding for wages	Not achieved
Identify, interview, hire and train appropriate youth staff	Awaiting funding

Goal: Employ a minimum of two part-time project coordinator/mentors	
Obtain funding for wages	Not achieved
Identify, interview, hire and train appropriate staff	Awaiting funding

Goal: Obtain at least one vacant lot or abandoned building which can be utilized as a site to develop a park, garden or playground	
Identify suitable sites	Achieved
Research and request funding	Not needed – achieved through partnerships
Obtain legal title to property	Not needed – achieved through partnerships

Goal: Completion of at least one greenspace project	
	Not achieved – delayed by weather/ funding

Analysis of these achievements and failures would indicate that, while we have been successful in forming the organization, beginning the community organizing process, and creating community partnerships, we have been far less successful in securing funding to hire both youth and staff. As of this writing, Seeds For Change remains a completely

volunteer organization, and preliminary neighborhood clean-up projects, scheduled for early April, will be staffed completely by volunteers.

After April 2005, Seeds will continue as an organization. Seeds will continue to build community partnerships and seek funding, primarily through approaches to local business for sponsorship of youth teams or of individuals. The organization is also investigating options for earned income, including the possible operation of a greenhouse. In the months and years to come, Seeds will continue to measure its effectiveness through measures including:

At the community level:
Quantity of open space and community space developed
Number of streetscape elements developed
Maintenance hours performed
Visual assessment of neighborhood or retail area changes (numeric tabulation system to be developed)
Community participation in planning meetings, program activities and work projects
Community use of above-developed open and communal areas (random survey and count)
Number of new businesses opening in impact neighborhoods
Number of vacant houses sold and occupied in impact neighborhoods
At the individual level:
Youth take role in assisting family (observed or reported)
Youth achieve in formal education i.e. attendance, changes in grades, participation in sports or clubs, participation in student government (observed or reported)
Gains in employability and work ethic, i.e. work attendance, level of energy and participation, taking leadership roles, learning new skills and professional networking skills (observed or reported)
Increased goal setting and strategic planning behaviors
Increased communication skills
Increased decision-making behavior
Youth plan for future achievement

Sustainability plan

Short-term sustainability of the project will be dependent entirely on our ability to raise funds through grants, donations and funding through the city and/or the Syracuse Neighborhood Initiative. However, long-term dependency on donations and grants can be problematic to sustain. In order to add an earned income component to the project, we intend to model ourselves (in some capacity) after the Seattle Youth Garden Works project in Seattle, Washington, with the addition of market gardening of either produce or flowers. These products can be sold either by subscription under a community supported agriculture model in which supporters pay a monthly fee for a weekly delivery of seasonal produce, or sold wholesale to local businesses (grocery stores and/or florists) or an existing youth farm stand project. While income generated from sales of produce and flowers will, presumably, not be sufficient to support the project in its entirety, it does produce a stream of earned income as well as the opportunity for future profit sharing or cooperative ownership by program participants. These possibilities will be examined in further detail in the future.

Clearly, the sustainability of any organization also depends on the environment in which it operates. Seeds For Change is meeting an expressed need of the community, from public meetings to the editorial pages of The Post Standard newspaper. This widespread public support for addressing the issue of abandoned properties and the appearance of city neighborhoods can be leveraged into ongoing support of Seeds For Change if appropriate publicity and public education is undertaken. Additionally, our potential partnering

organizations (Habitat for Humanity, Housing Visions, Jubilee Homes) are numerous and all involved with construction or rehabilitation of housing – improving the neighborhood, but not through development of greenspace. Our efforts, therefore, are highly complimentary rather than competitive at the street level. While some potential funders may be shared in common, we will not be tapping into funding streams designated for housing, which are the lifeblood of these organizations.

Seeds For Change will intentionally keep its overhead low by utilizing donated space and equipment whenever possible, preferring instead to funnel available funding into wages and benefits for employees. This approach more directly benefits community residents, as well as making the project more palatable to funders and donors. Since the project seeks to address the entire city of Syracuse (working one neighborhood at a time), as well as undertaking continual maintenance of our projects, we have the opportunity to work indefinitely.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The original goals and objectives of the Seeds For Change project changed fairly continuously throughout the life of the project, with this trend continuing today. The original project grew out of the heads of a handful of individuals working in nonprofit human service organizations in the Syracuse area. Like many individuals doing such work, we believed that we knew what the community needed – even though most of us did not live there. As we engaged in some genuine community organizing, began forming a Board of Directors that included community residents, and started talking to community

members about what they wanted to see happen, we discovered that our ideas did not necessarily agree with the view of the people who would live with the results of our actions.

As a result, we have exceeded our original goals in the organization-forming area and are lagging behind in the physical project accomplishment. The original plan called for the filing of necessary paperwork to form the organization, the raising of funds, hiring of a few youth workers and creating a park. What we found was that we needed to spend a lot more time in the community talking to people and getting both their input and their buy-in to the project. We were astounded when community members told us that they didn't much care about parks since they weren't safe anyway; what they wanted in the community was houses with families in them, more jobs, and fewer shootings. As a result, true community participation was much slower in coming than we had originally planned. After spending more time talking to residents we determined that a greenspace would be welcomed provided that it had sufficient lighting to make it safe, was kept clean and maintained, and that police would agree to patrol frequently.

In hindsight, the community would be more encouraged by a program that brought jobs or a grocery store than it is by parks and greenspace. If we had met with the community in a series of fact-finding meetings prior to the selection of a project, then the choice of a project would have been different.

While Seeds For Change will continue as an organization beyond April 2005, much still needs to be done to bring the project to an evaluation point at that time. Due to unexpected delays in funding, we have still been unable to hire the youth workers and their supervising project coordinators. We are now approaching companies and individuals to fundraise for the program, and hope to have this situation reverse in the near future.

Should funding not materialize by early spring, we will be in the position of needing to move forward with volunteers in order to complete at least one project. This is necessitated, not only by the need to have a completed project to evaluate for this course, but also to help show the community and our local funders what impact the program can actually have. At the moment, it's great in theory and invisible in practice – not a compelling story to fundraise on.

My recommendations to other practitioners are:

- To spend more time in the target community and find out what the residents want and need – not what the practitioner thinks they should have.
- To build in enough time to gain community involvement; community organizing can be a slow process.
- If public funding support (through fundraising or foundations) is needed, plan in sufficient lead-time. Many grant programs have significant delays between application and funding.

- To not rely solely on anticipated grant funding; this can disappear through no fault of your organization's.
- To build partnerships with other community organizations; they can be invaluable.

More specifically, to students in the Southern New Hampshire University School of Community Economic Development, I also recommend:

- Select a project for which there is already some existing community support and energy; it's difficult to get the ball rolling if you are a team of one.
- If you are employed, try to choose a project that relates to your employment; the M.S. CED program adds not one, but two significant activities to your existing life – class work and project work. It's probably easier to accomplish more on your project if it relates to another existing part of your life.
- Do not rely solely on grant funding – even if you know the program officer, even if it's been promised, even if they seem completely excited about your project. You aren't funded until the check is in your hand; and there's an awful lot that can go wrong in that process.

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Promising Practices in Afterschool www.afterschool.org (February 2004)

Seattle Youth Garden Works www.sygw.org (February 2004)

Shimberg Center For Affordable Housing, University of Florida (October 2003) www.shimberg.ufl.edu

Appendices

Staff Job Descriptions

Executive Director

The Director is responsible for overseeing all activities of Seeds For Change, specifically to insure that the organization operates in keeping with its stated mission. The Director reports to board of directors and is supervised by the executive committee of that board.

Responsibilities:

- The Director will oversee and manage the staff and the overall day-to-day operations of the organization.
- Create and execute programs in keeping with the organization's stated mission.
- Work with the board in determining policy and setting the course for the organization.
- Actively promote the organization in the community.
- Function as the primary fundraiser for the organization.
- Work cooperatively with related community organizations.

Skills:

- The Director should have an extensive knowledge of other community organizations and an understanding with the dynamics of the Syracuse area.
- Be capable of working with a variety of persons and organizations in a cooperative manner.
- Have excellent verbal and written communication skills, particularly with regard to public speaking and proposal/publicity writing.
- Ability to conduct needed financial analysis and planning.
- Strong leadership skills.
- Respect for the environment.
- Appreciation of diversity.
- Strong organizational skills.

Requirements and experience:

The Director will possess at least a Bachelor's degree in a related field and have a minimum of three years of experience in not-profit or community work in either a paid or volunteer capacity. Demonstrated fund-raising ability is preferred.

Project Coordinator

The Project Coordinator reports to the Director and supervises a team of five (5) part-time youth employees who are engaged in creating and maintaining greenspace projects. The Project Coordinator will be mindful of their position as a role model and mentor to youth employees and will conduct all activities in keeping with that role. Project Coordinators, due to their direct exposure to young people, will be subject to a background and reference check.

Responsibilities:

- The Project Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that all safety practices are adhered to at all times, and will be consistently aware of the whereabouts and activities of youth workers.
- Maintain the work schedule and records of hours worked by youth employees.
- Update Director and other staff members regarding the status of all assigned projects.
- Coordinate with the Volunteer Coordinator to ensure smooth interplay between youth workers and volunteers on the project.
- Engage in hands-on work in the assigned project and set an example of a positive work ethic.
- Serve as a public representative of the organization on the project site and with parents, community members and volunteers.
- Responsible for operation of machinery to include lawnmowers, edgers, roto-tillers and related equipment.

Skills:

- The Project Coordinator must model responsible and professional adult behavior at all times when interacting with youth workers, parents, volunteers and community members.
- Excellent verbal communication skills.
- Ability to work constructively with diverse groups of persons and with young people of various backgrounds.
- Good organizational skills and ability to carry out projects in a coherent manner.
- Basic landscaping and gardening skills and abilities.
- Ability to operate lawnmowers, edgers, roto-tillers and related equipment safely and competently.
- Ability to drive and possessing a valid New York State driver's license.
- Physical strength and fitness such that the individual can complete heavy physical work, consistent with gardening and landscaping activities.
- First aid and CPR certification (or willing to attend training and obtain certification).

Requirements and experience:

The Project Coordinator will have either experience or formal training working with young people in either a paid or volunteer capacity. In order to act as a role model for youth, the individual will either possess some college background, or evidence a commitment to education through current college enrollment.

Youth Worker

Youth workers are paid part-time employees of Seeds For Change who will be engaged in the creation and maintenance of parks, gardens, playgrounds and other community spaces. Youth workers are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is respectful of their fellow employees, their Project Coordinator and any volunteers or members of the community they may contact through their work with Seeds For Change.

Responsibilities:

- Youth workers will be responsible for reporting to work on time as scheduled and communicating necessary schedule changes with their assigned Project Coordinator.
- Follow all safety procedures, and ask Project Coordinator for guidance when in doubt.
- Youth workers MUST maintain school enrollment and attendance as a requirement for continued employment. Satisfactory progress towards a GED may be used to satisfy the school attendance requirement, so long as studies for the GED are being conducted through some established program (i.e. The Learning Place, Laubach Literacy, BOCES, etc.)
- Youth workers will engage in physical activities to include picking up litter, planting trees and shrubs, and assisting in the construction and assembly of benches, picnic tables, playground equipment and related items.

Skills:

- Youth workers must demonstrate a willingness to work hard, get dirty, have fun and stay in school.

Requirements and experience:

Youth workers should be capable of engaging in physical activities consistent with landscaping and gardening activities. No experience is required.

Volunteer Coordinator

The Volunteer Coordinator reports to the Director and is responsible for soliciting, arranging, coordinating and maintaining volunteer participation in Seeds For Change projects.

Responsibilities:

- The Volunteer Coordinator will be responsible for recruiting volunteers through public speaking engagements and business outreach as well as through face-to-face community outreach to neighborhood residents.
- Work cooperatively with Project Coordinators to ensure that volunteer support on each project is productive and harmonious with our youth employment goals.
- Maintain volunteer information files and schedules.
- Train volunteers in safety precautions and Seeds For Change policy and procedure (where appropriate).
- Ensure that our volunteers are appropriately and abundantly recognized through a variety of personal thanks, media releases, letters to employers and recognition events.

Skills:

- The Volunteer Coordinator should possess outstanding verbal and written communication skills, particularly with regard to public speaking.
- High energy and strongly self-motivated and self-directed.
- Ability to multi-task with a high degree of accuracy and organization.
- Outstanding customer service skills.
- Ability to work with diverse populations.
- Ability to use computers and appropriate software (MS Word, MS Excel, MS Project)
- Flexibility, creativity and the ability to work as a member of a team.
- Great sense of humor.

Requirements and experience:

A Bachelor's degree is desired, although not required, for this position. A minimum of two years experience in a related field (including sales, marketing, or customer service) is required. Fund-raising and marketing experience is desirable.