

**“Supporting Community Revitalization through Community Garden Projects in  
Indiana, Pennsylvania”**

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## **Final Report Narrative**

Title of Project: Supporting Community Revitalization through Community Garden Projects in Indiana, Pennsylvania

Grant Period: February 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015

Grantee Name: Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Project Director: Dr. Amanda Poole

### **Description of Project:**

With support from ARC through the Appalachian Teaching Project, students from the Cultural Ecology class at IUP (Fall 2014) partnered with the Indiana Community Garden to meet two goals: coordinate programs that enhance the cultural and biological diversity of the garden; and create educational resources that assist the garden in its mission to be a hub for educating people about sustainable practices and global food issues.

The Indiana Community Garden is a local community initiative organized through the Indiana County Penn State Extension Master Gardener Program. The mission of the ICG is “to create a healthy and enjoyable community movement through planting, harvesting, cultivating, educating, cooking and sharing of knowledge and ideas.” The ICG has grown rapidly since it began in 2012, with enthusiastic support from community members, local businesses, and public institutions. The ICG now includes 39 raised beds (9 community beds along with garden plots designated for community use and rural food aid programs) and a range of sustainability initiatives (like rain barrels, composting and worm bins, a bat house, disease resistant apple trees, adding native plants to create a pollinator friendly garden, etc.) that were developed with the input and support of community volunteers and an extensive array of private, public, and non-profit partners. The ICG has truly become a catalyst for community action on developing and promoting local and accessible food systems in Indiana. Our partnership with the ICG grows out of the 2013-2014 ATP project in which the ICG served as a key site on a wayfinding tour of Indiana, and ICG leaders graciously worked with anthropology students who conducted ethnographic research on the social significance of the garden.

Indiana County faces many of the socio-economic issues impacting the Appalachian Region, including a lack of economic diversification and living wage jobs in part due to deindustrialization and the boom and bust cycles that accompany energy extraction industries. It has been widely noted in the social science literature that community gardens can become catalysts for urban and rural revitalization, with

potential benefits to food and economic security and community health. The Indiana Community Garden is part of a growing movement in Indiana County to foster a diverse, resilient local economy and promote healthy communities through developing a local food system. The ICG has been a local leader in working on this broadly popular approach to asset based development, and has succeeded in creating a number of active collaborations between local schools, non-profit organizations, social service agencies, churches, community centers, restaurants, food banks, and the farmer's market. While these efforts have been successful, the all-volunteer ICG is at a formative moment in which creative input and participation from ATP students will help them to achieve their goals and confront key problems facing the organization.

There are two main challenges facing the garden: reaching out to diverse community members in promoting equity and access to locally grown foods, and creating a bank of resources that can be used by the garden in fulfilling its educational mission. Some of the key challenges to community gardens include fostering cultural and biological diversity, as 'people grow what they know', and gardens (along with other key actors in alternative food movements) may face challenges in recruiting diverse participants. The ICG has made tremendous progress in intentionally crafting itself as an inclusive and welcoming space. A partnership with anthropology students helped them to further meet this challenge through recommendations based on research about the experiences, foodways, and gardening practices of community members from minority and lower-income groups. Students also assisted the community garden in meeting a second challenge by creating enduring resources, such as an ethnoecological tour of garden plants and projects to be located at the garden with additional resources accessed online. Garden leaders note that the ICG is an all-volunteer organization: Although they have started many important new initiatives that promote sustainability and expand educational efforts, they have faced a shortage of time and resources to develop educational resources.

### **Activities:**

Please include full details regarding all activities, including the conference presentation, poster, and the following requirements of the 2014-2015 Scope of Work:

- activities with community partners (include partner name(s), dates and locations of meetings, topics of focus-group discussions, etc.)

The Indiana Community Garden was one of the sites profiled during the IUP 2013-2014 ATP Project, when students conducted ethnographic web pages of local sites of social significance for a wayfinding project. The students who worked with the community garden on this project, Kelimae Perkins and Lisa McCann, developed strong relations with garden members. This project laid the foundations for our 2014-2015 ATP collaboration with the ICG. Lisa McCann also began to work with the garden on a regular basis as a photographer and blogger. She graduated from the Anthropology Undergraduate Program in May 2014 and began the MA program

in Sociology in Fall 2014. She was involved with our ATP project this year as a member of our community partner organization, the ICG.

Two planning sessions were held with community garden leaders. Kay Snyder (ICG Volunteer Coordinator) and Lisa McCann met with Amanda Poole at the Cozy Corner Cafe in Indiana on 6/11/2014 to discuss the scope and goals of the project (see minutes in attached documents). On 8/12/2014 Amanda Poole and garden leader Marie Olson (ICG Project Coordinator) met at the Amadeus Café in Indiana in order to discuss the ATP project and the ways that curriculum could be integrated with community based work and research on food issues.

Community garden representatives Kay Snyder and Lisa McCann visited our class on 9/11/14 in order to discuss the project with students and introduce them to the ICG's goals, mission statement, and history. During this class, students introduced themselves and their interests. We discussed our own positionalities in relation to 'foodways' (cultural dimensions of food production and preparation), and brainstormed about our class' involvement with garden activities.

On a beautiful afternoon, Thursday September 16, the entire class visited the garden and were introduced to the resources there by Kay Snyder and another garden leader, Tom Nowak. As an icebreaker, students were tasked with working in groups to identify socially significant plants growing at the garden and seek information about these plants from garden members. Snyder set up a number of activities for students, writing in an email: "In addition to giving the students a quick tour of the garden, and pointing out some things they did not see in the slides, I am hoping that we would have enough time to clean up probably a couple of garden beds, amend the soil, add compost, and then plant a cover crop. This would give the students a hands-on way to learn more about sustainability, and see some of the issues that we are currently trying to address in the garden."

Shortly after this visit, we set up a schedule for participation at the garden. Every student volunteered around 2-5 hour per week throughout the semester. These activities included working with garden members, master gardeners, and other volunteer groups to coordinate garden events, assist with prepping beds for the winter, and harvesting late fall crops (some of which were donated to the local food pantry). Please see photos of students participating in garden activities in the attached resources.

In addition to regular seasonal work, major garden events included an IUP community volunteer effort called 'Into the Streets' (9/27/14), Friday sessions working with international students from the IUP American Language Institute, Food Pantry harvests and distributions that occurred biweekly, and a seed swap held on campus (9/8/14) that was co-organized by the ICG. Students assisted in coordinating, documenting, and staffing each event (please see attached materials for photos and promotional materials).

Students also worked in three groups to conduct research that led to the design of educational materials for the garden according to three major topic areas- food

justice, ethnoecology, and seed saving. These projects were all conducted with IRB approval, and involved surveys of garden members, structured interviews with food bank clients, ethnographic interviews with local experts, and structured interviews with seed savers who attended the seed swap. Students compiled final papers based on their research, and in groups, designed educational materials that included signage for the garden, informational brochures, and fliers.

Our community partners, Kay Snyder and Lisa McCann, attended the Appalachian Teaching Project Conference with us in Arlington, VA December 2014. Five students involved with this project presented on their research at this conference with a PowerPoint presentation and an academic poster. Our community partners were instrumental in providing key feedback on our PowerPoint presentation and our poster. They also provided valuable feedback on our survey instruments and on the educational materials developed by students (see attachment section below for some of this correspondence). Unfortunately, given the mismatch between our spring semester and the growing season (spring planting will not start at the garden until Memorial Day weekend), our public presentation at the garden has been delayed until the early Fall semester, when Kay, Lisa, and I plan on having returning ATP students present on their work in coordination with the Folk Festival to be held September 11 and 12 in downtown Indiana.

While the public presentation was delayed, students have presented on their ATP work at the IUP Undergraduate Scholars Forum – an event hosted each year at IUP that is open to the public and involves students from departments across campus (Indiana, April 8, 2014). Elizabeth Bauer, a student who attended the ATP conference and spoke in the student wrap-up session, also presented on her ethnoecology research with the garden at the international Society for Applied Anthropology Conference in Pittsburgh (March 25, 2015). Finally, both Poole and Bauer presented at a roundtable about social justice and undergraduate research at the Society for the Anthropology of North America annual conference in New York City (April 19, 2014). Both addressed the learning outcomes of the ATP project, and the transformative nature of undergraduate research projects conducted in partnership with community organizations on issue related to inequality and social justice. Bauer applied for and received a professional development grant from the IUP Graduate School in order to attend this conference.

- links to any videos or social media that show the students interacting with their community partner(s)

Photos of ATP students working at the community garden are online at the blog maintained by Lisa McCann: <http://indianacg.blogspot.com/>

Examples of news releases on the IUP website and in *The Indiana Gazette* regarding student research presentations, and the seed swap are available below in the attached materials document.

Dr. Poole's interview about the ATP project on *The Permaculture Podcast* is available at: <http://www.thepermaculturepodcast.com/2014/icg/>

## **Project Outcomes:**

The project has met its goals in both pedagogy and project deliverables. Students conducted original research that provided input from garden members on the reasons people are involved with the garden, the value of the garden to the community, and possible future programming. Students gathered ideas about ways to increase the connections between the ICG and campus. Students were also able to assess the efficacy of food justice projects, like the garden's outreach efforts with fresh produce donations to the local food pantry. One outstanding ethnographic paper about the social significance of produce availability at the food pantry, by ATP student Hannah Charlton, is currently undergoing revision for publication in a student journal.

Students created educational materials for the garden, including information on the many exciting sustainability projects that the garden has undertaken. Attached below are some excellent examples of signage created for the garden using artwork drawn by children who attended the seed swap.

Students also participated in the First Annual Seed Swap on November 8, coordinated by the ICG along with the IUP SEEDS Club, the Center for Northern Appalachian Studies and the Biotechnology Research Institute. ATP students assisting with organizing and conducting the event, cataloging seeds, developing and conducting children's activities, and interviewing attendees to gain insight on the kinds of seed saving happening in Northern Appalachia.

Finally this project helped to spread the word about the community garden on campus and in the broader region, for instance, through an interview with Dr. Poole on *The Permaculture Podcast with Steve Mann*, and student presentations at the IUP Undergraduate Scholars Forum, the Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Conference in Pittsburgh, and the Society for the Anthropology of North America Annual Conference in New York City. Students involved with this project also presented on their research at the Appalachian Teaching Project Annual Conference in Arlington, VA, December 2014.

## **Problems Encountered:**

The biggest problem we encountered was scheduling a public presentation involving garden members. Unfortunately, Spring semester is quiet at the garden, and planting day (the first major gathering at the garden) does not happen until May 31, well after the end of the semester. I spoke at length with Kay Snyder about the best way to present student projects to garden members and the broader public, and we decided to organize a presentation in early September, possibly in coordination with the Northern Appalachian Folk Festival (September 11, 12) when the garden is planning to table at the event and host a workshop at the garden.

Finally, the structure of the class assignments worked well this year as they were designed to produce both individual and group products within a workable time

frame. I intentionally designed the project in a way that was informed by our experiences last year with the challenges of group web page design. Time was also a constraining factor again this year due to the heavy mentoring demands of student research projects. I was astounded by Kay Snyder's generous contributions of time and effort working with students in all capacities during this project. Our lessons-learned include involving more of the garden members in working with students in order to lighten the demand on Kay's time. However, this issue was difficult to avoid given the unexpected absence of the ICT Project Coordinator, Marie Oslon, for the semester.

### **Program Continuation and Sustainability:**

Our project with the garden emerged from our previous ATP project profiling sites of local social significance. It was exciting to build on these relationships this past year, and assist the garden in accomplishing a number of important projects- from community building activities to the actual physical work of making dirt. I have talked to Kay Snyder about ways to continue our collaboration, structuring my Cultural Ecology class (taught every other fall semester) around an enduring partnership with the garden.

Student research has produced three key results: the finding that garden members overwhelmingly point to 'community' as a key reason for involvement in the ICG; observations and recommendations from food pantry clients regarding the value, timing, and content of distributions of fresh local foods and seedlings; and recommendations by IUP undergraduate students who were interviewed during the project about ways to catalyze student involvement in food issues through work with the garden on and off campus. These findings can inform garden programming, while educational materials may be integrated into the website, or printed as on-site signage to be posted in the pagoda at the garden.

Individual students continue their involvement in the garden, even after the conclusion of our class. As mentioned, Lisa McCann worked with the ICG as an ATP student in 2013-2014. The webpage she designed for this class has become an active and ongoing blog that she uses to update the public about garden events (link above). Lisa has also gone on to head up an exciting project involving the distributions of seedlings by the ICG at the local food pantry as a way to empower people to grow their own produce.

I have talked to Kay Snyder about developing an internship position at the garden for Anthropology undergraduates as part of the expansion of experiential learning within our applied anthropology track. Currently, we are working to develop a three credit internship for Spring Semester 2016. Finally, at the IUP Center for Northern Appalachian Studies, we have designed next year's research project on poverty to include a focus on food issues. To this end, the ICG will be a key resource for linking students to local people and organizations knowledgeable about and active on local food security issues. We were pleased to have formed a

partnership with this vibrant community organization, and look forward to future collaboration.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

As noted above, there have been many positive relationships formed through this year's ATP project. I see the ATP project as a valuable resource for our students on many levels as they gain hands-on experience with practicing anthropology outside of academia- the fastest growing segment of our field professionally. This ATP project has also been important for the Anthropology department through the opportunity of teaching using high impact learning strategies. ATP has also been a catalyst for growth in our IUP Center for Northern Appalachian Studies, which is now working with the Community Garden and the Departments of Biology and Anthropology on a seed bank project inspired by an ATP project conducted by the University of North Georgia. We are also planning an ATP project next year that partners an Economics of Poverty class taught by Dr. Brandon Vick (Department of Economics) and Amanda Poole's Applied Anthropology class with a community organization that grew out of our first ATP project in 2012-2013 (the Coalition for a Healthy County which has expanded to become a non-profit organization- The Center for Community Growth). We plan on working across the disciplines of Economics and Anthropology to do a living wage study of Indiana County and map local barriers people experience to getting out of poverty. One component of this project will likely involve food security issues, and Kay Snyder has already generously provided input and ideas about the nature of this project.

Student recommendations for future projects generated at the end of class included some terrific directions for future work here. Among the many ideas generated by student were: involving elementary and junior high students in community gardening; supporting the local farmer's market in their attempts to reach a more diverse clientele; working with the garden to increase IUP student access to local fresh produce or begin a garden on campus; and investigating the impacts of hydraulic fracturing on the cultural and social wellbeing of local residents. Ultimately, this project built relationships, generated good ideas, and created momentum for building sustainability through an awareness of the importance of community building through local food projects.

### **Attachments (in PDF format):**

Include such items as the following:

- Minutes of meetings with community partners
- Flyers, text for PSA announcements, etc.
- Photographs showing students in action
- PR such as newspaper articles, documentation of TV and radio spots, etc.
- Correspondence with community partners