



Federation of
City Farms
& Community
Gardens

Factsheet

Promote your project

There are lots of ways you can help promote your community farm or garden. A publicity drive can attract new volunteers, visitors and prospective funders, raise your profile in the community and spread the word about the benefits of growing your own.

Promotion can seem intimidating and time-consuming, especially if you are a small organisation largely staffed by volunteers who are already giving up a lot of their free time. However it is possible to create plenty of publicity on quite limited resources. Below are some key points to consider before you get started.

What are you promoting?

First think about what you want to gain from publicity. It helps to have a focus. Do you want more volunteers, donations of specific equipment, more funding, or just to raise your profile in the area? You might want all of those things, but creating targeted campaigns for each of them can be more effective than a general push.

Who can take responsibility?

Does one of your group already have experience with promotion - writing press releases, designing websites, using social media? If not, choose one person or a sub-group willing to work on publicity.

Alternatively, you could advertise specifically for a promotions volunteer – or consider offering a skills exchange on a community site like Gumtree, Local Exchange Trading, Freecycle, letslinkuk or justforthe love of it. No media experience but a glut of courgettes? Find out if someone is willing to help you with leaflet design, press releases or promotion in exchange for some free produce.

What is your target audience?

Think about all the groups of people you want to target – volunteers, schools, local businesses etc – and then use this factsheet to make a list of ways you can reach them.

Which would be the best medium - local networks, on site, face-to-face, print, press and media, digital?

Think about what would work best for you, taking into account time constraints and existing skills. Below are some of the ways you can promote your plot effectively, from face-to-face marketing to digital media. You can use one or any of them in combination to meet your project's needs.

Using local networks

Word of mouth is still the best way to build local support for your project and find volunteers or groups whose clients might benefit from working on your site.

Consider contacting:

- Scouts and Brownies, Woodcraft Folk
- MIND
- Age Concern
- Religious groups
- Social clubs and youth groups/centres
- Local schools
- Ethnic minority community groups/centres (your local authority may be able to help with translating information into other languages)
- Local volunteer societies/organisations
- Student volunteer organisations/magazines for local universities and schools/FE colleges
- Refugee groups
- Local businesses who might want to send a work group as part of Corporate Social Responsibility work
- Prison rehabilitation/youth offender groups
- Local restaurants/cafes for cooking demos or potentially taking produce
- Locality is a national network of community-led organisations that aims to inspire local communities to change and improve. Check their website (<http://locality.org.uk>) to find out how they could help your group.
- Agencies offering community services – gardening can have multiple benefits for their clients and the service

provider will give support and supervision for their client group when on site. Contact your local authority for details of support services for people with disability needs or mental health issues and homeless people. The new NHS clinical commissioning groups may also be able to suggest groups who would benefit.

- There may be a local growing network in your area that can help, such as Growing Birmingham, Feeding Manchester and the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership.
- The Black Environment Network works to enable full ethnic participation in the built and natural environment, and can help you deliver events such as cultural food exchanges. Small groups can join for free and take part in training and networking days that will help you promote your plot to ethnic communities

On site promotion

Signage

Even if you can't be open all the time, you can still ensure passers-by know what is happening inside and when.

If you can, put a noticeboard or banner at the site entrance with essential information such as the name of the site, opening times and a website (if you have one) in large lettering. If boards are likely to be vandalised, opt for a cheap, easily replaceable format.

Metal signs with vinyl lettering are more weather-resistant than painted wood. Remember to laminate paper notices for any outdoor use. Shop laminating can be expensive. Buying your own laminator may be cheaper in the long run.

Open days and events

The very best way for people to learn about what you do is for them to see it for themselves.

Events on-site provide a great opportunity to show off your site, celebrate your produce and/or animals and get staff and volunteers to talk directly to visitors – there's nothing like hearing individual stories and people's passion for what they do to inspire new supporters.

You could hold a 'come-along-and-try' day for new volunteers, giving them an introduction to the site and a chance to have a go at the work. Alternatively, set up a more open event/party with extra entertainment.



Here are some top tips for throwing a party on-site. You can ask for donations at the gate to help with funds for the party too.

- Time your event to coincide with seasonal festivals that will make the best of your site. Harvest-time is great for showing off your produce, but Halloween and Christmas can be equally attractive. Have bonfires, story-telling sessions, pumpkin-carving etc.
- Provide lots of shelter using gazebos or attaching a tarpaulin between trees.
- Entertainment in the form of music, craft demonstrations and children's activities will add to the fun. Group members, friends and family are the best source of ideas for entertainers – otherwise you could try a skills exchange site or offer free produce. Alternatively, charge a small fee or donations at the door to help cover costs, or allow musicians to pass a hat round.
- Craftspeople may be happy to demonstrate if they are able to sell their crafts. Pole lathes (wood turning) and wool spinning are especially popular. Find contacts through local craft guilds, woodland centres and craft markets.



- For children's activities try local youth groups, party organisers, Scrapstore and community centres. There are also some good books on face painting, willow and nature crafts: perhaps someone in your group could run the children's area. To avoid any problems, put a notice up stating that only children accompanied by a parent can take part.
- Refreshments are a good idea. Even if you have no on-site facilities for cooking (clay oven, etc) you can set up some trestle tables and a gas bottle operated tea urn or hobs. The Women's Institute may be able to help. If you do have facilities, make use of your produce! Find someone to give a cooking demonstration using produce from the site, or run workshops with kids making home-made pizzas. Show people what you can do with your fruit and veg.
- Remember to inform your local authority, including the environmental health department, of your event well in advance. Check your insurance too – are you covered via your own or local authority's policy for public liability at an event?

Face to face

Stalls at local events or presentations to local organisations are effective because they allow you to talk directly to people. Check your local paper for school fairs, gardening shows or other events and visit your library or voluntary resource centre for a list of local groups.

A trestle table with leaflets and some seasonal vegetables is a good start, maybe a board with some photos of your site and a map. Try an interactive game like 'guess the weight of the marrow' or 'name the piglet'.

Farmers' markets are an excellent way of promoting your site as well as selling surplus plants and produce.

Think up some imaginative publicity stunts. How about dressing up as a fruit or vegetable to hand out leaflets?

Print marketing

People are bombarded by flyers and leaflets so they ignore a lot of them. Be strategic with your publicity. It is easy to underestimate the time taken to produce a leaflet and distribute it. For a timed (seasonal)

publicity drive, allow lots of time (8+weeks).

Flyers are usually handed to people who are not familiar with your organisation and should be brief (as few as 50-100 words). A6 (1/4 piece of A4 paper) or bookmark size work well, any smaller gets lost. People do get fed up with street flyering so try and tie it in to a publicity stunt or event (see above under 'Face to Face') rather than just handing them out.

Leaflets are displayed on stalls, in libraries, or other situations where people make the choice to pick up and read information, or can be posted through letterboxes. A few hundred words can be included but make information more readable by using columns, boxes and images. A5 (1/2 piece of A4 paper) works well.

Does anyone in your group have a flair for design, a connection to a local printer or access to a big printer/photocopier? It is possible to design your own leaflets using a desktop program like Publisher or even Word but if you aren't familiar with the software it can take a while to get to grips with it, Leaflet drops (through letterboxes) have variable success but are worth trying.

What notice boards are there in your area? This could include outdoor boards in parks, boards in shops and post offices, boards in libraries and other community buildings.

Community newsletters, parish magazines and free newspapers often carry a list of local groups and are widely read, especially by older people. Make sure that your site is in there and submit occasional articles.

See if you can get your posters displayed by local shopkeepers, community centres or GP surgeries. Postcard sized adverts in shop windows are cheap and effective.

Run a poster colouring or design competition, asking the children who take part to stick the poster in their front windows.

Commercial advertising of any kind is expensive and not very effective. If you think creatively you should be able to place stories in the local press instead (see below under Press and PR)

Do you circulate a print newsletter? If you need to save money, consider switching to email instead or adding an e-newsletter (see below in the 'digital' section for further details)

Press and media

If one of your group is willing and able to take on a press liaison role, fantastic. It's helpful to have one person doing the promotion and chasing up.

Before you start, it's worth putting together a press list with contact details for the local newspaper, radio station and TV along with any other useful contacts (community magazines, websites etc).

If your local newspaper is big enough it may have a reporter who focuses on the environment or community issues, so it's worth ringing up and asking if anyone specialises in those subjects and would be happy to receive a press release.

If they have no specialist reporter, try and get a name, telephone number and email address for at least one of their journalists (this goes for radio and TV also). They will have a general news email address as well but the story is more likely to get picked up if you address it to a particular person - plus you can ring them and follow up on the story. You may also develop a relationship if you have further stories to send them, so that they get to know you and become engaged with your work and your cause.

Approaching the media

Media outlets need stories, but they also get bombarded with calls and emails daily which they need to filter through to pick out what is topical and will interest their readers. Make yours stand out!

Whether you are approaching a newspaper, radio or TV journalist, it's best to follow the same format when contacting them. Bear in mind they will probably be very busy and won't have time for long conversations.

1. Ring them and give a brief outline of your story. Keep it really short! eg. 'We're a community garden and we're holding a Halloween evening with pumpkin carving next week. It would be a good photo opportunity. Can I send you something about it?'
2. Email over a press release or a short email with the details of your story.
3. Wait a few days before ringing to check if they are able to use your story/send out a photographer.

Radio tips

If you're ringing the station, try not to call just before or on the hour or half hour as reporters are likely to be tied up preparing or reading the latest news bulletin and won't have time to talk to you.

The afternoon is the best time to ring as early in the morning journalists will be scrambling to find news stories for that particular day - in the afternoon they have a bit more time for forward planning.

The best way of bumping your story up is fielding an interviewee for them, either one who can go into the studio or one who can talk on the phone.

TV tips

TV is a visual medium so think about what will make a good piece to film. Make sure you have a group of volunteers that day so the farm or garden looks busy, and think about which areas of the site will look best on camera. Also make sure that one of your group is happy to speak on camera!

Writing a press release

You can use the press release template included at the end of this factsheet to create your own press releases. Key points to remember are:

- Keep it short (ideally one page)
- Put the most interesting and eye-catching information near the beginning
- Make sure you include all the address, time and date details.

Why would people want to read my story?

Sometimes you will only have something short and simple like an event to announce and that's fine – send the journalist a brief email with times, dates and details of what's happening and make it clear if there's a good photo opportunity. Just don't expect it to make the front page.

If you want to promote your site or work more generally and win more coverage, your story has to be newsworthy. Look for something you can spin a story round. Just putting out a call for volunteers or announcing your opening hours won't be interesting enough to merit more than a few words.

- Has your prize pig just produced 6 piglets you could photograph? Have you produced the biggest leek ever harvested? Has a young volunteer just won a prize for

their work? If there's anything outstanding about your plot, shout about it!

- Animal stories are always popular. Local newspapers love unusual animal stories, like this example from Edinburgh: www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/fringe-goat-walked-though-city-after-parking-row-1-3044471
- Don't forget that the press can also be very helpful if you have a bad-news story. If your site has been vandalised or tools stolen, ring the newsdesk and get a story in the paper. It may help recover your tools or prompt people to donate.
- Think creatively – are there national stories you can tie into? Some amazing photos you can send in? Is it a bumper year for strawberries, has there been snow in April?
- Time stories to coincide with seasonal events like harvest festival or National Allotments Week, when journalists are likely to be looking for local examples. Photographs of seasonal events on site work particularly well.
- Is there anything particularly unusual about your site? Is your produce grown on a roof or by

a bus stop? Does it have an interesting history?

Do we have images to go with the story?

Images are your secret weapon. They make websites look more attractive, people like to see images on social media, and they are crucial when it comes to getting press coverage. A good image makes your story far more likely to feature prominently. It can bump a story about an allotment day from a tiny panel tucked away in a corner into a big, bright picture story.

Images likely to attract journalists are those featuring people and especially people in action. Kids working on the farm with animals, people digging the ground or showing off produce will go down well. Posed photos – of everyone in a line – are less interesting, even if the Mayor is in them. Get the Mayor to dig up a courgette instead!

A newspaper will be looking for higher quality images for print than those going online. A print journalist will ask you for 'hi-res' images which need to be at least 1 MB in size and 300dpi resolution. If you have Photoshop – or even Microsoft Paint – you can check the size of your images.



Often mobile phone images will not be hi-res enough to come out well so use a proper digital camera if you can.

Conversely, images going up on websites or images sent by email should not be too large or they will block inboxes and be slow to upload! 1 MB max is a good threshold.

Bear in mind that you should get permission from people featured in photographs if you plan to send them out. This is especially important for children – check with parents first.

Do we have a good interviewee to put forward?

Everybody prefers a human interest story to a dry factoid. It really helps if you can provide an interviewee willing to talk to the journalist and be quoted – either a staff member or a volunteer. At the very least, think of a prepared quote that you can send over with the story.

For example, Bill Oaks said: “I was thrilled at the size of my prize marrow. Producing a vegetable bigger than a baby hippo has been a secret goal of mine since I was seven years old.”

Do not put people up for interview, or send their pictures over to a journalist, without



asking them first. And remember you have no control over what the journalist does with your story. It might turn into a double page spread or get cut to 50 words.

Setting up a website

Setting up a website or even a blog page for your site is one of the most useful ways of getting information to people. It means you can direct people to a single place where all your information is stored.

There are now many free platforms that allow you to set up an online blog space or website relatively easily and quickly (Blogger, Google blogs, Moonfruit and Wordpress to name a few).

You don't necessarily need a huge amount on your site. If resources are limited it could be as simple as a photo of the site plus a description of what takes place there, details of opening times and contact details.

If you have a bit more time you can keep it updated with blog posts. Put up pictures of your site at different times of the year and give a brief description of what's growing and how the site is developing. You can flag up events, feature staff or volunteer profiles, add in video or audio clips and put up seasonal recipes.

This is a useful guide to free platforms for community groups: <http://blog.green-space.org.uk/2011/09/15/community-groups-guide-to-getting-online-for-free>

Some FCFCG members' websites:

www.billquayfarm.org.uk

www.windmillhillcityfarm.org.uk

www.heeleyfarm.org.uk

www.hulmegardencentre.org.uk

<http://lewishamgardens.webs.com>

E-newsletters

E-newsletters can save you a lot of money on printing. There are free platforms like *mailchimp.com* that make it very easy to set up a contact list, design a template and email out in bulk – you can also track who reads and clicks through and set it up to go out automatically on Twitter and Facebook.

Bear in mind that people get bombarded with emails. Only send to people you know are interested and don't send too many. Once a month maximum if you have enough content, otherwise quarterly is fine. You can put up a newsletter subscription form on your website.

Social media

Twitter and Facebook may seem intimidating or not relevant to your work but they can be a great way of communicating with potential volunteers, local media, fellow gardeners and other community groups and local networks - as long as you have someone with enough time to keep them updated! It takes longer than you think.

Think of them as the carrier pigeons in your communications armoury. If your digital 'base' is your website, social media is a way of carrying your news, events and images out to a wider audience and giving people a nudge to remember you and look at what you're up to.

Twitter

Twitter can be an extremely useful tool for:

- Connecting with like-minded groups
- Contacting journalists direct
- Attracting new volunteers and staff



- You can engage with people by encouraging them to contribute – maybe hold a ‘pick a name’ competition for a newborn lamb?

Facebook

Facebook can offer a good alternative to setting up a separate website. The big advantage of Facebook is that many people are already on it, so if you set up a page or a group you can invite all your friends to join or ‘like’ the page and instantly have a set of followers.

What’s the difference between a page and a group?

A page is your public presence on Facebook, like a shop-front where you can show off all the things you do. It’s a bit like an individual Facebook profile but for companies and other organisations. People can post on your page but it will mostly be you filling the page with content.

A group is a discussion or noticeboard for people interested in your project. It can be public or you can make it invite-only. A group may be more appropriate for volunteers and staff at the project.

Facebook content

As with Twitter, try to keep your page updated regularly and make the content interesting by sharing photos or video clips of things happening on site. Use plenty of images to make the page look attractive and interesting.

Let people know about jobs, volunteering opportunities and events and ask your followers to share your content with their own friends and spread the word.

You can also ‘like’ pages run by similar projects and help promote their work too – like Twitter, Facebook is great for forming mutually beneficial networks with like-minded people.

- Keeping tabs on new funding or other opportunities.

It can seem like an overwhelming place when you first venture onto it but there are plenty of other community farms and gardens already on there and it is a really great platform for forming support and information-sharing networks with similar organisations.

The best way to learn how to use Twitter is simply to get on there and start tweeting. Twitter has helpful guides to getting started here: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/100990-signing-up-with-twitter>

Once you have a profile, start searching for people you are interested in following or who you would like to know about your work, such as local journalists and other farms and garden. You can search on Twitter’s home page or use sites like Listorious and Twibes to hunt for people using search terms like ‘gardening’ or ‘farming’. It’s worth looking at the profiles Twitter recommends for you too and following them.

You can keep the feed quite straightforward or you can be a bit more creative. Keep it positive. Also remember to interact with the people you follow or who follow you. Retweet their tweets about open days or funding appeals to help them spread the word. Start a conversation.

It’s worth keeping an eye on the hashtag #journorequest in case anyone’s looking to feature stories on farms/gardens.

Twitter Content

Think about your primary objectives in using Twitter and how much time you could dedicate to keeping a stream updated. To keep your feed interesting and relevant, you should aim to tweet at least once a day and have a scroll through your feed and see what the people you follow are up to.

Things to tweet:

- Any time you put a new blog post on your website
- Images from your site. Mobile phone cameras make this quick and easy to do – you can take a photo and immediately share it on Twitter/Facebook
- You can also share micro video clips (up to 6 seconds) if you download Twitter’s Vine app
- Reminders of upcoming events
- Appeals for funding or donations of tools etc
- Breaking news – ie you can tweet while an event is going on or a new animal arrival
- As with stories in general, you can capitalise on anniversaries or themed weeks like National Allotments Week

Other useful social media sites

- Flickr is great for sharing photos
- Vimeo and Youtube let you share videos with supporters, while Youtube for charities (see below for link) allows you to set up a 'Donate' button underneath videos. www.youtube.com/nonprofits
- Hootsuite is a handy tool for planning your Twitter feed – you can use it to schedule tweets in advance.
- Tumblr is a microblogging site where you can share photos and give brief updates on your activities. You can tag posts with categories like 'food' or 'gardening' so that people interested in those subjects will see your posts if they search under those categories.



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Press Release Template

Keep it at one or at most two pages and use the following headings.

For immediate release: [date]

If you want the media to use the story as soon as they receive it or

Embargoed for: [time/date]

Use this if you don't want the article to be published until after a specified time

Headline: Start with a snappy headline

Paragraph 1: Summarise the story - who, what, where, when and why. All key information needs to be in this paragraph

Paragraph 2: Put in more details to flesh out the story you have outlined in the first paragraph

Paragraph 3: Quotes from you or someone relevant to the story.

Paragraph 4: Extra relevant information

Ends

Notes for Editors

- Photo opportunity: what it is, where it is, when it is
- Give details (name, telephone and email) for the primary contact
- Outline what you have to offer: pictures, interviewees
- Give a bit of background about your project in case they can include something on your history and activities
- Outline any additional relevant information or facts and figures, but keep it short.

UK office: The GreenHouse, Hereford Street, Bristol BS3 4NA
Tel: 0117 923 1800 admin@farmgarden.org.uk

www.farmgarden.org.uk

Resources

Halton Partnership

Engagement toolkit

www.haltonpartnership.net/communityengagement/images/stories/engagement_toolkit.pdf

The Directory of Social Change

A number of useful publications available including the Complete Charity Media Skills Training and DIY guides to publicity and public relations.

www.dsc.org.uk/Publications

Charity Comms

Lots of helpful blog posts and how-to guides on marketing, handling the press and getting to grips with digital media.

www.charitycomms.org.uk

The Media Trust

Works in partnership with the media industry to support the voluntary sector's communication needs. Programme of workshops and seminars.

www.mediatrust.org

The Small Charities Coalition

A collection of useful links for small charities looking to boost their profile.

www.smallcharities.org.uk/media-communications

Voluntary Arts Network briefings

Briefings include information on creating a twitter presence and how to write a press release

www.voluntaryarts.org/running-your-group/va-briefings

FCFCG

Useful information about signs and notices can be found at <http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/publications/856-clean-hands-zone-toolkit>