



*Implementing Rural Community Composting in  
Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont*

***Local Opportunities, Issues, and Priorities Evaluation***

The goal of this project is to develop a sustainable community composting site with each Project Partner for composting food scraps, garden trimmings, and other organics. Early attention to site sustainability will ensure that the training and assistance provided results in the development of sites that are maintained through ongoing community involvement and managed in a way to benefit the community without creating any nuisance issues.

Community composting sites vary widely in mission, location, size, affiliations, and participants. Project Partners are establishing community composting sites in community gardens, schools, a public park, and a co-housing development. The “Local Priorities, Opportunities, and Needs Evaluation” will assist community composting participants to:

- Develop their mission/vision, goals and priorities
- identify community or neighborhood resources, strengths, opportunities, and challenges
- Assess their compost team strengths and needs
- Planning the composting site design, composting system(s), and maintenance needs.

The Evaluation is designed to encourage compost teams to work together on a series of exercises that will assist in establishing and maintaining their community composting site. It is also intended to be a “work in progress.”

It’s important that the Evaluation be started prior to the community composting site is set-up; however, completion of some of the exercises, particularly the site and system specific ones, will require additional training and technical assistance (provided by NERC). As sites are established, teams will want to revisit the exercises to modify and build upon their initial responses.

It is recommended that your responses be written on a flip chart or white board for the group to see and discuss. For your project records, please have someone write (or type) the ideas on this form as well.

## Mission and Vision Statements

A community composting site's Mission and Vision statements should reflect your community's values, why your team/other stakeholders believe community composting is important, how the site will benefit your community, and the goals, objectives, and priorities for the site.

1) What are the benefits you see community composting as bringing to your neighborhood and community?

*Examples: Neighborhood asset; compost for gardens; brings community members together; compost education and training.*

*A mission statement expresses a team's objectives and goals.*

*A vision statement articulates the long-term and sustainable community role envisioned for the site.*

2) Why do you want to establish a community composting site? What are your goals and objectives for the site? What do you hope to accomplish? What excites you about community composting? How do you envision as the future role of your community composting site? (See, SMART. Goal Setting.)

*Example: Divert food scraps locally; help to educate and inspire community members on the importance of food scrap diversion and composting; bring community members together; establish a compost education or demonstration site accessible to everyone in the community (neighborhood, school, cohousing); engage youth; foster self-sufficiency in waste diversion and local use of food scraps and organic resources; build stronger social networks; present a model for environmental stewardship; foster community pride and belonging.*

3) What are the issues and challenges that you may need to overcome when establishing a community compost site?

*Examples: How to build and sustain our Compost Team ("human resource management"); cultivating team skills; concerns that odors may be an issue; concerns that the site may attract wildlife (rats, insects, bears, etc.); how can we compost in winter; how do we overcome local political and cultural norms; theft/vandalism; compost site land permanency.*

4) List and prioritize your Community Composting site goals for this year

*Examples: Build and train our Compost Team; discuss the site with our immediate neighbors; start small with the collection of food scraps and other organics from our garden members (or housing community, or school, etc.) and turn these into compost; establish at least two compost systems in order to manage our compost and serve as a demonstration site for our neighborhood.*

List five primary goals your Compost Team would like to accomplish this year:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

***Draft a Mission and Vision Statement***

Use your benefits, goals, and objectives from to develop a mission statement that will unite your Compost Team’s mission and reflects your vision of how the community composting site will benefit your neighborhood and community and overcome the issues and challenges it may face.

## Assessing Your Compost Team and Your Community Readiness

Once your Team has created mission and vision statements, its readiness and community support can be evaluated. Utilizing “Asset-based community development (ABCD)” can assist the Team in determining its and your community’s existing strengths and assets. For a background on ABCD, see the “*What is Asset Based Community Development*” handout.

Using ABCD in evaluating readiness will inspire greater participation and help mobilize other community members and organizations to get involved. The process will identify the values, skills and resources Compost Team members bring to the site.

It can also help strengthen community connections. Focusing on the assets of individuals and communities, instead of the needs or barriers faced in developing your community composting site, allows for a more positive experience. Yes, being aware of the challenges your site may face is an important part of the planning process and this Evaluation. However, keeping the benefits and assets of your Team and the value of community composting in the forefront will help to make the task a more positive experience.

Additionally, demonstrating how community composting can benefit and nurture your community will serve to build the prospective partnerships your site will require.

1) Is there support for the community composting site? By whom? Does the support reflect the demographic makeup of the surrounding neighborhood? (See, *Good Neighbor Tips*.)

2) Who are the stakeholders/participants in the community composting project (name the stakeholders/participants, if you know the name, such as Compost Team Members, or describe if not, such as neighbors)? Who will you accept food scraps from? Who are your Compost Team members? Who will coordinate the site? What are the roles you envision for each member of your Team?

3) Are there existing partnerships, or ones that can be developed, to strengthen the connection between the community composting site and the community? Is there a group or organization that can benefit from a partnership with your community composting site?

*Examples: local environmental groups; area schools; nature centers; town/municipal staff; service learning programs, youth education organizations, and senior centers. (See the Mapping Reciprocal Partnerships Exercise)*

4) Are there community members or organizations that can support or join your Compost Team to assist with compost bin construction, financial management, material donations, site maintenance, etc. Who else in your community is supporting composting, food systems, sustainable local solutions, and environmental awareness?

*Examples: Local Carpenter Union members or Eagle Scouts to build bins, fencing, signage, bulletin board; connecting with a local hardware store for donated or discounted supplies; restaurants and schools for 5-gallon buckets for food scrap collection; service organizations; AmeriCorps; corporate or college volunteer programs or high school service learning programs.*

5) What are the specific skills, assets, and resources your Compost Team has? Where are the gaps? What type of training/support is needed? Will your site be managed and maintained by volunteers or a combination of staff and volunteers? How many staff? Volunteers? What is your plan for growing your Team? Do you have a system in place to collect feedback and input from your Team/neighborhood stakeholders?

## Identifying Resource Assets and Needs

Your community composting site will require one or more compost systems (tumblers, bins, piles, and windrows), equipment, and tools. (See the *Community Composting Tools, Supplies, & Resources Tip Sheet*)

The specific tools, supplies, and resources needed for your site will depend on the goals of your site (diverting food scraps; education/demonstration site); the size of your site (what systems and how many will fit on your footprint?); and the resources availability.

Regardless of the resource needs for your site, a basic budget should be prepared. This will allow for better planning for maintaining and potentially expanding your site. (See the *Sample Budget for Community Composting*)

1) What are the tools, supplies, and resources you think you will need for your site? Keep in mind the goals of your site. Do you want to have multiple types of compost bins so that your site serves as a demonstration site? How many compost bins will fit on your footprint? What types of bins do you want to have and/or build (tumbler, 3-bin system, etc.)? Do you have room for a compost pile or windrow (will this type of system work in your neighborhood?)

Make a list of the tools, supplies, and resources needed to get your site started.

2) What resources do you have available? What funds do you have (NERC grant, donations, other grants)? Are there Team members who have equipment that can be used? Is your site connected to a garden, school, or housing development that may already have tools and equipment you can use? What are the in-kind resources and services that can be cultivated?

*Examples: Individual gifts; associations and organizations (local, regional, state, national); institutions and government, local businesses); sources for in-kind construction of compost bins, signs, etc.*

Make a list of your known resources, monetary in-kind, donated tools, etc.

## Site Assessment

NERC will provide onsite technical assistance and training to assist each Compost Team in planning and designing their site. The Site Assessment and Site Design exercises will help inform NERC about your site and provide first steps for your Compost Team to undertake that need to be considered prior to site development. An onsite site assessment will be conducted by NERC with the Compost Team; the *Site Inspection Form* is attached so that each team can become acquainted with what will be reviewed.

1) What is the nature of the neighborhood? How will your community composting site benefit your immediate neighborhood? Who owns the land for the community composting site and what is its history, that is what was the land used for previously (this is important if it was previously used as an industrial site)?

2) What is the zoning for your location? Are there Board of Health, Building Codes, or other local regulations that apply to your site or any structures constructed onsite (such as a tool sheds or fencing)? What are the required set-backs? What are the adjacent uses? Will this affect the perception of neighbors (that community composting may attract unwanted wildlife, odors, etc.).

3) What parking is available for Compost Team members? How about for visitors and special events? Where are the closest bathrooms? Is there water available for Compost Team members and the compost site? Is there a concern about excessive noise (for example, if your site will be used for community or school composting trainings)?

4) What is the public visibility of the composting site? Are aesthetics a concern?

Some jurisdictions require permits for perimeter fencing; irrigation connections, and structures—although, most will not require a permit for structures as small as a tool shed. Regardless of the regulations, it is important that the Board of Health and other town/municipal staff be informed of the community composting site plans in advance.

If posts will be installed, or digging of any sort, locating underground utilities is required prior to initiating construction. Call 811 to be directed to the local operator who will schedule a utility locate with the appropriate agencies. To learn more about this process, visit your state's 811 or "Dig Safe" website.

## Site Design

Once a site has been selected, there are several very important underlying considerations when initiating the design process. In community composting site design, it is important to consider the flow of traffic, composting, while also reflecting the ideas of the Community Compost Team and how it will fit into the surrounding community. Consideration needs to be given to the size of your site footprint, adjacent property owners, others that may be using the site (such as community garden members, school staff, other site participants, or nearby residents), project partners, community leaders, and town/city officials.

The site should be well planned, organized, and constructed. Room for expansion should be considered, if possible. Signage and a message board are also important to include on the site. A site contingency plan for emergencies and site closure is also a component of the site design plan.

See the *Community Compost Site Diagram* to get a sense of the “flow” that should be considered when planning your site design.

Make a sketch of the site design.

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CREDITS: Gardening Matters, *Community Garden Start-Up Guide*; Denver Urban Gardens, *Best Management Practices for Community Gardens*; Kairsten Nitsch, The Garden Works Project, *How to Start a Community Garden*; Libby Weiland, Antioch University, *Community Garden Connections Education Manual*.

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