



Baltimore County Community Gardens— Education and Entrepreneurship

Impact Consulting Fellowship
Final Project Report

Ridwan Ahmed, Aditya Deshpande, Mohit Jaju, Bhavin Kothari,
Cristian Ortiz, Unwana Udoh

under the supervision of Nima Farschi,
Director, Center for Social Value Creation

May 2021

PALS - Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability
An initiative of the National Center for Smart Growth

Gerrit Knaap, NCSG Executive Director
Kimberly Fisher, PALS Director





Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Project Background and Objective	5
Methodology	6
Survey	6
Interviews.....	7
Garden Visit.....	7
Summary of Findings.....	8
Survey	8
Interviews.....	8
Garden Visit.....	8
Recommendations	10
Awareness.....	10
Participation	11
Appendix 1 – Community Gardens List.....	13
Appendix 2 – Survey Analysis	15
Appendix 3 – Sample information flyer on community gardening	23
Appendix 4 – Prototype subsite for community gardens	24

Executive Summary

Baltimore County Department of Parks and Receptions is responsible for the Community Gardens Program that makes individual plots in public spaces available to residents for the purpose of gardening.

The objective of this project was to test the level of residents' awareness of existing community gardens, identify the reasons for lack of participation, and develop information resources on gardening to facilitate education and learning.

The project team identified 14 existing community gardens in Baltimore County. To gather data on awareness and participation, the team developed and disseminated a County-wide survey, interviewed five master gardeners, and visited the Double Rock Community Garden in Parkville. Over the course of the project, the team held eight working sessions and four status meetings with the County, including the project kickoff and closeout meetings.

Findings indicated that over 75 percent of survey respondents were aware of the Community Gardens Program and actively visited their assigned plots. Most of the residents actively involved in gardening were senior citizens and learned about the program by word of mouth. For the 25 percent of survey respondents who were unaware, over 85 percent indicated an interest in community gardening.

To drive awareness, Baltimore County should develop a Community Gardens informational subsite, linked to the existing County website, to provide information on garden locations, participation requirements, and references for educational materials. Visually appealing flyers and social media could also be used to spread awareness.

The availability of more community gardens to improve proximity, along with enhancing the design of community gardens, especially to support senior citizens, would likely lead to an increase in participation levels.

Project Background and Objective

The Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks was created to provide recreational and leisure opportunities to the residents of Baltimore County. One such opportunity is the Community Gardens Program, which seeks to connect residents with food, land, and the natural environment through educational opportunities, interactive demonstrations, and authentic agricultural experiences. This is achieved by providing residents with gardening plots in county parks for a modest rental fee.

The project focused on 14 community gardens in Baltimore County and was prompted by a County report that indicated a lack of community engagement and low levels of participation in some of these gardens. There was also no central repository for countywide information on community gardening.

The project's objective was to assess the level of awareness of the community gardens and to identify the reasons for low engagement, with the aim of increasing participation levels. The County also requested the development of educational and information programs to inform residents on the importance and necessity of agricultural development.

This project was limited to developing improvement initiatives for existing community gardens and did not identify additional sites in the County for community gardening.

Methodology

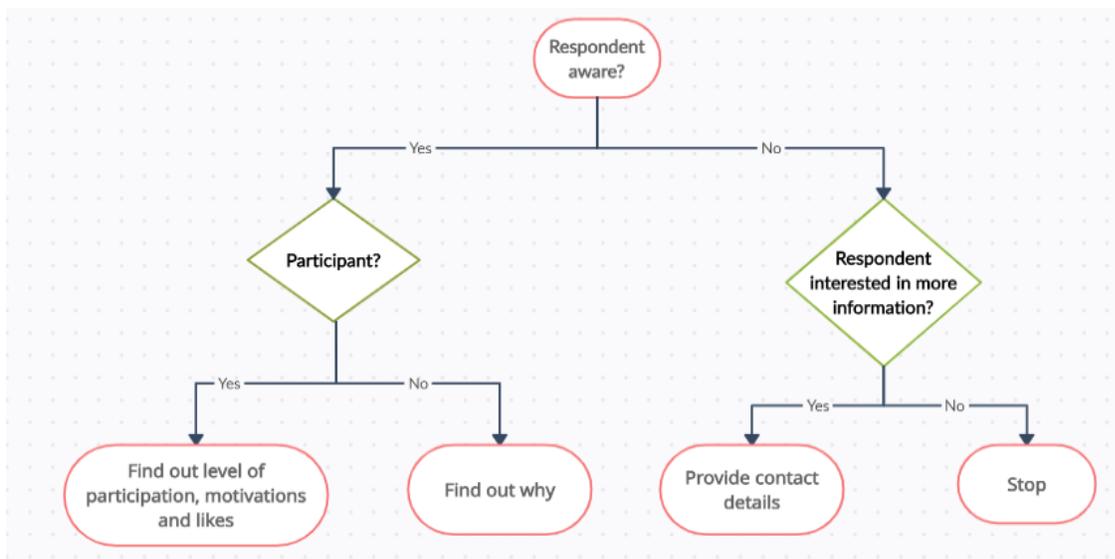
To test the level of awareness and identify the reasons for lack of participation, the team conducted an information-gathering survey, interviewed master gardeners, and visit a community garden.

Survey

The information gathering survey was designed to collect information from residents who were actively participating in community gardening to provide a generalized model that would help address common issues.

The survey was developed as a flowchart with different questions to respondents based on their responses to previous questions (see Figure 1). This helped categorize respondents into different categories based on awareness, interest, and level of participation. The survey was conducted with the help of the County's existing communication channels, targeted to respondents aged 18 and above.

Figure 1: Survey Flowchart



Interviews

The objective of the interviews was to speak with a selection of master gardeners to obtain feedback on their experiences and their ideas on how to drive awareness and increase participation. Questions ranged from years of experience with gardening and level of community participation to initiatives that could improve participation.

Garden Visit

The visit enabled the team to observe a community garden firsthand, engage with the master gardener or chairman on their experiences managing the garden, and learn areas where County intervention was required.

The garden chosen for this visit was based on its proximity to the project team and the availability of the chairman.

Summary of Findings

Survey

Of the surveys 64 respondents, 40 percent were 65 years or older, suggesting that senior citizens are actively involved in community gardening.

About 75 percent of survey respondents were aware of the community gardens program and had learned about it by word of mouth from family and friends. Meeting people and socializing with other gardeners was one of the top reasons for participation in community gardening. This suggests that creating awareness via existing social channels would be an effective way of improving participation.

Over 80 percent of the survey who weren't aware of the community gardening program indicated interest and provided contact details for future information.

Detailed survey responses and a link to the survey are provided in Appendix 2.

Interviews

Suggested improvements from meetings held with master gardeners are summarized below:

- Leverage existing resources of the University of Maryland Extension service to provide training to interested participants.
- Provide more community gardens closer to residents' homes.
- Consider sidewalk vegetable gardening—growing in the green along sidewalks.

Garden Visit

A project team member visited the Double Rock Community Garden in Parkville. In this garden, each plot is about 440 square feet, with water and restrooms available to gardeners. At the time of the visit in March, all available plots were assigned with some residents waitlisted. The plots had already been tilled by the County and some gardeners were already working on their plots.

Findings from this visit are summarized below:

- There is a high level of participation in this garden as evidenced by existing waitlist.
- The chairman expressed concerns with security as facilities have been vandalized in the past.

- The chairman also requested that the County provide compost and garden soil that would hold moisture longer and provide more nutrition to plants.
- The chairman also requested additional recipes for a cookbook his wife was putting together for gardeners.

Figure 2: Double Rock Park Community Garden



Recommendations

Based on feedback received from the survey, interviews with existing gardeners, and a community garden visit, the following actions are recommended to improve awareness and participation.

Awareness

Social Media

Survey results indicated that most of the existing gardeners learned about the program via word of mouth, while awareness via social media received no responses. The use of social media would thus provide an alternate channel to promote awareness, especially to younger residents. The County should leverage its existing social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter to post information and regular updates about community gardening, including featured locations, available gardening plots, and links to additional information, including educational resources. An Instagram account as well as a YouTube Channel would create a wider target audience and help to create more awareness.

Information Flyers

Flyers are one of the most effective ways to influence and spread awareness to the public. Visually appealing flyers should be developed and placed in public spaces to provide information for residents who may not be comfortable with social media. A sample informational flyer was developed and is in Appendix 3.

Website

A digital presence can spread awareness and educate both existing gardeners and residents who may be interested but don't know how to participate. The County should build a subsite specifically for community gardening, which can be incorporated into the existing County website. This proposed subsite should include details on garden locations, rental fees, gardening rules, and informational resources. The site should have a frequently asked questions (FAQ) section to address common queries and a search feature that allows users search for specific content. Links to this subsite should also be posted on the County's social media accounts and incorporated into informational flyers as a scannable barcode.

A prototype subsite for the community gardens was built using Wix, a free website building tool, and site ownership transferred to the County. A snapshot of the site homepage is included in Appendix 4.

Participation

Increase available garden locations

The second largest reason for lack of participation according to survey respondents, was the proximity of existing community gardens to their residences and the limited availability of gardening plots. A second project will propose additional locations for future community gardens. Recommendations from this project should be implemented to increase the number of available gardens.

Provide gardening education

The County should consider providing information and ongoing training, especially for residents who interested in gardening but who lack experience. Educational content could be delivered online via the website and scheduled webinars, or offline via educational flyers and brochures. Some educational videos have already been integrated into the prototype community gardening site. The Home and Garden Information Center (HGIC) at the University of Maryland Extension provides educational resources for gardening and also runs a Master Gardener program that the County can leverage to educate interested residents.

Make senior citizen enhancements

Survey results indicate that most residents involved in community gardening are senior citizens. To make the gardens safe and comfortable spaces, the County should provide additional resources to improve the gardening experience, including dedicated parking spots and accessibility considerations for residents with disabilities. Additional resources include water, mulch, fertilizers, tilling, and waste management. As these needs are unique to each garden, it would be beneficial for the County to engage the Master Gardener at each location to better understand and address site-specific needs.

Enhance garden design

The County should consider providing rest areas with benches and shade in the existing gardens to promote interaction among fellow gardeners. Survey respondents interested in community gardening, said their biggest motivation was the opportunity to meet other gardeners and make new friends. Making the gardens more comfortable would encourage socializing.

Consider other improvements

To improve participation, the County should consider year-round access to gardening plots, adding raised beds, increased bed spacing, green fence design (rather than barbed wire), and security to minimize food theft.

The survey, which was the major source of data, has been incorporated into the homepage of the prototype community gardening subsite as a way for the County to continue information gathering and feedback from residents.

Appendix 1 – Community Gardens List

S/N	City	Garden	Location	No. of plots	Fee per plot
1	Catonsville	Spring Grove Community Garden Collective	1 Pine Drive	53	\$40 - \$80/year
2	Cockeysville	County Home Park	Gibbons Boulevard	30-40	\$22/year
3		Oregon Ridge Park	Kurtz Lane off Beaver Dam Road	50-100	\$25
4	Dundalk	Stansbury Park	7880 Stansbury Road	110	\$17/year
5		Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) Dundalk Community Gardens	7200 Sollers Point Road	NA	NA
6	Essex	Community College of Baltimore County Essex	7201 Rossville Road, Rossville (behind Franklin Square Hospital)	NA	NA
7	Owings Mills	Northwest Regional Park	4515 Deer Park Road (corner of Lions Mill and Deer Park Road)	NA	None
8	Parkville	Double Rock Park	8211 Glen Road (end of Hiss Avenue)	135	\$5/year + \$7 registration + \$50 refundable clean-up deposit
9	Perry Hall	Perry Hall Community Garden	Baker Lane (behind Rosedale Federal S&L, 9618 Belair Road Nottingham)	21 + 1 training plot	\$10/year
10	Reisterstown	Hannah More Community Garden	12039 Reisterstown Road (behind Hannah More School)	20	\$10/year

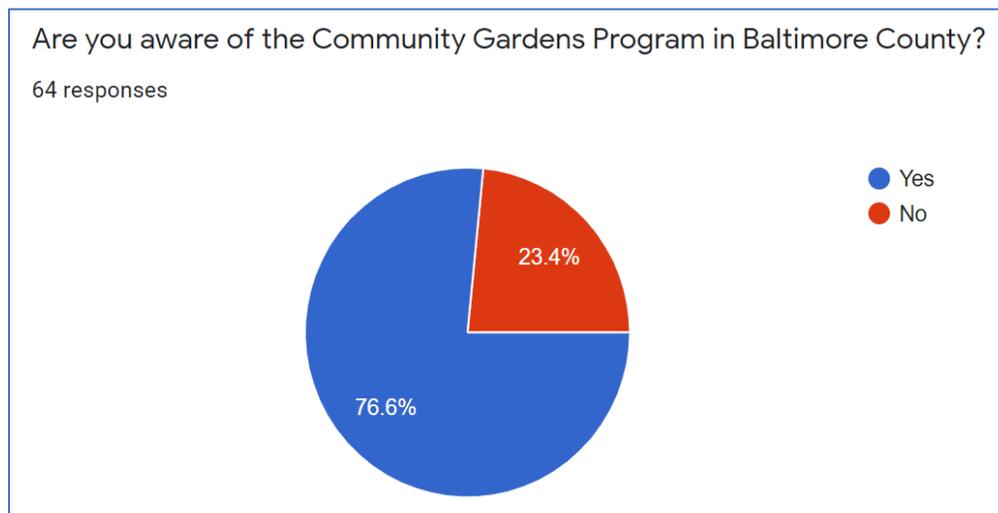
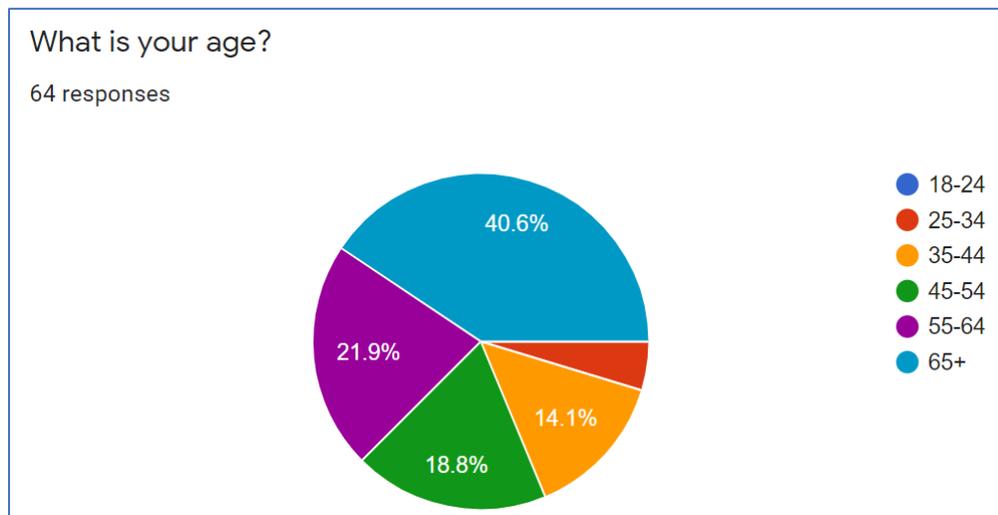
11	Towson	Forge Park	301 Schwartz Avenue	16	\$20/season
12	Turner Station	Turner Station Community Gardens	Avondale and Center Avenues	NA	NA
13	Windsor Mill	Rockdale Park	3400 block North Rolling Road (between Liberty and Milford Mill Roads)	75 + 5 or 10 raised beds	\$20/year + \$5 key deposit
14	Middle River	Marshy Point Park	7130 Marshy Point Road, Baltimore		\$25/season

Appendix 2 – Survey Analysis

Link to survey:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScgb_NIE8zCIY7aMjvXZ_EMemsufqODFo6zWKZok8sYTT2UQA/viewform

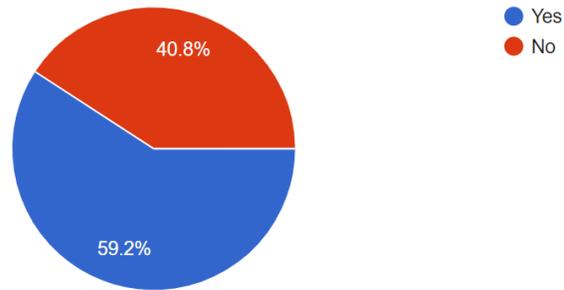
Demographics and Awareness



Respondents Aware of Community Gardens

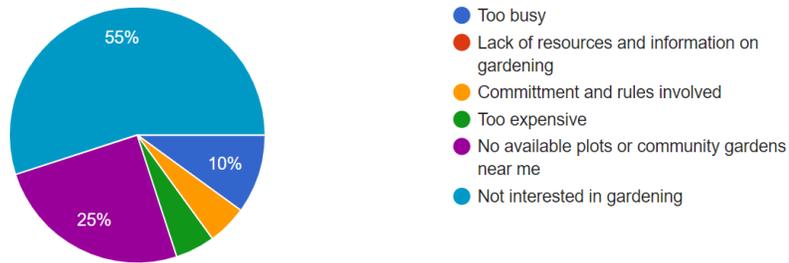
Do you have a garden plot with the Baltimore County Community Gardens Program?

49 responses



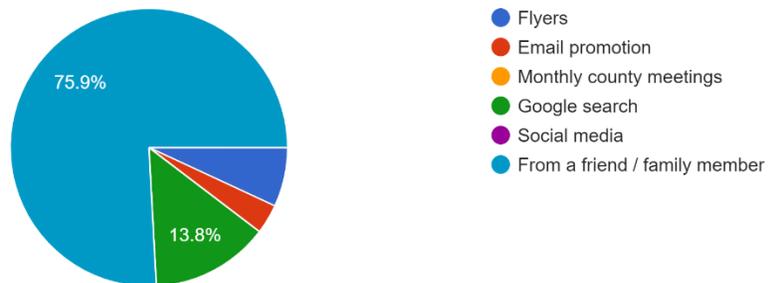
What has restricted you from enrolling in this program?

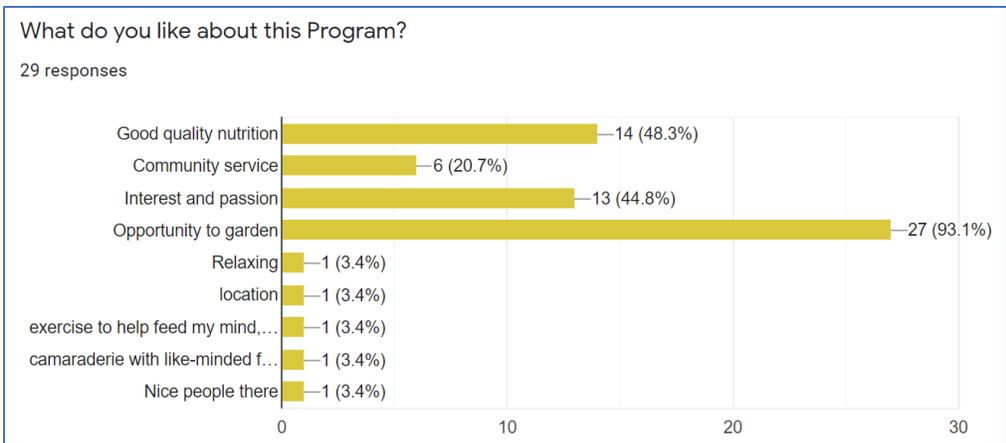
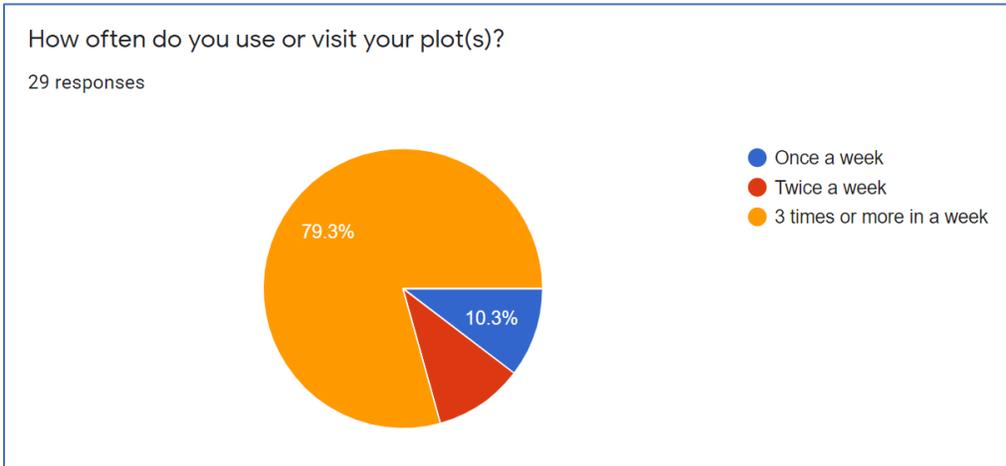
20 responses



How did you learn about this Program?

29 responses





Survey respondents' comments on suggested improvements:

1. Updates as necessary
2. If it could stay cleaner
3. Baltimore County to till the land when the gardening season is over
4. We need a tiller, a person who tills
5. The garden could provide more natural fertilizers for gardeners' use
6. A shaded seating pavilion at the front of the garden to take a rest when needed
7. The ability to use raised beds and better access to plots (working locks)
8. If the park/garden was a little closer to my home. It's now a 12- to 15-minute drive each way

9. More participation/services from Baltimore County Parks and Recreation to keep the park clean and safe for senior citizen participants
10. More garden equipment, compost and garden soil, and help for gardeners to maintain their gardens
11. Better care of grounds
12. More water access (some municipal gardens offer multiple pumps throughout plots); non-gardeners respecting parking lot restrictions (need a gardeners-only area since we carry heavy supplies and need nearby access)
13. Year-round access
14. Get more people involved in gardening
15. Small dumpster onsite, water earlier
16. For the garden to supply a big tiller and fertilizers
17. When the hose is turned on and off is a mystery. We'd appreciate more transparency in that process.
18. FAIRNESS
19. It would be nice to get some good mulch to improve garden
20. More resources, additional programs that coincide with the plots, perhaps a web forum
21. Access to plots during the winter
22. Larger plots
23. Raise the plots to avoid standing water
24. Improved garden grounds

Respondents interested in staying updated about community gardening:

1. 410-340-1654
2. 609-505-6653
3. 443-602-1940
4. 410-744-1818
5. 410-428-6167

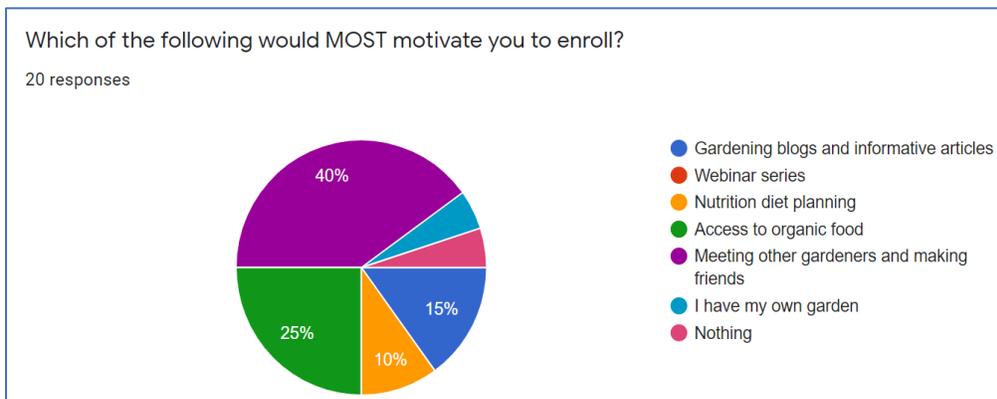
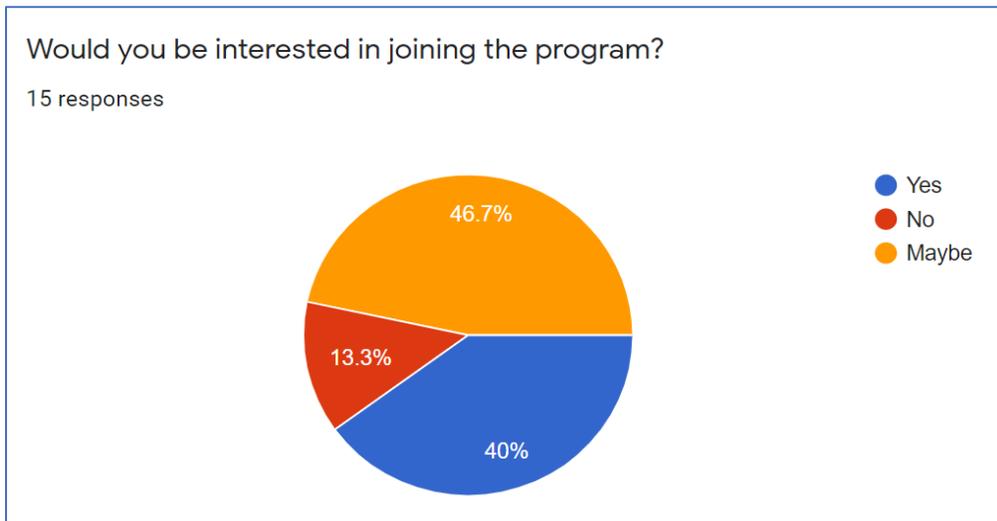
6. 443-621-9472
7. 443-570-5044
8. 410-299-7890
9. 410-370-9858
10. 410-382-4918
11. 443-391-6633
12. 412-874-1151
13. 410-499-6757
14. 410-961-7267
15. 443-604-2432
16. 410-902-8986
17. 443-729-8597
18. 410-746-6985
19. 410-922-4013
20. 410-686-7294
21. 443-400-3408
22. 410-887-8570
23. 410-453-0456
24. 410-967-4192
25. Barbellamy6@gmail.com
26. tracey.newsome@marylandauto.net
27. RinamIm@msn.com
28. regibblue@comcast.net

29. sarcp31@gmail.com
30. dncoop@verizon.net
31. marymagwood@gmail.com
32. Herbjames2@comcast.net
33. batesmom7@yahoo.com
34. gwenjohn@comcast.net
35. nbwilsonfl@hotmail.com
36. lukewildfire@gmail.com
37. wewegle27@gmail.com
38. minniegross@verizon.net
39. Prince.randall24@gmail.com
40. firstcherrylee@juno.com
41. Caseus.mus@gmail.com
42. Whatafriend2@gmail.com
43. global01@manjoeins.net
44. Adrian.burkes@hotmail.com
45. noel.enterprise@verizon.net
46. baypuffin@hotmail.com
47. Laury-neil@verizon.net
48. wrc2131@gmail.com
49. Kadmail@comcast.net
50. gporter@baltimorecountymd.gov
51. masudsalimian@gmail.com

52. joe@pelicanmgt.com

53. bfsmith@baltimorecountymd.gov

Respondents not aware of Community Gardens



Respondents interested in additional information about joining community gardening:

1. tjbbmsbeamer@gmail.com

2. Llear@baltimorecountymd.gov

3. tcdodge@yahoo.com

4. dani@growthgal.com

5. Prw3823@msn.com
6. aynsleyleighhamel@gmail.com
7. docllc@netzero.net
8. ajholewinski@yahoo.com
9. Jovialjeannie@gmail.com
10. susan_sommers@yahoo.com
11. 410-844-1222
12. 443-824-9409

One respondent indicated interest in a Community-supported Agriculture (CSA) model rather than a community garden.

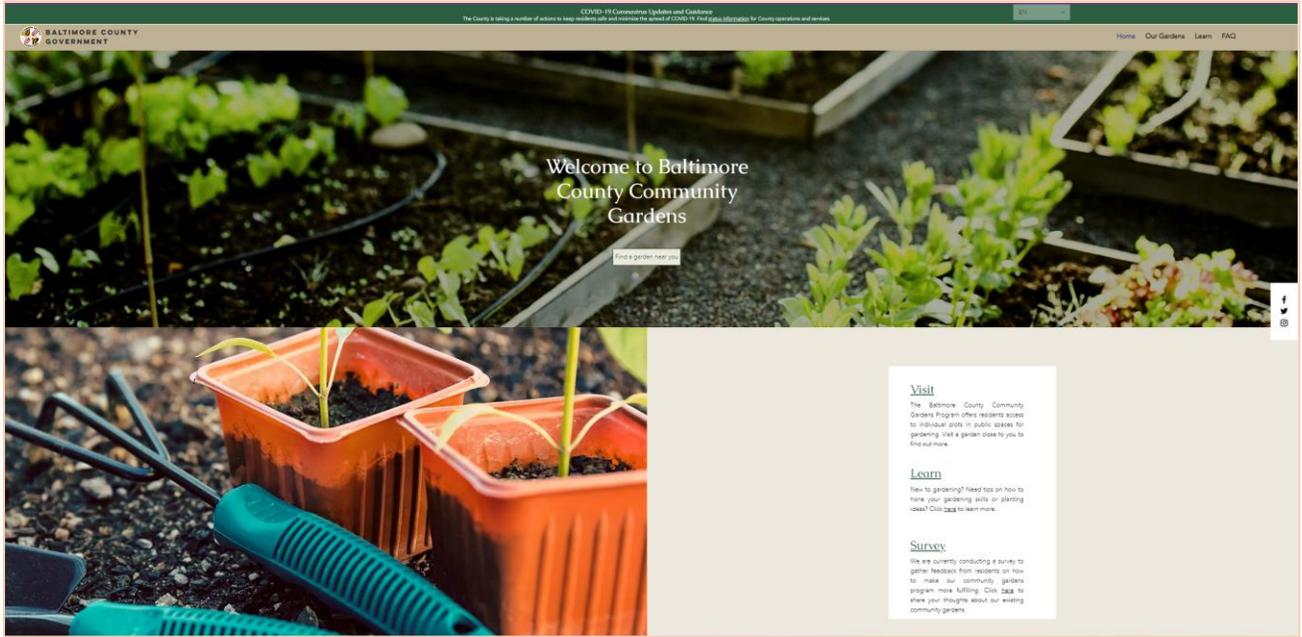
Appendix 3 – Sample information flyer on community gardening



*click on image to open the full PDF flyer

Appendix 4 – Prototype subsite for community gardens

Home Page



Visit our gardens Page

