

Urban Food in Action

USDN projects have set examples that other cities may choose to emulate.

Previous USDN grant products exploring urban agriculture practices find new audiences and spread between cities. Partners for Places has teamed with local community based foundations to promote urban agriculture in cities across North America.

The USDN Family of Funds supports urban agriculture policy and practice development by providing grants that promote idea spreading and concept implementation. Strong urban agriculture projects have been supported by the USDN Peer Learning Exchange Fund, USDN Innovation Fund, and Partners for Places Fund over the years. The following is a sampling of awarded projects.

In 2014, USDN's Peer Learning Exchange allowed USDN members from Columbia MO and Fayetteville AR to travel to Lawrence KS to learn about their urban agriculture programming and policies, especially Lawrence's "[Common Ground – Community Garden Program](#)." Each city learned from each other during their time together, citing the desire to try versions of each other's programs in their own cities.



Figure 1: City of Lawrence website

In 2015, USDN's Peer Learning Exchange funded representatives from Baltimore MD to travel to and meet in Minneapolis MN for a 2-day meeting to:

- Analyze and amplify Federal Policy change
- Support policy change in staple foods ordinances
- Embed mapping into policies and programs
- Understand how to distribute healthy foods

In 2016, USDN Regional Networks (now called [Partner Networks](#)) were offered a USDN Innovation Fund RFP specifically designed to encourage use of completed USDN grant projects beyond USDN members. Two regions selected food as their desired learning topic, and focused on earlier USDN urban food grant products, viewing them through the region-specific lens:

- The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana (OKI) Regional Network made the topic of all USDN urban agriculture products a feature at their annual meeting, discussing findings and resources with a broader audience.
- The Heartland Regional Network in the Midwest U.S. went more deeply into the 2012 Urban Food Scan, teaching newer members about its findings, and refining its uses in their region.

Peer Learning Exchanges between cities and collective explorations within USDN's Regional Networks have furthered the spread of urban agriculture practices. At the same time, local implementation is finding continued resources in the Partners for Places grant fund.

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Urban Farm and Job-Training at Re-Purposed Golf Course in Appleton WI

Appleton WI is a great example of a community that leveraged Partners for Places funding to help convert a 70-acre golf course into an urban farm, park, and job-training program.

The Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region connected with the cities sustainability department because of a 2012 Partners for Places Request for Proposals. The successful grantee partnership helped fund the golf course transformation. Over two years, [Riverview Gardens](#) has successfully engaged 2,800 volunteers and dozens of local businesses, schools, and universities to plant 4,000 fruit and nut trees and bushes, harvest 9,000 lbs. of produce for a local food pantry, provide job training to 164 people transitioning out of poverty, create 2.5 miles of trails, establish a beekeeping program, and host a bread-baking program, among many other accomplishments.

Because of this grant and project, the foundation and city sustainability office have continued to seek each other's input and opportunities to partner. The Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region even shifted its environmental grant making to an "environmental sustainability fund".

Lots of Hope: Urban Agriculture on City Lots in Providence RI

The [Lots of Hope](#) program to transform vacant, city-owned lots into thriving centers of urban agriculture and pilot small-scale composting in Providence neighborhoods is an example of a project supported by Partners for Places and the Rhode Island Foundation in two phases.

The idea for Lots of Hope originated when a young urban farmer's private lease was terminated and local officials stepped in to help relocate his farm to a city-owned lot. The farmer converted much of the asphalt-covered property into a productive farm, thus demonstrating the potential to revitalize vacant properties into sustainable local farms.

The initiative launched in 2013 and completed in 2015 (two grant cycles) and provides Providence residents access to low-cost, underutilized public land from the city. With technical assistance and hands-on support from the Southside Community Land Trust, the initiative helps turn vacant, city-owned properties into productive urban farms thereby bringing fresh produce to local neighborhoods. It also introduced a residential composting program to encourage families to reduce solid waste by creating a high-quality compost pile for use in local farming. Additionally, the initiative expands Providence's portfolio of green, open space and improves air quality, public health, and local property values.

A new greenhouse allowed the initiative to extend the growing season for urban farmers, foster micro-businesses, promote composting, and provide Providence students with healthy food. The 3,200-square foot vacant lot chosen for the greenhouse is in the heart of the South Providence community, within walking distance of two elementary schools, a library, a senior center, and a church. The greenhouse has hosted about 5 growers, increased use of local foods in schools, generated approximately \$10,000 to \$15,000 in sales for the growers, and engaged 25-30 classrooms in garden-based curriculum integration, including a composting pilot where students learn about local food systems and reducing solid waste.

In addition to these two examples, there are 15 other completed local urban agricultural projects that Partners for Places has funded over the years. The fund continues to support this work: within the past year, Partners for Places has also funded food related projects in Tucson AZ – which is focusing on a low income Latino neighborhood and food-related businesses - and in Minneapolis MN, which is focusing on building capacity of Farmers Markets, including a "Buy Local" campaign. Summaries of completed projects can be found [here](#).



Figure 2: Lots of Hope website