City in a Garden – Gardens in 12 Chicago neighborhoods
United States of America / Chicago, traditional homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi nations
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
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Summary
City in a Garden – Gardens in 12 Chicago neighborhoods was a listening project born from a translation of the city’s motto: urbs in horto. The project intended to document participants’ horticulture goals and assist in meeting those self-initialized goals through mentorship, education, and funding.

Project Description
How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approach(es) or strategies you chose to implement in your project?
In the last decade of working in urban horticulture I took notice that many funding programs focused on food production in underserved communities on Chicago’s south side. This approach overlooked asking what residents want. I have worked with adults with developmental and physical challenges and found that by adjusted programming to make room to listen was inclusive programming. I used open-ended questions to discover what horticulture programs participants wanted to do. The answers were varied as were the individuals from growing vegetables they like to eat, creating landscaped areas with ornamental plants, having therapeutic spaces where no work was required, placing a water fountain indoors, or just having a houseplant. My experiences, including helping run the Michigan family farm where I grew up, informed me that food production is just a part of working in horticulture. I personally peace in floral gardens and other natural spaces. The concept of biophilia, described as an innate affinity with nature, was at the base of this City in a Garden goal. My goal was to stay away from introducing definite projects. I encouraged participants to share personal horticulture goals without “begging the question” by suggesting the terms “garden” or “food.”

Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project?
I chose to focus on horticulture projects in communities near my Chicago home. My experience of running my own farm and gardens for others I knew there was something to having a space of one’s own. By working within my own community, I was able to easier connect with participants and to continue to develop a gardening community where I live. Through this project participants were encouraged to find resources in each other to meet similar goals.

What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why?
This project was intended to engage participants in the 18-22 age group who may be at a starting point in having an interest in horticulture. There was limited response to participate from this group and City in a Garden connect better to participants who had more gardening experience but had barriers to meeting their horticulture goals. Going forward I would engage organizing partners. It was a challenge to organize on my own and partner feedback and support would help make this project more fulfilling for everyone involved.

Did other fundraising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?
No, the City in a Garden project was entirely funded by Projects for Peace.

Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue? If so, please describe.
Yes. The initial Projects for Peace grant inspired me to develop City in a Garden into an annual project. I plan to develop City in a Garden into a nonprofit in 2024 to become eligible for additional grant funding to engage all 77 Chicago community areas. This will be an annual “listening program” that helps define goals while sustainably meeting those goals through encouragement, stakeholder feedback, as well as
funding or alternative sourcing. Going into the project I had planned to engage the 12 initial participants as facilitators the following year and the response to this plan was positive. I am planning on publishing a document illustrating the detailed results of participant’s projects and how their goals were met. This could be not only a record of City in a Garden project but also as a guide for others who may use the individual projects as a template to meet similar gardening goals.

Reflection
How do you define peace?
I define peace as having three aspects: the at ease of space within one’s mind, claiming a physical space of one’s own, and being a part of a larger community.

In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term? Long-term?
I developed the idea for City in a Garden as an open-ended listening program for personal horticulture goals. Being listening to can be a validation of all three aspects listed above. I noticed a few participants were hesitant to share their dream projects and found that by listening to my project goals engaged them to figure out how they would fit into that plan.

Identify a significant conflict you observed or encountered in your work (it could be any level of relationship: intra- or inter-personal, community/group based, and/or societal/global). How did you navigate the conflict and what would you like to learn more about as a result.
Verbalizing my idea was difficult as I prefer to communicate visually. My struggle to present my project included trying to find a way of speaking that better defined my project goals. Those goals were open-ended to allow for individualized. I tried to focus on the past (gardener’s experience), the present (their horticultural goal), and the future (what will they do when they achieve their goal). After all, plants are living things and will need care long after the City in a Garden project timeline finishes. I adjusted how I communicated the project by editing my shared documents to be simple basic information gathering. I would then allow for more detailed interaction in person. I adjusted my engagement to allow participant projects to evolve, if needed, as the plans become more concrete.

Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?
Yes. I went into this project knowing I wanted to learn more. I was curious to learn what neighbors in my community wanted in their public green spaces. I felt validated that my project had merit when the projects I imagined were in the proposals created by participants. They were as unique as the participants themselves and it can be challenging not working on a one-size-fits-all project but that was what inspired me to develop City in a Garden.

Personal Statement
A brief statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing the value of this project and what you have learned. Indicate the student's name (yours or your teammates') for quote attribution.

“This project focused on encouraging engagement with natural settings that fit the needs and wants of each community - which can contribute to both inner peace and community building.” -Vera Videnovich