



Kaniksu Land Trust

Creating stronger community... through cultivating public space

As part of their pledge to conserve land in perpetuity, land trusts across the country are finding ways to make land conservation relevant by engaging all people in their communities who have not traditionally been served by, engaged in, or moved by land conservation. Some are finding that cultivating public space, like community gardens, connects people to the land, to each other and eventually, to the mission of the land trust.

Nine tips for land trusts that want to create stronger communities through shared public spaces:

1 Clarify how this new or enhanced public space will boost your land trust's impact. Are you connecting more people to nature? To farms? Are you working to enhance community health, access to food, better integration of cultures, stronger learning, reducing isolation, growing empathy, or providing a sense of joy and connection to the outdoors as a tool for change? Could this space and related programming help to more deeply connect your land trust with different audiences and sectors in your service area?

Perhaps you can transform a space no longer considered a community asset or find a partnership that will allow you to connect conservation of land and waters in a new way in this particular region.

2 Identify the potential users of the public space/conservation area/park. Identify potential users in the broadest sense of the word by conducting outreach to any and all of the following groups in the area, as relevant to your community: People who live there (including renters and home-owners), businesses, community-based organizations, local coalitions, local elected officials, faith communities, schools and social services.

The broader the network is, the more people will be involved and invested in the public space, which often means that more people will participate in stewarding and maintaining the space.

3 Ask potential users what they need and listen deeply. Find a variety of ways to ask potential users what they need from a public space. Ensure you are reaching people in inclusive ways, taking into account different languages, abilities, schedules and interests. Consider meeting with people in small groups, as part of their community organizations. Ask for and follow up on referrals, using one-on-one interviews in addition to more formal focus groups. Understand their needs, what other challenges are in the community and how a public space would address that. As people provide insight into what they want to see in the space, be sure to listen carefully and have ways to capture their ideas.

- 4 **Ask what resources people can help with.** Any vibrant public space must have a network of people who are invested in using and supporting the space and its programming; everyone has something to offer. When designing a public space, ask what folks can bring to the table—food for programs or meetings, donations of services and/or materials, contributions for implementation, event space to raise awareness, public programming, community gardening, social service outreach, etc. These synergies can result in mutually beneficial networks that strengthen the entire fabric of the community, creating abundance for all. Be careful to ask less of those that have less.
 - 5 **Cultivate a specific group of diverse stakeholders to steer the evolution of the public space.** While the overall process should involve as many stakeholders as possible, it's also crucial to have a specified group of invested stakeholders, such as a steering committee, that has committed to the project. This helps the project keep momentum, and increases investment from different communities. Additionally, it can help create a structure for more accountable decision making about the vision for the space.
 - 6 **Develop a shared goal for the garden through a consensus-building process:**
 - a. Brainstorm any and all ideas—Remember the rules of the brainstorm:
 - i. There are no bad ideas
 - ii. Build on each other's ideas
 - iii. Go big!
 - b. Build consensus around the top five (for example) ideas for the community to execute. Building consensus can involve prioritizing ideas and identifying short- and long-term ideas.
 - 7 **Design and planning:** Once you have the goal for the garden, get explicit about planning for programming as part of the design and management plan to ensure it is a welcoming place. Everything doesn't have to be done at once, but the plan should accommodate all that the community would like to do, even if it doesn't happen right away.
 - 8 **Maintenance:** Consider upkeep needs and how the space can be maintained in a manner that builds and sustains trust and community pride. Consider different partnerships to assist in maintenance. The best partnerships are with those who can commit to helping on a regular basis, not a one-time effort.
 - 9 **Celebrate! Always remember to celebrate.** Building public spaces can take a long time, and it is important to broadcast interim achievements and celebrate along the way. A public celebration is a time to thank those who were involved and gather renewed interest and investment so that many are involved as the space enters the next stage: Management and maintenance. Make the celebration fun, joyful and a time to showcase the beauty of the public space.
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Resources

Community Conservation Spotlight documents that describe land trust work in different sectors, including one on addressing food and hunger, can be found at www.landtrustalliance.org/topics/community-conservation

Join the conversation

Community Conservation Learning Network forum on the Learning Center <https://tlc.lta.org/CCLNforum>

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